

Pastor Tom Sept 20 2026 Final

You know, we began the book of Ecclesiastes back in April. So for six months, Solomon has been building a case. He has been presenting evidence about what works and what doesn't, about what lasts and what only looks like it will. And this morning, after 12 chapters, all of the evidence is finally in. There's no more witnesses to call, no more arguments to make.

We have reached the conclusion, and Solomon is ready to render his final verdict. And I think that courtroom picture is especially fitting when you remember who Solomon was. And we know that he was the king of Israel. But what you might not realize is that one of the roles of a king in ancient Israel was to stand as judge over his people. That's why you have that famous scene in Solomon's life where two women have babies.

One of them dies, and they both claim that the living child is theirs. And that ends up before Solomon. He was judge. And when God appeared to him near the beginning of his reign and told him to ask for whatever he wanted, Solomon asked for the ability to judge. Well, in First Kings 3, it says, Give your servant, therefore, an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil.

For who is able to govern this, you great people? The Hebrew word that is translated as governed there is Shaphat, and its literal meaning is to judge. And God gave him what he asked for. He gave him incredible wisdom. He was the wisest man who ever lived.

And so when those two women came before him, he knew how to determine which one was the real mother. He ordered that the baby be divided in two and half, given to each woman. And immediately one of them cried out, no, no, give her the baby. Just don't harm the child. And Solomon knew that was the mother.

And then we get to Ecclesiastes, only this time it isn't two people standing before Solomon. Instead, Solomon puts life itself on trial. And right at the beginning, he tells us the question before the court in verse three says, what does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? In other words, when everything is said and done, what really matters? What lasts?

What is worth pursuing in life? And Solomon begins calling witnesses. There is pleasure and wealth, success and work and wisdom and power and justice. For 12 chapters, Solomon has listened to the testimony until we arrive where we stand today. Chapter 12, verse 13 says, the end of the matter.

All has been heard. That's where we stand this morning. Testimony is over. The evidence is in, and today we hear the verdict. But before we hear it, Solomon gives us one Final look at life under the sun.

And that begins by showing us where this life is headed. Because what Solomon's been doing throughout this book is to kind of strip away all of the things that we're tempted to build our lives around. And he shows us that they just can't bear the weight of our soul. And it wasn't some intellectual exercise. He actually went out and chased and experienced those things himself.

He tried pleasure beyond your wildest imagination. He had a thousand women at his beck and call, but it couldn't satisfy him. He accumulated wealth beyond measure, but it didn't secure him. He accomplished more than probably anyone who had ever lived. So.

So you have awesome landscaping or stunning garden. Solomon literally planted an entire forest. You have a beautiful house or nice things. His palace was opulent beyond description, but eventually it would all belong to somebody else. And wisdom, Wisdom, he was the wisest man ever.

Wisdom is better than folly. But it couldn't give him control over what happened. And now in chapter 12, Solomon strips away the very last thing that we might still be tempted to depend on, and that's ourselves. And what he does is he paints a vivid picture of aging. And look how he begins.

In verses two through five, he says, before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return after the rain and the day when the keepers of the house tremble. Now, the keepers of the house are your hands. As you grow older, they lose strength and they begin to tremble. And then it says in the strong men are bent. As you grow old, your legs and back that once held you upright don't work like they used to.

And the grinders cease because they are few. You start losing your teeth. And those who look through the windows are dimmed. So your eyesight begins to fail. The doors on the street are shut.

Your hearing fades when the sound of grinding is low and when rises up at the sound of a bird, meaning that as you get older, sleep becomes difficult. Then all the daughters of song are brought low. They are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way. See, as you age, you have to be more careful. And it isn't talking about some, like, irrational fear of heights.

This is saying that things that used to be no problem are now dangerous for you. And you need to be more careful. Then the almond tree blossoms. Flowers on an almond tree are white, so your hair turns white if you're lucky enough to have any. The grasshopper drags itself along.

Desire fails because man is going to his eternal home. And then Mourners go about the streets. That's a pretty rough description. I mean, a grasshopper just dragging himself along until it dies. And he's talking about us.

Eventually we all reach the end of the road. That's the point, he continues. In 6 and 7, he says, before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it, that is where every life under the sun is headed. The body that once seemed strong returns to dust. The life that we thought belonged to us returns to the God who gave it.

And then Solomon says the words that we have heard from the very beginning. Verse 8, he says, Vanity of vanity, says the preacher. All is vanity. And that should sound familiar to you because those are the very words that open the book. In chapter one, verse two, he says, vanity of vanity, says the preacher.

Vanity of vanities. All is vanity. So we have traveled through this entire book, and Solomon has brought us right back to where we started. And his assessment of life under the sun hasn't changed. Everything we try to hold on to eventually slips through our fingers.

It doesn't matter what it is. Your youth will fade. Your strength will fail. Every single thing you own will one day end up in a junkyard. Your accomplishments will be forgotten, and even your body won't remain.

It will become dust. And the point here is that everything under the sun gets stripped away. And that leaves us with a question that Ecclesiastes has really been driving us toward all along. When everything else is gone, well, what's left? And the answer is right in the text.

Everything else gets stripped away, but God remains. In verse one, he's identified as the Creator. He says, remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near, of which you will say, I have no pleasure in them. God is your Creator. That means that your very existence begins with Him.

You didn't make yourself. You didn't decide to exist. No, you are here because God determined that you would be here. And he designed you with great care. Psalm 139 says, for you formed my inward parts.

You knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works. My soul knows it very well. And I want you to think about what this means.

There is nothing about you that is a mistake. Every aspect of who you are was designed by Your creator for the sake of the glory of his name. That means that your life has a purpose that existed before you ever took a breath. We spend so much time trying to decide what we want to do with our lives. But that's the wrong question.

Because if God is your creator, then the first question isn't about what you want for your life. It's what your creator wants from the life that he gave you. See, you were not created to pursue comfort. You are not created to accumulate as much as you can. You are created by God and for God.

And that changes the way you understand everything that Solomon has been saying. See, the problem with all those things that Solomon chased after wasn't simply that they eventually failed him. The problem was that none of them could bear the weight of being the reason that he lived. That's the key here. That is why these things can be good and wonderful gifts that we enjoy, but they're still not enough.

Pleasure. It's a gift, but you weren't created for your pleasure. Work is a gift, but you weren't created for your work. Possessions are a gift, but you weren't created for possessions. Even your life, a gift, but you weren't created merely for this life.

You were created for God. That's why Solomon is telling us to remember our creator. He doesn't mean that we shouldn't forget that God exists. He's saying that you shouldn't forget whose you are and why you are here. God is creator and you are a creature.

And look what it says in verse seven. It says, the spirit returns to God who gave it. See, God is not only the creator, he is the giver. The life that you have is the life that God gave you. And really, that's one of the greatest lessons of Ecclesiastes.

See, we live as though our lives belong to us. We make plans and we decide what we're going to do and where we're going to go, what we plan to accomplish. But Solomon has spent 12 chapters reminding us that we aren't really in control of any of it. You don't know what tomorrow brings. You don't know how long you will live.

You can't guarantee that your plans are going to work out or even that you'll be here to carry them out. Because your life doesn't belong to you. It isn't something that you possess. It is something you have been given. And think about the implications of this.

If your life belongs to you, you're free to do whatever you want with it. But if your life has been given to you by God, then you are a steward of something that belongs to him. And make no mistake, it is his. That's what our verse says. Your spirit returns to God who gave it.

So your life, it begins with God and it is sustained by God. And ultimately it returns to God. And every single moment in between is a gift from him. That's why Solomon keeps reminding us throughout this book to enjoy the life that God gave you. He tells you to enjoy your food and to enjoy your work, to enjoy the people that God puts around us, to enjoy the good days when they come, but to enjoy them as gifts.

Don't confuse them with a giver, because all of those gifts will eventually be stripped away, but the giver remains. And then there's one more description of God here in verse 11 says the words of the wise are like goads. And like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings. They are given by one shepherd. God is our shepherd.

And I think it's particularly important picture for Solomon to give us at the end of this book because what does a shepherd do? He leads. He knows where the sheep need to go and the sheep follow him. And if there is one thing that Ecclesiastes has taught us, it is that we desperately need someone to lead us. Because we don't know nearly as much as we think we do.

It just keeps popping up over and over again. We don't know what tomorrow is going to bring. We don't know why some things happen the way they do. We don't understand everything that God is doing. And we certainly don't know where every road we take is going to lead us.

But our shepherd does see. He sees what you cannot see. And he knows what you don't know. He knows where the path leads before you take the first step. So God has not created us and then left us to stumble around trying to figure life out on our own.

He has spoken. That's what it says. It says the words of the wise are like goads, like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings. They're given by one shepherd. The shepherd has given us his words.

And Solomon says they do two things. First, they're like goads. So a goad was like an ancient tattle prod. It was basically just a long wooden stick with a sharp point at the end. So imagine you're trying to move a thousand pound ox that has decided it isn't going to go anywhere, right?

You can't exactly grab it by the collar and drag it. So the farmer would take the goad and give the animal a sharp poke. And he didn't want to hurt the animal. He just wanted to get it moving. And sometimes that is exactly what the word of God does to us.

It prods us, it corrects us. It turns us around when we are headed the wrong way. And that isn't something that we particularly enjoy, because some of the stuff that God says are not the things that we want to hear. There are times when the shepherd leads us somewhere we would not choose to go ourselves. But that is precisely when we have to remember that he is the shepherd and we are the sheep.

Because he knows what's coming. He sees what we don't see. So wisdom isn't demanding that God explain the entire road before we agree to walk it. Wisdom is trusting the shepherd to follow where he leads. But Solomon also says that God's word is like nails firmly fixed.

The Bible doesn't just direct us. It gives us something solid. Don't miss how important this is. Almost everything that Solomon has looked toward throughout this book has moved beneath his feet. Circumstances change.

People change. Our bodies break down, but the shepherd has spoken and his words are firmly fixed. Our God does not change and His Word does not change. First Peter 1:24 says, the grass withers and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever. And that means that in a world rife with uncertainty, there is something solid that you can build your life on.

It's not your circumstances or your skills or your possessions, your abilities. It's not even your own understanding. You build your life on God and what he has said. So God, he's creator. You're made by him, and for him, he's the giver.

Everything you have, including your life, comes from Him. And God is shepherd. He has spoken and shown you how the life he gave you is meant to be lived. Your life begins with God. It belongs to God.

And it was directed by God. And one day it will return to Him. And so here we are. Solomon is finally ready to tell us what all of that means. We're finally ready for his verdict to be read.

It's in verse 13. He says the end of the matter. All has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. There it is.

That is Solomon's answer to the question that that has been building throughout this book. What matters? What lasts? What is your life actually for? And the answer is incredibly simple.

Fear God, keep His commandments. But don't miss how radically different that answer is from the way we normally think about life. See, our natural bent is to turn inward and. And seek things that we think will fulfill us. But Solomon points us away from ourselves altogether.

See, your life finds its proper meaning when it is lived in relationship to the God who gave it to you. And that begins with fearing God. And we've talked about the fear of God several times as we've gone throughout this book. It doesn't mean you're terrified of Him. It means that you see God for who he really is, and therefore you see yourself for who you really are.

To fear God means that you recognize that he is the Creator and you're just the created one. It means that you see him as the giver and yourself as dependent. It means that you see him as the shepherd and yourself as the sheep. See, a rightful fear of God means you stop living as though God exists for you, and you recognize that you exist for the sake of his glory. And that just changes everything.

See, when you use that lens, you stop asking if your life is going the way you want it to, or if this is the life that you have that you want. And instead you ask, am I living a life that magnifies my Creator? That's why Solomon immediately connects fearing God with obeying Him. That's what it says. Fear God, keep His commandments.

Because the fear of God isn't something you feel. It shows up in the way you live. If God is really God, his word doesn't become optional when I disagree with it. I don't obey just when his commands make sense or when it's convenient. I obey because he is God and I love him.

John 14:15, if you love me, you will keep My commandments. So this isn't some kind of cold, mechanical obedience. It isn't like some list of things you have to do. Obedience is the natural response of a heart that. That sees God rightly.

Right. At the end of verse 13, Solomon presses into this point by saying, for this is the whole duty of man. The original Hebrew is even more striking. It simply says, for this is the whole of man. In other words, this is what your life is about.

This is what you were made for, not all those temporary things the Solomon tasted and that we're tempted to dedicate our lives toward. So it's not the pleasure, the wealth of the accomplishments are making a name for yourself. You were made to know God. You were made to fear him, to walk with him, to live every part of the life he gave you before him and for Him. So what actually matters when everything else Gets stripped away.

God does. And more importantly, your relationship with him. Does a life live for the glory of his name remains. Now, Solomon could have ended the book right there, but he doesn't. Because there's one final truth we need to understand.

Verse 14 says, For God will bring every deed into judgment with every secret thing, whether good or evil. Solomon spent 12 chapters examining life under the sun. And now in the final verse, he forces us to look beyond it. Because your life does not end at the edge of the grave. There is something beyond what you can see.

Something beyond the years you have been given on this earth. Something beyond life under the sun. Each and every one of us will one day stand before God, and every deed will be brought into judgment. Every secret thing, whether good or evil. Which means that the way you live now has significance that reaches into eternity.

That is what is raining on the other side of the sun. And we have a privilege that Solomon never had. See, he knew that judgment was coming, but he stood on the other side of a mystery that has now been revealed. Because we not only know that judgment is coming, but we know who will sit on that throne. We know who has been given all authority in heaven, on earth.

We know who the Father has appointed to judge the living and the dead. We know the one before whom kings will fall and nations tremble. We know the one before whom every knee will bow and every tongue confess. He is the Alpha and the Omega. He is the King of kings and the Lord of Lords.

And he has a name. A name above all names. A name at which every person will one day bow. A name at which heaven rejoices and hell trembles. And his name is Jesus.

And he is coming again. But not as a baby lying in a manger. Not as a suffering servant standing silently before Pilate. Not as a condemned man carrying a cross. He is coming as king, and he is coming as Lord, and he is coming as Judge.

The one who once stood before Pilate will one day have Pilate stand before him. And not only Pilate, all of us. And if that's all the Bible told us about Jesus, then we would have reason to be terrified. Because the Judge who is coming knows every deed and every thought we have ever had. None of us is ready to stand before him on our own.

But here's the good news. The judge who is coming is the Savior who already came. See, before Jesus comes to judge sinners, he came to save sinners. That's why he took on flesh. That's why the Creator entered his creation.

That is why The Sovereign Lord of all allowed himself to be nailed to a cross. He wasn't dying to save himself. He had never sinned. He was dying for us. And on that cross, Jesus took the judgment that guilty sinners deserve.

First, Peter 3 says, For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit. The righteous dying for the unrighteous, the innocent for the guilty, the judge bearing the judgment. And then he died. And his body was placed in a tomb. And for three days, it looked as though death had won again.

But on Sunday morning, Jesus Christ walked out of that grave. And it changes everything. Because we already know that there's life beyond the sun. Death is not the end. The grave isn't the end.

Dust isn't the end. John said. Jesus said in John 11:25, he said, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. Every one of us is going to stand before Jesus.

There is no escaping that. But you don't have to stand there drenched in this stench of your own sin. You can stand before him, clothed in his righteousness. See, the Judge is offering mercy to you today. And the key is to turn from your sin, to repent of your sin and turn towards Christ.

Place your faith in him. Say, yes, I want to do it your way. Stop building your life around things that cannot survive the grave, and trust Jesus Christ. And if you are his, if you have been saved, then give your life to him, every moment of it, every gift he has given you. Give back every opportunity he puts before you.

That's really the question before all of us. What are you going to do with a life God has given you? You don't want to waste it. You only get one, and it's moving faster than you think. One day, every single one of us will take our final breath.

And on that day, most of the things that seem so important right now won't matter at all. So live now for what will matter then? Because you know where this road ends. You know who's waiting at the end of it. And because of Jesus, you don't have to fear what is waiting on the other side.

So don't spend your life trying to make this world your home. Don't live as if these years are all that you have. Don't measure life by what you accumulate or what you accomplish, what you experience. Measure it by whether it was his.

Paul says in Philippians 1:21, he says for me to live is Christ and to die is gain. I can't think of a better way to live. And I can't think of a better way to die. To live is Christ. Christ is why I'm here.

It's why I belong. It's what I'm living for. And to die is gain because when this life is over, I don't lose Christ. I finally get to dwell with him. That is the life that I want for you.

That is the life I want for myself. When that silver cord is finally snapped, when we step out of life under the sun we will find Jesus waiting to welcome his people home. You have one life to live and then you will see God and he will be your judge or he will be your savior. So live this life for him. Please stand for our closing hymn.

It's number 602 in the hymnal. It's I have decided to follow Jesus.