

02-06-02b Ecclesiastes

We resume our study now in Ecclesiastes chapter 12, where having described the intensive effort involved in collection, which if you think about it is an interesting note, because although God granted to Solomon great wisdom, far beyond anyone in his age, Solomon still had to exert himself in the collection, the listening, the discerning, the straightening out of these mashalim, these illustrative parables, sayings, illustrations and so on. It shows once again the fact that even when God gives us a gift, we have to do our part. We have to avail ourselves of the opportunity created by that gift and expend effort and do what we do heartily.

The Bible wouldn't say, whatever you do, do it heartily as unto the Lord, if God infused us or injected us with some sort of divine energy that made things happen within us. Some people take that verse that says God is at work in you to will and to do his good purpose and take sort of a laissez-faire approach, sort of a fatalistic, hyper-sovereignty of God approach that well, when the time is right, God will just pull the strings. This is the yieldedness crowd.

I'm just going to yield myself to God. I'm just going to be the puppet that lays down and waits for God to pull the strings. Oh Lord, just use me.

I yield myself totally to you. I surrender all. You'll notice that's one song we never sing, I surrender all.

The Christian life is not a life of surrender. And don't let anybody tell you, oh, just surrender. What is the language of Scripture? Does the Apostle Paul say, surrender? No, he says, advance.

He says, put on the armor. Get out there, run the race. I surrender all, all to Jesus.

People just want to flop. They want to be carried to glory on a stretcher with their hands dangling off the edges. It's a life that requires us to will and to do.

And God gives us the enablement. God gives us the opportunity. God provides us the resources.

There's no better example than looking at Old Testament charity. The subject came up during the break about the story of Boaz and Ruth and about the fields that Boaz was harvesting. These great, huge fields.

And the law said, leave the corners of the field uncleaned. That gives the poor and the fatherless and the widow and the stranger a place to gather. But Boaz did not set out big picnic tables and have his servants doling out bread to the poor.

And the law of Moses from God did not say, take a tithe of all the bread that you bake out of every ten loaves that you bake. Take one loaf and put it on the windowsill for the poor. And let them come and grab a piece of bread and eat.

And encourage idleness and indigency. Instead, God said, leave them an opportunity. And people say, oh, but what if the widows are old? Or what if the children are young? Or what if the fatherless are disadvantaged? The Bible doesn't make any provision for that.

They say, find a way. Here's the opportunity. You get out there in the hot sun with the rest of those reapers.

Reap your own grain. You figure out a way to get it threshed. You figure out a way to carry home the grain.

You figure out a way to get it ground. You figure out a way to find an oven and bake it. Get some oil to put with it.

And you make your own bread. Earn your bread by the sweat of your brow. If you're disadvantaged, if you're a widow, an orphan, or a fatherless, then here's an opportunity.

You don't have to own property. You don't have to buy the grain. The grain is free, but it is something that you take and exploit.

You take it and you make your own bread. The Bible never encourages idleness, and it never encourages abject, carry me to glory, surrender. Do what you do heartily.

Do it with energy. Do it with enthusiasm. Do it with vigor.

Even if it's an unpleasant job, get in there and pitch. Don't just all to Jesus I surrender. Well, this idea of collecting wisdom is a service.

It creates a potential. You do not have to go learn Hebrew. You do not have to study Greek.

You do not have to read all of the volumes of systematic theology that were published by Schaeffer or Thiessen or Hodge or Shedd or Warfield or any of these other grand old parties of theology. You don't have to construct for yourself an entire framework in which to fit the Word of God. In the Old Testament days, God provided prophets.

God provided leadership. God provided priests and gave a framework for worship in Israel to which the Israelite had to come. The priests did not visit door to door.

The priests of God did not have a visitation program. They did not call. They did not rap at the flap of the tent and say, excuse me, let me come in and I've got a little bird here I want to rip in half and show you a sacrifice.

Worship was centralized and believers in Israel had a responsibility to cleanse themselves, to purify themselves, to abstain from evil and do good, to be ritually clean and qualified to come and to observe and to learn. God put His presence in the midst of the camp and He said, you

straighten yourself up and you come. Here is where the Word is taught.

Here is where forgiveness and cleansing are pictured. Here is where redemption is exemplified and symbolized in blood sacrifice. You get up the gumption and you come.

And you live by this law that I have sent you down from the mountain inscribed on tablets of stone with God's own finger, written down on parchment by God's own prophet. Here is your history. Here is your national destiny.

Here are your covenants. Here is your heritage in the fathers. Now you take this and do something with it.

So when we come to the closing thoughts of Solomon's call to Israel, what does he say? These delightful words, these words of Chepetz. It says delightful words, but that doesn't really convey the baggage of Chepetz. Chepetz is a desirable goal, something worthwhile, something transcendent.

It is synonymous with the good that is beautiful, Tov that is Yafei. Kohelet sought to find words of Chepetz and to record accurately words of truth. He did the work of collecting.

He did the work of editing. He did the work of straightening out the ones that had gone crooked and were being misused and misapplied. But you can't force feed the truth.

You can make it available. You can collect it. You can package it.

You can present it. You can make it palatable. You can make it understandable, hopefully.

But you cannot inject it. I was out here looking at the wood that we use to repair our deck out here in the backyard. I got treated wood down at Home Depot.

When I run those deck screws into it and they hit the wood and seat themselves, the head finally hits and embeds itself, this oil would ooze out of the fibers of the wood because it's pressure-treated lumber. They take this preserving oil that keeps the wood from decaying and put the wood under pressure. They put it in vats and they pressurize it and it forces the oil down into the very fibers of the wood so that it will last.

Well, perhaps, unfortunately, for whatever reason, God did not design it that way. I cannot put your soul in a pressure-treatment tank and squeeze the Word of God into the fibers of your thinking. God has collected.

God has organized. God has made a presentation that is interesting and memorable and understandable and clear. But we have to do our part.

We have to glean that field. These things that Solomon collected, these words of the wise men... Remember, the words themselves are not the point. You could sit and memorize the entire book

of Proverbs.

What are there, 31 chapters? You could probably sit there and memorize the entire book of Proverbs. People have done it. I think Jack Van Impey has memorized the entire book of Proverbs.

God bless him. But I'll tell you what, knowing the words is not enough. Memorizing Scripture is not enough.

It has to convey meaning. We were talking about this in the lyrics of our hymns. It's wonderful to know the hymns.

I know the lyrics to dozens and dozens, perhaps hundreds of hymns that I grew up singing and have sung in church all my life. But if I don't stop and think about those words, if they don't carry some freight, the words are vehicles. And it says here, the words of wise men are like agricultural implements.

They can scratch a furrow in the soil of your soul. They can be a pointed implement. My poor barbecue grill has fallen all apart.

And I got to noticing that there were flames. It was getting hard to cook on because places would have these bursts of flames. So I thought, well, I'll take it apart and replace that burner, you know, how we do.

The outside of the grill is getting kind of nasty, but Patty did a great job of cleaning it all up. We thought, you know, instead of going down and buying another \$100 grill, we can coax some more life out of this one even though it's showing some of the symptoms of old age that we've seen in this chapter. We cleaned it up and kind of brightened it up.

And I thought, well, I'll replace that burner. So I took off the grill where you put the meat. And my brother had given me these little ceramic domino-looking things.

I took all those off and took the grate out that holds those and went down to remove the burner. Well, there was no burner. There was just a bed of rust.

It was just a powder and flakes. And there was no, I mean, not even the shape of a burner. I had to guess what to replace it with because there was nothing.

Not an edge. Not a flat surface. It was just a, the gas had just been coming up like in your fireplace when you have a lot of ashes.

And you turn the gas on and light it and it just kind of comes. Well, that's what was happening at the bottom of the grill. So no wonder we had hot spots.

But anyway, we had all of this wonderful powdered iron oxide. And the people that know said, well, the reason your trees in the front yard have got funny-looking leaves is your soil is iron poor. So we got this great idea.

Well, we'll, you know, instead of going down and buying that ironite stuff at however many dollars a bag, we'll just take our grill rust and spread it abroad on the soil. And so, well, you can't just put it on the surface. It'll wash off when it rains.

And so we took the breaker bar, got a great big old heavy iron bar. It's got a point on one end. Jam it into the ground and work it around a little bit and make a hole.

And then it becomes like plant food spikes. You take the little hole and fill it up with rust. And over the course of time, this will leach into the soil, this is our theory, and help the trees.

But it's an iron implement with a point. You poke it into the ground and that makes it possible to help something grow. That's what an agricultural tool does.

That's what a sharpened iron point does. It dents the soil, that hard-packed soil that something would just roll off or wash off or be picked and carried away. You've got to make a dent in the soil.

What does this verse say? The words of the wise, the kachmim, are like sharpened iron implements. Dan asked a question about this. He said, why do all these English translations say goads? Well, if you go to the lexicon, and the lexicon says goads, ox goads, G-O-A-D-S.

You think, how on earth do you get from implements to goads? Well, the only verse in the world that they've got for that is back in 1 Samuel, I think it's chapter 12, verse 31 or something like that, where that one I mentioned in the first session where you've got the Philistines having the monopoly on the iron working trade. And it's got a list of agricultural things there. And when they get to the last word, they say, well, this must be ox goads.

Two-thirds of a shekel they charge to sharpen these various things. Now, let me ask you something. You've got a cow, and he doesn't want to move.

He's lazy. And he says, you know, I don't want to move, and you can't make me move. How many different ways can you get that cow to move? There's lots of ways.

You can take a branch and bang him on the hindquarters with it, and he'll eventually move. You can take a sharpened stick and poke him, and he will move. Would you spend two-thirds of a shekel to go to the Philistines to get something to make a cow move? No, you would not.

There are many, many ways. You know, a shekel is a lot of money. And they did not go down and say, please sharpen my ox goad so that I can make my ox move.

There's too many other ways you could do that without spending money. What is it that you

cannot replace? You could take a sharpened stick and try to plow the soil with it. And people used to try to use plowshares made out of wood, but they don't last, especially not in the kind of soil they've got over in ancient Israel.

It's rocky. It's abrasive. And anything less than iron, even bronze, wears away so quickly and dulls so quickly it becomes ineffectual and starts bouncing along across the top of the ground instead of digging a furrow.

And people would pay two-thirds of a shekel to get their plowshare sharpened, to get their implements of agriculture to dig into the soil, their hoe. And if you look at the New American Standard, it does not translate it, ox goad. It translates it to sharpen their hoes, H-O-E-S, because there is no substitute in that hard, abrasive soil for iron and sharp iron at that.

That's what this is. It's not an ox goad. Nobody's going to pay to sharpen an ox goad.

Get a leather whip. You can move them. My dad got a woven, one of those leather bullwhips, good, well-woven, fresh leather bullwhip.

And I'll tell you what, there wasn't an animal on the place that you couldn't get to move with that bullwhip. You could just crack it in the air and they would startle and move. And if you had to get them to budge and get out of the way so you could do what you needed to do, I promise you, a quirt, there's lots of ways to move an ox without spending two-thirds of a shekel.

But there is no other way to scratch and furrow hard-packed soil than sharpened iron. That's what the words of the wise do. How else is the hard-packed soil of our soul going to be cultivated so that the seed of the Word of God can take root? The words of the wise are not the truth in themselves.

They carry, they convey the truth. They will scratch the soil because people find catchy ways of saying things. There are pastors, I'm not one of them, but there are pastors that have a gift for the well-turned phrase, the memorable vocabulary word, the thing that sticks in your mind.

I think Bob Thieme has that gift. He's come up with all of these phrases. You could argue how far to carry something like that, but he would talk about things and put it in a one-phrase summary that was easy to remember.

You are what you think. The terms like the edification complex of the soul. It sounds like a mouthful, but if you think about it, edification is building up.

A complex is a structure that's got more than one facet to it, more than one level, more than one floor. You think about what the Word of God does in your soul as you have the foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ and then you build on it. It takes shape and it has a form and it's got complexity to it.

I thought that's really a good way of describing what otherwise you have to spend a whole paragraph trying to say. There are people that have that gift. The words of the wise can help make an open place in your soul for the truth to come in and reside and be there when you need it and it can sprout and bear fruit.

The words of the wise are like sharpened, iron, agricultural tools. It's just one word in Hebrew. Darbon is the singular, darbonot, since it's a plural.

The ot is a feminine plural ending. But they are like darbonot, these agricultural tools, d-a-r-b-o-n-o-t. And masters of these collections.

What collections? It says these collections. Well, what Kohelet gathered and organized and put in one place. That's a collection.

He got these scattered things and brought them all together. Now, the New American Standard says the masters of these collections are like well-driven nails. The New King James says the words of scholars are like well-driven nails.

They say, well, the master of a collection would be a scholar. So the words of scholars are like well-driven. Where do they get the well-driven nails? Well, it's the strangest result from starting with this vocabulary that you can imagine because well-driven, and let me see, I think the New American Standard even has a text note here that says literally planted.

And that's exactly what it is. And although the New King James is often good about giving you text notes, they don't give you one here. They give you one on scholars where they say, well, one of the scholars is literally masters of assemblies.

But well-driven here is the word for planted. Not even well-planted, it's just planted. So you say, okay, so it's supposed to say are like planted nails.

Well, what is the word nails? Well, it is that which is planted. And they start with this word and they end up with nails. And I can't quite figure out the train of thought by which they arrive at this, but I think their idea is that it's a fastener or it's something that, I can't even follow their logic here, but they had the idea of iron and well-driven and I guess they just came up with nails.

But masters of these collections in our translation are those who keep watch because the word here, I guess they end up with a noun for nails is from the verb shamar. And shamar, dozens, dozens, hundreds of times in the Old Testament means to guard, to keep watch, to watch over something, to take responsibility for oversight and for security. Shamar means to keep or to guard.

It even comes to mean to obey. Well, how guard turns into nail escapes me. So we'll translate this like those who keep watch over what is planted.

Well, what do you do if you sow a field? We used to have a garden outside of Claremore, 13 miles outside of Claremore where my folks live. Had a half acre or so cleared off there behind the house and it had been a garden and when we moved in there we planted a garden. Had all kinds of different things growing, tomatoes and okra and corn and one thing and another.

But once you cultivate that and go to all the trouble of weeding it out and sowing all these different kinds of seed, you have to guard it. You have to guard it from a lot of things. There are animals that will come in and eat it before it's ready.

There are bugs that will eat it. I mean, you have to tend it. You have to watch over it, care for it, keep an eye on it and cultivate it and ensure that what has been planted will grow to maturity and bear its fruit.

Nobody sows a field and then just goes off and leaves it. You have to watch over it and cultivate it. You have to guard it.

And that's what he's saying here. The words of the wise are like these planting tools. So you've got help in getting the seed sown.

God provides that. In Old Testament days there were the prophets and men like Solomon who wrote inspired scripture. What do we have in our day? God has made provision of pastors and teachers and there's a plethora of pastoring and teaching that goes on today.

And notice, *chakmim* is plural. He doesn't say the words of a single wise one. There are many ways that God communicates His Word to us.

I draw on all kinds of things when I'm studying to try to learn the Word of God so that I'm prepared to teach. I have many, many places I can go where there have been godly, faithful men who have invested themselves in the study and the learning of the Word of God. And it would be silly not to take advantage of all of that effort and all of the reward of their labors.

So the words of the wise are like these sharpened agricultural tools, these planting tools. Well, what are you going to do? The ground has been furrowed. The seed is available there.

Those who keep watch over what is planted are the masters of this collection. They're going to get the benefit. Who reaps the harvest from a cultivated field? It's the *ba'al*.

It's the one who has oversight, the one who has control. This stuff has been collected and it has been given a single pasture. Well, that word pasture is what we want to focus on here for just a few moments because it is from *ra'a* or *ro'e*, which is the word for shepherd.

And when you put a name in front of it, it is the pasture itself. It's the place where the animals are pastured. These things have been collected and they have been given one pasture.

They've all been put in one place. You don't have to run around guarding three or four things. You're guarding one thing, one place.

Well, this is the same root as the word in the phrase we saw, you know, this too is vapor and feeding on wind. We've seen that over and over and over again in Ecclesiastes. This is the same root.

How many different things have been labeled as vapor and feeding on wind? Investing yourself in possessions, investing yourself in work, pronouncing yourself good in your work and saying, there's a good job. I finally finished that project. Isn't that wonderful? I helped this person.

Isn't that wonderful? I accomplished this goal or this objective. Isn't that wonderful? Solomon has said time and again that is stuffing yourself with wind. It's pasturing on wind.

This is the same word in a different form. So what is Solomon giving us here? There's a contrast. Are you going to pasture on wind or are you going to pasture on this that has been collected, this that has been given a pasture, this that has been cultivated with the iron tools, the words of the wise.

Proverbs chapter 10 and verse 21 says, if you read it in the New King James, it says, the lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for lack of wisdom. Well, in Hebrew, you can equally well translate this, the lips of the righteous feed on abundance. The lips of the righteous feed on abundance, but fools die for lack of wisdom.

This is a better contrast. You have these parallels or you have a contrast in a parable, and what is the contrast here? Somebody is well fed and someone else is starving to death. Well, the lips of the righteous have an abundance on which to feed.

Fools die for lack of wisdom. Guard the pasture that grows that crop on which you feed. But that word for feeding there in the first phrase of Proverbs 10, 21 is from our word, from our root here.

You find this same one in Proverbs 15 and verse 14, just over a few pages. Proverbs 15, 14. This is the same contrast that we've seen throughout Ecclesiastes.

The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge, but the mouth of fools feeds on foolishness. The mouth of fools feeds on foolishness. You can look at the next verse as well.

All the days of the afflicted are evil, but he who is of a merry heart has a continual feast. Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure with trouble. Better is a dinner of vegetables where love is than a fatted calf with hatred.

There is a treasure, there is a nourishment of soul to be found in feeding on the truth, feeding on that which has substance, that which partakes of the eternal and the divine, as opposed to feeding on wind, that which seems to satisfy but has no substance, that which is here today and

gone tomorrow. Haven't we seen this contrast all through these 11 1/2 chapters of Ecclesiastes that we've studied? These other things are vapor, feeding on wind, vapor, feeding on wind, vapor, feeding, pasturing on wind. Now, he says, if you take these things that have been collected and given one pasture and master that collection, you have the substance because the very next verse in Ecclesiastes 12, verse 12 says, and what is left over? Yoter, same root from which Yitron comes.

YTR is the root. Prophet, heed the warning. The making of many books, there is no end, and to meditate greatly is weariness to the flesh.

The making of books. Lots of people are going to write books. Lots of people are going to try to offer wisdom.

You've got to look past the words to what they convey. You've got to look past the making of a book to whether or not you're getting the mastery of this collection. Is it in that one pasture? Is it that nourishment of soul that is going to feed you and point you toward the prophet? What prophet is there to a man when he labors his labor under the sun? How do you carry something away? We talk Friday night in our Luke study about conditioning of the soul, exercising faith day by day so that we're ready for challenges when they come, so that we're ready for opportunities when they come.

Faith has to have an object. The merit of faith is in the object. It's not our effort.

It's not how hard we grit our teeth. It's not how valiantly we struggle to have faith. The value and the merit of faith is in its object.

By the way, that's another word of the wise from Bob Thieme. The merit of faith is in the object. It's a wonderful way to remember a great Biblical truth and a great definition for what Biblical faith is all about.

Biblical faith is all about the object of that faith. When the object of faith is the Lord Jesus Christ, the result is eternal salvation. When the object of that faith is the Word of God, the mind of Christ, the result is deliverance and salvation in daily life.

We seize and lay hold of eternal things. We have something in our hand. So, the words of the wise have helped to plant these seeds in this one pasture.

We've got to guard that collection. We've got to guard that has been entrusted to us. Where is the profit from all of this? Well, heed the warning.

Don't be distracted. You know, we've got one of the oldest sayings in the English language is the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence. Looking over in some other pasture, being distracted by, oh, well, this is better quality stuff over here.

This is more interesting. This is more stimulating. This is more attractive in some way.

And we start looking outside that one pasture where God has planted and cultivated His truth. And it's easy to get sucked into worldly views. You see wonderful people who have a desire for ministry and a desire to help others and a love for people, and that love winds up getting used against them just like forwarded email gets.

And people come into your door and try to use your manners against you and use your good nature against you. The world will use our desire and the natural expression of our love for one another against us because we wind up being led into the clinics where it's a Christian counseling clinic, it's a Christian place for help, a Christian place for ministry. But first thing you know, you're getting fed food from some other pasture.

Now, well, let me tell you about codependency. Let me tell you about your dysfunctional family. Let me tell you about your need for approval and your lack of self-esteem and you're this and you're that and you're the other.

And this is not wisdom from the Word of God. This is not knowledge of divine truth and divine power and divine perspective and the reflection of the glory of God. This is explanations and observations from human psychologists and human psychiatrists and human efforts to figure out how the soul is broken and what it needs to be fixed.

Well, just take one of these pills each day and you'll be surprised how you're serotonin and you'll be happy. Food from a totally different pasture. It hasn't been cultivated by God.

It hasn't been brought into that one pasture to feed God's flock. Jesus talked about the fold where the sheep are kept. David in Psalm 23 talks about the fact that God will lead us into green pastures.

God will lead us beside the still waters. Don't let someone call you away. Paul tells them in the New Testament.

Do not let yourself be called away to another gospel, another piece of good news that is not a gospel at all, but it is rampant. It is pervasive. It is ubiquitous.

It is everywhere in our society today. In the Christian community, there is an awful lot. Just walk down the aisle of any Christian bookstore.

Walk down the religion aisle of any secular bookstore. We were in Barnes & Noble the other day looking at the weird stuff that is put out supposedly to build up believers in the faith. And it is not from this pasture.

It does not partake of the divine. It does not prepare your soul for the eternal. It does not give you something in your hand to carry away.

What is left over from these? My son, heed the warning. God has commissioned, God has provided the wise to corral, to straighten out and to put before you a pasture full of good seed and good plants that you need to guard and cultivate and allow to come to maturity and come to fruition and bear fruit in the soul. Many people are going to make books.

There is no end to it. And to meditate greatly is a weariness to the flesh. You can overthink.

You can decide that it is a think religion, that it is a think Christianity. These words of wisdom are designed to produce in us action. We are not laying on the stretcher with our knuckles dragging the ground.

We have got to take the Word of God and apply it. We have to look at how it makes a difference in our perspective, how it makes a difference in our priorities, how it makes a difference in identifying and pursuing Chepetz, a worthy goal, a desirable goal. You cannot simply say I am going to listen to the Word of God.

I am going to let it go into my soul and it will transport me. It will stand me on my feet. It will walk me down the path.

I am the puppet. God will pull the strings. I am the body.

God will provide the stretcher and carry me to glory. It does not happen that way. What about the corners of the field? What about the grain that grows in the field? Why did not God make plants that just spring out loaves of bread? Why do we have to earn our bread by the sweat of our brow? It is a picture of the fact that we have to avail ourselves.

This is the genuine message of the book of James. Faith without works is dead being fruitless. Let's say that you do guard the field that has been cultivated.

The plants do spring up and begin to bear. If you do not go in and reap, if you do not collect the grain and thresh it and grind it and mix it with oil and bake it, you are not going to have bread. You can subsist.

Jesus and the disciples walked through the field. Remember they were reaping the grain with their hands and eating it? But you do not live your life that way. That is a snack.

That is a carryover until you can get to the next full meal. But you cannot live on hand-reaped raw grain. That is a stopgap.

That is a quick fix. That is just a snack. But there are people who try to live their entire life and wonder why there is no strength and wonder why there is no victory and wonder why there is no resistance to temptation and wonder where the youthful vigor of their soul has gone.

It is because they are trying to live on snacks and the occasional morsel instead of cultivating the

field and reaping that which God has provided. The making of many books never ends. To meditate greatly is weariness to the flesh.

There is a time for meditation. Meditate on the law of the Lord day and night. But it is fruitless if it does not reek in us change, if it does not turn us around, if we do not act and live and decide and meet challenges in the strength that that fuel from God gives us.

So we need to heed the warning. We've got to take possession of that field and guard it, but at the same time we've got to take action based on what we learn and what we know. As it said in our Scripture reading this morning, Psalm 37.3, Trust in the Lord and do good.

Dwell in the land and feed on His faithfulness. Well, we're out of time this morning. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank You for the privilege of studying Your Word together. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will impress it on our hearts, help us to feed on Your faithfulness. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.