

Fear God and Keep His Commandments

Ecclesiastes Conclusion

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, January 30, 2022

Well, as you can tell the Lord is really doing a lot in the life of His people. I really appreciate all testimonies and those who stood up here today to join the church. One of our favourite things to do as a church, and you've heard this a couple times, is to open the Word of God together. And in fact, this morning, before the service started, I noticed someone in the pew writing in their notebook, and I said, "Hey, brother, the sermon hasn't started yet." And he said, "Yeah, but I want to be ready." And that's the spirit of our church. That's really the heart of our people. You guys love to hear the Word of God, you love to learn it, read it, study it, sing it, pray it. And that's what we're going to do now. So if you would just open your Bibles to the book of Ecclesiastes. That's the book we're going to be in this morning, please turn to the book of Ecclesiastes. And as you're doing that, I want to mention that we are getting ready to make a transition here in the life of our church, because we're about to start a new series on another book of the Bible. And that's the book of Hebrews. That's a book we're going to be studying the next time, we're together. It's affectionately called the riddle of the New Testament, because there's so little that we know about Hebrews...we don't know who the author was, we don't know who the audience was, or all the details surrounding the book. But we do know one thing about it, and that is that it exalts the name of Jesus Christ, it lifts Him high upon the throne, because it shows us that He kept the law. The book of Hebrews tells us that He met all the demands of the Old Testament, so we don't have to anymore. Because he satisfied all of that in our place. So many times you meet people today who say they're trying hard to get to heaven. They're doing their best to get there by praying and tithing and going to church and keeping the Sabbath and doing a bunch of works. And Hebrews backs the truck up for a minute and says, You don't have to do that, because Jesus paid it all. You don't have to do a bunch of good works to be saved. Because Jesus did that in your place. And that's what we're going to talk about next time we're together. But for this week, we're going to look at the book of Ecclesiastes. And if you would, look in this book, we could call this book the riddle of the Old Testament because there's a lot we don't know about it. We know who the author was and we know who he was writing to, but it's really hard to figure out why he could be so low at this point in his life. When you read this book, it's so hard to understand how he could be so depressed because if you look in the first chapter in the first few verses, Ecclesiastes, chapter one, verse one says, "The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." I want to tell you that that's a pretty rotten way to start a book of the Bible. And when he says that he's saying that my life is vanity, this is an autobiographical reference here. Solomon says that his life is all meaningless to him because he lived in sin. And he goes through the whole book explaining that to you, I won't review it all because we've talked about it before. But if you look in chapter 12, this is how he ends the book. This morning, we're just talking about the ending. So we can tie the book off here. But if you look in chapter 12, he says,

Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no delight in them"; before the sun and the light, the moon in the stars are darkened, and clouds return after the rain; in the day that the watchman of the house tremble, and mighty men stoop, and the grinding ones stand idle because they are few, and those who look through the windows grow dim; and the doors on the street are shut as the sound of the grinding mill is low, and one will arise at the sound of the bird, and all the daughters of song will sing softly.

Then if you look down in verse eight, he says,

Vanity, vanities,” says the Preacher, “all is vanity!” In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge; and he pondered, searched and arranged many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find delightful words and write words of truth correctly.

The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd. But beyond this, my son, be warned; the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearing to the body.

The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

If you notice, Solomon ends the book better than he started, because he says this is the solution to the problem of vanity; this is the conclusion to it all, and that is that you are to fear God and keep His commandments. And just to say a few words about that, if you're joining us for the first time this morning, we're finishing a series on the book of Ecclesiastes, that we started back in the month of August called *Memoirs of a Wasted Life* because that's what the book is about. Ecclesiastes, from start to finish, tells you how Solomon, the great king of Israel, wasted his life, because he sinned against God and broke His commandments. To the point that everything seemed vain for him. Now, it all just seems so useless. Because he didn't know how he was going to overcome that. As a Christian, it's kind of interesting to read a book in the Old Testament, because you don't have to feel this way. Because you know how to be saved when you see and you turn to Jesus Christ. And he'll take care of you. But the Jews didn't know Christ yet. They didn't understand all that. So every time they sinned, what a guy like Solomon would have to do is go back to the temple. That was how it worked. And every time he failed, he had to go back to the priests, back to the altar back to make another sacrifice, and then another and another, and another, to the point that had never ended, which explained Solomon's depression in this book, because he never knew if he did it enough. He had no idea if he made enough sacrifices, because he just kept sending, it was just an ongoing thing for him. And so it had to be weighing heavily on his mind. Now to be clear, the Jews could know for sure that they were saved, and the Old Testament teaches, they could have assurance of salvation, but not if you live like this. And that was the problem. If you lived a life that was as debauched and wicked and messed up as his was, you would always be wondering. And as he comes to the end of the book, and the end of his life, and the end of all this meandering through his misery, Solomon says this in verse 13, this is kind of where he wraps it up in his mind. He says, the conclusion when all has been heard is fear God and keep His commandments. And that word conclusion here that that means the conclusion of the book, the conclusion of his life, the conclusion of this search to solve the riddle of vanity, is that you should fear God. Solomon says, I can't figure all this out, I can't understand how God could forgive me, and pardon me, after all I've done but I know this, I can throw myself at His mercy. I should keep His commandments and fear Him and leave it in His hands, because He'll take care of it, because He's that kind of God.

Even in the Old Testament, they knew that God was a God of mercy. They didn't know it the way you do, because you know how the mercies fulfilled. But they had some understanding of it. And just to say a little bit about this passage, the word for “fear” here is the word *yirah*, which means to fear something, or be afraid of it. But the way

it's used, it literally means to be aware. Which means that as you go through life, this is what you need to do in order to defeat the vanity of this world. And that is you need to be aware of the presence of God, you need to know that He's there. So easy to forget that and so easy to look around and say where's God? At least He's there. You just have to remember and stop getting distracted by all these other things. That's what Solomon did. He had his mind so caught up in his houses and buildings and lands. He had his thoughts taken up with his wives and girlfriends and parties and alcohol and money that he forgot about God; it completely slipped his mind. He says, you don't want to make that mistake, because verse 14 says, "For God will bring every act to judgment." That means He will hold you accountable for every evil thing that you've done. He's keeping tabs on you. God is writing it all down in His perfect ledger book or Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, however you want to see that. And Solomon says, you need to remember it. Because when that day comes, when judgment day arrives, God's not going to care how many wives you had, or how pretty they were. And when you have to stand before the throne and answer for your life, He's not going to ask you how big your house was, and how many square feet it had. He's not going to wonder about how much money you made or how successful your business was. On that day, the only thing he's going to care about is your soul. You have to remember it. You know, a lot of people say the most important moment of life is the time you're born. But the most important life time in life is judgment day, because that's the day when God is going to decide who goes to heaven and who goes to hell. Nothing else matters but that. And Solomon says you need to be living for that now, because that's how you overcome this issue of sin and vanity. There's no point in living for all this other stuff when you're about to face God.

There's no point in wasting all your time and throwing it all away on all these physical things when you're about to stand before the throne. So you have to keep that in mind. I know for some Christians, any talk of judgment day is frightening to them. But I want you to notice that this is not how Solomon uses it here. This isn't put here to scare you. It's put here to motivate you. Because as a Christian on Judgment Day, you won't stand before the Lord condemned, you will stand forgiven, you will be clothed in the righteous robes of Christ. But Solomon says, "Make no mistake, you will stand there. And you'll answer for the things you did. And you've got to let the thought of that wake you up as you go through this crazy messed up world."

And here's how this applies to our lives today. I mean, as many of you know, we've been studying several controversial issues lately related to the topic of masks and vaccines and government mandates, because they're on everyone's mind, they're so important because we have to deal with them every day. You can't get away from them. But as we've done that, it reminds you of what Solomon is saying here, and that is that this world is so distracting right now. It can pull you in so many different directions, because we've been talking about the things related to the Coronavirus, but you don't have to stop there. Because if you heard about the recent fighting in Afghanistan lately; have you heard what they're doing to Christians there? It's awful. They're beating and raping and killing them. They're molesting them and mocking them and selling them into slavery. I mean, anytime you hear something like that, it breaks your heart. My cousin was killed in that war 10 years ago. And when I see the US pull out and all that chaos happened. I just ask, "What's it for?" Have you heard about the recent battles in Israel as well? It's not just Afghanistan, Israel has been fighting their neighbours over the Gaza Strip. Some of that ceased, but they were firing missiles back and forth against each other over the summer, multiple people were killed. There's also violence breaking out in places like Libya and Syria, famines occurring in Africa, droughts taking place, earthquakes are happening. And what Solomon is saying here is that if you're not careful, you can let all that stuff keep you from thinking about the most important thing, and that is that a judgment is coming for you. The day of final reckoning is near. And when it comes, there's only going to be one person you're going to be dealing with, and that's God. When that day happens, there's only going to be one person you're going to have to

answer to. And it's not going to be the news. And it's not going to be the government. And it's not going to be Facebook, and it's not going to be YouTube, it's going to be the Lord of heaven and earth. So you've got to keep your mind focused on that now. Solomon's not saying that all those other things are not important because they are. And he's not saying they don't matter, because they do matter. As a king, he would have to understand that more than anyone; he spent all his time thinking about that stuff. But what he's saying here is that this is what matters the most in life. And that is, Death comes for all men. And you've got to be ready. I mentioned that because there can be a tendency to look at all these issues, and do nothing but worry about it and let your mind get paralyzed with fear. We all know people who have seen the stuff going on in the world, and they just lock the doors in their house. Right? They won't go out. There was a study done several months ago, which said the number one cause of disability among men in Canada right now, not women, but men is depression. It's not a physical injury. It's a mental one, because everyone's so stressed out. Solomon says you don't need to be stressed out about this. You need to respond another way.

If you look in verse 11, this is interesting, and we're going to get into this. But he talks about how you're supposed to look at these things. He says that the words of the wise men or the words of the Bible are like goads to you and that word "goads" means something that pokes you and prods you like a cattle, like an oxen and it sticks in your side like a knife in order to get you moving in a time like this. You're not supposed to be depressed or anxious or worried, you have to get moving and do something for the glory of God. The rest of the verse says the masters of these collections are like well driven nails, and that refers to large spikes that are used to fix something into the floor so it doesn't get up and fly away. So many people are flying away right now, aren't they? The way they're responding to this, they're going off the handles, off the rails. Solomon says you need the Word of God to keep you grounded. But the point is that this is how you deal with vanity. You do it by going back to the Word of God. You know, as we've gone through this series on Ecclesiastes, I've talked to several people who have told me that the one thing that keeps them from going crazy in a time like this is the church because it's the one place where they can hear the truth. They can't hear truth at work. They can't hear it on the news. They only get it here. I've talked to other ones who said that if it were not for the church and the word of God, they think they would go crazy because this world is so nuts right now, so upside down. But when they open up the word, they realize that it's not. And that's what we're going to be talking about this morning.

So if you're taking notes in Ecclesiastes, in the last few verses, we're going to look at three final solutions to the problem of vanity in this book. So that's our outline for today. That's what we're going to be studying in Ecclesiastes 12, verses nine through 14, we're going to look at three final solutions to the problem of vanity. And we're going to do this because this is the point of the book. Solomon doesn't want to discuss the problem of vanity with you, he wants to solve it. He doesn't want to debate it and argue about it and just philosophize in the book. He wants to do something about it. And he does it definitively in these final verses. Let's look at three final solutions to the problem of Vantage.

The first one is that you need to let the word of God goad you. This means you need to let it prick you a little bit and stick you when you go astray. That's what it's here for. It's not here to make you feel comfortable. It's not here to make you feel like you're safe. It's here to get you moving in a Godward direction. And if you look in verse nine, Solomon writes, "In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge; and he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find delightful words to write words of truth correctly. And the words of wise men are like goads..."

And just to say a little bit about what he's telling you here, I've told you before, the book of Ecclesiastes falls into a section of the Old Testament, that's known as the poetry section. If you were to look at the table of contents in your Bible, you would see that it's not arranged in chronological order, according to a timeline. It's arranged according to how the books are written. You have all the law books together, and then all the history books are together, and then the prophecy books. And when you get into Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, those are the poetry books. What that means is that they were written to express someone's feelings, because that's what poetry does. Believe it or not, God inspired that. They were written to display someone's emotions in a touching way, which is why these books are so hard to understand at times. As we've gone through Ecclesiastes, one thing I've learned is that you probably shouldn't preach too much through the book of Ecclesiastes. It's hard to understand. But that's because it's not written logically, it's written passionately. Solomon is not writing to give you a doctrinal treatise here. He's giving you his emotional condition, which is why he uses metaphors, similes and word pictures in the book. That's why he gives you hyperboles, exaggeration and shades of meaning to express how he's doing on the inside.

And as he does that, he comes to the end here and he says in verse nine, he says, "In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge." And when he uses the term preacher, here, he is referring to himself. He's speaking in third person; he does it all throughout the book. Some have said that Solomon does that because he's ashamed in the book. He says so many awful things about his life, he didn't want to actually give his name. But to show you how this relates to Ecclesiastes as a whole, if you want to keep your finger in chapter 12 And turn back to the first verse in chapter one, this is just how this book comes together. If you notice, in chapter one, verse one, he starts off and says, "The words of the Preacher, son of David, the king in Jerusalem. "Vanity of vanities," says the preacher, "all his vanity!" when Solomon mentions the preacher here, again, that's another reference to himself. I mean, he's the son of David, he's the king in Jerusalem. He's all these different things. And he uses it at the beginning of the book to tie the book together. This is the conclusion. And as he concludes the book in chapter 12, if you want to turn back there, he says this, "In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge." Solomon says this here just to show you at the end that he wasn't just a rotten guy. He had done so many bad things, but he wasn't just bad, because he's given you a good picture of himself here as well. When he taught the people different things, we don't know how he did this and taught the people knowledge, but he could have set up a school system in Israel or a training center, something like that. It also says that he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs. Now, that doesn't mean much to us today, because we don't put a lot of stock in proverbs, but the people in the ancient world did because they couldn't read. They were illiterate. So one of the ways that they would teach each other is to give themselves short catchy sayings that they could remember. There are 915 of those sayings in the book of Proverbs. But first Kings tells us that Solomon actually wrote 3000 Proverbs, which comes to about one a day every day for 10 years of his life. He's very prolific in this. And some of you have read the book of Proverbs, and you'll know they're full of helpful statements like, "he who walks with the wise will grow wise," which means that if you want to be smart, have smart friends don't have stupid ones. And there are other ones too: "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." We talked about that with the Iron Man's Bible study. One that I really like to give to single guys is this one, "Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion." I like to give that to the single guys in the church, because it paints a picture for you. That's what the Proverbs do. It gives you this idea, this beautiful gold ring. It's gorgeous. It shines, and there's a gigantic pig behind it. Solomon does this so it'll stick in your head. What he's saying is stay away from that. Don't marry a woman who has a lot of baggage.

It's one thing to say don't marry the wrong person. It's another thing to give you that kind of picture. That's what the Proverbs do. When Solomon did that, it's another good thing that he did. But he says here in verse 11, the reason he wrote all this stuff, and the reason he gave you this big book of Ecclesiastes is so that the words of the wise men would be like goads to you. You wonder why did God put so much wisdom and things like this in the Bible; it is so the Word of God could stick you in the right direction.

The word goad here is another way of referring to a cattle prod, or a long, four or five foot stick that was used to beat the oxen and poke them every time they got out of line. Today, we don't have that anymore, because we have mechanized plows that cost \$300,000 and have their own GPS. But in ancient days, when you plowed a field, you did it by using oxen, and you would put a yoke around their neck or like a metal bar. And then you would tie them to a wooden plow. And in order to get them moving, you would poke them with a goad; you would use a whip as well. And if they were plowing a field and going the wrong way, you would take the prod and stick it into their side and get him back this way. It was just another way of teaching them how not to walk crooked. You guys have heard the phrase don't kick against the goads. That's where this comes from. It's very foolish to do that. You can imagine a cattle being proud of this way, if you're going to kick against that little sharp stick, it's gonna make your feet bleed.

And there's several things about a goad that tie into the Word of God here. For one thing, goads hurt. When you get stuck by one of those things, they sting a little bit because they go beneath the skin. They cut you and turn you into a bloody mess. They also get on your nerves as well. Goads are very irritating. They never leave you alone, no matter what you do. They never stop you. And they keep you from being lazy. That's the point. God keeps you from making a mistake. And Solomon says it's the same way with the words of the wise. This is why God gave you the Bible: to keep you from being spiritually lazy. Because you guys know what this is like. But you see something in the news. You watch something on Facebook and you start going off the wrong way, don't you? You see something on the internet that really bothers you and you start thinking some really wicked evil thought and Solomon says, The Bible's here so that when you read it, you say I shouldn't do that and you get back in line. I shouldn't let my mind go taken off in that direction. I shouldn't lust after that woman, I shouldn't be anxious about that terrible thing happening. I shouldn't be so depressed. We're all capable of doing this. We're all prone to sin if left to our own devices, and the words of Scripture are given to keep you from doing that. And here's how this applies to our lives today. And that is, if you want to avoid the mistakes as Solomon has written in this book, and keep yourself from pursuing vanity and sin and wickedness and evil and debauchery, this is what you have to do: you have to read your Bible. You have to pay attention to it. Because that's what it's here to do. The world is telling you to go this way, God is telling you to stay straight. Society is telling you to go off the rails and go crazy. And God is putting you back in the right path.

I don't think I have to tell you that the world has a very twisted view of sin. It has a very distorted view of it. And if you don't have someone speaking truth into your life in the midst of that, it'll really do some damage. I just talked about Bill C4 a few weeks ago. But in that bill, they said that homosexuality is right. In fact, they said it's so right, that it's wrong to confront someone who is gay in certain settings. They'll throw you in prison for that. Now, just think about that for a moment. Do you know what that is? That's called madness. Do you know what it is to make a law that says you cannot confront homosexuality? It is insanity. It reminds you of the words of Romans one: "For they exchange the truth of God for a lie." Why do they do that? Because they forgot the Bible. Why is the world gone in such a terrible direction? Well, because they turn their backs on God, they started calling the right thing wrong and the wrong thing right and they went insane.

There's another law that came out recently in Vancouver some time ago, which says that if a teenager wants to change his gender and identify as someone from the opposite sex, his parents cannot stop him. Now think about that for a moment. Do you know what that is to say your parents can't stop you from going in a bad direction? That is insanity. He reminds you of the words of Isaiah Five, Verse 20, "Woe unto them that call evil good." There was a time when most Canadians had some working knowledge of the Bible. I mean, there was a day when the schools and churches and Law Courts followed it to some degree, they had some awareness of it, but not anymore. That day is over. And as a result, our country is losing its mind. And what Solomon is saying here is you can join them in that you have to do something different. And the only way to do that is to familiarize yourself with the words of Scripture. I can't tell you how many times I've counseled someone who was struggling with pornography, who told me that it all started when they got their mind off of God. It happened when they stopped reading their bible and going to church and praying. They didn't have anybody steering them in the right direction. I also can't tell you how many times I've talked to someone who was depressed and asked them why and they said it was because they shut out all their relationships in their life. They had nobody around anymore. And Solomon says you can't let that happen to you today.

This brings us to another way to cure the problem of vanity in this book. And that is to let the word of God ground you. The first way is to let it goad you, which is an interesting thing to say because nobody likes being goaded. I mean, it's a miserable process, to have something stick in your side all the time and poke you and prod you like this and cut you and make you bleed. But he says it's essential to the spiritual life. In fact, this is so important that in other parts of the Bible, it's referred to as being pruned, or winnowed, or cleansed from something. It's referred to as being disciplined or chastised or purified from evil. It's just another way of referring to the sanctification process where God gets sin out of your life. And Solomon says even though it's painful, it's something you have to do.

Which brings us to a second way to cure the problem of vanity at the end of this book, and that is to let the word of God ground you, which means you need to let it nail you to the floor. Not only should you let it prod you, but you should also let it give you a sense of stability. And that's what he says in verses 11 through 12: "The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd. But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearing to the body."

As you read that, you can tell that the phrase "the words of wise men" and "the masters of these collections" is just another way of referring to the Bible as a whole book. Ecclesiastes was part of a larger canon of Scripture. That's the idea here. And it is something that Solomon neglected in his life, he turned his back on the Word of God. And we don't have time to go back through all of this to show you this. But if you want to turn back to Ecclesiastes chapter one with me, I just want you to see some of the things that he says in here to show you the kind of emotional state that he had come to in the book, because it paints a picture of why he says this. If you look in chapter one, the first few verses, it says,

The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem, "Vanity of vanity," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity." What advantage does man have in all His work which He does under the sun? A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever. Also, the sun rises and the sun sets; and hastening to its place it rises there again. Blowing toward the south, then turning toward

the north, the wind continues swirling along; and on its circular courses the wind returns. All the rivers flow into the sea, yet the sea is not full. To the place where the rivers flow, there they flow again. All things are wearisome.

Now, when you read that, again, that sounds mysterious, because Solomon is writing poetry here. But it means that he can't find any peace in life anymore. That's how he begins the book. He can't find any purpose, because his life was lived in such a terrible way. Because he says, "A generation comes in a generation goes, people live, and they die, but the earth remains," which means I can't stop it. I can't do anything in order to change this crazy messed up world. So why bother? When he says, "All things are wearisome," I assume he means I try one sin and it doesn't satisfy. So then I try another one, and it doesn't satisfy, then I try another one. And the same thing happens. We've all known people that have hopped out of one marriage and into another and into another and into another. And their life is so awful. That's what he's saying here. That's what he did. And it gets worse if you want to look in chapter three. Again, this is just a quick summary of the book of Ecclesiastes. But if you look in chapter three, his life doesn't get any better. When he says this, he says, "There is an appointed time for everything. And there's a time for every event under heaven, time to give birth and a time to die, a time to plant in a time to uproot what is planted, time to kill and a time to heal, time to tear down and time to build up, time to weep. And a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance and a time to throw stones and a time to gather them." But if you look down in verse nine, he says, "What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?" And that's one of the most popular passages in the Bible, because it's so beautiful. People love to hang it on their walls and frame it on their desk at work in order to remind them of the sovereignty of God. But that's not the way Solomon uses it here. Because in verse nine, when he says, what profit is there in it? He means that, yes, there's an appointed time for everything. And yes, there's a day to be born and a day to die and a day to heal and kill and all that kind of stuff. But it doesn't matter, because I'm still going to die. He said, none of that means anything because my life is going so I might as well give up and stop trying.

Now, if you're wondering why Solomon says all this here, remember, he's not being rational, he's being emotional. He's not being reasonable. He's giving into his feelings. Because if you asked him, Solomon, do you really believe that life is vanity? He would say no. But he's not thinking anymore. He switched his brain off. But when you come to chapter 12, if you want to turn back there, I just said all that to give you a taste of the book. When you come to chapter 12, something happens to him at the end of it because he's coming back to his senses. And he says this in verse 11, says, "The words of wise men are like goads. And masters of these collections are like well driven nails, they're given by one Shepherd." In other words, now after I've done all of that, Solomon says, I understand something and that is that God has given the Bible to me. He's given me the masters of these collections in the words of wise men, in order to shepherd me because I didn't get that in my life. I didn't understand that as I was going and sinning and failing and everything spiritually. But now I understand that there is a God who loves me and cares for me, and this book was given to prevent all of this. You can imagine him as an old man sitting in a rocking chair, putting his head in his hands and weeping and saying I blew it, but I didn't have to. Because I had something better. And just to explain this, the word for nails here is a Hebrew word that refers to anything that would nail wood into a floor or hammer it in. In Solomon's day, they didn't have a lot of iron nails or a lot of wooden things. Israel was a dry place, it was a desert, and wood was pretty scarce, but they did have enough wood to make small things like furniture, and they were held together by iron spikes. And with this in mind, Solomon says that his is what the Bible does for us, it holds our life together, it keeps it from falling apart. The reason Solomon was so anxious and restless and upset all the time is because he forgot that and the reason he is emotional and impulsive and testy in this book and calling everything vain is because he ignored it. And now

he's telling you not to do the same thing. If you think about it, just like it was with the word goad, there's a lot of purposes for a nail that are similar to what the Word of God is. For instance, a nail is used to ground you into something, it is bolted to the floor, so you don't flop around every time the wind blows. We have a lot of wind here until the lack from time to time and you guys have all looked out the window and seen parts of your furniture flying away, and you thought I need to nail that to the floor. That's what a nail does. It also keeps you stable as well, because it gives you something to stand on. A nail helps you fix your feet firmly onto something so you don't go up and down like a roller coaster, and turn this way and that way.

Here's how this applies to our lives today. And that is that we all need grace and help in learning how to be stable. We're all a little too prone to go up and down nowadays, with all the stuff that's going on in the world. And the only way to do that is to go back to Scripture. In fact, this is one of the greatest faults in our world today, I think and that is that people are so wrapped up in their emotions nowadays. They're so caught up in their feelings, which is why they're so impulsive all the time. Everybody makes decisions by saying "I feel this" and "I feel that" "I want this" and "I want that" just like a toddler in the cereal aisle at Save On Foods. But that's not important to be a Christian. As a Christian, you need to ask yourself the question, What does God want me to do? What does the Bible say about this? Because that's the only thing that really matters.

Someone sent me an email this past week from a parachurch organization. And they said they come across my sermon on Bill C4. And they wanted to know, how do I feel about that? How does it make me feel? And I didn't write them back. Because I didn't know what to say at the moment. But I wanted to say what does it matter? Who cares what I feel about it? What matters is what does the Bible say? What's important is what it tells me about the subject of conversion and homosexuality and marriage and all these things, irregardless of my feelings. But they ask that because that's how people process things today. You know, if I feel this way, I'm going to do this. If I feel that way, I'm going to do that. And I'm going to pass this law and give you this mandate, and arrest you if you offend me. And what this passage says is, it shouldn't be that way for us, we need to be different.

Now, if you think about it, a nail only helps you when it goes in deep and doesn't do any good if it sits on the surface, and it's the same way with Scripture, because the Bible needs to penetrate your heart; it needs to go down deep into your soul. Solomon's problem here was that he had a Bible and he didn't read it. And he knew the word of God but he didn't do what it says. So he became an emotional wreck, which is what he refers to in verse 12. If you look down there, he says, "But beyond this, my son, be warned for the writing of many books is endless and excessive devotion to books is worrying to the body." And when he says that, he doesn't mean it's wrong to write a book because obviously it's not and he doesn't mean it's wrong to study them. But he means it's wrong to do it if you don't apply it.

It does you no good to read all these books and write all these proverbs if it doesn't change your life. And that's what you can't let happen to you today. When I was studying my sermon this past week, I came across an old friend of mine from University, who had gone through a terrible divorce. His life was in shambles. And it reminded me of the fact that my life would be no different if it were not for the things that I learned in the Bible, Amen? My life is no better than his. I am not smarter than him, or nicer or kinder or brighter. I'm just a rotten, stinking sinner in my soul. The only thing that separates me is the word of God. And that's all. Friends, just think about where your life would be today if you never came across the Bible. Just think about the things you would be doing right now. Some of you probably would be dead. And that's God's grace in your life.

The story is told of a time George Whitfield saw a man on his way to be executed. And his friend standing beside him said, "Isn't that a tragedy?", and George Woodfield said, "Yes, it's a tragedy, but there but for the grace of God, go I." You're a sinner saved by grace, you stand on the Word of God, and you have to remember it.

And that brings us to one more way to cure the problem of vanity. At the end of this book, just to review the other ones in here, the first one is to let the word of God goad you. And secondly, you need to let it ground you and give you a firm place to stand as well, so you don't fly off the handle and go crazy every time the world throws you a curveball. This is one of my favorite things about the Bible. And that is that it never changes; it gives you something to stand on every time you read it. So if you read it today, it says the same thing. And if you read it tomorrow, it says the same thing. And if you read it the next day, it says the same thing. It gives you something to build your life on.

That brings us to one more way to cure the problem of vanity in his book, and that is to let the word of God cause you to fear Him. A third way to cure the problem of vanity at the end of the book is to let the word of God bring you to fear him, which means you need to let it cause you to respect God and give Him glory. And if you look in verse 13, this is how Solomon ends it. He says, "The conclusion, when all has been heard, is fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil." As I mentioned earlier, verse 13 begins with "the conclusion." And that means the conclusion to all that's been said in the book, this is a summary of it, and that is that you need to fear God. And it's interesting that Solomon puts this in here, because he starts with the problem of vanity, and he ends with this. He starts with sin and his messed-up life and all the mistakes that he made. And he ends with the word fear, which had an interesting history in the Old Testament because it gives you the idea of being afraid of God to a degree, but it's really the idea of being aware of His presence of respecting him. We could use the word consciousness, your conscience of him, and you're alert to the fact that he's there. Because the idea is that in order to be saved, you have to realize that this is more important than all this. And He, the Lord, the God of all creation is more important than you and me and everything that's going on right now in this world. That's where salvation begins. And it's something the Bible says over and over again, because the term shows up in just about every major part of Israel's history. When you read through the Old Testament, you see that just about every major landmark for them was marked with some command to fear God. So for example, Moses mentions it right after he wrote the 10 commandments. And there in Exodus chapter 20 he says, "Do not fear, for God has come in order to test you. And He has done all of this in order that the fear of Him may remain with you." In other words, all the things that happened when the 10 commandments were given, and the ground shook, and the trumpets blasted in the mountain was covered with fire, they were given to remind you to fear God, don't fear all this. Don't worry about the trumpets and the lightning and the smoke, worry about Him.

Then later on, when the people of Israel were about to cross the Jordan River and conquer the Promised Land, Joshua told them to remember that God has done all these miracles these past 40 years in order that you may fear Him. In other words, as you're going into the Promised Land, getting ready to conquer the Canaanites. This time around, remember the first thing in your minds: fear God. They conquered the problem with the worst military strategy in human history: come to the walls of Jericho march around it seven times and then shout. That is the worst battle plan that's ever been given to an army in the entire history of the human race. But it worked because of God. Fear Him.

Later on, David, Israel's greatest king said in Psalm 34 "Oh fear the Lord, you His saints." Isaiah says in Isaiah 11, "The fear of the Lord is Zion's treasure." There are many things you can treasure in life, you can treasure money, you can treasure stocks and bonds and cryptocurrency and all that stuff. Treasure God. Jeremiah, the prophet says, "When I give you my new covenant, I will put my fear in your heart." But the reason they said all this is because this is what it's all about. You need to fear God. In fact, Solomon shows you why you need to fear Him. When he says in verse 14 that you need to fear God and keep His commandments because this applies to every person for God will bring every act to judgment, that means he'll make you answer for everything that you do. He'll hold you accountable for every behavior. Other men won't do that, but God will. Other people won't make you stand before the throne and give an account and tell them why you did this or that or behave this way or that way. But God will do it. Because this power belongs to Him alone. In fact, this is something that you read over and over again, or you see in the book of Ecclesiastes, and that is that there is a God shaped hole in every one of us. There is an eternity shaped void in the soul of every man that can only be filled by Him, nothing else will do it. Money won't do it and neither will pleasure. Wisdom can't do it. And neither can work. Pride can't do it and neither can reputation or promotions, or raises or job transfers, or 1000 wives in a harem and a kingdom, because God is the only thing that can satisfy your soul. And not only that, but he says here at the end, God will also judge you for how you respond to that. God will call you to account for the way you responded to this God shaped hole in your heart.

When he says here that God will bring every act to judgment, the word every means every. He'll call you to account for every single one of them no matter what it was, big or small, little are great. And it says He will do it for everything that is hidden. And that means He'll judge you for the things people see and the things they don't see. He'll judge you for the things that are known and unknown and done behind closed doors. And it says He'll do it whether it's good or evil, which means God's not going to be picking and choosing. He's not going to set aside the best of your deeds and ignore the rest. Which is a frightening thought if it were not for the fact that God is a gracious God. Solomon ends on this note of God judging. If you notice the book and you come to verse 14, it just kind of ends there so that it's ringing in your ears. He doesn't offer a lot of hope at the end of it, because there's an assumed hope in here. And the assumed hope is that God forgave Solomon, and he'll forgive you. Some people have asked the questions like if Solomon saved after reading this book. Is he going to heaven? I think he was because otherwise, the book wouldn't be in here. There's no reason for God to include a terrible story like this. If it were not for the fact that Solomon later on repented, and the hope that you have is that if God forgave him, he can do the same for you. In fact, you have more of a reason to repent than Solomon did. Because he knew the Shepherd and you know the Saviour, amen? He knew the Lord, you know the Messiah, and the one-time sacrifice for sin. you can imagine after Solomon finished this last chapter of the book, he probably went right back to the temple to offer another sacrifice. You don't have to do that. You don't have to go back to the priest, back to the altar, back to the ceremonies of the Old Testament, and kill another lamb and another goat, another bull and another, another, and another. You can just come to Jesus and that's it. There's nothing that should be holding you back from Him. The Bible says Jesus came into this world to live a perfect life free from sin, free from vanity and all the terrible things that we do. And with that perfect life He died on the cross in order to present a perfect sacrifice to God. You couldn't do that. So He did it. You couldn't present a perfect sacrifice, so Christ did that on your behalf, so that whoever believes in Him will be saved.

In fact, if you come back next week, I think you're really going to enjoy it because that's what we're going to be talking about in the book of Hebrews. We're going to spend several, probably several years until the Lord returns,

going through Hebrews in order for you to understand what Jesus did in order to make your salvation happen. So please come back next time and we'll talk about that.

But for this week, the story is told of the time a Jewish priest was coming to the temple in the first century, looking frazzled, he was worn out and tired. And someone asked him why. And he said it was because he was so sick of making sacrifices every day it was wearing him out. All that cutting and killing. And so his friend sarcastically said to him, again, this is in the first century, he said, "Why don't you go visit the Christians, they only believe in one sacrifice for sin, haha." And so the priest, when he listened to what they had to say, he was converted. And friends, I tell you that story, because that's all you have to do in order to be forgiven this morning. You just have to come to Jesus. You have to come to one Saviour, one Messiah, one Lord. And He will pardon you. Will you do that today? This is a perfect time to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Let me close us in a word of prayer. And we'll do that together and remember what our wonderful Saviour has done.

Heavenly Father, we thank You, Lord, for this one-time sacrifice for sin. And as we've gone through this difficult book of Ecclesiastes, I mean, it's difficult because of the poetry in here and the wording and all of that. But it also has a difficult message, and that is that life can be wasted. And Father that needs to be ringing in all of our years, we're living in a time where there is so much waste of time, waste of resources, waste of energy. And we don't want to do that with our lives. We want to spend them for the glory of God. But many of us have failed in that father. And so, Lord, I pray for those who have failed in directing their life toward eternity, you would draw them to the Saviour this morning. For those who have messed up, turn their backs on you gone through this life chasing after money and wealth or whatever it is. He would bring them back to Christ. Father, thank You that our salvation is so simple. It goes through one way. And that's because of your mercy and grace toward us. Would you help us to honour You as we move forward today in our lives, coming back to Christ and as we take the Lord's Supper, we do, Father, want to remember the depth of what has been paid for us. This salvation stretches back 1000s of years all the way back to the things that happened in the Old Testament. There was a price that was paid, there was blood that was spilled. There was a murder that took place to save us. Lord, may we remember that today and live a solemn holy life. As a result, we pray this all in Christ's name for His glory. Amen.