Ecclesiastes

When Adam and Eve first sinned, God placed the world under a curse. In Rom. 8 it describes this curse as God subjecting the world to futility. Ever since the first sin, people think they can find meaning and purpose in life without God. But the futility that God placed on the world says otherwise. It says that life “under the sun” without God is totally meaningless. Someone who lives a purely secular life without God, who takes an honest look at life in this world, will come to the same conclusion – and many have. And so **that is the theme of Ecclesiastes (Eccl) – life in this world is meaningless**.

Eccl probes the meaning of life from the point of view of a secularist. Solomon looks for meaning in life outside of God. He looks at everything “under the sun.” Amongst other things, he looks for meaning in wisdom, folly, pleasure, wealth, youthfulness, and knowledge. He finds that all of these fall short.

It might be surprising to Christians that this is in the Bible. But what Eccl is doing is showing the true reality of life in a fallen world. Many who have a progressive worldview think that we as a human race are improving and progressing toward a life where all is fair and just and right. Eccl pours cold water on this idea. It shows that all of our pursuits to achieve these things end up in the long run as meaningless. All of our achievements in life end up as vapor that dissipates until there is nothing left. To show that life is meaningless, Eccl goes through our lives and all of our pursuits and shoots them down one by one.

Eccl only hints at a resolution to the meaningless fate that awaits us. What it does is prepare us for the resolution of our problem, which is found in the NT. If one does not understand the predicament one is in, then one will not understand and look for an answer to one’s problem. So what Eccl is doing then is almost entirely Law. It is the main purpose of the Law to prepare us for the Gospel. The Law reveals the bad situation we are in and that no solutions for it can be found here on earth. The answer will have to come from outside of us and our world. And that is why God broke in to our world and became a flesh and blood human being. He did it so that he could provide us with the meaning and purpose that we are looking for and crave. He did it in the person of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God. It is only in Christ that meaning can be found. He is the Logos, the Word or Meaning made flesh. So it is the purpose of Eccl to prepare us for Christ who alone can provide meaning to our vain lives. (The answer, which is Christ, will be highlighted in a blue colored font throughout this study.)

About This Study

This Bible study is what I call a meditative Bible Study. The intent is to take a tiny portion of Scripture each day and meditate on it. Read it and reread it. Think about it. Look at individual words. Think about its main point. The type of writing that Solomon employs in Eccl is not easy to understand. Many times you have to chew on it for a long while before you get the gist of it. Since it is difficult to chew on, only small bites are given at a time. Some days there will only be a single verse. Other days there might be two or three verses. So don’t be in a hurry to get through it. Take your time and wrestle with the text.

*Eccl Bible Study – Part 2 (Eccl 3:16 – 7:22)*

Lesson 1 – Eccl 3:16 – The Vanity of Philanthropy and Justice

1. Read Eccl 3:16

**16Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness.**

1. The context. We have finished the first part of Eccl. Solomon has stated his overall theme that all of life lived on this earth under the sun is meaningless. He has shown that the cycles of life are meaningless. He has shown that the toils of life are meaningless. He has shown that man is subject to the times and seasons of life that are set by God. Man is not in control and is subject to his fallen human nature.  
     
   From 3:16 to the end of the book, Solomon randomly shows that anywhere you look in life for meaning and purpose you will instead only find vanity. Anywhere you look outside of God in the person of Jesus Christ is a dead end. One by one he strings together a pearl necklace, where each pearl is precious because it leads us away from something meaningless and pushes us closer to the God who loves us so much that he gave his only begotten Son for us. Let’s see what the first pearl is in this necklace.
2. If you look up the definition of philanthropy, what does it say?  
     
   > One definition might be: looking out for the welfare of others.  
     
   We think of philanthropists as people who are well off financially who generously give their money for good causes that benefit other people and society as a whole. If you were looking for a place where goodness and righteousness abounded and where wickedness was in short supply, that place would be philanthropy. We could say that philanthropy is the best that humans have to offer because in it we are showing love and concern for others.
3. Using these thoughts about philanthropy, would our justice system be a form of philanthropy? Why?  
     
   > Yes, our justice system would be a form of philanthropy because in it we are seeking to right the wrongs committed against someone. We are showing love to our neighbor.  
     
   What are three major parts of our justice system?  
     
   > We have laws that regulate how we act toward one another.  
     
   > We have police officers who enforce the laws.  
     
   > We have courts who decide if laws have been broken and if punishment and compensation is due.  
     
   When Solomon looked in the place of justice, what did he find (3:16a)?  
     
   > In the place of justice he found wickedness.  
     
   When Solomon looked in the place of righteousness, what did he find (3:16b)?  
     
   > In the place of righteousness he found wickedness.  
     
   In our justice system, like Solomon, what do often find?  
     
   > In our justice system we often find injustice and wickedness just as Solomon found.
4. Think about what Solomon and the Holy Spirit are doing here. They are presenting the best of mankind. They are presenting a system that man intentionally sets up for the benefit of his neighbor, to right any wrongs against him. You expect wickedness in most other areas of life but not in the area of philanthropy. **Even in areas of life, like our justice system, where we intentionally try undo what is wrong and do what is right, we find wickedness and injustice.** This the genius of Solomon and the Holy Spirit. **They show us how bad humanity is by showing us the best of humanity.**  
     
   Remember, this is the best that man has to offer to his fellow human beings. But even here man fails. So philanthropy and justice also do not fulfill our need for meaning and purpose. The more we try and establish justice and righteousness for the love of our fellow human beings, the more elusive it is. The multiplication of laws seeking justice strangely often have the opposite effect. This too is vanity and why we need an answer in Christ Jesus. Since we are subject to wickedness, God had to take on human flesh in Christ and be our righteousness and establish it.
5. Think about the United States. Its people are some of the most generous people in the world. We talk about stamping out homelessness. There are all kinds of non-profits formed to do this. People give them all kinds of money and volunteer to help. But in the wake of all this, has the homeless problem gotten any better?  
     
   > No. In fact it seems to be worse.  
     
   We are not saying that it is bad to try and do away with homelessness. It is a very good thing to do. We are saying that this shows very clearly that we are subject to our fallen human nature. As a result of sin, the world is under a curse, and therefore true and lasting righteousness and justice cannot be found in this world, it can only be found in Christ.  
     
   As another example think of our justice system. We are supposed to have one of the best justice systems in the world. And yet what do we see in it? We see that our fallen human nature clouds the picture. That which is to be good and right ends up being perverted by wickedness and injustice. Perhaps this has happened to you or someone you know. As Christians, this leads us to yearn for the life to come where there will be true and eternal justice and righteousness.  
     
   As you go about your day, look for unrighteousness and injustice. It shouldn’t be too hard to find. It is all around us. But instead of looking for it “out there” some place, look for it in your personal life, in the lives of your family and friends. Look for it especially in those areas where we have intentionally set out to do the opposite and yet wickedness prevails. If you look at it honestly, you won’t be surprised. An honest look at ourselves and others means recognizing that each of us is prone to think and do wicked things. The fact that our church services start out with a confession of sins is testimony to our fallenness. The best we have to offer is not good, not good at all. But thankfully Christ came to take away all of our sins and replace them with his righteousness.  
     
   Don’t wait until Sunday to confess your sins. Do it daily and by grace through faith receive the forgiveness that Christ offers you.

Lesson 2 – Eccl 3:17 – A Hint at the Answer to Finding Meaning

1. Read Eccl 3:17

**17I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work.**

1. The context. The bulk of Eccl mimics life in that our lives consist of one random event after another. The rest of Eccl is like this. It meanders from one topic to another, all of which show us the place to find meaning and purpose is not found in this world but outside of it.
2. So far in Eccl in his quest for meaning and purpose in life, among other things Solomon has considered wisdom and pleasure and greatness. And in the prior verse he has even considered philanthropy, love for our fellow human beings. But he has found that none of them fill the void for meaning in our lives.  
     
   Now in v. 17 who does Solomon turn to?  
     
   > Now Solomon turns to God.  
     
   What will God do to counter the fact that in the place of justice and righteousness wickedness is found?  
     
   > He will judge between the righteous and the wicked.  
     
   On the one hand, this might give us some hope. God is not going to let the wicked trample all over the righteous. But as we observe life, do we see God putting the wicked in their place?  
     
   > No, more often than not it seems like the wicked prosper and the righteous get crushed.  
     
   When this happens what do God’s people do? (See Job and Pss. 5, 17, 28)  
     
   > God’s people cry out to God, looking for justice and righteousness.  
     
   There is a conflict between what we see and experience and what we believe. Our experience contradicts what we believe. So in faith, God’s people cry out to him. They know him to be a God who is not only merciful and gracious, but also just and righteous. In faith they appeal to his justice.
3. God’s judgment appears to be the answer we are looking for, yet in Eccl we don’t get the full story. And we can’t get the full story by only using our eyes and ears and reason. What we observe in life is a God that seems fickle. We can’t make sense of him and what he is doing. We hope he will set things right but from what we see, it doesn’t appear that he is. So even by bringing God into the picture, Eccl does not spell it out for us. **From what we observe, if God is judging people to set things right, it doesn’t appear to be working**.  
     
   In order to make sense of things, we need more. We have to have God reveal himself. We have to have God speak. And that is what he does in other parts of the OT and in the NT. He says, In these last days, I have spoken by my Son. We have to have God enlighten us as to what this judgment is and how it can make any sense of this messed up world. He reveals that he will send his Son who will take on the sins of the world and God’s judgment will be directed at his Son. And at the same time the Son will give his righteousness to those who have faith and trust in him. And those who reject the Son will be cast off to eternal fire.  
     
   But this is not revealed here in Eccl. So even though he hints at the answer in this verse, we are still left partially in the dark. We know God will take care of things. It says in this verse that “there is a time for every matter,” but we don’t know when that time is.
4. Like all people you have had times in your life when someone did something wicked against you. You have prayed to God that he would right this wrong. And yet nothing seemed to happen. You may have prayed one of the psalms such as Ps. 17.  
     
   **17**Hear a just cause, O Lord; attend to my cry!  
       Give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit!  
   **2**From your presence let my vindication come!  
       Let your eyes behold the right!  
   …  
   **13**Arise, O Lord! Confront him, subdue him!  
       Deliver my soul from the wicked by your sword,  
   **14**from men by your hand, O Lord,  
       from men of the world whose portion is in this life.  
     
   This is the cry of faith. We know God to be just. We call upon him to execute that justice. He will execute justice but it may not be at the time we want. Even so we do not lose faith. We know if not now, at the End he will. Sometimes he answers our pleas with, Not yet. Even if we have to wait, we know God’s justice will prevail. We can say with confidence like the psalmist ends Ps. 17:  
     
   **15**As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness;  
       when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness.  
     
   No matter how it appears, trust in the Lord.

Lesson 3 – Eccl 3:18-21 – Being Human is Vanity

1. Read Eccl 3:18-21

**18I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts. 19For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. 20All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return. 21Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth?**

1. The context. Eccl 3:16 to the end of the book is like a string of pearls where each pearl shows us what is not the answer to the meaning to life. We have seen that philanthropy and justice is vanity. We have seen that God’s judgment might be the answer but from our earthly vantage point we can’t see how. Now we look at another pearl that shows us what is not the answer.
2. In v. 18 it says that God tests the children of man. Think about someone who wants to get a driver’s license. What is the first thing they have to do in order to get one? They have to learn the rules for driving. Then they will probably practice driving. When it comes time to get a license, what do they have to pass?  
     
   > They have to pass a driver’s test.  
     
   They must show that they not only know the rules but that they can follow the laws. God’s test for living in this world is the Ten Commandments. Using them God tests us every day. How do we fare in taking this test? Does anyone pass the test?  
     
   > We do not fare well. We all fail.  
     
   We are all selfish. We look out for ourselves instead of others. We are no different than the beasts of the fields. As they are only concerned about themselves, so are we.
3. Using our senses to compare humans and animals biologically, how are they the same?  
     
   > 3:19a: They both die physical deaths.  
     
   > 3:19b: They both breath the same air.  
     
   > 3:20: They both came from dust and when they die, they return to dust.  
     
   Using our senses there seems to be little difference between men and animals. In science we use our senses to learn about ourselves and our environment. To many people in the world who hold strictly to science and have no need for God, how do they view man?  
     
   > They view man through the lens of evolution. They believe man descended from apes.  
     
   So they come to the same conclusion as Solomon. Using only our sight and reason, it is reasonable to assume we “are but beasts.” That is why many believe we are just a higher form of animal.
4. Yet, we do have the sense that humans are made up of a body and a spirit, for when we die the spirit seems to leave the body. But what happens to that spirit when we die? If we use our senses and are truthful, how must we answer this question?  
     
   > We must say we don’t know.  
     
   Some would like to believe that the spirit of man goes up and the spirit of the beasts goes down, but we have no proof of it. Others believe there is no difference. When we die and when animals die, we all face the same fate. We and they no longer exist.
5. **Without special revelation (the Scriptures), people are just fleshly creatures just like animals.** But we do have a Word from God. And in that Word, he reveals that we are different from the animals. All people and animals experience birth. But in his Word, God says there is another birth available to humans. He says to “enter the kingdom of God,” one must be “born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5). Without this birth from above, we are no better off than the animals. What is this birth where we are born of water and the Spirit?  
     
   > It is baptism.  
     
   In it we are adopted into God’s family. In it our sins are washed away. For those who believe in Jesus and are baptized into his death and resurrection, we know for certain that upon their death their spirit does indeed go upward to God where it awaits the End when their bodies will be raised and reunited with their spirit. Knowing this makes all the difference. We have hope. We know that eternal bliss awaits us.
6. Without your baptism, you are no better than the beasts – here one day, gone the next. Think about how precious your baptism is! In baptism God came to you and claimed you as his own. He wrote is name on your forehead and on your breast. In baptism he applies the death and resurrection of Jesus to you. In baptism the old sinful you is drowned and a new you arises. Outside of Christ being human is vanity. But knowing Christ makes all the difference. God’s law condemns us but “whoever believes in him is not condemned” (John 3:18a). As you go about your day, consciously remember your baptism and with great joy thank God for it.

Lesson 4 – Eccl 3:22 – Your Lot in Life is Meaningless

1. Read Eccl 3:22

**22So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him?**

1. The context. We began this long and winding section of Eccl learning that philanthropy and justice were vanity (3:16). Then we saw that God’s judgment might be the answer we are looking for, but we have no idea how (3:17). And then we saw that being human isn’t any better than being an animal (3:18-21). What would God have us to consider next?
2. What does it mean when you say, “That’s my lot in life”?  
     
   > Your lot in life is what you have been given in life. It is the circumstances you have been given to live with.   
     
   It implies that whether the circumstances are fortunate or unfortunate, they are out of your control. You take what has been given to you and do the best you can with it. For many people who are not Christians, who or what would they say is responsible for giving you your lot in life?  
     
   > They would say that it is completely a matter of chance.  
     
   Looking at life from a purely secular point of view means a lot of what happens to us in life is a matter of chance. Sure, you can plan and prepare and many times that does affect your life, but other times your planning and preparation end up falling apart and you end up going in a completely different direction. Your control of your life is severely limited.  
     
   Does a person have any control over the family he is born into? Does a person have control over what his abilities are, such as being good at math vs being very artistic? Does a person have control over how many brothers and sisters he has? Does a person control the time in world history that he lives in? Does a person control whether he has male or female chromosomes?  
     
   > Obviously the answer is no to all of these questions.  
     
   You are who you are. Your family is your family. Your country is your country. Your life consists of these things. All you can do is take what has been given to you – your lot in life - and try to navigate your way through it.
3. Given your life’s circumstances, what does Solomon say is the best thing you can do?  
     
   > He says take the work that has been given you and rejoice in it.  
     
   In your lot in life you may have been given the type of work that is lowly and looked down on. It may not pay very well. Or you may be a high energy CEO of a company. Whatever work you have been given to do in life, how does Solomon say you should approach it? Why?  
     
   > Rejoice in your work. That is the best you can do.
4. Now, just because there is nothing better than enjoying your work doesn’t mean that your work and your life are going to be great. It may be complete drudgery or extremely high pressure. In any case no one’s life is a utopia. In fact, it will be far from it. Yet if one can find pleasure in and enjoy one’s work there is nothing better than that in this sin-filled world. It is the best you can hope for. Life is unpredictable. It takes many unexpected twists and turns. If you don’t know what will happen during your life, then it is even more true that you don’t know what will happen after you leave this life on earth. So **all you can do is take what life hands you, do the best you can with it, and enjoy the work you have been given. In the end, that is all there is to life and it is all meaningless anyway.**
5. What kind of lot has life handed you?  
     
   What kind of things are you good at?  
     
   What kind of family are you a part of?  
     
   Whatever your life consists of, your life is your life. Much of it you do not have direct control of. The best you can do is enjoy your work. Make the best of it. Life on this fallen earth is no panacea. Life without Christ is actually meaningless. But with Christ life has meaning and purpose. He gives hope that goes beyond our short lives on this earth. We do the best we can now, knowing that we have eternal life with Christ to look forward to.

Lesson 5 – Eccl 4:1 – Oppression Makes Life Vanity

1. Read Eccl 4:1

**4 Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them.**

1. The context. We are randomly going through the various things of life looking for meaning and purpose and finding out that all of them are vanity. Philanthropy and justice, Gods’ judgment, being human, your lot in life – without God they are all meaningless. And now we are looking at some verses (4:1-3) that tell us about another aspect of life that makes it meaningless.
2. What two groups does Solomon talk about in v.1?  
     
   > The oppressors and the oppressed.  
     
   Do we still have these two groups today?  
     
   > Yes. You see it all the time.  
     
   You see oppression start at a young age. In our schools you see oppressors bullying the oppressed. You see one country oppressing another in the form of wars or economic hardships. Racism is a form of oppression. We see plenty of that today. We see premeditated robbery of businesses by groups of thieves who quickly smash and grab. And those groups claim that they do it because they have been oppressed. Oppression is all around us.
3. What does Solomon say is the bad news for the oppressed? (He says it twice.)  
     
   > He says “they had no one to comfort them.”  
     
   So the point is that the oppressors have the power, they use that power to oppress, and there is no one who is stopping the oppressors.  
     
   So in the case of shopping lifting by bans of criminals, the police are the ones who are supposed to stop them, but in some cases, they intentionally stand by and let them loot the stores. It would be a great comfort to the store owners if the police stepped in and did their job. But when they don’t they have no comfort.
4. There is someone else who could step in and stop the oppressors. Who is the One who created all things and controls all things, and is all powerful?  
     
   > In his sovereignty God is over all the earth. He has the power to stop all oppression.  
     
   And so we, like Habakkuk, cry out to God and lodge a complaint against him.  
     
   Hab. 1:2-4  
   **2**O Lord, how long shall I cry for help,  
       and you will not hear?  
   Or cry to you “Violence!”  
       and you will not save?  
   **3**Why do you make me see iniquity,  
       and why do you idly look at wrong?  
   Destruction and violence are before me;  
       strife and contention arise.  
   **4**So the law is paralyzed,  
       and justice never goes forth.  
   For the wicked surround the righteous;  
       so justice goes forth perverted.  
     
   God’s response to Habakkuk’s cry is that he actually is working to right what is wrong. He may not see it or comprehend it but it is true. God has promised to bring about justice and he will do it in a strange way. God raised up the Babylonians to squash the injustice of the Israelites. God uses evil to punish evil. And the evil of the Babylonians, while serving the Lord’s purposes, will not go unpunished. They too have judgment coming against them.  
     
   After hearing God’s response, how did Habakkuk react? He believes the Lord’s word that the wicked will be punished and he prays that when that punishment comes that the Lord will have mercy on his people. Habakkuk quietly waited in faith for God to fulfill his Word. And we should do the same. We look forward to the Last Day when God will deal with evil and vindicate the righteous. Like Habakkuk, we “will rejoice in the Lord; [we] will take joy in the God of [our] salvation. God, the Lord, is [our] strength” (Hab. 3:18-19a).
5. Yet in Eccl, we have no promise from God that he will stop the oppressors. Without the rest of the story of the Scriptures, in Eccl all we have is an indictment against God. **Oppression is everywhere. The oppressors use their power to benefit themselves and step on others. And God, who has the power to stop it, stands by and does nothing.**
6. As we look at the world around us, we see all kinds of oppression. Most likely at times in your life you have been oppressed. Some people face minor forms of oppression and others face severe forms. Whatever the case is for you, if you didn’t have the possibility of God righting what is wrong, your only hope would be in man righting the wrongs. Sometimes this happens but more often than not it doesn’t. Most wrongs are not corrected. That is one of the reasons we say life is not fair.   
     
   Take notice of the oppression you see around you and in the world. Even though you do not find comfort in the oppression being stopped, you need not despair. As a Christian you know that in the End God will stop all oppression and make things right. The oppression of this world serves God’s purpose to drive you away from trusting in this world and to drive you into the arms of your loving Savior.

Lesson 6 – Eccl 4:2-3 – Despairing of Life Itself is Good!

1. Read Eccl 4:2-3

**2And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive.** **3But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.**

1. The context. We are randomly going through the things of life looking for what can give us meaning and purpose and finding out that all of them are vanity. Philanthropy and justice, Gods’ judgment, being human, your lot in life – without God they are all meaningless. And now we are looking at some verses (4:1-3) that tell us about how there is oppression all around us but no one does anything about it – including God.
2. In the previous lesson we talked about the oppression that is in the world and the fact that there is no comfort for the oppressed because no one stops their oppressors. Knowing this, what could this lead you to believe (4:2)?  
     
   > It is better to be dead than alive.  
     
   If no one is going to stop the oppressors, then life is just one pain and sorrow after another. You quickly lose hope. You think to yourself, At least if I were dead I wouldn’t have to endure all this oppression. The dead are more fortunate than the living.  
     
   Or, taking it one step further, what conclusion might you come to (4:3)?  
     
   > It would be even better if I had never existed. I wouldn’t have to live with all this oppression. I wouldn’t have to die. I wouldn’t have to experience any of this.  
     
   For us the existential experience is, “Look, I didn’t ask to be born into this world. I didn’t ask to be wrapped in this sinful body. I didn’t ask for any of this. I sin and I can’t get out of it because I’m trapped in myself. And I can’t get out to this oppressive world. There is nothing I can do about any of it.”   
     
   **That is precisely where the Law and the curse want to drive us – to the point where we throw up our hands and say, It would have been better if I had never existed at all**. When we come to that conclusion, it may seem the most godless, a most profound accusation against God. Yet at the same time, in a very paradoxical way, we have unwittingly been backed into the arms of God.   
     
   What needs to happen is that we need to despair of all things, even life itself. Then the only one we can turn to is God. Without Christ isn’t all of this true? Without Christ, wouldn’t you rather that you never existed? Christ makes all the difference.
3. So when people, even our Christian brothers or sisters, are going through all of this suffering and sadness and they come to you and say, “I wish I was dead,” remember the theology of Eccl and say, Thank God! These people are a lot closer to God than most. It is the same when they say, “I’d be better off if I had never been born.” Don’t overreact. Know that they are closer to the truth than most people who don’t see the world for what it really is. When you see people in this situation, don’t be surprised. Recognize the situation they are in. These people see the truth and are very ripe for hearing the alternative of a God that doesn’t simply reverse oppression and injustice but comes into our world, wraps himself with it all and bears it all himself, takes it into death, and rises to new life and grants us new life.  
     
   That brings to mind the words of Christ: Whoever loves his life will lose it. Whoever hates his life will gain it. Jesus wants us to despair of our lives so he can give us his life. It is so much profoundly better than what we have. The life that we have is such that the moment we are born we start dying. Our life is really a living death. Jesus says, The day is coming and now is when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of Man and come forth. What is he saying? We are dead and Jesus speaks to the dead and we have risen and come to life. And the life that we live is his life, eternal life. So, it is not I who live but Christ who lives in me. And Christ’s life gives me hope that all of the oppression and injustice will be reversed and we will inherit a new heavens and new earth. So what matters is that you have been born again and are a new creation. You have been given new life in Baptism.
4. Everyone of us has had a time in our life when we’ve face oppression and said or thought, I wish I was already dead or I wish I had never existed. When things get this bad, we lose hope and don’t see the point of continuing to live. Think about a specific time or two where you have felt this way. It is probably painful to do so. You might not have seen the purpose for it, but even in such terrible times God can and does use these things to drive us into his loving arms. Thank God that he brought you through these times. And if you are going through such times right now, keep your eyes on Jesus. He came into this world and took all of the world’s oppression upon himself. He knows what you are going through. You are not alone. Trust in him. He will get you through it. You have an eternal future where you will never have to experience oppression again.

Lesson 7 – Eccl 4:4-6 – Both Too Much Work and Laziness are Vanity

1. Read Eccl 4:4-6

**4Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.   
5The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh.  
6Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. The last of these was the oppression of the world and the fact that no one stops it.
2. We now take a look at the work that man does. When people choose a career and they become quite good at it, they might be what is called a master. What are some careers where someone is called a master?  
     
   > a master gardener, a master electrician, a master carpenter, a master at excel  
     
   In professional sports, if someone rises up and is better than all of his peers, he is given the designation of being “all pro” or an “all-star.”   
     
   According to Solomon, what is it that drives someone to be the best (4:4a)?  
     
   > “a man’s envy of his neighbor.”  
     
   Maybe another way of saying this might be that these people thrive with competition. They want to be the best. They can’t stand to lose or to be second best. What does that drive them to do (4:4a)?  
     
   > That drives them to toil and work hard and to hone their skills.  
     
   Yet, what does Solomon think this “envy of his neighbor” and drive to be the best amounts to (4:4b)?  
     
   > Solomon says it “is vanity and striving after the wind.”  
     
   We said earlier that “vanity” could be just as well translated as “vapor.” All the effort exerted at toil and work and skill is like a puff of vapor. It is there for a moment but quickly dissipates into nothing. **In the big picture all our hard work doesn’t amount to anything**.
3. If all of this toil and work and skill is worthless, what is the opposite that a person could do (4:5a)?  
     
   > The opposite of working your fingers to the bone is sitting on your hands and doing nothing.  
     
   What happens when someone does that (4:5b)?  
     
   > He “eats his own flesh.” He just wastes away. That is what laziness does.  
     
   What does Solomon call a person who is lazy and does no work (4:5))?  
     
   > He calls him a fool.
4. So he said in v. 4, our drive to be the best at work comes from a sinful motive, envy of our neighbor. And then in v. 5 he said, Don’t be lazy and sit around and do nothing. What does Solomon say is the middle ground between the two extremes (4:6)?  
     
   > He says it is better to mix in some quiet time with your work.  
     
   **He says it is better to have some quiet time than to work really hard only to find out that all your toil is “a striving after wind.”**
5. Do you ever feel like you are stuck between a rock and a hard place? The answer for most of us at some point in our life is yes. If you feel like there is no escape from this conundrum then that is actually good! That is the whole purpose of Eccl. It purposely hems us in, destroying our false idols. It causes us to ask, Is this the life I want?  
     
   As they say today, how is your work/life balance? It is easy to get out of kilter. It is easy to let your work take over your life isn’t it? What suffers when you do this?  
     
   > It might be something different for different people. It might be your spouse suffers taking up your slack. It might be your children who suffer when you don’t have time to spend with them. It might be your church suffers when you don’t have time to use your skills as a volunteer.  
     
   Take some time and evaluate where you stand in your work/leisure balance. If your work has too high a priority, make plans to correct this. Don’t let work become an idol for you.

Lesson 8 – Eccl 4:7-8 – Living as a Workaholic Miser is Vanity

1. Read Eccl 4:7-8

**7Again, I saw vanity under the sun: 8one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, “For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?” This also is vanity and an unhappy business.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. The last of these was that working too much and being lazy are vanity.
2. Next Solomon comments on another vanity that he has observed in life on this earth (v. 7). How does he begin to describe the next person he has observed (4:8a)?  
     
   > The person he observes has no family to take care of, no son or brother. He only has to worry about providing for himself.  
     
   How does it describe the amount of work he does (4:8b)?  
     
   > It says “there is no end to all his toil.” He is constantly working.  
     
   As he works, he is getting rich. So his situation is that he has no one to provide for but himself, he works all the time, and he has become rich from all his hard work. But what is his attitude towards his riches (4:8c)?  
     
   > “His eyes are never satisfied with riches.” He always wants to work and earn more.  
     
   He never stops and takes a moment to ask himself what question (4:8d)?  
     
   > “For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?”  
     
   Restate the question in your own words.  
     
   > Who will benefit from all my hard work and all the riches I’ve accumulated? I have deprived myself of all the pleasures of life to gain these riches, but if I don’t take time to enjoy them, what good is it?  
     
   What is Solomon’s conclusion about all of the constant toiling and depriving one’s self of pleasure (4:8e)?  
     
   > Like everything else he has looked at in life, this too is “vanity and an unhappy business.
3. What do we call someone who works all the time? Whose life completely revolves around his work? Who has paid time off but never uses it?  
     
   > We call that person a workaholic.  
     
   What do we call someone who makes a bunch of money and stores it away unwilling to spend any of it?  
     
   > We call that person a miser.  
     
   So to summarize, **Solomon observed someone who was a workaholic and a miser, who had no other family to care for, who had accumulated great wealth and who did not spend it on any pleasures. He describes this kind of life as “an unhappy business.”**  
     
   For this kind of person, their work is their life. Their work becomes their identity. If you take away their work, they don’t know what to do or who they are. How do you think this person’s life will end?  
     
   > This person will die with all of the money he earned sitting in a bank or investments and all that money will go to someone else.  
     
   In our society and culture, we hold those who are driven, successful, and rich high on a pedestal. We want to emulate them. We want to be like them. But as Solomon observes, it is not all that great. It is an unhappy business that is in the end vanity.
4. What about you? Are you a workaholic? Or do you know someone in your family or one of your friends that is workaholic?  
     
   Are you someone who has amassed a great deal of wealth, stashed it away, and are unwilling to spend any of it? Or if this doesn’t describe you, do you know someone else who is like that?  
     
   If this describes you or someone you know, how happy are you or they? Are you or they happy with life? What is the purpose of working all the time and amassing this wealth that you will never spend?  
     
   I think we all agree that such a life is vanity. It is meaningless. It is unhappy. You are only on this earth for a short while. Is that the way you want to live life?

Lesson 8 – Eccl 4:9-12 – Companionship is Vanity

1. Read Eccl 4:9-12

**9Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil.  10For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! 11Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone?  12And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. The last of these was the fact that living life as a workaholic miser is vanity.
2. Eccl 4:9a is the theme for vv. 9-12. What is it?  
     
   > “Two are better than one.”  
     
   Generally speaking, what does that mean?  
     
   > It is better to have fellowship and community with others than to be lonely and all by yourself.  
     
   Solomon gives three examples as to why this is the case. Why is two better than one in v. 9?  
     
   > In the first example Solomon speaks of two people working together. He says they are rewarded. In many cases, two can work more efficiently and get more done than just one person on his own. So the reward is that the job gets done easier and faster.  
     
   Still considering two people working together, what is another reason two is better than one (4:10)?  
     
   > The phrase “if they fall” could be taken literally or figuratively. If one of them falls down or is having trouble doing the job, he has someone else who can help pick him up and get back on the right track to finish the job. If you are all alone, there is no one who can help lift him up.
3. In v. 11 he gives a second example of why two are better than one. What is that example?  
     
   > Here he talks about staying warm. Two people can huddle up with each other and share each other’s body heat. If you are by yourself there is no one else to help keep you warm.  
     
   And in v. 12 he gives a third example. Why are two better than one in this case (4:12a)?  
     
   > If you have an adversary, it easier for that adversary to prevail against you if you are alone. But if there are two against one, it would be harder for the adversary to prevail.  
     
   What does he use to illustrate this (4:12b)?  
     
   > He uses a threefold cord to illustrate this. If you have one strand of fabric it is easy to break. But if you weave the fabric together threefold, it become much harder to tear.
4. By giving these examples and illustrations, Solomon is commending companionship. In what kinds of basic things in life do we have companionship and find it beneficial?  
     
   > We have companionship in our marriages, our families, our local communities, our states, and our country.  
     
   He is saying that if we band together, whether it be two people in marriage or a whole country economically, we benefit from standing and working together. This is very similar to Solomon saying that wisdom is better than folly (2:13). Likewise, two are better than one. But in the end what did Solomon say about wisdom concerning the meaning and purpose of life (2:15)?  
     
   > He said what happens to the fool happens to the wise. What he concludes about wisdom is that “this too is vanity.”  
     
   Here in the verses we are considering, Solomon lifts up companionship as good but he does not say that it is the key to finding meaning in life. You might think that he would say that the purpose of living is to pour yourself out for others. That is what philanthropy is, but he has already told us that that too is vanity. So **companionship is good. It helps us get through life. But like everything else in this world, it does not fill our lives with meaning and purpose**.
5. We all know someone who is a loner and someone who is a real people person. You can give life a go all by yourself but most of the time it is much easier if you have others you can depend on. Whether it is working together or caring for each other or combating an enemy it is better to have someone by your side working with you. It lightens your load.  
     
   Think about the people you know. Can you name someone you know who is a loner, who prefers to do everything himself? Have you seen some events in that person’s life where it would have been better if that person had a companion to help him get through it or to make things a little easier?  
     
   And what about someone in your life that has companions that he can depend on and works with? Watching them, is it apparent how much better life is when you have others to go through life with?  
     
   Even if you have companions to help you in life, you know that life is no panacea. There are still many trials and problems that crop up. And so you do the best you can, knowing that heaven awaits. In heaven you will still have companionship, only without all the troubles and pain.

Lesson 9 – Eccl 4:13-16 – Being Successful is Vanity

1. Read Eccl 4:13-16

**13Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to take advice.  14For [even though] he went from prison to the throne, though in his own kingdom he had been born poor [destitute].  15I saw all the living who move about under the sun, along with that youth who was to stand in the king's  place. 16****There was no end of all the people, all of whom he led. Yet** **those who come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a striving after wind.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. The last of these was the fact that companionship is better than being a loner, but there is no promise that it will fill what is missing in your life.
2. In these verses, Solomon makes a comparison between two figures, who are they (4:13a)?  
     
   > He compares a poor, wise youth with an old, foolish king.  
     
   What is one thing that makes the king foolish (4:14b)?  
     
   > One thing that shows that the king is foolish is that he “no longer knew how to take advise.”
3. Further describing the wise youth, what does 4:14a say he went from and to?  
     
   > It says he went from prison to the throne.  
     
   Prison probably refers to a debtor’s prison. He was born so poor and destitute that he had to do whatever was necessary to survive and because he couldn’t pay back his debts he ended up in prison. But his wisdom took him from prison all the way to the throne. It was a real rag to riches story. Some would say this is the American dream, to go from having no money or power to having great wealth and power.
4. In 4:15-16, Solomon tells us what he observed. What did he observe?  
     
   > in 4:15a: He observed “all the living who move about under the sun.”  
     
   > in 4:15b: He observed “that youth who was to stand in the king’s place.”  
     
   He saw the youth who rose up to be king and all the people of his kingdom that flocked around him. In 4:16a, how does he describe the people of his kingdom?  
     
   > “There was no end of all the people, all of whom he led.”  
     
   It gives the impression that he led all the people of his kingdom and that they were all willing and faithful followers. They celebrated his rule and esteemed and honored him.  
     
   But what did the next generation think about him (4:16b)?  
     
   > Solomon says, “those who come later will not rejoice in him.” The one who they once rejoiced in as their ruler will in the future not be honored or esteemed.  
     
   At one point a country can have a highly celebrated and popular leader, but in the next generation his popularity quickly fades and he is forgotten.   
     
   Solomon is saying that it is better to be a poor, wise youth than to be an unwise king and that it is better to remain poor and wise than to go from rags to riches. Solomon is talking about us being “successful.” **In the eyes of the world, those who hold positions of power and prestige are successful.** Here that is represented by being a king. The king may be a foolish king who doesn’t take advice or he may be a wise king who goes from rags to riches. Either way, one minute he may be celebrated by the people and the next minute that popularity is gone. What does Solomon conclude about being successful (4:16c)?  
     
   > Like everything else in this life under the sun, **he concludes that being successful “is vanity and a striving after wind.”**
5. In America many believe that with enough hard work and perseverance anyone can become successful. What success is may be defined differently by different people but by in large those who rise up to positions of power and prestige are looked at as being successful. Solomon says that this type of worldly success is vanity. As quickly as it comes it goes.  
     
   What about you? What is your idea of success? Are you striving to move up the corporate ladder? There is nothing wrong with striving to achieve, but you have to realize that in the big picture it doesn’t amount to anything. In fact, you might be happier if you are lower on the totem pole. No matter where you stand in the pecking order, you need to realize that worldly success is fleeting and in the end quite meaningless. So take a step back and survey your life and what you are trying to achieve and look at it with the big picture in mind. Don’t think that success will give you great meaning and purpose in life because it won’t.

Lesson 10 – Eccl 5:1 – Worshipping God Can Be Vanity

1. Read Eccl 5:1

**5  Guard your steps when you go to the house of God.** **To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. The last of these was that being successful is vanity. Now we switch to something else that is vanity that surprises us.
2. The main point of Eccl is that no matter where we look for meaning and purpose “under the heavens,” we find that it is instead vanity and meaningless. So, if nothing on this earth gives us meaning and purpose, logically who should we look to for meaning and purpose? Who is mentioned in Eccl 5:1, who is not “under the sun”?  
     
   > God is mentioned. He must be the answer.  
     
   When looked at in the right way, he is the answer. But Solomon says we should be cautious when we do what (5:1a)?  
     
   > He says, “Guard your steps when you go to the house of God.”  
     
   What does that mean? God isn’t safe? I thought that when humanity fails me and kings fail me and justice and righteousness fail me and all the toils and pursuits and work fail me, I can always go right to God and everything will be ok. But Solomon says, “Guard your steps.” It is shocking and surprising. And what follows is even more surprising.
3. Read 5:1b. What religious act is mentioned?  
     
   > Offering sacrifices.  
     
   Didn’t God institute sacrifices? Yes (see Lev.) Then how can they be bad? Notice how the sacrifice is described. What is the sacrifice called (5:1b)?  
     
   > It is called “the sacrifice of fools.”  
     
   Heb. 11:6 says “without faith it is impossible to please God.” If a sacrifice is offered without faith, it is a “sacrifice of fools.” The Concordia Self-Study Commentary puts it this way: **“It is a sacrifice of fools to engage in outward rites of worship without the heartfelt intention of conforming one’s life to God’s will** (1 Sam. 15:22; Ps. 50:7 ff.; Prov. 21:3; Is. 1:11 ff.; Amos 5:22 ff.)”.  
     
   In fact according to 5:1c, it is even worse than that. If someone offers “the sacrifice of fools,” what are they really doing?  
     
   > They are really doing evil.  
     
   So sacrifices offered without faith not only do not please God, they are evil. How so? People who offer such sacrifices are doing so in order to appease or manipulate God. They want God to do their will rather than them doing God’s will.
4. Anyone can choose Yahweh’s religion just like they can choose any other religion. They can go to the temple and offer the prescribed sacrifices. They can do exactly what God wants them to do and yet what they do is evil. If they are doing it to manipulate God, God despises those sacrifices. That is what is meant by passages such as Ps. 51:16-17: “**16**For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. **17**The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” What God really wants is “a broken spirit and a broken and contrite heart.” If you offer the sacrifices with a broken spirit and heart, then that is not despised by God. That is the sacrifice of the wise.  
     
   How do you get “a broken spirit and contrite heart”? What does Eccl 5:1b tell us?  
     
   > It says, “To draw near to listen is better.”  
     
   Come to the house of God and listen to what God says and take it to heart. He says you are a sinner. That is why these sacrifices are being made. That is why substitutionary atonement is being made. Hearing his word breaks our rock-hard hearts to pieces and replaces them with soft, living, repentant hearts.
5. According to Heb. 10:5-10, it is Jesus who is speaking in Ps. 40:6-8 to the Father. Read Heb. 10:5-10 now where Ps. 40:6-8 is quoted and then explained.   
     
   > There he talks about sacrifices. Similarly, he says, “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired.” He goes on to say, “I have come to do your will, O God.” And Heb. 10:10 says, “And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” Ultimately the sacrifices of the OT point forward to the one great sacrifice made by Christ in order to sanctify us. In terms of salvation, our sacrifices don’t win us points with God. The only sacrifice that matters in terms of our justification is Christ’s sacrifice for us.
6. What does this mean for our worship? That means the emphasis has to remain on Christ and his sacrifice for us. For sure in gratitude we offer the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. But those are given only in response to what Christ has done for us. What did he do for us? Jesus said to the Father, “I have come to do your will.” (Heb. 10:9a). He did what none of us can do. He lived a perfect life. But that was not all. He offered his body once for all. He died for the sins of the world. Through his perfect obedience and his suffering and death Jesus won for us forgiveness of sins. How does he give us the forgiveness he won? It is in worship that Jesus comes to us and gives us the gift of forgiveness. While our sacrifices to God are appropriate, much more important is the sacrifice of Christ and the spiritual gifts he gives out in the Divine Service.  
     
   When you go to church, are you going primarily to offer God sacrifices or to receive the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice for you? That makes all the difference in the world. If you are going to offer him your sacrifices thinking it will earn you points with God, you are sadly mistaken. If that is the case then it is as Eccl 5:1 says, you are unaware that what you are doing is evil. When you go to the Divine Service, let Jesus serve you. When he walked this earth, he served people. Just because he ascended into heaven doesn’t mean he stopped serving people. He continues to do so in the Divine Service.

Lesson 11 – Eccl 5:2-7 – Speaking Many Words or Making a Rash Vow to God is Vanity

1. Read Eccl 5:2-7

**2****Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few. 3For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words. 4When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow.  5It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. 6Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands? 7For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. The last of these that we studied was surprising. Going to the house of God and appearing before him, if not done in the correct posture, can also be vanity. In our lesson today, the discussion of worship continues.
2. In terms of worship, what do these verses address (5:2)?  
     
   > These verses address being “rash with your mouth” and letting “your heart be hasty to utter a word before God.”  
     
   Many times our mouth and our words can get us into trouble, especially when we come before God. So what does Solomon advise (5:2b)?  
     
   > He advises “let your word be few.”  
     
   He said in 5:1 it is better to listen. God’s word is much more important that our words. When we talk, we cannot hear. So, it is better to keep our words few and to listen to God speak.
3. When your life is consumed by the business you are in, the work you do, or the cares you have, the result is to have incoherent dreams, a disturbed sleep (5:3). So the thought in v. 3 is this: As surely as restless sleep comes from worrying about your life, so the fool will most assuredly babble on with many meaningless words. So when it comes to worship (prayers or vows) don’t be babbling fool. As he said in v.2, “let your words be few.” Hearing God’s words to you are more important than your words to God.
4. What is the main topic of 5:4-6 (see 5:4a)?  
     
   > The topic in these verses is making a vow to God.  
     
   When you make a vow to God, you are making a commitment to him. An example of a vow might be: Lord, if you cure me of this cancer, I will give $10,000 to the church. What is Solomon’s advice to you when you make a vow (5:4b, d)?  
     
   > “Do not delay in paying it.” “Pay what you vow.”  
     
   Not keeping your vow shows that you are fool (5:4c). If you have a choice of making a vow to God and not paying it or not making a vow at all, what should you do (5:5)?  
     
   > In that case, don’t make a vow at all.  
     
   Making a rash vow only leads to sin (5:6a). For an example of this see Judg. 11:30-40 where the rash vow Jephthah made cost him dearly. And to say that the vow was a mistake is to say, I made the vow hastily in ignorance without thinking it through. What is the result of making a vow “by mistake” (5:6b)?  
     
   > God will be angry and punish you for it.
5. So when you go to God’s house to worship, it is best to go ready to listen than to speak. **It is better to have God speak to you than for you to speak to God. We tend to be rash and hasty with our words.** This is true with prayer and with vows made to God. If you make a vow, make sure you keep it. And when you do speak, don’t go on and on with many words for this is just vanity (5:7a). Rather your posture should be one of fear toward God (5:7b).
6. In the picture of God that Solomon is painting, God is not particularly gracious, merciful, personable, or forgiving. Rather he is one to be feared, not taken lightly, not lied to, not mocked. So at the end of these verses, what does God look like? Not much different than the portrait Solomon painted earlier in chpt. 2. If we view God with our reason and sight under the sun, we see him as fickle, as dangerous, and our interaction with him in worship as fraught with danger.  
     
   One can believe in God without special revelation. Just by observing nature and the orderliness of the world we can deduce that there is a God and that he is in control. In that sense, all people are religious. That is why there are so many religions in the world. All religions practiced “under the sun” are religions of law. They are man-centered religions where men tend to speak many words. Looking for meaning and purpose in these man-made religions is vanity just like all the other pursuits of man “under the sun.”
7. As a Christian you do not follow any of the thousands of man-made religions in the world. You know that all of these religions are worthless. But even if you worship the one, true God, your worship can also be worthless**. If your worship of the true God is centered on you and your words, then your worship is vanity.** That is why our view and practice of religion is so important. We must realize that true worship is Divine Service. It is God coming to us and serving us by heaping his grace and mercy upon us. Unfortunately, the worship of many Christians, especially in the USA, center on man and the words of praise we offer to God. How much better is our worship when God speaks words of forgiveness, peace, life, and joy to us than we speaking babbling words to God? Make sure you go to a church where at every service you hear God’s Word and receive the wonderful gifts God has to offer. That is what gives meaning and purpose to life.

Lesson 12 – Eccl 5:8-9 – Human Government is Vanity

1. Read Eccl 5:8-9

**8If you see in a province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and righteousness, do not be amazed at the matter, for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them.  9But this is gain for a land in every way: a king committed to cultivated fields.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. The last of these that we studied was surprising. Going to the house of God and appearing before him speaking many words can also be vanity. In our lesson today, we take a look at human governments.
2. What two things does Solomon lament in 5:8a?  
     
   > “the oppression of the poor” and “the violation of justice and righteousness”  
     
   Take these two statements and turn them around to positively state the purpose of governments.  
     
   > The purpose of governments is to protect the poor and maintain justice and act righteously.
3. Should we be surprised by the oppression of the poor and the injustice we see (5:8b)?  
     
   > Solomon says we should not be amazed by it.  
     
   What do we call it when in our governments we have one official who is watching over another official who in turn is watching over another official, etc., as stated in 5:8c?  
     
   > Bureaucracy.  
     
   We certainly have many layers of bureaucracy in our government. Solomon is lamenting how human leadership and the bureaucracy that naturally develops fails to protect humanity, to protect the weak from oppression. He laments it but says we shouldn’t be amazed that it happens. This is a great indictment of humanity! As we said above, the main purpose of human governments is to protect the poor and to maintain justice. And yet, we shouldn’t be amazed at its ineffectiveness in doing its job.  
     
   Solomon is the king, so he is not anti-government, but he is anti-human ineptitude and he is anti-bureaucracy because it perverts justice. But unfortunately, humanity at its best devolves into this. **Man’s rule of himself ends in utter failure and we shouldn’t be surprised by it**.  
     
   This failure of human government points us to the need for a very different kind of government, a different kind of king, who is not of this world and whose ways are not of this world, nor is his kingdom of this world but rather envisioned precisely and iconicly as a king who is crowned in thorns and hangs on a cross, with no bureaucracy, just getting it done all by himself for us. He is a king who serves the people rather than having the people serve him. Yet in Eccl, all we have in these verses is the lament and the insight that this is never going to go away. The governments of the world will always be this way.
4. What do we get from cultivated fields (5:9b)?  
     
   > From cultivated fields comes a harvest of grain.  
     
   What is grain turned into that benefits the people greatly?  
     
   > Grain is turned into food.  
     
   So, what does 5:9 say a king should be interested in?  
     
   > A king should be interested in providing food for his people. Or in other words, the purpose of a king (government) is to provide for the well-being of his people.  
     
   Perhaps this is what Luther had in mind. He said princes shouldn’t have on their crests lions or wreaths, but instead a loaf of bread. And coins stamped with the heads of the rulers should instead be stamped with a loaf of bread. Why? To remind the ruler and the people of the purpose of the ruler. It is to help and aid people in eating and living, protecting them.  
     
   So, Solomon is saying, instead of worrying about bureaucracy and climbing the ladder to become a higher official, it is a great blessing to have a king who is simply devoted to cultivated fields so that there is food for his people.
5. Take a look at the government of the country you live in. Is it doing what a government is supposed to do? Is it protecting the poor? Does it care for its citizens? Does it provide justice for its people? Are its acts righteous? The answer to all of these questions no matter where you live is no. But hopeful it is not totally corrupt and is still the goal of your government even if it falls short.  
     
   If you are in a situation where you need government assistance and the government is failing you, it is infuriating. You do the right thing. You pay your taxes. And what do you get in return? The run around. It is aggravating but you should not be surprised. And if your government is helpful in your time of need, consider it a great blessing because that is not always the case.

Lesson 13 – Eccl 5:10-12 – The Love of Money is Vanity

1. Read Eccl 5:10-12

**10He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.  11When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes?  12Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. The last of these that we studied was how human governments are supposed to help the poor and provide justice for its citizens. But more times than not, it fails to do so. In our lesson today, we take a look at money.
2. If religion isn’t the answer (5:2-7) and human government isn’t the answer (5:8-9), then surely money will be the answer, right? But what happens to those who love money and wealth (5:10)?  
     
   > They will not be satisfied with the amount of money and wealth they have.  
     
   There could be several reasons for this. First, it is just plain covetousness. We keep wanting more even though we already have more than enough. Second, money powers economies. Some want more and more money because they covet power. As the saying goes, money talks. Third, to some extent money provides security but some people never have enough money to feel secure. They worry about bad things happening to them where they could lose their wealth and therefore their power, prestige, and security, and so they accumulate more and more.  
     
   If this is how we think and feel, what are we doing? We are putting our faith and trust in money. In other words, money and wealth have become our god. Here is what Luther has to say about a god. “*A god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need. To have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe him with our whole heart. … That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, I say, really your God.”*  
     
   What does Solomon say about never being satisfied with the amount of money we have? What kind of life is it where we think we never have enough money (5:10b)?  
     
   > Living life to accumulate more and more money and wealth is just vanity, a puff of smoke.
3. What normally happens to spending when you make more money?  
     
   > You spend more.  
     
   The more money you make, the more you probably spend on yourself. If family members know you have money, it is not uncommon for them to ask for some of it. And then there are others who, knowing you have money, try and cash in on your money. Or maybe your wealth comes from your business. If you want to grow your business to make more money, you will have to hire more people or get better equipment, which requires you to spend money. No matter who or what the money is spent on, any advantages to the owner are lost as he sees what his money is spent on (5:11).
4. Those who love money and are never satisfied with the money they constantly think about money, how not to lose the money they have, and how to make more. It is a constant worry. Opposite of this is the laborer who just wants enough money to live. He goes to work, does his job, comes home, and doesn’t worry about his money. What does Solomon say about the sleep of this individual (5:12a)?  
     
   > His sleep is sweet. Whether he has plenty to eat or just enough to get by, he does not worry about it and is able to sleep soundly.  
     
   In terms of sleep, what happens to the lover of money who gorges himself on food (5:12b)?  
     
   > He eats so much that he is uncomfortable and cannot sleep.  
     
   Or the lover of money goes to bed with a full stomach but cannot sleep. What other reason would cause this?  
     
   > In this case, his sleeplessness is caused by his worries over his money and the need for more.
5. In our lesson today we’ve looked at **those who love money. They are never satisfied with how much money they have.** They are constantly thinking about how not to lose the money they have and how to gain more money. With their money they can fill their stomachs but their obsession with money keeps them up at night. In the end, living a life like this is meaningless.  
     
   Take a look at your own life. What is your attitude toward money? Surprisingly I know of several pastors at churches who seem to always be concerned about money. That shows that no one is immune to this. Who or what do we trust in more to provide our needs in life? Do you trust in God to provide or do you trust in money? In America, probably the richest country in world and one based on capitalism, this is a huge problem. We must realize this and be watchful that the love of money does not take over our lives.

Lesson 14 – Eccl 5:13-17 – Our Toil for Riches is Vanity

1. Read Eccl 5:13-17

**13There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, 14and those riches were lost in a bad venture. And he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand. 15As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and** **shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand. 16This also is a grievous evil: just as he came, so shall he go, and what****gain is there to him who toils for the wind? 17Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson we looked at money. Today we continue our discussion on money and possessions.
2. Solomon sees another “grievous evil” as he observes life lived “under the sun” (5:13a). He observes that the one who loves money hoards his money in order to leave it to his heir, but in the end this hoarding causes nothing but hurt (5:13b). How so (5:14)?  
     
   > He invests the money with the intent of making it grow so that he can pass it down to his son. But because the venture was bad, he loses it all. Therefore, he is left with nothing and so is his son.
3. What general truth about life under the sun do we learn in 5:15?  
     
   > We come into this world with nothing and we will leave it with nothing.  
     
   What does all of your toil amount to when you die (5:15b)?  
     
   > It amounts to nothing because you can’t take with you anything you toiled for.  
     
   The picture painted here is this. You work hard for your money. You worry over and make great plans for your money. You are intent on amassing great wealth and passing it down to your children so that they have a leg up on everyone else. So to accomplish this, you invest it. But then suddenly it all comes crashing down. The investment that once looked so promising suddenly falls apart and you lose everything. This affects not only your future but also your children’s future. You are left with nothing. This is a grievous evil caused by the fact that this world is cursed and has been subjected to futility. It all culminates in death - **death strips us of everything. We come into this world with nothing and we will leave it with nothing. When we die all of toils are for nothing.**
4. We come into this world under the sun with nothing (5:16b). During our life we may work hard to earn money and then invest it wisely and accumulate possessions. But Solomon askes, “what gain is there to him who toils for the wind?” He has just given the answer in 5:15b. What is it?  
     
   > He “shall take nothing for his toil.”  
     
   Death is the great equalizer. All people die. When they die, they take nothing with them. So, during life you may be extremely poor or extremely rich but when you die it won’t matter. The rich and the poor go out of this life in the same way – with nothing.  
     
   In v. 16 Solomon calls this a grievous evil. It feels unjust but it is the world cursed and subjected to futility. In the end we lose not only our bodies but everything we’ve earned under the sun. The first step in wisdom is realizing that all humanity is toiling for nothing. Eccl breaks the delusion that all this striving is somehow meaningful.
5. The phrase to “eat in darkness” in v. 17 can have a couple of meanings. It could be speaking of a miser who loves money, so the miser could be eating in darkness to save the cost of candle light. He could be eating in darkness because he has worked until it was dark before he sits down to eat, earning every last penny he can. It could be a way of describing the life of one who has lost all that he toiled for in a bad investment. His life is one of darkness. It could describe the life of a lover of money as he denies himself the joys and comforts of life in order to gain more money. Basically**, the life of the lover of money is one of gloom and cheerlessness**.  
     
   Earlier Solomon said that both wisdom and work bring with them vexation, frustration. Now here he uses the word vexation in regards to the lover of money (5:17). The curse and futility we live under causes many unexpected and bad things to happen in life. When bad things happen to our money it causes us frustration and makes us angry. Because of the curse we get sick and that too causes frustration and anger. Look at people’s Facebook pages. Are they filled with vexation, sickness, and anger? Most are not. We present ourselves as happy. This is not reality. When God strips us of our money and health, it causes us frustration and anger and forces us to pause and see that the things of life under the sun are but temporary and in the long run meaningless. This causes us to turn to God and his love as shown by the cross.
6. Consider for a moment how you view money and possessions. Do you put a lot of faith in them? Are you trying to pile up cash to leave to your children? What will happen to all your money if we go into a recession or depression? You know that when you die, you can’t take it with you, right? Solomon makes clear that, in the end, all of your toil to gain riches is like trying to catch the wind. It is meaningless.

Lesson 15 – Eccl 5:18-20 –Not Accepting One’s Lot in Life is Vanity

1. Read Eccl 5:18-20

**18Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot.  19Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God.  20For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson we looked at money. Today we look at enjoying life.
2. Back in 2:24, Solomon said nearly the same thing about eating and drinking and toil that he says in 5:18a. Take some time right now to review Lesson 19 in Part 1 of the Eccl Bible Study.   
     
   In 2:24, he said “there is nothing better than” and here in v. 18 he says it is “good and fitting” “to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil.” To get us to see that we cannot find meaning and purpose in life by pursuing the things of this world, he has talked negatively of those things. To look for meaning and purpose in those things is vanity, but if you don’t look for meaning and purpose in those things, they can be “good and fitting.” They are gifts from “the hand of God” (2:24). Life is not all doom and gloom. We can find enjoyment in life in our eating and drinking and toils.
3. A key to understanding these verses is to understand what “his lot” is (vv. 18, 19). What is your lot in life? It is the circumstances and talents and time in history that you happen to live in. For the most part, these are things you do not have control over. In the latter half of v. 18, what is a person’s lot in life in terms of time?  
     
   > God gives each person a “the few days of his life.”  
     
   It is God who has set the span of your life short. He has made it your “lot.” If you know the biblical big picture then you know that this lot of a short life span is simply the curse for the wages of sin being death. In the original world that God created, that was not our lot. He didn’t originally create humans to live a few days and then be forgotten. In the beginning there was no death. There was no lot. God didn’t need to say, Enjoy it the best you can because your life span will be short. Everything you have is a gift.  
     
   Whether a person lives 1 day or 100 years, in the big picture it only amounts to a “few days.” He is saying, you’re not going to be around very long in this life “under the sun,” so do the best you can to enjoy it.  
     
   What Solomon is doing is advocating for a middle ground. On the one extreme, there are those who say life “under the sun” is great and there is great meaning and purpose found in it. On the other extreme, there are those who say life “under the sun” is worthless and meaningless and what is the point. Solomon is saying, in terms of meaning and purpose, life is vanity but our lives are a “gift of God” (5:19) and there are things in this life that we can find enjoyment in. Don’t treat those things as the end-all be-all, but do treat them as gifts from God which are to be enjoyed.
4. How do we acquire wealth and possessions (5:19a)?  
     
   > God has given them to us.  
     
   What else does God give as a gift (5:19b)?  
     
   > The “power to enjoy them.” The power to enjoy the wealth and possessions God has given us is also a gift. And the power to accept our lot in life and to rejoice in our toil is a gift from God.  
     
   Earlier in Eccl Solomon said he hated all his toils and now he says to rejoice in your toils as a gift from God. It appears that Solomon is saying that this gift of enjoying your toil is something that comes and goes. At times you will hate your toil and at other times you will enjoy your toil. When you look at your toil from the perspective of under the sun, you see the pointlessness of it all and the vanity of it all. This causes you to hate your toil. And yet, having wealth and possessions is a gift of God**. It is also a gift to have the ability to rejoice in your toil, all the while seeing with your eyes wide open, seeing its limitations**.
5. In 5:20 Solomon talks about the “joy in his heart.” What is this “joy in his heart”? (see 5:19)  
     
   > It is everything we just read in v. 19, being given wealth and possessions, being given power to enjoy them, being given the ability to accept one’s lot, and being able to enjoy one’s toil - these are all gifts from God that can give us joy.  
     
   God keeps us occupied with these things. Why does he do this? God keeps us occupied with these things so that we don’t have time to pay attention to the shortness and meaninglessness of life.  
     
   To “remember the days of his life” is to look backwards into the past. You can go through life looking backwards, remembering the past but not living now in the current moment.
6. We might summarize what Solomon is saying as, too much looking back as you go through life is not good. Looking too much forward is not good either. You won’t have any joy in either of these cases. It is better to live in the present, seeing what God has given you: your money, your abilities, your reason, your energy, your feelings, your compassion. Realize that these are gifts from the Lord and realize that recognizing that they are gifts to be enjoyed is also a gift. It might sound easy but it actually hard to put into practice. In our fallen nature, we tend to see these gifts as burdens, responsibilities.
7. To have the power to enjoy what God has given us is a gift from the Lord. This is a blessing and the preferable way of living the lot God has given you. It is preferable to see them as gifts as opposed to see them as burdens. To realize this is great wisdom and blessing. So also is recognizing the war within us between the old and new man, which want us to see these things in two totally different ways. That is what is in view here at the end of chpt. 5. God keeps us occupied with his gifts and gives us joy in our hearts as we live in the present.  
     
   Do you see life in this way? Do you see the things you have in life as a gift from God? Do you enjoy them? Do you see children as a gift from God or do you see them as burden that holds you back? Do you live in the present or the past or the future?

Lesson 16 – Eccl 6:1-2 –Not Enjoying God’s Gifts is Vanity

1. Read Eccl 6:1-6:2

**6 There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy on mankind: 2a man to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honor, so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them. This is vanity; it is a grievous evil.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson we looked at accepting and enjoying one’s lot in life. Today we look at enjoying what God has given us.
2. There is another evil that Solomon has observed in life on this earth and it is something that all of mankind is prone to (6:1). To illustrate his observation, he references an extreme case. In the case that he cites, what has God given a man (6:2a)?  
     
   > God has given a man “wealth, possessions, and honor”.  
     
   What does this man lack in life (6:2b)?  
     
   > He lacks nothing. Everything his heart desires he has.  
     
   So far this doesn’t sound evil. What is it that makes this “evil” (6:2c)?  
     
   > What makes it evil is the fact that God has given him all of these things – all that he ever desired – and yet God has not given him “the power to enjoy them.”
3. The key to these verses is “the power to enjoy them.” Look back at 5:19 where it too speaks of “the power to enjoy them.” What does it say that wealth, possessions, the power to enjoy them, and the ability to rejoice in your toils are?  
     
   > All of these things are a gift from God. God gives us our wealth and possessions. God gives us the ability to find joy in our toils. And God gives us the “power to enjoy them.”  
     
   The point that Solomon is making is this: **He is saying, you can have the whole world but if you don’t have the power to enjoy it, it is all worthless. It is vanity. It is “a grievous evil.”**
4. In 5:10, it says that those who love money will never be satisfied with the money they have. In 5:18 and 6:2, it says God gives wealth and possessions as a gift and to some he gives the gift to enjoy them and to others he doesn’t.  
     
   What if you lack the gift to enjoy them? What if you hate your life? What if you think it is better to be dead than alive or to have never been born at all? Since enjoyment is a gift from God and not something we can create, what do we do? We must ask God for the gift. We have a similar prayer in Church. We pray, “Restore unto me the joy of your salvation.” If we don’t enjoy the things in life that God has gifted to us, then we do not need to go to a self-help seminar but instead pray for God’s gift of joy.
5. Even if we have been given the gift of “the power to enjoy” the “wealth, possessions, and honor” God has given us, we are still sinners and prone to gripe and complain and not be satisfied. So even if we have not been given great sums of wealth, we all have enough to live on and to thank God for and to enjoy. But because we are sinners who live under the curse, we don’t enjoy the gifts God has given us. Let us all recognize that God is the Giver of many good gifts, he has blessed us in many ways, and we should gratefully receive what he has given us and enjoy them. After all it is “good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot” (5:18).
6. Consider your own life. What wealth and possessions has God gifted to you? Do you enjoy the gifts that God has given to you? If you do not enjoy them, ask God for the gift of the “power to enjoy them.” For to be given wealth, possessions, and honor but not to enjoy them “is vanity; it is a grievous evil” (6:2). Your life is very short. Your life under the sun can be very hard. You won’t find anything better in life than to enjoy the gifts and toils God has given you.

Lesson 17 – Eccl 6:3-9 –Our Desire for Meaning and Purpose is Never Satisfied

1. Read Eccl 6:3-9

**3If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with life's good things, and he also has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. 4For it comes in vanity and goes in darkness, and in darkness its name is covered.** **5Moreover, it [the stillborn child] has not seen the sun or known anything, yet it finds rest rather than he. 6Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy no good—do not all go to the one place? 7All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied.** **8 For what advantage has the wise man over the fool? And what does the poor man have who knows how to conduct himself before the living?** **9Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite: this also is vanity and a striving after wind.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson we looked at not enjoying gifts that God gives in life. Today we look at being satisfied with what we have.
2. Read vv. 3-6. In 6:3a he gives another example of an extreme case. What is it?  
     
   > The example he gives is of a man who lives to be very very old and who has fathered a hundred children.  
     
   What is the man’s problem (6:3b)?  
     
   > “His soul is not satisfied with life’s good things.” Also he does not receive a proper burial. He dies unlamented and dishonored.  
     
   Then Solomon makes a stunning statement in 6:3c. What is it?  
     
   > He said it would be better to be a stillborn child than to be this man who has lived a long life and has had a hundred children.  
     
   The stillborn child never sees the light of day. It exists only in the darkness of the womb. It has nothing (6:4-5a). Yet what does the stillborn have that the rich old man who has lived a very long life and has had a hundred children not have (6:5b)?  
     
   > The stillborn has rest. The rich man’s life has been one of restlessness.  
     
   Solomon says, if a man lives 2000 years but does not enjoy the good he has during that life, he is no better off than the stillborn child (6:6a). From human observation, both the old man who has had great blessings for many years and the stillborn child who had nothing end up in the same place (6:6b). They both end up in the grave.
3. Our lives are a gift from God. The good things we have in life are a gift from God. The power to enjoy them are a gift from God. The two extremes we face are that we are never satisfied with the gifts God has given us or we are fully satisfied with them. The fact is that we will never be fully satisfied because “all the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied” (6:7).  
     
   The fact is, you have to eat. And you only eat if you work. And you work by toiling. So we are slaves to our mouths and our mouths are not gracious masters. Everything we do is for our mouth, but our mouth is never satisfied. So, Solomon takes us down the middle of the road but points out that in life under the sun we have a master and that master will never be satisfied.Life is short. You are given your lot in life, enjoy it. Pray that God gives you the power to enjoy it. Be content with it. Be satisfied in so far as you can be satisfied. And yet **realize that you will never be fully satisfied because all of the various toils of life end up being a toil for man’s mouth/appetite. And that appetite is never satisfied.**
4. 6:8-9 offers us three comparisons. What two people are compared first (6:8a)?  
     
   > A wise man and a fool.  
     
   Earlier in Eccl we have seen that, in this life under the sun, the wise do have an advantage over the foolish. But here the question asked implies that there is no advantage.  
     
   The second comparison is between two poor men. The one who knows how to conduct himself in life has an advantage over the one who does not (6:8b).  
     
   The third comparison speaks of “the sight of the eyes” (6:9a). “The sight of the eyes” means to actually have something. It is better to actually have something than to not have something and to be constantly searching for it. In all three of these comparisons, one person has an advantage over another and yet in the end they all end up in the same place. So the end result is that it is all vanity, a chasing after the wind (6:9b).  
     
   It can be summarized like this. It is better to be wise than a fool, but they both die. It is better to be a poor man who can conduct himself with others than a poor man who can’t, and yet they both die. It is better to have than not have, but they both die. It is all vanity because **even satisfaction itself is elusive and we will never be fully satisfied. The appetite that drives us, the seeking, the desire for meaning and purpose is vanity and striving after the wind.**
5. People want to believe that there is some kind of meaning and purpose in life. And so we search and strive for it. But the fact is we will never be fully satisfied. There is a void in our lives that we cannot fill. There is only One who can fill it and that person is Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Word made flesh. Another translation of this could be that Jesus is the Meaning made flesh. Outside of Christ there is no meaning to life.  
     
   What about your life? Do you find meaning in life? God does give as a gift the ability to enjoy life. And yet our appetite for meaning is never fully satisfied if the place where we look for meaning and satisfaction is “under the sun.” The only place where meaning and satisfaction can be found is “under the Son.”  
     
   If you find yourself never being truly satisfied with your life, you are not alone! At some point, if you are honest, you will realize that life under the sun is not satisfying. You may live wisely and have some advantages over others but in the end you end up in the grave just like everyone else. To find meaning and satisfaction you need to refocus your eyes. Focusing on Jesus is the only way to have true and full satisfaction.

Lesson 18 – Eccl 6:10-12 – Trying to Control Every Aspect of Life is Vanity

1. Read Eccl 6:10-12

**10Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what man is, and that he is not able to dispute with one stronger than he.** **11The more words, the more vanity, and what is the advantage to man?** **12For who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow? For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun?**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson we looked at man’s desire to find meaning and purpose in life. Today we look at the lack of control that man has.
2. Back in Eccl 3 is the famous poem that says all the times of our lives are set by God. He is in complete control and we are not. Now in 6:10 it says the same thing. The “one stronger” that we cannot dispute with is God. “Whatever has come to be,” has come to be because he has already predetermined it. Similarly, “what man is” is already known by God. God is the Stronger One who names what will happen before it happens and who knows what man is far in advance. **God is in control. Man is not. God has set limits on man**.
3. One can try and dispute with God (6:10c), but what will your words get you (6:11a)?  
     
   > Whatever words you use to dispute with God are just vanity – a puff of smoke that quickly dissipates into nothing.   
     
   It is worthless to even try to dispute with God. Your words provide no “advantage to man” (6:11b). Man seeks answers to and the meaning of life and speaks many words about it but those words just amount to a bunch of noise. Our many words are in contrast to the one Word of God. Our words are meaningless but the Word made flesh is meaning. He is the one Word that gives “the advantage to man.”
4. In v. 12 two questions are asked. If the answer to those questions can only be God or man, what is the implied and obvious answer?  
     
   > By the way that the questions are stated, it is implied that man cannot know what is good for man. And man cannot know what will be after him. Only God knows “what is good for man” and only God “can tell a man what will be after him.”  
     
   How is man’s life described (6:12a)?  
     
   > Man’s life is but a few days and man’s life is vain.  
     
   In 5:18 it said we should “find enjoyment in … the few days of his life that God has given him.” Here in 6:12a, an adjective is added to “the few days of his life.” “The few days of his *vain* life” paints the picture of a life that is here one minute and gone the next. So on the one hand, it is good to find enjoyment in life. But on the other hand, our lives are useless and we are not in control and our life “passes like a shadow.”  
     
   Think about life as a shadow. As your body casts a shadow when you are in the sun, so our lives are like a shadow. There is you and there is your shadow. Which is the real thing?  
     
   > You are.  
     
   **Our short, vain lives on this earth are a shadow. They are not the real thing**. To believe this life is it and that it is meaningful is a great error and falsehood. The Word (Meaning) who became flesh gives us real life. He transforms our shadowy existence to a life of substance and meaning, from a life that passes quickly to a life that is eternal.
5. Do you always feel like you are in control of your life? Do things always go as you want? Most likely not. Life throws us a lot of curve balls that we don’t expect. This is a result of the curse that we are under. Life is short. Life is filled with all kinds of problems. You must recognize that you are not in control, that you live under the curse just like everyone else. Life “under the Sun” is not fair. It never will be. You won’t find meaning and purpose in it.  
     
   Even if you are well organized and have your life planned out, if you are honest, you will admit that you are not in control, that many things happen that you did not expect. And there are times when something happens in your life that you think is good, only to find out that it was really bad. We don’t always know what is good for our lives. When our lives take an unexpected turn that we don’t like, rather than disputing with God with many words, turn to and entrust yourself the One who knows you better than you know yourself and who knows what is next in your life.

Lesson 19 – Eccl 7:1-4 – Evading Death, Sorrow, and Mourning is Vanity

1. Read Eccl 7:1-4

**7 A good name is better than precious ointment,  
    and the day of death than the day of birth.  
2It is better to go to the house of mourning  
    than to go to the house of feasting,  
for this is the end of all mankind,  
    and the living will lay it to heart.  
3Sorrow is better than laughter,  
    for by sadness of face the heart is made glad.  
4The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning,  
    but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson we looked at man trying to control the aspects of his life. Today we look at death, mourning, and sorrow.
2. In 7:1 Solomon compares two sets of things and in each one he says one thing is better than the other. In the first set (7:1a) what is better than the other?  
     
   > “A good name is better than precious ointment.”  
     
   In the second set of things (7:1b), what is better than the other?  
     
   > “the day of death [is better] than the day of birth.”  
     
   Precious ointment is very costly. It may cost as much as a car or house. That goes to show you how important a good name and reputation are and it sets up an even stronger reversal that death is better than birth. That is indeed surprising. If you are a Christian, you might be able to make sense of this second comparison. As a Christian, why might death be better than birth?  
     
   > A Christian might say that death is better than birth because he knows that death is the door that leads to eternal life in heaven and there is nothing better than that.  
     
   But Solomon is not speaking from the point of view of a Christian. He is talking about life “under the sun.” He sees life as it really is – hard, short, unfair, painful. He is saying that when you are born, this is what awaits you. It is not very pleasant. It is better to just skip all of this sorrow and go straight to death. It is a clear-eyed view of life.
3. In vv. 2-4 Solomon continues to compare opposites and to say that one is better than the other. What are the opposites and in each case which is better?  
     
   > 7:2a: Mourning and feasting, with mourning being better.  
     
   > 7:3a: Sorrow and laughter, with sorrow being better.  
     
   > 7:4: The wise and the fool and mourning and mirth. The wise choose mourning and the fool chooses mirth (fun, laughter).  
     
   When we experience mourning, death, and sorrow, it bring us to a point of crisis. In that crisis we are helpless and that drives us to look for help from God. If you are feasting and having a good time, you won’t look for help and reflect on the true reality of life. The true reality is that God has subjected our lives to futility. Without the cross, life is meaningless. Without the cross life doesn’t make sense. Without the cross, God doesn’t make sense. Without the cross, people don’t make sense. In Eccl Solomon is driving us away from this world to the cross and it is through the cross that we interpret our experiences in this world.  
     
   So “sorrow is better than laughter” is a way of saying that we look at things as they really are. Looking at the curse is better than laughing it away. **Looking at the reality of death and the sorrow it brings with it brings wisdom and reality.** So let’s say you have cancer. You go through all the harsh treatments and eventually you are declared cancer free. That’s great! It may buy you a few more years. But a clear-eyed view of life says, it is great that you have been cured of cancer but the fact remains that you are still going to die. You’ve just delayed it for a little while. Looking at the true reality of life inevitably brings with it sorrow and sadness. That is an accurate picture of life.
4. These verses mention feasting, laughing, and mirth. If you make your life about these things, you have the heart of a fool (7:4). You are using these things to try and avoid the truth. Don’t get me wrong. These things are good. Enjoy them as a gift from God, but don’t use them to try and evade reality. The wise see life for what it really is.  
     
   How do you live your life? If you are like most people, you want to avoid death and mourning and sorrows as much as possible. There is nothing wrong with that. But you also do not want to dismiss reality and try and laugh it away. No matter what you do, those things will not go away. The reality is that there is death and there are sorrows in life. You cannot escape them. So how do you deal with them, wisely or foolishly? If you are wise, you acknowledge them. You deal with them the best you can. You look to the Lord Jesus for help. Undergirding your life is the sure and certain hope you have in Christ.

Lesson 20 – Eccl 7:5-6 – A Substantive Rebuke is Better than the Praise of Fools

1. Read Eccl 7:5-6

**5It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise  
    than to hear the song of fools.  
6For as the crackling of thorns under a pot,  
    so is the laughter of the fools;  
    this also is vanity.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson we looked at accepting the reality of death, sorrow and mourning. Today we look at being rebuked versus being praised.
2. V. 5 starts out with “It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of …” How many people like to be rebuked? No one that I know likes to be criticized. Why is that?  
     
   > That is because criticism hurts our ego. We think more highly of ourselves than we ought to. Being rebuked knocks us down a peg.  
     
   But now Solomon is saying that being rebuked is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, when is being rebuked a good thing (7:5a)?  
     
   > Being rebuked can be a good thing when the criticism comes from a wise person.  
     
   How can that be good?  
     
   > A wise person sees things as they really are and points out where you are deficient. Knowing this gives you a chance to learn something about yourself and to make improvements.  
     
   It is humbling but in the bigger view of life, it is a blessing.
3. What kind of judgments and advice come from fools?  
     
   > Foolish people tend to make foolish judgments and give foolish advice.  
     
   So if someone who is foolish starts to sing your praises (7:5b), what should this cause you to do and think?  
     
   > If a foolish person is singing your praises, it should cause you take pause and think about what he is saying. It is very likely that the opposite is true.  
     
   The praise of fools may not only be worthless, but if taken to heart it can also be very damaging. It can puff you up and cause you to think that the course of action you are taking is good when in reality it is bad.
4. Sometimes you might not know the person rebuking you, so you don’t know if they are wise or a fool. In that case concentrate on the substance of what is being said. Ask yourself, is the rebuke true? Does it have substance? Is what I am doing or saying wrong or going down the wrong path? If so, take it to heart. Confess your sin to God.  
     
   **We live in a world that says, it is better to hear your praises sung than to be rebuked. Solomon says that is a lie. He says a rebuke can be a good thing and praise can be a bad thing.**
5. Let’s say you are out in the country. You have a pot with some contents in it. You want to heat it up but there is little fuel to do so. What can you light on fire to heat the pot (7:6a)?  
     
   > You can find and gather some thorns and light them on fire.  
     
   If you light them on fire, what kind of noise will they make (7:6a)?  
     
   > Thorns that are burning make a crackling, popping noise.  
     
   What is similar to the crackling noise of thorns (7:6b)?  
     
   > “The laughter of fools.”  
     
   As the burning of thorns makes noise, so the laughter of fools is just noise. The things they laugh at and the advice and observations of the fool are just noise. They are meaningless. Much of the world we live in is foolish. What Solomon says here is an indictment of our world. Our world is filled with self-congratulation and self-therapy and self-help and all it amounts to is just a bunch of noise. The song of fools and the laughter of fools is just noise that we should not be listening to.
6. Think about these questions. How often does someone rebuke you? How do you take it when you are rebuked? When you are rebuked, do you consider if the person rebuking you is wise or foolish? Does the rebuke of a wise person mean more to you than the rebuke of a fool?  
     
   How often does someone praise you? How do you take it when you are praised? When you are praised, do you consider if the person praising you is wise or foolish? Does the praise of a wise person mean more to you than the praise of a fool?  
     
   If you are rebuked, consider if what is said is wise or foolish. If it is wise, take it to heart and learn from it. If you receive praise, consider if it comes from a foolish person. If it does, know that it is just a bunch of noise that is meaningless.

Lesson 21 – Eccl 7:7-9 – The Heart is Corrupted by Money, Pride and Intelligence

1. Read Eccl 7:7-9

**7Surely oppression [extortion] drives the wise into madness,  
    and a bribe corrupts the heart.**  
**8Better is the end of a thing than its beginning,  
    and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.  
9Be not quick in your spirit to become angry,  
    for anger lodges in the heart[bosom] of fools.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson we looked at how a rebuke can be better than praise. Today we look at the effects of money and pride on the heart.
2. Extortion and bribery both have to do with money. What is extortion?  
     
   > Extortion is money wrongly taken.  
     
   What is bribery?  
     
   > Bribery is money wrongly received.  
     
   What do extortion and bribery result in (7:7)?  
     
   > They result in madness and corruption.  
     
   Money can be good and give you advantages in life. But **if you think money will solve all your problems you are sadly mistaken. Instead, it can actually cause problems**. This is counter-intuitive to the way the world thinks. Why do many people play the lottery? They think that if they win money will solve their problems and they will be on easy street. But studies of those who have won the lottery show different results. Many times the lives of those who win the lottery are ruined. They go crazy spending money and blow through it all very quickly. Rather than living happy lives without any worries, they end up broke and no better off than they were before.
3. The first half of v. 8 is similar to 7:1 where it says “the day of your death is better than the day of your birth.” Many times we begin with all kinds of hope only to find it was all in vain. It was a lie. So **it is better to have the truth with no sugar coating than to begin with a sugar coated hope that is ultimately dashed in the end**.
4. In the latter half of v. 8 we have a contrast between “the patient in spirit” and “the proud in spirit.” Have you ever noticed that someone who is very good at what they do and is very proud of it can be very short with someone who isn’t as good? They can be very impatient with them. Many times an impatient person is a proud person. So in that sense, the proud/impatient are the opposite of the patient.  
     
   Have you ever noticed how God works in our lives. **He takes our pride and impatience and rebukes us and humbles us in order to break us down, expand us, and teach us patience**. Take for example marriage. You enter it feeling pretty good about yourself. But during your marriage you face all kinds of crosses and trials and through them you come to realize just how self-absorbed you are. And that is a result of you learning to deal with one other human being. Then you add children to the mix and the crucible of your life becomes even hotter. You may think you are a very patient person until you have children then you learn very quickly that you are not patient at all. But over time you learn to be more patient. This is a gift from God. It is a very strange gift that you receive in a very roundabout way. God uses these events in life to expand you and to get you to go beyond what you think you can.
5. While v. 8 spoke of those patient and proud in spirit, v. 9 speaks of those who are quick in spirit to become angry. Often in life we see that those who are very intelligent are the ones who get angry the fastest. They are quick to see that an idea will not work and when others don’t get it, they are quick to anger. They develop the mindset that they are always right and quickly get angry when others don’t listen to them. But Solomon says that the truly wise person is the one who is patient and slow to anger. Those who allow anger to lodge in their hearts are fools.
6. If were to summarize these verses, what would we say? **God works in our lives in ways that we do not expect and that are counter-intuitive.** Sometimes having money doesn’t bring the relief we expect. Instead, it actually causes more problems. God uses those problems to change us. Sometimes our hopes when we begin something are completely dashed and we have to go through an arduous process to get through to the end and God uses that process to change us. Having a gift or talent in a certain area can make us impatient and proud and quick tempered. God will then rebuke us and humble us in order to teach us life lessons. God works through crosses. Jesus had his and we as his followers have ours.
7. Take a look at your life. What kinds of problems, dashed dreams, and areas of impatience do you have? What has been the result of these things? As you go through the process of resolving these issues and picking up the pieces, has it changed you? Do you see life in a different way? Because of it, do you approach life differently now than what you used to? God uses these things to make you more like Christ. Sometimes God works in ways that we least expect.  
     
   Have you been in a situation where you thought that if you only had more money if would solve your issues, only to find out it didn’t solve your issues it made them worse? Did you learn from the experience? Be wise. See money for what it is, a gift from God not to center our lives around but to help us get through life.  
     
   We’ve all had times in our lives where we started a project with high hopes. But our hopes didn’t pan out and we ended up going through a tough slog to get to the end. We were glad to get to the end but it was hard getting there. How did God use that tough slog to change you? It may be counter-intuitive, but God works through tough times to change us, to humble us and make us more patient.  
     
   Is there something in life that you are really good at? If you are dealing with someone else who is not so good at it, how do you react? Are you so proud of yourself that it makes you impatient or angry with those who are slower to get it? Humble yourself, be patient, and don’t allow anger to take up residence in you.

Lesson 21 – Eccl 7:10-12 – What the Wise Person Does

1. Read Eccl 7:10-12

**10Say not, “Why were the former days better than these?”  
    For it is not from wisdom that you ask this.  
11Wisdom is [or, is as] good with an inheritance,  
    an advantage to those who see the sun.  
12For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money,****and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson we looked at how money, pride, and intelligence corrupt us. Today we look at some advice about wisdom.
2. We do it all the time. We talk about “the good old days.” We want to return to a time in our lives when we perceived that things were good as opposed to now when things are bad. But have things ever really been good? Haven’t we always had problems? Is it really worse now than what it used to be? According to Solomon the answer is no (7:10a)  
     
   Sometimes we reverse this and think that life is better now than in the past. Certainly, with all of the advances in technology the life we live is much easier than in generations in the past. Just go back a couple of generations and you will see people washing clothes by hand and riding a horse for transportation. But our modern advances bring with them other problems. The fast pace of life causes a lack of sleep and depression. We have simply replaced one set of problems with another set of problems. Our present time and age are no better and no worse than a previous time and age. As human beings we cannot escape lives filled with problems. Every generation goes through the same cycle of life as previous generations.  
     
   The bottom line is that in the big picture things were not better in “the former days” and things are not any better now. Every generation lives in a sin-filled world. **We cycle through life with some good times and some bad times just like everyone before us and after us. If you are wise you will see that** (7:10b).
3. What do vv. 11 and 12 say provide an advantage and protection in life?  
     
   > V. 11 – An inheritance provides an advantage.  
     
   > V. 12 – Money provides protection.  
     
   Knowing this, will having money fulfill all your deepest longings?  
     
   > No, money has its limits.  
     
   So receiving money or property from an inheritance or having a high paying job do give people an advantage and provide some protections and can be used to preserve life. Money isn’t everything, but it can definitely be beneficial.  
     
   What is compared to money in vv. 11-12?  
     
   > Wisdom.  
     
   Like money, it too can give you an advantage in life, it too can protect you, it too can be used to preserve life. So in the same way, wisdom can serve the same purpose as money. Wisdom sees life as it really is. It sees the troubles and pitfalls of life and it expects them to come your way. So you prepare for them ahead of time the best you can to soften the blow and to get you by them quicker and with less hurt.
4. **Wisdom can help you see life as it really is and cope with it better. Wisdom can give you advantages and protection and preserve life** similar to the way money can. But like all things in life under the sun, money and wisdom are limited. While secular wisdom can be beneficial, it does not give meaning and purpose to life. It stills falls under the category of vanity and meaninglessness. Wisdom is a good gift from God. Use it to help you but don’t think that it will fulfill your deepest longings.
5. How do you approach your life under the sun? Do you do it wisely? Living using wisdom has advantages. Do you see life as it really is and not through some rose colored glasses? Wisdom will help you do it. You probably aren’t rich but even so you can use wisdom like it is money. Can you think of a time in your life when you acted wisely and it really paid off? Maybe others in the same situation as you did not act wisely and you can see the advantage wisdom gave you in the results that you and they achieved. Or maybe there was a time when you acted wisely and someone else didn’t and it resulted in health benefits for you and health problems for him. Living wisely can pay off. Just don’t expect for it to bring you a utopia here on this fallen earth.

Lesson 22 – Eccl 7:13-14 – Consider the Surprising Work of God in Life

1. Read Eccl 7:13-14

**13****Consider the work of God:  
    who can make straight what he has made crooked?  
  
14****In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson we looked at what wise people do. Today we consider what surprising thing God is doing in life.
2. We have mentioned in this study and will continue to mention the fact that as a result of sin God has placed this world under a curse (see Gen. 3) and subjected this world to futility (see Rom. 8). So when it talks about “what he [God] has made crooked” (7:13b), that is what it is talking about. What is this called (7:13a)?  
     
   > That is the work of God.  
     
   Earlier in Eccl Solomon told us he had tried several different toils – religion, philanthrope, greatness, wisdom, pleasure. Through them he attempted to straighten what God had made crooked, but in the end he concluded that everything he tried was vanity. They all led to futility. There is one great big proof of all of this – Death. No one can stop oneself from dying. Death is the nail in the coffin of the whole argument of human progress. Death undoes it all. But then when Christ does come, he undoes death. That is the beginning of a new world under the S-o-n where there is no more death and there is no more futility and meaninglessness.
3. So we live in a world where there is homelessness and there are people who don’t have enough to eat and who need clothing. **This is the crookedness that this world is subject to. No matter what we do, we will never be able to straighten this crookedness**. So does that mean we don’t even try to help people? No, Eccl tells us, do good for other folks, help them, feed them but in the process realize you are never going to solve the problem and, in the end, in life under the sun, all of our lives are futile. What is that doing? That is cutting down the great human idol of philanthrope. It is cutting down the idea that, with or without God, I can make my life meaningful by pouring my life out for others.  
     
   Now there is One whom God sends to this world under the sun to straighten things out. That is Jesus. He will usher in a new heaven and a new earth. He will do away with the curse and the futility. When we believe in Jesus, we enter this new world. In this new world the little things we do for others really matter. In Rev. it says that a small deed, such as giving a person a cold cup of water, will follow us into eternity. Something as small as that is not meaningless in the new earth. It is filled with meaning. That is one of the great mysteries of doing good works. Cleansed by the blood of Jesus, they follow us and have great significance.
4. In the beginning of v. 14 Solomon gives some advice. What is it? (7:14a)  
     
   > “In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider.”  
     
   Before we look closer at these days, where do these days come from (7:14b)?  
     
   > Both of these days come from God. He “has made the one as well as the other.” We don’t like to think that God sends us adversity.  
     
   The first piece of advice is to enjoy the days of prosperity that God gives you. They are gifts from God that are to be enjoyed. Now this is something we might take for granted – that we enjoy our prosperity. But does everyone who works hard prosper? No. **Does everyone who prospers enjoy it? No. It truly is a gift from God that we enjoy our prosperity**.  
     
   The second piece of advice is harder to understand because it concerns the day of adversity. We easily credit God with sending prosperity to people. But do most American Christians agree that God sends adversity? If not, where do they say that adversity comes from?  
     
   > No. They say that adversity comes from the devil or it comes as a result of sin or it comes as a result of the fallen world we live in.  
     
   If anyone says this, they contradict Eccl and the Psalms. Biblical theology helps us understand that God sends suffering and works through suffering and it is often in the midst of suffering that we experience the presence of God.
5. When the day of adversity comes our way, what should we do (7:14a)?  
     
   > Consider it, think about it, meditate on it.  
     
   Is that what most people do?  
     
   > No, instead we pop a Tylenol or drink some alcohol or avoid the issue.  
     
   **If God brings adversity and we do all we can to avoid adversity then in reality God is near and we push him away**. Theologically speaking, what typically happens to a person when he faces adversity?  
     
   > Many times when adversity hits, we find ourselves praying intensely to God. We cry out to God for help.  
     
   The whole story of Job deals with this. Like Job’s friends, we might ascribe adversity to our sin or lack of repentance – that we are getting what we deserve. But if you are like Job and you haven’t done anything wrong, you go to God and ask why? You hold God to his promises. You dialog with God and that dialog is based not on you and your worthiness but on who God is and his worthiness. That is what it means to consider.
6. And lastly, why does God send prosperity and adversity, seemingly randomly, our way (7:14c)?  
     
   > He makes our lives random so that we have no idea of what will come after us.  
     
   He set limits on us, on what we do and experience. It is another way that God says, I’m in charge and you’re not.
7. Consider the work of God in your life. Has God made everything straight and prosperous in your life? Or has he gifted you with some crookedness and adversity? Each of us faces adversity. Not many of us consider it a gift. You may be facing adversity this day or in the days to come. When God sends it your way, stop and consider it. Don’t just try and get through it as quick as possible. It is in the struggles and pains of life that God is nearest. Look to him in all circumstances but especially in adversity.

Lesson 23 – Eccl 7:15-18 – Avoiding Extreme Righteousness and Wickedness

1. Read Eccl 7:15-18

**15In my vain life I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing.  
 16Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself?  
 17Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time?  
 18It is good that you should take hold of this, and from that withhold not your hand, for the one who fears God shall come out from both of them.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson we looked at God making life crooked and bringing us adversity. Today we look at avoiding two extremes.
2. What is the theme of the book of Eccl (1:2)?  
     
   > All is vanity.  
     
   Solomon accomplished a lot in life. He built the temple, ran an empire, and was known for his great wisdom. Yet, how does he describe his life (7:15a)?  
     
   > He calls his life “my vain life.”  
     
   In Solomon’s confession, there is an acknowledgment that all his great accomplishments are meaningless and that there must be something more to life. In his lifetime, Solomon has seen every pursuit of man (7:15a). What has Solomon observed about the righteous and the wicked (7:15b)?  
     
   > He has seen someone who pursues righteousness die young and someone who is wicked and does evil live a long life.  
     
   Solomon is stating that there is a fundamental injustice in the world and the way it works. Who is it that oversees the world and could remedy this?  
     
   > God.  
     
   This is an indictment against God similar to the complaint psalms.
3. In vv. 16 and 17, Solomon advises against two extremes. What are they?  
     
   > Being overly righteous and overly wicked.  
     
   Another way of describing these two extremes might be arrogant, rigid legalism and libertinism. Legalism can puff up and lead to a great fall. If you think of yourself as righteous, then what need is there for a savior? Maybe this seems far fetched to you. But think about this. When people are asked if they will go to heaven when they die, many think they will because they’ve done more good than bad. They think that as long as their righteousness outweighs their wickedness, they will be heaven bound. This kind of righteousness leads to eternal destruction.  
     
   The world we live in lives by laws. If we break the law, we have to pay the punishment. The breaking of civil and moral laws is called wickedness. The “overly wicked” will face greater punishments to the point that one’s life is required to pay for one’s wickedness. So the advice of not being overly wicked is rather clear to us.  
     
   What Solomon is doing once again is steering us down the middle, **advising us to avoid two extremes. Going to the extreme either way in Solomon’s experience leads to destruction or dying before one’s time.**
4. If extreme righteousness and extreme wickedness are two ditches on the side of a road, what is it that will keep you in the middle on the road and out of the ditches (7:18c)?  
     
   > “The one who fears God” will stay out of the ditches of extremism.  
     
   Fearing God has two aspects to it. When we sin we should fear, that is, be afraid of God, since he hates and punishes sin. We rightly fear the wrath of God. Fear also means having a deep reverence for God. **Having a great respect for and honoring God as the One who is above or over all things, as well as fearing his wrath, will help keep you out of the ditches.**
5. Examine your own life. Are you one who takes righteousness to the extreme? This leads to self-dependence rather than being dependent upon Christ. Or are you one who has committed your share of wickedness? If so, maybe you’ve had to face the consequences of your actions. In either case, the antidote is having fear of the Lord. Having that fear will steer you away from the ditch of wickedness by causing you to fear God’s wrath. Having that fear will steer you away from the ditch of self-righteousness, causing you to trust in Jesus’ righteousness rather than your own.

Lesson 24 – Eccl 7:19-22 – Three Nuggets of Truth for Living

1. Read Eccl 7:19-22

**19Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.**

**20Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.**

**21Do not take to heart all the things that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. 22Your heart knows that**[***l***](https://www.esv.org/Ga6.1)**many times you yourself have cursed  others.**

1. The context. We are going through a series of things in life that drive us away from this sin-filled world and into the arms of God. In the last lesson we looked at avoiding extreme righteousness and extreme wickedness. Today we are given three nuggets of truth about living.
2. Earlier in Eccl we saw wisdom compared to money. It said wisdom can protect you like money can protect you. In 7:19, what is wisdom compared to?  
     
   > Wisdom is compared to ten rulers.  
     
   It is assumed that if you are a ruler of a country that you have an army. So he is saying that wisdom provides more strength than the military might of ten rulers. So it is good to let wisdom rule over you to protect you.  
     
   The main theme of Eccl is that all is vanity. That includes wisdom. But that does not mean that one way of living is as good as another. Living wisely is preferable to living foolishly. It is beneficial. It can protect you. But you always need to keep in mind that even if you live wisely, when all is said and done it is vanity. Earthly wisdom helps you during your short life on this earth but in the end, it can’t stop you from dying just like the fool.
3. V. 20 shifts us from wisdom to what (7:20a)?  
     
   > This verse talks about righteousness.  
     
   Many people think they are good, righteous people. Some might do a pretty good job and live a fairly righteous life. But what is the true reality? Is there anyone who always does good (7:20)?  
     
   > No, “there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.”  
     
   So don’t think too highly of yourself because no matter how hard you try you will never get to the point where you are sinless. Base your view of your righteousness on the truth. If you think you can stand before God based on your righteousness you had better think again. To quote another part of scripture, the truth is that “all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment” (Is. 64:6). No one is as righteous as they think they are.
4. Verses 21 and 22 go together. What topic do these verses address (7:21)?  
     
   > It addresses the topic of people talking about you and maybe even cursing you.  
     
   What does he say you should not do (7:21a)?  
     
   > He says, “Do not take to heart all the things that people say.”  
     
   Don’t get so caught up in what other people are saying about you that you are obsessively listening to every word they say. If you do, at some point what will you hear them say (7:21b)?  
     
   > You will hear them curse you.  
     
   To curse someone is to express extreme anger toward someone or is to call upon God to inflict harm or to punish that person. People do this in a moment of rage. They uncontrollably lash out toward the person they are angry at. Why should you not get so upset when someone does it to you (7:22)?  
     
   > You shouldn’t take it to heart when they do this because if you are honest, you know you have done the same thing – you have cursed someone else when you were angry with them.  
     
   In other words, everyone is sinful. Everyone loses it sometimes and says things they wish they hadn’t and wish they could take back. You know that when things cool down, they didn’t mean all of the bad things they said. If it is taken too seriously, grudges will be held and feelings will be hurt and there is the temptation to get back at that person.
5. In these four verses we have **three nuggets of wisdom to live by**. First, if you **live wisely**, that wisdom can protect you, providing more strength than ten armies. Second, if you live honestly, you will see that **you are not as righteous as you think you are**. In fact, you will observe that there isn’t a single person on this earth that always does good and never sins. Third, **don’t be hyper sensitive to what others say about you when they are mad at you**. After all, when any of us are angry with other, we tend to say things that we don’t really mean.
6. How about your life, do you live in such a way that you let wisdom be your shield to protect you? Or does foolishness sometimes leave you vulnerable?  
     
   Do you ever find yourself comparing yourself to others and thinking, I am better than he or she is? Maybe you are or maybe you aren’t, but we are rarely as righteous as we think. So be careful in how good you judge yourself and others to be.  
     
   Do you find yourself very sensitive to what others say about you, especially in moments when they are angry with you? Don’t take what they say too seriously. In fits of rage, we all say things we don’t really mean. Our sinful nature lashes out in that moment. We must admit they we do the same thing to others.

A new section about wisdom begins with 7:23. We use that as the starting point for Part 3 of our study of Eccl.