

## ECCLESIASTES PART 2

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Well, brethren, last time we began what should be a part of a four-part study on the book of Ecclesiastes and we covered chapters 1 and 2. We reflected, last time, on how incredibly gifted with wisdom Solomon was by God. God gave him, granted him this as a gift.

He was able to build, to design, to achieve, to understand, to discern tremendous things at a miraculous level and yet he came to a point in his life, as we all know, where he finally came and said “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”

In other words he came to a point in his life where he said, “Life is meaningless. It’s like grasping for the wind. There’s nothing there, nothing to hang on to.”

That’s what his life had become as he grew farther and farther away from God. He actually came to a point where he hated life, which is an incredible thing.

He’d lost the humility that he had formerly had when he was a younger man. We had talked about that last time. And he was utterly frustrated with life apart from God as he allowed himself to engage in sin, worshipping other gods, having many, many wives, et cetera, and concubines. The farther that he separated himself from God the more frustrated, the more empty the man became. The recording of his downward slide is the work of a man who’d come to himself in his latter years. He did come to himself. He came to understand and he turned from what he had done.

He’d proved with his life that there is no satisfaction in living apart from God. There was nothing there but emptiness in a life that is not centered on God.

And, of course it was written for our benefit. It was written for the benefit of any reader, but especially those who can comprehend and not all men can at this time, which is also an incredible thing.

Let’s turn to Ecclesiastes chapter 2. Take a look at what Solomon was coming back to at the end of his life. And this is what we concluded with last time. We’ll pick it up in verse 24.

**Ecclesiastes 2:24** *Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God.*

**Verse 25** *For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I?*

We talked about those last three words there, “more than I”. It actually should read “without Him”. And that’s how most of the translations put it. It should read: *For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, without Him.*

**Verse 26:** *For God gives (this is important to remember) God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy (all these things) to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.*

So his conclusion is that a joyous and purposeful life is the gift of God to those who humbly walk before Him, those who obey Him. It's a gift from God. It's not something that a man can create on his own. Obviously Solomon couldn't, which he understood clearly.

It's important that we remember this conclusion that Solomon came to and other correct conclusions that he comes to in this book, because some of his observations seem to be at odds with some of the conclusions that he's drawn, and so we have to think our way through these things.

In all likelihood this disparity simply reflects Solomon's method of teaching. He leaves the reader to fill in the gap between the observation and the fact. The observation – what he sees in life – and yet what he knows is true from God – because there seems to be a disparity between the two. So, in essence, what Solomon is doing is he is forcing us to think our way through the contrast between those two realms – of what is true and what is factual according to God and also what we observe in normal life. We have to think our way through that.

Now we're going to try to cover chapters 3-5 tonight but let's begin by going to the end of tonight's study so that we have the conclusion clearly in mind as we go. So let's go to chapter 5 and let's begin in verse 18. Bear in mind that Solomon, of course, was one of the richest men who ever lived and this is one of the conclusions that he came to near the end of his life.

***Ecclesiastes 5:18*** *Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; (again he acknowledges that God gives us what we have the days of our life) for it is his heritage.*

He's talking about keeping work in balance, in essence, right here. It's a very necessary thing – work – but it's necessary in balance. It's one of God's traits—He works, He creates, He molds and shapes us continuously. God is continually refining us through the process that He uses.

But for us, if work or the pursuit of money becomes our god it's worthless, it's utterly vain and vanity, like grasping for the wind.

It's good to do it in balance in order to enjoy the eating and the drinking and pleasant moments and to be able to have contentment with the moments that are not pleasant in our lives.

**Verse 19** *As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God.*

*Verse 20* *For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart.*

God's wants us (and this is what Solomon is acknowledging), God wants us to find joy in life, not to feel like it's emptiness and futility because it's not. You know, no matter however great or small our physical blessings are, He wants us to find joy in them.

The obedient go through many, many trials just like everyone else in the world does and difficulties in life but God answers His prayers of those that obey Him in that He gives him joy or peace of mind regardless of the circumstances and that's the unique thing.

So with this in mind, let's begin in chapter 3 verse 1:

***Ecclesiastes 3:1*** *To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven:*

Men always want to know about timing of things, don't they, the timing of investments, the timing of a marriage, the timing of planting or harvesting or whatever the case may be. There's many, many things – decisions that have to be made, that men want to know.

Most men seek to know the right times, the right decisions in ways others than trusting God.

As an example, (this is one of the things I read in researching this) in the period of time 1900-1600 BC, in Mesopotamia if someone needed to make a decision or wanted to know the best timing in a situation, they often turned, not to God, but to divination.

The question would be asked, whatever it might be, an animal would be sacrificed and its entrails would then be examined (more specifically, the liver would be examined) of this particular sacrifice. The liver's condition would then help the diviners to know what it was the gods were communicating of the particular question that was asked.

To us that sounds like a really strange thing to do something of that sort. And yet it's no stranger than somebody today checking their horoscope every single day and basing the decisions that they make throughout the day on that horoscope. The only difference is that the horoscope is less messy than the other way.

But Solomon's point is, that it's God who knows the timing and decisions for everything because He and He alone is the one who sets the seasons. This is what, you know, when we get humbled through life that we come to understand this very clearly.

He goes on in verse 2:

***Verse 2*** *A time to be born, And a time to die; A time to plant, And a time to pluck what is planted;*

***Verse 3*** *A time to kill, And a time to heal; A time to break down, And a time to build up;*

***Verse 4*** *A time to weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn, And a time to dance;*

***Verse 5*** *A time to cast away stones, And a time to gather stones; A time to embrace, And a time*

*to refrain from embracing;*

**Verse 6** *A time to gain, And a time to lose; A time to keep, And a time to throw away;*

**Verse 7** *A time to tear, And a time to sew; A time to keep silence, And a time to speak;*

**Verse 8** *A time to love, And a time to hate; A time of war, And a time of peace.*

There is a time for everything under the sun; a time for everything. What Solomon has used here is a literary device that's known as merism. It's where two polar opposites are stated, such as; being born or dying – polar opposites on each end of the spectrum. And the two opposites imply all of life's circumstances between those two points on the spectrum. So, there are thousands, perhaps millions, of experiences we experience between birth and death, and so, all of these things are implied with each of these situations, each of these polarities that he talks about.

Solomon has basically covered about anything that anyone can experience in a life time. These polarities have always been a part of human life (at least since the fall of Adam and Eve).

And then he says in verse 9:

**Verse 9** *What profit has the worker from that in which he labors?*

Considering all these times we go through, what profit has the worker for which he labors?

His point is that God has set every time and season. So the majority of these things we'll experience, but then before we know it, it's our time to die. Yes, we'll experience many, many things through life but then it comes our time to die and that's what we do, we die just like all those before us.

On a physical level it profits us nothing physically because we can't take anything, not a single thing, with us when we die, on a physical level.

Let's go to verse 10. I want to read this from the King James Version. I've been reading from the New King James.

**Verse 10** *I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.*

The God-given travail is going through all the set times that we go through, all the experiences we go through in life is the travail that God has given to the sons of men.

When Solomon says that we're exercised by these times, the word translated exercised is the Hebrew word 'awnaw'. That's a word most of us are very familiar with, many of us anyway. I'm certainly not a Hebrew or a Greek scholar, but that is one word that I do recognize, because it's one we talk about at Atonement and at other times of the year.

In Psalms 35 verse 13 David wrote, *"I humbled my soul with fasting."* And 'humbled' is that word 'awnaw'. That's what it means, humbled.

So God humbles us through the times of our lives, the seasons of our lives. Everything between birth and death God is going to use that thing to humble us in some way.

None of us, when we stop and think about it, this alone should humble us, none of us chooses the day of our birth. We don't have any power over that. We have nothing to say about it. We have nothing to say about the day of our death except if someone chooses to remove God from the picture and end their own life. None of us choose the length or the severity of the trials with which we are tried during our lifetime.

Why does God exercise us in this way?

Let's go to 1 Chronicles chapter 28 and in verse 9. David, Solomon's father, told him why before he made him king. Verse 9:

***1 Chronicles 28:9*** *As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever.*

God humbles us because He knows us. And He knows us because He searches all minds not just to know our thoughts but even the earliest beginnings of those thoughts. He wants to know the things that motivate what become actual thoughts. God is very intent on it.

Go to Genesis chapter 6. It's another verse here that verifies the same thing. It shows that God has been concerned about this from the very beginning. Verse 5:

***Genesis 6:5*** *Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*

God has always, and will always, study the intentions and thoughts of men, of what's going on in our minds. And He does it with each of us and He uses the times of our lives that He's delegated to each of us to therefore humble us. And you know, it's no news flash here, but ever since the Garden of Eden mankind has felt like they were fully capable of directing themselves. And isn't that really, unless we put a reign on ourselves, isn't that how we feel? If we choose not to yield to our Father as we should, we feel the same way. We're fully capable of directing ourselves. It's the human, carnal reaction.

Those who've responded to God's call come to see this clearly, we can look back with a fair amount of clarity at it in our lives.

I can remember very clearly when my dad was probably in his mid 50's and I was out of high school. I had begun farming and I was helping my dad, using his equipment and we were farming together, of sorts. And, I can remember, we'd be talking together about our farming plans for the coming year. After the one year was over we'd be talking about the next. Being

young I had a very gung-ho attitude and I'd come up with ideas. I'd always be coming up with ideas, some way that might make us some money in the year ahead so that we could potentially try something different.

But I can remember my dad said this to me numerous times, several times through the years. He would very, very calmly say, "Well, son, it might work and then again it might not." And then he'd continue and he'd say, "I've come up with lots of ideas in my time. Some of them have worked but most of them haven't. So I'm really not interested at this point in my life in making a lot of money. I just want to be able to pay my bills and live a good life."

I've thought back on that numerous times in my lifetime and what I realize now was, he was being humbled through all the seasons of sowing and preparing the soil, cultivating, watering, harvesting. He was being humbled through all those circumstances that came along between the planting and the harvesting, along with all the other circumstances in life. But the more that he was humbled, the more God-centered his life became and the more content he became. It was an interesting thing.

Let's go back to Ecclesiastes chapter 3 and pick it up in verse 11.

**Ecclesiastes 3:11** *He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.*

And so, very truly, God gave us an incredibly beautiful environment to live in. And all the times and seasons of our lives, the times and the seasons of nature, et cetera, all these things fit beautifully in place when we don't ignorantly, or sometimes willfully, make them our god instead. We can find a time, a circumstance in our life that we really like and then try to force our will to keep things just that way, despite what God's intention might be. He might have a trial in mind for us to turn us in another direction, to teach us a different lesson. And, you know, when we come up with these ideas of our own it doesn't produce contentment. There's no question about that.

So what is meant by 'God has set the world in man's mind'? World is translated from the Hebrew 'olam' which refers to eternity. Through the spirit in man we can know that there is more time in front of us and there was obviously a lot of time behind us. But we understand that we only have a finite amount of time and there's much time in both directions from us.

Most if not all tribes of people on the earth have a concept of there being some kind of afterlife. And so, it's not a foreign thing. It's something that God has put into the minds of men.

Humanity, as Solomon says here, knows the concept of eternity but can only partially cope with the activities in their time. And even that is often far beyond us, isn't it?

We are like an incredibly near-sighted person. I happen to be near-sighted. I know how I have to struggle and strain to see something (I have to) to see something beyond a foot in front of their face. I have to struggle and strain to see what it is to focus on it.

In **Romans 11:33** Paul said, *“Oh, that depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!”*

Some of His mysteries He’s revealed to the Church. He’s given His people, His spiritually begotten people; He’s given us some, much more than the rest of the world at this time,

We know that the holy days reveal the basic framework of the near future and by near future I mean the next 11 or 12 hundred years or so. We know what lies ahead in terms of that. We know that there are very few called initially, which is where we fit into the picture.

Those of them who remain faithful throughout life will become spirit-born members of God’s family at Christ’s return. They will assist Christ in retraining mankind that’s lived through the tribulation and through the day of the Lord. We know all of this very well during the millennial time frame. We’re very aware of it. And that, of course, will be followed by a 100-years period of judgment for all of those resurrected that have never had a chance at salvation before.

And, of course, we believe and hope that there will be billions added to God’s family and of course beyond that lies the rest of eternity and perhaps we’ll have a hand in bringing life to trillions of presently dead planets in the known galaxies of which there are multiple billions of galaxies that we’re presently aware of.

So we have a far greater view than others who are not yet called. There’s no question about that but there’s still a multitude that is unknown to us as well.

And probably the biggest unknown to us, brethren, is generally between the beginning and ending of our own lives. That’s some of the greatest of the unknowns is in our own lives. And there’s a reason for it.

The more that pride and self will enter, the more obscure God’s work in us becomes. We lose sight of where He’s trying to take us, where He wants us to go, what He’s trying to achieve in us. And the more difficult it is to find the joy and the contentment that God desires and that He intends for us to have. That’s why we go through trials. He intends for us to have those things.

**Ecclesiastes 3:12** *I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives,*

*Verse 13 and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God.*

This is what God intends for us, and the more pride and the more self will that are overcome, the greater we can enjoy God’s gift in the seasons that He gives us.

Let's go to Philippians chapter 4. The apostle Paul is a great example of this. Let's pick it up in verse 11

**Philippians 4:11** *Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:*

**Verse 12** *I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.*

**Verse 13** *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*

Paul was content in every circumstance, or every time that God took him through. We don't need to go through the list, because we know it very, very well. Something we probably reflect on when we're having difficulties, we reflect on the life of Paul and all the things that the man went through in service to God.

But he learned not to fight God's will in these matters and that's why he could have contentment. He didn't fight God's will because he believed that God was working in him and that He would work a work that would be complete.

He believed that all things would work to the good ultimately that's what he wrote that's what he believed and believed that to his death.

Now, of course, we know that Paul was martyred. So did all things work to the good? Was he wrong, was his faith misplaced? Certainly not! A crown or righteousness awaits the apostle Paul.

What it means, brethren, is that some things we'll understand in this life and some things we won't. Some things are still past finding out right now.

But by faith, believing that He'll bring it all to a right conclusion either in this life or the next, we can enjoy God's gift of contentment right here and right now. It's a priceless gift if we don't reject it with our own will. That's a profound lesson in life, isn't it? We can reject contentment simply because we want our own will.

**Ecclesiastes 3:14** *I know that whatever God does, It shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, And nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him.*

**Verse 15** *That which is has already been, And what is to be has already been; And God requires an account of what is past.*

The tasks that God gives us at various times are His and His alone to give. No amount of self-will, no amount of self determination can change a fraction of that. It is entirely up to God.

So these verses here, 12-15, are some of the sound conclusions that Solomon inserts amid these other thoughts in order to get us thinking, to get us coming and working to the right and solid conclusion.

**Verse 16** *Moreover I saw under the sun: In the place of judgment, Wickedness was there; And in the place of righteousness, Iniquity was there.*

So this is one of Solomon's many observations and we see this very same thing today. This was a very accurate observation – nothing new under the sun.

Sodomy or homosexuality, as an example, used to be against the law in this country, which was a sound judgment. Today gay marriage is legal in many states and so wickedness is in the place of righteousness today in this country and in most countries.

This reality could cause some to say, "How can there really be a God if this allowed?" It could create doubts in your mind.

The observations that Solomon raises here and in the next two chapters are things that run through peoples' minds all of the time because we observe, don't we? We look around and we see it.

**Verse 17** *I said in my heart, "God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, For there is a time there for every purpose and for every work."*

So again, he brings it to the sound conclusion, doesn't he? Nothing goes unnoticed by God. Everything will have its time of judgment, no matter how it appears to us right now, no matter how unjust, how wrong it is, there will be a time of judgment because God's plan of salvation, which we are very privileged to understand, provides a time of judgment for all who've ever lived and so, each will have their own time of judgment.

**Verse 18** *I said in my heart, "Concerning the condition of the sons of men, God tests them, that they may see that they themselves are like animals."*

**Verse 19** *For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity.*

**Verse 20** *All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust.*

**Verse 21** *Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth?*

For us it's very easy, it's very normal, to observe the difference God made between man and beast. We have dominion over the beasts of the field. Let me just give you an example of this. My wife and I were coming home earlier this week, traveling through northeast Nebraska. We were about 15 minutes behind the two tornados that did a great deal of devastation up in that part of the state. And we got to see the aftermath of what happened. And what we saw, we came past two feed lots – and for those of you that don't know what a feed lot is, it's where cattle are put into a very close situation where you may have thousands of cattle in one spot being fed by their owners to get them fat for market.

And so, we came across these feed lots and the tornado had gone through both of them and what we saw was cattle scattered everywhere. There were hundreds of cattle running across corn fields and bean fields just tearing things up. They didn't have a clue what was going on. They didn't have a clue.

They didn't get together and put their heads together and say, "Well now, what about those people that come out here to feed us. We probably should be thinking about them. We probably should do something to help them because it looks like their house is gone." No, they didn't do that.

There were men out there and they were trying to round up these cattle and try to find some way to contain them because the structures were destroyed.

We do work with animals in that way. We do get together and put our minds together and come up with solutions in regard to the animals. God gave mankind a spirit that makes that possible.

But Solomon's point here is simply a reiteration of the fact that we're just plain animals apart from God. That's why God humbles us through the seasons of our lives.

He didn't make us in His image to act like an animal. He made us in His image so that we could become like Him. That's why He humbles us through the seasons of our life

The natural man doesn't want to think that God truly is in control of all things in our lives, simply because we don't want to give up our autonomy. We want to think that we're in control, don't we?

But Solomon found out in his own life that the more he accomplished and the bigger that he became in his own eyes, the emptier he became. The air just went out of him. There was nothing worth living for. And nearing the end of his life he found out what all men find out (and women). We're going to die just like any other living thing that God created, even though He made us very different than the animal kingdom.

**Verse 22** *So I perceived that nothing is better than that a man should rejoice in his own works, for that is his heritage. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?*

God intends for us to humbly enjoy the seasons and times with which He tests us. The unspoken thing here that's obvious enough to those with the Holy Spirit is, that it's a choice. It's a choice, isn't it, for us to find contentment. It is a choice. We have to give up our own will and our own ego in order to find contentment.

Let's go to chapter 4 and we'll begin in verse 1.

**Ecclesiastes 4:1** *Then I returned and considered all the oppression that is done under the sun: And look! The tears of the oppressed, But they have no comforter— On the side of their oppressors there is power, But they have no comforter.*

*Verse 2 Therefore I praised the dead who were already dead, More than the living who are still alive.*

*Verse 3 Yet, better than both is he who has never existed, Who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.*

So now here's Solomon and he's challenging us again, the reader, to think.

From Cain's time until now, men have oppressed one another, there's no question about that. We all have experienced this in life. We've all been oppressors and we've all been oppressed.

There is oppression in the courts, it can be found in business, (it's very, very common in business). It can be found in marriage, either from the husband toward the wife or the wife toward the husband. It can be found at school, children oppressing one another. It can be found in any relationships where there's power without love.

We can look at the oppression of slavery. All through time there have been slaves. It's gone on and on from millennia, hasn't it? Israel was taken slave in Egypt. We could look at the American south, there was slavery. There will be slavery again in Europe between now and the end. We know that's ahead of us.

There have been genocides in Africa and the Balkans. There was the attempted genocide of the Jews in the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War.

In Job chapter 21 verse 13, Job acknowledged that sometimes the wicked spend their days in prosperity, and in peace they go to their graves, which just seems like another atrocity, doesn't it? On and on it goes.

This time Solomon doesn't follow his observation with what he did in chapter 3 and in verse 17.

There he said, "*God will judge the righteous and the wicked.*" He didn't follow it with that.

So the reader is left to think for him. He's pointing out again what seems like disharmony between biblical truth and what really occurs. He doesn't have to repeat it every time for us to get it because his observation and facts are true. What are the facts?

The facts are that we live in an oppressive world, that's a fact, and at the same time we live in a world that was made so that everything is appropriate in its time. That's also a fact.

The other fact is that we know God will judge both the evil and the good.

That's lot's of facts, so which way is up. How do we then live our lives based on these facts?

Do we just give up because there's oppression? Do we become cynical and bitter because there is oppression?

The answer is that without God it can be a very miserable existence in this world. It can be, and I'm sure that there have been thousands and millions of people who have felt that they'd be better off to be dead than alive with some of the oppression that they've gone through.

But the answer is, that without God it is miserable. But through God we can have comfort, we can have peace, we can have joy and contentment despite the difficulties that we go through, the difficult tasks that God takes us through in our span of time.

**Verse 4** *Again, I saw that for all toil and every skillful work a man is envied by his neighbor. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.*

Toil comes from the Hebrew word aw-mawl, which means wearing effort and therefore worry either of mind or body. And so by wearing effort, it means excessive physical or mental labor.

And, of course we know that our Father and Christ both work –scripture tells us so- so we know that effort of mind and body is good. It's not a bad thing. It's a part of God's way of being.

Now, the effort that men put out can either be in a godly balance or not. Men can do it properly or they cannot. God does it properly. A man can toil, he can work in balance and he can have a lazy, envious neighbor, right? A man can toil excessively to the exclusion of his family with the hope of gaining an envious neighbor.

There is emptiness in both situations even though it's not participated in by both in the first example.

And so this is Solomon's observation and it's followed by another.

**Verse 5** *The fool folds his hands And consumes his own flesh.*

This is the flip side of the workaholic. Solomon's description of the lazy here is very apt. They destroy themselves; they destroy themselves.

Proverbs uses the metaphor of being attacked by an armed bandit to describe the consequences of idleness, which is also a great way of thinking about it – actually being attacked!

It affects more than one individual when somebody is a lazy person. It affects families, it affects neighbors. It affects the entire nation that we live in, doesn't it? We live in a system where the lazy are taken care of by those who produce, those who work. It puts a greater burden on those who work.

We would agree with Solomon's observations, without a doubt.

**Verse 6** *Better a handful with quietness Than both hands full, together with toil and grasping for the wind.*

So he's saying, balance is better in quietness and quietness doesn't mean inactivity. It doesn't mean that at all. It means working enough. It means getting our priorities right in life, not being out of balance.

The wise response to what Solomon has raised is that the gift of contentment goes to the one who fears God and works in balance despite what we may observe going on around us. We see lots of unjust situations when we observe things around us.

Then he says **verse 7**: *Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun:*

So here's another observation.

**Verse 8** *There is one alone, without companion: He has neither son nor brother. Yet there is no end to all his labors, Nor is his eye satisfied with riches. But he never asks, "For whom do I toil and deprive myself of good?" This also is vanity and a grave misfortune.*

**Verse 9** *Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor.*

**Verse 10** *For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up.*

**Verse 11** *Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm alone?*

**Verse 12** *Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.*

So now in verse 8 Solomon isn't referring to a single person, per se. It's an unmarried person, but the one he's referring to is a single person in the form of a miser. This person could be male or female. They work hard to accumulate more and more and they never find satisfaction in the process.

One commentator said this, "The vanity of it all is that unremitting (self) determination and single-minded diligence reap no self-fulfillment but self-deprivation." In other words, self deprivation is the end product of what Solomon has observed here – self-deprivation when they think they're going for the exact opposite.

So Solomon's accurate observation is that a life of self determination is meaningless. It's like trying to hold onto the wind. And that the fulfillment we crave involves other people- the companionship of godly people.

Fulfillment is never found apart from the godly standard. And the godly standard is to work with and associate with godly people – have good friends.

**Verse 13** *Better a poor and wise youth Than an old and foolish king who will be admonished no more.*

**Verse 14** *For he comes out of prison to be king, Although he was born poor in his kingdom.*

**Verse 15** *I saw all the living who walk under the sun; They were with the second youth who stands in his place.*

*Verse 16 There was no end of all the people over whom he was made king; Yet those who come afterward will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and grasping for the wind.*

So here in his final observation of the chapter, he points out that fame and popularity are fleeting. They are vanity. They are meaningless. This is what he came to see through his own life. It is meaningless.

A king, in this case, or anyone can reach what seems to be the pinnacle of human glory. It might be your career, it might be an achievement, it might be a position you might have held or whatever the case may be. We can come to that point only to be stranded there and left behind and forgotten.

And the reason for being stranded is because of pride, as we see in the case of this old king. He couldn't be admonished any more. When we can't be admonished, when we can't be turned to accomplish God's will then we find emptiness. It happens every time.

He had become big in his own eyes and he had therefore become empty.

The answer to this observation is that those who walk humbly with God and allow Him to shape them through the tasks and the trials of life will become what? -Immortal members of His family never forgotten and always living. What a contrast, what a contrast!

Thus far we've seen that despite what man proudly thinks, God is in control of everything. This is something that is easy to say, brethren, but we need to think about it. We need to really think about it in our own lives. God is in control of everything!

We've seen the contentment and enjoyment in a life full of God-given tasks (which can be incredibly difficult, incredibly difficult). These things actually come by grace through faith so that no one can boast. All credit, all glory, has to go to God.

Believers can humbly walk with God and grow through life. These are basic truths that we've come to thus far.

Additionally, we've seen that a fool approaches God on his own strength and ability. He doesn't approach God in the way that a wise man approaches God. The wise approach God listening, and believing and doing. Totally, totally different approaches.

Solomon now addresses some practical obstacles that can blur our understanding of these basic truths.

So let's continue in chapter 5 now, 5 verse 1. One thing that can wreck our understanding is how it is that we think about God. Where do we place Him in our minds and in our demeanor and in our actions? Where do we put Him? And the other is how we live before Him.

**Ecclesiastes 5:1** *Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil.*

**Verse 2** *Do not be rash with your mouth, And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; Therefore let your words be few.*

**Verse 3** *For a dream comes through much activity, And a fool's voice is known by his many words.*

To walk prudently means to approach God properly and that involves more than just being there. We have to approach God in a proper manner with a proper attitude.

In Deuteronomy 5 (we don't need to turn there), and in verse 1, Moses said this (and I want you to take note of where I put my emphasis when I read this verse). In Deuteronomy 5:1 Moses said, "**Hear**, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your hearing today that you may **learn** them and be careful to **observe** them."

Now similar instruction to this is given in numerous places throughout scripture. Our attitude in approaching God is to be ready to listen, and by listening, of course we listen with our ears, yes. We can also listen by reading, what we take in through the eyes that is transmitted to our mind. We listen in that way too, don't we? Learning requires humility because it means we're like a child. We're teachable, ready to understand. And then, of course there's the doing, the active part.

Solomon's warning is against talking a lot and listening little when we approach God.

Now when Christ taught the disciples to pray in Matthew 6, He wasn't wordy, you know. It was very short and very concise. It's very simple and easy to follow.

He also said (He told them at that same time) don't use vain repetitions, thinking that God will hear you because you talk so much. That's not how it works.

But then on the other hand, we could point to scripture such as Luke chapter 6 verse 12 where Christ went into the mountains and He prayed all night. This is not something He did once in a while. He did it from time to time.

In I Thessalonians 5 and in verse 17, the apostle Paul tells us to pray without ceasing and in another place he tells us to be devoted to prayer. So this sounds like a lot, doesn't it? Lots of words. And so, which is it?

Solomon has shown us that life is finite. We have a short period of time God's allotted to us, that God uses our short span of time to humble and test us. He's shown that if we desire to be content through it all, we can't ignore Him and call our own shots in life. If we want to be content we can't do that because that's what a fool does. They try to call their own shots.

Solomon's admonition here, therefore, is to approach God as a little child and not as a wheeler-dealer. That's what he's talking about.

You can pray all night long just like Christ did, with the attitude of a little child. You can be totally devoted to and pray without ceasing, with the attitude of a little child.

But a foolish person is far better advised to listen much and say very little until they begin to learn to properly fear God. That's where Solomon was in what he was saying there.

**Ecclesiastes 5:4** *When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; For He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed—*

**Verse 5** *Better not to vow than to vow and not pay.*

**Verse 6** *Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger of God that it was an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands?*

**Verse 7** *For in the multitude of dreams and many words there is also vanity. But fear God.*

These verses closely relate to the three previous.

The foolish talk about what they'll do and then they don't do it. They like to talk. They talk a good talk, perhaps. But then they don't follow through.

We can't approach our Father in such a carelessness manner as that. It's like trying to approach our Father as if we were some kind of salesman, and that's a stench in God's nostrils.

He is the One who can give us the gift of a meaningful life and contentment in it. Why would we approach Him any other way than with the proper fear? Because what He can give us is far beyond the natural man, because the natural man will seek to accomplish his own will every time.

The antidote to this is to learn the proper fear of God, to walk humbly with God.

**Verse 8** *If you see the oppression of the poor, and the violent perversion of justice and righteousness in a province, do not marvel at the matter; for high official watches over high official, and higher officials are over them.*

**Verse 9** *Moreover the profit of the land is for all; even the king is served from the field.*

This is another valid observation by Solomon.

We shouldn't be spiritually unhinged when we see oppression and when we see injustice within the human governments on this earth because that's all there is, by and large, there is some justice, or when we look at our own country in particular, because oppression is rampant and injustice is rampant in our own country. It is part of what God allows to test us; it's part of what He allows.

So we're cautioned here not to let it embitter us because it easily could if we lose sight of the bigger picture. It's what Solomon is trying to drive at here. Don't let it embitter us but rather we are to stay the godly course regardless.

**Verse 10** *He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity.*

**Verse 11** *When goods increase, They increase who eat them; So what profit have the owners Except to see them with their eyes?*

Lusting after more and more wealth is like trying to get a grip on the wind. It's impossible. It is utterly impossible to do. Speaking from past experience in his life Solomon is here cautioning the wise man. He's cautioning us against this.

Stop and think about this, brethren. What I'm going to say here in two sentences or so is really a sermon in itself that needs to be done. Stop and think about this. If men and women drove themselves even fractionally as hard at raising godly seed as they do at making money, what kind of world would we live in today? It would be a totally different world. It would be on the side other side of the spectrum. It really would.

So on the one side of the scale we have a child that becomes an immortal spirit being with the mind and the character of God our Father and that of Jesus Christ which is perfect and incorruptible. That's what we have on one side of the scale.

And on the other side of the scale is a pile of shiny metal which we would call precious metal today, and it's going to be spent by somebody that comes after us when we die.

And so, you see, we need to get it in perspective, don't we? It's vanity versus wealth forever.

Let's go to **verse 12**: *The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, Whether he eats little or much; But the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep.*

**Verse 13** *There is a severe evil which I have seen under the sun: Riches kept for their owner to his hurt.*

**Verse 14** *But those riches perish through misfortune; When he begets a son, there is nothing in his hand.*

**Verse 15** *As he came from his mother's womb, naked shall he return, To go as he came; And he shall take nothing from his labor Which he may carry away in his hand.*

**Verse 16** *And this also is a severe evil— Just exactly as he came, so shall he go. And what profit has he who has labored for the wind?*

**Verse 17** *All his days he also eats in darkness, And he has much sorrow and sickness and anger.*

These verses are a continuation of the previous two. Solomon isn't condemning wealth here, but he's making the point that it's a great evil if that is what drives us in life. It's a great evil – in other words, if we make it our god.

The laboring man (who may have little or he may have a moderate amount of whatever income may be), he's going to take just as much with him when he dies as will the rich man, virtually no difference. Neither can take anything with him.

So what's the difference between the two?

The difference is, in being able to enjoy those seasons of our lives that are enjoyable – to be able to enjoy the things that are good, and being able to be content in the really difficult tests that God determines for us. You know, there's a tremendous difference. So, you see, Solomon is pushing us to think our way through all matters that we observe. Because we see extreme's all over, don't we? And we have to be able to come to right conclusions.

**Verse 18:** *Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage.*

**Verse 19** *As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God.*

**Verse 20** *For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart.*

And so, again, we come down to the facts. God wants us to enjoy this physical life as much as we possibly can in the seasons that we go through in it.

Solomon has made it clear in these three chapters that our Father has power over everything that we experience in life. We don't call the shots. And we won't find contentment, brethren, until we fully believe that and accept it and find contentment in it.

He's also challenged us to think so that we can come to right conclusions when we see examples in life that seem to contradict biblical principle. We see it all the time and Solomon covered many of these in these chapters here.

And he's cautioned also the wise about some of the pitfalls that can rob us of God's intended joy in our lives.

That will bring this study to a close for tonight, brethren. I hope it's been helpful and useful.

I do want to wish you all a very pleasant Sabbath day tomorrow. And with that I would say good night.