

02-05-26a Ecclesiastes

As we continue our worship this morning, let's take a moment as we prepare to look at the Word of God and pause to clear our minds and prepare our hearts and seek the specific ministry of God's Holy Spirit as it relates to leading us into all truth, to help us to lay a straight course in the Word of Truth. All across the nation there are pulpits, there are guys like me who are presenting the Word of God and it is a sad thing to realize that the words of the Lord Jesus Christ are true. There are so many of us who do not rightly divide the Word of Truth.

We don't get into the need of God's Word at such a time as we ought to be teachers. We have need that someone teach us again the first principles of the doctrine of Christ. Knowing that and wanting to heed that warning, each of us as believers have as a responsibility a right understanding and application of God's Word.

We are here because we recognize the importance of God's Word, we recognize how vital it is to the nourishment and the strengthening of our souls, the guidance of our steps on the path that we take through life. So there is no more important time to be sensitive to the ministry of God's Spirit and the power of God's Word than when we are at the point of seeking to understand it and see its pertinence to our circumstances. So we pause at this time to ensure that we have acknowledged unconfessed sin, that we are in a position to avail ourselves of the wonderful grace of God, His power to live the life that He has called us to.

Shall we pray? Father we are thankful on this day and the national holiday that we celebrate this weekend for the freedom that we have in the United States of America to assemble and to worship without fear of reprisal, without fear of persecution, without fear of oppression or hindrance of any kind. We have a great environment and we know that it has not always been thus in many times and in many places. Believers have had to meet in secret, have had to be furtive and careful and be always aware that they could be taken and imprisoned and worse for the love of your Word and the desire to assemble with believers of like mind.

So we thank you for the government that we have. We thank you for the military services and those who have served in them and continue to serve and we pray that you'll especially bless them, guide their leadership so that their efforts are not misdirected and their lives are not wasted but that the opportunity that you have given us through their presence and through their continued vigilance will ensure that we can continue to pursue freely and fully the high calling that you have given us in Christ Jesus. We ask your blessing on us as we worship together.

We thank you for the privilege that we have of being together and receiving the ministry that comes through the presence of your Spirit in each heart and in each life and we pray that we will come away blessed and encouraged and strengthened and ready to fulfill all of the potential that you have given us through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And we ask these things in his name. Amen.

Turn with me for our scripture reading to Proverbs chapter 10. We're in the study of Ecclesiastes. We're in chapter 12.

We are moving rapidly toward the close of this terrific book that we've studied for the last several weeks, months, perhaps longer than that. We have a little bit longer. But Proverbs chapter 10, these are labeled wise sayings of Solomon.

If you have your New King James there, the chapter heading says, this chapter to the twenty-fifth chapter contain various observations of virtues and their contrary vices. We're going to be watching for something slightly different. See if you can catch a theme, a theme.

Anytime you go to Proverbs, if you try to memorize a chapter of Proverbs, it's kind of difficult because it's not like a didactic, a teaching epistle of Paul where he's putting an argument together and flowing his thoughts from one to the next. It isn't like narrative where there's a thread of circumstances that goes from one verse to the next. It almost seems like a hodgepodge, like things have just been collected and stuck together.

It's like looking through the hymnal. Sometimes they try to put all the Easter hymns together and the Christmas hymns together, but other places you look and here's one on the Holy Spirit, here's one on the Word, here's one on Christ, and here's one on God and thankfulness, and they don't necessarily seem to have a pattern. But there is a thread that runs through these Proverbs.

Of course, you know the chapter and verse divisions did not exist in the Hebrew version of this book, but this section is fairly well marked and makes a good starting point for the things we're going to look at this morning. Proverbs 10, the Proverbs of Solomon. A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is the grief of his mother.

Treasures of wickedness profit nothing, but righteousness delivers from death. The Lord will not allow the righteous soul to famish, but he casts away the desire of the wicked. He who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.

He who gathers in summer is a wise son. He who sleeps in harvest is a son who causes shame. Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked.

The memory of the righteous is blessed, but the name of the wicked will rot. The wise in heart will receive commands, but a prating fool will fall. He who walks with integrity walks securely, but he who perverts his ways will become manifest, will become known.

He who winks with the eye causes trouble, but a prating fool will fall. The mouth of the righteous is a well of life, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked. Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins.

Wisdom is found on the lips of him who has understanding, but a rod is for the back of him who is

devoid of understanding. Wise people store up knowledge, but the mouth of the fool is near destruction. The rich man's wealth is his strong city.

The destruction of the poor is their poverty. The labor of the righteous leads to life. The wages of the wicked to sin.

He who keeps instruction is in the way of life, but he who refuses correction goes astray. Whoever hides hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool. In the multitude of words, sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise.

The tongue of the righteous is choice silver. The heart of the wicked is worth little. The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of wisdom.

The blessing of the Lord makes one rich, and he adds no sorrow with it. To do evil is like sport to a fool, but a man of understanding has wisdom. The fear of the wicked will come upon him, and the desire of the righteous will be granted.

When the whirlwind passes by, the wicked is no more, but the righteous has what kind of foundation? Everlasting foundation unto the ages. As vinegar to the teeth and as smoke to the eyes, so is the lazy man to those who sin him. The fear of the Lord prolongs days, but the years of the wicked will be shortened.

The hope of the righteous will be gladness, but the expectation of the wicked will perish. The way of the Lord is strength for the upright, but destruction will come to the workers of iniquity. The righteous will never be removed, but the wicked will not inhabit the earth.

The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but the perverse tongue will be cut out. The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked knows what is perverse." Throughout these sayings, and each of these is preachable on its own. You could just spend a whole hour on any of these and some of the interrelationships where he ties them together with similar second lines and things like that.

But the point we want to see here is that there are benefits in time and there are disadvantages in time during the days of our lives depending on our attitude toward God's Word and toward the way of righteousness. There are also long-lasting consequences that go beyond this life depending on our attitude toward the things of God. We've seen in some of the earlier passages in Ecclesiastes how he said, I've seen servants ruling like kings and wise men walking along like servants.

I've seen the rich just getting richer and never getting their comeuppance for the oppression by which they gained their wealth. And I've seen the poor man who saved the city by his wisdom being ignored and forgotten. There is not always a balancing of the scales.

There is not always a vindication of the righteous and a vindication of the wise. And there is not

always a punishment of the wicked in this life. Often there is.

Generally there is. And in the inner life of the soul there always is. There is blessing from God, but it's not always visible.

We saw that in our Luke study Friday night where two will be grinding in the field. One will be taken in judgment and the other will be left. They look the same, but there is a difference on the spiritual level that causes one to be taken away in discipline and the other to be left.

Wheat and tares look the same until the time of harvest when the grain is supposed to be there. And that's when they are rooted out and separated. So it is often frustrating and sometimes challenging to our hope and to our faith to say, well, I don't see any big difference circumstantially.

I don't see any big difference in outcome. It seems like the people who pervert and who ignore the word of God are getting over. They seem to be doing well and prospering.

You can look at people who have manifestly bad theology who have mega churches filled with thousands of people and have lots of money and lots of opportunities and you say, how can God let that go on? Why doesn't he show everybody how wrong they are by blighting their efforts in some way? Solomon tells us here that there are consequences in time and there are also consequences in eternity. And you cannot always look at one and project the other. You can't always look at what is prosperous in this life and decide it's going to be prosperous in the next.

So the other thing we see is that unlike some scholars like to say about the Old Testament, there was a clear view of resurrection and eternal reward and eternal, or at least everlasting in the sense of what takes place in the kingdom, discipline that goes beyond the grave. And that's why he talks here when the whirlwind in verse 25 passes by, the wicked is no more. But the righteous has a foundation unto the ages.

His foundation puts you in mind of Jesus' parable about the wise man building his house on a permanent foundation. A foolish person can have a beautiful looking house and it looks great sitting on the sand and it might sit there for weeks, it might sit there for months, it might sit there for years. But at some given time determined by God, the rain is going to come and beat on the house and the test of the strength of the foundation will become evident.

And things are not always as they appear. So as we turn back now to our study in Ecclesiastes, in this final chapter we've seen, and by the way I have an extended version of the translation that I gave you of chapter 12 last week. I think I gave you the first 6 or 7 verses.

This takes us down through verse 12 this morning. Solomon begins this chapter with an exhortation to remember the Creator. He goes all the way back to Genesis chapter 1. He's beginning to sum up and pull together the threads that he's woven through this entire book.

He began talking about the cycle in creation, the winds that blow, the waters that are evaporating and falling as rain and coursing down through the riverbeds to the sea and evaporating and returning again, the winds that cycle. He began looking at creation and the cycle of creation and how things are quickly forgotten. The earth seems to go on as it was.

Man springs up like the grass, withers and fades away and he says, where is the prophet? Let's turn back to chapter 1 real quickly. We've seen so often how things will be mirrored in the first half and in the second half of a section of Scripture or even in a book of Scripture or even in the entire Bible in some cases. Here Solomon is going to return to some of the themes he introduced at the beginning of the book.

He says, Vapor of vapors in verse 2 of chapter 1 says Kohelet. Kohel meaning to call an assembly, to gather people. Why do you gather people? Because you have something to say.

You've got to issue some orders. You've got to issue information or exhortation of some sort. So Kohelet, the title here doesn't so much mean preacher as one who issues a call to a group.

Vapor of vapors says Kohelet. Vapor of vapors, all is vapor. What is the prophet to a man from all of his labor in which he labors under the sun? Under the sun, during his earthly life.

Where is the prophet? Yitron from a Hebrew verb that has as its consonants Y-T-R, Yater or Yatar. This noun Yitron is derived from the Hebrew word Yitron. Yitron means what is the remainder? What is left over? We'll see some uses of this root in our passage this morning.

What's left over when the sun sets? You strut and fret. You work and labor and toil. You build and plant.

You've got your house sitting there on some kind of a foundation. But when the sun sets, it's appointed for man once to die and after that the judgment. What will you have that God is going to say this is going to survive the fire? It's not wood.

It's not hay. It's not stubble. It's not chaff.

It's not a withered and dry fruitless branch that had to be broken out of the tree. It has intrinsic value. What is intrinsic value? It's the righteousness of God.

The only thing that God approves is righteousness according to His standard and we are assigned God's righteousness. We can't generate it. We can't produce it.

We can't grunt and strain and excrete it in any fashion. It is assigned. Abraham believed God and it was credited.

It's an accounting term. It was signed over to him as righteousness. So we know, especially from our hindsight here in the New Testament age, that the Yitrone that Solomon is talking about is

that intrinsic, eternally reflective righteousness that is a part of God's character, that is assigned to us, that is given to us when we exercise faith.

So what is the profit that man is going to have from all of this labor? He talks about how things on this earth get erased with the cycles of time. The greatest wonders of the ancient world, you have to go to an encyclopedia to find them, don't you? The Hanging Gardens of Babylon and all of these. About the only one you can still see are the pyramids and what a wreck they are.

If you've ever seen close-up pictures of the pyramids, their marble exteriors have been stripped and their contents have been looted. Thieves have broken in over the centuries and taken everything away. They are decaying crypts robbed of their treasures.

So, where is that which lasts? Well, let's go back to chapter 12 now, because creation reveals to us the character of God. Creation reveals what can be known about God, His eternal Godhead and deity, as Paul tells us in chapter 1 of Romans. Creation ought itself to tell us, look at how we had a great big elm tree in the yard a few years ago and now there's not even a stump.

Look at how we had a wonderful mansion here, but in 1968 it burned to the ground. Look at what was built. Look at this fabulous, somebody was asking me about Church on the Rock, and I don't mean to pick on any particular group, but when we lived in Rockwell, Church on the Rock was a huge, gigantic building, televised ministry, nationally known pastor.

On Sundays, heaven help you if you were trying to get in or out of Rockwell because there were lines of cars in both directions on I-30, stretched clear across Lake Ray Hubbard. They had the Rockwell police out there directing traffic to get all of those people into the huge parking lot, into that huge auditorium. Now, it's some kind of a school or daycare center, something like that.

The church is gone. The congregation is gone. The pastor is gone.

The TV ministry is gone. It's not Church on the Rock anymore, and it was one of the biggest things in the whole metroplex area less than ten years ago. The grass withers and the flower fades.

What is it that lasts? Well, remember your Creator, He says, in the days of your youth, while yet the evil days do not come and the years strike that you will say, there is not to me in them the ability to accomplish a desirable goal. We will not always have the opportunities that we have today. Today, we have the opportunity to seize and lay hold of the grace of God.

Today, we have the opportunity to do something with the truth of the Word of God. It doesn't matter how old you are. You can be on your deathbed hearing this tape right before you expire.

You are still in your youth in the sense that if you're alive and drawing breath, this is youth in the sense of, look at your eternal life. We are all going to live eternally. So what part of that eternal life are we in? Are we middle-aged? Are we elderly? Or are we in our youth? These are the days

of our youth.

These are our learning days. These are the days of our instruction. We are learning things now.

How many of us have been back to grade school lately? Well, none of us. Some may teach grade school, but we are not second graders, and we haven't been second graders for decades. We'll never be second graders again.

There are things that we learned, the three R's and all that, when we were in our youth that you have to learn in your youth or your life is going to be strange and difficult. There are things we learn in our youth, and if you don't get them then, you're never going to get them. You meet adults all the time who are stunted in their emotional or their mental growth in some fashion because they never developed maturity.

They never developed the sense of responsibility. They never linked cause and effect in their mind, and they wind up in their later years being classified as mentally ill because they can't put together the things that you're supposed to learn in your youth so that you can lead a productive and fruitful life just in the secular world. Well, how much more so in the spiritual realm? Here's the point.

These are the days of our youth. We are in the days of our youth right now because this is the learning phase. This is where we lay hold of that which will sustain us and define us in all of the days to come.

So, since we are all in the days of our youth, what should we do? Solomon says, remember your Creator. You know that cycle of how everything starts at an origin and goes along a course and then returns to the source of its origin? The wind returns to the source of the winds? The water returns to the source of the waters? Guess what? Our source, the Creator of our souls, is God, and we are all going to return to God. This life, we have some distance between us and God.

It's a picture of the human race. God bent over and breathed into the nostrils of Adam's body the breath of life. That is as close as God has ever been to mankind, with the exception of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the God-man.

But God, as Creator, breathed into his nostrils, like mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, the breath of life. You can't get any closer than that. But you have the fall.

You have the angel posted at the gates of the Garden of Eden, the whirling sword. Separation from God. We've been separated as human beings ever since.

The Lord Jesus Christ, one of his primary functions, is a mediator. Remember Job? Where is my mediator so that I can come and have my case represented before God? The Lord Jesus Christ, pictured like that angel suspended between heaven and earth when the plague was sweeping

through Jerusalem and David had numbered the people. Where the angel stopped, hovering in the sky, is where the temple was built, where the Ark of the Covenant would come to rest, and where the presence of God would be symbolized.

Can anybody go into the Holy of Holies? God and his holiness is separated from us in our sinfulness, even when we're cleansed, even when we're worshiping. Only a mediator can approach. The high priest is the only one who could go in once a year.

Well guess what? At the point of death, we as believers are going to return to our Creator. And what are we going to have in our hand? What will we say? What will we represent when we return to the place from which we came? Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, while yet the evil days, the ra-ah days, the days, this is not evil in the sense of moral badness, this is bad days, miserable days, days that we dislike for whatever reason. They are not profitable, they are not fruitful.

While yet the evil days do not come and the years strike that you will say there is not to me in them a desirable goal. I can no longer avail myself. And this is the painting of ourselves into a corner by bad decisions, a pattern of bad decisions over the course of days and weeks and months and years.

There is a point of no return. The Bible teaches it. This is what John is talking about in his epistle when he says there is a sin unto death.

He says I do not say that you should pray for that. There is no point in praying for someone that has established a pattern and has passed a point of no return. And there is such a thing.

We can disable ourselves. We can bring upon ourselves evil days and years that strike where there is no desirable goal left. We have the opportunity now.

This is like the day that Noah was shut up in the ark. God shut the door. The flood has not fallen yet, has it? He is in there.

We saw this in our Luke passage, the days of Noah, the days of Lot that Jesus was talking about. The rain did not start falling. You see these movies and the raindrops are falling and they are all rushing.

You get the last of the animals in and Noah grabs the rope and pulls so the door will shut. Read the biblical account. Noah went in and God shut the door.

And the door stayed shut. And anybody that changed their mind and said, you know, I think maybe just to be safe I will go in there with Noah. It is too late.

That is why the Bible says now is the appointed time. Now is the day of salvation. Hebrews chapter 3 and chapter 4. Today, while it is still called today, do not harden your hearts as in the

Meribah.

What happened in the Meribah? Israel in the Old Testament days in the wilderness. Pattern of apathy. Pattern of rejection.

Pattern of looking over their shoulder back at Egypt like Lot's wife. And what happened? They passed a point of no return and God said, you will not enter the land. You will not partake of the promises.

You are going to wander until you drop and your children will have their chance to seize and lay hold of these promises. Jesus' generation, John the Baptist came offering them the kingdom. The Lord Jesus himself, the king embodying the kingdom walked among them.

They had an opportunity for those few years to see him, recognize him and accept him. They missed it. They crucified him.

Some of those people lived another 30, 40, 50 years. Did they have an opportunity to go back and remake that decision? Those were the days of their youth. Those were the days where there was a desirable goal that could be seized and obtained.

Some people might argue and say, well, I just don't think it is ever too late for the grace of God. Well, fine. Are you going to use that as an excuse? Let's say you are right and I am wrong and I have misunderstood the scriptures.

Are you therefore going to defer and say, well, I don't believe I will use today. There is always a chance, so I am going to wait and do it later. Well, you have that freedom and you have that opportunity, but I am telling you that is not what Solomon says here.

He says, remember your creator in the days of your youth. He says my son in here a time or two. He is going to say it here in the section we look at this morning.

My son. What is he saying? You are in the days of your youth. If he is saying my son, then he is older than you are.

He is wiser than you are. He is putting himself in the position of the father with instruction. He says, look, you are in the days of your youth.

Don't waste it. Remember your creator before you get to the point where you can't seize the desirable goal. While yet the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are not darkened.

What are these? We have our clue there in the days of the creator. When did God make those? Creation week. What are they for? Signs for seasons.

They are guideposts. They tell us where we are. They tell us where we should go.

Every midshipman, I assume they still do it when you go through the naval academy, gets trained in celestial navigation. We have got global positioning satellites and we have got radars and we have got all these fancy things, but they still teach us to steer by the stars. Why? You might end up in a life boat with nothing but your life and a piece of rubber inflated around you and you may be out there for days or weeks.

How will you know where you are? If somebody does contact you on a radio or something, how can you tell them where you are? How can you, if you see some distant land, how are you going to know if it is friendly or not? We guide ourselves by these things, the lights that God put in the sky. What do these stand for? What do they represent for us in the spiritual realm? They are not yet darkened. We can still see clearly.

We haven't gone past that point of no return. We can still see and be guided by what God has given us. You know and I know people who have passed that point.

It is pearls before swine. They are running in the opposite direction. You could put the blinding light of the sun right in front of their face and they would turn away and go a different direction.

They can't see the moon. They can't see the stars. They don't see the signs and the seasons and the days and the years.

They don't understand what Solomon is teaching us about the rising and the setting of the sun. We see it. We are in the days of our youth.

The sun and these other guiding lights have not yet been darkened and the clouds return after the rain. This is gloom, gloom and doom. You know the Little Abner comic strip used to have that guy Joe Bit of Splicker, whatever his name was, that walked around and there was just a cloud over his head everywhere he went.

It was a part of him. It was right over him. Wherever he was, there was this big dark cloud.

We can get to that point. We can reach the point and you can't see the sun and the stars and the light, can you? If the clouds return after the rain, you expect, well, I've had a bad spell, but now sunshine, hope, renewal, growth and all that. If the clouds return after the rain and you say, well, there is just going to be more rain because it is still cloudy, it is just gloom, loss of hope, loss of potential, loss of opportunity.

You still can't see the guiding lights in the sky. Sometimes it gets so cloudy, you can't tell if it is really day or night. And then it talks about all of these figures that we looked at last time, the keepers of the house.

I was talking to the girls about carpe diem, yesterday or the day before. It is a Latin term that means seize the day. Well, carpe, carpal tunnel syndrome, your carpal and metacarpal bones are

in your hands.

Carpe talks about what you seize, what you use to keep and grab hold of things. And the keepers of the house, these are your hands. This is what you do things with.

What happens in the literal old age? You see people trembling. You see their hands shaking and they can't control it. The strong men, the legs are caused to be crooked.

The grinders like teeth cease because they are greatly diminished. We saw the two grinding in Luke and women typically did this work. But it is hard to keep going.

If you are the only one, the ones looking in the openings are darkened. These are pictures of literal old age, which is a harbinger of the setting of the sun. What sin does to us during the course of our lives.

We see our skin wrinkle. We see our bones and joints weaken and swell and get full of pain. We see our capacities diminish.

Sin does that. And all of us have to go through it if we don't die an accidental death. Why does God let that happen? If we are saved, how come the power of sin is not? I thought Jesus conquered sin and death on the cross.

Then why am I still getting old and creaky? Why am I still losing my capacities and my abilities? The same reason Solomon puts this description of old age in the Word of God. The reason the Holy Spirit guided him in putting this content before us. It is a reminder.

This life is getting shorter and shorter. There are fewer and fewer days left. How much of my youth do I have left to seize and lay hold of these things that God has called us to? One of these days the doors are going to be shut in the street.

You are not going to be able to hear anymore. That is how you block out sound. This fountain is bubbling in the background here.

If I went over here and closed the glass door we wouldn't hear that. Well, the doors are shut. You lose the ability to take in and to hear what you need to hear.

The sound of grinding is made low. If you think you hear the sound of a bird you will get up to see if you can hear it because it has been so long since you heard any high frequency sounds. All the daughters of song are muffled.

How many people are audiophiles and stereophiles and like to hear music? Well, how depressing it would be to get old and hard of hearing. A lot of people who listen to loud music are going to get hard of hearing and not be able to hear it anymore. The daughters of song are muffled.

They have to really get close and sing loud. You know the old trumpet that used to stick in their

ear? Diminished capacities, diminished abilities. Now is the time of our youth.

Now is the time of our opportunity. They fear a height and terror is in the way. The almond tree blossoms.

This means you used to go out and walk the roads. You used to be unafraid. You used to climb and get up high and see things.

Now that prospect intimidates you. This is intimidation. This is being overwhelmed and suppressed by circumstances, by situations.

Saying, oh, that's too risky. I will be damaged. I will suffer bodily harm if I do that.

I don't have the ability to cope with that situation like I could when I was young. The almond tree blossoms. The picture of the white hair.

The locust burdens himself. He used to be able to hop and fly a locust and make one spring with his legs and go halfway across the yard or further. But if you've ever seen an old grasshopper or a grasshopper at the end of the summer and you see this elegant machine that God made that had all those capacities and it just staggers along.

The spring has gone out of its legs. It's going to be eaten or it's going to keel over and die. Loss of capacity.

Loss of ability. The caperberry. This was a stimulant.

This was like the caffeine of the ancient world. It was thought in some cases to be an aphrodisiac, to be something that stimulated all of your systems. But the caperberry that's supposed to be juicy and get in there and do its work to stimulate and to energize, it crumbles.

It's dry. It's ineffectual. It doesn't do anything anymore.

Man walks to his eternal house. It literally says the house of the ages. But what is the house in which someone resides and they don't leave for ages and ages? It's the tomb.

Man goes to his tomb is what it's talking about. You're going to live in your tomb and your coffin longer than anywhere else you've ever lived. Unless you're in the last few years of the age before the resurrection, most people's bodies are going to spend more time in the grave than anywhere else they've ever lived.

And mourners go about in the streets. And this is a clear reference to the mourning that's a part of a funeral. What's interesting to me is you get to this point.

This is kind of where we stopped last time. So you've had this picture of you're in your youth. You have all these opportunities before all of these things happen.

You degrade. You crumble. You break down.

And then you die. Your body gets put in the tomb. Everybody's mourning and crying the blues.

So he's pretty well covered the whole picture. You've gone from youth to old age to death. But now he backs up and he says, you've got this silver cord and golden bowl and all that.

Well, why wasn't that before the mourners in the streets? Because people say, well, the silver cord is like the spinal cord. The golden bowl is like the cranium where your brain sits. And they're trying to continue the metaphor of these symbolic effects and pictures of aging and old age and deterioration before death.

I would submit to you that the reason these follow the body going in the tomb and the mourners going about in the street is that they do not continue that metaphor. These are not pictures of the physical body. We know all about anatomy and we know the spinal cord is a silvery-looking big nerve going down our backbone.

But people in the ancient world, they didn't take apart their spines to look and see what was in there. They didn't think of the... Where else in Scripture? Have you ever seen anybody talk about the spinal cord anywhere in Scripture or the cranium as a golden bowl? They've struggled. You can go to commentaries and people are all over the map on what these mean and what they represent.

Well, I've given you here on your page a very literal translation. It says, while yet the rope of silver is not parted and the basin of gold smashes and the jar at the spring is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is smashed. I use the word smashed there twice because the verb in Hebrew is the same.

You would think that from a literary fashion that he would vary his vocabulary and use plenty of good words for destruction in Hebrew, but he repeats that same, two different forms of the same verb there. So, let's just stop and think. Let's separate ourselves from the idea that this is still some part of the human body or some aspect of aging and ask ourselves, what would a rope of silver or a basin of gold be? And whatever it is, this rope of silver must be something that comes under strain.

It must carry a load of some sort because it's going to part. Beginning here in this section of chapter 12, the Hebrew gets very strange in the sense that the words are rare and you don't find them used elsewhere in the Old Testament in this form. It reminds me of sections of Greek in the New Testament where Paul is writing and he's reaching.

When you translate Ephesians and some parts of Paul in Corinthians where he's really emotional about what he's talking about, he starts lapsing. His sentences are no longer complete and his phrases come disjointedly. There's ellipses and he'll start a sentence and then he won't finish it.

He'll go off in a different direction and never come back and put the apodictic to the prodictic and this kind of thing. Whenever you see someone starting to stray from the normal path of common language and common structure in Scripture, it's usually a sign that it's emphatic, it's important to them. They're reaching and straining and struggling.

They're grasping at whatever they can to try to get this across. In some cases you think, well, if it's so important, why can't you be more clear and more structured rather than getting elliptical and disjointed almost. Solomon is coming to the close of the book and he says, this is my last shot here.

I've just got a few verses left to get this across to you. He's taking words and putting endings on them they don't usually have. He's leaving out conjunctions and leaving out verbs.

You want to talk about a forest of different trees when it comes to people telling you what this all means? Nobody agrees. Everybody has their own idea. We ask ourselves, what do ropes do elsewhere in Scripture? Look at the Scriptures from Solomon's time and before, which is basically the five books of Moses.

What do you do with a rope? Why would you have a silver one? Why would you have a silver rope? Well, we have common things that we use for common purposes. You use a rope because you want to draw something up or you want to let something down. This same word for rope was used over in Joshua for the spies that got out of Rahab's house.

She let them down with a rope and that's how they got out. Remember they talk about the scarlet cord that was bound in the window? Well, it's just a rope. It's made out of sisal or hemp or something.

Well, this one is not made of sisal or hemp. It's made of silver. Well, what on earth? This is a kesef, by the way.

We saw it earlier when we said silver is found in the shade. It's in the darkness. People are out there looking in the sunshine at all the obvious things, but the silver, and in a lot of Bibles it translates as money.

The same thing up above where it said the rafters are sagging and the house is leaking, but people inside are feasting and having fellowship together over a meal and silver will solve all problems. They've got the silver that will take care of any sagging or any leaking. They don't have to be out there laboring on appearances.

They're inside doing what counts is the idea. But silver is money. Silver is a material of which things are made.

Because we have rope of silver and we have basin of gold, we don't look at this in terms of

money. This is the material from which the rope is constructed. Well, where would you have a silver rope? I used to look at myself in the mirror and I had military insignia.

This is Memorial Day weekend. Oddly enough and ironically, one of the symbols of the Navy is an anchor with what civilians would call a rope entwined around it. It's a foul anchor.

In genuine Navy life, a fouled anchor is a bad thing. You don't want your anchor chain or your anchor line, your cable, fouled all around your anchor because then the anchor can't grab like it's supposed to. It's supposed to be hooked at the top and the flukes dig into the muddy bottom there and secure your ship.

But the symbol for the Navy, look on Dan's cover, you've got a fouled anchor. The Marine Corps has got the eagle globe and anchor and the anchor is fouled. It's got a line wrapped around it.

So I don't know why we came up with that but it looks artistic. But my point is, what kind of line is that? I love the Navy's insignia because it's beautiful. It's a combination of gold and silver as is the officer's insignia in the Marine Corps and they make a little silver rope that goes around.

It's not hemp. They don't make it out of twine. The insignia is made out of precious metal.

Why? It's symbolic. It represents something. It means this is something valuable.

Here is an officer. You better get your arm free and ready to salute. Here is something official.

Here's something that is of value, has authority, is to be respected. Well, here you have a silver rope that used to not be parted but along with everything else deteriorating this silver rope is going to part and whatever it used to do it can't do anymore. This word actually means depart, to be removed.

Some English translations even say removed. Well, we have to get help here by going forward and saying the Golden Basin or Bowl is smashed. This word basin is the one that was used by Caleb's daughter.

Remember Caleb went up there. He was the oldest man in Israel and when Joshua was apportioning out the land he said, Caleb, what do you want? Caleb said, I want the mountain that's full of enemies there. I want to climb that mountain.

I want to kill all those guys and I want to take it. He did. Later on his daughter said, you've given me some land here but I want the part that has the springs.

In English it's translated springs. Caleb gave her the upper and the lower springs. That word springs actually is basin.

These were sort of like well-watered valleys. They were depressions in the land. Up in the mountains, inevitably you're going to have valleys.

She wanted the valley land. She wasn't quite up to living on top of the mountain like Caleb. She says, give me the basin.

Give me the depression where Caleb, her father, had asked for the mountain. It says upper and lower springs. It's not springs, it's valleys.

This is a container. It's a basin. It holds things and it's made of gold.

You have silver rope, you have gold. What is this? You don't find this in your common Israelite household. You don't find this out by somebody's well.

It wouldn't be there ten minutes. Somebody would steal it, melt it down and get the value. This is decorative.

This is of value. This is something that you use in really prosperous circumstances. You've got a silver rope.

You've got a golden basin. You have, what are you going to serve in that? What are you going to draw or pull or represent with that silver rope and that golden basin? The most valuable things in the land. This is going to be in the palace.

This is going to be in the throne room. This is going to be at the feasting times and the banquets and the presence of the king. You're going to have these silver ropes that are draped and decorative.

If they're doing any sort of symbolic, there's all kinds of ceremonies and parades this weekend. You have lots of symbolic things. You've got a cord that wraps around the handle of a sword and it's golden.

Golden straps and golden ropes, silver ropes. What are we talking about here? The most valuable things are going to be pulled with this rope. The most valued and treasured things are going to be in a silver basin.

Remember one of the Proverbs says, like apples of gold and pictures of silver are the words of wisdom on the lips of the wise or some such thing. A word fitly spoken, like apples of gold and pictures of silver. It's the most valuable thing that you have.

You have the opportunity to carry the golden basin, to use the silver rope. You have access to these things that are in the throne room. You have things that are part of royalty.

They say that this silver cord or silver rope must have parted, but the verb means to remove. It's taken away. There is no silver rope.

The golden bowl, what could be worse than to walk into an elegant throne room or something and

instead of having this wonderful golden basin and these wonderful decorative silver ropes, there is no silver rope and the golden bowl is smashed. You can't have that, but that's what has happened. That opportunity is gone.

That beauty, all of that value is gone. The jar at the spring is shattered. This is the jar that was filled on the top of Mount Carmel to put water on the sacrifice before God lit it.

This is not just a pitcher. This is a jar that was carried on the shoulder. These are the jars that were carried by the men of Gideon when they had a torch.

Remember they had the trumpet and the torch and the jar? It says pitchers. It sounds like they had little handpicked little mugs. But these were large enough to put a torch inside.

They put the torches inside these big clay jars and they could not be seen until they smashed the jars and then suddenly the enemy was surrounded by all of these lights that they hadn't seen come into position. So it's a big jar and this is a water carrying jar. You carry as much as you can carry on your shoulder.

It's a big jar and it's shattered and the wheel at the cistern is smashed. These are pictures of opportunities to deal with the things that are most important in life. Things that are the most valuable in life.

Most valuable elements in the ancient world were silver and gold. The most life-sustaining thing that you had to have for life was water. These people lived a nomadic existence, agricultural existence.

They're out there in the pastures and the deserts. What do they need more than anything else? Water. What is the worst tragedy that can happen? You can be the poorest person that ever lived.

You can be Hagar and Ishmael cast out and wandering with nothing and what's the first thing you need? Water. That's one end of the spectrum. What's the other end of the spectrum? The golden basin, the silver rope.

All of those, whether you are at the sublime or at the ridiculous, whether you're at the highest or the lowest, it's all smashed. It's all shattered. It's all gone.

But those things contain and give you access to the most valuable things in life. Life-sustaining water and the precious things that would be encased or associated with this golden basin and silver rope. So what is the point? While we are in our youth, while we still have our capacities, we want to fill our golden basin.

We want to use our silver rope while we've got it. You pull in the most valuable things in life with a silver rope. It's ceremonial.

It's grand. It's associated with the throne. You want to get your clay jar full of water.

You want to get the water home. You want to use the wheel at the cistern to pull up the water that you need. And one of these days that's going to be shattered and you will not be able to do that anymore.

So if there was ever a scripture that pictured that now is the appointed time, we can't wait, we can't dally, we can't say tomorrow. Now is the day of our youth. Now is the day of opportunity.

One of these days it will be gone. All of these metaphors are like the setting of the sun. He says, you know what? Your sun hasn't set yet.

You can still put something in your hand. How do we do that? Well, we're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to see that in the latter part of chapter 12, Solomon is going to spill it out.

You can't miss it. It's so plainly clear how everything that he said in these first eleven and a half chapters is going to be distilled and come out in the last half of chapter 12. So that's where we will pick up when we resume.