

Obtaining the Best Ending

Book Of Ecclesiastes

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Bible Text: Ecclesiastes 7:8
Preached on: Sunday, February 23, 2020

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Well, I'd ask you to turn to the book of Ecclesiastes 7 again. I just want to read one verse today, verse 8. Again, let us give our reverent and affectionate attention to this portion of God's word.

8 Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

Amen. And with that word opened and read, let us again seek the Lord's help as we come to this passage this morning.

Our Father and our great God, we come to that word that is true from the beginning, that is ever settled in heaven, that is not the cunningly devised fables of men but rather is the very word of God and, Lord, as we are sinful by nature and thus, Lord, desirous in that same nature to ignore thy word, O we pray that the mighty Spirit for the grace of Christ may draw near and rather, Lord, make us pliable, and as Ezekiel says, to put that heart of flesh in us so that we will hear the word of God, for we to be open to thee as we hear thy voice in the Scripture. So bless each one, Lord, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

We're continuing on in this section where Solomon is giving us these things that are better. As we mentioned last Sunday in verse 12 of chapter 6, "who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow?" And Solomon is telling us some of the good things, some of the things that are better in our lives, our shadowy lives, not morally but rather concerning its length. Shadows go away, but the sins do not. The sun goes down, so do they. Shortness of life that in and of itself doesn't deliver what's expected, thus a vain life and it's a short life. And yet there are some things, as Solomon points out, that are better or good. Again, one of the modern evangelical commentators on Ecclesiastes who thinks the author is not Solomon but rather a Jewish man confused and struggling through life's contradictions. The sad thing is that he suggests that because such is the author we do indeed have contradictions and reverses of mind etc. because Ecclesiastes is just meant to say the way things are and not really to help us in all these areas that it covers. Don't misunderstand me, I've been helped in other ways by this author, and I'll probably quote him in a little bit on his

translation of the second part of the verse, but it is sad because I think it robs us of so much instruction, light, help and comfort to get through our vain lives here under the sun.

And here's one of them that is a helpful thing to us, "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit." And so, first of all, I want say this about this verse, that this verse is not universally true, you'll see what I mean in just a minute, but normally saying something is not true means that it's not the part of the truth of God. That's not what we're saying. It's fully inspired, without error. We're saying it's a proverb. So Solomon has a certain idea, in a certain sphere. Now certainly he's looking at this as true, 'that the end of this thing is better than the beginning.' Why do I say Solomon doesn't mean this is as a blanket statement that everything is better at its end than its beginning? Well, I'll give you a couple points.

If you turn over a couple of pages to the 10th chapter of this book, Ecclesiastes 10, and verse 12 and 13, and in verse 12 he says, "The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious, but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself. The *beginning* of the words of his mouth is foolishness: and the *end* of his talk is mischievous madness." Or evil, or bad. Mischievous, that word means all kinds of negative things in the Old Testament. Mischievous madness. You see, the beginning and the end of this thing is bad as far as the fool's talk.

So you see, Solomon is not meaning just anything and everything is automatically better at its end. Here is another example. If you want to turn back, you can, to the Scripture reading we had in our service earlier, 2 Samuel 17 where we read about Ahithophel. Ahithophel's an example that the end is not better than the beginning. Remember what we read at the end of chapter 16, that "the counsel of Ahithophel which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God: so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom." It doesn't mean that everything he counseled was godly but he was so wise, he could see through situations so well that if you followed his counsel, whatever you asked him you want to get done, it would get done. That's how people thought it was almost like going to God. He was so wise and so perceptive and so discerning, he could give you that kind of advice. But his end was bad, wasn't it? Well, we read today 2 Samuel 17:23, "when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed," what did he do? He went home, put things in order and hung himself. His end, therefore, was not better than his beginning.

So it's not a universal thing but it is normally true that the end is better than the beginning. Christ in Luke 12:50 some things concerning his end, but let us think a moment before we read that text of Christ's beginning, that is, on earth. He had not a beginning in eternity. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are eternal, that is without beginning and without end. But as he came and manifested himself in the world, he came through the virgin Mary. He took on a real human body and soul, and so he had a glorious beginning in the sense that the angels came and announced him. Though he was in a manger stall, in that sense it was very lowly and he was to poor parents, and as he went through life, especially in his ministry, he suffered much abuse, much persecution, opposition and unbelief. But the end, but the end. He says in Luke 12:50, "But I have a

baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" You see, Christ, yes, it was a hard end as we see him struggling in the garden, but it's an end that accomplished a salvation of his people that would bring to him the just rewards of such a suffering of being exalted to the right hand of God not in his person as God but in his nature as man, the only mediator, and receive that honor and riches and glory and power as Christ, both God and man in one person, two natures, forever! You see, he was not looking to just continue on in his state. He wanted to get to the *end*. He was straitened or pained until he could get there.

So his end was better than his beginning, because if he only came into Bethlehem as he did and stayed in the manger, just grew up as a normal young boy, even being the God-man, without the shedding of blood on the cross, it would not be good because he would not have saved anyone. So this case, it is true. In this case it is true for Christ.

So it's not a universal, in other words, it's not a blanket statement that we just apply to everything that, you know, everybody's life is better at the end. Think of Ahithophel. Everybody's circumstances are better at the end etc. etc. But there is, because it is God's word, there is this truth and we saw it in Christ and we want to just go, secondly, then to some instances where it is true. Christ was the first one we gave, that his end was better, his death and then the things that followed upon it, his resurrection, his exaltation, and now his intercession. He is building his church in the midst of the world all because he got to the end, the better end of his life, a sacrifice upon the cross which others, Christ said when they saw it, they would rejoice not because they thought it was a better end but because they thought he was ended, he was done, finished, nothing left of his ministry and work and they could get on with their lives without being afflicted by this great and mighty prophet like unto Moses.

What happened to the disciples? Christ said, "Others would rejoice but ye shall weep," and brothers and sisters, let's think about that a little bit before we go on. The purposes of God wherein he comes to the end of a thing, to bring it to a conclusion, sometimes when we see it, at first we also may think, "This is not good." This is an end that seems to be putting a period on it and not an exclamation point or not a smiley face, if we could say that, and therefore we weep. But what did Christ say? "But your sorrow will be turned to joy." Because that wasn't all that happened, he came up from the grave. Then they could see that was a good end. That was a good end.

Paul said that he would not want to just stay where he's at in his sanctification, in his knowledge of Christ, in his prayers, in his experience of the righteousness that we have by faith. Philippians 3, he would press forward to the mark of the high calling of Christ. You see, he wanted to get to the end of the race. The end. Oh, he had a good beginning, the road to Damascus and he met Christ there but he didn't think, "I've been saved." And you know, this can apply to our day, it's not enough for us, in other words, we shouldn't be content or we've believed back whenever it was, maybe recently, maybe many decades for some of us, and I'm good. You've heard the thing, you know, you've heard the phrase, I should say, "You know, once saved, always saved." Or somebody will characterize the easy-believism. You know, you just believe one time and you don't have to grow, you

don't have to change, you don't have to repent, not just initially but throughout your life. There's no change. There's no degrees of sanctification making you more and more like the one who bought you on the cross. Paul wasn't like that. We can't be like that. You must desire, as Peter says, to grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Better is the end of a thing than its beginning.

So in our own sanctification, we should follow Paul and press forward. It's no disservice to us and no dishonor to us to have to say, maybe after being saved for many years, I mean, many of us have been, not all of us, some of us are more new, praise God for that, but we that have been, "Oh, you know what? I need to quit doing that. I can see now from God's word it's a sin." Or maybe it's not a sin in itself but as Christ says, "If our eye offends us," what? "Pluck it out." It's dear to us, we love it, but you know, it's hindering me, it's causing me to do this other thing that is a sin. It's no disservice to us. What are we living for? Well, we should be living for Christ and his kingdom and to enter in, as it's used to be said in the pulpits of believing churches, to make ourselves fit for heaven. Not that we make ourselves fit in the sense of we merit it, but you think about it, we're going to the marriage supper of the Lamb, we're going to see the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us. If you go to a marriage, what do you do? You just don't come out of the garden, you know, with everything dirty and all crumpled up and drive down and walk in and, you know, "Okay, I'm ready. It's not big deal." You know, it shows you it didn't mean much, does it? We're not saying we'll have to have the same level of clothing but, you know, you try to, what? You try to clean up. You try to get a bath. You try to put on your clean clothes. You think about it. You're anticipating this great event especially if you're the bride, which we are in Christ, right?

We have many pictures of that in the Old and New Testament of how the bride fixes herself up and anticipates, and puts on the ornaments and the garments. That's what it is. She didn't, Christ didn't choose her because she was doing this but because she was chosen and justified and sanctified and adopted, she is doing it. And brothers and sisters, the end we're going to is heaven, it's worth making ourselves fit or putting on the garments and the ornaments that Christ has given us in his word so that we may shine. And as you read his word and he is your spiritual husband as Ephesians 5 talks about, he washes us with the water of the word, pray that he will, expect him to. If there's nothing to wash off, brothers and sisters, we think we've already arrived, that's not the picture we get in the Scripture, is it? We still have stains that would be blotted out. We have wrinkles that need to be ironed out so they'd look nice and proper and Christ does that by his word and the Spirit. So we don't want to just stop and think the beginnings are all we need. I've got to grow. You've got to grow. We've got to be washed. We've got to be ironed out.

Many times it comes by chastening, God's fatherly and loving discipline. I think this may draw together these two parts of this verse, "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit." The man that I mentioned, Tremper Longman III, in his commentary that disappoints me in some ways, but he says helpfully that this last phrase could be translated, "the long impatience is better than the height of pride." Something like that. Didn't write it down but basically

that's what it is because, you see, the word we have here is like the long of spirit and the height of spirit, that's why it's translated the patient in spirit and the proud in spirit, but I think the chastening of the Lord brings these things together.

So I would ask you to turn to Hebrews 12 where there is, I think, a helpful portion in pulling this together in Solomon's book, for the beginning is not as good as the end for the child of God. Notice, have you got Hebrews 12 there? Notice the beginning there in verse 11. So this is the context is the chastening of the Lord for his own and true sons. So verse 11 says, "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous." There's the beginning. You ask any child that's been disciplined, it's not joyful, it's grievous, it's painful, it's bad in that sense. That's the beginning but notice the next half of that verse, "nevertheless afterward," so the end, okay, "it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." The end of it brings the peaceable fruit of righteousness. You're growing. You're becoming more like the Savior, righteousness in the exercise of it in your life is increasing. The fruits of the Spirit are growing. They're coming out on you, if you will, even though the beginning is grievous and not joyful. You see, in your life whatever the chastening hand of God may be giving you and me, it doesn't seem very joyful, maybe it doesn't seem very helpful, maybe it doesn't seem very rational, but the end, if we're exercised by it, don't resist it and oppose God in it, will be the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

So I may overlap some here in talking about this in Hebrews 12 but notice, isn't that one of the great motives and great reasons for being exercised? There is a hope that you're gonna get good by it. In fact, there is a promise you and I are gonna get good by it. It will yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness. So I think that's what draws us together, these verses, that is, this verse in Solomon because the end is better than the beginning and why is that? Because the peaceable fruit. But in getting that peaceable fruit and being exercised and going through and submitting to the discipline of God, the chastening of God.

You look at verse 5, you might just put this in there. If we are going to not faint in our minds and become wearied, as he says in verse 3, we need verse 5. Verse 3 then was about not fainting. "ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children." You stop right there a minute. If we're going to see the end become better than where we began with God in chastening and even our Christian lives. Sometimes we want, you know, how could Paul think of getting better, meeting the Lord on that road and talking to him audibly and a number of things there in the beginning, but it did. How are we going to think, "Now this beginning is not too good, we're getting chastened." We need to remember something. What are we supposed to remember? It's an exhortation that speaks to us as children and where does he find this exhortation? In the holy Scriptures. "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God." If we're going to have a patient spirit as Solomon says in that text, that is better than the proud spirit, we need faith. If we don't have faith, we cannot be patient. Where does faith come from? The word of God.

So let's see what that exhortation is. "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him." In other words, have patience. Why? "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." And he goes on to say if we're really sons, we're gonna have this but see the point, remember why he's doing it, because he loves you, because he's going to advance your holiness, he's going to advance your righteousness, he's going to advance your peace, your trust. He's going to advance the inner man. It may not be the outward man. This book, you know, was written to the Hebrews, to believing Jews and many of them, he says, because they loved the Gospel, because they loved Paul and they held to him, they suffered gladly the spoiling of their goods. They lost property. They also were made a gazing sight. They had abuses hurled at them, etc. But what? In that chastening the inner man was being strengthened. It was being shined. The gold is being refined. The silver was coming out that may have been laid hidden. The diamond, as it were, was getting the facets cut into it so it can be more beautiful, more valuable.

Patience in spirit, but you have to remember that exhortation to you as children, that he loves you, that the end he looks for you to come to is not a demise, is not destruction, though it feels like you might be getting there with the rod on your backside. You don't think it's going anywhere good at the present moment, but it is. In God's hand, it's a wise discipline.

Verse 9 of Hebrews 12, "Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they," that is, those fathers, those earthly fleshly fathers, "verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness." You see the things that God is promising you and me, the partaking of his holiness. Yes, God is separate from man, he is high and he is holy, and yet we as his redeemed children are precious to him, and if God is so wonderful, if God is so happy, if God is so content within himself and he is so holy and all that, we would think we'd want to be like him and God is saying, "I want my children to be like me."

You know, as we're fathers, we discipline our children, we chasten them, try to get them to be like us, not in a bad way but to do the right thing. Hopefully we're trying to do the right thing too, to help form their character and to warn them, spare them from the evil ways because we love them, we want them to have the benefits. Well, the Father, how much more, Paul says, to the Father of spirits? We love our children to a certain degree and it's a great degree even if we're evil, Christ says, but the Father is beyond our degrees, so much higher, so much more. "God commendeth his love to us," what? "That while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Not for good men. Not for good women. Not for good children but for sinners Christ died for, and that's a commendation, that is a recommendation of his love toward us.

But we must have patience. This whole chapter begins in Hebrews 12 there about running the race with, what? Patience. Verse 1, "we're seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses," remember chapter 11? "Let us lay aside every weight, and the

sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured," what? "The cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye," we could say, "lest we be wearied and faint in our minds." We're no different than these believing Hebrews. We're apt to faint, become weary, and not endure, not have patience and keep at it.

That's why Solomon says a patient spirit is better than the proud in spirit. What does the proud in spirit do? Well, again, if you look at verse 5 right there in Hebrews 12, "the proud in spirit despises the chastening of the Lord because we think too much of ourselves. We don't need this. "It's not a good time for me to be going through this. I don't know why I have to be dealing with this right now. My sins have to be brought to mind. I don't really, you know, other people got problems too, I don't know why I'm here." "Lord", I speak as a fool here, "you're not being fair." That's despising the chastening of the Lord because we think too highly of ourselves.

That's why Paul has to exhort us. I need exhortation from this passage. You need it. Don't despise, don't count little and almost of no account the chastening of the Lord but consider your Savior. He had patience. He endured. Why? As a man. He had something that was set before him. What was it? The joy, the joy that was set before him. Brothers and sisters, God in loving you through his Son has given you something to set before. It's joy. It's joy. He deals with you as he deals with Christ. The joy Christ had was not only the majesty and the exaltation that he got, but I think many say this and I think they're right, it was also the redemption of his people; that he would be given to see in time what he had been given in eternity to do, the accomplishment of their salvation.

Again, don't we marvel when we read John 17 when he says of the sinners that were his disciples, of the sinners that would be saved later and become his disciples, namely us and others, that "I will that they be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." That's you and me, brothers and sisters. That's some of the joy that was set before Christ. We can't understand it. Why would he want us to be with him? But yet he does. He loves us.

Brother, your joy and my joy is to be with him. He wants us to be with him but he's also said those pearly gates are opened for all the Father gave me, "All that come unto me, I will in no wise cast out. All that take me as their Savior. I have prepared a place for them in heaven." He goes to do that. I think all of us have had enough experience in life, more or less of us anyway, adults, of seeing things wrecked or destroyed or burned or die, to know this life, even just looking at it that way, is not very long and is not very stable and is not very substantial, and how much of a blessing and how a great a joy is it to know that the Savior who came and suffered on the cross also went to heaven on our behalf with us in mind to build us a place, as it were, to prepare a place to receive us into glory that'll last forever and there's no unsubstantialness there. There's no transitoriness there. There's no vanity there as Solomon says of this life.

So brothers, if we would have patience of spirit, we'll endure to the end, but to have that patience remember, don't forget what God has promised you as you go through this life and as you end this life into glory. There's little stops along the way, isn't there? We're willing to keep reading, of course, as God wills in 2 Samuel and what happened to King David? Well, he comes back to his throne. The end was better than the beginning of that chastening, wasn't it? I mean, he, can we say, he got whooped good for his own sin, but what happened? God received him back with arms of love and smiles of joy.

What about Job? Let's just turn up from here in Hebrews, if you want to look at, James, one more book. It'll kind of give us the great summation of Job's life. James 5:11 he says of those suffering affliction, "Behold, we count them happy which endure." There's your patience, the patient spirit. "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen," notice, "the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." Do you see that? The end was better than the beginning. Job was chastened sore but the end of the Lord is, what? Very pitiful, very great in mercy.

But you have to have patience. Remember that. Remember that "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit." Let us not think too highly of ourselves. Let us think soberly as God has told us of ourselves in this book and let us not forget his exhortations, his blessing, his promise that he disciplines us, he guides us for our profit, to make us partakers of his holiness, to give us joy, that he is very pitiful and merciful to us as Job gives us an example. Aren't you glad for the whole Bible? That's why I encourage us all to read through the Bible as often as you can. James is talking to these folks and he says, "You've heard of Job's patience." Sadly a lot of us Christians in this country of America do not even read through our Bibles. We may have heard of Job but we've never read Job, but read him. And others, these are given, Paul says, so it'll strengthen us and give us hope and comfort of the Scriptures that we're not the only ones, that believers in the Old and New Testaments, they suffered, they were afflicted. As Jacob said when he came to Pharaoh, "Few and evil have been my days," and yet then he lived, not a whole lot longer after that but you see the great blessings of the covenant promises in his sons and he prophesied the coming Redeemer through Judah, and to see, of course, his family preserved in Egypt.

But we all have that and we can be comforted, "that better is the patient in spirit than the proud in spirit." I'll just finish with this, one commentator said the proud in spirit is the impatient obviously, it's put to that, because he thinks, "I want my success and I want these things to work out now." Not willing to go through what it takes. The patient in spirit is willing to start with not the best start maybe, have many unsuccessful tries, and kind of wonder what's going on, but to keep remembering the promises of God and they keep at it and that will be a better end. Amen.

Let us pray.

Our Father in heaven, as we have mentioned, our great Savior who himself as a man could not be but straitened until he came to that death upon the cross and accomplished the redemption of mankind, oh, we pray that we would all consider him today both as a

Savior for our own sins and having received him as such a one, to consider him also as a pattern for our own lives, that he endured the cross, he despised the shame because of the joy that was set before him, and he sat down, Lord, he got the better end of all those sufferings and afflictions on the behalf of his people. Lord, help us to remember, consider him lest we also be weary and faint in our minds. Lord, make it true for us that the end is better than the beginning; that the patient of spirit is better than the proud of spirit, each one of our lives. Lord, forgive us for being impatient with thee, for demanding that God work in our way, in our time, and according to our will, and forgetting all that the Bible tells us, all that Christ has accomplished in our behalf, and the great end to what he has told us he's bringing us to. Lord, help us to see the joy that is set before us and to be patient knowing that it'll come in the great mercy of our God. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.