

02-03-24a Ecclesiastes

For our scripture reading this morning, we're actually going to stay in the book in which we are studying, which is Ecclesiastes. What I'd like to do is read a section a little earlier in the book that we've already covered, because if you think about it, the original recipients of this book didn't have the entire Bible to draw upon as we do, with all of its different ways and means of presenting the truths of God. People would have heard this book read in the synagogue or in the early days when the Temple of Solomon was still standing and later on in the Temple at Jerusalem, but generally they didn't have the wonderful blessing that we have of being able to see the thread of various themes running throughout the 66 books of the Bible.

And so a book in many ways, to its original recipients, had to be self-contained. Even a section had to have within its context the sufficient means of understanding and getting the benefit of what is being said. And it's a wonderful thing to me to, it always reminds me, and forgive me if I say this too often, but it always reminds me of a giant diamond, a giant gem.

And if you look at it behind glass, you go to a museum and see the Hope Diamond or some other very large gemstone, you can peer through the glass and see it, but that's not the same as being able to pick it up in your hand and turn it and see all of the different facets and the way the light plays through it, look at it close, look at it far away. And in some ways I think the original recipients of a book were able to see in a limited way and in an immediate way what God had to say, and that is the first and primary meaning. And there are some people who say that a rule of interpretation is you are only allowed to see what the original recipients saw in a passage.

But I think to me that's keeping the gem behind glass. And God has given us in these latter days especially the ability to reach out and touch that gem and to pick it up in our hands and to hold it up to the light and to see all of its colors and all of its facets. And there is a depth of meaning that is inexhaustible.

But it's also a useful exercise to place ourselves back in the time when Solomon first gathered these thoughts and set them down and presented them to the people of Israel and think, now if I was an Israelite in that day, what is my context? What is my milieu? What kind of an environment am I living in? And what would I have to work with in terms of thinking? Well Solomon has provided that for us back in chapter 2. And so I want to kind of ramp up into chapter 2 by beginning our scripture reading this morning back in Ecclesiastes chapter 1 and verse 12. And we're going to be looking at some structural things here in a couple of weeks now that we've excavated the content for so many chapters. We're going to be seeing some symmetries in this book, but you will notice a resonance with what we're going to see this morning in chapter 9 with what Solomon has already said back in chapter 2. So let's begin our reading this morning in Ecclesiastes 1.12. And I'm going to just read this out of the New King James.

I the preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem, and I set my heart to seek and search out by

wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven, this burdensome task or answer as we know it, that God has given to the sons of men by which they may be exercised or answered. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and indeed all is vanity, vapor, and grasping for the wind or feeding on wind. What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be numbered.

I communed with my heart saying, look, I have attained greatness and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge, and I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind or feeding on wind.

For in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow." Now, thinking about everything that we've covered in the last 8 1/2 chapters, what do you think is going through Solomon's mind as he pens these words at the beginning of the book? He has traveled the road of human achievement. He has occupied himself and busied himself with everything that is immediate and everything that is part of attainment in this world, and he says, you know, no matter how hard you work, there are some things that just can't be fixed. There are lacks that you cannot fill.

There is a void that remains no matter how much you achieve and no matter how much you obtain. And so he is wrestling with this in his heart, and he spans the spectrum from wisdom all the way to folly and everything in between, and he says, you know, I have been stuffing myself with wind. This is why what is crooked can't be made straight and what is lacking can't be numbered because the substance that I am gaining and the things that I'm achieving end up being wind.

It's vapor. It doesn't last. So I'm just stuffing myself with wind.

So in the wisdom that lifts the gaze from the immediate, some people just stay busy with the things of this earth and they don't want to think about anything else, and so they are content to stuff themselves with wind. But if you raise your gaze and say, you know, what is the point? What is the meaning of life? When you gain that wisdom, you wind up being grieved instead of satisfied. People that busy themselves satisfying themselves with the things of this life, if you reach the conviction that this isn't really permanent and it isn't really substantial, as you increase your knowledge, you increase your sorrow.

So he says in his heart in chapter 2, come now, I will test you with mirth or pleasure, therefore enjoy pleasure. But surely this also was vapor. I said of laughter, it is incoherent.

It is, this is the PL of Hallel, it is sort of babbling. It's incoherent. Of mirth, what does it accomplish? I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine while guarding my heart with wisdom and how to lay hold on folly till I might see what is good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their life.

I made my works great. I built houses, planted vineyards, made gardens and orchards, planted all kinds of fruit trees, made myself water pools. To water the growing trees of the grove, I acquired male and female servants, had servants born in my house.

I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were before me in Jerusalem. We've seen that this is not historical, this is current. Everybody that's in front of my face in Jerusalem, I've excelled them all.

Because there has been no period of prosperity in Jerusalem like the time of Solomon. It hasn't been before or since. And so when he says greatness, he's talking about, you know, a rising tide floats all boats.

Everyone is prosperous, but Solomon is the most prosperous of all. I gathered for myself silver and gold, the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers and the delights of the sons of men.

And it says musical instruments of all kinds, but this, my best understanding of this is a noble lady and noble ladies. So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me.

Whatever my eyes desired, I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure. My heart rejoiced in all my labor, and this was my reward from all my labor.

I took pleasure in the moment, in those accomplishments. They have a program on television that has to do with entertainment. I don't remember even which one it is.

It's probably Entertainment Tonight or something, but they have been on a long time. And so they have a sort of a spin-off thing, whatever happened to, and they show, you know, favorite TV stars of the 70s or whatever, whatever became of them. And so you see film of people back when they first did something great, like Steven Spielberg when he first made E.T. or, you know, things from 20 and 30 years ago.

And they bring these interviews back that they did at the time, and you see someone that is all flushed with the success of the project that they've been working on and they're passionate about it and they believe in it and they really have a lot of excitement and enthusiasm for it. But then, you know, they will interview someone more currently, and part of the, I guess, sort of sadistic interest in this program is how the mighty have fallen, because a lot of these people wind up in wheelchairs and unable to get the kidney they need. And I remember they did an interview with the guy that played Darren on Bewitched, and gracious sakes, that guy was just a pathetic remnant of a man before he died.

He had an oxygen tube in his nose and was penniless and had all kinds of problems and was

kind of bewailing his fate because he'd been riding high back in the 60s with that series, and they replaced him even before the series was over, and then he just really took a rocky road. They had Flip Wilson on there, and Flip Wilson had all kinds of problems before he passed away. And a lot of these, you know, reach a pinnacle, and then the reason people are asking whatever happened to him is something bad happened.

And it is a reminder to me of the fact that in the moment and at the time, you can have great satisfaction and great pleasure, and that's what Solomon is talking about here. He says, I gratified my flesh, even as I was guiding my heart with wisdom. I was skillful.

I figured out how to achieve and how to build and how to obtain and how to make my works great. And verse 10 says, I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure. My heart rejoiced in my labor.

I had great fulfillment and great satisfaction in that moment. And this was my reward. This was my possession.

This is what I brought away from my labor was this satisfaction. But then look at verse 11. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done.

Now they're receding into the distance because it's a done deal. They're over with. These are the accomplishments of the past.

And on the labor in which I had toiled and indeed all was vapor and stuffing myself with wind. That's what he's literally saying here. Vanity and feeding on wind.

There was no Yitron. There was no lasting profit under the sun. So I turned myself to consider wisdom and incoherence and folly.

For what can the man do who succeeds the king? Can anybody do more? Only what the king has already done. I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness. The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness.

Yet I myself perceived that the same event befalls them all. So I said in my heart, as it happens to the fool, it also happens to me. Why was I then more wise? I said in my heart, this also is vapor.

For there is no more remembrance of the wise than of the fool forever. Since all that now is will be forgotten in the days to come. And how does a wise man die? As the fool.

Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me for all is vapor and feeding on wind. Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun. Now this is the same man that a couple of verses earlier is saying I took my pleasure in all this work I was doing under the sun.

Now he says I hated my labor because I must leave it to the man who will come after me. And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool. Yet he will rule over all my labor in which I toiled and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun.

This also is vapor. Therefore I turned my heart in despair of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun. There is a man whose labor is with wisdom, knowledge, and skill, yet he must leave his heritage, his possession to a man who has not labored for it.

This also is vapor and a great evil, a great misery. For what does a man have for all his labor and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun? For all his days are full of sorrow and his work is burdensome. Even in the night his heart takes no rest.

This also is vapor. Nothing is better for a man or as we've seen, the Hebrew here literally says there is nothing good in a man eating and drinking and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. It seems good at the moment, but ultimately there's no good in it.

It's a false good. It's a vapor. It's a stuffing of oneself with wind.

I saw this also was from the hand of God. And who should know better than Solomon? Who can eat or have enjoyment more than I? God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in his sight. To the sinner he gives the work of gathering and collecting that he may give to the one who is good before God.

This also is vapor and stuffing oneself with wind. So we have two kinds of good here, don't we? We have good that we see in our own labor and we have good that is assigned by God, the man who is good in God's sight. There is wisdom and skill in labor and there is a wisdom and knowledge and joy that is given by God.

Same vocabulary words. Chakma is wisdom. Da'at is knowledge.

And the word for pleasure here is the same one we've had up above. You can either get these things from your work or you can get them from God. You can either see good in your work or you can be given good by God, declared good by God, good in his sight.

The fact that we can be fooled and that we can accept a substitute that seems substantial but is in fact vapor is something that happens under the sun. That's the message that Solomon introduces in the last part of chapter 1 and in chapter 2, right? Okay, well let's just segue directly into our passage for this morning which is in Ecclesiastes chapter 9. And let's review at the beginning in the translation that I gave you last week. Hopefully you still have that.

I think it's a little bit more clear. Although it is more wooden and literal, I think it's somewhat easier to follow. Solomon in chapter 8 talked about the fact that these men are declaring themselves good.

They're going in and out of the holy place and not only declaring themselves good and enjoying the moment in their work but also in their religious life. They're fooling themselves that not only are they taking pleasure in their daily work but that everything is fine with God. They go in and out and they declare themselves to be good.

And so in chapter 9 Solomon says, I have given all of this to my heart even to make all of this clear or my heart saw all of this depending on how you devise your consonants there that the righteous ones and the wise ones and their works of service are in the hand of God. Even as God's love so also is God's hate. Man is not knowing.

When you're operating under the sun there are people that God is declaring to be good. There are people who are good in God's sight like we saw at the end of chapter 2. But you can't tell it from looking in this life. You look at us.

Look at us in our circumstances. People, neighbors and things, if they just observe what kind of car we drive or what kind of house we live in or the kind of job that we have, our comings and goings in daily life, nobody can tell and we can't tell by looking at others. I have been quite surprised.

I'll tell you a story. It's something that happened this week. A lady contacted me and she calls me 2 or 3 times a year.

She works for a client. It was one of the first network installations that I ever did as an employee of Rainbow Information Systems way back in about 1987 or 88. So I've known this lady around 15 years now just off and on.

We put in their network and over the years they are still using this piece of software that's 15 years old. It runs under DOS. I am the only man in the entire Metroplex who can keep their system running.

I'm still digging through my garage and getting CGA monitors and old equipment and nursing their system along. Well, she called and called the house because she had my work number where I no longer work. So she called the house and Elizabeth took the call.

I got a message and I thought, well, they're having another problem with their software. I've never been very impressed with the company that she worked with. They are totally disorganized.

I used to walk into an office and see papers and checks and bills and things stacked in piles. This poor lady is working there and it's just in complete disarray. They were always kind of iffy and chancy on payment.

I got to where I would try to...and this lady, Joyce, was really good about trying to pay me when I came because if she left it to their company, it would never happen. And so I thought, well, you know, she works here and this is just the way it is. I never thought much about it.

But she called me this week and when I returned the call, it had nothing to do with where she works. It turns out that she's gone to Dr. Griswold's church all of her life and is a real good friend of the family and now is involved in a project since he has passed away of archiving and collecting for posterity all of his sermon notes and everything else. She's working directly with the family.

One of the daughters is her best friend and she's known her all her life and they need some help on the computer side to do the scanning and archiving of all of this stuff. And I would have never suspected it. I've known Joyce for 15 years, never knew she was a believer, never knew she went to church and it turns out she has a very strong interest in that area.

So the point being, you can't tell by looking whether, and even then, I don't know what her spiritual status is and she doesn't know mine. She probably doesn't know that I'm a seminary student, but I'm sure she's going to find out when I go down there next weekend to spend the day helping them get their stuff organized on the computer. But the point is, you can't tell.

Men looking at each other under the sun, you can't see who's good in God's sight. It's not a matter like the Jews thought that, well, the rich are favored in God's sight and the poor are despised and they must be sinners and they've been judged to be evil. Man is not aware.

God's love and God's hate are not visible in this life. You just can't tell. Somebody can be the soul of evil and look benevolent and look charitable and look like they're a wonderful benefactor for a lot of people.

That's what 9-1 says. Solomon says, you know, I had to put this into the computer of my heart. I had to calculate and meditate and think through this for a long time because the righteous ones and the wise ones and their works of service, that's in the hand of God.

And you can't tell in this life who God loves and who God hates in the sense of disapproval and the coming judgment. Because when people look around, all before their faces, and you remember this should not have been divided between one and two, right smack in the middle of the sentence, all before their faces, all before man's face, is everything happening to everyone. It's just the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

Doesn't matter if you're small or great, good or bad, everything happens to everyone. And it's even possible here that again, the way you divide your consonants, this may say hebo, vapor, happening to all. A single fate, the same outcome, happens to the righteous and to the evil, to the good and to the clean and to the unclean, to the one sacrificing, to the one who is not sacrificing, for the good, for the one sinning, the one pledging himself, just as the one who fears to pledge himself or swear an oath.

And so Solomon says in 9.3, this is the evil in all that is worked under the sun. This is the bad

thing. Ra'ah has a wide range of meaning, misery, dissatisfaction, calamity.

This is the bad thing in all that is worked under the sun, because the same outcome happens to all, and the heart of the sons of men are full of evil and derangements. This is that same holel, the translated madness in New King James. The incoherence is in their hearts and in their lives, and after this, even unto death, unto the dying ones, among the dying ones.

For who is chosen, and this literally verse 4, who that is chosen unto all the living, there is confidence. That's just woodenly literal out of the Hebrew. For the living dog it is better than a dead lion.

What is this basically saying? You're not going to draw conclusions. You're not going to necessarily be motivated to pursue the things of God by what you see around you. This is the false gospel that is preached.

The prosperity gospel says, come to God and He'll fix your problems. Come to God and He will bless. Come to God and He will give you all of these areas of blessing.

He'll prosper you professionally. He will prosper you materially. He will prosper you in relationships.

Holding out this carrot of blessing and reward in time as a reason to come to God, and it just doesn't work that way. Look around. The same kind of stuff happens to everyone.

There are wonderful godly people who die young, who suffer losses, who are bereaved, who have financial reverses. Why is that? Because it is not God's purpose to be so simplistic with the carrot on a stick. A lot of us are learning things through our calamities and through our trials, and when people on the outside look, they say, well, see, there's no advantage in being a believer.

There's no advantage in being a Christian. They've got the same kind of problems I do. In fact, I wouldn't want to be them.

Look at the health problems that their child has, or look at the financial problems. Look at the circumstances they're having to cope with. I wouldn't want to have to deal with that every day.

I don't see any advantage in them being a Christian. Well, you cannot measure by circumstances. That is the point.

And you cannot assume that someone is blessed because they are enjoying their life. This is what Solomon said, I made my works great, planted all the gardens, had all the singers, and came to the conclusion that I was just stuffing myself with wind. And so when we arrive here now, where we pick up this morning in chapter 9, verse 4, we're coming out of verse 3, this is the evil in all that is worked under the sun, because the same outcome happens to all.

We like to think, and some of this, if you've ever heard teaching, and, you know, bless his heart, Bob Thiem brought out the idea of the client nation, and the client nation to God, and the concept of a remnant of believers that he calls a pivot and so on. And that nationally, you know, when the nation is being good, God is going to bless it, and when the nation is being evil, God is going to destroy it. And this was an Old Testament principle that applied to the nation of Israel, it's very clear in Deuteronomy when God pronounces the blessings and cursings on the nation, that that was true because God was dealing in the Old Testament age with nations.

But God is dealing in this age with individuals, and you don't see a New Testament affirmation of God's dealing on a national level. There have been many prosperous nations who weren't particularly righteous. Look at Saudi Arabia today, who's got the most money per capita on the planet? Look at the Saudi Arabians, they're sitting on all that oil and we're paying them for it, and they are just, you know, lighting their cigars with hundred dollar bills or whatever it is they spend over there.

And there is nothing of God going on in Saudi Arabia, there are a You cannot look around and judge, you can't see who God loves and who God hates. Individual level evil, either. Do you think that Nate Saint and Jim Elliott were evil men when they got spirited to death by the Akka's back in the 50's? People would look and say, oh, you know, must have not been doing something right because they died young, they didn't even hardly get started.

And look at their families that were bereaved. Elizabeth Elliott went through an awful time when her husband was taken from her, and they hadn't even been married all that long. Well, this is the bad thing about what is worked under the sun, because the same outcome happens to all, and the hearts of the sons of men, therefore, are full of evil and derangements.

Incoherence is in their hearts, in their lives, and after this, all the way through to death, necessarily come to a knowledge of what's going on in the unseen realm. And they feel like if you have to choose, and this is the gist of what 9.4 says in the Hebrew here, is difficult. And my literal translation here, who that is chosen unto all the living, there is confidence.

This is the noun form of *batak*. *Batak* means to trust. This is the thing that is trusted.

What is it that you're trusting in? And then he goes on to say, for to the living dog it is better than a dead lion. Well, what does this mean? I think Solomon is suggesting here, what is the conventional wisdom? What do people typically say? Why are their hearts full of evil? Why will they compromise? Why will they set aside right standards and do the expedient thing? Because hey, anything is better than dying. Why should you die? Why is it that we have such a hard time with people sacrificing themselves in a worthy cause anymore? People say, well, I'll be noble as long as it doesn't cost me anything, but hey, this isn't worth dying for.

It's better to be a living dog than a dead lion. The lion of the tribe of Judah, that's the noble

symbol of nobility and of character and so on, and the dog of course was an unclean animal and life at any cost. Don't, if you get captured as a POW, just go ahead and spill all the beans.

I mean, why should you die over it? Nothing is worth being tortured and killed over. And so the trust, what they trust in is all in this life. What is it they're going to choose? They're going to choose to trust in whatever it is that gets you by, whatever it is that sustains your life.

That's the gist of what's going on in 9.4. And he explains it in verse 5, the living are aware that they will die, but the dying are not aware of anything. And there is no longer to them a wage or a reward for their memory is forgotten. So what is the thinking? Well, you've got to do whatever it is, you know, grab for the gusto as you go around in this life.

Remember the old beer commercial? You only go around once in life, so grab for the gusto. If you're going to get any gusto, it's got to be in this life. That's the thinking.

There is no reward. There is nothing after you die, so you've got to make the most of it. You know, do whatever you can to enjoy this life, even if it means compromise, even if it means trusting in things that are a part of the vapor and a part of the wind, because their memory is forgotten.

9.6, also their love, their hatred, their passion or their ardor have already perished, and there's no longer a reward or an allocation for them forever, unto the ages, in all that is worked under the sun. So Solomon, it's the same contrast that we saw back in chapter 2. What's the idea here? You can immerse yourself in the accomplishments of this life and find your reward and your satisfaction, but you've got to keep on working. You've got to keep on accomplishing, because it doesn't last.

You're stuffing yourself with wind, so you've always got to get a fresh bag full of wind. You've got to get a fresh vapor. This is why the producer that was really, you know, they never can rest on their laurels.

People in times of trial, when things start to slump, you know, Dick, what was the guy's name, in Beewitched? I can almost remember the guy's name. I saw him with that tube in his nose and in a wheelchair and abandoned and penniless. Dick York.

Thanks. You know, he didn't, did he think back on his glory days on Beewitched when he was a household name and a well-known star? Did that sustain him when he was breathing oxygen and penniless and forgotten? It has no substance. It was great at the time, but it isn't a uterine.

It isn't something that lasts. It isn't something that sustains. When's the last time when you were having a really difficult day and you were beset with pressures on every side that you thought back and thought, you know, I remember that vacation we took someplace, or I remember that time when I went and had a really wonderful experience? Past experiences and past joys don't

give us a sustaining power in current trial, do they? You know, when I am busy and beset and stressed out, I've had a lot of wonderful things.

I've had the chance to travel and see things and do things and had thrills. I've gotten to ride in jets and ride in helicopters and, you know, see all of the major parts of the world. And I've had many enjoyable experiences.

I remember my wedding day. It was a wonderful day. It was one of the pinnacle, if not the pinnacle day that I can think of.

But when I'm all beset and stressed and being shot with all the slings and arrows, I don't just stop and say, you know, let me just think back to my wedding day. There was a day. You know, now I feel better.

I mean, it just doesn't, you know, the joys of the past and the accomplishments of the past. I remember the day we threw our covers in the air at Navy after four grueling years. And for me it was more grueling than most because it was harder, I think, for me to get through.

I don't think I could get through except that they were desperate in the 70s after Vietnam. Hardly anybody was going. You know, I sometimes think that God timed it so that I could make it through.

But that day of throwing the cover in the air, man, what a day. The feeling of accomplishment and of survival was great. But I don't think back to the cover throwing day when I'm in stress and, you know, beset on every side, man, dogs yapping at my heels, it does not sustain.

So this is what he's talking about here. He says, you know, slings and arrows happen to everyone. People's hearts are full of evil and they don't get disabused of it in this life.

Their love, their hatred, their passions have perished. There is no longer a reward for them forever in all that is worked under the sun. You get your reward at the moment, but it doesn't last.

You can't just keep going back to that well and drawing fresh pleasure and fresh sustaining power from it. You get it while it's there and then it's gone. So, you know, think about being in the grip of infatuation.

There are people who try to go and recapture that. You know, people in their, you know, used to be in their late teens. I don't know when it happens now, but you just get in the throes of obsession with somebody of the opposite gender and you think about them and seeing them and the stimulation and if you get the chance to date them and go out.

I mean, that is a high for a lot of people that is rare and unmatched. And then people go on to get married and then later on they say, you know, whatever happened to the spark and to the romance? You know, they call that all, put it all into the heading of romance. And they, you know,

you can't live on that kind of adrenaline very long.

But people want to and they want to recapture that. And this is the enticement of affairs and of, you know, people say, oh, you know, it's the thrill of it all and the excitement of that first this and the first that and the first the other. Well, why do they have to keep going back and trying to do that again? Because you can't go back and just remember the first time you felt that way and get that reward again.

It was great at the time, but the memory of it has no substance. This is what Solomon is talking about. Think about any area of accomplishment, any area of passion, any area of love or hatred.

There are people who like to hate. There are people who campaign in a cause. There are people who go to war and even become mercenaries and try to stay in war because they love to find a cause in which they can vent their anger and their hatred.

And so they will attack. There are people in the lawyering profession, criminal lawyering, who like to take on, who like to drag somebody down. Let's bring down the prosecution or let's bring down the defense.

Let's bring down something, you know, it's righteous indignation. And it's a kind of hatred fuel that people run on. And they've got to have a dragon to slay.

They've got to have a castle to attack. They've got to be taking on something. They've got to be the little guy in the big fight.

Their love, their hatred, their ardor, it has already perished, Solomon says. And there's no longer reward for them from that. So what does he say in verse 7? He says, Go eat with pleasure your bread and drink with a good heart your wine, for God already has favored your works.

What does he mean by this? This word for favored means to accept, has the idea of God accepting a sacrifice or being pleased even, has the connotation of being pleased or accepting something. And so you think now, how does this fit with what he's just been saying? The sun rises on everybody on the planet. The rain falls on the just and the unjust.

And there is a satisfaction that comes with accomplishment. There is a satisfaction that comes with a relationship with somebody of the opposite sex. There are built-in joys in life.

There are things, and some people say, well, it's because it's part of the laws of divine establishment to support your nation, to be patriotic, to have a family, to have a wife, you know, marriage, family, nation, free exercise of your will. These have been classified by others in the past as being parts of what God has established as necessary foundations for human life. And when people operate within those, there is a gratification and there is a satisfaction.

You work hard and you achieve something, people celebrate. That's something that God has built

in. What is Solomon saying in verse 7? When you go and eat with pleasure your bread.

Why does he say bread? Because bread is something that comes through labor. You have to plant the seed, you have to grow the wheat, you have to harvest the wheat, you have to take it and grind it into flour, and you have to turn that flour into bread. And so eating the bread is a metaphor for partaking of the satisfaction of your work.

You're eating your bread. What did God tell Adam? You will go and you will earn your bread by the sweat of your brow. The bread comes from the sweat of the brow.

So what is the fruit of your labor? You partake of it. And he says, go and eat that bread, grab that satisfaction, and drink with a good or merry heart. It says a merry heart, but it's the word *tov*.

It's a good heart, a heart of prosperity. Your wine. Bread and wine.

What does it say? A loaf of bread, a jug of wine, and thou is some famous saying. For God already has favored your works. And what he means by that is not that there is some register in heaven where because you worked hard you're getting credit, but whatever favor you're going to get from your works, that's it.

Eat the bread, enjoy it, drink the wine and enjoy it, because that pleasure that you're taking. Remember chapter 2? Solomon said, I threw myself into my work, I built all these things and I saw my labor as good. I got my reward in my labor.

And then he turns right around and says, I was made miserable by it because it was going to go to someone else and it wasn't a lasting reward. The key to understanding verse 7 is the word already. And I've given you in the translation the exact word order in Hebrew, for already God has favored.

It's a perfect tense. It doesn't say in the future God will favor. What has Solomon's point been in this whole long discussion here? You can't tell who God favors in the world.

You can't tell by looking who God loves and who God hates. But if you work hard and you get pleasure from that, guess what? The pleasure that you got from that, that was from the hand of God, but you've already gotten it. The implication is, there's nothing coming in the future from God.

God has already favored your work. If you're telling yourself that God favors you, guess what? The favor that you got from God, the way God built the universe under the sun, we've seen this a time or two before. Eat your bread, drink your wine.

I saw that this too was from the hand of God. The rain falls on the just and the unjust. There are pleasures and there are satisfactions in this life.

God hasn't built the world so that if you're not living for Him, you're just miserable from dawn to dusk. There are pleasures in doing the right thing. There are pleasures in working hard.

There is satisfaction with the opposite sex and having a good marriage. You look around and you see unbelievers and faithless believers who do derive pleasure from their work and their relationships. Solomon is not saying there is no such thing as genuine pleasure.

There is, and it's from God. God made it so where our heart would be gratified in hard work, but you have to be careful. The reward you get, you get that reward and it's from God, but it comes to everybody, whether God loves you or hates you.

If you take pleasure in your work, if you eat with pleasure your bread and drink with a good heart your wine, that pleasure, that satisfaction is from God. But be careful, don't settle for that. The pleasure that Solomon got from the gardens and the orchestras in chapter 2 was from God, but he said, you know what, it doesn't last.

I'm going to have to hand these things off to somebody else, and that satisfaction is not a Yitron. Satisfaction is not necessarily divine good. Satisfaction and pleasure in life is not necessarily fruit, and it is easily confused.

We easily mistake one for the other. Wasn't this a mistake the Pharisees made? They enjoyed being rich. They enjoyed being seen and strutting about in purple and fine linen.

They enjoyed being seen praying on the street corners. A lot of people have gotten satisfaction from hard work and making a living and supporting their family and making a name for themselves in their field of endeavor. That's from the hand of God, but do not mistake it for eternal fruit.

Do not mistake it for being declared good in God's eyes. It's a subtle point, but remember, who's the wisest man in the Old Testament age? It's Solomon, and Solomon is trying to get this across in this section. What should we be thinking about when we examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith? It's an easy thing to find satisfaction in what we do.

We had a big list of things to get done, and we got it done. We were faithful and we were diligent. We were called upon.

We had a duty, and we did it. People in the military stay up long hours, kill themselves doing their duty, and a lot of them do it out of a very good heart and a sense of patriotism, but that in and of itself, even though it's satisfying, A, it doesn't last forever, and you have to keep doing that and doing that to have a current sense of pleasure, and B, it is not the same as being good in God's sight. So when we examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith and when we measure ourselves to see if there is fruit on the branches of our tree, is there a 30, 60, or 100-fold crop growing in the field of our soul where God has planted the seed of His Word, do not measure by

a sense of satisfaction.

Do not measure by a sense of accomplishment. This is the folly of, quote unquote, impacting people that is current in the church today. People measure because they are impactful.

I've actually seen that word in print. That was so impactful. That's such an abused word.

Anyway, it is not impact. It is not people's opinion. It is not looking around and being able to see your gardens and your orchestras and your riches above others that are in your periphery.

What does it mean to be good in God's sight? That is the only thing that will last beyond the setting of the sun. So the message of this section is do not accept a vapor-filled substitute. We should not stuff ourselves with wind.

You can bloat yourself temporarily, but when that wind goes away, you are going to be just as empty as when you started. We are going to come back and pick up here at verse 7 and go forward with the translation I handed out for you this morning. We will see the continuation of this thought, and Solomon is going to bring it to a conclusion in the rest of the chapter.