



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Lessons from Mike Black

Ecclesiastes 12: 8-14

Lesson 16 of 16

2007-08

“The End Of The Matter”

TRANSCRIPT

This is our final lecture in the Book of Ecclesiastes and let me say that I have appreciated so much the kind encouragement that you have given to me over these weeks, and now months, struggling through this book as I have. This is the most difficult teaching experience I've ever had. I thought there were times in the Book of Romans that things were very difficult. But they don't touch this book at all, simply because you have so much more material to draw from in a book like Romans. And, to my surprise, so little work has been done on the book of Ecclesiastes. So I want to thank you, and I appreciate your kind words of encouragement, and your many kind notes and letters to me. They have all been a source of real encouragement and blessing, as I have struggled through these weeks.

And I want to say to the elders of Believers Chapel, I'm very grateful to have had this opportunity to teach. And I appreciate so much your confidence in me to expound the scriptures; because I don't take the opportunity to teach at Believers Chapel lightly. I consider it to be the great pulpit of America. The history and tradition of this church, the teachers that have been here, and the teacher that you have now, make the Chapel a place of great respect in my heart and my mind.

All right, let's look at *'The End of The Matter'*. We are in Ecclesiastes, chapter 12, and we begin in verse 8, which as I will explain, really frames this chapter as we bring it to a conclusion.

"Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher,
"Everything is meaningless!"

Not only was the Teacher wise, but he also imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true.

The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like well driven nails firmly embedded—given by one Shepherd. Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them.

Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.

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.
For God will bring every deed into judgment,
including every hidden thing,
whether it is good or evil.

Ecclesiastes 12: 8-14

Let's bow before the LORD of the Word for a moment of meditation and prayer, and then we'll begin our study.

And so LORD, we bring to a conclusion this magnificent book, that is strewn with so many dark alleys; so many places that we have tried to come up for a breath of air. It seems out of kilter with the rest of the Scriptures. And yet here, in this conclusion, in this chapter, 'our man with the powerful mind' will bring it together for us. I pray that tonight, these stammering lips can deliver that final subject, *The End of The Matter*; and that we will all come away with a new appreciation for the Book of Ecclesiastes, and what it is telling us about our lives here 'under the sun'. So bless us to that end and help us, for we seek to only bring glory and honor to Christ, Who is our life, and Who is our life to come. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

The context of our concluding lesson began with three *exhortations*. In chapter 11, verse 1; the exhortation to **be bold** (lesson 14). In chapter 11, verse 7; to **be joyful**; and chapter 12, verse 1; to **be godly** (lesson 15). And now, here we are to our concluding lesson that also fits into this context of *exhortation*.

Our text tonight divides into two parts. The first, verses 8-12, and the second, verses 13 and 14. We want to observe the change of the narrative voice in verse 9: For it moves our transcript from 'the man with the powerful mind' and his observations 'under the sun', to an 'epilogue'. Observe—we move from first person speech to third person speech. Now, is this a change of writer, speaker, or a change in persons, or a person's perspective? Is this an actual shift to another party, commenting on 'the man with the powerful mind's' transcript that he has finished? Or is it the same hand involved in all of the writings? These are the numerous questions that fill commentaries.

Personally, I don't see any reason to advocate another writer. Rather, I understand this to be a stylistic device to frame the conclusion which begins for us in verse 8. Of utmost importance, let's remember, everything here is inspired and inerrant: Profitable for teaching, for correction, for rule and righteousness.

So, he opens the first part of our outline, verse 8, with language that we have heard before; specifically telling us that 'there is no real meaning in the world.' This is what he told us at the beginning of the book; see chapter 1 in verse 2. So, the book ends where it began.

There are two deviations from what we had at the beginning. In chapter 1, verse 2; in the NIV it says, "Life is *utterly* meaningless"; making the chapter 1's saying a bit longer and more emphatic than what we have here in verse 8. Also, in chapter 1 verse 2; we have the definite article, the Teacher, which we do not have here at the conclusion. With those two exceptions, everything else is the same.

So now, here is our text for today: Verse 9. After summarizing the thesis (vs8), 'the man with the powerful mind' starts with a description of his work. Let's stop here for a moment and consider this 'providential work'. Some men have to work long hours, and work weekends. And therefore they are limited to their amount of time they have

to study the Word of God. Today we have tapes; we have CDs; we have iPods: And those fill in the gaps and have been wonderful tools to keep the Word of God fresh in our minds. I am very grateful that we do have this kind of technology today: (And I am grateful that Believers Chapel stays on the cutting edge of this technology; moving ahead with this type of work). But men and women, because of their schedules, are limited.

So, let's consider Solomon; 'the man with the powerful mind'. He didn't have to fight the battles that David did. Under David's expansion and rule, Israel was the most powerful nation in all of the Near East. So Solomon, who we have interpreted to be 'the man with the powerful mind', inherited tranquility. And as a result, he was therefore able to study; to write; to think; and to observe: All because Providence had brought those things to his door post.

Let's make a couple of applications in light of the above. First: If you have the discretionary time to learn the Word, then learn it. Be a student of this text and be a student of the Scriptures. And what better place to learn it than Believers Chapel, who centers all of their ministry around the Word of God. Secondly: Even with all of Solomon's studying and gifting, we now see that it did not lead him to a wise or skillful life. You see, one may see the details of life around him with perfect clarity, but it takes courage and fortitude to carry out the messages within those details.

For example, in Matthew, chapter 2, in verse 1, the Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, 'Where is the one born to the King of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.' Now consider what an event that was. The revelation of God had been confined to the people of Israel, and here come these strangers into their temple saying, 'Behold. We have seen his star.' And what did the chief priest and scribes do? Well, they quoted Micah 5:2, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you be small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from all time."

But Question! Did the chief priest and scribes act on what they knew? Bethlehem's just five miles down the road, but they didn't inquire into this report!

Rather, they just sent the Magi on their way—and stayed home. Why? Well, they knew the details but they just didn't believe them. If you any question about this, the Lord Jesus Himself, pegs the problem in John 5:39&40. He told the Jewish leaders, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you might have life." See, there's a world of difference between *knowing* and actually *believing* in something. Jonah *knew* what to do. He just didn't do it. And it took a ride in a whale to make him learn. It's amazing how we learn after a ride in a whale, isn't it?

So, in verse 9, when our writer refers to himself as a 'wise man', we must consider the distinction. No doubt he was 'wise'. In some ways he was 'very wise'. He was a hard worker (and we will be looking at those verbs in a moment), but in many ways he lacked the skill to live life properly. Mr. Spurgeon said, "I don't want my death pillow stuffed with thorns of regret": But Solomon's was. Isn't it interesting that the two most gifted individuals by God in Holy Scripture, namely Solomon and Samson, squandered their gifts and wasted their talent.

Now look at his activity level in verse 9; all these verbs that describe his work: He imparted knowledge, he taught, he pondered, he heard, he searched out, he investigated, he set in order, and he put in order many proverbs. Then in verse 10, the last sentence, lists three specific activities that our wise teacher performed during his career '**Seeking**' (the NIV: '*to search*'): And they are; 1.) reading and acquainting oneself with a broad range of material, 2.) considering the exact words to use, and then 3.) writing those words to tell us the "*upright and true*". This is really the work of a scholar; or of a professor.....

[I think of you at Believers Chapel: What a blessing the heritage of this church has. You had S Lewis Johnson, Jr., who Bruce Waltke called the greatest Bible teacher in the last half of the last century. And how blessed you are today with Dan Duncan: A student; always a student; always learning; always absorbing. And Dan's understanding of history with his travels amazes me: And how he can tie this understanding with his travel into his messages...You are truly blessed people.]

...An intrigue in this verse 10 is found in the phrase 'sought to find' ('*searched to find*' in the NIV). This phrase has been used several times throughout the book, and often it's our 'man with the powerful mind' seeking something; and never finding it. For example, in chapter 7: 23, 'He *sought* to be wise, but found that it was beyond him.' In chapter 8: 16, 'He *applied* his mind to know wisdom' in such a way that he deprived himself of sleep. And yet, in exhaustion he found that it could not be discovered. And finally, on a humorous note, the one thing he did seek and did find: the 'bitterness of women' (See Chapter 7: 26). (And I bet he did 'the finding' in the midst of all those wives he had.)

Verse 11. We are now given his intentions; the characterization of his writings of wisdom. In brief, he likens wisdom's teaching to '*goads*', that prod livestock in line, and '*nails*' that are firmly fixed into place. And he also names their source as coming from "...one Shepherd". Now let's watch this first sentence of vs11 very carefully, for the syntax here is a bit odd in the inspired language. Notice the images of **goads and firmly planted nails** are after their objects of comparison, namely '**words**'. And "the wise" (in the NIV) is probably better understood as 'instructors' or 'masters'. And in the third part of the verse, "...given by one Shepherd", ties back to the word "...**words**...", and to the 'instructors or masters' (called "wise" in your NIV). Well, let's first look at the images, and then proceed on that basis.

The **goad**, which is a long rod with one or more points on the end, stir livestock into motion. This, we want to remember, is part of the shepherd's stock-and-trade. The **nails** are firmly established into the **goad** like a spike. Michael Fox correctly observes that when those two elements are united; they sting. I can remember Dr. Bruce Waltke saying that 'the father taught the son' throughout the Proverbs with a 'bite'. In other words, it was stern and straightforward: They were forceful words of instruction. The 23rd Psalm, we have the image of the rod and the staff: the 'spur' will stick to the memory of the student. That's the idea.

The correspondents to these images are "words", and "instructors" (or "masters"). Notice: "**Words**" are God's chosen means of revelation. They have been

preserved down through history by His miraculous Providence. Do you want to know God? Well, you must hear His Word. He will tell you who He is. Do you want to know yourself? You must hear His Word. He will tell you who you are. He will tell you what you are.

Let me just say, going to any modern day “religious service” will not be a great deal of value for the believer. Remember, the reformers took the pulpits and put them in the center of the meeting to emphasize that the Word of God was at the center of the meeting. That is instructive enough.

But we are really in a crisis today. Believers Chapel is so wise to have separated the Worship Service that occurs on Sunday evening from the Ministry of the Word Service that occurs in the morning, because here is what is out there; (and I know; I've been there): The modern-day service compromises both services. Therefore, you get a ‘Ministry of the Word’ that is very short and not very deep; and you get the worship portion of the service that is usually ‘pushed through’ without any sense of guidance and direction.

You see, what we have here at the Chapel on Sunday night is truly a Worship Service. We focus upon the Body and the Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ: And that is our Worship. It’s a different kind of meeting and an elevated meeting. If you question that, just look at Paul's description of the meeting in I Corinthians (11:17-22). There, in Corinth, the meeting was being abused by taking the Lord's table and making it a common meal. And Paul said, ‘Away with that. It's more than a common meal. It's worship.’

You can stand before audiences and tell them that you are a Christian, you want to be identified with Christ, and your name identified with Christ: But when you enter the baptism, that's a different form of public identification, isn't it? It's an elevated form. So what we have here (at the Chapel), is the instruction of the Word of God, in depth; and you have The Worship Service, in depth: All according to the Scriptures.

But here's what is unique about what you have at Believers Chapel: The great emphasis upon the teaching ministry of the Word of God. You see, my friends, it is the

Words of Almighty God that are the **'goad and the nail'** used by the Holy Spirit, Who is resident in the believer; to provoke the godly life. And above all else, we can be assured that these Words are Words of Authority. So, notice in verse 11 the word **"given"**. This Word did not come from the heart of men: This is not self-expression. Rather, right here, we are **"given"** a second term for our Creator: In Chapter 12, verse 1, He was the **"Creator"**; and now in verse 11 He is **"...one Shepherd."**

Let's put these two thoughts together for just a moment. The 'Creator' is Austere and Majestic, but He is also the 'Shepherd' who is at hand. The Shepherd is known and can be known. He can be identified. He speaks to us from the voice of a man. And here is how the writer to the Epistle to the Hebrews put that for us so ably: Hebrews 1:1, 'God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spoke unto us through the prophets, has now, in the last days, spoken to us by the Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, and through whom He has made all thing;'

'One Shepherd'. The Shepherd of the believer is both grand and personal. He is both great and intimate. How carefully Dr. Johnson taught us that it is always the 'One Shepherd' that the church looks to. It is the Lord Jesus. He is the 'One Shepherd'. And the elders of the church; they are the 'under-shepherds'. And observe: They are called 'shepherds', Not Ranchers! Ranchers quarantine; they fence in; they brand. And they expand their enterprise on the back of their livestock. But not the shepherd. The shepherd is the protector. The shepherd leads them into peaceful places, and into protective places. He lays down his life for them. He is the 'lender of last resort'. He is the protector.

See, here at Believers Chapel, you will never have to worry about someone 'getting a vision in the night' and coming here and telling you that you need to sign pledge cards and 'leverage-up' so we can finance a new project. That does not happen here. But how do things get done then? 'Things' get done because the elders look to the 'one Shepherd' and let Him lead and guide.

You've never been asked for a donation to the tape ministry/CD ministry—
You've never been asked for a donation or a pledge to build a building; to change a
nursery; to add on a project: And you won't—Not here.

So with one so important as our Shepherd, 'the man with the powerful mind'
warns us, in our lives 'under the sun', not to be distracted.

Next, look at verse 12: Here, for the first time, The Teacher makes explicit the
recipient of his dialog; "...my son...". Now we have the father/son dialog common in the
ancient Near Eastern literature; and the *Book of Proverbs* adamantly attests to a father
and son dialog. So here is 'the son'. Who is he? Biological? Vocational? A literal son; a
disciple; a student? We simply don't know. But what is clear, and what we don't want to
miss: The "Be warned, my son...". Don't 'you' become exhausted by so many different
opinions. For the Christian, for the believer, we want you to have a free mind of inquiry:
But make certain that your inquiry is always focused upon the 'one Shepherd'; be
certain and be resolute with your focus.

This dialog from the Teacher has told us there are many ways that he has gone
in his life and now, at the end, he wants to clear for us one simple path to truth. And this
leads us to the second point of our outline; beginning in verse 13. 'Now here is the
conclusion of the matter, now that everything has been heard.' Let's observe these last
two verses. They are composed of a declaration and a motive clause. First the
declaration, in the inspired language, is brief; even abrupt. It is simply: '*The End of The
Matter*'. The significance of this pointed statement is to emphasize the goal that is being
made for us. It is what man needs for this life 'under the sun'. We have found our 'gold
nugget' for the right way to live, and a right relationship with God, Who is both Creator
and Shepherd.

The two exhortations. The first, "Fear God". Fear God in a world that could care
less. David F. Wells, a fine thinker, a believer, has written in his work *God in the
Wasteland*, the following. "It is one of the defining marks of our time that God is now
weightless. I do not mean by that that He is ethereal, but rather that He has become

unimportant. He rests upon the world so inconsequentially, as not even to be noticed. He has lost His saliency for human life. Those who assure the pollsters of their belief in God's existence may, nonetheless, consider Him less interesting than television; His commands less authoritative than their appetites for affluence and influence; His judgments no more awe inspiring than the evening news; and His truth less compelling than the advertiser's sweet fog of flattery and lies. That," said Wells, "is weightlessness." It is a condition we have assigned to Him, after nudging Him out to the periphery of our secularized life. His truth is no longer welcome in our public discourse as the engine of modernity rumbles on. He is but a speck on the path of the citizen.

So, in this world that could care less—**Fear God**, my friends. **Fear God**: For to fear God is the most relevant thing you can do in this life 'under the sun': And this is according to our 'man with the powerful mind'. You see, to 'Fear God', in the midst of this world of confusion 'under the sun', is to make everything become uncluttered. Now, we can see the prize. Now, for the first time, we can see things as they really should be and are: God as the constant object of our Worship; and we as worshipers put in our place.

Now look at his second exhortation: It is to "...keep His commandments." Worship, true worship, is following the Word of God. Listening to it, then acting upon it: That inseparable link between reverence and obedience. Here is the way Moses put it to the Children of Israel on the plains of Moab, Deuteronomy, chapter 6, in verse 13. "Fear the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oaths in His name."

And now the motive clause: "...the whole 'duty' of man." (vs 13b). Your 'reasonable service to God' (Rom 12:1), who gave you this life 'under the sun' is to fear Him; to fellowship with Him; and to follow Him and His commandments.

Verse 14 provides us with our second motive clause telling us the 'why'— But here comes the bolt from out of nowhere that shocks us. It's the 90 mile an hour fast ball that comes right by our nose. From whence did this come? See, from the beginning to the end of his work, our 'man with the powerful mind' has told us that 'nothing is really important in this life'. It's all 'meaningless, a chasing after the wind'. He's told us

that everything that we gain here, 'under the sun', we will, ultimately, give it all away. It will be lost to us for we can't take it with us.

But now look: Here, for the first time, he tells us 'Everything is important': Every word; every deed; down to the smallest of details; is seen by your God, and that is your relationship with Him. Nothing is too small. Nothing is too insignificant to miss His gaze. Eating, drinking, an idle word, a dirty thought. Or the falling of a sparrow to the earth, a cup of water offered to someone. A widow's mite in the midst of a fanfare of 'look at me' generosity. A single man on planet Earth, covered with sores, sitting on a dung heap, singing the doxology, as the flies spin about his face: Job; life's greatest loser 'under the sun'. God: He misses nothing.

Look at the word "*hidden*". Even those things that no one else sees or knows about; there is still a judgment for everything. And that judgement is still on schedule; set by His time, (and time, as we have learned, is a sovereignly ordained event; never to be moved for you, for me, or for the world). Fear God. Fear Him: For No One gets away with anything.

And this is calling for you and me, as believers in Christ, to urgent living: In season, out of season—Run the race, and run it well—Finish the course! And we have much to live for: An invisible kingdom today, with the permanent one to come tomorrow!

I know you've been hurt. I know many of you are ravaged with pain, physically: And now you are confined to a life that you've never had before, simply because of pain. Or you have been lied to, lied about, taken advantage of, stolen from. You've been betrayed; you're the product of divorce. Death—you are now acquainted with; and some very tragically acquainted with. So much so that you have said your own Martha's prayer: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." (Jn 11:21).

But behind it all, and above it all, in this convoluted life 'under the sun', is Christ; is His Kingdom, is His Glory. And He is caring for you one day at a time, day by day; and He will get you there. And then.....There will be no more pain, and there will be no more sorrows, and you will live the perfect life: Because you will no longer be

‘under the sun’. And Jesus Christ, Himself, will be our light; and we will rest with Him for eternity.

But until then, we're here. We are ‘under the sun’. And so we remain steadfast: ever abounding in the work of the Lord. We look through a glass darkly. We live by faith knowing that life, in its most fundamental denomination, is Christ. If you doubt that, if you ever question that, just hold the hand of a dying saint and listen to their prayers.

You see, what we all know, but we give little time and attention to or give little energy to, is that: *It's all about Him*. And He must increase: And daily we must decrease. That is—***The End of The Matter***.

And so, in this proper context, I conclude with the prayer written by the late William Laud:

“Grant, O LORD, that we may live in Thy fear;
die in Thy favor;
rest in Thy peace;
rise in Thy power;
reign in Thy glory
for Thine own beloved Son's sake,
Jesus Christ, our Lord.”
Amen.

(End of Audio)