

Those Who Are Wise in Heart

[The Book of Ecclesiastes]

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Introduction

I wanted to meditate on Ecclesiastes. That's because I felt the urgent need of God's wisdom in my life. Especially, as I was wondering how to live a life in this world that the Teacher King Solomon said "Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless" (Ecc. 1: 2), I wanted to meditate on Ecclesiastes, one of the books of wisdom. As the word of God kept on revealing to me my folly, I wanted to meditate on Ecclesiastes so that I may not live the rest of my life in vain. So after I finished meditating on the Book of Psalms during every Wednesday night prayer meeting, I decided to meditate on the book of Ecclesiastes. I meditated on the Book of Ecclesiastes as I was seeking the wisdom of God.

It was Wednesday, October 17, 2009, when I first began meditating on the book of Ecclesiastes. I began to meditate again after meditating and preaching to the first part of Ecclesiastes, 1: 1-11, under the title of "Vain world" at the Wednesday night prayer meeting. Then, almost every week during the Wednesday night prayer meeting, I meditated on the book of Ecclesiastes for about one year and two months. And on the last day of December 22nd, 2010, under the heading "Now all has been heard ..." I meditated on the words of Ecclesiastes 12: 9-14 and preached on that night and then I meditated it again. As I was meditating on this book of Ecclesiastes, preaching, and meditating again, God had given me very rewarding time. Meditating on the Word of God has been rewarding, and it has been rewarding because of the enlightenment God has given through the meditating Word ["My understanding is this" (7: 23-29)]. In particular, having a death perspective [Take a perspective of death (7:2)], in this "Vain world" (1:11) I thank God for enabling me to throw away the "Vain wisdom" (1:12-18), that is "The wisdom of man" (8:1-8) and "Vain pleasure" (2:1-11) in "A lifetime of shadows" (6:7-12) but to pursue "The wisdom of the poor in spirit" (4:13-16), "Wisdom that empowers those who are wise" (7:19-22), 'Skill that will bring success' (10:8-11) and "Beauty of wisdom" (7:11-14). I want to continue to pursue this wisdom because I do not want to prove myself foolish anymore ["Do not prove yourself that you are a fool" (10: 1-4)]. Rather, I want to remember my Creator God ["Remember your Creator in the days of your youth" (12:1-8). Also only by standing in awe of God ["Stand in awe of God" (5:1-7)] and by faith I want finish this race of life [Race of life (7:8-10, 14) until the end as I enjoy myself [Are you enjoying yourself?" (6:3, 6)].

Today I am grateful and glad that I am able to end the modification even in the midst of lacking while reading the Ecclesiastical manuscripts again that I meditated about five years ago with the motivation given by God. What is most pleasing to me now is that I am able to share this meditation essay of the Book of Ecclesiastes with my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. I hope and pray that through this sharing, may God fulfill his will and give you grace, those who seek the wisdom of God.

In Him,

James Kim

Vain world

[Ecclesiastes 1:1-11]

What do you think life is? I think life is vain. If we talk about life, I would like to say 'a fleeting life.' Here, the word "fleeting" means there is nothing between, there is no time, there is no residence, it changes quickly and be free of (Internet). As I went through this word on the internet, I got to know the word "a spring dream". The meaning of the word "a spring dream" is 'a scene of the spring dream.' This word is referred to 'a vain movie or a fleeting thing' (Internet). So people often think of life as a day dreaming. The Psalmist Moses prayed: "Teach us to number our days aright" (Ps. 90:12). We should also pray like Moses. In this prayer, there are two kinds of meanings: (1) 'Teach me the vanity of life' and (2) Teach me how to value life'. Then how do we know the vanity of life? There are three:

- (1) First, life is vain because it returns to dust. Look at Psalms 90:3 - "You turn men back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, O sons of men."
- (2) Second, life is vain because it is short. Look at Psalms 90:4-6 - "For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night. You sweep men away in the sleep of death; they are like the new grass of the morning - though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered."
- (3) Third, life is vain because there is hard work and sorrow in lifetime. Look at Psalms 90:10 - "The length of our days is seventy years-- or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away."

Today's passage Ecclesiastes 1: 1-11 is the introductory part of the whole Ecclesiastes. This introductory part can be divided into two parts; the first part is verse 1. This Bible passage says that the author of Ecclesiastes is Solomon, King of Jerusalem, son of David. That is, Solomon is the "Teacher" who wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes. The second part is verse 2-11. This Bible passage says that the world is vanity. In this second part of the world where we are told that the world is vanity. The Teacher we have heard of him saying, "Vanity of vanities, Vanity of vanities! All is vanity" (v. 2). This confession is a conclusive confession from the experience of King Solomon the Teacher who took everything in this world and enjoyed it. The confession is that "everything is in vain". What is interesting here is the meaning of Hebrew in the word "vain" which King Solomon speaks here is "breath". This is figure of speech that means "a fleeting thing that is opposed to the solid and enduring things"(Ps. 90:9) (Park Yun-sun). According to John MacArthur, the word "vanity" is used by King Solomon the Teacher in at least three meanings in his entire book of Ecclesiastes:

- (1) The first means is that what the people under the sun do is fleeting. In other words, our life is like being "a fog that shows and disappears for a moment" (Jam. 4:14).
- (2) The second meaning is that what the people do under the sun is futile or meaningless. It focuses on the weakening effects of human experience on this planet in the cursed state of the entire universe.
- (3) The third meaning is that what people do under the sun is incomprehensible or enigmatic. This is the conclusion that comes down to the inexplicable questions of life (MacArthur).

Today, under the title of "Vain world," I would like to think of four things why this world that we are living in is vain. Hopefully, through today's Word, I hope we will realize more of the vanity of this world. I hope and pray that we can live the meaningful life in this vain world with the wisdom that God gives to us so that our life can be remembered in the sight of God.

Why this world we live in is a vain world?

First, the reason why this world is vain is because it is useless. In other words, this world is vain because there is no gain.

Look at Ecclesiastes 1:3 - "What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?" This means that all the labor we do away from God under the sun is of no benefit or remnant. This reminds me Psalms 90:10 - "The length of our days is seventy years-- or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away." Moses the man of God (Ps. 90) tells us that the life of seventy or eighty flies swiftly and those years are full of trouble and sorrow. What do you and I are going to say when we look back in those seventy or eighty years of our life and think about what we have left behind in all our labors? This is what the Teacher King Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 5:15-16: "Naked a man comes from his mother's womb, and as he comes, so he departs. He takes nothing from his labor that he can carry in his hand. This too is a grievous evil: As a man comes, so he departs, and what does he gain, since he toils for the wind?" He says that all the labor in this world apart from God is a labor to catch the wind. How can we catch the wind? It is a vain labor that has no benefit for us. So King Solomon said, "The work of life that has left God is nothing after his death" (1: 3) (Park Yun-sun). Therefore, the Teacher says that the world is vanity and vanity.

Second, the reason why this world is vain is because life ultimately returns to dust.

Look at Ecclesiastes 1:5-6 - "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." This means that the people in this world are energetic when they are young but eventually they return to the dust without much activity (Park Yun-sun). No matter how young we were when we were hot-blooded and strong (Ps. 39: 5) we must realize that eventually we came from dust and we go back to dust. We must remember that "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field" (1 Pet. 1:24). We must realize that eventually the grass will wither and the flowers will fall (v. 24). We must remember that "Man is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro: He bustles about, but only in vain; he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it" (Ps. 39:6). Our life is like a wind. As the wind blows to the south and turns to the north, round and round it goes, ever returning on its course (v. 6), our life was made with dust so it will eventually return to dust. Therefore, the Teacher is saying that the world is vanity and vanity.

Third, the reason why this world is vain is because there is no satisfaction with human greed.

Look at Ecclesiastes 1:8 - "All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing." "The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing" means that the desire of man cannot be satisfied even as "All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full" (v. 7) (Park Yun-sun). Indeed, the "the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what he has and does" of people seem to have no end (1 Jn. 2:16). I think our greed is endless. That's why King Solomon said "his eyes were not content with his wealth" (Eccl. 4:8). And yet, we seek this thing in this futile world to satisfy its endless greed. But in the end, we are not satisfied. What King Solomon did was he denied himself nothing his eyes desired and he refused his heart no pleasure (2:10). Although King Solomon enjoyed whatever he saw and wanted and that was the reward for all his labor (2:10) this was his confession: "Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun" (v. 11). In conclusion, the Proverbs says: "Death and Destruction are never satisfied, and neither are the eyes of man" (Prov. 27:20).

Nowadays science has developed so much that new machines are keeps on coming out. But would these machines be able to satisfy the Christian minds who have become new creations in Christ? I don't think so. As time goes by, new things will come out. And more they come out people will keep on buying them. But I think buying them will never satisfy their hearts. The reason I think that way is because what Ecclesiastes 3:11 says: "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men" God has given us a longing for eternity. So we can never be satisfied with momentary things in this world. Therefore, pursuing momentary things is a useless thing, just like trying to catch the wind. Indeed, this world is vanity and vanity.

Lastly, the reason why this world is vain is because people of the future will not remember people of this age.

Look at Ecclesiastes 1:11 - "There is no remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow." King Solomon said, "What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, 'Look! This is something new'? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time" (vv. 9-10). The meaning of this word is that 'there is no new thing in this world, and people are not satisfied because they are only repeating old things' (Park Yun-sun). So King Solomon said, 'This world is vanity because the people of the future will not remember the people of this age' (v. 11) (Park Yun-sun). No matter how much wealth, authority, and power you have, what is left of it when you die? Will you not be forgotten after many years pass by after you die? One generation goes and one generation comes (v. 3). And because the past generation has been forgotten, this world is vanity and vanity.

When a lion is alive, it is a king of the mountains. But after it dies, a dog bites its bones and walking around (Park Yun-sun). If it dies, there is no use at all. A living dog is better than a dead lion. Although you enjoy so many things when you are alive, you cannot prevent from dying. And there is no use after death. When the time passes, everything will be forgotten. It is a vain and vain world indeed.

Then how shall we live in this vain world?

First, although the work of life in this vain world that was done outside of God has nothing left, we who believe in Jesus should ask God for wisdom so that we may live in this world wisely.

Why should we seek wisdom from God? The reason is that only wisdom is profitable for success (10:10). We should seek the wisdom of heaven (Jam. 3:17-18) to the God who gives it generously (1:5). And we must live wisely in this vain world with the wisdom God gives us. How should we live wisely in this vain world? We must live a life of obedience to the Word of God and fearing God with the wisdom God gives us. This is a truly successful life in God's sight. This is a meaningful life that leaves a life-long achievement.

Second, we should pray like this: "'Show me, O LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life" (Ps. 39:4).

Like the psalmist David, we should pray to God to teach us how fleeting our life is. Our lives came from dust and have to go back to dust. And the short seventy or eighty years of given life in this vain world, how should we live wisely? I found an answer from Ecclesiastes 7:2 - "It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart." In other words, we must live this world with a death perspective. As we pray to God "Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Ps. 90:12), we must live, by God's wisdom, in this limited and precious time that is given to us in this earth for the glory of God.

Third, we must abandon our greed and be content and satisfied with only Jesus.

This is what the psalmist Asaph confessed in Psalms 73:25 - "Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you." There is only Jesus who can satisfy our souls in this vain world. Only Jesus can satisfy our souls. The reason is that our soul desires eternity so only the eternal Jesus can satisfy our souls. We must learn to be content whatever circumstances, whether in abundance or in need (Phil. 4:11). We must be satisfied with only one Jesus. We must be content with Jesus and obey God's Word. And we must live in pursuit of eternity.

Lastly, we must try to live a life that God will remember.

No one will remember us after we die. Of course, we do not know our children and grandchildren will remember or not, but as time goes by, people will not remember us. But we are the people whom God remembers. The reason is that we are precious and honorable in God's sight (Isa. 43:4). Cornelius was a man whom God

remembered (Acts 10: 4). Like Cornelius, we must live a life that God will remember. Like Cornelius, who lived a life of prayer and relief that God remembers, we must live the life that God remembers that is meaningful in God's sight in this vain world.

This world we live in is a vain world. A world without any profitable, we who must return to the dust are greedy in this vain world. But we are not satisfied. That's why this world is the vain world. This world is the vain world because the people of future generations will not remember people of this age. How should we live in this vain world? We must live profitably in this vain world with the wisdom God gives us. And for a given period of time in this world, we should live in contentment with Jesus alone without being greedy. We must be the God's people who obey the God's word in fearing God so that we may be remembered by God.

Vain wisdom

[Ecclesiastes 1:12-18]

We had meditated on the “Vain world” based on Ecclesiastes 1:1-11. Why is the world vain? We are taught in four ways: This world is vain because (1) It is useless and there is no gain, (2) life ultimately returns to dust, (3) there is no satisfaction with human greed and (4) people of the future will not remember people of this age. After we meditated on the vanity of this world in four ways, we learned four things about how to live in this vanity world. The first lesson of these four lessons is that we, as believers in Jesus, should seek wisdom from God and live wisely in this world.

Why should we seek wisdom from God? The reason is that only wisdom is profitable for success (10:10). Here we need to distinguish between two kinds of wisdom. In other words, we must distinguish between the wisdom God gives us and the wisdom of this world. As a good example, we can read James 3:13-18. The apostle James says of two kinds of wisdom:

- (1) James pointed to the first kind of wisdom, saying, "The wisdom from above" (v. 17). The wisdom that comes from heaven is “first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere” (v. 17). The believers who possess wisdom from above show by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom (v. 13).
- (2) The second kind of wisdom is "earthly, unspiritual, of the devil" (v. 15). In this kind of wisdom, there is envy, selfish ambition, disorder and every evil practice (v. 16). The reason why there is fighting and contention in this group of earthly, unspiritual and devilish wisdom is because of their ‘desires that battle with them’ (4:1). And they do not receive answers to prayer because they ask with wrong motives, that they may spend what they get on their pleasures (v. 3).

In today’s passage, Ecclesiastes 1:12-18, King Solomon the Teacher pursues the wisdom of this world. Look at verse 17: “Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly” Here we see that King Solomon relied on his own empirical research rather than relying on divine revelation of God (MacArthur). We can know this when we look at verse 16: “I thought to myself, ‘Look, I have grown and increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge.’” Since King Solomon had a lot of wisdom that he gained through his life experiences more than those who were in Jerusalem before, he did empirical research as he relied on his great wisdom. So he had seen all the things that were done under the sun (v. 14) and he devoted himself to study and to explore by wisdom all that was done under heaven (v. 13). What was the conclusion he gained in his quest to see all that was done under the sun? In other words, what was the conclusion about his empirical research? The today’s passage says there are three things:

- (1) First, this is what Ecclesiastes 1:13 says about the conclusion about King Solomon’s empirical research: “I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men!” The first conclusion of his empirical research is that ‘all things in the world are painful to our lives and God has laid the heavy burden on men. This is what he said also in Ecclesiastes 3:10 – “I have seen the burden God has laid on men.”
- (2) Second, this is the conclusion that King Solomon made in his quest to see all the things that he did under the sun: “What is twisted cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted” (1:15). Here, the phrase “What is twisted cannot be straightened” means that wisdom and knowledge, except God, in fact, ultimately can not solve any problems. And “what is lacking cannot be counted” means there is no way to perfect things that are imperfect. In short, there is no way to save a human being through human wisdom (Park Yun-sun). King Solomon's second conclusion in his quest to see all the things under the sun was that we could not save ourselves by human wisdom.

- (3) Third, the conclusion that King Solomon had in his quest to look at all the things that was done under the sun was, “all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind” (v. 14). How can a person catch the wind? It’s just as vain. Without God, all the things that are done in this world are in vain. Look at 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.” Eventually, after King Solomon explored all the things that were done under the sun with his own great wisdom (v. 16), he concluded that it was painful (God had laid on men), there was no way to save a damn human with human wisdom and it was chasing after the wind in vain. In a word, King Solomon’s confession was that the wisdom under the sun that is the wisdom of this world is vanity and vanity.

Why is the wisdom of this world vain? I found the reason in 1 Corinthians 1:21 – “For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.” In a word, the wisdom of this world is vain because the wisdom of this world does not know God. The wisdom of this world is vain because the wisdom of this world we can not save ourselves. The crucified Jesus Christ preached by Paul and his co-workers to the Greeks (v. 22) who pursued this vain wisdom as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 1: 22-23 by the Apostle Paul was "a fool" (v. 23). In other words, the gospel of Jesus Christ preached by Paul and his co-workers in view of the wisdom of this world was foolish. But to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God (v. 24). The Bible clearly says that Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God (v.24). Jesus Christ is our wisdom (v. 30).

Jesus Christ is our wisdom. God is telling me and you who believe in this Jesus Christ: “But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise ...” (v. 27). Why does God choose a foolish man, in terms of the world, to shame those who have the wisdom of the world? Why? Look at 1 Corinthians 1:29 – “so that no one may boast before him.” Rather, God allows us to believe in Jesus Christ, the wisdom of God, so that "those who boast may boast in the Lord" (v. 31). The true wise therefore boasts only Jesus Christ. I hope that we may be able to accept humbly the fact that the wisdom of this world is vain, as the wisest King Solomon concluded after he saw the wisdom below, that is the wisdom of this world. Therefore, we should no longer seek the vain wisdom of the world. We must seek out only true wisdom. We must be saved through faith in Jesus Christ, our true wisdom. And since we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ, we must grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. The more we know Jesus, the wiser we must become. And the wiser we become, the more we fear God and obey God's commandments. And the more we obey the God’s commandments, the more we live in a personified life of God, so that we may live a life that manifests Jesus Christ, the Wisdom of God, in this vain world. A true wise man is a true witness. And true witnesses testify Jesus Christ. Jesus' witnesses bring many people back to Jesus by preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. I hope and pray that we all become such wise people of God!

“Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever” (Dan. 12:3).

Vain pleasure

[Ecclesiastes 2:1-11]

What is hedonism? In the Internet Wikipedia, it defines as follow: “Hedonism is a school of thought that argues that the pursuit of pleasure and intrinsic goods are the primary or most important goals of human life.” In the end, hedonism is based on the belief that pleasure is an essential good and pain is evil. It is a form of happiness that claims that promoting happiness is good (Internet). The goal of life pursued by hedonism is happiness and happiness is achieved by pursuing pleasure. I personally think of “Epicureanism” when I think about hedonism. Epicureanism is “an ancient school of philosophy founded in Athens by Epicurus. “Epicurus believed that what he called "pleasure" (ἡδονή) was the greatest good, but that the way to attain such pleasure was to live modestly, to gain knowledge of the workings of the world, and to limit one's desires. This would lead one to attain a state of tranquility (ataraxia) and freedom from fear as well as an absence of bodily pain (aponia). The combination of these two states constitutes happiness in its highest form” (Internet). “The school rejected determinism and advocated hedonism (pleasure as the highest good), but of a restrained kind: mental pleasure was regarded more highly than physical, and the ultimate pleasure was held to be freedom from anxiety and mental pain, especially that arising from needless fear of death and of the gods” (Internet). In addition to this school, there was another school that represented the ancient Greek hedonism. The school is called the "the Cyrenaic School". This was a sensual hedonist Greek school of philosophy founded in the 4th century BCE, supposedly by Aristippus of Cyrene, a friend of Socrates (Internet). Aristippus was influenced by Socrates and emphasized the principle of happiness that a virtuous man should pursue. According to his assertion, virtue is the ability to get pleasure, and this joy is obtained by satisfaction of pleasure. Pleasure is the only good and the greatest good. The thinkers of the Cyrenaic School emphasized the sensual and physical pleasures of the moment because the future is beyond our capabilities. According to Aristippus, the wise man, the philosopher possesses the ability to enjoy the present, and thus does not become a slave of pleasure, but a master of pleasure. Therefore, the ideology of hedonism is to pursue physical desire, but to control the pleasure with wisdom (Internet).

When we look at the passage Ecclesiastes 2:1, we see the Teacher King Solomon testes himself with pleasure to find out what is good. Look at verse 1: “I thought in my heart, ‘Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.’” Here, “I will test you with pleasure” means King Solomon would test himself with pleasure. So he tried to see what can make him enjoy the pleasure. There are three things that he tried to enjoy the pleasure in today’s passage. Today I want to meditate on those three things and pray that God will give us grace so that we may live wisely in this vain world.

First, King Solomon tried to test himself with “wine”.

Look at Ecclesiastes 2:3 – “I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly--my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives.” The first thing that King Solomon tried to cheer himself was with wine. He tried to make his body cheerful with wine. So as he drank wine, he controlled his mind with wisdom. Like what the Cyrenaic School emphasized, King Solomon enjoyed drinking wine but not becoming a slave of wine but a master of wine. In other words, he tried to delight himself with wine while dominating the pleasures of wine with his wisdom, as the claims of the Cyrenai School. But what was his conclusion? It was “embracing folly” (v. 3). In a word, King Solomon's conclusion was ‘It is foolish to try to enjoy pleasure by drunkenness.’

What is the pleasure of alcoholism? Why do people drink until they are drunk? I saw an article on the internet and this is what it says regarding why people drink from Monday to Sunday (Internet): 'Monday is - the day of drinking; Tuesday - a hot day to drink; Wednesday – a day to drink from time to time; Thursdays - the day of drinking with a long neck; Friday - the day of drinking soon and drinking again; Saturdays - a day of drinking until you vomit; Sunday - the day of drinking until you cannot get up. The same internet article mentions about following as well: ‘A cup is said to drink for health. If it is hot, you drink for pleasure. And if it gets drunk, there will be indulgent behavior and madness (Internet). One of the reasons for drinking is that it feels good. Why do people feel

better when they drink alcohol? The reason is that when you drink a little alcohol, the central and peripheral nerves are initially excited, the secretion of the stomach is promoted, and the neurotransmitter called dopamine is secreted. However, alcohol overuse or long-term abuse can lead to brain cell destruction, which, unfortunately, inhibits brain function. If not, normally 100,000 brain cells die automatically every day. Drinking a lot of alcohol causes more brain cells to die. Both academic and memory or thinking abilities decline and their decline is directly proportional to the concentration of alcohol. When you drink alcohol too much, you cannot remember what you said and what you did. This is called 'film break' phenomenon. Another man says he drinks because these reasons: 'I drink when I have good things. I drink when I have bad things. I drink when I have something to celebrate. I drink to get acquainted. I drink to confess. I drink in order to forget a person whom I missed. I drink alcohol when I am upset. I drink when I want to see someone. I drink when my heart is depressed and when it rains. I drink when I am tired of exhaustion. I drink for unity. I drink because of curiosity. I drink when I am lonely' (Internet).

In my case when I look at back in the years of my puberty, the reason why I drank was because of curiosity. I drank with my friends and even vomited because of too much drinks. Then, in the first year of college, I was called by the Lord during the church college retreats. And I repented my sins and lost interest in drinking. However, I often stayed at the drink places with my friends. In those times, I thought about what is beneficial for drinking. I even remembered two of my friends who were shot and killed at the drinking places. I still remember the memories at the funeral of my friends. There is nothing beneficial to alcohol. Liquor is useless.

This is what Ephesians 5:18 – “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” In Genesis chapter 9, Noah was blessed by God after the flood (v. 1) so he proceeded to plant a vineyard (v. 20). One day he drank some of its wine and became drunk. And he lay uncovered inside his tent (v. 21). Although Noah was “a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God” (6:9) he was drunken and naked. When I think about this Noah, Matthew 24:37-39 came into my mind: “As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.” I think this era is a time when we can not understand the crisis of destruction while eating and drinking like the days of Noah. I think people seem to be absorbed in many kinds of pleasures. It seems that they are preoccupied with a wealth, absorbed in sexual pleasure, and addicted to so many things of this vain world. Among those, I think alcohol addiction is serious. About drunkenness, King Solomon says ‘Drunkenness is talking folly.’

Second, King Solomon tried to test himself with “great projects”.

Look at Ecclesiastes 2:4 – “I undertook great projects:” In order to know what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives (v. 3) King Solomon tested himself with “great projects” (v. 4). Here, the great projects that he tried without relying on God was to build houses for himself, to plant vineyards (v. 4), to make gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them (v. 5) and to make reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees (v. 6). And in order to manage all these houses, the vineyards, the gardens and parks and so, King Solomon bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in his house (v. 7). Why did he make such great projects? What was the reason? Of course, there was reason to try to enjoy pleasure, but in the end it was 'wealth'. Look at v. 7b – 8a: “... I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces.” King Solomon sought this kind of glory for his own personal life. He was corrupted in such a time of peace (1 Chron. 22:9) (Park Yun-sun).

We can pursue a luxurious life when we are as peaceful as King Solomon. And luxurious life eventually destroys the personality (Park Yun-sun). What is luxury? Luxury means spending more money than you need or excessive life style (Internet). I saw an article on the internet OhmyNews titled "Why are you enthusiastic about luxury?" (Internet). In that article, a person named Kim Nan-do said there are four types of people who buy luxury goods: Show off, Jealousy, Fantasy and Sympathetic.

- (1) Show off luxury is the rich people buy luxury goods because they are conscious of their class characteristics. They are afraid that they are like others. They are the owners of wealth in capitalist society who think of themselves as special. So they have class consciousness as capital. For them, luxury is to show off. d

- (2) Jealousy luxury is the fake rich people imitating the real rich. They are desperately trying to avoid being ignored. So do not give up luxury even if you have no capacity.
- (3) Fantasy luxury is a kind of narcissistic people who are afraid of shabby things and are dreaming about transformation. They want to own expensive and popular things. If they do, they believe that they will be like them too. Although I understand such a thing because everyone has a narcissism, but fantasy luxury is very worrisome because it can cause horrific results. It can lead to addiction.
- (4) Sympathetic luxury is a case when you are purchasing to level up to avoid being bullied by your friends or others. For example, all of my friends are dressed in expensive clothes, so I have a feeling that I should wear them too. This is especially true in young people. People rationalized themselves by thinking ‘Since others are buying it, I buy it too’. So they buy luxury even though it is irrational. And they have guilty feeling about this. But the problem is this can continue as an adult.

We must not live beyond our limit. To do so, it is important to know our limitation. I want to share a story about an American immigrant society that is satirized in the world. When people come to the United States, those who go to Los Angeles buy luxury cars first, even if they live in a rented room. Those who go to New York, they buy business first, and people who go to Chicago, they buy house first. This means that New York and Chicago immigrants look out for themselves and know their limit and prepare for the future to live, while Los Angeles immigrants are gorgeous outwardly but poor inwardly. They are externally-minded and conscious of the other person’s eyes first (even though they are not) (Internet). Each of us has our own limitation. We should know our limitation and should not act too much on our limitation. It’s not good to go beyond our limitation. If we go beyond our limitation, we will surely make mistakes. Also it is the cause of misfortune and of disease. Overeating, overdrinking, overworking and overuse all harm our health and make us unhappy. Keeping a limitation means that we are not being excessive. We must be satisfied with our life and know how to stay where we suppose to stay (Internet). We must watch out for a desire to possess things. Especially those who do business, they should guard their hearts against possessiveness. Ultimately, possessions can never be satisfied. Look at King Solomon. Although he owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before him (v. 7) he wasn’t satisfied with them. So he amassed silver and gold for himself and treasure of kings and providences (v. 8). We can never satisfy our desire to make all these things our own. The more we possess, the more desire we will be. After all, such possessions are also vain. King Solomon confessed that doing the great projects was “embracing folly” (v. 3).

Third, King Solomon tried to test himself with “many concubines”.

Look at Ecclesiastes 2:8 – “... I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men--many concubines” (NASB). This is what God said in Deuteronomy 17:17 regarding a king of Israel: “He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.” But King Solomon broke this commandment. Obviously God commanded the Israelites not only to intermarry with the Gentiles, but also not to let them interfere with the Israelites (1 Kgs. 11: 1-3). God forbids this because the Gentiles would turn the hearts of the Israelites to follow the Gentile gods (v. 2). But King Solomon, the leader of a nation, “loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter” (v. 1). He had 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines and his wives led him astray (v. 3). When King Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods (v. 4). Eventually, the problem that King Solomon intended to satisfy the lust of the flesh made him to sin against God, even to the sin of spiritual adultery of worshiping idols. In other words, the physical adultery which is done to satisfy the lust of the flesh will eventually bring forth the sinful fruit of spiritual adultery.

Long time ago, I read an internet news ‘Sex with God’s will ... a pastor who sexually assaulted a woman in a church’ (Internet). A police has filed for arrest warrants for a rape charge against pastor “A”(46 years old) of “T” religious organization who raped women for more than 10 years. After organizing a “T” religious organization in Dongjak-gu, Seoul Korea, “A” had raped six teenage 20-year-old many times for the past 10 years by telling them that he was doing it according to God’s will and their sins would be washed away if they have sex with him. Although I was little bit relieve by seeing that the “T” organization wasn’t Protestant but Unification church but nevertheless I think this crime of sexual degradation seems to be inevitable reality among us too. When we speak of the lust of the body, we can have ‘sexual desire’ as an example. ‘Sexual desire’ is considered to be one of the three needs of human beings along with appetite and sleeping desire (Internet). When a man is captured by sexual desire then he will commit serious crimes such as rape. A typical example of sexual desire explosion is rape.

Swapping of an upper class couple without any guilt, a change of life that has even removed the concept of marriage, unbelievable premarital sexual intercourse under the pretext of love, easily get divorce because no more love, phone sex, video chatting sex, instant sexually transmitted images through camera phones or computer cameras, teen sex trafficking through Internet chat, rapid growth of sexual experiences spreading even to elementary school students, not to mention not only middle and high school students, internet or cyber porn that causes addiction to men as well as women! If we see our sex culture becoming more and more exciting, outspoken and anomalous, there seems to be no one who can control sexual desire, and sexuality can also be perceived as a natural phenomenon by instinct, regardless of time, place or object (Internet). Indeed, this is a serious social phenomenon. Nowadays it seems perception that the couples having affair is prevalent in the world. Now we live in an era where sexual pleasures are prevalent. We who live in this era must realize how dangerous and foolish King Solomon's efforts were to satisfy his own physical desire.

In conclusion, what is the message that God is trying to give to us through King Solomon who tested himself with wine, wealth and possessions through his great projects and 1,000 women of wives and concubines in order to know what pleasure is as his heart was controlled by his wisdom? Look at Ecclesiastes 2:1-2: "I said to myself, 'Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.' And behold, it too was futility. I said of laughter, 'It is madness,' and of pleasure, 'What does it accomplish?'" In other words, King Solomon's experiential conclusion of enjoying himself in falling into pleasure was 'This is also vanity'. Why is it vain to pursue pleasure? How did King Solomon know that pleasure was vain? That was because he asked this question: "what does pleasure accomplish?" (v. 2) This was King Solomon's answer: "Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun" (v. 11). Although he denied himself nothing his eyes desired and refused his heart no pleasure (v. 10) the conclusion through such an experience was "everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun" (v. 11). In conclusion, pleasure is vain and empty.

How should we live? How should we live after listening to the message of King Solomon who concluded that the pleasure he pursued in this vain world actually and experientially was vain and empty? I looked up the answer in Westminster Short Catechism question and answer 1: Q. What is the chief end of man? A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever. Enjoying God here means that we should make our God our highest joy (Ps. 43: 4). And living a life that makes our God our highest joy is to keep God's commands as we fear God (Eccle. 12:13). Therefore, as we remain in Jesus' love by keeping the Lord's commandments, our joy will be full (Jn. 15: 9-11). This is the joy of obedience. We must seek the joy of obeying the Lord's commandments. The apostle Paul, who enjoyed this joy, obeyed the Lord's command and boldly proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ. And as he wrote the letter to the believers in Philippi, he said "my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown" (Phil. 4:1). I hope and pray that Jesus is our greatest joy and we will be able to dedicate our lives in obeying the Lord's command in preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and make His disciples. As a result, they will be more Jesus' disciples who are our joy and our crown and thus the Lord's joy can be our joy as well.

1. O! Thou, in whose presence my soul takes delight, On whom in affliction I call,
My comfort by day, and my song in the night, My hope, my salvation, my all!
5. Dear Shepherd! I hear, and will follow Thy call; I know the sweet sound of Thy voice;
Restore and defend me, for Thou art my all, And in Thee I will ever rejoice.

(O Thou, in whose presence)

Those who are pleased with God

[Ecclesiastes 2:12-26]

What Scripture passages do you recall if I say, 'A man who is pleasing to God'? What must we do to please God? Look at Hebrews 11:6 – “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” When I think about the Word “without faith it is impossible to please God” God is speaking to us to live by faith in order to please him. When we live by faith alone we can please God. Then what does it mean to live by faith alone when we think in terms of the Ecclesiastes that we meditated? From the point of view of the Ecclesiastes we have meditated so far, living by faith means that understanding that the world in which we live is vain (1: 1-11), the wisdom of this world is vain (1: 12-18), and pleasure of the world is vain (2:1-11), we no longer pursue the vain world, the vain wisdom, and the vain pleasures. Instead, we pursue the heavenly wisdom, consider God as our greatest joy and delight (Ps. 43:4) and live a life of glorifying God and enjoy him forever. God is pleased with those who live by faith. Do we now live by faith? Do we live a life that pleases God?

When we look at Ecclesiastes 2:26, King Solomon the Teacher says that God gives wisdom, knowledge and joy to those with whom he pleased. Then how do they live? Based on Ecclesiastes 2:12-26, I would like to think about it in two ways:

First, they who are pleased with God think of their wisdom in terms of death.

Look at Ecclesiastes 2:12 – “...Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom, and also madness and folly.” King Solomon already applied himself to the understanding of wisdom and also of madness and folly (1:17). Although he did so to understand wisdom, his conclusion was that this also was chasing after the wind. However, he turned his thoughts to consider wisdom again (2:12-17). Although he said that “with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief” (1:18), he thoughts about wisdom again and we get the impression that he was walking again in the path of despair. In such an agony and anxiety King Solomon threw the question “What more can the king’s successor do than what has already been done?” (2:12). He was pondering the question that after his death his children and descendants would become king of Israel and would follow his wisdom to do much more than what he had already accomplished.

We must also prepare ourselves in mind and pray before we leave this world. And one of the things we hope is to inherit the legacy of faith to our children and descendants. Another, like King Solomon, we must leave the wisdom of life we have learned during seventy, eighty years of our life on this earth to our children and descendants. In other words, in front of death like King Solomon we must also leave the wisdom of our lives to lead our children and their descendants. But here is the question. We can not be sure that our children and descendants will see the value of our wisdom and will follow it or not. For example, let’s say we say to our children and descendants “Do not live like me” after we have realized that experimentally drunk, doing some great projects and satisfying the lust of body and so on are futile and vain. However, who know that our children and descendants hear our instructions and learn the wisdom of life from us and say ‘I will never do what my father or grandfather did in order to enjoy pleasure. Instead, I will consider God as my greatest joy and delight and will enjoy the joy of obedience’ or not. Will our children and descendants be humble and obedient to the wisdom learned in our lives because they value our wisdom? I am afraid that though we teach our children and descendants the lessons we have learned in our lives, they will not listen to us but will experience the pleasure by themselves and will regret by saying ‘Ah. I should have listened to my parents’. The reason I think this way is because of Ecclesiastes 1:9 – “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.” When I meditate on this word, I think our children will have to do it again after what we have already done. Even if we teach our children and their descendants what we have learned in the world through our experiences or mistakes without hearing our parents’ words, they are more likely to fail to hear and to commit the mistakes that we already made. That’s why King Solomon said as follow: “... What more can the king’s successor do than what has already been done?” (2:12)

King Solomon said as follow: “I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness” (v. 13). How is wisdom better than folly? Look at verse 14: “The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in the darkness” How is a wise better than a fool? The wise man wisely lives by thinking about how to live the rest of his life with death perspective, but the fool walks in darkness and does not prepare his death (Wiersbe). Nevertheless, when King Solomon looked at the wise and the fool from the point of view of death, he came to realize that the same fate overtakes both the wise and the fool (v. 14). What does it mean? Look at Ecclesiastes 2:16 – “For the wise man, like the fool, will not be long remembered; in days to come both will be forgotten. Like the fool, the wise man too must die!” In other words, King Solomon realized that both the wise and the fool will die. And both the wise and the fool will be forgotten after their death. So he thought in his heart that “The fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?” (v. 15) He confessed that “This too is meaningless” (v. 15). This means that all things are vain as long as man can not solve the problem of death (Park Yun-sun). So he said, “I hate life” (v. 17). Why did King Solomon lament his life? Why did he hate it? The reason is that King Solomon realized that what he did under the sun was bitterness for him, and that he was trying to catch the wind in vain (v.17). This is surely not the attitude of a wise person who pleases God. He who pleases God never laments or hates life that God gave. On the contrary, he loves life (1 Pet. 3:10) (Wiersbe). In other words, those who are pleased with God love their lives. Those who are pleased with God look at his wisdom in death perspective and do not pursue vain wisdom. Rather, they live wisely to glorify God with the heavenly wisdom, with wisdom that God has given them until the life they have left in this world. And they never walk in darkness like the fools whose eyes are darkened. Instead, they live like disciples of Jesus whose eyes are enlightened and walk in the light. This is how we should live as disciples of Jesus.

Second, they who are pleased with God think of their labor in terms of death.

King Solomon lamented his life by considering his wisdom from the point of view of death (v. 17) and hated all his labors under the sun (v.18). Look at verse 18: “I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun” Why did King Solomon hate all the things he had toiled for under the sun? Pastor Warren Wiersbe says there are three reasons:

(1) First reason is that he could not have the wealth he had gained through all his labor.

Look at Ecclesiastes 2:18 – “... because I must leave them to the one who comes after me.” When King Solomon thought about all the wealth that had labored in his perspective of death, he knew that he who came to this world with empty-handed he would leave with empty-handed as well. So he hated his life because he knew that after his death he had leaved all his wealth to his successor.

Last week, when I saw the Korean news, I heard about the suicide of one of the big company in Korea. The news of his death reveals that the president of a large corporation, which had once been wealthy, eventually left the world with only debt, rather than leaving wealth to his children. I think that the relationship between the siblings was not so good. And I heard what happened when the younger brother became the chairman of the big corporation. Through the news, I thought about what this dead person left behind to his children at the end of his life. What will we leave behind to our children and descendants? When we look at life in terms of death, what do you think we can take and leave this world?

(2) Second reason is that he could not protect his wealth that he had gained through all his labor.

Look at Ecclesiastes 2:19 – “And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless.” When King Solomon thought of all the troubles he had suffered under the sun from the point of view of death, he thought that not only could he not had all the wealth he had acquired in this earth, but also that if he dies he had to hand all his wealth to his children and leave this earth. So he hated his life. Think about it. If you think that you foolish children waste all your wealth that you have achieved for seventy or eighty years of your life, how vain that is and wouldn’t you lament your own efforts? King Solomon made this lament. The materials he had obtained with all the labor

he could not even protect them. And after all, he had to pass on all his wealth to his son Rehoboam. But as we know, after King Solomon's death, at the time of his successor King Rehoboam, his kingdom was divided into two. The northern kingdom was reigned by Jeroboam and the southern kingdom by King Rehoboam. And they wasted all of their opportunities (MacArthur). Can you imagine? When King Solomon knew that his kingdom which he had done for a lifetime would be divided into two at his son Rehoboam's time due to his sins, what would King Solomon's heart be like? What would his heart be when he thought of all the hard work he did under the sun knowing what was going to happen in this future that could not be reversed? We cannot protect what we earn in our lifetime that we inherit to our children when we leave this world. We don't know whether our children are wise or not. And we don't know when our children manage all of our materials after we die (v. 19) whether they will waste all the materials we have left for them or to glorify God through them. That's why this is what King Solomon said in verse 20: "So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun." After all, King Solomon was disappointed when he thought of all his labor under the sun from the point of view of death.

(3) Third reason is that he could not enjoy the wealth he got from all the labor he had worked for.

King Solomon would have enjoyed the wealth he gained through all his labors in his life. However, he is very pessimistic when he reads the verses from verses 21 to 23. For example, although he worked with his wisdom and knowledge and skill, and then he had to leave all he owned to someone who had not worked for it. "This too is meaningless and a great misfortune" (v. 21). And he said "What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun?" (v. 22). This he concluded: "All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless" (v. 23). What does it mean? All his days his work is pain and grief. King Solomon said, 'This is also vain' because the result of working diligently at all the time without resting at night was pain and grief (vv. 21, 23).

King Solomon confessed that his wisdom and his efforts were vanity when he considered his wisdom and his labor in terms of death. What is the lesson that he learned here? Look at Ecclesiastes 2:24 – "A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God." When King Solomon confessed that his wisdom and his labor were in vain, the lesson he learned was that 'Satisfaction a man find in his work does not come from himself but from God'. It is a gift from God that we eat and drink and find satisfaction from our works and enjoy them. If we can enjoy the joy of material life on this earth, it is also a gift of God's grace and not enjoyment from our wisdom, knowledge and skill. So King Solomon said "for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?" (v.25) In conclusion, to the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness (v. 26). To what extent does he enjoy? To the sinner God gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God (v. 26). For those sinners who live in a life of unbelief and disobedience and do not please God, they can not enjoy even the material that they have labored on this earth, but rather those who believe in God and please God, who obeys the Word of God, they enjoy it. I hope and pray that we may be able to please God so that we may enjoy the wisdom, knowledge and joy that God gives to those who please him.

God who makes beautiful in time (1)

[Ecclesiastes 3:1-14]

What time do you think now? Around October, 2010, I attended one of my church's cell bible studies. And I heard one of the brothers in Christ talking about a new movie called "2012" during the dinner time. He told us that the movie was about 2 hours long and there is a lot of action. So I did some researches on Internet about this movie "2012". This film was a disaster movie, which stated that the Earth would be destroyed on December 21, 2012. The story of the destruction of humanity, which had been constantly being talked about since the ancient Mayan civilization, was that the earth's destruction on December 21, 2012 was probably because the Mayan calendar was only created on December 21, 2012. In addition, prominent scientists say that the time of destruction is actually 2012 after many years of research. After the 1940s, especially in the last 11,000 years after the melting of glaciers due to rapid global warming at the end of the ice age since 2003, the sun is acting wilder than ever before. The physicists studying the sun, based on their observations, predicted that the solar activity would peak again in 2012. If there would be a storm in the sun, then there would be a storm occur on the earth too. As a result, they would be earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, gigantic tsunamis, and other natural disasters all over the world and it would be an end of the world. After I heard about this movie on Saturday, I talked about that movie with one of my church member who was over 90 years old during the lunch time on Sunday. The reason was because he had previously talked to me about the destruction of the earth in 2050 based on a Japanese newspaper. At that time, I told him in a joke that in 2050, 'You won't be alive so you don't have to worry about it'. But now since the movie said that the end of the world was 2012, I wanted to know what he thought about it. What do you think about these movies and newspaper articles, the stories of this world about the end times? My personal thoughts still feel like people in this world know that someday the end of this world will come. So Luke 12:56-57 came into my mind: "Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time? Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right?" Although people know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky, they cannot interpret this present time. Of course, like the movie "2012", there are a lot of disaster movies and books about the destruction of the earth, it seems that many people do not know that this age is the last time.

When we look at Ecclesiastes 3:11, the Teacher King Solomon said God had made everything beautiful in its time. So I want to meditate on Ecclesiastes 3:1-14 under the heading of "God who makes beautiful in time (1)" and think about how God makes all things beautiful in its time. I just want to think about one thing today.

First, God makes everything beautiful by fulfilling all the purposes.

Look at Ecclesiastes 3:1 – "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven." Here, King Solomon says that there is time in all things. He says that because God is in the midst of our individual lives, he eventually achieves God's purpose and God's will (Wiersbe). And he speaks about many different times in verses 2 through 8. I divided these times into five:

(1) There is a time to be born and a time to die.

Look at Ecclesiastes 3:2 – "a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot." King Solomon already said that "Like the fool, the wise man too must die!" (2:16). And he said that for sure there is a time to be born and a time to die (3:2). If we say birth and death in terms of a tree, there is a time to plant and a time to uproot. Here, the important thing is the sovereignty of God. In other words, man is born in the sovereignty of God and man dies in the sovereignty of God. Not only man's life but also the life of the tree is in the sovereignty of God. The important thing is that through life and death, the will of the Lord must be fulfilled. In other words, through our lives and death, only the glory of the Lord must be revealed. By doing so, our lives and death will be beautiful. God makes all things beautiful by fulfilling his sovereign will through our lives and death. As I was meditating on this passage Ecclesiastes 3:2, this became my prayer of wish: "God, make my death more beautiful than my birth." Even now, I am praying

to God to grant me a beautiful death. If I speak in terms of tree, my prayer is that God may plant me and make me to grow more and more and bear a lot of fruit for God's glory and then God will uproot me in his perfect time. But I pray that God's sovereign will will be done through my life and death, not my will. The reason is because only if God's will be done and not my will through my life, my death will be beautiful.

(2) There is a time to be disciplined and a time to be restored.

Look at Ecclesiastes 3:3, 5-7: "a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, ... a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend," These words mean that there is a time when God discipline us and a time when God restores us (Park Yun-sun). The phrases "a time to kill", "a time to tear down", "a time to scatter stones", "a time to refrain", "a time to give up", "a time to throw away" and "a time to tear" refer to God's discipline. And the phrases "a time to heal", "a time to build", "a time to gather them", "a time to embrace", "a time to search", "a time to keep" and "a time to mend" refer to God's restoration. Why did King Solomon talk about the time of discipline and the time of restoration? The reason is because even though we believe in Jesus by God's grace until we die, we tend to go back to our old nature and commit sins against God, and thus God had to discipline us. But the amazing grace of God is the fact that our God is not only disciplined when we sin, but also he restores us. Here, we must remember that there are two important elements in God's discipline and God's restoration. And two important elements are God's love and our repentance.

Why does God discipline and restore us? That's because God loves us. If God doesn't love us, he doesn't need to discipline us. God disciplines us when we disobey him and commit sins against him because he loves us. And he restores us because he loves us. Another thing is there is our confession and repentance between God's loving discipline and restoration. It is because without our confession and repentance, there is no restoration. Eventually, through God's discipline and restoration, through his love and our confession of sin and repentance, God fulfills his sovereign will and makes us beautiful.

(3) There is a time to weep and a time to laugh.

Look at Ecclesiastes 3:4 – "a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance." This world is full of sorrow, affliction, sin and death. As Moses said in Psalms 90:10, the length of our days is seventy years, or eighty, if we have the strength. Yet our span is but trouble and sorrow. Thus, whether we are believers or not, we all have to experience sorrow in this world. But the sadness of the believer and the unbeliever is different. It must be different. We must not shed the same sorrow as non-believers do. The tear we the believers must shed is tears of repentance. When we sin against God and are disciplined, we must weep and sorrow in suffering and pain. These tears and sorrows are precious. King Solomon says that sorrow is better than laughter (Eccle. 7: 3). We must have grief on our faces. The reason is because our hearts can be good with grief on our faces. How can our hearts be good? It is because godly anxiety makes us to repent our sins so as a result, it gives us laughter and joy. That is to say, it is good to have grief on our faces because godly sorrows enable us to enjoy God's restoring grace by forgiveness of our sins. That's why we must thank God for both sorrow and joy. We must thank God because we can confess and repent of our sins through the sorrow that God has allowed in His sovereign will. When we confess our sins and repent, we can get the true joy God gives us. In the end, God makes us beautiful by fulfilling his purpose when we cry or laugh.

(4) There is a time to be silent and a time to speak.

Look at Ecclesiastes 3:7 – "... a time to be silent and a time to speak." This is what King Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 5:2 – "Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few." King Solomon said when we pray to God do not be hasty in our hearts and to do be quick with our mouth. This doesn't mean that we should pray short. I think instead of keep on praying the same thing over and over again and pray long, it's better to pray truthfully by pouring our hearts. What is important is not how long or short we pray to God. It is 'How' we should pray to him. First of all, we must be quiet before God when we pray. Here, being quiet has two implications. And the two implications are fully trusting God and listening to God's voice. When

we pray to God, we must first have silence of total trust in God. And in that trust we must strive to hear God's voice. In order to do that, we should try to listen to God's voice through the Word of God rather than to say many words to him. Especially, we must let the Word of God to speak to our hearts by being silent before God. By doing so, we must realize our sins through the Word. Then we must open our mouth and confess our sins to him. Eventually God makes us beautiful by calming us and making us to speak. In other words, God makes us beautiful by making us to completely trust in him and opening our hearts and mouths to confess our sins to him.

(5) There is a time to love and a time to hate.

Look at Ecclesiastes 3:8 – “a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.” We who believe in Jesus are beautiful when we obey God's Word and love their neighbors. And we are beautiful when we obey God's word and hate evil. But somehow, when we look at our church these days, we hate our neighbors whom we should love, and we seem to love our sins that we should hate. That's why the church is ugly instead of beautiful. We must clearly distinguish between the objects we should love and the objects we should hate. God says to love our neighbor and hate evil. The reason is because God wants us to be beautiful as we love each other with his love. God also wants us to be beautiful by making us to hate evil. Therefore, in obeying God's Word, we must fight spiritually against the temptations of Satan to confuse the object of love with the object of hatred. And in fighting this spiritual war we must have the conviction of victory. The reason is because Jesus has already won the victory on the cross. And Jesus' victory is our victory. God makes us beautiful by giving us the victory in our spiritual battle. And he makes us beautiful by giving us peace in Jesus Christ. In this way, God makes everything beautiful in love and peace, and makes everything beautiful even in hatred and war. Eventually, God makes us beautiful by fulfilling his sovereign will in the midst of love and hate and war and peace. Our God is the God who makes everything beautiful in his time. God makes us beautiful by fulfilling his sovereign will when we are born, when we die, when we cry, when we laugh, when we are disciplined, when we are restored, when we are quiet, when we speak, when we love and when we hate. The sovereign will of God is working in all these times and makes us to be like Jesus. In doing so, though we may not have a beauty to have attraction (Isa. 53:2) in the sight of God we will be his beautiful children. Therefore, we are to praise God “My Jesus, as Thou wilt”:

“My Jesus, as Thou wilt! Oh, may Thy will be mine! Into Thy hand of love
I would my all resign; Through sorrow, or through joy, Conduct me as Thine own,
And help me still to say, My Lord, Thy will be done!

My Jesus, as Thou wilt! Though seen through many a tear, Let not my star of hope
Grow dim or disappear; Since Thou on earth hast wept, And sorrowed oft alone,
If I must weep with Thee, My Lord, Thy will be done!

My Jesus, as Thou wilt! All shall be well for me; Each changing future scene
I gladly trust with Thee. Straight to Thy rest above I travel calmly on,
And sing, in life or death, My Lord, Thy will be done!”

God who makes beautiful in time (2)

[Ecclesiastes 3:1-14]

There will be a memorial service for one of our church member's son on this coming Friday. As I was preparing for her son's memorial service, the meditation "God who makes beautiful in time (1)" came into my mind. We all have a time to born and a time to die. We all need to face our death someday. When I think about our church member's son who has already passed away suddenly, I believe that God's sovereign will was done by fulfilling his sovereign will and purpose through his life and his death. I hope and pray that God comforts his mother and give her hope.

During the last Wednesday night prayer meeting, we have received the first word of how God makes everything beautiful in times of need under the heading of "God who makes beautiful in time (1)" based on Ecclesiastes 3:1-14. In short, God fulfills all the purposes, so that He will make all things beautiful according to His own time (v.1). Here, King Solomon speaks of many times from Ecclesiastes 3:2-8. I have divided these times into five and meditated on them and said that God makes everything beautiful by fulfilling his sovereign will in all these times: (1) A time to be born and a time to die (v. 2), (2) A time to be disciplined and a time to be restored (vv. 3, 5-7), (3) A time to weep and a time to laugh (v. 4), (4) A time to be silent and a time to speak (v.7) and (5) A time to love and a time to hate (v. 8). God is God who makes all things beautiful by accomplishing his sovereign purpose in all these times. God makes everything beautiful by fulfilling his sovereign will in times such as the time to be born, the time to die, the time to be disciplines, the time to be restored, the time to weep, the time to laugh, the time to be silent, the time to speak, the time to love, the time to hate and so on. Therefore, we can praise God "My Jesus, as Thou wilt".

Today I want to receive God's grace as I meditate on how God is making everything beautiful in his times, under the title "God who makes beautiful in time (2)" based on Ecclesiastes 3:1-14.

Second, God makes everything beautiful by setting eternity in our hearts.

Look at Ecclesiastes 3:11 – "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men;" There is a question that we must cast like King Solomon did while living in this vain world. It is, "What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?" (1:3) King Solomon asked this question again in 2:22 – "What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun?" In today's passage Ecclesiastes 3:9, he threw the same question again: "What does the worker gain from his toil?" After repeatedly asking such questions, King Solomon says, "I have seen the burden God has laid on men" (3:10). He said that God laid the burden on us. Why did God lay the burden on us? Why did he make us labor on earth? Certainly, King Solomon confessed, "All his days his work is pain and grief, even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless" (2:23). Why does God make this vain thing or vain labor? I have looked for the answer in Ecclesiastes 3:11 – "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men." The reason is God wants to set eternity in our hearts so that we may seek eternity. Therefore, God wants us not to labor in vain any longer but to seek eternal things in the Lord so that we may do meaningful hard work in God's sight.

What is meaningful labor in God's sight? It's doing good. Look at Ecclesiastes 3:12 – "I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live." There is nothing better than rejoicing and doing good while we live on this earth. What is "doing good" here? It means doing good things to others (Park Yun-sun). Then what would be doing good to others? Since we have become new creatures in Jesus Christ, God has given us the eternal desire for eternity. So we must think doing good to others in an eternal perspective. In other words, we have to think about doing good to others in terms of eternity. Then what is doing good to others in eternal perspective? It is to love others with the love of eternal God. To love others with the eternal love of God is to introduce them to the Eternal Lord. In other words, it is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to them. By doing so, they too believe in Jesus Christ and have eternal life like us. This is the work of God. There is nothing better than

to rejoice in doing God's work. Therefore, we must enjoy ourselves doing this God's work as we eat and drink (Eccle. 3:13). In other words, whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we must enjoy doing our best to fulfill God's purpose or God's will. This is the gift of God. Are we enjoying this gift now?

We need to do God's work hard while we are living in this earth. Why? Look at Ecclesiastes 3:14 – "I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him." We must participate in God's work that will last forever. As we participate, we must fear God. In doing so, God will beautify everything along the time.

Last Monday, I opened my small New Testament Bible that I had been carrying around in my car and read the Book of Romans. As I was reading it, my gaze stopped at Romans 13:11 – "And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed." What do you think of this God's Word that we are living now, "our salvation is nearer than when we first believed?" Do you feel that our salvation is near at the end of the day? Are you longing for that salvation? When our Jesus comes back to earth, he will beautify everything through our salvation. The Lord will lead us who seek eternity into eternal heaven. And we will live there eternally with our Lord and will enjoy eternal rest there. Having this hope, I hope and pray that all of us are faithful in doing the work of God, in fulfilling God's will through the grace of God who helps us to live in this world.

You must enjoy it in a balanced way

[Ecclesiastes 3:13-14]

It is wearisome life (Eccle. 1:8). We cannot tell the wearisome of a man (v. 8). It is heavy burdensome life (v. 13). “What a heavy burden God has laid on men!” (v.13). The life is full of pain and grief (2:23). “All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless” (v. 23). It is a meaningless and useless life (v. 11). Everything “was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun” (v. 11). “So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun (v. 20). What must we do?

We must stop and ponder everything we have done. Ponder, but we have to ask ourselves the right question. Of course there will be several questions that we can throw to ourselves. For example King Solomon the Teacher (1: 1) asked these questions: “What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun? (v. 3), “And what does pleasure accomplish?” (2:2), “What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun?” (v. 22), “What does the worker gain from his toil?” (3:9)”. I’ve briefly summarized these four questions into two: (1) What do I really get from my hard work now? (2) What is it that I am really trying to accomplish now?

First we have to ask these questions to ourselves, and now we have to think about what we gain and what we lose.

In other words, now we have to think about what to get and what to lose. In a word, we have to calculate the gains and losses. Then we have to lose some of the things we have to lose with the right discernment. And we must pursue what we must get. For example, what we must surely lose is vain things in the sight of God (1: 2, 14; 2:11, 15, 17, etc). In other words, we must lose things that are worthless in God's sight (2:11). Then what are the things that are useless to us in the sight of God? They are “cheering myself with wine” (v. 3), ‘undertaking great projects’ (v. 4), ‘owning more slaves, more herds and flocks and amassing silver and gold’ (vv. 7, 8), ‘becoming greater by far than anyone’ (v. 9), ‘not denying myself nothing my eyes desired and not refusing my heart no pleasure’ (v. 10), etc.. So what is beneficial to us in the sight of God? It is the man who eats and drinks and is satisfied with all the work he does (v. 24, 3:13). This is “from the hand of God” (2:24) and “the gift of God” (3:13).

We must enjoy this gift of God humbly. In other words, we should enjoy eating and drinking. In particular, we should enjoy eating and drinking with the person(s) we love. People may say that what a big deal about eating and drinking is. But when I think about my father-in-law who couldn’t eat and drink for almost 10 years until he died, I am grateful for the blessing of being able to eat and drink even though they are very basic. When I think about those beloved ones who were in a nursing home or an intensive care unit as well as my father-in-law, I think we should thank God and enjoy eating and drinking. We should also be happy about what we do. This is what the Teacher King Solomon confessed: “So I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work” We must enjoy what we do (v. 22). And we must be satisfied with it (5:18). Our soul must be content with such happiness (6: 3). If we do not feel pleasure and satisfaction in what we do, this is vain (vv. 5:10). What good is it if we do not enjoy the pleasure even though we live a thousand years (6: 6), So this is what King Solomon said: “Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him--for this is his lot” (5:18), “So I commend the enjoyment of life, because nothing is better for a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany him in his work all the days of the life God has given him under the sun” (8:15). We must enjoy a short life in this earth that God has given us.

Finally, we must think about what we are trying to accomplish and what we are doing now.

The Teacher King Solomon devoted himself to study and to explore by wisdom all that was done under heaven (1:13). Then he applied himself to the understanding of wisdom, and also madness and folly (v. 17). He wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives (2:3). So he tested himself with pleasure to find out what was good (2:1-2). So he tried cheering himself with wine as his mind was guiding him with wisdom (v. 3). The reason was because he thought that that was worthwhile for him to do under heaven during the few days of his lives (v. 3). Not only that, King Solomon undertook great projects such as building houses for himself and planting vineyards and all kinds of fruit trees in them and making gardens and parks (vv. 4-5). He amassed silver and gold for himself, and the treasure of kings and provinces (v. 8). He denied himself nothing his eyes desired and didn't refuse his heart no pleasure (v. 10). But his conclusion was what do they accomplish? (v. 2), 'I was chasing after the wind' and "nothing was gained under the sun" (vv. 11; 1:14). So he hated all the things he had toiled for and his heart began to despair over all his toilsome labor under the sun (2:18, 20). King Solomon made these confessions: "This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead" (9:3) and "Naked a man comes from his mother's womb, and as he comes, so he departs. He takes nothing from his labor that he can carry in his hand" (5:15). Even in this confession, King Solomon realized these truths: "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men" (3:11) and "I know that everything God does will endure forever" (v. 14).

God set eternity in our hearts those who believe in Jesus Christ. Although we live on this earth, we enjoy eating and drinking, which is a gift from God, and enjoying our short life by rejoicing in what we do, but this joy and pleasure is never eternal. This pleasure and enjoyment is instantaneous. In other words, this joy and pleasure is something we can enjoy only in this world. We must enjoy the gift of God humbly, but we should not be satisfied there. The reason is that God wants us to enjoy eternal satisfaction. In other words, God wants us to enjoy not only in this Age but also in the Coming Age forever. That's why God set eternity in our hearts (3:11). Not only that, God has made us to fear him and has enabled us to participate in what God does that endures forever (v. 14). That work of God is the twofold commandment of Jesus (loving God and loving our neighbor) and the preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, according to the Spirit's guidance, we must love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our strength and with all our mind and love our neighbor as ourselves (Lk. 10:27). We must love God and love our neighbors with the eternal love of God. In doing so, God's joy overflows in our hearts. Therefore, we should enjoy and obey the twofold commandment of Jesus. And we must preach the gospel of Jesus (Mk. 16:15). We must proclaim the good news to those who do not know Jesus Christ with the affection of Christ Jesus (Phil. 1:8). Therefore, we must humbly participate in the lost souls whom God wants to save so that God's joy can be our joy and we may be able to taste the heavenly joy (Lk. 15:7, 10, 24).

We have to enjoy the gift of God in a balanced way. We must humbly enjoy the gift God gives to us in this world. We should enjoy eating and drinking and also enjoy our short life while rejoicing in what we do. At the same time, we must humbly receive the gifts God gives in the coming world. God has given us the eternal heart to desire and also to participate in the eternal work that God does. Therefore, we should enjoy obeying the twofold commandment of Jesus and the commandment to preach the gospel of Jesus. In doing so, we will rejoice forever in this world as well as in the coming world.

Everything that God does will remain forever

[Ecclesiastes 3:14]

What do we gain from all our labors at which we toil in this world? (Eccle. 1:3) What is the use of pleasure that we enjoy in this world? (2:2) What do we get for all the toil and anxious striving with which we labor in this world? (2:22) What do we gain from our toil? (3:9)

This is what the Teacher King Solomon said: “All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless” (2:23). All our days our work is pain and grief, even at night our minds do not rest but we gain nothing (2:23; 5:15) but only sorrow, how useless is that? We will take nothing from our labor that we can carry in our hand (v. 15). Then how shall we live? What should we labor for?

This is what the Teacher King Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 3:14 – “everything God does will endure forever”. What is “everything” that God does that will last forever? Of course, we can not understand everything God does from beginning to end (v. 11). However, according to what God reveals through the Bible, what God does is the Lord's "eternal salvation" (Isa. 45:17). Here, the Lord's eternal salvation is God loves us with everlasting love (Jer 31: 3) he chose us in Christ before the creation of the world and in love he predestined us (Eph. 1:4-5) in order to give us eternal life (1 Jn. 2:25) and to enter us into the eternal kingdom of the Savior Jesus Christ (Ps. 145: 13; 2 Pet. 1:11) to give us “eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2 Cor. 4:17). In a word, all that God does forever is to "give us salvation in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Tim. 2:10). In fulfilling this, God delivers his only begotten Son Jesus on the cross so that He can deliver us from ‘eternal wrath’ (Mal 1: 4) and ‘receiving the punishment of everlasting fire’ (Jude 1: 7) and lead us to eternal glory (1 Pet. 5:10) “the eternal house in heaven” (2 Cor. 5: 1).

God has given us a longing for eternity (Eccle. 3:11). Therefore, we should desire eternity. We must yearn for the eternal Lord's eternal kingdom (Ps. 145: 13). Though we will suffer a little while we live on the earth, we thank God for the grace of salvation that the God of all grace calls us into Christ to enter into his eternal glory (1 Pet. 5:10). We must humbly join the work of God's eternal salvation. To do so, we must obey God's calling (1 Cor. 7:22; Rom. 1:6; Rev. 17:14) as we fear God (Eccle. 3:14). And as we are Christ's servants, we must proclaim the eternal gospel of Jesus Christ (Rev. 14:6). I hope and pray that we all can participate in God's work of saving souls by preaching the eternal gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:5, 7), whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

God who makes beautiful in time (3)

[Ecclesiastes 3:14-22]

During the last Sunday's leaders' meeting, we had time to share the grace that God gave us throughout this year. Personally, as I looked back this year and I wrote letters with my Christmas cards and sent them here and there. Among the contents of the letter is this sentence: 'This year alone, I was able to laugh in the grace of God. Although there were times when I was sad, I cried and my heart was in pain, eventually God made me happy and made me to laugh. And this is God's great love and grace.' Even this year, I am able to give thanks to God and to praise him for giving me grace and helping me in time of need (Heb. 4:16). In fact, our God is the God who makes everything beautiful in his time.

We have been meditating over couple of weeks during the Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting, "God who makes beautiful in time" based on Ecclesiastes 3: 1-14. We meditate two things: (1) God makes everything beautiful by fulfilling all the purposes, (2) God makes everything beautiful by setting eternity in our hearts. Today, I would like to humbly receive the grace of God in meditating on how and when God makes beautiful under the title of "God who makes beautiful in time" based on Ecclesiastes 3: 14-22.

Third, God makes everything beautiful by fulfilling his purpose even when the judgment of unrighteousness is done in the court of the world.

Look at Ecclesiastes 3:16 – "And I saw something else under the sun: In the place of judgment--wickedness was there, in the place of justice--wickedness was there." The Teacher King Solomon witnessed something in this world. It is in the world's courts the judges do not judge fairly by distinguishing the righteous and the unrighteous (Park Yun-sun). How many injustices are being done in King Solomon's day and now in the world court? Aren't we looking at injustice, unrighteousness and falsehood in these world courts rather than justice, righteousness and truth? Although the judges suppose to judge justly, they are bribed and judge unjustly. And the criminals who have a lot of money are able to buy very expensive lawyers and able to make not guilty to those criminals who are guilty of murder. Isn't this the world that we are living in? As a result, we the believers are suffering. Look at Lot in Sodom and Gomorrah. That was what he went through. Lot, a righteous man, was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men of Sodom and Gomorrah when he was living among them day after day. He was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard (2 Pet. 2:7-8). But King Solomon said that even these injustices, especially when unrighteous judgments are being made, God still make everything beautiful by fulfilling his sovereign purposes (Eccle. 3:14-22). How does God make beautiful? The Bible teaches us in two things:

- (1) The Bible says that when the judgment of unrighteousness of this world is done, God makes all things beautiful because God judges the righteous and the wicked in the life to come.

Look at Ecclesiastes 3:17 – "I thought in my heart, "God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed." What King Solomon believed in his heart was that God surely would judge. And the judgment is not that God will intervene in this Age to judge justly, but God will judge all people in the Coming Age. So this is what he said in Ecclesiastes 12:14 – "For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil." In the end, God will judge all our acts, including every hidden thing that we have done in the Coming Age, whether they are good or evil. But what is the problem? The problem is many people are living in this world without being conscious of God's judgment. Even we Christians who believe in our Jesus are lacking in consciousness of God's judgment. Of course, the judgment of the unbeliever and the believer is different. The judgment of the unbeliever, not recorded in the book of God's life, will receive the final judgment just before being cast into the lake of fire (a place of eternal punishment, commonly called hell), but our believers will be rewarded for what we do (Internet). Thus, King Solomon gave this instruction to

young men: "Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment" (Eccle. 11:9). He was warning young people not to follow their heart and whatever their eyes see. How did he warn them? King Solomon warned them that God will judge after death. In that final judgment we have to be responsible for all our actions.

How should we live since we are responsible for all our actions and know that there will be the final judgment? Like King Solomon, we should think in our hearts: "God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed" (3:17). There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven (v. 1). Certainly, there is a time of judgement (v. 17). Even at the time of judgement, we should believe that God will make everything beautiful by fulfilling his sovereign will. We should look at injustices done in the world courts in God's perspective. In other words, we must believe that God will judge everyone with justice. Although we are unjustly afflicted by unrighteousness in this world, we must be patient in hope of God's righteous judgment. And we must fear God (v. 14). As we fear God, we should obey God's commands. We must obey God's Word, expecting God's reward for all our actions. We must live righteous life as we fear God.

(2) God makes everything beautiful by making us humble when the judgement of unrighteousness of this world is being done.

Look at Ecclesiastes 3:18 – "I also thought, "As for men, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals." King Solomon says that although our believers may suffer because of unrighteous trials (v. 16) in this world, God tests our believers through the unrighteous trials of the wicked in this world. Here, God tests us means God makes us humble through trials (Park Yun-sun). Why does God humble us through trials? What is the purpose? This is what Dr. Park Yun-sun said regarding the purpose of our trials: 'So, the purpose of trials is to make people realize that they are like beasts in the mortal deaths when they are oppressed and that they should not live in the flesh-centered life. Eventually, the purpose of trials is to make us humble and not to live in the flesh-centered life. This is what King Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 3:19-20: "Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath ; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return." What he is saying here is that it is vain to live in the center of the flesh because all man and beast die.

Sometimes when we see a murderer who has committed a terrible murder through TV or Internet news, we say, 'He is a man less than an animal.' Few weeks ago, when I saw in the news that a man raped and murdered a woman who was pregnant with a twin I thought that how cruel a person could be. I guess around 60 years old man saw him raping her and tried to stop him but couldn't so he called 911. But eventually she died with her twin children. The murderer seemed like a beast and not a human being. But do you know that Psalmist Asaph in Psalms 73:22 referred to himself as "a brute beast" before the Lord? Did Asaph murder someone cruelly? No. Then why did he say that he is a beast? Didn't he sin against God being jealous of the prosperity of the wicked? Is envying the prosperity of the wicked the act of beast? Here, the lesson we should have in connection with today's Ecclesiastes 3: 19-20 is that the flesh-centered life is like a beast. And, referring to such a life, King Solomon says it is a vain life. In Ecclesiastes 3:11, where we have already meditated, we have learned that God has given us a desire for eternity. Therefore, we must seek eternal work. We should never pursue the work of the flesh and live a life like a beast. We must listen to the message King Solomon gives us: "So I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work, because that is his lot. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?" (v. 22) What does it mean? It means that there is nothing better than being loyal to his own work, the Lord's work and eternal work and enjoy doing them while we live in this earth. This is our lot. What is the reason? The reason is because when we die, we cannot return to this world again (v. 22) (Park Yun-sun). We should not live in vain by doing the work of flesh in this world. Since the future of the man's spirit and the animal's spirit are different (v. 21) how can we live like the beast doing the work of the flesh?

During the yesterday morning prayer meeting, I meditated on the Word of God based on 2 Thessalonians 3:3. As I was doing so, I received Apostle Paul's exhortation that we must stand firm because before the Second Coming of Jesus, Satan will keep on tempting us, the believers, in order to make us fall. Those who are unlawful, those who do not love the truth and who believe in falsehood, are doing injustice in this world, disobeying the

gospel. Although we the believers suffer unfairness due to the judgement of injustice in the court, we must believe that even in that time God will make everything beautiful. How does he do that? He does that by making us to believe that there is a just judgment of the Lord in the life to come and that he makes us humble through these trials. Also, God makes everything beautiful by making us to do the work of the Spirit, the work of the Lord and not the work of the flesh and making us to enjoy that lot in this earth. I hope and pray God who makes beautiful in this time will make our life more beautiful.

‘They have no comforter’

[Ecclesiastes 4:1-3]

Two things happened after the end of the New Year the church leaders’ prayer meeting. One thing is that one of the women in the church took a lot of sleeping pills and attempted suicide. On that Sunday afternoon my wife, our church elder and two young ladies went to her apartment and helped her. The next day, when my wife went to visit her apartment, the woman was already on the ambulance and went to the hospital. Now she is in the nursing home. Another thing I heard was that one of the college students who went to the church in Korea where I used to serve went to a mission field and drowned. I used to serve the English Ministry (EM) with his mother and I remembered seeing him few times during the EM worship. So when I heard the news about his death, I was very shocked. So I thought about how to comfort his parents and his older sister. And I wrote a letter to them and I prayed to God. “Abba Father,” I pleaded with God the Father, asking God to comfort them and his friends and church members.

Indeed, this world is a full of anxious thing, of painful thing and of sinful thing. As we begin the New Year, we see our beloved brothers and sisters in pain and suffering. How can we comfort our beloved brothers and sisters in Christ who are in pain and suffering? When I think about the word “comfort”, it reminds me Job’s friends in Job 162 and Barnabas in Acts 4:16. When we look at Job 16:2, Job said that his friends who came to comfort him are “sorry comforters”. And when we look at Acts 4:16, the author of the Book of Acts Luke said that Barnabas is “Son of Encouragement”. Although the Job’s friends were the sorry comforters, Barnabas in the early church was a true encourager. So when I personally pray for myself, I pray to God like this: ‘Lord, help me be to be an encourager and an evangelist who is fire for You.’ But so many times, I don’t know how to comfort my beloved brothers and sisters in Christ around me who are in pain and suffering. Although I want to love them and comfort them with the Lord’s love, so many times I don’t know what to do.

In the book ‘Spirituality of Comfort’ by Rev. Robert Strand, there are 101 stories about comforting a wounded soul. The book’s preface was written by a priest Henry Nowen, who says that, the word “comfort” means ‘to be with a lonely man’. He also says that comforting does not mean taking pain away, but rather being together. And being together, according to Nowen, refers to as “care of soul”. And caring soul means crying together, suffering together, feeling together and sympathizes. Priest Henry Nowen said: ‘Often our sorrow makes us to dance. And our dance creates space for our sadness. In the tears of losing a loved one, we find joy that we do not know. In the middle of a party celebrating success we can feel deep sorrow. Like a clown’s face that seems to be sad and rejoicing in order to make us to be sad or to laugh, sadness, dancing, bitterness, laughter, mourning, and joy belong to a single place. We can see the beauty of life where grief and dancing touch each other’. Do you and I live in the beauty of life where sadness and dancing touch each other?

The Teacher King Solomon in Ecclesiastes 4:1-3 also said what he saw: “Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed-- and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors-- and they have no comforter” (v. 1). What he witnessed in this world was the abusing of the tyrants. In other words, he saw the abused people. And he saw the tears of the abused people. But the problem was there is no one who comforts these abused people. King Solomon saw this. He saw that the abused people had no comforter. And this is what he said: “And I declared that the dead, who had already died, are happier than the living, who are still alive. But better than both is he who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun.” What does it mean? It doesn’t mean that it is better to die than to live as getting abused. King Solomon never encourages suicide, saying that suicide is better than being abused. The world we live in these days is a world that encourages suicide. How do you know this? If you look at the internet these days, there is a suicide website. What is surprising is that even if people do not know each other they meet through suicide web sites and commit suicide together. I have heard through people I know that there are few people who have committed suicide. Maybe this world is getting harder and harder now, and many people in life are trying to take their precious lives in suicide. So it seems that the success of suicide is increasing. Maybe for these people, Ecclesiastes 4: 2 might be misinterpreted from the viewpoint of suicide, saying, ‘Ah, the wise King Solomon said it

is better to die than to be abused'. So you should not take your life, thinking that it is better to die than to live like this. In today's passage, King Solomon never recommends suicide. Rather, when he saw the tears of those who are being abused by those who are in power in this world, he is saying that the lives of such abused people are less than death. In other words, King Solomon does not say that God's given life itself is not better than death, but that the painful life of unjustly oppressed is less than death (Park Yun-sun).

What kind of life would it be if we suffer pain that we could not die? When I think about this question, the North Korean defectors came into my mind. I read an article in the Wall Street Journal regarding the North Korean defectors who entered the United States for the first time according to the North Korean Human Rights Act on May 1, 2006. The articles had the testimonies of the defectors who lived the miserable lives in China. The article introduces the woman, a 36-year-old woman, who was a teacher in Pyongyang. She went to a cloth shop to help her with difficult living. She went to a border town to get a cloth and lost consciousness during dinner. When she woke up, she was already trafficked and was in China. From there she was sold to a Chinese man and the Chinese husband said, "Killing a North Korean woman like you is easier than killing a chicken." She was beaten so badly that her bones broke and she thought of suicide once. Wouldn't there be many more testimonies from many other defectors as well? Although I don't know well, I still remembered what a pastor said to me: 'Because I saw the defectors, now I was able to read the Book of Exodus.'

How much more feelings and sympathy with these words in Ecclesiastes 4:3 is true for these people who suffer so much? It is better for those have not yet been born who have not seen the evil that is done under the sun than those who are still alive (Eccle. 4:2-3). If the defectors were not born at all, they didn't have to see the evil done in this world and didn't have to suffer to the point of wanting to die? How about you? When you look at back on your past life, did you ever live because you couldn't die? Have you ever been so painful that you feel it is worse than dying? So, did you ever stay in tears? But when we suffer so much to the point of wanting to die, more than suffering itself, the thing that makes us very difficult is that there is no comforter. It is the fact that when we are the hardest, the most painful, and the heart aches, our hearts are getting more and more troubled by the fact that no one really understands, sympathizes, and comforts us with our hardships, pain and suffering. What is more distressing is the fact that there are those who love us around and try to comfort us, when no one truly comforts us (or perhaps we are so distressed that we are refusing their comfort). When the evil of the wicked does not seem endless, and when the act of abuse and oppression does not show signs of ending, we no longer dream. We no longer have the hope. We end up with the last line of hope. This makes us depress. Life without hope is bound to despair. What should we do when we are in such despair? We can learn three things from the Bible:

First, when we are in despair we must speak to our soul.

One of the books I still can not forget is the book *Spiritual Depression* by Lloyd Jones. What I was challenged in reading the book is that when we are disappointed and depressed, we should speak to our soul like a psalmist. How should I say it? As an example, Pastor Lloyd Jones quoted Psalm 42: 5, 11; 43: 5 – "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God" (3x). So, when I sometimes become discouraged, I remember myself saying this prayer to myself, remembering this psalm: "James, why are you so downcast, O my soul. Why so disturbed within me? James, put your hope in God." And I try to pray with deliberate looking at the Lord who helps me. When I do, I often experience God's help. You can try it. When your heart is discouraged and in despair, why don't you proclaim the word of God to yourself, like a psalmist. It doesn't have to be the Book of Psalms. If you have any God's promise that you want to hold onto, why don't you hold on to that promised Word of God and cry out to him. Whenever I am struggling with my church ministry, I am holding unto the His promise Word "... I ... build my church" (Mt. 16:18) and cry out to God. And I know that God certainly helps me.

Second, when we are in despair we must seek the Lord.

When we are in despair we must desire Jesus. We should eagerly desire him. Especially when we are in despair because of pain, we must look to Jesus' suffering on the cross. Why is that? The reason is that when we meditate on His suffering, our suffering can be connected to the sufferings of Jesus, so that true comfort and healing can occur. When I personally feel depressed, I sometimes remember the words of Jonah 2: 4 – "I said, 'I have been banished from your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple'." The reason I think of this Jonah is

because when I disobeyed the Lord's words like Jonah, and is in the midst of a chastisement discipline, I decided that I would look to the temple of the Lord again, because I desperately want to seek him. I hope that when you are depressed and despair, you will rely on this Jonah's word and look to Him again. I hope you can turn your despair into an opportunity to seek the Lord.

Third, when we are in despair we must hope in the Lord.

Ultimately, I think desperation is making us to hope in the Lord. When we live in this world and are despaired because of these and other things, that despair is a good opportunity to seek the Lord. Also, I think despair is an opportunity for us to only look to the Lord and hope in Him. That's why we need to be thoroughly discouraged and in despair by this world. Furthermore, we need to be more or less discouraged and be in despair because of ourselves. The reason is that without such hopelessness, we rarely yearn for and hope in God. That's why I like the Hymn "My hope is built on nothing less" text 3 lyrics: "His oath, His covenant, His blood, Support me in the whelming flood; When all around my soul gives way He then is all my hope and stay." I love this song because when all the things we believed in the world are cut off, we began to rely on the Lord more and more. By doing so, all our despair in our hearts fade away and our hearts are filled with hope in the Lord. In doing so, we can praise God this way: (1) "O! Thou, in whose presence my soul takes delight, On whom in affliction I call, My comfort by day, and my song in the night, My hope, my salvation, my all!", (5) "Dear Shepherd! I hear, and will follow Thy call; I know the sweet sound of Thy voice; Restore and depend me, for Thou art my all, And in Thee I will ever rejoice."

I hope that the Lord of hope will comfort you. I pray that our Lord will comfort you when no one can comfort you. When you refuse to be comforted by anybody else due to your great and unbearable pains, I pray that the Lord fills your heart with a longing for the Lord and a hope for Him. I pray that you can see the beauty of life, the beauty of Christians, where grief and delight touch each other. As I end this meditation of the Word, I want to share with you what I wrote as I thought about a sister in Christ who made me to see the beauty of the Christian:

You are beautiful.
Even in the tears of the heart,
You smile.
You are beautiful.

Even in the midst of your son's death,
You give thanks to God,
You are beautiful.

You think about your church members
More than your family,
You are beautiful.

You want to comfort others
More than receiving comfort from others
You love to give
More than receiving,
You are beautiful.

You who hold the heart of Heavenly Father
And use your strength to save souls,
You are beautiful.

You who are glorifying God,
You are beautiful.

I see Christ in you ...

‘Tranquility’

[Ecclesiastes 4:4-6]

What is in your mind these days? Do you have peace in your heart? Have you ever read “The Serenity Prayer”? This is what it says: “God, grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, courage to change the things we can, and wisdom to know the difference. Amen (Internet). Like this prayer, have you ever asked God for the serenity of accepting things that you cannot change? I don’t think I ever prayed to God like this. I prayed to God for a peace that the world could not give in my heart, but I never seem to have found the serenity to accept things I can not change. Rather, I think I am trying to change myself instead of accept things I cannot change. In other words, there were a lot of times when I tried to change things before God because I could not accept things that I could not change. So, there were many times when I was not in peace of mind. Instead, I was in a state of conflict, anxiety, and self-defense. But God had mercy on me. He guided me with the Word of God and enabled me to humbly accept the things that I cannot change that were reflected in the Word. Moreover, he enabled me to entrust everything to God in prayer and to wait for God to touch my heart. Therefore, God had given me peace in my heart and still gives it to me.

Pope John Paul II shares the "Ten Commandments of Tranquility" (Internet). Pope John Paul II seems to have tried to keep his own Ten Commandments of Tranquility in order to keep calm in his own mind:

1. Even today, I will try to live only one day without trying to solve my life problems at once.
2. Even today, I will act very carefully. I will not criticize anyone and will not try to correct others. I will only criticize and correct myself.
3. Even today, I will be happy in my conviction that I was created for happiness, not for others, but for the world.
4. Even today, I will adapt to various situations and circumstances without adapting to my wishes.
5. Even today, I will devote to reading for ten minutes of the time given to me. Just as food is needed in the physical life, good reading is needed in the life of the soul.
6. Even today, I will behave well. And I will not tell it to anyone.
7. Even today, I will do something that has nothing to do with my desires. If I feel that there is something unfortunate in my heart, I will take care not to let anyone notice it.
8. Even today, I will surely believe that even if it is the opposite of my will, God's providence cares for me as if there is no one but me in this world.
9. Even today, I will not fear anything. I will not be afraid to be particularly pleased with what is beautiful, or to enjoy it.
10. Even today, I will write an accurate schedule. Even if the plan can not be executed correctly, it will write it. And I will be careful of two evils, 'hasty hastening' and 'undecided and indecisive action'.

In Ecclesiastes 4: 4-6, the Teacher King Solomon gives us three lessons on how we should do to keep tranquility in our mind.

First, we must get rid of envy in order to keep the tranquility of our hearts.

Look at Ecclesiastes 4:4 – “And I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.” When we mediated on Ecclesiastes 4:1-3, we thought about how King Solomon saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun. And he saw the tears of the oppressed. In Ecclesiastes 4: 4, he saw people envying each other and doing all sorts of hard work and tricky things. In other words, King Solomon saw in this world that people are jealous and compete with each other and do all the hard work. “This too is chasing is meaningless, a chasing after the wind” (v.4).

What is envy? Envy is “desire to have a quality, possession, or other desirable attribute belonging to (someone else)” (Internet). The Latin “indivia” means ‘to look up with evil eye’ and to make one’s heart the ‘evil

eye'. In other words, envy entails desire to seize what other possessed that is better than what one has with a feeling of sadness and displeasure over the possession of others (Internet). A good biblical example is King Saul. When we look at 1 Samuel 18:9, the Bible says that King Saul kept a jealousy eye on David. From that time on when the women came out from all the towns of Israel (v. 6) and sang as they danced "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands" (v. 7), King Saul kept a jealousy eye on David. So King Saul tried to kill David. As I read the Book of Genesis in these days, I see some people in the Bible envied others. For example, in Genesis 30:1, I see that Rachel became jealous of her sister Leah and said to her husband Jacob "Give me children, or I'll die!" And in Genesis 37:11, I see Joseph's old brothers who were jealous of Joseph because they saw that their father loved Joseph more than any of them (v. 4). So they tried to kill their own young brother Joseph. How scary is this? The Psalmist Asaph also envied the arrogant when he saw the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous (Ps. 73). We can also envy the wicked who are prosperous but the righteous who are suffering. It is envy when our heart is sad and displeased with what we don't have and when we desire to possess what the wicked have. This is what King Solomon said in Proverbs 14:30 – "A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones." Peace of mind, tranquility of the heart gives life to our bodies, but envy rots our bones. So a pastor said: 'Good for bones is good words, joy of heart is peace of mind. Envy, anxiety and anger are bad for bones. Envy decays the bones, the anxiety dries the bones, and the anger kills the bones' (Internet).

One of the things I still do not forget is that when I attended a seminary presidential ceremony, an elderly pastor said he made good competition among his church assistant pastors. When I heard him saying it, I was little bit surprised. And I asked myself 'How could a senior pastor make his assistant pastors to compete each other. Is it right to say that's good competition?' People are working with competitiveness in doing things in and out of the church. Even at home, parents are making their children to do "good competition" as they raise them. Do you think "good competition" is right? Based on Ecclesiastes 4:4, I think having competition among each other is not right. The reason is because competition takes away tranquility in heart. If we do everything with a competitive consciousness, then there is more chance that our hearts will be filled with envy, anxiety and anger rather than peace. That's why King Solomon says that all labor and all achievement spring from man's envy in the sense of competing with neighbors is in vain (4: 4). Therefore, we must get rid of all competitive consciousness and envy that take away tranquility from our hearts. We should no longer do the vain effort of greed with the consciousness of competing with our neighbors. I hope and pray that we get rid of envy so that we may keep the tranquility of our hearts.

Second, we must work diligently in order to keep the tranquility of our hearts.

Look at Ecclesiastes 4:5 – "The fool folds his hands and ruins himself." King Solomon said that the fool folds his hands and it means the fool does not work. This is what the Bible Proverbs 21:25 says: "The sluggard's craving will be the death of him, because his hands refuse to work." Those sluggards who refuse to work with their hands are the fools (Eccle. 4:5). When I think about this, 1 Thessalonians 3:10 came into my mind: "... If a man will not work, he shall not eat." At the time of Paul there were brothers in the Thessalonian community who did not want to work. The problem was not only that they did not work at all, but rather they were busybodies (v. 11). Why didn't they work and were busybodies? In other words, why did they refuse to work with their hands? It was because they had wrong eschatology. In other words, the people who did not work in the Thessalonian church had a crooked view of Jesus' second coming. And that's what some Jehovah's Witnesses people did after they heard the prophecy of Charles Taze Russell, the founder of Jehovah's Witnesses that Jesus' Second Coming would be in 1874 so they stopped everything and prepared for His Second Coming. Beside such erroneous eschatology, what are some other reasons why Christians refuse to work with their hands and are lazy?

Do you know what the characteristic of the lazy person is? One of its characteristics is that the lazy person is good at making excuses. Look at Proverbs 26:13 – "The sluggard says, "There is a lion in the road, a fierce lion roaming the streets!" Roads and streets are the places where people work. If there is a lion there, you will not be able to go there. This is an excuse to scare people when they are trying to do something and to excuse themselves when they have no confidence (Internet). Another characteristic of lazy people is that they like sleep. Look at Proverbs 26:14 – "As a door turns on its hinges, so a sluggard turns on his bed." This means that the lazy one hangs around the bed. In other words, the lazy person is rolling over the bed and is enjoying sleeping. In addition to these Bible passages, Proverbs speaks of laziness several times: "How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest- and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man" (6:9-11), "Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent

hands bring wealth” (10:4), “The sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied” (13:4), “Laziness brings on deep sleep, and the shiftless man goes hungry” (19:15).

In today’s passage Ecclesiastes 4:5, King Solomon said, “The fool folds his hands and ruins himself.” The meaning is that fools are lazy and can not earn any income, but only to perpetuate destruction (Park Yun-sun). So he said “If a man is lazy, the rafters sag; if his hands are idle, the house leaks” (10:18). This means that the prodigal life of the lazy rulers is destroying the nation. But diligent hands bring wealth (Prov. 10:4). In other words, the diligent man prizes his possessions (12:27). The Bible says that diligent hands bring wealth (10:4), will rule (12:24), and their desires will be fully satisfied (13:4) and will make their hope sure (Heb. 6:11). There is tranquility in the heart of the diligent (Internet). But in the mind of the lazy, there is nothing but anxiety, worry, excuses, grudges, complaints.

Lastly, we must be satisfied with God alone in order to keep the tranquility of our hearts.

Look at Ecclesiastes 4:6 – “Better one handful with tranquility than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind.” This word means that it is better to have tranquility in our heart with full of one hand than laboring in vain with full of both hands. In other words, the important thing is not whether we have a lot of possession or not but to have tranquility of heart or not. The problem is that when we try to pursue the abundance of material or possessions, we often try to be greedy and envious while competing with our neighbors. As a result, we can not help but lose the tranquility of our hearts. The greater danger is not only the loss of the tranquility of our hearts, but also we will be satisfied with the wealth of possessions rather than God. And as we continue to enjoy that satisfaction, we become more and more greedy. And when we become greedier, we become more filled with stress, anxiety, and worry than the tranquility of heart. When we reach such state of mind, our hearts cannot bear fruit because the Word of God is blocked (Mt. 13:22). That’s why the Psalmist said as follow: “Better the little that the righteous have than the wealth of many wicked” (Ps. 37:16). Also, this is what King Solomon said in Proverbs 16:8 – “Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice.” What does it mean? It means that having a lot of income or small income is not important but the righteous, the wicked and the righteousness and unrighteousness is. This doesn’t mean that the righteous must always have little possession. The Bible says that Abraham and Job the righteous men, had a lot of possession. Of course, it is not to say that the wicked are always wealthy. There are many wicked people in the world who have little possessions. What is important is that the mind of the righteous is satisfied with the Lord alone, while the heart of the wicked is satisfied with the abundance of possessions. Thus, in the wicked heart, there is and cannot be any tranquility that is from God.

We must learn to be satisfied with the Lord alone in order to keep the tranquility in our hearts. Look at Philippians 4:11-13: “I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” Like Apostle Paul, we also need to learn how to live in want or in plenty. And we must learn the secret of being content in any situation, whether in plenty or in want. The secret is to be content with only one Lord who gives us strength. In doing so, we will be able to enjoy the true peace of the Lord, the King of Peace.

There is a memory of heart that still can not be forgotten. When I visited Brother Mark at the hospice a few years ago, I sang the gospel song "My peace I give unto you" in tears. The song goes like this: “My Peace I Give Unto You; It’s A Peace That The World Cannot Give; Its A Peace That The World Cannot Understand, Peace to Know, Peace To Live, My Peace I Give Unto You.” I still remember singing this song in my dream when I was in high school. Though we live in this world without peace, Jesus who is the King of Peace dwells in our hearts, and we can give praise to God, “My peace I give unto You.” I hope and pray that all of you may enjoy the true tranquility of the Lord that the world cannot give.

Two people are better than one

[Ecclesiastes 4:7-12]

As I was reading a sermon 'The principle of ministry together' in the book of Nehemiah, written by Pastor Dong-won Lee, he talked about how Lee Iacocca, who rebuilt the broken American automaker Chrysler, mentioned about the famous 3-P's when a newspaper reporter asked him about the secret of his business. The 3-P's principles are (1) Principle, (2) Practice and (3) Persistence (Internet). In a word, the principle is saying that we have to set the principles and put them into practice consistently and intensively. In doing so, Pastor Lee talked about the Principle-centered Leadership, which has recently been presented as an ideal of healthy leadership. He said that the leader Nehemiah in the Bible had already reconstructed the city of Jerusalem and was able to accomplish a great project by exercising his leadership based on this principle. And he summarized in three ways, asking what the principles of leadership he focused on were. The first principle among them is "Principle of cooperation". Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem with more than 75 people in Nehemiah 3, more than 75 of them co-operating side by side at the same time, keeping his position and achieving the reconstruction of the city of Jerusalem. In contrast, the first point of disqualification in the leadership of our Koreans is pointed out as the spirit of this cooperation. These individualistic, non-collaborative people are likened to "crabs in a jar". Every single crab in the jar has enough power to crawl out of the jar but cannot. The reason is that if one crab tries to get out, another crab hangs on the hind legs. The crab's way of survival is, in a word, "you die and I die". These extreme egoism, is not it the church today?

This is what King Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 4:7 – "Again I saw something meaningless under the sun." What is that vain thing? Look at verse 8: "There was a man all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. 'For whom am I toiling,' he asked, 'and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?' This too is meaningless-- a miserable business!" This statement indicates that extreme individualism is vain in order to fill only its own covetousness (Park Yun-sun). King Solomon saw under the sun that people were envious of each other, doing all the hard work and doing various tricky things (v. 4). Such a time eventually provokes the covetousness of the envy of a person, and the more envious the person becomes an extreme individualist in order to fill his covetousness. So he said that this extreme individualist is "alone, without a son, no brother" (v. 8). This means that the extreme individualist does not even take care of his or her son and brother (Park Yun-sun). Ultimately, the extreme individualist does endure all the trouble in this world in order to gain wealth only for himself, but later he confesses: 'For whom am I toiling, and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment? This too is meaningless-- a miserable business!' (v.8) In a word, extreme personalistic life is vain and useless. All labor is vain and useless. King Solomon saw from the extreme individualists that when they looked at back later in their lives all the hard works they did without experiencing joy they realized "I lived in vain".

Do we really see, like King Solomon, the vain and useless labor of the extreme individualists in this world? Have you ever seen the pity souls who worked so hard without taking care of their children and brothers/sisters and accumulated wealth but could not enjoy their lives? Although they think and say that they have worked so hard for their families, their families don't think so because they didn't even take care of their families and thus their relationship is severed. So the extreme individualists are asking themselves, in extreme loneliness, "For whom did I work so hard?" Have you ever seen people around you who threw this kind of questions? Have you ever seen someone who worked so hard all his or her life, accumulate so much wealth but died without fully enjoying it? Moreover, have you ever seen someone die lonely because his or her relationship with his or her children and siblings are not good? "This too is meaningless – a miserable business!" (v.8)

King Solomon saw something that is not in vain but profitable (vv. 9-12). What is that profitable thing? That profitable thing is two are better than one. Look at verse 9: "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work." Why is two better than one? It is because they have a good return for their work (v. 9). Here "Two are better than one" doesn't mean numbers but it means when we cooperate with each other, it is beneficial (Park Yun-sun). Then what is really beneficial? King Solomon talked about three:

First, two are better one because if one falls down, another person can help him up.

Look at Ecclesiastes 4:10 – “If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!” Who can raise you up when you are alone? But when two people walk together and one falls, another person can hold him up and raise him. Likewise, King Solomon says that the reason why two people are better than one person here is because they can hold each other and raise each other. In other words, two people can help each other when it is hard. How about you? Do you have a person who can help you when you are going through really hard time? The church must be a community that helps each other when it is difficult. It is a true church that is a community that holds, supports, and helps each other when we fall.

Second, two are better one because we can comfort each other.

Look at Ecclesiastes 4:11 – “Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?” King Solomon saw those who were abused in this world and saw their tears, but saw that they had no comforter (v. 1). We need people who can help us when we are in trouble and difficulty, but we also desperately need comforting people who can comfort us. We need a comforter who can be with us when we are lonely and who can weep with us when we are weeping. In doing so, we can be comforted by feeling God’s warm love through the consolation. This must be the image of our church. It is a community that encourages each other, comforts one another and empowers each other. This is the true church.

Lastly, two are better than one because they are able to stand firm and overcome all adversity together.

Look at Ecclesiastes 4:12 – “Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” Isn’t it interesting? King Solomon talks about one person in verse 8, two people in verse 9 through 11 and then three people (“three strands”) in verse 12. What does “three strands” mean? One line will be easily broken, two lines will be less easily broken, but if there are three lines, it means that it will never be easily broken (Wiersbe). Have you ever visited the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco? Do you know a bit about the cable that supports the Golden Gate Bridge? The cable is said to be made up of a number of wires that form a single thick cable. The thickness of the cable is 92.4cm, which is thicker than a few trees. To make one cable, 27,572 thin wires were combined and pencil-thick wires were moved together to form 61 rods, which were compressed and bundled together to form a 3-foot-tall rope. Finally, the cable was wrapped with thin wire and finished smoothly. It is said that the steel cable of 129,000 km is woven into a thick cable (Internet). Is not it amazing? Just as the Golden Gate Bridge cable never breaks easily, when three people come together in one heart, they stand firmly and can overcome all kinds of difficulties together. They can help each other, comfort each other, protect each other, and overcome all adversity. Don’t you want this fellowship of love in the Lord? Don’t you want to dream of this community?

This age in which we live is increasingly marked by the extreme individualism tendencies in which people love themselves (2 Tim. 3: 2). Where these individualistic tendencies can be seen, they can be seen from those who labored to fill only their own covetousness (Ecc 4: 8). When we look at those people who have been working hard for a lifetime and have accumulated a certain amount of wealth, but have not been satisfied and have continued to build up wealth but eventually have lost their relationship with their family members and are left alone with no one around them, I can not help but throw this question: “Who do you work for?” When we see people who worked so hard and suffered in their life time but never enjoyed his life and die in their loneliness, we cannot help but confess as King Solomon did, ‘This is meaningless and useless.’ Along with this extreme selfishness, I think that what we can see in the world these days is ‘selfish familialism.’ In other words, people are increasingly aware of their own families. They are not interested in other families. I think this phenomenon is an extreme reverse reaction especially in this era when the family is collapsing. In other words, in this era when the family is collapsing, selfish familialism, which people only care about their own family, is prominent. So we who believe in Jesus also tend to pray and live faithfully in the church for our own families alone. Is this a right life of faith? King Solomon is teaching us the right principle of living in a faith community, which is ‘two are better than one.’ In other words, the principle of good faith community life is cooperation. And this principle of cooperation is beneficial. The reason is not only that we can help each other when we are in difficulties but also we can stand up together firmly

and overcome all the adversities together. I hope and pray that our faith community will be faithful to the principle of cooperation so that we can help each other, comfort each other and overcome any kinds of difficulties together.

The wisdom of the poor in spirit

[Ecclesiastes 4:13-16]

Last week during the Saturday morning prayer, we meditated on Exodus 36:1-7 and prayed to God for 3 things regarding serving the Lord's church. Those 3 prayer requests were (1) 'God, give us wisdom and intelligence to us.', (2) 'God, give us volunteer hearts', and (3) 'God, please remove covetousness from our hearts.' Among these 3 prayer requests, the reason why we prayed for the first prayer request, that is 'God, give us wisdom and skills', was so that we may be able to understand God's will and to know how to fulfill his will. That was what God did to the Israelites when they were building a tabernacle. Not only that God gave them wisdom and skill, he taught them exactly what to do and how to build the tabernacle. Likewise, we asked God to give us wisdom and skills so that we may know how to build the Lord's church according to His will. Therefore, we must serve His church with God's given wisdom.

Today, as I was meditating on Ecclesiastes 4: 13-16, especially the words "poor" in verse 13 and "poverty" in verse 14 came to my attention. And these two words reminded me Matthew 5:3 – "Blessed are the poor in spirit" So I thought about the wisdom of the poor. Of course, the poverty and the poor in today's passage speak more of the poor in physical side than the spiritual side. But I spiritualized the physical poverty and thought about the wisdom of the poor in spirit. The reason was I thought there is some connection between actual poverty and the poor in spirit. I believe that the basis of the connection is Matthew 5: 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" Of course, I think there are a lot of true godly believers who are actually wealthy and poor in spirit. And I think that there are more believers who are not poor in spirit and they are actually poor too. The important thing is not to be really poor or to be rich, but our spirit should always be poor. The reason is because God gives the blessing to those who are poor in spirit. And one of those blessings is "wisdom."

So today, as we mediated on Ecclesiastes 4:13-16, under the heading "The wisdom of the poor in spirit", I want to think about three things as to what the wisdom of the poor is.

First, the wisdom of the poor in spirit knows how to take warning.

Look at Ecclesiastes 4:13 today: "Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to take warning." Here we can see the Teacher King King Solomon comparing three things: "boy" and "king", wisdom and dullness, and poverty and wealth. When we compare these comparisons in one, King Solomon is comparing the poor but wise boy and the old and dull king. What is the point of this comparison? It is not the poor and the wealth, the young, the old, the boy or the king that is important here, but the wisdom. And King Solomon says that the wise man knows how to receive warning. But the dull and the fool do not receive warning. So King Solomon says in the verse 13 that the old and dull king does not know how to receive warning.

When I meditated on this word, one question came to my mind. The question is, "Did the old and dull king, who did not listen to advice, was like that when he was young?" Maybe this old and dull king humbly listen to the advises that surround beloved people gave to him when he was young (maybe before he became king). If that was true, I wondered what made him dull king who didn't listen to the advice and take warning. I think it may had to with his wealth or his power which made him proud and dull. This is what Dr. Park Yun-sun said: 'The old and dull king in the throne who became proud did not receive warning and this shows how unfortunate he was.' A proud person never hears the right advice. He doesn't have ears and heart to listen to warning. But a wise man listens to the advice and warning. Look at Proverbs 12:15 – "The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice." When Solomon was about to become a king, he asked God for 'a wise heart'. The reason was so that he could discern good and evil when he judged God's people (1 Kgs. 3:9). What is interesting is that the Hebrew word that was used here for the 'wise' is 'shemea' which means 'hearing'. This means that King Solomon had an humble attitude in his heart that whatever God said he was willing to listen and obey. In fact, he had an attitude of submission (Internet). So he says in Proverbs 19:20, "Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise." Hopefully you and I have the wisdom of the poor so that we may listen to the right advice and warning.

Second, the wisdom of the poor in spirit how to exalt the Lord.

Look at Ecclesiastes 4:14 – “The youth may have come from prison to the kingship, or he may have been born in poverty within his kingdom.” Here King Solomon explains why the wise boy who is poor is better than the old and dull king who didn’t listen to the warning. The reason is that even though the wise boy was born in a poor house in that country and was imprisoned, eventually he was saved from prison and became king in that country. This doesn’t mean that there was another king besides the old and dull king who did not listen to the warning in that country where a poor wise boy lived. This means that the old and dull king withdrew from power, and then his successor, this wise poor boy, became king. When you hear these words, who comes to your mind among the Bible characters? Do you not remember Joseph in Genesis? Of course, Joseph didn’t become the king of Egypt. However, when I think of “a wise young man” who is “a poor man who came out of the prison and became a king” in Ecclesiastes 4: 13-14, Joseph came in to my mind because he was in prison and interpreted the dream of Pharaoh king of Egypt with the wisdom God gave him and he became the prime minister of Egypt. Although he was hated by his old brothers and almost about to get slain but was sold as a slave in Egypt and became poor. But because God loved and was with him, God made him prosperous. Also God gave him wisdom so that he was able to interpret the dream of the cup-bearer of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Eventually Joseph was able to interpret the dream of Pharaoh, so he was not only saved from prison, but also he became the prime minister of Egypt.

The lesson we learn here is that God exalts the poor in spirit, the humble ones. The Bible says a lot about this truth here and there. Among them I am capturing the words of 1 Peter 5:5-6 which the apostle Peter exhorted to the young men: “Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble’. Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.” Also, this is what the Bible James 4:10 says:””Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt you.” The Bible tells us that when we are humble before the Lord, He will exalt us. Do you believe this promise of God?

Why does the poor in spirit force to humble himself before the Lord? The reason is because Jesus, our Lord, humbled himself. To what extent did Jesus humble? When we look at Philippians 2: 6-8, this is what the Bible says: “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!” “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (vv. 9-11). Let us humble ourselves as Jesus did. Let us humble ourselves before the Lord. Then God will surely exalt us in his time.

Third, the wisdom of the poor in spirit knows that the glory of this world is in vain.

Look at Ecclesiastes 4:15-16: “I saw that all who lived and walked under the sun followed the youth, the king’s successor. There was no end to all the people who were before them. But those who came later were not pleased with the successor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.” The wise King Solomon saw under the sun a poor and wise young man (v. 13). Even though he was born poor, when he came out of prison and became king (v. 14). And when the young king ruled over the country, his people like him and were pleased with him. But eventually, when the young king was old (when he became dull?), the generations of those innumerable people were not pleased with the old king. Therefore, King Solomon said, “This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind” (v. 16). In one word, it is the glory of this world that King Solomon says it is meaningless and chasing after the wind (vv. 15-16).

I sometimes have this kind of thought when I see the presidential elections in Korea or the US: “Why are they trying to become a president? If they become the president, it must be hard to be in charge of a country.” What do you think is the reason why they want to be president? Is it because they want to take power? Perhaps some presidents of some countries are going to take the power by raising a coup. But I think not only they want power but also glory. If so, I ask this question: “What is the glory of the world?”. What I felt through a movie that I saw was that some marines, like the Marine Corps, live for honor and die for honor. But I ask this question, “What is the benefit of the glory of this world when we see it in the sight of God or from an eternal point of view?” What do you

think is the benefit of the world's glory when you think of it from an eternal perspective?

Do you think that the king that King Solomon mentioned in Ecclesiastes 4:15-16 enjoyed all the glory of the world like King Solomon did? I do not think so. I don't think he did enjoy glory like King Solomon did. Maybe there was not a King who enjoyed the glory of the world as King Solomon did through the Old and New Testaments. But he says in the text today that the world's glory is vain, and pursuing the glory of the glory of in this world is to catch the wind. In a word, King Solomon is saying that the world's glory is of no benefit. This truth is known to the poor in spirit. Anyone who has the wisdom that God has given knows that it is vain to follow the glory in this world. Therefore, they pursue the glory of God rather than seeking the glory of the world. In other words, those who are poor in spirit do not live for the glory of the world that is no benefit, but for the glory of God that has eternal value. Because they hear the advice that the Lord gives through the Word, they live a life that pleases God by humbling themselves before the Lord, and obey the Word of God.

I hope that you and I seek the wisdom of the poor in spirit so that we may not only listen to the advice of the Lord but also the advises from the people around us. I also pray that we can humble ourselves before the Lord and live a humble life knowing that the Lord will surely exalt us in his time. I pray in the name of Jesus that we all become the poor wise men and women of God who live for the glory of God, rather than pursuing the vain glory of this world.

‘Stand in awe of God’

[Ecclesiastes 5: 1-7]

Do we fear God? After a Wednesday night prayer meeting last week, we the session and the deacons asked this question during the Bible Study: ‘Which people truly fear God? The prophet Jonah or the Gentile sailors?’ When we look at Jonah chapter 1, the word ‘fear’ appears four times: “All the sailors were afraid ...” (1:5), “... and I fear the Lord God of heaven ...” (v. 9), “Then the men became extremely frightened ...” (v. 10) and “Then the men feared the Lord greatly ...” (v. 16). Among these four times, one time the prophet Jonah feared God (v. 9) and other three times the Gentile sailors feared God (vv. 5, 10, 16). Though Jonah confessed that he feared God, we can not help but doubt that he truly feared God when we see his actions. In contrast, the Gentile sailors were terrified when the ship was nearly broken up because of the great wind, and when they heard Jonah's confession, they were greatly afraid. They began to fear the Creator God, the God who made the sea and the land, and eventually came to fear God greatly when the sea became calm after they threw Jonah into the sea. Who really feared God? Is it the Lord's servant Jonah or the Gentile sailors?

Today's text In Ecclesiastes 5: 7 and the second half, the wise King Solomon exhorts us, “Therefore stand in awe of God.” Based on Ecclesiastes 5:1-7, we are going to learn how to fear God in three ways. Hopefully, we can learn these three ways and live a life of standing in awe of God.

First, those who fear God obey God's Word.

Look at Ecclesiastes 5:1 – “Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong.” In Ecclesiastes 4: 13-16, which we have already meditated, King Solomon compared with the poor but wise young man and the old and dull king who did not know how to receive advice and warning (v. 13). That is, the wise man knows how to receive advice and warning. Then King Solomon came to Ecclesiastes 5: 1 and said, “Listen.” In other words, King Solomon says that a wise man enters God's presence and hears God's word. As I meditate on this word, I learned that not only the wise hear the word of God, but also the one who fears God obeys the word of God. In short, if I summarize my thoughts, the wise (4:13) is the one who fear God (5:7), and the one who fear God is the wise. This is the connection between wisdom and fearing God. Proverbs 1: 7 can be the basis of this: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.” Then, according to King Solomon in Ecclesiastes 5:1, what does the wise man do who fears God? King Solomon says that when he enters the temple of God, he not only guards his steps when he goes to the house of God but also he goes near to listen to the voice of God. But the fools despise wisdom and discipline (Prov. 1:7) and offer sacrifices instead of listening to God's voice. Doesn't this remind you of any of the characters in the Old Testament? Don't you remember King Saul? God commanded that all the Amalekites be destroyed, but King Saul was disobedient and did not destroy them completely. He left the good things and later he got caught by Prophet Samuel. So he excused himself by saying that he left good animals to sacrifice to God. Then what was the word of the prophet Samuel? The word was “To obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Sam. 15:22). What God wants is obedience, not offering sacrifice to God in disobedience.

We must fear God. And a wise man who fear God not only hears the word of God, but obeys it. Therefore, we must listen to the Word of God and obey it. When we look at Leviticus 26, God gives us blessing if we obey his command, but if we disobey it there is discipline. What is interesting is that if the people of Israel are not obedient and do not follow all the commands of God (v. 14), God said “I will punish you for your sins seven times over” (v. 18), “I will multiply our afflictions seven times over, as your sins deserve” (v. 21), “... will afflict you for your sins seven times over” (v. 24), and “I myself will punish you for your sins seven times over” (v. 28). What was he talking about? Doesn't it tell us that the Israelites did not obey the word of God that much? That was why God disciplined them. If we do not listen to the word of God and disobeys it, then God will discipline us for our sins seven times over. Why is God doing so? That's how much God wants us to hear and obey God's Word. This God of Israel is our God. Our God wants us to obey him. Obedience is better than sacrifice. Therefore, we must listen to the word of God, obey it, and enter into the presence of God and worship him. We must never worship God,

without hearing the word of God in our daily lives. It is a folly in the sight of God and a foolish act of those who do not fear him. We should be people who listen to God's Word and obey him.

Second, those who fear God pray to God immediately.

Look at Ecclesiastes 5:2 – “Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.” The Teacher King Solomon says that those who fear God not only go near to listen to him but also do not be quick with their mouths. In other words, when those who fear God go near to God to pray, they do not open their mouths quickly and utter anything before him. In a word, those who fear God speak few words when they pray (Park Yun-sun). Why do they speak fewer words when they pray to God? The reason is that God is in heaven and we are on earth (v.2). When I meditated on this, I remembered Isaiah 55: 8-9: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” How can we on earth understand all the deep, broad, and high thoughts of God in heaven? Without understanding God's high thoughts, we pray to him by pouring out a lot of words. We must pray in faith, rather than trying to understand God's high thoughts. We must hold onto the Word of God by faith and pray to God. In this way, we must pray with full trust in God. Another reason we need to speak less when we pray to God is because ‘they are many words in the speech of a fool’ (Eccle. 5:3). What is the speech of the fool? In Ecclesiastes 10: 12-14, King Solomon says: ” Words from a wise man's mouth are gracious, but a fool is consumed by his own lips. At the beginning his words are folly; at the end they are wicked madness - and the fool multiplies words. No one knows what is coming-- who can tell him what will happen after him?” King Solomon tells us that the beginning of the word of the fool's mouth is folly and at the end they are wicked madness. All those many words of the fool are only vain. What a foolish thought to think that God would answer that prayer if we prayed to God with such many vain words?

Those who fear God is wise, so they hear God's word and asks for God's will. In other words, when they pray to God, they do not use vain repetitions (Mt. 6:7). But the fools who do not listen to God and do not know the will of God open their mouths in their state of confusion and repeat the same prayer again and again. Why do they continue to pray the same thing over and over again? Why do they say many vain words when they pray to God? We can find the answer in Matthew 6:7 – “‘And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words’” (NASB). The Gentiles thought that God would listen to their prayers if they speak many words. In a way, the Gentiles offered a human prayer, a long prayer of human endeavor, a prayer based on human merit that they could receive answers to prayer when they prayed to God with many words. We must pray to God by relying on the merit of Jesus' cross. When we pray, we must offer a right prayer to God. How can we offer the right prayer to God? In order to offer the right prayer to God, we must pray with preparedness of our hearts (Wiersbe). The reason is that what is in our hearts comes out of our mouths (Mt. 12:34-37). John Bunyan, who wrote “The Pilgrim's Progress”, wrote: "In prayer, it is better to have a heart without words, than words without a heart" (Wiersbe). We should pray to God with truthful hearts rather than many words. This is the right prayer in God's sight. Then we will not be quick with our mouths to utter anything before God (Eccle. 5:2). We will make few words instead of using vain repetitions. Of course, today's verse Ecclesiastes 5:2 doesn't mean that we should not make prayer long. This is what Dr. Park Yun-sun said: ‘Here, the truthful pray does not oppose long and specific prayers. In fact, the truthful prayer can be long and specific. The reason is because since you trust in God who is in heaven, he can be specific in his prayer as he pours out his soul to God’ (Park Yun-sun). We must offer this prayer to God. We must pour out our souls to God and pray specifically as we trust him completely.

As I meditated on both Ecclesiastes 4:13-16 and 5:1-7, I realized that when we pray to God, we must first listen to God and obey his words. In other words, prayer and obedience to the Word must go together. Just like the front and back of a coin, obedience to God and praying to God can not be separated. Therefore, we should pray to God by obeying the Word of God first and foremost, rather than saying a lot in prayer to God. In other words, those who fear God will pour out their souls truthfully to God while obeying the word of God.

Lastly, those who fear God fulfill their vows that they made to God.

Look at Ecclesiastes 5:4 – “When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure

in fools; fulfill your vow.” If we fear God, we are praying to him with a sincere heart to God while obeying the Word of God. And in such a life of faith we will show our truthfulness. How will we show our true hearts before God? We will do so by manifesting our truthful life. And such a truthful life is fulfilling what we have promised to God. This is to say that we should keep our vows to God (v. 4). What is a “vow” here? What does it mean to say that we have made the vow to God? It is making an oath to God. It is a blessing if we keep the oath that we swore to God, but a curse if we do not keep it. In the Old Testament, it is Jacob who made the first vow to God. Jacob went out from Beelzebah and went to Haran (Gen 28:10). While listening to the voice of God as he watched as the anger of God ascended and descends on the ladder in the dream, (vv. 11-15). After waking from sleep, he called his name Bethel, and there Jacob vowed to God (vv. 20-22): “Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's house, then the LORD will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth.” In the Bible, all the vows made to God are promised with the expectation of grace from God (v. 20), or thanks to God's blessings (Ps. 116: 12-14) (Youngblood). And the vowing was part of the devotion to God every day (61:8) or the annual festival (1 Sam. 1:21). And to make a vow was to volunteer. And if we made a vow to God, we must obey (Deut. 23: 21-23; Eccle. 5:4-6). Thus, those who made a vow had to make a vow after considering it carefully (Prov. 20:25) (Youngblood).

As I meditate on these bible passages about a vow, we must faithfully keep our vows to God, as God has made a covenant with us and has faithfully fulfilled the covenant in our covenant relationship with God. If we made the vow to God in devotion to him, King Solomon encourages us not to be delay in fulfilling it (Eccle. 5: 4). If we are not fulfilling the vow to God, or putting off keeping the vow, then we are sinning against God. Please think about it. If we do not fulfill the vow that we made to God, then isn't it we are lying to the true God? And if we don't fulfill our vow to God by making an excuse by saying “My vow was a mistake” (v. 6), this is what King Solomon said: “Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands?” (v. 6) We should listen to what King Solomon says in verse 7: “Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore stand in awe of God.”

I would like to share the prayer of vow that was written by Pastor A. W. Tozer, who was called the 21st century prophet, with you (Internet): “O Lord, I have heard Thy voice and was afraid. Thou hast called me to an awesome task in a grave and perilous hour. Thou are about to shake all nations and the earth and also heaven, that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. O Lord, our Lord, Thou has stopped to honor me to be Thy servant. No man takes this honor upon himself save he that is called of God as was Aaron. Thou has ordained me Thy messenger to them that are stubborn of heart and hard of hearing. They have rejected Thee, the Master, and it is not to be expected that they will receive me, the servant. My God, I shall not waste time deploring my weakness nor my unfittedness for the work. The responsibility is not mine but Thine. Thou hast said, “I knew thee—I ordained thee—I sanctified thee,” and Thou has also said, “Thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.” Who am I to argue with Thee or to call into question Thy sovereign choice? The decision is not mine but Thine. So be it, Lord. Thy will, not mine, be done. Well do I know, Thou God of the prophets and the apostles, that as long as I honor Thee Thou wilt honor me. Help me therefore to take this solemn vow to honor Thee in all my future life and labors, whether by gain or by loss, by life or by death, and then to keep that vow unbroken while I live. It is time, O God, for Thee to work, for the enemy has entered into Thy pastures and the sheep are torn and scattered. And false shepherds abound who deny the danger and laugh at the perils which surround Thy flock. The sheep are deceived by these hirelings and follow them with touching loyalty while the wolf closes in to kill and destroy. I beseech Thee, give me sharp eyes to detect the presence of the enemy; give me understanding to distinguish the false friend from the true. Give me vision to see and courage to report what I see faithfully. Make my voice so like Thine own that even the sick sheep will recognize it and follow Thee. Lord Jesus, I come to Thee for spiritual preparation. Lay Thy hand upon me. Anoint me with the oil of the New Testament prophet. Forbid that I should become a religious scribe and thus lose my prophetic calling. Save me from the curse that lies dark across the face of the modern clergy, the curse of compromise, of imitation, of professionalism. Save me from the error of judging a church by its size, its popularity or the amount of its yearly offering. Help me to remember that I am a prophet; not a promoter, not a religious manager—but a prophet. Let me never become a slave to crowds. Heal my soul of carnal ambitions and deliver me from the itch for publicity. Save me from the bondage to things. Let me not waste my days puttering around the house. Lay Thy terror upon me, O God, and drive me to the place of prayer where I may wrestle with principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness of this world. Deliver me from overeating and late sleeping. Teach me self-discipline that I may be a good soldier of Jesus Christ. I accept hard work and small rewards in this life. I ask for no easy place. I shall try to be blind to the little ways that

I could make my life easier. If others seek the smoother path I shall try to take the hard way without judging them too harshly. I shall expect opposition and try to take it quietly when it comes. Or if, as sometimes it falleth out to Thy servants, I shall have grateful gifts pressed upon me by Thy kindly people, stand by me then and save me from the blight that often follows. Teach me to use whatever I receive in such manner that it will not injure my soul nor diminish my spiritual power. And if in Thy permissive providence honor should come to me from Thy church, let me not forget in that hour that I am unworthy of the least of Thy mercies, and that if men knew me as intimately as I know myself they would withhold their honors or bestow them upon others more worthy to receive them. And now, O Lord of heaven and earth, I consecrate my remaining days to Thee; let them be many or few, as Thou wilt. Let me stand before the great or minister to the poor and lowly; that choice is not mine, and I would not influence it if I could. I am Thy servant to do Thy will, and that will is sweeter to me than position or riches or fame and I choose it above all things on earth or in heaven. Though I am chosen of Thee and honored by a high and holy calling, let me never forget that I am but a man of dust and ashes, a man with all the natural faults and passions that plague the race of men. I pray Thee therefore, my Lord and Redeemer, save me from myself and from all the injuries I may do myself while trying to be a blessing to others. Fill me with thy power by the Holy Spirit, and I will go in Thy strength and tell of Thy righteousness, even Thine only. I will spread abroad the message of redeeming love while my normal powers endure. Then, dear Lord, when I am old and weary and too tired to go on, have a place ready for me above, and make me to be numbered with Thy saints in glory everlasting. Amen” (Tozer).

‘Do not be surprised at such things’

[Ecclesiastes 5: 8-9]

On Tuesday afternoon, there was the funeral of Mr. Kim. Arriving at Skyrose Chapel in the Rose Hills Cemetery, I first walked over to the coffin where Mr. Kim was lying and put my hand in his hand. His hand was cold. When I laid my hand on his hand in the St. Vincent Hospital intensive care unit to pray to God, his hand was warm. But after he passed away, his hands were cold. After greeting the family of Mr. Kim, I went to the solitary area and prepared the funeral service. When I saw the paper that I received from the worker who was in charge of the Rose Hills cemetery funeral, I found out that Mr. Kim's birthday is same as my first deceased baby Charis' birthday. So when I preached about the "love of God" to the bereaved family, I shared my experience of my first baby Charis in the funeral service. Although I got to know Mr. Kim only three weeks ago, the Holy Spirit led my heart during the service and enabled me to proclaim the Word of God to the families and relatives of the deceased. That evening I went into the room of my beloved daughter and told her about the funeral. I told her there are two high school daughters to the deceased and they cried a lot because of their father's death. So I prayed for them. After my daughter heard this, she asked me, 'When I and my sister become high school students, are you going to do that for us too?' I think she meant that if she and her sister would become high school students, I might die and they had to come to my funeral service. Haha. So I told her: 'Even if dad dies, when you believe in Jesus, you will have a hope of resurrection so that we will meet again in heaven.' And when I saw her yawning, I said: 'You are like your mom because whenever I said some serious stuff your mom yawned too. Haha. And she laughed.

After I talked to my daughter, one of the thoughts that came to my mind what maybe I talked about too serious topic, death to too young child. On the one hand I thought so, but on the other hand, I just want my daughter to prepare her heart to say "Good night" to my and my wife because someday for sure I and my will die. So I wanted her to know and believe in Jesus and hoped that the Lord plant in her heart the hope of resurrection and the hope of heaven. This conversation about death is not a remarkable conversation in our home. However, sometimes I am surprised. Whenever I had a chance to talk about death and faith with my children, I often had a surprise when I hear the words of my youngest daughter Karis. For example, when I went out to LA in a car with my children, I told the children that I went to the hospital of Rev. Gomez, who is in charge of our church's Hispanic ministry. Then Karis said 'God will rescue him, because he loves God, and he is a preacher.' I was surprised by her saying because she said things that I didn't expect at all. I think her mind is becoming spiritualized. I think that she has begun to think everything in God-centered. That's why I often find myself surprised by the child.

In today's text Ecclesiastes 5: 8, King Solomon, says, "do not be surprised at such things." In other words, 'Don't be surprised.' What is King Solomon telling us not to be surprised by? It is 'the poor being oppressed' and "justice and rights denied" (v. 8). In other words, King Solomon is saying that we should not be surprised to see that poor farmers are being abused and are being deprived of their rights. Look at Ecclesiastes 5: 8 – "If you see the poor oppressed in a district, and justice and rights denied, do not be surprised at such things" King Solomon saw in this world that the poor were abused. How did King Solomon see who abused the poor? King Solomon saw a higher official abusing the poor by denying the justice and rights of the poor. What is interesting, however, is that King Solomon says not to be surprised by such things. Why shouldn't we be surprised to see such sinful things? First of all, what we must be sure here is that King Solomon never approved the illegal act of the higher official oppressing the poor (Wiersbe). King Solomon said, "do not be surprised at such thing" because he saw all the abuse under the sun (4:1). In other words, King Solomon says that it's not surprise to see that those who are in power abusing their power in oppressing those who are weak. More specifically, since King Solomon saw that there was evil in the place of judgment and of justice (3:16), it wasn't surprising to him that those with evil powers oppress the weak and poor.

It is no surprise to us that as we live in this world, poor and powerless people are being abused as they are deprived of their rights by wealthy and powerful people. The reason is that things are so prevalent in this world. There is a book called "The Unheard Truth: Poverty and Human Rights" by Irene Khan, the seventh Secretary General of Amnesty International, the world's largest human rights organization. This book is an intensive analysis of human

rights problems caused by poverty (Internet). The author, Irene Khan, said in this book that people are poor because they are discriminated against, not because they earn less. When she came to South Korea and had a special meeting with 400 members of the International Amnesty Korea branch under the heading 'It is now human rights' at the Ewha Women's 100th Anniversary Memorial Hall, this is what she said: "The poor live in insecurity, are alienated, and can not speak out. Particularly, their basic rights such as education rights, health rights, and housing rights are also deprived. 70% of the world's poor are women, which is not a coincidence. Among the poor, there are many minorities, migrants, and natives. The reason is because the poor are discriminated against because they are poor and the poor are discriminated against because they are in poverty" (Internet). In addition to this, one of the things we see and hear through the media is "child slavery." It is said that children are deprived of their rights and abused while working, especially in the poorest countries. According to the announcement of the International Labor Organization in 2005, there are 12.3 million who are in child slavery. International trafficking, a modern slave trade is estimated to be between 800,000 and 900,000 people, or between 10 billion and 32 billion dollars a year. Modern slavery is a global phenomenon. The Middle East is home slave, South Asia is a mortgage labor slave to pay the debt, Uganda and Sri Lanka are child soldier slaves, and advanced countries are sex slaves. Slaves are produced by all means, including violence, kidnapping, fraud, intimidation, medication, etc. There is a trafficking organization that hunts slaves with promises of free sightseeing, and there are poor parents who sell their children to modern slaves. Modern slave industries are growing because of the development of traffic, low sentences, poor border control, consensus between high rank government officials and international slave trade organization, etc.. Internationalization and globalization help the slave industry (Internet). Therefore King Solomon is encouraging us not to be surprised by the poor people being abused by their wicked oppressed officers who deprive the right of the poor.

In this world there is a thing that we should be surprised at. It is that the wicked officials who don't know that when they abuse their power to the poor, they will be punished by the the higher Lord than they. Look at Ecclesiastes 5:8 – "... for one official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still." King Wisdom King Solomon was not surprised to see the oppressed officials in this world depriving the poor and abusing them, but he could not help but wonder that the unscrupulous officials did not know that they had the higher Lord over them. Of course King Solomon knew that there was a higher King, the King of kings, because he had wisdom. But the kings, who had no wisdom like King Solomon, did not know that there was a higher Lord than them. So they abused their power and oppressed the poor. And even though they were abusive, not only they had no fear of judgment but also they didn't even know that they will be punishment. King Solomon could not help but was surprised by their ignorance. In particular, he could not help but wondered why they were abusing the peasants, because the ruling kings and officials lived in the interests of the land obtained by the poor peasants. Isn't it strange that the president, the politicians, and the civil servants all live in the interests of the farmers and the common people, but some of the wicked officials oppress them and deprive the right to farmers and ordinary people.

When I was meditating on this, I remembered the words of Ephesians 6:9 – "And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him." Why is the boss in the workplace, who taking people in their appearance, abusing people? The reason is because he does not know that his Master Lord is in heaven. Although he knows his Master Lord is in heaven, he does not acknowledge the Lord in his workplace. Therefore, he has no awe toward God. As a result, he is not afraid to commit the sin of abusing the poor because he is not afraid of the just God. In other words, he is bold to commit sin. The reason we abuse God's given rights is because we do not fear God. That's why King Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 5:7, "Therefore stand in awe of God." We must stand in awe of God. We must fear him. And we must keep in mind that God is observing us all. In particular, we should know that God is observing orphans, widows and the poor who are being oppressed. So we should not oppress them and deprive their rights. Rather, we should take care of them. And we must ask the Lord, who is higher than the wicked officials, when the wicked officials are abusing their power in oppressing the powerless, the moneyless and the poor. We must pray for God's deliverance.

How many sinful things have we seen, heard, and felt in our lives? Even if we watch news on TV, we hear news of killing another person, and we are no longer surprised. Although we hear the news about a killer who killed people brutally and thus we think about 'How much is the cruelty of a person,' but we are no longer surprised by the news. The reason is because this is the true reality of sinful human beings. So, I am not so surprised to see the brutal officials that King Solomon spoke of in Ecclesiastes 5: 8-9 who eradicated the justice of the poor. I am no longer surprised when I see and hear the sinful actions of those wicked people. But these days, I have something more strange than before. Actually I am surprised by them. The reason is that I am amazed when I see with my spiritual eyes and ears that the Spirit working in my life and in the lives of the people around me. For example, today when I went into

my car to go to a Morning Prayer meeting, I turned on my cell phone and heard a voice message. The person who sent the voice message was Pastor Kim who loves me and our church. The content of the message was "I found a good pianist now." When I listened to that voice message I smiled and I thanked God because God is sending the pianist to our church so precisely in His time. Actually, last Monday, I talked to my cousin who was helping our church as a pianist for a month. And I told her that since a month is over, she could go back to her church with her husband. I told her not to worry about our church because the Lord will build His church and He will provide a pianist for us. But my cousin said she can't go back to her church until we find the new pianist. I am often surprised when God lets us see that God works in our church. However, the strangest thing I have in my life is that I am amazed at why Jesus was crucified for such sinner like me.

We will all be amazed at what will happen to us soon. And that is the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. On that day we will witness and experience amazing things that we can not imagine. We will be amazed at His glorious Second Coming and will experience our glorious change due to His Second Coming. Although we no longer are surprised by the sinful and evil things done in this world, let us see with our spiritual eyes and experience what God does in the midst of them. As we pray for that day and wait in anticipation, let us give thanks to God and praise and worship him.

A laborer whose sleep is sweet

[Ecclesiastes 5:10-12]

Do you sleep well at night? Professor Cho Yong-Won of Keimyung University Dongsan Hospital said that the number of people with nighttime sleep disability was 1141 and that 22.8% of them were insomnia. In the West about 20-30% of the total adult population is reported to suffer from night sleep disorders (Internet). The story I personally heard was that a long time ago, during Japanese colonial rule, Japanese police made the Korean prisoners not to sleep when they were torturing them. How hard is it not to sleep? Recent studies have shown that if we do not get enough sleep, our mental fatigue will become worse and our body's health will deteriorate and we will be more prone to have high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke and cancer (Internet).

When we look at Psalms 127:2, the psalmist says: "for he grants sleep to those he loves." What good benefits do our bodies have for sleeping well? Studies have shown that sleep is very important for fatigue, body growth, defense, body temperature, cognitive functioning, and memory (Internet). The appropriate sleeping time for each age is 2-3 months after birth, and a baby tends to wake up for 30 minutes even after getting fed. After, the sleeping time is shortened gradually. Usually 16-20 hours for infants, 12-13 hours for after infants, 10-11 hours for lower grades, 9-10 hours for upper grades, 8-9 hours for adolescents, 7-8 hours for youth, 6-7 hours for adults (Internet). It is said that it is 6-7 hours in the old age but if I can sleep for 6 hours straight without waking up, I feel refreshed. But when I wake up at night, I feel very tired in the morning.

In today's text Ecclesiastes 5:12, King Solomon says: "The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep." As I was reading this word, I recalled the title "A laborer whose sleep is sweet" in my thoughts and held it as the title of this meditation. And I asked myself, "How can a laborer sleep well?" And I looked up the answer in the today's text in two:

First, the most basic reason laborers can sleep is because they work. In other words, the laborers can sleep well because they work hard.

The laborers are able to sleep well because they work hard. In other words, they are able to sleep because they are not lazy but work diligently. But the Bible says the rich can not sleep. Why? I thought of two reasons for this: (1) The first reason is because of laziness. In Ecclesiastes 4:5, King Solomon said, "The fool folds his hands and ruins himself." Here, "The fool folds his hands" means the fool does not work. In other words, the fool is a lazy person and a lazy person hates to work (Prov. 21:25). And those who do not want to work can not sleep because they do not sweat for their hard work. (2) The second reason why the rich can not sleep is because of their abundance (Eccle. 5:12). When we eat a lot of food and our stomach is full, then it is not easy for us to lay down and sleep. The reason is because we don't move around as much as we eat and digest. Also, when we think of this in material perspective, we have sinful tendency not to work when we are rich and are in abundance materially. We cannot sleep because we are lazy, do not work, and have no sweat of labor. But those laborers who work hard can sleep well. It is because they work hard and diligently.

What is labor? As Dr. Park Yun-sun said, 'Labor is a virtue of obedience to God's command that says work hard and eat' (Park Yun-sun). As we fear God, we must work in obedience to God's command. We have to work hard. We have to work hard in sweat. We have to work hard, but we have to keep in mind. It is that we must work hard for something that is fruitful. Too many of us who believe in Jesus do the useless labor in vain. We are working hard with sweat on fruitless things that have no profit in God's perspective. So King Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 2:22-23 as follow: "What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless." We should not do our labor in vain. We should not work for our glory. We will not be able to sleep if we work only to satisfy our greed. Rather, we must do fruitful work. What is the fruitful work in the sight of God? It is a labor for the glory of God. In other words, the fruitful work is to do the work of the Lord. When we work hard the work of the Lord for the glory of God, God will give us sweet sleep.

Second, the reason laborers can sleep is because they are satisfied with their lives.

Rich is not. In other words, the rich are not satisfied with life. They are never satisfied with their growing income, nor can they. So this is what King Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 5:10: "Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless." In Ecclesiastes 1:8, King Solomon said, "The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing." It means that our greed cannot be satisfied like there is no satisfaction in seeing with the eyes or hearing with ears and like the ocean that won't be filled with streams of water (v. 7). So when our greed is full due to the abundance of matter, it is difficult for us to sleep. The reason is because our greed cannot be filled and be satisfied. Somehow we will be worrying about how to make more money and accumulate wealth. So we will not be able to sleep well. In short, the reason the rich can not sleep is because they love money, and the rich can not sleep well because the money can not satisfy them. Especially, as 1 Timothy 6:10 says that "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil", those who love money cannot sleep well. But those laborers who love God instead of money can sleep well. In other words, those workers who gave up the greed of material and are satisfied with only Jesus can have a sweet sleep. They can sleep well because there is peace in their hearts. Also, whether they are in abundance or in need, because they are doing the work of the Lord for the glory of the Lord, God gives them the sweet sleep. The wise laborers who live in satisfaction with the Lord alone can have sweet sleep. Are you having sweet sleep?

When I look at my house, all three girls seem to sleep well except me and my son. Especially when I see my first daughter, she seems to sleep well. She seems to be asleep in a couple of minutes if she lies on her bed. I think she is like my wife. My wife sleeps well after her work, doing house works and so on. So I used to say to her, 'You must feel good because you can fall sleep quickly.' The reason I told that to her was because I could not sleep well. But that does not mean I have insomnia. But when I can not sleep, I sometimes think about those who can not sleep. In the meantime, I often feel like, 'How terrible are they?' It is a blessing to sleep well. It is a great blessing to have sweet sleep. The Bible says that God does not give the blessings of sweet sleep to rich people, but to laborers who are working hard and enjoying their lives. Are we working hard on the Lord's work? Do we have peace in our hearts? Are we satisfied with the Lord alone?

God who is able to give riches and enjoy them

[Ecclesiastes 5:13-20]

Do you know who is the richest person in the world? Last week, I saw the internet news titled 'Bill Gates step down as the richest person in the world according to 2010 World Rich Rankings'. So when I read the article, it said 'the world's richest man in 2010 is Carlos Slim Helu in Mexico (Net Worth: \$ 53.3 billion) (Internet). Carlos Slim Helu earned his money through his entrepreneurship at age 70, and he has the largest telecom company in Latin America. According to Forbes, Carlos Slim Helu, chairman of Telmex, has grown its net worth by \$ 18.5 billion to a total of \$ 53.5 billion. It has been 16 years since 1994 that the richest man came from a country other than the United States. By region, Asia has the most number of new billionaires that were born in 2010 this year, with 97 people. It is also said that China has emerged as the number two billionaire country for the first time. South Korea, which had only four billionaires last year, has increased to 11 this year. Samsung Electronics chairman Lee Kun-hee's total assets surged more than twice to \$ 7.2 billion so his rank went up from 205 to 100. How did they become so rich?

Today, in Ecclesiastes 5:19, the Teacher King Solomon says: "Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work--this is a gift of God." Here, we must receive three lessons that God gives to us:

First, God is the God who gives us wealth and riches.

Here, "us" does not refer to 'those who love money' (Eccles. 5:10). God never gives wealth and riches to those who love money. Even if it is given, it is not a blessing but a curse. How can wealth and riches be a curse for those who love money? One of those curse and punishments is the desire of greed. If there is more money to those who love money, then they will not be satisfied with it because they will end up getting greedier. This is curse and punishment. How curse is it to have desire of greed that cannot be satisfied? For those who love money and have desire of greed that cannot be satisfied, there is no peace in their hearts. So here, "us" refers to those who love God, rather than those who love money. In other words, God gives wealth and riches to those who love Him. Those who love God here refer to those who fear God and keep his commandments. Look at Psalm 112: 1-3, "Praise the LORD. Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who finds great delight in his commands. His children will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever." God blesses those who fear him and keep his commandments by giving them wealth and riches. How then does God give blessings of wealth and riches to those who fear God and keep his commandments? According to Deuteronomy 8:18, the Bible says that God blesses them with wealth and riches by giving them the "the ability to produce wealth". Those who do not fear God do not think like this. They do not think that God has given them the ability to produce wealth. But they think they have made a lot of money with their own power. To those who think like this, wealth and riches are not a blessing, but a curse.

Second, God is the God who enables us to enjoy the wealth and riches that He has given us.

I think the foolish people in this world are the ones have abundant wealth but is unable to enjoy it. How foolish are those who enjoy using their wealth in vain pleasures. Why can't they enjoy their abundant wealth? I find the reason in Ecclesiastes 5:13 – "I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner." Why can't they enjoy their abundance riches? The reason is because they try to keep their wealth even by harming themselves. How foolish is this? Why are they keeping their abundant wealth to harm themselves? The reason is because they love money (wealth) more than themselves. How can money be worth more than man's life? Dr. Park Yun-sun said: "It is harmful to offer one's life for what you can not have forever." This is a grievous evil under the sun (v. 13). What King Solomon saw in this world was that the owner of wealth who hoarded his wealth even to harm himself lose all of his wealth through some misfortune, "so that when he has a son there is nothing left

for him” (v. 14). Therefore, this is what King Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 5: 15-16: “Naked a man comes from his mother’s womb, and as he comes, so he departs. He takes nothing from his labor that he can carry in his hand. This too is a grievous evil: As a man comes, so he departs, and what does he gain, since he toils for the wind?” Indeed, naked we came from our mothers’womb, so we will depart. Although we gain a lot of wealth through our hard labors, we cannot take it to our graves. What good it is to accumulate a lot of wealth by even harming ourselves? What good it is to lose all our wealth through some misfortune even without enjoy it? As a result, King Solomon says, “All his days he eats in darkness, with great frustration, affliction and anger” (v. 17). In the end, the foolish rich people are nothing but the vain laborers who are only chasing wind. But God gives wealth and riches to those who love God and actually those whom God loves and make them to enjoy wealth and riches. Here, there is an important truth that we must keep in mind. Not only that God has give to us ability to produce wealth so that we can have abundant wealth and riches but also God has make us to enjoy our abundant wealth and riches so that we can enjoy them.

Third and last, God is the God who makes us to rejoice in labor.

The grievous evil that King Solomon saw under the sun was not only that the owners trying to hoard their abundant wealth to harm themselves (v. 13) but also to lose all their wealth through some misfortune (v. 14). In other words, the grievous evil that King Solomon saw was people are laboring in vain to catch the wind (v. 16). In addition to that, there was something good and beautiful that King Solomon saw (v. 18). It is written in Ecclesiastes 5:18 – “Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him--for this is his lot.” What King Solomon saw that it is good and beautiful is to eat and drink and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor. In other words, King Solomon came to realize that it is good and beautiful to enjoy the pleasures of eating and drinking and working (Park Yun-sun). And King Solomon says that this is his reward that God gives to those who labor. The important thing is that whether we have joy in our heart while we are working, laboring, and even suffering or not. Do you have joy in your heart while you are working, laboring, and suffering? Whether God gives you wealth and riches and lets you enjoy them, or give you your reward to rejoice in your labor, do you have joy in your heart? According to Ecclesiastes 5:19, this joy in your heart is the gift of God. And verse 20 says, God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart. Are we enjoying the joy that God has given us as a gift? The important thing is not whether we have a lot of wealth or not. What really matters is whether there is a lot of joy in our hearts or not. If we have the joy in our hearts that God gives, we will not often consider the years of our lives (v. 20). I hope and pray that we may experience the divine joy that God gives to us as a gift, and that we may do good and beautiful things in the sight of God.

We have received three lessons from God from Ecclesiastes 5:13-20: (1) The fact that God is the God who gives us wealth and riches, (2) The fact that God is the God, who gives us wealth and riches, enables us to enjoy them, (3) The fact that God is the God who makes us rejoice in labor. Now how shall we live? Ecclesiastes 3: 12-13 comes to my mind: “I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one’s lifetime; moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor--it is the gift of God.” There is nothing better for us than to rejoice and do good in our lives. And there is nothing better for us than to eat and drink and see good in all our labor. So let us rejoice and do good. And let us eat and drink and see good in all our labor. I hope that you and I can receive this gift of God.

More important than the blessings of wealth

[Ecclesiastes 5:19]

Is it wrong to ask God for the blessings of wealth? Is it a sin to ask God for the blessing of wealth while we are living in poverty in a world that is too hard to live? Won't we be happy if we have abundant wealth?

What is happiness in the Bible? When I think about the word "happiness," two verses came into my mind. The first verse is Deuteronomy 33:29 – “Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD? He is your shield and helper and your glorious sword. Your enemies will cower before you, and you will trample down their high places.” According to this verse, the happiness that the Bible talks about is saved by God, and God keeps and gives victory. We are like the people of Israel who are happy in the Lord because we are saved by God in Christ Jesus and are also protected and victorious by God. The second verse is Genesis 39:2-3 and verse 23: “The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered ...” (v. 2), “When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did” (v. 3), and “The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did” (v. 23). The true happiness is that God is with us. Even though there are temptations, injustices, and sufferings, in God's sight those whom God is with are happy people. In that perspective, we are happy people. The reason is because Immanuel God is with us.

When we look at Ecclesiastes 6:3 and 6:6, which is the context of today's Scripture Ecclesiastes 5:19, the word "prosperity" comes out: “A man may have a hundred children and live many years; yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity and does not receive proper burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he” (v. 3), “even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity. Do not all go to the same place?” (v. 6). Here the word “his prosperity” refers to God's given wealth and riches (v. 2). In other words, the blessing of wealth and riches that God gives us is our happiness. We are happy people when we receive the blessings of wealth and riches from God. But what we must remember here is that there is more to it than the blessings of wealth and riches. It is a blessing to enjoy the blessing of wealth and riches. Look at Ecclesiastes 5:19: “Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work--this is a gift of God.” Here, King Solomon talks about four things: (1) God blesses us with wealth and riches; (2) God gives blessings of wealth and riches through our laboring; (3) God makes us to enjoy his blessing of wealth and riches, and (4) It is God's gift that we can enjoy the blessings of his wealth and riches. But in Ecclesiastes 6:1, King Solomon talks about “another evil” that weighs heavily on men. And the “another evil” is that people are not able to see their own happiness and are not satisfied with their happiness. Who are the ones who are not see their own happiness and are not satisfied with their happiness? They are those who received the blessing of wealth and riches from God, but are not allowed to enjoy it (v. 2). Although we may have a hundred children (v. 3) and live a thousand years twice over (v. 6), how can we say that we are happy people if we can not enjoy the blessings of wealth and riches we have received from God? They are an unhappy people. Therefore, more important than the blessings of wealth and riches is the blessing of enjoying those blessings.

A heavy thing for a person

[Ecclesiastes 6:1-6]

What is making your heart heavy these days? What is a thing that weighs your heart down? Yesterday Tuesday, I took my children to the academy for their lessons. And when they were getting lessons, I went out to make a phone call. Then after the conversation was over my youngest child, who came out of the room, talked with me. When the phone call was over, she said to me 'let's go and sit down under the tree'. So we sat down under the tree and I asked her, "How is your life?" And she said, "Good". So I asked her, 'What is good?' And she said: 'Actually I am tired'. Even six years old kid's life seemed to be tiresome. Haha. How about you? Aren't your lives tiresome too? Don't you have burden in your hearts? If you do, I hope that you can respond to the invitation of Jesus who says in Matthew 11: 28-30 as follows: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

According to Ecclesiastes 6:1, this is what King Solomon says: "I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on men." We have already thought about the fact that King Solomon saw "a grievous evil under the sun" in Ecclesiastes 5: 13-20 during the last Wednesday night prayer meeting. The grievous evil was "wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner" (v. 13). What King Solomon saw in this world was that it was the grievous evil that the owner of the wealth tried to keep his wealth to the point of even harming himself but eventually lost all his wealth due to the calamity and thus he had no wealth to pass on to his own son. So King Solomon said, "This too is a grievous evil" (v. 16) that "Naked a man comes from his mother's womb, and as he comes, so he departs. He takes nothing from his labor that he can carry in his hand" (v. 15). What does it do when you keep all your riches to such an extent that it harms you? What good is it if there is no wealth to pass on to your son because of the disaster and the loss of it? Indeed, it is the grievous evil that our lives come with empty-handed and depart with empty-handed. And in Ecclesiastes 6:1, King Solomon saw another grievous evil in this world, which weighs heavily upon man ["... though a man's misery weighs heavily upon him" (8: 6)]. What is that grievous evil that weighs heavily upon man? Look at Ecclesiastes 6:2 – "God gives a man wealth, possessions and honor, so that he lacks nothing his heart desires, but God does not enable him to enjoy them, and a stranger enjoys them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil." The grievous evil that weighs heavily upon man is even though he received wealth, riches, and honor from God, and thus is not lacking in the wishes of the heart, but has not been able to enjoy all of them. Rather, God has made others to enjoy all of them. To whom does God make to enjoy all his wealth, riches, and honor? Look at Ecclesiastes 2:26 – "To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, ...". God causes sinners to labor, to gather them up to build up wealth, and eventually to give all that wealth to those whom God is pleased with. King Solomon said this is meaningless (6:2) and "evil of affliction" (Swanson).

Moreover, the grievous evil that King Solomon saw was a man with all these possessions, riches, and honors as well as he had hundred children and lived many years; yet no matter how long he lived, he could not enjoy them (v. 3). Please think about it. What evil of affliction is this if you have received the blessings of wealth, riches, honor, children and long life from God and you cannot enjoy them all? Furthermore, not only can he not enjoy all these blessings, but if his body can not be properly buried at the time of death, what kind of grievous evil will this person suffer? At that time in the East, it was the most humiliation if the dead body could not be buried properly. So King Solomon says that "the miscarriage" is better off than those who can not enjoy all the riches and who can not be buried properly at their death (v. 3). How can the miscarriage be better than those who cannot enjoy all the riches and who are not buried properly at their death? Look at Ecclesiastes 6:4-5: "for it comes in futility and goes into obscurity; and its name is covered in obscurity. It never sees the sun and it never knows anything; it is better off than he." According to Pastor John MacArthur, no matter how long a person lived and how many children there were, if there were no one who was saddened when he died which honor, then he was considered worse than a miscarriage baby. Although the miscarried baby in his mother's womb comes in futility and goes into obscurity (v.4), the baby is better off than those who have all the wealth, riches, honor and blessings of children who have not enjoyed all these blessings and are not buried properly in their death because the miscarried baby has peace. In

other words, the miscarried baby is better off than all those who have all the wealth, riches, honor and blessings of children who cannot enjoy all these blessing and are not buried properly in their death because the baby has never seen the evil activity that is done under the sun (4:30). No matter how long they live in this world, they will not be able to enjoy all the wealth and riches, but they will see the wickedness, sorrow, and suffering of all the evil done in this world. And they won't be buried properly in their death. But the miscarried babies are better because they are free from the worries and pain of this world and from their hardships and sufferings. In this way King Solomon asks the conclusion question in Ecclesiastes 6:6 – “Even if the other man lives a thousand years twice and does not enjoy good things--do not all go to one place?” Eventually whether the miscarried baby or those who were blessed with all the wealth, riches and honor and live thousand years but cannot enjoy and die aren't all of them go back to the same place that is dust? Therefore, King Solomon says this is the grievous evil and burdensome.

One day, when I praised “I must tell Jesus all of my trials” in my church, I remember that one of my members told me that if I sang that hymn, he felt a little sinking. In fact, one of the reasons I am singing this hymn is because my heart is heavy. So I praise it so:

1. I must tell Je-sus all of my tri-als, I can-not bear these bur-dens a-lone;
In my dis-tress He kind-ly will help me, He ev-er loves and cares for His own.
2. I must tell Je-sus all of my troub-les, He is a kind, com-pas-sion-ate Friend;
If I but ask Him, He will de-liv-er, Make of my troub-les quick-ly and end.
3. Tempt-ed and tried I need a great Sav-ior, One who can help my bur-dens to bear;
I must tell Je-sus, I must tell Je-sus, He all my cares and sor-rows will share.
4. O how the world to e-vil al-lures me! O how my heart is tempt-ed to sin!
I must tell Je-sus, and He will help me O-ver the world the vic-t'ry to win.

{Chorus}

I must tell Je-sus! I must tell Je-sus! I can-not bear my bur-dens a-lone;
I must tell Je-sus! I must tell Je-sus! Je-sus can help me, Je-sus a-lone.

When I did so, I focused on my heavy burden instead of laying down my heavy burden before the Lord. So while singing this hymn, I often had a heavy heart. However, when I went to the mission field, where my father was several years ago, I fell asleep in the room around 4:00 am and heard my father singing this hymn in the morning prayer with disabled people. And there was power in his voice when was singing this hymn. It was a strong praise and I could not feel the heaviness at all in his voice. So I thought about how he could praise God with such strong voice without any heaviness in his heart. My conclusion was since he laid down all his burden before the Lord humbly in obedience to Jesus' invitation of “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-burden, and I will give you rest” (Mt. 11:28) so that he was able to enjoy rest and peace in the Lord. I hope that all of us can humbly receive Jesus' invitation and go to Him when we are weary and heavy-burden. And let us lay down all our weariness and heavy-burden before the Lord so that we may enjoy God's given rest and peace in our hearts.

Are you enjoying yourself?

[Ecclesiastes 6:3, 6]

Are you enjoying eating and drinking? Are you enjoying seeing good in all your labor? The Bible Ecclesiastes 3:13 says, 'Moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor--it is the gift of God.' The Bible says, "There is nothing better for a man to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good" (2:24, cf. 8:15). And the Bible says that it is good and fitting (5:18). Therefore, we should enjoy it when we can enjoy this gift God has given us. The reason is that we will not be able to eat or drink even if we want to. And the time will surely come when we cannot work even though we want to.

When we look at Ecclesiastes 6:3 and 6, we see a very unhappy person. The unfortunate man (v. 1) received God's wealth, riches, and honor out of all his wishes (v.2). Nevertheless, he is not satisfied with it (5:10). And he cannot sleep because he worries about his many possessions (v. 12). The very serious problem is that he hoards his wealth even to the point of harming himself (v. 13). Then there is nothing to pass on to his children, because he loses all his wealth due to some misfortune (v. 14). Therefore, all his days he eats in darkness, with great frustration, affliction and anger (v. 17). "This too is a grievous evil"(v. 16). Man is born naked at the time of his birth, and no matter how hard he may be, he will not have anything to take away from this world (v. 15). Man is forced to leave this world as it is, and why is he doing such a futile effort as to catch a wind that can not be caught (v. 16)? It is a grievous evil. The great grievous evil is that he has received wealth, riches, and honor from God without lack of all wishes, but that God does not allow him to enjoy it, so that others will enjoy it (6:2). How meaningless and sorrowful it is (v. 2). If he dies without enjoying God's given blessings even though he has given birth to one hundred children and lived a thousand years in this land (v. 3).

It "is good and proper for a man to eat and drink and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him" (5:18). If God gives us wealth and riches to enjoy it, and to bless us to enjoy our labors, it is God's gift (v. 19). If we are pleased with the gift of God because God has filled our hearts with joy, we will not seriously think that life is short (v. 20). God already gave us all spiritual blessings in heaven in Christ (Eph. 1: 3). May God fill our hearts with joy as we enjoy all the heavenly spiritual blessings.

A lifetime of shadows

[Ecclesiastes 6:7-12]

I went to the Hollywood Presbyterian Hospital yesterday. I went to see one of our church member whose lungs weren't doing good. The hospital seemed to continue to inspect his lungs and try to identify the cause in order to treat it. When I visited him yesterday, he told me that when he reflected back his 85 years of life in this earth, the conclusion is everything is false. So I told him what King Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 1:2 – "'Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity." Listening to his conclusion of his 85 years of life, I have come to think once again how to live in this this vain life.

In Ecclesiastes 6:12, King Solomon speaks of "a lifetime of shadows". What does it mean by "a lifetime of shadows"? I hope you will think about it. What do you think when I say "shadow"? When I say "shadows," the first thing I can think of is that we can not catch them. Another thing that I think of as "shadows" is that shadows do not stay long and disappear quickly. When King Solomon said "a lifetime of shadows", it can be interpreted in two ways: (1) First, the word "a lifetime as a shadow" means life flees quickly. Look at Job 14: 1-2: "Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He springs up like a flower and withers away; like a fleeting shadow, he does not endure." Like this words of Job, our life in this world is short, full of trouble and its goes quick as a shadow. Look at Psalm 90:10 – "The length of our days is seventy years-- or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away." The psalmist Moses is telling us that our life's span in this world is seventy or eighty but it is trouble and sorrow. (2) Second, "a lifetime of shadows" means a short and futile life in the world. Look at Ecclesiastes 6:12 – "For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, during the few years of his futile life? He will spend them like a shadow. ...". Looking back what King Solomon repeatedly said in Ecclesiastes 'vain' (1: 2; 2:15, 19, 21, 23; 3:19; 4: 7, 8; 5:10), 'vanity and striving after wind' (1:14, 17; 2:11, 17, 26; 4: 4, 16), 'what is profitable' and 'uselessness' (1: 3; 2:11; 4) : 8; 5:11, 16). It is a vain life to spend in the lifetime of shadows that go quickly, doing unprofitable and useless things things. Of course, this is not a word that refers to those whom God is pleased with. The reason is that those whom God is please with live a meaningful and profitable life in the sight of God, even though the life is short and goes quickly. Rather, it refers to the sinner (6:1-6). Here, the sinner refers to a person who is worse than a miscarried baby. Who is worse than the miscarried baby? Those whom God blessed with wealth, riches, honor, and children's blessings and longevity, but not able to enjoy all of it and in their death their bodies can not be buried properly. These sinners' lives are like shadows and that they have spent the short and meaningless days in this world.

Then why is the lifetime of shadows vain? Why is it meaningless? Why are the reasons? (1) First, the reason that lifetime of shadow is meaningless and useless is because there is no satisfaction. King Solomon said, "All things are wearisome; Man is not able to tell it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, Nor is the ear filled with hearing" (1:8). What does it mean? It means there is no satisfaction with our eyes and ears even though we see and hear. That's why King Solomon said that the world is vanity because there is no satisfaction in greed of human being. And this is what King Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 6:7 – "All a man's labor is for his mouth and yet the appetite is not satisfied." Here a "man" referred to "the man" in verse 3. And "the man" is regarded as unhappier than the miscarried baby because there is no satisfaction in his soul (Park Yun-sun). This man's appetite cannot be satisfied no matter how hard he works for his mouth. There is no satisfaction in his soul. Why isn't he satisfied with his soul? The reason is that our soul can only be satisfied with one God, but he wanted to leave God and fulfill his appetite. A person who is not satisfied with the soul is unable to enjoy life but keep on working and live a vain and meaningless life and die later on. (2) Second, the lifetime of shadows is futile and meaningless because it can not be saved. Look at Ecclesiastes 6:8 – "For what advantage does the wise man have over the fool? What advantage does the poor man have, knowing how to walk before the living?" Here King Solomon is saying that those who are not saved, whether they are wise or fool, are same (Park Yun-sun). No matter how humble we are in this world to deal with things wisely, the point is that we do not know God and have no salvation and this is useless. In Ecclesiastes 2: 12-17, King Solomon spoke of the wise and foolish, and the key lesson was that: "For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man as with the fool, inasmuch as in the coming days all will be forgotten And how the wise man and the fool alike die! So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to

me; because everything is futility and striving after wind.” Whether people are wise or foolish, their destiny is death. The problem is after death. It is important whether their souls will have eternal life after death or eternal condemnation. No matter how much people are wise and humbly dealt with things of this world, if they do not walk in the way of salvation, what will happen to the soul after death? There is nothing meaningful unless we walk in the path of salvation by believing in Jesus.

How then shall we live this lifetime of shadows? What is a meaningful and useful life in God’s sight?

First, in this lifetime of shadows, the meaningful and useful life in God’s sight is to be satisfied only by the Lord alone.

The usefulness and meaning of life is to be satisfied only by the Lord alone and walk in the path of salvation by faith in Jesus. We must abandon our greed and be content with only Jesus. Jesus is the only One who is able to satisfy our souls while living in this lifetime of shadows. Only Jesus can satisfy our souls. It is because our soul desires eternity and only eternal Jesus can satisfy our eternal souls. We, like Apostle Paul, must learn to be content in abundance and poverty, "whatever it is" (Phil. 4:11). Therefore, we must be satisfied with only Jesus. And if we are satisfied with Jesus alone, then we will obey His Word, and pursue eternal things. This is a meaningful and useful life in God's sight.

Second, in this lifetime of shadows, the meaningful and useful life in God's sight is to handle the Lord’s work humbly and wisely (Park Yun-sun).

Look at Ecclesiastes 6:8 – “For what advantage does the wise man have over the fool? What advantage does the poor man have, knowing how to walk before the living?” This verse is talking about those who have not been saved. But if we apply this to we who have been saved, in order for us to live the meaningful and useful life in God’s sight in this lifetime of shadows, we must humbly handle the Lord's work wisely.

At the morning prayer meeting yesterday, I thought about King Saul in 1 Samuel 15:17, who had considered himself small (1 Sam. 15:17), but eventually became proud and set up a monument for himself (v. 12) after winning the battle against the Amalekites. And although he had sinned by disobeying God's word, he still wanted Samuel to honor him before the elders of “my people” and before Israel” (v. 30). As I thought about King Saul, I compared myself in the past when I used to consider myself small and now when I wanted to be honored or exalted in front of people. Then the Holy Spirit worked in my heart to mourn for my own sins and enabled me to confess them and repent. The Holy Spirit worked in my heart to help me to put down my prideful heart in front of the cross. What was the reason for this abundant grace of God? It was because the Lord wanted me to humbly serve the Lord's church. It was because the Lord wanted me to serve His church with His humility and His wisdom (not depend on my own understanding). How about you? We should serve the Lord and His church humbly and with the wisdom that the Lord gives us. Such life of service with humility and wisdom is a life that is meaningful and useful to God.

Third, in this lifetime of shadows, the meaningful and useful life in God's sight is to enjoy the present good (Park Yun-sun).

Look at Ecclesiastes 6:9 – “What the eyes see is better than what the soul desires This too is futility and a striving after wind.” One scholar translated this verse like this: “It is better to enjoy the present good than to think of other good things.” What King Solomon is telling us is to enjoy the present and give thanks to God (Park Yun-sun). In Ecclesiastes 6:1-6, King Solomon saw the grievous evil in this world that even though a man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor so that his soul lacks nothing of all that he desires but God has not empowered him to enjoy them. How about you? Are you enjoying and satisfied with every spiritual blessings that God gave us in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:3)? We should enjoy the blessings God has already given to us in Jesus Christ in our present life. For example, when we think about God adopting us to be his children, one of the spiritual blessings that God gave us in Christ Jesus, we must enjoy this blessing humbly and wisely at this time, so that our souls may enjoy his blessing. To do that, we must seek our Heavenly Father. We should pray to our Heavenly Father, calling him "Abba Father" (Rom. 8:15). As we do so, we must hear and obey Heavenly Father's voice. Therefore, we must learn the heart of Heavenly Father. In doing so, we will be able to live a meaningful and useful life in the sight of

God. Let us enjoy the joy that the Lord gives us in this lifetime of shadows.

Fourth, in this lifetime of shadows, the meaningful and useful life in God's sight is to live in obedience to the truth in fearing God (Park Yun-sun).

Look at the text Ecclesiastes 6:10 – “Whatever exists has already been named, and it is known what man is; for he cannot dispute with him who is stronger than he is.” Dr. Park Yun-sun said: ‘This words means that since the position and degree of man has already been confirmed before God, he only obeys truth in his real life one step at a time in fearing God.’ Those who live in vain and meaningless life do not fear God. They struggle with God and go too far beyond their boundary. Having struggles with God, they ignore God, who has determined their existence and boundary, and do whatever they want. This is futile (v. 11). Living this lifetime of shadows apart from God is vanity (v. 12) (Park Yun-sun). But the life of fearing God is meaningful and useful in God’s sight. Therefore, we must be obedient to the Word of God. In fact, this is the conclusion of the Book of Ecclesiastes. Look at Ecclesiastes 12:13 – “The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person.”

As I meditate on Ecclesiastes 6:7-12, I asked this question to myself: ‘How shall I live the rest of my life in this lifetime of shadows?’ During this lifetime of shadows which goes quickly, I want to live a meaningful life. I want to be satisfied with the Lord alone. And I want to live humbly and wisely in doing the work of the Lord that the Lord has entrusted to me. I also want to enjoy all the spiritual blessings God has already given to me in Jesus Christ. And I want to live in obedience to the Word of God in fearing him, as King Solomon had conclusively stated in Ecclesiastes 12:13. I hope that this prayer of devotion will be with us today, here and now.

‘The living should take this to heart’

[Ecclesiastes 7:1-4]

On Thursday, April 20, 2008, there was interesting news in South Korea YTN 11 o'clock night news. The news was about some people taking pictures for their funerals, writing their last will letters, reading that letters in a mortuary room. I saw most of them crying when they were reading down their letters. Not only did they read down their letters, but they actually went into their coffins in the mortuary room. Then the other person slowly poured the soil over the coffin with a shovel. When I was watching that moment I thought if a person who was inside the coffin heard that sound of the soil, he would probably felt real about his death. The response of those who experienced their dying process was "I wanted to live more." And they said that they remembered their family members the most when they were going through that dying process. I heard the person who is the director of the death experience center came out and said, so many people are interested about their own well-being but not many people were interested in well-dying. He said that was why he started this program. You might think that what a strange program that is. But personally I thought it was a good idea to have that kind of program. I think it is good if we could feel our deaths more realistically so that we can prepare to die.

In Ecclesiastes 7:2, King Solomon says that "the living should take this to heart." What is "this" here? Here, "this" is the destiny of everyone which is death. Look at Ecclesiastes 7:2 – "It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart." We have to think about our death. We have to ponder about the fact that someday we all have to our end in this earth, which is death. From this point of view of death, we have to think seriously and momentarily about how we shall live. How can we do that? King Solomon gives us good way in Ecclesiastes 7:2. What is that good way? It is to go to a house of mourning (v. 2). In other words, going to a funeral is a good way to think about death. There is no better way to think about our own death than to go to a funeral. As we mourn the death of the deceased, we can imagine what death we will face in this world. I personally have a thought to attend my funeral and often feel my death more realistically. My thought is to live well in order to die well. In the end, death at a funeral gives me an opportunity to think about how to live well.

But what is the problem? It is that our instinct prefers to go to the house of feasting rather than the house of mourning. This means we like laughter than sadness (v. 3). In other words, we like to enjoy the physical pleasure than to visit those who have lost their beloved one (Park Yun-sun). But as King Solomon had already said in Ecclesiastes 2:11, physical pleasure is useless. In other words, going to the feast house and enjoying worldly pleasures is of no benefit in God's perspective. Rather, King Solomon says that what is beneficial is to go to the house of mourning and experience grief. Why does he say that sadness is better than laughter? It is because "a sad face is good for the heart" (v. 3). What does it mean? It means that our hearts are softened by the sorrow of the death (Park Yun-sun). And when our hearts are soften, we will not pursue this worldly pleasure and waste our lives in vain. Instead, we will humble ourselves before the Lord and will be in obedience to the Word of God and live a profitable life in the sight of God. So this is what King Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 7:4 – "The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure."

Our hearts should not be in the house of pleasure. In other words, our hearts should not be in the house of feasting where we can enjoy physical pleasure. Rather, our hearts must be in the house of mourning. We should like to go to the funeral better than the wedding. And we should go to the funeral and think about our death before the death of the deceased. We also have to go someday when the Lord calls us. The reason is because death is the destiny for all of us (v. 2). Therefore, we should think about our death and how we should live beautifully today. We have to leave the "good name" in this world (v. 1). What is the best beautiful name? We must keep in mind that it is the Name "Jesus". We who believe in Jesus should imitate Him so that at our funeral we can leave the memories of Jesus likeness to our children's hearts, in the hearts of our descendants and our neighbors. Therefore, at our funeral, there must be true praise when our children, descendants, or even neighbors think about our names. Furthermore, the people should gratefully praise God in thanksgiving as they mourn over our death.

Take a perspective of death

[Ecclesiastes 7:2]

In this New Year 2008, I already attended the funeral twice. That's also within a week. As I attended the two funerals, I came to think about Ecclesiastes 7:2 again. As I thought about the truth that the destiny of everyone is death and the living should take this to heart, I asked myself again "How shall I live?" In particular, after I heard my third uncle pastor Andrew Kim's doctor saying that my uncle had about two or three weeks to live, I meditated on Ecclesiastes 7:2 again. And the challenge that I got was I should live with a death perspective.

Why should we live with the death perspective? The reason is because it is beneficial to us. What are some benefits? There are several benefits, but I want to share only three.

First, when we live with the death perspective, we become more and more dependent on God because we acknowledge our inability and helplessness.

What I felt again when I attended two funerals in this New Year was the fact that we humans come from the earth and return to earth. And as James 4:14 says, I came to think again about our lives that "is a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." In front of death, we can not help but feel incompetent and helpless. No matter how strong, no matter how famous and rich people are, before death everyone cannot but feel the inability and helplessness of human beings. Especially young people like me should go to a funeral more and more so that I can fully realize my inability and helplessness. Why should I do this? The reason is to get rid of my strength. In other words, I need to take away my strength and rely on God's strength and power.

I think we need to be humble. We need to be humble before God rather than in front of people. When we think about our coming death before God, we should not rely on our own strength but depend on God's strength and power. We must learn through funerals that God is in control of life and death. In other words, we must learn to recognize God's sovereignty. We must acknowledge that our lives depend on the Lord. To do so, we must face ourselves in terms of death.

I personally like to sing hymn titled "Simply trusting every day". This is verse 1 and chorus: "Simply trusting everyday, Trusting through a stormy way; Even when my faith is small, Trusting Jesus, that is all. Trusting as the moments fly, Trusting as the days go by; Trusting Him whatever befall, Trusting Jesus, that is all." God is making how fragile my faith is through the difficulties that my beloved people are experiencing. Therefore, God is making me to depend on the Lord more and more. As the years pass, I am learning about the weakness of humanity and the strength of God by experiencing the realities of humanity, which grow old and become ill. Therefore, I would like to look back on my life with a view of death more and more.

Second, when we live with the death perspective, we pursue the eternal things rather than the temporary things.

We often say we come with empty hands and that we leave this world with empty hands. Even though we know it, we are busy trying to fill something in our hands. Then, when we participate in the funeral of our beloved, we are stimulated again little bit and think about how we should live rest of our lives in this earth. But when time passes by, we tend to forget about decisions we made after the funeral and again we make a busy life trying to grab somethings in our hands. What is the result of working hard without rest? In the end it is going to the grave with our empty hands.

At least those who believe in Jesus will look back on their lives from the point of view of death through a funeral and think about how to live for the days on this earth that God allows. In doing so, we think of things above, rather than thinking of things in the world, and we think that we should pursue eternity rather than seek temporary

things. We realize that this world is not our home, and we are going to the heaven like the ancestors of faith in Hebrews chapter 11. The reason is because from the point of view of death we agree with the Word of Solomon that the things we pursue in this world are meaningless and meaningless. Also, we realize that all the temporary things will fade away and only the eternal things will remain forever. So we determine to live for the things that last forever. We live for the eternal Lord, according to His eternal Word and preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to the eternal souls with His eternal love.

I think about my death often at the beloved people's funerals as I see the bodies of the beloved who return to the dust. And I will think about what does "the day of death is better than the day of birth" means (7:1). Furthermore, I think about what King Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 7:1 – "A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth." Will my beloved people around me remember my name "James Kim" as 'a good name'? Sometimes I imagine how many people would say, 'James Kim went to eternity after pursuing eternal things all his life'. In order to live in this world like the one who lives in the coming world, we must live with the death perspective. In other words, while living in this world with an eternal perspective, we must live for eternity.

Third, when we live with the death perspective, we can save time.

A person who lives with a view of death is a wise man. And the wise man pursues eternal things. He is very careful how he lives, not as unwise but as wise (Eph. 5:15). As an example, the wise man does not pursue debauchery like getting drunk (v. 18). It is because he knows that such a life is a foolish life (v. 17). Instead, he makes the most of every opportunity knowing that the days are evil (v. 16). Moreover, he understands what the Lord's will is (v. 17) and tries to fulfill His will. That's why, being filled with the Holy Spirit, he speaks to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (v. 19). He sings and makes music in his heart to the Lord (v. 19). He always gives thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 20).

I think we are realizing that the time is passing so fast that the more we get older, the more we realize it. Of course, there are some people who are ignorant of this fact that the time is passing by so fast as they get older. How can we save the time that is flowing so quickly? I think one of the ways is to attend a funeral and think about our own death. If we are busy think that we will live forever in this earth, we should look at our life at least once by attending to our loved one's funeral. And we should think about how to live my life and how to finish it. The reason is because our funerals are not too far away.

I am already 40 years old. If the average life expectancy is 7-80, then I already lived half. Of course I do not know when God will call me to heaven. Somehow nowadays I think about the importance of living day by day. It is because no one knows tomorrow's work. Since God has allowed us to live today, we try to live today for the glory of God. And if God allows us to have tomorrow, we will live tomorrow in the same attitude as today. I don't think it's wise to be obsessed with the past and to worry about future too much. I think it is good to enjoy day by day in gratitude to walk with the Lord. Then I believe we can go to the Lord with thanksgiving even if we die tonight. I don't know how many years God has left me on this earth (I do not think it is necessary to know), but I just want to pursue eternity while relying on the Lord day by day. I would like to live for the glory of God while I walk with Him and be faithful in the ministry that the Lord called me to do.

My dear Pastor Andrew Kim is now in a very weak physical condition. I think of the pastor who was hard to get up on the couch himself. In the midst of that, I recall the image when he relied on God and praised "How Great Thou Art" to God in loud voice. Though his body is very fragile, his soul is like an eagle flying toward the sky. His soul was depending on the eternal God alone when he was praising God's greatness. As I want to participate in his earnest prayer of glorifying God alone, this is what I want to confess: 'I was to live like a dead person'. I want to live with the death perspective. To do so, I would like to take the advice from the Teacher King Solomon and go to more funerals. And I want to think about the end of life that is death as the living person when I go to the funerals. I want to feel it and experience it. And I want to write it on the tablet of my heart. And from the death perspective, I want to continue living this day, pursuing eternal life while trusting the Lord more and more. I believe that when I die, I will live forever. Amen.

Rebuke from a wise man

[Ecclesiastes 7:5-7]

Have you ever heard of "pastor's disease"? About one or two weeks ago, I heard this phrase from a pastor for the first time. According to that pastor, we, pastors, have disease. And that pastor's disease was 'to teach others'. His intention seems to be that 'the pastor's disease is to teach others but does not listen to what others teach'. When I heard his words, there was nothing for me to say. That was because I agreed with him. When I see myself, I have that pastor's disease. Although I didn't want to get caught in this pastor's disease, I know I am. And I feel terrible because even though I am pursuing the spirituality of the wilderness and trying to listen to God's voice through the meditating on the Word of God, I have the pastor's disease. When I think about what's wrong with me, the Pharisees in the New Testament came into my mind. And the thought that came into my mind was like Pharisees I was neglecting to teach myself as I was teaching my church members. What was the result? It was pride. And since I was proud, not only I wasn't listening to God's voice but also to the voice of people around me.

Few days ago, I meditated on the words of 2 Samuel 12: 7 at the Morning Prayer under the heading "You are the man." This Bible story we know well is the Prophet Nathan rebuking King David's sin. King David committed sins against God by sleeping with Bathsheba and found that the baby had conceived and attempted to cover up the sins, eventually leading to a murder of her husband Uriah, his own faithful soldier (v. 12). What King David had done was evil in the sight of the Lord (11:27). So the Lord sent Prophet Nathan and Nathan told him the parable of two men, the one rich and the other poor (12:1-4). When David heard the parable his anger burned greatly against the rich man, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, surely the man who has done this deserve to die" (v. 5). David didn't know that he was the one who deserve to die, maybe because he had covered his conscience while covering up his sins. At that time Prophet Nathan directly rebuked King David: "You are the man!" (v. 7) What a shocking rebuke? David himself had apparently never thought of himself that he was the one who deserve to die, but how surprised was that Prophet Nathan saying, "You are the man!" Won't our conscience be shocked when the holy God exposes our sins and the Spirit rebuke us to the point that we are conscience-stricken?

In Ecclesiastes 7:5, King Solomon says: "It is better to heed a wise man's rebuke than to listen to the song of fools." We had already meditated on Ecclesiastes 7:1-4 under the title "The living should take this to heart." We were taught that we should ponder the fact that our destiny is death. And we learned that in order to think deeply we should go to the house of mourning rather than the house of feasting. So King Solomon told us in Ecclesiastes 7:4 that "The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure." The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning because he can think about the destiny of everyone which is death. But the heart of the fool is in the house of meaningless and meaningless pleasure. King Solomon continues to talk about the wise in Ecclesiastes 7: 5-7. If Ecclesiastes 7:1-4 is talking about "the heart of the wise", then Ecclesiastes 7:5-7 is talking about "the rebuke of the wise." The voice that God tells us through today's text is 'Listen to the wise man's rebuke.'

Who would love to hear rebuke? Our sinful old instinct wants to be praised by people and doesn't want to be rebuked. I personally have questions about Korean parents raising their children in my parents' time. One of the questions is why Korean parents keep on pointing out their children's shortcomings instead of praising them for what good they have done. I still don't understand this even though I know in my head that this is their way of loving us. I think it's because I am so used to American parenting. The American-style child-rearing that I am referring to here refers specifically to parents praising their children. One day, I saw children playing soccer on TV. The scene that I still could not forget was that when a child couldn't make a goal in front of the goal, an adult who looked like the child's father standing on the sideline said 'Good job! Good job!' as he was clapping. If the father was Korean, I think he probably said 'You couldn't even make that goal? You stupid.' When I went to see my son playing little league soccer, I saw the kids' mothers were more frenzy these days as well as their fathers. It seemed to me the mothers were cheering and screaming more. Well, of course, I do not entirely agree with American parenting. I just think that in raising children we need both praise and rebuke. From this point of view, if we consider Ecclesiastes 7:5, the lesson that we should learn is it is better to heed a wise's man's rebuke than to listen to

the praise of fools. Look at verse 5: "It is better to heed a wise man's rebuke than to listen to the song of fools." What is "the song of fools" here? This refers to the "false comfort of the wicked" (Park Yun-sun). What King Solomon is telling us is to watch out for the false comfort of the wicked. Why should we beware of the false comfort of the wicked? The reason is written in verse 6: "Like the crackling of thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of fools. This too is meaningless." In a word, the reason we should beware of the fool's song, the false comfort of the wicked, is that comfort is meaningless. King Solomon said that meaningless comfort is 'like the crackling of thorns under the pot' (v. 6). What does it mean? What do you think of the crackling of thorns? Don't they make loud noises? But do they get the heat to boil the pot? The words "thorns" often refer to the wicked (2 Sam. 23:6; Nah. 1:10) (Jamieson). And the wicked who enjoys physical pleasure makes the sounds of comfort are false comfort. And it seems to be comforting for a moment, but it disappears quickly. There is no comfort. In a word, the comfort of the wicked is vain. Therefore, King Solomon teaches us that what we should listen to is not the song of the fool, but the rebuke of the wise.

This is what Proverbs 17:10 says: "A rebuke impresses a man of discernment more than a hundred lashes a fool." A fool does not listen to a rebuke. If you rebuke the fool, he will hate you (9:8). So the Bible says to rebuke a wise because the wise will love you (v. 8). We should rebuke the wise in love because he will be wiser. Look at Proverbs 9:9 – "Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning." Look also Proverbs 25:12 – "Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man's rebuke to a listening ear." How precious is the listening ear? The ear that can hear the voice of God is very precious. When we listen to the voice of God, we should not only listen to his commands but also his rebuke. The reason is because God's rebuke is useful to our souls (2 Tim. 3:16). Because we are rebuked by God, we no longer walk in the way of sin but repent and walk in the way of righteousness. That's why Proverbs 27:5 says "Better is open rebuke than hidden love." If we truly love our brothers, we must rebuke them in love. If God gives them wisdom, then they will receive our reproof and will repent and walk in the right way. The danger here, however, is that the wise man who is rebuking with love is not walking the right way. In other words, when the wise man neglects to teach himself, there is a risk that he himself will enjoy the song of the fool. This is what King Solomon said about that danger in Ecclesiastes 7:7 – "Extortion turns a wise man into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart." This means that the coveting mind is darkened and is not able to discern righteousness from unrighteousness (Jamieson). Actually, if the wise man is not faithfully rebuking himself while he does so to others, then there is a risk that he will be disturbed by the temptation of bribes to be stimulated by the rising covetousness of the mind. Look at Proverbs 17:23 – "A wicked man accepts a bribe in secret to pervert the course of justice." So this is what the Bible Deuteronomy 16:19-20 says: "Do not pervert justice or show partiality. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. Follow justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the LORD your God is giving you."

We must humbly listen to the rebuke of the wise. I think, in this age, it is hard to find the beautiful ears in the eyes of God. In particular, I think we keep on rejecting the Holy Spirit God's rebuke through the Word of God. So we don't like the sermons that rebuke our sins. This reminds me 2 Timothy 4:3-4: "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths." We need a mind-set like a psalmist. Look at Psalms 141:5 – "Let a righteous man strike me--it is a kindness; let him rebuke me--it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it. Yet my prayer is ever against the deeds of evildoers." We must consider the wise man's rebuke in love as oil of our heads. Although rebuke is hard to hear at the time, we should take it as an opportunity to look back in silence when our consciences are stricken by the rebuke. When we hear God's voice through the wise man's rebuke, we should acknowledge, confess and repent our sins. And we should have right discernment to discern righteousness from unrighteousness and will be able to walk in the right path. Do you think that we Christians are walking the path of righteousness by discerning righteousness and unrighteousness with the right judgment? Do you think that the church is walking in the way of righteousness by obeying the Lord's words?

Today, I met a pastor and had lunch together and we had a lot of genuine conversation. Through the conversation with him, God taught me precious lessons and I got encouraged. Moreover, God gave me a gentle rebuke through the conversation with him. And when I was receiving the gentle rebuke from him, it reminded me someone I know. So after I say bye to him and on the way to my church by car I gave a phone call to that person and gave an apology. And I also made a confession of love to him. After I hang up the phone with him, my heart was moving. What is God trying to say to us this moment? What is his gentle rebuke to us, the church? Let's look

at Revelation 2-3. We can hear the words the Lord giving to the seven churches. Among the seven churches, only the Church of Smyrna and the Church of Philadelphia in the seven churches are praised, and the remaining five churches receive rebuke from the Lord with praise: (1) The Church of Ephesus: "Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love" (Rev. 2: 4), (2) The Church of Pergamum: "Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans." (vv. 14-15), (3) The Church of Thyatira: "Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling" (vv. 20-21), (4) The Church of Sardis: "To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you" (3:1-3), (5) The Church of Laodicea: "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm--neither hot nor cold--I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked." (vv. 15-17). How do you hear the Lord's rebuke to these five churches? What do you think is the word of reproach to our church? "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 2: 7, 11, 17, 29; 3: 6, 13, 22).

Why do you have an affair?

[Ecclesiastes 7:7]

I heard this from someone today. There is a country where a 99% of nurses want to go to work abroad but about 98% of them are having an affair when they go abroad. When I heard that, I was surprised. Although I heard that many married couple are having affair, I didn't know it was that much. Indeed, this is a serious problem. Why are there so many affair relationships? I have looked at why people are having an affair based on Proverbs 5:8 – “Keep to a path far from her, do not go near the door of her house.” The reason is because a man who is having an affair is not staying away from another woman whom he has to put distant with. At the same time, he is not staying close to his own wife. In other words, he who has the affair does so because he is close to another woman whom he needs to stay away instead of being close to his wife. He is not loving his wife faithfully (v. 15), but also because he is not enjoying her (v.18). And because he is not always satisfied with her bosom and is not captivated by her love (v. 19), he gives his heart to another woman, embraces the bosom of another man's wife and gives birth to a child (vv. 16, 20).

I would like to think of another reason why people are having an affair from the text of Ecclesiastes 7:7. The reason is "greed." When we look at Exodus 20:17, we can see the tenth commandment of the Moses' Ten Commandments: “You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” Obviously, God has commanded that “You shall not covet your neighbor's wife”. But why are we coveting? The reason is because there is covetousness in us. If we have covetous heart, we are not satisfied with our wives' bosom (Prov. 5:19). Not only that, we begin to covet another woman. So we look at another woman other than our wives, drawn by the lust of eyes. And our ears start to hear her voice. But our eyes are not satisfied with all those women who we see (Eccle. 1:8). Thus, Satan tempts us with the lust of the flesh by lewdness, and causes us to sin (2 Pet. 2:18). Satan makes us to commit sins against God by making us to covet other women.

The cause of our affair is the greed. Greed does not know enough (Isa. 56:11). Therefore, greed makes us not to be satisfied with our wives (Prov. 5:19) and makes to covet our neighbor's wife (Exod. 29:17). Therefore, our hearts must not turn to greed (Ps. 119: 36). The Bible says ‘greed is idolatry’ (Col. 3:5). Therefore, we must defeat all covetousness (Lk. 12:15). And we must kill the earthly desires of the flesh (Col. 3:5). We must put to death “sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed” (v. 5). The reason is because we who belong to Christ Jesus already crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desire (Gal. 5:24). I hope and pray that we do not covet our neighbor's wife (Exod. 20:17) and always be content with our wife's bosom (Prov. 5:19).

A wise man's service

[Ecclesiastes 7:8-10]

This morning I called two church members who made me a side dish. After I tasted the side dish, I called them to thank them. One of them told me that she went to the hospital because she was sick and came back home. And she told me that she would come to our church until she dies. When I heard that, I was thankful. It is beautiful to serve one another in the church and to serve the Lord together. When we can look at the beauty of service in our lives, we see a small Jesus from each other. And I think that such a small Jesus meeting is a true community of Jesus. May our church be a community of such service. And the question that we throw is "How should I serve"

As we began to meditate on Ecclesiastes chapter 7, we were taught about 'the mind of the wise' (vv. 1-4) and 'the wisdom of the wise' (vv. 5-7). Today, God is giving us the valuable lesson in the text of Ecclesiastes 7:8-10, that is 'service of the wise.' So in today's text, I want to think about how the wise serves the Lord. How does the wise do the Lord's work? Let us think about it in three ways:

First, the wise man works to the end and bears a fruit.

Look at Ecclesiastes 7:8 – "The end of a matter is better than its beginning, ...". King Solomon says, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven" (v. 1). And he said, there is "a time to be born and a time to die" (v. 2). And in Ecclesiastes 7:2 he speaks of the death of all of us. In other words, the Bible says that the end of all of us in this world is death. And in today's text Ecclesiastes 7:8, the Bible says that the end of the matter is better than its beginning. What does it mean? Here, "The end of a matter" refers to the fruit of what the person does. It is "better than its beginning" means it is better than just starting and is not doing (Park Yun-sun).

Looking back at our everyday life, there are many things that we start but don't finish. For example, I like to open a book and start to read it, but most of the time I can not read until the end. In addition to reading books, there are a lot of things that I can not finish and postpone. While we are working in this way, we think that there aren't many times when we can not finish our work by comforting ourselves with the idea that "work is half started". However, the Bible does not just start, but exhort to finish the work to the end and bears a fruit. I have personally meditated on Ecclesiastes 3:1-2, 7: 2, and 7: 8 together. And it made me to think about what kind of fruit am I bearing as I am trying to fulfill God's given purpose in my life before death. So I asked these questions to myself: 'What kind of fruit did I bear as I had been doing the work of the Lord?', 'What fruit did I expect from the work of the Lord that I am doing?', 'When I stand in front of the Lord and settle the account in front of the Lord, is there any fruit I can offer to the Lord?' etc.. With the thought that it would not be a fig tree without fruit, I thought that God would expect me another fruit from me. I think that life should run to the end. No matter how great the beginning is, our end should not be too small. Although the beginning was weak, it is beautiful when the end is great. Of course, there is no need for the end to be great. The important thing is that we should never get off in the race of faith while doing the Lord's work. We must run the race of faith until the end. We must run as we think about the end. And we should run to the end. And we must bear beautiful fruits to the Lord. There must be praiseworthy fruits in our lives in God's sight.

Second, the wise man works with a patient heart.

Look at Ecclesiastes 7:8 – "... and patience is better than pride." Last week, what God had taught me through the conversation that I had with my friend pastor was 'Be patient'. Especially in the work of the Lord, my friend pastor encouraged me to have a lot of patience and humility. This encouragement was gentle rebuke in my heart. The reason is because I see the impatience in me. Not only that I have impatient personality but also but there is a tendency in me to think too hastily and not to be patient in doing the Lord's work. And since I think in a hurry, there are a lot of mistakes that I am making. A greater risk is that I can ruin God's work. How? It is by going ahead of God. When I think about myself, the reason I am in hurry is because of my proud heart (v. 8). There

is no perseverance in the arrogant heart. Rather, there is impatience in the arrogant heart. That's why not only in words but also in the realm of thought, I am ahead of the Lord in haste. Therefore, those who are impatient like me should listen to the words of Proverbs 21:5 and 29:20 – “The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty” (21:5), “Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him” (29:20). The Bible says that not only hasty people don't have hope, but also those who are impatient lead to poverty. This is what King Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 7:9 – “Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools.” In doing the work of the Lord, we can encounter many difficult things, but we also can have a lot of angry moments. In those circumstances, if we are not patient but are angry like a fool, then we can ruin the Lord's work. So this is what Proverbs 19:11 says: “A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense.” We are told by proverbs that when we are angry we must persuade someone who has made us angry with patience. Look at Proverbs 25:15 – “Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone.” How beautiful would it be to be patient with when we are angry and to speak to the other person with the gentle tongue, so that we can persuade the other person and do the work of the Lord together?

We have to be patient. In order to be faithful to the Lord's work to the end, we must be patient. We have to be patient. We must listen to James 5: 10-11: “Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.” We will see the good ending that the Lord gives us when we fully trust Him and patiently wait for Him.

Lastly, the wise man is faithful to reality in doing His work.

Look at Ecclesiastes 7:10 – “Do not say, “Why were the old days better than these?” For it is not wise to ask such questions.” When we do the Lord's work, there are times when it is hard and difficult. In those times, we must fulfill the Lord's work to the end with a humble heart. We must fulfill the Lord's work faithfully and bear fruit until the end with a sense of mission. However, when we face very difficult things in doing the Lord's work, there is danger that our hearts may become proud and thus we stop the work of the Lord. We cannot afford to work until the end and give up on the way. The start may have been tremendous, but we cannot accomplish it. The reason is that when we are arrogant we lose patience and jump in haste. And we cannot temper our feelings and sometimes we get angry in adversity. Not only we are angry with the situation, we are angry with people around us, and even with ourselves. The Bible refers to these people as fools (v. 9). And the fools miss the past days when they were prospered in the present times of trouble and adversity (v. 10). It's like a worker who thinks that it was a good idea to start work, but as he continued to work, he missed a good time of the past when he encountered difficulties. This is the thought of a fool. So fools are being unfaithful to the present life by being led by the past of the sweet fantasy instead of being faithful to the Lord's given calling and mission, face the reality and finish His work. Therefore, fools are continually trying to deny reality. He can not accept reality as it is. But a wise man accepts reality as it is. And he is faithful to reality. Instead of longing for the past and stay in the past, he remembers the grace from the past and commemorates it in the present. And as he commemorates it, he moves forward by faith, believing that God will rescue him in this present difficulties and hardships he faces. Not only that, but the wise will move forward with the hope of the future. He is never past-oriented, but futuristic. If we borrow the words of the apostle Paul, the wise man is he who moves toward the goal. As a race of faith, it is wise to look at the goal line. Knowing that the Lord will reward him if he passes the goal line, the wise man looks at the reward and runs the race faithfully toward the goal. Therefore, King Solomon is encouraging us not to say “Why were the old days better than these?” (Eccle. 7:10). I think this is reproof rather than exhortation. We must humbly listen to this rebuke from the wise Teacher King Solomon.

One of the things that God gives me understanding nowadays as I am serving the Lord's church is I am lacking in wisdom. When I see this lack of wisdom in me, one of the confessions that I can only make is that I came thus far by God's total grace. As I am confessing that by God's grace I was able to serve the Victorious Presbyterian Church until this day, I am concern that I would have made my church members difficult due to my lack of wisdom. So I got a prayer request. That prayer request is to ask God for wisdom. I want to keep on holding unto God's promise of James 1:5 and to pray: “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.” As I am doing so, I am thankful that I am able to meditate on the Book of Ecclesiastes every Wednesday in a prayer meeting. It is because God is teaching me the wisdom of the heart through the Book of Ecclesiastes. In particular, concerning today's text Ecclesiastes 7:8-10, God has given me and you three lessons regarding the service of the wise man: (1) First, the wise man works to the end to bear the fruit,

(2) Second, the wise man works with a patient heart, and (3) Lastly, the wise man is faithful to reality in doing His work. I hope and pray that you and I can take these lessons to our hearts and serve the Lord and His church wisely.

Race of life

[Ecclesiastes 7:8-10, 14]

I talked to my friend pastor this week. He is 48 years old, and he said that the next two years are very important to him. He seemed to be ministering with the idea that the foundation of the church must stand firm before he was 50 years old. Actually, I think if we are in our 50's and the ministry is not stable, then I see that the ministry is not really smooth. I am sure there are pastors around us who are in the 60's are struggling in their ministries. As I see some of the retired pastors, I think about how I should live my life and how I should endure ministry and pray to God. I personally thought of life as a 100 mile race as I am having fellowship with my church members who are their 90's, 80's, 70's, 60's and 50's. Of course we may not be able to live our life until 100 years but may die before that. But I thought of 100 years of life as a 100 mile race. From that point of view, I was driven by God's grace for 40 miles. Now the question is how shall I finish the race until the end? I want to learn how to run the race of the rest of my life with the five main points of the text.

First, I am taught that I must run the race of life to the end.

In Ecclesiastes 7:8, King Solomon said "The end of a matter is better than its beginning." If we run without thinking to run to the end while racing, what will happen to the race? We must run to the end without giving up the race. And we should not just run the race when we start racing. As we run the race with the attitude of finishing to the end, our ending should be more beautiful than starting. We hear that many pastors' end of their ministries are not beautiful and hurt many believers. When I hear about the pastors who are not able to retire graciously after their 30 years or 40 years of ministries, the word "The end of a matter is better than its beginning" (v. 8) comes to my mind as good lesson. And this lesson doesn't apply to our pastors only. This lesson applies to all the people. The wise will listen to the God's word today and will try to finish the race beautifully not only in God's sight but also in the people's sight. I hope and pray that the end of our race will be more beautiful than the beginning and the fragrance of Jesus will be manifested.

Second, I am taught that I must run the race with the patient and humble heart.

In Ecclesiastes 7:8, King Solomon said "... patience is better than pride." As we struggle to run the race of our lives toward the end, we experience a lot of situations to bear with. I think we are running the life of marathon that requires patience. We must endure the hardships and difficulties in order to finish the race of life to the end. In addition to this enduring heart, we must run the race of life with a humble heart. We must not start to run the race of life with humility and then later run the race with pride. King Saul initially considered himself small and humble, but later became proud and disobeyed God's Word and sinned against God. The king of Solomon, at first, sought wisdom to God with a humble heart, and he reigned over the Israelites well. But the last part of his life was disobedient to God's word and wasn't beautiful at all. I am afraid of how hard it is to live faithfully in the service of the Lord with a humble heart to the end. At the beginning of the ministry, like John the Baptist, there is cry of the wilderness in our ministries. But later when we become arrogant, many pastors sin in a palace like King David. The fear is that we become arrogant without knowing it. This tells us that it is very hard to keep our heart in humility. However, those who have started running to complete the race of life must endure to the end and must keep their humility until the end. The beginning of the race of our lives must be humility and the end as well. Let us complete the race of faith with patience and humility.

Third, I am taught that I must not run the race in a rush and anger.

In Ecclesiastes 7:9, King Solomon said "Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit ...". Although I don't know about the marathon, but I don't think that a runner runs a marathon quickly from the start. It is because if he runs quickly from the start then he probably will never be able to finish the race. Those who have lived a lot more than I am will know well that life should never run out of haste. Of course, this doesn't mean that we should live

our lives lazily because laziness is sin. We have to run the race of life diligently. But we should not run it hastily. Also, we should not run the race of life in anger. It is easy to make an outburst when we are in a hurry. Before when I went to a nursing home to see my church grandmothers with my kids, I heard the other two grandmothers yelling and screaming at each other. I was surprised to hear them yelling and screaming and wondered what they were so angry at each other. So after we saw our church grandmothers we came out quickly because I thought it was bad education for my kids. How ugly is this that we cannot control our anger. "A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension" (Prov. 15:18). As President Lincoln said, I am now in my 40's and I have to be responsible for my face. We should not run the race of life with an angry face. In this bustling world, let us have relaxed mind and run the race of life calmly.

Fourth, I am taught that I should not run the race of life as I miss my past.

In Ecclesiastes 7:10, King Solomon says, "Do not say, "Why were the old days better than these?". The reason is because "it is not wise to ask such questions" (v. 10). In other words, a wise person does not run the current race as misses the past. Please think about it. If a marathon runner runs the race thinking about the start of the race when he was running a little faster than now, what will happen to his race? I think too many people are long for their past that their lives are not progressing and they refuse to develop themselves. If they keep on saying "I was once ..." and longing for their past, they cannot be faithful in their present lives. Also, they won't be able to run their race with their full potential. But the wise man runs forward, not looking back but front. There is no marathon runner who looks back. The marathon runner looks at the goal line. That's what we must do. We must not look back when we run our race to the end. Of course, we must not forget the grace God has given us in the past. But we must never be left to that past grace. Our God is the God who gives more grace in the present than the past (Isa. 43:18-19). Therefore, we must run our race of faith by praying, expecting, and waiting for the work of God to do new things. We need to run the race, expecting more grace from God. Surely God will give us abundant grace we need.

Last fifth, I am taught that I need run the race by faith, knowing that there is a combination of prosperity and adversity in our race of life.

In Ecclesiastes 7:14, King Solomon says that God has made prosperity as well as adversity. He says that we need to be happy in the day of prosperity but consider in the day of adversity (v. 14). Why did God make these two things work together? The purpose is "so that man will not discover anything that will be after him" (v. 14). It may seem better to know what will happen in the future, but we will surely commit more sins to God if we know our future. If we know our future, we will surely become proud and not depend on God. Also, we will try to live our lives however we want. Not only can we be lazy, but we may give up our lives and live let it flow lives. I think it is better not to know the future. It is not fun to watch a soccer game if we already know the score. Actually, if know the score already, I don't want to watch it at all. Sometimes, we don't need to know. We don't need to know whether there will be prosperity or adversity in our future. If there is prosperity in the future, we will be happy. But if there is adversity, we can consider. And we should not have prosperity only. If so, then we will become proud. Also, we should not have adversity only. If so, then we will commit sins against God. We have the all knowing God who gives us both prosperity and adversity in the race of our lives. We need both in the race of our lives. Then we will be able to run to the end of this race of faith as we look to God alone and praise him and give thanks to him.

When I think about this race of faith, two Bible verse came into my mind: (1) "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:7-8) and (2) "However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me--the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace" (Acts 20:24). Let us all finish the race like Apostle Paul. Let us complete the race of faith. Let us run the race of faith where our end of the race is beautiful that our beginnings. Let us be patient and run to the end with humility. Let us not run the race in a rush and anger. And let us complete the race of faith by looking at the Lord who works for the good in all things, even the adversity before us. Therefore, I hope and pray that we can glorify God.

The beauty of wisdom

[Ecclesiastes 7:11-14]

What do you think is the decision criterion that we make in our lives? My personal thought is 'Are there any benefits for me?' For example, if we are standing at the crossroads of choices A and B, if the path A benefits us, but path B is disadvantageous to us, then we will choose path A. Of course, we have to think about the "benefits" that it give to us when we make the choice. We must consider whether the way we choose is beneficial to our faith or only to our physical life. And if the way we want to choose is spiritually profitable, then we should choose that path. Although the path does not benefit our physical life, we must choose that path if the path is profitable to our spiritual life. In order to make the right decision, we need God's wisdom. We must have God's wisdom so we can make the right judgments with the right discernment.

As we continue to meditate on Ecclesiastes 7, we are thinking about "wisdom": verses 1 to 4 are 'the heart of wisdom,' verses 5 to 7 are 'rebuke of wisdom,' and verses 8-10, 'service of wisdom'. In that context, this is what King Solomon, says in Ecclesiastes 7:11 and 12: "Wisdom along with an inheritance is good ..." (v. 11), "But the advantage of knowledge is ..." (v. 12). In a word, he says that wisdom is beautiful. In fact, King Solomon speaks of "beauty of wisdom." Here, the word 'beautiful' means 'good' or 'advantage'. This means that wisdom is good for us and it has advantage. What are the advantages of wisdom to us? There are three things:

First, the advantage of wisdom is that wisdom gives us eternal values.

In Ecclesiastes 7:11, King Solomon said that wisdom along with an inheritance is good. Here, "inheritance" refers to a perpetual possession. In other words, wisdom is beautiful because it is worth forever to us (Park Yun-sun). The substance or power of the world is not worth eternity, but wisdom is worthy of eternal value to us. That's why wisdom is beautiful. Wisdom is good and beautiful like the inheritance because it gives us eternal value of wisdom. Wisdom is good, beneficial and beautiful because it leads us to pursue the eternal things. In particular, as King Solomon already said in Ecclesiastes 3:11, God has given us a longing for eternity, and wisdom satisfies our very eternal heart. That's why wisdom is good, beneficial and beautiful. So Proverbs 24:14 says as follow: "Know also that wisdom is sweet to your soul; if you find it, there is a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off." For those who have wisdom have eternal hope.

Second, the advantage of wisdom is that wisdom gives us protection.

Look at Ecclesiastes 7:12 – "For wisdom is protection just as money is protection, But the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the lives of its possessors." Here, the literal meaning of the word "protection" means "shade" or "shelter" (Radmacher). What King Solomon is saying is that wisdom and money is shade or shelter to us. Imagine a day with sunshine. How hot would it be? Then will we not go to find the shade? King Solomon says that wisdom and money give us such a shade. The word 'wisdom and money give us shade' means it gives us pleasant security. In a word, wisdom and money protect us. What do you think? Do you think wisdom and money protect you? I think we agree that money protects us. The reason is that if we have money, we can be without fear and anxiety. So Proverbs 13:8 says "A man's riches may ransom his life, but a poor man hears no threat." For example, if my kid is kidnapped and the kidnapper asks for the money, if I have the money, then I can pay for his child and save my child. But what if we do not have money in such a situation? But King Solomon says that wisdom is more beautiful than money. In other words, wisdom has an advantage in protecting us more than money. Do you also think wisdom is more beneficial in protecting us than money? In Proverbs 31:10-31, the Bible speaks of a noble woman. Especially in verse 10, the Bible says: "A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies." Things like pearls and money are things that will disappear. In other words, money has no eternity. But, as we have already meditated on today's Ecclesiastes 7:11, wisdom does not disappear. Wisdom has eternal worth to us. That's why King Solomon says that wisdom is more beneficial than money. Money may be able to preserve our physical lives but it cannot preserve our souls. But wisdom can preserve both

our physical lives and our souls. So Proverbs 3:13-14 says as follow: “Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold.” We must listen to what Proverbs 4:6 says: “Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you.”

Lastly, the advantage of wisdom is that wisdom enables us to experience God's helping grace in time of need.

What is the grace of God that helps us in time of need? The Bible says in two ways: (1) First, the grace of God we experience is to acknowledge God's sovereignty. Look at Ecclesiastes 7:13 – “Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked?” The meaning of this word is that man can not fix God's work. Therefore, this is the word that refers to the absolute sovereignty of God (Park Yun-sun). It may be easy to acknowledge God's absolute sovereignty when we prosper. However, it is impossible without faith to acknowledge the absolute sovereignty of God even in times of hardship. Of course, we can acknowledge God's sovereignty by faith alone even when we are prosperous. However, I think that it is not easy to acknowledge the sovereignty of God when we are in trouble. Of course, we can ask this question: 'If God loves us, why doesn't God only gives us prosperity and not hardship?' It is a sovereign work of God that can not be understood by our intellect. What is God's will? Look at Ecclesiastes 7:14 – “When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future.” In His sovereignty, the reason God allows us to have not only good times but also bad times are so that we cannot discover anything about our future. This is beneficial to us because we believe in God alone (Park Yun-sun). The message that God is giving us is wisdom recognizes the absolute sovereignty of God in times of prosperity and trouble. Therefore, a wise man lives by faith in acknowledging his sovereignty when he is prosperous or when he is in trouble. (2) Second, the grace of God we experience in time of need through wisdom is that it makes us to be happy when times are good and to consider when times are bad. Look at Ecclesiastes 7:14 again: “When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider ...” A wise man knows that God gives both prosperity and hardship in our lives. The wise man does not rejoice only when he is prosperous. Rather, he enjoys God's grace in his suffering. What is that grace? The grace is wisdom makes us see what we have not seen until this time of trouble. What is it that wisdom makes us see when we are suffering and enjoy the grace of God? (Park Yun-sun) (1) First, it is the fact that we are sinners. In other words, wisdom makes us humble before God by seeing our sins when we are in trouble. How blessed is this? It is a great blessing to realize that we are sinners before God. The reason is that when we realize this, we can realize the greatness of the grace of Jesus Christ. If we can realize this grace when we are suffering, then the suffering that we go through is blessing. Wisdom is beneficial because wisdom helps us to realize this. (2) Second, another grace that wisdom gives us when we are in trouble is that it helps us to see other people. When we are doing well we tend to not look around us and even ignore other people around us. But when we are suffering, then we start to look at them. Before we use to ignore them but now we show some concern about them. (3) Third, grace that wisdom gives us when we are in trouble is it enables us to see God's judgment. Who will think of God's judgment when all is well and prosperous? But when we are in trouble, we meet a just God who judges sin. Therefore, we also have awe toward God. This is the grace God gives us when we are in trouble. (4) Lastly, grace that wisdom gives us when we are in trouble is it makes us look forward to dwelling with the Lord forever. Since the wisdom not only makes us eager for eternity, but also gives us eternal values, it makes us more and more eager for God's eternal kingdom, especially in times of trouble. And wisdom makes us to hope for eternal the kingdom where we will live with the Lord forever. This is the grace that God gives to us when we are in trouble or afflicted. This is the advantages of wisdom. This is the beauty of wisdom.

Wisdom is beautiful. In other words, wisdom is good for us. The reason is because wisdom gives us eternal values. Also, wisdom is beneficial because it protects us. Moreover, wisdom is beneficial because it helps us to experience God's grace in time of need. So this is what Proverbs 4:7 says: “Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.” So let us ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, for wisdom (Jam. 1:5). Therefore, I hope and pray that we all be able to experience the beauty of wisdom.

The beginning of wisdom

[Ecclesiastes 7:15-18]

In this Morning Prayer, based on 2 Chronicles 9:7, I mediated about on blessed homes, blessed churches, and blessed nations. This is what 2 Chronicles 9:7 says: “How happy your men must be! How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom!” As I meditated on this Word, I came to think of how blessed it is to meet a wise leader. The reason is because Israel was blessed because they had the wise king Solomon. Because the king of Solomon wisely made the nation of Israel strong, because he did righteousness with the justice (v. 8), the people of that country were a blessed people as the queen of Sheba had spoken. To be a blessed family, the husband/the father, who is the head of a family, must be wise. To make our company a blessed company, the president of the company must be wise. In order for our church to be a blessed church, the pastor must be wise. To be a blessed nation our president must be wise. So we prayed for the leaders at the Morning Prayer today. We prayed that God would give wisdom to our family leaders, company leaders, church leaders, and country leaders.

We have been meditating on the seventh chapter of Ecclesiastes every Wednesday night prayer meeting. Verses 1 to 4 are ‘The Heart of Wisdom’, verses 5-7 are ‘Repentance of Wisdom’, verses 8-10 are ‘Service of Wisdom’, and verses 11-14 are “Beauty of Wisdom”. In the midst of that, in today's Ecclesiastes 7:18, King Solomon speaks of those who fear God. As I meditate on this passage, I am reminded of Proverbs 1: 7: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but a fool despises wisdom and discipline.” So with the title “The beginning of wisdom”, I would like to think about how those who has the beginning of wisdom and fear God act.

Look at Ecclesiastes 7:18 – “It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. The man who fears God will avoid all extremes.” King Solomon says that those who fear God are avoiding both extremes. I personally think that “balance” is important in Christian life. The reason is that I think that our Christians are living a unbalanced faith life. One example is that Christians like the day of their prosperity and not the day of trouble as in Ecclesiastes 7:14. Although we believe that we enjoy grace whether in the day of prosperity or the day of trouble, we do only enjoy God’s grace in the day of prosperity but not the day of trouble. What do you think? Do you enjoy the grace of God who helps you in times of trouble? Do you experience God’s grace when you are in trouble, something you didn’t see when you were prosperous? Do you see that when we are afflicted we see ourselves as sinners and that we see others around us that we have not seen in our triumphs, that we see the just God who judges sin and that we will live with the Lord forever? I feel more and more urgent that we need a balance in our faith life when we see that God not only gives us the day of prosperity, but also they day of afflictions. We need not only the day of prosperity, but also the day of trouble. God has made both of these days in our faith so that we can live by faith in God alone since we can not count our future things and know them (v. 14). Therefore, we should not have only prosperity. We need suffering. But nowadays we Christians seem to know the blessings of prosperity, but they do not seem to know the blessings of suffering. This is a life of faith that has lost balance.

What we do not understand is not only the future (v. 14). We also do not understand why the righteous should suffer and the wicked to prosper. In other words, not only did God make us not to understand why there is the day of prosperity and the day of trouble, but also why God in his sovereignty the righteous suffers and the wicked prospers. Look at Ecclesiastes 7:15 – “In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: a righteous man perishing in his righteousness, and a wicked man living long in his wickedness.” King Solomon says that he does not understand why the righteous perish and the wicked live long. Do you understand? Shouldn’t the righteous who believe in Jesus enjoy the blessings of long life? How can the wicked enjoy the blessing of long life? It is a sovereign work of God that can not understood with our understanding. Therefore, we can only admit God's absolute sovereignty. And we have no choice but to walk by faith in the sovereign God. We are bound to only obey God’s Word. One of the words of God is to avoid the both extreme. Those who live a balanced life of faith and are wise and fear God will avoid both extreme. What does King Solomon's talking about here refer to? It refers to “the one” and “the other” (v. 18), which means not to be too righteous and too wicked. In other words, the Bible says that those who have the beginning of wisdom, those who fear God avoid being overly righteous and overly wicked.

First, King Solomon encourages us not to be overrighteous.

The "righteous" that we speak here refers not to the righteous who are justified by faith in Jesus Christ, but to the hypocrites who claim themselves as righteous (Park, Yun-sun). Who are thy hypocrites? They are like the Pharisees, who obey God's law and seek salvation. In other words, the hypocrites are those who seek to be saved by their own good deeds. The hypocrites are those who seek to gain the righteousness of God through their own efforts and merits, rather than the righteousness of God being imputed to them. Their righteousness is to acknowledge their efforts and merit, and to uplift themselves on their own. In the end, this righteousness can only make them proud. Eventually, the hypocrites considered themselves wise. But their wisdom was never wisdom from above (Jam. 1:15). How can we know this? The wisdom that comes down from above is meekness, that is, humility, and the hypocrites have proud that elevate themselves. So this is what King Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 7:16: "Do not be overrighteous, neither be overwise-- why destroy yourself?" This word reminded me Proverbs 16:18 – "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall." We must not be too righteous to avoid being defeated.

Second, King Solomon encourages us not to be overwicked.

Look at Ecclesiastes 7:17 – "Do not be overwicked, and do not be a fool-- why die before your time?" This doesn't mean that it is okay to be a certain wicked person. Rather, it is a warning word that warns of extreme evil. That's why King Solomon is exhorting us not to be too wicked. Then how can we become overwicked? That is, we are not fearing God, but are disobedient to the Word of God. A fool who pursues extreme evil disobeys the Word of God because he believes there is no God. For example, the extreme wicked are very foolish. And the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure (v. 4). Also, the heart of fools is dominated by covetousness and likes bribes (v. 7). The foolish people is arrogant (v. 8), and quickly provoke in his spirit (v. 9). What can we hope for from these people? What does the Bible say about this extreme wicked people? King Solomon says that the extreme wicked die before the due date (v. 17). However, somehow this verse 17 seems to be somewhat contrary to the words of the second half of verse 15. King Solomon said that in the second half of verse 15 there was a wicked man who lived for a long time. But in verse 17, he said that the wicked can die before the due date. How should we interpret these two words? Look at Ecclesiastes 8: 12-13: "Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God. Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow." Although we may think that the wicked men live long in their wickedness (7:15), the Bible clearly says that it will not go well with the wicked and their days will not lengthen (8:13). The reason is because the wicked do not fear God. The Bible clearly says that those who do not fear God do not live long.

Those who fear God do not live extreme lives. In other words, the wise men who fear God do not live both extreme, that is overrighteous or overwicked (vv. 16, 17). Those who fear God with the root of wisdom are neither overrighteous nor overwicked. The reason is that those who fear God who has the beginning of wisdom know that being overrighteous is self-defeating, and that being overwicked will die before the due date. Rather, they are free from all of this and have a balanced life of faith. The balanced life of faith is justified by faith in Jesus Christ, so they live only by faith and live a life of hating evil. The reason they hate evil is because they fear God (Prov. 8:13). And because they fear God, they love righteousness. Therefore, those who fear God with the beginning of wisdom hate injustice, love righteousness, and walk on the path of righteousness. And those who fear God will not turn to the left or right. I hope and pray that we all have the beginning of wisdom and fear God.

Wisdom that strengthens a wise man

[Ecclesiastes 7:19-22]

I am experiencing the agony of my elderly people around me these days, and I realize that our destiny in this earth is death as Ecclesiastes 7:2 says. And I am taking this truth in my heart. As we get older, I see that our body, the tent of our flesh, cannot but become increasingly weaker. And as our body becomes weaker and weaker, we are exposed to many different illnesses and thus suffer. As the body weakens, the immune system is less able to take illnesses, and I think that if our souls are not strong enough, they will easily fall into temptations and commit sins against God. So we need spiritual power. Then what should we do to get this spiritual power? We must pray to God. I think this prayer that we give to God should be a Word-centered prayer. So perhaps someone is saying that spiritual power is the power of prayer. We must pray hard when we pray. I have personally heard a few years ago that an elderly person told me that I am lacking in spiritual power as a young pastor. Then I did not know how to react because I did not know what spiritual power means. However, when I see myself, I feel that I am lacking not only spiritual power but also intellect, ability, practicality, physical strength, etc. That's why sometimes I feel very helpless. What should I do? I feel the necessity of strengthening my weaknesses such as spiritual power, intelligence, ability, practice, power. How can I strengthen it? How can I especially strengthen my spiritual power?

In Ecclesiastes 7:19, King Solomon says: "Wisdom makes one wise man more powerful than ten rulers in a city." What does it mean? This means that wisdom is more powerful to a wise man than ten rulers who rule a city. In a word, wisdom makes the wise man strong. How does wisdom make the wise strong? There are three things we want to learn from the text today.

First, wisdom makes the wise man strong by teaching him that there is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.

Look at Ecclesiastes 7:20 – "There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins." King Solomon says that there is no righteous man who does good in this world and does not commit sin. What does it mean? It means that there is no one in the world who will earn righteousness by doing good works. In other words, no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by observing the law (Rom. 3:20). So Apostle Paul said in Romans 3:10, "There is no one righteous, not even one." Wisdom makes the wise man strong by letting him know that there is no one in this world who will be saved by good deeds. How does wisdom make the wise man strong? Wisdom makes him wise by making the wise man to look to the God of salvation. Wisdom teaches us that there is no righteous man who does good in this world and does not commit sin, and that there is no one in this world who is worthy of salvation through human good deeds. By doing so, wisdom makes us look to the God and makes us strong. Therefore, we must desire this wisdom that makes us strong. We should desire this wisdom more than gold treasures. We, who are already justified through faith in Jesus Christ, can be strengthened by wisdom that makes us to realize that we are justified by God's whole grace. In a word, wisdom that makes us strong is the power of grace. Wisdom makes us strong by the power of grace.

Second, wisdom makes the wise man strong by giving a discerning ear.

Look at Ecclesiastes 7:21 – "Do not pay attention to every word people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you." I personally think that the ear that listens to someone else's words is very precious. This is because the ears that listen to others are not so common. It is one of the most precious comforts to listen to the words of people who are going through their own difficulties and hardships in their lives. Of course, I don't think this is an easy task. The reason is because we have to control ourselves to listen to others. And as Apostle James said in James 1:19, we have to devote ourselves to be slow to speak in order to listen to others' words actively. Furthermore, we have to devote ourselves to be quick to listen what others saying (v. 19). That's why we must seek wisdom from God. Why? When God gives us wisdom, we can not only hear others humbly but also listen with discernment. A true wise man does not listen to everything unconditionally. Instead, he listens to others' sayings

with discernment. In a word, the wise man has a discerning ear. So with his discerning ears, the wise man filters what others are saying. He listens to the words that need to be listened but the rest he filters them out. If we are foolish and without such discerning ears, we will listen to everyone. Then we will hear the words of those who gossip about us and put them in our hearts. We will even hear someone cursing us (Eccle. 7:21). If we listen too carefully to all the words of everyone, then we will even hear someone cursing us. How will we feel if that happens to us? "Charles Spurgeon told his pastoral students that the minister ought to have one blind eye and one deaf ear. "You cannot stop people's tongues," he said, "and therefore the best thing to do is to stop your own ears and never mind what is spoken" (Wiersbe).

We must seek wisdom from God. We should ask God to give us a discerning ear. Therefore, we must make a distinction between what we should listen to and what we should not listen to. We should listen to only those words that we should so that they can be beneficial to us. One of the words we should hear is the rebuke of the wise (7:5-7). Look at Ecclesiastes 7:5 – "It is better to heed a wise man's rebuke than to listen to the song of fools." Who would like to hear the voice of self-reproach? But wisdom makes the wise hear the rebuke of the wise. Not only do we hear reproof, but wisdom allows us to hear God's voice. Therefore, we must seek wisdom from God. We must seek God's discerning ear. And we must rejoice in listening to the voice of the Lord by distinguishing the voice of the world from the voice of the Lord with the sensible ear that God gives us. In a word, the power that wisdom gives us is the power of the Word. Wisdom makes us strong by the word of God.

Lastly, wisdom makes the wise man strong by making him realize his sins.

Look at Ecclesiastes 7:22 – "for you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others." When wisdom makes the wise man distinguish the voice of the world from the voice of the Lord and hear the voice of the Lord, we are aware of our sin through the voice of the Lord. Although the voice of the world causes us not to regard sin as sin and continues to commit the same sin, the voice of God makes us regard sin as sin. For example, King Solomon, in today's verse 22, says that wisdom makes wise men view sin as a sin and that is sin of our hearts. And the sins of the heart are that we curse others with our hearts (v.22). If we listen to others without discretion, we can hear curses. Furthermore, if we are not discernible, we may not be able to hear the sound of the heart that curses others in our hearts. Wisdom, however, makes the sound of this heart so powerful that it allows the wise man to hear. How does wisdom make a wise man strong? This wisdom makes the wise able to know the incompetence of the sins of the wise, and at the same time makes the wise to rely on the blood of the cross of Jesus who forgives sins. In other words, true wisdom not only makes the wise man realize the sins of the heart, but also makes him enjoy the freedom of sin by faith in Jesus, who died in the place of the cross, the tree of curse. Don't you want to enjoy freedom from sin? Wisdom strengthens the wise man by helping him to enjoy freedom from sin. Wisdom makes the wise man strong because it reassures and experiences the power of the blood of Jesus Christ. In a word, the power that wisdom gives us is the power of blood. Wisdom empowers us with the shed blood of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Wisdom makes the wise strong. Wisdom makes us strong. How does wisdom make us strong? Wisdom teaches us that there is no righteous man who does not commit sin in this world, so that we can only believe in Jesus Christ, who has done good in this world and has not sinned. As a result, wisdom makes us strong by the power of grace. And wisdom makes us grateful in our hearts because we are made capable of the power of grace. In addition, wisdom gives us a discernible ear and makes us strong. Wisdom makes us distinguished the voice of God from the voice of the world and the voice of the world, so that we can filter out the voice of the world, and listen to the voice of God. In other words, wisdom makes us strong by the power of the Word. And wisdom allows us to walk in the path of obedience because it makes us capable by the power of the Word. Wisdom makes us strong by making us aware of our sins. Especially wisdom makes us realize that we are guilty of cursing others with our hearts, so we look at Jesus who paid for his sins. Wisdom enables us to taste the joy of freedom by the power of the blood of Jesus Christ on the cross. I hope and pray that these blessings to be with you.

"Lord Jesus, grant grace in its fullness
Brimfull in my heart to be pour'd
Thou only my strength and my wholeness, Yes, Thou art my plenty, Lord!
(Hymns, "Heart longings")

“This only have I found”

[Ecclesiastes 7:23-29]

How are you going to resolve conflicts in human relationships? Of course, not all relationships are filled with conflict, but the relationship with one person is so conflicted that you will get a lot of stress. Especially, if the person who gives me a strain and makes me suffer is drawing out the worst things in me, what should we do? I personally avoid this person because I do not want conflict. I just do not want to talk to him, so I avoid him. If I ask whether this is God's will, my answer is 'I don't know.' I do not know if I am in a relationship now as the Lord wants me to. And yet I told my wife that if someone has made you difficult and brings out the bad spots in you, maybe God has made you realize your sin through that person. Is not that funny? I did not realize that in my own personal relationship that God is revealing my sins through the person I wanted to avoid, but rather that God might be giving that awakening to my wife. I personally realize nowadays that realizing my sin is a great blessing from God. Before I did not know that it was a great blessing to realize sin because it was so painful and depressed to feel guilty. However, when I was meditating on the Bible, there is a time when Saint Augustine's words "O Happy Sin!" continue to resonate in my mind. And God is making me realize the meaning of the word little by little in my life. From this point of view, when we consider the text of Ecclesiastes 7:23-29, we believe that enlightenment is a great blessing that God gives us.

As we look at today's Ecclesiastes 7: 23-29, we can see that King Solomon used the words "I discovered" (v. 26), "I have discovered" (v. 27) and "I have found" (v.29). When I think of these words, I ask the question, "What did King Solomon discover or find? I have summed up what King Solomon found in four ways:

First, King Solomon found that he could not become a wise man by himself.

Look at Ecclesiastes 7:23: "I tested all this with wisdom, and I said, "I will be wise," but it was far from me." As we know, King Solomon was a wise king. The Bible Chronicles 9:22 says that the wisdom of King Solomon is greater than all the kings of the earth. And in Ecclesiastes 1:16, King Solomon himself had a great deal of wisdom and knew that his wisdom was better than those who were in Jerusalem before him. Nevertheless King Solomon tried hard to be a wiser man. Look at Ecclesiastes 1:17: "And I set my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly; I realized that this also is striving after wind." What I do not understand is that King Solomon realized that what he wanted to know wisdom was to catch the wind in Ecclesiastes 1:17, but in Ecclesiastes 7:23 he tried to be more wise by testing "all this with wisdom". And his conclusion was that wisdom was far from him. King Solomon made a lot of effort to come to wisdom, but in the end, he concluded that he could not become a wise man by himself.

What do we need to realize here? We can not be wise by ourselves, but only God can make us wise. In other words, we must realize that God has to give us wisdom so that we can become wise. Did King Solomon become self-wise by himself? No. After King Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on the altar to the Lord (1 Chron. 1:6), God appeared to King Solomon at night and asked, "What will I give you?" (v. 7). Then King Solomon asked God for wisdom and knowledge" (v. 10). God must give us wisdom. What we can do is to seek wisdom from God like King Solomon. We must seek by faith in God, who freely gives wisdom to all men and does not rebuke them (Jam. 1: 5).

Second, King Solomon found that wisdom could not be discovered.

Look at Ecclesiastes 7:24 – "What has been is remote and exceedingly mysterious Who can discover it?" Here, the word 'discover' in Greek means 'examine' or 'search' (Internet). King Solomon struggled to find the wisdom in the depths of human society, but he was sad that he eventually found it difficult to understand (Park Yun-sun). If we apply this statement to us, if God does not give us wisdom, then even if we try to seek wisdom our efforts are of no use so we groan. How can we, being unable to be wise by our own efforts, can discover wisdom?

What do we need to realize here? If the Spirit of God allows us to discover wisdom, then we can find wisdom. So the apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:10: "For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God." Isn't it strange that the Holy Spirit, who is God, searching even the depths of God? Why then does Paul say that the Holy Spirit is searching for the depths of God? The reason is that Paul wrote this letter from our perspective rather than God's perspective. In other words, because the Holy Spirit is God, the Spirit does not need to search the depths of God, but the Spirit needs to work in us, those who believe in Jesus, to search the depths of God. That's right. Even at this time, the Holy Spirit who dwells in us is enabling us to find the Word of God and also to understand it. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit is making us obedient to the will of God by making us to know His will. "In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (Rom. 8:26). The Holy Spirit intercedes for us according to the will of God (v. 27). We must understand this truth and we must live under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Third, King Solomon found that only God can solve all the problems of life.

King Solomon, a wise man, struggled to be wiser to solve his life problems. Look at Ecclesiastes 7:25 – "I directed my mind to know, to investigate and to seek wisdom and an explanation, and to know the evil of folly and the foolishness of madness." What did he realize as he struggled to become wiser in himself? It is the fact that there is no solution in us for all of our life problems. Why don't we have a solution to every problem in life? This is because our minds are like snares and nets. Look at Ecclesiastes 7:26 – "And I discovered more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are chains. One who is pleasing to God will escape from her, but the sinner will be captured by her." What does it mean that our hearts are like snares and nets? It means that our hearts are bitter than death and easy to fall into the trappings of a woman whose hands are chains. So when we look at the book of Proverbs, we see that the wise man exhort us not to lean to the way of the adulteress (Prov. 2: 16-19, 5: 1-14, 6: 24-29, 7: 1-27) (MacArthur). In particular, in Proverbs 7:1-27, the wise man says that if we get closer to wisdom, it will keep us from the adulteress who flatters with her words (v. 5). But a foolish man follows her as an ox goes to the slaughter or as one in fetters to the discipline of a fool (v. 22). It is as if a bird hastens to the snare and does not know that it will cost him his life (v. 23). It was the folly of man that King Solomon eventually realized that he intended to obtain more wisdom by himself. And he realized that the folly of human beings sucks into the temptation of this world, and eventually loses life by snares and nets. However, King Solomon realized that a wise man who obeys the Word of God and pleases God does not fall into the temptations of this world and avoids the snares and nets.

What King Solomon realized that in the midst of this enlightenment was indeed only God can solve all the problems of life (Park, Yun-sun). What do you think? Do you believe that only God has the solution to all the problems of life? Or do you still believe that the solution to the problem is within you? If you still believe that there is a solution to the problem of life in you, you will fall into your own snares and nets and be living as slaves of sin. But if you believe that only God can solve the problem of life, then you will be living free from snares and nets and free from sin.

Fourth, King Solomon found that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices.

Look at Ecclesiastes 7:29 – "'Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices.'" King Solomon, who found that only God can solve all the problems of life, is groaned by the fact that it is not easy for one to realize the wisdom of God in solving life problems: "'Behold, I have discovered this," says the Preacher, "adding one thing to another to find an explanation, which I am still seeking but have not found. I have found one man among a thousand, but I have not found a woman among all these" (vv. 27-28). What King Solomon says is there are not many who realize God's wisdom in solving problems in our lives, especially among the women. How can we understand God's wisdom? How can we understand the wisdom of God in solving all the problems of our lives? Like King Solomon, why can't we find God's wisdom even though we seek it desperately? Why did it become hard for us to understand God's truth? What causes it? The cause is not in God but in us (Park, Yun-sun). In other words, it is difficult for us to realize the truth of God because we are not upright. As Solomon said in verse 29, God has made men upright, but we have sought out many devices. That's why we cannot understand God's wisdom in solving our life problems. After all, we have fallen into our own schemes and

are disobedient to the Word of God, so we can not understand God's wisdom and truth.

Because God loves such sinners like us, he made Jesus and His only begotten Son to be crucified to death, so He created us upright. And he made us to understand God's wisdom by making us to believe in the Truth, Jesus Christ and to obey His words. Therefore, we are now enjoying the blessing of praying for God's wisdom and obeying the Word of God by faith. What is the wisdom of God that you are aware of in your lives these days?

We must realize that we can not become wise by ourselves. Also, we must realize that we can not discover wisdom. We must realize that we cannot solve the problems of our lives, but only God can. And we must realize that God has made men upright, but that they have sought out many devices. This understanding comes from God. God has made us to realize that Jesus Christ is the true wisdom. Therefore, we must obey Jesus, who is true wisdom in the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit. In obedience, we must enjoy the grace of understanding the wisdom of God in solving all the problems of life. Even though our understanding may not be enough, we must move forward by believing in Jesus Christ even in that little understanding.

The wisdom of man

[Ecclesiastes 8:1-8]

In Korean proverbs, there is a saying that 'you dig your own grave' which means that you put yourself in the corner. I often remembered this Korean proverb after I meditated on Ecclesiastes 7:23-29 during the last Wednesday night prayer meeting. Perhaps it is because of King Solomon said that our hearts are like snares and nets (v. 26). If we have God's wisdom and live in obedience to the Word of God, then we will not dig our own graves by snares and nets. But if we are foolish, we will disobey God's Word and eventually we will find ourselves digging our own graves. But somehow, it seems that we Christians are digging our own graves. In other words, I think that we have many foolish aspects. So we often think that in our folly, we often disobey God's Word and eventually fall into snares and nets in our own lives to suffer tribulation and suffering. That's what I do a lot of time. I often see cases where I am foolish and cannot abstain my thoughts and lips and put myself to the corner. And when I am at the corner, no matter how I regret later because what I said to another person it's too late because the words that I already said cannot be picked up again like spilled water. The typical case is that I did not know that a word that I threw to an elder of a church at the presbytery in last March made me to be in a bit of trouble. Of course, I can say enough about what it would be like when others see it, but it was very stressful when I was in a corner like that. Even now, there is a time when I am still in the midst of my troubles as I look back what I said to that elder. How about you? Have you ever been so foolish like me where you put yourself into a corner?

So I would like to think about a man's wisdom today, centered on the text Ecclesiastes 8:1-8. I would like to think of two: (1) First, what is the wisdom of man, and (2) second, what are the benefits of man's wisdom.

First, what is the wisdom of man? In short, the wisdom of man is obedience to the word of God.

Look at Ecclesiastes 8:2 – "I say, 'Keep the command of the king because of the oath before God.'" Here, the word "the king" refers not to the king of this world but to the King of heaven, God. The Teacher King Solomon is exhorting the people of Israel to obey the command of God, the king of heaven. Why? The reason is that the people of Israel swore that they were his people before God (v. 2) (Park Yun-sun). We must obey God's word. That is our wisdom. First of all, we must humbly acknowledge that God is God. What does it mean by God is God? Look at verses 3b-4: "... Do not join in an evil matter, for he will do whatever he pleases. Since the word of the king is authoritative, who will say to him, 'What are you doing?'" What does it mean? It means that God is the sovereign. The sovereign God is doing everything that he wishes to do. Look at Romans 9: 20-21: "On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?" What must we do? How should we respond to our sovereign God? We must not say to our God 'What are you doing?' We creatures are not to question the sovereignty of the Creator God. All we have to do is humble obedience to the powerful Word of God. In other words, we must obey God's authoritative word (Eccle. 8:4). This is the wisdom of man. A truly wise man acknowledges God's sovereignty and humbly obeys God's sovereign word. In other words, the wise man obeys the command of the sovereign God. But a fool, who is against the sovereign will of God, disobeys the Word of God. And a foolish man sinned against God by doing evil (v. 3). King Solomon tells us not to be such a fool. Rather, he is exhorting us to be wise. Why does King Wisdom Solomon exhort us to be wise? The reason is because the wisdom of man has the benefit to us.

Second, what are the benefits of the man wisdom to us? King Solomon teaches us two benefits of the man's wisdom:

(1) The man's wisdom helps us not to go through trouble.

Look at Ecclesiastes 8:5 – “He who keeps a royal command experiences no trouble, for a wise heart knows the proper time and procedure.” What a precious lesson for us? If we have wisdom, we will experience no trouble. This means that if we are fools, then we will experience trouble. Who is a fool? He who is not obedient to God's Word is the fool. And fools are experiencing trouble because they do not obey God's Word. But the Bible says that a wise man who obeys the Word of God does not experience trouble. How does wisdom keep us from trouble? Wisdom keeps us from trouble by knowing the proper time and procedure (v. 5b). For example, wisdom gives us biblical discernment at what time it is now. What time is it now? The Bible says that it is the end time. Also, the Bible says it is the time to be saved. Wisdom also gives us good judgment. The Bible says that we do not know what will happen (v. 7). Also the Bible says that we have no authority over the day of death (v. 8) and so on. This is the fact that our judgment is that we are incompetent, and God is omnipotent and dominates all these things. Wisdom gives us this judgment. In this judgment, we can think of why God did not let us know the future. The purpose is so that “man will not discover anything that will be after him” (7:14). In short, the purpose is for us to fully dependent on God. Therefore, we can not know what will happen to us tomorrow, the day after and the future. What we can know is that there will be the day of prosperity and the day of adversity (v. 14). Wisdom gives us right judgment about these unknown future events. For example, wisdom makes us happy in the day of prosperity but in the day of adversity consider (v. 14).

(2) The man's wisdom makes our face to beam.

Look at Ecclesiastes 8:1 – “Who is like the wise man and who knows the interpretation of a matter? A man's wisdom illumines him and causes his stern face to beam.” King Solomon says that the man's wisdom illumines him and causes his stern face to beam. It is not a good example when we make our faces furious. What do you think when non-believers see our angry face? I think President Lincoln said that when a man reaches age 40, he must take responsibility for his face. Now I am over 40's so I must be responsible for my face. But I cannot help asking whether there is a stern side in my face. Did we and our faces change a little after we believed in Jesus? Even though our faces do not beam, did the stern side of our faces disappear? Indeed, wise Christians have changed the sternness of their faces, but their faces are radiant. In other words, the face of a truly wise person is filled with peace (Park Yun-sun). Therefore, a true wise man is full of true peace on his face, like Stephen, who truly knew and obeyed the will of God and who face was radiant when he was dying. This wisdom benefits those who obey the Word of God.

The true wisdom is obedience to the word of God. When we obey God's Word, wisdom will make us not to go through trouble. Furthermore, the wisdom will changes our face and makes our face to beam. I hope and pray that these blessings to be with you and me.

‘Everything that has been done under the sun’

[Ecclesiastes 8:9-13]

What are you seeing and feeling as you live in this world day by day? And what do you say when you think about what you see and feel? I personally can not but agree with Psalm 90:10 that one of the things I see and feel is indeed the burden and sorrow of this world. I also fully agree with the one of the Korean hymn saying, ‘There are many sorrows in this world.’ I am totally agreeable with the hymn saying that the world is filled with sorrows, hardships, and sins, and death, because it is what I see and hear and feel as I live. So, I have concluded that while I live in this world that is like a wilderness, there is nothing but the Lord who I can look to and depend on. Therefore, I have the heart that I should make the Lord my hope and prepare to live for the world to come. What kind of mind do you live with? As you live in this world, what conclusions do you make when you think deeply about what you see, hear and feel?

As we look at Ecclesiastes 8: 9, we can see a glimpse of King Solomon looking at everything he does under the sun with all his heart. We see King Solomon making his own conclusions about the things he has wrought in God's wisdom. The conclusion is, in one word, that those who fear God will do well.

Look at Ecclesiastes 8:12 – “Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and may lengthen his life, still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly.” King Solomon looks after all the things that are done under the sun with all his heart (v. 9). His conclusion is that the wicked are not good (v. 13) but those who fear God will be well (v. 12). Look at verse 13: “But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God.” King Solomon clearly states that it will not be well for the evil man. The Bible says that even though the sinner does evil a hundred times and may lengthen his life (v. 12), it will not be well for him and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow (v. 13). Why is that? The reason is that the sinner does not fear God (v. 13). The sinner who does not fear God is bold to do evil because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly (v. 11). His heart is given fully to do evil (v. 11). What is the point? The punishment is not carried out so quickly that the heart of the sinner is bold to do evil. If God's punishment comes quickly when we are not repenting after sin, then we will not speed up sinning in fear. But God is waiting for us to repent and return because he is slow in anger and longsuffering. So since God doesn't punish us quickly, we commit sins boldly.

In today's text, the evil wicked man who was able to do the evil that King Solomon had spoken of is the evil king who rules his people (Park, Yun-sun). How can we know this? When you look at the second half of verse 9, you can see from King Solomon's whole heart that he looked at everything that he did under the sun, that he saw a man has exercised authority over others to his own hurt. Here, “a man” who has exercised authority over “others” refers to the king who ruled the people of a nation. King Solomon saw that this king was hurting himself by ruling the people. Why is that? Look at verse 10: “Then too, I saw the wicked buried--those who used to come and go from the holy place and receive praise in the city where they did this. This too is meaningless.” The reason is that the evil king himself will also die (Park Yun-sun). And he will also be forgotten among the ruling people, so King Solomon is saying, “This too is meaningless.”

How shall we live? Look at 3 John 1:2: “Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.” How can we receive this blessing? How can our soul prosper? King Solomon teaches us the secret in Ecclesiastes 8: 12-13: “Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men, who are reverent before God. Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow.” The secret is to fear God. As a result of examining all the things King Solomon has done in this world, the wicked who boldly commit sin without fearing God will seem to live long, but never will live long and his life will be like a shadow. But it will be well with those who fear God. In order for our souls to be well, we must fear God. We must fear God and obey God's command in order for our souls to be well in all circumstances (12:13). I hope and pray that we all enjoy the blessings that are good in all things because we all fear God and obey God's Word.

God's punishment that is not quickly carried out

[Ecclesiastes 8:11]

King Solomon says that people are bold in doing evil because punishment is not carried out quickly. It is the Word of God that can not be disagreeable. If God's punishment comes quickly when people do wicked things, then they will hesitate to do evil again because they are afraid. But because the punishment does not come quickly, the people do evil. There is no fear while doing evil. They do evil without fear because they think that God doesn't see what they do. That's why they commit "a hundred crimes" (v. 12). The more they do evil, the bolder they become. Because of repeated sin, their hearts become harder. Because they do not fear God, they do evil with their hardened hearts.

Why then is the punishment of God slow? Look at Romans 2:4 – "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" The reason why God's punishment does not come fast when we sin is because God wants us to repent. In other words, God does not punish us immediately when we commit our sins because he wants to give us time (opportunity) to repent. But we do not think that we often appreciate God's mercy. As a result, we are testing the patience of God by sinning before God. Instead of repenting our sins, we are quickly turning to sin. "Like a dog that returns to its vomits", we do the foolish thing repeatedly (Prov. 26:11).

Those who fear God are afraid to do evil. That is because they have tasted the consequences of their own evil. That is, those who are punished by God for their sins are afraid to do evil. They never take the punishment of God lightly. Therefore, those who fear God not only sin boldly but also they cannot. The heart is softened by the punishment of God's love, so they can not boldly do evil. Those who fear God have a clear conscience. As a result, they fight against temptations and overcome sin as their conscience is stricken. They will never do evil things that are against their conscience. Since they love God and serve him with good conscience those who fear God have clear conscience before God and men. They are bold before God and not before sinning. Those who fear God hate evil. The reason is because God hates evil. And because God is holy, those who fear Him also seek God's holiness.

The incomprehensive works of God

[Ecclesiastes 8:14 – 9:1]

What are you realizing in your life these days? I am a little more aware than ever before that living in this world is 'life is short and that many things that we do during life are meaningless and vain.' In the midst of that, I meditate on Ecclesiastes every week during the Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting and the question that arose in my mind is, "Why does God let the wicked to prosper?" As we learned in the last week, the wicked are bold in sinning because God does not punish them quickly. Why doesn't God punish them quickly? Do you know the answer to this question?

As we meditated on Ecclesiastes 8:9-13, we learned the conclusion that King Solomon looked through all the things under the sun with all his heart. The conclusion was that 'those who fear God will be well.' In other words, the conclusion of King Solomon is that those who do evil without fearing God will never do well (v. 13), but only those who fear God will do well (v. 12). In the midst of this, King Solomon saw every work of God and made this conclusion: "I concluded that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover; and though the wise man should say, "I know," he cannot discover" (v. 17). King Solomon's conclusion was that he could not understand the work of God. Based on this conclusion, I would like to think of two things under the heading of "The incomprehensible works of God". I hope and pray that we receive God's instructions humbly and be obedient to him so that we may be able to live in this world wisely.

The first thing I want to think about is, "What was God's works that King Solomon could not understand?"

First, the work of God, which King Solomon could not understand, is recorded in Ecclesiastes 8:14 – "There is futility which is done on the earth, that is, there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked. On the other hand, there are evil men to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous. I say that this too is futility." King Solomon was unable to realize in this world that a righteous man was not doing well as an evil man, but that the evil man was doing well as the righteous man (Park Yun-sun). In other words, King Solomon confesses that he could not understand how it seemed like just God punished the righteous man as the evil man and that he rewarded the evil man as the righteous man (MacDonald). Do you understand? Do you know that God, who is righteous, punishes the righteous as the wicked and rewards the wicked as the righteous? I think this question is related to the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked. Last week, when I was reading the Bible, my gaze stopped in Jeremiah 12:1. The reason was that I thought only Asaph, who wrote Psalm 73, was troubled by the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked, but I found out that Prophet Jeremiah was also troubled by it. Look at Jeremiah 12:1 – "Righteous are You, O LORD, that I would plead my case with You; Indeed I would discuss matters of justice with You: Why has the way of the wicked prospered? Why are all those who deal in treachery at ease?" The prophet Jeremiah asked God about his righteousness, 'Why is the wicked prosperous and ease?' Isn't this the question we often ask God? After all, the key to our question is about God's justice: 'Why does God of justice cause the wicked to be prosperous and the righteous to suffer?'

Second, the work of God, which King Solomon could not understand, is recorded in Ecclesiastes 9:1 – "For I have taken all this to my heart and explain it that righteous men, wise men, and their deeds are in the hand of God Man does not know whether it will be love or hatred; anything awaits him." Another work of God that King of Solomon could not understand in this world is that whether what happens to the righteous or wise man is a sign of God's love or a sign of hatred (MacDonald). It is clear that all the things that the righteous and the wise do are in the hands of God. But what is unclear is that why God does not make the righteous prosper in the world physically (Park Yun-sun). And we cannot know whether it is the sign of God's love or hatred. How can we predict God's plan? How can we know God's great plan for granting suffering to the righteous? Many times we can only see the

little glimpse of God's plan only after all is done, but we can never fully realize God's grand will. No matter how much we try to understand God's will, we cannot fully understand why God doesn't make the righteous prosper in this world. We believe in saying that God allows the righteous to suffer in this world because God loves the righteous. But sometimes we wonder why God allow the righteous to suffer if he truly loves him. In such a way, not only do we doubt the love of God, but we also have the idea that God hates us. That's what the Israelites thought at the time of Exodus. Look at Deuteronomy 1:27 – "and you grumbled in your tents and said, 'Because the LORD hates us, He has brought us out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us.'" At the time of the Exodus, the Israelites blamed God. The resentment was, in one word, "God hates us" (v.27). So they said that God brought them out of the land of Egypt to put them to the hand of the Amorites, to destroy them. This doesn't make sense at all. If God hated them, why did God brought them out of Egypt? Obviously, God loves the Israelites and saved them. But the people of Israel thought that God hated them. Is the suffering that God allows us to go through is a sign of love or a sign of hate? King Solomon's conclusion is that we do not know the answer.

The second thing that I want to think about is, "What must we do when we cannot understand the works of God?"

When we can not understand what God is doing in this world, we must look at God only (8:16-17), knowing that the difficulty lies in the hand of God, rather than trying to solve what we can not understand (Park, Yun-sun). How many difficulties do we face in this world as we live? How many difficult problems are there in our life? Can we understand them? Do we understand why these problems come to our life? Do we really know God's will? King Wisdom Solomon not only tried to understand the causes of life's difficulties but also tried to solve those difficult problems. But his conclusions tell us that we should look at God only because we believe that the difficulties are in the hands of God rather than trying to solve ourselves. Although there are so many things happening in this world that we can not understand, there is truth that we must confidently believe. It is the fact that all the difficulties we face in our lives are in God's hands. Not only that, but we must believe that our future, which we can not know, is under God's hand. Although no one knows what we will happen in the future, we must believe that God knows all our future as well. And what we must believe is that through the difficulties in our lives, God fulfills his sovereign will. And we must believe that God will supervise our future according to His will. When we believe in the Lord's control, we will be able to overcome by faith even though there is suffering and adversity before us.

What should we do when we can not understand what God is doing in this world? We must be contented and pleased with a portion we receive (Park, Yun-sun). Look at Ecclesiastes 8:15 – "So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils throughout the days of his life which God has given him under the sun." When we see countless difficulty problems that we can not understand and solve while we are living on this earth, we must believe that all things are in the hands of the Lord and enjoy day by day what God has given us as our shares. Of course, in Ecclesiastes 8:15, King Solomon is not telling us that the eating, drinking and rejoicing we receive is to live in the enjoyment of physical pleasures. We know this because he has already sought for the test of physical pleasure, but his conclusion is vanity. Here King Solomon is saying that although we can not understand what God is doing as we live in this world, we should believe that everything is in the hands of God and that we should enjoy the blessings we receive from God each day. We should listen to Ecclesiastes 2:24 – "There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God." We must realize the blessings God has given us. Each day we must count the blessings we receive from God in order to live and enjoy the blessings we receive from the Lord. We already receive every spiritual blessing from God in Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:3). We should enjoy them in the Lord. Instead of spending time and energy in solving the difficult problems we face in this unfair world, we should leave them to God and in the meantime, we should enjoy our shares that God gave us.

As I was coming to church today, I heard a bit of an interesting story from the AM 1230 radio. The interesting story was about a lotus flower that was planted around 700 years ago finally bloomed in Gyeongnam providence in South Korea for 700. I don't know how people could tell the flower was planted 700 years ago, but what I agree with Mr. Park who was speaking about the flower story was that even though our human life's span is around seventy or eighty the life span of the lotus flower is very long and it is surprising. And when I thought about God's sovereignty, God who not only rules over us but also rules over all the flowers as well, I was amazed by

God's providence in the lotus flower's blooming as well. Can we understand everything what God does in this world? If we can not even understand how the seeds of the lotus bloom after 700 years, how can we understand all the work of God who rules and manages all things in this universe? Why does it seem like God is rewarding the wicked and punish the righteous? Can we really understand what God is doing? Do we know why God has not made the righteous prosper in our world? Can we tell if that is a sign of love or a sign of hatred? So what can we do? We must believe that all the difficulties are in the hands of God rather than trying to solve what we can not. As we do so, we must be satisfied and pleased with the blessings that God has given us in our daily life. I hope and pray that we can become such wise people.

“The same destiny overtakes all”

[Ecclesiastes 9:2-6]

Have you ever heard of "Paul Syndrome"? "Paul Syndrome" is a syndrome that hit the World Cup in South Africa. It refers to the syndrome produced by the "fortune-teller octopus" named Paul. Paul who lives at the aquarium of Oberhausen Marine Biological Museum in western Germany, predicted the scores of the World Cup match and they were 100% right. Paul predicted 100% right for the German soccer team for 8 games total including the championship (Internet). I also saw the news about this octopus on TV and the Internet, but I thought it was ridiculous. The reason for this was not only the octopus but also other animals that are called the fortune teller and the star astrologer. It was funny that in the betting business, there are also some businesses that have made a lot of money because of this fortune teller octopus Paul. After winning the finals, I saw the Spanish player on the TV saying "Long live Paul". I just laughed.

Why do you think people see fortune-tellers? Isn't it because they want to know the future? But the Bible speaks clearly that we can not comprehend the future (Eccl. 7:14; 8:7). Only God, who controls the past, present, and future, knows all about our future. But there is one thing you and I know clearly about our future. What is that? It is the fact that all of us will die ultimately. And no one will deny that the end of man is death. But what we do not know is that people will react differently to this definite future that we all know. How do you respond to your eventual death?

When we look at Ecclesiastes 9: 2-3, King Solomon, says four times, 'There is one fate.' What is he saying 'There is one fate' over and over again? It is death that is the end of all of us. In other words, King Solomon says that the end of all of us is death. Look at Ecclesiastes 9:2 – "It is the same for all There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean and for the unclean; for the man who offers a sacrifice and for the one who does not sacrifice. As the good man is, so is the sinner; as the swearer is, so is the one who is afraid to swear." King Solomon tells us that the righteous and the wicked, the good and the sinful, the good and the clean, the unclean, the man who offers the sacrifice and the one who does not, all die in the end. There will be no one in this world who will deny this truth. Everyone knows that our end in this earth is death. Whether we are Christians or non-Christians, we all agree that death is our end in this world. But there are things that we Christians do not agree with non-Christians. It is what happens after death. In other words, Christians and non-Christians agree that death is the end in this Age, but they differ concerning the The Coming Age. We Christians believe in the life in the Coming Age after the death. In other words, we believe in eternal life. But the non-Christians do not believe in the life of the Coming Age. They do not believe in eternal life. They do not believe the Bible's teaching about heaven and hell. This is the difference between Christians and non-Christians.

What must we do? Unlike non-Christians, we who believe in the Coming Age, what must we do? We should listen to the words of Ecclesiastes 7:2 – "It is better to go to a house of mourning Than to go to a house of feasting, Because that is the end of every man, And the living takes it to heart." We should take this truth to our hearts that everyone's end is dead in this earth. As we do so, we must live the rest of our lives with death perspective. How should we live in this world with death perspective? I would like to think of 2 things based on Ecclesiastes 9:2-6.

First, we must live in repentance of our sins that are in our hearts with a view of death.

Look at Ecclesiastes 9:3 – "This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead." Since there is not much difference regarding the consequences of what the righteous men or the wicked men face in this earth, those who belong to this world, the wicked, take this as an opportunity to commit sins all the days of their lives(Park Yun-sun). For example, when the wicked perceive the righteous who believe in Jesus as suffering as they do, the wicked commit sins because they perceive that there is no

distinction between believing in Jesus and not believing, And the reason why the wicked sin is more and more boldly guilty is because the punishment of God is not carried out quickly on the evil things that he does (8:11). Therefore, the wicked not only will not but also cannot repent of their sins even before death. Rather, in front of death they are bold to commit sin.

How would you respond if you knew that your death was imminent? For example, how would you respond if your doctor told you that you can only live six months or a year? I think there can be at least two reactions: (1) Trying to do whatever I want to do within the days to live, or (2) Looking back at myself in front of death and repent my sins that I committed against God. And I think that the first of two reactions is likely to be more reactive than the second one. The reason is that those who do not believe in Jesus can never look back on themselves before death and give true repentance to God. So if we include these non-believers as well as believers who want to do what they want to do in front of death, like non-repentant and non-believers, the first response seems to be more than the second. The biblical basis is that when we see the Israelites at the time of the Old Testament exodus, we can see how they were so stubborn, the stiff-necked and refusing to repent, so that they were in the wrath of God. I think we are no different from them. Even before death we are slow to realize our sins and repent. My personal thoughts are that there are more people who try to live their lives as they would like to do instead of repenting their sins before their death. If we live our life like this even before our death, then "there is madness in their(our) hearts while they(we) live, and afterward they(we) join the dead" (9:3). We must not die this way. Instead, we must repent our sins that are filled in our hearts before we die.

When I thought about death, I thought about what Pastor Warren Wiersbe said. He said that death is like "X-ray power of death" (Wiersbe). This means that death is like an X-ray that lets us see things in our minds, just as we do X-rays when we go to the hospital and do health checks. So, just as the X-ray shows what is in us, death gives us the opportunity to repent before God by bringing out the full sins that are in our hearts. In other words, God uses the means of death to make us the holy people of God by making us to repent our sins. Therefore, when we live in this world, we must live in repentance of the sins filled in our minds with a view of death. We must live our remaining lives by laying down our sins that are in our hearts before the cross by connecting our death to the death of Jesus on the cross. We must diligently lay down our sins before His cross. As we rely on the power of the blood of Jesus that was shed on the cross, we must lay down all our sins in front of the cross. Even though we have been sentenced to death, we must live the rest of our lives on this earth as we repent of the iniquities in our hearts. In doing so, we will be able to receive death worthy of God's sight as God's holy people.

Lastly, we must live with hope in our hearts with a view of death.

Look at Ecclesiastes 9:4 – "Anyone who is among the living has hope --even a live dog is better off than a dead lion!" What do you think about the word "a live dog is better off than a dead lion"? For the Jews, "dog" was the most despicable animal (Walvoord). And as we know, the lion is king in animal kingdom. Nevertheless King Solomon is saying that a living dog is better than a dead lion. What does it mean? It means living is better than dead. Why is living better than death? The reason is that once a person dies, there is no chance to live right again, but to those who is still alive, they have opportunity to repent and hope to be right before God (Park Yun-sun). Therefore, the living dog is better than the dead lion. Therefore, we who are alive are better than those who are already dead, no matter how famous they were, no matter how wealthy and powerful they were.

How shall we live today? We must live to know that we are going to die. Look at Ecclesiastes 9:5 – "For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten." As King Solomon is saying here, the dead do not know anything. To the dead, there is neither love nor hate nor envy (v. 6). Since they are already dead, "never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun" (v. 6). In a word, there is no hope for the dead. The dead do not have the understanding to look at the reward and act (Park, Yun-sun). The dead have no hope, and their names have been wiped out. But the living has hope. What kind of hope do the livings have? Since they know they will die, they have hope of awakening and to live with a new determination and resolution (Park Yun-sun). Do we have such hope? Do we know that we will die? And knowing that we will die, do we live with a new determination and resolution? We must repent when we have the opportunity to repent. There is not always an opportunity to repent. Knowing that we will someday die, we must turn away from sin when we are still living. And we must walk the right way in the right relationship with God. Never miss God's opportunity for repentance, and do not regret it too late. Let's not try to repent when it is too late to do so and we regret it. That is useless. After we die, we can not repent or regret. The

opportunity to repent is now.

The same destiny overtakes all of us. Whether we are righteous or the wicked, all of our end is death is this earth. Knowing this, how shall we live in this world for a given time? We must live to repent of our sins that are filled in our hearts. We have to live in repentance, dependent on the power of the blood of Jesus on the cross each day before our holy God, with a view of death while we ponder the death that functions like an X-ray that shows things in our hearts. We also have to live with hope in the mind with a view of death. We are the ones who have the hope in the Lord to determine to live a new life. In this hope, we must walk in the right path of the Lord with new resolution, repenting as the living ones. When we walk in the path of the Lord, we have hope in the future. Let us remember that the living dog is better than the dead lion.

“God has already approved your works”

[Ecclesiastes 9:7-10]

What kind of pleasure do you have these days? What joy are you having as you live day by day? Even though we are living in a world where there are a lot of sadness, the Bible says “Rejoice always”(1 Thess. 5:16). Are we rejoicing always? What should we do to rejoice always? We must obey the commandments of God. In other words, we can rejoice always when we live in obedience to the Word of God. And when we live in obedience to the Word of God, God will be pleased with us.

When we look at Ecclesiastes 9:7, this is what King Solomon says: “Go then, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works.” I asked the question, “Whom does God approve?” The answer is those who live according to the Word of God (Park Yun-sun). And those who live according to the word of God live happily. I want to think about how those who are pleased with God live happily in four ways based on Ecclesiastes 9:7-10. May God bless us with His word.

First, those who are approved by God will eat and drink with joy.

Look at Ecclesiastes 9:7a – “Go then, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart;” Those who are approved by God will live in obedience to God's Word, and God blesses them. What blessing does God give to them? Look at Ecclesiastes 2:24 – “There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God.” The blessing God gives to those who obey the Word is God allows them to eat and drink joyfully. Are we enjoying this blessing of God? When I think about the image of eating and drinking in Ecclesiastes 2:24 and 9:7, this reminds me “a feast”. And when I think of the “feast” or “banquet”, I remembered the Ghana wedding feast in John 2. Then, I remembered a lecture about Pastor Tim Keller's Cana wedding feast recently. The challenge of the lecture was ‘The Kingdom of God is feast’. Then, our life should be a feast every day since we believe in Jesus Christ. This is because Jesus, the King of the kingdom of God, dwells in us as the Holy Spirit. Like the church, when our believers come together, we must eat, drink, and rejoice like a feast. In this sense, when we receive the bread and the cup symbolizing the flesh and blood of Jesus, we, who commemorate the death of Jesus' cross, should be glad to eat and drink. The reason is that not only did all our sins be forgiven by Jesus' death on the cross, but when Jesus comes back we will go to Heaven and join the wedding of the Lamb. Those who are approved by God are happy to eat and drink with joy, and every day is a feast for them.

Second, those who are approved by God will live a pure and joyful life.

Look at Ecclesiastes 9:8 – “Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head.” Here, the word “Let your clothes be white all the time” means our life must always be pure. And the word “let not oil be lacking on your head” means always have joy in our lives (Radmacher). What King Solomon is saying that the life that God is pleased to receive is to live a pure and joyful life. When I meditated on this word, I thought that there was a connection between purity and joy. In other words, there is joy to those who live the pure life. But for those who do not live the pure life, there will be no joy. The reason is because sin can never give us joy. Eventually, those who please God obey God's Word and seek the pure life that enjoys freedom from sin. If we want to be God-pleasing, then we must pursue the pure life. And if we want to enjoy the joy that God gives us, then we must pursue the purity of our hearts. Why? That's because God sees our hearts. We can do all kinds of sins in our hearts while we live the pure life in front of people, but we can not deceive God who knows everything. Therefore, we must live a life in pursuing the purity of the heart before the holy God. To do so, we rely on the blood of Jesus on the cross and confess and repent our sins every day. We must throw the sins of our hearts on the cross. In doing so, we will be able to enjoy the joy of freedom from sin, and the joy of the pure heart.

Third, those who are approved by God will enjoy living with their beloved spouse.

Look at Ecclesiastes 9:9 – “Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun.” King Solomon tells us that in this vain world, the reward in our life and in our toil is enjoy living with the loving wife whom God has given us. He says that in order to please God, we should enjoy a feast to eat and drink (v. 7), a pure life (v. 8) and our beloved wife (v. 9). Listen to the words of King Solomon in the Proverbs: “He who finds a wife finds a good thing And obtains favor from the LORD (18:22), “House and wealth are an inheritance from fathers, But a prudent wife is from the LORD” (19:14). The lives of those who are approved by God are those who humbly enjoy the blessing of his wife whom God has given. As God commands, they love their wives as Jesus loves the church. They are please with their wife and delighted in her like Jesus delights in the church. Do we delight with our spouse? Do we enjoy living with our dear spouse?

This Monday I went to the YMCA to work out. And in the locker room, I heard an 80 years old man talking to another old man. The 80 years old man told another man that his 60th year of wedding anniversary was coming soon. When the man heard him saying that, he asked him, ‘How could you live with your wife that long in the midst of many divorces in these days?’ Then the 80 years old man answered, ‘It was because my wife was patience with me.’ Haha. Then he said, “We have a lot of similarities and trust each other.” When I heard him saying that, I could feel that the 80 years old man loves his wife. Nowadays, as the other man said, there are many divorces and remarriages. How should we love our wives in such a social flow? This is what Proverbs 5:18-19 says: “May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer-- may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love.” We should always be satisfied with her bosom. If not, then we will turn to another woman and will constantly gaze into her. And eventually we will have affair with her and commit adultery

Lastly, those who are approved by God will work hard with all their might.

Look at Ecclesiastes 9:10 – “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going.” According to Pastor Wiersbe, the Jews did not see work as a curse, but as a stewardship from God (Wiersbe). In other words, the Jews did their work with divine calling in their work. They were the stewards of God who had done what God had entrusted to them. From this point of view, considering Ecclesiastes 9:10, King Solomon seems to be exhorting us: ‘Find your work and work hard’ and ‘When you are able to work, do your best.’ Why do you think King Solomon is exhorting us to work hard when we can work? The reason is that there comes the night when we can not work. While we are living in this world, we should be able to enjoy doing the Lord's work. If we continue to complain and complain when we work in the workplace or in the church, how difficult is it? Especially if we do not have a clear sense of mission, then we will not be able to work harder and enjoy the work itself. We must have stewardship like the Apostle Paul in the New Testament. We must have a stewardship from God when we serve the Lord or work in the workplace. If we are clear sense of mission and stewardship, we will be able to work hard and enjoy working. This is what people do those who are approved by God. I hope and pray that we will be able to do our work our best with stewardship.

What kind of people should we be? We must be people whom God approves. To do so, we must obey God's Word as we fear God. Also we ought to eat in happiness and drink your with cheerful heart (v. 7). We must live a pure and joyful life (v. 8). We must live happily with our loving spouse (v.9). We must work hard when we can work (v. 10). Therefore, I hope and pray that we can please God.

Time and chance

[Ecclesiastes 9:11-12]

I read an interesting article on CNN News last week. The article was written by a 35-year-old man named Mitchell Heidsman who lived at Harvard University's Camps apartment and committed suicide at 11 am on Saturday, September 18, the day of the Jewish Atonement (Yom Kippur). Before he took his own life, he wrote a 1,905-page suicide note. That note was called "Suicide Note". The Suicide Note mentions people like Socrates, Newton, Einstein, and also about the wisdom about freedom, nihilism, God, Judaism, Jewish symbols, Jewish IQ, and history of Anglo-Saxon. I have not read all of the notes, but one thing that I agreed with what he said was "Life is meaningless". As I was reading this in an Internet news article, the words of Ecclesiastes 1:2 came into my mind: "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless." I was saddened as I read the man who wrote "Life is meaningless" in his own suicide note and took his own life. The reason is that he may have realized the vanity of life, but he did not realize the meaning of life in Jesus and took his own life. If he understood the meaning of life in Jesus, he would surely have not committed suicide, and that he would have lived for the Lord by living the best of his life. And if he realized the meaning of life in Jesus and lived a meaningful life for the Lord, he would never have had a vain death. Rather, I think he could have met the beautiful death of the saints before God's sight.

I'm thinking a bit about "timing" these days. In other words, I think about those who are suffering from illness who try to live their best for the loved ones but when should they let go of the effort and leave the world comfortably. The reason is because of my beloved father-in-law. His doctor told me that he should prepare for the end. In some ways, it is advisable to give up on him and send him to the hospice program until the last day of his life in this earth because the doctor and the hospital cannot do any more medically. Nonetheless, my mother-in-law is doing her best for him since she loves him most dearly. So I came to think about timing. Of course, nobody know the timing exactly. The reason is that even though the doctor tells us to give up and make the final preparations, we who believe in Jesus can continue to pray for him by believing in the God of healing. And we pray because we do not know whether God will spare him or take him Home. One example is that when King David's first baby born to Bathsheba was sick, David fasted and prayed to God. He apparently received God's word through the prophet Nathan, "But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt, the son born to you will die" (2 Sam. 12:14), he still fasted and pleaded with God for the child (v. 16). Why did he do that? This is what 2 Samuel 12:22 says: "... While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, 'Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live.'"

When we look at Ecclesiastes 9:11, King Solomon said, "... but time and chance happen to them all." What is the meaning of this word? Before we know the meaning of this word, the first thing we need to know is that in God's sovereignty, there can be no coincidence. There is no coincidence as everything is happening in God's sovereignty and providence. We believe that everything is done in the sovereign will of God. So I personally do not accept the word "good luck". Then what does it mean by "chance"? According to the Internet Naver dictionary, chance is defined as 'appropriate time or occasion for doing something'. And the Internet Naver Korean-Chinese dictionary says chance is 'the expected time, the appropriate time for doing work.' Generally speaking, what do we usually expect when we catch an opportunity and work? Isn't it a success? What should those who wait for a chance to succeed do? They need to prepare. They must prepare their own abilities in order to be successful by making the most of their opportunities when they come.

In Ecclesiastes 9:11, King Solomon speaks of five kinds of prepared people, or people who are capable. We can say that these are people who are well prepared in developing their own abilities for their own life opportunities. Those five kinds of people are:

(1) They are the fast racers.

What do the fast racers want? Of course it would be the first place in the race. To do so, the fast racers

train themselves to run faster. And when they are given a chance to race, they will do their best and run hard towards the goal line. The reason is so they can enter the goal line and make the first place.

(2) They are the warriors.

What would the warriors want? Of course it will be to win the war. And to win the war, the soldiers have to be truly brave soldiers. That will require a lot of training.

(3) They are wise men.

The wise men should be able to use their knowledge effectively in their lives so they can contribute to the living. I am sure there will be no wise men who want to live their lives without being able to afford themselves with their useless knowledge.

(4) There are the discerning people.

Those who are discerning will also work hard with their smart brains to earn a lot of money and be rich.

(5) They are the intellectual people.

They want to be acknowledged and graced by many people with their knowledge and hard work.

But the problem is that even though these five types of prepared and capable people expect success in their own way, and seize the opportunity and do their best, the results can not be guaranteed. This is what King Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 9:11 – “I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise nor wealth to the discerning nor favor to men of ability; for time and chance overtake them all.” No matter how fast the racer is running he may not win the race. No matter how brave the warrior is he may not win the war. The meaning of this is that we cannot understand and explain it. In other words, all of these things happen as a result of God's intervention, and we cannot explain them (Park Yun-sun). This is what Dr. Park said: ‘Therefore, man should not be arrogant as he will succeed by self-sufficiency, even if he has the necessary conditions there to achieve a certain purpose. He must always look to the Lord.’

There is arrogant in our human sinful nature that keeps on saying that we succeed with our own efforts. For example, our arrogant hearts want to boast that we have made a lot of money with our own strength and ability. But this is what Deuteronomy 8:17-18 says: “Otherwise, you may say in your heart, 'My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.' But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.” The Israelites did not gain much wealth because of their ability. But God fulfilled the covenant that he made to their fathers. God has to give us power to make wealth. So the apostle James says in James 4:16 – “But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.” Why are we not to boast in our arrogance? This is because the day of disaster can happen to us unexpectedly. Look at Ecclesiastes 9:12 – “Moreover, man does not know his time: like fish caught in a treacherous net and birds trapped in a snare, so the sons of men are ensnared at an evil time when it suddenly falls on them.” What does it mean? It means that even though we have done our best to prepare for hard work and strive to do our best, unexpected things can happen to us. What is that unexpected things? It is a day of calamity that comes suddenly. The Bible tells us that the day of disaster can come suddenly, as if a fish caught in the net and the bird caught in the snare, and we cannot do anything with our own power. What should we do then?

We must remember. There is a time for everything (3:1-8). There is a proper time and procedure for every matter (8:6). As we remember these words of truth, the truth that we should not forget in the days of disasters we come upon is the words of Ephesians 3:11 that God makes everything beautiful in its time (Wiersbe). Although all the things that are happening in our lives are not going as we expected but is painful and difficult like a day of disaster, we should not put down a hope in the Lord. We must believe that everything that happens in our lives is happening in God's sovereignty. Furthermore, we must believe that God will ultimately make everything beautiful through all of this. We must believe that, even though in our human sense, the plight of the disaster is so dark and not at all beautiful, God who loves us will work together even in this calamity to make good in the sight of God. In

doing so, we will see the glory of God.

In John's Gospel, Jesus often said many times that 'My hour has not come yet' (2:4, 7: 6, 8, 30, 8:20, 12:4, 23, 27, 13:1, 17:1). What does Jesus mean by "my time"? That is the time when Jesus was crucified and died to redeem us. In other words, the time of Jesus refers to the time when glory can be revealed as the Son of God. The Bible promised us that Jesus, who died and resurrected, will surely come again. The Bible says that only God knows that time (Mt. 24:36). Then God will make all of us who are living in this dark world and all the people of God beautiful with the completion of salvation. I hope and pray that we be ready for that time.

A poor wise man

[Ecclesiastes 9:13-18]

If you choose between "Wealth" and "Wisdom", what would you choose? If you have to choose only one of them, will you choose to be rich or poor but gaining wisdom? When I asked myself this question, I remembered the story of Nabal and the Abigail in Old Testament First Samuel chapter 25. Nabal was very wealthy. He had 1,000 goats and 3,000 sheep (1 Sam. 25:2). But he was surely and mean in his dealings (v. 3), such a wicked man that no one can talk to him (v. 17) and a fool (v. 25). His foolishness was recognized even by his wife Abigail. So Abigail went to David and said: "May my lord pay no attention to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name--his name is Fool, and folly goes with him. ..." (v. 25). In contrast, the Bible says that his wife, Abigail, was intelligent and beautiful woman (v. 3). When she heard the news that her foolish husband Nabal had repaid David's good for evil (v. 21) and that David had decided to destroy Nabal and his whole household (v. 17), she quickly went to David (v. 20) with 200 loaves of bread, 2 skins of wine, 5 dressed sheep, 5 seahs of roasted grain, 100 cakes of raisins and 200 cakes of pressed figs (v. 18) and prevented David from shedding blood and avenging himself (v. 33). Then David said to Abigail: "Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands" (vv. 32-33). The Scriptures we can think of are the words of Ecclesiastes 4:13-16 that we have already meditated on. King Solomon wisely compared between a poor but wise boy with an old and dull king. But what he is saying is that it is not important that whether he is poor or wealthy, young or old age, boy or king, but what is really important is wisdom. When we think of these two Scriptures, we can see that what we should choose. It is not "wealth," but "wisdom." But here we have one more question to ask. It is "what if you are poor, rather than rich, even though you have chosen wisdom, and if you are rejected rather than to be treated with admittance and praise to men?" Will you still choose wisdom over wealth?

This is what King Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 9:13 – "I also saw under the sun this example of wisdom that greatly impressed me." What is the example that King Solomon saw here? "There was once a small city with only a few people in it. And a powerful king came against it, surrounded it and built huge siegeworks against it. Now there lived in that city a man poor but wise, and he saved the city by his wisdom" (vv. 14-15). No matter how great the king is and how he tries to strike a small city with the large siege works, no one can be sure of the result (vv. 11-12). Though it is natural to think that the great king can win a war against the small city, King Solomon says that the few people of the small city may win. How is this possible? It is because of the "poor wise man". Look at Ecclesiastes 9:15 – "Now there lived in that city a man poor but wise, and he saved the city by his wisdom. ..." King Solomon saw that no matter how rich and great king you are, you still can lose to a poor wise man. A good example is in 2 Samuel 20:14-22. When the ancient city of Abel was besieged by the army of Joab, a wise woman in that city saved the city by wisely speaking to Joab (Park Yun-sun). After all, with this example of wisdom what is the point King Solomon trying to tell us? Look at Ecclesiastes 9:16: "So I said, 'Wisdom is better than strength'." That is, 'Wisdom is better than strength'. Look at verse 18: "Wisdom is better than weapons of war" King Solomon says, 'Wisdom is better than weapons.' How important is power and weapons in war? However, no matter how powerful and weaponous you are, you can not win a war without wisdom. King Solomon tells us that wisdom is more important than power and weapons. This is what Proverbs 4:7 says: "The beginning of wisdom is: Acquire wisdom; And with all your acquiring, get understanding." And King Solomon said to us in Ecclesiastes 9:17 – "The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools." It is better to listen to the quiet words of the wise than to the shout of the leader of the fools.

But what is the problem? This wisdom is better than strength and weaponry, but King Solomon speaks in the text today that he saw things that he could not understand under the sun. There are 2 things that he couldn't understand:

First, look at Ecclesiastes 9:16 – "... But the wisdom of the poor man is despised and his words are not heeded."

What King Solomon saw, what he could not understand and could not explain, is that the poor wise man often does not receive the treatment of people and is rejected even though he did a great job in saving a city. Why do you think this is happening? Why does the poor wise man not only receive great hospitality, but also be rejected after he has done a great work of delivering a city? I looked for the reason in Proverbs: “The poor is hated even by his neighbor, ...” (Prov. 14:20), “... But a poor man is separated from his friend” (19:4). Why do people reject and mistreat the poor wise man who have saved themselves and the town where they live? The reason is because the wise man is poor. If the wisdom was rich, then perhaps many would have approached him and tried to become friends, and have listened to the wise man and praised him. They would never have despised and rejected the wise if he was rich.

Second, look at Ecclesiastes 9:18 – “... but one sinner destroys much good.”

What does this mean? If we read Ecclesiastes 10:1, we may be able to understand: “As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.” Wisdom can be easily overthrown, as a small mistake makes the smell of the more beautiful more than the scent of wisdom (10:1). In other words, the great value of wisdom can be destroyed by small foolish actions (Walvoord). A good example of this is the first human Adam in the book of Genesis. In Genesis 3 or Romans 5, we can see sin entered the world through one man Adam, and death through sin (Rom. 5:12) a sinner can destroy many good fully. We can also see in the Book of Joshua when we look at Achan. We know that the Israelites have been defeated in the Ai war because of the crime of one man Achan (Josh. 7). Even the disaster was upon the Israelites because of King David’s crime (2 Sam. 24), his son Absalom started a coup and caused a civil in Israel (ch. 15ff) (Wiersbe). Because of this foolish behavior of Achan, that is his disobedience, the nation Israel suffered. And because of one man Adam’s disobedience, sin entered into the world and death through sin. At that time God did what no one could understand. God sent His only begotten Son Jesus Christ into the world to be crucified so that we may be saved. Just as a poor wise man rescued a small town from a great king, Jesus, who is true wisdom, has saved us from eternal death, Satan, and his forces. Nevertheless, what we can not understand is that people are forgetting Jesus Christ, as if they had forgotten the poor wise man. Also, as people did not listen to the poor wise man and despised his wisdom, many people despised Jesus’ wisdom and did not listen to His words. Do you understand that Jesus came to this world to redeem many people, but His people did not accept Jesus (Jn. 1:12). This is what God is saying to us in Proverbs 8: 33-36: “Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not ignore it. Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway. For whoever finds me finds life and receives favor from the LORD. But whoever fails to find me harms himself; all who hate me love death.” We must receive Jesus who is true wisdom. In doing so, we will not only receive eternal life, but will also receive grace from God. I hope and pray that this precious grace be with all of us.

Do not prove yourself that you are a fool

[Ecclesiastes 10:1-4]

What do you think is the folly of man? In other words, what do you think is the extreme of our folly? When I think about it, I remember Proverbs 26:11 – “Like a dog that returns to its vomit Is a fool who repeats his folly.” We may not have seen the dog eat the vomit, but we would have seen the dog eat the poop. What do you think about it? Don’t you think it is a foolish dog? How much foolishness does God see in us when we keep on doing foolishly? For example, how foolish did God see the Israelites in the Book of Exodus and of Judge, when they kept on grumbling and disobedient to God and his Word? But don’t you think this is our image? But I don’t think this is the extreme of our folly. I think the extreme of foolishness is said in Psalm 14:1 – “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” I think the extreme of foolishness is the incredulity of God’s existence. And the mind that says there is no God is corrupted. And the conduct from the corrupt heart is detestable (v.1). In the end, those who say that there is no God are fools, and not only they do not do good, they can not. I think that this dark world that we are living in now is a world full of such folly. People do not believe in God’s existence and absolute truth, but are doing what was right their own eyes which are corruption and abominable deeds. Therefore, they are proving their folly. In other words, because they believe that there is no God, they live in that faith and live to prove their folly.

This is what King Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 10:3 – “Even when the fool walks along the road, His sense is lacking and he demonstrates to everyone that he is a fool.” What do you think of this Scripture that a fool demonstrates his own foolishness? I could not help agreeing. The reason is that when I see myself, there are many times when I live to prove my own folly, just like the foolish ones in today’s text. For example, as Proverbs 10:19 says that “When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise”, I do sin against God by not restraining my lips and talk a lot. Thus, I expose my folly. Another example is Proverbs 14:29 – “He who is slow to anger has great understanding, But he who is quick-tempered exalts folly.” If I look at myself in this passage, I should be slow to be angry. But sometimes I prove myself that I am a fool by being angry or quick-tempered and sinning against God and man. So I have nothing to say about Proverbs 12:23 – “A prudent man conceals knowledge, But the heart of fools proclaims folly.” So I would like to receive a lesson from God today under the heading “Do not prove yourself that you are a fool”, centering on the text of Ecclesiastes 10:1-4. I hope and pray that we may humbly receive the lessons that God gives to us so that we may no longer live our lives in proving ourselves that we are fools but live our lives wisely for God’s glory.

What is the lesson God wants to give to us in today’s text? We should think about at least 2 things:

First, we must think about at least 2 things that we must not prove ourselves that we are a fool:

(1) We should not expose even a little foolishness.

Look at Ecclesiastes 10:1 – “Dead flies make a perfumer’s oil stink, so a little foolishness is weightier than wisdom and honor.” As we have already meditated on this passage in connection with Ecclesiastes 9:18, our little foolishness exacerbates the smell of fools rather than the scent of wisdom. We have thought of the first human Adam as a good example of this. By the disobedience of one man Adam, sin entered the world, and the death of all mankind through sin. So evil, even a small one, can harm mankind (Park Yun-sun). Therefore, we must not commit even a little evil or a little foolishness. We should never consider even little foolishness lightly.

(2) We should not oppose our sovereigns.

Look at Ecclesiastes 10:4 – “If the ruler’s temper rises against you, do not abandon your position, because

composure allays great offenses.” King Solomon is telling us to keep our place even if the bad ruler’s temper arises against us. In other words, he says that we should not oppose the sovereign even if we are treated unrightfully by the wrongful sovereign (Park Yun-sun). Why should we do that? It is “because composure allays great offenses” (v. 4). What does it mean? Here, the word “composure” in Hebrews means health without disease or weakness and restoration. This means that even if the wrongful sovereign is angry with us and treats us unjustly, we will not commit many sins if we are spiritually and physically healthy and not oppose our sovereigns and endure well (Park Yun-sun). We must be healthy physically and spiritually so that we may not oppose our boss. We must be patient. No matter how wrong our boss is and get angry at us and unjust to us, we should not oppose him. Therefore, we must prevent larger and more sinful acts.

Lastly, we must think about what we should do in order not to expose our foolishness.

Look at Ecclesiastes 10:2 – “A wise man’s heart directs him toward the right, but the foolish man’s heart directs him toward the left.” What does it mean? It means that our hearts should be wise so that our hearts can be on the right. In other words, our hearts must be the hearts of the wise, and the hearts of the wise is on the right. According to Rev. Warren Wiersbe, in the old ancient world, right hand refers to power and honor, and left hand to weakness and rejection (Mt. 25:33, 41) (Wiersbe). The fact that the heart of the wise man is on the right means the wise man is always able to keep his heart firmly. And the fact that the heart of a fool is on the left means that he is as helpless as his left hand in controlling his mind (Park Yun-sun). In a word, the lesson we are given to us in today’s text is that we must be able to keep our hearts firmly like the wise man. This is what Proverbs 4:23 says: “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”

How can we keep our hearts firmly?

(1) We must be awake.

What will happen to a castle if the watchmen who are guarding the castle from the aggression of its enemies are asleep? It will be forced to fall. Therefore, the watchmen must be awake. In other words, we must be spiritually awake. We must be awake and persevering to pray to God. We must seek God’s protection. And we must seek God’s wisdom. The reason is that when God gives us wisdom, we can guard our hearts in spiritual warfare.

(2) We must warn our hearts with the Word of God.

The role of the watchmen who are guarding the castle is to warn the people in the castle by blowing the trumpet when the enemy strikes. Likewise, we must warn our hearts which are the source of life when Satan attacks our hearts. How should we warn our hearts? We must warn our hearts with the Word of God. For example, when our hearts are downcast and anxious, we must warn our hearts with Psalms 42:5, 11 and 43:5 – “Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.” In doing so, we will be able to guard our hearts.

The wise people will stay away from folly! (Wiersbe). We must stay away even from little folly. The reason is that because of our little folly we can commit great sin to God. Also we must also keep our position. No matter how our sovereign is wrong, making us angry and mistreating us, we should not oppose the sovereign. In order to do that, we must guard our hearts faithfully. We must be awake and persevere to pray to God. And we must warn ourselves with the Word of God. Therefore, we should not prove that we are fools, but rather we must prove that we are wise.

Be calm!

[Ecclesiastes 10:4]

I read yesterday in Korean Yahoo News that there was an article called "Supreme Court Ruling on Minor Charge Pastors." The former pastor, Chung (63 years old), went to the church where he was dismissed, knocked on a chair with an empty soda bottle, called a micro hymn and interrupted the worship. The reason for the disruption was the expulsion of the elder without the approval of the denomination. In September 2001, the church was dismissed from the denomination and another church was established. However, the denomination sent another pastor to the church and thus there were many disputes and conflicts regarding ownership of the church. That was why former pastor Chung interrupted the worship. The judge said, 'Despite the biblical teachings that Jung as a pastor should love even his enemies, he did not reflect at all. And without showing any remorse, he pursued only his own secular interests. In particular, the pastor who supposed to guide his people correctly led them astray.' So the judge sentenced him 3 years in prison. I think a similar thing is our presbytery now. It seems that a large church belonging to the presbytery has been divided into two groups and is on the way to a court battle, in a conflict. Our presbytery tried to make peace between them but it didn't work out. The group of people who were dissatisfied with the presbytery left the presbytery. I don't know the details, but because of their internal dispute they fought with each other. And I saw the news that the police were mobilized last week. It's a shame.

Why fight? There may be many reasons, but because of the anger, there is more fire in the fight. When we look at today's text, Ecclesiastes 10:4, the Bible gives some lessons on how to deal with anger.

The first thing to think about is how we should see an angry ruler.

Here, the "ruler" can be a king, and if we apply it widely, I think it can refer to our leader, our boss, our pastor, our husband and so on. The Bible teaches that the angry ruler is lacking in wisdom and manifesting his own foolishness (stupid) (v. 3). It is because the ruler is not running toward the Word of God, so that his mind has not widened through the life of obedience to the Word (Ps. 119:32). And with lack of wisdom, he is controlled by his emotion more than his intelligence. Such a person can be said to be lacking emotional coping skills because his emotion cannot be driven by the Word of God. As a result, he expresses anger easily. Look at Proverbs 25:28 – "Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control." The Bible says that those who have no control, those who lack wisdom, those who can not control their emotions and who are easily angry, are foolish people who listen to their folly.

The second thing to think about is how to act in front of an angry ruler.

King Solomon says "do not abandon your position" (Eccle. 10:4). This means that no matter how wicked the ruler is, we should not oppose him even he treats us unrightfully. We should not be angry with the angry ruler. However, I confess that many times I was angry at my wife when she was angry at me. This is the manifestation of my own folly and the sin of breaking the Word of God. Look at Ecclesiastes 8:3 – "Do not be in a hurry to leave him. Do not join in an evil matter, for he will do whatever he pleases." David did. The wicked King Saul tried to kill David, but David did not oppose King Saul because he feared God. It is a word that we should not oppose an angry ruler (pastor, husband, boss, president, etc.).

The last thing to think about is the precious lesson that we should be calm in front of the angry ruler.

Look at Ecclesiastes 10:4 – "... calmness can lay great errors to rest." I think that the soul of a calm person is like a calm wave. Biblically speaking, I think we can say that the calm person has a gentle spirit. It is the spirit of the wise man. He is the one who knows how to control his anger. Look at Proverbs 16:32 – "Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city." The patient man, the wise

man can restrain anger of the angry man. How can he do that? I find an answer in Proverbs 25:15 – “Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone.” Through patience and the gentle tongue, the wise man can restrain the anger of the angry man.

There are so many things around us that upset us. Also, there are many people who get upset as well. I think we are living in a society where emotions are being exploded. This is not just a phenomenon in society. In the church, even among pastors, there is a lot of anger expression. It has to do with lack of wisdom. That’s why we are manifesting our own folly. When our leaders express their anger, we must not oppose him. Instead, we must be calm and let his anger rest. Do you think it is possible? If not, then we should be able to control our own anger first.

“There is an evil”

[Ecclesiastes 10:5-7]

What kind of advertisements do you often see when you watch TV these days? I often see advertisements about the US midterm elections on November 2. Among those advertisements, I am interest in three things: the California Senate, governor election, and Prop 19. Especially, I am interest in Prop 19 because because it is an amendment of the rate related to the marijuana which we consider as a drug. In California, people are trying to legitimize marijuana so that they can buy it for a certain amount of time as a hobby. But when I saw the news this week, about 40% of people want to legalize it, and 44% of people oppose it. In addition to Prop 19, I have no choice but to be interested in advertising for Senate or Governor Elections because I live in California. And if I look at the TV ads of Republican and Democratic candidates, this is almost mutual slander and black propaganda. I am not here to say that you should choose a certain candidate for the California Senate and governor. But I am trying to say that at least we as Californians should be aware of who will be our next leaders who will lead this California. The reason is because I think it is very important to have a right leader for the state and for our country as well. In particular, as a pastor, I think that it is very important to establish a church officer who has an important position in the church. So I can not help but be interested in establishing a leader.

What leaders should we raise in the church? The leader that our church sought and prayed for is Christ-centered leader who is neither me-center nor the men-center. Here, the word Christ-centered leaders refer to the leaders who obey Jesus' commands. It is our vision to raise the Christ-centered leaders who humbly and faithfully obeys His Words. However, one of the difficulties in moving toward this vision is the lack of personality and change of life. And the problem is, I think, that the churches are establishing the people who lack such personality and life change as church leaders. In other words, I think that the church is breaking the order and peace of the church by establishing the unqualified people to be the leaders of the church. I think that this sinful thing is happening in our Presbyterian Church where unqualified people are becoming the teaching elders (pastors) and ruling elders who are the key leaders of the Presbyterian Church. Especially the pastor like me is the problem. And the cause of the problem is because we, the pastors, are not wise.

This is what King Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 10:5 – “There is an evil I have seen under the sun, the sort of error that arises from a ruler.” Here, when I think about “an evil”, it reminds me Ecclesiastes 6:1 that we already meditated. King Solomon said he had seen “another evil” in this world. One such thing is that weighs heavily on a man who has received God's wealth, riches, and honor, so that he does not lack in his heart, but he has not been able to enjoy all of it. Rather, God has enabled those who are pleased with God to enjoy all of them. Before this evil, King Solomon said that he saw “a grievous evil” in Ecclesiastes 5:13-20. And that grievous evil was an owner who tried to keep his wealth even to the point of harming himself (v. 13). Furthermore, King Solomon saw that the owner who had kept his wealth to the point of harming himself could not hand over anything to his children because of the disaster and the loss of all his wealth (v. 14). What a grievous evil this is. Although we know the truth “Naked a man comes from his mother's womb, and as he comes, so he departs” (v. 15), why do people try to keep all their possessions to such a degree that it harms them? What is the benefit if they end up losing everything through disaster? Aren't we also witnessing these great evil living in this world?

What was “an evil” that King Solomon saw in this world? It was “the sort of error that arises from a ruler” (10:5). In other words, what he witnessed in this world was a transgression from the ruler. Here, when we discuss the “error” of the ruler, we can think of Ecclesiastes 10:4, which we already had meditated. The reason is that King Solomon speaks in verse 4 about “great errors”. Look at Ecclesiastes 10:4 again: “If a ruler's anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great errors to rest.” King Solomon gave us a lesson that even though the bad ruler treats us unjustly, we should keep our post and should not oppose him. The reason is because if we oppose the ruler, we can commit a greater sin to God. However, today in Ecclesiastes 10: 5, King Solomon again speaks of “an evil”. Whose evil is her referring to? It is the evil of the ruler. Then what is the evil of the ruler? It is a decision that comes from the foolishness of the ruler. One example of that decision is in verse 6: “Fools are put in

many high positions, while the rich occupy the low ones.” What does it mean? It means that the foolish ruler placed a fool in a high position or high office, and a "rich" in a low position or a low office (Wiersbe). If we say that we place the "rich" in a lower position, we may now think that the reality is that the rich are in a higher position in the Church, but here the "rich" refers to the wise (Walvoord). Look at Proverbs 14:24 – “The wealth of the wise is their crown, but the folly of fools yields folly.” When I think of the foolish decision of this ruler, what would happen to a nation if the foolish president puts a fool in a high position in the country and a wise man in a low position? I think the same is true of companies. The foolish boss does not just annoy his workers by disgracing them, but also he raises the fools to a higher position and the wise to a lower position. I think it is the same in the church. In particular, when we look at the reality of the church, especially the Presbyterian Church, the session appoints the unwise and unqualified people to the important positions of the church. For example, in light of Romans 16:1-16, those who should be appointed in the important position of the Church are those whom the Session commends (v. 1) and those who are “the approved in Christ” (v. 10). But it seems to me that the church these days are appointing anybody even though they are not commended and approved by the Session. As a result, the church is not glorifying God at all. Why are these things happening all the time in the church? Do you know why? Of course, it has to do with the folly of the church leaders. But more specifically there is another reason. That is “a ruler’s caprice” (Walvoord). If we take the example of a church, we can say that the pastor like me is foolish where I do not entrust a qualified wise person to the church but a unqualified and fool person to the church. Another commentary, “Be Satisfied,” by Rev. Warren Wiersbe, commented that the folly of the ruler is because he is too pliable (Wiersbe). And if the leader is so pliable, he can do the opposite in terms of appoint the people to the church positions because of lack of character and courage: to have a high position for fools and a low position for wise ones. If we give examples of the church, we can say that the pastor and the elders, who are pliable, can not do the right thing with courage.

What is the result? For example, when the President of a nation does not give a high rank to a wise man but to a fool in his foolishness (whether it is capricious or pliable), what will be the result? Look at Ecclesiastes 10:7 – “I have seen slaves on horseback, while princes go on foot like slaves.” The result of a foolish act by the president is that the country is broken in order, there is no peace, and the country can not be built firmly. Please think about it. If we see “slaves on horseback, while princes go on foot like slaves” (v. 7), what will the nation be like? I think this principle applies to the home, the workplace, and the church. For example, what will be the order of the family when the husband is not the head of the family but the wife is? The Bible says that wives should respect and obey their husbands and that husbands should love their wives. But what if the wives do not respect their husbands but rather change their roles so that they might be the head of the family? Workplace is the same. What if the boss and the employee are at work and the employee is sitting at the boss and gets all the respect and the boss is working for the employee? The church is the same. If there is a pastor, an elder, and an ordained deacon, who do not know their position and role, and think and act beyond the boundary, what will happen to that church? Such a home, a workplace, or a church is not in peace because it is out of order. This is the error of the foolish leaders. Do you see this error from me, the pastor of the church, and from your boss, your leader, and also from your husband (or father), who is your family leader?

As I meditate on this and I asked, “Why does God allow a foolish person to be a president of a nation?” The reason is that God decided to judge the nation through such foolish ruler (Park Yun-sun). In other words, God judges a nation through a foolish president, a church through a foolish pastor, and a family through a foolish husband and father of a household. Especially God disciplines the country, the church or the family by allowing the foolish President, or pastor, or the husband and father to be the leaders of a nation, a church or a household to put the unqualified people to be seated in a high position and by allowing them to break the order and peace of a nation, church and family. What should we do when we realize this? In other words, what should we do with the leaders of one family, one church, and one nation? The leaders must wisely think and act wisely as they forsake their folly and seek wisdom from God. In particular, the leaders should assign the wise men and not the foolish men to important positions so that we can respect those who should be respected. In doing so, the nation, the church, and family will stand firm in the Lord and enjoy the peace that the Lord gives. I hope and pray that such a home, church, and nation could be ours.

“Wisdom has the advantage of giving success”

[Ecclesiastes 10:8-11]

What do you think "success" is? Do you think that "success" in the world and "success" in the Bible are the same or do they differ? If they are different, how do you think they are different? Have you asked these questions to yourself? I personally think that "success" in the world and "success" in the Bible are different. But the problem is that even we Christians seem to be blind to worldly successes rather than biblical successes. If we look at the book 'Be successful in God's standard' written by Tony Nelson, this is what he said: 'Our human-centered society is captivated by success. Everyone talks about success and aspires to success. But why are so many people living hard in their self-defeating and regretting bitterness of failure? It is because they do not know the true success of the Bible. True success is not wealth. It is not living a happy life. Success is not something we achieve, but it is our being. Success is not that people are impressed with us, but God is pleased with us' (Internet). Do you understand? Do you know the true nature of the Bible's true success? Tony Nelson emphasizes in his book that we must have the biblical success of God's standards, as we are constantly thinking of success in terms of money, and of the worldly successes of prestige, honor and prosperity. And he introduces twelve biblical techniques of success in his book. Regarding the first of the twelve successes, he says: 'First, the skill of biblical success starts with adjusting our view. The starting point of success is to fear God and gain wisdom. The basis of our success is desperately dependent on God's presence so that the consciousness being with God dominates our lives. Because we know God's character and status, we do not take even one step in our life by trusting ourselves' (Internet). What do you think of these words? Do you agree?

Whenever I think about Joseph's story in Genesis chapter 39, I believe that in the biblical success there can be suffering and pain. And the true Biblical success is the "prosperity", and the essence of that prosperity is God with us. The Bible says in Genesis 39 that "The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered" (v. 2), "When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did" (v. 3), "the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden" (v. 21) and "... because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did" (v. 23). This is the secret of the success to us. Because Immanuel God is with us, we are enjoying blessing of success in this world. This is what the Psalmist prayed to God in Psalm 118:25 – "O LORD, save us; O LORD, grant us success."

This is what King Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 10:10 – "Wisdom has the advantage of giving success." What is this wisdom that has the advantage of giving success? It is the wisdom that applies to everyday life. In today's text King Solomon speaks in two things:

First, wisdom that has the advantage of giving success protects us from danger.

Look at Ecclesiastes 10:8-9: "Whoever digs a pit may fall into it; whoever breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake. Whoever quarries stones may be injured by them; whoever splits logs may be endangered by them." The world we live in has too many dangers. There are many factors that make us dangerous here and there. One of those factors is that those who devise to harm us set traps and make us to fall into that traps. Listen to a Psalmist who went through this experience in Psalm 140:5 – "Proud men have hidden a snare for me; they have spread out the cords of their net and have set traps for me along my path. Selah." The proud men have hidden the snare for us, have spread out the cords of their net and have set traps for us. Among these traps I particularly think that the words of Proverbs 23:27 are threatening: "for a prostitute is a deep pit and a wayward wife is a narrow well." The reason that this trap of the prostitute is very threatening is because many of us fall into that trap and sin against God. What causes it? It is because of our folly (Prov. 7:7). By our foolishness, when a woman who dressed like a prostitute (v. 10) sets a trap and deceives us with various words, we follow her like an ox going to the slaughter, like a deer stepping into a noose (vv. 21 -22). What should we do in this reality? In Ecclesiastes 10: 8-9, King Solomon uses the words "digs a pit", "breaks through a wall", "quarries stones" and "splits logs". These words describe the destructive acts and these destructive acts can put us in dangers. What are we to do when these dangerous factors

are trying to cross us on every side? What should we do when those who are trying to harm us will pit the traps to endanger us, tear down the walls, unleash the stones, and split the trees? We must seek God. Look at Psalm 141:9 – “Keep me from the snares they have laid for me, from the traps set by evildoers.” We must ask God to be delivered as the psalmist. We must pray to God to rescue us from those who are trying to destroy us by setting up the traps. And we must abandon our foolishness and seek wisdom from God. The reason is that when we receive the wisdom of God, we can escape from the trap of those who try to harm us with that wisdom. Look at Proverbs 13:14 – “The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death.” Look at Proverbs 2:16 – “It will save you also from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words.”

Lastly, wisdom that has the advantage of giving success prepares a lot in advance.

Look at Ecclesiastes 10:10-11: “If the axe is dull and he does not sharpen its edge, then he must exert more strength. Wisdom has the advantage of giving success. If the serpent bites before being charmed, there is no profit for the charmer.” What this means is that, no matter what a person does, they have to prepare a lot from beforehand to succeed. Anything that is not planned and not ready will fail inevitably (Internet). Here King Solomon has two examples: (1) The point of the first example is that if the knife is dull, a person who uses that knife has to use more strength. What does it mean? It means that the person has to sharpen the knife in advance in order to use less strength. The famous slogan says “Do not work harder - work smarter!” (Wiersbe). I think many times we work foolishly. But we need to be clever. The wise work so smartly. Like sharpened knife, a wise man does all the works well without using a lot of strength and saving his strength. (2) And the second example is that the charmer should use his methods and techniques first in handling the snakes. It means that the wise charmer must first learn the methods and techniques and then treat the snakes. Last week, I thought about the cost of discipleship, based on Luke 14:28 – “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?” What does it mean? It means that we have to budget how much it costs before we start to build the tower. And we have to figure it how much do we have right now in order to build the tower. The reason why Jesus mentioned this was to say that we must prepare thoroughly to become his disciple. In other words, we have to anticipate and prepare our mind about how much sacrifice is required to be his disciple. How should we prepare our mind? As disciples of Jesus, we must be prepared to sacrifice in our hearts. In other words, we must offer our lives to him and follow Jesus. When I was meditating on wisdom that has the advantage of giving success, I remembered the church being built in Namyangju, South Korea. The name of the church is ‘Prepared Church’. And the pastor of the church is a friend of mine who grew up together with me in the church where my father served as a senior pastor. When I saw the prayer subjects that he asked me to pray for, several prayer requests has the word ‘prepared’ in them. Last time I went to see the church building with my father’s friend pastor, we went into the church building and my father’s friend pastor prayed to God. When I heard from another pastor that God had prepared my friend for several years, I became more firmly convinced that God prepared the servant whom he wanted to use. And I think that the prepared God’s servants are beautiful and precious. Let’s remember that wise men prepare a lot. And God bring success to the wise man who is prepared.

There was a lot of apology from a pastor, who seemed like successfully carrying out the ministry of young people but stumbled. After he acknowledges his mistake on the internet, many people talked about him on internet. In the meantime, I was thinking that the first of the twelve skills needed for Biblical success that Tony Nelson said: ‘The starting point of success is to fear God and gain wisdom.’ I think it applies not only to the pastor who apologized on internet but also to all Christians. I think it is true that the starting point of success is to fear God and gain wisdom. The reason is because wisdom has the advantage of giving success (Eccle. 10:10). And we must accept that wisdom that has the advantage of giving success protects us from danger. It is the wisdom that God gives us protects us from the work of Satan and many temptations and pitfalls in this world. We must also accept the fact that we must prepare a lot of wisdom that has the advantage of giving success. This is because we who are not well prepared become too famous with big church, too rich eventually become proud, and fall into the trap of Satan to sin against God. Especially when we look at us who are trapped and sinned, I think it is a character that is not well prepared. No matter how much Biblical knowledge and a lot of theological study he has, if he doesn’t resemble Jesus, especially the humble personality, he tends to fall into temptation and sin against God. I hope and pray that we all take the word of wisdom “Wisdom has the advantage of giving success” humbly in our hearts and seek that wisdom so that we may live wisely for the glory of God.

The lips of a fool

[Ecclesiastes 10:12-15]

Do you know "the hidden power of words"? When I looked at one the internet website, the article talked about the fact that we have to keep talking until we die. But like when we polish the stone, it will become the diamond, if we polish our words again and again, then it will be the scent of life shining like jewels. And the article made few suggestions. And I want to share with you few of them: (1) Do not speak as the words come out of your mouth. Even you try to speak nicely, there will be defect rate. (2) There is a taste in the words too. Do not say a word that makes others to lost their appetite but say a tasty word. (3) Use many encouraging, thanking and loving words as you can. Then people will follow you. (4) Wounds of the words are lifelong. There is no eraser in the words, so be careful. (5) The word can become a seed. Think first what kind of seed you are sowing. What do you think? How are you speaking? Do we glorify God with our lips, or do we cover his glory?

In Ecclesiastes 10:12-15, King Solomon speaks of the lips of the fool: "the lips of a fool" (v. 12), "the beginning of his talking is folly" (v. 13) and "Yet the fool multiplies words" (v. 14). He speaks 4 characteristics about the lips of the fool. What are the 4 characteristics?

First, the lips of the fool harm himself.

Look at Ecclesiastes 10:12 – "Words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious, while the lips of a fool consume him." King Solomon says that the words of the mouth of the wise are gracious, while the lips of the fool consume him. Here, "the lips of the fool consume him" means to harm himself (Wiersbe). In other words, the lips of the fool harm himself. How does he harm himself? How does a fool harm himself with his lips? Look at Proverbs 10:32 – "The lips of the righteous know what is fitting, but the mouth of the wicked only what is perverse." A wise man knows how to please other so he speaks a word aptly (Prov. 25:11). But a foolish man speaks not to please other but himself so he speaks whatever he wants without considering other, whether he will get hurt or not. But the foolish man is harming himself. This is what the Bible says about the lips that hurt himself and others: "Like a club or a sword or a sharp arrow is the man who gives false testimony against his neighbor" (25:18). The lips of the fool are like the club or the sword or the sharp arrow. So the words coming out from the foolish man can harm, hurt and destroy others. This is what Apostle James said in James 3:5-8: "So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison." How scary is it? The tongue of a fool is very dangerous. We must be alert to the tongue of the fool which harms himself.

Second, the lips of fools are getting worse.

Look at Ecclesiastes 10:13 – "the beginning of his talking is folly and the end of it is wicked madness." It is because he is foolish that a fool can not only harm another with his own lips, but also harm himself. And a fool can not help but speak a foolish word. That's why King Solomon says that the beginning of the words of the mouth of the fool is foolish. If the beginning of the word of the mouth of the fool is foolish, what is the end? King Solomon says that the end is "wicked madness". What does it mean? The end of the words of the mouth of the fool is wicked madness. Mainly the foolish people speak nonsense. The more he talks about things we cannot understand, the more he talks about nonsense. And at the end, he talks like a lunatic. Look Proverbs 29:11 – "A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control." A fool not only speaks foolishly, but also reveals his anger. So the foolish man speaks not only nonsense words but when his temper blows then he speaks like a crazy person. The foolishness of a person may be weak at the beginning, but at the end it can get bigger and he can act crazy. We should not expect good words, wise words, or beneficial words to come out of the

lips of fools, which are getting worse. And we should stop talking to the foolish man when we know that talking to the foolish has no benefit. And we must leave him. If we continue to talk to the foolish man, then we will see the end of foolishness even the madness.

Third, the lips of the fool can not control itself and speak a lot.

Look at Ecclesiastes 10:14 – “Yet the fool multiplies words” A foolish man speaks a lot. As if an empty can makes more noise, the foolish man who has no knowledge expresses his stupidity by speaking a lot. In Ecclesiastes 10: 3, in which we have already meditated, King Solomon said, “Even when the fool walks along the road, his sense is lacking and he demonstrates to everyone that he is a fool.” How does he demonstrate his foolishness? He not only demonstrates his foolishness by taking his little foolishness lightly, but also opposing his own ruler (vv. 1, 4). When I think about this in relation to Ecclesiastes 10:14, the foolish man cannot control his lips and keeps on speaking foolish words more and more because he takes his little foolishness lightly. I also think that the foolish man cannot control his temper and demonstrates his own foolishness by speaking against his ruler or leader. So this is what Proverbs 10:19 says to us: “When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.” We should not like to use a tongue. Why? Look at Proverbs 18:21 – “The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.” Rather, we should restraint words. We must restraint words like those who have wisdom (17:27).

Lastly, the lips of the fool boast of himself.

Look at Ecclesiastes 10:14 – “No one knows what is coming-- who can tell him what will happen after him? A fool's work wearies him; he does not know the way to town.” Although we do not know the future and only God knows, the foolish man talks like he knows everything, thinking that his future is in his own control (Wiersbe). The result is that the foolish man afflicts and annoys all people (v. 15) (Park Yun-sun). How absurd is this? King Solomon says that the foolish man does not even know how to go to a city (v. 15). In other words, the foolish man doesn't know how to go to the city even though the road to the city is open to the public. Then how can say that he knows what will happen in the future? He pretends to know about the future and talk about it because he is not faithful to his own work in the present. Then why is it that the foolish man speaks so much about future as he knows it? What is his intention? His intention is to boast himself. Look at Proverbs 27:1 – “Do not boast about tomorrow, For you do not know what a day may bring forth.” But the foolish man boasts of himself as he knows everything about tomorrow. To him, this is what the Bible James 4:14-16 says: “Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.’ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.”

As I keep on meditating on the Book of Ecclesiastes, I can not help but admit that I am a fool. Therefore, when I pray to God, I confess my foolishness and seek God's wisdom. It is only our foolishness that we can boast. At the same, we should only boast God and his wisdom. Therefore, we must also confess, as the apostle Paul confessed in 1 Corinthians 1:25 – “Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” We must seek God's wisdom. We should comfort and edify others instead of harming ourselves with our mouths. By doing so, we can be comforted and edified. Also, the beginning of our words should be wisdom, and the end should be wisdom as well. The words of our lips must become better and wiser. And we must control our lips (Prov. 19:19). And we must boast Jesus with our lips. We must preach the gospel of Jesus Christ with our lips. May God give us this kind of wise lips!

Woe to a country

[Ecclesiastes 10:16-20]

Yesterday, on Tuesday morning, I heard news of North Korea's Yeonpyeong Island bombing provocation through internet news. Soon after the Cheonan incident happened, two marines and two civilians died because of the Yeonpyeong attack. When I think about how this could happen again on the Korean peninsula, my personal thought is that the leader of North Korea is a big problem. One day, I read an article on the internet by Mr. Hwang Jang - Kee, who claimed that Kim Jong Il, the supreme leader of North Korea, should die. It is a sad reality to see how such leader is tormenting and killing a lot of people. I think that the leader of the country is very important. It is no exaggeration to say that the rise and fall of a nation depends on the leader(s) of the country.

In today's text Ecclesiastes 10:16-20, King Solomon speaks of a country that is woe. Look at verse 16: "Woe to you, O land whose king was a servant and whose princes feast in the morning." What country is a country that is woe? There are three things we can think of:

First, the country without ruler is a country that is woe.

Look at Ecclesiastes 10:16 – "Woe to you, O land, whose king is a lad and whose princes feast in the morning." This means that although there is a king who rule over the country and princes, the king can not rule because he is young and his princes are prodigal (Park Yun-sun). Of course, all the kings cannot rule over the country because he is young. A good example is King Josiah of Judah in 2 Chronicle chapter 34. He rose to the throne when he was eight years old (2 Chron. 34:1) and when he was sixteen years old he reformed his country (v. 3ff). But the young king in Ecclesiastes 10:16 is a young man who immature and wants to do things his own way (Wiersbe). And this young king is childish (not childlike) and self-indulgent (Jamieson). If the king of the country is like this, at least his princes must be mature and keep their minds in order to rule the country wisely. But they feast in the morning (v. 16). In other words, they enjoy feasting from early in the morning (Park Yun-sun). So what will happen to the country? Since the king is immature and indulge himself like a little child, and his princes enjoy feasting in the morning, how can we say that there is rulers in that country?

I have once applied this word to our church. For example, if I am an immature leader who does whatever I want, our church Elder Yoon, who is a mature who serves our church wisely, then we can say that at least our church will have a ruler. But if I am young immature and self-indulgent and even Elder Yoon enjoys feasting in the morning, what will happen to our church? Can we say that our church leader is ruling the church? I think it is the same with family. In other words, when the husband who is the head of the family is mature, and his wife who helps the husband also is wise and governs the family together, the family will have order and peace. But what if the husband is immature and indulgent, and even his wife enjoys the worldly pleasure early in the morning? Can we say that there are those who rule such a family? The wise King Solomon tells us that there is no ruler in this kind of family, of church and of country.

On the other hand, according to King Solomon, there is a blessed country. Look at Ecclesiastes 10:17 – "Blessed are you, O land whose king is of noble birth and whose princes eat at a proper time-- for strength and not for drunkenness." What does this mean? Here the word "king is of noble birth" means the king has honorable character (Park Yun-sun). If a king who ruled over a country has honorable character, how would he not rule over the country well? And King Solomon said that the king's princes "eat at the appropriate time – for strength and not for drunkenness" (v. 17). This means the princes have honorable character and they are abstinent and self-control when they eat (Park Yun-sun). What a contrast with the rulers of a country that is woe? Such a country is a country that is so blessed that its king and princes are mature and honorable, and govern the country well. In other words, a country that is truly blessed is a country in which good politics is practiced (Park Yun-sun).

I think the church and the family are the same. If the leaders of the church and of the family have honorable character and abstinent and self-control, then the family and the church ruled by such leaders can be said

to be the blessed church and the blessed home. Especially here I have come to think of two things absolutely necessary for the leaders in the home, the church, and the country. It is "character" and "self-control." Of course, leaders need skills and ability. But what is more necessary is character. No matter how skillful or competent they are, if there is a problem with character, those who follow those leaders can not be happy. I do not know if they will be able to enjoy the sense of accomplishment, but I don't think they will be able to live a life transformed with good influence. Self-control is also essential to our leaders. Without self-control, one of the fruits of the Spirit, the leaders will not be able to overcome Satan's many temptations in their spiritual battles and they will sin against God and men. Therefore, the need for a leader of a country, of a church and of a home is honorable character and self-control that can dispel the temptations of debauchery and pleasure. The citizens of the country, the believers of the church and the children who follow such leaders are truly blessed people. I hope and pray that Korea and the United States will be such blessed countries. I hope and pray that our church can become such a blessed church. May our families be blessed home by God.

Second, a country that has a leader who is lazy and prodigal is a country that is woe.

Look at Ecclesiastes 10:18-19: "Through indolence the rafters sag, and through slackness the house leaks. Men prepare a meal for enjoyment, and wine makes life merry," This statement speaks of the prodigal life of the lazy rulers who are wandering and destroying the country. They keep enjoying pleasure and drinking wine for joy. They have no sense of responsibility and sense of justice to serve the people (Park Yun-sun). Imagine that if the leaders of the country do not have the responsibility and sense of justice to serve the people of the country, what will happen to that country? If the leaders of the country forget their responsibilities and enjoys pleasure with only drinking alcohol, what would the country be like? Sometimes, when I see a Korean drama that deals with the history of Korea, I see the king's servants enjoying alcohol and women and living prodigal. And they were corrupted and didn't bear their own responsibilities but rather they killed the honest and responsible king's servants.

One of the most popular Korean dramas these days shows a good image of the president but bad image of the opposition leader. I think this drama shows not only a bit of the history of Korea but also the reality of Korean government. That part of history and reality can be summed up in one word, corruption. I see not only the drama but also the news that the politicians who suppose to help the citizens to live will by governing and serving the country but instead they abandon their own position and are corrupted to fill their greedy hearts. Indeed, they are irresponsible leaders of the country. This is what Pastor Wiersbe said: "There is a difference between those who use an office and those who merely hold an office (1 Tim. 3:10). Immature people enjoy the privileges and ignore the responsibilities, while mature people see the responsibilities as privileges and use them to help others" (Wiersbe). Don't you agree with what he said? I cannot help but agree that there are those who merely hold an office and those who use it. However, I think that the big problem is that there are some leaders who serve themselves by abusing their office rather than serving the citizen. If I apply this to the church, I think there are church leaders who just have office titles but do not serve the church. I think there are immature church leaders who are lazy and who refuse to take on their role as a member of the church. But the bigger problem is the leaders who abuse their office in the church and enjoy being served rather than serving the church members. As a result, the church is getting sick.

In his book "Laziness," Pastor Kim Nam Joon expressed his thought on laziness: 'The identity of laziness is dislike, the root of laziness is self-love, the development of laziness is lust, the choice of laziness is careless, the consequences of laziness are painful ...' (Internet). When the leaders of a nation are lazy, their idleness develops and manifests their love according to their lusts. As a result, they end up living a life of debauchery, leading to making the nation corrupted. We need to listen to Charles R. Swindol. He said, 'There is a professional thief who comes to our minds and takes away the healthy desire and enthusiasm for life.' And he said, the thief's name is 'postponing to tomorrow.' In other words, lazy attitude to postpone work while annoying it makes the passion and the spirit of challenge necessary for life to cool down, and eventually it will take away the true happiness that a person can enjoy. Therefore, the value of life to be emphasized once again in our times is 'sincerity' (Internet). As a leader of a nation, the virtue that he needs is sincerity. A leader who is lazy and prodigal can never be used to build a blessed nation. Rather, God uses faithful and sincere leaders to build the country. The same is true of homes and churches. The Lord does not use lazy leaders in building up the home and the church. The Lord uses faithful and sincere leaders to build a family, a church, and a country. Therefore, the leaders must be faithful to build a country, a church, and a family that are blessed by God.

Lastly, a country with a leader who thinks that all we need is money is a country that is woe.

Look at Ecclesiastes 10:19 – “... and money is the answer to everything.” This means that the leaders of the country who are lazy and prodigal think that all the problems of the country will be solved if they have enough money. If you are a leader of a country with this idea, you are definitely a money-loving leader and you rely more on money than on God. Therefore, it is irresponsible to rule the country while enjoying lazy life and prodigal life under the thought that money is all, and will try to solve all things with money. And because they don't bear their responsibilities, all citizens suffer. But they continue to raise the taxes of the country and try to solve all the problems of the country (MacArthur). What is the result? In the end, the leaders who love money and try to solve all problems with money will be ruined with money.

We must guard our hearts from the thought that money can do everything. I think many people, even Christians, think that 'Money is power', which is a dangerous idea. If people try to rule a country, a church and a family with this idea, then such a country, church and family will have problems because of money. Furthermore, because of the money, the country, the church, and the family will suffer disaster. Therefore, we must not only guard ourselves from the idea that 'Money is power' but also from those leaders who have such ideas. Not only we must guard ourselves from them, we must not follow them as well. The reason is that we may suffer disaster. Rather, the leaders we are to follow are godly leaders who rely on God rather than relying on money. We must follow the leaders like Apostle Paul who have learned the secret of contentment whether we are living in abundance or in need. We must be content with Jesus only and not with money. In doing so, our home, our church, and our country will be blessed by God.

I believe that the ups and downs of a country are under God's sovereignty. Not only country, I think the family and the church as well. Their ups and downs are under God's sovereignty. The problem is that the leaders of the country (family, church) who have to bear the responsibility to govern the country (family, church) well do not fear God, are lazy, prodigal and have the idea that money can do everything. What is the result? Because of these leaders, the country (family, church) will suffer disaster. What if United States and Korea are about to suffer disaster, what should we do? This is what King Solomon teaches us in Ecclesiastes 10:20 – “Furthermore, in your bedchamber do not curse a king, and in your sleeping rooms do not curse a rich man, for a bird of the heavens will carry the sound and the winged creature will make the matter known.” What does it mean? If our leaders do not rule our country well because they are lazy and prodigal and think that money can do everything, we should be careful to curse and criticize such inappropriate leaders. The reason is because the curse or criticism that we made secretly about the leaders of our country can enter into their ears. Therefore, we should pray to God for them, rather than cursing and criticizing them. We should pray for God's mercy and grace, but also for the judgment of God. And we should pray to God for the leaders of our country (family, church), that God will teach them the qualities of resembling Jesus and of the fruit of the Spirit, self-control and faithfulness. In doing so, our country (family, church) will be blessed by God.

Let us remember the days of darkness

[Ecclesiastes 11:1-8]

When I look back on this year, I have things to thank for the grace and love God has given me. In particular, when I think of it as a church, I can not help but thank God that God gave his brother in Christ Kim Dong-Hwan a second chance of life. And when I think it as my home, I am thankful that God has extended the life of my father-in-law. When I think about these two beloved people I have learned some lessons. One of the lessons is that God hears our prayers. I still remember that when Brother Kim Dong-Hwan was lying in the intensive care unit, I visited him and met his wife. She said to me, 'Pastor, I only ask for the miracle of God.' And God has answered her prayer and we are actually seeing this wonderful miracle. I also see the similar kind of miracle in my father-in-law. Although he was sentenced to death by his own doctor because of his lung cancer, I am surprised to see that God is listening to so many people's prayers and that he is doing well. I still remember the moments when I saw and heard that both Brother Kim Dong-Hwan and my father-in-law received death sentences from their doctors. And I thought about how I would have reacted if I had been in their situation. Furthermore, if the doctor tells me that I have less than six months to live, I thought about how I would live the rest of my life. When I did that, I thought of two things. One thing was an illustration that I heard from a friend over a long time ago when I was in college. The illustration was monks' story in a monastery. When the monks were playing soccer in the monastery, their leader came and asked them, 'What are you going to do if you are going to die tomorrow?' The monks' answers were 'I will read the Bible more diligently', 'I will work harder to evangelize', 'I will pray more' etc.. But one monk replied, 'I will play soccer tomorrow.' The reason I like this story is because I want to continue to be faithful to what I have done so far even if I die tomorrow. And another thing that came to my mind was the story about my co-worker in Christ pastor Yong Suk Lee who passed away some years ago. When he was battling with his cancer, I heard that he preached in the church and the ambulance came and took him to the hospital. He wanted to be faithful in preaching the Word of God until he died. When I thought of this pastor who faithfully fulfilled his duty in the Lord's church until the last moment of his death, I also felt that I also want to faithfully take on the responsibility that the Lord has entrusted to me until that day of my last breath in this earth.

When we look at Ecclesiastes 11: 8, this is what the Bible says: "Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Everything that is to come will be futility." What King Solomon is exhorting us is to remember many days of darkness. What is "the days of darkness" that King Solomon is talking about? He is talking about the day of death (Park Yun-sun). King Solomon is encouraging us to look forward to the day of death. Then, what kind of life is a life that looks at the dark day, the day of death? There are three things we can think of:

First, a life that looks forward to the day of death is to live by faith carefully.

When we look at Ecclesiastes 11:2, 5, and 6, the same phrase appears three times over. The phrase is "you do not know" (vv. 2, 5, 6). What does King Solomon say that we do not know? It is the future. He is saying that we can not know the future. This is what King Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 7:14 – "In the day of prosperity be happy, But in the day of adversity consider-- God has made the one as well as the other So that man will not discover anything that will be after him." What does it mean? It means that God gives us not only the days of prosperity but also the days of trouble. What is God's intention? It is that we may not be able to discover anything that will happen in our future. So how should we live since we cannot know the future? Instead of being afraid of the future and worry about it, we should rely on God who knows and controls the future (7:14). And because we do not know the future, we should plan our lives more carefully and live (Wiersbe). We should never live without any plan saying that we live by faith. We must be careful. We must live our lives carefully and faithfully for the glory of God.

Second, a life that looks forward to the day of death is to live a life of loving our neighbors.

Here, loving neighbors refers specifically to relief or help. In other words, as we must look forward to the day of death, we should help our neighbors. How do we help our neighbors?

(1) We must help our neighbors with generosity and without stinginess.

Look at Ecclesiastes 11: 1 – “Cast your bread on the surface of the waters, for you will find it after many days.” Here, what does it mean to “Cast your bread on the surface of the waters”? It means that we must help our neighbors not with stinginess but with a generous heart (Park Yun-sun). King Solomon is exhorting us to live a life of helping others with generosity and without stinginess by looking at the day of death, the day of darkness without any desire for compensation (Park Yoon-sun). Why shouldn’t we desire any compensation for those whom we help? The reason is that we hope that the Lord will pay us back [(v. 1) “... for you will find it after many days ”].

(2) We must have a lot of mercy on many people.

Look at Ecclesiastes 11:2 – “Divide your portion to seven, or even to eight, for you do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth.” Here, the word “Divide your portion to seven or eight” means to do mercy in many ways as much as you can. Or it means to give a lot of mercy to many people (Park Yun-sun). The reason is that we do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth (v. 2). In other words, since we do not know when we will die, we must give many mercies to many people by helping our neighbors with material given by God for the given years. It is because we do not know when we will be in any misfortune and can no longer help others. It is clear, as King Solomon said in verse 3, “If the clouds are full, they pour out rain upon the earth; and whether a tree falls toward the south or toward the north, wherever the tree falls, there it lies.” And as if a storm comes, the tree falls, if a disaster strikes a person, he or she has to face the disaster (Park Yun-sun). How should we live when we do not know when disaster will happen to us? We can be reluctant to serve others while worrying about the calamities that may come to us. This is what King Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 11:4 - “He who watches the wind will not sow and he who looks at the clouds will not reap.” What does it mean? It means that we should not hesitate to help others while worrying about future disasters. That is to say, we cannot help others if we think about this and that. That’s why we have to help others by faith. Only God knows about our future. We don’t know what will happen to us in the future. So we need to give a lot of mercy to many people when God has given us a day of prosperity. Why? The reason is that we don’t know when they day of adversity may come to our lives (7:14).

Third, a life that looks forward to the day of death is to obey God's Word and to make every effort to do God's work.

Look at Ecclesiastes 11:5-6: “Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones are formed in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes all things. Sow your seed in the morning and do not be idle in the evening, for you do not know whether morning or evening sowing will succeed, or whether both of them alike will be good.” What does it mean? We do not know the way of the wind. We also do not know how the baby's bones in the mother's womb are formed and growing. Likewise, we do not know how God accomplishes everything in his providence. That’s why King Solomon is telling us, “Sow your seed in the morning and do not be idle in the evening” (v. 6). Dr. Park Yun-sun interpreted this: “In the days of youth (‘morning’), we must do the work of God's service with materials for righteousness and also in our old age (‘evening’).” Like a farmer, we must sow seeds all the days of our lives. We must sow seeds like the words of Psalms 126: 6 – “He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of seed” Then we will come again with a shout of joy, bringing our sheaves with us. In other words, we must be diligent in doing the work of God both in youth and in old age. Since we don’t know what kind of fruit God will bring forth, we must not lay our hands on it, but we must diligently and put our efforts in doing the Lord’s works.

Today, our church Hispanic Ministry Pastor Gomez had something to say to me. So I listened to him in my office. And I found out that one of our former members of Hispanic Ministry, who went to Mexico, got shot on his back and was paralyzed. It is sad news indeed. His wife served our church faithfully. And he is only 34 years old. After hearing this news for a few hours, I heard another news that one of the sister in Christ in Korea who treated

my family when we visited Korea, passed away. Indeed, it was the afternoon that I felt again that this world is full of deaths. How shall we live? We must live a day, thinking about that days of darkness, the day of our death. We must not only be careful to live by faith, but we must also love our neighbors as Jesus commanded us to do so. And we must do our best to help many people as we can with great mercy. We must obey God's Word and make every effort to do God's work. This life is a beautiful life in God's sight (v. 7) and a life of enjoying God's joy (vv. 7-8). I hope and pray that we may be able to live a beautiful life in the sight of God.

“Be happy, young man”

[Ecclesiastes 11:9-10]

Do you have a joy in your heart or anxiety in your heart these days?

We have been taught three things about how we should live when we look at our death based on the words of Ecclesiastes 11:1-8: (1) First, we must be careful to live our remaining life, trusting God entirely. (2) Second, when we look at our day of death, since we don't know what kind of disaster we may face in the future, we should love our neighbors by helping them as much as we can. (3) Third, we should do our best in doing the work of God as we think about our days of death. We have learned that this is a beautiful life in which we live in obedience to God's Word while looking at the day of death (v.7).

Today, I would like to receive a lesson from King Solomon, under the heading “Be happy, young man”, based on Ecclesiastes 11:9-10. Though today's text is the message of God to the young people, the principle of the message applies to all of us, and we must listen carefully.

First, young people should enjoy their youth.

Look at Ecclesiastes 11: 9 – “Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood.” After King Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 11:7 and 8, “... it is good for the eyes to see the sun” (v.7), “ Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all ...” (v. 8), he said in verse 9 “Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood.” After all, whether we are young or old, regardless of age, we must obey the Word of God, thinking of our days of death (v. 8). We must enjoy doing the work of God, helping our neighbors, as we trust in God completely. King Solomon, in particular, is focusing on young people today in verses 9 and 10. And while he says to the young men, ‘Rejoice and let your heart be pleasant’ (v. 9a) he also says to them “Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things” (v. 9b).

Until I meditated on the text today, I became confused every time I read the verse 9. The Bible says to the young man to “Rejoice” and “let our heart be pleasant”. But the same Bible says “Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things” (v. 9). So I wasn't sure whether the Bible is telling the young men to rejoice and let their hearts be pleasant or to follow the impulses of their hearts and the desire of their eyes but God will bring them to judgment for all these things (v. 9). Actually, Dr. Park Yun-sun interpreted the verse 9 as follows: ‘It is a satirical statement that the so-called ‘follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes’. King Solomon is saying that try to do that if you want to. But there is a danger. That's what the word “God will bring you to judgment (v. 9b)’ (Park Yun-sun). However, when I look at the comment of other scholars, I see the interpretation unlike Dr. Park Yun-sun. One scholar, for example, says that young people should enjoy the youthfulness of their hearts, but their desires should be tempered, while being conscious of the judgment of God (Walvoord). I am not sure which scholar's interpretation is right. But when I think about it in the context of Ecclesiastes 11:7-8, I think King Solomon is saying that being aware of the judgment of God, the youth should enjoy their youth with self-controlled desire.

Then how can young people enjoy their youth? When we look back on Ecclesiastes which we have already meditated, King Solomon has said many words of rejoicing in life that can be summarized in several ways: 'Enjoy eating and drinking' (2:24; 3:13; 8:15, 9: 7), “Enjoy life with the woman whom you love” (9:9), 'Enjoy oneself in all one's labor' (2:24, 5:18) and ‘Be happy in your activities’ (3:22). But when I think about how young people should enjoy their youth, I remembered the words of Psalm 119: 9 – “How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word.” The young people should rejoice in the pursuit of pure conduct according to the word of God. In a word, the way young people rejoice in their youth is to seek purity.

Second, the young people should remove anxiety from their heart and cast off the trouble from their body.

Look at Ecclesiastes 11:10 – “So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless.” If young people do not pursue the purity of life and conduct according to God's word, they will have anxiety in their hearts. Furthermore, when they do not live according to the Word of God, they can not but sin against God in the body. Park Yun-sun said: ‘If a young man does indulgence in his own way, he will eventually become anxious, and will be defiled with evil" (Park Yun-sun). That’s why King Solomon counsels the young men to remove anxiety from their heart and cast off the trouble from their body. How is this possible? When young people rejoice in their hearts while seeking purity according to the word of God, they can enjoy the freedom from the anxieties of their hearts and cast off the trouble from their body. Why then should they also live a life of joy and rejoicing in their hearts, seeking purity in accordance with the Word of God? The reason is that the life of youth is fleeting (v. 10).

What do you think? Don’t you think that time passes by very quickly? Please consider the time of your youth. Didn’t your youth pass too quickly? Have you enjoyed your youth time? Did you enjoy your youth? Did your heart have joy because you live a pure life according to the word of God rather than anxiety, pain, and sin? Or did you spend your youth with anxiety, sorrow, pain and sins in your body and mind? What would you recommend to young people? Young people should rejoice in their hearts. They should enjoy youth. They should enjoy eating, drinking, working, and living a happy life with their spouse in marriage. Furthermore, young people must enjoy the joy of their youth by purifying their hearts and deeds according to the word of God. They should never spend their youth in the worries of the mind, the pain of the body as they satisfy their sinful nature. Knowing the judgment of God and the time of youth passes by very quickly, the young people should enjoy the time of youth in the Lord.

“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth”

[Ecclesiastes 12:1-8]

We have received two lessons from King Solomon, under the title "Be happy young man" based on Ecclesiastes 11:9-10 last week. First, young people should enjoy their youth. But they should not be indulgent but self-controlled in enjoying themselves so that they may not sin against God. In other words, we have learned that young people should enjoy themselves in daily life and in marital affairs, enjoying work, and enjoying pursuing clean conduct according to God's Word, while remembering God's judgment. Second, we were instructed that young people should remove anxiety of their heart and cast off the trouble from their body. Today, King Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 12:1 – “Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them.” King Solomon says we must remember Creator God.

When should we remember the Creator God? It is "youth time". In other words, when we are young and strong, we must remember the Creator God. Why is that? Why should we remember the Creator God when we are young and strong? The reason is because there will be “the days of trouble” (v.1). What day is it to us to say "the days of trouble"? That day refers to ourselves saying, "I find no pleasure in them" (v.1). Then when do we usually say to ourselves, "I find no pleasure in them"? It is when we become old and our body becomes weak. So King Solomon is talking about the affects of the aging phenomenon of human beings up to verses 2 through 6. For example, look at verse 2: “before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain.” This refers to the winter climate phenomenon of Palestine in which there were frequent raining and the weather was dark. Likewise, when a man is old, he has no joy, and often he is depressed. So the Bible says to remember the Creator God in the days of your youth (v. 1). When we look at verse 3, the words “the keepers of the house tremble” refers to the trembling hands of the elderly, and the word “he strong men stoop” refers to the lack of strength in the legs of the elderly. Also, “when the grinders cease because they are few” (v. 3) is analogous to the condition of the tooth, which indicates that a person's teeth are badly damaged when he is old. The word “those looking through the windows grow dim” (v. 3) indicates that the eyes will be blurred when the age is old. In verse 4, “when the doors to the street are closed” means that the ears of the elderly person will slow down. The word “the sound of grinding fades” (v. 4) refers to the elderly who have little teeth and eat food with little sound. And the words “men rise up at the sound of birds” (v. 4) means that if a person is old, he can not sleep so deeply that he wakes up because of the "bird sound". The words “all their songs grow faint” (v. 4) means that the voices of the elderly are weakened and unable to vocalize. Then, in the end, the elderly person has no choice but to go to “his eternal home” (v. 5). In other words, the elderly has to die. Of course, both young people and elderly people will die, but we cannot deny that especially the elderly people have come to the death closer than the young people. Therefore, especially the elderly should live the rest of their lives with a view of death. And the young men will soon become aged as time goes by, so they must live in remembrance of the Creator God with a view of death.

What does it mean to remember the Creator God at the time of the youth? We can summarize it in three ways (Walvoord):

(1) The word "remember the Creator" means to fear God.

The conclusion of Ecclesiastes is Ecclesiastes 12:13 – “Now here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” This is a life that remembers the Creator. Young people who live in a world that is vanity should never spend the rest of their lives in vain (11: 8, 10). To do so, young people should fear God, who controls life and death. And by fearing God, they must pursue purity according to God's word (v. 10). In doing so, they will not have sorrow in their heart, nor will they sin in their body (v. 10).

(2) The word "remember the Creator" means to enjoy life in the Lord and to live responsibly.

When we look back on Ecclesiastes 11: 9-10, which we have already meditated, King Solomon exhorted the young people to rejoice and enjoy their life. At the same time, King Solomon told the young men to consider the judgment of God and to remove anxieties from their heart and cast off trouble in their body. In other words, the pleasure that young people should enjoy is the joy that accompanies responsible life. The Bible never encourages young people to live in irresponsibility pursuing what is futile. How can young people enjoy life in a responsible way? It is possible when they have a point of view of death. Look at Ecclesiastes 12: 6-7: "Remember him--before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well, and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it." These two verses refer to our death. What King Solomon is telling the young people is to enjoy their life in the Lord and be responsible when they are young and strong, because they will get old and will die some day. And the enjoying life and the responsible life are for the sake of the Lord. When we are responsible and satisfied with the Lord and live for the Lord, there is a real joy in that life.

(3) The word "remember the Creator" means to faithfully keep the law of God.

King Solomon exhorted us to "remember your Creator" in the texts of Romans 12:1, where the phrase "Remember" is very similar to "Keeping the Law" in Deuteronomy 8:18 and Psalm 119:55. Also, the phrase "remember" is similar to "meditating on and faithfully following" in Psalm 63: 6 (Walvoord). In other words, the word "remember the Creator" means to faithfully keep the law of God.

Then why should we remember the Creator God in our youth? There are two reasons for this:

(1) We should remember God the Creator in our youth because there are many temptations when we are young (Park Yun-sun).

When we are young, we have the privilege of enjoying youth, but at the same time, it is also the time of youthful temptation. Especially when we are young, there is a danger of following the wasted pleasures of the world rather than following God's law. Maybe one of the reasons for this is that when we are young, we have strong mental and physical strength. Therefore, if we do not live for the glory of God by controlling our mental and physical strength in our youth, we will end up in pursuing the vain glory of this world.

(2) When we are young, we must remember the Creator God because we have spiritual and physical strength, so we have the strength to serve and follow the Lord.

When we are young, we must work hard on the Lord's work. This is because we cannot do the Lord's work even though we want when we are old. When we have strength and power, we should work diligently with the passion of the Lord, because the time of youth passes quickly (11:10). To do so, we must remember the Creator God at the time of our youth.

In youth we must remember the Creator God. Before the days of troubles come and the years approach when we will say "I find no pleasure in them" (12:1), we must remember the Creator God. Before our bodies become weaker and can no longer do anything, we must fear God and keep God's commandments faithfully. Therefore, when we are young, we should enjoy our life with sense of responsibility. May these blessings be upon you.

“Now all has been heard ...”

[Ecclesiastes 12:9-14]

When I go to a Christian bookstore and buy a book, I mainly look at my favorite authors first. Then I check if there are books I have not bought and read yet. After that, if there is a book that I have not read yet, I open the book and look at the table of contents. The reason is to guess roughly what the contents of the book are. Then, before I buy that book, the main part I see is the conclusion at the end of the book. The reason is that if I see the conclusion, I can roughly know what the author wrote in the book.

Today we will finally meditate on Ecclesiastes 12: 9-14, which is the conclusion of the Book of Ecclesiastes. Here King Solomon gives us a final advice. The heart of the last advice is the verse 13: “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” When I started to meditate on Ecclesiastes, I meditated on the first part of Ecclesiastes, chapter 1:1-11, under the title “Vain World”. And after a year and two months later, we are now meditating on the last chapter of Ecclesiastes, Ecclesiastes 12:9-14. I would like to humbly receive the message of the last advice that God would give to us through Ecclesiastes under the heading “Now all has been heard ...,” based on the text of Ecclesiastes 12: 9-14.

The first thing that we must think about is that the Bible says, “Now all has been heard ...” and what is “all” that we have heard. That is the word of truth. Look at Ecclesiastes 12:10 – “The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly.” As we know, King Solomon was the most wise man in the world (1 Kgs. 3: 3-28). With the wisdom that God gave him, King Solomon not only taught the Israelites, God’s people, knowledge but also he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs (v.9). As he was doing so, King Solomon strived to find and use delightful words (v. 10). Such is what he says today in his verse 10 that he wrote words of truth correctly. In other words, King Solomon is claiming that his teaching of the Book of Ecclesiastes is true (not a lie). By saying so, he is telling us that the authority of this book is the Word of God (Park Yun-sun). Then how should we react to all the things that we have heard the words of the Book of Ecclesiastes that has God's authority? How shall we, those who have heard the word of God through Ecclesiastes, live? I would like to think about it in four ways:

First, we, who heard the words of Ecclesiastes, must be pierced by our hearts and consciences through the Word of God.

Look at Ecclesiastes 12:11 – “The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd.” Here, the word “goads” are tools that the shepherd used to guide the flock to the right path, and King Solomon now tells us that the word of God's truth has the same role. When we are swung to the left or to the right, the Word of God strikes our heart and conscience and making us to repent so we can walk on the right path again. This is what the Bible Hebrews 4:12 says: “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” In Acts 2, when the apostle Peter preached the word of God, the people who listened to it were pierced to the heart and asked Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). And Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (v. 38). There were 3,000 people who received the word of God through Peter’s preaching that day and were baptized into repentance by heart (v. 41). Thus the word of God's truth pierces our hearts and our conscience. The question we must ask ourselves is whether our mind and conscience have been pierced by the Word of God as we meditate on the Book of Ecclesiastes every week for over a year. How is it? Personally, I have been pierced in my heart and conscience through the words of Ecclesiastes because I was pursuing vain and futile things of this world. Although Missionary Jim Elliot said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose”, I was fool in pursuing temporal things of this world such as vain pleasure (2:1-11). That’s why my heart and conscience was pierced by the truthful words of Ecclesiastes.

Second, we, who heard the words of Ecclesiastes, must have the Word of God that is like like the “well-driven nails’ in our hearts. In other words, we must solve all the problems of life based on the Word of God.

Look at Ecclesiastes 12:11 – “The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd.” When the Lord, who is the true wisdom and our teacher, speaks the Word to us, it is not only piercing our heart and conscience, but also it is like a “well-driven nails”. What does it mean by the word of truth that is “well-driven nails”? Dr. Park Yun-sun says, “The word ‘well-driven nail’ means that all the problems of life are solved on the basis of God’s Word, just as the important objects are hanged on the nail” (Park Yun-sun). We must listen to the Word of the Lord, who is our Shepherd. And we must be guided and led by His Word. Also, we must obtain wisdom from His Word so that we may be able to solve all the problems of life. We must no longer commit the foolish sin in trying to solve all the problems of our live apart from the Word of God. To do so, the word of truth of God must be like a well-nailed in our hearts. Imagine if a nail is not well-nailed on the wall, how can we hang an important thing on the nail? Likewise, if the words of the truth of God are not well engraved in our hearts, when we encounter the problems of life, we will not and also cannot return to the Word of God’s truth and try to solve the problem. Therefore, now that we have heard all the Word of Ecclesiastes today, we must penetrate the problems of life through the power of the Word of God by engraving the truthful words of Ecclesiastes in our mind.

Third, we, who heard the words of Ecclesiastes, must receive God’s warning through His Word.

Look at Ecclesiastes 12:12 – “But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body.” The Bible 2 Timothy 3:16 says, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” We are not only to be taught by God’s truthful words, but also to be reproved. But what do we receive mainly before we are reproved to God? That’s warning. Our God is the God who warns us before he reproaches us. If we hear and obey the warning of God, we will be praised by God, but if we hear and disobey, we will be rebuked by God. What is the warning that King Solomon giving us in Ecclesiastes 12:12? That is to say, ‘Do not rely on books of the world other than the Bible.’ What is the reason? The reason is that, besides the biblical book, the books of this world are not very satisfactory and only give the researchers fatigue (Park Yun-sun). What do you think? Many books in the world, are they satisfying our soul? Are we sure that only the Bible can satisfy our souls? We should live by faith in “Sola Scriptura” as the 16th century reformers cried out. To do so, we must eat the Word of God, which is the food of our souls. And we should obey the Word so that not only we digest it, but it also becomes our spiritual muscle. Therefore, we must stand firmly in the Word of God and rely on the Word to glorify God by obeying God’s will.

Lastly, we, who heard the words of Ecclesiastes, must fear God and keep His command.

Look at Ecclesiastes 12:13 – “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” This is the conclusion of the whole book of Ecclesiastes. And the conclusion is to fear God and keep His command. The Bible says this is “the whole duty of man.” Here, “the whole duty of man” means ‘all things for man’ (Park Yun-sun). That is, life is made to fear God and to keep his command, and that the value of life depends only on serving God (Park, Yun-sun). In a word, all of us should know the purpose of life and the value of life, and we should live for that purpose and value. What is the value of our life? It only depends on serving God. And what is the purpose of our life? It is to fear God and to keep His command. We should believe in the fact that “God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil” (v. 14) and that we should faithfully fulfill our whole duty in this earth.

We have heard the God’s truths from Ecclesiastes 12: 9-14. God wants us to respond in four ways: (1) God wants us to be pierced in our hearts and consciences through the Word of God. (2) God wants us to solve all the problems of life based on the Word of God. (3) God wants us to receive his warning through his Word – ‘Do not rely on the books of the world other than the Bible.’ (4) Our God wants us to fear God and keep His command. I hope and pray that we, who live in this vain world, will fulfill our whole duty faithfully until the end so that we may

be praised by God as "a good and faithful servant" when we stand before the Lord (Mt. 25:21, 23).

Conclusion