

So Father we do praise you this morning for all that you have given, all that you do, all that you have done. We know who you are because we have your word, Lord. We have our prayers. We have godly people in our lives that reflect your glory into the world. We pray that we, at least at times, may be one of those people as well, Lord. Bless us now as we enter into learning, growing, becoming the disciples, the image bearers that you see, Lord. Lead us in all things as the rightful pastor and teacher of this church and of your church universally. In Jesus name. Amen. As I mentioned before, and I've mentioned many times through this journey through Ecclesiastes, it's a very, very, very unique book. It's one of those books that you know the ending to before you really begin to read it. And we've talked about that at great length. You can't avoid not knowing the ending of Ecclesiastes. Maybe, maybe if you're completely ignorant of Christianity and of Jesus Christ and of God's Holy Spirit and all of those different things and the power of God in the life of the believer. But that's what makes Ecclesiastes so unique is that we know that the teacher is a follower of God, of Yahweh. He submitted to Yahweh. He wants to know what it's all about. And yet he still comes across these great life questions of what does it all mean? And that's what makes it unique. We, as we mentioned last week, I said this book is, in my opinion, much more profound than Proverbs because of that. Because it really is the life of the believer, whether you're talking about the Old Testament or the New, the life of the believer, the follower of Jesus Christ, as joyful as we are and as inspired by God's Holy Spirit as we are, we still have all of the times that are described in Ecclesiastes. So the question that he is addressing is really not just why, oh Lord, it is how do I move through this, oh Lord? In the teaching profession, we always said it's not the why or the how, it's the what's next. What's next? When we talk about behavior, we've talked about this before, life in congregation with other human beings. No, it's not a piece of cake and we're going to have irritants and we're going to have discussions and disagreements. Any congregation that pretends that will not happen is a veneer that is just waiting to be ripped off and then bad things are really underneath. We don't ask the question when, we ask the question as congregation because we love one another, what's next? And how do we handle that? And so when we look at Ecclesiastes, he's not saying it's a matter of, that this won't happen, he's saying it is a matter of when and the real question is what's next? I'm living with the power of God within me and this tragedy happens and then I get ill and then I get better and then this tragedy happens and then my best friend, why? Okay, we've addressed that in the first couple of chapters because life is unfair. God is just life under the sun. Remember that phrase? Under the sun is unfair. So we've established that we're a believer walking in this life under the sun, experiencing all the things of life. So what should we do? Should we turn to money? Should we turn to possessions? Should we turn to sex? Should we turn to politics and power? Should we turn to corporate building? What do we do then to actually make us happy? And the author of Ecclesiastes speaks about that at great length as well. And he finds no conclusions now. For nothing that he endeavors to do, and the author of Ecclesiastes has all of the resources of the known world. He literally, and I don't use that word the way kids use it today, he literally could do anything that he wanted and he did to try to find out how it made him feel he were. He did everything that he possibly could do under the sun to find out how it would make him feel. So we're putting the pieces of this puzzle together as we live life as a human being, or as you as an individual, as a congregation. We get to chapter seven and it's one of the most unique chapters. If you go to even the best study Bibles, you will not find, I think in all of my Bibles, and I have access to lots and that's not a brag, I just, I have Bible software, it's not a big thing, but I think I found one cross reference in all the scripture in this chapter. It's so unique. The author seems so confused. It seems almost like one of those songs where the psalmist is crying out, "Lord, why don't you love me? I love you. Why don't you help me? I've been good. Where are you? Oh, you're there. Praise God. Oh, this, it doesn't make it, it's all over the place." Commentaries about this chapter, some are very, very rigid. If you know your theologies, like a reformed theologian will say, "Look, chapter seven of Ecclesiastes directly proves predestination. Everything is ordered according to God's and there's nothing that this person can do about it." Conversely, if you're not of that mindset, you can easily say, "Look,

this clearly demonstrates the free will of the person who's making this decision and that decision and wondering this and wondering that." Most scholars, most commentary is basically this and this is where I am and what I did. Take it at face value. You're a human being living under the sun. He's a human being living under the sun. You're kind of messed up and confused even though you're a pastor and preach the word. He's kind of messed up and confused even though he's professing to be the wisest human being on earth. So take it at face value. So let's read through this and you're going to hear confusion. You're going to hear singing contradictions. You're going to hear probably, I'm guessing, all of the things that you say in your own prayers at some point in time or another. And I think that's the value of it. We always talk about, "Okay, here's Ecclesiastes seven where we talk about those songs, right? Here's this song crying out to God or yelling at God about something and I've talked to you about this before. Many of you whom I've counseled in this before." It's okay to feel the feelings. It's not okay to get stuck in your feelings. You're a human being. You're going to feel anger. You're going to feel grief. You're going to feel it. That's you. But also know that that is not where your foundation of your life lies. So let's read a little bit of this. We'll open up and then we'll go open up a song. So I wanted to frame it. I'm not going to do too much preaching through it. This is one of those deals where I give you what we call, again in education, a precursor reset, right? The frame of what we're about to experience. And you, in your own biblical literacy, in your own lives, you're going to filter this through your own life and your own understanding of the word. And you're going to see how kind of unusual it is, yet how kind of also very fundamentally common it is when we read it together. "A good reputation is more valuable than costly perfume. And the day you die is better than the day you are born." Okay, I said I wasn't going to preach through it. I do this all the time. And I won't ask for a raise of hands. How many people have ever had that thought? How many people around the world have had that thought? Oh, if I had only not been born, I'd not be experiencing this right now. How many poor people who may be suffering with some mental illness or severe depression think things of this nature? So you can't say that, oh wow, that's very random in scripture. No, it's not. It's very representative of the brokenness of humankind. It's brutally honest. It's brutally true. Some have it, many have. And it's speaking into those hearts like, oh my gosh, in my secret moment when I thought God wasn't even listening to me and I had these thoughts, he was listening to me and he knows I had these thoughts. That's powerful. So there's the example, right? There's more part of the frame. We can't just gloss over and then say, well, that doesn't make any sense. It makes a lot of sense. If we look in the mirror and if you met it, he looks in the mirror and it is really honest with itself. Better to spend your time at funerals than at parties. After all, everyone dies. So the living should take this to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter for sadness has a refining influence on us. A wise person thinks a lot about death while a fool thinks only about having a good time. Better to be criticized by a wise person than to be praised by a fool. A fool's laughter is quickly gone like thorns crackling in a fire. This is also meaningless. Extortion turns wise people into fools and bribes corrupt the heart. Finishing is better than starting. Patience is better than pride. Control your temper for anger labels you a fool. Don't long for the good old days. This is not wise. Wisdom is even better when you have money. Both are a benefit to you to go through life. Wisdom and money can get you almost anything but only wisdom can save your life. Before we finish, all over the place, right? Thoughts, stream of consciousness. How do I feel? What about the wise person and the foolish person? We both die. What's the difference between the wise and the foolish? Now we, again, we know the ending of this, right? We know the answer to these questions. But they're worthy to be asked of every human being in front of your own mirror so that you can come to terms with them. And there isn't anything that he's saying here that isn't brutally honest. But when it says only wisdom can save your life, if you know your wisdom literature, wisdom is of God. Accept the way God does things for who can straighten what he has made crooked? Enjoy prosperity while you can, but when hard times strike, realize that both come from God. Right, Joe? Remember that nothing is certain in this life. No, if you come to hear your 12-piece band and we're going to give you a big cheerleading session and so forth, no, that's not what we do here. We open up scripture and we want to reap what scripture is sowing into our lives.

And sometimes we're upon a place where I do hope that you leave very challenged by what you've heard. And I do hope that you leave willing to ask and answer these questions in your own life. It's worthy of doing so and recognize what the teacher is saying and speaking to you into your own life. Let's finish off this strange and unique chapter. I was reminded that when that song came up, number 463, it is the only song in the hymnal that references Ecclesiastes. So there's something different about Ecclesiastes and that's part of the big message that I'm trying to send to you. And I think that as many interpretations, but as much meaningful message will be received as there are people in this room. You will read it and you will say, "The Lord is speaking to me in that direction. The Lord is speaking about this situation. I have experienced turmoil. I have experienced a great wealth. I have experienced poverty. I know what these things are like and I don't know what I'm going to have done without the power of the Lord within me, without the hope of salvation within me." Or perhaps you remember when you were not with the Lord and you went through such things and you were just a mess and you relied on so many people that just kind of pull you along and hold you together with duct tape and bubble gum and then you just you found this power of the gospel of the good news of God's Holy Spirit. And you're like, "This is different." Not that we don't need to duct tape and bubble gum every once in a while still, but we have this power within us that is greater than any of the circumstances, the wealth, the poverty, the grief and despair, the joy and the incredible mountaintop moments that transcends Ecclesiastes, transcends it. The big message and we'll probably finish this off next week. The big message is that the power of God, the hope that rests in your salvation, the age to come, transcends any circumstances under the sun. We know that there is a time for everything. We know that human beings will experience a great range of experiences and a great range of feelings and we know that there will be times when we think we are experiencing great joy and times when we think we are alone experiencing everything as being completely useless and meaningless. But, but the hope of the Lord transcends that all. If you think about it, not to go down too big of a rabbit trail, but when you take the three big pieces of wisdom literature, right? Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Job, the same message permeates all three. Proverbs talks about living this way and living this godly life and you have a better shot at prosperity, you have a better shot at raising good kids, you have a better shot at having a safe and long life. A bunch of circumstances there, we know that that's not always true. We do the things that McProverbs teaches yet these three moral agents that we call children, they do what they want too. So it's not like it's some sort of prophecy, but what we learned is that God is sovereign over all of that. Then we go to Ecclesiastes and just what we're talking about. Here are all of these circumstances, much more in a negative context, living under the sun, doing all of this stuff, feeling all of these feelings. And we learned that God is sovereign over all of that. We move on to Job and we have these great theological discussions about God and about doing good and about doing bad and God punishing and God helping. And God steps in and says, you know what? You're all wrong because I'm sovereign over everything. So the wisdom of the wisdom literature is God is sovereign. 15 verse 15. Let's finish reading this in the context that we all know now. I have seen everything in this meaningless life, including the death of good young people and the long life of wicked people brutally honest. So don't be too good or be too wise. Why destroy yourself? On the other hand, don't be too wicked either. Don't be a fool. Why die before your time? Pay attention to these instructions for anyone who fears God will avoid both extremes. Do you see that every time he seems to say something that either contradicts itself or seems patently absurd, he then inserts God and says, you got crazy over here. People got crazy over here. Life is completely unfair over here, but those who trust in the Lord will persevere over it all. And that's a common theme of the city. He plugs God in there. Ecclesiastes 3. See how sneaky it was? But the Lord has planted eternity in the human heart. So there's a time for everything under the sun, yet the Lord has planted eternity in the human heart. There's a different element to being a human being and we understand all of those things under the sun as being under God's sovereignty. One wise person is stronger than 10 leading citizens of the town. Not a single person on earth is always this good and never sins. Don't eavesdrop on others who may hear your servant curse you. For you know how often you yourself have cursed others. Really

honest. And part of my research, I came across that Spurgeon quote that I sent out to the men's ministry this morning because my mind is a muddled mess. As part of my research, I found that quote from a Spurgeon. "If any man thinks of you poorly, do not be angry with him, for you are worse than he thinks." I forgot the one word in the quote. It didn't make much sense the way I sent it. You can fix that for me, Karen. But if anybody, you know, and that's, you know, you are a fool if you don't think anybody is ever talking behind your back or saying things about you. We are human beings. Again, really honest. I have always tried my best to let wisdom guide my thoughts and actions. I said to myself, I am determined to be wise, but it didn't work. Wisdom is always distant and difficult to find. I searched everywhere, determined to find wisdom and to understand the reason for things. I was determined to prove to myself that wickedness is stupid and that foolishness is madness. I discovered that a seductive woman is a trap more bitter than death. Her passion is a snare and her soft hands are chains. Those who are pleasing to God will escape her, but sinners will be caught in her snare. Now, not necessarily, we understand the imagery of women in wisdom literature. And if you know your proverbs, and he talks about basically lady wisdom as opposed to the seductive wisdom of evil, and they're both personified as female, because both of those attractions, if you will, are very powerful. So it's a very powerful imagery to read. This is my conclusion, says the teacher. I discovered this after looking at the matter from every possible angle. Though I have searched repeatedly, I have not found what I was looking for. For only one out of a thousand men is virtuous, but not one woman. Now we can talk about that line. And I know that I've been saying this is brutally honest all the way through. But we also do understand that whether this is Solomon himself, or whether this is what we call Psalmonic literature, somebody later on, and there's a great case for this, that it was written hundreds of years later, reflecting back upon. Whichever the case is, we know who Solomon was. We know that as anointed as he was by the Lord, he was as unvirtuous of a person as he was ever lived under the sun. We know that he lived these lives, this wisdom life, anointed by God, understanding God, following God, seeking to pursue God, the eternal, while under the sun, building temples, having 700 wives and concubines, allowing them to worship all other gods, allowing, and Israel never recovered from his reign. Israel never recovered from what he did. So when he makes a line like this, there's where my brain goes, whether it's a person in the future looking back at all of his horrible mistakes, or whether it is him and him saying, "Look at all of my horrible mistakes." And I think that that's what that line represents. Now it's a good one to pull out every once in a while at a party and, you know, just throw it out there and see what happens. But I think there's a larger context at play here. There always is. There always is. But I did find this. God created people to be virtuous, but they have each turned to follow their own downward path. Very true. Was not Adam created to be virtuous? And then as he was separated and maybe became male and female, were we not created to be virtuous, walking with God in the garden, communicating with God directly because we were holy creatures? And then we weren't. Are we not created now even as unholy creatures with this desire to worship God? Yes, we are. And may I say, at least we are unholy creatures with still this spark of desire to worship. Led in the correct direction, worshiping God through Jesus Christ, seeking first the kingdom of God, that in a initiative is guided in the right direction. But oh, how quickly do we make idols out of anything else or create our own false religions or follow some false religion that promises something else that we may want at the moment instead of making our lives a living sacrifice unto the Lord? We'll do something a little easier. Just bow down and pray five times. That's a lot easier than having to live 24/7 as a sacrifice, a spiritual sacrifice unto the Lord. So we're born either way. If you want to look at it and go back to the garden, or whether you want to look at it today as individuals are born, the statement rings very, very true. We are born with spiritual beings, a corrupted spiritual self, guided in the correct direction is probably the most virtuous of decisions we will ever make is to follow the Lord and his commands and his will. Everything else goes the other direction. So there is great wisdom here when you read this and I say this before, I said it before, I'll say it again, that slow down wherever you are in scripture, slow down and you've read this line. Ryan talks to me about this all the time. He'll find a line and then he'll just have to like figure out what's going on with that line. It doesn't seem to make

any sense. Do that and you will discover that there's not a word of scripture that is wasted. There's not an idea that God is trying to convey to his special creation that is not inherent in the word of God. One of the areas we go astray in church and in preaching today is we deny that or we recognize it and then we want to add to it. There's not an idea. There's not a way, right? I just preached yesterday at that wedding, but now let me show you a way that is best of all, right? We do that and then you also get Brian's version of what's good and what's right and the way you get one version, God's version and everything that you need for your life, everything that you need for your relationships, everything that you need for your parenting, everything that you need for your interactions at work, everything that you need for your life is conveyed through the word of God, not the ideas and experience of Brian or anybody else. So there is the uniqueness of chapter seven of Ecclesiastes. Now I'm a Bible geek. If you don't have your, if you don't consider yourself a Bible geek, don't take one of those cards, but if you find this very interesting, you really should take one of those Bible geek cards today because this is a chapter that if you're very interested in, you're like, well, I didn't know. I never saw that before. I never thought of that before. All that wisdom is packed in that weird writing. You're a Bible geek and that's a good thing. So that is my book. That's a good thing. That's that's top five, right? Top five. Okay.