

02-04-14b Ecclesiastes

Let's resume our study this morning in Ecclesiastes chapter 10. We have a background and a setting this morning from Jeremiah chapter 33 in terms of the future hope that is ours to claim along with the nation of Israel in the fulfillment of God's promises even in the midst of adversity. And it does not matter what your circumstances are in this life.

You can be high or you can be low. You can be prosperous or you can be in the midst of great financial challenge. You can look like from the outside everything is gilded, but all of us have the traps and snares in our soul.

We all have the pitfalls and oftentimes we are victims of our own bad judgment. We are victims of the actions of others. All of us are somewhere in an authority structure and someone has control over some aspect of our life.

We live in Texas here. September 11th they flew these planes into buildings over on the east coast and everyone felt the tragedy. It's like the Kennedy assassination, those of us that are old enough to remember that.

It's become a truism that everybody remembers where they were and what they were doing when they heard that news back in November of 1963. And September 11th is that way for the current generation in our country. But as tragic as that is, like Mount St. Helens and lots of other things, that's way over there.

And for at least the first few weeks we did not have any material change in the way our day would go, in the way our lives are lived. But one of the perhaps trivial and yet to me significant changes since that day is airline travel. Those of us that have to fly, there is a tremendous change in the way you get on airplanes and go places now from six months ago or actually seven months ago now.

And the authorities, the Federal Aviation Administration and the people who govern us have decided that we have to take measures to ensure that that cannot happen again. So now I cannot travel with my usual computer tools because they could be used as a weapon. I cannot carry barber scissors in my shaving kit.

I cannot carry my little penknife that I am never without unless I want to check those things in my baggage. And if you decide to check baggage, you can plan on investing several hours of your life at each airport you pass through getting your luggage from point to point because the lines for baggage are exceedingly long and tedious. And I have always traveled carry-on.

Well, you can't carry anything. You can't even carry nail clippers through security to get on a plane. My point is this.

I have lost a freedom, trivial though it may be. There are people who have lost their lives. I understand that.

I'm just using it as an example of change. Something that happened far away has caused authorities to exert their power over me in a way that they did not used to do. And I have lost some privileges and some conveniences that I used to have that I no longer have.

And only if you know me well do you know how inconvenient it is for me not to have my little knife or not to have my ratchet screwdriver with which I can take apart anything from a radio to a building. It has everything I need. With my pocket knife and my ratchet screwdriver with all of its little bits inside the handle, I am prepared for any eventuality.

And if I have my tools all, which is my little folding thing that's got a rasp and a file and a saw and a pair of pliers and three different screwdrivers and et cetera, et cetera, then I don't even need to go to the garage for 99% of what I do, even here at home. I can't carry any of those things with me now, and it is a tremendous inconvenience. I had to rebuild a cart made of the sawdust and glue type of thing that holds up a TV set and has shelves inside.

Well, it got delivered damaged in Mexico City, where it takes an act of God to get something through customs anyway. And it was delivered and it was cracked. And I could fix it, but I had no tools.

And I basically had to repair it with three tubes of super glue and my fingers. And I got it done, but I grievously missed my panoply of tools with which I face my day. Well, this is authority.

And whether it's fair or unfair, whether it's right or wrong, whether it is the necessary result of having to tighten security, all I'm saying is someone has used their authority and changed my daily life. And this is a trivial example. I haven't lost any sleep over it.

I haven't prayed any imprecatory prayers over it. It is just insignificant to the point of nonsense compared to the challenges that people have faced and do face. But look at Ecclesiastes 10, verse 4. If the spirit of a ruler rises against you, do not leave your post, it says in the New King James, for conciliation pacifies great offenses.

What is being talked about here? Well, we've already seen in the first nine chapters that Solomon has a lot to say about government and he's used different words to talk about those who are in leadership roles. He's used the word from which we get sultan or shultan. He's used moshel, which is from mashal, which means to rule.

He has used melek, which is the king. He's used a number of different synonyms for governmental authorities. He's talked about the medina, which is the province and provincial rulers.

He's talked about those who are princes in Jerusalem. He's talked about the ones who have influence, who are high and mighty, with many, many different synonyms. And I think the reason he does this is he doesn't want anyone coming to this book and saying, well, this is Solomon on government.

By varying his vocabulary here, he's talking about all different kinds of authority. It might be regional authority. It might be city government.

It might be just the ruler of a household who has servants who are speaking well or ill of him. It might be a man who should have authority over his own soul, but he's being ensnared by a woman whose heart is trapped in snares and whose hands are bonds and that sort of thing. Everywhere you look in Ecclesiastes, sooner or later, he talks about you are somewhere in an authority structure.

You either are married to someone, you work for someone, you live in someone's household because they are your parents. You are a slave to a master in some way, shape, or form. You have someone who is Moshel, someone who is ruling.

You have someone who is the prince, who has power to affect the way you carry on your business. And in verse 4 here, what if the spirit of that ruler rises up against you? The first word in the verse here in Hebrew is *im*, I am. It means if.

The second word is *ruach*, which sometimes means wind and sometimes means spirit. It's easy from the context most of the time to tell which one is in view. Here it is spirit because we have the next word in what in Greek we would call the genitive, a possessive, that says who the spirit belongs to.

And this is *ha-moshel*. Moshel, again the o-e verbal pattern here, the vowel pattern. Moshel is an infix which takes *mashal* and makes it into, in English it's an *ing* word, the one ruling.

So the *ruach ha-moshel*, the spirit of the one that is exerting authority. If the spirit of the one exerting authority *ta-ala*. *Ala* means to go up or to rise up.

It's the word that is used of the smoke from the altar during burnt sacrifices. *Ala* means to lift up. It's the verb that's used of the dawn.

And one of my more interesting word studies where I ended up disagreeing with the lexicon is in the Hebrew word that the lexicon says means dawn. But everywhere you find that where it's literally talking about the dawn, it says the dawn and then it has the verb for *ala* which means to lift. Well, they say see the dawn is rising, the dawn is lifting.

But the word actually means darkness. It's the word that's used of Satan. He says, How thou art fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of... And most of your English translations say darkness, son

of darkness.

I'm sorry, they say son of the dawn. O Lucifer, son of the morning or son of the dawn. But I translate it darkness because that word, at the dawn, the darkness is lifting.

You watch the eastern sky in the morning, the darkness lifts. And when you look at the other uses of the word, it's root, it's origin is darkness. Anyway, this is ala.

So what does it mean that the spirit of the ruler is rising? Well, the next phrase, you have a preposition al which means against. And then you have the pronoun attached to it that means you. So the spirit of the ruler is rising up against you.

Well, if you've ever gotten angry, I don't know if that includes all of us. I think it might. If you've ever gotten angry over something, you recognize why we have these things that say that makes my blood boil.

Or I could see the red rising from his collar up to his ears. You know, the veins stand out in your temples. You feel a chemical change in your bloodstream when you get angry.

If you get really angry, you feel it rising. It's like something that starts in your chest and just rises up and gets into your head. That's my experience anyway.

Not an infrequent occurrence in some cases, especially in traffic. And this is why the Hebrew says the spirit is rising. This is not a happy thing.

He's not becoming joyful over you. The spirit of the ruler is rising not for you and not because of you. He's becoming joyful because of you.

It is rising, the implication is, in anger against you. Well, this is a precarious position for anyone under authority to find themselves in. It doesn't say rightly or wrongly.

It says the spirit of the ruler is rising up against you. They are upset with you for some real or imagined affront. The next phrase is the apotheosis of this sentence.

The prothesis is, the situation that's put before you is, you, as someone under authority, find yourself seriously out of favor. The spirit, the ire of this authority has risen against you. The next phrase says, it begins with the preposition em or maim in Hebrew, which means from.

And then we have the noun kom with the suffix ka, which means, kom is where you are. It's your place. Makom means basically your place, your position.

It's where you happen to be at the moment. So it says, from your place. Then we have the negative word al.

Al, if you spell it with a lamed, is the preposition that means against. You know, that evil lamed. It

seems like words that have ion in them often have sort of a negative connotation.

He says the spirit of the ruler rises against you. That's al spelled with an ion. Now we have al spelled with an aleph, first letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

And that means, from your place, do not. This is the actual negative particle. Do not, and then it says tanak, which is a verb that means to depart, to move away, to cease or rest is its root meaning.

It means to fall away from something, to cease from it, to stop, to give it a rest. You've been in a place and you were doing something and you're going to stop. It says don't do that.

You're in a place and at that place, don't cease. Don't stop standing your ground. Don't stop doing what you were doing.

Then we have an explanatory phrase introduced by the word ki, which means for or because. So what's the temptation? You can imagine someone in the court of the king. He's been called in, hey, Uriah, come in here for a moment.

I want to talk to you. So you come into the presence of the king and the king stands up and you can see the red just go up from his royal collar up to his royal crown and he's looking and his temples are throbbing. His ire has been aroused for some reason.

What is the instinct that arises in poor Uriah? Well, fight is not an option, so flight is the other logical choice. You say, you know, this is not a good time to be in the presence of the king. Excuse me, sire, but I hear my mother calling and you want to go away.

He says don't abandon your position. Don't go look for rest by leaving your place. Because.

Well, why should you not flee and live to fight another day? Well, the next word is marpe, M-A-R-P-E, and it is a word that means to heal. It means healing or cure. This is the word, by the way, that we saw in Jeremiah 33, where God said the Babylonians are coming, the Chaldeans are breaking down.

They've got their siege ramps and their swords. You're having such a hard time fending them off. You're having to take your houses apart to try to fortify the wall to protect against this invasion.

And God says you're going to die in place. What's left of your houses are going to be inhabited by dead bodies if you continue to resist. He says, but I will bring healing.

I will heal your land. I will restore. I will conciliate.

What does it mean to heal? In the ancient world, what's the most common kind of wound? It's a gash of some sort. You get gashed by a sword or an axe or a spear or something punctures your skin. What does healing consist of? Pulling the skin together and having it knit.

Having it be restored to togetherness. In the symbolic world, this comes to mean to conciliate, to bring something together that has been rifted or torn apart, has been cloven asunder. You bring it back together.

That's what marpe means. It is remedy. It is a cure.

It is a bringing back together of something that has been rifted. And that's the word that's used here. So why should you stand your ground and not be affrighted into fleeing and seeking rest some other place? Because healing will pacify, it says in the New King James.

This is from the verb nuach, n-u-a-c-h. And it also means to cease or to rest or to let down or set down. And hence you can see the translation pacify.

It means to put something in place, to set it down. What has happened to the spirit of the ruler? It has risen up against you, but healing or conciliation, bringing together a rift, will put back in place this great offense. Offense is the word kataim.

Kata is the word that is used to offend, to transgress, to be guilty of blame. It's also a word that has usages of reconciliation and purification. It's one of those words that you say, how can it have opposite meanings and be the same word? We saw one of these in Luke, where epitimao means both to reward and to blame.

You say, how can that take place? Well, epi upon timao means to honor or talks about the standard of honor. So you apply the standard of honor to someone. If they measure up, you reward them.

If they don't measure up, they are blamed. They are found at fault. You have the same idea here.

It's interesting that he didn't just use the word for transgression against the commandment of God, or for missing the mark and falling short. This is a word that tells us, you may or may not actually be guilty of an offense. You might have actually done something good, but it's being construed as a sin or an offense in the mind of the ruler.

So the emphasis here is not on the fact that you have actually screwed up and incurred the wrath of your superiors. It's hard to get across in English the way it comes across in Hebrew. But Solomon is saying here, you walk in, you kind of get blindsided.

Here's this authority that's all upset with you. And he says, if you conciliate, if you stand your ground, don't respond in kind. You don't have your ire rise up, and you try to see whose spirit can get the highest against the other, which would be suicidal when somebody has the power to take your life, in the case of an actual king.

But he says, just stay in your place, and look for a way to bring the cloven flesh back together.

Look for a way to heal without abandoning your position. If you did what you did for a good reason, then just stand your ground, and it has the idea of calmness, of healing the breach, and even though the last word here is gadolim, or gadol, which means high or great.

So in the mind of the ruler, this is some kind of great, bad thing that has happened, that has caused his spirit to rise against you, but you are stable. You are the thermostat in this situation, not the thermometer. You are the controlling factor.

You stand your ground. And it's an irony, because supposedly the ruler is the one that determines the temperature in the room, right? He determines who lives and who dies, and what's going to take place. But Solomon says, you know what? Stability can bring someone else's temperature back down.

If you're calm, if you're cool, if you're collected, if you are the level head in the room, and you remember, in order to heal a breach, you have to partake of both sides. How does Jesus accomplish mediatorship for us? He partakes of the divine and of the human. He can represent the human side of the equation to God, and He represents God's side of the equation to us.

In the same way, how do you bring down someone's boiling blood pressure? You don't immediately go into the self-defense mode. You don't immediately start lawyering, or as they used to say at Navy, sea lawyering, trying to explain and justify and vindicate, and you're only representing one side. This word that means to bring closure and to heal the breach, you've got to grab a hold of both sides, and you've got to find a way to bring them together.

You have to acknowledge that, well, I can see where you might think this. I can see why this could cause you to get upset. Let me show you this other side as well.

And it isn't a simple knee-jerk self-defense. My ego has been wounded, and I'm going to respond in kind. I will see your anger and raise you ten degrees.

It has the idea of grabbing a hold of both sides and trying to pull it together into common ground, and say, well, with respect, because you are talking to someone that has authority, I can see what you're saying. Let me see if I can bring this other side over and pull this together. And you do it calmly.

You do it without losing your cool. In a few brief Hebrew words here, because of their etymology, because of their word associations, a lot is being said. So when the spirit of the ruler rises against you, this is sort of a first-class condition, if and it's true.

It's going to happen from time to time. And the ruler doesn't just mean if City Hall comes down, or if a policeman stops you, or if your boss, this is anyone who is Moshel, anyone who's got the oversight, got the authority. Their spirit rises against you.

Don't retreat. Don't look for safety somewhere else. Retreat is a word that's similar to the Tanakh

here, in the sense of Tanakh has the idea of moving away, and it also has the idea of rest.

We use retreat as a word that means to boogie out, get away from the attack. But we also talk about a retreat, ladies retreat, all the ladies go up in the hills and talk to each other and get marriage counseling, and how can we live with these impossible men, and they call that a retreat. And they don't think of it in terms of running away, they think of it in terms of a rest.

Well, Tanakh sort of has the same locus of implications here. Why do you not evaporate under this pressure? Because if you can grab each side of the wound, and calmly and out of stability, and out of strength in your soul, pull the sides together, these supposedly great offenses, which may or may not be offenses, can be healed. He goes on to say, there is an evil I have seen under the sun, verse 5, as an error proceeding forth from the ruler.

This error goes forth from the ruler. So he's saying, look, I'm not unaware of the fact that this rising spirit is often going to be unjust and unfair, and it is a manifestation of the weakness of the person holding authority. It's an unfortunate fact of life that achieving a place of authority does not mean that you actually have the capacity to exercise that authority fairly and partially in a God-glorifying way.

We often find ourselves wielding authority and we're totally unqualified to do so. And we often fail. And Solomon says, look, I have seen this evil under the sun, and it's the ruler's fault.

Somebody who ought to know better and ought to do better and should have fixed this didn't fix it. They caused it. What is the error? What is the evil under the sun? Verse 6, folly is set in an exalted place.

Folly is raised up on high. Most people that have authority were put there by some other authority, while the rich sit in a lowly place. I have seen servants on horses while princes walk on the ground like servants.

All you have to do is spend some time in any organization. The military comes to mind for those of us that have had that experience of seeing that someone can get promoted for reasons that are beyond all human comprehension. Someone outranks you, and yet you have to submit to their orders and their faulty plans and their complete deafness to logic and reason.

And in time of war, this can cost people their lives because someone has an ambition. I was reading recently about Napoleon's attempt to take Russia back in the early 1800s. He had taken the French and used them against the Spaniards and against lots of other countries.

And then he was trying to fight England and then he thought, well, I'll go up and take Russia. And had his own little battle with the wintertime up there, which killed more of his men than the Russians did. And they didn't learn that lesson from history.

You study Stalingrad in World War II and recognize that Hitler made the very same mistake that Napoleon made, underestimating the land and the weather in Russia. But somebody is in authority, and as a result, people who have faulty plans and bad judgment and won't listen to reason, Hitler was counseled, at great personal peril to the people that tried it, to try to tell him, look, if you persist, we're going to be destroyed. And he did it anyway, and of course he was destroyed, thank the good Lord.

But, I have seen servants on horses while princes walk on the ground like servants. And you often find yourself in the position of having to fully support and implement a plan you know to be faulty, you know to be destined to fail, but you are not the authority. You are the prince walking on the ground like a servant, while the fools and the servants and the ones who don't know enough to do any more than be a lackey are running the show.

And this happens in organizations. There are people who, by dint of their investment or by dint of their position in an organization, are running the show, and they don't really have the standards, they don't have the grip or the viewpoint, but there they are. So Solomon says, don't be shocked and don't be surprised when in this life authority messes up and things are topsy-turvy.

People that ought to be leaders are servants, and people that ought to be servants are leaders. He says, give it time. What does verse 8 and verse 9 and verse 10 really talk about? Eventually, the one digging a pit is going to fall into it.

Eventually, whoever breaks through a wall is going to be bitten by the serpent on the far side of that wall that they didn't anticipate. People tried to tell him, and they would not listen. He who quarries stones will be hurt by them.

He who splits wood will be endangered by it. If you are attempting things that require great strength and you're doing it by might and main without thought is the idea here, sooner or later it will catch up. It may not be in this life, it may not be before the setting of the sun, but those who are trying to, in the spiritual realm, force their way violently into the kingdom are going to wind up being hoist on their own petard.

Their very efforts are going to be the source of their condemnation. If the axe is dull and one does not sharpen the edge, then he must use more strength. And again, we talked about this last time, if you're not the sharpest knife in the drawer, you have to exert more force.

And you see people that are just busting through the walls, digging the big holes, chopping stones out of the side of the mountain, splitting wood. You're going to build this thing on your own. You're going to dig the hole and lay the foundation.

You're going to break down the old walls and clear the ground. You're going to get stones and quarry them and build it. You're going to put the wood structure in place and put the roof over this.

You're building the whole thing yourself. You're doing it by might and by main. And this tends to be the recourse of the foolish.

Someone that does not have wisdom is going to use strength. This, in a nutshell, if you want a classic example, is the wife abuser. Women who get slapped around by their husbands.

Why does the husband use physical force? He's a dull axe. He doesn't have wisdom. He makes mistakes.

He's foolish. And he can't explain himself. He can't control himself.

And so he uses physical force to try to stay on top of the slippery slope, which is his authority in his marriage. He can't preserve it by earning it. He can't preserve it by logic and reason.

So he's just going to try to preserve it by brute force. He is the dull axe that has to be applied with more strength. Genuine success comes through wisdom.

Wisdom makes it unnecessary to go quarry your own stones. It makes it unnecessary to go dig your own holes and break down the walls. We saw walls being broken down in Jerusalem, didn't we? I've got to defend myself.

Here come the Chaldeans. My walls are not strong enough. I'll break down my houses and I'll take the stones over and I'll build up the wall.

We sang the hymn this morning, Jesus is a rock in the weary land, a shelter in the time of storm. Who is our mighty fortress, a bulwark never failing? Are you going to try to build your own wall, sink your own revetments, quarry your own stones and split your own wood? The wise man knows he doesn't have to do that. He doesn't have to try to apply his own strength.

Where does strength come from? The righteousness of God. How is the righteousness of God applied to us? Through faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God.

The ones who please God through faith are declared righteous, they are strengthened, they are helped, they are upheld by the strong right hand of God's righteousness. So we have a choice. And we will often find ourselves in the sway and under the authority of people who don't know this principle and who are swinging away with their dull axe, flinging chips and slinging dirt and breaking down walls and hauling quarried stones all over the place because they are not functioning in wisdom.

Solomon says, don't abandon your place. You can be the one that speaks the truth in love. These supposed offenses... Remember Mordecai who did not bow even though it was the law of the land? Remember Daniel who did not bow even though it was the law of the land? He stood his ground.

He didn't get up in anybody's face. He didn't rail, he didn't rant, he didn't picket, he didn't organize a revolt. He just said, you can't tell me not to pray to my God evening and morning and at noon.

I will pray and I will cry aloud. He was stable, he was calm and he let the chips fall where they might. And God preserved him.

The three friends were preserved even through the seven times hotter fiery furnace. They didn't rail, they didn't rant, they didn't try to match their anger to those who were trying to extinguish them, exterminate them. They just did what they knew they had to do.

And the breach is healed. You remember Nebuchadnezzar makes a proclamation. He says, you know what? I saw the fourth man in the fire and the God of Israel.

That breach was healed, wasn't it? He made a proclamation. He said, everybody that wants to can worship the God of Israel in this land and that's the law. And it changed because of the faithfulness of three men.

Same thing with Daniel. So Solomon says, keep your eye on the prize. Remember that vindication comes even if you are... A lot of people have been martyred in this life.

A lot of people have gone to their eternal destination because they held their ground and the authority did not relent. We studied the story of the English Bible and you have Wycliffe and all of the others who died for their faith not having been vindicated in this life. But they understood the same thing that Solomon is telling us.

We have got to stand our ground. Our ground is the solid rock of the faith. We have promises.

We have principles. We have doctrines. The Word of God is alive.

It is powerful. It is the sharp sword that is the opposite of the dull axe. It will pierce to the dividing asunder of the soul and the spirit and the joints and the marrow.

And that is where the battle is won or lost. It doesn't matter what the outcome is in this life. It doesn't matter if we are recognized.

It doesn't matter if someone's ire rises against us and they exert their authority and do their worst. We have the sharp sword of the Word of God. We have our sights set on something beyond this life.

We know that even though beggars are riding and princes are walking on the ground, it will not always be so. What does Jeremiah 33 say? You may go into captivity now, but I promise you as surely as the sun rises and the sun sets and the sun rises again and day follows night, there is going to be a restoration. There is going to be a healing.

And there is going to be a day when the voice of joy will be heard in the streets, when the bride and the groom will be found in the city rejoicing. We have to decide when we see the spirit of authority rising against us, do I want to win this little temporal, time-bound, momentary battle and try to match anger with anger or am I going to use the soft answer that turns away wrath? Am I going to function in integrity and let God declare me righteous by my faith and secure for myself an eternal weight of glory? It's a hard thing to remember because our human soul wants vindication. We want justice.

We want self-defense. We want people to see and to know and we want to swing our dull axe. Wisdom will bring success.

If we lose control of our tongue, remember the man that can bridle the tongue, James says, can control his entire body. Look at verse 11 just in anticipation of what we are going to see next week. A serpent may bite when it is not charmed.

The babbler is no different. Solomon has already given us a couple of paragraphs on controlling the tongue, hasn't he? A dream comes in many words. We can accomplish the standing of our ground in a few words, in a soft answer, but we don't have to babble and we don't have to run amok in self-defense.

The words, verse 12, of a wise man's mouth are gracious, but the lips of a fool shall swallow him up. So whatever we do, it will be done in few and gracious words. That is the soft answer that turns away wrath.

That is the holding of the position that will heal this real or imagined breach. So, that's a real practical set of truths to carry forward with us into the coming week. Let's hope we can remember that and God the Holy Spirit can remind us of it in the days ahead.

Let's close in a word of prayer. Father, we do thank you for the fact that you fortify our souls with brick and mortar of eternal strength. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will impress these things on our hearts.

We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.