

## RWA 19 - Session 2

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[ 0 : 00 ] I think my experience of Ecclesiastes, and particularly our morning, was this. Turn it to 7.24. 7.23, sorry. This is what I think happened this morning. All this is that I have tested by wisdom.

I said, I will be wise. That's what I thought we were going to do. But it was far from me. That's what actually happened. I thought I'd be wise, but it was far from me.

Yes, I think we'll just continue. We'll leave some stuff out. We'll edit some stuff, and we'll be fine, hopefully. Just a little word about how I think wisdom works. Let me tell you a story.

There was a king. He was a brilliant king. He looked like this. Brilliant king, and his name was King Lothar, and he was married to Queen Emma.

And they were a wonderful, godly couple in charge of a great kingdom. And Lothar and Emma had three sons.

[ 1 : 10 ] And they were called Alexander, and Julius, and Joseph. You can tell their family, they all look very similar.

Share a lot of DNA together. And Alexander, he was the oldest. And everybody loved Alexander because he was handsome. And Julius, he was the second oldest.

And everyone loved him because he was really strong. And everyone loved Joseph because he was a brilliant shepherd, even though he was the youngest.

What happened was, is King Lothar got very old, and Queen Emma got very old, and they started to think about succession. Now, in this kingdom, it was a brilliantly equal kingdom, that it wasn't primogenita, which means that any of the sons could have become king.

It wasn't necessarily the oldest. Lothar and Emma talked long into the night. They didn't get any sleep. They were very worried. Who should we leave the kingdom to? In the end, King Lothar decided, let's set them a test to see who's worthy to be a king.

[ 2 : 19 ] And so he gathered all the people in the courtyard, and he gathered his three sons. And he said to them, you have 24 hours. I want each of you to get an animal that best represents what a king should be.

24 hours to get what best represents what a king should be. And I'll see you back here this time tomorrow. Well, Alexander, he searched high and low, long and far.

He went to the zoology department at Glasgow University, and he came back with a peacock. The weirdest peacock you've ever seen.

These pictures are copyrighted, by the way. A peacock. And everybody was like, that's just amazing. The peacock got out of the trailer.

It was covered up. Alexander lifted the lid. The peacock came out, did its display. And everyone went, that's amazing. We want a king who is beautiful. Who everyone wants to come and see.

[ 3 : 24 ] Please, could you make Alexander king over us, King Lothar? King Lothar said, hang on a minute. Let's see what the other two have brought out. So King Julius came.

He too had a cart and covered over, and he pulled off the cloth. And out came a lion. And a lion. That too is copyrighted.

And the lion jumped out of the cart, roared loudly, and ate the peacock. And everyone said, King Lothar, please make Julius king over us.

And King Lothar said, wait a minute. What about young Alexander? Alexander pulled in his cart and pulled off the cloth.

And out came the little servant girl from across the valley. He knows she's a servant girl because she's carrying a bucket. And also a broom. And he said to them, this is what the king should be.

[ 4 : 36 ] He should be a servant. And it was Prince Joseph who became the king. It's not the most amazing story you've ever heard.

But there is something about that story that just seems right, doesn't it? There's something about the king seeing himself as a servant and one who's there to help others. There's something about that that just seems very wise.

And I think that's what happens when we really get into wisdom literature. We hear something. And it just seems right. It just seems to cut through the pretense and the ethos and the vision and the values of the world.

It seems to cut through all of that. And we go, no, that's right. And I think that's what will happen to us in Ecclesiastes as we go through.

We go, do you know what? There's just something about this that just seems right and fresh and revealing and new. I think in its big headline.

[ 5 : 49 ] It says if you want to live wisely in the world. If you want to live wisely as fallen people in a fallen world, this is how you do it. Live your life as a gift and not for gain.

Live life as a gift and not for gain. If you were summing up this speed date that we're all crazily on together. If you were to sum that up on a feedback form.

And the question on the feedback form of match.com was how was your date. Sum up your date in a sentence. The Ecclesiastes is about one thing. He seems to all be about living life as a gift and not for gain.

Okay, we're back in Ecclesiastes. Come with me to 1 verse 12. So we set the big headline in 1, 1 to 11. Live life as a gift and not for gain.

And now in 12 and most of 2 he's going to see whether that works. He's a good scientist. He has a hypothesis. And now he's going to test it out. He's got some thoughts.

[ 6 : 57 ] And now he's going to see if his theory works in practice. So look with me at chapter 1 verses 12 to 18. What he's going to do is try and make sense of life. He's going to try and make sense of life in the loop, the loop.

Everything's cyclical. Is that the way life really works? Let me read. I, the preacher, have been king over Jerusalem. And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven.

It is an unhappiness that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. I have seen everything that is done under the sun. And behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind.

What is crooked cannot be made straight. And what is lacking cannot be counted. I said in my heart I have acquired great wisdom surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me.

And my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceive that this also is but a striving after wind.

[ 8 : 01 ] For in much wisdom is much vexation. And he who increases in knowledge increases sorrow. What is our preacher trying to do? He's trying to make sense of life in the loop, the loop.

He's trying to see how it works on the inside. He's trying to reason his way to understanding. And so what does he do? He commits to an enormous effort.

A massive research project. He's got government funding galore. He has got a library that smells of mahogany and is full of leather bound books.

He is well placed and he says, I am going to work this out myself. He goes to the Glasgow University and he gets a double PhD in life and he's now sat.

He says, I'm going to work it out. I'm going to work out this life in the loop, the loop. So verses 12 to 13. I'm going to apply my heart to seek and to search up by wisdom all that is done under heaven.

[ 9 : 07 ] This is going to be a unifying theory of absolutely everything. He works and he works and he is busy.

He's like John Nash in A Beautiful Mind. He starts writing on the windows. He started putting cuttings everywhere. He's drawing. People think that he's a psychopath. He isn't.

He's a thorough reach, though, John. He says, verse 16, I've acquired great wisdom.

I've surpassed all who were before me. I am the top of the class. I am the alpha mater of Glasgow University. I get to do the acceptance speech on graduation day.

I am that brilliant. Worked it all out. What's his conclusion? All is vanity.

[ 10 : 10 ] A striving after wind. I tried to work it out. And it was always before me and I could never quite see it. And I certainly couldn't grasp it. Verse 14. Look at verse 17.

I plied my heart to know wisdom. And just in case wisdom didn't work, I went to the other extreme and did madness and folly as well. I have a PhD in wisdom.

A PhD in madness. And a PhD in folly. And when people come up to me and say, what is life all about? It's a striving after wind.

It's beyond me. It overtakes me. It overruns me. I can't control it. I can't grab it. It is utterly beyond me. Not only is it pointless, he says, trying to work out the world.

He says it's also counterproductive. Why? Verse 15. Because from his experience, what is crooked cannot be made straight. And what is lacking cannot be counted.

[11:15] There is something fundamentally broken with the world, he says. There is something about the world that does not work. We think A plus B equals C.

And he says, I've done it all. And I've read it all. And I've seen it all. And I've done it with test tubes and conical flasks. Done it with Bunsen burners and experiments.

And let me tell you, A plus B does not equal C in this world. Why? Because it's twisted. Because it's irrevocably twisted.

It is fallen and broken. That the world doesn't work. What is crooked cannot be made straight.

It is fundamentally at its base level illogical and irrational. Things happen and we don't know why.

Things are going to happen and we don't know when.

[12:19] Isn't this the case at the fall? Isn't this where the twisting happens? How does God set up the world? Well, God is in charge. Man is his vice regent.

Man is to lead his wife and have dominion over creation. That's right, isn't it? God, man. Man leading and loving his wife. The two of them having dominion over creation.

What happens at the fall? Well, the whole thing is twisted, isn't it? You have creation in the form of a serpent. Deceiving and leading the woman into sin.

Who then leads her husband into sin. Who then subverts the rule of God. Do you see that's an absolute twisting? That is where something became crooked.

And the preacher is saying, now that it's crooked, it's beyond us to straighten it. What is lacking cannot be counted.

[13:17] How much money do you not have? Well, you don't really know because you don't have it. I met my wife in TK Maxx.

Not proud of it. Just true. And, uh, she was always in trouble because her till never quite came to the right thing at the end of the day.

She'd always say it was £11 short. It was normally about £600 short. But no one knew. Because what's lacking cannot be counted. I think it was when I put my cheap boxer shorts on the conveyor belt that she thought he really is the one for me.

Probably not. You know, don't you, that life is a little bit logical. Irrational. You have the best plans and they never quite come to fruition.

You do all the work and you still get a C-. The doctors amongst you, someone comes in presenting all the right symptoms for this.

[14:21] And they still die. There's something fundamentally twisted, broken, illogical, irrational in the world. See this in the world, don't we? Remember at Bruntsfield, it's the godly young woman in your church who you wish you could clone.

She's the one dying those with breast cancer. Well, the cantankerous old woman who wants nothing but ill to come to you. She's 90 years old, gets a clean bill of health every year and looks like she's around to haunt you until she's 120.

It's illogical, isn't it? See in the news, it's the impoverished village in Nepal that is hit by a decimating earthquake of 9.7 on the Richter scale.

The entire population is utterly decimated and destroyed and they cannot cope. Well, the affluent village in Shropshire wins Britain in bloom for the third year in a row.

It just seems unfair. No one knows why. 70% of the world is dying of starvation while 30% of the population of the world is crippled by obesity.

[15:26] Does it really make great sense? In one wing of the hospital, doctors are trying frantically to save premature babies.

And in the other wing of the hospital, mothers are undergoing procedures to terminate their pregnancies at the same course in gestation. Can't work it out, can you?

The world is fundamentally broken and we need to remember that. We don't really like it. That's why we try and create these bubbles of meaning and purpose and control for ourselves.

And Ecclesiastes the myth buster. He busts them all, grabs you under the chin and says, no, this is life. It doesn't really work. You can't know everything. Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Why? Because they wanted to know everything. And so they were cursed. And Mr. Ecclesiastes says, you can't know everything and stop trying. He tries to make sense of the world.

[16:31] Not only could he not make sense of the world, but you see, the more he tries to make sense of the world, the more his head hurts. Verse 18, for in much wisdom is much vexation.

The more you know, the more you realize you don't know. You're doing a master's in media management.

And the more you know about media management, the less media can be managed. That's the way it works. And he who increases in knowledge increases in sorrow.

The endless searching for answers only reveals to you how elusive answers are. It's all a bit foggy. A bit elusive.

A bit ephemeral. It's a bit shape-shifting. So our preacher, he's done the experiment and he says, I tried to work it out. And it was beyond me.

[17:33] It's too much. My education came to nothing. It just seems to be vanity. And I tried to employ all of my intellect, all of my wisdom, all of my research.

And I came to the conclusion it really is vanity. It's just smoke. So he's done this thought experiment. He tried to make sense of life.

Now in chapter 2, he tries to make the most of life. So he says, I can't work it out in my head and in my research. Can I work it out through experience? And so if the end of chapter 1 was making sense of life in the loop-to-loop, chapter 2 is all about making the most of life in the loop-to-loop.

Look with me at verses 1-3. I said in my heart, come now, I will test you with pleasure. He's going for it. He's going to say no to nothing and yes to everything.

I said in my heart, come now, I will test you with pleasure. Enjoy yourself. That's his new ethos. But behold, this also was vanity. I said of laughter, it is mad and of pleasure.

[18:50] What use is it? Do you see what he's doing in verses 1-3?

He's trying recreation. He says, let's eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. If it's just a loop-to-loop, then let me squeeze out of life all that I can.

So what does he do? Verse 2, I said of laughter. He went to every comedy festival whatsoever. He even got on the Glasgow to Edinburgh Express.

He went to everything at the Fringe Festival he possibly could. Life seems so meaningless and sad, so let me just laugh my way through it. Let me go and see Nish Kumar and Michael McIntyre, Sarah Pascoe.

Let me go and see them all and let's see if laughter makes sense of stuff. I think there's no mistaking that in a world that is so pressured and pressed, like our 21st century life, that what is the big bill item on the telly?

[20:01] It is comedy. Now we can't make sense of life in the loop, so let's just laugh our way through it. This is what the preacher does.

He's so contemporary. He's a modern man. 2,600 years ago. I'm going to laugh my way through it. What does he say? It's mad. It's pointless. Created this little bubble of comedy for me to try and anaesthetise me from what's going on outside.

He says it's mad. It didn't work. I still went home after the encore and I cried myself to sleep on my memory foam pillow. And the problems were still there.

Then what does he do? I said of laughter it is mad. He went to fencing on a Friday. What use is it? He went for a hedonistic lifestyle.

He went water skiing on the weekend. He went to fencing on a Friday. He went to board game club on Wednesday.

[21:08] He went to cookery class on Thursday. He did it all. He went skating. Skydiving. He went to laser quest.

He went to laser quest. He did it all. And he said, what use is it? Yeah, it was a bit of a distraction for the little bit of time I was there.

And I'm pleased that I shot more people with my laser gun than anyone else. But then I went home and it's gone. Fleeting pleasure. And again, in our 21st century society, isn't that the way we live?

What is the growth market? Well, it's not shopping anymore. It's experiences. Let's do stuff. Life out in the world, in the cycle, is so repetitive and meaningless.

So let's look for new experience, novelty. Let's go on a balloon ride. Let's go on a week's holiday to the Algarve. Let's go trekking through the Amazon.

[ 22 : 15 ] And it's not that the preacher is saying these are bad things. He's saying that if it's pure escapism, what's the point? Pointless. Do you see how into making the most of life he is?

Comedy festival. Saying yes to every form of pleasure. And then verse 3. I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine.

I couldn't laugh it away. I couldn't experience it away. Can I drink it away? Just live for the weekend. Just like... All the time. It's not that he was a reckless binge drinker.

His heart's still guiding him with wisdom. But it didn't matter how much gin and tequila and brew dog lager he drank. He still woke up feeling terrible in the morning and life still didn't make sense.

He did it all. Until end of verse 3. Until I might see what was good for the children of man to do unto heaven during the few days of their life.

[ 23 : 24 ] It didn't work. It was vanity. It was a striving after wind. He couldn't laugh it away. He couldn't experience it away.

He couldn't drink it away. Do you see verse 3? The few days of their life. Death was still coming. If he drank too much it would come very much quicker than he thought.

If he did some really extreme sports it might come on the next slope. Or the next river. And isn't that how we build a bubble for ourselves?

Live for the weekend. Laughter is the best medicine. How can it be wrong when it feels so good? I'm H-A-P-P-Y.

I'm H-A-P-P-Y. I know I am. I'm sure I am. I'm H-A-P-P-Y. And the preacher just goes, bop. Doesn't make any difference.

[ 24 : 27 ] Still going to die. Still goes round and round and round and round. And not only are you going to die. But no one will remember you at the pub as the guy who could drink 20 pints and still walk home.

Nobody's going to remember your triple salco on a snowboard that you did. And nobody's going to remember you. As the guy who went to the comedy festival and laughed the loudest and heckled the most.

So that's what he does. He tried recreation. He said pointless. Verses 4 to 6. If that didn't work. He's going to do some construction. If I couldn't make sense of life in recreation.

What if I build stuff? Do you see what he does? Verse 4. I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself.

He said, well, recreation's not going to work. What if I build the best house? What if I build a vineyard and everyone goes, oh, John Gemmell, Cote de Reserve, 1574, the nicest wine.

[ 25 : 38 ] That'll give meaning and significance to my life. Then verse 5. He makes gardens and parks. Planted in them all kinds of fruit trees.

That is definitely an allusion to Eden. If I could make a little Eden-like existence for myself, then it will make sense. He's really giving himself to construction.

Do you see also, verse 6, I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. I think the sense there is, I've not only built great vineyards and gardens, but I've also worked out an irrigation system so they'll last a very long time and they won't shrivel and die.

Even when I'm gone. He's done all of this. He did some great construction. Not only that, but he did some accumulation. He went shopping.

Verse 7, I bought male and female slaves. And not only that, but I set up a dynasty so there were new slaves that were born in my house. Some of the female slaves got together with the male slaves and I had more slaves.

[ 26 : 44 ] I also had great possessions of herds and flocks. More than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. I was on the Forbes rich list. I was on the Forbes rich list. I was on the Forbes rich list. I was on the Forbes rich list.

2600 BC. Forbes rich list, number one, the preacher. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces.

His underground bunker just full of ingots. Gold. Gold. Do you remember Duck Tales? Scrooge McDuck. He just went swimming in his gold every morning.

This was this guy. How many lengths did you do this morning? I did 70 lengths through gold sovereigns. It was hard work. But it made me feel great about myself. I got singers.

He employed singers. Natalie's got a picture, very jealous, of her and Taylor Swift. This guy employed Taylor Swift to do private concerts for him all the time.

[ 27 : 48 ] Taylor, sing as a song. Okay. Taylor, serenade us, please. We want to hear it. Not only that, and many concubines.

That sounds very Solomon-ish, doesn't it? 700 wives and 300 concubines. The delight of the sons of man. Do you see? He's really gone for it. I couldn't make sense of it, so I'll make the most of it.

So I became great, verse 9, and surpassed all he would be for me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. And whatever my eyes desired, I did not keep from them.

He didn't have an Amazon wish list. He didn't. He just bought it. Add to basket. Add to basket. Add to basket. Page after page. Billions of pounds invested. The white vans would just queue up outside his house.

Here's some stuff. And here's some stuff. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil.

[ 28 : 51 ] Then I considered all that my hands had done, and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, I was greatly satisfied and died happy, and people remembered me forever.

No! All was vanity. And a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained after the, under the sun.

I did all of these things. My Facebook page was full of photos that made everyone jealous. And then I died. And the account was deleted. And seven years afterwards, people would sit in the pub and go, do you remember?

People go, I just can't remember his name. I just can't remember his name. You see, it didn't result in gain. He couldn't make sense of it. He couldn't make the most of it.

Life happens. From the cradle to the grave. Then it was over. But there is somewhat of a contradiction, isn't there?

[ 29 : 59 ] Verse 10, and whatever my eyes desired, I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward.

This was my halak. This was my gift. In all my toil. Do you see what he says? I did all this stuff. There was no gain from it, but I enjoyed it.

But when I saw it as a gift, my 58 years in Glasgow, there was pleasure. I did enjoy it.

It was a good thing that I received and had opportunity to do from God. I lived for the day. Carpe diem. I grabbed it.

But at the end, when I considered all that I'd done, all that I'd expended, all that I'd spent, all was vanity and a striving after wind.

[ 30 : 58 ] And there was nothing to be gained. There was no net gain from my life. Do you see how freeing that is? Do you see how freeing that is? Sounds a bit pessimistic, but it is freeing.

That you have one life to enjoy. One life to live. One existence to live in great gratitude for.

One life to live in great gratitude for. And so you'd be foolish to use this life to try and make a name for yourself. Foolish. Foolish to try and perpetuate a reputation that is just gone.

As you are gone. Wisdom didn't work. Experience didn't work. But it comes to some understanding. It was great. But it won't last. It was excellent. And fun. And enjoyable.

[ 32 : 06 ] And my work. Made me feel happy and gave me meaning and purpose. But when they put me in the ground, it was over. Live for today, says the preacher.

Life in the loop, the loop. It's going to go round anyway, so you may as well enjoy the ride. Do you remember the Thunder Looper at Alton Towers? Just like a loop. You got on it.

It shot you up. You went round. You went up. You came down. And you went back. You ended up in exactly the same place you started. In fact, all roller coasters are like that, aren't they? You never make any real progress. Like the Smiler at Alton Towers.

The Smiler is terrifying. Do you know what's even more terrifying? When you're at the front of the queue after two and a half hours, they expect fixing it. And you're the first people on it. That brings a whole new level of jeopardy to it.

And the preacher says, life's a roller coaster. You're not going to make any progress. You're going to end up where you started. He's going to say very clearly, from dust you came and from dust you return. So how should you live?

[ 33 : 09 ] You should put your hands in the air like you just don't care. And enjoy it and enjoy it and enjoy it as a gift. Not as gain. Because you will get off at the same place that you got on.

Round and round. Up and down. Why can there be no gain?

What is it that sets this research? The preacher has been there, done that, thought about it, got the t-shirt, made the t-shirt, sold the t-shirt. He enjoyed it. When it was gift.

But he said the end result was not gain. That's freeing. You don't need to invest your life to try and perpetuate your name. That's dealt with. So enjoy it.

Now in 12 to 23 he tells us why. So I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly.

[ 34 : 09 ] For what can the man do who comes after the king? Even the king will die. Only what has already been done. It's still the loop the loop. Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom and in folly.

As there is more gain in light than in darkness. The wise person has his eyes in his head. But the fool walks in darkness. And yet I perceive that the same event happens to all of them.

The same event, death. Then I said in my heart, what happens to the fool will also happen to me. Why then have I been so wise? And I said in my heart that this also is vanity.

For of the wise as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance. Seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool.

So I hated life. Because what is done under the sun was grievous to me. For all is vanity and a striving after wind. Do you see the reset button is death.

[ 35 : 10 ] Indiscriminate death. Death is coming to us all. It is closer now than when we began. There's a lovely thought for you. You will be closer to your death.

When you get back from the weekend than you were when you arrived. And the preacher is not even depressed about that. He says for your life be wise.

Live wisdom is better than folly. Live a wise life. But don't think living a wise life will end in game. Because you're still going to die.

He says remember every funeral you go to is a constant reminder to you. That one day it will be you they're putting in the ground. Get used to that and be free.

Don't spend all of your life trying not to think about death. Because it will surprise you when it comes. And you'll have wasted your life while you were waiting. Be wise.

[ 36 : 08 ] Don't be foolish. But don't think your wisdom will inoculate you against death. It is coming. One day you are going to see the ground from the brown side. Not the green side.

He's not a nihilist. Many people read the preacher and they think he should go for counselling. Because he's very depressed and pessimistic.

He's not actually. He's the most joyful liberated individual we can ever meet. Because he stares death in the face. He knows he's coming. He knows he deserves it.

And he says I'm going to make the most of my life now. Just imagine. You go to the doctor on Monday. And they say to you. You have two months to live.

You have a heart condition. And it's nearly failed. For these two months you can live a normal life. There's nothing you can do to stave off death. You have two months.

[ 37 : 12 ] And in around two months. It'll stop beating and there's nothing we can do. Like sudden death syndrome. But you knew it was coming. Like Fabrice Mwamba.

Just going to spark out on the ground. How differently would you live your life? For those two months. What kind of things would you do? You tell people that you love them.

You do all the things that you've always really wanted to do. But never quite squeezed in. You get your affairs in order. You'd make the most of every minute.

Of every second. And the preacher's saying. You do have a heart condition.

You might spark out at any moment. So why does knowing when the end is coming. Exactly. Make a difference. When you know the end is coming. And every day you live is a gift to enjoy.

[ 38 : 17 ] Not a product to invest. That I think the big thing the Bible is going to tell us all the time is. Today is what matters.

Don't be anxious about tomorrow. That'll be work out itself. Work on today. The writer to the Hebrews would say. Today is the day of salvation. Today is the day to do stuff. And why is that so important?

Because you cannot guarantee tomorrow. None of us could guarantee that on my car. That on our car journey. On the way home. Tomorrow afternoon.

We will not hit black ice. And skid over a ravine. And plunge to our deaths. I had friends in London. Millie and Toby.

Two young teachers. And in the summer they went on holiday. To Sardinia. And they hired a June bus. Buggy. To go up the volcano. And it went very wrong.

[ 39 : 14 ] And they plunged to their deaths. The funeral was appallingly sad. But amazingly joyful. Why? Because they loved each other.

They loved the Lord. And in their short lives. They accomplished many things for him. And left an indelible impact for the Lord Jesus. On many people's lives. And I think that's what Ecclesiastes is doing.

It's giving us a shake. Saying don't be so fixated with the future. And miss what is happening right now. Don't be so fixated in gaining tomorrow.

When you have a wonderful gift to enjoy now. Do you know mindfulness? Living in the present. My watch tells me to breathe every so often.

And you have to kind of breathe with it. And then there's the kind of Headspace app. Which you do for a bit. All to try and make you focus in on yourself in the moment. I want to say some of that is total mumbo jumbo.

[ 40 : 19 ] But it is just actually the message of Ecclesiastes. That live in the present. Enjoy the one life you have. In the time that you have it.

And so he comes into land in the conclusion. 24 to 26. There is nothing better.

For a person. That he should eat. And drink. And find enjoyment. In his toil.

This also I saw is. From the hand of God. It's a gift. For apart from him who can eat. Or who can have enjoyment. For to the one who pleases God.

Has given wisdom and knowledge and joy. But to the sinner. To the one who doesn't acknowledge God. He has given the business of gathering and collecting. Only to give to one who pleases God.

[ 41 : 16 ] This also is vanity. And a striving after wind. How do we make the most of today? How are we going to make the most of lunch time?

We're going to eat our food to the glory of God. With joy in our hearts and gratefulness. How many of us are eating is not done in enjoyment?

We just like try and stuff as many calories into our faces. To get on to the next thing. How many of us are eating lunch at our desk? Ecclesiastes says that's no way to live.

Ecclesiastes would say. What is your theology of food? Say grace. Really mean it. Say for every mouthful. Take time over it.

Take time to enjoy it with people. And then continue to do your work. With joy in your hearts and thankfulness for what he's given you to do.

[ 42 : 15 ] Isn't that the Lord Jesus? What is the Lord Jesus doing all the time in the Gospels? He's eating. Isn't he? There's one theologian who says Jesus eats his way through the Gospels.

I think that's really good. And why do they kill him? Because he eats with the wrong people. He has a rich theology of enjoying his food.

I always watch Greg Wallace and I think he's the person I'd like to be. Because what does he do? He has this way of taking a mouthful of food from the MasterChef contestant.

That shows that he is in the moment. Savouring the flavour. Like it's the most important mouthful that he's ever eaten. I mean it's quasi-erotic at times I think what he's going for.

And I think be like Greg Wallace with your food. Eat it. And enjoy it. Why? Because you might not get lunch tomorrow. Why? And drink.

[ 43 : 24 ] Both Schler. And if you're so inclined. Some Brewdruck Craft Lager. Do you see how it's rich here?

He says enjoy what's right in front of you. Find enjoyment in your toil. I live in London where loads of people do terrible jobs for an enormous length of time to try and get on in the world. To try and climb the greasy pole of success to get to the very top.

And when they get there it's just as miserable as it was on the way down. I've just read the autobiography of Matt Lucas. The guy who did Little Britain. He said he spent much of his years trying to become famous.

He said I got fed up of paying for tickets to the theatre. Because they cost so much money. I just wanted to be invited and looked after myself. And what he said the problem is now people give me free tickets to the cinema.

Free tickets to the theatre. The problem is then I need to go to make up. I need to find somebody to accompany me on the red carpet. I need to buy new clothes.

[ 44 : 33 ] And actually it's more expensive to go to the theatre now than it was when I was paying for the ticket myself. That he spent all of his time thinking about the future and he missed what was right in front of him all of the time.

This also is vanity. Do you see the sinner? What does he do? He just collects and gathers stuff and accumulates stuff and then he dies and it goes to someone else.

Like the person who made the tetrapack fortune. You know tetrapacks that you get milk in? Made billions of pounds and all the children have squandered the money in loose living.

It didn't really count for anything. We can't even remember their name, the tetrapack man. He did some amazing origami and made billions. Given the business of gathering and collecting only to give to another, this too is vanity.

Striving after wind. Big message. Live life as a gift from God to be enjoyed. In which to employ wisdom.

[ 45 : 41 ] But don't try to gain from it. That is the path of frustration and loss. See how mind bending Ecclesiastes is?

It almost sounds very un-Christian doesn't it? But I think it's really Christian. That these present joys of eating and drinking.

What got Adam and Eve into trouble in the garden? Eating. They had so much to enjoy but it was always that little bit more. How does the Bible end? What's the big image of that last day when we meet the Lord Jesus?

A wedding banquet. So we enjoy food in the present. As we look back to where it all went wrong. But we look forward to where it's going. You have the chance to practice enjoying your food now. Because one day you'll be enjoying food with all God's people for absolutely ever.

[ 46 : 44 ] Enjoy it. Chew it. Keep chewing it. Savour every last mouthful and do it with real gratitude in your heart.

Knowing that it is a good gift from God. I think Jesus gets very close doesn't he in the parable of the rich fall. This guy is a guy who's trying to live life for gain.

And he told them a parable saying, The land of a rich man produced plentifully. And he thought to himself, What shall I do for I have nowhere to store my crops?

And he said, I will do this. I will tear down my barns and build larger ones. And there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, He's literally praying to himself, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years.

Relax, eat, drink and be merry. But God said to him, Fall this night your soul is required of you. And the things you have prepared, Whose will they be? You've just gathered them.

[ 47 : 50 ] And they'll be given to another. So the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not, So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God. What's the rich fool's problem?

It's not that he's rich. It's that he's self-contained and he's tried to invest his life to make his life easier and to last forever. What is his problem? That he was not rich toward God.

He didn't see it as gift. He thought he was the reason for his success. He was the reason that he could kick back, eat, drink and be merry. And all the time totally neglected God.

And that's why he's a fool. You too could be a fool if you go the same way. It is foolishness.

Because one day the food in your bigger barns will rot.

And it will rot as you're rotting in the ground. But be rich toward God now and enjoy all of his good gifts. Well, what a joy. I think our biggest problem in the Western world is not that we have nothing to be thankful for.

[ 48 : 55 ] It's that we've forgotten that we have someone to be thankful to. Our biggest problem in the 21st century is not that we don't have anything to be thankful for. It's that we've forgotten that we have somebody to be thankful to.

Isn't that why we are all so desperately miserable in the UK? We have wealth we don't know what to do with. We have possessions that we have to go to big yellow storage to try and keep them dry.

And yet at the same time we are desperately miserable. We are crunching on antidepressants like they were smarties. Antidepressants like they were smarties. And I think at the absolute core root of that.

Is it's not that we don't have anything to be thankful for. It's that we've forgotten we've got somebody to be thankful to. And Ecclesiastes says enjoy your life. To the best of your ability. To the glory of God. Giving thanks to him all the way through. So here's your homework before we meet later. But go and have lunch.

[ 50 : 04 ] And take your time over it. And savour it and chew it with gratitude in your hearts. Drink your water and your juice. Knowing that they come from your heavenly father who does not withhold good gifts from his children.

And enjoy the fellowship with one another. Knowing that if some people do some outrageous activities this afternoon you might not see them again. Until eternity. Amen. Enjoy it. To the glory of God. That's what Ecclesiastes says. Whole shift in our attitudes and actions.

It's freeing. You don't need to make yourself last forever. The Lord Jesus has already nailed that for you. It frees you to make the most of.

Now. Now. And today. Living life in the loop. The loop. Only works if we live our lives as gift. And not for gain. Whole shift in our attitudes and actions.

[ 51 : 10 ] Free to enjoy things now. Not very good at it. We're always trying to get somewhere else. Enjoy life now. And expect things not to work out.

Save yourselves loads of disappointment. If you know that the world does not work. Then don't be surprised when it doesn't work. And don't be crushed by it.

But let that point you forward to a day where it will all work perfectly. Seeing life as gift and not for gain. It changes everything. It makes me very thankful.

That all the time I think I don't deserve it. God if you treated me how I deserve. I would not wake up tomorrow morning. And that would be the right judgment.

I have had 38 years and 2 weeks of your grace. And all of them were totally undeserved. It makes me very present in the moment.

[ 52 : 11 ] Enjoying what God has given me today. Rather than trying to store it or stockpile it to get me through tomorrow. It makes me very gracious to other people. Because I'm humbled.

It enables me to enjoy other people. It helps me see that they're a good gift from God. That I can help. Of benefit from. I love. And serve.

Rather than competition that I need to trample over or pull down. Because they're a gift. It makes me a brilliant steward. Not in church helping people find their seat.

I mean stewarding what God has given you. It's all a gift from him. My money is not mine. Therefore I don't have to hold on to it tightly. I should be wise with it. It's not reckless milky bar kids.

Throwing it everywhere. But it is saying this doesn't define me. This isn't where my security is found. This doesn't ensure my tomorrow. That's all a gift. It means I can be generous.

[ 53 : 15 ] It means my stuff isn't my stuff. It means the house that I have is in my little castle where I live. And my own sanctuary. It means if someone spills red wine on my cath kits and cushions.

They were mine anyway. I'll be furious though. Doesn't it make me more godly? More God conscious?

That every mouthful I have I chew. Because my heavenly father has fed me. Isn't that why we come to at the end of twelve? And I promise this is the last thing I will say.

The end of the matter. All has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments.

For this is the whole duty of man. What does it mean to fear God? I think it means this. It means be conscious of God being conscious of you. Be conscious of God being conscious of you.

[ 54 : 18 ] And I think if we get into this gift and not gain mentality. It helps us be perpetually conscious. Of God our heavenly father who is perpetually conscious of me.

And that will change everything. It will make me grateful. It will make me holy. It will make me fear him. Which will enable me to tell others about him. I will fear him most.

I will be way more conscious of him being conscious of me. Than I am conscious of them and what they think about me. And I think this is the nub of Ecclesiastes.

Friends, live life. Whatever it looks like. In a way that says this is a gift. And not for gain.

Isn't that the way the gospel works? None of us came to know the Lord Jesus because we were great. Or clever. Or wealthy.

[ 55 : 20 ] Or brilliant. Or had two PhDs in life from Glasgow University. That's not the way it worked. How did it come to us? Came to us as a gift. It's the most famous verse in the Bible.

For God so loved the world that he gave. His only son that whoever believes in him should not perish. Should not come to nothing. But gain. Eternal life.

Friends, live life as. Gift. And not. For gain. Let me tell you what I think we're going to do. Now we're completely behind time and everything.

I think we'll look at chapter five this evening. Which is just massaging that point in the realm of wealth. And the realm of worship. And then I think there's lots of other quiriness in Ecclesiastes. So you know in your house you have a messy drawer. Where you just put like all the batteries and cables you don't know what to do with. That will be Sunday morning. We'll just pull out some stuff from the messy drawer. Which I hope will give us some real practical things of what this might look like.

[ 56 : 22 ] As we go on from here. Like I said. Speed dating Ecclesiastes. But I hope you're firm friends. In a strong relationship for all of the rest of your lives.

Even if they only last until tomorrow. Brilliant. Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you.