

Ecclesiastes 9-12 • “No man knows”

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Ecclesiastes, chapter 9. I have been wanting to lengthen this a little bit, because I know that coming next is the Song of Solomon and we will do it. We will do it. Yeah. We may have to put up a rating ahead of time and make sure that the kids are all out of the room. The Song of Solomon is PG; you know that, right?

But anyway, we are still in the Book of Ecclesiastes. This is this wonderful book that is given to us in the Bible, written by Solomon, a man who had great wisdom and incredible resources in terms of his wealth. And he sought to understand life apart from God. And when I say apart from God, I'm not saying with God completely out of the equation, because he references God on several occasions throughout the Book of Ecclesiastes. But apart from God basically means apart from the revelation of God. In other words, I'm going to try to see if life on earth makes sense apart from what God has shown us about eternity, about life after death, and all the other things that go along with it so that is what we mean.

And he refers to it over and over again as life, under the sun. That is his pet phrase: under the sun. Meaning life on earth apart from the revelation of God. This is basically life as man sees it. With man's wisdom, with man's ability to look at—and he tries to look at—all kinds of things. He looks at life. He looks at death. He looks at work. He looks at pleasure. He looks at insanity. He looks at foolishness.

He takes all of these things into consideration and says, is there anything here that is worthwhile? Is there anything here that has any meaning? And of course, we saw when we started off the Book of Ecclesiastes, he started with his summary, which is very opposite of the way we say things. We wait until the end to give our summary. He started off right from the get-go and said, Meaningless. Meaningless, it's all meaningless. It's all vanity. It's all emptiness. And so he then spends the rest of the book of what we call Ecclesiastes proving his point. And we are going to see more of that tonight.

And we are going to see—and I have reminded you many times throughout the course of this study—that this is how your unsaved neighbor sees the world, sees life, and death, and that sort of thing. And it is why people freak out so much when they hear about a virus, frankly, because this life is all there is.

Anyway, here we are beginning in Chapter 9, we are going to see in this chapter a repetition of a couple of other phrases such as, no man knows, and you do not know. Solomon is going to say that on several occasions because he is going to be highlighting in this chapter, man's inability to know what is going to happen to him in the future, whether good or bad. Because we just don't know.

And he is going to think about it in terms of whether your hard work in life is going to pay off. And he says, You really don't know if your hard work is going to pay off, or you don't really even know if the fool who didn't work all his life — didn't care about working— is actually going to strike it rich. You just don't know. And so he said, life is unfair that way, but there is a great deal about life we don't know.

He begins here in verse 1 of Chapter 9, by saying: *“But all this I laid to heart, examining it all (meaning with his wisdom, he says), how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God. Whether it is love or hate, man does not know; both are before him.” (ESV)*

Both are before God. In other words, what Solomon is saying in this first verse is that man really can't know how God is ultimately even going to deal with man's good deeds and whether he is going to judge him as good or bad.

If you go to your unsaved neighbor, you talk to somebody who doesn't know the Lord, and you say—assuming they even believe in God— and you say to them, Well, tell me, do you believe, are we going to stand before God? And they, if they believe in God, they will probably say something like, Well, yeah, I suppose.

Then, ask him a further question: How do you think you're going to do? And on what basis is God going to judge you? And they are probably going to say something like, well, He's probably going to just look at my life and check out the good and the bad, and He is going to weigh it on a scale, I suppose. And I'm hoping that my life tips a little bit to the good.

That is what people think in the world. That is their idea of judgment. I hope I've done some good things in my life. Wow. And you and I, who know what the Bible says, we think to ourselves, Wow, if that was my conclusion, I would be really bummed right now, because I am fairly convinced that the bad outweighs the good, for the most part.

I'll be honest with you. I've done some really creepy things in my life. And if I am going to be judged on whether I lived a better life than the bad, I'm not so

sure how that is going to go. I wouldn't at all be certain. I would not have an assurance. I would probably be biting my fingernails right up to the moment of judgment. And that is what Solomon is saying in this first verse; he is basically saying, it is all in the hands of God, and we don't know.

And man doesn't know whether it is good or whether it is going to be bad. All those things are in front of God, but they are not in front of man, and we don't know how it is going to turn out. And the reason, of course, that man is so clueless about such things as what we are talking about here. is that Solomon goes on to say, every man dies, even those who have lived a good life. They share the same fate as those who have lived a bad life.

Look what he says in verse 2 and following. He says, listen, *"It is the same (he says) for all, since the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice (never offered a sacrifice in his whole life. He says,) As the good one is, so is the sinner, and he who swears (and that is not talking about speaking swear words, it is talking about swearing an oath. He says, and he who swears) is as he who shuns an oath."* Or who says, I'm not going to take any oath.

And he says in verse 3, this is his summary: *"This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all."*

He says, first of all, we don't know how God is going to judge us at the end of it. And second of all, it is really unfair that I live my entire life, if that were the case, living for God, trying to live a righteous life, trying to be good. And I'm going to die just like the guy who gave his life to crime. We are both going to end up in the same place.

And so his conclusion is, *"This is an evil..."* this is an evil thing, that we all have to die. It should be that my life that I have lived in goodness should pay off for me somehow.

We are still in the middle of verse 3. He goes on. He says, *"Also, (look at this) the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that, they go to the dead."* And Solomon is saying this, and he is wise enough to know that man's heart is evil. And he understands that, which only confuses the matter all the more. He says, well, how is God going to judge us? How is God going to judge us? And he is saying under the sun, it is a mystery. We don't know. We don't know how God is going to judge us. See, your unsaved neighbor doesn't know how God is going to judge him or her.

They have no idea. All they can do is guess. That is all they can do. Or maybe they heard somebody say something once upon a time about the Judgment Seat, or somebody told a story, or even a stupid joke, and so they just assume that is the way it works. They don't know. They don't have a clue. And that is what Solomon is saying. We don't know, under the sun, how it is all going to play out.

He says in verse 4, “*But (and here's the conclusion of people who are living apart from God. He says, but) he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.*” I've always thought that, haven't you? Yeah, take a living dog over a dead lion any day.

He says: “⁵*For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten.*” In other words, the living person knows that he could still attempt to try to live a better life. But the dead person— it's all over. It's all over. And look what he says: “...*the memory of them is forgotten.*”

He says in verse 6, “*Their love and their hate and their envy (and all the things that they had during their life—they) have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun.*”

And again, we see that term, under the sun, meaning when death comes, it is all over. That's all she wrote. That's it. He's dead. What happened to good old Joe Schniggenhaben? He's dead, gone. Pretty hopeless view, isn't it?

Life under the sun is pretty hopeless and that is what Solomon is saying. And so with that in view, how should we look at living our lives?

Look at verse 7. And this is the attitude of the world: “*Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.* (So) ⁸*Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head.*”

By the way, this isn't the way you and I live. But to wear white garments meant that was what you would do when you were joyful. And again, when you are joyful, you put oil on your head. I keep thinking about the way we did things back in the 60s. We called it greasy kid stuff, but that wasn't because of joy. Believe me, there was no joy in that. At all.

But he is basically saying, don't dress like you are in a state of mourning because, you see, when somebody— just like we do today, when people are

mourning— they put on dark clothing, and they would let their hair go unkempt and not put oil on it. And that would be assigned to people that you were in a place of mourning. And so he is basically saying here, let your garments be white. Don't let oil be lacking on your head because, hey, enjoying life is all you got, so enjoy it. Enjoy life.

In fact, he goes on to say, verse 9, “*Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your (empty) life.*” It is great. Now the word, vain is here in the ESV, but that means empty, meaningless.

He says, “⁹*Enjoy life with the wife whom you love all the days of your (empty) life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.*” This is it. This is your lot in life so just enjoy it as best you can, because the days when you probably won't enjoy it are coming.

And he is actually going to talk about that here in a little bit, but verse 10, he says, “*Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might.*” In other words, do it with all your strength, “*for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in (the grave or) Sheol, to which you are going.*” So do it now, because in the grave, you won't be doing any of that.

Again, this is life under the sun. This is the man or the woman who does not take God into consideration of eternity or life after death. And they are basically saying, hey, when you're in the grave, there's nothing going on, you might as well have fun now. Get it done, so forth. So, remember that. Death under the sun is non-life, okay, is non-life.

Very different from what the apostle Paul said, didn't he? The apostle Paul said it is better to depart and be with Christ, didn't he? I was actually just sharing that with a woman today in a letter. And I was just making reference to the fact that Paul wrote it. He says, I would much rather depart and be with Christ. Much rather. (Philippians 1:23) He says, I am convinced that I am probably going to stick around for you guys, but it is for your benefit, not for mine. I would much rather go be with the Lord. I would much rather leave this body and go and be with the Lord. Far and away better.

But that is not what you are getting here from Solomon when he thinks of life under the sun. Paul is viewing it from life above the sun. He is thinking of it in the sense of eternity and the revelation of what God has given us in his Word. And he can't wait to go be with the Lord. He knows that he needs to stay because God has a purpose for him staying.

God has a purpose for your life. And when that purpose is over, we gladly go to be with the Lord, because that is, as Paul says, better by far. Now, that is not what you're hearing here from Solomon. He is saying, No, when you're dead, that's non-life. There is no life going on. Paul called going to be with the Lord—listen to this—he called it the life that is, truly life, when he wrote to Timothy (1 Timothy 6:19).

Anyway, it goes on here. Verse 11. He says, *“Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all.”* In other words, when you live life under the sun, and you are not thinking about the sovereignty of God and the purpose of God and the plan of God, life becomes a coin toss. It's like, hey, flip a coin.

And he says, looking at life, I have noticed that the race doesn't always go to the guy who is the fastest. And the battle doesn't always get won by the strongest. And so sometimes it is just like, Who knows? Who knows why that guy won? Who knows why that guy came out on top? Who knows why that guy over there was successful in business, and that guy there tanked? We don't know. He says, it is chance, just chance. That is what your neighbor thinks—your unsaved neighbor

Verse 12: *“For man does not know his time. (He says we're) Like fish who are taken in an evil net, and like birds that are caught in a snare, so the children of man are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them.”*

Did you notice here how Solomon characterizes man as a victim of his circumstances? And he says, We are just swimming along like a dumb fish, or we are flying along like a dumb bird. And all of a sudden, boom, like a fish, we swim into the net, and we don't really even know how we got here. Or like a bird, we're suddenly in a snare and it's like, well, what's this? What is this?

And he says, man is like that, and we are just caught, and there it is. It's like, well, it is just chance. It happens to some people. Hope it doesn't happen to you. Hope you do better. Go be warm and well-fed. Hope your life is better than that fish over there that got caught in the net. He talks about the fish being taken in an evil net, which is his way of saying that there are evil days that just suddenly seem to come upon a person.

Evil days. Do you remember what the apostle Paul talked about when he wrote to the Ephesians about the day of evil? Because Solomon is right. The day of evil does come from time to time. It does spring upon us from time to time.

However, Paul told us that when the day of evil comes, that God has given us an armor to put on. In fact, it is a full armor, right? He says, put on the full armor so you can take your stand when the day of evil comes. (Ephesians 6:10) And after doing everything, you are going to end up standing in victory, because God has given you the victory. The battle belongs to Him. And you are able to stand because of God. And Solomon, of course, isn't keeping any of that in mind. And he is just saying you are caught in a net, and you are dead.

But see above the sun, we know something different. We look at the difficulties of life differently from the people of the world. Verse 13, *"I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me."*¹⁴ *There was a little city with few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it.* Meaning ramps to crawl up and scale the walls of the city.

And it says in verse 15, *"But there was found in it a poor, wise man, and he by his wisdom, he delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man."*

After the man died, nobody made a monument to him or put a rock in the wall, dedicated to so-and-so who saved the city by his wisdom. He was poor, but wise. We are going to remember. He said, nobody did that and the guy died and he is gone. And nobody's like, they're like, Who? Huh?

Interesting, so the man was wise, but nobody remembered. And so he says, *"¹⁶ But I say (even so, the man that wasn't remembered, still, he says,) wisdom is better than (strength or) might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised (now because nobody remembers him) and his words are not heard."* Any longer because nobody remembers even what he said.

He says, *"¹⁷ The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. (And I would agree with that. He says,) ¹⁸ Wisdom is better than weapons of war, (which is another good saying. And yet, he says) but one sinner destroys much good."* He is just finishing the chapter here with making simple observations.

He goes on in Chapter 10, and he begins with some more, under the sun proverbs. He says, *"¹ Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench; (And in just in that same way, he says) so a little folly (or foolishness) outweighs wisdom and honor."* You and I would use a different phrase. I assume, I have never smelled dead flies in ointment, but we would say something like, I suppose, maybe, one bad apple can spoil the whole bunch, or

something like that. But the point of what Solomon is saying is, it just takes a little foolishness to ruin a lot of wisdom.

And then he goes on in verse 2 to say, *“A wise man's heart inclines him to the right, but a fool's heart to the left.”* And by the way, that is not a political statement, unless you want it to be. It's fine.

“Even when the fool, (verse 3) walks on the road, he lacks sense, and he says to everyone that he is a fool. ⁴ If the anger of the ruler rises against you, (he says) do not leave your place, for calmness will lay great offenses to rest.” This is just another proverb.

He says, if something comes out against you, if a ruler comes out against you, he says, don't panic and run, because that makes you look guilty. Just hold your ground. That is good advice, I suppose. But again, these are just observations of life under the sun.

He says in verse 5, *“There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as it were an error proceeding from the ruler; ⁶ folly is set in many places, and the rich sit in a low place. ⁷ I have seen slaves on horses, and princes walking on the ground like slaves.”*

This is another thing that really bothered Solomon. He considered it a great inconsistency that showed a great lack of wisdom, when he would look at kings, and he would say, This king is dumb. He's a fool. And yet he ascended to the throne of this country. And here is this wise man who walks like a slave, and he is well able to rule the country, and yet he is barely even noticed. And he is just talking about how in the world we see these kinds of things all the time, and it is an inconsistency, and it is something that he thinks is a great evil.

And so he continues now to speak on how a lack of wisdom can negatively affect a person who chooses to reject wisdom. He says, *“⁸ He who digs a pit will fall into it, (and a servant will bite him, excuse me) and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall. ⁹ He who quarries stones is hurt by them, and he who splits logs is endangered by them.”*

In other words, if you are not wise, if you are dumb about the way you do your work, you are liable to get hurt. And he is making an observation that if you don't bring wisdom into play in your job, you are liable to be wounded in the midst of it.

In fact, he goes on to say, “¹⁰ *If the iron, (and that's another word for an ax, they called it an iron in those days.) is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength,* (obviously to cut a piece of wood or cut down a tree. But then, here is the conclusion,) *but wisdom helps one to succeed.*” And again, this is just another observation, that if you apply wisdom to whatever you do, you are going to succeed better.

He says in verse 11, “*If the serpent bites before it is charmed, there is no advantage to the charmer.*” I don't know if you are into that sort of thing. I have never seen anybody charm a snake, but I accept on movies, I suppose. And that probably wasn't real. But what he's saying here is if wisdom or if one's ability isn't applied in the right way or at the right time, it is not going to be any help to him, and that makes sense. These are just some proverbs that he is laying out.

“¹² *The words of the wise man's mouth win him favor, but the lips of a fool consume him.* ¹³ *The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is evil madness.* (In fact, he says) ¹⁴ *A fool multiplies words, though no man knows what is to be, and who can tell him what will be after him?*”

I love that verse because he says men don't really know what they're talking about, and yet they'll just keep talking. And that's what he is saying. “*A fool multiplies words.*” That means, he talks and he talks, but he really doesn't know what he's talking about because he doesn't know what is to be. And nobody can tell him, because nobody else knows either. And yet he just keeps talking.

Verse 15 says: “*The toil (or the labor) of a fool wearies him, for he does not know the way to the city.*” When he makes that statement— “*he does not know the way to the city,*” it just speaks of how ignorant he is. You and I might say something like, he doesn't know enough to come in out of the rain. I will say that sometimes. Didn't your mama teach you to come in out of the rain? And it is meant to infer, you are not really using your common sense right now. And that is what he means when he says the toil of a fool, the work of a fool, wearies him, because he doesn't have common sense that he is applying to his every day actions.

Verse 16. “*Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning!* ¹⁷ *Happy are you, O land, when your king is the son of the nobility, and your princes feast at the proper time, for strength, and not for drunkenness!*” Good leaders benefit a nation.

He says, “¹⁸ *Through sloth* (which is laziness), *the roof sinks in* (because somebody is not taking care of his house), *and through indolence* (which is another word for laziness), *the house leaks*. ¹⁹ *Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life*, (and here's the attitude of the world, isn't it?) *and money answers everything*. ”

There it is, huh? Life under the sun. You got money; you can answer everything. That takes care of everything. And people still believe it today. We still believe that money is the answer for everything.

Verse 20, “*Even in your thoughts*, (he says,) *do not curse the king, nor in your bedroom* (even) *curse the rich, for a bird of the air will carry your voice, or some winged creature tell the matter*. ”

Today, we would say, Be careful what you say, because the internet is going to take it everywhere. Loose lips sink ships. You ever heard that saying? Solomon is basically commenting here about how important it is to control your words because they can easily come back to bite you. Frankly, that is a good reminder. There is nothing that we are going to differ with him on that.

Chapter 11 continues with the theme of not knowing what the future holds. Solomon offers some advice here. He says, “¹ *Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days*. ² *Give a portion to seven, or even to eight, for you know not what disaster may happen on earth...* ”

Let me tell you what he says here. When he uses the phrase, casting “*your bread upon the waters*. ” He is basically talking about distributing your generosity or your goodness to a lot of people so that they will end up owing you in the end.

That is what he is talking about. He says, “*Cast your bread upon the waters* ” because you don't know what is going to happen in life. And you might need to call in a favor. Or two or three, and you can say, hey, remember when I helped you? Yeah. Well, I'm asking for a favor now. He says, you never know. You never know what disaster might come up.

That is the way the world thinks. Life under the sun. Hey, if you don't have God to turn to in a time of disaster, it is like, well, then be smart about your resources and give them to people so that when times get tough, you can call in some favors. Verse 3. This is interesting, and it sounds a little funny, but I'll explain it: “*If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves on the earth...* ” Sounds like something a wise weatherman would say, doesn't it? And then he says,

“...And if a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie.” Now that's wisdom for you, guys. When the tree falls, that's where it is going to lie.

It sounds funny. To you and me, it sounds like he is stating the obvious, but actually he is continuing the thought of the previous verse saying that man's life under the sun never knows how life is going to turn out or what may befall him. And the simple message of that is that there is a finality and assurance to life that when it happens, just as rain clouds dump water on the earth, so do troubles get dumped on people.

And those living under the sun, you and I would say, Hey, we hear about somebody who is going through hard time after hard time. What do we say? When it rains, it pours, I guess. That is all he is saying. When the rain clouds are full of moisture, they dump. And then this point about the falling tree— he is basically saying that once a tree is cut and it is felled in the forest, its fate is decided. And there it lies.

And in the same way, he is saying that mankind living under the sun has no control over his fate. Something happens in his life. And there he lies. And there is nothing he can do about it. Just like the tree that just got cut down by the person with the ax; it falls in the forest and there it lies. It's done. It's over. Its fate is determined.

Do you understand, this whole idea of determination is a very depressed way of looking at life, to say that all these things are determined, and this is our fate, and it happens, and when it happens, there is nothing you and I can do about it. And this is just life. And, oh, what a horrible way to live. Don't you think? What a horrible way to live, to think, Well, I guess that was his fate. Got cut down in the forest, and there he lies.

Verse 4 says: *“He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap.”* In other words, if you wait for conditions to be perfect, you are never going to get anything accomplished so just get busy.

I always love it when people come to me, and they want to get married. They say, We're just waiting to have enough money to get married. And I'm thinking, How much is that? How much money exactly do you need? We are going to start having children when we have some things in order in our life, and we have enough money. I'm like, God bless you. Anyway, if you're waiting for the perfect time, you're going to wait for a long time.

Verse 5, and this is really a fascinating statement: *“As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.”*

Do you know what he is saying here? He is saying, as you do not know when an unborn child becomes alive—that is what he is saying—so also, he says, you don't know how God works. You don't know the work of God. You can't figure out God just like you can't figure—do you know, we are still debating this. We are still today debating when a child— an unborn child—becomes a living being. We are still talking about it today.

And he is saying that they didn't know. He didn't know. Some people aren't sure today. And so he says, but you know what, in that same way where— while we're still debating some of these issues— you think it is easy to understand God if you can't figure out man, you can't figure out when man's life begins, how are you going to figure out the work of God? He is basically saying, you are just as clueless about that as you are about the other thing.

And so man living under the sun is simply left to guess. He guesses. And we talked about this before. Unbelievers guess. They guess. I encourage you; go talk to somebody who doesn't know the Lord. Ask them questions. Just say, What do you think about this? What do you think about heaven? Tell me about heaven. What do you think about...? And they're going to go, Well, I think.... and it's going to be probably just wild, fanciful.

And what do you think about what happens to us when we die? Well, and they're just going to throw out their... Aren't they? You've all heard it before. You've been probably privy to some conversations, hearing people talk, at work or whatever. Maybe you were even part of those conversations before you got saved. And you said some things that were off the top of your head. Here's what I think....

Solomon is saying here that there is no way, there is no way you can know these things under the sun. You can't know them. You can't know God's will. You can't know God's purpose under the sun. Even Christians struggle with this. I would have to say one of the most common questions that I get asked is, Pastor Paul, how can I know the will of God? Now, Solomon says living under the sun, you can't. You can't. He says, you're clueless. You're just as clueless to understand how life begins in an unborn baby. You don't know the will of God, the purpose of God, the works of God. You can't know them.

Now as believers, it is a different situation, isn't it? Because we have been given the mind of Christ. We have been given prayer, we have been given the insight of God's Word, the revelation of God's Word to understand His will. We know a great deal about God's will just from the Bible alone. And then God's Spirit moves upon us and gives us wisdom and understanding related to these things. But the person in the world is just guessing. Just guessing.

Verse 6: *"In the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand. (And that means don't stop working. Why? He says,) for you do not know, (you don't know) which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good."* You don't even know if that seed is going to come up for sure.

You don't know if, after having planted it there, the water is going to be too lean or the nutrients in the soil or are such that it is just not going to work. He says, basically, don't stop. And again, he is just emphasizing that refrain. You do not know.

He says, verse 7: *"Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun."⁸ So if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity."* Or emptiness.

This is where Solomon starts talking about old age. And I love this part because this is so perky. It fills us with all kinds of hope. He is basically saying, If you love your days, great, that's wonderful. But just know this, the darkness is coming.

In fact, he says in verse 9, *"Rejoice. O, young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment."* You just don't know how He is going to judge you because under the sun, you don't know those things.

And so he says, *"¹⁰ Remove vexation from your heart, (which is grief and agony) and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life (or the vigor of life, if you will) are vanity."* They are emptiness. He's saying that these things are just a wisp; they mean nothing in the grand scheme of things. Boy, tell that to the young people of America, where we think that youth is so much the thing that we will actually go under the knife when we start to see our faces sag or some parts of our body sag. We will go under the knife and have plastic surgery because we want to look young, because youth is elevated and exalted and Solomon says it is meaningless. It is meaningless.

Chapter 12: *“¹ Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come in the years draw near of which you will say, ‘I have no pleasure in them;...’”*

In other words, what Solomon is saying is, live wisely, or we might say, live circumspectly, because, he says, There's going to come a day as you get older, when the challenges of life are going to become greater as your body begins to break down, as you deal with the issues that go along with age. This is just the cheeriest stuff you've ever read in the Bible, isn't it?

Goes along with what the apostle Paul says, even though our bodies are breaking down and decomposing and stuff. What does he say though? He says, we're being remade every day, aren't we? In the image of Christ. He says, spiritually speaking, we are being transformed, even though the body is deteriorating or decomposing or however you want to say it. (2 Corinthians 4:16)

It is always interesting when you see in movies, somebody gets sick, and they say— in this moment of drama with the music— and they say, I'm dying. I want to say, kid, you were dying when you were born. Ever since you were born, you started dying.

We say that to say, they've told me now that I think I know my departure date. Before that, you just didn't know, but you were still dying before you knew your departure date, before the doctor said to you, you have six months or a year or whatever; you were dying before that. I'm not trying to depress you. Seriously, I'm not, I'm simply saying that this is life under the sun.

And if you think that is bad, keep reading with me because it gets much worse. He says in verse 2, *“...before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain, ³ in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look through the windows are dimmed,*

⁴ and the doors on the street are shut —when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low— ⁵ they are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in their way; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails, because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets— ⁶ before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern,

⁷ and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. ⁸ *Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity.*” And that's just about as depressing as you can get — of life under the sun.

And so this chapter ends with some references related to Solomon. And it says, “⁹ *Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care.*” ¹⁰ *The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth.*

“¹¹ *The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd.*” In other words, he is saying there is a pointedness to the truth. It is like a goad or a nail.

Have you ever thought about that? Truth is like that, isn't it? It kind of pokes, it pokes at you, and its truth is very black and white. Truth does not have gray shades. It's just black and white.

And he depicts it here as pointed. He says in verse 12, “*My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.*” He says, there's no end to writing books and investigating life.

And it is all rather exhausting to read them. Man, this is exactly how I felt in high school. I just couldn't get the words put together to explain to my parents. But here it is, right in the Bible. I wish I would have found it. I could have just quoted Ecclesiastes to him. I don't know that it would have made any difference, but I could have said, “*...much study is weariness of the flesh.*” They would have said, Get in there and do your homework. That's what they would have said.

“¹³ *The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.*” ¹⁴ *For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.*” Now, I want you to pause with me here. These final comments might sound like Solomon just lifted his head above the sun, because he talks about fearing God, keeping His commandments, remembering that He will judge all things in the end. And it sounds to us like, Oh, wow, Solomon finally lifted his head. But even though he tells us to fear God. We need to remember that fearing God and having a confident faith in God are two very different things. And so these words aren't necessarily expressing any more spiritual insight than what we have been seeing throughout the course of the Book of Ecclesiastes. Because as

I said, even living under the sun, man will talk about God. He is just clueless about Him. That's all.

Let me end our study here of Ecclesiastes by helping to do what I think we all want to do, and that is lift our eyes above the sun. And to do that, we are going to take a look at a passage from 2 Corinthians. Chapter 4. Check this out on the screen. Paul writes:

2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 5:1 (ESV)

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. (Look at what he says about the difficulties of life.) For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen (I'll put in, under the sun) but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen (under the sun) are transient. (In other words, they quickly flee away.) But the things that are unseen (above the sun) are eternal. For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home (our body) is destroyed, (we know) we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

This is what we know above the sun. This is what we know. Did you notice that Paul said that: “*For we know.*” Solomon just took us through 12 chapters of, we don't know nothing under the sun. We don't have a clue what life is going to be after death. Who knows? Who knows?

Paul gives this beautiful exhortation. It says we do know, actually; we do know, because God has made it known. He has revealed the purpose of His will as it relates to those who put their faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And this we know

and what a wonderful thing that is to go through life knowing that we know, because God has made it known. He has revealed it.