

01-11-18a Ecclesiastes

Let's continue our worship this morning by turning for our scripture reading to Psalm 89. Psalm 89. This is subtitled in the New King James, Remembering the Covenant with David and Sorrow for Lost Blessings.

In reality, there's quite a bit more than that in here. I really appreciate some of the great imagery in this Psalm. This is titled in the text, A Contemplation of Ethan the Ezraite.

I have no earthly idea who Ethan the Ezraite was, but I'll tell you one thing, he could write a corker of a Psalm. And this is it. It's kind of lengthy, and yet there are unifying themes that tie it together and make it easy to get through without losing your train of thought.

But note particularly what Ethan the Ezraite understands about God. Psalm 89 begins, I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever. With my mouth, will I make known your faithfulness to all generations.

For I have said mercy shall be built up forever. Your faithfulness you shall establish in the very heavens. I have made a covenant with my chosen.

I have sworn to my servant, David, your seed I will establish forever and build up your throne to all generations. And the heavens will praise your wonders, O Lord, your faithfulness also in the assembly of the saints. For who in the heavens can be compared to the Lord? Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened to the Lord? God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints and to be held in reverence by all those around him.

O Lord God of hosts, who is mighty like you, O Lord? Your faithfulness also surrounds you. You rule the raging of the sea. When its waves rise, you still them.

You have broken Rahab in pieces as one who is slain. You have scattered your enemies with your mighty arm. The heavens are yours.

The earth also is yours. The world and all its fullness, you have founded them. The north and the south, you have created them.

Tabor and Hermon rejoice in your name. You have a mighty arm. Strong is your hand and high is your right hand.

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne. Mercy and truth go before your face. Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound.

They walk, O Lord, in the light of your countenance. In your name they rejoice all day long, and in your righteousness they are exalted. For you are the glory of their strength, and in your favor our horn is exalted.

For our shield belongs to the Lord and our king to the Holy One of Israel. Then you spoke in a vision to your Holy One and said, I have given help to one who is mighty. I have exalted one chosen from the people.

I have found my servant David. With my holy oil I have anointed him, with whom my hand shall be established. Also my arm shall strengthen him.

The enemy shall not outwit him, nor the son of wickedness afflict him. I will beat down his foes before his face and plague those who hate him. But my faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him, and in my name his horn shall be exalted.

Also I will set his hand over the sea and his right hand over the rivers. He shall cry to me, You are my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation. Also I will make him my firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.

My mercy I will keep for him forever, and my covenant shall stand firm with him. His seed also I will make to endure forever, and his throne as the days of heaven. If his sons forsake my law and do not walk in my judgments, if they break my statutes and do not keep my commandments, then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes.

Nevertheless, my lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him, nor allow my faithfulness to fail. My covenant I will not break, nor alter the word that has gone out of my lips. Once I have sworn by my holiness, I will not lie to David.

His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established forever like the moon, even like the faithful witness in the sky. Selah.

But you have cast off and abhorred. You have been furious with your anointed. You have renounced the covenant of your servant.

You have profaned his crown by casting it to the ground. You have broken down all his hedges. You have brought his strongholds to ruin.

All who pass by the way plunder him. He is a reproach to his neighbors. You have exalted the right hand of his adversaries.

You have made all his enemies rejoice. You have also turned back the edge of his sword and have not sustained him in the battle. You have made his glory cease and cast his throne down to the ground.

The days of his youth you have shortened. You have covered him with shame. Selah.

How long, Lord? Will you hide yourself forever? Will your wrath burn like fire? Remember how short my time is. For what futility have you created all the children of men? What man can live

and not see death? Can he deliver his life from the power of the grave? Selah. Lord, where are your former lovingkindnesses, which you swore to David in your truth? Remember, Lord, the reproach of your servants, how I bear in my bosom the reproach of all the many peoples with which your enemies have reproached, O Lord, with which they have reproached the footsteps of your anointed.

Blessed be the Lord forever. Amen and amen. The first half of this psalm, as you no doubt have observed, is a great celebration of the covenant promises of God to David and by extension to the nation of Israel.

The second portion is the cry of despair where it seems as though despite the many assurances and the many statements of ongoing faithfulness that God has withdrawn the fulfillment of all of those covenant promises, and it is in fact true that he did. How can it be true that David's throne is established forever and at the same time his throne is wiped out and his crown is profaned and cast to the ground? His hedges are broken down and his strongholds have been brought to ruin. How can both things be true? Well, the promise like all of the Old Testament covenant promises is conditional and when God affirms his covenant promises to Israel, he affirms them to those who are faithful.

He affirms them to David. He affirms them to Solomon. He affirms them to the believers in Israel to whom those promises are meaningful and who are seeking to please God.

You can be an Israelite. You can be a generation in Israel. You can be the nation of Israel and miss out on the fulfillment of the covenant promises of God.

There is no greater demonstration of this than when John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus Christ himself comes and offers the immediate fulfillment of these long-awaited covenant promises and that generation is not ready. They do not enter the place of blessing. They don't avail themselves of God's grace because they are apathetic.

They're indifferent. They have not sought out and gained knowledge and wisdom of God. What faith they have, they misdirect.

The righteousness they seek is their own and not that of God. It is a serious blow to the viewpoint of an Israelite who says, I'm a son of Abraham. I see the promises to the king of Israel, to David and to the tribe of Judah, to the nation of Israel in general, falling to the ground.

All of these things that God has promised seem to be obviated. It's not happening. Why? This prayer in the last portion of the Psalm goes back and says, Lord, how long is this going to last? Well, what is the answer to that question? This is a great way of communicating the situation because this Psalm is in the hymnal of Israel, right? And under the guise of praying to God and saying, Lord, how long is this going to last? It brings this question and brings the issue to the minds of the Israelites.

And they ought to be asking themselves the question, wow, has God taken his word back? Are his promises failing? What is the problem? Well, this happens in our lives as well. When adversity comes and we're expecting blessing, we're expecting at least a reasonable amount of prosperity. We're expecting things to work together for good as we define good.

And it doesn't happen. What's the result? If we're believers and if we care anything about God and the plan and purpose of God, we start to ask ourselves the question, why am I not partaking of the manifestations of God's grace? Why am I not feeling blessed? Why do I not feel like I am one for whom all things are working together for good? And that's a good, healthy question to ask. Not all suffering is for discipline.

There are lots of reasons why Christians suffer. You can develop an entire doctrine on that, and some have. But some suffering is for discipline.

Some suffering is designed to draw us up short and cause us to question the structure of things and the divine action and interaction and reaction in our lives and in history at large. So this Psalm, as it appeals to God and says in verse 46, how long, Lord, will you hide yourself forever? Will your wrath burn like fire? Remember how short my time is. For what futility have you created all of the children of men? What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his life from the power of the grave? And you get down to the fundamental issues of life and death and the meaning of life.

And that's exactly what adversity often causes in us as a questioning of the basis of our understanding. Are we really where we should be? Is our understanding of God correct? Have we properly understood and interpreted His Word and His promises? So the upshot is this. We know the situation in Israel.

The Israelites who sang this Psalm know the situation. This is, Ethan is late. He's many generations after David.

This is after national adversity has struck, the prosperity of the days of David and Solomon has been squandered away. Enemies have come. The northern tribes have probably already gone out under the discipline of God in the Assyrian captivity.

And this is likely to have been written in the days when the southern kingdom of Judah was hard pressed and was itself about to disappear. And believers who were trying to please God look around and say, how can this be happening to us? And okay, we have obviously malfunctioned in some way to bring this on our heads, but how long is this going to last? Well, what's the answer to that question? Asked in verse 46, how long, O Lord? It is going to last as long as the attitudes that brought it down on the heads of the Israelites lasts. As long as they are indifferent, as long as they are apathetic, as long as they are self-seeking, as long as they are disobedient, as long as they are rebellious, as long as they seek their own righteousness instead of the righteousness of

God.

How long do you discipline a child? You discipline them until their attitude changes. You discipline them until their behavior changes. How long do we keep someone in prison? What's the function of a parole board? It's kind of a crude example, but what do they do? They look for signs of change.

They say, does he exhibit any remorse? Has he learned anything from his incarceration? Has he got a different attitude? Should we turn him loose on parole? And as long as there's no change, the parole board says, I see no signs of remorse. I don't see that you've learned anything from your incarceration, so we're going to keep you in here and, ideally at least, hope that this experience is going to give you a different outlook so that when you go back into the realm of free people, you don't abuse your freedom and violate the rights of others. So that is really the question here.

It boils down to attitude and priorities because that is going to determine whether or not God is able to fulfill his covenant promises. God is great. You look at the first half of the psalm and you see his might.

You see how he is glorified among the assembly. There's some fascinating material there in verses 5 through 10 or 11 talking about the assembly in heaven. And you'll notice where it says the sons of the mighty there.

And these are actually the bene Elohim. These are the sons of God. Some people have theological difficulties with that, so they say sons of the mighty in verse 6. But God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, verse 7, and to be held in reverence by all those around him.

So what is going to happen to those who do not hold him in reverence, who do not fear the Lord and walk in the fear of the Lord? Calamity is going to occur. There is going to be no benefit, no lasting. All of these things talk about the eternity of God, his presence in the heavens, his glory in the heavens.

We can partake of that eternity here on earth or we can miss out. And if we are indifferent to the righteousness and justice that are the foundation of God's throne, we're going to end up with the situation of verse 38, cast off, abhorred. God is furious with his anointed.

You've renounced your covenant. You've profaned the crown. You've broken down the hedges.

Hedges, of course, are the walls of protection, the barriers to outsiders coming in and plundering. You've brought his strongholds to ruin. All who pass by the way plunder him.

All the divine protection and preservation has been removed. Why would God withdraw his protection? Why would he withdraw his blessing? Well, look at the first half of the Psalm. God is to be revered.

God is to be feared. Those who don't, even though they belong to him, even though they have a covenant relationship with him, are going to suffer the consequences. Well, as we return now to our study in Ecclesiastes chapter 7, we find that there is a sort of a reverse of the situation we have in Psalm 89.

In Psalm 89, we started out with people who were in the place of blessing, who were in the place of covenant relationship, who had been promised all of the advantages from God, but they fell away. And as a result, they go from all of these wonderful provisions and expressions of God's grace to the vacuum and the darkness that follows the withdrawal of those things. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon backs up and looks at human life from sort of the opposite sequence of events.

Man under the sun cannot find the eternal things. He cannot partake of things that last. No matter what he does, no matter how he struts and frets his hour on the stage, no matter how he tries to build and tries to collect and gather riches and fame and all these things and try to pass them on, within a generation, it can all disappear.

And even if he does manage to pass it on, he's going to disappear and he won't know what happens after him. He can't find out what's going to happen after him. And so, where is the benefit? Where's the profit? Where is the advantage if everything is contained under the sun? The girls over the last year or two have really been fascinated by fish.

They started out taking walks down by the creek. They would see these little guppies and fish swimming and they started out capturing little guppies and bringing them back and putting them in a little fishbowl and watching them swim around. And they got more and more interested and they started going down to the pet store and getting little fish.

And now we've got just fish all over the place, little swimming. And you think about a fish, it reminds me of the song, How Much Is That Dog in the Window? I get confused between Patti Page's version and Homer and Jethro's version, where I think she says something like, I don't want other kinds of pet because you can't take a goldfish for a walk or something like that. But fish, I guess they're nice to look at.

They're bright and they swim around. But after looking at a fish for about a minute, I'm ready to go do something else. Their brain is microscopic.

I read someplace, I was concerned because I thought if I was a fish and I was swimming in a little tiny bowl, I would be so frustrated that I couldn't go anywhere or do anything and that there's nothing to do. You just swim back and forth, back and forth, wait once a day for somebody to drop pieces of other fish into the top of the tank so you can eat it. It just doesn't seem like much of a life.

I was comforted to learn that, according to the experts, the memory of a fish is only about a minute and a half and then they forget. So they don't remember that they've been there all that time. They can go day after day after day and they're just kind of waking up in a new world every couple of minutes.

And so they can go back and bump their nose on the same little plastic plant. But they just swim around and around and you see them exploring the edges of the tank. Well, that's the picture in Ecclesiastes chapter one, isn't it? When he talks about the cycle of life and the rising and setting of the sun, it's like a fishbowl that you can't escape from.

You can't swim through the glass. You can't leap out and somehow flip your way to the great river and ocean and have unlimited access. We're confined under the sun.

And not only can we not escape it, but we can't produce anything in there that lasts. It's a frustration, but that is the answer that God has given the sons of men. We're supposed to be frustrated, just like Ethan.

You're supposed to be frustrated when you look around and you see that you can't partake of the divine promises, that the covenant blessings are not available. It ought to frustrate. It ought to make you ask the question, why? And that's what happens in Ecclesiastes.

So when you get to chapter three, for example, in verse 10, Solomon says, well, he says in verse nine, what profit does the doer have in that which he himself labors? You strut and fret, you work, you strive. It's always something that puts me in the mode of reflection to look at someone who has just died. The shipmate magazine, it's the alumni magazine for the Naval Academy.

And in the back, they have last call, you know, every issue, all of the alumni who have passed away are listed in the back. And they have a little biographical sketch there, the obituary, so to speak, and they'll review their accomplishments and what ships they served in, or what duty stations, what positions they held, or if they got out and went into the sphere of life, they became president of this or vice president of that. They were active in their church.

They did this, that, and the other. And you see the summation of the labor of a lifetime and the living of an entire life all there in a few paragraphs. And the family will often express how much they miss them.

And donations can be made to some charity in their behalf and so on. Well, occasionally when I'm cleaning out, I find an old shipmate magazine from a year or two or five or six years ago. And I look back and I think, you know, there was a ripple when that person died.

Everyone paid attention and looked at their life and remembered them as a classmate or as a fellow service member. But within a year or two, even in the living memory of people who knew you, you start to fade. And in almost no time at all, you're gone.

The people who knew you will be gone. All of these accomplishments, you earned this award, you gathered this much financial resources and so on, it all just blows away in the wind. And you think, you know, when I pass on and somebody writes my little paragraph at the back page of shipmate, is that all there is? You made a ripple when you went through and then it's over.

Well, people always, even unbelievers, wax philosophic at the thought of death. But Solomon says, you know, we've got to do something about this. The answer that God has given the sons of men is an evil answer.

It's an unsatisfactory answer that you just swim around in your bowl until you die. And when they find you floating belly up in the bowl, they just scoop you out and replace you with another fish. And that's it.

Verse 10 of chapter 3, I have seen the answer which God has given the sons of men to be answered with. Everything he has done, everything God has done. Remember, we had to go through two and a half chapters to get to this point in Ecclesiastes.

Everything he has done, everything God has done is beautiful. YAPHE, Y-A-P-H-E-H. What God does is beautiful in its time.

Also, he has given eternity in their hearts. Who's they? It's the sons of men. He's put eternity in their hearts without which man will not find, he will not attain to the doings, the work that God is doing from the beginning even to the end.

If you don't avail yourself of the eternity that God has put in your heart, the understanding that there are ages that supersede and surround the fishbowl of human life, the rising and setting of the sun, that there is a larger context in which human life sits. God has put that knowledge in the heart of every man. That's one of the things that convicts us.

It's one of the things that God the Holy Spirit uses when he brings us to God consciousness and brings us to the issue in this dispensation of Jesus Christ himself. There's got to be more than this. Everyone knows it deep in their heart.

That's the fount from which all false religions spring. Why do people, almost everybody believes in something, karma, reincarnation, going back and joining the great collective consciousness, whatever it might be. Everybody thinks there's more to life than this because God has put that knowledge in the heart of every person.

And that knowledge is supposed to cause a response, just like Psalm 89. You look around and you say there's a disparity between what ought to be and what is. There ought to be great blessing and fulfillment.

There ought to be the fulfillment of God's promises to David. I don't see it. How long, oh Lord?

What's the solution here? The same is true here.

The answer that we get when we look around and say everything fades and everything disappears, everything is temporary, that's just not going to cut it. There's got to be more. Solomon says, I've seen that answer.

Everything God has done is beautiful. It's eternal. It lasts.

And he's put that eternity in their hearts. And without that, man is not going to find out the work of God from the beginning to the end. Verse 12 of chapter 3, I know that there is nothing good in them.

There's nothing good in these men. God has put that knowledge in, but he hasn't given them the ability to do anything about it on their own. Apart from God, there's nothing good in any of us.

Any man who rejoices or does good in his life, every man who eats and drinks and sees good in his labor, it's a thing given by God. You can't look at good and judge it by your own standards and say, well, that was a good life. This was a good effort.

This was a good use of my time. This, my vocation, my choices in life were good. I look back over it at the end.

Other people look back over it when they write your obituary and say, oh, he was a good man. He lived a good life. The good that lasts, the good that is beautiful is a thing given by God.

Verse 14, I know that everything that God will do will be eternal. There's nothing to add to it. There's nothing to take away from it.

God has done that which they will fear before his face. People look at the difference between what they do and what God does, and you recognize who God is. It's like the first half of Psalm 89.

This is the eternal God. This is the God who sits in the heavens and is glorified among the Bnei Elohim. He is glorified in the assembly of the holy ones, the saints.

By the way, in the New King James, every place you see saints, you can annotate that and say holy ones, and then you can ask yourself, well, who are these holy ones who surround God? It's not you and me, at least not yet. So people who have an interest in the angelic conflict, that's another great passage to study. Verse 15, what is has already been.

That which will be already is. God will intensively seek what is pursued. When God analyzes us, he doesn't look at what we've accomplished.

He looks at what we're pursuing. What are we after? What is our purpose? Remember how chapter three began? For everything, there is a season and there is a time for every purpose

under heaven. God is analyzing our intentions, our purposes, our priorities.

What is it we're trying to do? What are we after? God will intensively seek what is pursued in verse 15. Verse 16, yet I have seen under the sun in the place of justice, there's the guilt of crime. In the place of righteousness, there's the guilt of crime.

Where there ought to be righteousness and justice, what in Psalm 89 was the foundation of God's throne? Righteousness and justice. What ought to be reflected in the lives and the hearts of God's people? Righteousness and justice. But where there's supposed to be righteousness, there's crime.

Where there's supposed to be justice, there's crime. And he goes on from there. Verse 18, actually 17, I myself said in my heart, the righteous and the criminal, God will judge because there is a time for every purpose and concerning every doing, every work there.

God is evaluating and God is judging the purposes, the thoughts and intents of the heart. Verse 18 of chapter three, I myself said in my heart on the matter, the sons of men are to sanctify God. This verb means to separate, to purify, to clarify, to look at with a clear eye, to see the actual nature of something.

The sons of men are to separate or purify or clarify God and to see that they themselves are animals. We saw in our study Friday night the difference. Jesus says, unless you hate your father and mother and your sister and brothers and your wife and your children, you cannot be my disciple.

And we ask ourselves, I thought we were supposed to love one another. I thought we were supposed to honor our father and mother. How can Jesus say, unless you hate everybody, you can't be my disciple? Is discipleship of being a disciple of Christ involved just hating everyone around you? Is it a religion, a spiritual pursuit of hate? What is he saying? By comparison, the priority of following Christ is that much greater than what would normally be the greatest human priorities of fidelity to family and to loved ones.

That by comparison, the human loyalties look like hate compared to the loyalty we should have for Christ. And unless we have that level of priority, we can't be his disciple. It's the same idea here.

When you look at God, when you separate him out, clarify him, purify him, set him apart, and look at him, men, by comparison, even though we're supposedly made in the image of God, we're just like animals compared to God. Well, let's skip forward to chapter 7. If this is the case, if we're swimming in the fishbowl that's circumscribed by the rising and setting of the sun, what is it that we should pursue? Well, we've already seen that there is good that is beautiful, there is good that is eternal, and there's got to be a way to reach out and partake of the eternal. This is what Solomon is challenging his audience with.

He's Kohelet. He's the one that calls an assembly. He says, listen, assembled people, have you ever stopped and thought about the fact that you're strutting and fretting your hour on the stage, but it is all sound and fury and signifies nothing? It's just going to blow away like a puff of vapor.

Where is the profit? Where is the advantage? Well, in chapter 7, we've already seen that it says in the New King James, a good name is better than precious ointment. What we saw is that this just says a name is better than a good salve or a good ointment. The day of death is better than the day of birth.

We need to be thinking about that obituary, not in the back of a magazine, not in an obscure page of the newspaper, the obituary that God is going to write. God who judges by the standards of eternity. God who looks for the good that is beautiful, not the good that we assign to our works.

Everybody looks at their work and says that it's good. A lot of people enjoy it and take pride in it and get satisfaction from it. But we've seen over and over again, Solomon says it's not good for a man.

It's so unfortunate that in our standard English translations, it says there is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and find good in his labor, to see good in his work. Solomon says there's nothing good in that. The good that is beautiful is when God looks at it and says, this is what I'm after.

This partakes of eternity. So to gain that perspective, we need to be thinking about the end of things rather than their beginning. Not speaking great swelling words of promise, not standing tall at the beginning of something, but enduring long and persevering to the end of something.

We've seen this in these verses. It's better to walk to the house of mourning than to walk to the house of feasting, in which itself is the end of all mankind. The living will set this upon his heart.

It's not a human celebration that makes things worthwhile. We have banquets and dinners. We talked in our Luke parable about the man who's throwing the party.

He's giving the great feast and the people have excuses and don't want to come. And he is angry because the house needs to be full. Why does it need to be full? This is a feast that's given in honor of someone.

Well, this is a common human custom. We give a feast in honor of someone. We celebrate something with an awards banquet or a dinner.

But you can end up just bumping your nose on the glass of life if that's all you do is human celebration, human measures of accomplishment. Solomon says in verse three, it's better to be aggravated than to be laughing. Better aggravation than laughter.

For in distress of the face, the heart is made good. Why did God put the calamity on the nation of

Israel that Ethan speaks of in Psalm 89? To shake them out of the self-congratulation, to shake them out of the self-assurance that is a deception, that is a falsehood. It's good in their eyes, but it's not good in God's eyes.

If you're aggravated, if you get into distress of the face, one of the good things about it is it's an opportunity to make the heart good. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning. The heart of fools is in the house of gladness.

It is better to listen to the rebuke of the wise than for a man to listen to the song of fools. For like the sound of nettles under the kettles, thus is the laughter of the fool. And this is a vapor.

This laughter, this self-congratulation, this self-satisfaction, swimming around in the goldfish bowl, it just, there's nothing permanent about it. Ill-gotten gain deranges the wise, verse 7. It makes foolish the wise, and what is given makes a ruin of the heart. Did Israel have the knowledge of God? Did they have the law passed down from Moses? Did they have a great king? Did they have the Psalms of David? Did they have the Proverbs of Solomon by the time that Ethan wrote? Of course they did.

They had great resources available to them. They had, for relatively the first time, it had only been in the last few hundred years, for centuries before that, before the time of Moses, they had no written law. Before 1000 B.C., they didn't have the great Psalms of David.

They didn't have the Proverbs of Solomon and Ecclesiastes and the things that he wrote. But they've got these things. But you can fritter away the benefit of your knowledge to take advantage, to seek short-term gain at the expense of long-term priorities.

Ill-gotten gain will make foolish the wise, and that which is given will make a ruin of the heart. Verse 8, the outcome of a matter is better than its beginning. A long spirit is better than a tall spirit.

An enduring spirit that prevails to the end is better than one that stood tall at the beginning. You remember the episode where the mother of James and John, the disciples of Jesus, she goes to him. I think this was Jesus' aunt.

I think James and John were Jesus' cousins. I think Mary, his mother, and the mother of James and John were sisters. She figures there ought to be an advantage.

There ought to be some extra coming to James and John because, hey, they're blood relations. So she comes to Jesus and she says, grant that they may sit at your right and left hand when you come into the kingdom. Jesus says, that's not an honor that is mine to give.

But he says to James and John, are you able to drink of the cup that I'm going to drink? Are you able to be baptized with the baptism that I'm going to be baptized with? And what do they say? Lord, we are able. And there's a hymn, you know, are ye able, said the master, to be crucified

with me? Yea, the sturdy dreamers answered, to the death we follow thee. That's standing tall at the beginning.

That's a tall spirit. But you ask yourself the question, are they enduring spirits? Are they actually going to be able to do that? And of course, after a few false starts, they will and they do. But the outcome of a matter, let's measure at the end.

Let's not be congratulating ourselves and looking at our work and saying, well, this is good, that was good. We want to have our eye on the prize. We want to be looking outside the fishbowl, past the setting of the sun, to God's evaluation.

He is seeking. He's looking at what we pursue. What's our goal? Why do we do what we do? Don't be deflected.

Don't get involved in short-term activities that distract you and deflect you and keep you from seeing the prize, seeing the goal. Look at verse 9. Do not be troubled in your spirit to be angry. You get troubled, first of all, and that creates an environment where anger will dwell.

Being troubled and being unsettled builds the little house in which anger dwells. Anger dwells or rests in the bosom of fools. They get troubled.

They get disturbed. They don't master the details of life. They don't have a relaxed mental attitude.

They don't have orientation to God's grace. Instead, I've got to fix this. This isn't right.

I am being put upon. This is unfair to me. There's a song that Jake Hess sings and part of it says, people are always trying to block my progress.

They're just blocking my progress. And we look around this and it troubles us. It unsettles us.

We say, why is this blocking my progress? I'm trying to get to point B here and I'm still at point A because people are blocking my progress. Do not be troubled in your spirit and let it lead to anger because anger rests in the bosom of fools. Verse 10, don't be looking over your shoulder and saying, why is it that the beginning days were better than these? Wisdom does not prompt one to ask this question.

You don't look back and say, oh, in the good old days, back in the old core, back when I was a plebe, back in Grafenwoehr, oh, in my old unit, in my last company, oh, when I worked at the bank, this is what we did. I say that, there's a lady down at work and you cannot talk to her for 30 seconds without her saying, oh, when I worked at the bank, we did this and so on. I'm about ready to go burn that bank down.

Don't be looking over your shoulder. Why is the beginning of days better than these? It is not from

wisdom that you inquire about this. Now, look at verse 11.

Wisdom is good, it says in the New King James, with an inheritance and profitable to those who see the sun. Here is something that is profitable. Here's an answer to the question asked back in chapter one and again in chapter three.

Where is the profit? Here's the profit, wisdom with an inheritance. Well, this is, as they like to say, this is a pregnant phrase. There's a lot of meat in this verse.

So we're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to break it down into its component parts and see what a rich amount of information Solomon is giving us here. But in closing for this lesson, it is important for us to stop in the midst of the ongoing hustle and bustle of life and evaluate our priorities, evaluate our motives, and ask ourselves before God asks the question at the end, what am I pursuing? God is seeking out, God is evaluating what we pursue.

Why do we do what we do? Much of Christianity today concentrates on what is it you're doing. I've told you many times, Patty was there the night one of my seminary professors said, you know, Christians spend too much time worrying about their motivations and examining their spiritual belly button and worrying about why they do what they do. Just get out there and do it.

Let the heart take care of itself. If you just get involved, and this is tacitly what most churches do, well, let's get the people in and just get them involved in good works and it'll kind of absorb its way in. Their heart will eventually come right when they get involved and get in a good environment and do good works.

Wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong. We have to analyze the thoughts and intents of our own heart. We have got to find where the flaws are and ask God to cleanse us.

He can't do it until we ask. Why could God not cleanse Israel and why did he have to discipline them, send them out under captivity? Because they would not cleanse themselves in God's grace. We have to make that decision.

We have to make the analysis and we have to do it because the time is short. Remember what Ethan said? Remember, Lord, the years of my life are not very long. If I'm ever going to get back to the place of enjoying your favor, we need to do it soon.

Well, how do we do that? It's not up to God who is leaning forward ready to bless and ready to create in us good that is of eternal value. What is the obstacle that's blocking our progress? It's like Pogo says, we have met the enemy and it is us. We are the obstacle.

Well, let's pause. When we come back, we'll take a look at what wisdom is when it comes along with an inheritance.