

02-04-28a Ecclesiastes

Let's take a moment at this point in our worship service to pause for a moment and clear our minds and prepare our hearts and seek the ministry of God the Holy Spirit specifically as it relates to our perception and our understanding and our remembrance of the truth of the word of God of which we are about to partake, shall we pray? Father we do thank you for the privilege of studying your word together. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will have free reign in our hearts and in our souls to teach us to minister the truth of your word to our souls in such a way that we will be transformed and renewed and built up in the faith that we will have the strength and the enablement to fulfill every purpose that you have for us in our walk before you. We pray that we will be a blessing to one another.

We pray that the edification that comes from the operation of each believer's spiritual gift will have opportunity and be exercised in such a way that our Lord Jesus Christ is glorified. We ask it in his name, amen. We have a double scripture reading this morning and it has a wonderful bearing on our study in Ecclesiastes.

We begin in Numbers chapter 25. The overarching theme, if I was Perry Mason and I had to tell the judge what the thread was that was going to bind up all of my material here, it is the relationship of the temporal to the eternal. How does our daily life bear on and interrelate with our eternal destiny? This is the theme of Ecclesiastes.

Where is the return? What is it that you can hold in your hand and take with you beyond the end of this life? We have to live this life. We have to operate in the material world. We have to face our challenges.

I've mentioned this before, but it is a thought that has often crossed my mind, especially when I was deeply in the grip of a philosophy of the Christian life or an understanding of the Christian life that heavily leaned on study of the Word of God. I was reminded and told over and over and believed in my heart of hearts that the more you could study the Word of God, the better you were able to please God. The study of the Word of God itself was the measure of your spiritual life.

It came to me over the course of time that if the study of the Word of God, if intake and perception and growing in knowledge was the whole duty of believers, why did God put so much interference in our path? Why do we have to spend so much of the day making a living, getting things done? It just seems that if that's really what our calling is, to just immerse ourselves in the Word of God, it's impossible to do it because you'll starve in a week. You can't spend six or eight hours a day just gazing off into the blue and trying to put together line upon line and precept upon precept. In other words, God has so constructed our lives that we don't spend most of our time learning the Word of God.

We can't. I don't care who you are. You can be a seminary professor.

You can be a church pastor. You can be a monk in the monastery. You still can't spend most of your day laboring and pouring over the Word of God.

You've got to spend a third of the day sleeping. If you're normal, you have to spend a couple of hours a day eating and somebody has to prepare the food. And unless you have some sort of a sponsor somewhere who is just going to take care of your every need and let you just sit there, in other words, for most of us, it's just not physically possible and God made life that way.

So I ask myself this question. Why is it that God constructed human life in such a way that most of our day is taken up with the doing of mundane tasks, where it is impossible to just be thinking abstract theological thoughts? The reason is that it is in the doing of those things that we are to manifest and implement and apply the Word of God that we take in. It's sort of like meals.

In fact, it's a lot like meals. The Word of God compares it to meals. I was talking to Elizabeth this morning about, well actually to all the children when we sang about the bread of heaven, Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah, part of that hymn talks about bread of heaven, bread of heaven, feed me until I want no more.

And we think, well feed me until I don't want anymore, but want in the earlier sense of the word means until I lack no more, feed me until I have the sufficiency that I need. I might not want very much to begin with, but there's a difference between the lack that I have and the desire that I have. At any rate, God has put us in this life and has put before us in our path the doing of all of these tasks, the operating within all of our relationships, the authority up and down the chain, the responsibilities that we have, and we are to manifest and apply who we are and why we are here in that arena.

Our spiritual life is not in Bible class, it's not in church, it is in the daily doing of things. So the question becomes, how can we accomplish the daily doing of things and the relating that is a part of relationships in such a way that when the sun sets and our life is over we have something permanent to show for it? Because all of our inclination, all of our bent, all of the evidence of our senses tells us that from a human point of view, the measure of success in the doing of things and the relating of relationships is in the result that we see. It's like the laws of physics, for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.

So we perform actions and we want to see the reaction in time, in life. The whole purpose, after all the lessons we've had in Ecclesiastes, if you don't remember anything else about the book of Ecclesiastes, this is Solomon's big point. This is what Yitron, translated prophet, P-R-O-F-I-T, is all about.

How do you convert the doing of deeds and the relating in relationships in such a way that there is an eternal result and not just a temporal result, not just a time bound result? Well, let's take a

look for our scripture reading this morning at Numbers 25 and then we are going to go from there to Psalm 106. Psalm 106 refers back and it was fresh, much fresher than it is in our minds, in the minds of people who were singing and thinking about the words of Psalm 106. So we are going to review for ourselves the background of part of that Psalm here in Numbers 25.

Israel was in what in the old King James was called Shittim. People get a little sensitive about that. So in the New King James they translated the Acacia Grove, but it is Shittim.

And the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab. They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor and the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel.

We know that the career of the nation of Israel and the people of Israel in the Old Testament is metaphorical. It prefigures things that happen in our individual Christian life and walk. So what does this represent right off the bat? They have come into contact with people who don't care about God, who have an alternate set of priorities, an alternate way.

People didn't just worship like this because they had some sort of religious fervor and it was pointed in the wrong direction. This was an alternate religion that satisfied basic and priorient human desires. This was a religion that incorporated priestesses and sort of government-sanctioned prostitution and it had ostensibly as its goal better crops, greater prosperity.

This was a way of getting ahead and getting happiness and being religious about it all rolled into one. So it had all of the ingredients that are appealing to the baser side of someone's nature and yet it's dressed up in religious terms. So this was very appealing to the Moabites and the Israelites were drawn into this by way of contact.

God had told them to be separate. God had told them. They knew the origins of Moab and Ammon and incest between Lot and his daughters.

But here they adopted a different world view and a different system. This wasn't just worship and it wasn't just prostitution. It was rationalized.

This is the way to ensure that your crops are good. This is the way. And they said, well, you know, Baal, he's the Lord, the Lord as you understand him.

This is just our way. They rationalized the Canaanites and the Moabites and all these other Ammonites. They said, you know, our God is your God.

This sort of goes on with the Muslims today. Well, Allah and your God, it's really the same God. It's just a different way of approach.

No it's not. It is deceptive. It appeals to certain things.

Well we have that in our society today. People want to rationalize certain things. So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor and the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel.

And I promise you to the extent that we compromise with our culture and to the extent that we buy into the philosophies of our culture, we are imitating. We are walking in the shadow of Israel here. So the Lord said to Moses, take all the leaders of the people and hang the offenders before the Lord out in the sun so that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel.

I could spend an entire lesson or two just on that verse, talking about the proper way to implement capital punishment. Should they televise executions? Just read that verse. So Moses said to the judges of Israel, every one of you kill his men who were joined to Baal of Peor.

And indeed, one of the children of Israel came in and presented to his brethren a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel who were weeping at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. What is going on here? Who is this Midianite woman? Well if you look at a map and look at the region of Moab, you look at the region of Midian, you look at the... this was a rationalization. The Midianites, who is Moses' father-in-law? Who is Moses' wife? Where is she from? Midian.

So he is doing the same thing with this woman, but he says, oh well, but this is more legitimate because they are not technically Moabites, they are sort of different, and what is Moses going to say about this? There is a lot left unsaid here about legitimizing the practice and trying to put the leadership in an awkward spot. As though, well Moses can't say anything about this because she is a Midianite, as is his own wife and his own father-in-law, and there were Midianites in the congregation of Israel. But he brings her in and he presented to his brethren this woman.

He is not just going off and doing this on his own, he is not saying, well this is my personal belief, he is flaunting this before his brethren, what is he doing? He is undermining the policy. He is saying, well, you know, I found a way to beat the system here. And he brought her there in the sight of all the congregation of Israel who were weeping at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

So when Phinehas, the son of Eliezer, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose from among the congregation and took a javelin in his hand and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through her body. Now how was he able to do this? Because they were in the act at the point that he went in there. Their bodies were conjoined and Phinehas went in there and stabbed them through with a single javelin thrust, pinned them to the ground, and the woman through her body.

So the plague was stopped among the children of Israel. What plague is that? It's the plague of attitude. It's the plague of flaunting authority, of rationalizing and trying to find a way around the mandate of God.

Those who died in the plague were 24,000. Then the Lord spoke to Moses saying, Phinehas, the

son of Eliezer, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the children of Israel because he was zealous with my zeal among them so that I did not consume the children of Israel in my zeal. Therefore say, behold, I give to him my covenant of peace and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood because he was zealous for his God and made atonement for the children of Israel.

Now the name of the Israelite who was killed, who was killed with the Midianite woman was Zimri, the son of Selu, a leader of a father's house among the Simeonites. And there's another lesson in itself just talking about the tribe of Simeon going all the way back to their progenitor, the son of Jacob. And the name of the Midianite woman who was killed was Cosby, the daughter of Zur.

He was head of the people of a father's house in Midian. See he as a leader in the tribe and she as a prominent woman, they were trying to say, well look, here's a legitimate, we're legitimizing this departure from God's command. So the Lord spoke to Moses saying, harass the Midianites and attack them for they harassed you with their schemes by which they seduced you in the matter of Peor and in the matter of Cosby, the daughter of a leader of Midian, their sister, who was killed in the day of the plague because of Peor.

So all of this, without going into detail, is what? Cultural inroads, seducing people away from loyalty to God and dedication to God and worship of God. And someone has to take a stand. In the nation it was Phineas and Phineas went in, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron.

He is also in a position of responsibility, isn't he? He's a part of the priesthood. He's a son of Aaron. He's of the tribe of Levi.

And he stood up and these people who are publicly leading people astray were publicly made an issue of. Here literally they were run through with a javelin and God was pleased because someone had to take a stand or else God was going to wipe them all out. And this is referred to now in Psalm 106, if you'll turn over there now, this gets closer to our passage in Ecclesiastes.

This is a record, a rehearsal, if you will, of Israel's times of rebellion and repentance and the continued mercies of God. When God's righteousness and justice are satisfied, he stops the discipline mode and returns to the grace and benefit mode. Praise the Lord.

O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His mercy endures forever. Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord? Who can declare all His praise? Blessed are those who keep justice and He who does righteousness at all times.

Remember me, O Lord, with the favor you have toward your people. O visit me with your salvation, your deliverance, that I may see the benefit of your chosen ones, that I may rejoice in the gladness of your nation, that I may glory with your inheritance. We have sinned with our fathers.

We have committed iniquity. We have done wickedly. Our fathers in Egypt did not understand your wonders.

They did not remember the multitude of your mercies, but rebelled by the sea, the Red Sea. Nevertheless, He saved them for His name's sake, that He might make His mighty power known. He rebuked the Red Sea also when it dried up.

So He led them through the depths as through the wilderness. He saved them from the hand of Him who hated them and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy. The waters covered their enemies.

There was not one of them left. Then they believed His words and they sang His praise. They soon forgot His works.

They did not wait for His counsel, but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness and tested God in the desert. And He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul. When they envied Moses in the camp and Aaron the saint of the Lord, the earth opened up and swallowed Dathan and covered the faction of Abiram.

A fire was kindled in their company. The flame burned up the wicked. They made a calf at Horeb and worshipped the molded image.

And they changed their glory into the image of an ox that eats grass. They forgot God, their Savior, who had done great things in Egypt, wondrous works in the land of Ham, awesome things by the Red Sea. Therefore He said that He would destroy them, had not Moses, His chosen one, stood before Him in the breach to turn away His wrath, lest He destroy them.

Then they despised the pleasant land. They did not believe His word, but complained in their tents and did not heed the voice of the Lord. Therefore He raised up His hand in an oath against them, to overthrow them in the wilderness, to overthrow their descendants among the nations, and to scatter them in the lands.

They joined themselves also to Baal of Peor, and ate sacrifices made to the dead. Thus they provoked Him to anger with their deeds, and the plague broke out among them. Then Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was stopped.

And that was accounted to him for righteousness to all generations forevermore. They angered him also at the waters of Strife, or Meribah, so that it went ill with Moses on account of them, because they rebelled against his spirit, so that he spoke rashly with his lips. They did not destroy the peoples concerning whom the Lord had commanded them, but they mingled with the Gentiles and learned their works.

They served their idols, which became a snare to them. They even sacrificed their sons and their

daughters to demons, and shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan. And the land was polluted with blood.

Thus they were defiled by their own works, and played the harlot by their own deeds. Therefore the wrath of the Lord was kindled against His people, so that He abhorred His own inheritance. And He gave them into the hand of the Gentiles, and those who hated them ruled over them.

Their enemies also oppressed them, and they were brought into subjection under their hand. Many times He delivered them, but they rebelled in their counsel, and were brought low for their iniquity. Nevertheless He regarded their affliction when He heard their cry, and for their sake He remembered His covenant, and relented according to the multitude of His mercies.

He also made them to be pitied by all who carried them away captive. Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the Gentiles, to give thanks to Your holy name, to triumph in Your praise. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting, and let all the people say, Amen.

Praise the Lord. There's a lot you could say about that Psalm, but in summary, God used circumstances. God used captivity.

God used discipline, the cycles of discipline that are mentioned back in Deuteronomy, to try to teach the nation of Israel to look to God, and not to look in their culture, in their surroundings, in their short-term human viewpoint for solutions and for gratification. He used every means, including painful discipline, to turn them, and every time they did turn, He heard their voice and delivered them. But over and over again, He used their situation as a nation, by turning it bad, to try to turn them to Himself, to raise their eyes from the immediate and the circumstantial, and get them to think about the promises of God, because the point is to bless the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting, to look past the immediate, to look past circumstances, to try to not measure success, and not look for satisfaction and gratification in what's immediately available.

Well, this is, in fact, what we are being called to remember in Ecclesiastes. We are now in chapter 10, and we're close to finishing that chapter, and we just have two chapters left. We're coming up to the exit ramp for Ecclesiastes here.

We'll be finishing in just a few more lessons. And here in chapter 10, we have already seen that there is a contrast between wisdom and foolishness. There's a contrast between what seems high and is really low, and what seems low and is really high.

And it's, I think, a good time to step back for a moment and just see the forest of this book, even as we look at the individual trees. So what I want to do is step back and quickly outline what Solomon has told us here in his book that is known as Kohelet. We saw in chapter 1 the setting, the earth with its unchangeable cycles and seasons, the waters, the winds.

We are here in a material world, a material universe, and it is the immovable object. There are irresistible forces. We can't pick the day of our birth.

We don't know the day of our death. We are here. We are the transient element in what, from a human perspective, looks like a very long-lasting and permanent situation on the earth.

So he talked about that in the first 11 verses. This is the earth under heaven and under the sun. You can't change these things.

Man with all his technology can't control the weather, can't control the cycle of condensation and flowing of rivers and evaporation from the seas back into the clouds. We can't determine rainfall. We are still plagued with floods and with drought.

They can try to fly planes and seed clouds, but they can't change these great forces of nature and the forward progress of time, global warming and everything else. People have no control over that. Those are the immovable fixed objects.

So in Ecclesiastes chapter 1, after setting that stage, you get to, and also stating the big question of the book in verse 3, where is the etrone? What profit does a man have from all his labor in which he toils in this environment, in this situation? We do this every day, don't we? What happens when you get up in the morning? You've got a set of tasks. You've got to make yourself presentable to the rest of the world. You've got to do hygiene and get dressed and get started in the day.

We always have a list of tasks that need to be done. This is unchangeable. So when you get down to verse 12, Solomon says, Look, I was king over Israel.

If anybody had power to try to make something happen in this environment, it's me. And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning this issue of what you do under the sun, what's done under heaven. I asked the question, What's the point? What's the purpose? What's the answer? How should we measure the doing of things under the sun? And he said, You know what? I figured out that it is an evil answer that God gives the sons of men to be answered with.

When you ask that question, What's the point? What's the purpose? What's the measure? And you look around under the sun, you say, You know what? There is no point. There is no purpose. It's all vapor.

You can work and toil and struggle and slave away. And if you have ever known an elderly person who didn't have the hope of eternal life, who gets close to the end of their life and they see it coming, and they look back and they say, You know, I slaved for 20 or 30 years at a job. I worked.

I accumulated a portfolio of wealth. I cultivated relationships. I tried to make my superiors happy

with me so I could advance.

I sweated and struggled and I strutted and fretted my hour on the stage. And when people come to the imminency of death, you haven't really appreciated until you have seen in someone's face the utter sense of futility that people near the end of their life can reach when they don't have any eternal hope. It just sinks them.

It doesn't matter what they've accomplished. It doesn't matter what their honors and laurels are. It doesn't matter what they've accumulated.

All of these things that Solomon talks about in Chapter 2, Solomon, by wisdom, came to that point before he reached the time of his death. But for a lot of people, they just distract themselves. They keep going from one thing to the next.

And then they say, You know, what was it all for? What does it all mean? What's it all about, Alfie? They just can't figure out. And Solomon says, You know what? That is a miserable answer. That's just not good enough to say it just all blows away with the wind.

Well, God put that answer out there, because we are called, we are supposed to look beyond the mundane. Well, that's an easy thing to see in Ecclesiastes. We've talked about it many times in this book.

But do we do that in our day? When we get up in the morning, do we remember that truth? And do we lift our eyes onto the hills from whence comes our help? Do we remember that there is an eternal agenda, that there is a divine plan and purpose that surrounds and is the context for our mundane daily tasks? This, I would say, is the great affliction of the church today. Why do people get caught up in charisma? Why do people get caught up in programs? Why do people get distracted and caught up in the prosperity gospel or in the world of legalism or in the push for evangelism and all of the other distractions that the church is distracted with today? Why does that happen? It is because we do not see the eternal measure accurately. A lot of times, even when believers lift their eyes and say, You know, there's going to be a judgment, it boils down to one of the gospel songs that the statesman quartet sang where they said, You know, who could ask for more than to walk through heaven's door and take a hold of the nail-scarred hand? And that sounds great.

I want to see the Lord Jesus who saved me. But he says, we're going to look around and see all the souls that we've won and that really the measure is going to be, How many people did we witness to? How many people did we bring with us into the kingdom? I heard a whole sermon this morning on how our culture and people in our culture are looking for answers and the church is not providing them. Change is rapid.

Somebody read one of these email circulars about how college graduates who are graduating college and going into sort of the adult world this year don't have any remembrance of things that

most of us in our middle age or our later age take for granted. They were talking about these mundane things like a lot of the people graduating college this year have never seen a 13-channel TV. They don't know who J.R. was.

They don't remember President Reagan's presidency. They don't remember things that... You think about it. They were too young to be paying attention when the Cold War ended, quote-unquote, and the Berlin Wall came down.

They have no memory of the moonwalk or any of the stuff that we just sort of take for granted and his point was there is such rapid change and people are distracted by the change and the new things that come along and it's stimulation for the moment. And his point was the church needs to jump in there and try to pull people out of the maelstrom and bring them into the kingdom. We've got to change with the times.

We've got to be trendy. We've got to be relevant. We've got to be, you know, they used to say, hip and with it and all the things.

Nobody knows what those mean anymore either, thank goodness. But a lot of the church is caught up in saying, you know, we've got to look out here and try to rescue people out of the culture. I'm sorry, but most of us in the church are, we are the drowning people in the culture and it's like, well, what am I going to do? How can I save somebody from what I'm already immersed in? And the infiltration of change and relevance and all the other weird stuff that's going on in the church, it's like the blind trying to lead the blind.

It's like the child of hell trying to make somebody not be a child of hell. What's the point? We are, our calling is not to rescue other people from entrapment in the mundane and entrapment in the culture and what goes on under the sun. Our calling is to be rescued by God from those things.

That's why we're here. You think about the daily tasks, your daily responsibilities, your daily routine, your agenda, the things you've got to get done to get through the day. We are called to be elevated, not out of those things, but in those things, elevated as we do them, to make them count for eternity.

And that is a far greater challenge than somebody, you know, they're saying, oh, well, you just, you know, we don't have the gumption to go knock on doors and we don't have the dedication to God to go witness to somebody. We don't need to be knocking on doors and we don't need to be witnessing until we ourselves have been witnessed to, until we ourselves have opened the door and listened to the truth and been changed by it. And it is a daily, minute-by-minute challenge.

People fool themselves into thinking, well, that ministry I'm involved in at the church or that ministry that I contribute to or that ministry that I pray for, that's my contribution to the world and I'm looking out here trying to rescue the perishing and care for the dying and bring in the sheaves and bring them in, bring them in, bring the wandering ones to Jesus. And we don't realize that we

are the wandering ones. We are the ones who need deliverance out of this present evil age.

Read Galatians chapter 1, O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? Having started by grace, are you going to end up being entrapped in circumstances and entrapped by details and rules and quick fixes? Well, Solomon sets the stage in chapter 1 and he asks the question, there is a substance, there is something meaningful that comes out of this life and it's not measured by what you see in this life. He says, there is no remembrance in verse 11 of former things, there won't be any remembrance of things that are to come by those who come after. If you are measuring your day by what you got done and what you checked off your list, think about people that lived a hundred years ago, I'm real anxious to see this series, I think it starts, is it tomorrow? I think it's tomorrow, Monday, I think it's a three part series, 1883, where the people go to Montana and live like they lived a hundred years ago and try to live out the prairie days.

Well, think about people a hundred years ago who went through their struggles and they cultivated relationships and they built this and planted that and hewed and hacked away at the challenges of life. It's all blown away, nobody even knows the specifics anymore. People that lived 50 years ago, people that lived 20 years ago, we have no idea.

I look at pictures of my relatives from back in the 1950s before I was around, I have no idea what their personalities were like or what their challenges and struggles were like. It's all blown away, there is no remembrance even in our high tech age. We don't know what was going on back then.

And he says, if you look in verse 14 at the works that are done under the sun, you're not changing anything, you're not making, people say, I just want to make a difference. If a child will remember me as a good influence, they've got posters you can put on the wall and stationery and envelope cards. I've got a stack of post-it notes I found in my desk drawer from some predecessor who used my desk at work and they've got these little motivational sayings on them about how, oh, make a difference, teach a child, Crosby, Stills and Nash, teach your children.

Solomon says, look, I've seen everything that's done under the sun and guess what? It is all vapor and feeding on wind because the things that are crooked cannot be made straight. You can start all your foundations. It's so trendy now to start a foundation.

Everybody starts these funds and these memorials and these scholarships and things. They put their name on it and say, well, it's the Thus and So Foundation and we're going to help children and we're going to educate. What is crooked cannot be made straight.

What is lacking cannot be numbered. Well, guess what? If all you are doing in your day is getting tasks accomplished for their own sake so that they will be accomplished, these verses apply to us. We're wasting our time.

If you're just mowing the lawn to get the lawn mowed, if you're just straightening the house to get the house straight, if you're just doing your job to draw your paycheck, two weeks later you've got

to draw another paycheck. A month later you've got to get another paycheck. You've got to go through and pay the bills again.

It's cyclical. It's like the winds and the waters and everything else in life. It doesn't last.

It doesn't sustain and it doesn't have eternal value in and of itself. However, these things can be converted into eternal issues. Even living smart, we think, well, you know, if you are smart, if you're wise, wisdom and smartness by themselves, even if you get some temporary gain in circumstances, even if you're the one who hedged your bets, you didn't get clobbered by the stock market plunge, you didn't get bad consequences because you made wise choices, you didn't screw up your life, you didn't make big fatal mistakes early on, you didn't get a tattoo and now you've got to try to get rid of it.

You've lived wisely. Guess what? If it's just knowledge and wisdom in this life, it's still a short-term gain and that's what he talks about in verse 18. He said in 17, I set my heart to know wisdom and to know rantings and folly.

I perceive that this is also stuffing yourself with wind because in much wisdom is much grief and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow. You say, now wait a minute. I thought that wisdom and knowledge were the key to life because that's what leads you to God.

If they lead you to God, if your wisdom and knowledge transcend this life, that's true. But wisdom and knowledge for its own sake, what does Paul say? Knowledge puffs up. Paul said, even if I have faith so as to move mountains, if it doesn't work itself out in love, it's nothing.

I am nothing. I accomplish nothing. You can read 1 Corinthians 13 and see a lot of the same thoughts that Solomon came to.

Well, that's chapter 1. That's the context. When you get into the conclusion of this book, it's anticipated in chapter 1. Solomon kind of tells us in chapter 1 where he's going. Knowledge for its own sake, wisdom for its own sake is just going to increase sorrow and increase grief.

Remember the rich man in torment in Luke? Well, chapter 2 talks about this gratification and being caught up in the affairs of the world and looking for satisfaction in that. We've seen that. We know that gratifying the flesh, working hard to obtain things and rejoicing in your labor, he says it is not good.

He says in verse 11, I looked on all the works my hands had done, the labor in which I had toiled. It was impermanent. It was vapor.

It was feeding on wind. There was no yitrone under the sun, nothing to carry away. So I turned and considered once again wisdom and rantings and folly.

What can the man do who succeeds the king? I'm in the best position to figure this out of

anybody because I've got all the resources. And he said, I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness. Your eyes are in your head.

You don't bump into things. You can have a better short-term life if you have wisdom. If you live smart, you don't wind up having to pay the price of being foolish.

But verse 15, I saw as it happens to the fool, it also happens to me. Why was I then really more wise? If the short term doesn't turn into the long term, it's not really wisdom. So you get down to verse 24.

What is the conclusion here? Nothing good for a man eating and drinking and declaring himself good in his soul, in his labor, seeing himself as good. If you're declaring yourself good, it's not really good. And nobody knows this better than Solomon in verse 25.

And verse 26 is a big key here. It is God who gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in his sight. Whose measure are we using? If a man declares himself to be good in his own eyes, in his own work, that's one thing.

It's not our satisfaction that counts. It's not that we can check off our list and feel good about what we've done. It is what God evaluates.

When God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy, he gives it to a man who is good in his sight. Otherwise, you're just gathering and collecting and it's all going to go to someone else. Well, the point here, when you think about Israel, you think about how over and over again God tried to raise their sights beyond the cultural, beyond the immediate gratification, beyond the things that they kept falling into.

They were supposed to be different than the surrounding people. They were not supposed to be worshipping Baal Hapeor. They were not supposed to be fornicating with the Midianites.

They were supposed to be the people of God, the residents of God. They were supposed to obtain an inheritance. We are the same.

Every day, you think about any given day of this past week, any of those days that we did not do what we did with an eye on inheritance, with an eye on being good in God's sight, was a wasted day. Because all of that effort, if it hasn't already blown away in the wind, it soon will. We are wasting our time.

We are wasting God's time if we don't look up, if we don't look beyond the setting of the sun. There is no point in going on. There is no point in wasting the breath that God gave us, wasting the opportunities that God gave us.

We know better. We have been called by a man who tried it all. We are called by God the Holy Spirit through His words to remember who we are and why we are here.

We are strangers and pilgrims. Our citizenship is in heaven. What does that metaphor mean? It means that our treasure should be laid up in heaven.

Our spiritual blessings are in heaven. Our citizenship is in heaven. Our Father is in heaven.

Our Savior is in heaven. The groom for the bride is in heaven. Our inheritance, everything that is substantial and meaningful, awaits us on the other side of the setting of the sun.

That is what has to drive our priorities. It doesn't matter what the outcome is in this life. And as you can think about the rest of what we have seen in Ecclesiastes, Solomon says, you know, the outcome in this life is come see, come saw.

You may be righteous and be poor and unrecognized. You may be a fool and be elevated. Princes walk like servants.

Fools ride on horses like kings. Don't waste your time evaluating by the standards of this world and this life. It is what is heavenly and what pleases God that counts.

We are going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we are going to continue our rehearsal of the outline of the book. When we come back to chapter 10, we are going to see that Solomon is actually reviewing as he comes out of the book what he started with.

He is bringing us back to his original point and there is a great application that he is going to make here as we come to his conclusion. But if there is one thing to remember out of what we have seen in our Scripture reading in this section, it is that to the extent that we are short-sighted, to that extent, all of God's grace and all of God's faithfulness and all of God's provision and the work of Christ on the cross on our behalf is wasted. Like it says in Galatians, if we fall back into those things like the Israelites did with Moab and with Midian, we are fallen from grace and we are cut off from Christ because Christ died to deliver us out of this present evil age.

That should be the measure at the end of the day, not what did I get done on my list, but what did I do that was pleasing in God's sight? Did I do what I did in a way that was pleasing to Him? We have to avail ourselves of divine power to do that and we have to maintain a divine perspective to keep that view. Let's pause here and take our break.