

**Ecclesiastes 3: 14 and 15; “God’s Work is Forever”, Sermon # 20 in the series –
“Remember Your Creator”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall, on
March 12th, 2017, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

These verses are related to verse 11 which we studied the last time. “He has made everything beautiful in its time.” I said to you then, that it is the work of God to make everything beautiful in its time for those who know Him. It is not as though He does not make everything that He makes beautiful, and that those who do not know Him do not see this temporal beauty. But we need to understand that because of sin, all earthly beauty fades and eventually dies. Let us also understand that not everyone attributes the beauty of the creation which they see, to God. But that does not mean that God did not create the beauty, which in its time, was evident. What it means is that many people are spiritually blind to God’s being the author of all beauty. The hearts of sinful men will not acknowledge God’s handiwork. It was beautiful, and its beauty was evident for the time that He appointed it. It lived for a time and flourished; but all physical beauty in this fallen world eventually fades and dies. It does so in accordance with God’s will and command. He commands that there will be seasons in life.

And, we have seen that He wills that there is a time and purpose for everything under heaven. He wills that the plants that are perennial come back the next year, and whereas they had once faded and withered and died in the late fall and winter; now in the spring, they come back again. God is not only a God who creates things which are very beautiful; He is also a God who is eternal. And because He is eternal, verse 14 that we are studying, must be related to God’s ability to make all things beautiful in an eternal sense as well as a temporal one. This is what we want to examine at this hour. “I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever.” I would like us to think, 1st of all, about the fact that God’s work, which lasts forever, is perfect; nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it”. And then, 2nd, I would like us to see that the reason that God does this perfect and eternal work is, “that men should fear before Him”. And then 3rd and finally, I will touch briefly on the eternal judgment of God in relation to His work; “God requires an account of what is past”.

1st of all – God’s work, which lasts forever, is perfect.

“I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever.” The reason that God’s work lasts forever is because it is perfect. He designs it to be so, and He executes it to fulfill His every purpose. All of His works are based upon His eternal counsels. He is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, in wisdom, power and holiness; in justice, goodness, and truth, as the Westminster Shorter Catechism states. As Edward Reynolds says in his commentary on this verse, “God’s works themselves may alter and vanish, but the counsel of God is constant and immutable, and he doth in a stable and fixed way dispose of all things to his ends, beyond the power of any creature, either to alter or evade.” Turn with me over to Malachi 3: 6 and you will have this confirmed. “For I am the Lord, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.” You can see from this verse that God, because He is perfect in every sense, He is also perfect in this sense of being unchangeable in His purposes. It is because of this that He can exercise patience, and work with men over time, to bring them to repentance, even though they have been stubborn in the past. God’s ways, in the outworking of His decrees in Election, and in His granting repentance, are very mysterious. Because even though He is sovereign, and could overwhelm the sinner with His power and consume him; yet He rather wills to reason with him, so as to bring Him to the place where he will repent of all of his sins. I am speaking of the Elect now, and not of all men.

Although it is God’s expressly stated will, in relation to the preaching of the gospel, that all men everywhere repent, it is not His sovereign will in terms of His eternal decrees that all men have the same grace given to them, to be able to do so. This would seem to make God unfair, and therefore unrighteous in regard to His decrees; that He has the right to choose some sinners to eternal life

and not others. But according to God's word to us here, it because God is unchangeable in His being and in His plans, that all of us are not consumed. It is not His purpose that all men perish, but that some will most definitely be called out of their sinful rebellion against Him, and repent and be saved. If you will look with me at Malachi chapter 3, verse 7, you will see how this worked itself out in relation to sinful Israel. "Yet from the days of your fathers You have gone away from My ordinances and have not kept them." "Return to Me, and I will return to you," says the Lord of Hosts." You see here, how God commands Israel to repent, but in New Testament times, we need to understand that He commands all men everywhere to repent." In the open and public declaration of His word, He would have all men to repent and not to perish, as it says in 2 Peter 3: 9. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

But this verse should also be thought of in terms of His secret decretive purpose. In the ultimate sense of His decretive will He is not willing that any of us who believe in Jesus would perish, but that all would, and will, come to repentance. He has not purposed to save all men but some; and that for His own glory; not because in themselves, they deserved in any way to be shown mercy and grace, and be brought to the foot of the cross. They did not deserve it, and are no better than anyone else. But God has mercy on whom He will have mercy, as it says in Romans chapter 9. (Verses 14 and 15) It is God's work, and it is God alone, who can save men from perishing in their sins. He is under no obligation to save any, because He is wiser than men, and He knows that their sin deserves His eternal judgment. But because he is working perfectly in conjunction with His own purposes in His eternal decrees, that He is compassionate, and He will reason with sinners everywhere, in and through the preaching of the gospel and His word. He reasoned perfectly with Israel there in the Old Testament times. He reasons perfectly with us now in the New Testament times in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. All men must return to God if they would be saved; but not all men want to return. The only reason that some people want to return, is because they have been given saving grace.

Turn with me to Deuteronomy Chapter 32. Sometimes people like to think hard thoughts against God because He doesn't save all people; when it is evident that they really do not appreciate or love Him for His wisdom and holiness and justice at all. People often do not realize the extent of their depravity. Even many in the Old Covenant nation of Israel did not understand. Listen to this. "Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of My mouth." Let my teaching drop as the rain, My speech distill as the dew, as raindrops on the tender herb, and as showers on the grass." "For I proclaim the name of the Lord: Ascribe greatness to our God." "He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He." "They have corrupted themselves; they are not His children because of their blemish: A perverse and crooked generation." "Do you thus deal with the Lord, O foolish and unwise people?" "Is He not your Father, who bought you?" "Has He not made you and established you?" "Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations." "Ask your father, and he will show you; your elders, and they will tell you: When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel." "For the Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance." "He found him in a desert land and in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye." "As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings, so the Lord alone led him and there was no foreign god with him."

Do you see how loving the Lord was with them; how He looked upon them in mercy when they were helpless, and needy. They were dependent upon Him from the very beginning of His bringing them out of Egypt, and all through the Wilderness, which He led them through. Verse 13 says, "He made him ride in the heights of the earth, that he might eat the produce of the fields; He made him draw honey from the rock, and oil from the flinty rock; curds from the cattle, and milk of the flock,

with fat of lambs; and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the choicest wheat; and you drank wine, the blood of the grapes.” And how did Israel respond to this? Verse 15 – “But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked; you grew fat, you grew thick, you are obese!” “Then he forsook God who made him and scornfully esteemed the Rock of his salvation.” You see, God’s work was perfect, but theirs was far from perfect. What can we learn from this? We should learn to highly esteem the work of God which is perfect. He does all of His work, both in mercy and in judgment, so that it will last forever. Men’s sins are not ultimately a hindrance to the fulfillment of His eternal purpose, but that truth ought never to give us reason to be lax in our responsibility to consider, by the way that we live, that the work which God is doing in those who believe in Him is an eternally perfect work.

2nd – Let’s think together about the reason for God’s doing these perfect works: “That men should fear before Him.”

We have been seeing, through the verses that I have shown to you, that God does His eternal work in relation to His word, which is also eternal. It cannot be added to, or taken away from. He gave us His word which is perfect, and He does His work in accordance with His eternal decrees, using His eternal and perfect word. “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away,” Jesus said in Matthew 24: 35. God does His perfect works in things related to this temporal world, and they exist for a time, and then they pass away. But the Lord does His eternal works in the heart of man in order that His work will last forever. In other words the works of God’s grace in Jesus Christ are the works that will last forever. And He does all of these good and eternal works in order that men might fear Him as they live their lives. There is common grace and there is special and saving grace.

Turn with me over to Psalm 90. “Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.” “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.” “You turn man to destruction, and say, ‘Return, O children of men.’” “For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night.” “You carry them away like a flood; they are like a sleep.” “In the morning they are like grass which grows up: in the morning it flourishes and grows up; in the evening it is cut down and withers.” “For we have been consumed by Your anger, and by Your wrath we are terrified.” “You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your countenance.” “For all our days have passed away in Your wrath; we finish our years like a sigh.” “The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.” “Who knows the power of Your anger?”

This is the verse that I want you to consider: “For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath.” This is a difficult sentence. I think that the intent of these words is to compare the amount of the fear of God, in man, to the assuaging of His anger and wrath toward them for their secret sins. They were his covenant people, but they had sinned. And He had chastised them for it. Under the Old Covenant, a person might be in outward covenant with God through circumcision and observing the Old Testament ceremonial law, but they still might not know God. I believe that a good many of them didn’t. It was common grace that was given to them, in their being His people in this sense, but they needed to pray for a greater grace. Did they really fear God? The NAS says, “Who understands the power of Thine anger, and Thy fury, according to the fear that is due Thee? I think this helps us understand. They deserved God’s eternal anger and wrath coming against them because of their sins, and Moses was praying on behalf of the people; that they would come to understand what they deserved. But Moses wouldn’t stop there in his prayer.

It was his prayer, on their behalf, that they would pray along with him, the words of verse 12 in all sincerity. “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” This is the fear that is due to God; to so live, that we are repenting of all of our sins, and that we are becoming wise in the way that we live before Him. “Return, O Lord!” “How long?” “And have compassion

on Your servants.” “Oh satisfy us early with Your mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days!” This was what Moses desired as he prayed to God. And this ought to be our desire as we pray to God. It is; that we would be wise and holy in our thoughts, and in all of our behavior. And, that we would rejoice and be glad to pursue God in that holy way.

And then finally and briefly – I would like us to see that God does require an account of what is past. (verse 15)

“That which is, has already been, and what is to be has already been; and God requires an account of what is past.” I find that when I am in conversation with unbelieving people about death, the death of their loved ones or their own death, that they like to think of death purely in terms of an end to their earthly sufferings. They don’t want others to suffer, and they themselves do not want to suffer physically, any longer than they have to. They believe that death means an end to those sufferings for each and every person. But they are forgetting the soul. The soul of man is a work of God; men and women being made the image and likeness of God. This means that every soul that He has brought into being, it continues on forever. Let us remember the words of our text; “Whatever God does, it shall be forever.” Each and every person has an eternal soul. And as it says in Hebrews 9: 27, “It has been appointed unto men once to die; and then comes the judgment”. So when a person dies; their soul most definitely leaves their body, and then immediately the soul goes to God for judgment. Ecclesiastes 12: 7 says, “Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.”

The souls of every person are either placed in His blessed presence to stay there with Him forever, or they are separated from Him in the place of outer darkness; in torment, to await the judgment of the Great Day of Christ’s return at the end of the world. (Read also Luke 16: 19-31) At that time, at the time of a person’s death, the Bible tells us that there will be an initial judgment of both the living and the dead; that is, a judgment of the spiritually living and the spiritual dead. For all people who died physically, both the righteous and the unrighteous, will be raised from the dead at Christ’s second coming. Those righteous persons whose spirits were made perfect when they died, will be glorified by their being given their old body back again. But this time it will be made new and like Christ’s glorious body, for all of eternity. And all of those Christians who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall be caught up together with them; changed and transformed as well, to be like Christ. And all of those persons who are alive, who are not saved people, shall have to face the Lord in their sins, and be ushered off to the realms of eternal darkness and the lake of fire.

This text tells us that God requires an account. He knows the beginning from the end. He knows everything which has been, perfectly, and He knows what is to be, as though it has already happened. That is the greatness of our God, and it is a part of His perfections. He knows everything that He has given to us both spiritually and physically. He expects us to be faithful to Him, and to use what He has given to us, wisely, in accordance with what He has commanded us in the Bible; to use all for His glory, and to do all to His glory. Even a Christian, although He will not be condemned at the judgment, he will still have to give an account of himself to God for the things that he did in the body. It will affect the rewards which are given to him at that time and which will be known and seen in his person, and in his position in relation to other believers, throughout all of eternity. The question that I want to close this study with, is simply this: Are you so living that you are keeping this truth in mind; that there is an account to give? Listen to 2nd Corinthians 5, verse 9. “Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, (that is from the body) to be well pleasing to Him.” “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” I pray that each of us will bear these things in mind in the way that we live our lives.