

02-03-31b Ecclesiastes

Let's resume our study now in Ecclesiastes chapter 9, and I suppose there's a danger of beating the subject of death to death, and I want to move a little bit forward here, because I think, especially having straightened out some of the difficulties in these verses, we know, we can see Solomon's point, that looking around in this life, you're going to become one of two things. You will either become, from a human point of view, adjusted or fatalistic about the outcomes, that there's just no telling what's going to happen, and you just want to hope for the best and pray that there's a silver lining in the cloud and go on, or you're going to become very Machiavellian and try to bend circumstances to your will and to accomplish your purpose. So you basically either take an active or a passive approach to the inevitabilities of life, and you just have to grit your teeth and get through the hard times and hope for better ones, or you can consciously do everything in your power to try to make for good times and to minimize your bad times.

And Solomon says this is an evil that's worked under the sun because it does not initially point people to God. Wouldn't it be great if every time someone sinned, a bad consequence resulted? It was cause and effect, and people were undeniably convinced that there was a God in heaven and that the only way to live is to live righteously and to live for Him, because every time you do anything other than that, you get discipline from heaven. Lightning strikes, the ground opens up, bad things happen to bad people, and only good people have the good things of life.

That would be a nice, orderly, cause and effect, predictable universe. But he says it isn't that way, and because it's not that way, it's an evil in the sense that people look around and say, well, who is it that's blessed and who is it that's chosen? It's not necessarily the clean and the religious and the righteous. It's just whoever happens to get over.

Anybody who's alive has a shot at prosperity. A living dog is better than a dead lion, is how it's translated in your English Bible. But it literally says that for the living dog, it is better than a dead lion.

And that's a subtle but important difference. It doesn't say a living dog is better than a dead lion. It says for the living dog, it is better.

And you have the Hebrew pronoun, who, which means he. There's an old thing in first-year Hebrew, who is he and he is she, and me is who. And that's how it works.

Me means who. We just had it in the beginning of verse 4. Who, H-U, is he or it, and he, H-I-Y, is she, the feminine pronoun. Who is he? He is she.

Me is who. So, who is blessed and chosen? I mean, it's anybody's guess. It's whoever gets over.

You can sometimes passively go along and receive it. You can aggressively seek it. But there's one thing that is believed among all the living.

It's a thing that's trusted. It's a thing that people put their confidence in. And that is that for the living dog, it's better than for a dead lion.

So, even if you have to compromise, even if you are unclean, which a dog was unclean. A dog was despised. A dog wasn't useful for much.

They might have used them out amongst the sheep. But generally speaking, the dogs were just kind of lurking around the edges of the camp, pouncing on unsuspecting poultry and feeding on offal and scraps, and were despised. They were the ones that licked Lazarus' sores.

But a living dog is better. It's better for a living dog. He's got at least some chance of prosperity than a dead lion.

So, the idea is, do whatever you have to do. Even if you have to become a dog to stay alive, you're going to have a better lot in life than someone who stands up for their principles and dies in the process. We see that all around us today.

People find very little worth dying for. And I would submit that if you are not in possession of things that are worth dying for, you probably are not in possession of things worth living for either, which, of course, are the things of God. Then in verse 5, he continues and he says, For the living are aware that they will die.

This is the participle from yada, which is the verb that means to know. And it doesn't say they know as though it's a point in time. In English, we call this a gerund.

It's an I-N-G word. They are knowing. They are aware.

All the time, it's in their mind. They know that they're going to die. The dying are not aware of anything.

And there is no longer to them a wage or a reward, for their memory is forgotten. This is an explanation of this saying that people believe to be true in the previous verse. There's a better lot for the living dog than for the dead lion.

Why? Because the living, they know they're going to die, but they haven't died yet. The dead have already died. They're not aware of anything.

There's no more reward left. If you want your reward, in other words, you've got to get it in life. If you're dead, it's over with in terms of reward.

This is the popular view. This is the bitcone from the verb batac, which means to trust. This is the popular wisdom.

Better to be alive and grab the gusto than to be dead where you can't get any more gusto. Even

your memory is forgotten. Also, their love, their hatred, and their ardor have already perished.

What are they talking about here? What is Solomon saying? What are the things that give people pleasure in this life? Where do people get their joie de vivre, as the French say? Well, some people get it from their love. It's all about relationships and their fellow man, either the people that are close to them or their altruistic love, their benefactors and their doctors or their inventors or someone who makes a difference. This is the big popular mantra today.

If your life makes a difference to other people... Milton Berle just passed away this past week. I was in a hotel room somewhere and saw on CNN where he had passed away, and they had these retrospectives. He was Mr. TV, and he lived to be 90-something years old and made a lot of people laugh.

And they said, you know, that's his legacy is that he made people laugh. He brought some joy in their life. And, of course, he also sold a whole lot of TV sets back in the 1950s.

I had heard this before, and they reminded everyone of the fact that they could see the water levels in New York City visibly diminish every time there was a commercial on the Milton Berle show because everybody was running to the bathroom during the commercials and they would see this big dip. There were businesses that let out early on Tuesday evenings so that people could make it home in time to see the Milton Berle show. So he had a great impact.

He affected a lot of people, and this is a popular measure. But from a spiritual point of view, and I have no earthly idea what the nature of his relationship with God was or might have been, but even if he is remembered, I mean, people remember Julius Caesar, we remember Hannibal, we remember Lord Nelson. I was in the pen club of New York, which is sort of a gentleman's club.

I don't know if they can still get away with being a gentleman's club now or not, but a real old club in an old part of New York City. I was wandering around in there, and in a room there was a big piece of furniture, really beautiful, walnut-burled, obviously old. I looked, and it had a little plaque on the inside, and it said that this had once been the property of Admiral Lord Nelson way back in the 1600s, you know, the late 1700s, I guess it was when he operated, late 1700s and early 1800s.

This had been his property, and they showed the path whereby it had come down to the Canadian club, which became the pen club of New York. And I thought, you know, I touched the wood and opened it, it had some upper doors like a hutch, and there were drawers inside, it was really ornate with brass pulls and everything. And I thought, you know, Admiral Nelson, people that know anything about naval history are really impressed with Lord Nelson.

I'm among them. He was a tremendous naval officer and leader in the British Navy, and this was a thing that he used. He touched those same pulls, opened those same drawers, kept his clothing in there.

And so I was musing over the fact that here's an artifact that actually belonged to him, and he's gone, but his memory sort of remains. And we think, well, there are people who are remembered. But this is talking about there is no longer to them a wage or a reward for their memory is forgotten.

What does that mean? We remember people from the dim, dark past going all the way back to Adam and Eve, but what good does that do Lord Nelson or Hannibal or Caesar or any of the other remembered people? What good does it do Milton Berle that people remember that he made them laugh in the 50s and 60s? His ability to reap joy or pleasure or some sense of accomplishment from that is gone. You know, they always give posthumous awards. They give lifetime achievement Oscars and things to people posthumously.

They name buildings and do a lot of things in honor of the memory of someone who is gone. And that's all fine for the surviving family and for people who think that they've accomplished something by doing that, but the person that's passed away knows nothing of that. Their reward from any adulation that they got in this life perishes with them.

And it doesn't come back in the resurrection. God's not, we've talked about this before, God's not going to take a poll. God's not going to have a popularity contest.

There's not going to be an academy of people who are going to submit their votes and say these are the ones we think ought to be partaking of the hidden manna or I vote a white robe for so-and-so because they did thus and so for me. It's all exclusively the judgment of God. The only benefit we reap from impressing each other is while we're alive in this life.

And so people look around and they say, you know, I'd rather be a dead dog and have the chance of pleasure or making something of myself. And even if you're a lion, if you're dead, you can't enjoy being a lion anymore. Remember the parable that Samson told the Philistines about the lion's carcass? Out of the eater came forth meat, and from that which was putrid came forth something sweet is the gist of it out of the Hebrew.

And he posed this as a riddle. And, of course, it was a beehive inside a lion's carcass. And so out of the eater came forth something to eat, and from this rotting carcass came forth something sweet.

And it was a conundrum. But, of course, Delilah spilled the beans, and so they had to go slay a bunch of Philistines to pay off the bet. But, you know, the dead lion, he can't roar and be the king of the jungle.

It just doesn't know good. The living are aware that they will die, but you can push that out of your mind. The dying are not aware of anything.

There is no longer to them a reward. They don't get the wage of what they do in life. Their

memory is forgotten.

Also, their love, and people get all kinds of pleasure out of love, romance, loyalty, the love of friends, the love of fellow man, the ability to impress and make an impact on people, the admiration, you know, people that get up on the stage. I heard Celine Dion talking the other day, and she was saying, oh, you know, I've been away for two years having my child, but it's so wonderful to be back on the stage and feel the love, you know, that goes back and forth between the performer and the audience. But that perishes with the performer.

Anybody who has died, their love, I look at the photographs, almost everybody has family photographs of people that lived in the dim, dark past, and you wonder, well, what were they passionate about? What did they think? What did they say? What did their voice sound like? What were they enthusiastic about? What did they hate? What did they love? What were their struggles in life? It's all perished, and even somebody just two generations back, you know virtually nothing about them. All of their strutting and fretting their hour on the stage has perished, whether it's their love, their hatred, and their passion, their ardor, all of the things that made life worth living for them and the things that they struggled against in a mighty fashion, it's gone. It has perished already, Solomon says in verse 6, and there is no longer an allocation for them.

This is a reward in the sense of what is divided. We have two different words for reward here. The first one that we saw in verse 5 is reward in the sense of a wage, something that is earned as a result of one's efforts or one's diligence.

You're recognized as having done something, and this is a recompense in verse 5. The second word in verse 6 is the word that we've seen before. We've sometimes translated it as permanent possession. This is from the verb that means to divide out or allocate something.

You're splitting up the inheritance. This is the word that was used to divide up the land amongst the tribes of Israel. So, the first word there, if you want to write these down, is sakar, S-A-K-A-R in verse 5, which has the idea of being recompensed or paid a wage.

And in verse 6, it is, let me find it here because it's a long verse, there is no longer to them owed. And this is o, let's see, any longer, kelek, C-H-E-L-E-Q. And that comes first.

It literally says, and allocation is not to them any more forever or unto the ages olam. So, it's really the first word after the end there in the second part of verse 5, or verse 6 rather. And where is this reward? There is no longer an allocation for them unto the ages or forever in all that is worked under the sun.

Everybody is looking at this stuff that happens under the sun. So, what is Solomon's conclusion? We've heard and rehearsed all of these concepts up to verse 6, and I think it's pretty clear. So, what does Solomon say? If that is going to be your view, if you're going to take the popular view that a living dog has a better lot in life than a dead lion, then go and eat with pleasure your bread,

he says, and drink with a good heart your wine, for already God has favored your works.

Whatever favor you're going to get from God, which is from God, anything that is good, anything that is joy-inducing in the real sense, not perverse joy, but anything that is genuinely satisfying, is from God. And even unbelievers, the rain falls on the just and the unjust. So, go eat with pleasure your bread, and drink with a good heart your wine, because that is the favor that God has built into life, and that's already, that's all you're going to get.

There's not going to be anything in the future. And while you're on this earth, in every time, this is time under the sun, your robes will be white, and oil upon your head you will not lack. And they make this a justive, or a cohortative when they translate it.

They say, let your robes be white, and let there be oil upon your head. But that's an interpretive decision. The form of the verb is no different than the future tense.

So, if you understand this to be a cohortative, which makes sense in the context, because verse 7 begins with something of an imperative, as does verse 9. So, in every time, to the extent that you're able to, wear a white robe, dress yourself up and enjoy walking around in fine clothes, and let there be oil on your head, let the oil on your head not lack. In other words, enjoy whatever prosperity you have while you have it under the sun. Because that is the only favor from God that you're going to be able to enjoy.

So, this is a mild form of sarcasm. If that's how you're going to think, then this is the best you can do. This is advice for those who can't see past the setting of the sun, whose life and whose works are not in God's hand.

And so, what you're going to reap from God is only going to be in this life. And you think, well, now, how do you know that he's not saying this to faithful people? Look at verse 9. It literally says, see life. This is the verb ra-a, which means to see.

And it says, see life. This is a figure of speech that means, live it up. Milk it for all it's worth.

Carpe diem. Seize the day. See life with the wife that you love.

He's not enjoining people to just go awry and do anything that comes to their mind. If it feels good, do it. It's not what Solomon is saying.

He's saying you still need to observe the law. You need to be wearing a white robe, not a purple robe with a silver lining. Live a moral life.

See life. Enjoy life. See life with the wife that you love.

All the days of what? This is literal. All the days of the life of your vapor, your hevel, which he, God, gives you under the sun. This is, in other words, avail yourself of common grace.

If you're not going to avail yourself of the surpassing grace of God for those who live faithfully and obediently and who seek his will, then all you have access to is common grace, the joys and the benefits that God has built into life in general, even for unbelievers. Any unbeliever can work hard and get satisfaction in looking at the works of their hands. Anyone can marry a wife and enjoy her or marry a spouse and enjoy them all the days of your life.

But the life of vapor tells us that this is talking to people who don't have a life of substance, who are not accumulating a yitron, a profit that is going to be in their hand beyond the setting of the sun. He says, this is your allocation. This is the same word we just saw up in verse 6. This is your allocation.

What's divided to you from God? That's it. It's the joy that you get out of this life. That's your allocation in life and in your labor which you yourself labor under the sun.

And the emphasis here is, you're sort of making your own happiness. It isn't something that God is working on your behalf, and that's why it emphasizes you yourself. Your labor which you yourself labor under the sun.

This is all sort of a happiness that is based on your own works, your own efforts, and it is there. It is a joy. You can see life.

You can enjoy life. Wear a white robe. Put some oil on your head.

Eat your bread with pleasure. Drink your wine with a good heart. But just be aware, that's all you're going to get.

That's the allocation from God. Verse 10, all that your hand finds to do in your strength, work. For there is no work, there is no ingenuity, there is no knowledge, there is no wisdom in Sheol.

And depending on how you want to translate this literally, it says in that you yourself are going there. You're headed for Sheol, and you're not going to be able to accumulate work that has eternal value. You're not going to be able to avail yourself of ingenuity or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol.

It isn't to be found. If you don't find it in this life, you're not going to find it in the grave. And that's where you're going.

So Solomon says in verse 11, I turned to see under the sun that not to the swift is the race, not to the valiant is the battle, not to the wise is the bread, also not to the discerning is riches, and also not to the knowledgeable is compassion, for time and happenstance occur to all of them. You do not guarantee a happy, blessed, prosperous life because you are swift or because you're valiant or because you're wise or because you're discerning or because you're knowledgeable. The knowledgeable and wise, and this is talking about genuine knowledge and genuine wisdom in the

things of God, is not going to automatically result in riches, not automatically going to result in prosperity.

You're not always going to have a... Sometimes you will, and sometimes you won't, but it is not determinative. You cannot go to God and say, look God, I've been faithful, and I've learned your word, and I've been obedient, and I have run with patience my race. Where is my temporal blessing? Where is my prosperity? Where is my fulfillment? Where is the substantial return on all my dreams and all my hopes? I just don't see it, and now I'm unhappy with you, God, because I've done all these things, and I didn't see the return.

Solomon says, I've found out that that's not the case under the sun. And notice that phrase, under the sun. It is true that the race will be won by the swift.

It is true that the battle will be won by the valorous. It is true that there will be bread for the wise, and there will be riches for the discerning, and there will be mercy and compassion for the knowledgeable, but not necessarily under the sun. You can think, I am sure, of verses that we've seen in the New Testament, where the wise are going to shine like the sun in the kingdom of the Father.

The wise are going to share the hidden manna that Christ distributes to the overcomers. They are going to walk with Christ. They are going to wear the victor's crown.

But under the sun, Solomon says, I see that that doesn't take place. And because of this, in verse 12, he says, also man does not know his time. We think that our time is circumscribed by the rising and setting of the sun, and we don't realize that our time actually extends forward into eternity.

Man does not know his time, like fish that are caught in an evil net, or birds that are caught in a snare. Like them, the sons of man are lured and trapped unto an evil time when it falls on them suddenly. And what do you think this evil time is? It's death.

It's the setting of the sun. And you're free to swim about as a fish. You're free to fly about as a bird.

And you enjoy the trees, or you enjoy the freedom of the sea, or wherever it is. And then, at a time when you think not, the snare is tripped, or the net is drawn up, and you're taken out of that environment. And what does a snare do? It takes away your freedom of movement.

You can no longer do the exercise of your free will. And it happens suddenly and unexpectedly. How many people in the Twin Towers thought that that was the last day of their life? How many of the Marines and sailors in the barracks in Beirut on October 23rd of 1983 thought that that was the last morning that they would be in their bunks and getting ready to lace up their boots and go out for another day, when at 6.10 a.m. the suicide bomber went in and leveled that building and

killed several hundred? People die in traffic accidents.

People die of unforeseen strokes and physical maladies. People get killed accidentally and are victims of crime and all other sorts of unforeseen eventualities every single day. Nobody gets up in the morning and thinks, Well, I guess this is the last day of my life.

I will never forget. I don't know how many people have actually seen a dead person, seen the result of someone who's been shot or killed or the victim of an accident, but I will never forget one of the first times I saw someone who had been unexpectedly killed. And the image in my mind is their shoes and their socks, because they were laying there, and pretty soon somebody came and put a blanket over them.

But their feet were toward me, and I could see their shoes and their socks, and I looked down at my own shoes and socks, and I thought, You know, this person got up this morning, pulled on their socks and tied their shoes, just like I did, with the same expectation of immortality that I have, that my death is in the far-off future, and here they are. They will never tie those shoes again. Someone else is going to untie them.

Someone else is going to dress them at the morgue. Somebody else is going to attire them for their final trip to the grave in terms of their body. They never had a clue that that was their last day on earth, and we just have the confident expectation that death is far away.

That's what Solomon is talking about here. Man does not know his time. Like fish caught in an evil net, birds caught in a snare, the sons of man are trapped unto an evil time when it falls on them suddenly.

He says, Also this I have seen as wisdom under the sun, and it is gadol, G-A-D-O-L, it is great, it is high, it is wonderful to me. And this is the introduction to the little parable that follows. He says, People don't think about the fact that death is going to come and their ability to influence their eternal future is over.

You can't change your eternal fate from the point of death forward. You can only influence it now. So he says, I have seen this as wisdom under the sun, and it is great to me.

Verse 14, There was a little city and few men in it, and a great king came upon it and besieged it and built upon it great snares. Same word that we had in verse 12, the birds that were caught in a snare. Kind of an unusual thing for a great king to attack a city with, but that's what the text says.

Besieged it and built upon it great snares. He found, or actually there was found in it, it literally says he found, but I should probably change this to say there was found in it, a poor wise man. And he delivered the city by his wisdom.

But Adam, mankind, did not remember that same poor man. So I myself said wisdom is better than valor, but the wisdom of the poor one is despised and his words are not heard. This was the

problem in Israel when Jesus came.

Jesus had powerful words of wisdom from the word of God, but because he didn't come in glory and because he wasn't attired as a prince or a king in Israel, he was overlooked by the majority of his people, as were the disciples and apostles who taught after them. Because people have this equation in their mind, if you're really smart, it's going to show in life. You're going to make out, you're going to get a return in this life.

So no one remembered the same poor man. Wisdom is better than valor, but the wisdom of the poor one is despised and his words are not heard. And then in verse 17, there's this summary.

There's not even a verb here. It says, the words of the wise being heard rather than the shout of one ruling among fools. This is the choice that we face.

Are we going to limit our viewpoint to what's in this life? Now, that's a temporal view. Everything we've talked about this morning is looking in time. What are you going to do with your life before you die? But there is a spiritual application as well.

And what is the analogy between physical life and physical accomplishment and spiritual? There's a very close parallel because as we live our lives as believers, we choose each day whether we're looking for earthly impact and earthly achievement or storing up for ourselves treasure in heaven. And there is a death that can come upon us unexpectedly that is not physical death. It is, and I can't really call it spiritual death because we know that to be the condition that is that of the hellbound lake of fire dwellers for all eternity.

But it is an operational death. It is the death of the branch that's supposed to be producing fruit. And it comes, it says, man does not know his time in verse 12.

He's caught in an evil net. He's caught in a snare. The sons of man are lured and trapped onto an evil time when it falls on them suddenly.

We can be ensnared by this life. We can be rendered operationally dead, spiritually unfruitful. Those are the branches that are spoken of as withered and broken off, that are fruitless and gathered in bundles and burned.

So that's what verse 17 is talking about. Do we heed the words of the wise so that our city is delivered or do we pay attention to the shout of one ruling among fools? That always reminds me of Rehoboam right after Solomon when he listened to his young counselors who said raise the taxes and make life even harder for the subjects in the land. And he said my little finger is thicker than my father Solomon's waist and so on.

The words of the wise being heard rather than the shout of one ruling among fools. Better wisdom than weapons of war but a single sinner will wipe out an abundance of good. And the

word for abundance here is actually a verb that means to cause to multiply.

And you get the idea that there is good that can just be multiplied. It's like the rivers of living water that Jesus talked about that would flow forth from the belly of one who would respond to his call. And he says a single sinner can wipe out this bubbling fountain of good that is potential.

If we are ensnared and entrapped we can lose the potential for building up that profit that is going to be revealed after death. That concludes chapter 9 and I just want to close this morning by going over in the New Testament to Romans chapter 6. Romans chapter 6. There is no more fitting day than today, Resurrection Sunday, to talk about the issues of life and death that Solomon raises. And Paul in Romans 6, having argued forcefully that the law came to expose for us our sinfulness and our need for God's redeeming grace and God's righteousness by faith even after our salvation.

In chapter 6 verse 1 he says, What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin so that grace may abound? Certainly not. How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him through baptism into death so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. So thinking about the words of Solomon, if we recognize that living to complete tasks and fulfill accomplishments in this life as an end in itself is pointless, it becomes more clear what it means to die to sin and live to God because we have to act as though we have already reached the grave where accomplishments and the memory of them is already gone and forgotten.

If we picture ourselves as already having died in this life, it's easier to see that impacting people or accomplishing goals or working works or doing things that satisfy me, if I'm dead, that doesn't work anymore. I don't have any benefit from that now. And Solomon says those who have died, their love and their hate and their ardor, their passion, their accomplishments have all perished with them.

They don't gain any more reward from that. Well, if we can essentially die ahead of time in the sense of this life and picture ourselves, see ourselves as dead to this world and living for the next, it frees us from the snare. It frees us from the evil net that entraps so much of humanity today because we're not living each day for the normal human satisfactions.

And that's what Paul is talking about. He says in verse 5, if we've been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be captives, no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.

If we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him, for the death

that He died, He died to sin once for all. But the life that He lives, He lives to God.

In the exhortation in verse 11, likewise you also reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. How does that work itself out? He says in verse 12, therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body. And we tend to think, well that means don't go off and do sinful things, don't commit obvious sins.

But sin can reign in our mortal body if we are living for this life's accomplishments. We measure by the satisfaction that we get in completing a task or fulfilling hard labor. We get that common grace pleasure, seeing good in our work and pronouncing ourselves to be good, and that's where we stop and we don't look at the eternal picture.

We haven't really died to this life. We're reaping the reward of this life just like an unbeliever would who doesn't know any better. He says, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey it in its passions, its lusts, its desires. Do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. And this is foreshadowing our resurrection.

When we're actually resurrected, everybody in the Christian world recognizes that we're going to be in the presence of God and we're going to want to please Him and serve Him because we'll be able to see Him face to face. Paul says, don't wait for that resurrection. Die now and get resurrected now and dedicate yourselves to God as being alive from the dead.

Dedicate your members as instruments of righteousness to God. Sin shall not have dominion over you. You are not under law but under grace.

If you read the accounts of Jesus' resurrection and if you read popular accounts and if you watch reenactments, I saw a reenactment on television. I read a book. I've even got the title page of it here because it fell off.

It's a 30-year-old book by Taylor Caldwell called Great Lion of God. It's a fictionalized biography of the Apostle Paul. Interesting book.

But in here, he has an account of the resurrection. I heard in songs, I heard someone preach it this morning. I've seen it everywhere.

This is what people believe. Early in the morning on the third day, the women went to the tomb and found the stone rolled away and Jesus was gone. Jesus had been raised.

However, if you read Matthew 28 carefully, that is not the way it happened. The account in Great Lion of God, the Roman soldier is recounting what he saw. For some reason, he wasn't struck

unconscious like all the rest of them.

He saw a great being of light come down and roll away the stone and he saw Jesus come forth. He tells this story to Paul, who at that time is still Saul and doesn't believe it. This is a very popular conception, specifically that the angels came and rolled away the stone and Jesus came forth.

But read Matthew 28 because Jesus left the tomb while the stone was still in place. The angel came down when the two Marys came to the garden early. They were the first two to get there and the angel rolled away the stone to reveal an empty tomb.

Jesus had already been raised. He was already gone. Nobody let Jesus out of the tomb.

He was gone already. So what is the rolling away of the stone? It is a revelation of a hidden truth. Jesus was gone, but no one knew it until the stone was rolled away.

No one knew that Jesus was alive to God. It wasn't obvious until that stone was rolled away to reveal the empty grave. And I think that that is a wonderful picture of what happens with us.

We can live this life that Solomon is talking about. We can live the life that Paul is talking about and it still may not be visible and may not be apparent until the day that God rolls away the stone to reveal our empty grave. And it will be revealed that there were those who, like Christ, had already been raised to new life, had already begun to live their life to please God.

That should be our ambition. That should be the measure by which we measure each day. Did I live this day heartily as unto the Lord? Was I just taking pleasure the way common grace allows us to take pleasure in accomplishments, in fulfillments, in love, in the doing of things that need to be done? Or did I really set my sights on the heavenly goal, on laying up treasure in heaven? Because that's what Jesus did.

That's how he lived his life. And that's what God revealed when that stone was rolled away. The tomb was already empty and Jesus had already arisen.

Well, this is a good place for us to stop. The beginning of a chapter awaits us in chapter 10 of Ecclesiastes, and that's where we'll begin next time. What a great place to start.

Dead flies make a perfumer's oil stink. That's where we'll pick up next time. Father, we thank You for the privilege of studying Your Word.

We thank You that You have invested our lives with meaning and purpose through the death of Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and His resurrection to new life. And even now He sits at Your right hand interceding for us and waiting for the day when You will send Him to collect us and take us to be with Him forever. We pray that we can keep that truth and that reality in mind, that it will motivate us and encourage us to live our lives in a way that is pleasing in Your sight.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.