

02-03-17a Ecclesiastes

Let's continue our worship this morning by turning for our scripture reading to 2 Timothy chapter 3. 2 Timothy chapter 3. We find ourselves at something of an intersection in our studies in the Old and New Testaments. Our New Testament study in Luke chapter 16 with the challenge that Jesus gave his generation with regard to stewardship, stewardship of resources, stewardship of time, stewardship of opportunities. It's pictured in the sense of monetary riches, especially in the case of the Pharisees who were lovers of money.

But when Jesus tells those parables, it is a reminder and an exhortation to change of mind with regard to the way life is viewed. What is the objective and what is the measure of success? It boils down to, for a believer, whether we live our lives to please ourselves or we live our lives to please God. We will find, and this is the message of Ecclesiastes.

We are now in chapter 9 and Solomon has gone to great lengths to demonstrate that preoccupation with this life and its tasks and its accomplishments is going to leave us empty-handed at the end. And as he lifts his gaze to look beyond the setting of the sun to the next life, his question is, what profit, what is the yitron, what can we carry away that is meaningful? This is a hard thing to remember. Every time I see Entertainment Tonight on television, the most watched entertainment show, they are quick to tell you, I think about the vapidness, you know, vapid is sort of related to the word vapor, of wondering what celebrity is doing what and that this is news and that you can actually occupy a half-hour program with nothing but the doings of people who make their living in cinema.

But it is sort of a metaphor, I think, of what is common in our culture because celebrities are greatly esteemed. People will get a signature, even in the Christian world, you know, a lot of us like to go meet our favorite gospel singer and get them to sign our CD or our picture or whatever. We enjoy the accomplishments of this life and the people who are successful at accomplishing them and kept in perspective, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with that.

All of us have a favorite author or perhaps a favorite singer or a favorite artist, someone who has excelled in a particular area of endeavor and it is a wonderful thing. Those are expressions of giftings from God and kept in perspective, they are a wonderful thing. But when they become an end in themselves, when we set goals for ourselves in the area of our employment or our personal life or the level of prosperity that we achieve, where we live and how we live and who sees it, you know, most people wouldn't go to near the trouble that they do of acquiring their cars and so on if they were on an island where nobody saw it but them.

You'd probably all be driving four-wheel drive Jeeps instead of Lexuses and Cadillacs and so on. But the point is that we get wrapped up in this life and Solomon in Kohelet, remember that name itself means to call people to assemble them and to challenge them with a message. He is the preacher, it's not a terribly bad translation but it has the idea of issuing a call and what is that

call? It is to wake up and realize that the sun has risen but as inexorably as it rose it is also going to set and what are you going to have in your hand at the end? Well the measure is whether for believers and we've seen this so far, whether we measure our day by what we did heartily as unto the Lord or what we did heartily as unto ourselves.

Paul talks about this in Romans chapter 1 and 2, he says, you're quick, oh man, to look out at the world and see them wasting their lives in dissolution and evil and all manner of disobedience to God even though what may be known of God is manifest in nature. You're so quick to see it, I'm quick to see it, I can turn on Entertainment Tonight or I can turn on Trinity Broadcasting Network and lots of others and I can point the finger and say those people are wasting time, they're wasting money, they're blaspheming, they're breaking all of the laws of divine establishment simultaneously in some cases. But Romans chapter 2 is a very convicting chapter because it says, oh man, you who are pointing that finger at the world don't notice the three fingers pointing back at yourself because you are doing the same thing.

He's talking about believers who get too much wrapped up in this life and what we forget is that the pattern in the scriptures is these are not people who are believers living like pagans, they're believers living like religious people. Religion is a part of the veneer that keeps us on the surface and not plumbing the depths of God's grace and exploiting the opportunities of God's plan. Our religion becomes an obstacle rather than a means because it obscures our sight.

Well we saw Romans chapter 2 recently in our study of Luke so I want to look this morning for our scripture reading instead to 2 Timothy chapter 3. Paul here in one of the last letters that he was able to write is speaking to a young pastor, a protege, a son in the faith as he calls him and he wants him to understand something that in the last days perilous times will come. I doubt that you can find believers anywhere whatever their theological stripe who do not believe that we are in the latter days and the last days. What does Paul say 2,000 years ago about these days? But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come for men will be lovers of themselves.

By the way, what is the first and greatest commandment? Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy might. Jesus reiterates that on a couple of occasions in the New Testament scriptures and nothing has superseded that. So what could be worse than becoming a lover of self? We have so much going on in the way of trying to build people's self-esteem, education for children.

We want to do whatever we do to make sure that children are esteeming themselves. In fact, the Bible says it's not self-esteem that is the problem, it's the foolishness that is bound up in the heart of a child. But lovers of themselves, lovers of money.

This is the theme of Luke chapter 16, isn't it? Beginning with the unjust steward, extending back to the parable of the servant. Jesus pictured the servant who says my master delays his coming and instead of exercising stewardship over the master's household and belongings, instead he

sits in the master's chair and begins to eat and drink and get drunk and beat his fellow servants and act like he's the master. He takes possession of what does not belong to him but what has been committed to his care as a steward.

Lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors. This, by the way, is a synonym. It's not the same word, but it is a synonym for pormia, covenant breakers, promise breakers.

How many people walk down the altar and say, till death do us part, and then they part and they're not dead? Traitors. This doesn't mean patriotic traitors. This means promise breakers.

You know, they ought to just sign everybody up. They have promise keepers, but there are far more people who are members of promise breakers than there are promise keepers. Headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

This really sums it all up, doesn't it? Too much in this world, looking for satisfaction, looking for fulfillment. Having a form of godliness. Notice, they are not godless in the sense that they don't mention God or don't have some trappings.

They do have. They have the trappings of Christianity in our day. They have the trappings of religion.

They talk about God. They incorporate God and their worship life into this whole system of life. In fact, in many cases, it is the church or church life that is the place where all of these things take place.

And all you have to do is spend some time in a large church and you can assign specific examples and illustrations to each one of these syndromes that Paul has mentioned. Having a form of godliness but denying its power. What is the power of godliness? Where does the power of God come from in our lives? The power of God comes into our lives from God.

It's the Word of God and the Spirit of God and no other way. So what is happening if people are denying its power? It means that they are denying the Word of God. They may be citing it.

They may be quoting it. But it is superficially understood or misunderstood. It is twisted.

It is misapplied. It is yanked out of context. It is made to say what God never intended to say.

And what happens to the ministry of the Spirit? What is the ministry of the Spirit? How can you deny the power of God in the person of the Spirit? Failing to listen to His convicting ministry. Not acknowledging error. Not acknowledging sin.

Denying its power. It is the Word of God that is in the hand of the Spirit. It's His sharp sword.

It's that that exposes our thoughts and intents of the heart to the criticism of the divine eye. From such people turn away. We are enjoined, Paul tells Timothy, do not be joined to people who act this way.

I used to think, and I've actually tried this one, especially when I was still in the military and I would be assigned to a place or spend time in a town or at a duty station. I would think, well, there's all kinds of Christians. Look at all the churches I drive by.

Look at all of the signs with the pastor's name and the times of worship. I ought to just find the best of these and just go ahead and assemble. Just go ahead and go there.

They're my brothers in Christ. Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together. I hear that there are divisions among you.

I don't want to be divided. And if you can find a group to worship with that is not categorized, cannot be classified by these actions, you should be there. It doesn't matter if they don't understand everything that you understand or if they understand things better than you do and for some reason you disagree.

We always think that we know more than they do. It may be that they know more than we do in some cases. But it is not doctrinal issues that should divide us unless they are of a fundamental nature like the deity of Christ and the nature of salvation and the basics of the plan of God.

But what we want to separate from, in fact what we must separate from, from such people turn away. If people are in the business of gratifying themselves in their church, if it is all about entertainment, if the worship service is designed to lift people up on a wave of emotion and give them an experience, what are they? They're a lover of self. They're a lover of pleasure.

If they're not listening to the Word of God, if they're not cultivating the ministry of the Spirit, from such people turn away. And there are entire communities where all you can find are such people. And in that situation, my encouragement for all of us is to pray to the Lord to lead us to people with whom we can fellowship.

We don't want to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. On the other hand, it is not a good substitute to go to a church where these things are practiced. If some churches are obsessed with their finances and you hear something right before the offering plate is passed every Sunday about, well, you know, we're going to have to turn off the lights next Sunday because, you know, we couldn't pay the missionaries, we couldn't do this, that, and the other, lovers of money.

And it's all dressed up in the trappings of religion, but that doesn't turn the sow's ear into a silk purse. Four, verse six, of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins. What does this tell us? Look at the ministries that worm

their way into the hearts and minds of people.

And it's characterized here by women who are not protected by the authority of their husbands. Where is the husband here? How come they're not talking to the husband? Somebody comes to the door and knocks, they ought to be talking to the head of the household. They ought to be talking to the husband and the father.

Not coming along during the day when he's away at work and trying to subvert the thinking of a wife and mother, as so many cults tend to do. But notice, these are people who have a form of godliness. And yet what are they doing? They're getting into the hearts and minds of people, and how do they, what is their leverage? Guilt.

They offer someone a way of assuaging their guilt, of not feeling so guilty. They're burdened down with sins and led away by desires, and these people pander to that and play into it. What do we see on Christian television today? What are the desires that people have? Oh, I want a better life.

I want a better relationship. I want my husband to love me. I want my children to turn out better.

And so you have ministry after ministry after ministry, quote-unquote, that targets that desire and exploits it, and gets people to send in money to get the latest tape series or the latest book series, or come to our convention center. We're going to have a big powwow, and all the people just like you who are equally gullible are going to come over, and we'll pass the plate while you're there, and that's how we can fly and get TV time and do all the things that we do. Make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various desires.

Always learning. Notice, there is content being pushed out. These will have the trappings of teaching ministries in many cases.

There's lots of Scripture being quoted. People waving their Bible as they strut and fret on the stage. Always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Just as Janus and Jambres, these are the names supposedly of the magicians in Pharaoh's court when Moses went to challenge Pharaoh to let the people go, they resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth. You remember this story. We don't have time to go back to Exodus and look at it, but we tend to just skip right over Janus and Jambres.

Why does Paul include that? It's not even scriptural, since those names are not in Exodus, but he says, just as Janus and Jambres resisted Moses. How did they resist Moses? What was the nature of their resistance? What was the first thing Moses did when he went in there? Well, you remember when he threw down the rod and it turned into a serpent? What did Janus and Jambres do? They threw down a rod and the Bible says their rod turned into a serpent. It is counterfeit divine power.

It doesn't say that Moses' rod that he threw down, or Aaron's rod, when they threw that rod down, it doesn't say that it ate up the rod of the Egyptians, it says it ate up the serpents. So, I don't know, did they hypnotize a snake? Did they do some sleight of hand where they threw their robe up in the air and as they hid the rod and threw it down, I don't know how they did it, but it was so good that the Bible says their rod essentially turned into a serpent and that the serpent of God ate the serpent of the Egyptian magicians. But what's the point? Just as Janus and Jambres resisted Moses.

Because this is going to have a very convincing counterfeit appearance. If this form of godliness is pretty convincing to a lot of people, gullible people weighed down with sins are going to be convinced by this false religion. We see that all around us today and we ourselves are not immune because we have our presuppositions, we have our assumptions that we make and we have to let the Word of God in the hand of the Spirit, that power of God, get inside our souls and convict us.

We have to be listening. We have to be sensitive. We have to have a changeable mind.

That's a decision that we make. And I will add this, especially because so many of us have a background in prioritizing the hearing of the Word of God. Many of us have moved heaven and earth to get to Bible class or to hear a tape every day and that kind of thing.

And as a veteran of thousands of hours of that activity, let me remind you that it is not the hearing of the Word of God that accomplishes this. It is not the hearing of the Word of God that accomplishes this. What does James say? It is the doer.

How do we become a doer? We have to meditate, as Psalm 1 says, day and night. It is not the hearing, it is what you do after you hear that matters. How many of us have gone to church and when a very intense and in-depth Bible class was over, people walked out leaving their notebook and Bible on their chair so that they would have another opportunity to listen next time? It is not the hearing.

To me, that was just emblematic. It was a metaphor for everything that's wrong with being hearers only. It is not the hearing.

Hearing does us no good unless that becomes the object of our meditation. We have to think about it and say, now, what does that mean to me? Is there a way that I am having a form of godliness and denying its power? Am I somehow engaging in these activities? We can't just broadly classify our entire life. We have to look at different areas.

We may be real strong in some area and weak in another. Is there some area of our life where we are loving ourself and we're putting our security and our desire ahead of the things of God? Are we a lover of money in some area of life? Are we a boaster in some area? Are we proud in some area? Are we blaspheming in some area? What does it mean to blaspheme? It means to

do the exact opposite and to say the exact opposite of what Scripture says and teaches. Disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving.

A lot of us have a hard time getting over what people do. I'm one of them. But Scripture tells us time and time again, if you do not forgive, you are not forgiven.

It doesn't mean that the blood of Christ has not saved us from the penalty of sin, but it does mean that the power of sin remains unbroken in that area of our life. We have not availed ourselves of God's grace in being cleansed from all sin, like it talks about in 1 John 1. So, always learning, never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Convinced by a counterfeit.

Going along, playing along with a false religion. And we were not cut out of different cloth than the rest of the human race. It is just as easy for you and me to fall for a counterfeit as it is anybody else if we are not constantly asking and seeking and banging on the door and saying, Lord, open my eyes that I may see visions of truth thou hast for me, as the song says.

These also resist the truth. Men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith. These are believers, but they are not a workman that needs not to be ashamed.

They are workmen that need to be ashamed. They are not rightly dividing the word of truth. Instead, they are corrupt minded, they are disapproved concerning the faith, but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, just as the folly of Janus and Jambres was.

But, and here is the positive side, verse 10, you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra, the persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. Now, this is not necessarily somebody raking you over the coals for your faith.

Remember the afflictions that Paul suffered were not all humanly instigated, but they generally come through people. Persecutions just mean that we are going to get people testing. If we desire to live godly, we are going to get people testing.

That is what this says. Our test is going to come from rubbing elbows with humanity. Often, our fellow believers, evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.

But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for deliverance. This is not lake of fire escape. This is deliverance out of this present evil age.

The Scriptures are able to make you wise unto deliverance with a view toward deliverance

through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, profitable for reproof, profitable for correction, profitable for instruction in righteousness so that the man of God may be complete, mature, the old King James said, perfect, thoroughly equipped for every good work. We do not do good works and become spiritually mature.

We become spiritually mature and are then equipped for every good work. Most of the church has that backwards. All of this is a contrast, isn't it, between living for ourselves because the counterfeit satisfies a need.

The counterfeit plays into our desires, our gullibilities. Where is it that we're vulnerable? It's somebody telling us what we want to believe. I remember vividly when I was a young Marine Corps officer, surrounded by other young Marine Corps officers who were dating young ladies out in the local ville and going to social functions and commandant's calls and various things and seeing girls who knew that this guy that they were with had two-timed and done wrong girls of their acquaintance, but they found him desirable and they were dating him and they willed themselves to believe that they were different and that he would be different with them when he manifestly was not.

He was using them for his own purposes and would cast the next one aside just as he did the previous one. You spend enough time around young men without morals and without integrity and you see this happen regularly. The thing that astonished me, in addition to the callousness with which a guy could deflower all of the young maidens he could get his hands on, was that they willed themselves to believe.

There was clear, irrefutable evidence that this guy had no character, had no integrity, would be unfaithful, was being unfaithful even while they were dating, and they would will themselves to believe because they wanted him. They wanted the life of an officer's wife. They wanted the security.

They wanted the status. It made them feel good to think that they could snag this guy that nobody else had been able to keep. It plays into desires.

That's kind of a gross example, but there are areas in our life where we want to believe that something is true. It fits our view. It makes us feel better to think that that's the case.

We don't let ourselves be rebuked and corrected and instructed by scripture. We have willing suspension of disbelief. This is what Solomon in Ecclesiastes chapter 8 and chapter 9 is pointing out.

If we do that, to the extent that we do that, we are really living to please ourselves. To please God, we have to let ourselves be cut to the marrow and cut to the quick by the Word of God. We have to let the thoughts and intents of our heart be judged, be exposed, and be corrected.

It's not an easy thing. I don't think any of us have any problem remembering the last time someone tried to tell us that we were wrong. It is a hard thing to accept criticism, isn't it? It's a hard thing to be told, you know, you goofed that up.

You did that wrong. You made a mistake. Even when we deep in our heart know that we're wrong, we don't want that just coming out.

How easy is it for us to say, you know, you're right, I really did screw that up. Unless we're having a particularly good day, it's just generally not that easy. Our reflex action is to say, what do you mean I screwed that up? Then we'll either say, everybody screws that up, or there's a scapegoat, there's a reason why I screwed that up.

If you had the reasons that I have, well, you would have screwed it up too. Who's to say that you haven't screwed something up? Let me think about the last time you screwed something up. We deflect, we turn, we blame, we do everything except say, our first instinct is not to say, you are exactly right.

I am a worthless individual, and look what I, you're right, I'm so sorry. That just doesn't come naturally to us. It gets easier as we grow and recognize that it's not our merit that qualifies us for anything.

But, what do we do? We want to please ourself. We want things to look the way we want them to look. It's a minimum of discomfort on our part.

Well, let's turn now to our current passage in Ecclesiastes chapter 9, and I don't want you to faint, I don't want you to pass out, but I actually have in my precious right hand a printout of the translation, not only for Ecclesiastes chapter 8 and up to where we are in chapter 9, but another section of Ecclesiastes to which we are going to look by way of review, and that is Ecclesiastes chapter 2. And I would like to ask you to follow along with me because we're going to go back. We need, it's, you know, I will grant you. I wish I could start all over and do Ecclesiastes again.

It hasn't been the easiest study in the world. We're treading untrodden ground. We're having to hack and slash our way through.

But I'd like to step back now that we have arduously straightened out our translation and recovered the thread of thought that Solomon was following here, and let's begin. We noted, you may recall, that this chapter actually should begin in verse 2 of chapter 8 because he begins a fresh subject there. And he says, and what we want to do, I want to just read this all the way through.

And let's get the general thread of his thought, not so much bogged down in the details of any given phrase. But what is he talking about? He says, I myself, I'm King Solomon. I guard the mouth of the king.

I guard my mouth for the sake of the contractual promise of God. We reviewed that promise. God said, King, you've got to be faithful or not only you, but the whole nation is going to suffer.

We saw that. Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple. God's promise to Solomon.

He appeared to him on two or three occasions and said, if you are obedient, if you are a keeper of the word that I entrusted to your father, then I will fulfill to you all the promises I made to your father David. So Solomon says, I've got that contractual promise of God. I've got to guard my mouth because we're talking to God.

We're not going to make rash oaths to God. He's already talked about making a vow and being sure to keep it up in the past. Do not hurry from his presence, God's presence.

Walk. Do not stand in an evil manner. For everything which he purposes, he will do.

Solomon says, look, there are specific contractual promises of God that relate to me as the king and as the son of David. But everything that God has promised, look at your law. Look at the Pentateuch.

That's pretty much what the Bible is at this point. And he says, you've also got to be careful about what you do in the presence of God. Don't stand in an evil manner.

Again, Psalm 1, blessed is the man that does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly. Does not stand in the way of sinners. Doesn't sit in the seat of the scornful.

He says, don't stand in an evil manner. For everything which God purposes, God will do. In which the matter of the king is highest.

This is an a fortiori argument. Here's my example. I'm the king and God says, as goes the king, so goes the nation.

Well, here I am. I'm guarding my mouth. You ought to be doing the same.

Who is going to say to God, what are you doing? The king can't answer back to God and say, you're unfair. So you sure can't. You don't even have the standing of the king.

You don't have a special promise of God. You've got the general promises from the law. Verse 5, the one keeping the contractual command does not know an evil matter.

That means he's not intimately involved with evil. He's not the one that is wrapped up in it. The wise heart knows the time and the judgment.

Wise hearts don't meditate on evil. Wise hearts don't involve themselves in evil. The wise heart thinks about the time and thinks about the judgment.

When you see something evil, here's a shortcut to happiness. Here's a shortcut to prosperity. Here's a rationalization that will let me do what I want to do, so that I can be a lover of self.

The wise heart remembers the time and remembers the judgment. For to every purpose, there is a time and a judgment, because the evil of man increases greatly. Just remember, any time you're tempted to fall for the counterfeit, any time you're tempted to rationalize and find the easy way that is more gratifying, just remember, there is a time.

The sun is arcing across the sky, and it's going to set, and then there's going to be a judgment. There is not for him knowing what will be. For that which will be, who can tell it to him? Now, who's he talking about here? This is the evil man.

The man who does stand in an evil matter. The man who does let himself be fooled by the counterfeit. He doesn't think about the time and the judgment.

He doesn't think about what will be. And guess what? Nobody can tell it to him. You see people in your periphery who are sowing the seeds of their own destruction.

He that sows to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption. And we know people. In some cases, they're relatives, or they're near and dear, they're friends, they're co-workers, or someone in our near periphery.

And you can see somebody just not redeeming the time, even if they're a believer. They just don't think about the time, and they don't think about the judgment. They haven't heeded these warnings.

You can't tell them. You cannot wake them up. It's kind of like what Abraham tells the rich man in Torment.

He says, if your brothers will not hear Moses and the prophets, they're not going to hear a man, even if that man has been resurrected from the dead, even if he's the biggest celebrity there is, even if he has come back from the grave, a more powerful witness than a resurrected man is God's law, God's message through the mouth of the prophets. And if they haven't heard the greater and more powerful witness... Basically, he's saying the Word of God is more powerful than the testimony of any man, even a man that says, I've been to heaven and back. The Word of God is alive and powerful.

It is sharper than any two-edged sword. There's so much value placed on testimony these days, and let me tell you my experience. It pales into insignificance next to the power of God's Word in the hand of God's Spirit.

That is the power of God. Do not fool yourself into thinking that, oh, if I can just explain it well enough, they will come to see. What does Solomon tell us? For him, there's no knowing what will

be.

He can't wrap his mind around the time and the judgment. And who can tell it to him? You can't. You can't get this across to someone.

The best thing you can do is speak the truth in love and let the Word of God in the hands of the Spirit do its work on the inside. There is not a man of mastery in the Spirit, a man of lordship. Remember this word, shalit, is the root from which shultan or sultan comes from.

There's not a man of mastery in the Spirit to restrain the Spirit, and there's no one who is uppermost or in authority in the day of death. There's no sending forth in battle, and evil does not deliver its ba'als, its ba'alim, its lords. You know, you can wrestle with some of the phraseology here, but what's he saying? Death is coming and nobody can control it.

You can't restrain your Spirit and keep it from leaving your body. You can't name the day of your death. And people who master evil and become cunning executors of their own plan in life are not going to be delivered by that.

All of their planning, all of their scheming, all of their financial wizardry, all of their cunning and getting to the top of the heap. You see people climbing over each other, leaving cleat marks in the backs of people as they rise. Boy, you know this is another place where the military is great to watch guys do whatever it takes to get promoted, do whatever it takes to get a ribbon, do whatever it takes to climb to the top of the pile and let their ambition be their guide.

Well, it isn't going to deliver them, because when the sun sets and the time is over and the judgment comes, all of that has no meaning in God's judgment. He says in verse 9, "...and all this I have seen, and to give my heart to all the work that is worked under the sun, with which a man gains mastery over man, resulting in evil to him." You know, a lot of us have seen people step on us on their way up. I certainly have.

I'm sure you have as well. People will use and abuse. They will, like the old 70's song, they smile in your face and all the time they want to take your place.

Backstabbers. Solomon says, I've seen this. He didn't get to be king and have all of those advisors and so on in the palace without seeing these same things happen.

He's seen intrigue. He's seen maneuvering. He's seen the Machiavellian exploits of all the people around him.

He says, I've analyzed this with my heart. I've looked at all the stuff that's done under the sun, with which a man gains mastery. He's climbing to the top of the pile and it results in evil.

And in verse 10 he says, Instead, I have seen the wicked approach and come in and from the holy place they go forth and commend themselves, having a form of godliness. They're going to

go into the holy place and they're going to come out and they're patting each other on the back and they're saying, oh, I want you to meet so-and-so. He's the most wonderful believer.

He's made such an impact on my life. Oh, let me tell you about this guy. He's the one that's blessed me.

You get a mutual admiration society going. And they're wicked. They approach, they come in, and from the holy place they go forth and they commend themselves in the city that they have done right.

Solomon says this is vapor. This is temporary. It's ephemeral.

Jesus characterized this. He said, you know, they stand on the street corner and pray their righteousness. They have their reward.

That momentary approval that they think they got, that's it. That's their reward. This is vapor.

Solomon says, as he has analyzed this in his heart, he said, you know why this happens? Because their punishment doesn't come. When they strut and they parade and they commend, lightning doesn't strike. They're not exposed for the shams and the charlatans and the superficial counterfeits that they are.

Why doesn't God expose them? He says, look, verse 11, it is not worked quickly, the edict against evil work. God has made promises against evil work, hasn't He? Look at Deuteronomy 26, the national indictment, the national punishment that's been called the five cycles of discipline against evil work in the land. But it's not worked quickly.

And this is the tragedy in our justice system here in the United States, is that we don't quickly pass sentence. And even when we do, it's often not a severe enough sentence. So the edict against evil work is not worked quickly.

Instead, the heart of the sons of man is filled up in them to work evil. They say, hey, that guy over there is getting over. He's been doing that for years.

And look at where he's gotten himself. They're measuring with the human standards. So there's no penalty.

There's no punishment to it. Because the one sinning, working evil a hundred times, he endures for it. He lasts.

He survives. He's still on top of the pile. For also, I myself know that good will be to those fearing God because they will fear before Him or before His face, literally.

What's Solomon saying here? In this life, you can look, somebody does this over and over again and it looks like they get away with it. They're evil. They live an evil life.

They get all the way to the end of their life and they don't ever seem to pay the price. But, I know that good will be. He doesn't say good is.

He says will be. Yahweh is the future. It's the same word from which Yahweh comes.

I am, the verb for being, well, this is the future. Yet, yet means will be. There is a future time.

Solomon says, I know something about the future that these guys don't know. They look at the present and they see the guy enduring. But, I know that ultimately, there will be good to those who are fearing God because they fear before Him.

They do what they do in the fear of the Lord, not out of expediency. And what else does he know? Verse 13, Good will not be to the wicked and He will not prolong His days like a shadow because He did not fear before the face of God. Even though He seems to get over, even though He seems to prosper, when the sun sets and you start looking at what's in your hand, some people are going to have good in their hand and others are not because they did not fear before the face of God.

There is Hevel. There is vapor. There is a temporary condition that has worked upon the earth because there are righteous ones that it befalls them according to the work of the wicked.

Verse 14, There are wicked ones that it is befalling them according to the work of the righteous. I said it before and I'll say it again. This is temporary.

This is vapor. You see it now, but it will soon be gone. So, verse 15, Solomon has a little tongue-in-cheek here.

He says, I myself commended pleasure because there's nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be pleased. And to be pleased is the infinitive that is related to the noun pleasure. Pleasure and be pleased is from the same word.

And he says, I've commended it because there's nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and be pleased. And this will accompany him in his labor in the days of his life that God has given to him under the sun. Well, we've seen this addressed before in Ecclesiastes.

And if you'll flip over to your chapter 2 translation, Solomon says, I commend pleasure because there's nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and drink and be pleased. Eat, drink, and be merry is what the old used to say. But you remember chapter 2, and I'm not going to read this whole thing.

At the beginning of the chapter, Solomon reviews all of the works that he did under the sun. All of the things that he did to please himself and to get gratification. I caused my works to be great in verse 4. I built houses.

I planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks. You know, gardens and parks are for other people to wander around in.

He was a benefactor to others. Planted every kind of fruit tree. I recreated Eden here.

I made reservoirs of water to irrigate the forests of growing trees. I got manservants and maidservants. Took good care of them.

Had children born in the house. Cattle, oxen, and sheep were multiplied to me more than all who were before my face in Jerusalem. I looked around at all the other rich men.

I was richer than them all, more accomplished than them all. I collected for myself silver and gold, the wealth of kings and provinces. I got orchestras and bands and music and culture and the arts, the refinements of the sons of man, noble lady and noble ladies.

I surrounded myself with all of these refinements. I became great and increased more than all who were before my face in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, my wisdom stood firm for me.

And all that my eyes asked for, I did not withdraw from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure. Simchah, same word we have in chapter 8. For my heart was pleased, same verb from that word group, from all my labor.

And this was my portion from all my labor. Is Solomon eating and drinking and being merry in all that he's done? He is. I turned myself, verse 11, among all my works that my hands had done and the labor which I labored to do, and behold, it was all vapor, feeding on wind.

And there was no yitron. There was nothing permanent in my hand under the sun. So then I turned myself to look at wisdom and rantings and foolishness.

For what is there for the man who will come after the king but what he, the king, has already done? This is kind of a torturous piece of Hebrew here, but he basically says there's nobody more qualified than me to analyze this because I've excelled everyone in gathering all this stuff together. If anybody can tell you what's what, it's me. Whether it's either end of the spectrum, all the way from wisdom to rantings and foolishness.

Anybody that comes after me is not going to do it better than I've done it. And I saw for myself, verse 13, that there is profit to wisdom as opposed to foolishness, like the profit of the light as opposed to the darkness. The wise, their eyes are in their heads, but the fool is walking in darkness.

And I know also myself that one fate will befall all of them. One outcome will befall them all. What is that one outcome? They're going to pass away.

The sun is going to set. They are going to die. So what does Solomon say in verse 15 of chapter

2? I declared to myself in my heart, like the fate of the fool, also it will befall me.

And for what purpose was I myself then more wise? And I answered in my heart, this also is vapor. For there is no remembrance for the wise together with the fool unto the ages forever. La'olam.

In that, after the days to come, the whole will be forgotten. You can go over to Israel today and you cannot see a single scrap of evidence that Solomon was ever there. No genuine evidence.

His gardens, his trees, his palace, the temple that he built, the men's servants and maid's servants, the orchestras, the stuff that he did in this endeavor. There is not one stone left upon another. There are some things over there labeled Solomon's this and Solomon's that, but they're late.

They're from the time of the Crusades where people would just pick an obelisk and say, oh, that's Solomon's tomb. There's the tomb of David and so on. None of it's left.

So he was right. There is no remembrance for the wise together with the fool forever. In that, after the days to come, the whole will be forgotten.

So how will the wise die? With the foolish. Same end happens to them all. And I hated life because it was evil to me.

The work which I had worked under the sun for the whole was vapor and feeding on wind. Now this is the same work that he just got through saying. I was eating and drinking and taking pleasure in my work.

But when he looked at it through the eyes of wisdom, he said it was evil to me, this work that I worked under the sun, because it was all temporary. It was all stuffing myself with wind. Verse 18, I myself hated all my labor which I myself labored under the sun that I caused rest to a man who would be after me.

I assemble it all together and Rehoboam or somebody is going to inherit it all. Who is knowing whether that man that comes after, who is aware whether he will be wise or a fool, he's going to rule in all my labor which I labored and which I was wise under the sun. And this is vapor.

I turned about in my heart to despair upon all the labor which I had labored under the sun. Why? This is the old thing. You can't take it with you.

Somebody else is going to inherit it. There is a man, verse 21, that his labor is in wisdom and knowledge and skill and to a man who did not labor in it, he will give his heritage, his permanent possession. This is vapor and a great misery, a great calamity, a great evil.

For what is there for a man in all his labor and in the striving of his heart that he himself labored

under the sun? For all his days are anguished. And his answer is vexation. What's the answer to that question? What does he get out of all that labor? Vexation.

Even in the night, his heart does not rest. Also, this itself is vapor. Everywhere you turn, things are just dissolving in the mist.

Out of all of this effort and all of the priorities and the work, there is no good in a man. Here's the verse that links to chapter 8. There is no good in a man that eats and drinks and sees his soul as good in his labor. Also, I myself saw this, that it is from the hand of God.

God constructed the universe this way. People would make a superficial reading of the law and think, you know, the evil people are going to be punished and they're going to be punished right away. And the good are going to be blessed and going to become rich and prosperous.

And it's going to happen pretty quick. Solomon says, you know what? A lot of times that equation doesn't solve in this life. And that's disturbing.

It's vexing. What is there for a man in all his labor and in the striving of his heart that he himself has labored under the sun? It's anguish. It's vexation.

Even in the night, his heart does not rest. There is no good in a man that eats and drinks and sees his soul as good in his labor. I saw that this is from the hand of God.

Why? Verse 25, For who will eat and who will be dismayed outside more than Me? And this is a fresh correction to that verse that I just figured out this week. Because, boy, if you don't check every single word, and the word there says, who will eat and who will enjoy or who will have enjoyment more than Me? But the word means to be dismayed followed by the word outside. This means outside in the street.

This means public, in the public eye. And again, just like Solomon said before, I'm the king. Who's going to be able to top me in this endeavor? Who will eat and who will be dismayed? He sums everything up.

All of his works are summed up in eating, partaking of life in the fleshly sense. And who is going to be dismayed more than him? The more he did, the more he was dismayed. For to the man, and here's the point, verse 26, For to the man that is good before his face, he, God, gives wisdom and knowledge and pleasure.

Now, this is the same word, but it's from a different source, isn't it? Simchah, or pleasure. S-I-M-C-H-A-H There is pleasure that comes from seeing your soul as good, and there's pleasure that comes from God. To the man that is good before his face, before God's face, God gives wisdom and knowledge and pleasure.

To the sinner, he gives a different response. He gives gathering and collecting to give to the good

one before the face of God. And this also is vapor and feeding on wind.

Well, Solomon returns to this same issue in chapter 8, doesn't he? All of the people who are working, the people who are pronouncing themselves wise, and now, instead of in the realm of human attainments, this is in the realm of religion. They're going in and out of the holy place, commending themselves. He says, remember what I said back in chapter 2 about people who build gardens and assemble orchestras and do all of that? And I was the top, and you can't take it with you? Guess what? It's the same thing in the area of religion.

It's the same thing in going in and out of the holy place. Well, we're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to get into chapter 9, where he's going to move forward in this thought and give us an alternative.

What is the answer to all of this despair and vexation as you look around and realize that it's all strutting and fretting an hour on the stage, sound and fury signifying nothing? Well, Solomon doesn't leave us answerless, and we'll find out what that answer is when we come back.