Men's Conference | Session 1

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Preacher: Jim Hamilton

[0:00] Well, it's a joy for me to formally introduce our speaker, Dr. Jim Hamilton.! He's a professor of biblical theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville,! Kentucky. He's a pastor of Kenwood Baptist Church. He's an author, husband, father, and baseball coach. Formerly, maybe. Still. But so busy. And what he's going to be preaching to us on, he has lived. And he lives a faithful life. I'm grateful for his impact on my life and the lives of many in this room. So it's a joy to get to sit under the preaching of the word as he's instructing us this weekend. So would you please join me in welcoming to the stage Dr. Jim Hamilton.

It's a thrill to be here. I am delighted. It's so encouraging to see a thriving, healthy local church. And I'm honored to get to open the word with you guys. Let's open with a word of prayer as we begin. Father, I pray that you would teach us what it means to redeem the time. And Lord, help us to think well about the fact that the heavens will be burned up and dissolved. And Lord, help us to know what we should be doing as we wait for and hasten the coming of the day of God.
Lord, help us to think about who we are as men made in your image. Help us to think about our role and our responsibility as members of a local church and as those who have received this Great Commission task to make disciples of all nations. And Lord, we ask that you would help us to attempt great things for you and expect great things from you. And Lord, at the same time, make us content with what you give us. So we pray that you would help us to be ambitious for the gospel and for the kingdom and also able to enjoy what you provide for us. So we commit these requests to you, Lord, and we offer ourselves to you and pray that you would enable us to be living sacrifices, even as we think together about the scriptures now. We pray all this in Christ's name. Amen.
I'd invite you to open this evening to Ecclesiastes chapter 2. And as you turn there, I just want to say a little bit about who Solomon was and what he seems to have understood about his role, his responsibility, his place in God's kingdom. And I want to think with you about this tonight in the hope that it will spur your thinking about who you are and about your place in God's kingdom.
[2:55] And I hope that in the same way that as we think about Ecclesiastes chapter 2, we will see Solomon's biblically informed creativity. I hope in a similar way, your biblically informed creativity will be stimulated. Now, our project is not Solomon's project. We're going to think about Solomon's project. So let me say a word here at the beginning about what I think our project is. We are those, like Solomon, who are made in the image and likeness of God. And I think this means, in part, that we are meant to be those who bring God's authority to bear in God's creation. We are the visible representations of the invisible God as those made in his image. And when God blessed man in the beginning, Genesis 1, 28, and said to them, be fruitful and multiply, he clearly wanted the man and the woman to replicate and to multiply so that those who bear God's image would fill the dry lands as the waters cover the sea. So from the beginning, God's purpose is to fill the world with his glory. And then you know about the rebellion, the sin that enters in, and you know about the Lord Jesus saying, go make disciples of all nations. Now, we're not going to think a whole lot about the church. I understand your pastor's been preaching about the church. I am a proponent, an advocate of, a believer in church-based international missions. So I'm somebody that I think that if, when we think about world missions, we should be thinking about cross-cultural church work, local church work, that that should be the hub out of which missions flow and back which, back into which missions feeds. And I hope that as I talk about

Solomon tonight and what he was trying to do, your thinking will be stimulated about what you can do in this local church, and maybe some of you, how the Lord might be stirring your heart to send you somewhere else in the world, maybe to a different culture to seek to build the temple of the Holy Spirit, the church of the living God. So Solomon, Solomon was the son of David. And you'll remember that in 2 Samuel 7, David, when he had rest from all his enemies around him, he

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immediately had this desire well up within him to build a temple. Now the reason he wanted to build a temple is because he understood God's program from creation. David discerned from his reading of Genesis 1 and 2 and from other scripture available to him that when God built the world, what got built was a cosmic temple. So you can think, for instance, of Isaiah 66 where the Lord says, heaven is my throne, the earth is my footstool. And of course the footstool in the Holy of Holies is the Ark of the Covenant with the mercy seat. That's the footstool. But the Lord is saying, the earth is my footstool. And then he asks, what is the house that you would build for me? It's as though the Lord is saying, I built my house. It's the cosmos. And I mean for my house to be filled with my glory. Once man gets driven out of the Garden of Eden, God gives to Israel a replica of his heavenly tabernacle. See that you make everything according to what was shown you, according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain. And Moses is to replicate the heavenly tabernacle in the earthly tabernacle. And that's a small scale picture of what the whole world is supposed to be. A place, the most important thing about this is it's a place inhabited by the Lord himself. That's what happens in Exodus chapter 40. That's what happens in first Kings eight when Solomon builds the temple. Now I think that David, he wants to build a temple because he understands Adam's role in creation. Adam is the image of God. Where do you put the image? You put the image in the temple. And Adam was to fill the world with God's glory, making it so that all the earth was like the Holy of Holies, which was represented by the Garden of Eden. But because of sin and death and defilement, he was driven out of God's presence. When David desires to build the temple, his desire is to make it so that God's glory radiates out from that temple and covers the dry lands as the waters cover the sea.

So that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting, the name of the Lord will be praised. That's what David wants to do. And David is told, you're not the man to do this. But the Lord tells him in second Samuel 7 14, I will raise up your seed after you and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. And he, that seed of David will build a house for my name. Solomon is the seed of David, whom the Lord said would build a house for the Lord's name. And I think that in the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon is doing two, at least two things for us. He's doing a lot of things, but these are the two things I want to highlight. One thing he's doing is confessing and repenting of his sin. [8:27] So I would argue that in this book, Solomon is acknowledging the ways that he departed from God's purposes and transgressed against God's commandments. And he's repenting by affirming the truth. The other thing, the other big thing I think Solomon is doing is reflecting on his attempt to take up this Adamic task, which was also a Davidic task. And it's the task of building the temple. And in a sense, I think what Solomon was trying to do was recapture what was lost when man was driven from the Garden of Eden. So just as we think about this, let me go ahead and say this now about what's going on when man is driven out of the Garden of Eden. And then God gives to Israel the tabernacle with the holy place and the holy of holies. You may remember that over in Hebrews chapter 9, the author of Hebrews comments on how only the priests could enter the holy place. Now, the reason the author of Hebrews makes that comment is because we're all made to dwell in God's presence all the time. We're all made to dwell in God's presence all the time. So what the author of Hebrews is saying is, you can see that the old covenant is not getting the job done because it's not getting everybody into the holy place. Only the priest can go in there. And then only the high priest can go into the holy of holies. And he can only go there once a year. So what Solomon is trying to do is he's trying to rebuild the temple and rebuild Eden, I think, so that all God's people can dwell in God's presence all the time. That's a massive task. That's a great task. And I think we're all men in this room, no women in this room, right?

Men are made for great tasks. Joey mentioned that I've been a baseball coach. The last four years, I had the privilege of coaching a high school baseball team. I'm no longer doing that.

I had a son graduate and things that, you know, we reprioritize and reconsider. I loved having the parent meeting and requiring the players to show up to the parent meeting where we would explain the objective of this baseball team. Our goal was to win championships. Now we're a really small school, you know, graduating classes of like 35 to 40. And, and they don't classify according to school size in the state of Kentucky. So we play against Trinity high school, which last year was the number one team in the state of, not only in the state of Kentucky, but also in the nation. They were the number one high school baseball team in the nation. They had a kid, Grayson Willoughby, that, that he touched a hundred as a high school pitcher. I mean, it's crazy to play against Trinity, but our goal, our goal, it may be impossible, but our goal is to win championships. Our goal was to beat

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Trinity.
Even, I mean, I know it, look, it's impossible, but I want those kids to believe our goal. Our goal is to manifest God's glory in this world. Our goal is to have marriages that show forth the relationship between Christ and the church. Our goal is to raise up young men who will be elder qualified men. Our goal is for our daughters to be Proverbs 31 women. Our goal is for this church to, to be thriving with health because of the way that we're loving one another, because of the way that we're living out the one another's of scripture. Our goal is to know the Bible as thoroughly as we possibly can. Our goal is to be Christ-like. That's the objective. And then our goal is to make disciples of all nations. Those are the tasks. Those are massive tasks. They're huge tasks.
And as we think about, as we think about things like this, this orders our time. Because once we know what we're for, once we know what the objective is, now we work back from the goal. And we ask ourselves, what do I need to be doing right now to take steps toward that goal? So if I want to know the scriptures, I need to be memorizing the Bible. I should be, this is my goal, every morning, I want to wake up and, you know, maybe it's wrong that I do this, but this is what I do. My phone charges right next to my bed.
[13:07] I grab my phone. Before I ever get out of bed, I open the Bible app on my phone and I start working on the next verse. And I read it 10 times and then I close my eyes and I try to say it 10 times.

And I come back the next day and before I, before I look at it, I try to say the verse that I got yesterday and, and, and then I refresh and review it. And then I move to the next verse and I read it 10 times and I say it 10 times. And, and it, we need to have those kinds of practical action steps. If we want to know the Bible, if we want to grow in our biblical knowledge that we're working on, on every one of these fronts, if we want to have great marriages, we got to, we got to pour into these great marriages. If we want to have great kids, we got to be investing in these kids, discipling these kids, building relationships with our kids and, and so on and so forth throughout. So Solomon, he's trying to rebuild the garden of Eden. Look with me, if you will, at Ecclesiastes chapter two, and we'll start in verse one. Solomon writes here, I said in my heart, come now, I will test you with pleasure. Now, um, the word pleasure in the ESV, it, it potentially skews things in a slightly negative direction. And, and I, you know, depending on what translation you're looking at, like if you're looking at the net Bible translation, it really skews in a hedonistic direction. On the basis of what we're going to see Solomon talk about here, I don't think he's talking about hedonistic, sinful, self-indulgent pleasure. I think he's talking about pleasure that's on the joy side of the equation.
In fact, the word that's used here, it's, it's a term simcha is the Hebrew word, and it occurs all over the Psalter to talk about feeling joy. And then there's a corresponding verb, sameach, that, that is translated all over the Psalms, rejoice. So I think that Solomon here is talking about godly joy, that kind of pleasure, not hedonistic, sinful self-indulgence.
I said in my heart, I will test you with pleasure. And then I think this next phrase, enjoy yourself, is unfortunate. Now I'm going to be making recourse to Hebrew here, and I teach at a seminary. And I think that we need the biblical languages. And I think that the biblical languages are within reach for just about, I mean, anybody in this room that can read English, you can learn Greek and Hebrew. Hebrew. And I'm not saying everybody needs to do that, but if you're a young person and you're considering ministry, you ought to give yourself to Greek and Hebrew. If you're a young person and you've, you've received a classical education, you've got some Latin, Greek will be easy for you to learn. You should absolutely do what you can to get Greek and Hebrew. The ESV renders this, enjoy yourself. But literally what the text says is, see good. Come now, I will test you with joy. See good. And I want to make a suggestion about what Solomon is doing here. Solomon is obeying Paul before Paul wrote Ephesians 5.1. I mean, yeah, Paul's going to write long in the future from Solomon's day. But in Ephesians 5.1, Paul's going to say, be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children. And Solomon understands what 2 Samuel 7.14 said. I will raise up your seed after you. I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. He shall build a house for my name.
[16:50] I will be a father to him. He will be a son to me. Solomon is the son of God. He's not the son of God like Jesus is, but he's in the line of descent. He's the seed of David. And he understands that like Adam was a son of God, like Israel is a son of God. Solomon understands he represents Adam and Israel.

And so he's trying to be an imitator of God as a dearly loved child. When God did his work, God saw what he had made and it was good. And I think Solomon is admonishing himself here. Come now, I

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will test you with joy. Now, if you're Solomon and you have more wisdom than God has ever given to anybody in the history of humanity, that's what 1 Kings 3 tells us the Lord promised to Solomon. If you've got that kind of wisdom and you understand, I've got a job to do, what kind of joy are you going to seek? I think Solomon is seeking the joy of, of doing God's will. And he's trying to do it the way God did his work. Come now, I will test you with joy, with joy. See good. In other words, do your work work the way God did his work. Now there's not a one-to-one analogy between us and God, right? We, we, we live in time. We experience, we live on this rock, this earth that is spinning on an axis and that has a moon revolving around it and that is going in orbit around the sun. And, and these things constitute for us seconds and moments and hours and days and seasons like months and years.

God is outside all that. God is above and beyond our time. God is not, he's not in time. God is eternal. And yet God has a program. God has a salvation historical development, a plan, and he's working his plan. And, and so there's not a one-to-one between us and God, but as a dearly loved child, we should look at how much time we've got. We should think about what we're trying to accomplish and then we should plan. We should go to work on what's the objective? What's the goal? How do I work back from that? What do I need to start doing right now to accomplish the objective?

This is what Solomon is doing. Come now. I will test you with joy. See good. And then he says, but behold, this also, and the ESV renders this word vanity. If you look down in the, it's got a footnote on the word vanity down in the lower margin. It says the Hebrew term hevel can refer to vapor or mere breath. And then it gives you these verses where this word is going to occur. I want to just suggest, let's, let's work with the word vapor. This also was vapor. I don't think Solomon is saying this was totally pointless. It was altogether meaningless. It was completely insignificant. I think he's saying, yeah, I attempted it and it was breath. Meaning it was insubstantial. I couldn't keep it. It was over quickly and, and, and it's not going to prove to be lasting. And in, in the next unit, uh, verses 12 through 17, what he's going to talk about is the way he realized he was going to die. So one of the things that makes his attempts, his endeavors breath is his own mortality. He can see I'm going to die.

[20:32] And then the unit that follows that in, in Ecclesiastes 2, 18 through 23, what's communicated there is he cannot make it so that the one who comes after him will be wise. The one who comes after him might be wise, but he might be a fool. And I think Solomon can see which direction Rehoboam is going. And I think he's recognizing I'm going to die. And then I can't, I can't ensure that the guy that comes after me is going to be wise. And that makes what I'm trying to do here like breath or like vapor. That's what he means by the word vanity. Now, um, notice how he, he uses this word pleasure again there in verse two. I said of laughter, it is mad and of pleasure. What use is it?

I think that's a very profound question. What use is joy? What use is joy? What, how does joy work? What does it accomplish? What is it for? I think he's probing the nature of life here, but notice how you've got two instances of pleasure there. Um, I will test you with pleasure in verse one and then end of pleasure in verse two. If you drop your eyes down to verse 10, we're going to see two instances of pleasure near the end of this thought unit where he says, whatever my eyes desired, I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure. Again, I think if we use the word joy, it doesn't feel so skewed in a hedonistic direction for my heart found joy in all my toil. So those two instances of joy in verses one and two, and then in verse 10, they're forming a kind of bookend around this whole thought unit. And then notice also how there in verse one, he says, behold, this also was breath. And he's going to say that again, also at the end of the passage down in verse 11, where he says, behold, all was breath and or vanity and a striving after wind. So this idea that it's vanity or breath and that he's seeking pleasure, these concepts are bracketing what he, what he's doing here. Look back up at verse three, where he says, I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine, my heart still guiding me with wisdom. Now we can read statements in Psalms, Psalm 105, I think it is where the Psalmist affirms that the Lord has given wine to the sons of men, which gladdens their hearts. And I think what Solomon is saying here is that he tested the boundaries.

He tested the limits. He, he, he performed controlled experiments with his heart guiding him with wisdom there in verse three. And it's like, he's saying, can I use wine as a stimulant without crossing over into inebriation? And, and, and, and he's, what he's trying to do is lay hold on folly

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there in verse three. So he's, he's searching with his heart, how to cheer his body with wine, how to stimulate himself, how to be wise, and how to lay hold on folly. It's as though he's trying to determine where's the boundary between wisdom and folly. And, and to illustrate this, I want to talk just briefly about this, this study that I, I read, heard about and then read about that, that was done at Duke University about optimists. They, they, they performed this research experiment and they found that optimistic people, they get more job interviews, they make more money, they go on more dates and, and they, they generally live happier lives. Optimists do. I want to be an optimist, don't you? I mean, I don't need dates anymore, but you know, you, you, you have more success.
I do need to date my wife, but you, you understand what I'm saying. But at a certain point, the optimism becomes delusional and it starts to become destructive. So if you go, if you go too far with this optimism, these people start making these investments that are never going to pay out.
[24:50] They're, they're so optimistic about some new company that they sink all their money and then they lose everything. So at some point, optimism becomes unrealistic delusion. And I think that's the kind of thing that Solomon is talking about here when he says he wants to lay hold on folly till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life.

All over the book of Ecclesiastes, he makes this reference to this under heaven. I think he's talking about life in this world, life in this fallen world. Um, as we experience it, uh, between the fall and, uh, in Solomon's day, the coming of the Messiah. And this brings us to verse four, where he's going to start talking about what he sought out, what he set out to do. And, um, I'm going to invite you to start trying to find your way back to Genesis two. And maybe if you've got a bookmark or something in your Bible, you can stick a bookmark in Genesis two. And we're going to, we're going to walk through Ecclesiastes two, four through eight and compare what Solomon says here with what we have back in Genesis two, because, because here's what Solomon is doing. Solomon is trying to imitate God as a dearly loved child. And he's trying to imitate God by carrying out the biblical program that God gave to him by means of his father and earlier scripture. So Solomon thoroughly understands the Bible.
And what he's trying to do is what he sees in the scriptures. He's understood what God is after and he's pursuing it. Verse four, he says, I made great works. This is not hedonistic self-indulgence. This is a wise man with enormous resources at his disposal who attempted massive and significant projects. And then he looks on everything that he did and he says, I made great works.
And then he continues, I built houses. And we can read back in first Kings six through eight of the way that he built the temple. And he also built his own house. And I'm not going to go take the time to look at it tonight, but first Kings in the narrative of the building of the temple, it becomes clear that it took Solomon exactly seven years to build the temple. I think that was on purpose.
[27:30] I think he built the temple in seven years to match the seven days of creation, because in Solomon's view, what he's doing is, is creating a small scale replica of the cosmos in the building of the temple.

He says, I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. And here I would invite you to look back at Ecclesiastes, Genesis chapter two. And in verse eight, we read, and the Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the East. And, and the, the way that this word plant, it's the same Hebrew word planted. And it's, it's formulated the same way from Genesis two, eight here in Ecclesiastes chapter two, verse four, when Solomon says, I built houses and planted vineyards. It's almost like he's saying, look, God, God built creation and then planted a garden.
And I did the same thing. That's what I was trying to do in building the temple and then planting these vineyards. And then he continues in verse five, I made myself gardens. And the word garden is the same word that you've got back in Genesis two, eight, the Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the East. So God, Solomon says, I made myself gardens and parks. And this word parks is the Hebrew term, pardesim. It's the word from which we get our word paradise. So a paradise is an enclosed space where people can, can, you know, enjoy themselves. It's like a baseball stadium. It's a baseball field.
That's what a paradise is. Uh, uh, you know, it's, it's enclosed, it's safe, it's set apart and, and people can do their thing. That that's what a paradise is. That's what the garden of Eden was.
He says, I made myself gardens and parks or paradises and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. Genesis chapter two, verse nine. Well, I'll read verse eight. The Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the East. And there he put the man whom he had formed and out of the ground, the Lord God

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made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So what Solomon is doing is just walking point for point through Genesis two and saying what the Lord did at creation. I was doing in my building projects. Verse six of Ecclesiastes two, he says, I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. Genesis chapter two, verse 10, a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden and there it divided and became four rivers. So the Lord has these water sources. Solomon provides water sources. And this brings us to verse seven, which says, I bought male and female slaves and had slaves who were born in my house. Now this can create some problems for us. And what I want to try to do is diffuse those problems. And I want to diffuse those problems in a couple of ways. The first, the first way is by talking about this word slaves. This is the Hebrew term, um, Eved. It's the plural form of Eved. And it's on,
[30:55] I think it's unfortunate. Well, it's unfortunate that we don't read Hebrew, but it's unfortunate that this word is not translated consistently. Sometimes this word is translated slave. Sometimes it's translated servant. This is the word used Eved when Moses is described as the servant of Yahweh. When Joshua is described as the servant of when David is described as my servant. So imagine how it would hit us if Moses was described as the slave of Yahweh and David, my David, go and tell David my slave. And then the real kicker is Isaiah 52, 13.

Behold, my servant, there's our word, shall act wisely. He shall be high and lifted up. I mean, imagine reading, behold, my slave shall act, it would, it would alter our understanding of this word slave. It's the same Hebrew term. So the connotations of the word slave for us in English don't map directly onto the connotations of the word Eved in Hebrew. Also, I would note that in old covenant Israel, I don't think that if you have, if, if it, I mean, Exodus chapter 21, Moses says, when you buy a Hebrew slave, I don't think that Moses and Paul are thinking if somebody is subjected to slavery, it denies that they are made in the image and likeness of God. And it, it robs them of their human dignity. Now I'm not denying that there, there have been wicked cultures like the culture of slavery in the American South and in many other places that when they subject people to slavery, they rob their human dignity and they looked at those people as being less than human and beneath the image of God. What I'm saying is,
I don't think that's the way Moses is thinking about it. I don't think that's the way that Paul is thinking about it. And I don't think that's the way Solomon is thinking about it. So when we read about slaves in the Bible, we don't want to just import everything that we know about slavery from, from our culture or the history of this country or whatever. In the Bible, when a, when a Hebrew person buys a slave, it, it not only does not reduce that, that slave's humanity, it, it also doesn't exhaust the responsibilities of the owner to the slave. The owner, it's, it's kind of like an economic relationship where the slave is going to work for the owner and the owner is going to provide or pay just not in currency. He's going to pay by providing food, shelter, and clothing and by making it so that the slave is part of the owner's household. So we don't want to think about slavery in the Bible, the way that people talk about slavery in our culture, the way slavery was experienced in our culture.
So Solomon writes here, I'm going to, I'm going to, I'm going to supply the Hebrew word. I bought avadim. Okay. I bought servants, we could say, or I acquired servants. One of the reasons this is significant is because that, that word evad, it, it also has a corresponding verb avad, which means to work or to serve. And that's the word used when God put Adam in the garden to work it and keep it. I mean, the, the Bible doesn't say God made a slave when he made Adam. That's not what's going on, but God put Adam in the garden to work the garden. And by the way, the priests at the tabernacle, their responsibility was to work the tabernacle. So in a sense, Solomon is a God built, again, just doing what the Lord did in Genesis. In Genesis, God builds the cosmic tabernacle, the cosmic temple, and then he populates it with people who are to, who are going to do the work of working and keeping the garden. And Solomon has done the same thing when he says, I bought male and female slaves. In fact, it's interesting. The word bought there, that, that Hebrew verb is used in
Proverbs eight, when it starts talking about how wisdom helped the Lord to create the world. So this word bought can also carry a connotation of create. So Solomon could be saying, I created servants, male and female servants and had servants who were born in my house. And then you remember the flow of thought in Genesis two, the Lord makes the man, he puts him in the garden. I'm going to walk through this flow of thought here because it's going to be important for what we're going to see later in the chapter. He makes the man, Genesis two, seven forms him from the dirt,

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dust of the ground, breathes into his nostrils, the breath of life. And then Genesis two, 15, he puts him in the garden to work it and keep it, keep it. And then I think we too, we too regularly don't think about Genesis 2, 16. The Lord says to the man, he says of every tree of the garden, eating, you may eat. He gives him access to all the food in the garden of Eden in Genesis 2, 16. And then he says in 2, 17, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you must not eat in the day you eat of it, you will surely die. And then the next verse to 18, it is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper fit for him. And then what's he do? He makes, he starts making the animals and no suitable helper is found for Adam. And then he makes the woman. Look at Genesis, Ecclesiastes chapter two, the end of verse seven. I also had great possessions of herds and flocks more than any who had been before me in
[36:47] Jerusalem. So he puts his, his servants in his garden as it were. And then he starts talking about the animals in the same way that we got that flow of thought in Genesis chapter two, verse eight of, of Ecclesiastes two. I also gathered for myself silver and gold, the treasure of kings and provinces.

Genesis chapter two, verse 11. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold and the gold of that land is good. Bdellium and onyx stone are there.
And then he goes on talking about the other rivers. So there are precious stones and gold in the garden of Eden. And Solomon gathers these things as well. And then Solomon says in verse eight, I got singers, both men and women. Now I love, I mean, it's awesome to gather with a group of Christians Christians and hear great music and join in the singing. And I love the way that Christians throughout history have cultivated music. In fact, a few weeks ago, I had the privilege of being in Turkey. I was there to visit a missionary couple, couple from our church. And, um, and, uh, I got to fellowship with the church that this brother is pastoring. And there was a guy who had, who'd come to Turkey from Iran? You know, these Muslim countries like Iran, when somebody becomes a Christian in one of those countries, their, their, their Muslim country passport only lets them go to another
Muslim country. So this guy, he could get to Turkey, which it's more free in Turkey. He can find a church in Turkey. He can be a Christian and not get killed in Turkey. So he kind of fled Iran and came to Turkey.
And, and he showed me the video of him being baptized in this church. It's just beautiful. And I said to him, what drew you to Christianity in Iran? How did you even hear about Christianity?
[38:47] And he got this big smile on his face and he goes, it was, it's, he said, it started with classical music. I was like classical music. He said, yes, they don't produce anything like that in Muslim, in Muslim cultures. There's nothing like classical music in Muslim cultures. And he said, I heard, I heard Bach and it was so beautiful. And I wanted to know what worldview produced this. And that led him into all of this great Christian art, which eventually prompted him to think to himself, I got to get my hands on a Bible. And he said, he said, you can't legally buy a Bible in Iran, but they don't have the internet entirely shut down. And so he eventually found his way to the Bible online and he starts reading the Bible and he came to faith. The point here is Solomon is cultivating beauty. He's cultivating music. And, and this is an expression of the glory of God. I got singers, both men and women.

And then I think this next translation is another unfortunate rendering. It says, and many concubines. Now, look, we know that Solomon sinned with a bunch of women in first Kings 11. We know all about that.
I just don't think that's what he's talking about. There, there is a Hebrew word for concubine. The word is pilegesh. And that is not what, that's not the expression that Solomon uses here. The expression that Solomon uses here is, is shida vashidot. And you know, sometimes you hear about exegetical gymnastics. If you want an example of exegetical gymnastics, go read the commentators that try to make shida vashidot into many concubines. It is a convoluted pretzel that they have to wrap themselves in. And notice how there is a footnote here that tells you the meaning of the Hebrew word is uncertain.
At the end of the day, we're, we're not exactly certain what this expression means, but the earliest translation of he, of the Hebrew into Greek took this to refer to like a fine table setting, you know, like the, the, we, we would, we would have fine China and maybe, maybe crystal glasses or something like that. These fine implements used at a, at a sophisticated dinner that the best scholars, I think, think that that's maybe what Solomon is referencing here. The delight of the sons

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of man in that sense, not in the first Kings 11 sin sense. And I think in view of the flow of thought, for him to reference concubines and, and many women, it, it just doesn't fit the rest of the flow of thought. Verse nine, he writes, so I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem.
Also my wisdom remained with me. Notice how we started with two instances of pleasure in verse, verses one and two, and then we had wisdom in verse three. Now we've got wisdom in verse nine, and we're going to have two instances of pleasure in verse 10. So this whole thing he's saying was characterized by wisdom. Now think about this for a moment. Solomon is saying, I set out to do what God did when he made the world and I did it with wisdom. You know, I referenced Proverbs eight earlier in Proverbs eight, Solomon again is talking about how he's speaking in the voice of wisdom and wisdom is saying that she was with the Lord when he made the world. So I think this is tracking with, with the creation theme that's here. Verse 10, whatever my eyes desired, I did not, did not keep from them. Again, you could read this hedonistically. I don't think that's the way to read it. I think the kinds of pleasure and the kinds of things that Solomon is seeking here are things that are ambitious for God's glory.
[42:51] I think when he says, whatever my eyes desired, I did not keep from them. We should think of the extravagance that he went, the links that he went to in the building of the temple in the attempt to show forth God's glory. And then he continues, I kept my heart from no, and I'm going to use the word joy. I kept my heart from no joy. Here's what I would suggest to you. If you give yourself to the great task that the Lord Jesus gave to his people, go make disciples of all nations. This is what's going to be required that you're going to, you're going to have to cultivate keeping your heart from no joy. And that's going to require refusing the things that are going to ruin your joy, refusing the worldly and satanic perversions of pleasure that take joy away from you. You're going to have to cultivate holiness if you're going to keep your heart from no joy. And then look at what he says, for my heart found joy in all my toil. In other words, it's like he's, he's looking, he's surveying everything that he accomplished. And, and he's, and he's looking back on the, the exertions, the mental exertions, the organizational exertions, the architectural exertions. I mean, everything that Solomon had to learn, everything that he had to, to figure out how to do, to, to move those massive blocks of rock that formed the foundation stones of the temple, to build that massive structure, to accomplish all that he pulled off. And he says, my heart found pleasure in all my toil. Now, before I read the next words, let me draw your attention to what he says in chapter one, verse three, in chapter one, verse three, he asked the question, what does man gain gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? And then he's going to repeat that question in chapter three, verse nine, what gain has the worker from his toil? Those are good questions for us to think about. What do we gain from all our toil? And with that question in mind, look at what he says at the end of verse 10 in chapter two, this was my reward for all my toil. I'm going to read the whole line. I kept my heart from no joy for my heart found joy in all my toil. And this was my reward for all my toil. Now I'm going to read the next few statements and then we're going to come back and think about what, what he's saying here. Verse 11, then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil that I had expended in doing it and behold, all was breath and a striving after wind. The temple that he, that he built, the gardens, the parks, the music, the servants, the flocks and herds, breath, breath. I mean, none of it remains. It's all gone. And, and I think that Solomon could tell from his reading of Leviticus 26, the curses of the covenant and the, and the prophecy of the exile from the land. I think he could tell from Deuteronomy four, 25 through 31, where Moses again says, essentially, you're going to cross the Jordan river. You're going to break the covenant. God's going to drive you into exile. And he could tell from his reading of Deuteronomy 28 through 32, we're going to get exiled. I think he knew this temple is going to be raised to the ground. This is breath.

I considered all that my hands had done and the toil that I had expended in doing it. And behold, all was breath and a striving after wind. Have you ever tried to catch the wind? Maybe, do you remember a time maybe when you were a kid and you felt a breeze go by and you thought to yourself, I'm going to catch that. And you take off running after the wind. There's nothing for you to get their arm, your arms around. Is there, there are no handles for you to get your fingers onto. Two, you're striving after wind and it just slips right through. That's what Solomon says his endeavors were. And there was nothing to be gained under the sun. Now here's what I would propose he means. He means something like this. I realized that though I am the anointed King of Israel, though I am the son of David, though I am the new Adam, the representative, the federal

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head of the nation of Israel. And though I am building the temple of God, I am not the one who can rebuild Eden. I think he realized I'm not the one who is to come. I'm not the Lord Jesus.
And he also realized not only am I not Jesus and I can't rebuild Eden. I think he realizes on the basis of two, 12 through 17, I can't overcome death. I can't make it where the ones who come after me are righteous. I can't choose the people of God and make them righteous. I can't build Eden. I can't overcome death. I can't elect the people of God. What he's saying is I am not the Christ. He's saying it was my job to attempt it. It was my responsibility to try, but it was all breath and striving after wind. Now look again at verse 10. I kept my heart from no joy for my heart found joy in all my toil.
And this was my reward for all my toil. I want to give you a kind of illustration from my own life that thankfully did not. I mean, it's, it's more than breath, but it's breath. Um, several years ago, I was writing, I was in the process of writing a commentary on Psalms. It's now published. It's a beautiful two volume commentary. I say it's beautiful because the publisher made it beautiful.
[49:10] They're the ones that put it in these, this beautiful cover. It's really nice. It's, I'm just so pleased with it. But, um, just as I complete the manuscript on that commentary on Psalms, 800 pages in a word document, um, 325,000 words in a word document, I get ready to email it to the publisher.

And I reach out to my friend at Broadman and Holman at the time. And I said, Hey, Chris, I'm, I'm wrapping up my, my manuscript on my commentary on Psalms. Who do I send it to? And he writes me back and he says, Oh, Jim, I am so sorry. And I'm like, Oh, he says, he says, um, we have analyzed the sales data on the commentary series and we've decided to shut it down. We will not be publishing your commentary on Psalms.
And I'm like, you gotta be kidding me. You're, I wrote this thing. You contracted me, write this thing. I've got 800 pages. I've got comments on every one of the 150 Psalms and you're, it's dead. It's over breath. You know, my next thought, honestly, I mean, praise God, God, this is God's grace to me.
My, my next thought was it was worth doing, even if it's never published, if it's never published, it was worth doing for the joy that I had in doing it. Praise the Lord. That's what Solomon is saying here. He's saying, yeah, I failed. I didn't rebuild Eden. I didn't overcome death. I'm not the Messiah, but I had joy in the task. I had joy in the work. We want to, we want to use our time on things that are valid, things that are noble, things that are good and things that will give us joy, even if we fail. I mean, those Highlands Latin baseball teams that I coached, we didn't win any championships.
We won. There's this, they, they take the smallest 60 schools in the state of Kentucky and they put them in this all, they call it the all a tournament because they don't classify by school size. So they let all the school, all the small schools play each other. And there was one year when I was coaching, when we won the all a district and then we got slaughtered in the all a regional, but we had joy in the effort. We had joy in going for it. And I wouldn't trade a second of coaching those teams and, and, and, and going after it with those boys. Um, praise God B&H sold the commentary series to another publisher who resurrected it from the dead and gave it new life. And, and hallelujah, it actually did get printed. Praise the Lord. Um, Solomon, I think is modeling for us what it looks like to be an imitator of God as a dearly loved child. And I hope that in considering this passage, I want to, I want, I want to look with you at some things he says at the end of this chapter, but I hope that in, in considering this passage, you will reflect on, okay, look what Solomon did with the task under the old covenant. We live under the new covenant. Our job is not to build a building, right? God, God under the old covenant, the glory of God radiated out from the temple.
[52:32] Every man in Israel was to go up to the temple three times a year. That's not our task. Our task as people believe in Jesus, they are born again by the power of the Holy spirit indwelt by the Holy spirit with the result that Paul says to the church in Corinth. Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in you. So I think one of the things that's incumbent upon all of us is to think about Hebrews 10, where the author of Hebrews says, let us consider how we may stir one another up to love and good deeds. And we ought to take this creativity and this, this intellectual endeavor that Solomon has just described for us. And we ought to say, how do I use that kind of creativity? How do I engage in that kind of endeavor to try to stir up my, my fellow members of the temple of the Holy spirit to love and good deeds, to show forth the glory of God. What can I be doing to live out the one another's in this church? How can I be a better man, a more Christ-like man? And this is just a side comment. And if you hate this novel, you know,

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that's fine. I don't care. Recently, I read this novel by Alan Levi called Theo of golden.

And that book made me want to be a better man. And if you want an example of somebody that's loving people, that's a, that's a great, it's a great story. I would encourage you to check it.
If you like novels, maybe that's something to check out. Let me invite you to look, look with me down at the end of this passage in Ecclesiastes chapter two. And to, to kind of see where we're going, remember that he said in verse three, he says at the end of verse three, till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life. In, in Ecclesiastes 2 24, he says, there is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink. And the ESV renders it find enjoyment, but in the lower margin, they got a footnote. It says, or make his soul see good. So there's see and good again in his toil, which I think again is alluding to Genesis one.
God, God said, let there be light. And God saw that the light was good. There's nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and see good in his toil. This also I saw is from the hand of God for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment for to the one who pleases him. God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy. If we had time, I think I could take you through and show you that in the book of Ecclesiastes to please God is to believe to the one who pleases God by grace through faith. God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner, he has given the business of gathering and collecting only to give to the one who pleases God. Solomon is going to make this kind statement repeatedly through this book. Let me just show you, let me take you to one other place where he says the same things. Look over at chapter nine and look at what he adds here starting in 9-7. He says, go eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a merry heart for God has already approved what you do. Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head. Verse nine, enjoy life with the wife whom you love all the days of your, your brief life, your life of breath that he has given you under the sun because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. I wanted to bring in the wife there because every one of these so-called joy passages, Ecclesiastes 2, 24 through 26, chapter 3, verses 12 and 13, 3, 22, 5, 18 through 20, and then 9, 7, 8, 15, and then 9, 7 through 9.
[56:38] Every one of those basically includes eat and drink, see good in your toil, nothing better than that. And I think what Solomon is doing is reminding you, reminding his audience, reminding us of the flow of thought in Genesis 2 again. Genesis 2, 15, God put the man in the garden to work it and to keep it. You're made to work. God, God put Adam in the garden to work the garden. You're built for work. You want to work in such a way that you see good in your work. Genesis 2, 16, of every tree in the garden, eating you may eat.

So you want to work and then you want to receive God's provision with a grateful heart and be able to enjoy what God gives you. And then Genesis 2, 18, it's not good for the man to be alone. I'll make a helper suit fit for him. Ecclesiastes 9, 7 through 9, enjoy life with the wife whom you love. Solomon is saying something like this. We don't live in the garden of Eden. We don't dwell naked and unashamed. We live in a realm where sin has defiled everything and brought death to everyone. We don't live in the garden of Eden. But if you walk with God, you can have an Edenic quality of life where you, you do good work. And basically if you're not in the sin industry and by sin industry, I mean, you know, you're not, you're not exploiting women in the sex industry, the adult industry. You're not, you're not exploiting stupid people in the gambling industry. If you're in one of those industries, if you're not a drug dealer, you know, you're basic, you're not a thief. That's not how you make your living.
You're not a criminal. If you're doing good, valid, righteous work, do it in such a way that you imitate God and you see good in your work. And then receive what God provides for you with a grateful heart, eat, drink, see good in your toil. That's God's gift to you. That's God's gift to you. And apart from him, you can't enjoy that. So we want to recognize that we have a life of breath. I think that's a better rendering than that vain life in Ecclesiastes nine. We have a life of breath, meaning it's going to be, it's going to be over soon. I'm, I'm 52 years old. I'm, I'm not going to, I'm probably not going to live another 52 years. I'm probably not going to make it to 104. There's probably fewer ahead of me than there are behind me. So I want to be a good steward of what God has given me. I want to be an imitator of God as a dearly loved child. I want to redeem the child, the time. I want to hasten while I wait for the day of God, which is going to be the resurrection from the dead. And then I think that, um, I think the Bible everywhere teaches that there's going to be this final judgment. And after that, there's going to be this resurrection. And I think Solomon is working on that assumption too.

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You fear God because of the coming judgment, because of the verdict that's going to be applied in the resurrection. So we want to look at the time that we, we have, and we want to ask ourselves, how can I be godly? How can I be Christ-like? How can I be a good steward of what God has given me in this task of building the new covenant temple? That's what we're after in building the church. And we want to see the church spread all over the world. And I think that,
I think that every aspect of our lives is related to this. Your faithfulness at work, your marriage, your children, even, even the way that you, uh, enjoy life in things like watching, uh, Oklahoma football or maybe Oklahoma state football. I don't know. I don't enjoy life watching Arkansas football too much these days. Maybe they'll be good again. One day we can hope for it. The ways that we enjoy life, we can, it's like receiving God's goodness to us for the glory of God. We want to make good use of the time that we have. And we want to remember that we're made for a purpose. We're, we're made as image bearers of God built to bring God's glory to bear in all creation. That's what Solomon's trying to do in Ecclesiastes 2. That's our task as we pursue the great commission. Let me pray for us.
[61:26] Lord, we thank you for the scriptures. We thank you for opening our minds to understand them. And Lord, we pray that you would give us ever deepening insight into your word, help us to understand our times, help us to know what your people should do. And Lord, we pray that you would cause us to want to be better men, men who love holy pleasures, holy joys, men who live for your kingdom, men who live to build the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Lord, help us to be devoted to that, holy to you. And Lord, we pray that Solomon's creativity would spur our creativity. And we pray that you would help us to endeavor to, to make your glory known. help us to sing now in a way that's worthy of you and help us to live lives that are worthy of the gospel. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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