

# 13. The Way of Venturesome Joy in Life

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 17 June 2007

Preacher: William Philip

[ 0 : 00 ] If you would, to Ecclesiastes and to the passages we read, page 559 in the Church Bibles. And as we'll see, it's all about the way of venturesome joy in life.

We're coming to the end of our studies in this remarkable book, and it has been a book of many puzzles, and yet full of many rich and powerful lessons for us, hasn't it?

Think back to the early chapters of the book, where there's the outline of the essential futility of life in a world that is vain, that is hevel, ephemeral, fleeting, like a vapor.

What can man gain, says the preacher, by all his toil under the sun? And the answer to that comes back repeatedly, nothing. There is no permanent gain in the passing world, there can't be.

And yet amid the futility of the endless cycles of nature, where there is nothing new under the sun, there are hints of something above and beyond.

[ 1 : 10 ] The preacher tells us that we sense it inside, where God has put eternity into our hearts. There is a time also, says the preacher, for the judgment of all things.

And that fact gives us a shaft of light and a perspective on life. And in the following chapters we've seen, he relentlessly teaches us about the harsh realities of life in this world, as they really are. In a world governed by vanity, by enigmas, by bafflement. It's a world, he says to us, where wisdom is better than folly. And yet in the end, both the wise and the foolish go to the same place, back to the dust of the earth.

And where often in life it does seem to us, doesn't it, that the wicked get the best deal in life. But again, there's a sense of ultimate purpose that breaks through.

God is sovereign. As we saw in chapter 9, everything is in the hand of God. And therefore, real wisdom comes in listening to and heeding his words of wisdom.

[ 2 : 20 ] Wisdom is better than might, says the preacher, even though those words are unheard, even though they're despised, rejected. And so there's a relentless optimism that keeps coming through this book.

As the preacher again and again, despite all the apparent futility of the world round about us, despite its bondage to decay, its vexation, its vanity, he can say to us, be joyful.

I commend joy, he says, all the days of this fleeting life on earth. Believing joy is possible in the baffling world that we live in for God's people.

Go, he says, eat your bread, drink your wine with joy. That's what God wants of you. Enjoy, wife, with the life you love. There's venturesome joy to be had on life's journey.

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might. That's the way God wants us to live. And these vignettes of glorious belief have given an irrepressible sense of joy to this book.

[ 3 : 30 ] And now as we come to the very end, to the climax of his argument, the preacher, as it were, changes up a gear. He says in verse 13 of chapter 12, this is the end of the matter.

Everything's been heard. We're coming to the climax. And I'm going to sum it up for you. It all amounts to this. Fear God and keep his commandments. For that is the whole of the duty of man.

That's what it means to be human. In the end, that's what it's all about, he's saying. To know life in all its fullness. To know life as God means it to be. As God purposes it to be.

Is summed up by that. Fear him and keep his commands. Listen to him. And life like that and lived like that can face death and judgment with a steady eye.

To live like that is the only way to live in our world that is fleeting, that is puzzling and painful. And not be overwhelmed by it. Not destroyed by it. And the only way to face eternity that is rooted deep within our souls is to live like this.

[ 4 : 38 ] Fearing God and honoring him. But what does that mean in practice? What is the life that fulfills the whole calling and purpose of humanity?

In down to earth terms. Well that's what these last two chapters of Ecclesiastes are all about. That's what they encapsulate for us. And I want us to see this morning just what an upbeat picture, what a positive and rich view of life is encapsulated by the preacher.

Remember what Jesus said. I have come that they might have life and have it in abundance. And that is exactly the life that the preacher is laying out for us here in chapter 11 and 12 of this book. It's a life, he says, of trusting God, of rejoicing in God, of honoring God, and of listening to God. So look first at chapter 11 verses 1 to 6.

The preacher says to us in these verses, Trust God. Live boldly, he says. Recognize God's sovereign providence over your life and be venturesome now wherever he gives you opportunity. [ 5 : 47 ] These verses are an unmistakable picture of a free and unfettered and liberated existence, aren't they? Enthusiastic and zealous, living life to the full.

Verse 1, cast your bread upon the waters, venture out boldly. Verse 2, give a portion, not just to one or two, but to seven or eight. Verse 6, get out and sow your seed in the morning and the evening. That is every opportunity you have. Do you see? And do you see also that in each case, it is ignorance of the future and uncertainty about the world that is the spur to action, not certainty and control of the world.

See, four times in these verses, he points up our ignorance and our impotence to control our destiny. And that's what's emphasized as the reason that we should venture out in faith. Do you see? Give, he says, verse 2, because you don't know what disaster may come upon you. Verse 5, you can't fathom the work of God.

[ 6 : 52 ] You do not know. Verse 6, you do not know what way will prosper. So go at life with all your might. See, life is full of unknowns.

But there is one certainty for the Christian believer. And that is that it is God who makes everything. And therefore, it's God who controls everything. And we can trust God. And therefore, we can and we must seize the day of opportunity when he gives it to us.

Launch out in life confidently. Creatively. To live life to the full as he's given it to us. Now, the scholars discuss the precise details of these images, but the main point is surely absolutely clear, isn't it?

It's all about a whole approach to looking at life with a right attitude, with an attitude of total trust in a sovereign God. And there are so many things, aren't there, in life that we just don't know, we can't understand, we can't control.

Like the mystery in verse 5 of the very spark of life itself. We just don't know. But the point is, we're not to let life's mysteries and perplexities and uncertainties paralyze us into timidity and into super caution.

[ 8 : 08 ] It's quite the reverse. These are to be the very things that spur us on into ventures and boldness, says the preacher. Disaster may come, yes, says verse 2, but that's why you give a portion widely.

Uncertainty is all around us, says verse 6, but that's why you sow anywhere and everywhere all the time. The basic picture here does seem to come from trade and from commerce.

Well, we all know that, don't we? Nothing ventured, nothing gained in business. It's never the person who's always waiting for ideal circumstances for things to come around.

It's never the person who's waiting for the wind who's going to be a successful entrepreneur, is it? You don't build a great business by spending all your time worrying so much about interest rates and inflation and all of these things that you never actually start making your product and selling it. You'll never make a profit that way, will you? He who regards the clouds says the preacher will not reap. And so it is with the whole attitude to the whole of life. Think about it in spiritual terms.

[ 9 : 15 ] There are some Christians who seem to be so paralyzed by life. They can't make decisions. They can't commit to anything. They can't take any decisive steps at all in any direction about their career or their relationships or their church service, whatever it is, because they demand certainty.

They need control. They want to be able to see exactly how it's going to work out before they set a foot on the threshold. Now, friends, that is the way of paralysis because you can't have that in life. You just can't, ever. You can't control the wind. You can't control the weather. These just aren't ours to control. Verse 3, if the clouds are full of rain, it's going to rain.

Nothing you can do about it. If the tree's falling in the north or in the south, it's going to fall and lie where it is. You just have to accept it. And so it is, says verse 5, with God.

You don't know the works of God. He is sovereign. And the secret things, as we saw last time, belong to Him and not to us. We are not God. That's so hard, isn't it, for some of us to really take to heart because we want control.

[10:28] We want to know everything about how our life's going to turn out. But the Bible says that's wanting to be God. And that's the essence of sin.

Been so from Adam and Eve onwards, wasn't it? We'll be as God. We'll have the knowledge of good and evil if we grasp at this fruit. But no, says the preacher, you need to recognize that God is sovereign and you need to trust Him.

Trust His wise and loving providence over everything, over all of life and over your life, in every intimate detail. Because it's when you do that that you can live boldly and fearlessly.

It's when you do that that you can have a fruitful life. And that's God's command for your life. Verse 6, Trust God and get on with your life. Sow your seed. Remember chapter 10, verse 9, Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.

Be bold, be venturesome. Trust God and His sovereign providence. But what if it doesn't work out, we say? We'll wait till we're sure.

[11:37] We need a sign. We need a text. We need a sense of peace about a decision. Well, says God, you might wait forever. The world may never change the way that you want it to.

And you'll never reap. If you're a Christian who's paralyzed often in all sorts of choices and issues of guidance and so on, then this is a real word for you, my friend.

It's not more text that you need. It's more trust in God. Cast your bread upon the waters. Sow your seed. For you do not know. But you can trust a sovereign God.

Now, don't misunderstand. The preacher's not saying we're to be reckless. Verse 2 probably does refer to spreading risk. You give to 7 or 8. In other words, you don't put all your eggs in one basket. Because there are uncertainties in life. And yes, there is, of course, room for prudence. But that is very different from paralysis. And that's a lesson we need very much, I think, in the church.

[12:44] In this country, don't we? Such a feature of church life in our land so often that we're marked by fear and paralysis. We can't be certain about what might happen if we do something, so we do nothing.

We're so afraid of failure. We're always waiting for the wind, so we're never sowing, and that's why we're never reaping. And the same can be so true of our personal life, can't it?

Yet the truth is, so often, the reason for paralysis, for defensive living, for protecting ourselves is because our horizons are actually so small. We're fixated by this world alone.

We are living, seeking for profit under the sun. But the preacher keeps telling us in this book that is a futile exercise. We need to see above and beyond the sun.

We need to live in the light of eternity, the eternal truth that's in our hearts. And that alone is the thing that can give perspective to this world. It's only when that's a reality that we can be released from the bondage of earthbound existence for the bold and venturesome living of real life.

[13:56] Life that's lived for the certainty of the lasting treasure, the solid joys. Not for the uncertainty of the fleeting gains of this life under the sun where moth and rust destroy and decay.

But that's the question, isn't it, for each of us? Do we trust God enough to live boldly, taking risks, in this uncertain world, for the certainties of the world to come?

But that's what our life's for, isn't it? That's why God has given us life. I've chosen you, said Jesus, that you should go forth and bear fruit, fruit that will last eternally.

But you bear fruit only if you go out to sow. And you'll never do that if the things that most shape your thinking are the uncertain prospects and the potential calamities of this life under the sun. You'll only do it if you can really trust in the sovereign providence of a God who has every hair on your head numbered. The God of the preacher here, who he says made everything and therefore controls everything.

[15:10] The God who is revealed to us most wonderfully and clearly in our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus was so against negative and defensive living, wasn't he?

Paralyzed existence. I'm come that you may have life, abundant life, he says. Think of the parable of the sower. I wonder if Jesus got his image of that from here.

We don't know. But certainly his emphasis is the same, isn't it? There's no guarantee of success as the sower goes out to sow. In fact, it's quite the opposite. Jesus guarantees certain disappointment in this life.

And yet our job is to sow the seed, scatter the gospel word abundantly. You don't wait for the wind, you don't wait for ideal conditions, you sow morning and evening.

Think of the parable of the talents in Matthew chapter 25. Go and bear fruit, says the Master as he gives the talents to his servants. And they do, except there's one anxious and nervous and uncertain man.

[16:13] He says, well, I'll bury it in the ground, at least it'll be safe. No, no, no, says Jesus. That's not the way. That's perverse. That's paralysis.

You make yourself incapable of sharing in my joy if you live that way. That's just what the preacher is saying here. Trust God. He who sows sparingly, reaps sparingly, says Paul to the Corinthians. And that's true in so many areas of life, isn't it? Not just giving, which is what Paul's talking about. Do you want to reap bountifully in life and in eternity?

Well, sow your seed. Give, not to one or two, give to seven or eight. Do you want to do something for Christ? Well, don't wait for the wind. Get out and sow, morning and evening.

Trust God. Recognize his good providence over all you do and venture out wherever he gives you opportunity. It's not just what you do, though, it's how you do it that matters as well.

[17:17] And so the preacher goes on in verses seven to ten to tell us we are to rejoice in God. We're to live joyfully, recognizing God's sovereign goodness in our life also.

We're to be joyful now, he says, while God gives us capacity to do so. See, so much defensive living and paralysis among Christians comes from a wrong view of God, doesn't it?

As though he were a dark and inscrutable power, just waiting to put a stumbling block in your path, instead of a loving God who is sovereign over your whole life, who wants to release you to live for him.

And so also, so much joyless Christian living comes from a same totally wrong view of God. We think like the one talent man who said, you're a hard man.

But he was quite the opposite. He was the master who loved to say to his servants, well done, you've been fruitful in a little, now I'm going to put you over much.

[18:17] He's the master who longed to say, come, enter into your master's joy. Those servants didn't have a joyless view of the master. And that's what the preacher says here, he's a bountiful God.

He's given us life on earth to be a joy, a life of thanksgiving for all the goodness he's given us in the land of the living. He wants us to rejoice in his good gifts all the days of our lives.

The point of these verses 7 to 10 is that the reality of our death and the judgment to come is not a reason to give up in despair. It's the very opposite. It's a spur, he says, to live life to the full, to find joy in life urgently while we have the capacity to do so because that's God's gift to us.

It's all about understanding what it means to be human. Do you remember chapter 3? There's a time to be born and a time to die. Well, that's God's plan and purpose for our human life. So embrace that fearlessly and be joyful in the time he gives us, whether he gives you much or little. It's a joy to be alive, he says. Verse 7, especially when the sun shines. Light is sweet, it's pleasant for the eyes to see the sun. Well, especially if you live in this country, it most certainly is.

[19:34] We can all say amen to that, can't we? But rejoice in it, he says, lap it up. Rejoice all your days, verse 8, because you know that one day the darkness of death will come to us all.

All that is coming is vanity. Well, better translated there, all the days that are coming are fleeting. Life will end. So live. It's not foolish frivolity that he's peddling here.

No, it's responsible joy. It's joy that takes time and eternity seriously. And that's what gives real weight and significance and meaning to our joy, isn't it?

It's the very fact that life does have meaning. The greatest robber of real joy and satisfaction and fulfillment would be the sense that everything that we're doing is pointless.

Well, we know that, don't we, in life, just in our jobs and things like that. What is it that make people so depressed and down? Well, it's feeling there's no point in what they do. Endless paperwork that nobody reads, endless bureaucracy.

[20:39] We say, what's the point? It's depressing. But the preacher's great message all the way through is that life does have a point. Listen to what Derek Kidner says on these verses.

The ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes, verse 9, must have a goal worth reaching, a well done to strive for, to find fulfillment in. Otherwise, triviality takes over, or worse, vice.

And he goes on to say that people that we call playboys, well, they're just pitiable figures, aren't they? He goes on to say that this verse, by insisting that our ways matter to God and therefore are meaningful through and through, robs joy of nothing but its hollowness.

You see, solid joys are to be had in life for those who rejoice in God and see his goodness and his purpose in their lives. So, verse 10, remove vexation and evil from your life.

Don't be defined in your attitude to life by the world's bitterness and the world's cynicism. We have that well done, good and faithful servant to strive for.

[ 21 : 54 ] We have that great consummation of joy and purpose to look forward to, to prepare for now. Sharing in the Master's joy is the great activity of eternity.

But we only have these few fleeting days of life on earth to become truly practiced rejoicers. See, youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

They're fleeting. They're passing us by. So, the point is, start being a rejoicing believer early in life. Remember, God commands joy. Banish niggardly and negative, joyless Christianity.

That's what the writer's saying. Asceticism belongs in hell with the demons. That's what Paul says to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4, isn't it? Everything created by God is good.

It's to be received with thanksgiving. God will bring everything to judgment. And if he'll judge us for misuse of this world's pleasures, he will also judge us for misery and for rejection of them.

[ 23 : 00 ] The reality of death and judgment isn't a reason for despair. Rather, it's a spur to rejoice in the goodness of God, our Creator. Rejoice in God, he says.

That brings us to the third command in chapter 12, verses 1 to 8. Honor God, says the preacher. Live reverently, recognizing God's purpose in life. Be godly and have faith now while God gives you that possibility. See, this sense of joy that comes from having real meaning and purpose in life comes into sharp relief here with chapter 12, verse 1.

Remember your Creator in the days of your youth. See, above all, the very purpose of mortal life is that we should honor and revere our Creator God.

That's why he made us. And to remember him means far more than we tend to mean by that word. It means in the Bible to be passionately and completely abandoning our whole existence and loyalty to God alone.

[ 24 : 12 ] It's to make God the greatest and highest joy in our life. So the psalmist says in Psalm 137, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not set you above my highest joy.

That's remembering God. And it's simply what it means to worship, to acknowledge God as truly God and to acknowledge ourselves as truly his creatures made for him.

And the reality is that we can only really ever find true joy in the good gifts of God if we first find our greatest joy in God, the giver of those gifts. And the way to true and fulsome and liberated and joyful humanity on this earth is to honor and revere God at the earliest possible time in our life, in the days of our youth.

That's the very opposite, isn't it, of the world's idea? Well, in your youth you sow your wild oats, you live it up, you seek pleasures and then, well, eventually, when you feel in need of a bit of a crutch, well, I suppose that's the time to get religion.

But no, says the preacher, not so. For one thing, it gets harder, doesn't it? As we get older, it's just the facts of life. It's because our hearts get harder as we get older and it is harder to bow the knee to the God of all the earth.

[ 25 : 45 ] But it's more than that. The very point and purpose of our life is to be lived before God, with God. That's the way to real life. You can't have real life otherwise.

And so God gives us days in which he can be found. Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call on him while he is near. But from the days of youth, the clock is ticking, isn't it?

Those days are passing fast. And these verses give us a vivid picture, don't they, of the unmaking of life at the hands of time. The evil days, says verse 1, are marching on and the light begins to fade on our mortal existence.

It's a picture here, isn't it, of the reversal of creation. Look at verse 2. The sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened. There's no returning of the sun after the rain. There's just more clouds.

The beauty in the poetry, isn't there? But it's haunting, it's chilling, too. It speaks of the undoing of life and the undoing of the web of complexity and beauty that is our human lives.

[ 26 : 55 ] things. Some people take these verses allegorically as though they're referring to the decay of our bodies, the grinders are our teeth and the windows are our eyes and so on.

Well, maybe, but I think it's better to see it as a picture as a whole of a community in decline and in decay. Everything that's associated with life and relationships fading and disappearing.

So look at verse three. People are fading away. The great ones and the doorkeepers alike. The women who grind the corn and those who just watch from the windows, fading.

Verse four. Activity is fading. Houses are shut off from the street. Even the songbirds seem to be gone. Verse five. Enjoyment fades. Only fear remains.

The almond tree blossoms. That's all. There's no fruit. And the crops are consumed by the locusts who are staggering along so full they can't fly.

[ 28 : 01 ] And desire fails. Literally it says the caper plant fails. The caper plant with its berries used to stimulate appetite and other appetites too. All of that's fading.

Why? Because life's mortal journey is coming to an end. And another home beckons man. Verse five. And the mourners are going about in the street of this world.

In verse six, isn't it a poignant picture? The dissolution of life. Something that was once so beautiful, so precious, like a golden lamp bowl strung on a silver cord.

Or like a pitcher full of water filled by the pump wheels at the fountain. But now they're broken. Now they're shattered. And the oil of joy is spent. And the water of life is drained.

And verse seven, it's ashes to ashes and dust to dust. Adam, the man, becomes Adama, the dust. The human being returns to the humus from which we get our name.

[ 29 : 07 ] And you see, verse eight ends the main portion of this book just with the motto that it began. Hevel. Hevel.

Everything is Hevel. Best to translate it here, fleeting. Fleeting. Everything is fleeting. See, the opening poem in chapter one spoke of the circularity of nature's unchanging ways and the cry was, be serious about the facts of life.

You simply can't get one up on nature. You can't get lasting profit from a world that's cursed with futility. But in the same way, this closing poem cries out, be serious about faith in life.

Now, while you can. That's what you're created for, to find fellowship with God before you return to dust. If you don't, well, if you don't, then Macbeth was right after all, wasn't he?

All our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle, life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage then is heard no more.

[ 30 : 17 ] It's a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. But no, says the preacher, life does have significance and purpose.

And it is to remember our Creator, to recognize Him, to honor Him, to cleave to Him now, before the silver cord is snapped, before the golden ball breaks. There's an urgency, isn't there, friends? Because fleeting, fleeting, everything is fleeting, the time is passing. And that's the preacher's last word to us in this book, in his own words. But in the epilogue, the narrator calls our attention, doesn't he, to heed his words.

That's the message of verses 9 to 14. Listen to God. Listen to Him. Live wisely, recognizing God's sovereign calling on your life.

Be obedient now, be responsive, while He's given us the time. He's given us all the direction that we need to find the significance in life now, to find the meaning of humanity.

[ 31 : 28 ] And He's given us all we need, verse 14, to find significance in the world beyond the judgment when it comes. You see, God is not silent, is He?

We've seen that in this book. In this world of confusion and perplexity, He calls out to us through His twin megaphone of pain and of pleasure, both of which resonate with our sense of the eternal in our hearts.

And they tell us that there must be more to life than this. We sense it. There must be a judgment, a reversal, a justice for all this pain and perplexity.

We also sense it from our sense of beauty in this world. There must be somehow a full flourishing of the beauty and the pleasure that we sense that in this world must just be a shadow of what could be something so much greater, so much better.

Yes, He speaks to us in the very nature of life and these are a powerful witness to the eternity that's in our hearts but more, much, much more than that, God speaks to us in words, words of clarity and truth through the preacher here, verse 9, with his exquisite words and through the many other words of Scripture, words of delight and truth, says verse 10.

[ 32 : 51 ] Words, verse 11, to goad us, to prick us, to respond. Strong words, He says, that are like nails to fix our lives on with certainty, with safety. And these are words spoken by many mouthpieces but they are, says verse 11, ultimately the words of the one shepherd, of God Himself.

And in this book, God has spoken to us with stark realism about life, hasn't He? Yes, life is vexing, it's perplexing, it's painful and it is so because of the reality of the tragedy of human sin.

How could life be anything other than a world of mess? And furthermore, even for believers, life is full of perplexities and hardships simply because of the reality of the transcendence of God.

He is the Creator, He is sovereign, He can't be grasped, He can't be controlled, far less domesticated and tamed. So even for people of faith, this world will always be a mystery.

That's the realism, isn't it, of the true biblical gospel. There's nothing trite or trivial about the biblical gospel. There's no false triumphalism in it, not anywhere. Yet as well as all that stark realism about life, this book is also full of joy.

[ 34 : 17 ] And that too is the true biblical gospel. And paradoxically, there can be real joy precisely because of our mortality. Our life in this baffling world is transient.

This is not all that there is. There is an eternal dimension above the sun. God will bring, says verse 14, every deed to judgment, those seen and unseen.

There is and there shall be the eternal triumph of the purpose of God. And so there is an answer to life with all its enigmas, with all its uncertainties and perplexities and vexations.

And that answer is to be found even now, even here, under the sun, when we fear him, when we submit to him. That's the beginning of wisdom.

When we throw everything on him and when we worship him, when we listen to him and obey him, that's the whole duty of man. That's what it means to find true humanity.

[ 35 : 22 ] It's what it means to find the secret and the purpose of human life in all its richness of glory. Life as it is truly meant to be under God.

It's the only way to significance now in our mortal existence and significance beyond the sun, above the sun, in the realm beyond judgment that awaits every one of us, the living and the dead.

But there is only one way to that life and it's in listening to him, to his voice alone.

There are many competing, clamoring voices in the world but beware of those, says the preacher in verse 12. The books, the philosophies, the religions, the ideals, there's no end of these but in the end they are to no end, to no purpose and yet people are wearing themselves to death, the preacher recognizes, chasing after them all but they're chasing the wind.

It's all empty, it's vain, it's Hevel. But the words of the one shepherd, though that's so very, very different, they are the words of truth, he says, the words of delight to all who are truly looking for meaning and significance in life.

[ 36 : 41 ] The Lord Jesus Christ said, I am the good shepherd. I came that you might have life in all its fullness. Come to me, he says, all of you who labor and are weary with life's vexations and perplexities and I will give you rest.

You see, the preacher here is just pointing us to the gospel that is fulfilled for us in the great preacher, the great shepherd, the Lord Jesus. Listen to him, he says, the one shepherd, obey him, fear him, keep his commandments for this is the whole of man.

In the end, that's the only thing that matters, he says, in life and in the judgment. Jesus said, these words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.

Jesus said, my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will ever snatch them out of my hand. Friends, to hear that voice and to have obeyed it and bowed down to Jesus Christ as your Lord, as your shepherd is to have found the life that God made you for.

Not an escapist fantasy banishing pain and perplexity this side of heaven, no, but a sure and certain hope and an anchor above the sun in the judgment to come when this passing world itself is past and done.

[ 38 : 12 ] But even now it is to have the life in this world in Jesus Christ that God wants us to have. There is a way of bountiful blessing even amid the baffling struggles of this life.

There is a way of venturesome joy through all the vexed journey of our lives. There is gain and profit. There is solid joy and lasting pleasure to be had all along the path of this life when life is lived like that in the Lord.

And when it is, says Paul, lived in the Lord, none of your labor is in vain. None of it ever. Every part of it and everything your life is and stands for and achieves will outlast the Son.

But that way of joy, that way of liberation, those solid joys and lasting treasures, they come only, only when your search for fulfillment and gain in this world comes to an end.

And when you've seen it for what it is, vain and fleeting and ephemeral and passing, it comes when you hear the words of the one shepherd.

[ 39 : 35 ] And his words alone have power to fix your life like solid nails for all eternity. They are spirit and life. And no one comes to the Father but by me, said our Lord Jesus Christ.

That means if you ignore him, life will forever be wearisome and futile and a cycle of vexation. Life will be sound and furious, signifying precisely nothing.

But hear him and honor him and rejoice in him and trust him and you shall have life in all its abundant joy here now in this world under the sun and eternal life forever.

That's a lasting message of the preacher of this book of Ecclesiastes. The words of the wise are like goads and like nails.

Firmly fixed are the collected sayings. They are given by one shepherd. Beware of anything beyond these. This is the end of the matter. All has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole of humanity.

[ 41 : 00 ] For God will bring every deed to judgment with every secret thing whether good or evil. Jesus said my sheep hear my voice.

Friends every one of us must hear and heed that voice today and forever. And when you do you will have found life itself.

Let's pray. Gracious God our Father we thank you for the wonderful realism of your word that tells us about life as we know it truly to be gives us no illusions or chimeras to chase after and only be disappointed but promises us the solidity and the certainty of a life that is eternal in Christ Jesus our Lord and therefore a joy that is unquenchable and abiding through all the perplexing paths of our lives even here in this sinful world.

Turn our eyes we pray to our Lord Jesus Christ and give us strength in him that we may know him and love him today for we ask it in his name.

Amen.