

01-12-02a Ecclesiastes

Let's turn for our scripture reading this morning to Psalm 111. Psalm 111, the subtitle in the New King James for this psalm is, Praise to God for His faithfulness and justice. Psalm 111 says, Praise the Lord.

I will praise the Lord with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright and in the congregation. The works of the Lord are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them. His work is honorable and glorious, and His righteousness endures forever.

He has made His wonderful works to be remembered. The Lord is gracious and full of compassion. He has given food to those who fear Him.

He will be ever mindful of His covenant. He has declared to His people the power of His works, in giving them the heritage of the nations. The works of His hands are verity and justice.

All His precepts are sure. They stand fast forever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness. He has sent redemption to His people.

He has commanded His covenant forever. Holy and awesome is His name. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

A good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever. Well, I don't even need to tell you how closely that connects with what we've been studying in Ecclesiastes, especially recently in Ecclesiastes chapter 7. What a wonderful summary of the permanence of the work of God, the perfection of it, the honor and the glory attached to it.

The greatness of God's work is studied, it says in verse 2, by all who have pleasure in them. Some people have pleasure in the work of the Lord, and others really don't. They have more pleasure in their own work.

But because His work is divine, because it is the work of God, it is permanent, it lasts forever, and He gives us the opportunity to partake of that eternal work, that eternal glory. And you'll notice in verse 6, He has declared to His people the power of His works in giving them the heritage of the nations. He gives us a heritage.

What is a heritage? A heritage is something that lasts. It's a permanent possession. It's something you're given that you can't take away.

It's your heritage. People say a lot about heritage. I'm going to say something really politically incorrect, and I hope anybody whose feelings might be hurt by this will just try to understand the point that I'm making as I say it.

But I am dismayed at the invented holiday of Kwanzaa. I saw a commercial. They're starting

every year around Christmastime.

They're having the 11th annual Kwanzaa Fest here in Dallas. And I know that the intentions are good. They're trying to cultivate pride and unity and community spirit among black families and want to give them something unique to themselves.

The Jews have Hanukkah. The Christians have Christmas. And the black community has tried to take some obscure thing out of African history and sort of try to breathe some life into it and call it Kwanzaa.

They've got the spirit of Kwanzaa and its unity and ability and pride and all these different things. It's supposed to be a healthy, self-esteem sort of a holiday. But there's no heritage in Kwanzaa.

People might argue with that and say, well, it's the heritage of Africa. Well, go back and look at Africa and see if that's really the heritage that is being spoken of. It's an invented, it's a manufactured holiday.

The great thing about the holidays that the church observes, you know, holiday is a modern form of the two-word phrase, holy day. You know, the I used to be a Y. It's holy day. And believers who understand the work of God in history celebrate the anniversary of great things in the plan of God.

We don't know exactly when Christ was born, but the church long ago, partly to counter a bunch of pagan festivals that happened around the winter solstice, chose to celebrate the birth of Christ in December. And since we don't know the date, that's as good a date as any. I think he was actually probably born in the spring.

But it's fine with me. I enjoy celebrating the birth of Christ, but that's a heritage. That is always going to be a cause for celebration.

The in-breaking of the divine and holy God into human history, into human life, God made flesh, Emmanuel, God with us. What a wonderful thing to celebrate. And all of us understand how great that is, but that's heritage.

It's permanent. It partakes of the divine. It partakes of the righteousness of God.

It is a reminder of the expression of God's love and God's grace, the personification of the fullness of deity in bodily form, the Lord Jesus Christ, who humbled himself, who took up his cross and walked the road of the Father's plan all the way to death and beyond for us. Now that is something to celebrate. And for someone to manufacture a holiday in the same month as sort of an alternative and as something to release you from having to think about the issues of Christ and Christianity, I think is a bad thing.

If I was a believer and if I had a black heritage, I would eschew Kwanzaa. Yet in the same way

that I would eschew anything else that distracts and takes away from the heritage we have as believers. So anyway, like I say, I'll probably be shot on sight in some quarters for saying that, but it to me is a great example of comparing the work of man to the work of God.

You can talk about altruistic and noble secular qualities of humanity and brotherhood and unity and self-esteem and all this kind of stuff, but it just pales into complete vapor next to the work of God. You have them both in the same month. You get Kwanzaa and you get Christmas.

Which one reveals the honor and glory of God? Which one partakes of the divine and the eternal? There's just no contest. It just shows you how vapid and how ethereal and how transient and how shallow and how completely weak and unworthy human efforts are compared to the work of God. We have such a great heritage in the Lord.

He has made, verse 4, his wonderful works to be remembered. If you want to celebrate something and you want to remember something, think about the works of God. We celebrate resurrection on Resurrection Sunday.

What a great, I mean, the birth of Christ and the resurrection and ascension of Christ. Can you think of anything that is more worth celebrating than that? That is the victory day. That is the day that defines what it is to be a believer and to have a relationship with God.

If Christ had not been raised, remember in Corinthians where Paul says, if Christ is not raised, you are yet in your sins, and we of all men would be most miserable. If we only have hope in this life, if there's no hope of the kingdom, if there's no hope of eternal life with God, then Christianity is a sham and we are just ridiculous and foolish in this life. And yet Christianity today is put forward as some sort of an aid to life under the sun.

It is a coping mechanism. It's a way to solve problems. It's a way to overcome difficulties and to get yourself out of addictions or to get yourself out of codependent relationships or to solve your problems in life.

God is the big problem solver. Well, he is, but that's not the point. Paul says, if we have hope in this life only, if Christianity is just something you use to get through this life, he says, we are of all men most miserable.

Why? Because we have a relationship with an eternal God. It is the hope of the future. It is partaking of the honor and glory of the eternal works of God that is the issue.

Working through problems and surviving difficulties and facing challenges here, it's a means to an end. It's not an end in itself. And when churches and when believers make Christianity an end in itself, they lose the heritage.

They lose partaking of the divine and the eternal. It's your back under the sun. And you haven't found the wisdom that is in the shadow.

You haven't found the silver that is in the shadow. That is not part and parcel of the sun. It's something you find that's not revealed in the sunlight.

It's revealed another way. It's revealed when you look in the hidden places, when you search, when you dig, when you lift up your voice and when you cry out. Proverbs chapter 2. God has declared, well, verse 5, he has given food to those who fear him.

Provision for God is just like logistics for a military force. You're not feeding your army. You're not feeding your sailors and your marines and your pilots and your infantrymen in the army.

You're not feeding them just because it's a wonderful social act of goodness. You feed them because they are a force that's going to go implement the policies of the United States. It's going to secure the defense of our country.

It's going to promote our interests all around the world. And you feed them because they are accomplishing a purpose. Feeding them is not the purpose.

And it's amazing where so many people in Christianity today have the idea that, well, we're just here to be sustained. We're here to be protected. We're here to be, you know, our goals and our life is what's important.

God has a purpose that he's achieving. It is higher and grander than anything we could conceive. When God is giving food to those who fear him, he is ever mindful of his covenant.

Covenant, any sort of agreement, any sort of contract, has provisions that apply to both parties. And both parties are supposed to benefit. Otherwise, why would someone enter into an agreement? They're supposed to be benefit.

Even in the days of conquest, when one king would conquer a neighboring kingdom and a treaty would be drawn up, the treaty would make provisions. We have this suzerain vassal treaty format that is reflected even in some of the Old Testament scriptures, even in the covenants that God made with his own people. It follows a format that was in common use in the ancient Near East.

And part of that format says, I am the king. You will be obedient. You will not rise up in rebellion against me.

You will pay your tribute when it is due. And you will send men as conscripts for my armies and so on. And in exchange for that, I will love you.

And this was formal treaty language. The king said, I will love you. And what did he mean? He wasn't talking about getting all gooey about them.

I will benefit you. I will protect you. If you are attacked, I will defend your borders.

I will create public works in your cities. I will build your schools and your libraries and your streets. I will wall your cities.

I will protect you so that you can grow your crops and not be raided and invaded. If there are robbers and bandits, I will send law enforcement and secure a lifestyle. So there is benefit on both sides.

The king says, I need you to be obedient and to help implement my policies. And in exchange for that, I will benefit you. I will bless you.

I will love you. Well, the same is true. And when it says here that God, why are these things in the same verse? He has given food to those who fear him.

He will ever be mindful of his covenant. He is mindful of his covenant. Those who fear him are helping to implement his policies.

Helping to accomplish his plan and his purpose. And in exchange for that, he is going to give them food. He is going to benefit them.

But it doesn't say that God is going to be in the subservient role. That God is going to be the genie of the lamp. And that if you will only praise him and fear him and say nice things about him, he will give you everything you want and smooth your way and solve all your problems.

And that his goal in life is just to be the beneficent one who accomplishes everything that we plan and purpose. There is a reason why one is the suzerain and the other is the vassal. The suzerain has the authority.

The suzerain has the power. The suzerain makes the plan. And in a lot of Christianity today, it is as though the ship has capsized.

The center of flotation sunk down below the center of gravity. And when that happens on a ship, the ship capsizes and it is hull to the sky. Well, that puts what is supposed to be on the bottom on the top.

And so a lot of Christianity today has the believer with his interests and his goals and his problems and his needs for provision and protection and security and all as the main goal. And all of the prayers and all of the endeavors and everything are, well, we have a vision. We have a, you know, they quote Scripture, without a vision the people will perish.

Well, I've got a vision. We're going to do this. We're going to build this building or evangelize this community or start this ministry or do X, Y, and Z. And God is subordinate to the plans of the people.

And they become the suzerain and he becomes the vassal. Now, they would never say that,

would never admit it. But in practical terms, when you look at what is happening, that's what has happened.

Now, how does that happen? It's because the plans and the purposes of the people are not in line with God's. How does that happen? Because they don't know God. They don't know what his plan and purpose is.

And instead of seeking his righteousness, they are seeking to establish their own. That was the problem in Israel. Go read Romans chapters 9, 10, and 11.

What was the problem in Israel? They did not understand the righteousness of God. They did not pursue the righteousness of God. Instead, they pursued their own.

And it wasn't evil. At least it didn't start out being evil. But it became evil when it superseded God's plan.

The works of God's hands he declares to the people. He has declared to his people the power of his works in verse 6 in giving them the heritage of the nations. Heritage, permanence, something that lasts.

The works of his hands are verity and justice. All his precepts are sure. They stand fast forever and ever.

They are done in truth and uprightness. If you find yourself having to be deceptive, if you find yourself feeling as though you're not really transparent, you're having to do some sort of a fan dance, we sometimes think, and I've seen examples just in the recent days, where we think we can justify certain kinds of behavior because, well, that's how it is in the business world. In the business world, you have to do things a certain way.

Well, as believers, our responsibility to God, our reflection of divine character takes priority. Business needs do not take priority over our responsibilities before the Lord. We should not be deceptive.

We should not be untruthful. We should not be less than forthright. We should not be uncaring.

You can't disregard the well-being of others. What happened to sacrificial and beneficial as descriptions of Christian love? Well, a lot of times that goes by the wayside in the business world or in the social world or in the world of family, and it's justified. Well, it has to be that way because that's just how the world works.

It's impractical. You can't function with truth. You can't function with honesty in certain areas of the world.

It just won't work. Well, I'm sorry, but this is why Paul told the Corinthians, I can't believe that you

all are taking each other to court. Do you not know that you will judge angels? Well, people today would say, well, you've got to defend yourself.

Sometimes you've got to take people to court to get your rights, to get what's coming to you. And you've got to take advantage of what the law says. And the law says that this is the way it works.

And there was an episode, I will confess that I enjoy watching the TV show called The Practice, and it's about a law firm and their defense attorneys, and they defend a lot of real unsavory characters. And I didn't realize this, they usually showed it on Sunday nights, which would be tonight, but they had an episode on late last night, and it was one I had not seen. And a priest, Bobby Donald, who's the head of the firm, his priest was performing an exorcism on a woman who had some schizophrenia problems and thought she was possessed by the devil, and she wanted him to exorcise, to get the demon out of her.

Well, he went to his bishop, being a Catholic priest, they can't really, not supposed to do that without permission, so he went to his bishop, and the bishop said, no way, we don't perform exorcisms when we think there might be mental illness as the cause. And, well, the priest thought, you know, this lady is so desperate, she's begging, I'll just do it anyway. So he strapped her down to a table and was sprinkling holy water and praying, doing one thing and another, and he kind of got overexcited and he thumped her on the chest, and he was saying, you know, Satan be gone, and he whacked her, well, he whacked her a little too hard, and it caused a cardiac arrest, and she died.

And so he came to Bobby, who, he has been Bobby Donald's priest ever since he was a child, and he helped Bobby get through the death or divorce of his parents or whatever. So anyway, to make a long story short, Bobby Donald knows all the tricks of the trade, all of the legalities, and he said, well, and the priest, after she kind of started turning blue, he tried mouth-to-mouth. Well, when the police came, Bobby Donald said, you know, tell them what happened.

He said, well, I was consulting with her and I can't reveal the nature of it because you have priest confidentiality, but she went into cardiac arrest and I performed mouth-to-mouth. Well, you know, he was leaving out details. He wasn't telling the whole truth.

And then Bobby Donald said, well, you know, the priest gave her mouth-to-mouth and then he performed compressions on her chest because he knew there was going to be a bruise. And so they were going to explain away this bruise with a deception, and the priest said, no, I didn't do compressions. But the priest ends up not being charged.

They wound up sort of proactively telling a little bit more of the truth, but he cajoled and he coerced. He put pressure on the bishop to come out and support the priest, even though they had forbidden him from doing this. He called in a favor from a stoolie and got something to sort of bribe a policeman with so that he wouldn't push too hard on the investigation.

And the priest was never charged. My whole point in going through this long rigmarole is at the end of the episode, just before the credits rolled, Bobby Donald is happy because he's been able to help this priest that he loves and has been such a staunch friend to him all of his life. And the priest, he says, this is great.

You're not going to be charged. It's over with. And the priest is looking kind of troubled.

And he said, what's the matter? And the priest said, I'm glad. I appreciate everything you've done. And if it wasn't for you, I would have lost my parish.

I would have lost my life's vocation. My whole life would have gone down the drain. And I appreciate it.

Don't get me wrong. But he said, I'm troubled by how it was accomplished. You used pressure.

You used deception. And Bobby comes back and he says, nothing I've done was unethical. It's all within the bounds of the law.

And the priest said, let me make sure you understand. I am not so much troubled by what you have done for me, but I'm troubled by what I have not done for you. Because in the course of being his priest, the implication is he hasn't really instilled integrity in him and a higher sense of what's really right.

And that is the risk that we run when we say, well, the exigencies of this life make it justifiable to not be honest or to shade or to compromise. But when you look at the work of God's hands in verse 7, his works are verity and justice. All his precepts are sure.

They stand fast forever and ever. And they are done in truth and they are done in uprightness. Every time we hedge righteousness, every time we compromise truth, we're expressing a lack of faith that God's truth and God's righteousness are sufficient.

And we're departing from the verity and the justice of God's work that stands forever and ever. If we really trust God, we're not going to feel the need to compromise the truth. We're not going to feel the need to depart from uprightness.

And even if it is accepted, even if it is common practice, even if it is no one can bring a legal accusation against us for what we've done, it's the norm, it's accepted, it's the usual. What is the standard of God? Are we adhering to righteousness? Are we adhering to truth? Well, this is part and parcel of our study in Ecclesiastes because the goal, what Solomon, Kohelet, is calling us to is to find that which will remain in the hand after the sun sets. What is it that's permanent? What is it that's not vapor? Well, the things that are not vapor are the works of God.

They're eternal. They're done in verity and justice. They're done in truth and uprightness.

He has sent redemption to His people. Sin is what we're getting away from. We've been redeemed out of sin.

We've been bought out of the slave market of sin. Why walk back in? Because it's expedient. We've been redeemed.

He has commanded His covenant forever. Think about the covenant. Party of the first part, party of the second part.

I will love you. I will benefit you. I will protect you.

I will preserve you. I will give you that which you cannot lose. That's God's part.

What is our part? Obedience, faithfulness, consistency in pursuing truth and pursuing righteousness. When we depart from that, we're breaking the covenant. God has commanded His covenant forever.

Holy and awesome is His name. It's the reputation of God that's at stake. We are called by His name.

I love the verse in John where it says, As many as received Him, to them gave He the power, the right, the authority to be called sons of God. We bear the name of the Holy God. Well, you're always embarrassed.

Families often have a black sheep. I've often thought back when I was studying history back during the war with the British and the French and whatnot, there was a General Hull up in Detroit. It's the only time in American history that American soil has been surrendered and handed over to the enemy.

I thought, Boy, I sure hope I'm not related to that guy. I hope he's from some other branch of Hulls that have no genetic link whatsoever. I'd rather be related to Isaac Hull who commanded the Constitution.

I'd rather be related to some other Hull, a Hull that was associated with Patrick Henry, I think, a noble guy. I don't want my name besmirched with some guy that surrendered American land and was an inept general and a dingbat. Well, imagine God.

He's putting His name on us, and are we going to soil and besmirch His name? Holy and awesome is His name. We ought to think about that. We sing the song, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, wonderful name of Jesus, Jesus' name that I love.

We have so many different songs and hymns of praise that talk about the name of Jesus. Blessed be the name. And yet, do we really think about that when it comes to be crunch time and where the practicalities of life start sinking in? Well, verse 10, the fear of the Lord is the beginning

of wisdom.

Solomon has had a lot to say about wisdom, and it's fascinating to me how when he tells us in chapter 7 that wisdom is found in the shadow, and wisdom and silver is found in the shadow while the sun is shining. It's not the sun that is the issue. It's what you find in the shade.

It's what you find in the shadow. And Psalm 91, He who dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

When you're in the shadow of the Almighty, you're going to find that wisdom in that shadow. You're going to find the silver, the lasting value that cannot be taken away. A good understanding have all those who do.

And you'll notice His commandments is in italics. A good understanding have all those who function, who perform, all of the things that have been talked about here, who remember the covenant, who honor His name, who seek the righteousness that's a part of eternal things. His praise endures forever.

Ultimately, it's not our praise. It's not our accomplishment. We were looking at the rich young ruler the other day where he went away sorrowing because his possessions.

He had been righteous. He could look at the law and say that he had done these things, but there was one thing that he lacked. He had an attachment to something.

You think now, I wonder what ever happened to the riches that belonged to the rich young ruler. He probably owned some land. He probably had a quantity of gold.

He might have had some silos and barns full of grain. He might have had a few businesses running there, staffed by servants and so on. He had a little empire going there.

He had a great holding. It might have been sort of like a Rockefeller in his day or a Perot or a Donald Trump there in the area. And he had this, I wonder where it is now.

I wonder where all of those actual possessions and who owns that land. Nobody even knows his name, much less what he had at the time and what an opportunity he had when Jesus said, this one thing you lack, sell what you have, give it to the poor, come follow me. He could have been a disciple.

He could have been an author of inspired scripture. He could have had an eternal heritage, but he couldn't see the difference. He was trying to hang on to things that he couldn't keep, that have evaporated away.

Nobody knows where they are now. And he frittered away eternal things that he could have had his name. If he'd been a good guy, he'd be like Zacchaeus.

His name would be in scripture. Wouldn't it be a great thing? Your name is in the eternal word of God, recorded unto the ages. Every angel knows it.

Every human being that goes to glory knows the name. He didn't get that honor because he let some stuff become too important to him. We can make that same mistake.

Psalms 111 is so great for summarizing. This is Solomon's theme in Ecclesiastes chapter 7. Let's return there now. We have a few things to point out in Ecclesiastes chapter 7. I'm not having my laptop anymore.

I'm going back to the old-fashioned way here. You'll hear my pages ruffling. But I want to review the translation that I have given you here for chapter 7. A name is better than good ointment, and the day of death than the day of birth.

Why is that? Think about the eulogy. I just got my ship magazine from the Naval Academy Alumni Association, and this is the issue where they listed the alumni who were killed on September 11. There were a lot of them.

There were several in the Pentagon. There were a couple on the airplanes. There were more than you would think.

There were eight or nine alumni who all died on that day. There were others that have died. The very last few pages of the magazine are last call, and that's where the roster of all of the guys from the class of 1926 and all of the World War II veterans and Korea veterans, and there will be a paragraph, a eulogy, or a summary.

In fact, this most recent magazine, one of the men who has had to do that, he's in the class of 47, I think, he's written a lot of eulogies for his classmates over the years for shipmate, and they asked him to kind of give some tips on how to write a good eulogy, a good last call article, because a lot of the younger graduates have never had to do that before, and this is going to be something the family is going to save, and you want to really do the best that you can. And so he wrote a one-page article on what's important to include and what you want to be careful of and points on how to do a good job of that. Well, why is the day of death better than the day of birth? That's when you look back over your life and say, What was it all for? What did it mean? If we would measure ourselves each day by, What kind of an entry is this going to make in my eulogy file? Is this going to be something that on the day of my death is going to be on the credit side of the ledger? Is this something that God is going to look at when I stand before Christ at the judgment seat and say, Now, there was a day where you seized and lay hold of that which is good, that which is eternal.

The day of birth, that's the beginning. You're looking ahead. You've got big dreams, big plans.

Anytime you're starting something new, you have aspirations, and you have all kinds of...

Remember what we saw in the last chapter where a dream comes with many answers and the voice of a fool and many words? Well, that's what you do at the beginning of things. Before you see the denouement, before you find out how it all turns out. The day of death is better because the record is written and you look back, and if you keep the day of death in mind rather than the day of birth... I've often thought... I used to be... You know, denominational churches and things, a lot of people would celebrate their spiritual birthday.

There was kind of a fad that went there for a while where everybody would say, Oh, you know, I was saved on April the 19th of 19... Whatever it was. And every year I think back to the day of my spiritual birth. Well, the perverse side of my nature says what we ought to do is have a death day.

We ought to have a death day where we think about, Well, you know, one of these days I'm going to pass away. We ought to spend the whole day looking in prospect at what the summation of our life will be. That's what Solomon says.

The day of death is better than the day of birth. Happy death day. Happy death day to you.

I mean, you know. But think about it. What's going to count in eternity? It's not the birthday.

It's the death day. What is the record that you write, that we are writing even as we speak? That is a good and healthy thing to put some distress on your face. Which is what he goes on to say.

It's better to walk to the house of mourning than to walk to the house of feasting. What is he saying there? I enjoy translating that literally. It's better to walk instead of go.

Because halak there is that same verb that got used so much in chapter 1. And it tells us that we're walking. In the New Testament, it's peripateo. To walk around.

Peri, like perimeter, circumference. Peri means around. And pateo means to walk.

Paul, over in Ephesians, he says, walk circumspectly. Peripateo. It's a synonym for lifestyle.

When Glenn Carnegie, my pastor back in the 70s, taught through Ephesians and he got to that, he used the illustration. When he got to walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, he said, circumspectly, this is the way you walk in the barnyard. How do you walk in a barnyard? You walk circumspectly.

You watch where you put your feet or you're going to be on the back porch scraping them off. Way back when I had chickens, we kept an old butter knife that had been found somewhere and didn't match our silverware. Kept an old butter knife on the ledge by the back door because before you go in the house, you have to scrape your shoes.

If you've not been walking circumspectly, you can go in the house with those shoes. And that's what Glenn was talking about. He said, walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise.

And peripateo, to walk about. Well, halak is the Old Testament equivalent of peripateo. And he says, it is better to walk.

As you go through, be aware that your destination is the house of mourning. Somebody's going to be crying the blues when you shuffle off your mortal coil. And what will be the summation? What's going to be the evaluation of your life? It's better to walk to the house of mourning than to walk to the house of feasting.

To spend your life, instead of thinking about what is the significance of my life, what is the outcome of my life, you think, where can I get the next fix of pleasure in my life? How can I have the next high point? What's the next stimulating thing I can do? What are you walking toward? It reminds me of going to Six Flags. I've been to Six Flags several times. Not necessarily or entirely of my own volition.

But when you walk around Six Flags, what do you do? You're looking for, well, what would be a fun ride to ride? What would be a fun painted cardboard thing to walk through? And do we want to watch the cowboys shoot themselves and fall off the balcony? Or do we want to go in and ride the little Bugs Bunny thing through Toonville? Or do we want to get up on the Viper or the Rocket Ride or the merry-go-round or the sombrero or the swinging ship? You know, you spend your whole day at Six Flags. To me, I have the hardest time with that because it's just antithetical. I have children, I know they need to go and it's important to go and it's my duty.

But I have the hardest time with amusement parks because to me it's antithetical to everything I believe. Let's spend a day pursuing transient, temporary pleasure. Let's walk around looking for the house of feasting.

It just is a very difficult thing for me. I have pulled it off several times, but not always with grace and not always in an absence of mental attitude sense. But that's just me.

There's nothing sinful and wrong about amusement parks. But to me, they're just a metaphor for everything that's wrong with human life. Anyway, it's better to walk to the house of mourning.

Not to say that if I had my way, we'd all pack up and go look around and see where the hearses are parked and walk in and listen to eulogies all day either. But the end of all mankind is in the house of feasting. How many billions of people have frittered away their lives in the search for pleasure, in the search for stimulation, in the search for happiness as an end in itself? That's the end of all mankind.

That's the default. If you don't do something, if you don't latch on to something that God is holding out to you, you are going to end up in the house of feasting and you're going to end up with nothing. It's the house of vapor.

And you have to take action. You're on the railroad train to hell as a human being. We all are.

That is the default. It's built into our nature. We're corrupt.

We're fallen. We are self-seeking. We're selfish.

And if we don't reach up and grab the outstretched hand of God, we're going to be... It's the end of all mankind. The living will set it upon their heart. If you're alive, if you're going to be productive and bear fruit, it's not just living in the sense that you're still breathing and walking around.

If you've got any spiritual life, you're going to take this to heart. If you're spiritually alive, you're going to be walking to the house of death. It's one of those oxymorons.

It's one of those contradictions, ironies, that the more alive you are spiritually, the more oriented toward death you're going to be. That's the way to stay alive. The way to stay productive is to remember that death is coming.

You're walking to the house of mourning. This is what Solomon tells us. Aggravation is better than laughter, in verse 3, because distress of the face makes your heart good, rather than sitting on our laurels and complimenting and applauding ourselves for the tests that we passed, we ought to be distressed about the ones that we're still failing after all these many years, after all these hundreds of hours of Bible study.

There are areas that ought to distress our face. And as we walk to the house of mourning, we realize, you know, I still haven't passed that test. I still haven't grown in that area.

I still haven't had that rock in my soul busted up so that good things can grow there. It ought to distress our face. That's what will make our heart good.

It is recognizing. And we shouldn't feel bad. A lot of times we say, oh, you know, I'm such a failure, and we get to feeling all depressed.

It's a good thing to be aware of your failures. That's healthy. It's people who are failing all over the place and aren't aware of it, who have a happy expression on their face and are running to the house of feasting and they've got all these problems.

Those are the ones that have really got problems. So at the same time that we have distress in our face, it's not grieving as those who have no hope. Take comfort in the fact that this is necessary.

We're supposed to be aware. We're supposed to have some distress in the face. And you're on a good path if you do.

If you're distressed about your failures, that's good. Be glad. If you weren't distressed about your failures, that would be terrible.

At least you know where the work needs to be done, and that's half the battle. You cannot be saved if you don't know you're lost. You cannot be rescued if you don't know you're perishing.

You can't grab the life ring if you don't realize you're drowning. And the first step toward claiming the available grace of God is recognizing that you need it. Look at any decent help program, AA or any 12-step program.

What's step number one? Acknowledge that you have a problem and do it publicly. If you don't acknowledge the problem, if you don't have distress of the face, your heart is not going to be made good. So this is a good thing.

We grieve over it, and it's bad in that sense, but it's good that you care. Have you ever seen a child that didn't care that they were bad? What a horrific situation. Discipline just goes like water off a duck's back because they don't care.

So at least caring, that's the road to making our heart good. Well, we're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to run right up to where we currently are in chapter 7, and we're going to see some fascinating things when we get down here to verse 19 and 20 and 21 and 22.

The progress of Solomon's thought that's established in the beginning of the chapter, we have to kind of get a running start to make it through those verses because they're kind of tricky otherwise. We'll do that when we come back.