

**Ecclesiastes 5: 8 and 9; “Higher than the Highest”, Sermon # 32 in the series – “Remember Your Creator”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall, on February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

There are times in the preaching of the word when a pastor needs to try to explain what translation of the Bible is the most accurate in relation to the original languages and thus establish the real meaning of the verse. In the second part of verse 8, the way that the King James words it is so crucial to the real understanding of the passage that it needs to be brought out. In the New King James it says in the second part of the verse, “...do not marvel at the matter; for high official watches over high official, and higher officials are over them.” In the NAS it says, “...do not be shocked at the sight, for one official watches over another official, and there are higher officials over them.” The ESV says, “...do not be amazed at the matter, for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them.” Now, you would think that this passage is only talking about earthly officials by the way that it is worded in those translations. But in the King James it says this: “...marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they.” I believe that this translation is the best.

I believe that what the verse is saying is that there is an authority in heaven, even God Himself, who is higher than the highest earthly authority, and He is regarding what is going on, and He will render His judgment upon all the oppressive actions of people in authority over us; He will eventually deal with all tyrannical authority, and grant relief to the oppressed person who is trusting in Him. In the final analysis, on the Day of Judgment, if not in this life sometime, He will exercise His authority over them; He will have regard for the poor. That is what we want to think about now. I have benefited from what Loyal Young, the Commentator, who has this to say about this verse. He says, “Higher rulers sit in judgment on lower.” “There are higher than they” means that God is higher than all, and He will judge all.” “The plural (in the Hebrew) is used as intensive, to designate the Most High God.” “Do not consider it inexplicable that there is oppression, (marvel not at it), for there is One who will bring it all right at last.” “Here a future reward is evidently hinted at.” “An appeal lies to a higher court; but if the matter still goes on adversely there, then remember for your comfort that there is One superior to all, who will bring all into judgment.”

I believe that this is the true meaning of the text. If it were not the true meaning of the text, then why is it said that “we should not be surprised”; we should “marvel not”. We would be surprised and dismayed if the judgments of earthly officials were the only thing that were going to stand in this life. But, I believe that we are not to be surprised and marvel because God is the ultimate authority. So let’s open up this truth by looking at 3 reasons why we should not marvel at the oppression of the poor and the violent perversion of justice which often takes place in the world today. 1<sup>st</sup> – We are not to marvel at the oppression of the poor because some men abuse the authority which God has given them. 2<sup>nd</sup> – We are not to marvel because God does not judge oppressive men immediately, but rather in His own good time. And then 3<sup>rd</sup> – We are not to marvel because the Lord works His perfect will by means that are not obvious to many people. **1<sup>st</sup> – We are not to marvel at the oppression of the poor because some men abuse the authority which God has given to them.**

God has given authority for men on various levels of government, to govern. Turn with me to Romans chapter 13. “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities.” “For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.” “Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.” There you have it; the statement of the responsibility of a godly citizen. We are to be subject to the governing authorities in the sense that we do not, “resist the

ordinance". We do not resist our God-ordained role of submitting to the authority of being governed by rulers who do right things, and who are trying to enforce good laws. "For rulers (verse 3) are not a terror to good works, but to evil." "Do you want to be unafraid of the authority?" "Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same." "For he is God's minister to you for good." Now, we know that this statement is true, but oftentimes, the authorities themselves do not. And some who have been raised up by God, abuse their authority and they oppress their citizens. Those who rule, sometimes do not realize that God has raised them up to their work, and God will judge them according to their work. We are not to marvel over their oppressions because God has left all men free to make wise or foolish decisions; right or wrong decisions, in their life. Man is a responsible being.

God has raised up some men to be in the highest of earthly authority. They are kings. But because of sin, even kings oftentimes do not realize what it means to govern wisely and thoughtfully, and gently. Rather they govern harshly and forcefully in order to get what they want done. And this state of affairs has come about, either because the king does not know God, or he has not been following the Lord in accordance with His Word. In both cases, the man who uses force and oppression, who uses it to accomplish his own goals, is not realizing that God is evaluating his thoughts, his words, and his actions while he is oppressing those under his charge. He oppresses them because he believes that he should feel good about himself, and what he is accomplishing for himself; either to control the people, or to profit from their labor for himself, in some way. This is not righteousness. This is a sin in the ruler or the official. And God sees it. Proverbs 15: 3 – "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good."

Let's turn over to 1<sup>st</sup> Kings Chapter 12 and we will see an example of oppression. Solomon has died, and his son Rehoboam was reigning in his place. "And Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had gone to Shechem to make him king." "So it happened, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat heard it (he was still in Egypt, for he had fled from the presence of King Solomon and had been dwelling in Egypt), that they sent and called him." "Then Jeroboam and the whole assembly of Israel came and spoke to Rehoboam, saying, 'Your father made our yoke heavy; now therefore, lighten the burdensome service of your father, and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you.'" "So he said to them, 'Depart for three days, then come back to me.'" "And the people departed". "Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who stood before his father Solomon while he still lived, and he said, 'How do you advise me to answer these people?'" "And they spoke to him, saying 'If you will be a servant to these people today, and serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever."

Now, you see here, that a good leader will be a servant of the people; serving them for their good. But watch this. (Verse 8) "But he rejected the advice which the elders had given him, and consulted the young men who had grown up with him who stood before him." "And he said to them, 'What advice do you give?'" "How should we answer this people who have spoken to me, saying, 'Lighten the yoke which your father put on us?'" (Should I continue the oppression?) "Then the young men who had grown up with him spoke to him saying 'Thus you should speak to this people who have spoken to you, saying, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, but you make it lighter on us'—thus you shall say to them: My little finger shall be thicker than my father's waist!" "And now, whereas my father put a heavy yoke on you, I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!" "So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king had directed, saying, 'Come back to me the third day.'" "Then the king answered the people roughly, and rejected the advice which the elders had given him; and he spoke to them according the advice of the young men, saying, 'My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!'"

This is how oppression often begins. It begins by young men who are in positions of authority not listening to those who have gone before them who are older and wiser; both morally and practically. They reasoned that if Solomon, Rehoboam's father, had kept the people in line by burdensome service, so they think that they should do even more and more of the same; as though this would work. They will outdo Solomon in this work of oppression. But the older men knew that this would not work, and it would not be good. Some men abuse the authority which they have been given by God, and they oppress others with it. And when they do so, the consequences are devastating for everyone under their authority.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – We are not to marvel if men are oppressive because God does not judge and chasten oppressive men immediately, but rather in His own good time.**

God does not immediately judge people for their sins in most cases. And because of it, some people think that He will never judge. He is patient for a time with them, and so they conclude that He does not see, and that He will not act. And this is why they think that they can get away with their oppressions. "For high official watches over high official, and higher officials are over them." Or as the King James has it, "For he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they." Now, it is very interesting how this incident that I just read to you, came about. The explanation is found in verse 15 of 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 12. "So the king did not listen to the people; for the turn of events was from the Lord, that He might fulfill His word, which the Lord had spoken to Jeroboam the son of Nebat."

In other words, God, who is the highest of the high, He is the Most High God. He is One who had regard for the way that Solomon lived and ruled, and He was the One who had regard for Rehoboam and how he lived and ruled. And as the higher authority than all; He rendered a righteous judgment in relation to them and their works. This turn of events; king Rehoboam's not listening to the people; not listening to the counsel of the older men, and making a fool of himself in the way that he answered the people harshly, with words of oppression; this was "from the Lord", it says. The Lord did not have any part in the sins of Jeroboam or the young men. He simply let them go on, in accordance with their own desires to do what they really wanted to do. They thought that they were wise, when really they were fools and they did not know how to lead at all. God ordained and permitted this thing as a righteous recompense, not only for their sins, but also for the sins of Solomon.

Turn back to Chapter 11 and you will find the reason that even Solomon, a godly man, became oppressive in his rule. Verse 9 says, "So the Lord became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the Lord God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice." God had revealed Himself to Solomon when he was young. He had been pleased with Solomon, that he had asked for wisdom when he was young. And God had blessed Solomon with great wisdom, and riches, and length of life. God had patiently watched Solomon grow up, and He lovingly blessed and helped Him. He revealed Himself a second time to Solomon after the completion of the temple. But something happened over time to Solomon which showed God that He must act; why it was that he must bring chastening. It was that Solomon's heart had departed from God. It says in verse 11: "Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, 'Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant.'" Solomon was the highest of officials in the land, and yet God was infinitely higher above him. I think that it was during this period of time when Solomon's heart departed from God. That is, this was the time when he became the oppressor that we have seen him described as, in previous passages. And yet we also know that He found mercy because he was one of God's elect people. His son Rehoboam may have never come to true repentance and saving faith, but Solomon, we should know, did have grace at work in his heart and life. He did repent of his sins and his oppressions.

Turn with me to 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3, verse 9, and you will find the reason that the Lord was so patient, even with such a wayward man as Solomon was. “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.” This passage is often misunderstood by people who think that it is God’s will of intention that all men come to repentance, even those who are not His Elect. I believe that the Bible teaches very clearly, that God does have a general love for all mankind, and that He does have a will of desire that everyone to whom the gospel will come, would repent of their sins and believe in His dear Son. This verse can be understood this way and it does no violence to God’s sovereignty in salvation. But the way that the verse reads, if you look at it more carefully, shows us that the will, or desire that is mentioned there, is that no one trusting in Christ should perish, and it appears that it is given in relation to “you” or “us”, the persons reading the verse. God is longsuffering towards “us”; that is, those who will trust in Christ, and who long to come to a thorough repentance of all of their sins. God is patient with such, and is not willing that anyone looking to Him in faith; that they in particular should perish. Let us take heart, and believe in this great promise, and be thankful for His patience with us; that if we are trusting in Christ, we will be given grace to thoroughly repent of all of our sins.

**And then 3<sup>rd</sup> – We are not to marvel because the Lord works His perfect will by means that are not obvious to many people.**

Verse 9 says, “Moreover the profit of the land is for all; even the king is served from the field. The NAS says, “After all, a king who cultivates the field is an advantage to the land.” Since this is spoken of in relation to earthly things, it is true that every man, from the lowest peasant, to the king himself, are profited when the land is cultivated, and crops are produced. Everyone in the kingdom benefits from it. The king who will promote that, is an advantage to the land. The ESV says, “But this is gain for a land in every way: a king committed to cultivating fields.” You should know that we have in our God, a King who is committed to cultivating His fields of righteousness and truth, in the hearts of all of His people. He will have a harvest of righteousness come from His people’s lives, to promote His glory. And the profit of His cultivating this grace in the hearts of His people is that “He is served by the field” that He cultivates. His name is honored. His name is praised. His name is glorified. He is committed to seeing that all oppression of His dear people cease. “Let My people go”, was His commandment through Moses to Pharaoh.

In Psalm 103, verse 6 it says, “The Lord executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed.” In Isaiah 53, verse 7, we find out what God does for each one who wants to stop oppressing, and for each one who wants to be delivered from oppression. It says of the Lord Jesus, “He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth.” He had His Son to be oppressed so that we could be freed from oppression. This was for us who believe in Him. I will close with the words of the Lord in Isaiah 51, verses 12-16: “I, even I, am He who comforts you.” “Who are you that you should be afraid of a man who will die, and the son of a man who will be made like grass?” “And you forget the Lord your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth; you have feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, when he has prepared to destroy.” “And where is the fury of the oppressor?” “The captive exile hastens, that he may be loosed, that he should not die in the pit, and that his bread should not fail.” “But I am the Lord your God, who divided the sea whose waves roared – The Lord of hosts is His name.” “And I have put My words in your mouth; I have covered you with the shadow of my hand, that I may plant the heavens, lay the foundations of the earth, and say to Zion, ‘You are My people.’” May we indeed see, that He is the Most High God, and see that He has sovereign power over all officials. Let us trust Him to be working His will through what He permits concerning them, and what He purposes concerning us.