

Ecclesiastes Part 4
Marshall Stiver
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Now in our last study in Ecclesiastes we made it through chapters 6 and 7. And tonight we'll plan to go through chapters 8 and 9. I had originally planned to go through 8, 9 and 10, but I found that it was just too lengthy, too much material. And so this study tonight may be just a little bit shorter than normal. But that's what we'll do for tonight, chapters 8 and 9.

We've been recapping this as we begin each study and so we're going to do the same this evening just to keep the thoughts fresh in our mind.

Initially when we began the book we saw that Solomon got farther and farther away from God. And of course there is the well-chronicled sin that he engaged in, in his life after God had given him all this tremendous wisdom that he did. But we saw that he became increasingly less and less satisfied with his life as he strayed from God, as he committed the sins that he did.

That's why he said "*vanity of vanities, all is vanity*" - because his life had in fact become purposeless. It was an empty life. It was not fulfilling in any way, because it was no longer a life that was centered on God. In other words, he was living - with the incredible mind that God had given him - he was living with a self-centered mind. Not focused on God as he should have been.

But as he came to himself, he saw very clearly that it is God who has power over everything that we experience in life. Solomon came to see it in his life. He made the statement in regard to all of men. And He also explained that what God does is, that He humbles us through the experiences that we go through in life. We all go through many, many different experiences. From the time that we're young until the time that we die we're in this humbling process. That God's humbling us so He can work and shape our minds to point He wants them to be.

Solomon stressed that we won't find contentment until we fully believe that and accept it. That is that God has the power over every experience that we experience in life and that He is in fact allowing the things we go through in order to humble us.

That's what we have to fully believe and fully accept if we have to want to be able to find joy and contentment in this life.

We also saw that Solomon would draw sound biblical conclusions and then relate various observances in life that seem to contradict that particular biblical principle. He did this and he continues to do it time after time throughout the book of Ecclesiastes.

And he brings up very common things that we've all seen so that we can all easily relate. There seem to be contradictions to the biblical principle. And he does this for the purpose of making us think.

Now let's go ahead and begin tonight in chapter 8. And Solomon concludes in chapter 7, I think we probably will recall, by saying how rare it was to find a truly wise man or a wise woman. And so then he says this at the beginning of chapter 8. He says:

Ecclesiastes 8:1 *Who is like a wise man? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? (Who's able to interpret something that normal men can't do?) A man's wisdom makes his face shine, And the sternness of his face is changed.*

So, what he's saying here is – incredibly true as we all know – that wise people are rare are very noticeable, very noticeable. They stand out because they are people that God can inspire, that God can inspire their minds to understand things that they wouldn't have understood – deep things, difficult things to understand. And He can direct a wise person's mind.

We can relate to what he said here. When a wise person is able to resolve a very complex situation, a difficult situation, they are able to resolve that matter, they can have a very visible effect on their countenance, on their face, on that person's face.

Let's turn to James chapter 3. James here describes some of the qualities of God's wisdom. You think about these qualities and you think about how that would appear on a person's face, that's not a hard thing to think of.

James 3 and in verse 17:

James 3:17 *But the wisdom that is from above (in other words, God's wisdom not the wisdom of the world) is first pure, (think about that on someone's face) pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.*

You think of that in an expression on somebody's face. That's a very different sort of expression. All these characteristics of wisdom would change the outward appearance of a person's face from stern (perhaps we would be stern normally – living in the world that we live in we can certainly understand that), it can change the expression on someone's face to where it kind of expresses an inner light.

We know what I'm talking about. It's a look that expresses confidence in God. It's kind of a quiet confidence that's in God, and that stands out. We see plenty of confidence among men, don't we – you know, cockiness, pride. But when there's a quiet assurance of confidence in God, it stands out.

Let's continue on here in with verse 2. Solomon goes on to give wise counsel in dealing with worldly authority that's over us.

Ecclesiastes 8:2 *I say, "Keep the king's commandment for the sake of your oath to God.*

Verse 3 *Do not be hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand for an evil thing, for he does whatever pleases him."*

Verse 4 *Where the word of a king is, there is power; And who may say to him, "What are you doing?"*

Verse 5 *He who keeps his command will experience nothing harmful; And a wise man's heart discerns both time and judgment,*

Verse 6 *Because for every matter there is a time and judgment, Though the misery of man increases greatly.*

Solomon is referring to dealing with a king, but in principle he could have talked about dealing with any civil authority, any authority in the world. He could have been talking about a person's employer, anyone who has power over us in some sort of a way.

There is wisdom in not just spontaneously questioning the person who has whatever level of power they do have over us.

In our culture today, and I know we all know this very, very well, the first response, the most common thing is to just blurt something out spontaneously, because in our culture we all think, we've been trained to think through the political system, that we have the right. Of course, maybe we do have the right from a civil perspective but it's not always wisdom. It's not always wisdom to say those things, to say the first thing that comes to our mind.

Even if we know the right way or a better way to administer a thing – oftentimes that's the case, maybe we do – confronting the one in authority is not the way to go. That is not the thing to do. A confrontation, that word in itself would cause us to think of an adversary, an adversary confronts us, gets in our face – that sort of a thing. That's something we would expect from an opponent, and not someone we'd be considered to be loyal to.

The person who's viewed as loyal is often viewed that way simply because they don't confront. That's why they're viewed as loyal, because they don't confront. It's not that they don't ever present other ideas or solutions, they do. A wise person does.

But they wait for the right time and the right judgment, and then it's offered as something from a true friend. It's not as an opponent or an adversary. But it's offered as something from someone who truly is loyal to you, a friend.

In **Proverbs 27:17**, Solomon wrote, *“As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.”*

The right way or a better way coming kindly from a friend always has the most hope of being heard. If a wise person wants to be heard, they need to present themselves in that way.

The misery of a person increases greatly when no regard is given to time and judgment, you know, if we just blurt something out, we can create enemies, we can get into a big mess without being wise about how we do it.

Now Solomon was writing here about living wisely in a carnal world. We have to remember that's the context that he's looking at in this case. We need to add two additional things, I think, that should be said in regard to this.

Sometimes there is no right time, or I should say maybe there is a right time, to offer the recourse to those in authority.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego couldn't both obey Nebuchadnezzar and God. They didn't have a choice; they had to say something straight up, didn't they? They didn't have a chance to pick a different time. They had to say it when they said it. And so they obeyed God, which is of course what we have to do.

But the thing is they stated their case matter-of-factly. If you go to the account you can see that they didn't get in Nebuchadnezzar's face. They just stated what they had to do, to the king, and of course Nebuchadnezzar did take it as confrontation. He got boiling mad, no pun intended, considering the plan he had for them. He became furious. But, none the less, there are times when we have to say something.

Let's go to Acts chapter 4, verse 13. The point I'm trying to make here is that, there is a point at which when a situation goes south, when a situation goes bad, converted people have to say something but they should not respond as the world would respond. They should do it wisely. Verse 13:

Acts 4:13 *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.*

Verse 14 *And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.*

Verse 15 *But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves,*

Verse 16 *saying, "What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.*

Verse 17 *But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name."*

Verse 18 *So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.*

Verse 19 *But Peter and John answered and said to them, (and again, look at the tenor of what they have to say here) "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge.*

Verse 20 *For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."*

Verse 21 *So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done.*

Peter and John did not respond arrogantly. They didn't get "in the face" of the council. They didn't get their dig in, as the world would. What they said was very even, it was very even-toned, it was very matter-of-factly. And brethren, that should be our response when a situation offers no chance for time or judgment. When we just simply have to stand up and say something. That's how it should be done.

The other additional thing we should bring out is that, among the converted –those who bear the fruit of God's Holy Spirit – is that we're to submit to one another in the fear of God whether it's a member to a minister or vice versa, whether it's a wife to a husband or vice versa. We are to submit to one another.

We understand that there are varying roles of authority within the Church and in the family but as members of one another we submit to each other in the fear of God. That is to say that we submit to our Father's standard, regardless of who brings it to us kindly. In the world it probably wouldn't be a great thing if certain people brought a matter to an authority no matter who it was.

But among God's people, brethren, we should be able to receive instruction or correction even from a humble little child, one from among us. And I know I've given this example before but I can recall in the raising of our children that one of our daughters corrected me one time. She brought to me a godly principle. And we told our daughters, you can bring things to mom and dad if you do it respectfully. If you see that there's something we need correction and you bring it respectfully, we'll listen. She was right. She brought the godly principle and I had to listen because it was right.

But again Solomon in this particular case is referring to what we encounter in the world. I just added that on.

Let's go to verse 7 of Ecclesiastes 8, verse 7.

Ecclesiastes 8:7 *For he does not know what will happen; So who can tell him when it will occur?*

Verse 8 *No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, And no one has power in the day of death. There is no release from that war, And wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it.*

Previously, Solomon has stressed exercising wisdom in dealing with those who have power over us. But now his point is that no one, whether it's the king or subject, or as we pointed out, the employer or the employee, or the minister or member, or the husband or wife, no one has power over death.

All conflicts or tensions—and these should not remain among the brotherhood—but all of these things should be kept in perspective. We're all powerless in the face of death. Only spirit beings are unaffected.

Verse 9 *All this I have seen, and applied my heart to every work that is done under the sun: There is a time in which one man rules over another to his own hurt.*

Again Solomon is pointing out the obvious, at least to those who are thinking. These are things we've seen. This is something we've all seen. There is a lot of craziness associated with the arrogance in man. Sometimes those in power for instance, and this is very common throughout the history of mankind, those in power will impose such high taxes on the people that business people can no longer hire the labor. They can't afford to pay the price for labor any more so that they can stay in business.

And so what happens as a result? Well, first of all the labor force suffers. Those laboring people are unable to find paying jobs because the taxation is so high. The business people can't afford it so the business people vanish and when that happens the king's revenues dry up and his nation becomes weak in a very hungry world because this isn't the Kingdom of God at this time. This is the world under Satan's sway. This king, this ruler has obviously ruled abusively and he's done it to his own hurt. It's crazy, and you can see it all over the world. That sort of a ruler is ruled by the way the natural man thinks by what seems right to him. 'It seems like this ought to be the way to make it

work. Surely it'll work this way' and of course, it doesn't. This is the crazy world, brethren, that the wise must also live in. We live in the world but we're to come out of it. We still have to deal with the world.

But the fact is, we can't walk by the sight of our eyes. We have to walk by faith. This is one of the sub-themes that comes out in what Solomon has to say.

Verse 10 *Then I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of holiness, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done. This also is vanity.*

Sometimes evil or unjust people of power have monuments raised to them and when they die they are buried with honor. These things are very, very common. We can look back through history. But when they're gone, when they're dead they are soon forgotten except for in the history books. But in the day to day life of people, people don't think about them, and so, as Solomon said "what an empty and meaningless existence." In other words, it's vanity, it's just vanity.

Verse 11 *Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.*

Now, this is a statement of truth, a very obvious truth again. As a young person I use to marvel at this truth that Solomon has just stated. He didn't say it here, but of course he says this throughout the book, but this is vanity, this also is vanity. It's meaningless. It's worthless.

I grew up in a family, and I was very privileged to do so, where evil was dealt with speedily – and by evil I mean wrong behavior, wrong attitudes, that sort of thing. Among my siblings and I, it was dealt with speedily.

Now, initially, yes there was some anger. That's something that my parents worked at overcoming and did overcome through the course of their lifetime. But the vast majority of the correction came speedily. It wasn't put off and it came in love. It didn't take a lot of years of life in my childhood to see that this was a really good thing. This was a wonderful thing. Home life was very enjoyable. It wasn't tension filled. It was enjoyable because my parents had learned to bring justice speedily where it needed to be.

The reason that it was enjoyable is that not only was evil dealt with quickly but the necessary understanding as to why good is good and why evil is evil was explained over and over again. As we were going, as my parents would work with us they'd explain these things to us and so it soaked in.

And so I soon marveled at why it wasn't that evil is always dealt with quickly in the world around us. It used to puzzle me as a child seeing how much nicer, how much more enjoyable life is where there is the quick dealing with such things. Why wasn't it this way? It wasn't until more recent years that the reason became very obvious to me.

It's very simply, a mind that's never been humbled by swift justice, because that does humble a person, a mind that's never been humbled by swift justice and that's also tasted the fruit of it; you know, you taste the fruit of swift justice in the way that my parents delivered it to my siblings and I

– if a person has not experienced that then they're repulsed by anything that doesn't promote self will. That, of course is what we see in the world today. That's another message in itself.

But now after this dialogue about the upside-down world that we live in, the teacher comes back to the real truth about it.

Verse 12 *Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him.*

Verse 13 *But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he does not fear before God.*

Despite all the physical evidence to the contrary, Solomon is stating the truth very confidently here, very, very confidently. It's not a confidence in himself, this is a confidence in God. This is what he had spent a lot of his life having to learn.

The faithful know without question, that regardless of the insanity we see around us and the pressures that are consequently brought upon us, brought to bear in our lives, that a resurrection to eternal life awaits those who fear God. That's what we have full confidence in and we understand that.

Solomon continues, verse 14:

Verse 14 *There is a vanity which occurs on earth, that there are just men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked; again, there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.*

This is something that tugs at every last one of us. I know it does. The fact is, that sometimes evil men win, they dominate - being evil and ruthless – and good men lose. And as Solomon says, this is vanity. It's meaningless in terms of the faithful coming undone by it.

What do I mean by that? What I'm saying is, the faithful should not be undone by it because it's a meaningless thing; it's a meaningless tactic that Satan throws in our face. He amplifies this illusion, it's not really an illusion; he amplifies this fact to us, doesn't he? Sometimes the good guys just don't win on the physical level. Sometimes the bad guys do, and quite frequently.

But to the faithful that is as meaningless as a puff of wind. It's not always that way every single instance in our minds but that's what we come to – we come to understand that because the God fearing are the only ones who win in the end. That's what we have full confidence in.

And so given the state of things and this is the real state of things, Solomon continues in verse 15.

Verse 15 *So I commended enjoyment, because a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry; for this will remain with him in his labor all the days of his life which God gives him under the sun.*

Given that we must live wisely, Solomon therefore commends enjoyment or mirth as the *King James Version* renders it. The Hebrew word that they're translated from is *simchah*. The word is applied to not just to the pleasures of the physical senses – a person reading this might think that - but it also applies to religious joy, which makes it a whole lot more meaningful, joy being one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

So even though we live in a thoroughly mixed up world where evil men are allowed, on occasion, and increasingly so, they're allowed to triumph over God-fearing ones, we should stir up the Holy Spirit and enjoy all we can each day that God gives us. They don't have the Holy Spirit, they don't know what the future holds. They can't truly find joy in the things that we can find joy in.

This makes me think about little children who have grown up in a household where the parents were very poor, perhaps and they could barely rub two nickels together. They didn't have spare money. Maybe children of neighboring couples had all sorts of the latest gadgets and the greatest of toys, et cetera. Perhaps you've seen circumstances like this. I know I have. I've seen different families in this situation.

Regardless of that, the children, without all those things can take some of the simplest things, and I've always marveled at this, a cardboard box. A cardboard box with a blanket or a throw rug or something of that sort that's put over it and suddenly that cardboard box is transformed into anything they want it to become. It can be a doll house, it can become a fort. It can become a hiding place. It can become whatever the imagination can come up with.

I've see children in such situations spend hours and hours of joy and contentment in that cardboard box. It's an amazing thing. I've seen this happen in various homes where the children knew that they were really loved by their parents. That's where I've seen it the most.

Solomon didn't give this example but it's the same thing in essence, isn't it? We live in a world, parts of the world at least, where there are great excesses and those things are fervently pursued by people vainly trying to fill the emptiness they feel inside because they've lost contact with their Father. I'm not talking about their physical father; I'm talking about God the Father. They've lost contact and so consequently people try to fill it with things, and so on and so forth.

We are so privileged, the God-fearing are so privileged to know our Father and to know his unbreakable faithfulness, no matter how it looks, His faithfulness is unbreakable toward His children, so that despite the circumstances He allows in our lives, we can truly find some joy in every day that we live. Whether it's much that we have or very little, whether our circumstance is dire or whether it's okay, we can find joy.

Verse 16 *When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth, even though one sees no sleep day or night,*

Verse 17 *then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. For though a man labors to discover it—and certainly Solomon did, without a question—yet he will not find it; moreover, though a wise man attempts to know it, he will not be able to find it.*

The faithful are all confronted, we're all confronted, with the question of 'why does God work His work in us the way He does'. Why does He allow the circumstances in our lives the way that He does? I know that every last one of us wonder these things. Sometimes we wonder them frequently. Why does He take us on the roller-coaster ride that we go through in life? Maybe it's a day, maybe it's a week, a month, a year, maybe it's a decade of difficulties and then He'll give us a period of smooth sailing. Why? Why does He do that?

Brethren, we already know because it's been written for our good, for our understanding. The trying of our faith produces patience and patience produces perfection. It'll bring us to that point of perfection over time.

We also know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who fear God, who are the called according to His purpose. These are the things we know.

So, Solomon is in essence saying the same things. The faithful, the wise, need to trust that God will work His work and they should enjoy the good and godly things that they have in life to whatever degree it is that He blesses them with them.

Let's go on to chapter 9 now, verse 1.

Ecclesiastes 9:1 *For I considered all this in my heart, so that I could declare it all: that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God. People know neither love nor hatred by anything they see before them.*

Verse 2 *All things come alike to all: One event happens to the righteous and the wicked; To the good, the clean, and the unclean; To him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As is the good, so is the sinner; He who takes an oath as he who fears an oath.*

Verse 3 *This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing happens to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.*

Solomon is simply continuing his thought process from chapter 8, because we see some of the same theme being reiterated here. Whether people are foolish or whether they're wise, righteous or not, they are in God's hands and good and bad circumstances come into all lives. Everyone's life has got circumstances.

So that if you looked at only the physical evidence, I mean if that's all you were looking at, how could you tell the difference between good and bad people?

With just the physical evidence, how can we know if God loves us or hates us because what we see in the world around us is basically the same thing we see within the Church. Many, many very, very similar circumstances, trials that people go through. On a physical level we can't tell the difference and I said on a physical level we can't tell the difference.

And so we have to ask the question, was God only smiling down on those He stopped the mouths of lions for? Are those the only ones that He loved? Was He only pleased with those that He delivered

in battle or with those through whom He did great miracles, perhaps miracles of healing? Are those the only ones that He loved and that He was pleased with?

Would we conclude that He was displeased with Paul because He let him suffer with his physical affliction instead of healing him? Was He displeased with those believers who were stoned to death or cut in half? Is that why He allowed that to happen? Did He not love them?

On a physical level you can't see a difference between the clean or unclean based on what they experience in God's hands. You can't see a difference.

Let's go to 1 John chapter 3 and in verse 10. The difference brethren, is readily seen, as we know, on the spiritual level and that's where the difference is.

1 John 3:10 *In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: (they are made known) Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.*

The difficulties, brethren, the easy going, the turbulence we go through in God's hands, doesn't reveal who He loves. What we do is what matters to our Father, what's inside our mind and what comes out in terms of actions. The faithful practice righteousness, whether in or out of a trial.

Does it mean we do it perfectly? No, we get back on track all the time and we all know that. We get back on track. We try to maintain the standard whether we're in a trial or whether we're not. The distinction of having faith is what pleases God. That's the distinction, isn't it, that's how we know if God is pleased, if we have living faith. He can't be pleased without it.

And John didn't miss the opportunity to teach here. To just say, "*Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God,*" was a complete statement in itself. It was a complete statement regarding faith, without a question.

But he deliberately added to it, and he did it, brethren, because just like Solomon he was teaching, and John's teaching here. He added, "*Nor is he who does not love his brother.*" What he's saying is "The children of God can't really practice righteousness unless they love their brother – their faith isn't living without that." He was driving home the point.

Why would he say that, brethren? I know, we know. Because humanly we want to say, "Yes I love my brother or I love my sister, every one of them. I love them." That's what we want to think about ourselves and that's how we would like to have others to think about us or to have others talk about us.

Do we take the actions of love, filling each other's needs? That's what John gets into in that book, encouraging each other, forgiving each other communicating openly and personally with each other in all sorts of trials and tests, and on and on it goes. The doing of these things is love. It's practicing righteousness. And brethren, that is what living faith looks like.

That is what pleases God. That's the person that God loves and we can know it, whether we're the one being encouraged because we're in a tough situation or whether we're the one who's doing the encouraging, it makes no difference.

Now, regarding the fact that on the physical level, it's hard for men to know who's loved by God or not, Solomon said it was an evil. Was He saying, God was evil because both pleasant and unpleasant things happen to those who believe God and those who don't? Is that what he was saying?

Not at all, it simply troubled him or perhaps frustrated him, because it was so. He knew the fact that any person could see death comes to all, that fact – death comes to everybody – anybody can see it and they can come to that conclusion. What does it have the potential of doing? It has the potential of hardening an unbeliever. It encourages that person to do evil when they see that they, just like their righteous neighbor, are only eventually going to die. Why should they seek to obey God? Why should they fear God?

Sometimes, and this is a huge understatement and I know we'll all agree with that, sometimes we get frustrated too by what we see going on around us. Who doesn't? We all do. Political decisions are made sometimes that hurt a nation, because they're not godly decisions. They are evil decisions. That bothers us from time to time. Sometimes we fixate on it, we talk about it.

And then we realign in our thoughts and we realize 'nope, you're getting off the track here.' We realign our thoughts with the fact that we are solidly in God's hands despite what we see around us, no matter how crazy it is. And so we get back on track and then the frustration evaporates. We're really no different than Solomon in that at all. We get frustrated, too.

Let's go to verse 4.

Ecclesiastes 9:4 *But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.*

The phrase in the verse just ahead of this verse, in verse 3, "*under the sun*" is used in numerous places throughout this chapter and throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, about 24 times in the book of Ecclesiastes, and it's a very important phrase. '*Under the sun*' is the place where vanity reigns. It's the present physical world which is under the sway of darkness. In other words, it's under Satan's sway.

So, in this present world under the sun, that's the world that Solomon's talking about now – this present evil world – the living still have hope. They still have hope. The word translated hope here is used only three times in the Old Testament and its exact meaning is somewhat uncertain.

It doesn't seem to describe the hope associated with the resurrection, as it relates to the hope here under the sun. In other words, it relates to hope we have in this physical lifetime, in this present evil world.

So, Solomon says, "*a living dog is better than a dead lion.*" That kind of a statement, as with many of the Proverbs for instance, it sounds odd to us today. But in his time dogs were considered scavengers. They were not considered to be noble creatures. They were kind of contemptible;

they were scavengers. Today we look at dogs in a different way, at least in this part of the world. They are considered to be man's best friend, probably because men can't get along with men. People can't get along with people.

And so man's best friend is a dog and so now in our country today and in this kind of culture we have here, who knows how many millions of dollars, or perhaps billions, are spent on dog food and doggie essentials – the doggie-essential market. It's an incredible amount of money.

But lions, on the other hand, in Solomon's time were seen as very noble creatures, very, very noble. So we can see what he's talking about. Whereas today, and this is just an aside, all creatures pretty much are considered noble, aren't they. I mean, look at it. We have interstate systems that are put on hold because of the snail dodger. The logging industry is destroyed in the Northwest over a spotted owl.

Today, almost all creatures are worshipped. And that's what Paul talks about in Romans 1. And at same time, human babies are aborted, they're murdered at an appalling rate. That's the world we live in. That's an aside, obviously.

But his point here, the point that Solomon is trying to make is that no matter how ignoble, life is better than death, because there is still hope. Life is better than death, on a physical level, because there's still hope. Maybe things will get better.

Verse 5 *For the living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing, And they have no more reward, For the memory of them is forgotten.*

Verse 6 *Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; Nevermore will they have a share In anything done under the sun.*

In other words, once you're dead, you're dead. That's as simple as it can be put. That's what Solomon says here. This is one of the passages in the Bible that disproves the concept of the immortal soul. Now once you're dead, you're dead.

Turn to Psalm 146. Here is another place we can look to. In verse 3, this is David:

Psalm 146:3 *Do not put your trust in princes, Nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help.*

Now we can't trust men, put our trust in men, because we're not immortal. We don't have any power over the circumstances of life, no real power.

Verse 4 *His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; In that very day his plans perish.*

It's over. It's as over as it can be. So what he's saying is we are to trust God, whose plans never perish because He is immortal.

So, when we die, any hope we that we had under the sun in this physical lifetime and in this physical world, dies, it perishes with us. If we had hopes of building something or doing whatever the case may be, when we die it's over.

There is a tremendous hope later but not in this present evil world. That's the difference. And that's what Solomon was referring to. We have hope in the resurrection but he was talking about this present evil world.

Verse 7 of Ecclesiastes 9; let's go back to Ecclesiastes 9:

Ecclesiastes 9:7 *Go, eat your bread with joy, And drink your wine with a merry heart; For God has already accepted your works.*

Verse 8 *Let your garments always be white, And let your head lack no oil.*

He's saying in essence, don't perplex yourself with all of the seeming, not just seeming, but all of the contradictions and anomalies that we see in this present physical life. Don't perplex yourself with that. That's vain, that's worthless. Continue, this is what is worthwhile, continue to trust that God is doing His work and that He knows exactly how to resolve all matters in their proper time, for the extreme best consequences of both us and all other people, those who have never been called yet.

So, in that faith, which is acceptable to God, enjoy your physical life as much as you possibly can in your own circumstances. That's what Solomon is saying. And of course, Joy is a gift from God. It's a fruit of the Holy Spirit, as we mentioned earlier.

The white garments Solomon spoke of were typically worn by the Jews on Feast days and they were emblems of joy and purity, innocence. And a good name was likened to the oil of anointing so that blessing could be called down upon that person. So these are good things.

The faithful are to live a happy and godly life in the midst of all the craziness that we experience under the sun, in other words, in this crazy physical life that we go through.

Verse 9, he continues:

Verse 9 *Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun.*

Verse 10 *Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.*

I think it's good to read these two verses together, although verse 10 applies to virtually everything that we do in life. It makes no difference – physical, spiritual, mental – we're to do whatever we do, with all our might. We're not to be 'asleep at the wheel' so to speak.

I like to read these two together, because to live joyfully with your one wife all the days of your temporary/physical life requires something, doesn't it? It requires effort. It requires diligent, continual effort – and vice versa, from a wife toward her husband.

Let's turn to Proverbs 18, speaking of the effort, this is what we see here. Proverbs 18 and in verse 22.

Proverbs 18:22 *He who finds a wife finds a good thing, And obtains favor from the LORD.*

And so, to find a wife means, obviously, that we have to diligently seek for one in the first place and to seek, not just seek diligently but to do it wisely. Seek wisely and wisely means to first and foremost seek God's direction and guidance with all of your might. Be engaged in searching for and meeting a potential mate but be fully open to God's will in the matter. That's the important thing.

I can remember back in my single years, it seems like a long time ago. If you do have a good marriage it seems like you can't remember being single. But I can remember some of it and I do remember searching for a number of years without success and then it slowly soaked into my mind that I was seeking according to my own will. Probably the Holy Spirit led me to that, obviously.

In other words, I was seeking according to what I could see. I was walking by sight. Now, it turns out that a particular young lady had been searching by sight, as well. We had both been searching by sight and not by faith. We both had come to the conclusion, unbeknownst to the other, we hadn't even met each other, and we came to the conclusion that yes, we needed to seek and we needed to do it diligently, but not by sight.

We both began praying that God would show us who His pick was for us. It wasn't very long after that, my wife and I met each other and guess what? When we first met, we were not impressed by each other's physical appearance. To me, my wife is a gorgeous lady. I don't really know what she thinks of me.

But, the fact is, we were not impressed by looks. We had to get to know the person inside. And that was the thing that began to work with our minds and then later the physical attraction became a part of it as well.

Let's notice too, chapter 19 while we're here, verse 14:

Proverbs 19:14 *Houses and riches are an inheritance from fathers, (this is what fathers will give us, physical fathers) But a prudent wife (or a prudent mate, let's say because we all seek, each of us seek) is from the LORD.*

Yes, we do have to search with our might, we need to do that. But it begins with seeking God's help. Proper effort is rewarded by God with a good wife or a good husband, whichever the case may be. God gives the wise mate to those who seek it with their might.

And of course, we all know those of us who have been married for any amount of time, that marriage is a wonderful thing, it's a tremendously good thing. But it can only remain that way, or improve, by working at it with our might.

Nothing forces a man or a woman to come to grips with who they are and why they are what they are, more than marriage – nothing. Nothing will do it more than marriage.

It forces us, and force may not be the right word, we're not 'forced' but we're forced to see ourselves. Perhaps that's a good way to put it. And then to deal with it. That's our choice. When we choose, when we do it with our might, that relationship can get better and better.

And of course, it's a physical type of the spiritual family that we are in embryonic form. The more we overcome, the more we reflect the very love of our Father.

And as I said, the principle of doing with our might whatever our hand finds to do applies to everything that we do in life, whether it's our prayer life, whether it's our study, our meditation, whether it's fasting, whether it's whatever it is – on a physical level, our job, our education, whatever the case may be

It's an attitude of someone who is successful on a physical level and it's the attitude on a spiritual level, of someone whom Christ will find awake. We think of the parable of the virgins. We want to be found awake and we want to be found so doing at His return. We have to do whatever we do with our might, especially the spiritual things.

And in all the doing we need to remember what Solomon learned at such a heavy cost in his own life, that we are fully in God's hands and not our own. We can do lots of things, God's given us all talents, there's no question about that. We can do lots of things with our might but we dare not get big in our own eyes, because if we do, brethren, even the good things we can enjoy in life will become empty. They will become empty and fruitless.

Let's go to Ecclesiastes 9 now and pick it up in verse 11.

Ecclesiastes 9:11 *I returned and saw under the sun that— The race is not to the swift, Nor the battle to the strong, Nor bread to the wise, Nor riches to men of understanding, Nor favor to men of skill; But time and chance happen to them all.*

Verse 12 *For man also does not know his time: Like fish taken in a cruel net, Like birds caught in a snare, So the sons of men are snared in an evil time, When it falls suddenly upon them.*

While verses 7-10 speak of living the good life, the clean life, in this physical, carnal world and enjoying the blessings in that world, the blessings of food and drink and marriage and doing all the things that we can do with our might, we're reminded here, that we don't control our own physical destiny.

And again, Solomon, one of the greatest lessons that he ever learned was that of humility. We don't control it.

Let's go to Romans chapter 9 and verse 15. Paul makes this very, very clear. We're not in our own hands.

Romans 9:15 *For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."*

No amount of effort and will to do good (and those are good things – putting forth effort, doing it with our might – exercising good will, those are good things), but none of that gives us any power over the circumstances we face - it's all God's call. Just having that understanding, brethren, when we really think about it, should give us confidence when we're in discouraging times and it should give us hope regardless of the factors that we deal with, because God is the one who decides and He is the one who is in control.

Ecclesiastes 9 verse 13 – we'll go down through the rest of the chapter here at this point:

Ecclesiastes 9:13 *This wisdom I have also seen under the sun, and it seemed great to me:*

Verse 14 *There was a little city with few men in it; and a great king came against it, besieged it, and built great snares around it.*

Snares would be better translated as bulwarks and it is translated that way in several translations. Bulwarks are the structures or the towers that are put up against a wall to gain entry into a city. So the picture that Solomon's painting is this was an overwhelmingly doomed city. They had no chance, this little city, of surviving.

Verse 15 *Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that same poor man.*

Verse 16 *Then I said: "Wisdom is better than strength. Nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, And his words are not heard.*

Verse 17 *Words of the wise, spoken quietly, should be heard Rather than the shout of a ruler of fools.*

Verse 18 *Wisdom is better than weapons of war; But one sinner destroys much good."*

There are some tremendous lessons in these last verses of this chapter that can easily be read past. The casual reader might say, "what a pity about that poor man, his wisdom is forgotten. The man's forgotten. He did a good thing. OK what's next in chapter 10?" I've read this section of scripture and have those thoughts.

There's a lot more to it than that. One of the things we should glean here is the description of this fellow as a poor wise man. It automatically implies something to us, that he was a humble person. He was a humble person. There's nothing written to indicate that he wanted or that he tried to see that he's be remembered for his contribution to the city. Probably wasn't important to him at all.

Another thing that we can see here is that God gives His wisdom. This man didn't have the wisdom of this world. He had God's wisdom. God gives His wisdom to the humble. In Isaiah 66, we see that God makes His home with the humble.

But because God gave him this wisdom, that's why the city was spared. That's why it worked.

We have to ask ourselves when we read this, why wasn't he remembered? Is there a reason? We've talked about it extensively through the book of Ecclesiastes. The natural man walks by sight, and by sight, I mean by what we can see, by what we can reason, by what we believe we can do or what we believe that somebody else can do.

When we do that, when we reason in that way, which is what the men of this city did after they were delivered, God gets removed from the picture. And so it stands to reason that the humble man who trusted in God for wisdom to deliver them would naturally be forgotten. Quite naturally. Just as God is forgotten when we proudly follow our own reasoning, even though we may speak of Him often.

We can talk about God and think about God and so on and so forth, but if we follow our own reasoning after we speak about God, it's of no value.

These are some of the lessons of Solomon's own life for a period of time. These are the lessons that he had to learn. He needed to be like this man in the city – one who was not well known, not remembered. He had to be willing to be like that man instead of 'Solomon the Great'. There are a lot of lessons that we can learn from it, because Solomon's life was full of 'hard learned' understanding. There's a lot we can gain from it.

In verse 17 he said, *"Words of the wise, spoken quietly, should be heard, rather the shout of a ruler of fools."*

The moral of the story is that we have to humbly listen to God's wisdom and then walk by faith. Do that thing that He shows us to do.

No weapon of war, as Solomon was saying, has any comparison to it. Wisdom, God's wisdom, is by far the greater power.

That's how we're able to enjoy whatever blessings God allows us amidst all the various trials, brethren, that He uses to try our faith as He very faithfully goes about perfecting us in our lives.

So next time we'll pick it up in chapter 10, and we'll go from there. But for tonight, I bid you all a pleasant good evening.