

God's Wisdom: Turning Trials Into Treasure (Part 2)

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[0 : 00] I'll invite you to turn to the book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 7. We'll be getting back into Genesis here soon, probably next Sunday.

A couple of things that I want to share with you in the light of God's wisdom for life and assessing life. This is kind of a part two.

Because I shared so much about Poland last Sunday, I didn't have time to finish this message, so I basically shared some of my intro with you and got you kind of familiar with what I wanted to share with you from this particular chapter.

The title of the message, God's Wisdom, Turning Trials into Treasure. We all have trials. We all have hardships, adversity, suffering in this life. That's part of what it means to follow the Lord in a broken world.

And before I read the text for you again this morning, let me make some comments that kind of bring us into the tone and tenor of the theme of what we have.

[1 : 07] I shared this with you last week. Let me put it up here again just so you can see what we're dealing with. The saving, that is the spiritual, the Holy Spirit given knowledge of God in your heart, fosters the character of God in your life.

In other words, you are what you think. This is a statement that has everything to do with your soul, your heart, your mind, your personhood.

That is the center of who you are. We often refer to this as your intellect or your mind. It is the way that you make meaning about life.

It is the way that your person, who you are as a person, sees the issues of life and interprets or makes meaning of those issues that are coming at you.

Whether it's the way you make meaning about your married life, the way you make meaning about being a parent, working your job, dealing with your relationships that you have in life, dealing with a sense of loss, perceiving the hardships, adversities, troubles and trials of your life.

[2 : 23] You do all of that out of the center of your personhood. And each one of us are unique in that sense. And that God has made us as individual people.

And as individual people, we come to a certain situation and we make meaning. We interpret that situation. The most important aspect about what we do in making that meaning is our relationship to God.

Are we making meaning of that context in our life in that moment from and defined by our relationship to God?

Unbelievers can't do that. They don't have a saving Holy Spirit knowledge of God in their heart by which they can then interpret that situation in a God way with God's wisdom and grace.

And so that's why we say you have to have God living in your heart, your soul, your personhood, defining you as a person for you to then to display the character of God in your life.

[3 : 30] You with me on that? Those are very basic foundational truths about what it means to live the Christian life. Now, I told you last week the antithesis, the opposite effect of this is this.

It is also true and so very dangerous if we go the opposite way. The lack of a saving spiritual knowledge of God leaves your soul, your personhood, spiritually bankrupt and your life empty. Now, we've all felt this at some point in our life because we've all been unsaved at some point in our life. That is, not walking with God and not receiving the power of the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to spiritual things.

Unbelieving people are not able to make spiritual decisions. They are not able to make moral decisions based on pleasing God.

Unbelievers cannot do that. They have no capacity to do that. Why? Because they don't have the Holy Spirit living in them. How can they make Holy Spirit pleasing decisions that honor the Lord when they have no Holy Spirit in them?

[4 : 45] You follow that? This is the dilemma that we all live in as unbelievers and why we need the miracle transforming grace of God from heaven to do that distinct life changing work of providing us a saving spiritual knowledge of God in our heart.

Now, that's the foundation for what we're dealing with when we talk about God's wisdom. You cannot have or live by God's wisdom apart from the Spirit of God living in you.

Jesus living in you. Now, this is just what the Apostle Paul was describing, and you don't have to turn there because I'm just going to mention it.

In Ephesians 4, verse 17, regarding unbelievers or unspiritual people living in the, what Paul called, futility of their minds.

That's how he described unbelieving people, among other things. He said they were calloused in their hearts and hard-hearted and that kind of thing. But he started off at the beginning describing unbelievers living in the futility of their minds, their intellect.

[6 : 05] The center of their personhood is a life of futility. From that, they get that. This is very interesting to me because futility is the word matai otetai.

Matai otetai for you Greek people. Let you have that one for free. And here's what it means. It means useless, purposeless, worthless, or vain.

These are all the nuanced kind of ways that this word comes across as it's used in the New Testament. And Paul is using it here to characterize what is empty and foolish in verse 17 of Ephesians 4.

It characterized what is empty and foolish. And so it was thought of as what never could produce the desired or needed result.

And so when you think about something empty and vain and worthless, it just never can produce the desired result. There's no sense of success or completion about this kind of thinking.

[7 : 18] And so this is what Paul also meant when I read to you in 1 Corinthians, where he talked about the cross of Christ being foolish to those who are perishing.

They think about the cross in futile ways, purposeless, worthless ways. They cannot make meaning of the cross apart from the power of the Holy Spirit, and neither can you, neither can I.

Now, Dr. MacArthur describes the futilely minded person like this. A futilely minded person is bound up in thinking and acting in an arena of ultimate trivia.

He consumes himself in the pursuit of goals that are purely selfish, in the accumulation of that which is temporary, and in looking for satisfaction in that which is intrinsically deceptive and disappointing.

Now, if you've ever seen a person living like this, or if you yourself have lived like this, you know how frustrating it is to be around this kind of thing.

[8 : 31] A person who is constantly living in an ultimate trivia. Boy, when you think about the unbelieving world and look at what turns on and does it for the unbelieving world, do you not see something that is totally vapid?

Totally empty. Totally full of just nonsense and trivia. They move from one fad to the other. One empty thing to the other. You look at the lifestyles of the people who make the money in this country.

Actors and actors. Why in the world do people put so much emphasis on what actors... They make a living pretending to be somebody else. But we give them so much glory.

We glorify people who get half-dressed and stand up on a stage and simulate stuff that you want to cover the eyes of everybody in the room. And they sing songs that make no sense and have no meaning.

And they make millions of dollars. And we idolize them. We rush to their concerts. We fill our lives with the emptiness of what the world says is meaningful.

[9 : 42] And then we're surprised when we come up for air and realize that our lives are empty and that we've chased the air at best. This is precisely what Solomon, the author of Ecclesiastes is also saying about a life lived in worldly wisdom.

It is vanity, he says. It is emptiness to try and live without or apart from God and His wisdom for life. I want to show you several places where he's dealing with this. If you go to chapter 1 of Ecclesiastes, he begins the book this way.

He says, The words of the preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. So this is Solomon referring to himself this way. And this is his assessment of living life apart from God.

Vanity of vanities, says the preacher. Vanity of vanities. All is vanity. If you go over to chapter 2 and look at verse 17 with me.

[10:51] He says, I tried all these different things in life and then I came to hate life. So I hated life. For the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me because everything is, notice the word, futility and striving after wind.

Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun. For I must leave it to the man who will come after me. You see what he's saying? I worked and I labored and I experimented and I invested and I did what I thought was right in my own eyes and it left me empty.

It was all futile and I learned to hate it. Have you ever woke up in the middle of whatever that you've chased and said, what in the world am I doing? I'm miserable and I'm ruining my life. This is exactly where Solomon found himself.

Now this was all because of what we can read in chapter 2. Look at verse, if you would, 24. There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good.

This also I've seen that it is from the hand of God. He says, you know what? There's nothing better than living a good life. There's nothing better than enjoying good food, having clothes to wear, having some joy in life, taking some comfort in some things that we can do in this world that bring us happiness and joy.

[12:17] That's a good thing, he says. There's nothing wrong with that. We should be some of the happiest, most joyful people on the planet because we're Christians. He said, just understand, all of that is from the hand of God.

You didn't manufacture that. That's from the Lord. Your ability to enjoy life is from the Lord. It's a gift. Verse 25.

For who can eat? He's just talking about the mundane things, the everyday things of life. Who can do these everyday things of life and who can have enjoyment in those things without God?

And I'll tell you, what's the answer? No one. No one. It's all futile. It's all vapid. It's all air. I remember when my professor was teaching on these first opening lines in the book of Ecclesiastes in a class I took years ago.

He talked about vanity of vanities being like soap bubbles. The bubbles that kind of go up and you know, like you blow. What do you call that stuff?

[13:21] Anyway, you do this and the wand and they come out. Bubbles. Don't overthink it, Jeff. Bubbles.

And what happens? They don't go far and they bust, right? And you've got to make more. He said vanity of vanities is like soap bubbles. It's just always disappearing. It floats and it's beautiful for a second and then pop and it's gone.

This is the vanity of vanities. If you look then at chapter 7, the chapter that we're looking at, and go toward the end here, the very last verse of chapter 7, Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices.

That's the problem. Men constantly seek out their own agendas apart from God, trying to circumvent the wisdom and the will of God in every kind of way, in every kind of relationship, and we end up in trouble.

But then, at the end of this book, in chapter 12, I want you to notice how he sums up the issue. If you look at chapter 12, beginning in verse 13, the conclusion of all of this, he says, that I've come to in all my wisdom and in all my experimentation in my life, when all has been heard, when all the wisdom is laid bare for what it is, here it is.

[14:58] Fear God and keep His commandments. Because this applies to every person. No one can escape this reality.

If you don't live a life in the fear, that is the holy reverence of God, having a high regard for the Lord and living in that high regard for the Lord, and if you don't obey His truth, if you don't come to submit to His truth, it applies to every person, you will live a miserable life.

No matter how much money you have, no matter how much stuff you have, at the end of the day, you have to face something that all of us have to face. That's what I'm going to be preaching about in just a moment. What does verse 14 say?

For God will bring every act to judgment. He says, yeah, you can have all that. You can live all that. But at the end of the day, God is going to bring every act of your life to judgment.

And in that judgment, you will stand or fall for all eternity. Everything which is hidden in your life, everything that is good or evil, God will expose and He will judge.

[16:08] Now that's sobering, isn't it? Back to chapter 7. Very sobering. In Ecclesiastes 7, 1-14, we're faced with Solomon's answers to the question that he posed in chapter 6, verse 12.

And here it is up on the screen. For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime? That's the basic question. Who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime?

I've tried all this stuff. Nothing works. During the few years of his, notice the word, futile life. The futile minded and the futile life.

Well, the answer is an answer the world hates and rejects. God. God is the only one who knows. God always and most fully knows what is good, better, and best for you in any given moment and situation of your life.

Now I told you, I was challenged with this this week. As Suzanne got worse and worse, as I took her in and I sat there and watched her crying in pain, and as I watched the medical people around her, I sat there helpless.

[17:23] All I could do in those moments was, and I'm not trying to say this is not a good thing or a helpful thing, I prayed. But there was nothing my hands could do. You know what I'm saying?

You see the person you love suffering and what do you want to do? You want to alleviate it. You want to take it. There's nothing. Nothing. And so what do I do in that moment?

Do I believe in my heart God always and most fully knows what is good, better, and best for Suzanne even as she lays there like that? He knows what's good, better, and best for her right now as we face these medical challenges for her.

I will either believe that and order my life by that truth or I won't. And I'm going to tell you, I could not stand in this pulpit and do what I'm doing right now if I didn't take that truth into my heart and let it comfort me.

I'd be at the house right now in a mad mess. I was very tempted to get in the car and make a drive to Richmond and show up at the doctor's office and say, I'm going to tell y'all what's about to happen.

[18:30] And that would have been very prideful and very wrong. And it wouldn't have shown much trust in the Lord, would it? Folks, this stuff gets really real for us when we're faced with stuff that's really pushing our buttons.

Life's kind of moving along rather smoothly. We're tempted not even to think about the Lord. But boy, you let a trial hit in a Christian's life and all of a sudden we wake up to the reality of I'm pretty feeble and pretty weak.

I could be taken out in half a second from anything. God knows. Now to clearly show the absolute need that I'm talking about that we all have for God to tell us.

We need God to tell us, to instruct us in what is good and better when we're living through these complications of the seasons of our life, these hardships.

Our passage gives us what I called last week a cold shower of contrasts. And he does that through a list of Proverbs. Let me read through it with you in chapter 7.

[19:37] Now we're only going to deal with the first four verses so don't worry. I won't keep you here all day. But let me go down through verse 14 to give you a feel for this. What we're looking for are these contrasts put in proverbial form to help us make this assessment.

He says a good name is better than. So we have something better than something else. A good name is better than a good ointment. The day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth. How in the world can that be? It is better to go to a house of mourning, sadness, death, than to go to a house of feasting, pleasure, and happiness. How can that be? Because that is the end of every man and the living takes it to heart.

So he's saying, hey, you better think hard about these things. Sorrow is better than laughter. Again, how can that be? For when a face is sad, a heart may be happy. The mind of the wise is in the house of death or mourning while the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure.

It is better to listen to the rebuke of a wise man than for one to listen to the song of fools. For as the crackling of thorn bushes under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool. And this too is futility.

[20 : 49] For oppression makes a wise man mad and a bribe corrupts the heart. The end of a matter is better than its beginning. Patience of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit.

Amen. Do not be eager in your heart to be angry. Anger resides in the bosoms of fools. Do not say, well, why is that the former days were better than these?

For it's not from wisdom that you're asking about this. Wisdom along with an inheritance is good and an advantage to those who see the sun. For wisdom is protection just as money is protection. But, but, the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the lives of its possessors. So, consider the work of God. For who is able to straighten what he's bent?

The answer is no one. In the day of prosperity, you need to be happy. Ride that wave while you can, he says. But, in the day of adversity, hardship, suffering, trials, consider this.

[21 : 49] God has made the one as well as the other so that man will not discover anything that will be after him. In other words, the future. He won't be able to discern or see in his little crystal ball the future.

If you would, it would not be comforting. I promise you that. Because there's more hardship and suffering to come in a broken world. All down through this passage then, you see these contrasts being made.

We've got something that's better than something else. We've got things that you shouldn't do and things that you should do. We've got things that you should forsake and things that you should bring into your life.

Things that you should heed and listen to, cling to. Things that you should abandon. This is all through these first 14 verses. What's he doing? Solomon uses these contrasts to shatter what you think you know about assessing a good life.

What do you know? What do I know? Now we're going to survey verses 1-4. We're going to see what Solomon means about using God's wise perspectives to change our view of the hardships, trials, sufferings of life.

[23 : 04] The reason? We want to be able to turn our trials into the treasure of growing in God's wisdom and grace. Again, not to put too fine a point on it, but this is something that I, as your friend and pastor, was challenged with throughout this week.

Will I allow the trial that God is taking us through together, my wife and I? Will I allow that to become a treasure in my life because I am looking to God to help me understand what He wants to do in my heart to conform me to Christ through this trial?

As I hugged my wife and stood there holding her, I whispered in her ear and I said, Suzanne, you know our greatest challenge right now is to offer worship to God so that we can surrender our hearts to know what He wants to do in us through this.

Just reminding her, reminding myself, we're in this together and it's going to take both of us to move through it and learn from the Lord. And trials come at all levels, don't they?

You're in a trial when whatever's going on in your life, your little pet peeve is hitting you and you're tempted to be impatient or unkind or speak in abrupt ways or selfish ways or unkind ways.

[24 : 18] And then you're in trials when you hit stuff like what I've been describing. There's all levels. We have sense of loss. We lose people we love. Look, all of this is brought about by the Lord and His sovereignty to help conform us to the image of His Son.

And what I'm saying to you is that Christians always suffer in the wisdom and purpose of God, not apart from it. And so we don't want to struggle out of a trial because we struggle out of what God's wanting to do to conform us to Christ.

We embrace it. We move through it in the trust of the Lord. All right, I want to look now, look at verses 1-4 and then I'll come back, do a little summary and I'll come back and do them each with you.

A good name is better than a good ointment and the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth. It is better to go to a house of mourning than a house of feasting. That's the end of every man, the living, they need to take that to heart.

Sorrow is better than laughter. When a face is sad, a heart can be happy. The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning while the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure.

[25 : 27] Now, if we take verses 1-4 together, we can do kind of a little summary. So let's take it as a whole and sum up what we're facing.

What we're dealing with here are limitations we face in life and we constantly push against them.

Now, that's fine, I'm a pusher, but I want to push God's way.

I want to make meaning of these trials and I want to push. Look, death is my enemy. I don't give in to it. Weakness is my enemy. My body decaying is my enemy.

I'm fighting it. I'm not giving in to it. The arthritis and the pain and all, you fight through that. Those are your enemies. Those are signs of the brokenness of this world. Not our friends.

So it's okay, man. Get after that. Don't give in to it and just sit down on the couch and say, oh well, you need to be useful to the Lord.

[26 : 22] I need to be useful to the Lord. There are limitations in life. You will face more as you age. The limitations get more sobering and more real to you as you age.

It's just a real thing. And we need to interpret those God's way. We need to push against them

God's way. Not manipulating it. Not trying to control it.

Not trying to force the issue. Listen, we are finite creatures on a steady course to meet our own death. And this is what He's dealing with.

Death is our most sobering limitation. Now this is where He's going. He wants to talk to you about death as it relates to adversity or the trials in life.

There are also knowns, things you can know, and unknowns, things you can't know about life as it relates to your death.

[27 : 21] For example, we know that each one of us must die. Right? Every one of us in this room are going to die. What we don't know, none of us know, is when.

You don't know and I don't know. You don't know how. I don't know that either. You don't know what will be involved in your death or who might be involved in your death. You don't know that and I don't know that.

What we can know is that we will die. And then there are many unknowns about how that's going to happen and when that's going to happen. But this certainty and this uncertainty can serve us well if we see it in God's wisdom.

That's what Solomon's trying to tell us. We need to intentionally allow for our own mortality to instruct us in living.

We take heed to the fact that there's something out there that's going to hit every single one of us. It's coming for some of us sooner rather than later. We don't even know who or when.

[28 : 31] We need to deal with that and let it instruct us. Now, to help you get your mind around this summary that I'm doing about the first four verses, look, let me share this with you. David Gibson is a commentator.

He wrote a commentary on Ecclesiastes and I thought he had some helpful insight here so I want to share it with you. Here's his quote. Your life won't go on forever. That's a certainty. Okay, that's what we can know.

But death is not just a line you cross when your time is up. Death is an evangelist. He looks us in the eye and asks us to look Him right back with a steady gaze and allow Him to do His work in us.

He wants to teach us that the day of our coming death can be a friend to us in advance. The very limitation that death introduces into our life can instruct us about life.

Think of it as death's helping hand. Does that make sense to you? We're all going to die. What are you doing with that reality? How are you letting your impending death instruct your living today?

[29 : 40] Right now? It's good. So Solomon wants to sober us with the reality of death but he wants this to help us focus on God's wisdom for living.

He doesn't want us to be morbid. He doesn't want to depress us. As we think about our coming death he wants us to realize that God has wisdom in that death.

For Christians death is the entry gate to eternity with the Lord not eternity in hell. So we see look I'm not looking forward to dying.

It's hard enough to decay but when I get to the point where I'm going to die if I know what's going on I've seen death many times as a pastor. It's ugly. I don't like it.

It's hard to see my friends die. It's hard to see what they go through. So death is an enemy. I get that. But at the same time death is something that Christians can look at with hope.

[30 : 39] Right? We have hope in our death but are we letting our impending death instruct us today? Are we gaining the advantages that we can gain in the wisdom of God by looking at our impending death and letting it instruct us today?

Let it sober us today. This is what Solomon wants. Now here is how he helps us focus on God's wisdom for living by looking at our death.

Here's how he does it. Notice in verse 1 a good name is better than a good ointment and the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth.

So he's setting up this death motif with what he says in the first half of the verse. A good name is better than a good ointment and that gives us a jump into now what he's going to do thematically with the idea of death.

In the first half of the verse the emphasis is superficiality contrasted with the depth and purpose of an honorable life.

[31 : 46] A superficial life contrasted with an honorable life. Now folks please hear me. It is not difficult to live a superficial life.

That is not hard to do. Just do what you want to do and you'll be superficial. You'll be chasing the trivial. You'll be living in the emptiness.

It is difficult to live a sanctified life. I could have said it this way. It's impossible apart from the spirit. Only the power of God can help you live a life pleasing to God.

Without the power of God working in your heart to sober you and guide you, you will not live a sanctified. Sanctified means set apart to God holy life. You won't. You'll do your thing.

It's hard enough to do that as a Christian. Isn't it? Much less as an unbeliever. It's an impossible thing contrasted with an honorable life.

[32 : 53] You can either live an honorable life in the sight of the Lord or you can live a superficial life and be your own God. You have two choices that's it. That's the way it works in God's economy.

Now think of this. Smelling good on the outside is fine but not if what is on the inside is rotten! Because all you're doing is trying to perfume a shallow and selfish life can only work for a time and then you will see you for what you are and other people will also.

Is that not true? You can only hide it for a time. A good name he says is a life that people think fondly and admirably!

about. A good life suggests that your life has had some good and godly impact on other people. But I warn you that's the life that we want to live but the warning comes take stock and count the cost of living a life like that.

[33 : 59] If you set your heart to live full out for the Lord Jesus Christ you will make enemies. All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

! 2 Timothy 3 12 All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. We need to prepare our kids for that don't we?

But we need to prepare our own hearts for that reality as well. Nevertheless a good name is something that people look to and honor.

The second half of the verse then seems more contrary to what we might immediately think is true. Look at what it says. The day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth.

Now keep in mind what he's trying to put across here and it'll help you with your interpretation and understanding. How can death be better than birth? Well one way to think of this verse is to consider that birth is a joyful experience.

[35 : 04] It's so full of potential and plans and hopes and dreams. Boy I wonder what she'll be when she grows up. I wonder what she'll be like at six years old since she just came out of the womb speaking complete sentences.

That was my daughter. Came out of the womb. Daddy I'm hungry and I don't like where I am and I'm cold. I'm telling you it never stopped. It went right on.

Very smart. She was smarter than both her brothers put together. And I told her that. And I told them that. Listen that's birth. Filled with potential and joy hopes and dreams.

Death however is about ends. It's about hurts. It's about mourning sadness loss. At least it is from an earthly unbelieving perspective.

Right? But not if you are listening carefully to what Solomon has been saying beloved. So look again at his question in chapter 6 verse 12.

[36 : 08] What does he say? For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime during the few years of his fuel life. He will spend them like a shadow for who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun.

Then again if you look at! chapter 2 chapter 2 24 and 25 there is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink that is to just live the issues of life and tell himself that the labor is good.

Okay? It's all good. This also I've seen that the ability to do that is from the hand of God for who can eat who can live who can go through the issues of life who can have enjoyment in any of that without him no one chapter 3 verse 12 look at that with me chapter 3 verse 12 let me find it with you I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime moreover that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor it is the what gift of God I know that everything God does will remain forever there's nothing to add to it there's nothing to take from it for God has so worked that men should revere him have a holy reverence for him and then finally in chapter five if you look at verse seven for in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness futility rather instead contrast here's the better than fear

God if you have a high and holy reverence for God and you have fixed in your heart that the most important thing about you and the life that you live and all you think say and do is that you want to be pleasing to God you want your life to be a sweet aroma of worship to God in every area of your life and at all times that is the fear of the Lord that is the reverence of God that is guiding!

your life so you're making decisions you're that's what he's talking about here if you look at chapter 5 verse 18 here is what I have seen to be good and fitting to eat to drink and enjoy oneself and all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life notice which God has given him for this is his reward God has given you the ability to live a life that has some joy some fun some fulfillment in it Christians shouldn't be walking around moping about the fact that the world hates us and having a pity party about the fact that living the Christian life is hard it's not hard it's impossible so you need the power of

[39 : 28] God to help you do it and so do I I don't even want to think about what kind of person I would have been without the Lord in what just happened in my life this past week because if there's anything that pushes my buttons it's seeing my wife suffer like that it's it's very very challenging very difficult thing for us and I understand that we all have buttons like that this is why it's so important for us to be instructed in God's wisdom for life look Solomon is simply emphasizing the issue of death for every single person and he's asking you what are you doing with that are you allowing that to help you with some dividends are you gaining and squeezing out everything you can to help you with that reality Solomon wants to sober you with the truth that you will one day attend your own funeral his point is more the issue that listen your death is better a better teacher and revealer about the real you than your birth do you hear me the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth how in the world because your death is a better teacher and revealer about the real you than your birth how is that well listen if you're a

Christian if you're a follower of Jesus Christ by faith then death is not about potential you hear me your death is not about potential it's not about plans hopes or dreams it is about a new beginning and fulfillment in your life life it's about promises kept and it's about the completion of you as a living being and not a dead one that's how Christians look forward to what will come after death it's not about potential it's about certainty I know exactly because I know what the word tells me and so do you listen your life in Christ is about faithfulness and finishing well keep those in mind those are your bookends faithfulness to God while I'm here God's not asking us to always be perfect he knows that's not going to happen in any of our life but faithfulness are you faithful are you making the most of those moments and then over here on this side finishing well

I'm allowing myself to look out to what I know is going to be my lot I'm going to die and I'm allowing that to instruct me in the wisdom of God about the life that I live up to that moment how many of you saw Dr.

MacArthur's funeral and the tribute they made and what did they emphasize more than anything faithfulness he was a faithful man he lived an honorable life because he sought to be faithful to God he was a man faithfully carrying the torch of truth and ministering to God's people as an under shepherd what what an example one of the reasons that I love him so much and appreciate so much who he is and what he did this if you're a Christian is about fulfillment promises kept it's about gaining a life free from death suffering pain sorrow and the changing perplexing vexing and rotten ways of this life I don't mean to sound disparaging I'm telling the truth faithfulness and finishing well

are about preparing yourself for heaven we're not trying to build treasure here what did he say I worked all this work I made all this investment and at the end of the day you know what I realized I'm going to die and leave it to another man somebody else is going to get all because this is not my home I'm going to be taken to a different place with treasures far beyond the imagination are you laying up treasure in heaven so let's do this friends let's make both our birth and our death matter for the Lord let's realize that potential how well look we look at our birth and we thank God for giving us life that's first thank you Lord that I was born and you gave me life and that I'm breathing your air even with all the ups and downs the heartaches the fears the losses the struggles the reality is this we are living beings and we are experiencing life because

[44 : 16] God gave it to us we exist human birth is filled with that potential I mentioned it's filled though also with a lifetime of unknowns but we start there now look at this one death sees all that potential for what it became or what it failed to become which one is more truthful birth or death death because you've lived it now baby there ain't no potential you've lived it and now your death is going to tell the story of what you lived who you were and what you did isn't it death is going to deal with the reality of what you became or failed to become with the life that God gave you so death looks at the reality of what you lived it looks at what you did with yourself and with all that

God brought into your life and it says did you do? What did you do? Now look a life lived by faith in Christ that is a life measured by his wisdom applied in his love is life lived in the certainty of heaven gained that's not potential that's certainty your your highest hopes met and exceeded the complete fulfillment of a secure eternity with treasures beyond your comprehension that's the reality of what we're living in that's not something that we're saying well like I hope it doesn't rain today no this is a hope that says I know I am hoping in what I know is the certainty of God that's that's how God's going to deal with my life as I chasing what is empty listen to the way I say this death looks back on an earthly life and tells the truth about you does it not but what does your birth say your birth says well

I don't know I don't know what I don't know what she's going to be I don't know what he's going to do who's he going to marry who's she going are they going to death looks back and says oh we got a record right here we know exactly who you are and what you did and so what does he say isn't this wise do you look at this and go man only God could come up with something like this the day of one's death is better than the day of birth if you will let it be!

what did your! life matter for so take a serious look at your own forthcoming death and consider you have only one limited lifetime to make good on your life and so make it count for eternity this is what the Bible means when we're told build your treasure in heaven make it count for eternity this is the theme that's driven home to our hearts as the passage continues would you look at verse 2 to the house of feasting because that is the end of every man and the living takes it to heart well what's he referring to here alright the house of mourning is a place where someone has died you've ever been in that context you will know exactly what I'm talking about it is a very difficult place to be death does spell the end of life because it does!

this somber scene that he's picturing here for us should cause a wise person to take it seriously and allow it to shape their heart we don't like to think about it but we need to funerals can be so uncomfortable the thought of death I've had to have a conversation with my mom the last couple of weeks she's 84 her health is terrible and she's got all kinds of things going on and I remember talking with her in this last conversation just days ago updating her about Suzanne and we started talking about life and the feebleness of life and I remember saying to my mom now mom so in light of that and we got into a conversation about all the different things that I'm in charge of when she dies she's put that she's asked me to take care of all that the funeral the officiating where to take her go back to Georgia be with her home church do all this man there was a part of that that was like

[49 : 13] I don't even want to think about that right I'm like mama you're not in the grave yet kind of thing but at the same time it was a sobering conversation that had to happen funerals are hard people don't like facing the reality of death they don't like thinking about their mortality they don't like dealing with the tears they don't like dealing with the sadness they don't they don't know what to say to people who survived the person it's hard to know I'm sorry for your loss we say things like this he's in a better place she's not suffering anymore!

we mean those things but you know after you heard them about 15 times you're standing there and you just kind of go numb they don't like dealing with the negative realities that someone's life might

have left behind I remember when I did my grandfather's funeral he was an unbeliever and I begged that man many times to come to Christ he always cut me off and I did my grandfather's funeral and I could not stand up there and talk about what a great life he had because he lived none of his life for Christ none of it that was tough tough for all these reasons funerals and trials adversity suffering death all of that should teach us the value of a life well lived why because we will all face these things are we making the most of them feasting on the other hand look at that feasting has its meaningful place in the good life we've seen him say this enjoy your life it can be fun but in this particular context what

Solomon is doing he's saying this is seen as frivolous this is the trivial that he talked about it's contrasted with the more instructive nature of the house of which attends someone's death in the house of mourning can teach our hearts the value of eternal priorities because the end of every person is a death that will look back and that death will tell how that person lived the living takes that to heart and allows it to instruct us and sober us alright so now let me ask you some questions here I want you so much to grasp this what what are you allowing hardship and trials and adversities and failures to do to you because you all have them and you all will experience them just like me what are you allowing those things to do to you what are you doing with your pain what are you doing with your suffering what are you doing with your sense of disappointment what are you doing with your sense of failure are you wasting your suffering do you understand and interpret your life!

of your life every situation of your life by God's view of those situations do you interpret those situations by his wisdom his truth his purposes in your life let me make a statement now that I want to be super clear about please listen you never suffer for nothing in Jesus you never suffer for nothing in Jesus Jesus doesn't waste your suffering he always uses your adversities and trials and hardships in your life to conform you to his son that's what the Lord does we never suffer for Christ in a wasteful way this is why verse four reemphasizes the wisdom of taking this view of the death of others look at verse four the mind of the wise is in the house of mourning there it is again while the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure listen now wise people godly people spiritually discerning people allow the activities of the house of mourning to teach them life lessons for wise living even though funerals are a time of difficulty they're a time for the wise to take stock adversity suffering trials in this life before we die remind us to look to

Jesus last week was a reminder Jeff you're at your limits and so what are you going to do look to Christ it reminds me to look to Jesus and you will learn this as you grow in the Lord as you walk with the!

[54 : 24] more and more and more of your default setting will become when I start feeling that pressure it is a cue for me to look up as it were in my heart to look up to Jesus not to look down not to set my teeth and want to fight people or fight the circumstance necessarily but to look to God for the wisdom that I need to move through it faithfully superficial nature of the house of pleasure now catch what he's saying here this is a place where everyone is just interested in getting by getting more getting out or getting on with their agendas that's the house of pleasure that's what it represents you understand there's a house of mourning that gives us this sense of sobering us it fixes our feet in reality it kind of slaps us a little bit into what was

I doing wait a minute let's reset let's reset right and then there's the house of pleasure the house of pleasure comes over here and says don't worry come on be you chase that pursue this don't worry about it so what is he telling us people who don't want to look reality in the eye often retreat into the frivolous aspects of temporal life as a way of escape this is the world learning to cope and escape life without living for Jesus is chasing after the wind it's vanity it's empty and it will bring you to ruin so then you say well Jeff then why are so many Christians feeling so empty and discouraged in their life I mean if

Christianity is the apex of living the good life why are so many Christians themselves discouraged disappointed disillusioned depressed why does it seem that so many Christians are seeking out therapy on a par that parallels what unbelievers do I'm going to give you the answer this is based on much experience throughout my ministry as well as what the truth of the word of God says probably should have said that one first but anyway it's based on the truth and my experience together as I've lived for the Lord here it is one basic reason prevails in the answer to this question because they are not learning to think say and do all for the reason of pleasing Jesus Christ period there you go you bust it all down that's where you get to so many Christians are feeling empty

discouraged and despondent in their life for the same reasons unbelievers!
Because they're not making it about Jesus they're not they're busy oh they're busy do you remember me telling you friends Satan wants you to worship he wants you to come to church he wants you to be religious he wants you to read your Bible he wants you to do all of that and more he wants you to give money to the church to support what we do here and who we are here he wants you to do all the kinds of things that help you sit back and say yeah you know I'm good he wants you to do all of that just don't make it about Jesus that's what he wants just don't let it be about Christ let it be about anything else and as long as it makes you it toots your horn and helps you get down the road we're good that is not the same as walking with Jesus this is a little bit of a commercial for Wednesday night coming up now I want to say something to you in all love as a pastor if you know everything that there is to know in scripture about what it means to walk with Jesus do not come to these services on Wednesday night don't come you'll be bored out of your skull don't come but if you don't know everything that there is to know in scripture about walking with Jesus please be here you might learn something and it might encourage!

[58 : 49] you to that's what we're going to be working on together the wisdom and the ways of Jesus help us make meaning of our suffering our sadness our hardships our adversities as we experience these hard realities of life in a fallen world only Jesus can do that otherwise you'll spin out of control and you'll crash and burn why because only the power of Jesus can lift your eyes to see him and off talk about what it is to look at your sin and focus on your sin so much that your sin is actually becoming like God to you and all you can see is the problem and all you want to do is work on the problem and fix the problem and deal with the problem so the problem becomes God I want to teach you about that and what to do about it because God has a specific way to do that so that we don't get sucked down into the vortex of that thing crashing and burning into the ground that will happen every single time if you don't heed the scripture

Jesus helps us make meaning I skipped verse 3 intentionally I'll come back to it now look at verse 3 sorrow is better than laughter for when a face is sad a heart may mean by all of this the reason this statement is true is because of the context of the truth that it is set within when sadness helps sober our hearts when it helps us think biblically and soberly about eternal!

things in our lives then that's a good exercise for our souls real life is a soul sobering exercise as long as we put our hope in the Lord life but we often choose a different way to deal with life and so I want you to hear this now please hear this when he talks about laughing here he's not saying laughing is wrong here's what he's saying laughing in this context means trying to escape reality trying to laugh your way through life as a way of denying or blunting the pain and the fear along the way now let me show you there are lots of ways to laugh off life that are not good for us like this one right getting drunk shooting up taking pills chasing your lustful pleasures making making a hobby the center of your life looking to another human being in your life to be what only

God can be for you and setting that person up for failure because they're going to constantly fail you and they feel that pressure they end up learning to live their lives trying to please you instead of please Jesus because you make it so hard for them when they don't all of those ways are ways that we laugh as it were our way through life trying to medicate ourselves through the hard times trying to convince ourselves it's this instead of that but not allowing ourselves to look to the wisdom of God to make meaning out of these hardships in the way God wants us to see it we try to find a way to escape reality escape the sense of our own failure our own emptiness our own limitations we don't want to face that we don't want to do so we run we're all cowards at heart aren't we all of us are cowards at heart we want to think ourselves big and bad and we're not the only bad about us is the bad of sin laughing then is used here to represent all kinds of ways that we try to cope with sadness loneliness fears disappointments even as we feel disappointed toward other people what do you do with that now to draw all this to a close listen in the

New Testament Christians are given this promise there is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus people who are Christians are not going to face God in heaven and have God stand there with his finger and wag his finger and say oh you bad bad boy you bad bad girl now I'm going to put this up here on the video screen and show you all the things you said and did that were not nice are you listening and then poof there it goes what we get in the Lord Jesus is we get God the Father saying my son paid all of that for you enter into your rest that's what we get and any of the things that we've thought or said or done that have glorified and pleased Jesus Christ those become treasures that are built up for us and laid up in heaven those become the impetus for our

reward we get rewarded for all that anything that we've done in our life thought said or did that we've done in our life that has not been about pleasing the

[64 : 13] Lord Jesus and in walking with him God considers that wood hay and stubble and it gets burned we don't get burned that stuff gets burned and then we get rewarded! for all that we've lived for in Christ we don't get condemned we don't get judged we don't get chewed out we don't have daddy wave his finger in our face Jesus took all that from the father God spent his wrath on his holy son so that we would not have to deal with that if God had to do that for us we have been jettisoned to hell and be there for pretty raw deal for Jesus huh well he did all that in obedience to the father he did it because he loved Jesus he loved the father and he loved us there's no condemnation for us who are in Christ Jesus here is the promised reality and hope of every believer in

Jesus Christ as he or she faces the day of their death look at this one for you have already died and your life is hidden with Christ in God what better place when Christ who is our life is revealed you also will be revealed with him in glory how about that so Jesus conquered death for you too that's not the final say about you as a Christian Jesus is so death is your doorway to being with Jesus forever all right one last slide here we each have our stuff to deal with don't we so make the most of what you can while you can by making much of Jesus while you can don't waste your life don't waste your suffering don't waste the situations that God brings into your life where you are facing hardship!

adversity and your own limitations don't waste them allow the Lord to use those to conform you to Christ that's God's heart of wisdom for helping us turn those limitations liabilities and adversities into treasures of worship fit for heaven let's pray together father we honor your heart and we thank you for your goodness and your grace as we have taken the table we have sung songs to honor your name we have had the word of God preached to us that we might have your wisdom in our heart as we leave today and live by that wisdom in the week and so I pray for my brothers and sisters to be greatly blessed as they seek to honor you in facing the hardships of life Lord it's just difficult and I know that you see us in that you know every nuance of what it is for us to suffer and for us to face the trials that we do and I pray that you will use us together each other to encourage one another and build each other up in the hope and in the certainty that you are always working in our lives to use our suffering for the purposes of heaven help us to take great comfort in that even if our circumstance doesn't change and help us to look to you and walk with you in the peace and in the calm that you bring in those moments thank you for your truth and your wisdom that we have in Jesus your son in his name we pray amen