

The End of All Mankind

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[0 : 0 0] It's such a joy and privilege to worship with you guys. Please turn with me to Ecclesiastes. If you don't have a Bible, please raise your hand. We'd love to give you a copy that you can have and you can use this morning.

Ecclesiastes almost smack in the middle of the Bible after Psalms and Proverbs. We're in Ecclesiastes chapter 7 today.

Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's word. Father, there are so many ups and downs and good things and bad things that litter our lives.

And we need humility, Lord, to accept the lot you've given us. And we need your wisdom, Lord, to live in light of our impending death and with hope in the life after.

So, Lord, take all the misconceptions and functional misbeliefs that we have this morning that prevent us from living in light of the wisdom you give to us here in this book of Ecclesiastes.

[1 : 4 9] Please, conform us to your will. Humble us and glorify, magnify your grace in Jesus Christ toward us.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Please stand, if you are able, as I read from Ecclesiastes 7, God's word.

Amen. Amen. A good name is better than precious ointment, and a day of death than the day of birth.

It 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.

Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of face the heart is made glad. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

[2 : 5 3] It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools. For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fools.

This also is vanity. Surely oppression drives the wise into madness, and a bribe corrupts the heart. Better is the end of a thing than its beginning, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools. Say not, why were the former days better than these?

For it is not from wisdom that you ask this. Wisdom is good with an inheritance, an advantage to those who see the sun. For 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.

Consider the work of God. Who can make straight what he has made crooked? In the day of prosperity, be joyful. And in the day of adversity, consider.

[4 : 0 4] God has made the one as well as the other, so that men may not find out anything that will be after him. This is God's holy and authoritative word.

You may be seated. Ever since Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden and were cast out from the Garden, and without access to the tree of life, humanity has been on this quest for immortality, and even ancient stories tell of this.

The Epic of Gilgamesh, which is a Mesopotamian story dated 2100 BC, tells the story of Gilgamesh, who after the death of his companion Enkidu, imparks on a perilous journey to find the secret of eternal life.

But interestingly enough, he is spoiled by a serpent in his quest. In the third century BC, Emperor Qin Shi Huang of China searched repeatedly for the elixir of life when he found an inscription that predicted his death.

He got so angry that he searched the entire town over to find, identify the culprit, whoever inscribed about his death. When he couldn't find the person, he decided he'll kill the entire town off and pulverize the stone upon which his death was predicted.

[5 : 30] He was so obsessed with escaping death that many people think that he died of poisoning from mercury when he drank what he thought was an elixir of life to give him immortality. Similarly, European alchemists sought, were rumored about the philosopher's stone, which they hoped would grant eternal life.

I think that piqued the interest of some of the kids here who's read the Harry Potter series. This quest for immortality is still going on today. In 2013, Google launched Calico Life Services, which is a biotech company founded for the purpose of solving death.

Venture capitalist and founder of PayPal, Peter Thiel, has pledged to fight death by investing in anti-aging research. In 2021, founder of Amazon, Jeff Bezos, invested in Altoslab, a company that hopes to develop life extension therapies that will halt or reverse human aging.

But seeking eternal life apart from God is a fool's errand. History bears that out, and we see that in God's Word in Ecclesiastes 7, 1-14.

This passage teaches us instead that we should live knowing that we'll die and die knowing that we'll live forever. My first point is going to be this.

[6 : 57] Death is the end of all mankind. I'm going to spend the bulk of my time in that point, establishing that point from this passage, and then I'm going to conclude with my second point. Eternal life is the end of all Christians.

At the end of chapter 6, the preacher of Ecclesiastes last week asked the question, for who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow?

What is good for man while he lives? And then in chapter 7, verses 1-14, the word good, often translated better, occurs 11 times. So he's trying to answer that question that he has raised for us with a series of better-than statements.

This is what the good life looks like in light of inevitable death that is fast approaching. And the preacher's answers, characteristically, upend our expectations.

First better-than statement is this, in verse 1, a good name is better than precious ointment. The comparison is even stronger in Hebrew, which is literally, a good name is better than good ointment.

[8 : 03] This echoes the wisdom of Proverbs 22.1, a good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold. You might remember from the Bible, the story of Mary anointing Jesus' feet with precious ointment.

It says that she broke a jar that contained a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard. John chapter 12. And who objects but Judas Iscariot, who says that the ointment could have been sold for 300 denarii.

One denarius was the wage of a common worker for a day's work. So 300 is 300 days worth of work for a common laborer.

So that's almost an year's worth of salary for a common laborer. And that's how expensive that perfume was that she broke to anoint Jesus with. So you can tell from this that even back then, like today, some perfumes were genuine luxury items.

But still, verse 1 says this, A good name is better than precious ointment. How precious then is a good name? In light of this, sully your good reputation for the sake of gaining wealth is a height of folly.

[9 : 23] But this is also a sharp warning to those of us who would never dare to steal a precious jewel from someone that we know, but don't think twice about stealing their good reputation with gossip and slander.

A good name is more precious than any jewel. I'm sure you've all had the experience of someone on the streets walking by you.

Sometimes they run by you and they're like in these exercise clothes and then you just get this whiff of perfume. And no matter how fragrant that perfume is, it's delightful to our senses, it only lingers for a fleeting moment and poof, and it's gone.

But a good name stays with you. Your reputation precedes you. What good is it if you wear an ointment that smells of fragrant jasmine when your name or your reputation smells of rotten eggs and sewage and sweaty socks?

Do people smile at the mention of your name? Do they bless the memory of your name? Or do they curse the memory of your name? So far, verse one sounds like a nice, neat, predictable proverb.

[10 : 42] But here's the kicker, the rest of verse one. And the day of death than the day of birth. A good name is a precious commodity, but whether you have a good name or a bad name, you're going to die one day.

And it serves us to remember that fact. The day of death is better than the day of birth. This is not what we'd expect people to say, but it is consistent with the message of Ecclesiastes we've seen.

Early in chapter six, we are told that a stillborn child is better off than the man who lives a long life but is never satisfied with life's good things. In chapter four, verse two, because of the oppression or the robbery, the extortion and injustice in the world, the preacher said, I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive.

But better than both is he who has not yet been, has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun. Repeatedly, we're told that life under the sun is a vanity and a striving after wind for all our days are full of sorrow and work.

Our work is a vexation. Life is hard and life is miserable. One of the privileges of being a pastor is that many of you do me the honor of confiding in me and bringing me into your pains and struggles in life.

[12 : 11] I hear about some of your debilitating physical or mental conditions. I think of our sister, Jenny, still at the hospital since her open heart surgery last Monday.

I hear about how you are treated, some of you, at your workplaces. I hear about your painful family history, baggage with your family members and relatives.

even two days ago when I was visiting Caleb, Caleb born in the neonatal intensive care unit, I walked through dozens of rooms, infants hooked up to tubes.

this life is messed up. Mark Twain had this to say in his autobiography at the end of his life.

A myriad of men are born. They labor and sweat and struggle for bread. They squabble and scold and fight. They scramble for little mean advantages over each other.

[13 : 29] Age creeps upon them infirmities follow. Shames and humiliations bring down their prides and their vanities. Those they love are taken from them and the joy of life is turned to aching grief.

The burden of pain, care, misery grows heavier year by year. At length, ambition is dead. Pride is dead. Vanity is dead. Longing for release is in their place.

It comes at last. The only unpoisoned gift earth ever had for them. And they vanish from a world where they were of no consequence, where they achieved nothing, where they were a mistake and a failure and a foolishness, where they have left no sign that they have existed, a world which will lament them a day and forget them forever.

Then another myriad takes their place and copies all they did and goes along the same profitless road and vanishes as they vanished to make room for another and another and a million other myriads to follow the same arid path through the same desert and accomplish what the first myriad and all the myriads that came after it accomplished nothing.

It sounds like Ecclesiastes, doesn't it? It's plagiarized. Yeah. Yeah. Mark Twain got it halfway right because he's missing God from the picture but he gets this observation about our fall in the broken world, right?

[15 : 03] So then why are so many people desperate to stay alive a little longer? Well, people are desperate to stay alive because they fear death but once you remove the fear of death from the equation, a clear-eyed view of life's suffering and oppression and injustice leads to the inevitable conclusion that the day of death is better than the day of birth.

If your motto is life is good, I think that's a New England company, right? If you expect everything in life to make sense and you expect good things to happen to good people and bad things to happen to bad people and if you expect people to be nice to you because you're a nice person, if you expect to be successful because you're a hard-working person, if you never expect to get sick and die because you exercise and have a healthy diet, then you will be disappointed because that's not how this life works.

We live in a fallen and broken world and if you don't figure out how to align your naivete with this harsh reality, then you will become disillusioned, discontented, angry, and bitter but if you know that the world isn't fair, if you know that the day of death is better than the day of birth, then you can be thankful for the surprising number of blessings in your life.

You can rejoice at the few things that actually go the way they should go and you can enjoy the good gifts that God has already given you rather than grumbling and complaining about what you don't have.

Imagine that you drive a 30-year-old clunker of a car. I know this from experience because my first two cars were like that.

[16 : 56] When you drive a car like that, you don't care that the AC doesn't work or the heat doesn't work or that when you roll the window down, it gets stuck in the middle. You're just happy that it started and now you don't have to walk somewhere.

You can drive. But imagine that you have a brand new car. Even if the smallest thing doesn't work, it annoys you greatly, frustrates you.

The tiniest scratch on that shiny thing upsets you because on a new car, you expect everything to be perfect. You expect everything to work the way they're supposed to.

I think often people expect the world to be like that. We expect there to be peace and order and justice and righteousness. It's as if the rest of humanity is living in denial that we have been caught off from the Garden of Eden and from the Tree of Life, that we live in a fallen and broken world that's been subjected to futility.

as it says in Romans 8. So saying that the day of death is better than the day of birth is a sober-minded recognition of this reality that the world is not the way it's supposed to be.

[18 : 24] It's important to note here that the preacher is not commenting here on the implications of life after death on eternity because of course that has an impact on whether your day of death is better than the day of birth or not.

And I'll address that later. But that's not the preacher's concern here. He is simply making the observation that all creation has been subjected to futility and that there is because of that vanity in this life and the day of death is better than the day of birth.

Far from having a death wish, Ecclesiastes does not have a death wish, the preacher of Ecclesiastes repeatedly tells us, and if you've been with us in this series you know this, he tells us again and again to enjoy life.

Joy is a major theme of the book of Ecclesiastes. Remember, we find the thesis of Ecclesiastes in the five parallel passages throughout the book where he tells us to receive and enjoy life as a gift from God rather than striving in vain for gain, seeking to control life and to leverage life in order to get ahead in life and to make something of life.

That's not how we're supposed to live. If your life is go, go, go, all be from one appointment to the next appointment, from one project to the next, from one rung on the creator ladder to climbing to the next one, then we will never stop and actually enjoy life.

[19 : 47] In other words, you don't begin to live until you know that you're going to die. And the book of Ecclesiastes seeks to remind us that we don't have to wait until the doctor tells us of a terminal diagnosis.

We're already terminal because we have a spiritual disease called sin. Romans 5.12 says, sin came into the world through one man and death through sin.

And so death spread to all men because all sinned. So then we should live knowing that we'll die. In 2018, there was a Washington Post article about Veronica Bennett, a TV producer who ran a popular blog series on aging called Time Goes By on the Washington Post.

This interview was conducted shortly after Bennett was diagnosed with the rare form of cancer, terminal cancer in her body's soft tissues. And her doctors told her that there is no cure and that she might expect to have six to eight months of good health after which her body will start deteriorating rapidly.

And the diagnosis completely changed the then 77-year-old Veronica Bennett's perspective on life. She said, it colors everything. I've always lived tentatively, but I'm not anymore because the worst has happened.

[21 : 11] I've been told I'm going to die. All kinds of things fall away at just about the exact moment the doctor says there is no treatment. She started making immediate changes to the way she lived.

Here are some things that she stopped doing immediately. Some of these are quite funny. No more try-to-stay-healthy extended exercise routines every morning. An activity that she formally forced herself to do but never enjoyed.

No more watching her diet. Palliative care is very different from preventative care. No more worrying about whether memory lapses were normal or an early sign of dementia.

Well, it doesn't matter anymore. And no more worrying about what other people are going to think of her. And here are the things that she wanted to do and have more of.

Ice cream and cheese, her favorite foods. walks in the park near her home. A romp with kittens or puppies licking her and making her laugh.

[22 : 18] And deep conversations with friends. These kinds of perspective shifts are not uncommon when people receive terminal diagnoses.

Welsh photographer Sir Ridwin Hughes created a short film entitled What Matters Most? Question Mark. Which documents the lives of people who have received the terminal diagnosis.

And one of her subjects in the documentary is a 30-year-old woman named Megan McClay. She says that after being diagnosed with stage 4 eye cancer, she says this, I'm able to have a perspective on what is important to me that I didn't have before.

I value spending time with my family, being with my partner more, being more present with myself. I feel like we're always striving for more, a bigger home, a bigger car, a bigger this, and a bigger that, but we forget to see what we actually have in front of us.

Her diagnosis also changed the perspective of her boyfriend who said this, instead of always doing what I thought was a helpful thing and taking action, being away and working, I've not calmed down significantly.

[23 : 26] Me and Megan are able to have as much meaning within our time together as possible because we won't have that time in the future. Remember what I said to you about Pastor Tim Keller a few, maybe last month or so when he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer?

Which would eventually take his life. When faced with death, he finally stopped trying to make a heaven out of earth and realized that he needs to make a heaven out of heaven.

And as he and his wife, Kathy, did this, they noticed a change. Quote, this world becomes something we're actually enjoying for its own sake. Instead of trying to make it give us more than it really can.

So oddly enough, we've never been happier. Day to day, we've never enjoyed our days more. We've never enjoyed hugs more. We've never enjoyed food more. She'll say, this would be great to make.

We've never enjoyed walks more. We've never enjoyed the actual things we see, touch, taste, hear, and then smell around us more. It's ironic, isn't it? We don't begin to live until we're expecting to die.

[24 : 37] It's only when we keep death in view that we begin to truly enjoy life. That's the meaning of verses 2 to 6. Verses 2 to 3, loosely parallel, verses 4 to 6, and you can tell that by the repetition of words and themes that bind them together, words like house, mourning, heart, laughter, fool, wise, they both compare the house of mourning to the house of feasting and conclude that the house of mourning is better.

They both include a better than statement saying that sorrow is better than laughter and that the rebuke of the wise is better than the song of fools. They both include a rationale statement, an explanation statement that explains this surprising proposition and it begins with the word for and the reason it gives is death because all our lives end in death.

The laughter and the songs of fools that make us forget this troublesome reality of life are vanities. Going to a funeral is better than going to a party because what's waiting for us at the end of our life is not a party but death.

The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. The preacher is not saying that we should never throw parties. I was at two of them yesterday.

But this is what it means. When you come face to face with the brokenness of this fallen world you can be driven into despair and cynicism. And to avoid that there are only two ways you can deal with the problem.

[26 : 09] The first way is to party like there's no tomorrow. This is the route of escapism. Drink away your sorrows. Dance the night away. Divert yourself with endless comedy shows so that you can forget your trouble.

The second way is to look at death squarely in the eyes come to terms with your own mortality and significance acknowledge that you don't have all the answers and cultivate humility and submission before God.

That produces gratitude and joy. The first way is folly. The second way is wisdom. The first way inebriates you. The second way sobers you.

This is why sorrow is better than laughter for the sadness of face by the sadness of face the heart is made glad. The word translated made glad here is a Hebrew word that often means to do good.

So I actually prefer the rendering that the new international version has. It says a sad face is good for the heart. Or the King James version says this by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.

[27 : 22] A cure for heart sickness surprisingly is a vial of medicine called a dose of reality the reality of death. Confronting the realities of suffering and death in this life makes us sober and humble.

It forces us to shed our delusions of grandeur and immortality. It instills in us deep in our bones a freedom of insignificance and the humility of wisdom.

This is why sadness of faith is good for the heart. In contrast the laughter of the fools is like the crackling of thorns under a pot. This is an image of a pot you're cooking in a pot you have some water or some food soup in it and underneath what's burning is a whole bunch of thorns that you have no use for but to burn.

And as the thorns are burning and the twigs are burning they crackle. They crackle because of the pressure of the heat the thorns crack open and the little bit of moisture that's left in it evaporates immediately and pops.

It's like a mini explosion. That's what the songs and laughter of fools who seek to escape this reality of death are like. They crackle with life for a fleeting moment and then they're reduced to ashes.

[28 : 43] So remember death. Christian author Randy Alcorn writes this in his book Heaven that ancient merchants often wrote the words memento mori think of death in large letters on the first page of their accounting books.

I think that's a healthy practice that we could recover. Philip of Macedon father of Alexander the great commissioned a servant to stand in his presence each day and say to him Philip you will die.

What a job. In contrast Francis Louis XIV decreed that the word death not be uttered in his presence.

Be more like Philip of Macedon than Louis XIV. Think of death. I read last week about an author who writes her own obituary every single year.

A practice that she learned while accompanying our mom who was volunteering at a hospice and one of the training that you do when you volunteer for hospice at this place was to write your own obituary so that you could imagine yourself in the shoes of the people who are spending the end of their lives there.

[30 : 07] And so she started doing this practice. Try writing your own obituary one day. It forces you to think about what people will say about you after you die.

What will they say? Will they say that you loved well? That you loved Jesus? You walked with him? Will they say that you knew how to receive and enjoy the good gifts of life?

Or will the clinical recitation of your string of accomplishments suggest that you lived life for gain and that you got a lot of things done but you were never truly known by anyone?

That exercise will clarify your priorities in life. Some accomplishments that you have prided yourself in or hope to accomplish one day will ring hollow in the light of the certainty of death.

It says in Psalm 90 for all our days pass away under your wrath. We bring our ears to an end like a sigh. The years of our life are 70 or even by reason of strength 80.

[31 : 24] Yet their span is but toil and trouble. They are soon gone and we fly away. So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. We should all seek to get this heart of wisdom.

Number our days. But we also need to remember that the heart of wisdom is not immune to corruption. That's what verse 7 teaches us. Surely oppression drives the wise into madness and a bribe corrupts the heart.

The word surely is actually a translation of the same word that in verse 6 is translated as 4. The translators couldn't discern the logical connection between verses 5 and 6.

So they started a new thought but it's actually supposed to be connected to verses 5 and 6. It's another reason clause explaining why it is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools.

We should pay attention to the rebuke of the wise for oppression drives the wise into madness and a bribe corrupts the heart. In other words, even those who possess wisdom are not immune to corruption and therefore we should be open to listening to the rebuke of the wise.

[32 : 34] The word translated oppression here in scripture refers to dishonest gain by means of oppression which is why it is sometimes translated as robbery or extortion. The NIV translates it this way, the extortion turns a wise person into a fool and bribe corrupts the heart.

Both clauses in verse 7 are referring to the potential for money to corrupt the person who has wisdom. It could mean that the wise, even the wise can buckle under the pressure of extortion and do something foolish or it could mean probably more likely in my mind that when the wise person gains a possession of influence or authority in some kind of office by the virtue of their wisdom they can be tempted to use their station in life to gain more, to extort.

And if you do that then you've forfeited your heart of wisdom. And if you take a bribe that colors your judgment then you also have forfeited your heart of wisdom.

And once again remembering death can fortify us against the allures of money. As we talked about last week in chapters 5 and 6 earthly money is expiring currency.

It's going to lose 100% of its value on the day you die. So why sacrifice your integrity for death?

[34 : 03] That's a bad trade. So remember death and go to a funeral. Write your obituary. Let the remembrance of death protect you from the allure of money. Similarly, verse 8 echoes earlier verses, better is the end of a thing than its beginning and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

That sounds like verse 1, right? The day of death is better than the day of birth. The crib is full of hope and potential and we've been rejoicing the coming of babies in this season in our church.

But there's really not much you can say about a newborn baby. Right? What's the same thing that everybody says when they look at your newborn baby? Oh, I think she looks like the mom.

Oh, I think he looks like the dad because there's not much else we can say. It's all potential, no reality.

It's not the crib but the coffin that tells us what a man or a woman is really worth. What they were really like.

- [35 : 16] Better is the end of a thing than its beginning. So don't lose heart because you've made a mess of your life up to this point. Jesus is a strong redeemer and he is indeed making all things new.

There's still hope for you and we're going to talk more about that. You probably don't know who George Mallory is. You guys know? Anybody know who George Mallory is? I didn't know who he was until I googled him earlier this week.

He's believed to be the first person to scale Mount Everest. Why don't we know about him? Well because he never made it back down. He died on the summit.

The name you probably have heard of is Sir Edmund Hillary who is widely known as the first person to summit Mount Everest because he made it back down.

As many people have said it's not how you start that's important but how you finish. and when you keep the end in sight it will help us to be patient in spirit rather than proud in spirit.

- [36 : 25] Why be proud of who you are and what you have accomplished when you're still in the middle of the race? Don't join that infamous list of YouTube compilations of people who celebrated too early and lost the race.

You are not finished yet and much can happen between now and the end. Don't take where you are at this stage of your life, your current spiritual walk with God for granted.

The race is not over. You need to persevere till the end. Better is the end of a thing than its beginning. Keeping death in view also brings our priorities into focus.

We can know better that some things are not worth fretting about. It makes us patient in spirit rather than proud in spirit. Do you really care that much about what people think about you when your day of death is approaching?

Do you really care that much that your wife didn't have dinner prepared for that day or that your husband didn't put the dirty laundry in the washer? Do you really care that much that your roommate talks too loudly on the phone or leaves the common room area as messy?

- [37 : 39] Do you really care that much that your kids spilled a drink and made a mess on your pristine carpet? Does that matter when the day of death fast approaches?

The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Verse 9 is thematically connected to verse 8 by the repetition of the word spirit. Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools.

Anger is our emotional response to perceived wrong. And people who get angry often are easily offended because they often perceive what other people say and do to be wrong.

And they often perceive what other people say and do to be wrong because they are proud in spirit. Those who are quick in their spirit to become angry are proud in spirit.

This is a sin with which I am intimately familiar. So if you feel like I am calling your cards and reading your mail, don't worry, I am just reading my own mail. Oftentimes, our anger, unlike God's anger, is not righteous anger, it is self-righteous anger.

- [38 : 56] In our judicial system, a judge is required to recuse himself if he is personally implicated in the case. Because how are you going to judge a case impartially if you are personally affected by it.

But when we are personally offended and affected by something, far from recusing ourselves, we appoint ourselves the judge, the jury, and jailer all at once.

We sit in judgment over the person, fooling ourselves that we can discern every motivation of their heart. and then instead of seeking the Lord's guidance and being patient in prayer and seeking the counsel of wise people around us, we quickly pronounce the verdict as the jury.

Well, yep, that was that, and that was wrong. I'm right, you're wrong. And then since our verdict as a jury is impeccable, we start acting as the jailer.

We jail the offending person in the cold prison of our icy stairs and chilly silence. Or we punish them with hundred lashes of the tongue by berating them.

[40 : 22] People with anger issues are often wise in their own eyes. In fact, I would say that they are invariably wise in their own eyes.

But the preacher of Ecclesiastes pops our balloons when he kindly reminds us, anger lodges in the heart of fools. It's not the wise, it's the fool.

So what's the solution? Look at all the other verses in the passage that mention the heart. Verse 2, this is the end of all mankind and the living will lay to heart. Verse 3, sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of faith the heart is made glad.

Verse 4, the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. If you don't want the heart of fools, here's the prescription from Ecclesiastes. If you want the heart of the wise, then spend some time reflecting on the end of your life, so that you might grow smaller in your own eyes.

Make your face sad by reflecting on death and by grieving your own sins, since the wages of sin is death. If you are regularly grieving your own sins, and the death which ineluctably comes as a result of your sins, then we are well on our way to becoming more patient in spirit than proud in spirit.

[41 : 47] verse 10 gives another invaluable counsel to fools who think themselves wise. It says, say not, why were the former days better than these? For it is not from wisdom that you ask this.

People who think themselves wise often bemoan the good old days. I know you guys have done this.

I have too. And it's because they accurately perceive the evils and ills of society today that they pine for yesterday. But such thinking is not from wisdom.

In Exodus 14 and 16, the Israelites pine for the good old days. And you know what their good old days were? Slavery in Egypt. If anything proves our selective memory and the faultiness of nostalgia, I think Exodus does it.

They say, oh, we were better off serving the Egyptians than wandering here in the wilderness. Oh, when we were in Egypt, we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full.

[42 : 55] When they were actually slaves, worked to the bone to make bricks without straw, and they were crying out for deliverance from God. people who tend to reminisce dreamily about the good old days likely don't remember accurately what those old days were like.

Remember Ecclesiastes 1, 9-10. What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there a thing of which it is said, see, this is new?

It has been already in the ages before us. The decadence and perversions that we see in our world and society today are nothing new. They've been around for millennia.

Sure, they didn't have internet or cell phones or social media in the past, but you don't think that people dealt with frivolous diversions and self-absorption and self-promotion back in those days, of course they did.

Of course we live in the age of feminism and sexual liberation and the corresponding jerk reaction of masculinism, but do you really think that the struggle between the sexes and oppression between the sexes is new?

[44 : 18] It's not new. There's nothing new under the sun because human beings remain fundamentally unchanged.

the sin that is at the root of all people are still there. It's been there all along. So the wise person does not dwell on the past or dream of the future, but faithfully and fully lives in the present moment.

It says in verses 13 to 14, consider the work of God who can make straight what he has made crooked. In the day of prosperity be joyful and in the day of adversity consider God has made the one and as well as the other.

so that man may not find out anything that will be after him. This echoes what Ecclesiastes 115 said, the greatest philosophers of throughout the ages and the best scientists, the most brilliant scientists throughout the ages cannot make what is crooked straight.

I've said this to you before, despite all the knowledge and wisdom we have gained in the advancement of medicine and technology, people still get sick, hospitals are still full, people still die, and our average lifespan is still not beyond what Psalm 90 10 said 3,000 years ago, 70 or by reason of strength 80.

[45 : 43] So I'm sorry if you work in the health care, that's just the reality. Despite all the experience and wisdom we have gained in diplomacy and peacemaking, the world is still ravaged by war, is it not?

Despite all the knowledge we have and wisdom we've gained about the human mind, about the brain and the mental health, people are still depressed and anxious as ever. Despite all our technological advancements, despite all our inventions, this world is still not the way it's supposed to be.

It's still messed up. And despite all of our wise choices, we cannot control the comings and goings of the days of prosperity and the days of adversity.

What is crooked cannot be made straight. This world is bent out of shape and despite our best efforts, we cannot straighten it out. God himself has subjected the creation to futility.

And since the fall, vanity has been woven into the very fabric of our universe. And this is intended to humble us, to remind us that we are not the saviors, that we are not the redeemers.

[46 : 57] God is. To remind us that we are creatures subject to the passing of time and God alone is the creator. It's not for man to find out anything that will be after him.

We cannot control our times and days, so our lot then is this. In the day of prosperity, be joyful. In the day of adversity, consider God has made one as well as the other.

We receive the things in life, both good and bad, as they come from the sovereign hand of our loving Father. If you're thinking to yourself right now, well, that's depressing, then here's the hope.

Death is the end of all mankind, but eternal life and resurrection life is the end of all Christians. In fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, Luke 3, 5 says this about the coming of Jesus, the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

In his life and ministry, what did Jesus do? He goes around and he makes the lame walk and he makes the blind see. He makes the lepers clean. Why does he do that?

[48 : 20] They're still gonna die. Why does he spend the time doing that? To show us that the Redeemer has come who will start to make things right again, who will make the crooked things straight again, who will make broken people whole again.

Jesus, the folly of Christ crucified, is the wisdom of God, and the power of God. You see, death first entered our world through the sin of one man, Adam.

But to save us from sin and death, God sent his only son, Jesus. And we read this earlier, Romans 5, 17. For if because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

Romans 5, 21 continues, so that as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness, leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Jesus is the one man in history who didn't have anything to do with how crooked and messed up our world is. He's the one man who never deserved to die.

[49 : 41] But he died on that cross for our sins so that he might bring about the redemption and salvation of all those who put their faith in him and indeed in the future of all creation.

The death of Christ spells the death of death and because sin, which is the sting of death, is removed on the cross because the law, which is the power of sin, is fulfilled by Jesus on the cross.

It's in Jesus that the relentless march of death is arrested. So this, my fellow crooked, broken sinners, is the most important thing you can take away from this passage.

Come to terms with your death for the wages of sin is death. All have sinned and therefore all will die. And having come to terms with your death, come to terms with Jesus who defeated death.

For the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. And you don't need to do anything to earn that. It's a free gift. All you need to do is receive it.

[50 : 47] And that's what we call faith. And this is why, Christians, we don't fear death. I don't have a death wish.

I'm not suicidal. I'm not even depressed. But I know without a shadow of doubt, the day of my death is going to be the happiest day of my life.

It's going to be the happiest day of my life. Because here, we are exiles, aliens in a foreign land. But then, we will be home.

We'll be home in our father's house. Here, we're in the wilderness, tossed to and fro by the waves at the sea. But there, we will find land.

We will finally land on the shore. Here, life is full of toil, vexation. That's our life. But there, we'll finally find rest in Jesus Christ.

[51 : 54] So let us live knowing that we will die and die knowing that we will live forever. Let's pray. Amen. Yes, God, we worship you.

We thank you for your grace and kindness toward us in Jesus Christ. Lord, you are the savior of our ruined life.

And even now, you are straightening us out. O Lord, we so long for that day and we anticipate that day. When we die, our soul will pass to be with you.

And when you return, O Lord Jesus, you will raise our bodies. And we will dwell with you forever in the new heaven and the new earth. Give us an unwavering hope in that certainty.

So that we live today with the heart of wisdom. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.