

“How to Deal with Life When All Hevel Breaks Loose” // Ecclesiastes 1:1–3, 12:13–14

So, last week we finished up all of our spring message series--the Life of David and then our Ethnic Unity series, and we don't start our summer series until next week, so we had a couple of loner weeks here at the end of May in a kind of awkward sermon “no man's land”--a couple of weeks to kill, if you will. So, Bryan and I, who were slated to preach these weeks, decided that we would just preach what was on our hearts.

And I had a message all picked out, but after hearing Pastor Bryan's message last week, and feeling like it really was a word for our church, I wanted to build off of it this week.

If you weren't here, Pastor Bryan preached a word to those of us who feel disappointed with God. And I think there's a lot of us, if we were honest, in that category--confused as to why our lives have taken some of the turns that it's taken; why this or that thing did or didn't happen. It seemed like what you were asking of God, or expecting of him, was reasonable, and if God really loved you as much as he says he does, surely he would have come through for you. But you've been left waiting, disappointed, and you wonder, “Where IS God? Is he even there?” “Why doesn't he hear me?”

How many of you have been there--or maybe are there now? Look around, saints--this is a common experience of believers.

It's encouraging to me that the majority of our Bible was written by people who were waiting for God--people who believed God was there and that he was good, but waiting on him to do something and wondering why he delayed.

So, I want to come at this question from another angle by exploring one of my favorite Old Testament books, the book of Ecclesiastes--a book that, perhaps more than any other, embraces, head-on, the disappointments and chaos of life. The writer of Ecclesiastes puts into words things you've probably thought but were scared to say out loud. *Some of you are not going to believe the things you're going to hear today!*

Open your Bibles to...

I love this book so much--but if you don't understand what the author is doing, it might be the most confusing book in the Bible. How many of you have read through the book of Ecclesiastes? It's filled with all kinds of **weird insights and statements that we just don't know what to do with. Statements like:**

- **Ecc 9:2, Everything ends the same for everyone: The same fate awaits the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad...** I mean, that's not exactly the message we usually preach in church, is it?
- Or, some really strange advice, like **(Ecc 7:16) “Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you wear yourself out?”** IOW, “Calm down already with all the excessive spirituality and the Bible study.”

- Plus, just some odd, random advice: **Ecc 9:8, “Wear fine clothes, with a splash of cologne!”** **Granted, I know some single guys** who need to hear that--that’s a WORD for you today--but is that important enough to include in the Bible?
- **And then verses you just don’t know what to do with:** **Ecc 10:19, “Wine makes life happy, and money is the answer for everything.”** *And all God’s people said... WHUTTTT?*
- **Or verses where you are not quite sure** what point is being made: **Ecc 11:3, “If a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie.”** (Mmmm... Well, thank you, Captain Obvious! You could have at least told us whether it makes a sound or not.)
- **And finally some really politically incorrect verses like this one:** **Ecc 7:28, “I found one upright man among a thousand... ...but not one upright woman among them all.”** (Occasionally when I’m at a place I’ll get asked to do a book signing, I’ll include verse references in my signature (verses that inspired the book). I almost always include 1 like this, so when they look it up later they’re confused.

So, here’s the most important ground rule in understanding this enigmatic book:

- **Ecclesiastes has two voices--one serves as basically the plaintiff,** or the complainer, if you will, who makes observations about the absurdity of life. Basically, he’s venting--he’s complaining. (He’s the one making most of those strange observations. These are not heaven’s final verdicts; it’s a guy venting his feelings.)
- **The second voice is that of a narrator,** who breaks in every once in a while to offer the divine perspective on things and offer counsel. (Basically, imagine this book as a stage play where you got one guy articulating thoughts everyone in the audience resonates with (but was afraid to say out loud), and then a narrator on the other side who steps in every once in a while to offer correction and draw some lessons.)
- **The confusing thing is that the writer doesn’t clearly identify in the script when you go from one voice to the other--**you are supposed to figure that out from the context. Which I guess was a little clearer when you read it in Hebrew, but it’s confusing for us.
- **Scholars believe that both voices are most likely Solomon. Solomon plays both plaintiff and interpreter in this.**
- And who was Solomon, you ask? Solomon was Israel’s most successful King. He was the son of David, and he enjoyed seemingly endless wealth, power, women and a list of accomplishments anybody would be proud of. And in this book he explains that in spite of his success, life felt to him like one big disappointment.

Let’s begin in vs. 1 The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem. ²“Absolute futility,” says the Teacher. “Absolute futility. Everything is futile.” ³What does a person gain for all his efforts that he labors at under the sun?

That phrase, “*absolute futility*,” is used 38 times throughout this book, and it’s the theme of the whole book.

- **Some translations render this word as “meaningless” or “empty” or, in the KJV, “vanity,”-- vanity, vanity, all is vanity.** And scholars say it means a little bit of all of those but is not FULLY captured by any of them; it is a tough word to translate.
- The Hebrew is “hevel,”—say it with me now, HEVEL—and it literally means vapor, or smoke. Like a CLOUD. Scholars say the best way to understand the word is to think about the word-picture.
 - You know how when you were a kid **the clouds looked like big gigantic, comfy pillows** that you could bounce around on or curl up in? I remember as a kid, on my first airplane flight, how disappointed I was when we passed through the clouds and you could really see that there’s nothing to even those fullest-looking clouds. If you were falling, you wouldn’t hit the clouds like a nice, fluffy pillow, you pass through even the thickest clouds like they aren’t even there.

- **In fact, how many of you have gone skydiving?** Skydiving, I think I've told you, is one of 4 things in my life that has fully lived up to expectations... 1. Knowing Jesus. 2. Getting married and having kids (was both better and more challenging than I ever realized); 3. Going to Kauai, Hawaii, and 4. Skydiving--those four fully lived up to or exceeded my expectations. For everything else, the expectation was greater than the experience.
 - **One of the best parts of skydiving** is when you pass through a cloud. That cloud looks so solid and substantive from the outside, but it isn't. You pass through like air. It's full of nothing. HEVEL.
- **That's what life is like, Solomon says.** It looks so big and inviting from the outside, but when you press into it, you find out it is full of nothing; it is empty. **One scholar says the best translation is "absurd."**
- Life often feels absurd--even when you are walking with God. Chaotic. Fleeting. **Disappointing.**

Solomon points out 5 different absurdities throughout this book:

Absurdity #1. Success leaves you hollow

Ecclesiastes 2:10–11: "And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure..." Solomon had succeeded in just about every way a person would want to succeed. He had 700 wives and 300 concubines. He was multi-talented, well-read; he was popular; he sat on top of a thriving kingdom; he wrote multiple NYT bestselling books on several different subjects; he wrote a couple of stage-plays; he was one of the most popular song-writers of his day. He built the most impressive temple the world had ever seen and led Israel in a national revival. He was basically Mark Cuban, Brene Brown, Malcolm Gladwell, Nicolas Cage, Ronald Reagan, Taylor Swift, and the Dos Equis "World's Most Interesting Man" all mixed into one. "Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was useless and like striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun."

- Solomon got to the top of every chart you'd ever want to get to and said, "It's all disappointing. It's all *hevel*." Solomon is basically the CEO in Forbes who I've told you about that says, "I spent my whole life climbing the ladder of success only to find out when I got to the top that it was leaning against the wrong building!"

Absurdity #1 is that those people who are most successful--those who have obtained all the things we've ever wanted to obtain--say that success is not what any of us think it is. We see multiple attestations to this in our world today, don't we?

- I think of **comedian Jim Carrey** who said, "I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it's not the answer."
- Or **Katy Perry** who said a couple of years ago on Instagram: "100 million digital singles and still insecure."
- It's like **Oscar Wilde** famously said, "In this world there are only two tragedies. One is not getting what you want; the other is getting it."

Which leads me to absurdity #2...

Absurdity #2. "Doing the right thing" doesn't always lead to blessing

In chapter 9:13–17 Solomon tells the story of a poor man who through his wise and shrewd behavior uncovers a plot against the city; he acts boldly and heroically and saves the city... but some rich, spoiled people in the city figure out a way to steal his credit for themselves by manipulating the media. In the end the rich manipulators are honored, and the poor man's heroism is ignored. And the writer of Ecclesiastes says, "Where is the justice in that?"

- **Haven't you had the experience** of doing the right thing and not being rewarded for it? Even worse, not only are you not rewarded, you watch someone who did the wrong actually get the reward!

- o **One of my jobs in college was** pushing credit cards outside of one of the department stores in Crabtree Valley Mall. **I had a lot of bad jobs in college--this one was probably the worst.** People would walk by and we'd try to get them to sign up for a credit card by offering them a free gift--a stuffed animal or a beer can koozie or some other kind of kitsch. That's right... I was *that guy*. And, here's the thing: I was pretty good at it (I could get their attention, get them to stop)... Well, my boss came to me one day and said, "Hey, your numbers are spectacular, you're one of our best employees, and he gave me a bonus for the week... but he said, "You're not getting them to sign up for the 'insurance,'" which basically was this big scam where they agreed to a monthly premium whether they used the card or not, and he wanted me to get them to just check the box without telling them what it was because if you explained to them what they were signing up for, they'd always say 'no.' So, he said, don't tell them, just tell them to check that box when they sign, or you do it for them. Well, that didn't feel right, so I just didn't do it. My numbers stayed spectacular, but eventually I was let go. Here was the thing. I know Proverbs 28:25, which says, "The wicked will be brought to shame, the one who honors God will prosper" but that's not what I experienced. The wicked, the dishonest, weren't brought to shame, they were rewarded. It was like there was a glitch in the system. I was supposed to be like Daniel—I'd make the hard, virtuous decision and I would end up with even greater sales and the company would promote me like Daniel.
- o **Or, here's another one from a couple of weeks ago: Like many of you,** I've become a raging Canes' fan. A Caniac. A member of that elite "Bunch of Jerks." And some of you know that several of the players come to our church. One of the team leaders, Jaccob Slavin, is a spiritual leader both on and off the ice. Last year he got the Lady Byng Trophy, which is awarded annually to the NHL player who best combines sportsmanship, gentlemanly conduct and ability. Jaccob was awarded that because of his incredible generosity and leadership both on and off the court. Even though he's on the ice nearly constantly, in 52 games he only got one, minor penalty. Well, in the last game this season, the one that put the Canes out of the tournament, in the first period a player for the Florida Panthers comes out of nowhere and puts a hit on Jaccob that looked pretty illegal, giving Jaccob a concussion and puts him out of the game. But instead of Florida getting a penalty, the Canes were given one, which resulted in a power play that the Panthers scored on, which ultimately led to them losing and the Canes being eliminated from the tournament. And I'm watching this saying, "I know this is just hockey, but where is the justice of God in this? I mean, Florida plays dirty throughout the whole series and the one guy who is known across the league for not playing dirty is the one who gets put out of the game with a concussion and his team loses... which is fine if God empowers them to turn it around later in a miraculous comeback but that's not what happened. They just lost and went home. Where is the justice of God in that?"
- o If you've been to the PNC arena, when the other team gets a penalty, all the Canes fans yell in unison, "Cheaters. Never. Win," which is basically a summary of Proverbs 26:27. And yet, in this situation, it sure looked like the cheaters won.

You've had these situations, I know you have. Where you or somebody you knew did the right thing and instead of being rewarded for it they were *punished*. And you think, "Was God just asleep during that one?" And all you can say is, **What the *hevel* is going on?**

Similarly,

Absurdity #3. Even the soundest business wisdom sometimes fails us.

"Again I saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, or the battle to the strong, or bread to the wise, or riches to the discerning, or favor to the skillful; rather, time and chance happen to all of them." (9:11)

- Sometimes you do everything right: you do all your homework, all the research, you put in the hours, implement the latest and best wisdom--and you fail. And again, even worse, you see someone who doesn't do any of those things--through sheer luck stumbles into the success you worked so hard for.
- You did everything right, and you were more talented--but their career took off and yours floundered.
- You parented your kid right but he rebelled. You read to him at night before bed. You sent him off to Summit Student Camp every summer and made sure church was a priority in your family. Another parent mostly ignored their kid and spent each weekend at the lake and their kid turned out awesome.
- You were fastidious about your health but you're the one with all the medical issues; meanwhile, your friend chain smokes and pours bacon grease on their food and they are doing triathlons into their 80s. And it doesn't feel fair.

Absurdity #4. Worldly justice systems often fail us

"There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: the righteous who get what the wicked deserve, and the wicked who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, causes life to feel meaningless." (8:14)

- We all see this. It's one of the most frustrating and infuriating experiences.
- Powerful people get away with injustice. Somebody manipulates the court system. Or hides evidence and gets away with it.
- When I was SBC President, one of the things we most worked on was improving the reporting and prosecution processes for victims of sexual abuse. It blew my mind and staggered me to learn that out of every 1000 sexual assaults, only 25 offenders will ever be convicted.¹ The average male abuser has 150 victims; he usually gets prosecuted for 1. Where is the justice in that?
- Listen, I am so grateful for our U.S. justice system. I think it's one of the best in the world, but worldly justice systems will always eventually fail us.
- And some of you have been the victim of this. I know many of my friends of color feel this very personally. Or maybe for you it was a spouse who wronged you. You weren't prepared for what they were going to bring into divorce court and you lost big. They kept you from having access to your kids and it wasn't right.
- Or, you really got wronged at your workplace but you didn't have the resources to fight them--so big business won and you got trampled on.
- And you say, "It's just not right."

Absurdity #5. Our legacies might get (and will likely be!) squandered.

(2:18–19) "I hated all my work that I labored at under the sun because I must leave it to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will take over all my work that I labored at skillfully under the sun. This too is futile."

- IOW, "You can toil faithfully and build great work and leave it to the next generation only to have them screw it all up." We've seen this happen throughout history with political dynasties, personal fortunes, family names, and great businesses. Gen 1 builds it; Gens 2 and 3 tank it. Studies show that's the norm! So, you think, I'm building something that will change the world and that will bless not only my children but my grandchildren's grandchildren.
- I hear so many people talk about building their businesses or their churches and leaving them to the next generation, and that's admirable, and we should think about that and sometimes it works--but sometimes, Solomon says, despite your best efforts, the opposite happens. You hand it to a fool who squanders it.

¹ RAINN

- Sometimes, ironically, your success is the very thing that spoils them. You intended for all your work to give them a leg up; something to build on; instead it turns them into spoiled trust fund kids who fail to develop a good work ethic.
- I read this parenting book recently called *The Price of Privilege* and it basically said that despite all the good intentions so many of us have in setting our kids up for success, a lot of our efforts end up having the opposite effect. *The Price of Privilege*: studies show that our kids, who grow up in privilege, pay a pretty steep price in their development and we should be aware of that.
- This is not saying you should never think about succession plans or try to provide benefits for your kids, just that there are no guarantees. “Who knows,” Solomon says, “whether the one who comes after me will be wise or a fool?” You can’t control that!
- Listen: **I want to pastor The Summit Church for the next 20 years and then leave it to a new pastor who has more gifting and talent than I do.** That’s my plan. But who knows? Maybe that guy will turn out to be a fool. If so... sorry.

So, there you have **5 absurdities**: **1. Success often leaves you hollow**; **2. Doing the right thing doesn’t always lead to blessing**; **3. Even the soundest business wisdom sometimes fails**; **4. worldly justice systems will often fail us**; and **5. Our legacies might get (and will likely be) squandered**. We’ve all had these observations, even if we have been afraid to articulate them, haven’t we? And all we can say is, *“What. The. Hevel. is going on?”*

You are like, **“Well, this is the worst message I’ve ever heard. When can Pastor Bryan preach again?”**

So, what does all this mean? And how are we supposed to live in light of these absurdities?

Great question. These **5 absurdities are matched by 5 golden truths**, and they are all tucked into the final chapter of Ecclesiastes. Here’s what Solomon, now speaking as the divine narrator, says in **12:13–14**: **“Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter (this is the point, the one takeaway from the whole book. The reason Solomon wrote this book was to get you to this): Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.”**

Golden Truth #1: God’s story will turn out exactly as planned.

- One of the phrases the narrator uses throughout this book is the phrase **“under the sun”**. **He uses it a total of 29x!** All these bleak observations only take into account what life looks like “under the sun.” You need a perspective “over the sun.” **And what perspective is ‘over the sun’?** Well, that’s heaven’s perspective.
- **And what is heaven’s perspective?** Heaven’s perspective is that while your story may not turn out exactly as you hoped, God’s will, and if you are a Christian, you get the privilege of your story being wrapped up in his.
- You say, “Well, what comfort is that to me, if God’s plans succeed but I personally fail? What benefit is that to me?” It’s because when you become a Christian, your story gets swallowed up in God’s story. I’ve often compared it to resigning your role as main character in a movie that’s all about you and taking up a role as a minor character, supporting cast, in a movie about Jesus.
 - For example, I would guess that for 97% of you, the name Biggs Darklighter has no meaning whatsoever. Unless you are a devoted Star Wars fan—the kind who owns your own light-saber and dressed up as a extra-terrestrial to go see the final movies, you probably don’t know that Biggs was an X-Wing pilot in the first Star Wars film, *A New Hope*, that came out in 1977. Biggs was a very talented and very loyal X-wing pilot who used his X-wing to shield Luke Skywalker from getting shot by Darth Vader’s Tie-fighter. Because he shielded Luke at just the right moment, Luke could fire the shot that

destroyed the first Death Star. We don't know that much about Biggs—he obviously had spent a life training to be a good pilot, but he comes onto the scene for just a moment to sacrifice himself—but without him, the whole Star Wars saga—all 538 movies--would never have gotten off the ground. No successful rebellion, no reunion with Yoda, no Rey or Finn or Poe or redemption of Kylo, no happy ending in a galaxy far, far away. Yet, those of you who watched all of the Star Wars movies got to experience all of those things because of an X-wing fighter pilot named Biggs Darklighter. And yet, you've never probably heard of him. Why? Because Star Wars is about Luke, not Biggs. Luke is the main character. And how Biggs' personal story ends is less important than how the whole story ends.

- And my guess is that if we could talk to Biggs (which we can't, because—spoiler alert—he died, and—extra spoiler alert—Stars Wars isn't real), he would probably say that he doesn't care that we don't know about him, because his small sliver of the story successfully served the purposes of the Rebellion. And that means Biggs gets to stand on the stage at the end and take a bow with Luke and Leia and Poe and Kylo and the redeemed Darth Vader and everyone else. He gets to share in the victory of the Star Wars story. That story is his story.
- Part of becoming a Christian means resigning your role as the main character in a movie about you and taking up a supporting role in a movie about Jesus. And here's why that's awesome. I know how the story of Jesus is going to turn out, and I know that in heaven, when those credits start to roll at the end of Jesus' story, and that whole angelic audience rises to their feet to stand and cheer, I get to stand up there with the cast and take a bow. Because my story is Jesus' eternal story, and I get to be part of it, and share in its victories..
- **And when we get there, we will see that despite all the difficult and disappointing things that happened in my life, not one thread was out of place.**
 - I've compared it to one of the tapestries you see at the Biltmore mansion or one of those old European castles--where if you look on the backside... One day God will flip over the tapestry of world history and I'll see that not one thread was out of place; it was all woven together in a beautiful picture of Jesus.
 - If you have submitted yourself to Jesus, every chaotic thread in your life is doing one of two things--weaving Jesus' glory into the world or weaving Jesus into you. And we know that all things are working together for good to them that love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.
 - And in that moment, when death is swallowed up in victory and God flips over the tapestry, you'll see that not one thread was out of place, and you'll see that every disappointing thing in your life served his eternal purpose.

Golden Truth #2: Proverbs are generally true, not iron-clad promises.

You say, what about all those promises in Proverbs that if I do things God's way, I will be blessed? For example,

- Or **Prov 6:6** which says **"Work hard like the ant and save money like the beaver and you'll have lifelong riches that you'll be able to leave to your children."**²
- Or **Prov 22:6**, **"Raise up a child in the way he should go, and when he's old he will not depart from it."**

But sometimes, as we pointed out, you do all those things and things don't work out: the hevel happens.

² Prov 6:6; 19:4-5, 13:22

Here's the thing: Proverbs are general principles about how life works. But they are not promises. So, live by the Proverbs. You'll be far more successful if you do than if you don't. They are by far the best way to blessing and flourishing—and the most guaranteed way to honor God. But don't turn them into something they are not. They are not promises. Think about it: Jesus fully obeyed all the principles of Proverbs, and yet he died a tortured death on the cross, seemingly abandoned by God and man.

Ecclesiastes comes **right after the book of Proverbs in your Bible**, which is intentional—they are to be read together. Obey the principles of Proverbs. They are the best way to blessing and flourishing. But then Ecclesiastes shows you sometimes, even after you've done that, the hevel happens, and when it does, you can trust God. Fear God (that means 'trust him'), and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

Golden truth #3: Final judgment is the one certain thing.

- One thing you can be very certain of in this very uncertain world, Solomon says, is that you will stand before your Creator one day and give an account.
- And thus, it is the height of folly, Solomon says, not to live with that awareness. You have almost no other guarantees, but the one thing you are guaranteed of is that you will stand before God.
- I can't promise that if you work hard and do everything right and put God first your life will be an unvarnished success. "Time and chance happen to all" of us. But I can promise you that one day you will stand before God and answer for how diligently you sought out his will for your life and lived it all. "So this is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil."
- One thing is certain: *"Only one life to live, 'twill soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last."*

Golden Truth #4: Find happiness in the present, not the future.

This one is really practical. I love this one. Solomon explains that many of us always assume that happiness is just ahead of us.

- **Looking back, I realize my dilemma growing up** has been that whatever state I am in, I always assume the happiness I crave is just around the corner, right after I get through this chapter--when I was a kid, I thought it would be when I was in high school and could drive and had some freedom; then, when in high school, when I was in college, out on my own; when I was single, I assumed it would be when I had a girlfriend; after I started to date Veronica, I assumed the fullness of happiness would be when we got married; then, after marriage, I assumed it would be when we had kids; then, now, when we get those kids out of the house. When I was starting out in my job I assumed I'd be happy when I had a successful career and a little money in the bank; or, now that we're there, it's when I retire and don't have to work and I can enjoy what I've saved. The point is, no matter what stage I'm in, the fulness of happiness is always just on the other side. It's like **Pascal** said: For many of us, **We never live, but we only hope to live; we are always preparing to be happy but never are."**
- **But the truth is, if you're not happy now, there's no future state that is going to give it to you, and that's because happiness is not found in a change of circumstances.** You see, Jesus said in John 17:3... "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." Eternal life (the full life, the abundant life) is not something you enter into later; it's something available to you now. And it's found in knowing God.
- And that means, if you're not experiencing that kind of fullness, or happiness, now, it's not a change of circumstance that will give you that. It's something in your relationship with God that needs to change.

- There's some of you who need to realize that the happiness you are looking for is not out there, in that next stage. That girlfriend. That higher income level. That new status. It's in Jesus.
- And when you experience that, you can start to enjoy the different seasons of life. Don't be like me, who has rushed through all these seasons to get to this supposed happiness in the next one. It's not there. Learn to find happiness in Jesus now, and enjoy the unique blessings of whatever season you are in. I've always been in such desperation to get to the next stage that I've rushed through some of the greatest chapters of my life and failed to enjoy those unique blessings available to me in each one. The blessings of being single and unencumbered. The blessing of being married without kids. Even the blessing of having to really trust God with our finances because things were so tight.
- **The blessing of having young kids at home**--the sweetness of those moments that you just can't get back. You get to 50 years old and you look back at having young kids at home and say, *"Man, those were great days. I wish I'd taken time to enjoy them more... and focused more on what God was doing in my life in the moment."* I think of the wise words of St. Bernard here, and by "St. Bernard" I mean **Andy Bernard on the last episode of *The Office***, **"I wish there was a way to know you were living in the "the good ol' days" before they pass you by."**
- **Martin Luther said:** *"Only 2 days matter on the Christian's calendar: This day, and that day."*
 - That day--the day you stand before God.
 - "This day"--the day God has you in right now, that you should live to the full, enjoy him in, and soak the blessings out of.

Last one. **Golden Truth #5. Don't let the uncertainty of life keep you from obeying God.**

11:4 One who watches the wind will not sow, and the one who looks at the clouds will not reap... (Here you have a farmer who never sows his seed because he feels the uncertainty of things like the weather. "What if it doesn't rain? What if there is a sandstorm? Or an earthquake? Or an unexpected meteor shower?")

Throughout Ecclesiastes, the writer acknowledges that though we cannot control things, and there are few if any guarantees, he says, vs. 6: **In the morning sow your seed, and at evening do not let your hand rest, because you don't know which will succeed, whether one or the other.** (11:6)

- In other words, "Don't let the uncertainty of life and the possibility of failure paralyze you!" Live by wisdom and take appropriate risks!
- There are some of you who, because of the uncertainty in life, never really get going.
- **Scripture commends those who take a risk on God's faithfulness.** In Jesus' famous parable of the talents, the Master rewarded the ones who took a risk... they didn't know if their investment would turn out. But the Master commended them for taking the risk.
- The one he condemned was the one who let the uncertainty of life keep him from obedience.
- So, start that business. Invest that money. Take bold steps in that ministry. Reach out to that person. Give away that money. Ask her out! Whatever God has put in your heart, do it... and trust that God commends the risk and will take care of you in it.

Listen, God doesn't promise to make everything smooth sailing, but he DOES promise to take care of you in all the uncertainty! I'm talking about promises like Ps. 37:25 (and btw, unlike Proverbs, these are actual promises!)--Ps 37:25 says, "I have never seen the righteous go hungry" Phil 4:19, "My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in Christ Jesus" and Heb 13:5, "I will never leave you or forsake you."

So, “fear God and keep his commandments” means “live by wisdom and take bold, appropriate risks for God’s kingdom, trusting that he will take care of you in success or failure!”

The question Ecclesiastes really asks is this: Can you trust this God with your whole life in this hevel of a world we call home? You should. He’s the one thing in this uncertain world you can hold on to. And how do you know that? Well, this God was the one who went to a cross to rescue you when you were running away from him. And now I say, “Well, if Jesus wouldn’t abandon me at the cross, when my disappointment and betrayal of him were at their height, then I know he won’t abandon me now!”

This is a God you can pin all your hopes on. No, we don’t have guarantees about how everything will turn out “under the sun”--in this church, in my marriage, with my kids, or in my health. But I know whom I have believed, and I’m convinced that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day. He’s good and I can trust him. He is a tender Savior who weeps with me in my pain and would never turn his back on me even when anybody else would have. That means I can trust him with my marriage and my family and job and anything else that is important to me. I can trust that he is a good God with good intentions for me and that I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. I know whom I have believed in, and am persuaded that he will keep that which I have committed to him against that day!

You see, here’s how to read Ecclesiastes from the perspective of the NT: Jesus perfectly practiced the principles of Proverbs and yet he still experienced all the hevel that came from living in a fallen world. But he did that so he could promise me that he will bring resurrection and good out of all the hevel I am going through now. Life is not meaningless. There is perfect justice.

I mean, what greater assurance is there that God’s story will turn out exactly as planned than when Jesus overcame death and walked out of the grave? Where has there ever been a more potent picture of the fact that justice will prevail than when righteousness incarnated walked victorious out of the tomb?

Can we trust this God? The resurrection is the resounding YES to that question.

I mean, it’s like Paul said in Romans: “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

That’s a God I can trust in this *hevel of uncertainty* we call “life under the sun.” In fact, he’s the only thing worth trusting in this life. **So that’s my question:** Have you built your life on the rock? Or are you building it on the shifting sands of hevel? Are you reaching out for him, or are you still grasping at the vapor?

God invites you to come to him and build your life on him. It starts by simple repentance and faith... giving your life to Jesus, which means...