

01-12-02b Ecclesiastes

Let's resume our study now in Ecclesiastes chapter 7. We've reviewed our translation, and I know I've reviewed this before, and I could imagine my own self sitting and thinking, well, you know, we need to move forward, we don't need to keep going back, but I have to keep going back myself as we move forward in the verses because we've understood these in a different way for so long, they've been set in a different context for so long that I almost feel like I have to get a running start and review and have fresh in my mind the context that Solomon himself has established and the train of thought that he has created, the issues that he's addressing and have those correctly identified so that when we tackle our new verses, they flow. One of the criticisms of the book of Ecclesiastes, one of the observations that's been made about it by many commentators is that in some ways it's like the Proverbs, that it's disjointed, that it seems to be a hodgepodge, that sections are thrown together and that there aren't really any connecting links. Well, the traditional understanding of the book, you find that to be the case, but I think we've observed thus far in the first six and a half chapters that if you catch Solomon's drift, it really does flow, it does make sense, he does go logically from one area to another, he takes on the nature of injustice in the world and looks at different aspects of it, not only what it does to other people, but what it does to the person who is perpetrating the injustice.

You can start out wise, but then if you compromise, if you begin to take advantage of the fact that you have influence or you have an opportunity, if you compromise your integrity, it can make a ruin of your heart. Verse 7, we've gone back through the first four verses in our first session this morning. In verse 5, it is better to listen to the rebuke of the wise than for a man to listen to the song of fools.

We've talked about the nettles under the kettle and the laughter of the fool and this being so transient and no lasting impact, no lasting effect, no lasting benefit, nothing in your hand. Then you get to verse 7, ill-gotten gain will make foolish the wise and what is given makes a ruin of the heart. The ill-gotten gain means that you're taking advantage of an opportunity that's really not the best.

I gave you the illustration from the television program where you can gain an advantage by taking advantage. And if it isn't a reflection of integrity, if it isn't the truest and best and partaking of God's righteousness and justice, if it isn't an expression of faith, if it isn't leaving things in God's hand, whatever gain you derive from that, you might actually get over. You might actually obtain a benefit in that act of compromise, in that winking of the eye at something that's just not quite kosher.

But it will detract from your wisdom, the wisdom that you've gained, the path that you've established, the momentum that you've gained as a believer in growth and in walking down the narrow road and your direction toward the straight gate. One of the things that you learn in artillery is one of the very first, you know, they talk about the first principles of the doctrine of

Christ. Well, the first principles of the doctrines pertaining to artillery is your deflection and your quadrant elevation are everything.

Everything in artillery, moving the guns, having ammunition, the trucks, the procedures, the communications, getting set up, getting in place, having observers out, everything that has to do with putting steel on the target as far as artillery goes comes down to two things. When you get ready to fire an artillery projectile, what direction is that tube pointed? The lateral movement, the direction, northeast, south and west, if you will, is called deflection. What direction are you pointed? In fact, degrees, we have 360 degrees in a circle in the artillery.

Degrees are too coarse a measurement. And so you have, we have to divide a circle into more parts than that. And so in the artillery we use mils of deflection because they are a finer graduation.

There are many more mils in a circle than there are degrees. There are only 360 degrees in a circle. But there are 3,600 mils in a circle.

Well, there's actually more than that. Deflection is very important. What direction is the howitzer's tube pointed? And then quadrant elevation, how far have you raised it? What range are you going to achieve? How far will the projectile travel? You have other things involved, how much powder and so on.

But everything hinges on your aim, if you want to call it that, because you can't see the target in indirect fire. Most of the time you can't see. You have observers who are on the radio calling back and telling you how to adjust your fire.

But even though you can't see the target, you elevate the tube to a certain angle and you deflect the tube a certain number of mils in order to achieve the objective. Well, even a small difference at the ranges that artillery fires, just being off a fraction of a degree, makes a huge difference by the time the round has traveled several kilometers away. You think about this, the people that try to shoot a pistol or shoot a rifle, even at short range, just the smallest wiggle in your hand and the bullet can completely miss the tin can or the piece of cardboard or whatever it is you're aiming at, people that have done that.

We've gone up to Claremore, up to Mom and Dad's, and gone out in the pasture and set something up and got the old .45 out and cranked off a few rounds. It's amazing how just the slightest movement of your hand can cause you to completely miss a fairly large target. Well, this is the idea.

Ill-gotten gain makes foolish the wise. It just takes a small deflection of our integrity. It just takes a small compromise of our righteousness to erode away our wisdom.

It is like the presence of sin versus the presence of God. God and sin cannot coexist in the same

space. This was reflected in the worship life of Israel.

When you go to Leviticus and you see what could defile an Israelite and prevent them from approaching the tabernacle, could prevent them from coming in to offer a sacrifice, cause them to remain outside the camp, couldn't even have truck with the rest of the Israelites, couldn't even have fellowship with their brothers and their tribe mates and their clan and their fellow Israelites have to be outside the camp because of ritual defilement. And it was a picture of the fact that God is holy, sin is antithetical to the presence and the purpose and the plan of God, and they just don't coexist in the same space. Well, in the same way, self-seeking and appealing to the wisdom of man is going to occupy space that ought to be taken up by the wisdom of God.

They just can't coexist in the same space. So to the extent that you rely on, to the extent that you harbor and take to yourself gain through human avenues and human wisdom, you have displaced divine wisdom. And to that extent, you make yourself foolish, you make yourself a babbler.

We talked about the verb *halal*, which is the verb that means to praise in its *cal* form, its standard form. But the *piel*, which is the intensive, means that that's been pushed to an extreme. And instead of praising, you're babbling, you're in ecstatic, so to speak, you've kind of lost control.

It is used of going from praise to boasting, overweening praise, inappropriate praise, flattery, obsequiousness. It has all of the implications of praise that has been taken to excess and has become something bad, something embarrassing, something humiliating. Well, that's what happens to your wisdom.

It's often translated madness, but that doesn't catch the sense of the word. Think about praise and think about taking it to an extreme. It's loss of control.

It's the ship with all of its sails set and the rudder broken off. So that's what happens when we take to ourselves ill-gotten gain. We take advantage of some leverage or of an opportunity that isn't consistent with integrity, but it's just so tempting.

We just take it and we say, you know, I can secure myself this way. I can help myself this way. It would be so much better if I could just do this.

And we turn a blind eye to things that we know from the Word of God and it just displaces. To that extent, it has displaced the wisdom of God and we lose it. In the second half of the verse, in verse 7, it says, what is given makes a ruin of the heart.

I think I mentioned this before. The make a ruin verb there is in the Masoretic text, but the 4Q *Qohelet*, which is from K4 at Qumran, it has a slightly different word here. And I've mentioned to you in the past, especially when we were going through 1 Samuel, how in the course of copying, sometimes someone would be reading the text and the copyist, there might be three or four guys

all making a copy and they might mishear a word or the copyist looking at one manuscript to another.

There are different forms of mistake that can be made. If you want to see some of these, you can find it out yourself. Take any typewritten, single-spaced sheet of English verbiage and just make a handwritten copy and then go back and proofread it.

And you'll find that when the word and was at the end of a line, you've doubled it and you've written it twice. It'll say and, and if you look at the end of the line and the beginning of the next line. Or if a word is repeated, sometimes your eye will skip from the first place the word was used to the second place and you'll skip the intervening text.

Or sometimes you'll go back and repeat something. You'll have the same phrase twice because the same word or phrase is repeated. And all of these were, the scribes were susceptible to that.

And so it shouldn't throw us into shock when we, I mean, even within the Word of God where you find the Song of Moses, look at it in its original location, look at it in the Psalms. The Hebrew is not identical. And yet we know Moses only wrote one song.

What happened? Well, there'd been transmission errors and you can see them. It's a textbook case. And God put it in there on purpose to show us.

He said, look, watch out for this. I'm giving you two copies of this. Same thing in Kings and Chronicles.

Look at the same account and you'll see where a D is turned into an R or vice versa. So anyhow, we have this, and I think 4Q Kohelet actually preserves possibly a better reading here where the verb, instead of make a ruin of the heart, it is the verb that means to twist. And it kind of makes harmony with the first half of the verse.

Ill-gotten gain makes foolish the wise, and what is given twists the heart. Make a ruin is the verb that means to desolate, to utterly destroy and leave, you know, burn the city and sow the ground with salt. Desolate it.

Make it barren and completely obliterated is the make a ruin verb. But you notice in the first half, it hasn't destroyed the wise, it's just made them foolish. It's displaced their wisdom.

And here, this gift, this thing that is given, this thing that is obtained twists the heart, points it in a different direction, changes your deflection and you're going to miss the target. So it's my preference. The Masoretic text says make a ruin, but I suspect the Qumran fragment probably preserves the more original reading.

Then in verse 8, the outcome of a matter is better than its beginning. A long spirit is better than a tall spirit. We've reviewed that a couple of times.

Obviously, it is your record over time that matters. And this is true in a lot of things. There were a lot of good football games on television yesterday, Army-Navy game, Navy lost.

They had the Big 12 championship game between Colorado and Texas. Texas was favored, Texas lost. It was just a bad day for all the teams.

If I was going to care about sports, I would have been rooting that everybody lost. But when you think about sports, you think about football in particular, somebody can have an incredible game. You can have a player who intercepts passes and who gets around their defender and sacks the quarterback on defense and does all of these wonderful things.

You can have a running back who just carries the whole game on his shoulders. He's a big hero and enables him to win a game. And that's a great thing.

But if he only does that once in the season, what is his evaluation as a player? You can say, boy, he had a heck of a game there that first game of the season, but what value is he at the end of the season? Are they going to want to have him back the following year? Or was he what we call a flash in the pan? It isn't how you looked at the beginning. It's the record you've established over time. Now, if he does that in every game, if he's like Emmitt Smith was for so many years on the Dallas Cowboys, where you could count on the guy.

I mean, he had 100-yard rushing games, game after game after game after game. It didn't matter what they threw at him. He had a great line blocking for him who would open up holes and he knew how to take advantage of just the smallest seam in the defense and could move so well laterally, had great sight, could just see and was fresh and didn't have any injuries yet.

Game after game after game. And Emmitt Smith, it wasn't that he's not the tallest, he's not the biggest, he's not the flashiest runner in the NFL, but he wasn't so much a tall spirit as a long spirit. Just game after game after game, he just cranked out the yardage.

He's up there among the all-time greats for rushing yardage over a career. And it's consistency over time that is valued. And he's one of the few players that's been with the Cowboys more than a couple of years.

I mean, Troy's gone, everybody else has gone. Emmitt's still in there pounding out the yardage because he's just consistent. He's a long spirit.

He's an enduring player. And that's what Solomon points out here. The outcome is what counts.

This just harks back to the beginning of the chapter. Are you in the house of mourning? Are you looking at the day of death? The spirit that can be commended on that day is a lot better than the one that stood tall at the beginning but flaked out somewhere along the way. How is it that you flake out? You compromise.

You go for the quick fix. You go for the ill-gotten gain. You take advantage of something that's being offered.

You know, people get in trouble for accepting a gift when they're in business and somebody sort of tries to sweeten the deal and gives them a box of steaks or gives them some sort of thing that makes it worthwhile for them to accept this company as a vendor or as a contractor or whatever. And that's forbidden for a reason. You don't want to be influenced by what amounts to a bribe or by some advantage that you will gain if you choose this way.

You need to be guided by principle, not by the prospect of gain. We understand that in the secular world. Well, it's true.

If you want to be that spirit that survives to the end and is commended at the day of death, you're not going to just take advantage. You're not going to seek what you can gain. And a lot of times these things are not sinful.

They're not evil. They're not unattractive. They're just ill-gotten.

It doesn't reflect integrity. It doesn't reflect righteousness. It doesn't reflect a focus on the eternal things like we saw in our psalm this morning.

Then in verse 9, Do not be troubled in your spirit to be angry. We've talked about how if you allow yourself to be troubled, if you lose the ability to relax when the details of life don't seem to be going your way, a troubled spirit is just a breeding ground for anger. And if you're troubled, if you're thrown off stride, if you're stressed, anger can breed.

And you have to watch all the time. Just when you think you've got it licked, you turn around and find out that you've got bitterness. You've got anger wanting to rear its ugly head.

And the solution, as we've talked about before, is not to try to address anger. Get back and eliminate the environment where anger can find a home. Don't be troubled.

Being troubled means you've already abandoned your faith. You're not focusing on the promises of God. You're not focusing on His provision, on His omniscience, on His foreknowledge, on His plan and purpose.

Like the old song says, He's got the whole world in His hand. If you lose sight of that, you're going to be troubled. And then anger comes in.

Well, anger is a hard thing to fight. Anger is an emotion and you have a difficult time quelling an emotion. Fear is an emotion and it's difficult to quell.

Well, don't tackle fear and don't tackle anger. Tackle the environment that allows them to exist. Exercise faith and get rid of the troubled spirit.

Anger and fear can't take hold. Faith eliminates the troubled spirit. What is the fruit of the spirit? Peace, patience, long-suffering, gentleness, self-control.

You're not going to get gripped by fear. You're not going to get gripped by anger or any of the other emotional complex of sins if you eliminate those things. Solomon reviews that principle here.

Do not be troubled in your spirit to be angry. Anger rests in the bosom of fools. And if you didn't start out as a fool, if you accumulated wisdom and so on, but you get a troubled spirit and you get anger in your bosom, anybody with anger in their bosom is a fool.

It has displaced their wisdom just like the Ogat and Gane will displace it. Do not say, why is it that the beginning days were better than these? It is not from wisdom that you inquire about this. One of the words in verse 10 is tov.

Why is it the beginning days were tovine from these? The beginning days were good-er. They were more tov than these days. There was more tov in the old days than there is now.

Wisdom doesn't ask this question. In verse 11, tov is wisdom with permanent possession. You are not going to find the good by looking back to the old days.

You are going to find the good when you maintain permanent possession of wisdom, when you have wisdom that leads to permanent possession. Wisdom is part and parcel of our eternal substance that we hold in our hand. They always say you can't take it with you.

There is one thing all of us will take with us at the point of death and beyond into the eternal future, and that is the wisdom that we gain in this life. What a tragic thing to let something displace that wisdom. Death is not going to cause us to lose our wisdom.

We can lose our wisdom by tolerating a troubled spirit. We can lose our wisdom by focusing on illicit gain, on gain in the short term that is not coming from faith and not coming from the provision of God. We can give away our wisdom and we won't have it to take with us into the future.

Wisdom, the word order is real good in Hebrew. Good, don't say the old days were good and more good than these. Good is wisdom with permanent possession.

The previous verse is looking back. This verse looks ahead. Permanent possession, that's a future thing.

I have this wisdom now and I'm going to have it in the future. I'm gaining it now for use in the future, not just in this life but even more so in the next. God will put us in positions in the millennial kingdom and beyond where the wisdom we've gained in this life will be essential.

If we've given away our wisdom, if we've frittered it away, if we've squandered it, if we've lost it through inattention and through focusing on short term things, we will be disqualified from function. We'll be disqualified from partaking and reflecting the honor and glory of God that we saw in Psalm 111. Good is wisdom with permanent possession.

It is profitable, Yitron. What is the profit to a man? This is the profit. Profitable to the ones who are seeing the sun.

Not only is it a permanent possession for the future, but it will profit you now. If you value wisdom, look at the promises that we saw in the Psalm. God will give food to those who fear Him, the ones who recognize the valuable things.

God's not going to let you waste away or wither or suffer harm and disrepute. There are so few of us who latch on to that truth. God is not going to lose track of you.

It's easy for Him to keep track of believers who actually fear Him because they're in the minority. Good is wisdom with permanent possession and profitable to the ones seeing the sun for in shadow is wisdom. In shadow is silver.

It's not the first thing you see as you live under the sun. The first thing you see under the sun is what the sun is shining on, the common things of this life. It's when you look in the hidden places.

You look in the shadow of the Almighty. That's where you're going to find the permanent things. Prophet Yitron is knowing wisdom gives life to her Baal, to her Lord, to her owner.

Prophet is knowing the value of wisdom and the life that comes from wisdom. It's not just wisdom as an end in itself. Solomon is going to talk about that in our upcoming verses.

What if you're just seeking wisdom for its own sake? He doesn't say prophet is wisdom and put a period in the sentence, does he? Prophet is knowing that wisdom is the means to an end. Wisdom is the means to life, eternal life. Life that's eternal in the sense of its fullness, of its enduring quality, partaking of the eternal.

As we've talked about in some of our New Testament studies. He says, look, look at the work of God. Who is able to straighten what He's made crooked? If you're busy trying to straighten out what God has purposely made or left crooked in this life, you're out in the sunshine.

You're not looking in the shade. You're not finding the silver. You say, oh look, here's a bent tree branch.

I'm going to see if I can straighten this out. Here's a road that doesn't make the most direct route. I'm going to hew me a straight path from one village to the next.

God has made these things crooked. God has allowed them to remain crooked in this life. There

are people who are trying to stamp out world hunger.

Not to say that it isn't a good thing to help the hungry or to clothe the ones who need clothing or to visit those who are sick and in prison. Those are good things. But don't make it your goal.

Don't say this is my aim and my end in life. This is what justifies my existence. So many people, how many times have you heard somebody say, well, you know, especially people at the end of their life, entertainment tonight, is it E.T. entertainment? Can't think what the T stands for.

Entertainment Tonight or something like that. Anyway, the program, they've had a series of features on whatever happened to, and they have these people that were famous on TV, and a lot of them have died or cancer got them or one thing or another. And they'll have, you know, here's the last interview that E.T. had with Michael Landon or with this person or that person or the other that has passed away now.

Red Fox and Darren from Bewitched, and they've had dozens of these people. And a lot of them, when they know that they're dying and their days are short, and when other people are evaluating and saying, well, this is the impact this person had beyond their television series, what do they say? Well, he made a difference. He, you know, if I can just make somebody smile, if I can just, it's all in this life.

It's all impact here. It doesn't partake of the divine. It doesn't partake of the eternal.

Well, I just, if I brought a little sunshine, if I was able to help, you know, different ones have gone and done charities and things. Solomon says, look at the work of God. You're not going to be able to straighten crooked things in this life.

God has infinite power, and God doesn't busy Himself straightening out every crooked thing. He leaves it crooked. In some cases, He made it crooked.

So don't fling yourself against a brick wall. Don't engage in a fruitless endeavor. It is a wonderful thing to be charitable.

It's a wonderful thing to see a need and exercise your spiritual gift and your opportunity to engage in ministry. Nothing wrong with that at all. But there is something wrong with making that your goal and your objective, the be-all and end-all, the measure of your life, whether or not you've been able to impact someone.

That is an entirely different kettle of fish. Look at the work of God. Who has straightened what He has made crooked? Here's what you need to do, He says in verse 14.

In the day of benefit, be for the good. When you're in a good day, then focus on the good. That's a wonderful thing.

Be for it. In the day of calamity, look also at this. In this regard, corresponding to this, this day of calamity, God works in a manner such that man will not lay hold of anything after.

It's one of the most difficult verses in Ecclesiastes to get the sense of in this context. But what is He saying? God is at work, whether it's the day of good or the day of calamity, and He's showing us something. You've got this awkward Hebrew phrase corresponding to this, God works in a manner such that God is not straightening that which is crooked.

Look at the work of God. What is God doing when He works? We just had that in the previous... He's not straightening out what is crooked. We think, well, God is at work to make my path straight.

No, He's not. God made the path crooked, and He wants you to walk the crooked path. Remember the crooked man and the crooked style and the crooked sixpence and all that? Well, God left us in a crooked world, and He wants us to, in a sense, walk the crooked road facing the details and the challenges of life.

Why? God is going to work in the manner such that man will not lay hold of anything after it. We come face to face with that evil answer we saw in chapter one, that the things of this life are evanescent. They are temporary.

They're ethereal. They're here and gone. The grass withers and the flower fades.

Things go in a cycle. We're supposed to be brought up to that conclusion. The day of calamity... You know, people in prosperity, when everybody's down having a fun time at Six Flags, they don't stop and think about the meaning of life and am I pursuing the permanent things? Am I pursuing the things of value? But in the day of calamity, we sure do.

We draw ourselves up short and take stock, don't we? Have I brought this on myself? Am I under discipline? Am I laying hold of what I should be laying hold of? In verse 14 he says, God is at work in the manner such that man will not lay hold of anything after it, it being the day of calamity. You know, people say, well, I'm a better person for having had my legs blown off in Vietnam or I'm a better person for having dived into the water, hit the rock and broke my neck and become a paraplegic. I'm a better person for having lived through the falling of the Twin Towers or whatever it might be.

God is at work in those situations to show us that even these life lessons and these, oh, I've grown, I've found the silver lining in the cloud and all that, is not permanent. God is at work in those situations to show us that whatever we think is a gain under the sun is really not. What is God facing us with? And you can't take verse 14 without going on down to verse 18.

Verse 18 says, it is good that you take hold in this and also from this not cause or allow your hand to rest. When he says take hold in this, what is he talking about? He says, I've seen

everything in the days of my vapor. There's righteous perishing in his righteousness, there's the transgressor lasting or living long in his transgression.

Well, if these life lessons are so valuable, if things in the day of calamity are supposed to be so good, why is it that the righteous perishes and why is it that the transgressor, the sinner, seems to prosper and go on? That doesn't look like the life lessons are working out to me. It looks like things are still crooked in the world. And that doesn't seem right.

There's an incongruity there. It doesn't match the old easy wisdom that says, do good and you'll be blessed, do bad and you'll be cursed. Here's the righteous perishing and here's the unrighteous prospering.

What's he talking about? God is at work in these days of calamity to bring us up short. Lay hold of the fact that the goal is not in this life. It's not a nice little half hour episode of a TV show where in 30 minutes you have the conflict, the climax, the resolution, and all the loose ends are tied up like Perry Mason.

You know, at the end you've got Perry and Della and Paul Drake and the last few questions you had about the case are all wrapped up in their little conversation and they all go out to eat and turn out the light. That's not how this life is. The answers are in the next life.

The answers are outside the setting of the sun. And God is not straightening what has been made crooked and we can't straighten what has been made crooked and we're not going to see the full reward of the righteous in this life. We're not going to see the full discipline and punishment of the reprobate in this life.

If you're restricting your view to what's under the sun, God is at work to show you that you can't lay hold. You can't make sense of it in this life. Where is the justice? What's the big problem with the Jews and the Holocaust? They can't figure out if they're the people of God, how could God let the Holocaust happen? What a crooked thing that is.

God is at work to show them. They can't lay hold of it. They can't make sense of it.

Look at world hunger. What's people's problem in believing in God? I can't believe that a loving God would let all these bad things happen. Look at these tragedies.

You've got bad things happening to children. You've got kidnappings and all these awful things happening. If there was a God, He just wouldn't let these things happen.

That's exactly the point. You've got to realize that this is not a nice little terrarium sealed up with all of the elements and everything equalizes and everything balances and you've got yin and yang and it all comes right in the end within this life. It doesn't.

God is at work to show you that it doesn't. God is at work to show us that there's something

beyond this life. If you just focus on this life, you can't grab anything in your hand.

So Solomon says, In the days of my vapor, in the days of my transient life, I've seen it all. I've seen the righteous perishing in his righteousness. I've seen the transgressor lasting in his transgression.

People say, Don't become excessively righteous. Do not make yourself overly wise. Why desolate yourself? If you make wisdom an end in itself, why do people do that? All you have to do is get on the internet and look around at people who think they've got life figured out.

Some people think that investments are the key and they've got their portfolio and their stocks and their bonds and their financial security all mapped out and they keep track of all of the developments day by day and they've got that figured out. Other people think, well, it's in philosophy. Oprah had yoga on the other day.

I thought I would never make it through to the end. I wanted to watch it just to... Oh my goodness. That is the closest I've come to actually getting physically sick.

Yoga is the people coming in with all these testimonials about how yoga saved their life. Yoga is a weight loss program. Here's a lady that lost 20 pounds as soon as she learned it because she was stress eating.

Once she got into yoga and stuck her feet up on her knees and pointed her hands out to the side, she lost 20 pounds. And yoga is the answer. People think that they've got this life wired and they've got it figured out.

He says, don't make righteousness. I've got the good path figured out. Don't make wisdom a goal.

Wisdom and righteousness are good things. We tend to think that something is either just totally bad or totally good. You can take a good thing and make it bad if you put it out of place.

What would happen if you were building a house and you put all the plywood and shingles at the bottom and you put the cinder blocks and the poured concrete slab up at the top? Nothing wrong with cinder blocks and concrete slabs. They make a great foundation, but they make a lousy roof. Shingles make a wonderful roof, but they make a lousy foundation.

You've got to put things where they belong or they can become bad. If you make righteousness an end, what do you think the Pharisees did? They were consumed with establishing their own righteousness. They memorized the Bible because they wanted to be the masters of wisdom.

And they just missed the boat because they made it an end in itself instead of the means of finding the fear of the Lord. So don't be excessively righteous. Do not make yourself overly wise.

Why desolate yourself? You're going to wind up like a barren wasteland and this is what the

Pharisees are going to be. They're going to be standing outside the kingdom, outside the house of feasting, looking at everybody sitting down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and they missed it because they made themselves overly righteous. They made themselves excessively wise and they just flat the boat sailed and they weren't on it.

Same thing, do not transgress excessively and do not become a fool. Do not be transgressing excessively. Don't fail to clean yourself up.

Don't be constantly getting defiled. Don't have sin and transgression as a stumbling block. He's already talked about transgressors who are prospering in their transgression.

And the fact that you don't get slapped down and that God doesn't come down and strike with lightning people who are engaged in transgression. There are believers I've seen, I think it's a shameful thing, many people that have had hundreds and even thousands of hours of good, solid Bible teaching, I'm talking about in other locales, other states, shack up and live together without the benefit of marriage. And I think, what happened to the Word of God in your soul that you can think that this is okay, that you can engage in this and just not be evaluating yourself in the light of the standard of the Word of God? Here you are, the beneficiary of clear, accurate teaching of the Word of God and it just isn't even making a dent.

You're a transgressor. Now God didn't strike those people down and say, well, to those whom much is given, much is required, here comes a big lightning bolt and there's a crater where their house used to be. I saw a couple live together for years who knew better and who should have done better and there was no excuse.

And I thought, you know, God's going to strike there, boy, all kinds of plague is going to... Nothing happened. They lived long in their transgression. What's the point? Do not transgress excessively, do not become a fool.

Why should you die in what is not your time? If you tolerate transgression, if you become a fool, if you let something displace your wisdom, you're going to die in what is not your time. And this is not physical death. This is operational death.

We just talked about wisdom. The prophet is knowing that wisdom gives life to her owner. We don't think that this gives you a better cardiovascular system, do we? Well, the context of life and death here are operational life and operational death.

What kind of life does wisdom give her owner, her Lord? It's life that partakes of the eternal, life that partakes of all the things we saw in Psalm 111. What is the kind of death that the fool is going to die here? You're going to cease to produce fruit under the sun before your physical life ends. Our time of production ought to last all the way up to our physical death.

But if you become a fool, if you transgress excessively, you're going to die in what is not your

time. You're still here, but spiritually, in terms of production, you've died. So people have tried to construe this and say, well, Solomon is teaching the golden mean.

He's saying don't overemphasize righteousness and don't overemphasize sin. Don't become a holier-than-thou, stick-in-the-mud, priggish, prudish, hyper-religious kind of a holier-than-thou. And don't become a gross, bank-robbing, murdering, raping, pillaging, plundering sinner either.

Just kind of follow the middle road. The golden mean, they call it. The golden mean is just hang in there with the average.

Just be right in the middle. Don't be too righteous. Don't be too sinful.

Don't be too wise. Don't be too foolish. What a tragedy to misunderstand what Solomon is saying here.

That's not what he's saying at all. He's saying do not confuse the means with the end. And don't let something take away your means.

Wisdom is the means of acquiring, of achieving eternal life. Not in the sense of salvation from the lake of fire, in the sense of laying hold of that which is eternal, that which is in your hand, the Yitron, the prophet. The prophet is knowing that wisdom gives life, life that partakes of the eternal.

And you can lose it if you either... There's two ways in this verse that you can do it. One is that you let sin displace your wisdom because you're not seeing any bad consequences. You know how children are.

They'll do something bad and then look around to see if somebody saw them and if they're going to get a spanking or something bad. If nothing bad happens, well, then they might continue on. And until somebody disciplines them, why, they figure, well, hey, I'm getting away with it.

I'm going to do this as long as I get away with it. Well, many times the transgressor lives long in his transgression. And he says, well, hey, as long as I'm getting away... God doesn't seem to be disciplining me.

Solomon says, that's a trap. You've died before your time. If you're waiting... Because if you already know better, sometimes God is not going to hammer you for sin.

If you know better and you're doing it anyway, just waiting for the spanking to come, if the spanking doesn't come, you're going to continue. You've done worse than escape discipline. You've died.

You've neutralized yourself as far as spiritual production goes. But what's the other error you can make? You can confuse the means with the end. You can focus on righteousness.

You can focus on wisdom as an end in itself and pat yourself on the back that I am wise, I am righteous. It's the Pharisee problem. And you have equally desolated yourself.

You're going to arrive in the kingdom by the skin of your teeth. You probably won't even have the wedding garment and get pitched outside and cut in two and be out there with the hypocrites. Solomon says, I've seen everything in my brief, vaporous life here.

And he says in verse 18, You've got to take hold of this. Do you want to know what's good? Do you want to know what's tov? We've got the word tov again in verse 18. Tov is taking hold in this.

Grab hold of this. Latch onto it and don't let go. From this do not allow your hand to rest.

He's had a lot of imagery of taking hold with the hand. Seizing and laying hold. What did he say up in verse 14? God is working in the day of calamity and the man or such as the man will not lay hold of anything after it.

God is working. God is showing us in the day of calamity that there's something more than what you can gain out of this life. Calamity is when you lose things you were trying to take hold of.

And God is showing you, your ability to seize and lay hold of stuff is transient at best. God is at work showing us that. So what do we lay hold of? Lay hold of that which is eternal.

Lay hold of that which partakes of righteousness and justice of God. It is good, it is tov to take hold of this. And don't let your hand relax.

Once you've grabbed hold of it, don't lose it. Don't have it for a little while and then cause your hand to rest. For fearing God comes forth from them all.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Psalm 111. Fearing God comes forth.

Is God under the sun or beyond the sun? We're under the sun. He's not. To fear God is to look beyond the rising and setting of the sun, beyond the transient, beyond the temporal, beyond the mundane and live your life in that light.

Your wisdom is the means. Your righteousness is a means in that regard. We saw verse 19 last time.

Wisdom helps the wise more than ten princes who are in a city. You'd think a city would be great if they had ten wise rulers, ten shalatin. It's kind of a rare word in the Bible.

I think it's only used once outside of Ecclesiastes for someone who's a ruler. But these were special guys. These were talented and gifted rulers.

And to have ten of them... Remember we're in 1 Samuel where Hannah isn't able to have any sons and the other wife is having children and she's very upset about this and her husband

comes and says, Am I not more to you than ten sons? Ten of something was kind of like we use it. Somebody who's a perfect ten, that's the ultimate. And they would say in Israel, Ten was just the fulfillment number.

Am I not worth more to you than ten sons? And you have phrases like this. Well, here Solomon says, Wisdom in your soul is better than ten princes in a city. A city might be well off with some wise rulers, but even a city with ten rulers is not as well off as the wisdom that's in the heart of the wise.

Now in the New King James, that verse is translated, Wisdom strengthens the wise. And I think I mentioned to you last time that, again from 4Q Kohelet and also from the Septuagint, you change one letter very slightly and this is the word for help. Wisdom helps the wise more than ten princes who are in a city.

For a man is not righteous in the earth, that he will do good and not sin. Also, all the words that they will speak, do not take to your heart, that you will not hear your...