

**Ecclesiastes 1: 13-18; “The Crooked Made Straight”, Sermon # 3 in the series – “Remember Your Creator”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2014, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

King Solomon, as we have seen in the last two studies, has set forth his proposition to us that everything under the sun is vanity of vanities. Apart from that knowledge and wisdom which comes from God, this is what life finally comes to. We have seen him assert that this is so in regard to all the generations of men. Verse 4 says, “One generation passes away, and another generation comes; but the earth abides forever.” And verse 8, “All things are full of labor; man cannot express it.” “The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing.” All his labor to do things to his own glory and honor, and to have those things bring lasting satisfaction to him are doomed to failure. But Solomon wants us to understand that it is not only our labor that is vain, when we strive for things apart from doing them to God's glory. But he also wants us to understand that the pursuit of earthly wisdom and knowledge is vain unless it is brought into the realm of bringing every thought captive to that holy goal of “Fearing God and keeping His commandments” which he mentions at the end of the book in Chapter 12, verses 13 and 14. In New Testament terms it would be said by the Apostle Paul, “to bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.” Solomon goes about to prove this assertion of his by making certain observations about life and about himself which he uses to convince us that our working to obtain earthly wisdom and knowledge is “grasping for the wind.” The question that he is asking of us is: Have you learned this truth? Have you learned the truth, first of all, that what is crooked cannot be made straight by your own wisdom and knowledge? And have you learned the truth, of one who has gone before you; that I have something to tell you about how you can accumulate wisdom and knowledge? The truth is, that the accumulation of wisdom brings grief, and the increase of earthly knowledge brings sorrow. What does Solomon mean by this? Well let's give it a little thought.

**1st of all - Have you learned the truth that what is crooked cannot be made straight by your own wisdom and knowledge?** (verse 15)

I think that in order to understand this verse better we need to turn over to Ecclesiastes 7: 13 where we will find this truth amplified. It says, “Consider the work of God; for who can make straight what He has made crooked?” “In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider; surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, so that man can find out nothing that will come after him.” Here we find out something more about the things that are crooked. It is that the things that are crooked are appointed to be that way by God. We are not talking about things that are crooked morally, because God is not the author of sin. But we are rather considering the truth of what God appoints in our lives and in the lives of all men which goes against the way that we would want them to go. These are the things that he makes, which are not perfect from our earthly conception of them, and the things which He providentially appoints which we do not want to submit to because we find them unfair or too difficult for us to bear. I think that we need to understand tonight that God is the author of these things that are crooked in our lives. And He permits them because He is holy, wise, and knows what will be for our good. He knows what will bring about a greater Christ-likeness in His people. We do not always want to agree with God's analysis. We will see this as we proceed.

Turn with me to Exodus Chapter 3. Here in this chapter, the Lord has appeared to Moses in the burning bush; the bush that burned but which was not consumed by the fire. He told Moses that He had seen the oppression of His people there in Egypt. He had heard their cry, because of their taskmasters, and He knew their sorrows. He is telling Moses that He was sending him to them to tell them that He was going to bring them up from Egypt, and deliver them from the

hand of the Egyptians, and bring them into a land which was flowing with milk and honey. Verse 10 says, "Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel out of Egypt." "But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?' Now this was the right reaction in Moses, to say such a thing, I believe. Such a great work; and he Moses was going to do it? Moses had real reason to suspect his calling to such a work. Why? Because 40 years before this, as is related in chapter 2, verse 11, it says, "Now it came to pass in those day, when Moses was grown, that he went out to his brethren and looked at their burdens." "And he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren." "So he looked this way and that way, and when he saw no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand." We will find Moses' reasoning at the time of this incident in Acts 7: 23 and following. "Now when Moses was 40 years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel." "And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian." "For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand." Even then, Moses felt the call to be a deliverer of his brethren. It says that he supposed that they knew that God would have him deliver them. But they did not. Why? Was it because God had not intended him to be the deliverer of His people? No, it was because this was not the right way to go about it. God could not approve of Moses committing a murder as a self-appointed vigilante policeman. This was not God's way of going about it. It was Moses taking matters of justice into his own hands apart from the leading and approval of God.

God did intend to raise up Moses to be the deliverer of His people, as we have seen in his call in chapter 3. But there was something that the Lord knew needed to change in Moses' heart. You will notice how confident Moses was that he was proceeding in the correct fashion in the incident of the killing of the Egyptian who was the oppressor. Turn with me over to Chapter 4, verse 1. Here Moses asks the Lord a question: "But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my voice; suppose they say, 'The Lord has not appeared to you', by showing him the signs that he would give to them to show them that he was appointed by God. Moses also says to the Lord, this interesting statement in verse 10. "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." You see, Moses believes that this is the crook in his lot. This is what is crooked and it cannot be changed; therefore he thinks that he is unfit for the task that God is calling him to. But look at what the Lord said to him in verse 11. "So the Lord said to him, 'Who has made man's mouth?' "Or who make the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind?" "Have not I, the Lord?" "Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say." What is God saying? He is saying, "Moses, I have created this thing which is crooked in your life; this weakness that you feel in relation to public speaking." "I am choosing you even with this crook to do this work." "I will be glorified through you in this way."

And this is what you and I need to understand. Whatever birth defects we have or encounter, whatever providential orderings or appointments of God that we find ourselves having to deal with, whenever we feel unable or inadequate to the task, we need to understand that God has appointed these things for the everlasting good of every believer. It may not seem like it to us however, because we know that these crooked things cannot be straightened out by us. But God Himself has appointed them. He expects us to receive them, and to work with them, and He knows that by the grace of Christ, we can learn to glorify Him in the midst of these difficulties. Let us see that this statement here in chapter 1 of Ecclesiastes is not written from the perspective of grace. However as we read these verses in Ecclesiastes 1, we should realize that was written from the standpoint of Solomon's seeing the pitiful condition of all men; their being unable to change the things that God has appointed to be crooked in their lives. But we should

understand that they can be changed or overcome by God's supernatural and powerful grace. This is seen in the sign that was given to Moses to show the children of Israel if they would not believe. Chapter 4, verse 2 says, "So the Lord said to him, 'What is that in your hand?'" "He said, 'A rod.'" "And He said, 'Cast it to the ground.'" "So he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it." That is what we always do when we see the crooked things in our life. We flee from them. But grace being given to us changes that fear into faith. Verse 4 says, "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Reach out your hand and take it by the tail.'" (And he reached out his hand and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand), that they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the god of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you." There it is, something that is crooked becoming straight. The lesson is, that grace can overcome and change the crooked things in our life and make them straight.

What was the "crook in the lot" of the Apostle Paul? Well, we are not told. But it may have been some weakness in his eyesight or physical abilities that he thought was a significant hindrance to his being able to preach the gospel and fulfill the ministry to which he was called. But listen to the way that he explains it in 2 Corinthians 12: 7, "And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure." "Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me." "And he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.'" "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. "For when I am weak, then I am strong." In his case the "crook in his lot" was not changed or taken away. He was simply given grace sufficient to bear it and to work with it. It is true, from the standpoint of God's sovereign appointment, that we cannot change what is crooked and make it straight in our lives. And there may be much, from the standpoint of how we would want to see things, that does not seem right or fair or good in that which is crooked. But the reality of that truth is meant to lead us to seek God's grace in Jesus Christ; to know the reality and the power of the grace that he gives to work with the things that are crooked in our lives and in the lives of others. This never means that we condone sin in ourselves or others. But it does mean that we receive and work with God's sovereign appointments in our lives.

**Then 2ndly – Have you learned the truth about how to accumulate wisdom and knowledge?** (Verses 16-18)

Solomon as he communed in his heart, knew that he had accumulated great wisdom and knowledge. He had set his heart to seek it and search it out. He knew that it had been given to him by God. But he also knew that it had brought him sorrow. He says, "Look, I have attained greatness and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem." "My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge." Was this wrong? No, it was by no means wrong for him to have the wisdom and knowledge which he pursued, which he asked God for, and which was given to him. It was in his using his wisdom and knowledge to pursue satisfaction in life without God Himself being the object of all his works; that was the problem. That is what brought him grief and sorrow. It was when he set his heart to know wisdom in relation to the glory of his works, or the glory of his own madness and folly, or the glory of his own earthly pleasures; the glory of any earthly gift or pleasure apart from the blessings of God's grace upon it. That is where it all ultimately became vanity and striving after the wind.

If you will turn with me over to James Chapter 3, verse 13, you will see for yourself that there are 2 different kinds of wisdom which are spoken of in the Scriptures. "Who is wise and understanding among you?" "Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom." "But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth." This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual,

and demonic.” “For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.” “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.” “Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” You can see here the difference between the wisdom which is earthly and the wisdom which is from above; from God. The wisdom from God leads to all of your works being done in meekness. That is; you are not willing to assert, or to have others believe, that your works are done because you are wise in yourself apart from God and the Scriptures. Instead you do them in the meekness of wisdom. You are not doing all of your works from selfish motives so that others will see you as great and wise. You are doing them all to the glory and praise of God, through the wisdom and the strength that He supplies; and you are willing to freely confess this before all men. I am saying that in Solomon’s case there was too much self-seeking. His wisdom was tainted with self-seeking and sensual motives at certain points. This is what you and I need to consider; if such a great man as Solomon had to write such a book as this, confessing the vanity of life apart from God’s wisdom and his grace, then certainly we, as God’s children, will also be brought to this place.

Oh how I pray that each of us would find the wisdom that is from above; the wisdom and knowledge which is found in Jesus Christ. For it is faith in Christ that brings true profit and satisfaction to all that we do. In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. It is in Him that all of our works before God are accepted and established, in relation to our believing the truth of the Scriptures. Remember the words of Solomon in the book of Proverbs, chapter 4 and verse 1, “Hear my children, the instruction of a father, and give attention to know understanding; for I give you good doctrine: do not forsake My law.” “When I was my father’s son, tender and the only one in the sight of my mother, he also taught me, and said to me: “Let your heart retain my words; keep my commands and live.” “Get wisdom!” “Get understanding!” “Do not forget, or turn away from the words of my mouth.” “Do not forsake her, and she will preserve you; love her, and she will keep you.” “Wisdom is the principal thing.” Here Solomon is speaking of the wisdom which is from above, the wisdom of the Scriptures which you should know will make you wise unto salvation. (2 Timothy 3: 15) Let us always remember to continue to seek for the wisdom which is from above as we continue on our pilgrimage to the heavenly city.