

Ecclesiastes (Part Five)

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Given 16-Jun-12; Sermon #1107

We are going to begin this sermon by turning to Ecclesiastes 1:3 for a momentary review here of something that Solomon said.

Ecclesiastes 1:3-11 What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun? One generation passes away, and another generation comes; but the earth abides forever. The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it arose. The wind goes toward the south, and turns around to the north; the wind whirls about continually, and comes again on its circuit. All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; to the place from which the rivers come, there they return again. All things are full of labor; man cannot express it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which it may be said, “See, this is new”? It has already been in ancient times before us. There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of things that are to come by those who will come after.

Within the first ten days of the month of May I began to re-read the book *The Fourth Turning* by Strauss and Howe. That book incidentally has a subtitle to it called *An American Prophecy*. It is not necessary for everyone to read this book. It is not easy reading. Though the subject fascinates me, it certainly will not be everyone’s cup of tea.

I am, though, looking through it with somewhat different eyes this second time, and I have come to more fully appreciate many of the things I truly did not grasp during the first reading. The first time I did not read it with as full of an understanding of how involved our sovereign God may be in the cultural cycles that Strauss and Howe have uncovered, but after having a

better grasp, especially of Ecclesiastes the third chapter, I believe that it is entirely possible God is responsible for the consistently—and surprisingly—uniformly changing national, political, religious, and social cycles in British and American history. The key words there are “consistently” and “uniformly.”

I have urged people for a long time to look for patterns in the Bible—patterns that God repeats time and time again for our benefit. Why does He do this? He does this so that our faith can be firm and increased, because we can constantly see the hand of God in the event. He says, “I am God. I change not;” and thus He consistently acts in the same general pattern.

What Strauss and Howe have perceived from their studies of British, and especially of American history, are four clearly-defined repetitions of national attitude and conduct. Also I might add to this they have discovered what causes them. They do not go as far as God, but I think that God is involved here.

They found that each major change or turning of national attitude and social condition takes place four times in an 80 to a 100-year period called a *saeculum*. Each change or turn lasts 20 to 25 years, and they have named each one of these changes after the four annual seasons of nature.

Turn One: Spring. It represents what they call “a high”—a period of positive cultural anticipation of growth. Everybody is up about something that is going on in their life in the world. There is much civic cooperation by the citizens, and it signals, like spring does, a rebirth. In the United States the most recent high was a period—(and you will be surprised by this)—of the Depression and World War II, and it carried on up through the 1950s.

Turn Two: Summer . It is a passionate era of *spiritual* upheaval when the civic order in a high comes under attack from new values being implemented within the culture and disturbing the peace. In the United States this was a tumultuous period of the 1960s, 1970s, and on into the 1980s. There were riots in the streets. Cities were burning. Abortion—legalized murder—became a “right” in the United States. God was rejected and kicked out of

the schools. That lasted until the beginning of the Reagan administration, and it almost seems as though God put that administration in to stop and slow things down a little bit.

Turn Three: Autumn. Within the nation, social conditions have peaked. This is represented by Autumn. This signals a turn of slow, but increasingly rapid decline toward unraveling of good times. Just think of what happened within the last twenty years or so—the unraveling of good times and a strengthening of individualism. This is not good civically. High divorce rates, family breakdown, and in this particular turn it lasted through the 1980s, the Clinton years in the 1990s, and they felt it would probably have ended about the year 2005 or so. (Incidentally, this book was published in 1997. They were right in the first half of the 1990s.)

Here comes the big one!

Turn Four: Winter. Winter suggests hardship—a period of severe upheaval from which a new birth of better values *may* arise. That is a big question mark—*may* arise. There is economic and political breakdown. The public is much at odds with each other, and even more so with the government. There is little civic cooperation, and there may even be war.

They originally predicted this may have started about 2005. Mr. Strauss has died since this book was published. Mr. Howe is still living. I saw an email from Mr. Howe that he had distributed. He feels that it is entirely possible that the Fourth Turning began in 2008. He said that 9/11 was not it, but 2008 he said was far more effective in pulling the nation down. Barak Obama and his administration was elected, and in addition to that there was a distribution of all that money that they stole from the taxpayers and distributed it to others. This in turn has inflamed people.

You can see, as this election campaign goes on, that peoples' emotions are running high. These turns are visible by the emotional quality of the people and their willingness or their unwillingness to cooperate with each other and with the government. You can see that things are deteriorating in terms of the cooperation with the government.

These four turnings are very similar to the merisms of Ecclesiastes 3, but they are *huge* in national consequences, and they affect the entire nation for considerable periods of time—usually at least 20 to 25 years.

If the researches of Strauss and Howe are correct, and what the Bible clearly describes in *its* prophecies, and the news reports that we hear daily, it appears to be confirming the United States is either right on the cusp of, or has already entered into the crisis of potentially disastrous proportions. Of course we know that Christ may be coming sometime very shortly within our lifetime, and you know that is going to be a disaster of tremendous consequences.

Did we not learn from the merisms and from other things God says in Ecclesiastes 3 that God Himself is responsible for imposing the merisms into the lives of His children? He does it to the nation too. Ecclesiastes 3 shows that God is actively governing His creation for achieving the purposes of producing what He created it for.

Ecclesiastes chapter 3 teaches us that God is sovereign over time, and there is a time for everything under the sun and, this is most important, that He is personally directing the events taking place, and their timing. If we really do believe God, that can really be a positive comforting thought, because everything, despite the way it looks on the surface, is really under His control.

Ecclesiastes 3 teaches us that life's events are not as chaotic and occurring anywhere near as randomly as one might ordinarily think.

Recall that I showed, while I was expounding Ecclesiastes one, that despite the fact that life and time appear to be circular, with the same things occurring over and over (and that is why I read verses 3 through 12 of Ecclesiastes chapter 1), you look at it on the surface and it looks like the same things are happening over and over again, and they do. The same basic things keep happening all through man's time on earth. But do we ever learn from history? Should we learn anything from things? Yes, things are being done repetitiously on earth, but we learn something else. The unconverted say these things just keep repeating. Yes, the same basic things keep

occurring over and over again, but time has a linear element to it, and it is headed somewhere, and this is very important.

If it were just the way, we will say, the Gentile world looks at things, there would be no hope. The same things would keep repeating over and over again. God says yes, the same general pattern is going on, except Christ is returning, and God's plan is headed in a direction that He wants it to be a part of.

I am using this general Pentecost season to continue on through the book of Ecclesiastes because I believe that Ecclesiastes chapter 3 has very much to do with our achieving what Pentecost represents. But there is also another reason too, and that is that Pentecost and biblical prophecies regarding our present time both involve a countdown.

I want you to turn with me now to I Peter 4.

I Peter 4:12 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you.

I Peter 4:16-19 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.

From here I want you to turn to Hebrews 9.

Hebrews 9:27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.

The 50-day countdown between Wavesheaf Day and Pentecost is obvious to us, and there is a day that is clear to us when the countdown ends on the Day

of Pentecost. The reality of death is a theme in Ecclesiastes that Solomon directly mentions I believe seven times, and there is also a day when our life ends.

Solomon does not deal with death in a fearful morbid way; however, he clearly does not want it to come either, because it has so many negative aspects to it. Yet he knows, and he *knows* that he knows that there is nothing he can do about it because it is God-given that man should die once. And so Solomon deals with it as a reality that he and we must accept and rightly use.

By linking these verses—I Peter 4, Hebrews 9:27—what we see here is a gentle reminder from God to look ahead. Remember that. That is one of Solomon’s pieces of advice. We have to look ahead. We are on a countdown. Death is coming. There is no way we can escape it, so we are given a gentle reminder from God to look ahead, and take death into consideration. Even though death is ever-present within life, nonetheless, we need reminding from time to time so that we are aware and we do take it into consideration.

Thus the fact of death presents to us a second countdown. The difference between the Pentecost countdown is that it is limited to 50 days each year, but Hebrews 9:27 day and date is unknown. We are dealing with a countdown that we do not know, except generally when it is going to end. When it arrives, the judgment for us is whether we will be in God’s Kingdom or the Lake of Fire, and that judgment will be sealed because the judging will be over.

I also want us to understand that we should not think of the merisms of Ecclesiastes 3 as being merely passing events. They are not a “here today and gone tomorrow” thing. God is the One who timed their beginning. God is the One who times their ending. Time and time’s events are in the hands of God. We have got to live with that. That is not a bad thing. That is good. God is love, and He is always looking out for our welfare, and He knows when to relieve the pressure. He knows when to apply more pressure to bring us to our senses, or whatever.

We must look at these merisms in the right way. They are exercises for character development. They are exercises preparing us for what *He* is preparing us for. They give us experience with Him. Richard's sermon last

week was about this very thing. We have to know God. The merisms help us to know God, and if we have a relationship with Him, we know then that God is the One who began the merisms, and God is going to be the One who ends the merisms.

Now what are we doing while they might be going on? I have come to understand this, that we might have several merisms going on in our life at the same time. God is putting us through the paces in order to develop something that we will go into.

God is the One who times their beginning and their ending, and we are to learn from these things by having experiences with God. I remember, in reading Herbert Armstrong's autobiography, that he was in virtual poverty for 28 straight years. I do not think any of us has ever been put through that kind of exercise. Twenty-eight straight years! He said in his autobiography, "I had one suit for every day of the week, and it was the same one." He wore his shoes out on the bottom, and like people during that period of time, he walked on cardboard. The top looked fine; the bottom was cardboard. Twenty-eight straight years.

Now this was a man who had a great deal of drive. He had very good business sense, and yet he could not make a nickel, even after he had been pretty wealthy. But God, in order to break his feelings about himself—the pride that was there—took him to the place where Herbert Armstrong finally learned that wealth came from God, and not him. God gives, and God takes away. God put Mr. Armstrong through that 28-year test—that 28-year exercise—until He felt pretty good that Mr. Armstrong had learned his lesson, and he needed that much time. Most of us maybe do not have that kind of a will. I do not know, but God really put that man to the test.

Every one of these merisms touches on relationships with people, and the resolution of our part within them is to find a wise, godly, and equitable way to meet the tests that are there. Some of them—(the first being the most obvious—"A time and a place for everything under the sun")—may encompass a great deal of time, and sometimes pretty dreadful experiences within them.

It is important that we must not think of them primarily as punishments. They are not. They are exercises. They are the kind of experiences that a teacher puts the students through so that both the teacher and the students know where they stand. An exercise is not intended to punish. An exercise is intended to improve.

What I am getting at here as we are going through these things is that God wants us to think: “Am I doing something wrong? Am I learning the lesson that He wants me to have? He’s not punishing me, but He’s making it difficult so that in the end I have better character than I did when we began this thing.” They are exercises given to produce good constructive changes in our character.

I want to show you a major benefit that appears in the Bible in I Kings 3. This involves Solomon. All of us know about Solomon’s asking for wisdom. That account appears in II Chronicles. But in I Kings we are going to look at what was written about this same event, because I Kings 3 adds something that the Chronicles account does not have that is very helpful to understand. Solomon is speaking to God, and this is during the dream.

I Kings 3:7-9 Now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?”

Did you see what he really asked for? He did not really ask for wisdom. He asked for *understanding*. That is different.

Now in what way did this benefit Solomon? Solomon already understood, and that is why he asked the question. That is why he asked for understanding. He understood that wisdom is the result of understanding what he was being confronted with that needed an answer.

I will give you a simple example. Solomon made a decision regarding two women who both claimed a baby was hers. He made a wise decision here. “Okay, you two ladies. One of you says it’s *your* baby, and the other one says it’s *her* baby. The way I am going to solve this thing is that we are going to chop that baby right in half and give part to this lady and part to the other lady.”

What did Solomon understand? He understood that the woman whose child it really was would decide, “Don’t kill it! I don’t want to see my child killed.” She would rather give life to the child and give the baby to somebody else so that the child could live and not be killed. That is what Solomon understood. You see, the understanding led to a wise decision.

I am getting back to the merisms again. As we are going through them, we are supposed to evaluate what we are going through, and asking God for understanding, and evaluating what we are going through, evaluating our responses, evaluating what is happening as a result of what we are doing along the way, and reaching the conclusion that will lead to wise choices. That is what God is after.

Sometimes a wise choice involves sacrificing ourselves further, but it is a wise choice made because we understand it. Understanding produces wisdom, and Solomon understood that principle, and if he was going to make wise decisions in ruling over Israel, it was going to be because he understood what was going on. He understood God’s place in things. He understood the character of the people, and he could therefore make right choices. That proof—the wisdom alone—will greatly help create spiritual maturity, so we must be looking for the lack of understanding within ourselves, correct the understanding first, and wiser choices and godly character will follow.

The Bible presents us with many, many countdowns, some of which the children of God have been acutely aware of. How about the four generations prophesied to Abraham? That happened in Genesis 15, and things did not proceed until that fourth generation came along. How about the 120 years of countdown that God gave to Noah, and then the rains came?

How about the 70 years in captivity which was given to Jeremiah regarding Judah? That appears in Jeremiah 29. How about the very long one concerning the arrival of the Savior? That was originally prophesied in Genesis 3, and that one was not fulfilled until Christ was born about four thousand years later. How about the 3 ½ years of the Tribulation and the preaching of the Two Witnesses? How about the second coming of Jesus Christ?

Remember, I said there is a countdown regarding Pentecost, and it is important for us to understand that. There is a countdown going on in our lives all the time. We are moving on constantly. Again, remember God is in charge of time. God is in charge of events, and we are caught in these countdowns that God has arranged to occur in our lifetime. Countdowns are not to be just flipped off as being of no consequence. It is part of God's purpose in working through these things that we take countdowns into consideration. They are major things in our life, and you see that death is one of those countdowns, and like these other countdowns, we do not know when it ends. God does. He withholds that from us, and in His wisdom He is withholding it.

Countdowns are common parts of God's operations with mankind, and in most cases, brethren, He is the only One who knows when the countdown ends, and so we must not feel that He is treating us unfairly. He has operated with all of those who know Him in the same manner, and therefore brethren, it is for our good that we do not know when these things are going to end. We do know this—He is in charge.

Now what factor in our life does this have a great deal to do with? It is faith. By nature, we want things answered pretty quickly, but faith operates when we do not have what it is that we want, and so countdowns are something that God deals with in order for us and Him to know where our faith is standing. Countdowns are a tool for testing whether we really do get it, and whether we will be loyally faithful, even when it seems as though He has forgotten us completely.

So we must accept countdowns as a vital part of our relationship with Him, and we have to deal with it. There is nothing we can do about it. It is there,

but we can deal with it. He is treating everybody the same way. Everybody has countdowns working in their life. It is part of moving forward through Ecclesiastes 3. I want us to turn back there, and we are going to go into Ecclesiastes 2 and verses 24 through 27 once again. This makes about the third time we have gone through this, but I believe that these three verses here are critical because they are the lead-in to chapter 3, and Solomon said some pretty significant things.

Ecclesiastes 2:24-26 Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God. For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I? For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

Verse 24 begins the thought that it is important that we face life as we move through time using our time to enjoy what we have been given, whether it is much or little. Whatever we have, God is saying, “Enjoy it.” Whether it is much or little, enjoy it. Really, this is a precursor of what you will find in I Timothy 6 in the epistle that Paul wrote to Timothy. Paul says there:

I Timothy 6:8-9 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

Paul is saying to us, and Solomon is saying to us—“Adjust your thinking.” They both are saying essentially the same thing. They are saying we are to take care of what is really important regardless of whether we have a lot or whether we have little. We are to take care of what we have, and enjoy what we have. Why can we? *Because God is going to take care of us.* If we really believe that God is involved in our life, if we have little, He is still going to supply what we need. It might not be a lot, but it gives Him the opportunity to bless us with what we *do* have, whether it is a lot or whether it is little. Regardless of whether it is a lot or little, Paul is saying be content with it. Accept it.

Now Solomon follows that up by essentially saying in verse 25: “For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment more than I?” Change the wording here a little bit. After what he said in verse 24, Solomon turns the spotlight on himself, and he says, “Look at me as an example. I have all of this wealth and power, and all of that entertainment at my fingertips.” He described this at the beginning of this chapter, and what he said is, “What has it accomplished?”

If you have a lot of money to do what Solomon did, what did he say at the end of that experience he had with building all of those buildings and having all of the entertainment at his command? He said it made him weary. He said that it did not do him any good. That was a pretty harsh judgment on himself. But that is what he is saying there in verse 25. “Look at me. It really didn’t do me any good to go through that experience.”

He goes on then there to verse 26. The word “for” means he is continuing the thought that he opened up here in verse 24. “For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight.”

Why did Solomon do all of those things, build all those great projects, and have all of that entertainment? He wanted to have joy. He wanted to really accomplish some things. Now what he is confessing to in verse 26 is that God did not give him the joy he expected from all of those projects and entertainment he expended the time on. He admits that right within the chapter.

Look at verse 17 of chapter 2. “Therefore I hated life.” That does not sound very positive, does it? He was being brutally honest. That is why he is saying, “Look at me” as an example. He expended all that time and energy, and he ended up hating life.

For those of us who have less than Solomon did—and that includes everybody who is listening to my words, and hardly anybody has ever had as much money and so forth as Solomon—hearing him say that, what comes to your mind? “Just give me the chance,” you see. But Solomon was at least humble enough to admit it really did not help him. You see, he is beginning to turn things so that we will see this in a spiritual light. Where does joy

come from? Where does knowledge come from? It is something that God gives. It is not something that comes from what Solomon did.

I am sure that Solomon kind of laughed his way all the way through this, and I am sure that he felt a sense of accomplishment in building all of those buildings and irrigation projects, and all of the trees and everything that he planted. That is not the issue. When it was all over, he looked at it, and then he said it really did not produce what he thought it would. We also saw the answer to that in chapter 2, because it shows very clearly in chapter 2 that he did it to please himself. All the way through that—“I,” “I,” “I,” “I.” “I.”

This does not mean that we should not have projects and so forth, but we have to learn, like Solomon did, that we have to look at them, while we are doing them and the things we accomplish, in a different light, and understand that what we need is the joy and the knowledge and so forth that God is able to give, and He can give it to somebody who is poor. It does not matter whether the person is rich or poor.

There is something else here:

Ecclesiastes 2:26 For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

And then begins chapter 3:

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

Here we see the suggestion of a change in Solomon’s approach to what he is teaching, and that is the introduction of the word “heaven.” It seems like a little thing, but it is not little.

What we have learned about the merisms—and here it is necessary to recall the four suggestions, four prods given by Solomon, which are very subtle, but they are in there—is that (1) we have to learn to look up above the sun, (2) we have to learn to look within ourselves, (3) we have to learn to look

around at what is going on in the culture, and (4) we have to look ahead to death. There is hope for wise counsel if we do this, because doing those helps produce understanding, which in turn leads to wisdom.

We are going to skip right over the merisms because we have gone into them in at least a little bit of detail, and begin with verse 9. This is a portion of this chapter that should be a vital part of every Christian's life. This paragraph is really a bell-ringer. Solomon begins it with the same question that he began the entire book with.

In Ecclesiastes 1:9 he said: "Is there any profit in what we are doing?" The word "heaven" begins to become important right at this point because it shows that Solomon adjusted his sight so that he is no longer looking only "under the sun." He uses the term "heaven." In my Bible right across the same page, chapter 5, verse 2, it says, "Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter any thing harshly before God, for God is in heaven and you on earth."

God never really got all that far from Solomon's thoughts, and he knew that God was in heaven. I know that this one term "heaven" shows an adjustment in Solomon's thinking. He was thinking about God, and this immediately follows the merisms.

Ecclesiastes 3:9 What profit has the worker from that in which he labors?

Remember, I told you in chapter 1, verse 3 that is the first question he asks. What profit is there in what we are doing?

Ecclesiastes 3:9-10 What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied.

What is he talking about? What are the God-given tasks that men are to be occupied with? It is the merisms! God imposes them on His children, and He does it in order to prepare them for the Kingdom of God. He wants to see whether we really do get it, whether our faith is real, whether we lose our faith in Him while we are going through a difficulty.

The Israelites in the wilderness never learned the lesson. They did not see God in their mind's eye. They only saw the problem. All too often that is all we look at, and do not look at it that it is God who is designing this problem we are going through, and that He has a purpose, a reason why He has put us through this. If you want to check, you can go back and read Deuteronomy 8: 1-5 again and you can see that God said, “*I made them go hungry.*” He was testing them. He was putting them through a merism to see what their response would be. They did not respond very well.

Why did the people in the wilderness die? Because they really did not believe Him. Their faith was broken. That is a lesson for you and me, and as we go through these things He wants us to use these merisms to come to an understanding so that there is wisdom in our choices, and know that these things have come upon us because God—the One who has given time and the One who is directing our lives—has decided to put us through these so that we can learn and be prepared for His Kingdom.

Ecclesiastes 3:9-10 What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied.

And so with Solomon's new perspective—he is including “heaven” there to some degree—he directly brings God into the picture. Now in view of the travail that *we* experience almost on a daily basis, life may seem to us to be a strange gift. But do not forget this. The most important point is, regardless of what *you* think of your life, life is God's gift nonetheless.

I wonder how many of you are familiar with the name Jean Paul Sartre. He was a French philosopher. I think it was in 1963 or 1964, somewhere around there, he turned down the Nobel Prize in literature, saying he did not deserve it. He turned it down. But Jean Paul Sartre was an existentialist philosopher, and he was no friend of God, but he came to a right conclusion about something important to us. He wrote, “It was true. I had always realized it. I hadn't any right to exist at all.” Think about that. “I hadn't any right to exist at all.” The key word there is “right.”

We are not entitled to life. What have we ever done that God would reward us with life? Nothing! He is the author of life. He is the author of time. It is He who gives us life, and He gives us life for a reason, for a purpose, and that purpose is to be like Him. If we can only carry this with us. This is worth all of the angst that it might cost us to get rid of the idea that our pride keeps pumping into us. We can see this at work in the United States of America, for 48% of the people are now being given life, as it were, through the largest of the 50% who are being taxed. Life has become something that Americans feel they are entitled to.

Life is a *gift*, brethren. We did absolutely nothing to be given it, but it opens up the opportunity to be like God so that we can live like He does, that we might share life with Him—the One who gave us life in the first place. This is understanding, brethren, because what it does, if we really do grasp it, is it gives us the opportunity to be humble so that we will submit to Him. We do not deserve life. It is simply we live at the discretion of our Creator. So if we can accept this, it helps us to keep our pride in check, and to know that every breath of air that we breathe is a gift from Him. That is an awesome thing.

This problem arises because pride demands that we have whatever it is that we want from God before we have been adequately prepared for the further gift He wants to give us.

Are you beginning to see what Solomon is writing here? Knowledge and joy and all the good things from life are gifts from God, and He gives them as gifts to those who please Him. And what does He give us? Love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, meekness, kindness, patience, on and on and on. He gives them to us, and they become part of our character, and in those things becoming part of our character our heart is formed and shaped into what His heart, as it were, is like, and that becomes the basis of our thinking, and therefore our actions. The actions from that kind of a heart is wisdom—practical and good in the sight of God.

I hope that you will go over and over and over this paragraph time and time again until it becomes ingrained in your mind. To me, it is one of the most important paragraphs in the entire Bible.

Ecclesiastes 3:9-11 What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? 10 I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

Not only have we been given life, but our life is linked to eternity. We might be really distressed about our life, but if we have life, whether we are converted or unconverted, it is linked to eternity. That does not mean that everybody is going to go into eternity at this time. God is the God of time. He times everything, but we know a great deal more than most of the people on the face of this earth, and our life is definitely a part of God's preparation of us for His Kingdom, and so our life is linked to eternity. We are created in God's image. Is that not what Genesis 1:26 says—"Let Us make man in Our image"? Even physically we bear some of the image of God. Not a complete work yet, but we are already, to some degree, in the image of God.

Let us carry this one thought further. Do you know that God nowhere says that the angels are created in His image? They are sons of God because there is a certain amount of character and thought and so forth that is similar to what He is Himself, but it is a character that is not created in the same way that ours is. What I am getting at here is that we are not insects. I made this statement before. Every single one of us is unique. There is nobody exactly like you in all of the creation. Your DNA is different from everybody else's.

In addition to that, we have been given the understanding that a creation is still underway in our life, and therefore we have a potential that is far greater than even any angel, including Michael, including Gabriel—powerful, powerful angelic beings—but they will never be what we are going to be in the Kingdom of God. Is it worth it? See, that is what Solomon is saying. Is there any profit to what we are doing? Absolutely! It is beyond calculation.

Solomon is hoping that people will pick up on what he is writing here, and be thankful for the life they do have even though it has its difficulties as God puts us through the transactions He is putting us through. He is doing this in order to make us into the image He wants us so that we are able to fulfill a position within His family government.

This is one of the few places in the Bible where we are directly connected to immortality. I mean *directly*, and it is something that has come to us as a gift. If I can put it this way, it is ours to lose by messing things up.

Do you see what Solomon is saying to you and me? Is this valuable enough, that even Jean Paul Sartre could see—“I don’t deserve to live”? Now we like life, but do we love its value? If we really love its value, why do we do so much complaining? Why do we do things that may antagonize God in treating our brethren with things that are not love when God says, “Hey! The standard is way up here. You’ve got to love your enemies.” Nobody in the church is supposed to be our enemy, so our love for them should be much, much higher.

We can go one more step with this. This begins to help us understand why Solomon could do all the things that he did with the massive amount of power and authority he had within the government, and the amount of wealth he had available to him, and why, at the end of it, when he was evaluating what he had done, and whether it had accomplished the expectations that he had before he began all of these projects, and he said, “I hated life.” It was not successful.

Now here is why it was not successful. It is actually very simple. I do not mean that as he was going along that it did not give him satisfaction. It did. He could step back and could see the things that he built and there was satisfaction there. We have a little bit of this.

I mentioned to you before that I had so many new cars in my life because I was in the Worldwide Church of God, and every 60-80 thousand miles or so I got a new automobile because I was doing so much driving. I would get that new automobile, and for awhile I really loved that new automobile, and the first thing you know, I was not loving that automobile. It was just a tool. The glory of the new automobile was fading away pretty quickly.

It was nice to have that new automobile, but that is all it was. Do you know why? Because the only thing that will give real satisfaction to those who have the same potential that we have, and have the Spirit of God, are those things that are connected to eternity, to immortality—to the things that we are being prepared to live in the future in God’s Kingdom. That is why God

says He has to give them. He gives knowledge. He gives joy. He gives understanding, and so forth.

There is something here a little bit later that he goes into this, but we have to understand that only immortality will truly satisfy the longing that we have within us. This is something that God instills into everybody that is born.

You are aware of something else that God instills in people. He put in people a conscience so that though they do not know the details of keeping the commandments of God, there is in man at least a shallow understanding of right and wrong. So man, who has no connection to God at all, can still feel guilty about sinning.

No matter where researchers go in the world—whether it is even amongst the cannibals of New Guinea, in the outback, and those people who live in the deep rain forest of Brazil who have a life that is so primitive by comparison to what we are living in our technologically-driven society—they find out these people have within them a hope of immortality. They want to live forever. God puts that in them.

Every religion on the face of the earth that anybody has found, they find there are hopes of immortality within the framework of that religion, and it is true, because God has done that. And so you have it, and I have it, but we have a great deal of truth about it because we believe this Book, and we have details about it that those others do not have. So Solomon has really given us simple advice.

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

They do not know the details. We know a great many of those details because God gives knowledge, so we are without excuse. They still have the excuse of not knowing a great deal that we already know.

Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives [We will go over this in another sermon in detail.], and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God.

I think it is a good time to stop because we are coming up on another paragraph, and it too, like the previous one, is just loaded with wonderful information.

So goodbye to all of you for today, and I hope that your Sabbath continues in God's good graces.