

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I once was a stranger to grace unto God.

I knew not my danger, I felt not my own. Though friends were in rapture of Christ on the tree, Jesus, I still gave you, was nothing to me.

I often with pleasure to serve your needs. I say I was a pleasure, I'm John's simple pitch.

[15:49] But even their picture, the blood's in your teeth. She told us to give you, seem perfect to me.

Like tears from the daughters of Zion the throne. I went from the waters, went over its storm.

Yet I thought what the crisis had left to the tree. She told us to give you, was nothing to me.

When fleek is a holy, I lie from on high. And me or fear should be, I travel to die.

No refuge, no safety, in self good I see. Jehovah's in heaven, my spirit will see.

[17:12] My terrors all vanish before the sea name. My guilty feels vanished, with boldness I came.

To take up the fountain, life getting unfree. Jehovah's in heaven, my death will see. Jehovah's in heaven, my treasure and wars.

Jehovah's in heaven, I cannot be lost. In me I shall conquer, my blood and my fears.

I gave on my anchor, my breastplate and shield. He tread in the body, the shadow of all dead.

This porch was shall rally, my fault and regret. For a life of all my sleeper, my thoughts have seen thee.

[18:42] Jehovah's in heaven, my death's song shall be. Let's turn now to the book of Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes chapter 1. We took an introductory look at this three or four weeks ago now.

And so we're returning to this passage tonight. And we'll begin to work our way through this book. Ecclesiastes, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes.

And we'll read from verse 1 of chapter 1 through to verse 11 of chapter 2. This is God's word. The words of the teacher, son of David, king of Jerusalem.

Meaningless, meaningless, says the teacher. Utterly meaningless. Everything is meaningless.

What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?

[19:54] Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises and the sun sets and hurries back to where it rises.

The wind blows to the south and turns to the north. Round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full.

To the place the streams come from, there they return again. All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear is full of hearing.

What has been will be again. What has been done will be done again. There is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, look, this is something new?

It was here already, long ago. It was here before our time. There is no remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow.

[20:57] I, the teacher, was king over Israel and Jerusalem. I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven.

What a heavy burden God has laid on men. I have seen all the things that are done under the sun.

All of them are meaningless. A chasing after the wind. What is twisted cannot be straightened.

What is lacking cannot be counted. I thought to myself, look, I have grown and increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me. I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge.

Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly. But I learned that this too is a chasing after the wind. For with much wisdom comes much sorrow.

The more knowledge, the more grief. I thought in my heart, come, now, I will test you with pleasure, to find out what is good.

[21:59] But that also proved to be meaningless. Laughter, I said, is foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish? I tried cheering myself with wine and embracing folly.

My mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives. I undertook great projects.

I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees.

I bought male and female slaves, and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me.

I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well, the delights of the heart of man.

[23 : 01] I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. I denied myself nothing my eyes desired.

I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. Yet, when I surveyed all that my hands had done, and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Nothing was gained under the sun. Amen. And may God bless that reading of his word to us.

We're going to sing again now to God's praise. We'll sing the last two stanzas of Psalm 42 in Gaelic. The last two stanzas.

It's one verse in the English, and I'll read it in English. So why art thou cast down my soul? Why thus with grief oppressed art thou disquiet in me, and God still hope and rest?

[24 : 08] For yet I know I shall him praise, who graciously to me the health is of my countenance, yea, mine own God is he. These two verses of Psalm 42, and I remain seated to sing in Gaelic.

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[25 : 14] ..

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[26 : 20]

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[27 : 24]

... heavenly father we thank you for your word and we thank you that we're able to sing it and we thank you that we have these we have some psalms that take us to the heights and give us words that we are able to take upon our lips to rejoice and we thank you that we have some psalms that lament and take us to to places that are deep places that are dark and give us words to to sing and to speak when our hearts are sore and we thank you that we have psalms like this one that speak about the thirst that our hearts have that is quenched only when we come into relationship with you and we thank you lord that when we are in relationship with you we have that satisfaction we have peace we have purpose we know why we are here and lord we praise you for that we thank you that you're the god who has made us and who is with us and who is for us we thank you that you did not make this world and then walk away from it like some watchmaker who winds up the watch and and leaves it be we thank you that you're involved in every detail of the cosmos in every detail of our lives and that you care for us we thank you father that you care for us so much that you sent your son jesus into this world to seek us and to save us and the lostness that we feel apart from you is cured when we come into relationship with you we'll come to the father through jesus the son and give him the glory great things he has done help us we pray to to have our eyes fixed on jesus and help us even sometimes when we might feel cast down as the psalmist did to preach to our own souls to to preach the gospel to ourselves help us to say with the psalmist though why art thou cast down my soul why in me so dismayed trust god for i shall praise him yet his countenance is mine aid so here my hear our prayers we we ask and help us as we open your word give us understanding help us to see all that we are being pointed to in this book which initially looks bleak but points us to the hope that is found only in christ and we ask all these things in jesus name amen some people would say that the bible is is out of date some people uh would say that um the bible is a book of another age another generation but uh the truth is the bible speaks to every age every generation every person every place every situation and this book of ecclesiastes that we've kind of

taken a step into is a book that explores the the meaning of life and in every place at every time people are asking the question why why am i here what's the purpose what's the point why am i working 40 50 60 70 80 hours a week why am i drawing a wage in order to spend and pay bills and go to school and get education and why am i going through the cycle of all these things that seems to come through generation after generation what's the point of it what's the purpose of it what's underlying it all and this is the question uh that the teacher uh solomon we believe is asking in uh this in this book

it's the why question science asks the how question sometimes people say well you know i'm not interested in the things of faith i'm only interested in asking uh these questions that are answered in science well science asks the how science asks the questions about how the world works and how the cosmos works and how our bodies work these are questions that are explored in the the chemistry and the biology and the physics textbooks they're beyond me but science doesn't help us with the the why question and for help with that question we need to turn to our the why question and how the world works and how the world works and how the world works and how the world works and so we're doing that uh this evening and this is uh uh it's a contemporary book and i'm conscious that as we study together the majority of people in this room are are christians are professing christians in some ways i was thinking that it may have been better to go to ecclesiastes in the morning there's a greater mix of people many people who are not professing to be christians but we are moving all of us in circles that that god has has ordained you you have friends relatives colleagues that only you have and all the people in your workplace and all the people i rub shoulders with in my world are people who are asking these questions why am i here what's it all about what's it for and actually the the greatest effect that this message can have is not so much when it goes out on a sunday morning but when it goes out through us through god's people on a monday tuesday wednesday thursday friday morning in the coffee uh rooms the tea breaks and all the different situations that we we find ourselves in so the first question that we come to uh just to recap on where we were uh and we look at the the the introductory verses of this book the first thing uh that we come to point number one is questions about life and i will i'll just skim over these first two points because we've we've looked a little into this already solomon who's the teacher he asks lots of questions and if you've got the bible in front of you there and ecclesiastes chapter one open uh then we can see that solomon he asks lots of questions and he makes some pretty bleak observations uh on life that's verses one to eleven doesn't make for the most encouraging and uh the most light-filled start uh to the book so he has all these questions some of them seem quite cynical almost and then he goes in this pursuit of of answers to these questions in verse 12 and following and he's trying to understand the purpose and the meaning of life in this world the code word that he phrase that he uses for uh life in this world as life under the sun and all his questions point us to the truth that there must be more to life than what's under the sun there must be more to life than simply what we can see and feel and touch the physical realm and that's what the book is driving towards just a couple of weeks ago two or three weeks ago the the the run rig singer some of you are big run rig fans and uh the run rig lead singer bruce guthrow uh he died age 62 and uh on social media there was lots of articles being written with tributes and i noticed uh in these tributes there was one song that was being posted over and over again and uh it was a song that was actually sang apparently at the funeral as well and the refrain the line in the song that's repeated is is this there must be a place under the sun where hearts of old and glory grow young and you can almost hear solomon singing that in this book he's saying there must be more than this there must be more than just this world and and that's the longing that's the drive that's the the deep question and search that's uh that's giving us this book and as we read on in the bible we get the answers to these questions and i think when we're going through ecclesiastes it's important for us to to grapple with these dark difficult questions but not just focus on ecclesiastes but think a little bit broader so solomon is saying there must be more there must be more than what's just simply under the sun and as we hear that question ringing out of ecclesiastes we we get the answer all over the bible think about isaiah 40. isaiah responds to the question that solomon asks and he tells us lift your eyes lift your eyes to what's above the sun lift your eyes verse 26 of isaiah 40 and look to the heavens who created all these he says he who brings out the starry host one by one and calls them each by name because of his great power and mighty strength not one of them is missing why do you see o jacob and complain o israel my way is hidden from the lord my cause is disregarded by my god do you not know have you not heard the lord is the everlasting god the creator of the ends of the earth he will not grow tired and weary his understanding no one can

fathom he gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak even youths grow tired and weary and young men stumble and fall but those who hope in the lord those who wait upon the lord will renew their strength they will soar in wings like eagles they will run and not grow weary they will walk and not be faint and isaiah in that chapter he's given a promise and he passes on this promise of this place of renewed strength this place where you could say that we grow young that place that our hearts long for and john in chapter 21 of revelation 21 uh he he says as he looks into uh heaven i saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea i saw the holy city the new jerusalem coming down out of heaven from god prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband and i heard a loud voice from the throne saying look god's dwelling place is now among the people and he will dwell with them they will be his people and god himself will be with them and be their god he will wipe every tear from their eyes there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away away and these are wonderful truths

isaiah gets a glimpse and john gets a glimpse in slightly higher definition and these are the wonderful truths that this book is leading us towards this is what solomon's looking for this is what the teacher is searching for but he's not there yet in ecclesiastics he's still looking for answers and for anyone here who's looking for answers to the deep questions of life and eternity this is where we find them read the bible this is where we get the answers to the deep questions this is where we find the meaning of life and i know i'm preaching to the converted mainly on this that when you go out on monday tuesday wednesday thursday friday the best thing that you and i can say to people is it's not let me tell you about my experiences the best thing we can say to people is why don't you read the bible the best thing we can do is put god's word in their hands and say why don't you read and i'm going to pray that god will reveal himself and reveal the purpose the meaning of life to you as you read and for those who are not going to read then let's try and have the have the salt of god's word on our lips paul talks i think it's paul that talks about our conversation being seasoned with grace we have lots of things in our lips we're talking about sport we're talking about the weather we're talking about the last thing we watched on tv at the best thing we can talk about the best thing we can have our lips on our lips is the bible give people a taste of the bible because this is what their hearts are looking for they may not know it but this is what their souls what their hearts are longing for so solomon he he's asking questions about life and the next thing that he does is he goes on the search and he looks for answers and study and in our terms you could say he matriculates at the the university of jerusalem he he looks to the best minds of his day verse 12 he he devotes himself to study to getting more head knowledge to learning more and more and he excels in this verse 16 he knows more than any other teachers but quickly he concedes that even though he has this massive knowledge that he has learned through his study it yields little and he likens it to a chasing after the wind in verse 17 as we if we reflect on that for a moment uh that phrase is a phrase that encapsulates so much of what we've we've seen and witnessed and and maybe read over over even recent generations think about Dawkins think about hawking think about various philosophers that have been studied through the ages what do they do it they're chasing after the wind they're confirming the more they study the position of solomon that what is the position of solomon well the position of solomon as the book starts is that if all there is is what's under the sun everything is meaningless

[44 : 08] and life is pointless and life is pointless and that's the grim conclusion that the hawkings and the dawkins have have come to and they and they take around the lecture circuits but the message that the teacher is leading us to the message that the bible is full of is that our lives are not meaningless but we find meaning not in what we know in terms of academic credentials and intellectual knowledge we find true meaning in who we who we know we were designed to know god we were designed to come into relationship with christ that's where there's meaning think about nicodemus john chapter 3 he was he was known uh he was called israel's teacher that's how jesus addresses him he he says to him you're israel's teacher you don't have any answers to these big questions so nicodemus he's he's this well-known character he has vast religious knowledge he's a he's a top theologian but that wasn't enough and that's where we find them after dark and he's sneaking around he's trying to to get five minutes with jesus so that he can bring to jesus his deep questions he's trying to get a taste of something that his soul is looking for and he comes to to realize i think through that encounter that true meaning satisfaction life is found in knowing jesus questions about life solomon he goes looking for answers and study uh the next thing is he goes for uh looking for answers and pleasure now one of the the biggest bands in the of the last couple of

generations some of them some of the fans are probably here in this room although you won't put your hands up one of the biggest bands of the last few generations has been uh the rolling stones they were superstars in the uk uh they went and even cracked america they were they were known for their their pleasure-seeking rock-and-roll hedonistic lifestyle and yet their most famous lyric was i can't get no satisfaction i try and i try and i try but i can't get no satisfaction but that was in the 60s i was wondering this afternoon just before i came out i thought i'll google the top 20 the top 10 songs i'll see if there's anything in the top 10 that still has that same sentiment and i don't know i never checked the number i can't remember what the number was but it was certainly in the top 10 or 20 and uh there was a there was a song what caught that caught my eye and uh it was it's by a woman uh called bully eilish um whom i wouldn't recommend i don't know her stuff but i know her stuff well enough not to know to know not to go listen to it so boys and girls don't go there but the song title that's in the top charts is is the title what was i made for this is brand new right out there just now brand new

and the title of the song is what was i made for i used to float now i just fall down i used to know but i'm not sure now what was i made for what was i made for taking a drive i was an ideal looked so alive turns out i'm not real just something you paid for what was i made for because i don't know how to feel but i want to try i don't know how to feel but someday i might someday i might when did it end all the enjoyment i'm sad again don't tell my boyfriend it's not what he's made for what was i made for and so it goes on i'm causing great hilarity for the young girls who always recognize the song but i'm not about to go into a rap don't worry but you get the point back then 3 000 years ago whenever it was that ecclesiastes were written i can't remember and then in the 1960s and brand new today it's the same questions what was i made for and so solomon he says right i'm gonna i'm gonna go on a crusade i'm gonna look for some answers in pleasure he says i thought in my heart verse one of chapter two come now i will test you with pleasure to find out what's good but that also proved to be meaningless laughter i said is foolish and what is pleasure accomplished i tried cheering myself with wine and embracing folly my mind still guiding me with wisdom i wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives so the teacher in this experiment he just tries everything anything that is offered to him in terms of pleasure hedonistic pleasure he says i'll take it i'll try it and he's a rich man so he's got access to to any and all pleasures that are available at that time so he's in the comedy club he's watching the latest stand-up comedians he's trying to get a laugh it's not enough he's at the theater he he's watching critically acclaimed shows he's at the cinema he's he's catching the the new releases he's down at the pub he's filling himself with fine wine he's out at the club trying to get a buzz that will last and he's speaking to his heart all the while in verse one he's saying come now i'll test you with pleasure let's taste all these things to find out what's good and yet nothing seems to have any lasting satisfaction nothing actually has any kind of deep goodness to it that's his conclusion so where would he find something good if we just widen the angle of this and look beyond ecclesiastes where will the teacher find something that will delight his heart who can answer this well a psalmist can answer psalm 37 delight yourself in the lord and he will give you the desires of your heart psalm 34 taste and see that the lord is good that's where the answers are or we could go uh with our microphone and our tv camera to a well in samaria and look for a woman in john 4 and this woman in john 4 she's she's looking for pleasure in relationships she's had five husbands she's now working on number six and she's still thirsty she's got no pleasure nothing's been good and then one day she met jesus she listened to jesus she trusted jesus and her thirst was gone and her heart was content and she tells us plainly what the teacher in ecclesiastes is kind of subtly pointing us towards and the the lesson is that the truth the truth is that jesus is the answer it's all pointing it's all pointing it's all leading to jesus it's all leading to to tasting him to delighting in him so how have we learned this maybe there's someone here or someone watching at a distance and you're still looking for goodness satisfaction and in this world's pleasures we won't find it if we want satisfaction if we want something that is good that satisfies our souls we have to forsake the vapor-like pressures of this world of what's under the sun for lasting pleasure in jesus remember the story i've told you a few times about uh lachlan mckenzie the happy man and the wee boy down at the shore for the day with his dad his dad's working he's trying to fill his time by gathering nice shells so by the end of the day he's got two handfuls of shells but it's six o'clock and he's heading home and his tummy's rumbling and he's starving and his dad wants to call him past lachlan mckenzie's house so he goes to the door he starts the conversation you can imagine the wee boy

how long is this going to last when am i going to get home and lachlan mckenzie as he speaks to the boy's father he looks at the boy and says are you hungry and the boy says yeah i'm hungry he said hang on a second into the kitchen he went two big hunks of bread a thick layer of butter and a big dollop of jam two big jam sandwiches he comes through with hands it to the boy and the boy looks at the jam sandwiches and he looks at his hands that are full of empty shells and he looks at the jam sandwiches and he looks at the shells and then he drops the shells he takes the sand and he's satisfied and the lesson that we get in ecclesiastes and all through the bible is that we have to drop the empty shells of this world's supposed pleasure in order to take hold of the the true pleasure that is experienced through abiding in christ so he's looking for answers and pleasure and lastly uh very briefly we see solomon and he he's looking for answers in work and we'll just read through the text really here uh he's uh in the last section here he's fixated on his work and he says in verse four i undertook great projects i built houses for myself and planted vineyards i made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them i made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees so we see this booming construction business we see this expert landscape gardener he says verse seven i bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house so he's got a huge workforce he's got lots of people in his employment he's got lots of assets he's got lots of property he's got lots of capital he says in verse seven i also own more herds and flocks than anyone in jerusalem before me i am asked verse eight silver and gold for myself and the treasure of kings and provinces so he's super rich and he uses these riches to to again sample some more pleasures verse eight he says i acquired men and women singers and a harim as well the delights of the hearts of man so he's he's a man who works hard and he plays hard hard he uses his money to have continual entertainment he has this harim of supermodels running after him to indulge any desire he has and he says in verse nine i became greater by far than anyone in jerusalem before me and all this my wisdom stayed with me so he's got power he's got influence and yet he can see through it because he still has wisdom i denied nothing verse 10 my eyes desired i refused my heart no pleasure my heart took delight in all my work and this was the reward for all my labor he has it all you know he's the he's the example of the guy who has absolutely made it he's got everything there's nothing that's beyond his reach he has reputation he has kudos and notice in verse 10 he does get some joy in this he did enjoy his work he says that and he did find some degree of pleasure pleasure in working hard and playing hard there is some pleasure in sin and for a moment in verse 10 we wonder has he now found the the reason for for living has he now found the answers that he's looking for because that's what it suggests in the first half of verse 10 but um the buzz of verse 10a quickly fades and when he comes to uh verse 11 it's almost as if he's had a moment of of ecstasy and he looks at his empire and he stands back from it and he says yet verse 11 when i surveyed all that my hands had done and what i had toiled to achieve everything was meaningless a chasing after the wind nothing was gained under the sun so the teacher concludes the session by admitting that the the answer to life is not found in working for what will fade away and the words of jesus also speak into this even more clearly in in matthew 6 jesus says do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moths and vermin destroy and where thieves break in and steal but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moths and vermin do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal for where your treasure is there your heart will be also the teacher you could say indirectly and negatively tells us what jesus preaches positively and directly and that is when the heart is concerned with only what's under the sun life has no meaning that's the lesson when our hearts are concerned only with what's under the sun when our eyes are filled with with this world life has no meaning because pleasures are fleeting and treasures fade away but when our hearts are captured with what is above the sun when our hearts are given over to the lord then there is and there is real pleasure and lasting treasure in him and life has meaning so go and tell mick jagger that and write a letter to billy irish and take us into school and take us into work and let's take us into our own hearts and thank god and praise him for who he is and what he has done for us in christ and we'll pray heavenly father we we thank you for your word and we thank you even for books like ecclesiastes which are hard for us to decipher and which seem very dark when we begin to explore them but we thank you that this is a book that ultimately guides us from the darkness to the light that is found only in christ help us to help us to use this book even to to diagnose the problems in our own lives because we confess lord that often we are found chasing this world's pleasures and treasures often we are found uh pursuing what does not satisfy we try the broken systems and yet we have to learn

the lesson over and over again that they they fail because none but christ can satisfy so enable us we pray to to live that out day by day and to be thankful for every good gift that you allow us to have to be thankful for work to be thankful for the the material things that you allow us to have on our hands for the period but may none of us make these material things ultimate things help us we pray to taste and see that the lord is good to delight our souls in him and to be thankful for all the the good gifts that you allow us to have as we travel through time and help us we pray also as we go from this place into a world that needs to hear the message of the book of ecclesiastes help us to tell it both in the words that we say and in the lives that we live and we pray all this in jesus name and for his sake amen we'll sing to finish uh the words of sam not sam but mission praise 37 mission praise 37 as the deer pants for the water so my soul longs after you you as the deer pants for the water so my soul longs after you you you alone are my heart's desire and i long to worship you

[64 : 18] you you alone are my heart's desire and i long to worship you you i want you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you are my heart's desire and I long to worship you you're my friend and you're my brother even though you are a king

I love you more than any other so much more than anything you alone are my strength my shield to you alone may my strength heal you alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship you and I may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all now and forevermore Amen Amen Amen