

Ecclesiastes Part 3
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Now, on our last study on Ecclesiastes we made it through chapters 3-5 and tonight we're going to try to go through chapters 6 and 7. I had originally intended to just make it a four studies for the book of Ecclesiastes but it's obviously going to be more like five to complete it. Two more after tonight, I'm thinking.

In the previous chapters we saw that as Solomon, through sin, got farther and farther from God, he found less and less satisfaction in life. There was less pleasure, less purpose in life for him. He actually came to the point where he hated life and he thought of it as vanity. It was purposeless. It was empty because his life was no longer centered on God. It was centered on what Solomon could do himself.

But as he came to himself he saw clearly that God has power over everything that we experience in life. And he saw that God uses the circumstances in life to humble men, to humble mankind. That's the purpose of this life.

And we found that we won't find contentment until we fully believe that and accept it that God is the ultimate authority and that He is using this life to actually humble us and shape us.

We saw that he would state sound biblical conclusions and then he would bring up observances that he'd made in life that seemed to contradict biblical principle. He would bring up, and continues in the book to bring up, circumstances that we are very familiar with, that we understand and that we relate to. And they seem to contradict biblical principle.

And, of course, he did this for the purpose of causing us to think, to really think about what is first of all true, then how do we correlate that with what we actually see in life and how should we react accordingly to that.

So let's begin in Ecclesiastes chapter 5 and verses 18 through 20 and we're going to remind ourselves of the sound conclusion that Solomon came to at the end of chapter 5 before we begin with chapter 6. Verse 18:

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; 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.*

So God gives the gift of joy as well. This was Solomon's conclusion after making it clear that our Father has power over everything that we experience in life. God's gift is to be able to enjoy life in its good moments and also to be content in other times because it's not always good. It's not always pleasurable, as we understand.

But it doesn't always work this way for everyone. And so, let's pick it up in chapter 6 now and in verse 1.

Ecclesiastes 6:1 *There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men:*

Verse 2 *A man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor, so that he lacks nothing for himself of all he desires; yet God does not give him power to eat of it, but a foreigner consumes it. This is vanity, and it is an evil affliction.*

Let's look at both concepts in this verse and let's turn to 1 Chronicles chapter 29 and read verses 10-12. We're going to first look at the concepts of wealth and honor. 1 Chronicles chapter 29 beginning in verse 10.

1 Chronicles 29:10 *Therefore David blessed the Lord before all the assembly; and David said: "Blessed are You, Lord God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever.*

Verse 11 *Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, The power and the glory, The victory and the majesty; For all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, And You are exalted as head over all.*

First he's acknowledging in fact God has power over all things. All things are His. Verse 12:

Verse 12 *Both riches and honor come from You, And You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; In Your hand it is to make great And to give strength to all.*

We can see what David said here. But what he didn't say, but rather infers, is equally as valid. God also has the power, as we well know, to take these things away according to His own choosing and according to His own purpose, because God always has a purpose.

Another unspoken and hugely discounted reality, by some, (not by all but by some) is that some riches have nothing whatsoever to do with material wealth. A lot of people do tend to think of blessings in terms of wealth or possessions or things of that sort—physical, material things. But it's not all that way at all. We'll address that more fully shortly.

But Solomon also said back in Ecclesiastes 6 and in verse 2 that although this man's been given all that he could ever want, God doesn't give him the power to eat of it. He said this

was vanity or emptiness and that it was an evil affliction. So was he suggesting that God was evilly afflicting the man? And, of course, we know the answers, clearly not. God was not doing that.

In chapter 5 and in verse 10, which we read last time, he already said that:

Ecclesiastes 5:10 *He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase.*

In other words the rich man tends to want more and more and more and he's never satisfied with what he's got. Though we've been given the opportunity for wealth by God, if we turn around and then make a god out of it, then we sin.

I remember hearing of a very old man from my youth. A gentleman who had never married (and there's no problem with that) but this individual had worked hard all his life. And he had saved just about every penny that he had ever made. And he lived in what would have been considered in his day and time a house that was almost a mansion. It was just a very, very beautiful, beautiful house. And he had inherited the home.

But this man didn't do any upkeep on the home. He didn't do anything to maintain the home. And, of course, when you don't do that, through the decades the roof began to lose its integrity. It began to leak. Water began to come through the roof. First it hit the upper floor and then it came down through the lower floor. And what he would do was go from room to room evading the water flow and he did this for a couple of decades.

But by the end of his long life he was living in rubble. He was living in a decayed, worn out, worthless home. He had no valuable possessions. He had just the barest of essentials, things to cook with, a few clothes to wear and that was it. He didn't go anywhere for pleasure. He didn't invite people into his home for pleasure; obviously he couldn't after it began to fall apart.

But this man was incredibly wealthy. He had saved nearly a half a million dollars! And this was decades ago. And the unfortunate thing is that it had taken him a lifetime. It had taken him over ninety-some years of life to accumulate all the wealth that he had. And then others consumed his fortune when he died. It took them a very short amount of time to consume it.

Why would God give the gift of pleasure when a person makes wealth their god? I am certainly not judging this man because I don't know. He might have had other reasons for his behavior. But for some it is a matter of making a god out of their wealth.

The man Solomon referred to here had brought an evil affliction upon himself.

Let's go to begin in verse 3 now of Ecclesiastes 6.

Ecclesiastes 6:3 *If a man begets a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with goodness, or indeed he has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better than he —*

Verse 4 *for it comes in vanity and departs in darkness, and its name is covered with darkness. Verse 5* *Though it has not seen the sun or known anything, this has more rest than that man, Verse 6* *even if he lives a thousand years twice — but has not seen goodness. Do not all go to one place?*

And so, he's painting a very, very vivid picture of an empty life. Scripture tells us that children are a blessing, a wonderful blessing like arrows in the hands of a warrior. It also says the same thing of long life. Long life is a blessing.

But a person can have these things and yet not be satisfied in life. Without enjoying the blessings, they won't have life more abundantly. That's what Christ came later to tell us, is that we can have life more abundantly. We could really enjoy every... and have peace of mind in our lifetime; to have it more abundantly.

Let's go to Deuteronomy chapter 8. You know, you have to ask yourself - how does something like this happen? The theme that we're going to come to here in Deuteronomy 8 is one that we've seen steadily through the book of Ecclesiastes and I'm sure we will to the end.

Let's pick it up in Deuteronomy 8 and verse 7.

Deuteronomy 8:7 *For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills;*

Verse 8 *a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey;*

Verse 9 *a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper.*

Verse 10 *When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you.*

Emphasis on **what He has given** and all the good things. God is going to give them the land that is so productive and so good.

So Solomon's words are reinforced here in that it is God alone, not we ourselves, who bring blessings upon ourselves. God has blessed Israel in this case. Verse 11:

Deuteronomy 8:11 *Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today,*

Verse 12 *lest — when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them;*

Verse 13 *and when your herds and your flocks multiply, (because all the blessings God has poured out) and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied;*

Verse 14 *when your heart is lifted up, (when you're your mind is lifted up and you become proud) and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage;*

In the midst of all of these great things that God gives us what is His concern, because God knows how things work? He understands. His concern is that we would forget Him while we're in our blessings. And, of course, we know how a person can do that. We could do it just as easily as Israel did it or just as easily as Solomon did for a time. We could forget God through pride. Verse 15:

Verse 15 *who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water; who brought water for you out of the flinty rock;*

Verse 16 *who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end —*

And again it comes back to that theme. God humbles mankind through the course of their lifetime. And for what purpose? To test us. And for what purpose? So he can do good for us in the end, so that eventually we can have eternal life.

Verse 17 *then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.'*

Verse 18 *And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.*

You know, when we forget God or when any man, any person, forgets God through pride and they begin to take credit to themselves, we automatically begin to remove ourselves from God. We automatically create a barrier, and there begins to be a rift.

And even if God allows us to retain some of those physical blessings, our life will eventually go flat. Solomon lived a pretty high life for a period of time but eventually it went stone-flat on him. And he detested life itself. It will become an empty life if it's not a God-centered life.

God blesses the obedient, humble individual with being able to find satisfaction and purpose in life regardless of the circumstance. It's a great, great gift that He gives.

Proverbs 18, let's go there in verses 10 and 11. Here Solomon's words echo what we just read in Deuteronomy 8 and in much shorter form.

Proverbs 18:10 *The name of the Lord is a strong tower; The righteous run to it and are safe.*

Verse 11 *The rich man's wealth is his strong city, (so he's drawing a comparison here) And like a high wall in his own esteem.*

The humble run to God for their needs and the proud stand by their own might – the self-made man or woman. And so, clearly we see that esteeming ourselves separates us from God.

Before we go on I'd like to talk briefly about other blessings. Many blessing are physical, material things. We just read about them in Deuteronomy 8 – wonderful, wonderful, good blessings, there's nothing wrong with that. A blessing is always a good thing as we saw there, if it's received humbly in the fear of God. That was exactly what we just read.

But there are other kinds of blessings and the Apostle Paul spoke of them in Ephesians 1 and verse 3 where he said:

Ephesians 1:3 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,*

And, of course, he was referring to the calling, the godly sorrow that leads to repentance, forgiveness of sin. He was talking about the Holy Spirit, reconciliation with the Father, and then also sonship – to actually be begotten children of God. These are obvious spiritual blessings but there are those far less obvious, brethren, that require spiritual maturity to even see them because we're inundated in a world that fixates on physical blessings.

Let's go to Matthew chapter 5. You know, the beatitudes are for the mature, for the spiritually mature. The word translated 'blessed' in the beatitudes is from the Greek word '*makarios*' and it means supremely blessed, fortunate, well off, happy or happier. This particular word puts a focus on the receiver doing something, in other words, faithfully taking action. This is a very mature sort of a blessing.

Let's just briefly read these beatitudes. Let's start in verse 4.

Matthew 5:4 *Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.* (happy are those who mourn, ultimately, when they participate in this)

Verse 5 *Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.*

Verse 6 *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.*

Verse 7 *Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.*

Verse 8 *Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.*

Verse 9 *Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.*

Verse 10 *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Verse 11 *"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. (and then he says)*

Verse 12 *Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven.*

These are very mature blessings. These are things that make us happy or happier. These are **supreme** blessings. But it takes spiritual maturity to recognize them and to appreciate them. Now let's go back to verse 3, the first of those beatitudes and Christ said:

Matthew 5:3 *Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

This doesn't have anything to do with physical possessions. It's all about an attitude of mind. It's all about an attitude that recognizes God and doesn't put its focus on self.

The English Bible translates verse 3 in this way.

Matthew 5:3 *How blessed are those who know they are poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

It's not really a challenge, is it, for any of us to know if we're physically poor or not. It's not even a question. We know if we're poor. But to know if we're poor in spirit, that is, humble, can be difficult to ascertain, depending on us.

Now it wasn't difficult for Christ. Christ knew that He was and he said, *"Most assuredly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself."* Christ said that because He meant it.

Now if we can generally say that of ourselves, brethren, if it's not just false humility, if it's not just a pleasant thing to say, then the blessing is going to be immeasurable, it's going to be great because as Isaiah wrote in chapter 57 and verse 15:

Isaiah 57:15 *For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.*

The blessing of humility, the supreme blessing of humility, ensures us of a place in God's Kingdom, which is future tense. It's out there in front of us. It's something we work

toward. But it also means He'll revive us now, enliven and empower our minds. He makes His home with us through His Spirit in our minds. And we can have that right now, brethren, so that we can have joy and find contentment regardless of whether we have little or whether we have much physically, regardless of easy sailing or regardless of the rough waters of life, we can have that.

And, of course, the opposite holds true as well. Just as Israel could lose their lives through pride so can we in a spiritual sense, if we forsake that supreme blessing of humility.

Now, this Bible Study is not about all the supreme blessings Christ spoke about in the beatitudes. We just read them. But each one would make a tremendously profitable Bible Study in itself for us personally to reflect on 'why is that such a wonderful blessing'. 'Why is it something that's going to cause supreme happiness, and so on?

These are strong meat, these beatitudes in the world of blessings.

Now let's go back to Ecclesiastes 6 and we'll pick it up in verse 7.

Ecclesiastes 6:7 *All the labor of man is for his mouth, And yet the soul is not satisfied.*

Verse 8 *For what more has the wise man than the fool? What does the poor man have, Who knows how to walk before the living?*

Verse 9 *Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.*

Everybody has to eat and to drink and to be clothed, to have shelter, et cetera, whether it's a wise person, whether it's a fool, whether it's a poor man who conducts himself properly. So, because everyone has to have all these, things what advantage does anyone have? Is there an advantage? Of those who accept God's gift, who have the humility to accept God's gift of contentment, and peace, and pleasure, these are the ones who will have it and the others won't. God doesn't force us to enjoy life. He wants us to enjoy life, He wants us to be content and be at peace, but it's a humble choice for us to do so. Verse 10:

Verse 10 *Whatever one is, he has been named already, For it is known that he is man ; And he cannot contend with Him who is mightier than he.*

Verse 11 *Since there are many things that increase vanity, How is man the better?*

So again, we see God's supreme authority is cited. It's something Solomon does frequently throughout this book.

But we are mankind. We have nothing to do with our creation. We didn't design what we're going to look like. God did. He gave us His form. We have no control over the date of our birth and no right control over the date of our death. No matter how clever we think

we are, brethren, we can't contend with our Maker. We cannot. It's an absurd thing to think that the clay is going to somehow persuade its Potter. Clay is just a bunch of clay and that is what we are, just living clay.

Reasoning that contends with God only increases futility of life apart from Him. To make it clear, reasonings that contend with God are thoughts that lead to decisions in our lives that will take us away from God's will—reasonings that take us away from God's will. That's contending with God.

If we decide, 'I'll choose my own moral code. I'll decide for myself what's right and what's wrong for me to do in life, in a sexual way, or in how I communicate or whatever the case may be.' Or if we choose if and when we think the Sabbath is or how it should be kept, same thing. If we decide we won't forgive then, brethren, we invite futility because we are contending with God. We're struggling with Him. The more we contend the more futility we'll experience. Verse 12:

Verse 12 *For who knows what is good for man in life, all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun?*

This statement is one of those that if we read it a certain way could make Solomon look like he can't make his mind up. His question simply illustrates that men, of and by themselves, in other words, apart from God, don't know what's good for them in life. We don't. The carnal, human mind will inevitably, invariably gravitate towards self, which is where we do not find contentment.

Let's go to chapter 7. Now we're going to read verses 1-12 and as we read through these proverbs realize that Solomon is now contrasting the previous point in chapter 6 that physical wealth isn't necessarily a blessing, okay. That was the point there. And he's going to contrast that with the concept that adversity, difficulty, trials, tests isn't necessarily **not** a blessing. It all depends on our attitude in life. It all depends. He says:

Ecclesiastes 7:1 *A good name is better than precious ointment, And the day of death than the day of one's birth;*

Verse 2 *Better to go to the house of mourning Than to go to the house of feasting, For that is the end of all men; And the living will take it to heart.*

Verse 3 *Sorrow is better than laughter, For by a sad countenance the heart is made better.*

Verse 4 *The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, But the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.*

Verse 5 *It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise Than for a man to hear the song of fools.*

Verse 6 *For like the crackling of thorns under a pot, So is the laughter of the fool. This also is vanity.*

Verse 7 *Surely oppression destroys a wise man's reason, And a bribe debases the heart.*

Verse 8 *The end of a thing is better than its beginning; The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.*

Verse 9 *Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, For anger rests in the bosom of fools.*

Verse 10 *Do not say, "Why were the former days better than these?" For you do not inquire wisely concerning this.*

Verse 11 *Wisdom is good with an inheritance, And profitable to those who see the sun.*

Verse 12 *For wisdom is a defense as money is a defense, But the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it.*

Now, verse 1 regarding a good name is the answer to the question in the verse preceding it. That is what's good for man in his life, a good name, in other words, godly character. That's what's good.

One of the beatitudes says this, we read it:

Matt 5:6 *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.*

Those who do that, those who are driven with hungering and thirsting for righteousness, they're going to be the ones who have a good reputation. No they won't be perfect. But they will have a good reputation. No amount of anything precious can compare to a good reputation and by that I mean a godly reputation. Who would trade any amount of money for that?

The idea that viewing the day of one's death is better than one's birth is absolutely true – depending, of course, you know the birth of a child is a very hopeful event. We're all thrilled when we have a child or we have a grandchild or great grandchild, it's always an excitement because there's so much life ahead of that infant. And there are so many choices that will help to form the character of that child as it grows on and becomes an adult, et cetera.

But to get to the end of one's life as an overcomer, you know that's the key, isn't it? To get to the end of your life as an overcomer, having a good name before God, is far better. It's far better because it's the end product. It's the finished product. We could consider it an analogy – what's better, a bowl full of raw ingredients, a couple of eggs, some flour, whatever you put into a cake, what's better, the raw ingredients or a cake that's been baked till it's done just perfectly? It's wonderful in smell and taste. What's better? Obviously the end product.

The Apostle Paul once said, *'For me to live as Christ but to die is gain.'* Death is not a curse for an overcomer. It's just not. It's just a moment's reprieve. It's just a deep sleep until Christ's return.

For some who don't understand what we've been blessed to understand, death is a fearsome thing. It's not a pleasurable thing for us, but we don't fear it. We don't fear it in the way that some do. As Paul said, it's gain. It is gain.

Now the next thing Solomon said was, *'mourning is better than feasting and sorrow is better than laughter.'* You notice he didn't say that feasting and laughter was evil. He just said that the other is better.

Let's go to James chapter 4, we'll read verses 8-10. And again, the spiritually mature will recognize the truth in Solomon's words because James echoes the same thing right here. He says in verse 8:

James 4:8 *Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

Verse 9 *Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.*

Verse 10 *Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.*

Mourning and sorrow produce a particular thing. It brings us to godly repentance – a humbled attitude. And then, brethren, in that condition, God lifts us up. And there's nothing better than to be in that situation.

You know, another of the beatitudes is, *'blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted.'* God grants the gift of comfort. He lifts us up, He fills the need.

You know the thing that these proverbs that Solomon has listed point to are the blessings of strong meat. Correction is a great blessing! It is an awesome blessing! We can learn to avoid the pain, we can learn to give of ourselves and be happy about it. So it's a wonderful thing.

I'm not going to go through each of these proverbs in this section but I want us to take notice of the caution that Solomon gives us in verse 7. He said a wise man can lose his reason under oppression or be debased with a bribe. In other words, his character can, if it's possible, his character can be corrupted in very trying circumstances. This is Solomon's warning.

So how does it happen? And of course we know. We have a very clear picture in our minds, I'm sure, of how it happens.

Lucifer lost his good character when his wisdom was corrupted by pride. And again, this pride plays into the theme of the book of Ecclesiastes over and over and over. Brethren, the same is true for any one of us.

And again, let's do a hypothetical. Let's say that we're barely making ends meet. Many of us have been in that particular point in our lifetime. Often it's when our children are very little. We're establishing a new home, and so on and so forth.

But we can, at that point in our life, when we're struggling and we're working so hard and seemingly not getting ahead, we look around at others. And we see others who don't tithe; we see others who maybe climbed the economic ladder on the backs of others. In other words, they 'politicked' their way. They've cut down the other guy. They made it a competition to get to the top. They live in bigger homes, they drive better cars. They seem to always have enough cash on hand to do whatever it is they want to do.

And we can begin, if we allow it, to feel oppressed, as our previously outgoing thoughts begin to turn inward. It's kind of a slow process, isn't it? The more we think about it the more oppressed we feel and the more oppressed we feel the more we begin to despise God's Law. It's a very slow process. It's a wearing down, isn't it?

Before long we're ready to follow whatever path we must in order to get what 'self' wants. The spiritually immature who fail to see the blessings of strong meat, such as we see in the beatitudes can be destroyed when circumstances get difficult enough, you know, under persecution, you know, the blessing of forgiving others, of being merciful, when we say to ourselves, 'I can't do that', we're getting set to fail. And that's what Solomon is warning against.

Now in Ecclesiastes 7:10 he said, *don't say, "Why were the former days better than these?"* because it's not a wise question. And so again, he's prodding us to think. You know, the more I've studied Ecclesiastes and looked and thought about how Solomon does what he does in his teaching I think he's an amazing person in terms of getting the reader to think. He's prodding us.

So, why is this a foolish question? Well, it's because when we focus only on the pleasant part of the past it can discourage us, from concentrating, and from learning and from growing in the present and especially if we're in a trying circumstance in the present time. It can take our eyes off of that and derail us.

Let's go to Numbers 11 and we'll begin in verse 5. The children of Israel illustrate this for us very well. Verse 5 of Numbers 11:

Numbers 11:5 *We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic;*

Verse 6 *but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!"*

You can almost hear them crying. You can almost hear them just being big babies. They had been slaves in Egypt doing hard, forced labor. And they had been crying out to God for deliverance, and yet here they are, yearning for their past bondage. This is just one of numerous times that this occurred.

Their fickleness angered God, because He brought them out for a special purpose. Israel was brought out there to become a model people, as we well know, so that God could use them to teach other nations His way of life. And brethren, blessings upon blessings awaited them, blessings of wealth and material as we read in Deuteronomy 8, awaited them. The blessings, the strong meat blessings of the beatitudes awaited them – tremendous growth – and they were ready to trade it all in for fish and melons and onions and leeks. It seems incredible.

They needed to be single-minded about the present. That's what they needed. And had they done that they could have learned to fear God always, and to put their total trust in Him in all their trials. They could have had a truly abundant life had they charted that course.

The same is true for us, brethren, if we concentrate on learning and growing through every circumstance God puts in front of us instead of wishing for the past.

Let's go to Ecclesiastes chapter 7 again, this time verse 13. We'll begin there.

Ecclesiastes 7:13 *Consider the work of God; For who can make straight what He has made crooked?*

Verse 14 *In the day of prosperity be joyful, But in the day of adversity consider: Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, So that man can find out nothing that will come after him.*

Verse 15 *I have seen everything in my days of vanity: There is a just man who perishes in his righteousness, And there is a wicked man who prolongs life in his wickedness.*

Now Solomon, in verse 13 comes back again to one of life's fundamental principles. There is no one like God. There is no one who can fix everything and command the outcome of anything other than God. He, and He alone, has the power and the wisdom to chart us through the easy times and through the most unexpected of calamities that we may

encounter – that we, of ourselves, are powerless to fix. Both extremes are by His appointment.

Sometimes He chooses to allow a just man to suffer and die in his righteousness, just as He may allow an evil man length of days to do his wickedness. And we can look back in the history of the faithful and many of them were allowed to die in their righteousness.

God has a purpose in it all. He has a very specific purpose. Sometimes we can look back in life and we can say that we now see why that particular circumstance was allowed, why that particular trial was allowed, whatever it might have been. We can look back and see that. Maybe it humbled us; maybe it produced the right timing in our life for some other circumstance to take place, whatever the case may be.

As Paul said, *'we know that all things work together to good for those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.'* We were called for a purpose and every circumstance we live or perhaps die through is for a specific purpose. Some things we're not going to understand until the resurrection because we're not God, and that's the point.

Solomon is cautioning us, brethren, against carelessly passing judgment on God or on His character for the circumstance that He allows us to face for our benefit. We don't understand, sometimes, why would He allow suffering? There's a purpose in it. Why would He allow whatever it is that He allows, when it's an unpleasant thing. We dare not assume or pass judgment on God any way.

What Solomon doesn't directly say but is inferred is that as we experience the things that leave us wondering why, we must faithfully trust our Father. And we'll experience many things like that in our lifetime that leaves us wondering why. And yet we must faithfully trust that our Father knows what He's doing.

And again remember that Israel failed for one reason. They failed for unbelief. They gave God a vote of no confidence. That's something we dare not do. That's what Solomon is cautioning us against.

Verse 16 in Ecclesiastes 7:

Verse 16 *Do not be overly righteous, Nor be overly wise: Why should you destroy yourself?*

Verse 17 *Do not be overly wicked, Nor be foolish: Why should you die before your time?*

Verse 18 *It is good that you grasp this, And also not remove your hand from the other; For he who fears God will escape them all.*

Now as you can well imagine, the commentaries vary some on these verses. But it's really not very difficult to comprehend the meaning here, based on the fact that Solomon consistently comes to sound conclusions and he continues to do it throughout the remainder of the book, as well, he is on course. He is on course.

And so, you have to ask yourself, given that, how does anyone become 'overly righteous'? God is perfectly righteous. So, does that make Him an extremist because He's perfectly righteous?

He's also perfectly wise. And so is God, somehow therefore, out of balance? Is He doing something wrong? Well, you know, those are nonsense questions, obviously. It's easy to see that Solomon isn't talking about genuine righteous or wisdom. He's talking about carnal, human perceptions of these things.

Go to Luke chapter 16 and we'll read verse 15. You know, before Christ's exposure of the Pharisees, they were largely viewed as righteous within their community. No doubt they were considered wise in their community. In verse 15 Christ says this:

Luke 16:15 *And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.*

They were overly righteous in their own eyes and in the eyes of those who followed them. And except that they would repent of this they would destroy themselves, ultimately. So would any of us who follow in that pattern.

So it's easy to see what Solomon is talking about. But why does he say don't be overly wicked? How does anybody not be overly wicked? And, of course, because we just answered the question before, we understand we're asking the same question with different words, aren't we – the same thing as concerning righteousness? The answer is also the same.

He's talking about carnal, human perceptions of wickedness. In other words, it's about us determining for ourselves what is wicked and what is not wicked and ignoring what God says.

Go to Mark chapter 7. Here Christ is speaking to the Pharisees again. Mark 7, let's begin in verse 8:

Mark 7:8 *For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men — the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.*

The Pharisees had their own lists of dos and don'ts concerning righteousness. They had carnal perceptions of righteousness, things that they came up with. It had nothing to do with God.

Mark 7:9 *He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.*

Verse 10 *For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.'*

Verse 11 *But you say, 'If a man says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban" — ' (that is, a gift to God),*

Verse 12 *then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother,*

Verse 13 *making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do."*

They rejected God's Law which determines what is wicked and what isn't wicked. Only God's Law can do that. To **not** honor one's parents is wicked according to God, but not in a mind that determines wickedness for itself. And that is what being overly wicked looks like – a mind that determines it for itself.

And Christ said *many such things you do*. In other words there are lots of ways we can be overly wicked. And that's why Solomon said that we need to fully grasp this concept and to fear God, because if we fear God we won't be overly righteous or overly wicked. There is genuine righteousness, genuine wisdom. There's genuine wickedness and foolishness that we do need to be very concerned about, only according to God's definition and not to man's.

Let's go back to Ecclesiastes now, chapter 7 and we'll pick it up in verse 19.

Ecclesiastes 7:19 *Wisdom strengthens the wise More than ten rulers of the city.*

Now wisdom, this again we view in the context that we've just been discussing. Wisdom according to God gives strength to the wise more than ten mighty men, who make their own definitions of what's righteous, or what's wise, or wicked or foolish. There's only one way that leads to life. That's what Solomon's message is all about. It's God's way, not our way. Verse 20:

Verse 20 *For there is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin.*

Now this is spoken in the context of verse 16 regarding not being overly righteous, in other words, not being self righteous. Among men only Christ, as we well know, walked this earth and did not sin, none of the rest of us. But given the understanding then, he continues with the next thought, verse 21:

Verse 21 *Also do not take to heart everything people say, Lest you hear your servant cursing you.*

Verse 22 *For many times, also, your own heart has known That even you have cursed others.*

An awareness of our own shortcomings, of our own weaknesses, our own slippages from time to time should impact – it must impact – the way that we deal with others.

There is an occasion, there's a proper time and place for Matthew 18, but it's not in a self-righteous attitude. It's in a very merciful attitude. Brethren, many, many things we can simply be patient and kind with, just as God has been with us. It goes back to what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13. Love bears all things. It believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. That's what Solomon's talking about. Verse 23:

Verse 23 *All this I have proved by wisdom .I said, "I will be wise";But it was far from me.*

'All this' probably refers to from verse 15 on down, all the things he has seen in the days of his vanity. The things he'd learned he set down as rules of his own conduct. But he fell far short from where he wanted to be.

It's almost like reading the Apostle Paul in Romans 7. *'I do the things that I don't want to do.'* And that's essentially what Solomon is saying. Verse 24:

Verse 24 *As for that which is far off and exceedingly deep, Who can find it out?*

Verse 25 *I applied my heart to know, To search and seek out wisdom and the reason of things, To know the wickedness of folly, Even of foolishness and madness.*

Even with the level of wisdom that God gave Solomon (and He gave him more wisdom than any man has ever had since, only Christ had more) – but he still couldn't grasp the why, the how, the where of everything. God didn't give him all that much.

The same is true for us, brethren. Our walk in this physical life is one of faith. We have to trust God even when we can't understand the why, the when and the how. We have to trust God. We can't see and know every answer. But if we don't cease trusting God we eventually will see how all things work for good, see how the plan was all laid out and we'll see the ultimate wisdom of our Father in the end. Verse 26:

Verse 26 *And I find more bitter than death The woman whose heart is snares and nets, Whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God shall escape from her. But the sinner shall be trapped by her.*

Verse 27 *"Here is what I have found," says the Preacher, "Adding one thing to the other to find out the reason,*

Verse 28 *Which my soul still seeks but I cannot find :One man among a thousand I have found, But a woman among all these I have not found.*

Now, these verses here are perhaps the most difficult to explain in the book of Ecclesiastes. Why does Solomon come to the conclusion he does here concerning women? Was he a misogynist? Was he a hater of women? Was he a distruster of women?

We can look at his writings in the book of Proverbs to shed some light. In chapter 1 he uses a woman to personify wisdom. That's an incredible thing.

Proverbs 1:20 *She raises her voice in the open squares.*

Verse 21 *She cries out in the chief concourses, At the openings of the gates in the city She speaks her words:*

In chapter 2 he says this of Lady Wisdom:

Prov 2:4 *If you seek her as silver, And search for her as for hidden treasures;*

In chapter 4 he speaks of Lady Wisdom's goodness and faithfulness. He said:

Prov 4:6 *Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you; Love her, and she will keep you.*

Verse 8 *Exalt her, and she will promote you; She will bring you honor, when you embrace her.*

Verse 9 *She will place on your head an ornament of grace; A crown of glory she will deliver to you.*

Solomon says a lot about Lady Wisdom – very, very complimentary, very faithful and good.

In chapter 31 he describes all the outstanding qualities of a virtuous woman. That's something that is kind of a hallmark. It's kind of like 1 Corinthians 13 when we think about love. And when we think about the good qualities of a woman we go immediately to Proverbs 31. It's Solomon's words, Solomon's writings.

So we see no evidence of a hatred of women.

Let's turn to Proverbs chapter 9 now. We'll read verses 13-18.

Proverbs 9:13 *A foolish woman is clamorous; She is simple, and knows nothing.*

Verse 14 *For she sits at the door of her house, On a seat by the highest places of the city,*

Verse 15 *To call to those who pass by, Who go straight on their way:*

Verse 16 *"Whoever is simple, let him turn in here"; And as for him who lacks understanding, she says to him,*

Verse 17 *"Stolen water is sweet, And bread eaten in secret is pleasant."*

Verse 18 *But he does not know that the dead are there, That her guests are in the depths of hell.*

Now these verses reflect the message as we saw in Ecclesiastes 7:26. Solomon isn't picking on women. He simply didn't find one in a thousand that he might have termed a Proverbs 31 example. And of course, when we look at Solomon's life, we can easily conclude that he might have looked at a different pool than you and I have. We can see some soundness of thought there.

The fact that he found one man in a thousand is **not** a great stat. Both are dismal. They're both dismal. What it boils down to is this, brethren. Wisdom and foolishness don't respect gender. They don't respect gender. Though there aren't many, both wise men and women exist.

Now let's go to the final verse in chapter 7, verse 29.

Verse 29 *Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright, But they have sought out many schemes."*

This is the carry-on conclusion to the fact that wise men and women are scarce. Some of our schemes are obvious, brethren – obvious wickedness or foolishness. Some are self-proclaimed righteousness and wickedness. All of these things lead to death.

So in this study we've seen that blessings aren't always what they seem. And that God gives us the power to see and appreciate blessings on a mature level. That's a very wonderful blessing.

We've also seen that we must evaluate ourselves properly; we must take a hard look. And that we must evaluate human-kind properly.

That brings us to a close for this evening. Next time we'll take on chapters 8, 9 and possibly 10. We'll see how it progresses.

I hope you all have a good night and a very pleasant Sabbath day tomorrow. Good night.