

Ecclesiastes 10

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[0 : 0 0] Hi, everyone. You know Sports Direct. You do know Sports Direct. That's where you get your! trainers. That's where you get your gym gear. Maybe you get tennis kit or rugby outfits.

! And recently, about a week ago, actually, it was supposed to release its annual financial data, right? It's financial statistics. And a few of you may know that it delayed the release of these. I don't know, actually, if they've been released yet. You might also guess that that's not necessarily a good thing for a company to do. Quarterly and annually, public companies release this information, right? And it gives you a sense for how the company's done that year. It gives you a sense for how they've done in comparison to previous years and maybe how they're going to do. And when they say, no, we're not quite going to release that information yet. It gets shareholders, investors, a little bit nervous. In the past, it hasn't been a good thing. So for some group, maybe small group in the world that's invested in Sports Direct, they are getting a little bit nervous or they may have had a bad week.

Because investments can be messy. They can be unpredictable. Sometimes they can be downright bad. What Australians call the global financial crisis. What some people just call 2007 to 2008. What I think the English call the economic downturn. And Americans call the stock market crash. A lot of messiness. A lot of unpredictability. A lot of bad things went on. It was a little glimpse into life when it's not the way that it should be.

I remember 12 years ago, driving around quite a nice neighborhood actually, and looking up at this half-built house. It had brick walls, sort of half-built. It had wooden frames exposed with no walls on the frames. And it looked as if the sort of construction workers had just dropped everything and left in the middle of the day. And my friend that was with me looks over and says, you know, that guy had everything in the stock market. He had everything in the stock market.

[2 : 1 8] Life is messy. Life is unpredictable. Sometimes it's illusory. It's not what it seems to be. And sometimes it's downright evil. That's one of the major messages of the book of Ecclesiastes.

The book of Ecclesiastes is going to show us, not just tell us this is the way the world is, it's going to show us this is what the world is like. And it's going to say it is messy. That it's unpredictable. That we have a very limited knowledge about our world. When we do things and we expect this certain outcome, sometimes that outcome doesn't happen. When we look at good people living, and life goes bad for them, that doesn't make sense.

And Ecclesiastes says that's the way that the world is. Kohelet is the name of the person that we're introduced to at the beginning of the book, actually. Kohelet, also known as the preacher.

And he basically sets out on an investigation. He's going to investigate life. He's going to say, I'm going to observe some things. I'm going to present them to you. And I'm going to come to some conclusions on what I've found in the world.

[3 : 2 2] He says, I'm going to investigate wisdom. I'm going to investigate folly. I'm going to look at righteousness. I'm going to look at wickedness. I'm going to look at all sorts of things.

What he calls under the sun. And he comes up with several conclusions. And one of the conclusions I want us to look at is on page 555 in the Church Bible.

And what we're going to see in this passage is that there are two grievous evils and one reliable good. Two grievous evils and one reliable good. The first evil is that there is nothing.

The man we're told about has nothing for his son. Nothing for his son. If you look at verse 13, there is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun. Riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, and those riches were lost in a bad venture.

And he is the father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand. He's the father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand. You may be watching Line of Duty, the show Line of Duty.

[4 : 29] And there's a character in there by the name of Hastings. He's superintendent, I think. Superintendent Hastings. He's in charge of a group. That's an anti-corruption group. And it's this unit in the police force, and they're searching for what he calls bent coppers.

And they're looking for any sources and signs of corruption in the police force. And Hastings is one of the most, probably the most, upright and upstanding characters in the show.

Right? And so he's just absolutely committed to justice and doing the right thing, no matter who he finds that's bent. He's not going to do anyone any favors. But we come to find out that in his personal life, his marriage is not going all that well.

His marriage is breaking down. And we find out, I won't say too much for you, that he's made a failed investment at one point. That he's had this money, and he invested without his wife's not invested this money, and the investment has gone bad.

One of the questions that comes up in this, one of the questions is, is he at fault? And I think, well, of course he's at fault. He invested this money. But I would say it's a little messier than that.

[5 : 41] It's not quite straightforward, because his investment was, and so it's not treated the way that it should have been. He was misled to some degree. And you start to think maybe it's ambiguous. That he is at fault.

At the same time, he's a bit of a victim. And the same thing's going on with this guy in the passage. If you look again at verse 13, riches were kept by their owners who is hurt.

Riches were kept. So we have this sort of active language of this person has kept them, and it's gone bad. But then we get to the next part. And those riches were lost in a bad venture.

This translation isn't quite, I think, what I would say. Those riches vanished, really, is what happened. Those riches disappeared. They perished, actually, is kind of a way you could say that. So the riches were lost.

It's not as if he just lost them. They went away, and then we were in a bad venture. So we get this sort of, this messy sense. That something didn't go right.

[6 : 38] Maybe this guy's at fault, yes. Maybe he's a victim, yes. Some of the, both things. But what we really come to see is that the focus is on the son. He's the father of a son.

He's a father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand. He has nothing to give his boy. And this is some pretty good Old Testament theology, actually.

Exodus 34, 6-7. You actually, you know these verses. The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting iniquity on the fathers, on the children and the children's children to the third and fourth generation.

These are wonderful verses, and in some ways they're by no means easy verses. Two things are going on here. One, family sin affects the family unit. Family sin affects the family unit.

When God punishes sin, he sees the iniquity punished on children and on the children's children to the third and the fourth generation. Family sin affects the family unit.

[7 : 57] The man had nothing in his hand to give to his son. We also get the sense that family sin repeats. There's the idea that families, children will repeat the sin or be prone to the same things that their parents were.

This can be very true if you think through several examples. Think about divorce, think about abuse, think about alcoholism. These are bad things, and that's what the passage is focusing on, but there's also good things.

We inherit the good things from our parents. Family virtue affects the family unit in a good way. But the most outstanding thing about Exodus 34 is the arithmetic.

It's the arithmetic. God's mercy is given to thousands. God's punishment is given to three and four generations. God's mercy is given to thousands, and his punishment is given to three and four generations.

God's mercy outdoes his justice and his punishment. His mercy is incomparable to him punishing sin and visiting iniquity on even his own people.

[9 : 06] So this is the first grievous evil. A man who seems both guilty and a victim has nothing to give his son. He has nothing to give his son. The second is that he has nothing for himself.

This is the second grievous evil. If you'll look at verse 16, this also is a grievous evil. Just as the man came, so shall he go. And what gain is there to him who toils for the wind?

Just as he came, so shall he go. He was born naked into this world with nothing, and he will leave the world naked with nothing. Right, life is a big bell curve. He comes in at zero.

This guy gains a lot. He loses a lot, and he leaves life at zero. Life is a bell curve. He may be looking back on life by the age of 65, and that's through your 60s.

A developmental psychologist tells us we start looking back on life, and we ask, have we lived a life that is satisfactory? Have we lived in a way that is integral, that we've lived with integrity to who we are?

[10:09] Not only have we left a legacy, but does it all add up to what we wanted and hoped it would be? The responses to this are satisfaction or despair.

And perhaps this man is looking back and thinking, just as I came, so shall I leave. If I started at zero, I am left with zero.

And there's one other question that's asked here. And what gain is there? This is still verse 16. And what gain is there to him who toils for the wind? Gain is a key word in Ecclesiastes.

It shows up in actually the third verse of the book itself, and it's sort of the programmatic question. What gain is there for my toil under the sun? What gain is there?

And a gain is not just anything that you might have from work. It's not just any amount of pleasure, of satisfaction, of achievement, accomplishment, of something that you have.

[11:08] It's not just a simple input and output. It's an extra, an extra edge, just a surplus. It's a leftover gain, something else that you have from your labors.

And this is what Kohelet is looking for. And in chapter 2, if you go home and read Ecclesiastes chapter 2, we get this whole experiment where Kohelet says, I have everything.

I have houses. I have money. I have people. I have land. And I have all of this stuff. And I'm going to see if I can get pleasure from it.

I'm going to see actually if I can get a gain from it, an extra edge, a surplus from this. And he goes through the motions, and he lives, and he spins, and he enjoys, and he eats, and he drinks, and he comes to the end, and he says, I got pleasure in my toil.

That was enjoyable. I got something from that. But did I get a gain? No, I didn't get a gain. I did not get a gain. I was left with no extra edge, no surplus.

[12:18] Life is like toiling for the wind. That's another key phrase. The one who toils for the wind is also striving, even shepherding the wind. It's a ridiculous, it's a ridiculous phrase. It's a ridiculous image, actually.

Imagine trying to shepherd the wind, or chase the wind, or strive for the wind. That's how life feels sometimes. It's not just unpredictable. It is messy. It is hard to grapple with.

It seems like we come up shorthanded, time and time again. So to have a gain, I don't know what it feels like to have a gain.

But I do know what it feels like to try to get a gain, an extra edge, and not get it. It feels like accomplishing something that you've set out to do, accomplishing it, and then wanting something else and not being satisfied with that.

Getting on to the next thing. It's like getting that job, but then wanting this part of that job. It feels like getting to know these people, but then wanting to get to know those people. Maybe it feels like having a child and then thinking, well, I want grandchildren, and I want grandchildren to live close to me, and so on.

[13:23] It's not quite satisfying. Maybe you think, I'm not actually really that ambitious. I don't set out to achieve things like that, and I'm quite satisfied where I am, and I'm okay, actually, with not looking for more.

Then verse 17 is for you. Verse 17 is for you. Moreover, it says, all his days he eats in darkness, in much vexation and sickness and anger.

The situation is bleak. This characterizes life and toil and existence, darkness, vexation, sickness and anger.

This is the daily grind. This is life, actually, under Genesis chapter 3, because Ecclesiastes doesn't start with Genesis 1 and 2. It doesn't start when everything's the way it should be, as if it's all good, and then shows us what happens afterwards.

It's not a fall from grace, so to speak. It's not an imperfect world, having come from a world where everything's right and good. It starts in Genesis 3.

[14:27] It starts when everything's not the way that it should be, and it follows out what life is like under the curse. What life is like under the curse. And it feels like we come up short.

It feels like we don't exactly know what's going on. It feels like we have vexation, we have sickness, we have anger. So this is the second grievous evil.

The man has nothing for himself. He has nothing for himself but frustration. Nothing for himself but frustration. Now, I've gone on for 15 or 20 minutes here about two grievous evils, and I could have read those passages to you, and you could have told me, yes, that's clearly a grievous evil.

I don't really need you to explain that. And Ecclesiastes is a little bit of a downer book, it feels like, as we read through it, there's not much happiness in the book.

There's not much good going on. It seems like everything's just not working. Things aren't the way it's supposed to be. And that's right. That is part of the message of the book. But that's not the end of the story.

[15:28] It's not the end of the story of the book. We know these two things are evil, but there's also one reliable good. There's also one reliable good. And Copeland wants to show us what is good and what we should do.

What is good and what we should do. And that's that God has given everyone a portion. God has given everyone a portion, and that portion is good. God has given everyone a portion, and that portion is good.

Verse 18. Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him.

For this is his lot. What I have seen is to be good and fitting, is to eat and to drink, and to find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life.

For this is what God has given him, and this is his lot. This is a person's lot. What's interesting in these three final verses, verses 18, 19, and 20, what we don't have is a person, this man featured, right?

[16:37] Beforehand, we haven't heard anything about God. We've just heard about this man comes into the world, he gains some things, he loses some things, he has nothing to give, he leaves the world just as he came. But verse 18, 19, and 20 is full of God.

It's full of God. I've seen this to be good and fitting. Yes, for people to eat and drink, and find enjoyment, but this is in the life that God has given him. God has given people wealth, possessions, and power to enjoy them and to accept their lot.

This is the gift of God. God keeps us occupied with the joy in our hearts. This is not focused on the man, this is focused on God. He's given everyone a portion, and that portion is good.

Let me just draw out three things from the end of this passage, three things. One, this is Ecclesiastes' way of saying, God has you where he wants you. He has you where he wants you in life.

And that we need to do what's before us faithfully. We need to be faithful with what's before us. It doesn't mean he's said everything is okay with our situation. It doesn't mean that he's not going to have us change our situation.

[17:46] But he says, I have you right now, where I want you. And live faithfully there. Live faithfully there. That is our lot. Because these images aren't images of hedonism, right? It's good and it's fitting to eat and drink and find enjoyment.

This doesn't mean, well, you know what? Life's bad. So why don't you drink as much as you want, eat as much as you want, and just find pleasure by whatever means you can. That's not what's going on.

What is going on is that Ecclesiastes is giving us pictures of the present. These are pictures of the present, the immediate, right? Food and drink are right before us. Food and drink are right before us.

We can find enjoyment in the toil that we're doing at the moment, day to day. There's some joy, there's some good in the daily grind. That's what God wants to show us.

That's what God has given us. God has you where he wants you. So be faithful with your life. Be faithful where you are. The second thing is that it feels often a bit like God has us in a holding pattern.

[18:48] Has us in a holding pattern. So this is where God has me. And he's told me that I can't land the plane, right? It's like he says in the aircraft operator. And he said, we have too many birds

on the ground.

You need to stay up in the air. Make one more pass. As a matter of fact, make another pass. So just stay up there until we tell you to calm down. God has us in a holding pattern. Same job, same problems, same life, same relationships, same issues in my marriage, same issues with my kids. Things just aren't going to change. As a matter of fact, they're not going anywhere. They're not going anywhere. I'm just circling. I'm just circling. But when the apostle Paul picks up on Ecclesiastes, when he gives us his tradition, say amplification, because Paul sees some things maybe that we don't see in Ecclesiastes, the revelation of Christ, the gift of the Spirit, Paul is going to say that life is going somewhere.

Life is going somewhere. I'd say the main place that Paul picks up on, even the New Testament as a whole picks up on Ecclesiastes, is Romans 8. It's Romans 8. And the major word you might think of with Ecclesiastes is vanity, vanity, all is vanity, right?

That's how the book opens. That's how it closes. Vanity. And this key word is picked up in Romans 8, about verses 19 and 20.

[20 : 13] For the creation was subjected to futility, or the creation was subjected to vanity, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption, and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

You know these verses, For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. The creation groaned and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the gift of the Spirit groan inwardly as we await eagerly our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

In Romans 8.28, And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good. We know that those who love God have all things working together for their good, for those who are called according to His purpose.

God's saying, the children whom I have adopted, whom I have given my Spirit, whom I have united to Christ, yes, they must suffer the way that Christ has suffered in the world, but life is going somewhere.

Life is going somewhere. Our lives individually are going somewhere, and creation as a whole God is bringing somewhere. He's recreating the world, and He's using us each step of the way.

[21 : 27] And He's given us the gift of the Spirit to pray, to pray to Him. Romans 8 is incredible. It says, the Spirit is praying to God on our behalf, that Christ is interceding on our behalf.

How could anything separate us from the love of God? Neither height, nor depth, nor rulers, nor powers, nor authorities can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ. That is absolutely incredible, and that is a good portion.

That is a good portion to have. Life is going somewhere. But we don't see all the pieces, and that's what Ecclesiastes wants to tell us.

You don't see the whole picture. It's not just that life is bad, it's that life doesn't always make sense. You don't have an advantageous look on the whole of life. We just see one little bit of it, and that's it.

But God sees the whole picture. That's my last point. Last point. God sees the whole picture. And so we shouldn't try to control the situation. We shouldn't try to just say, I've got to find some enjoyment here and sort of strong arm our day-to-day life.

[22 : 33] But we shouldn't press God for joy. We should be desperate to God for joy. We should be asking God for joy. We should actually be asking God to give us a heart that we see in Psalm 16.

the heart that we see in Psalm 16. I say to the Lord, You are my Lord. I have no good apart from You. I have no good apart from You.

Let me close just by reading some parts of this psalm. And if you want to know, what should I do after all this? Well, you can go home tonight. Don't go home tonight. Sit at the dinner table and put a smile on and say, I'm just going to find some joy.

I'm going to find some joy here. And just try to make the situation happy. That's not what it means to just find enjoyment in your toil. No, you sit down. You open the Bible.

Read Psalm 16 and say, Lord, give me a heart like this. Give me a heart like this. I'll close with a psalm. I say to the Lord, You are my Lord.

[23 : 39] I have no good apart from You. The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup. You hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places.

Those lines refer to geographical boundaries. He's saying, he's saying, basically, my plot of land is a nice one. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places. Indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance. I have set the Lord always before me. Because He's at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. Therefore, my heart is glad and my whole being rejoices. My flesh, it also dwells secure. You make known to me the path of life and in Your presence there is fullness of joy. At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Amen.
Amen.