

Father God, we thank you for our gathering together today. We gather together today in your name to worship you. And may you guide us in all that we do, all our song, all our prayer, our time in your Word. May you guide us, lead us, grant us your wisdom, show us your will and your purpose for all that we do, not just this morning when we're together, Lord. But in our lives, may we submit to you, may we seat you first in all things. Lord, we can't do that without the inspiration of your Holy Spirit. And we don't have the inspiration of your Holy Spirit without the life and the death and the resurrection of Jesus, the Christ of God. It's in his name that we pray. Amen. The opening reading is Psalm 42. As the deer longs for streams of water, so I long for you, O God. Thirst for God, the living God. When can I go and stand before him? Day and night I have only tears for food, while my enemies continually taunt me, saying, "Where is this God of yours?" My heart is breaking as I remember how it used to be. I walked among the crowds of worshippers leading a great procession to the house of God, singing for joy and giving thanks amid the sound of a great celebration. Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God. I will praise him again, my Savior and my God. Now I am deeply discouraged, but I will remember you, even from distant Mount Hermon, the source of the Jordan. From the land of Mount Mizar, I hear the tumult of the raging seas as your waves and surging tides sweep over me, but each day the Lord pours his unfailing love upon me. And through each night I sing his songs, praying to God who gives me life. "O God my rock," I cry, "why have you forgotten me? Why must I wander around and grieve oppressed by my enemies? Their taunts break my bones. They scoff, "Where is this God of yours? Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God. I will praise him again, my Savior and my God." Two weeks ago we began to talk about Ecclesiastes and reframed it in the context of wisdom literature and we talked a little bit about wisdom literature itself in Scripture. We talked about how it needs to be taken as a collective, right? We talked about there are five books, but the most common are Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Job, Song of Solomon, Psalms are often thrown into the list as well, and of course the wisdom that you glean all throughout the Bible. So there's so much overlap that, you know, you pull these books out for a very specific purpose. If you read Proverbs, you're not reading decrees and laws of God, you're reading what life is like as a human being following God and if you were to take this advice you could perhaps have these great possible outcomes. Talks about wisdom and the value of wisdom and how Solomon granted wisdom and we read, for example, "For wisdom will enter your heart and knowledge will fill you with joy. Wise choices will watch over you. Understanding will keep you safe. Wisdom will save you from evil people, from those whose words are twisted." That's wonderful and it's true, but circumstances can overwhelm that, right? So it's not like God is, here is a law of God, an ultimate truth that will never be challenged. This is what it's like to walk with God in His wisdom and these are the outcomes of walking with God in His wisdom. Most of the book is like that, very positive. The only negative things are negative examples. If you don't do this, then this won't happen or if you follow a fool, then this will happen. So the only negative types of things are negative examples that you don't want to follow. And we can't really understand Ecclesiastes if you don't understand Proverbs and you can't really understand Proverbs if you don't understand Ecclesiastes and how they work together and then you go and you read Job and you find, "Whoa, God is sovereign. He will make decisions about your life regardless." That's kind of how it all works together. Because today we're going to read some of the opposite of this when we get into Ecclesiastes. Now most people believe it was written by Solomon as well. There is some doubt that it was written about Solomon. So it's no doubt that it is intrinsically connected to Solomon and most scholars believe that he wrote it as well. He went on a quest to find out the meaning of life. What is the meaning of life? Every human being does so many things every day of their lives. What is the meaning of it all? What about your work? What about the pleasures that you seek? What about the simple quiet times? What about friends? What about other relationships? What does it all mean? So Solomon literally, whether he's writing it or writing it about him, Solomon literally set out to do all of those things and to explore all of those things so he could find out what the meaning is. And when you read through it you're going to be set

up for a big finish with an awful lot of negativity. And we'll begin reading that right now. This is simply Ecclesiastes 1. These are the words of the teacher, King David's son, who ruled in Jerusalem. Everything is meaningless. There you go. We can stop there. But we want to talk about this word meaningless because it's got a deeper, richer context than just hopelessness, meaningless. The word is "hevel." And we used this word before, we've talked about it before, because it means vaporous, formless. It can't be molded and shaped into something that is useful. It is vapor. It's also referred to, sometimes we're talking about spirit. And in the book of Ecclesiastes, this word "hevel" is used 38 times. And so when we do read the word meaningless, and this is again, we talk about this when we talk about translating into English language, some of the difficulties that we experience. Meaningless is okay. It's okay. It's an okay word to use. It doesn't have meaning and that fits in the context with where Solomon is going in this writing. There's not anything to it. There's no form, no function. And so the translators chose the word meaningless. But to begin, to begin this exploration with sort of your finding is interesting. These are the words of the teacher, King David's son, who ruled in Jerusalem. These are the words of the king. Everything is meaningless. Very inspirational. Come to church every Sunday and we'll just sit down and I'll go, "Everything is meaningless!" And we'll leave and go on our way and figure it out. Well, Solomon wants to figure it out. Everything is meaningless. You see, right? And sometimes when you're teaching, you do inductive or deductive, and he's hitting you with the concept right up front and now he's going to explore that concept. Everything is meaningless, says the teacher. Completely meaningless. There's three of the 38 times that the word is used already. With an exclamation point, no doubt. What do people get for all their hard work under the sun? Generations come and generations go, but the earth never changes. The sun rises and the sun sets, then hurries around to rise again. The wind blows south and then turns north, around and around it goes, blowing in circles. Rivers run to the sea, but the sea is never full. Then the water returns again to the rivers and flows out again to the sea. Everything is weird, weird so beyond description. No matter how much we see, we are never satisfied. No matter how much we hear, we are not content. Addressing the, what we might call the treadmill of life and using the water cycle to use as an example of the treadmill of life. What's the purpose of it all? The rivers run into the seas and the seas are never full and then the water just goes back into the rivers and runs into the seas. Well we know obviously, I'm going to give a little bit of the ending away here, that has green purpose. You can look at that water cycle and go, "That's very rude. That is an ecosystem with fresh water, salt water and everything that's provided by it." So we're going to get there eventually, but there is an awful lot of truth as we all know to what Solomon is going to bring forward in your daily grind of life. And that's what this is about. How we can lose meaning so quickly, no matter what. I always say when somebody is doing something that I can't do or whatever it takes for me, I imagine that even brain surgery becomes sort of routine if you do it every day, right? This is meaningless. Like this is the only thing I can do. It's brain surgery. Okay? To me, you're like, "Whoa!" But there you go. With the things that they've done to my knees and the incredible skill that they've done with them and all of that stuff, they do it eight times a day, four days a week. Nothing to them. They do a couple knees and then they go and have lunch. They come back and do a few more knees. You know what I'm saying? So I'll simply be like, "Whoa!" To them, it's meaningless. Hopefully not completely. You know what I mean. It's the daily grind. What did you do today? I think I replaced more knees. You know? Okay. So that's what's being brought across here. There's this great trip and the world participates in it as we know. Nature's cycles, we look out. Oh my spring, summer, fall, winter, spring, summer, fall, winter, spring, summer, fall, winter, does it ever stop? Spring, summer, fall. You know what I mean? Verse nine, "History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new." Sometimes people say, "Here's something new," but actually it is old. Nothing is ever truly new. We don't remember what happened in the past and in the future generations. No one will remember what we are doing now. I, the teacher, was king of Israel and I lived in Jerusalem. I devoted myself to search for understanding and to explore by wisdom everything being done under heaven. I soon discovered that God has dealt a tragic existence to the human race. Well, if you need grounded today, these are the words

that would ground you today. And we know you said, "Well, that's a very bleak. I kind of like waking up every day and doing my thing." But let's take a look at this in context of the story of Scripture. The sin that has infected the world and the sin that has infected you, but by the grace of God, the fact that you're not a prideful, selfish, egotistical jerk, that you're not out there trying to just harm people, get whatever you want, and doing all the things that you see, that's not you. But by the grace of God, that's not you because you have that inner core that God has redeemed unto him. You seek his will, not yours. They seek their will, not his. So what a cruel faith, if you will, for the human race. Someone that's not lying, people are broken. People need to save him. And again, giving away a little bit of the ending here, but he's setting us up for that. I observed everything going on under the sun and really it is all meaningless, like chasing the wind. What is wrong cannot be made right, what is missing cannot be recovered. I said to myself, "Look, I am wiser than any of the kings who live in Jerusalem before me. I have greater wisdom and knowledge than any of them." So I set out to learn everything from wisdom to madness and folly. But I learned firsthand that pursuing all this is like chasing the wind. The greater my wisdom, the greater my grief. That's the exact opposite of what I overdo it. To know wisdom is to know joy. So you can see once again, if you can imagine the scales being balanced with Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, and you can see the truth in Proverbs, follow the Lord, seek wisdom. You have a much better chance in this world following the Lord and seeking his wisdom. But you can also see the truth in Ecclesiastes. We have been dealt by Adam and Eve. This broken image, this need for a savior, the sin that infects our bodies. And understanding that as we look around as human beings on the treadmill of life, the more you look around, the more grief you experience. The more you look around, the more you're like, "What am I doing here?" Whether you are whatever, fill in the blank of your vocation, of your position in life, fill in the blank of your family, your position in your family. All I do is go to work every day, come home, play with my kids for a couple of hours because I'm so tired and I get go to sleep and I get back up and I do it again. Just so we put food on the table. That's a good reason, but man, can you ever feel like this when you're doing that. We've been there. There's truth in Ecclesiastes. And that's what is so... what I appreciate most about all of the wisdom literature, and I put Psalms in there. You guys know that I am a big fan of the Psalms. Almost every week we're in the Psalms somewhere. Every week I'm in the Psalms somewhere for sure. But you hear God relating wisdom as the righteous and the holy intermingle with the broken and the wicked. We live in that messy middle. We're not God. We may be redeemed. We may be seeking the Lord first in all that we do. We may understand the truths of Scripture and all that come with it, but we live in the messy middle. Not only with other believers and how we all get along, even though we have a bonding of the power of God's Holy Spirit, but with non-believers alike. Not only inside church, but outside of church. We live where the holy meets the unholy. Because as we turn toward God, the holy met the unholy. And we're there every day. Can you take off your Ecclesiastes glasses and look at life only through Proverbs? Sure you can, but you know that you're fooling yourself. And what are you going to do when you do those things and it doesn't turn out like it says in Proverbs? Can you take off your Proverbs glasses and view life only as a meaningless, formless, purposeless vapor? Sure you can. But man, you're selling yourself short. The joy and the glory of the Lord that shines through you. So how does it all work? Well, get there as we progress through Ecclesiastes. We've got some more doom and gloom before we get to experiencing some of those answers. Let me read verse 18 again in its entirety. "The greater my wisdom, the greater my grief. To increase knowledge only increases sorrow." Good morning, church. Have a great day. Go out and learn something today. No way of going. But I think everybody's brain is going to a place of understanding. Because everything that you experience as a child of God, everything that someone outside of the church experiences, not as a child of God, but as simply an image bearer of God, simply, forgive me, can be incredibly overwhelming because we simply do not live in the purity and holiness that we will live in one day, but we don't today. And if it's not us who are redeemed children of God acting unholy, then it is us in the world connecting with evangelizing, working with people who are unholy and even antagonistic. It's a mess. And there are times you're like, "I don't want to know this. I don't want to do this. I don't see the point in

any of this." I won't ask you to raise your hands, but I can almost guarantee all of you at some point in time in your jobs said, "I don't see the point in any of this." And I'm a bastard. You can feel that way. And that's what Ecclesiastes is bringing forward here in chapter one. So I want you to be encouraged. That's why I'm including wisdom literature and not just preaching this chapter one and sending you on your way. You already know that it's framed in a larger picture of how God through man is teaching us about how to be men and women of God. That make sense? And in so teaching, he digs his fingers in to the real messy middle where holy meets unholy, where I cry out, "Why?" in the song. "Where are you?" People are making fun of me saying, "Where is your God? My enemies are all around me. Where are you?" God inspired that. And he inspired it for our benefit so that we can understand that we don't have to pretend in a proverbs world and we certainly don't have to feel sorry for ourselves and escape to an Ecclesiastes world. I always talked about the Psalms as I talk about feelings sometimes because the Psalms are very emotional and deal an awful lot with human feelings. That feeling that you have, like, "I need more God, please." It's a feeling and I always say it's okay to feel that. It's okay to express that. It's not okay to live in that. God doesn't give us those Psalms. He doesn't give us proverbs and Ecclesiastes as an out. He gives us them as wisdom for the human being. You're killing me, Josh. Every single eye. Thank you, buddy. Look at him. Have you seen this baby, though? Don't drop her. I mean, she's amazing. Amazing. So there's no way any of us can compete with that right now. Thanks. That's just what we needed just at the perfect time, actually. And so I want to leave you with that. Check out your proverbs. Check out Ecclesiastes. We've gone through Job and, like we said, when we get through proverbs and Ecclesiastes and then all of a sudden we realize, you know what? It's really not all about us. It really is all about God. He is sovereign. He is the only pure joy, the only pure peace, the only pure love, and that's what we learn, believe it or not, from Job. So watch how they work together. [BLANK_AUDIO]