

Preacher And Teacher

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

- [0 : 00] Welcome to our evening service everybody. I trust you've had a safe week. We pray that God again will bless us as we come together in this way to worship him this evening.
- We're going to begin with praise and our first psalm of praise is Psalm 108. That's in St. Psalms on page 146 of the psalm books.
- Psalm 108 and verses 1 to 5. O Lord God, my heart is steadfast and with all my soul I'll sing. Harp and lyre I will awaken and my song the dawn will bring.
- Lord my God, among the nations I will ever give you praise. In the midst of all the peoples I will sing of you always. We'll sing to the tune Stuttgart verses 1 to 5.
- O Lord God, my heart is steadfast. O Lord God, my heart is steadfast and with all my soul I'll sing.
- [1 : 05] At the light I will awaken and my song the dawn will bring.
- Lord my God, among the nations I will ever give you praise.
- In the midst of all the people I will sing of you always.
- For your steadfast heart is boundless, greater than the heavens high.
- And your faithfulness towards us reaches even to the sky.
- [2 : 07] Far above the highest heavens be exalted, O my God.
- And through all the earth around us let your glory spread abroad.
- Let's read now from the book of Nehemiah and chapter 8. Book of Nehemiah chapter 8 verses 1 to 12.
- And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the water gate.
- And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel. So Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly with men and women and all who could understand what they heard on the first day of the seventh month.
- [3 : 12] And he read from it facing the square before the water gate from early morning until midday in the presence of the men and women and those who could understand.
- And the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law. And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Matithiah, Shema, Aniah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maseah on his right hand.
- And Padaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashem, Hashbana, Sechariah, and Meshulam on his left hand. And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above the people.
- And as he opened it, all the people stood. And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, lifting up their hands.

And they bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground. Also, Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Aquab, Shabbathiah, Hodiah, Maseah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Peliah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the law, while the people remained in their places.

[4 : 28] They read from the book from the law of God clearly, and they gave the sense so that the people understood the reading. And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites, who taught the people, said to all the people, This day is holy to the Lord your God.

Do not mourn or weep. For all the people wept as they heard the words of the law. Then he said to them, Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine, and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready.

For this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, Be quiet, for this day is holy.

Do not be grieved. And all the people went their way to eat and drink, and to send portions, and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

And we pray God will bless these words to us of his own precious word. Let's call upon the Lord now in prayer. Let's join together in prayer.

[5 : 41] Our gracious God, our Father in heaven, We thank you tonight again that we are privileged to be able to gather together in this way, and to come to join together in fellowship and in worship with the Lord our God.

And we thank you for that reminder, as we have read in the book of Nehemiah, going back so many hundreds of years, to the way that the people then listened so attentively to the word of God, and how they came and responded with proper and appropriate worship.

We give thanks, O Lord, that we understand that our worship of you is in response to your revelation to us, that our worship is indeed based upon what you have revealed of yourself, and the work of your Spirit in bringing to us the truth of God as it is in Christ Jesus, O Lord.

We thank you tonight that we are able to call upon you. We are able to come before you with praise and thanksgiving, and to call upon you in prayer. That we are able to come and seek the word of God to be expounded, and set before us in a way that, we trust by your Spirit we will be able to understand.

Lord, help us, we pray, to rejoice in your word. We are surrounded by so much suffering, so much that we know of as weeping, in the circumstances of our day, especially in regard to this virus that has been so rampant among us, and is again coming to increase throughout our land.

[7 : 17] Grant, Lord, that we may rejoice in you, that we may have that composed and serene mind, that realises that you are God, that we are under your sovereign care, that you have appointed all things to work towards your glory, and towards the good of your church at last.

We thank you, Lord, that as you are made head over all things to your church, so you assure us that nothing happens by accident, that everything that takes place has been already purposed by you.

And while we may not be able, Lord, to know the exact purpose of things that take place in providence, we give thanks that all things are known to you, we give thanks that all make sense to you, and that everything is clear and perfect in your knowledge.

Lord, we pray tonight, as we come to worship you, that you would impart to us that mind, that will indeed be steadfastly concentrated under your word, and applying your word to our own circumstances.

We pray your blessing tonight for all our people. We pray that throughout our land the gospel may flourish, even under the restrictions that are currently in place.

[8 : 31] We bless you that your word is not confined, that your spirit is able to take of the things of Christ, and apply them to our souls, even though we be not able to be physically together in one place.

Your spirit, O Lord, is not in any way hampered by the circumstances that we find ourselves in. For you are above everything that is physical, everything that is providential.

For you are God, and we are your creatures. And we pray, Lord, tonight that your word will go forth with power. Speak into our hearts, we pray, show to us in our mind the light of your truth.

Grant that you would guide us into further enjoyment of your presence, of your provision, of your salvation, of the Saviour himself in our experience.

Lord, our God, we ask that you would quieten our souls as we wait upon you and upon your word. Bless, we pray, the people we belong to in this land.

[9 : 32] Grant to us in these days, Lord, that you would also be at work in our midst with that spirit of discernment and spirit of repentance, that spirit of turning to the Lord and seeking him while he is to be found.

Lord, our God, we lament the departure that has been in place for so long from your word and from acknowledgement of you, from confession of you as God, and from a desire, O Lord, to seek you and to have you foremost in our thoughts, in our minds, in our conclusions, in our manifestos, in our decisions.

Turn us, we pray, to your own truth. Make this dreadful virus a means, Lord, of teaching us to fear you, teaching us your ways and showing us your paths.

For you alone are able to do this. And we pray and plead with you that you would grant, O Lord, this to us as a people. We again commend to you our leaders and government throughout the land.

Give them wisdom, Lord, we pray, whatever their relationship with you may be or not be. We do pray for them. You have called upon us to do so in your word, and we are glad to do so, Lord, because we know that you are able to give them the steerage in their lives that they require as we all do.

[10 : 53] And we do pray for them, for your upholding of them, for your strengthening of them in mind and body during this time of severe testing. And we ask, O Lord, that all who advise them, and especially those of your people who are able to bring counsel to them, will know your blessing and your upholding at this time.

Remember those tonight who have heavy hearts. We know that many, Lord, have a death in their experiences as families, in their relationships.

We ask, O Lord, that the cry of mourning goes up from our land and throughout the world that you would hear it in heaven and be merciful to us and send your comfort.

Think of those we know ourselves, O Lord, who are seriously ill at this time. We commend them to you, whether at home or in hospital or those who have gone to the hospice locally.

Those who have been flown away also to the mainland with illness, with procedures being required for them, Lord, we ask that you would bless them and bless and comfort their families.

[12 : 00] Give them the strength that they need and help them that all things may go well with them. We do commend them to you. And we too pray, Lord, for those who may be coming near the end stage of life.

Lord, prepare them, we pray, as we all must to take that great step out of time and into eternity. May they do so, Lord, safe in the knowledge of Christ and safe in the trust that is placed in him so that they may come to be ushered into that great land of promise that you hold before us in your word, that heaven where there is no more death and no mourning or crying or sorrow or any tears.

We ask that you would do this for us all, O Lord, and give to us as we further wait upon you now that we will do so under the direction of your Spirit.

Bless our children, bless our families, bless each and all tonight, Lord, that we love and that we commend to you. And we do ask that you would graciously provide for them and keep them, if it please you, Lord, safe from this virus so that they may indeed come themselves to give more time to the things of the Lord.

Hear us then now, we pray, and pardon our many sins. For Jesus' sake, Amen. Now, children, I want to ask a question tonight. What is it that makes a person beautiful?

[13 : 28] What is it that makes a person beautiful? If you look at Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 23, you find there that the parents of Moses saw that he was a beautiful child.

And that meant more than what they saw him, how they saw him physically, beautiful in terms of his face or body or whatever. They said that he was beautiful in a spiritual sense as well as what was meant.

They knew that he was significant, that the Lord was indeed going to hold him special as a leader in some way for his people. We live in the land and in the world of selfies.

I'm sure you've taken a selfie. I must confess sometimes I've had a selfie taken as well. And you know what it's like when people see a celebrity or somebody that's famous and especially if they're near to them and able to do so, out comes the mobile phone and along comes a selfie.

And very often sadly that's just so that people can then put that up on Facebook and say look who I met today. I had a selfie with whoever it was that was famous. And there was a survey apparently done recently and such a lot of things you find on Google and maybe not worth Googling anyway but apparently a survey was done recently as to who the most beautiful people in the world were.

[14 : 54] And not only so but it was actually broken down into who had the most beautiful eyes, who had the most beautiful hair, who had the most beautiful nose even and all that sort of stuff and it was done for men and for women and the results came in and I'm not going to tell you if you can Google it yourself but you can see a list of there of those who are reckoned to have the most beautiful eyes and so on.

They were mostly celebrities because they're so often in the news. But the thing is this, if you took the nose of the person that was reckoned to have the most beautiful nose and stuck that onto the eyes of the person who had the most beautiful eyes and the hair of the person who had the most beautiful hair and the one who had the most beautiful teeth and the one who had the best looking neck and so on, if you put all of that together you wouldn't have beauty.

You'd have something actually quite ugly. a bit like Frankenstein's monster in fact because when you put it all together in a picture you end up with something that really looks ugly.

We all have our own face with all our own parts that God has given us and we shouldn't have any desire to have somebody else's nose or somebody else's mouth or somebody else's teeth.

We are made the way that God intended and that's important in itself. But the reason I'm mentioning this is that when the Bible talks about beauty and it's something that we as parents are always trying to impress upon our children that beauty the saying goes beauty is more than skin deep.

[16 : 40] To actually define beauty and what makes a person beautiful you have to go beyond what they look like physically. Because there are many many people of whom you would say well they're not very good looking but they may be the most beautiful people in their souls.

They may be the most beautiful people in terms of love and obedience and patience and forgiveness and helpfulness to others and all of these sort of things that you cannot see in a person's skin colour or in a person's face.

beauty. That's why the Bible talks about beauty from the inside firstly outwards and whatever we look like outwardly it's what we add inwardly what we add in our souls what we add in our hearts that really is important as far as beauty is concerned.

That's what makes a person beautiful because beauty begins with God. No person is beautiful the way God is beautiful.

God is perfect. God has a beauty the Bible calls holiness and the beauty of holiness the beauty of that perfection of God as you read about God and what God is like in terms of his love and his grace his compassion all of these things that God tells us about himself that all belongs to the beauty of God.

[18 : 08] And you know the wonderful thing is this when you become a Christian when God changes you when God comes to bring you to Jesus and when Jesus becomes your saviour then the beauty of a Christian comes to resemble the beauty of God.

And this is what I want you to remember children. Don't be taken in by a world that wants just to be beautiful on the outside and that thinks if you're not beautiful on the outside you're not beautiful in any way.

you're beautiful to us, you're beautiful to your parents, you're beautiful to one another because of what you are inside, because of the way that you're able to love each other, love your parents, love your friends, and even love your enemies as the Bible calls upon us to do.

So the beauty of a Christian, the Bible tells us that when God starts to work in our lives, he sanctifies us. And that's a big word, really means he makes us increasingly like Jesus.

Because that's what heaven really is for all of God's people in heaven. The one thing that makes them all alike is that they're like Jesus. They have his image.

[19 : 28] They're in his likeness. And that's what really counts. When you have Jesus in your life, you are beautiful. And the most important thing of all is whatever people think of you, whatever your face is like, you are beautiful to God.

And when you're beautiful to God, that's really pretty much all that matters. So remember tonight, beauty is something that begins inside in your soul.

It's the beauty of salvation, the beauty of Jesus living in you. and the beauty of God's spirit working so that eventually in heaven you will be like Jesus, perfectly in beauty.

So let's say the Lord's Prayer now together. Our Father, which art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Your kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

[20 : 38] For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen. Amen. We're going to read again this time from Ecclesiastes and we're going to look at this passage for a short time this evening.

Ecclesiastes on chapter 12 where we finished last time. We're beginning tonight at verse 9. Beside being wise, the preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care.

The preacher sought to find words of delight and uprightly he wrote words of truth. The words of the wise are like goads and like nails firmly fixed on the collected sayings.

They are given by one shepherd. My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

Now if you take up a book today, any kind of book, usually you'll find a foreword, something at the beginning of the book that tells you about the author or about something of what the book is about, something of what the book is, whether it's a novel or a book on history or whatever it is.

[21 : 59] There's a foreword and that describes something of the book and what it's about. Often it has a recommendation based on the person who's writing the foreword knowing the author personally.

That's usually the case, very often the case anyway. But in Old Testament times, they didn't have a foreword to books, they actually had a postscript. So it came at the end of a book usually if there was to be a commendation of the book or of the author.

And that's what you find really here in Ecclesiastes because this is a reflection back on what's been written so far. And he's saying here, besides being wise, the preacher also taught the people knowledge.

Now we can take it, I think, that this is the same person that actually wrote the book, although he's using this description of himself, the preacher. And what he's saying is he taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying, arranging many proverbs with great care.

And the passage really is leading, indeed the whole book has been leading to the very final part which God will deal with next time. This is the end of the matter.

[23 : 08] This is where we've been heading, is what he's saying. All has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man. That's really where all these rivers of thought, all these tributaries of truth as you find them through the book, where they're all going to end up in this wonderful end matter that we need to fear God and keep his commandments.

And this passage we're looking at tonight is the penultimate, the second last of our studies as we've gone through this book together. And here we'll find that the preacher is really saying three things about us in these verses 9 to 12.

First of all he talks about the preacher's work. Being wise, the preacher taught the people knowledge. That was the main business in which he was involved.

Secondly, there's a matter of the method by which the preacher went about his work. Not just the objective of teaching the people but the method he actually carried out. Weighing, studying, arranging, seeking words of delight and teaching words of truth.

So that's the preacher's work. That's the objective, teaching the people knowledge. This is the method that he used. And then you come secondly to the preacher's words. Verse 11, the words of the wise, people like the preacher, are like goads.

[24 : 38] And like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings. They are given by one shepherd. And that, we'll see, contains very interesting things as well.

That's the preacher's words or the effect, you might say, of the preacher's words. And then the final part of verse 12, in verse 12 there, is the preacher's warning.

He's saying to us, beware of anything beyond these. That's these words of wisdom that he's been teaching the people. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

So these are the three areas we're going to look at briefly. The preacher's work, the preacher's words, and the preacher's warning. Let's look at the preacher's work here in verses 9 and 10.

The objective, as we said, the preacher had in mind, this was what he was aiming at all the time, teaching the people knowledge. Notice it's saying, besides being wise.

- [25 : 42] In other words, he's really saying, because he was wise, or alongside of being wise, or one of the issues of being wise was that he taught the people knowledge. In other words, he's saying to us, the preacher required this element of wisdom in order to be able to teach the people knowledge.

That's always going to be an important matter. You don't set about trying to teach people a subject that you know nothing or little about yourself. That's just being foolish. The preacher has been telling us all the way through the book the distinction between wisdom and foolishness in different ways.

So he's saying being wise, because he was wise, along with being wise, the preacher taught the people knowledge. Now, wisdom, as we've seen in different ways through Ecclesiastes, is defined in different ways.

But by and large, in the Old Testament, wisdom is more than just having an intellectual ability, that sort of knowledge which you must have to be wise, you need a degree of that.

But in the Old Testament, wisdom mostly means practical knowledge. Practical knowledge as to not just knowing about things, but knowing what to do in certain situations.

- [26 : 56] That's so important in the Old Testament that believers were always seeking that wisdom, that ability from God. And if we take it that, as we've done, that this is Solomon's work, the book of Ecclesiastes, that he's been the one who's been setting these things out.

You remember when Solomon came to the throne, find it in 1 Kings chapter 3, that he came to speak with God and he asked from God, he said, your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude.

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? Your great people.

God replied and said to him, because he'd not asked for long life or riches, that he'd asked for understanding to discern. Behold, he said, I now do according to your word.

I give you a wise and discerning mind so that none like you has been before you and none shall be after you. I give you also what you have not asked, riches and honour and so on.

- [28 : 12] So Solomon asked for wisdom. He asked for the ability to actually act properly in all circumstances. The knowledge that showed itself in practical acts of wisdom.

And that chapter in 1 Kings chapter 3 goes on. You remember the famous story of the two women. Each had a child. One of them had a child who died at the same time as the other one whose child survived.

the one whose child died took the other child and pretended that was her own. And so they came to Solomon. And you remember how Solomon decided who the child belonged to.

He said, go and get me a sword. And Solomon said, well, divide this child in two. Let me just kill the child and give a half to each. And the one who was the rightful mother of the child just threw her arms up.

She just immediately said, no, no, no, give it to her. Don't kill the child. And of course, Solomon then said, well, that's the mother of the child. And it says in the passage there that at that very early stage, Solomon showed the wisdom that God had given him even in that particular decision.

- [29 : 26] So here is what the preacher is, what the Ecclesiastes is in the preacher, being wise, taught the people knowledge, insight to know what to do especially.

And then when you go to the likes of Proverbs chapter 9 verse 10, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and the knowledge of the Holy One is wisdom.

There is what you find there in Proverbs, just the book before this, chapter 9 and verse 10. And that shows us something else that's very important. We're going to leave looking at it in detail until the next one because it deals with the fear of God in the next couple of verses at the end of our study.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. And there is a summary really of what Ecclesiastes is telling us as well.

The preacher being wise taught the people knowledge but the base of that knowledge and the base of that wisdom is the fear of God. The fear of God that's mentioned in verses 13 and 14 there.

[30 : 38] The fear that we've seen already involves love for God, awe and reverence for God, respect for his ways, all of these things. So there's the first thing the preacher's objective in the work of the preacher was to teach knowledge.

Now that comes into the preaching of the gospel as well because much of this really follows into what we know of as the preaching of the gospel and setting out the truth of God as we're trying to do tonight in a way of preaching from it, preaching it, bringing out its meaning.

And so it carries into the preaching of the gospel too. But you notice secondly, not just the objective but the method that he actually used for this.

And there are two aspects to that. First of all, that he was weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care.

That's the first part of it. The method involved weighing, studying, arranging many proverbs. Proverbs there really means all types of sayings. And these words that he uses there are important in his method.

[31 : 46] He first of all weighed these proverbs. He weighed these sayings, these statements. In other words, he was comparing as he was handling these different sayings that he came across.

He was comparing them with what he knew of already as the truth of God. And that's how you actually weigh whatever views you come across. You bring them to the word of God as your template.

You actually study them in relation to the word of God. You weigh them. You give consideration to them in the light of what God's own word teaches. When you go to Acts chapter 17, you'll find people there, Jews there, who were Berians.

They're called Berians. That's where they belonged to. And it's said of them there that one of the things that marked them was that they carefully considered the things that they heard, the teachings that they came across.

They carefully considered them and put them against Scripture as they knew it. The Old Testament it would be then. They actually compared very carefully. Everything they heard, even the teaching of the apostles, they actually took that and compared it with the Scripture.

[33 : 04] That's weighing the sayings. That's weighing the truth. That's what you're doing tonight. As I'm preaching to you, it's your responsibility, it's your privilege, it's your duty to be weighing what you're hearing.

How do you weigh what you're hearing? You put them against the template of Scripture. You know what a template is. It's the original of something by which everything that is copied from that is made.

When you have a template, for example, it's maybe not as current nowadays because joiners have all sorts of fancy equipment compared to the old days. If you were going to cut a piece of wood that was really important to get accurately cut and then every other cutting had to be the same exactly as that one, you wouldn't find a joiner after measuring the original one and then cutting it.

You wouldn't find him then taking that bit that he had cut and using that as his measuring and so on because eventually a bit is added on here and there as you're using that and you end up with a piece that's much longer than the original.

You just take the template and measure everything according to that. Now that's what the Bible is as well. The Bible is your template. Everything that you hear by way of opinions or teachings, philosophies, whatever they might be, that call upon you to believe them, to follow them, you take it to Scripture.

[34 : 30] You weigh it. You put it in the balances. You put Scripture on one side and that on the other. That's why it's important as I'm just saying this in passing but it's not unimportant.

That's why it's so important that we maintain a proper doctrine of Scripture. We'll come across that point in a minute. The doctrine of Scripture is foundational to our understanding of other doctrines that we hold valuable because that's where we find them.

If Scripture is something that changes then the doctrines will change with it. He weighed these sayings and he studied them as well as weighing them.

Studying just means giving very careful consideration to them, getting to know them for himself. You might say every preacher wants to come to the pulpit or say we do it perfectly at all, all the time.

But we want to come and preach the gospel after having put it to ourselves, after having preached it to ourselves, after having come to know that truth for ourselves.

[35 : 36] Then we're in a much better position to be able to actually study the word and give the word out in our preaching to others. That's what the preacher was doing. And then he was arranging many proverbs with care.

He didn't just weigh them, he didn't just compare them with the truth that he knew and study them so as to know them for himself. He arranged them. We've seen already the view that Ecclesiastes is just a loose kind of combination or arrangement of different proverbs, different sayings, and that they're just being put together without any order necessarily.

Now we've seen that sometimes it's difficult really to get your thread and to get the order, but it's there. And we mustn't think that it's just thrown together because the preacher sought very carefully to arrange what he was doing with great care.

And that's what we're seeking to do as well in our preaching. When I was going through college many years ago now, the late principal Graham who taught us about preaching itself and how to study and exegete the Bible, one of the things he always insisted upon, and it's remained with me all the way through is you have to, he said, make your sermon portable.

You have to make it carryable so that whatever you're preaching on, people are able then to take it home with them or take it home to heart to make it portable.

[37 : 08] And without having a careful arrangement we can't actually do that. Now I'm not saying at all that I do that successfully by any means. None of us is able to do that perfectly or in the measure that we would like to, but this is the standard that's set before us.

This is what the preacher was doing, to teach the people knowledge. This is how he went about it. He weighed, he studied, he arranged many proverbs with great care.

That's the first part of his method, the weighing, the studying, the arranging. And the second part is that he sought to find words of delight and uprightly he wrote words of truth.

Words of delight and words of truth, two types of words were also involved in the way he set this out. Words of delight really literally mean words that were fitting, words that were attractive but fitted with his purpose.

words. And indeed as we've gone through Ecclesiastes, if you recall and cast your mind back, we've seen how wonderfully he went about doing that. Take for example the beginning of chapter 3, that marvelous passage, a time to be born, a time to die, a time to plant, a time to pluck what is planted and so on, all the way through that stretch of these pairs of items that we've seen he's gone through.

[38 : 37] You can't actually read that, surely, without it catching your attention. It's one of the things he did in order to actually make it relevant and make it a delight. The form of the passage is something that he put together carefully.

You can say the same of chapter 10, you remember that remarkable reference, dead flies make the perfumer's ointment to give off a stench, so a little foolishness outweighs wisdom and honour.

In other words, he's saying a whole lot of wisdom can sometimes be spoiled by just a little bit of stupidity, of folly. But that's the wonderful image that he used. And then we saw last time, probably even more than any of these, the magnificent picture that he drew of our bodily decay, of our coming to stages, of losing our abilities and reaching into extreme old age sometimes, where you find the picture there of the house that's becoming dilapidated and ready just to collapse.

That's what it means when he says that the words that the preacher used, he sought out words of delight, words that were really fitting, that drew people's attention, that made them sit and take note of what he was saying.

And of course, where do you find the master of that? You find that in Jesus himself. You go through the Gospels, you read about the ministry of Jesus there, this is one of the things that stands out in the ministry of Jesus, his ability to use words, his ability to use words of delight, words that were fitting.

[40 : 19] That's why he so often didn't answer a question according to what the questioner wanted. He answered it according to what he knew the questioner needed to know. And that's the wisdom of Jesus, but also the way he chose words, of delight, words that were fitting and attractive in that sense.

But he also says words of truth. He sought to find words of delight and uprightly he wrote words of truth because the business he was engaged in in teaching the people knowledge was not the business of an entertainer.

Even though he sought to find words of delight, words that they could say really gave them satisfaction through their minds and informed and so on. Nevertheless, he had a serious message and for a serious message you need to have words of truth.

Words of truth. And that's again so crucial to the presentation of God's truth. We're not in the business of entertaining.

I'm not suggesting for a moment that a certain type of humour is not appropriate to preaching the gospel. Many preachers do that very, very successfully, very tellingly, even if I'm not one of them.

[41 : 42] Humour as it fits the gospel, even some of the great preachers of the past like C.H. Spurgeon. It has to be a humour that's honed and fitted into presenting the message and dovetails with the message itself.

It's not entertaining, and it's not sitting there like a stand-up comedian and seeking to give that sort of entertainment to people. He's saying he actually sought out words of truth and you see he's saying uprightly he wrote them.

He was serious about this business. This was not something secondary, it wasn't a hobby for him. It was something he did plainly and honestly and correctly, which is why we see Ecclesiastes as far from being a random selection of ill-thought-out and just cobbled-together sayings.

This is the first thing about the preacher's work. And one of the reasons we ask you please to keep praying for us who preach the word is this reason itself.

Not just that the words that we preach will be used by God, of course, that's a primary consideration, translation, but as we go about the study of the Bible and looking into the meaning of the text, that as you pray for us, that God will give us to weigh these words, to study these words, to arrange them in such a way that we hope will actually catch people's attention and be meaningful to them, and that they will always be words of truth, and that they will be words that we take so seriously and write plainly and honestly and correctly so as to give the sense, as Nehemiah and Ezra did in those days that we read about in Nehemiah chapter 8.

[43 : 28] There's the first thing the preachers work. Now, we're going to look at another two points, as we said, the time is passing, so we'll do this more briefly. The preacher's words, next, or the effect of the words, certainly in verse 11 there, the words of the wise are like goads and like nails, firmly fixed are the collected sayings, they're given by one shepherd.

Very interesting description. He says that the words were both like goads and like nails, two images important to describe how the preacher was handling the message that he was giving out or the objective of teaching the people knowledge.

What were goads? Well, goads were usually long pointed sticks very often associated with oxen ploughing. The person that was behind the plough very often would have a pointed stick so that if the ox started wandering to one side or the other he would give him a prod with a stick.

Of course, being sharp it would actually hurt and just remind the ox that well, just keep to what you should be doing and keep in a straight line and so on.

So that's what a goad was used to and a goad worked simply because it hurt. And the words of God, the words that God give us in the Bible, and indeed if we're handling them correctly, because one of the things we must not do is tone down the emphases that you find in God's word.

[45 : 01] One of the great lessons in that is Jesus himself and also the Old Testament prophets. They didn't actually tone it down just to suit the mood of the age. they were very much like goads, the preaching and the prophecies of these prophets and of Jesus himself.

And if you and I are dealing with God's word honestly, then we will know that it's not just there to comfort us, though it is that, thankfully, but very often it needs to act as a goad first before you come to know the benefit of it as a comfort.

You remember what Jesus said to Saul of Tarsus, who became the apostle Paul. He met him on the road to Damascus, a dedicated enemy of the gospel and an enemy of Jesus, of the name of Jesus.

You know very well the story, I'm sure, in Acts chapter 9. And when Jesus came and appeared before him in his brilliance of this light that came when the risen Jesus met him and knocked him to the ground with such was the effect of the appearance.

remember what Jesus said to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is difficult for you to kick against the goads. This wasn't the first time that Saul of Tarsus had heard the word of God.

[46 : 24] Saul had already been pricked in his conscience by the goads of God's word. And what Jesus was saying, it's hard for you to kick against the goads.

He's making a picture there of the ox that sometimes when prodded with the goad would kick out against it and only just hurt himself all the more. Well, that's how it is with the word of God as well.

And if you're finding that the word of God is indeed getting to your conscience, if the word of God is showing up a defect in your life or mine, if the word of God is hurting you in that sense, don't think that's a bad thing because that's God's prelude to comfort.

And when we try and kick against that, when we try and just get rid of that, when we try and just ignore it or kick against it, we'll find it hurts even more. And tonight, if you have not given your life to Jesus and you know what I'm talking about when the word of God hurts you, when it shows up the defects of your life as of mine, that's not easy to live with.

That's God's word as a goad to your soul. That's God's word hitting your conscience, causing that pain of conscience. Why is God doing that?

[47 : 45] So that you will use that positively and seek his own comfort and seek his own salvation in a way that will deal with the goad as well.

We all need these along with the comfort. They are an important aspect of God's word. These goads, the words of the wise, are like goads. I hope you know something of and I hope I know something of God's word as a goad to our souls.

We shouldn't think that that's all it does. It would be wrong of us to use God's word in order to batter people's consciences all the time. It's a bit of a spiritual surgical procedure because the pain of the surgery comes first and then there's the comfort afterwards of the matter that was a problem being dealt with and cut out and being mollified in terms of the pain.

And that's what is important about God's word. We need both aspects of it, friends, as a goad and as a comfort to touch us with a sense of guilt and to come to pour into our hearts the oil of God's own grace and comfort in it.

So they're like goads but also he says like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings. Like nails firmly fixed. Now that image is really one of fixing things down properly.

[49 : 15] Fixing things down like the word's really nails there is a word that's used for tent pegs in the Old Testament. And that seems to be the picture he has in mind. When you're hammering in tent pegs and especially if you're anticipating a gale you have to make sure that you hammer in the tent pegs firmly enough so that your tent won't blow away.

And that's what he's doing in this way. He's making a picture here for us of the words of the wise. They're not just like goads but they're like nails firmly fixed.

They're hammering them down so that what they're saying will prove permanent will prove fixed will not move. And that applies to preaching as well because and it applies to our understanding of the word of God as I mentioned earlier.

Because we cannot look at the word of God and say that we have to adapt it to the prevailing culture of our age. The same goes for preaching from the word of God.

We're not to adapt our preaching to the culture of our time. We're not to fall into the trap of thinking that just because we're dealing with things that are ancient texts and that we're dealing with reformed views that go back to the reformation and so on that these are outmoded and outdated and need to be jettisoned and we just need to move on from these things and find something different, something more meaningful to our age.

[50 : 42] And here is the writer reminding us that these truths are firmly fixed. God has given them as an absolute. And we need absolutes.

We need the absolute of God's truth. We live in an age when absolutes are really thrown out. We live in an age of relativism, an age when we think of the things that are important as movable things, changing as the opinions of one age after another changes.

God is telling us, I have given you absolutes. I have given you the absolute of my truth. You don't adapt it, you don't mould it, you don't change it with the way that the culture changes or the culture might insist upon.

And you don't adapt your preaching to that either. We're well aware of the fact that sadly you find varieties of preaching as well of views of the Bible that don't hold to that principle at all.

You know the way it goes, people would say to you, well, you know, if Paul were living in the present age, if he was writing Romans today, he wouldn't have written Romans 1 and Romans 2 the way he did then.

[51 : 54] That's a complete misunderstanding of Scripture, of the absolute that God has given us in his truths. And you and I need that absolute for our stability and our comfort.

If you have a ship or a boat that needs to be anchored, you don't anchor it on sand, that moves. You anchor it in a rocky place where it can be grounded firmly. And for our lives to have stability, we need to be grounded in the absolute of God's truth.

We need our comfort to come from the absolute of God's truth. How can you be comforted from something that you know is malleable, that depends upon the opinions of human beings from one generation to the next?

Where are you going to find your comfort from that? Where is life going to be given steerage from that? Where is your life going to be grounded firmly and with stability from that?

You have to be grounded in God's truth. This like nails firmly fixed on the collected sayings. You remember how Paul wrote to the Ephesians in chapter 4, a wonderful passage about the unity of God's people in the truth of God.

[53 : 06] I'm not going to read the whole passage, but you remember he's saying that he gave some apostles to be prophets, prophets, evangelists, so on, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

And then he says this, so that we may be no longer children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about with every wind of doctrine by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

Remember how Paul, when he met with the Ephesian elders in Acts chapter 20, he was meeting with him for the last time. It's a very emotional moment. But you recall yourselves how he spoke to them and especially how he addressed them with regard to their responsibilities in the ministry of the gospel.

Because he said, this is what's going to happen after I am gone. Because when I am no longer with you in the future, he said, this is what is going to happen.

For he said, fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. From outside of yourselves, influences, bad influences, destructive influences, and teachings will come in and they won't spare you.

[54 : 39] But he didn't leave it at that. He said, and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them, both from outside and from among yourselves.

That's why he's saying, please guard the flock of God over which he's made you overseers because you're always facing the danger of, from within or from outside, and it's more dangerous from within, defections from the truth, from the absolute of God's truth.

And then moving on, because I know the time has passed, and I should have finished some time ago, but I want to just finish this final part of this passage, they are given by one shepherd.

Now this is interesting because the phrase the one shepherd is only used three times in the Old Testament, here, and twice in the prophecy of Ezekiel. You'll find it in Ezekiel 34, 23-24, and Ezekiel 37, 24-25.

And both of these passages in Ezekiel are about the coming of the Messiah, the coming of the one that's going to be the Saviour, the promised deliverer, the shepherd, the David, as it's mentioned, who's going to be set over the flock of God.

[56 : 02] Now David was long since dead when Ezekiel rose, so this is a prophecy of Jesus. So you can legitimately take that into the New Testament, look at the passages there that speak of Jesus as the shepherd, Jesus himself in John 10, Hebrews 13, that great shepherd of the sheep that has been raised from the dead, and then John 7, where those who went out to arrest, Jesus came back and said to the authorities when they would ask, why couldn't you take him into custody?

Their answer was, nobody ever spoke like this man. What a marvelous answer. That's not the answer they expected.

They expected some kind of excuse, but they spoke the truth. We couldn't arrest this man. We've never come across this before. no one ever spoke like him.

These words of authority, these words that meant we couldn't take him in captive, the words of Jesus. What he's saying, these are the words of the wise, taking the words of Christ and seeking to apply them.

They're like goats, they're like nails, and they're from the one shepherd. Tonight, that's our great privilege, friends, to know the gospel and to seek to be faithful to the gospel and to know the one shepherd who is over the gospel, the Lord Jesus Christ, and to know him for ourselves as our friend, as our shepherd too.

[57 : 35] And then he says, my son, beware, just finishing with the third point, which is the warning, the preacher's work, the preacher's words, the preacher's warning. He says, my son, beware of anything beyond these.

Making many books, there is no end. Much study is a weariness of the flesh. Something my wife tells me very often, of making many books, there is no end, because as preachers, we're always tempted to give in to buying some books just to add to our library.

And what this is saying is, it's not a passage that's against study, it's not an anti-study passage, as if study were somehow wrong, or to add to the knowledge you have already, is wrong, and that you can do that with more books.

It's actually a counter to addiction to study. This is one of the dangers always for those of us who are in the business of having to study as the main aspect of our work.

We can take pride in it. We can take pride in showing a library full of books stacked, and yet we may be very far short of using them. They're good to look at, but beware, because many books, there is no end on much study.

[58 : 48] It's a weariness of the flesh, and it's detached from the real purpose. But I want to really emphasize this, beware of anything beyond these. What he's saying is, these words of the wise, these words of God, these absolutes, this absolute of God's truth, beware of anything beyond these.

In other words, it's emphasizing for us the sufficiency of Scripture. You have a complete Bible. Yes, you can read words along with that that help to explain it, and that's brilliant, but they're not the Bible itself.

They're not on an equality with the Bible. And if you're reading books more than you're reading the Bible, you've got things the wrong way round, and I have too, if that's the case. What he's saying is, God has given us the absolute of his truth.

So be careful of going beyond that. And indeed, that's how the Bible ends, isn't it, in Revelation chapter 22, where he says, I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book.

And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life, and in the holy city which are described in this book.

[60 : 14] Friends, we have the Bible. We have the God of the Bible. We have the saviour of the Bible. We have everything we need. God bless and however much we must have preaching and other books to help us understand the Bible.

The Bible is basic. The Bible is our walk. The Bible is our absolute from God. May God bless these thoughts to us tonight.

We're going to finish by singing in Psalm 19 in the Scottish Psalter. Psalm 19 that's verses 7 to 11.

You'll find that on page 223. Words that remind us of God's word, God's law as it says here, God's testimony, God's statutes, all these words used.

So verses 7 to 11 to a tune creditor, God's law is perfect and converts the soul in sin that lies. God's law is perfect and converts the soul in sin that lies.

[61 : 32] God's testimony is most true and makes the simple wise.

the statutes of the Lord arise and do rejoice the heart.

The Lord's command is pure and doth light to the eyes impart.

power. And spotted is the fear of God and doth endure forever.

The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous and righteous altogether.

[62 : 43] They more than gold, yea, much find gold to be desired are.

than honey, honey, honey, from the comb, that proper sweet and fire.

Moreover, they thy servant warn, how he his life should frame.

a great reward provided is for them that keep the same.

Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and ever more. Amen. A sincere thanks from us, to you all, for joining with us in worship this evening.

[64 : 00] I trust that you will know the Lord's blessing from his own word tonight, and that you will be kept safe in these difficult times, in these days ahead, and that you'll know the Lord's blessing, whatever the circumstances of your life are, if we're in the hands of the shepherd, we know that all is well with our soul.

So good night and thanks.achsen■ to mine are horrible about whateverness through Thank you.