

Ecclesiastes 1: 16-18 – “Setting My Heart to Know Wisdom”, Sermon # 4 in the series – “Remember Your Creator”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on November 16th, 2014, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

We are told here that Solomon the King of Israel, was a man who had been given much wisdom from God. And he believed that he had been given this wisdom in order to discover the meaning of life. He set out to conduct a search it says in verse 13 of Chapter 1. “I set my heart,” he says, “to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven....” His purpose was to find out, by the great wisdom given to him, if there was anything truly satisfying in earthly pursuits and activities, which he could devote himself to; and from it find lasting satisfaction and meaning. He found that there was not, but he wants to spare us the grief that he himself came to, by revealing the results of his search to us, and disclosing the outcome of it. This is why he wrote this book. He is saying that there is more to life than what we think or see. So this afternoon I think it will be profitable to ask ourselves 3 questions about the meaning of life. 1st – Do I commune with my heart about whether I am truly wise? 2nd – Do I set my heart to know wisdom, madness, and folly? And 3rd – How can I find the true and lasting wisdom that will not bring sorrow with it?

1st – Do I commune with my heart about whether I am truly wise?

“I communed with my heart, saying, “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.” I do not believe that Solomon was boasting when he said this. He truly was a man who communed with his own heart about what he had really attained to. He had attained to greatness. He had reached great heights of wisdom and knowledge; and so he would use this high and privileged position to draw conclusions about what he had experienced. If you look back at verse 13 you see that he mentions that it was God who had assigned this task to him; and not only to him, but also to all the sons of men. Even though this was so, he says in verse 15 that he is troubled. “What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be numbered.” He is saying that he was made aware that there was a Divine providence which he did not understand. He is saying that God so orders all things under the sun, that He made him think deeply about the meaning of his life. Let us learn from Solomon’s experience. Our God is a God who interacts with all of our thoughts and works. He is sovereign in the ordering of all things, and because He is infinitely wise, there are things in our lives which He makes crooked. He sees that it is not for our eternal well-being that everything should always go normally according to the way that we might want things to go. So strongly does He order these things in our lives, we find that we cannot change them.

We must confess that often we do not understand why God ordains these “crooks in our lot”; why He orders things in our life the way that He does. These sovereign and providential orderings, making some things crooked in his life, frustrated Solomon’s efforts to find lasting satisfaction and happiness for a time. This is why he says in verse 18, “For in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.” He is not saying that divine wisdom is a bad thing. And neither is he calling earthly wisdom and knowledge a bad thing either. Indeed, he will call it very good in verse 13 of Chapter 2. But he is trying to show us that there are certain attendants to the acquisition of earthly wisdom. They are, knowing what we can do and how we can accomplish things. This ability comes to us because God has given us certain natural gifts and abilities which he expects us to use. But He also wants us to understand that the attendants of this natural and earthly wisdom will sometimes lead us to grief and sorrow.

We may find ourselves becoming discouraged when we cannot establish our life’s work so that it will last even beyond our own generation. It may be very grievous to us to think that

whatever we try to pass on to the next generation, they may not grasp it at all. They may not see what needs to be done with what we have done. They may not see what we have accomplished, and it may be a great grief and sorrow to us. So, we need to receive this truth; the more that we learn and the wiser that we become, all of our learning and all of our earthly wisdom may bring with it the grief and sorrow of realizing that it has all been in vain. What a disappointment this was to Solomon. Let me ask you if you commune with your heart about such things?

What is the meaning of your life? Let me ask you whether you understand that there are two kinds of knowledge and wisdom in the world today? There is the acquisition of earthly and natural knowledge and wisdom. And then there is the acquisition of heavenly and divine knowledge and wisdom. You may have the first without having the second at all. All knowledge and wisdom comes from God. We must acknowledge that. And yet spiritual wisdom is not naturally attained. "The world by its wisdom does not come to know God". The knowledge and wisdom which come from God, and which are revealed to men through the gospel, and in His Word, bring real joy and lasting happiness. Solomon has not yet come to tell us about this; but he will later. But for right now he must tell us of his search for the truth; about the things which he made trial of. Human nature wants desperately to know if there is some other way to live, than living to God's glory and doing His will. It does not even have to be fallen human nature which wants desperately to know this. It may be redeemed human nature which still searches in this way. I believe that Solomon was a redeemed man when he wrote these things; He was a man who knew God. And yet, in some major ways, here, we still find him still seeking and searching for the ability to find satisfaction in all the good gifts which God had given him. He sought satisfaction in the gifts alone, without connecting them to God Himself and fellowship with his God. This is the principle which brought him to the grief and sorrow that he mentions; his leaving the immediate fellowship and guidance of God out of his search for lasting meaning. This may also be your problem as a Christian. Do you have the wisdom that brings sorrow or joy? Ask yourself now, am I truly wise?

Now, 2ndly – Do I set my heart to know wisdom, madness, and folly?

Verse 17 says: "And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly." "I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind." Solomon, you should know, was a man who started out well. And yet he drifted away from God when he reached the full height of his personal greatness. Let me show you how well things began for him. Turn with me to 1 Kings 3: 3. Solomon received the kingdom from his father David, in accordance with the will of the Lord, when he was a very young man. And since he was so young, he felt his own lack of understanding of how he could rule the kingdom in his father's place. And this is what it says of him. "And Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David, except that he sacrificed and burned incense at the high places." "Now the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place: Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar." "At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask!" "What shall I give you?" "And Solomon said: 'You have shown great mercy to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You; You have continued this great kindness for him, and You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is today.'" "Now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in." "And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted." "Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil." "For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?"

Now look at the Lord's response to this prayer. "The speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing." "Then God said to him: 'Because you have asked this thing, and have not

asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, behold, I have done according to your words; see I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before, nor shall nay like you arise after you.” “And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days.” We can see from this that when Solomon was young, he did have the right approach and the right attitude toward himself, and toward God. This was the beginning of a real relationship between God and Solomon. And it will be the beginning of a real relationship for you as well if you will continually bring to God in prayer all the concerns of your mind and heart. If you will pray to God asking Him for wisdom, He will give you a favorable answer. Even though you are young, you are not too young to be wise. God can speak to you in your heart, although you hear no audible voice. He speaks to you in the Scriptures and by His providence. And what He is asking you, is this: What do you really want in this life? Do you want to honor him? Do you want to have wisdom in judging and doing things in the right way? Will you ask for the wisdom to be led like a little child by the heavenly Father so that the decisions of what you will do with your life will be honoring to God and a blessing to other people? This is what you must ask yourself.

There is a very important lesson that we can all learn from Solomon’s life. We should see that just because we have come to know God and have found the Scripture promises to be true concerning our finding favor in God’s sight, it does not mean that we do not have to continue to seek the Lord for the wisdom which only He can give. There is a temptation to do this. To seek the Lord in our initial conversion for the grace of salvation, but then to forget that we must keep seeking Him every day of our lives. We must learn to seek Him for fresh grace, and the wisdom that we will need to persevere in godliness and progress in holiness. This is the wisdom from above. To have had God’s wisdom once, does not necessarily mean that you have wisdom always and in all things. Wisdom can be lost. And if she is lost, it will most certainly mean that grief and sorrow will come to you. Solomon did walk in the way of wisdom for a few years, the way which the Lord commanded. He was full of right wisdom when he built the glorious temple for the Lord. And his wisdom was still with him when the Queen of Sheba came from the ends of the earth to hear his words and see this wisdom of his, demonstrated in his works. In verse 6 of 1 Kings 10 it says, “Then she said to the king: ‘It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom.’” “However I did not believe the words until I came and saw with my own eyes; and indeed the half was not told me.” “Your wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame of which I heard.” “Happy are your men and happy are these your servants, who stand continually before you and hear your wisdom.”

But then something changed in Solomon after this. He sought to understand what he later would call madness and folly. He came to think that more was always better. It says in Chapter 10, verse 26, “And Solomon gathered chariots and horsemen; he had one thousand four hundred chariots and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he stationed in the chariot cities and with the king at Jerusalem.” And verse 27 says, “The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones, and he made cedar trees as abundant as the sycamores which are in the lowland.” “Also Solomon had horses imported from Egypt and Keveh; the king’s merchants bought them in Keveh at the current price.” This was the problem with the use of Solomon’s wisdom and knowledge. God had given him this great blessing of having the wisdom, the money, and the power to do and accomplish great things, but he turned it to find all of his satisfaction in earthly power and pleasure. He turned it to accumulate things that he could impress people with, or impress himself with. And he loved many foreign women as well. He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned his heart away from God. It says in Chapter 11, verse 4 “For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart

after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David.”

Now, evidently Solomon thought that he was wise when he was really playing the fool in these things that he did in terms of the silver and gold, the horses and chariots, and the foreign wives. Deuteronomy 17: 14 says, “When you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,’ you will surely set a king over you whom the Lord your God chooses; one from among your brethren ...” “But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the Lord has said to you, You shall not return that way again.” “Neither shall he multiply wives for himself lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.” “Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from one of the Levites, and it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.” We never read of Solomon doing this; of writing a copy of the book of the law and reading it every day of his life. This is where he evidently failed, and oh what great sorrow and disappointment it brought to him. This leads us to our final question.

3rd – How can I find the true and lasting wisdom that will not bring sorrow with it?

You know, there is an accumulation of wisdom that translates into great worldly wealth and works, which is not wise. It is when you use all the gifts and resources that God gives you in order to build your own kingdom here upon the earth, and you try to please yourself with your own greatness. You become lifted up in pride at all that you are doing and you forget God, and the Word of God, and some of His most important commandments. It is not always wise to do everything that you can do in terms of building an earthly kingdom. It may lead you to grief and sorrow at the last. It may turn your heart away from God, and you may not be loyal to Him. But let us understand in conclusion, that it is always wise to do what Jesus tells us to do in Matthew 6: 33. “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” In Luke 12: 32 Jesus says, “Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys.” “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Jim Elliot, the missionary to Ecuador who lost his life at the hands of the Auca Indians trying to reach them for Christ said, “He is no fool who gives that which cannot keep, to gain that which he cannot lose.” This is what is most important; for each one of us to learn the connection between worldly wisdom and sorrow, and the connection between divine wisdom and true and lasting happiness. For us, in New Covenant days, all the riches of wisdom and knowledge are found in our Lord Jesus Christ. He lived wisely and became the man of sorrows who was acquainted with grief. But it was for the joy that was set before him that He endured the cross and despised the shame, and thus purchased for us everlasting joy. These were holy sorrows and griefs. The wisdom that we find coming to us from Him will never disappoint us. We may have times of grief and sorrow and times of disappointment but they will sanctify the one believing in Jesus. They will give way to the joyful remembrance of all that Christ has done for us, is doing for us, and will do for us by His grace. It is the blessing of the Lord that makes rich, and He adds no sorrow to it.” (Proverbs 10: 22) I hope that each of us will have the wisdom which comes from above to use the gifts and the resources which God has given to us wisely; to use them in a way that will show God our loyalty to Him, that loyalty which will pursue building his kingdom and seeking His glory.

