

# The Perspective of Patient Hope

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Preacher: William Philip

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, we are going to be back in the book of Ecclesiastes again for a little while. So having broken off before Christmas, halfway through chapter 7, we're going to pick up again this morning, Ecclesiastes chapter 7, and beginning to read at verse 13.

Well, I may read verse 12, actually, the last verse of the section we looked at last time. Ecclesiastes chapter 7 and verse 12.

For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money, but the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it.

Not just in this life, but beyond. Consider the work of God. Who can make straight what he has made crooked?

In the day of prosperity, be joyful. And in the day of adversity, consider God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.

[ 1 : 2 1 ] In my vain life, I've seen everything. There's a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there's a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing.

Be not overly righteous. Do not try and make yourself too wise or wise to pursue lasting profit. Why should you destroy yourself?

Be not overly wicked. Neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time? It's good that you should take hold of this, and from that, with not withhold your hand.

For the one who fears God shall come out or escape from both of these. Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.

Surely there's not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins. Do not take to heart all the things that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you.

[ 2 : 3 4 ] Your heart knows that many times you yourself have cursed others. All this I've tested by wisdom. I said, I will be wise, but it was far from me.

That which has been is far off and deep, very deep. Who can find it out? I turned my heart to know and to search out and to seek wisdom in the scheme of things and to know the wickedness of folly and the foolishness that is madness.

And I find something more bitter than death. A woman whose heart is snares and nets and whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her.

Behold, this is what I find, said the preacher, while adding one thing to another to find the scheme of things. Which my soul has sought repeatedly, but I have not found.

One man among a thousand I've found, but a woman among all of those have not found. See, this alone I find. That God made man upright.

[ 3 : 5 5 ] But they have sought out many schemes. Amen. And may God bless to us his word.

Turn, if you would, to Ecclesiastes 7 and the passage we read there beginning at verse 13. Well, it is definitely now back to all clays and porridge, isn't it?

After the feasting and the holidays of Christmas and the new year, it's back to work, it's back to a lot of winter weather, it's back to the incessant misery from the media, it's back to reality.

And as we come back to Ecclesiastes, it is a relentless message, isn't it, as we've been seeing, that calls us always back to reality.

To the hard facts about life that actually so often we try very hard to avoid. That life on earth, that life under the sun, as he calls it, is both passing and perplexing.

[ 5 : 13 ] Wake up to the reality, is what the preacher is saying to us, that our world is ephemeral and passing and therefore we must learn to live with mortality that we cannot control.

And our life is also enigmatic, it's baffling. And so we have to come to terms with living with mystery that we simply cannot comprehend. And yet, as we've seen, I think, already, his message is not one of nihilism, it's not hopelessness, that's actually to miss the point very seriously.

This book offers the very opposite of that sort of bleak existential despair. The preacher's constant refrain throughout is calling us to rejoice.

Be joyful and do good as long as you live, chapter 3, verse 12. There's nothing better than man should rejoice in all his toil, chapter 3, verse 22. I commend joy, chapter 8, verse 15, and many other places.

That's the refrain. So he's not a pessimist, but he is a realist. And his message is that you will only find that joy, that deep joy in life, that detached joy, that confined contentment in all life's circumstances, you'll only find it if you have faced reality and come to terms with it.

[ 6 : 40 ] Because you have come to see life from a truly eternal perspective. And that means that you've accepted the limitations of our mortality.

You've stopped trying to oppose them, to resist them. Alas, as we often do, we often try and delude ourselves, don't we, to think that we are the masters of our own destiny.

But we're not. And in the end, of course, that illusion will be dispelled by the cold reality of death when it stares us in the face because we're not immortal though we might like to be.

That's why, as we saw in chapter 7 verse 4, when we looked at the first half of this chapter, that real wisdom, says the preacher, is something you'll find at a funeral, not in the laughter of a party.

Because it's a funeral that forces that reality on us, isn't it? Real wisdom means living humbly with the tension that we saw in chapter 3 verse 11, that God has put eternity in our hearts, and yet, so that we can't fathom it out.

[ 7 : 53 ] As mere mortals, we simply can't completely grasp what is beyond us, things that are infinite. But if we will accept that it is beyond us to fully understand our existence all by ourselves, well then, there is hope.

Look at chapter 7 verse 12 there. See, this is true wisdom that comes from above us, from God's revelation. And it is a protection in life in so many ways.

But the real advantage, he says, of such knowledge, is that this wisdom, this divine wisdom alone will preserve the life of him who has it. That is way beyond mere mortal life.

what lasting advantage, what gain does a man get from all of his toil? That is the repeated question all the way through this book.

And of course, the answer is none in the end, because wealth and education and power, they will all end in the same place, in the grave. The wise and the fool, both of them, will end just the same way.

[ 9 : 02 ] We have seen that several times. But here is a wisdom that will preserve life beyond that coming judgment, for real gain, for lasting gain.

It's very clear that he's talking in ultimate terms here, because he goes right on, look to verse 15, he goes right on to say very plainly that the righteous are not necessarily preserved and prosperous in their mortal life.

It's the same in chapter 8, verses 12 and 13. The wicked there, he says, may well prolong their earthly days, but ultimately he will not prolong his days. He won't stretch out like a never-ending shadow, because that cannot be, he says, for those who don't fear God.

So under the sun in this world, yes, there may well be temporary prosperity, but not in the judgment. And that is all that matters in the end, because, well, as we'll see in the very last verse of the book, God will bring every deed to judgment.

And the only thing that is able to preserve your life on that day, is to accept and submit to the revelation of God.

[ 10 : 17 ] And therefore, the only thing that can give you any perspective and any power for living in the present day, in this life, a life of perplexity, a life of puzzlement, the only thing that helps is to grasp the reality of God's revelation about ultimate things, about eternal things.

And we need this perspective of patient hope that only true biblical faith can give us. There is a life to be lived now, a real life, with all the ups and downs, with all the joys and the sorrows.

We know that only too well. And only a truly Christian biblical perspective of patient hope, all the mysteries and all the madness, only that will preserve us in life on earth and beyond life on this earth.

And here in the second half of chapter 7, we have more of what that really means. And again, it's all about facing reality. The reality about a sovereign God and about a sinful humanity.

and also in all of this, pointing us steadily to a saving hope. Look first at verses 13 to 18. They urge us to recognize the inevitable mystery of a truly sovereign God.

[ 11 : 45 ] Real wisdom, he is saying, begins with taking God seriously. Remember Proverbs again and again. The fear of the Lord is the very beginning of wisdom.

That's what the preacher says here in verse 13. Consider the work of God. That is, don't be any kind of vague illusion, any notion of your own about what God might be like.

No, rather acknowledge that he is the sovereign ruler and the creator of the universe. And not only is the world that we inhabit created by him, it's also cursed by him.

Who can make straight what he has made crooked? Now that might be very difficult for some of us to swallow. But that is the Bible's constant message.

This is a world under curse. And it is God who has cursed it. Subjected it to futility, as how the apostle Paul puts it in Romans 8.

[ 12 : 56 ] Same word, vanity, hevel, that the preacher uses here. Go back to Genesis chapter 3 right at the beginning. It's all there. And the reason is there too, isn't it? It's man's rebellion against God that is the cause, but the curse is God's doing.

So all the beauty, all the wonder in our world is God's doing. We're to praise him for it, but also the confusion and the corruption, well it comes ultimately from his hand.

I form light and I create darkness. I make well-being and I create calamity, says the Lord.

Isaiah 45 verse 7. I am the Lord who does all these things. And friends, until you learn to digest that basic fact about the true sovereignty of the God of Scripture, you'll never be at peace and you will never be capable of real joy in this mortal life.

Because, look at verse 14, the fact is that in our lives we will face days of prosperity and also days of adversity. And the key to life is to understand that God has a sovereign purpose in all of these things.

- [ 14 : 24 ] That God has made the one as well as the other, even though we can't fathom it out and we never will. let me say it again, only in that submission is the way to blessing.
- Because that is the way of reality. That's the way of patient hope, a detachment in life, not detachment from reality, but for reality.
- And that alone will enable you to navigate life without despair. Now look carefully at verse 14. Don't misunderstand. There is a time to rejoice.
- There are some Christians who find that perversely hard for some reason. Remember what Paul says to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4, God richly provides us with everything to enjoy.
- And we're not to reject anything he gives us if we can receive it with thanksgiving. And he's talking about food and drink and sexual relations when they're given by God for God's good purpose.
- [ 15 : 26 ] that's one part of recognizing God's true sovereignty is to rejoice in the many good gifts that he gives to bring joy to us in the day of prosperity.
- So true Christian faith can't possibly be kill joy, can it? It's the very opposite. In the day of prosperity, be joyful. Let there be laughter, joy, happiness in his presence.
- There is a time to rejoice. but also there's a time to reflect and to remember that God is sovereign also in the day of adversity and of pain and of loss.
- And the sad truth I think you see is that very often we need adversity so that we do remember the Lord, but we don't forget him amidst all that unfettered joy.
- Remember God's warning to Israel in the book of Deuteronomy. Take care when your prosperity accumulates, lest your heart be lifted up, lest you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt.
- [ 16 : 40 ] John Piper's right when he made that comment, the Christian's greatest danger is not poison, it's apple pie, too much of it. God sometimes God might have to bring us to the day of adversity so that we are forced back to truly consider him.
- That's certainly been true in my life. And I know I'm not alone in that. Listen to C.H. Spurgeon. I'm afraid that all the grace I've gotten out of my comfortable and easy times and happy hours might almost lie on a penny, he says.
- But the good I've received from my sorrows and pains and griefs are altogether incalculable. What I do not owe to the hammer and the anvil, to the fire and the file.
- Affliction is the best bit of furniture in my house. You see, there's a man who's come to terms with the real sovereignty of God.
- God. It's so important to grasp the second half of verse 14 here. In the day of adversity, God has made that too. But that's the opposite, isn't it, of so much Christian teaching, so-called, that we hear today, that focuses only on the day of prosperity, only on the health, only on the wealth, only on the happiness and the joy.
- [ 18 : 09 ] I sometimes get emails from people that sign off like this, be blessed or stay blessed. Almost as bad as that gassy, secular version nowadays, stay safe. Please don't write that on emails to me.
- You don't get my blessing, you might not even stay safe. But has anybody ever signed off an email or a letter to you with the second half of verse 14? Have you ever seen a Christian card or a calendar?
- With the second half of verse 14? God made the day of adversity. The adversity to us is a curse. It's something we want taken away.
- It's something we pray away like Paul prayed for his thorn to be taken away, remember, until he realized God is sovereign. And he had done that also for a purpose.

And we need to realize, don't we, that any idea of constant prosperity now is utterly at variance with what the Bible promises us.

[ 19 : 15 ] Certainly here, if you're one of those people who thinks, oh no, the New Testament's got a different message, well, listen to Jesus. In this world, you will have tribulation.

But take heart, he says, for I've overcome the world. There is a future. And it's that perspective of patient hope that enables us to face reality of life's experience, which matches clearly the Bible's expectation for our lives, does it not?

It's not just theory. Verse 15 is exactly what we know happens. righteous ones whose lives end prematurely, but wicked miscreants who so often seem to have it all and have a long and prosperous life to enjoy it all.

Think of Robert Mugabe living into his 90s, living it up. His whole country collapsed around him in penury. And plenty like him, aren't there?

I'll never forget myself. A lovely Christian fellow first-year student who was killed in our first few weeks at university, knocked off her bicycle by a car and killed.

[ 20 : 38 ] Why? Although that had a profound impact, let me say, on my life, and I think perhaps on many others, shaking us up to reality.

You see, in all these things, in joy and in adversity, we're to remember God, he says, and we're to fear him, we're to consider his true and total sovereignty.

I mean, all the mysteries of our life. And we can do so because we know he is sovereign and he does work all things to the ultimate, eternal good of those who love him.

we can have a patient hope because we know that ultimate future. The paradox, of course, is we don't know what tomorrow will bring or next week.

But faith means trust in God's sovereign care in the midst of all the mysteries and inconsistencies around us. And it means humble contentment in that, not resentment.

[ 21 : 45 ] To take what he gives and praise him still through good and ill, whoever lives, as we sang. But you see, so often we just don't live like that, do we?

And that's what the warning here in verses 16 to 18 is all about. Have a look at them. It's easy to misunderstand these verses as some kind of general advice about moderation in life.

That's to miss the point. No, he's warning us not to forget who God really is. He's the sovereign God in grace and in judgment. Because even as believers, you see, we can have such a shallow view of God and therefore a shallow view of the nature of the life of true faith.

Come to Jesus and everything will be fine. Or whenever any problem comes, just pray about it. As if that will solve all the problems in your work life, in your marriage, in your family, and everything else.

But of course reality is very different, isn't it? Just praying about it doesn't solve all life's problems. And yet we can persist in a sort of fantasy religion like that that wants to shape God in our image, to make God our servant, to manipulate him for our purposes in life.

[ 23 : 06 ] So maybe unconsciously we think, you see, we can get what we want in life from God either by earning his favor through more intense piety, or sometimes we think the opposite.

We can escape his disfavor by secret rebellion that he somehow won't see. And verses 16 and 17 here are warning us against both of these things.

Verse 16 is a warning against trying to get control of our lives by earning God's grace and favor. Be not overly righteous, literally, and wise for gain, for profit.

In other words, don't think you can profit from God your ways, what he's saying. Despite what we believe or say we believe about the gospel of free grace, unmerited grace alone that saves us, we're hardwired in our nature for self-justification.

That's the essence of sin. And we find grace so difficult and so easily, you see, therefore we revert to living as though our righteous doings will bring to us those blessings of God that we so desperately want.

[ 24 : 27 ] But the reality is that's a kind of self-righteousness that just destroys true humanity. It's only grasping God's totally sovereign grace and mercy that liberates us to be truly human.

But there's a graceless so-called righteousness. It can descend into what's just ugly and very destructive. Think of the Pharisees and their righteousness who so hated the Lord Jesus.

Think of the elder brother in the story in Luke 15. See, that elder brother spirit, I'm afraid, lurks very deep within all of our hearts.

So easy to think that we believe in the gospel of sheer grace and yet actually live trying to control life through our performance of righteousness.

So we can earn the fatted calf that way. And that's why we can become very resentful and bitter often when God doesn't give us what we think we deserve for all our piety and our faithfulness.

[ 25 : 38 ] But we're forgetting then, aren't we, that God is truly sovereign in his grace and also in all of his gifts. So we can do that, you see. Try to be so very pious that God will do what we want him to do for us.

And, of course, we can do the very opposite, not a legalistic spirit that destroys the true humanity that grace brings, but the reckless spirit that rebels against the true holiness that God's grace demands from us.

We pay lip service to God and to the gospel, but actually we live a lie. We live a life of secret sin. And that, too, is sheer folly. Verse 17, don't be a fool, he says, in that kind of wickedness.

Don't think God doesn't see and God doesn't know. He is a truly sovereign God. Now, those errors, when you look at them, they seem to be the very opposite end of a spectrum, don't they?

But you see how they're both exactly the same at their root. Both of them fail to consider properly the truly sovereign Lord in both salvation and in judgment.

[ 26 : 53 ] And that's why he says in verse 18 that we need to take hold, we need to grasp clearly that the answer to both this and that, both of these, is the same. It's to take God seriously as the sovereign Lord.

It's to fear God because the one who fears God will come out, will escape from both of these things, you see. Ultimately, the answer to every single spiritual problem we can have in life is to understand God and his true gospel properly.

the root of every problem is when we don't remember that, when we've forgotten the truth that God is truly sovereign in salvation and in judgment, that he will bring every deed to judgment and that he's the sovereign Lord and Savior who alone is the giver of all wisdom and all knowledge and all joy by his bounteous grace.

But you see, when we remember both of these things, when we, as the psalmist says, when we rejoice with trembling, then we'll escape the snares of our deceitful hearts, both the crushing bondage of legalism that can so blight our lives and also the dangerous part of license and disobedience that can so often lead people to ruin.

We need to learn to live with a real grasp of the gospel, of a truly sovereign God, with all the inevitable mysteries that are going to humble us and with all the demands that he as Lord makes of us.

- [ 28 : 38 ] And only that wisdom will give us power and strength for the life of faith. So we need to grasp the whole truth about God, but not only that, we need to grasp the whole truth about man as well.

And that's what verses 19 to 29 focus on. Real wisdom recognizes the inevitable confusion and corruption of a truly sinful humanity.

Verse 19 says that the wisdom of God enlightens the one who accepts it more than all the power of men. men. And that's because it accepts a reality that all of them in their different ways deny.

And that is the essential sinfulness and wickedness of every single human heart. He knows, verse 20, that sin is really pervasive.

There is not one righteous one on earth who does right and never sins. and he knows, look at verse 29 at the bottom, that it has its roots in deep perversity.

- [ 29 : 50 ] It's rebellion against the God who made man upright. In asserting human autonomy against God's authority, scheming constantly to do it my way and live life my way.

And that but, in verse 29 in the middle there, that just highlights the truth that the Bible makes plain everywhere, that our world is fallen and cursed because of human sin.

That's why it's confused and corrupt and chaotic. We human beings are responsible, and it is all our fault. But God has done it.

He is sovereign. He has cursed it. He made it crooked. Therefore, as verse 13 said, we can't possibly by ourselves make it straight. Only God can possibly do that.

And when you understand that, says the preacher, you're far wiser than all the rulers of a city, indeed all the rulers of a nation or the whole world, because they don't grasp that in our city chambers and in our parliament in Hollywood or in Westminster or in Brussels or in the United Nations or anywhere else.

- [ 31 : 10 ] Nor do the columnists in the media or the scientists or the social scientists, all of those who seem to want to rule us so much these days.

Nor do the billionaire philanthropists grasp that. Nor do the global elites of the World Economic Forum with all their utopian ideas. It's a foreign idea, isn't it, to all of these great ones in our world.

And so for all their grand schemes to save our world, every one of them is doomed to failure. George Philip, my uncle, put it like this, the rock on which so many brilliant ideas conjured up by men find her on is the fact that they are formulated on the premise that man is essentially good.

He's not. he's fallen. That's why our government can't fix society. Even if they spend more and more and more than ever before of your money and my money.

Nor can the UN ever fix world poverty or bring world peace. Never. That is all utter fantasy. But the Christian believer, you see, is a realist.

- [ 32 : 27 ] He understands the essential fallenness of the whole created order. And so we will not expect more of politics or of sociology or of psychology or anything else.

More than these things can ever realistically give in a world of twisted personalities, of fractured minds and hearts and societies.

That's a vital truth to learn, by the way. If your role in life, if your work involves helping people try and sort out their problems in life, if you don't recognize that there are some unstraightenable crooked things that no human means will ever, ever sort out, you don't realize that, you will go mad with frustration in your work.

You'll make yourself ill trying to straighten out things that can never be straightened. God's and we can't deny that reality can we if we look at the world honestly.

Goodness me, just look back over the last two years, it's all you need. But people don't like this idea of verse 20, do they? They don't like this idea of a totally depraved humanity and so they try to deny it.

[ 33 : 45 ] And so the preacher presses at home, very personally indeed in verse 21. Verse 21 is not just a useful piece of advice, although it is. There are many things, aren't there, which is far better not to hear than your staff team and your servants criticizing and cursing you.

But in the context, it's much more, isn't it? It's just one example that reminds us that we all belong to the humanity that verse 20 is describing. We're all sinful to the core.

We've all heard things we shouldn't, which hurt us deeply. But look at verse 21. We've all said things to others just the same, which have hurt other people deeply. Many times, in fact, he says.

And if we can't keep our tongue from sin, a tiny organ that wreaks such havoc, how on earth can we hope to control our whole life? Read James chapter 3 for more on that theme.

And you see the point of these verses here between these brackets of verse 20 and 29, which are so stark about human sin, the point is simply this. Because of the confusion caused by sin, there are many, many things that are elusive and that are beyond our grasp in this world.

[ 35 : 06 ] We like to think we can grasp it, like to think we can control it all, the life, the universe, everything. But no, that is a total delusion. Verse 23, it is far from us.

I said I will be wise, but it was far from me. Verse 24, it's a deep, deep mystery. Who can find it out? Says the wisest man alive.

Who can find it out? Beyond me. We just can't get a total explanation of this world, not the natural world or the psychological world or even the spiritual realm.

And that is because of the inevitable limitations that are placed upon us by the confusion, by the disorder, by the chaos that is caused by human sin.

Our world, of course, doesn't believe that. Constantly thinks it's got the answers in cosmology or in physics or in economics or technology or big data.

[ 36 : 08 ] Every generation has its own hubris, doesn't it? control at last is just within our grasp. This new medical discovery, this new satellite technology, this new political ideology, whatever it is.

But the reality, friends, is very different and we know it. As human beings, we are utterly blind to the things we cannot discover and we constantly want to blind ourselves to the things that we would far too easily discover if we opened our eyes.

we can't understand and control the world by our own wisdom. But we do fall frequently, don't we, into folly and madness of our own making.

Verse 25. And so often it is in the realm, isn't it, of human relationships where we find such bitterness. Look at verse 26 here.

He's a great leader, a great thinker. If not Solomon himself, then Solomon-esque in his wisdom. And yet all he discovers in his great labor to fathom life is the bitterness of love relationships gone disastrously wrong.



[ 37 : 20 ] And he's bitter, isn't he? Look. This woman who snared his heart into some sort of deathly entrapment. He's obviously had a very bad experience, hasn't he? Despite all his cleverness.

By the way, if you think he's being a bit harsh on womankind, you notice the end of verse 26. He does fairly blame the man's part, too. It's the sinner, the fool, the stupid man, who's taken in by her.

Takes two to tango. But it's true to life, isn't it? So often, so often it's the world's so-called great ones and wise ones, the most successful, intelligent, achieving people who have disastrous home lives and love lives.

not just princes and prime ministers and presidents that were surrounded by that, led by their gonads.

Think of all the celebrities, the actors, the billionaires, the politicians, the scientists with their lockdown-breaking affairs. I remember reading about Stephen Hawking, remember the great physicist who was in a wheelchair.

[ 38 : 27 ] who wrote that book, The History of Time, and then a complete theory of everything. You think, well, there's a man who surely understands everything. He left behind him two disastrous marriages, a completely estranged family, all sorts of chaos.

And it's just par for the course. It's an extraordinary conceit, isn't it, when you think about it, that there are those who think that they control our whole world and they can control its destiny.

And increasingly want to micro-control its population. Yeah, they can't even control their whole household, their own relationships, their own hormones. So what does a teacher find, verse 27, when he adds it all together, all the complexities of life, as we know, when he tries to find the scheme of things?

Well, verse 28, despite repeated extensive attempts, with hardly a man on earth any help to him, he says, and not a single woman at all, it seems.

He obviously does have scars in that area of life. What does he find? Well, he says, I have not found. I have not found. I've not found any great solution to life.

[ 39 : 43 ] Only, verse 29, the unavoidable, unpleasant reality that stares him in the face. The inevitable confusion and corruption of a truly sinful humanity.

That though God made man upright, they have sought out many schemes. Note that word, repeating, verse 25, verse 27, verse 29, all man's schemes.

It's the essence, isn't it, of the fall, as we call it. It's that man seeks his own answers to the scheme of things, to the world, to life, to everything, without submitting to the lordship of a sovereign God.

And that's what explains the folly and the failure of our world. And it's what explains so often, I'm afraid, the folly that we often exhibit as believers even in our Christian lives, thinking that we are at the center of our world, that we can be in control of our lives, or that we ought to be, if we just search out this way of doing things, or that kind of new spiritual thing.

All these spiritual sounding schemes, but just foolish schemes all the same, that forget the reality of a sovereign God, and that forget the reality of our sinful hearts, which are deceitful to the core.

[ 41 : 14 ] That's why we do loot ourselves, isn't it? That's why we so often make such a mess of our Christian lives. And that's why the preacher bursts that bubble to force reality on us, whether we like it or not.

We need to live with the inevitable mystery of a truly sovereign God, and we need to live with the realization of the inevitable corruption and confusion of truly sinful human hearts.

Well, is this message just one of despair then? Well, no, not at all. Because, you see, it's in facing reality honestly that we're forced to look up, that we're forced to look beyond ourselves, beyond this fractured world under the sun.

and to see our inevitable need for a truly saving hope. We've seen it again and again through the book, there is a way to joy and to peace, even amid the confusion and the mess of our baffling lives.

The cry to be joyful that keeps coming through the book, it's not a cruel taunt, it's just the way of fearing God, as verse 18 puts it, or as verse 26 puts the way of pleasing God, that escapes the snare.

[ 42 : 38 ] It's the way of true wisdom that can be found only from God above the sun and from his revelation. The question all the way through the Old Testament scriptures, of course, is, well, how shall true wisdom to be found?

How can we have true righteousness, true fear of the Lord, when no one on earth does good and never sins? Well, you see, it's also the promise, isn't it, of the whole Old Testament?

That it was one coming in whom all wisdom would be found and from whom wisdom would be given liberally to all who seek it. Isaiah the prophet spoke of the one who was the shoot from the stump of Jesse, filled with the spirit of wisdom and of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.

It's the Gospels, isn't it, that tell us of the climax of that story? of a child born of Mary who grew strong and filled with wisdom, of a man who when he taught, everyone said, where did he get such wisdom?

It's he who's the answer, isn't it, to our need for wisdom. What does it mean to fear the Lord, to please the Lord, and to find that true wisdom that both protects us in this crooked and confused world and will preserve us with real hope beyond and through that judgment?

[ 44 : 03 ] Well, Matthew tells us, doesn't he, when Jesus was transfigured in glory on the mountain, the voice of God spoke from the glory and said, this is my beloved son with whom I am pleased.

Listen to him. Listen to him. That's how you fear God. That's how you please God. Jesus is the Christ. He is the promised one.

He is the wisdom of God in the flesh to be our wisdom, to be our sanctification. He's the answer. He's the only answer to this confused and corrupted world.

Who can make straight what God has made crooked? Well, only God himself. And he has, you see, in the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

God has made him our wisdom. God has saved him. He's our righteousness. He's our sanctification. That we can have no other way in this corrupt world. He's our redemption. He's our escape at last from this crooked world under the curse.

[ 45 : 08 ] Without him, while the preacher's relentless reality would leave us in despair, think of it, a truly sinful humanity in the hands of a truly sovereign God.

God, but with him, we have a truly saving hope. And so with him, we can face a harsh reality of life in a cursed world.

We can face it with a steady eye, with a patient perspective of hope. It's true. We don't know, do we, what tomorrow holds?

We don't know what next week holds. a sudden death, a diagnosis of cancer. But we do know where it all ends.

And that is a strength to live by, more than all the power and influence of ten rulers in a city, or a million rulers all the world over. Let me close by reading some words from the Apostle Paul from Romans chapter 8.

[ 46 : 13 ] I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

For the creation was subject to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay, and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the spirits, we groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies, resurrection.

For in this hope, we were saved. And because we know that, says Paul, he can go on to say we wait for it with patience, with enduring patience.

And that is the true Christian way, the perspective of patient hope. Whatever our present adversity may be, and there will be many, both today and in days to come, may God grant us all that wisdom so that we can live with that strengthening power all the way through life and through the judgment to that glory that's to come.

[ 47 : 52 ] Let's pray. In the day of prosperity, be joyful. And in the day of adversity, consider God has made the one as well as the other.

So Lord, teach us your way. that we may walk in your truth and unite our hearts to fear your name, our only hope in life and death.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.