

Dr. Al Fuhr, Ecclesiastes, Session 9

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Although Kohelet has not been able to find any Yitron or ultimate lasting gain, even through the implementation of wisdom and the amassing of wealth and treasures and all of the things that a person could ever gain in this world, nevertheless he still seeks to find what is Tov, what is good. And so, at the end of chapter 6, he seems to reorient this journey or this quest to find what is tov. Now certainly in earlier chapters, we find the inclusion of and the incorporation of proverbial wisdom in the musings and the reflections of the wise man Kohelet.

But it's in chapters 7, 10, and 11 that we find more proverbs collected and we find a real emphasis on a kind of probabilistic wisdom where Kohelet finds what is good for a man in this fallen, hevel, uncertain world that we live in. We also find a continuation in chapters 7 through 12 of the enjoy life refrains of other motifs such as the inevitability of death. We find that in chapter 12 especially we've got a focus on the fear of God.

But we see that fear of God motif also in chapter 11 of the book. And so, we continue on with our survey, our brief exposition of the book of Ecclesiastes with chapter 7 and verse 1. Now in chapter 7, we've got a collection of better than sayings where one thing is esteemed better than another and this really does align well with the enjoy life refrains. There is nothing better for a man than to enjoy life.

It also aligns itself well with the quest to find what is tov. And so, in some sense verse 7 or verse 1 of chapter 7 seems to be responding right away to the question that is asked in chapter 6 and verse 12. Who knows what is good? A good name is better than fine perfume and the day of death better than the day of birth.

Now some would read that and say whoa, we've seen Kohelet talk a little bit about how it is better to be a stillborn child who has never seen the sun than to live a life of misery and sorrow. And yet you look at a proverb like this and you think the day of death better than the day of birth. The day of one's birth we rejoice, the day of one's death we mourn.

But again, keep in mind the context or the line of argument that this statement is found in. As a matter of fact the verses which follow will seem to give us some indication of what Kohelet's point is in verse 1. It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting for death is the destiny of every man. The living should take this to heart.

Remember in light of the inevitability of death one of the wisdom precepts we find in the book of Ecclesiastes is to fear God, live in sobriety knowing that you will answer

for the deeds that you have done. We've also found elsewhere in the book of Ecclesiastes that a fool is known for his boasting, his boasting of his accomplishments in this day, and his accomplishments that are yet to unfold in the future. Kohelet would say in light of the fact that man knows nothing of his future that is folly to boast of what tomorrow might bring.

You have no control over what tomorrow might bring. And so it seems like this proverbial wisdom in chapter 7 is framing the idea that it is better to wait until an accomplishment is accomplished until it has come to its end than to boast of what is still yet to unfold in the future. So, in that sense when all things are settled and you look back on a good life you can proclaim this is the end of things and now we know how such and such a life has unfolded.

Sorrow is better than laughter because a sad face is good for the heart. Again, this emphasizes sobriety in living. It's not just necessarily being a pessimist or anything of that kind, but in light of the realities of life in a fallen world, living in sobriety is in some sense a trait of wisdom.

The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure. It is better to heed a wise man's rebuke than to listen to the song of fools. To live life in such a way that you are oblivious to the rebukes of wisdom is a life of folly, Kohelet would say.

Like the crackling of thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of fools. In other words, rebuke is better than praise for a fool, for one who makes mistakes. This too, however, is hevel.

In other words, we see this cyclical sense of life lived in this world and we see that fools of tomorrow will again come to the future and you're going to see this cycle of folly and madness that will continue on and on. Exhortation turns a wise man into a fool, and so kind of lining up with the rebuke that is necessary for a wise man to be wise, exhortation turns a wise man into a fool and a bribe corrupts the heart. I'm sorry, I misspoke.

Extortion turns a wise man into a fool and a bribe corrupts the heart. There you see the natural result of corruption. The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride.

I love verse 8 because really what you see here emphasized is the idea that let's wait to the end of something to celebrate, let's not celebrate beforehand, to do so is only folly. Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools. Much in line with the wisdom of Proverbs, we find that one who is patient and one who is willing to hold back their words would be reflective of the wise.

Do not say, why were these old days better than these? In other words, don't live in the past, don't dwell upon the past, live rather in the present, and don't speak of the future as if you know what is going to occur, for it is not wise to ask such questions. With the limited scope that mankind has, even a wise man is wise to keep his mind on the present. Wisdom like an inheritance is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun.

So, wisdom in the book of Ecclesiastes is something to be esteemed, it is something that provides profit, but it is also limited in its benefits, especially in light of finding Yitron. Wisdom is a shelter, as money is a shelter, another wisdom provides some sense of benefit and safety, but the advantage of knowledge is this, that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor, something that money might ultimately not be capable of doing. Consider what God has done, who can straighten what he has made crooked? When times are good, be happy, but when times are bad, consider.

God has made the one as well as the other, therefore a man cannot discover anything about his future. Again, something that we see repeated throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, is the fact that man is ultimately incapable, even a wise man, of knowing the future. In this hevel life of mine, I have seen both of these, a righteous man perishing in his righteousness and a wicked man living long in his wickedness.

We have seen this kind of language before where Kohelet observes injustice in the world and he observes a lack of justice on the part of God, but he also realizes that it would only be foolish for man to tempt God or as we would sometimes say, to tempt fate. Do not be over-righteous, neither be over-wise. Why destroy yourself? In an earlier lecture, we looked at this word Shemam, a Hebrew word which is oftentimes, more often than not in the Old Testament, translated as destroy or something along the lines of that, but in this context, it might actually be referring to the results of destruction which in many Old Testament contexts would be astonishment.

And we see that that kind of language is employed elsewhere in relation to Shemam. The idea here perhaps is that Kohelet is saying, don't think that by being righteous, by exerting yourself with some kind of an expectation that things will go well for you because of your righteousness, don't be surprised. Why astonish yourself? Because we have seen that sometimes the righteous perish in their righteousness.

Sometimes the righteous get what essentially the wicked deserve. And so don't put all of your eggs into that basket, so to speak, because in this kind of a hevel world, nothing is guaranteed. Even though the normative expectation would be for the righteous to prosper, we have no guarantee of that in a world where we are so uncertain of things to come.

Do not be over-wicked and do not be a fool. Why die before your time? Don't put all your eggs in the righteousness basket expecting good things to follow and yet at the same time, don't think that God isn't watching. Don't act the fool.

Don't act out in wickedness. Don't be prompted to act wickedly because you see the wicked getting away with it because you might find yourself cut off from the earth. God might meet out his justice against you and his judgment against you very much in the here and now.

It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. In other words, don't think that there are any guarantees and yet at the same time, don't step out in folly thinking that God never acts. The man who fears God will avoid all extremes.

In other words, the man who fears God will have a sense of an expectation that God will judge and also recognize that God is not obligated to reward a man just for his righteous actions. Wisdom makes one wise man more powerful than ten rulers in a city. In other words, the idea that wisdom is in some sense mightier than the sword.

There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins. Throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, we've talked about how the language of Genesis chapter three permeates, and certainly in reflecting upon life in a fallen world, Kohelet observes that all men are sinners. This isn't necessarily a theological statement in the same vein that we would find in the book of Romans, but it is interesting that Kohelet reflects upon the reality of our fallen condition.

Do not pay attention to every word people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you. For you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others. Kohelet the wise man provides a bit of proverbial wisdom here.

What goes around comes around. And so Kohelet says, don't think of yourself as guiltless. Don't be surprised when you see things done against you because you know yourself you have oftentimes done things against others.

All this I tested by wisdom and I said I am determined to be wise, but this was beyond me. Remember in the reflections earlier in chapters one and two, Kohelet sought wisdom, but he ultimately found that wisdom was something that was ungraspable, at least in its full sense. In other words, he could continually achieve to be wiser and wiser, and yet he would never be able to master everything.

Whatever wisdom may be, it is far off and most profound. Who can discover it? Quite a statement coming from the man who is proclaiming to be the wisest among all. So, I turned my mind to understand, to investigate, and to search out wisdom in the scheme of things, the heaviness of life I would perhaps suggest, and to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the madness of folly.

Remember back in chapter one, he sought through wisdom to explore wisdom, madness, and folly. Now he comes back to this theme. I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a trap, and whose hands are chains.

The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare. Perhaps Kohelet here is reflecting upon the kind of thinking that we see representative in Proverbs chapters six and seven, where you find a wise man understanding the snare that this kind of woman might bring. Certainly, wisdom in the ancient world would have been oriented towards the male audience, and so that shouldn't shock us so much anymore than Proverbs six and seven should shock us.

However, we do realize that this kind of language could seem to be somewhat offensive to women, especially in what we're going to find here in verse 28. It may help to keep in mind that perhaps Kohelet is not just simply thinking in terms of a kind of sexual snare. He might be reflecting in this language back to Genesis chapter three, the scheme of things, the result of life lived in a fallen world.

And we find in the curses in Genesis chapter three, a rather ambiguous statement concerning women being cursed with pain and childbearing, and also have this sense of a kind of curse where her desire will be for her husband, but he should rule over her. And we see that as a result of the fall, there is tension between the sexes. We do find that this tension between the sexes is something that is experienced in marriage, it's experienced in relationships.

What God created to be good, what God created to be a perfect sense of companionship, has been corrupted by the fall, and so there's this tension, this struggle. As a matter of fact, Genesis 3.16 is very close in language to Genesis chapter four and verse seven, where God says to Cain that there will be a kind of struggle between man, the heart of man, and sin, and sin will seek to rule over man, but you must master it. There might be some sense in which that is reflective of the same kind of relationship between man and woman.

Man shall rule over woman in the sense of role relationship, and yet there will be this kind of struggle and tension between the two. It may be that Kohelet has some of that in mind with this wisdom. In verse 27 he says, or it says, Look, says the teacher, this is what I have discovered.

Adding one thing to another to discover the scheme of things, in other words, to figure things out in this fallen, heaven world, while I was still searching and not finding, again he never does in this search for Yitron, find it, I found one upright man among a thousand, but not one upright woman among them all. Now this of course is a very difficult statement, and I don't think Kohelet here is saying that some men are righteous. As a matter of fact, earlier on in verse 20, he says there is not a

righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins, but perhaps he is reflecting upon the potential snare that woman might bring even to a wise man, the fact that there will be this tension, that there will be this conflict for authority, and one thing that a wise man cannot grasp and control in Kohelet's line of thinking is woman, and so perhaps woman is seen as a potential snare even in the pursuit of wisdom.

This only I have found. God made mankind upright, both men and women, but men have gone in search of many schemes. In other words, again, reflecting the fall, God created all things good and very good, and God created mankind not to be in this kind of muck that we find described and realized by the wise man Kohelet.

Kohelet's a wise man who observes life in a fallen world, and he's very much vexed by the fact that this is not the way things were ever designed to be, and so really Ecclesiastes seems to be in some sense wisdom's pursuit to find some kind of a resolution to the fallenness that we see reflected in chapter 3 of Genesis. Now Kohelet does not give up on wisdom completely. As a matter of fact, we see repeated throughout the Proverbs and Ecclesiastes a kind of affirmation of wisdom's advantages, and so following this dismissal of having not been able to find wisdom and his frustration regarding the snares and the schemes that perhaps might impede wisdom, you find in chapter 8 the beginning of a statement affirming wisdom.

Who is like the wise man? Who knows the explanation of things? Wisdom brightens a man's face and changes his hard appearance. As hard as wisdom is to gain and to grasp, nevertheless wisdom, once grasped at whatever level, is going to provide an advantage. It provides a brightening of man's face.

Now in chapter 8 and verses 2 through 4, we have a set of statements regarding a wise man's relationship with the king, and it's somewhat interesting to find that the words of verses 2 through 4 of chapter 8 seem to mirror in some sense the words of chapter 5 verses 1 through 7, where Kohelet reflects upon a wise man's proper posture before the divine, before God, and the due reverence that a wise man will bring to the divine. Here you have the due reverence and the kind of posture that is appropriate for a wise man to bring before the king. The text says, Obey the king's command, I say, because you took an oath before God.

Do not be in a hurry to leave the king's presence. Do not stand up for a bad cause, for he will do whatever he pleases. In other words, in some sense, the king is the one who is in control.

The king is the one who will do as he pleases, even if you plead a case before the king. It seems like Kohelet is saying a wise man, when coming before the king, he will be careful in what battles he wages. In other words, he's not going to frivolously

bring a cause before the king, and he's not going to bring too many causes before the king.

He will be calculated, and he will be careful. He will kind of have discretion intact in how he approaches the king and what causes he deems fit to come and bring before the king. Since the king's word is supreme, who can say to him, what are you doing? In the same way that one cannot question God's activity, in the same sense, a wise man recognizes that the human authorities that are set over him, we cannot question their authority either.

Whoever obeys his command will come to no harm, and the wise heart will know the proper time and procedure. Kind of evoking back to the ideas that we saw reflected in the poem on time in chapter three. The proper and appropriate time.

Knowing those things, a wise man will recognize the importance of timing, and discretion, and again, timing is critical. For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, sounds very much like Ecclesiastes chapter three, though a man's misery weighs heavily upon him. We saw the same language of inyon, burden, in chapter three in verse ten.

Again, reflecting back on the language of chapter three. Since no man knows the future, who can tell him what is to come? Reflecting again, the imposition of limitation on man and God's sovereignty over him, thinking again of chapter three in verse fourteen perhaps. No man has power over the wind to contain it, so no one has power over the day of his death.

Man might know the appropriateness of timing, but man is not the one who determines the day of his death. Perhaps validating the approach that God's determined time is what is reflected at the beginning of the poem on time, a time to be born and a time to die. As no one is discharged in time of war, so wickedness will not release those who practice it.

There will be a day of reckoning for the wicked. In other words, their sin is sure to follow. Perhaps reflecting the language of chapter three in verse seventeen, where Kohelet says there is a time of reckoning.

There is a day of reckoning where man will answer for the deeds he has done and God will hold him accountable. And so, it's very interesting to see the language of chapter eight here reflected back in chapter three. All this I saw as I applied my mind to everything done under the sun.

There is a time when a man lords it over others to his own hurt. We saw that kind of language before where a man amasses wealth and treasure only to come to harm or only to bring him harm. Now we have a man who lords it over others or takes his

authority and power, lords it over others, only to have the tables turned and to be harmed by that.

Then too I saw the wicked buried. Those who used to come and go from the holy place and receive praise in the city where they did this. In other words, greed and corruption ultimately heads to the grave as well.

This too is hevel. When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of people are filled with schemes to do wrong. The scheme of things that Kohelet explores in chapter seven, perhaps he has that in mind as he refers to the schemes of the wicked.

Although the wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, in other words sometimes there is a kind of lack of justice that Kohelet observes, I know that it will go better with the God-fearing man who is reverent before God. It's that kind of wisdom that suggests even though we see exceptions to the normative expectation of justice, I'm not going to tempt God, I'm not going to tempt fate. Why find yourself judged and cut off from the earth? I know that it will go better, a kind of affirmation of the expectations of normal wisdom here.

Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them and their days will not lengthen like a shadow. In other words, I'm not going to step out and tempt God in such a way. I know that it will go better for the righteous than for the wicked.

There is something else hevel that occurs on earth, absurd as I think we see that family of meaning coming to the forefront with these observations of injustice and lack of equity in this hevel world. Righteous men who get what the wicked deserve and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve. This too I say is hevel and I would say amen to that.

I'm greatly frustrated. I'm vexed as somebody who observes corruption in this world and a lack of immediate justice and judgment. When I see the kinds of things that occur in this world that just sickens my heart and I say, God, where are you in this? I call that too hevel.

It's absurd. It's an affront to human reason. I can't explain it no more than Kohelet the wisest of the wise was able to explain it.

Perhaps God does it just to keep us on unsure footing. Perhaps God does it so that we know who we are on earth and who he is in heaven. So, I commend the enjoyment of life.

Remember the escalation of the enjoy life refrains. Kohelet before observes the enjoyment of life in light of the heaviness of life and not necessarily in spite of it but

rather in light of it. In other words, because of this hevel life that we live in, we ought to, as wise individuals ought to receive the gifts that God provides.

But now he's going to, as the teacher or the preacher, commend the enjoyment of life rather than just simply observe its sensibility. So, I commend the enjoyment of life because nothing is better, I am told there is nothing better, answering the question of what is good, for a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany him in his work all the days of his life that God has given him under the sun, however many days they may be.

When I applied my mind to know wisdom, and remember in chapter 7 he's searching out wisdom to see whether or not wisdom can be found and he's somewhat troubled by the fact that wisdom is ultimately ungraspable, in other words, there's always more to be found. When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe man's labor on earth, his eyes not seeing sleep day or night, thinking about the anxiety and the striving that he reflects upon in chapters 4 and 5, then I saw that God has, all that God has done, the activity of God in orchestrating the world that we live in. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun, in other words, we can't figure out what God is doing so often.

Despite all of his efforts to search it out, man cannot discover its meaning. Man is not able to figure God out, to figure out the divine, to master the divine. Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it.

As Kohelet has repeated over and over again, man can know nothing of his future. As Kohelet has reflected upon God, man can have nothing up on God. He cannot figure out and master the divine, no matter how wise he might be.

And so Kohelet reflects on this in chapter 9 in verse 1. He reflects on this and concludes that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands, God is sovereign, but no man knows whether love or hate awaits him. Man is certainly not sovereign, man knows nothing of his future, other than the fact that he shares a common destiny. The righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not, and what is that common destiny? The grave.

As it is with the good man, so with the sinner. As it is with those who take oaths, so with those who are afraid to take them. This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun.

And this isn't a kind of moral evil that Kohelet is referring to here. He's simply referring to the great angst, the vexation, the frustration of heaviness here. This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun.

The same destiny overtakes all, think about chapter 3 in verses 21 and 22. The hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil. Sometimes they are motivated by a seeming lack of justice.

And there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward, they join the dead. Anyone who is among the living has hope. Even a live dog is better off than a dead lion, perhaps reflecting the kind of wisdom we see in Ecclesiastes, that probability and possibility in regards to the implementation of wisdom in the present.

For the living know that they will die, they at least have that, but the dead know nothing. They have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten. In other words, there is no more activity available to them on the earth, under the sun.

This is not saying that Ecclesiastes is in some way contradictory to what we see elsewhere in Scripture regarding the bema seat of judgment in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and a kind of rewards basis that we know about from the New Testament. It's not saying that, it's just simply saying that there is no more time for activity in the grave. When is the time for activity? The time for activity is in the here and now.

It's in the life that we have in the present. Their love, their hate, and their jealousy have long since vanished. Never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun.

And so, now we have the sixth enjoy life refrain. And now we've moved not just from observation and commendation, but now we've moved to commandment. We've moved to the imperative.

Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favors what you do. Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love.

All the days of this hevel life that God has given you under the sun, the fleeting, the sometimes absurd, sometimes enigmatic, sometimes quite frustrating, sometimes quite senseless life that we have under the sun, all your hevel, your mortal days. For this is your lot, your helot, your allotment in life. God has given you the opportunity now.

And in your amal, your labor under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might. And I would add, do it now, Kohelet is saying, for in the grave, in Sheol, where you're going, and it's not talking about hell here, it's not talking about heaven, it's just simply talking about the grave, where you're heading, there is neither working, nor planning, nor knowledge, nor wisdom.

The wisdom of Ecclesiastes is present tense. Act now, don't put off till tomorrow what you can do for today, because you don't know if tomorrow is guaranteed to you. Because Kohelet has observed, something else under the sun.

The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant, as much as those things might provide advantage, ultimately God is the one who is in control. Because favor doesn't come just to the learned or the educated, but time and chance. And this isn't a non-theistic time and chance, but it's God's activity that man cannot fathom.

Time and chance happen to them all. Moreover, no man knows when his hour will come, his hour, his day of reckoning, the timing of his death, as fish are caught in a cruel net, or birds are taken in a snare, so men are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them. The truth is, I don't know after I take this if I'm going to make it home this evening.

I just simply don't know. There's no guarantee. I might drive carefully, I might do everything that ought to be done in wisely obeying the laws of traffic, but I don't know.

Times might fall unexpectedly upon me. And so, the wisdom of Ecclesiastes here is captured in the idea that one must take an approach to life that looks for present opportunity. Don't put off to tomorrow what you can do for today, for tomorrow is not guaranteed to you.

Now continuing on with example stories and Proverbs, the same kind of line of thinking on probabilistic wisdom continues. In verses 13 through 16 in chapter 9, we have another one of these example stories. This example story seems to focus on the issue of injustice and some of the benefits and failures of wisdom.

Verse 13 reads, I also saw under the sun this example of wisdom that greatly impressed me, so wisdom that provides advantage. There was once a small city with only a few people in it, and a powerful king came against it, surrounded it, and built siege works against it. Now there lived in that city a man, poor but wise, and he saved the city by his wisdom.

We're not told exactly how he did that, only that through his wisdom he was able to save the city against this powerful king. But nobody remembered that poor man. Kohelet's going to call this a great injustice.

So, I said, wisdom is better than strength, there's power and benefit in wisdom, but the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are no longer heeded. In other words, that wise act is no longer remembered. It's off for naught.

It's vanquished quickly. The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools. In other words, wisdom is powerful.

Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good. And so we see the benefits of wisdom and the power of wisdom, but we also see the fragility of wisdom, how quickly wisdom evaporates into mist or hevel. As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

It's all too often that wisdom is spoiled even by just a little folly. The heart of the wise inclines to the right, and the heart of the fool to the left. This is not necessarily referring to right-handed individuals and left-handed individuals or anything quite like that.

It's just simply saying that on the right side of the king where power was given, and on the left side of the king where servitude was exercised, it seems to be suggesting here that wisdom lends itself to positions of authority, whereas folly lends itself to positions of servitude. Even as he walks along the road, the fool lacks sense and shows everyone just how stupid he is. And so it's kind of like folly accompanying the fool.

If a ruler's anger rises against you, do not leave your post. Calmness can lay great errors to rest. Remember in chapter 8, Kohelet reflects upon a proper posture to take when coming to the king to ask for a favor or to plead a cause before the king.

Here you have also a kind of proper attitude and maybe even a proper kind of way to approach calming your anger. In other words, just a bit of wisdom here and how to exercise wisdom in a fallen world and how to navigate the various things that take place in this world. There is an evil that I've seen under the sun, the sort of error that arises from a ruler.

Fools are put in many high positions while the rich occupy the low ones. In other words, he sees the folly that occurs sometimes in this world in government and in leadership where governors and leaders don't necessarily make the wisest of decisions. I've seen slaves on horseback while princes go on foot like slaves.

In other words, in a fallen world, we would wish sometimes that things were built and structured in such a way that always the wisest of the wise were leading the pack, but sometimes that doesn't occur and sometimes we find fools put in high position. Whoever digs a pit may fall into it. Whoever breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake.

These seem to be kind of straightforward observations, but there's a point behind them. Whoever quarries stones may be injured by them. Whoever splits logs may be endangered by them.

The New Living Translation in the 1996 version makes a statement following these observations. Such are the risks of life. I would suggest to you that this wisdom here that's encapsulated in these observations is risk-oriented wisdom.

In other words, in a kind of world where the future is uncertain, for a wise man to actually still proceed and gain advantage, he sometimes has to take risks. Nothing will ever get done without taking appropriate and measured risks in life, and that seems to be the point of these observations. But not only will a person take risks, not only will a person work hard, but a person will also work smartly.

A wise man will work smartly to find success in life. And so, the next proverb suggests as much. If the axe is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed, but skill will bring success.

The New Living Translation again paraphrases such are the benefits of wisdom. In other words, wisdom provides a greater chance for success in life. If a snake bites before it is charmed, there is no profit for the charmer.

In other words, what we have to find here is that if a snake has already bit the charmer, there's no profit to the charmer. In other words, you've got to act before the proverbial hammer drops. If you wait too long, you're going to find yourself without any opportunity for advantage or benefit.

Words from a wise man's mouth are gracious, but a fool is consumed by his own lips. At the beginning his words are folly, and at the end, they are wicked madness, and the fool multiplies words. So again, reflective of conventional wisdom, the fool is one who spouts off and is not measured in his use of his language, of his words.

No one knows what is coming. Who can tell him what will happen after him? Perhaps reflective of the fool's boasting. And so, as we've seen earlier before in the book of Ecclesiastes, a wise man is one who will wait until things have already been laid out.

A wise man will, before celebrating and boasting, will wait to see what the outcome might be of his ventures, to see whether or not what he did brought any kind of success. And so we think of those who are involved in various activities, who boast of the great accomplishments that they will bring, all the while they, in an event, they bring nothing. And so, that's the kind of language of a fool, to boast before the evidence has actually come to fruition.

A fool's work wearies him. He does not know the way to town. The fool is one who is apt to give bad advice, and who is uncertain of what is even being done in the present.

Verse 16. Woe to you, O land, whose king was a servant, and whose princes feast in the morning. Blessed are you, O land, whose king is of noble birth, whose princes eat at a proper time for strength and not for drunkenness.

Perhaps musing on political governance here, Kohelet observes that it is a blessed thing for individuals in a fallen world to be governed by good leadership. And of course, for those who are living under corrupt leaders, they are living in a very, very difficult situation. Verse 18.

If a man is lazy, the rafters sag. If his hands are idle, the house leaks. Conventional wisdom regarding sluggardly behavior, and laziness.

In other words, a work ethic that is embraced by Kohelet is a work ethic that recognizes the responsibility of diligence, all the while recognizing that to strive for something that you cannot take ultimately with you, would be folly. Verse 19. A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes life merry, but money is the answer for everything.

I mentioned in an earlier lecture this proverb which seems to be somewhat odd, especially as we think about other texts in scripture that refer to one not being able to serve God and money, or for in 1 Timothy chapter 6, money being the root of all kinds of evil. Kohelet here is not being, you know, in some way backslidden in his wisdom. He's not speaking from a kind of worldly perspective here that embraces money before God, but rather he's looking at the utility of money.

And this again is practical wisdom meant to be implemented in life to find greater degrees and probability for success in life. A feast is made for laughter. It has utility in this very narrow area.

And wine makes life merry. Wine is good for doing this. But money provides a broad range of possibilities.

And so, the wisdom of Ecclesiastes is a probability and possibility-based wisdom. And so Kohelet sees the merits of money in that regard. Do not revile the king even in your thoughts, or curse the rich in your bedroom, because a bird on the air may carry your words, and a bird on the wing may report what you say.

Much in line with what we saw in chapter 8 and what we saw just a few verses earlier regarding a wise man's use of words, especially before those for whom he ought to give due honor and respect. Don't speak junk against the king. Don't speak out against your employer.

Don't talk about those who are in authority over you. Because we all know the way that gossip tends to spread. And gossip is the kind of venture of folly that Kohelet would see as quite absurd.

In other words, a wise man who is navigating this fallen and uncertain world wisely is going to be very careful with the words that he speaks. Not only when he is meant to be heard, but also when he is meant to not be heard. Because you never know when that little word might be carried off by a bird on the wing.

Chapter 11 begins another series of proverbs based upon life lived in an uncertain world taking risks and being adventurous in order to find some degree of success in life. Chapter 11 in verse 1 says, Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again. Be adventurous.

Step forward. You can't live life successfully always behind the line. Give portions to seven, yes to eight, for you do not know what disaster may come upon the land.

If you live life adventurously to find success in life, you also have to live life cautiously in the sense of diversifying your risks. Don't put all your eggs in one basket as we would perhaps say in the modern era. If clouds are full of water, they pour forth rain upon the earth.

Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where it falls, there will it lie. Now this is a somewhat odd statement, but it seems like Kohelet is simply saying, in a hevel world where man has no ultimate control, sometimes what is, is what is. In other words, sometimes circumstances happen in such a way that man has no real control over those circumstances.

So, a wise man will learn to navigate through life, even when he cannot control those things that have already occurred. Verse four reads, whoever watches the wind will not plant, whoever looks at the clouds will not reap. You can't always wait for the perfect conditions to come along.

Sometimes you'll find that things look scary out there in life, and yet nevertheless we must move forward if we're going to find any degree of success in life. Again, risk-taking seems to be the primary motif in these proverbs. As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, you cannot understand the work of God, the maker of all things.

Kind of tying this wisdom together. In light of the fact that you don't know the future, and you don't even know the way that God works in this world, you've got to learn to wisely navigate life in the present. In light of what you do understand, in light of the limited knowledge that you do have, and what you observe, you need to learn how

to take adventurous steps forward in life, even though you might not have a grasp, and might not master all the circumstances that surround you.

Sow your seed in the morning, and in the evening do not let your hands be idle. Now, Kohelet is not referring to an anxious striving that he was vexed by earlier in the book, but rather he sees that to find success in life, you can't just sit back and wait for things to come to you. You need to be adventurous, and you need to take risks to move forward in life.

Sow your seed in the morning, and in the evening do not let your hands be idle. You don't know if this will succeed, or if that will succeed, or whether both will do equally well. Work hard and work smart at tasks.

If you do that and you diversify, there is a greater probability of successful outcomes. This is very pragmatic, very practical wisdom. The kind of wisdom that we see Kohelet implementing for life to be lived and navigated in an uncertain world.

Verse 7, Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun. Certainly, Kohelet is affirming the goodness that is experienced or the potential goodness that is experienced in the life of the living. However, many years a man may live, let him enjoy them all.

Now we're beginning the seventh and the final enjoy life refrain. But also let him remember the days of darkness. Remember Kohelet is dwelt upon.

He's observed days of darkness, days of suffering, and lives soberly. Remember the Proverbs in chapter 7 that talked about entering into the house of mourners and not being like the crackling pot of fools who just laugh oblivious to the circumstances and the events that are taking place around them. Find opportunities to enjoy life, but don't live kind of with blinders on, oblivious to the suffering that surrounds you in this fallen world.

There's a balanced approach here that must be taken. For there will be many, there will be good times and there will be bad times. A wise man will know how to navigate through both of them.

Everything to come is hevel, again, perhaps reflecting upon the fleeting and the transient aspect of life. Be happy, young man, while you are young. So, affirming the potential possibilities that come with youth.

And let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Now is the time to be able to grasp the proverbial bull by the horns and make the most of every opportunity that God provides. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment.

As I've mentioned in earlier lectures, this is that wonderful two-sided wisdom coin, the paradigm for wise living in a fallen world. Enjoy life, make the most of the opportunities that God has gifted you with, the graces that He provides even in the midst of a cursed and fallen world, but don't live as if we're not living in a cursed and fallen world where sin is very much a common experience. Remember chapter 7, there is not a righteous man who always does what is right and never sins.

And so Kohelet is aware of that and he knows that the wise man and the fool too will answer to God for the deeds that they have done. And so, a wise man will live soberly recognizing the kind of world that we live in, not oblivious to suffering, not oblivious to the temptations of life. A wise man will enjoy life but not enjoy sin.

So then banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body. Remember, Kohelet said it's such a shame, it's a pitiful thing, it's a foolish thing for a person to strive in life and to become anxious over things which ultimately they have no control over and cast off the troubles of your body for youth and vigor are fleeting. Know that today is the day for the present possibility.

Youth and vigor are passing. Grasp today the possibilities in life. Know that in this day you will one day answer to God for the deeds that you perform.

And so, kind of have that present tense perspective all the while recognizing what is to come in the future. Remember your creator in the days of your youth. Don't put off till tomorrow this idea of understanding that you will answer for the deeds that you have done.

In other words, today is the day not only to enjoy life but also to remember your creator and the activities that you undertake before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say I find no pleasure in them. Before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark and the clouds return after the rain when the keepers of the house tremble and the strong men stoop when the grinders cease because they are few and those looking through the windows grow dim. Now, Kohelet is providing for us a picture of the aging process and it's somewhat difficult to attach direct reference to each one of these pictures that he paints but there is a kind of allegorical approach here where the aging process is being pictured by various aspects or elements of life.

And so, for instance, in verse 3 you have the keepers of the house trembling perhaps that refers to the hands trembling in an aged person and the strong men stoop perhaps the muscular system in the legs the strong muscles in the legs and the muscles in the back begin to stoop over when the grinders cease because they are few likely referring to teeth and the teeth of the aged falling out especially in the ancient context where you didn't have modern dentistry and such and so by the time

a person got to be a certain age they already lost their teeth and those looking through the windows grow dim, glaucoma and other kinds of diseases of the eye. We read about saints of old who in their old age their vision had grown dim probably referring to the eyes and the loss of eyesight. When the doors to the street are closed perhaps referring to the ears and the sound of grinding fades when men rise at the sound of birds. And so, one of the ironies of aging is that even though a loss of hearing has taken place nevertheless the aged oftentimes struggle with sleeplessness.

And all the songs grow faint when men are afraid of heights you sometimes hear of elderly people who take great caution because. They don't want to fall and when an elderly person does fall something that for a young person would be very easy to recover from for an aged person. It becomes the kind of thing that is ultimately crippling and leads them to the grave.

And of dangers in the streets obviously elderly people cannot defend themselves at the same level. When the almond tree blossoms perhaps referring to the whitening of the hair. And the grasshopper drags himself along perhaps referring to weakness and desire is no longer stirred perhaps referring to a lack of sexual desire in the aged. The man goes to his eternal home or then man goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets. Obviously, referring to the point of death in the grave.

Remember him, remember God before the silver cord is severed or the golden bowl is broken before the pitcher is shattered at the well or at the spring or the wheel broken at the well. Basically, what Kohelet is saying is remember God before the wellspring of life is cut off and dust returns to the ground it came from again evoking the imagery and the language of Genesis chapter 3.

And the spirit returns to God who gave it earlier in Ecclesiastes chapter 3 Kohelet wondered whether or not the life of the man would go back to God who gave it. The breath of life that God gave it or here he might be referring to some kind of eschatological reality of the spirit of man returning to God perhaps to answer for the deeds that he has done. We're not really sure exactly what Kohelet is referring to here I would not read too much theology into this. I simply make the point here that Kohelet recognizes that we are inevitably heading towards the grave dust to dust to reflect the language of Genesis chapter 3.

And then he concludes all this with the back end of the bracketing of the inclusio with another superlative Hebel judgment Hebel of Hevels says that Kohelet everything is Hebel.

And so, the body of the book concludes here but in chapter 12 verses 9 through 14 we have an epilogue. It is something which is very much in line a commentary if you will on the musings of the Kohelet that concludes the book. Not only was the Kohelet wise so now we have a third person reference to the Kohelet, but he also imparted knowledge to the people. In other words as a kind of concluding commentary on the book he pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. We certainly seen a number of proverbs as we surveyed the contents of chapter 7 chapter 10 and chapter 11 especially. The teacher that Kohelet searched to find just the right words and what he wrote was upright and true. This is a book that is impossible to master but it is tremendously profound and it really is a book that is so incredible in the wisdom that is espoused within.

The writer of the epilogue perhaps Kohelet perhaps an author of the book that is dealing with the life and the legacy of the Kohelet the writer of the epilogue here says that the Kohelet his words were upright and true. We have no commentary that suggests that Kohelet said things that were wrong and misleading, that the wisdom of Kohelet would lead someone astray. Rather the wisdom of Kohelet is wisdom that is profitable that is good for finding advantage in this fallen world.

The words of the wise are like goads in other words they prod and they prompt their collected sayings are firmly embedded nails. They tend to provide some kind of stability and grounding given by one shepherd some translations capitalize shepherd implying that this is wisdom given by God, other translations don't capitalize Shepherd. It's actually quite ambiguous as to whether or not this is referring to God and inspired wisdom or simply a shepherd sage that provides wisdom. Perhaps it refers to Kohelet himself. It's ambiguous certainly the message of Ecclesiastes as it's a part of canonical literature, a part of Scripture inspired by God would certainly reflect God given authority and God given inspiration whether or not this is the one shepherd our heavenly father God that is up to some debate. It's not made clear by the words of Ecclesiastes itself in any case.

Continuing on here the writer of the epilogue gives us the kind of injunction that we find in the book of Proverbs in the instructional discourses. Be warned my son of anything in addition to them and so be careful in the kind of wisdom that you receive he's basically saying I put the stamp of approval on what Kohelet has said here but remember there are many words and there are many sayings out there don't be misled of making many books there is no end and of much study we have weariness of the body much study wearies the body now verses 13 and 14 bring an apt conclusion to the book we saw in an earlier lecture that the fear of God motif permeates the book of Ecclesiastes chapter 3 and verse 17 chapter 5 verses 1-7 chapter 11 and verse 9 just to name a few all reflect the due reverence that Kohelet admonishes those who will listen to have for God to fear God but no place in Ecclesiastes makes the statement as clearly as chapter 12 verses 13 and 14 now all

has been heard. Here is the conclusion of the matter fear God and keep his commandments. This is imperative for this is the whole duty of man some translations will go with the whole duty of man. Some will say that this is applicable to all of men. The Hebrew here is actually quite vague it might be in some sense referring to both as Kohelet is very apt to do through some kind of intentional ambiguity he tends to through metaphors and such bring in multiple ideas. And so, perhaps he's referring to this being all that encompasses the duty of man and this applies to all men universally. He might be saying both in a very terse manner.

For God will bring every deed into judgment including every hidden thing whether it is good or evil. I think this reference to every hidden thing suggests that perhaps there is a kind of eschatological afterlife judgment in view here. God who sees all things done for whom nothing is hidden will bring to an account all things that man has performed in this mortal and fallen existence. And so, God will bring these things to judgment. Live soberly. Know that for everything that you do in the present you will answer to God in the future whether it be good or whether it be evil. Grasp both sides of this two-sided wisdom coin enjoy life but live soberly.

Enjoy life but don't enjoy sin make the most of every opportunity but know that for the things that you do you will answer to God in judgment.