



SETTING THE RECORD CROOKED

Part 1 of Ecclesiastes

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Ecclesiastes 1:1-18 | March 16, 2003

Good evening. Welcome to church. If you have a Bible, please turn to the Book of Ecclesiastes. That is where we will be for the next six months. This week, begin in Chapter 1.

As you're turning to Ecclesiastes, I'll give you a background on the book and on its author. Really, Ecclesiastes begins all the way back in Genesis. Everything does. Genesis is the book of beginnings. It's where all things begin. Therein, we find that there is one God and that this God has existed without beginning or end. He is eternal and he is loving and he is good. And that God knit together all of creation and called it good. And God knit together men and women and called us as his image bearers, very good. All of creation was knit together, essentially like a web of interconnected life that was then tethered to God by a string.

What happened, however, is that our first parents, Adam and Eve, decided that they would make choices not in accordance with God's will and God's Word. In a sense, they became very proud and very arrogant and they thought there was wisdom and life apart from God. In doing so, they sinned. In sinning, they set themselves up as enemies of God and as enemies of his good creation. At that moment, the tether that connected all life on the earth and all life under creation to God was severed and creation collapsed in on itself. Life became crooked. Death entered the equation. Frustration set in. And everything was tangled into a crooked mess and that explains the condition of the world that we live in presently.

In the middle of that, God then laid out a series of curses upon the man and the woman that are still binding upon us today. Very simply this; we were to steward and rule over creation and God was to steward and rule over us. As we became unruly and rebellious toward God, God then had creation that was under us become equally unruly and rebellious toward us. Now, we find ourselves in the position of being as frustrated with our life as God is with us. If you've ever been frustrated, you're getting close to being Biblical.

(Laughter)

That's my point. And the way that it works now is God did that, not because he hates us, but because he loves us. God wanted us to see that the wage for sin is death, that the consequence of sin is great. He wanted us to be so frustrated. Any of you ever been frustrated? Any of you ever tried to do anything – anything—and realized that whatever it is, it's never perfect, it's never finished, it's never completed, it's never right? It doesn't matter how much money or how much time you spend. It's frustrating. And God set up the earth that way so that we would become so frustrated that we would cry out to him and ask what the problem is. And he would tell us that we have severed the tether that connects us in our lives to him. And in so doing, we have collapsed in upon ourselves, separated from him. And then, hopefully, that would lead us back toward him and back toward his goodness and his provision.

And God makes a promise in Genesis 3, right after our first parents' sin, that, indeed, Jesus will one day come to accomplish that; to reconnect us to God; to redeem all that was lost. Over the course of human history, from that point forward, from our original parents, God raised up another man some years later. His name is Solomon. He's the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes that we'll be studying. His father was the great and mighty King David, who was a man after God's own heart, but like some of the men in the room tonight, he was still a crooked pervert.

(Laughter)

He saw a naked woman, thought she would be good to have, committed adultery with her and murdered her husband. Yes, that's wrong.

(Laughter)

In so doing, what happened is that they ending up having, some time later, a son named Solomon and upon his deathbed, David had to appoint one of his sons to take over his kingdom and he appointed Solomon. He told Solomon from his deathbed that Solomon should keep his nose in the scriptures and his heart close to the Lord and he should do what the Lord has said in his Word. And if Solomon would have heeded that counsel, his life would have turned out much differently, but he did not.

God loved Solomon. God cared for him so greatly that God actually came to him and granted him one wish. He told Solomon, "You can ask me for anything and I will fulfill it." And you think about it. I was meditating on this all week. What we would ask for if God said, "I'll give you anything. One shot. What do you want?" I think, "Well, I'd like power; I'd like to be in charge." "I like money; I'd like to be rich." "I'd like fame; I'd like to be a superstar." "I'd like knowledge; I wish I was smart. I wish my IQ was bigger than my waist. That would be great."

(Laughter)

“I wish I was attractive, right? I look in the mirror. I throw up.”

(Laughter)

“It’s just – it’s not working. I need a plan B.” Some of you, it’s very practical. “I would like my own lane on the highway, just mine.”

(Laughter)

“You know, I wish I wasn’t so hairy.” That’s mine. I mean, I have hair.

(Laughter)

I am like a prototype for a Chia pet. If I could ask God for one thing, it’d be just, you know, stop the insanity. It’s like I snorted a cat. It’s just terrible.

(Laughter)

And hair coming out my ears, one big eyebrow.

We all have something that if we could just go, “God, that’s great. Give me one thing. That’s what I need. Just nail that one, I’ll be happy.” Solomon contemplated what his answer would be and what he decided was that he would ask God for wisdom. God, we are told in the scriptures, was so pleased that he said, “Well, Solomon, since you didn’t ask for power, I’m going to give it to you. Since you didn’t ask for wealth, I’m going to give it to you. Since you didn’t ask for health and long life, I’ll provide that as well. And, I will grant you your request of wisdom.” And God gave to Solomon wisdom that is unparalleled in human history. He studied enumerable subjects. He wrote three Books of the Bible, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon and Proverbs. He penned 1,005 Psalms and 3,000 Psalms – Proverbs rather. And he was the most renowned man in all of the world. He is the equivalent of Hugh Hefner, Bill Gates and Albert Einstein, all rolled up into one guy who’s pretty good looking on top of that. That is Solomon.

And the good thing about Solomon is that he is a guy we can relate to. He came from a crooked family. He started off worshiping God and very early in his life, he made a few compromises that later led to great disaster. The first one was that he was worshiping the right God, but he was worshiping God in the wrong way. God isn’t just concerned about people being spiritual; he’s concerned about them being Biblical. And Solomon erred in taking his cues for his relationship with God, not from the scriptures, but from Paganism, and he began up on the high places, offering sacrifices and worshiping like the other religions and gods.

In addition, he married a woman that he should not have married. The moral of the story is very clear. Little sacrifices lead to long term grave consequences. Little compromises have big results and he married a woman that God had forbidden because this woman came from another nation. She was from another people that worshiped another God. He married her because he believed that it would be a strategic political alliance, that it would curry him favor with nearby nation and, ultimately, he ended up – by the time he was an old man, how many wives did he have? Seven hundred wives. How many men have a very difficult time emotionally filling up one woman?

(Laughter)

Right? Seven hundred wives. I can just hear it. “I don’t get quality time.” “We never talk.”

(Laughter)

“We don’t go out.”

(Laughter)

“Take a number, right? Take number 700.” Seven hundred wives. In addition to that, he picked up 300 concubines, which is, basically, a stripper girlfriend. That’s basically what a concubine is.

(Laughter)

And you’re thinking, “What does a guy with 700 wives need 300 girlfriends for?” This, you know, we say Hugh Hefner and he is – Hugh Hefner was, apparently, reading the Old Testament.

(Laughter)

This is nothing new. And most of us think, “Man, if I was smart and if I was wealthy and if I had, you know, one thousand women at my house every night, I would be happy.”

(Laughter)

“I would be very happy. I’d be happier than this guy was, totally depressed, needing to stay away from sharp objects. I would be happy.” And he wasn’t. He wasn’t. And the good thing about Solomon is this – brutal and frank honesty. We are told throughout the course of history that philosophy began with the Greeks – Heraclitus, Epimenides, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Alexander the Great. Predating all of them, 900 and some years before the birth of Jesus Christ, was King Solomon and the Old Testament wisdom literature.

Tonight, what we will be investigating is a piece of philosophy that is roughly 3,000 years old. Ecclesiastes is about the meaning of life. It raises the question that the rest of the Bible was written to answer. Why are we here? What's the point? Proverbs is additional wisdom and it's additional philosophy on how to live your life. Job is about suffering and evil and injustice and Song of Solomon is about romance and sexuality and love. All of these great philosophical inquiries speak to our present day because they are eternal, which makes them always relevant.

So, we will begin this great, great book. We'll see what this man had to say about the meaning of life. We will investigate with him all that he pursued and we will come to his conclusion. We are told in Chapter 1:1 of the great Book of Ecclesiastes the words of the teacher. He's going to teach us something tonight. The son of David, that's his dad, king in Jerusalem, okay?

Now, here we launch in. What is the meaning of life? From the wisest, richest, horniest guy who's ever lived. Here it is. Verse 2 – "Meaningless, meaningless", says the teacher. "What?" "Utterly meaningless." "Everything?" "Yes, everything is meaningless." You say, "Come on, isn't that an overstatement?" No, that's the brutal, honest truth. You ever felt that way? You ever got up in the morning and asked yourself, "What am I doing?" I mean, I know I'm going to work and I'm eating cereal and I'm brushing my teeth and I'm trying to get my hair to do what it's supposed to do, and it never does, because there's a curse. I understand that. But, what am I doing here?"

And his summary is this – everything is utterly meaningless. And some of you will have different translations. This word is very important for us. It appears 38 times in the Hebrew text of your Bible and some translations will say that life is a vapor. That you start off sort of helpless, eating soft foods, mumbling to yourself, wearing a diaper, having no teeth. Pretty much, that's where you end up as well.

(Laughter)

In the middle, there's a few years that pass really quick. Some of you understand that. As well, some of your translations will translate that word and they will say that life is vain. What's the point? It's just all pride and sin and folly and rebellion. What's the point? Some of your translations will say that life is frustrating. And it is, at least mine. And if you tie all of that together, you start to get the meaning of what life is. Like life, this word is hard to nail down. It's elusive. It's complicated. It's multiple layered. Life is short. Life is frustrating. Life is easily missed. Life can be lived in vain. Life can be lived apart from meaning.

I think the best translation of the word is this – (Blowing raspberry).

(Laughter)

That's life, right? If you have ever done that, you are a Hebrew scholar and a Biblical philosopher.

(Laughter)

Life is (Blowing raspberry). That's what it is. And now, you know why. You're just being Biblical. Everything is (Blowing raspberry) utterly (Blowing raspberry). That's what he says. He goes onto explain this. Here's why life is so (Blowing raspberry) in verse 3.

(Laughter)

Here's the point. What does man gain from all his labor, at which he toils under the sun? Under the sun? All of your labor – you go to school. You work. You mow your lawn. You pay your bills. We all have lives that are filled with activity and hurry and worry and busy. And the point is this – we work hard our whole life. The question is why? What does it gain us? At the end, we die. They paint us up like a circus clown. They put us in a box. And they put us in the ground. And whatever we had, somebody else enjoys and we didn't get to enjoy it because we were too busy working for it. And the question is what is the point? What is the profit? What is left over? And he uses this word – "under the sun". That is a key phrase that appears 29 times in the Book of Ecclesiastes and it means simply this – that he is looking solely at life on the earth. No revelation. No God breaking in. No God revealing. No God speaking. Just looking at life on the earth. If you just looked at life and asked yourself, "Why do I work so hard and then die? What is the point? There is no profit. There's not benefit. There's no gain." That's the conclusion he came to.

And I know some of you will say, "No, no, no, no, no. Yes, the world is messed up and things are terrible. Everything needs to be fixed, but can't we think happy thoughts? Can't we be optimistic? Can't we pull together? Every generation has this incessant, naïve myth that we're going to fix things. Now, actually, the generation of which I am a part, in large part, has abandoned that. In the '60s, everyone was naked and high and happy and "this'll fix things." No, it's denial and medication without doctors. What I'm part of is just sort of this cultive narcissism and depression. Everybody listens to depressing music and sits around and gets sad and, you know, and talks about the emotional spanking on their inner child. Generations just cope with this in different ways.

But, what he says is this – "Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever." Every generation rises up. We're gonna fix the world. We're gonna change everything. We're gonna make it a better place. Every generation before us, they were all dumb. We're finally here. Evolution has hit its peak.

(Laughter)

And you know what? We'll die and the trees will still be there. And the rivers will still be there. And the water will still be there. And the mountains will still be there and we came from the dust of the earth and the dust of the earth mocks us because it endures when we do not. And this is every single generation. And every single generation thinks that they are so significant and so important. And literally, what he's saying is this – "The earth is an

exercise bike. Generations come out of the womb, jump on the bike and pedal like mad 'til, eventually, they die and fall off. And then, the next generation gets on."

(Laughter)

And they say, "Well, you didn't get anywhere, but we'll pedal harder." And Solomon's saying, "Give it a good run. We've done this before. I promise you, it's not a vacation. You're not getting anywhere. You're not getting anywhere. There is no progress." He just completely undercuts any myth or progress and evolution and human inquiry that moves us forward. So many of us thought, "Oh, we move into the new millennium, it will be so incredible. Everything will change. It will be wonderful." Isn't it great? It's so different.

(Laughter)

It's so different. Everyone's employed and happy. And generations come. Generations go. The seas keep moving. Everything keeps moving. We don't make any progress. And you know what happens then? It's silly too because what we end up doing, we end up actually living in denial of the fact that we're not nearly as important as we think we are. We just don't.

And he tells us we should take our cue from creation; from the earth and the wind and the fire, the great '70s disco band here in verse five.

(Laughter)

"The sun rises and the sun sets and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north. Round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the sea and the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again." What he says is this – life isn't forward linear progression. Life is a circle, right? You say, "No, we're moving. We're moving." No, you're driving around a cul-de-sac.

(Laughter)

You're not going anywhere. Don't mistake movement for progress. You know, we rotate around the sun. In the morning, sun goes up; evening, sun goes down. Wooohooo. Big surprise. In addition, alright, the water runs its course through the water cycle. Big surprise. And the wind runs its course and circuit through the earth. Big surprise. Life isn't forward progress and evolutionary movement. What it is – it's a rut. Your life is a rut. My life is a rut. It is, right? Next week, you will sit there. Why? We're boring people.

(Laughter)

Life is frustrating and complicated and cursed and so what we try and do is find some routine that doesn't drive us insane. That's what he talks about in verse 8. "All things are worrisome more than one can say. The eye never has enough seeing, nor is the ear its fill of hearing." You ever notice that? That life is a crazy, maddening circle and nothing is every perfect and nothing is ever done. It's a routine. It's a rut. How many of you have noticed that when you decide you're going to wash the dishes – some of you single men should actually pray about contemplating that – when you wash the dishes –

(Laughter)

When you wash the dishes and you're all done and you have the sense of accomplishment. You walk out of the room. You walk back into the room. What's in the sink? The dish demon came. There's more dishes.

(Laughter)

You get a haircut. It looks good for eight or nine minutes and then, it's all jacked up and you need another one.

(Laughter)

You mow your lawn. You wake up the next day, the lawn doesn't look – nothing – you pay all the bills. "Okay, I'm flat broke. I paid all the bills. Good, whooo, I'm done." Next day, what's in the inbox?

(Laughter)

Bills, more bills. You pay your taxes just in time to file your taxes. Life is that way. And people say, "Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no. We are not a rut. We have causes and movements and isms. We have all of these wonderful things that we are going to do. We're a new people. We have a new plan. We have a new religion, a new philosophy. We have something nobody's ever heard of, nobody's thought of. We're educated beyond our intelligence. We're so smart. We have a new angle. Nobody's ever thought of this." He says, "No way. You're not gonna get out of this cyclical, boring rut."

He says simply this – "What has been will be again. What has been done will be done again. There is nothing new under the sun. Nothing new on the earth." People think they're so smart. "I've gotta brand new angle. Nobody's ever thought of this." Is there anything of which one can say, "Look, this is something new. It was here long ago. It was here before our time"? What he says is this – "You don't have any new ideas." We take old ideas and we recycle 'em and we're all excited because they're new to us because we all went to public school and we don't know history.

(Laughter)

Right? All the ideas, they're already done. That's why we don't even have new fashion anymore. You can't have new fashion. We've tried everything from naked to mu mu. It's all done.

(Laughter)

Right? It's over. That's why now, if you wanna be creative, you go to the vintage store and you wear old clothes. You go to the recycled furniture place, you use old furniture. Why? There's nothing new. We just recycle old ideas and old stuff. And people who think that they gotta new angle, they don't have a new angle. Somebody else tried this and we just don't know that and we weren't paying attention.

(Laughter)

You say, "No, but things change. Things change. We've made progress. We put a man on the moon." Whoopee, we put a man on the moon. Things change, people don't. He's a sinner. He's gonna die. They're gonna put him in a hole and he's gonna be mulch for some plant. Progress. Whoopee, that changes everything. Look at me, I'm on the moon. Wow, that changes everything. Nothing changes, right?

Some of you don't believe this. That's why we get into causes and movements and isms. Everybody joins some sort of team. "Oh, we're gonna fix it. We have an angle. We have a solution. Oh, we're so excited." Silly. I had an argument this week with a vegetarian. I'll pick on vegetarians. Later on, I'll get to rednecks. I was arguing with this vegetarian this week. He says, "You shouldn't eat meat." I said, "I eat meat." He says, "Well, I don't like the fact that you eat meat." I said, "I love the fact you eat vegetables. You keep the price of meat down." We are –we're on the same page.

(Laughter)

He says, "No, no, no, no. You don't understand that, as we eat animals, it creates this sort of primal urge to go kill people in us." I'm like, "Really?" So, there's no weird vegetarians? Like, I have evidence. Yeah, uhhh.

(Laughter)

He's already saying, "No, no, no. If we eat meat, here's a whole new angle. Nobody's ever thought of this. It's sort of blood thirsty and primal and it makes us into an aggressive society." I said, "Why is that?" He said, "because you're eating a living thing." I said, "What do you eat?" He said, "Vegetables." "So, you're a vegetable murderer."

(Laughter)

"Vegetables are living things. I go out and I eat animals. You eat vegetables. They don't even have a chance to run. You're sicker than me."

(Laughter)

"You're sicker than me. You're far sicker than me. You're a sick man." I'm gonna start an organization – PETA – People for the Ethical Treatment of Asparagus. It's just getting – asparagus is getting slaughtered. Where's their defender? Where's their justice?

(Laughter)

It's just so silly. You know, like, new angle, woohoooo. You know, I'm sure 5,000 years ago, there was some naked vegetarian movement. Like, whatever. There's no way to fix it. There's no new cause. There's no new idea. There's no new – "Well, I read a book." "Well, great. Great."

(Laughter)

"Good for you." You can't come up with a new idea. Some people have tried and if you keep reading, somebody else beat you to it.

In addition, some people say, "Okay, I don't have any new ideas. I don't have any new philosophies, new – I don't have any new causes, but I'm very important." I think this a lot about by myself. I'm very important. I will change the world. People will remember me. They'll be statues and monuments, holidays. St. Mark's Day – everyone will drink green beer, something like that.

(Laughter)

There will be a wonderful movement because of me. Because I'm on the earth, things will be different and here's what he says – "No." Verse 11 – "There is no remembrance of men of old and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow." You know what? We're gonna die and nobody's gonna even know we were here. You say, "No." Let me ask you this – who was in the obituary today? See, we don't know.

That's gonna be us. Nobody – here's the deal. You make the newspaper when you're born and when you die; and in the middle, they completely ignore you unless you do something catastrophic.

(Laughter)

That's it, right? That's it. Nobody's gonna remember us. You say, "Come on. Come on." You think about it. How much history do we really know? We don't pay attention. We're people with very short term memories. He says, "You know what? That's life on the earth – meaningless, short, fleeting. There's no new ideas. Everything's been tried. Everything's been done. Everybody thought that they were gonna change the world. We don't even remember those guys. Every generation thought they were the great solution and nothing happened." I know you're thinking, "This is depressing." Yep,

it is. It's really depressing.

But, it's brutally honest and that's the way that it is. And Solomon did for us a great service. He picked, basically, the six most common and popular ways that people try to find meaning and value and purpose and joy in life and he pursued 'em with unparalleled vigor. Occasionally, there's one person who tried to come up with some new, weird angle to have meaning and value in life, like, they commit their whole existence to karaoke or something. But, most people just stick on one of six lanes. He tried 'em all.

First he tried money – wealth. He has a whole fleet of ships bringing him gold every year. He's the richest man on the earth. See, some of you live under this myth that "As soon as I make more money, I'll be more happy. My life will have more meaning." And it's interesting because, at some point, you thought that as soon as you were making as much as you are currently, you'd be in better emotional, spiritual shape than you are. He tried his wealth.

Power – the guy rules over the earth in a time of 40 years of peace and prosperity. He tried religion, morality, spirituality. He tried having friends. He tried working his job and undertaking great projects. And he tried pleasure with unabated gusto. We're talking about a guy who there was nothing that his eye saw that he could not obtain for his own experience. And we live in a society like that, an experience based economy, where so much of our disposable dollars go toward experiences and pleasures. And he said, "You know what? There is nothing on this earth that gives you any indication of where we come from, where we're going and why we're here." And so, life becomes a frustrating, confusing, chaotic, bent, crooked, collapsed mess.

He tells us in verse 12, "I, the teacher, was king over Israel and Jerusalem" – that's his power. "I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under Heaven." Here's his conclusion – what a heavy burden God has laid on men. What a total mess. "I have seen all the things that are done under the sun. All of them are a meaningless chasing after the wind." Here's what I love. He says, "You know what? People try and, 'I'm gonna be powerful. I'm gonna be rich. I'm gonna be important. I'm gonna be famous. I'm gonna get in the paper. I'm gonna have a new idea. I'm gonna write a book. I'm gonna join a cause, a movement, an ism. I'll deny God. I'll give him the finger that he made. Whatever it is, I'll be somebody. I'll do something'." And he says, "You know what? All of those people are like a guy who's running around just trying to grab the wind and take it home, right?" Just, "What are you doing?" "Well, I'm gonna take the wind and I'm gonna take it home and it's gonna be all" What, did you take the little bus to school?

But, that's all it is. That's all it is. It's just a vain waste of time and you're busy, but you look silly. As if you could grasp all of these things and master them and bring them home and then bow down to them and have them be good gods who bless you and make you happy.

And here's why life is so tremendously frustrating. Verse 15, "What is twisted cannot be straightened." You and I cannot fix ourselves. We cannot fix our world. People don't know that. "I'll fix it." Good luck. I dare you to fix anything. I dare you to get everything on your car working every day for a month.

(Laughter)

I dare you to get anything fixed. It's cursed. It keeps breaking. It keeps falling apart. It doesn't matter what it is. We can't fix it. We can't straighten out the world. It's too crooked and we can't straighten it out because we're crooked. We need to get straightened out first. That's his metaphor for sin – crookedness. And he says as well, "Here's the other problem. What is lacking cannot be counted." We don't have the material, the resources, the grace, the wisdom, the insight, the power to change things. We even have a short life. It's not gonna get done by us.

Some of you think, "Well, isn't there another angle? Isn't there another option? Isn't there another possibility?" Nope. Verse 16 – "I thought to myself, 'Look, I have grown in increasing wisdom, more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me. I have experienced much of wisdom and of knowledge'." He says this, "I tried it all. I tried it all. Everything you can think of, I've checked it out. I'm smarter than you. I'm richer than you. I'm hornier than you. You can't beat me. You can't beat me."

Some say, "But, did he try this? Did he try this? Did he try this?" He did. Verse 17 – "Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this too is a chasing after the wind." What he says is this – "There's two approaches to finding meaning in your life. One is high brow." Some people go high brow. "I'll get a suit." "I'll figure out what the salad fork is actually for." "I won't drive my car. I'll pay a driver." "I will go to the symphony and I will pretend that large, Italian women yelling at me is enjoyable."

(Laughter)

"I will eat good food. I will drink good wine. I will sleep in a nice bed." "And I will use big words that I don't understand and I will live the high brow life." And he said, "I did that. I went to college and got more degrees than Fahrenheit. I spent all kinds of money and hung out with very sophisticated people. And you know what? They're all just lost and crooked and confused and frustrated like everybody else." So, he said, "You know what? I tried folly as well. I looked over, saw my redneck neighbors, thought, 'Hey, they look happy'. Maybe they're drunk and not that bright, but they look happy, so maybe they have an angle." So, he says, "You know what? I tried that as well. I got rid of my suit, got all NASCAR t-shirts."

(Laughter)

"I got rid of my condo in Belltown and I got myself a brand new old trailer. I took all the furniture and put it outside in the yard. Don't know why. All the neighbors did it, didn't wanna stick out."

(Laughter)

"I hung up a big poster of the trinity, you know, Hulk Hogan and Dale Earnhardt and Elvis."

(Laughter)

"Got a huge TV with a satellite dish out on the lawn so all the neighbors could covet. I did it all, man. I watched wrestling all day. Loved it. I traded in my limo, went out and got a Ford F150. You know, I did – I got fireworks, lit 'em off occasionally for no reason. Fired my gun in the air."

(Laughter)

He says, "You know what? Those people are all crooked and lost and frustrated and don't know what they're here for either. It's the same on both sides of the street. I tried 'em both. Didn't make any difference." High brow, low brow, you know, that's why we have garage sales. All the people that tried high brow realized it was empty, so they're selling all their junk, trying to downsize. That's how we try and make our life meaningful. "Oh, let's try happiness by addition – more money, more stuff, more experiences, more pleasure, more wisdom. No, okay, let's downsize. Okay, we'll go simple. No, I don't like this" and people just swap junk at garage sales. Those that are going from the high brow life to the low brow life are giving things away at discount prices to those who are failed at the low brow life and are making a run at the high brow life.

(Laughter)

And that's the world we live in. You say, "Oh, come on. This is so depressing. This is a new building, Mark. We spent a million bucks. Tell me about a bunny or a kitty. Make me happy."

(Laughter)

Verse 18 – here's the big problem. With much wisdom, comes much sorrow. The more knowledge, the more grief. The longer you live, the more you see. The more you see, the more you know. The more you know, the more medication you need.

(Laughter)

Because the sadder you become. Any of you notice? Any of you thinking when you went to college, "Woohoooo, I'm gonna learn about the world." And you're like, "I didn't wanna know that."

(Laughter)

"Don't tell me about that." I can remember, I went to college and the first thing I learned about was Hitler. I was like, "That's terrible. I didn't wanna know that. I didn't wanna know all the atrocity and all of the sin and the evil and the war and the injustice and the carnage." He says, "You know what? I've learned everything that can be known and it has made me nothing but sad because I can't fix it." And there is a big difference between information and transformation. Solomon, in his great wisdom, had information. He understood the human condition, but he could not fix it.

It's interesting, 900 some years later, after Solomon, comes Jesus Christ. Here's the beauty. Here's the good news. Under the sun, no hope. Who comes? God. God who's above and sovereign, over creation. God comes into creation as one of us, into this crooking, frustrating, fallen, bent, collapsed web of life. He comes into it. He's tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. Everything that Solomon pursued, Jesus was tempted to, but in wisdom unlike Adam and in wisdom unlike Solomon, he resisted. And it's interesting because at Jesus' birth, some of the first people who come to worship him are Magi in Matthew 2. Wise men, like Solomon, pursuing the truth. What's the meaning of life? What's the point? Where's the wisdom? And they end up on their knees worshiping the baby Jesus. Everybody who honestly pursues wisdom ends up kneeling before Jesus in worship.

And Jesus lives his life and he tells us something amazing in Matthew 12:42. He says, "Now one who is greater than Solomon is here." Here's his point. Solomon knew the problem, but he couldn't fix it. He knew the world was filled with sin, but he couldn't forgive sin. He couldn't cleanse the stain of sin. He knew that people were crooked, but he couldn't straighten 'em out. He knew that the world didn't have the resources it needed to be the kind of place that was declared good by God. But, Jesus did. Jesus came to right everything that Adam wronged and to answer all of the frustrations that Solomon articulated. And he was greater than Solomon because he was God, not just come to inform us, but to transform us. Not just to share in our sorrow and grief and suffering, but to die for our sin and rise in conquest over it. And it's beautiful because the Bible says that then what happened is this. We are so crooked and the world is so crooked and Jesus was so straight, that he looked peculiar, so we killed him. We killed God.

And upon the cross, something miraculous happened. We're told in 2 Corinthians 5:21 that God made him who knew no sin to become sin, so that in him, we might become the righteousness of God. We are told in Galatians that on the cross, he died for our sins and he redeemed us from our curse. We are told in Corinthians that in that moment, he gave us his righteousness and he gave us his wisdom, so we wouldn't need to live as fools anymore. And the beauty of it is that my sin past, present, future, my rebellion, my folly, all of my wickedness, even if I haven't done everything that Solomon did, I've thought about it, and in so doing, I condemn myself with my own conscious. Men here say, "I've been faithful to my wife." You probably have a harem bigger than Solomon's in your imagination. We're all guilty as charged.

And the fact of the matter is this – Jesus dies for our sin. The wage for sin is death. He comes into creation to liberate and redeem all who come to him in faith. And Jesus Christ rises from his grave. He conquers our enemies of Satan, sin and death. And he begins the great reclamation project of connecting everything back to the Father. That tether that was severed and the creation that collapsed in its web, is now being untangled by Jesus and reconnected to the Father because life has no meaning. Life has no purpose. Life has no goal, unless Creator and creation are reconciled. In every

philosophy, in every religion, and every morality and every movement is an attempt to bridge the gap between man and God, but there is no hope of us rising above the earth. And so, God came down. God came down here to be with us. God came down here to die and rise for us. And, to me, this is such an important and profound message.

You know, between 1970 and 1999, in this nation, the average person, their income, when adjusted for inflation, has gone up 16 percent; but, divorce has tripled. Teen suicide has tripled. Depression is an epidemic. We have a great depression, but it has little to do with our money. It's a poverty of soul. Medication, counseling, suicide, discouragement, despair. We then turn to all of our diversions of entertainment to sort of escape reality and sit around and watch reality TV because that's about as close as we can handle getting to the truth. And within it all, we've even created a new word that the mod – it didn't even exist 'til the modern era – and that is boredom. We have time to kill. We have affluence and wealth and so, we get bored. Why? Because life is not satisfying. Because life is not perfect. Basically, because life is not God and anyone who is seeking to squeeze full value, meaning, purpose, from this life is perennially frustrated.

You know, it's as if we've got full hands and empty souls. A commentator says it great. He says that "Every one of us walks around the earth with a can of peaches and Jesus is the only one with a can opener." And we're just frustrated. Sir Arnold Toynbee's a historian. He said that, "Of the 21 greatest nations, civilizations, in the history of the world, ours, the modern west, is the first and the only that does not teach its citizens why they exist because we don't know." We don't know where we came from. It's God. We don't know where we're going. It's God. We don't know why we're here. It's God. We've missed the big E on the eye chart. We go to school. We go to work. We have sex. We have kids. We spend money. We pay taxes. We drive cars. We get frustrated. We get happy. We get sad. We get busy. We don't know why. And then we die because, as Solomon said, "Life moves quick" and you blink and it's gone.

And Søren Kierkegaard, a great philosopher, he says that, "The goal, then, should be this – to find life forward, live it backward." You gotta know why you're here and then organize your life toward that purpose. And there's really only two options. The goal is us or the goal is God. And Jesus says, "If you lose your life, that's how you find it." That the whole point of life is God and I'll tell you the beauty of this. As soon as you worship God, as soon as you know God, as soon as you're connected to God, you have diminished expectations for life. Life doesn't need to be perfect. Jesus hasn't completed, finishing all of his reclamation project of redemption. We will have resurrected new bodies. We will walk into his kingdom. Things will be made new. All things will be made perfect in the meantime. We can eat and drink and work and laugh and play and die, and not take ourselves so seriously. And that's the point of Ecclesiastes. You can be rich. You can be horny. You can be smart. But, you'll never be satisfied until you meet him. And then, your life has a measure of joy because it has being reconnected to the God who gave it.

You know, and the beauty of it all is this, really. We don't need to be significant. We don't need to be successful. We don't need to be rich. We don't need to be smart. We just need to be repentant and we need to be loved. That's what we need. That's all that we need. And we take our cue from Solomon. This is a book of profound repentance. And it is a dire warning to us all. "Take my word. There's nothing here. Stop running from God. Go back to him." And we're loved. God loves us. God has come for us. God has redeemed us. God is resurrected for us. God is coming again for us. You know, I don't need 1,000 women. I just need Jesus and then he gives me eyes for my wife. I don't need a billion dollars. I just need Jesus and he gives me my daily bread. And it's an issue of satisfaction and there's a difference between stuff and satisfaction. Stuff, you can get on your own. Satisfaction comes from God. And you don't get that until you're reconnected to him through your mediator, Jesus, who came and died for your sins as your great God and rose to give you the gift of life.

The reason he's brought you here tonight is to love him. To worship him. To trust him. And to realize that he is the goal of your existence and anything else you may set up, will be frustrating. And those of you that have tried, that's why you keep changing gods. You've pursued something or someone founded on satisfying, so you've moved on to something else. And you will be restless until you find yourself in Christ. We invite you to him. We invite you to love him and trust him and then life, significantly, is filled with meaningfulness. Jesus says it this way. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and then everything else falls into place." We invite you to turn from sin. Turn to Christ. Turn from yourself. Turn to God. That's why we're here.

In a moment, we'll give you an opportunity to simply do that very practically. We're gonna give you some time to pray, to think through your sin, to bring it to God, your frustrations. And rather than just yelling at the frustrations in your life, ask yourself how God is using them to redirect you toward him. We're gonna call you forward for communion. Communion is remembering Jesus' body and blood shed for our sin. He's our great God. We're here for Jesus. Let me make that abundantly clear. We're not here for Mars Hill. We're not here for Pastor Mark. We're not here for the new building. I love the building, but it's all about Jesus and if it's not about him, all of the rest is just meaningless, really. There's no value or purpose and there'll be nothing to profit or leave in the end because when we die, the only thing we take with us are memories and friends. And we want you all to be friends of Christ and have good memories with him and with us. We'll invite you to communion to remember Jesus Christ, your great God and King.

As you come forward, you're welcome to leave your offering in the basket. You're welcome to partake of communion and remember it's about Jesus. Those two activities are reserved for Christians. Those of you that are not Christians, we don't want your money. You're a guest. It's good to have you. For those of you that aren't Christians, however, you are certainly welcome and we would implore you to do your business with God tonight; to be honest about the fact that you are not a good god. You're not good at ruling your own life. You need to trust him and turn from sin and name them and trust Jesus and thank him that he forgives you and loves you and that he will fill your life with his presence and his meaning and his purpose. And then, we'll respond with singing and joy because that's all that's left. When our lives have been filled with Christ, we get our meaning back. One greater than Solomon is here. We need not sit in his despair and his discouragement because we sit after the fact and we see the empty tomb and the risen Christ and we have reason for much joy.

I love you guys. I'm proud to be your pastor. This is a wonderful night for us all and we'll celebrate and we'll sing to Jesus and that's why we're here.

Our Father God, we thank you for an opportunity to gather together in this great new place as your people. We thank you so much that you invite us to repentance, to turn from sin and folly and death. To stop plugging away on our exercise bike and driving around our cul-de-sac. That the purpose of our life is clear. It is you. That you are a great God. That every other new idea or movement or cause or philosophy that we come up with is really just pretentious arrogance because others have come with it before and they have died and they have achieved nothing; otherwise, the world wouldn't look as it does. Thank you, Lord Jesus that you not only have the information that Solomon did, but that you bring transformation through your death, burial and resurrection.

I thank you Lord Jesus for dying for all of my sins, past, present, future, loving me, adopting me, forgiving me, encouraging me and putting up with me, even though I'm far more frustrating to you than anything that I have in my own life. God, we love you so much. We come forward for communion to remember your body and blood shed for our sin, to give of our offering and to give of our song.

God, for those who may not know you, we pray that they, indeed, would incline their hearts toward you and that they would learn from Solomon's wisdom, realizing that they will never have his insight or his money or his opportunity or his power, but, indeed, they can worship his God by learning from their teacher. Amen.