

Ecclesiastes 2: 24-26; “Enjoyment - The Good Gift of God”, Sermon # 9 in the series – “Remember Your Creator”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on May 15th, 2016, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

Solomon has come to some most definite conclusions concerning what a person labors for in this life, and he is giving them to us here in these verses. He says that if a man is able to eat and drink and to find enjoyment and contentment in his labor it is a very good thing in this life. Nothing is better than this. He is speaking in an existential sense of course. We know this, because for the Christian there is something far greater and more wonderful than earthly pleasures. The Christian lives for the spiritual and heavenly pleasures of fellowship and communion with God. The Christian is storing up treasure in heaven. They are not so much interested in living and laboring for treasure upon the earth. Their object is that they would truly enjoy the good things that God gives.

The question then becomes, for those who know the Lord: How can I so labor and build so that I will find real enjoyment and satisfaction in my life? How can I so live that I may say at the end of it that God has given me wisdom and knowledge and joy? How can I be “good” in God’s sight, and thus find these blessings? The answer is, that all these things come from the hand of God. They come from His great grace and goodness, and not from our own efforts to establish them. We may be very hard working and yet not receive these blessings. The object before us, in your receiving this truth, is that you would not only be hard working, but that you would also to be “good” in God’s sight. Solomon is saying that each of us must come to see what the good gifts are which come from God’s hand and then pursue them. In other words, you must be satisfied with these good gifts that He gives, if you would truly be a good person in His sight. So I want to set before you, from our text, 3 good gifts of God; gifts which will make you a truly good person in His sight, if you will improve upon them.

1st of all – It is the good gift of God when you understand the importance of the soul to the enjoyment of all bodily pursuits and pleasures. (Verse 24)

“Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor.” “This also, I saw, was from the hand of God.” It is an interesting wording in that verse. It is interesting because of the word soul which is used there: “that his soul should enjoy good in his labor.” In order for a person’s life to be satisfying to themselves, they must recognize that their soul has a very important part in it. Men and women have not been created as brute beasts, with only earthly interests and appetites to pursue. They have been created in the image and likeness of God; God has made us for His good pleasure. It is a person’s soul which is neglected or ignored if they do not know God. It is the soul which is the most important part of man, even if they do not know it themselves. Turn with me to Matthew 16, verse 25. Here we see from the words of Jesus that unless a person is warned of the value of their soul, they may lose it, if they are not careful. “For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.” “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his soul?” “Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” “For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.”

So, we need to see that our verses in Ecclesiastes are but a primitive form of this same question that Jesus is asking. What is the profit to a man, what is the lasting value to his soul, if he gains the whole world by his diligent work and labor and yet his soul is not satisfied in any lasting sense? It is the soul, the eternal soul of man that longs and yearns for meaning to its life, and meaning to its work. The unbelieving man and the earthly-oriented Christian are continually trying to save the life that they have built for themselves. They have forgotten, or they do not know, that there will be no future for that life. The thing that Solomon was learning was this very thing. Solomon is saying

that it is the soul which yearns to be satisfied in relation to work. It is the soul which yearns to enjoy good from all of the works of that it has the body do. All the works that are done to one's own personal glory will ultimately perish. Therefore unbelieving people, and Christians who fall into worldliness, will have to find this out the hard way. They refuse to live by faith in God; not realizing that having God at the center of their life is essential to their really having lasting satisfaction and enjoyment. Instead they believe that accumulating money and earthly possessions, building great works to the glory of their own intelligence, wisdom, and strength, that this, is the way to be lastingly satisfied.

But turn over with me to Jeremiah Chapter 9, and you will see what God thinks of this. "Thus says the Lord: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth." "For in these things I delight, says the Lord." What the Lord is saying here is that He does not approve of people who boast in themselves, their own abilities, or in the riches or possessions that they have. Why not? Because this boasting makes it appear that such a person can be satisfied by the works of their own devising, the thoughts of their own mind, or the strength of their own might, to live their life. They don't really believe that they have a great need for God. They don't really believe that need to seek daily wisdom and grace from God. They do not really appear to need God's power and strength to help them out with anything. This text is saying that God is greatly displeased with this, because He cannot be glorified in such a person. No, God is only satisfied with a person when they can eat and drink and offer up a sincere prayer before-hand; thanking Him for what they know; that these simple gifts of food and drink and a job that they is satisfied with working at, that only God could give this to them, and only God could supply these things. Only God could let them do these things to His glory and not their own. It was not done from a proud, self-sufficient, self-congratulatory spirit.

I am quite sure that I do not agree with the theology of the Shakers. They needed to do more Bible study in order that they might be sound in the faith. But there is an old Shaker hymn that I am well-satisfied to relate here. It goes like this.... "Tis a gift to be simple, 'tis a gift to be free, 'tis a gift to come down where you ought to be." "And when we find ourselves in the place just right, we'll be in the valley of love and delight." "When true simplicity is gained; to bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed." "To turn, to turn will be our delight, 'til by turning, turning, we come round right." To me this song is saying that life is like a dance. But unlike the Shakers we do not believe that we should bring dancing into the worship of God. Rather, we should understand that life is like a dance with God. When you believe in the gospel, you and God begin to live the Christian life together. You now have Christ, and you have His good Spirit in your heart. Christ is asking you to, as it were, to spiritually dance with Him; to go whirling and twirling through the many situations of your life, joyfully holding on to Him and moving with Him. And when you are dancing with Him, if you are wise, you will let Him lead when you dance with Him. He wants you to bow and to bend to His good will; and thus become a good person in relation to Him.

God wants to give to each person who believes in Him an infinite number of good things through Jesus Christ His Son. A good person realizes that they have to receive from God every good thing in relation to all that they desire to do, and all that they desire to have. He wants you to see it as coming immediately from His hand. He has placed you where you are now, and He is leading you. And so, if you would be wise, if you would be truly satisfied with your life, and with God Himself, you must learn to turn from trusting in your own thoughts, and in your own supposed wisdom, and keep on turning as you go. You must keep on repenting of self-sufficiency until you come round right. Psalm 37: 3 - "Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land; and feed on His faithfulness." Are you satisfied right where you are now; sitting here listening the word of God and learning to do God's will? "Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the

desires of your heart.” Good people realize that in everything that they want to do, and in everything that they pursue, that only God can truly satisfy them in it. This is why so many people, Christians included, are so dissatisfied with their lives. They haven’t learned this simple truth. “Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.” Will you not come to the place where you will daily put these principles into practice in your experience, by faith? Do you understand the importance of your soul? Do you understand the importance of keeping your heart? That is the first point and in some ways, the most important question.

Then 2nd - It is the good gift of God when you understand the importance of having God bless to you, the enjoyment of all bodily pursuits and pleasures. (Verse 25)

“For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I,” says Solomon. In the margin, there is a reference which tells us that the sentence can be translated, “For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, without Him?” We have seen the importance of our soul. Now we see the importance of God in relation to all of our pleasures. You and I, in order to make progress in sanctification must come to understand that there are sinful pleasures and pursuits and then there are holy pleasures and pursuits. God is the God who gives us all the legitimate pleasures that we will have, both in this life, and in eternity. It is the Christian’s pleasure to learn to please God and not just himself. It is by faith that we learn to please God. “Without faith it is impossible to please God, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” The Bible teaches us that before we come to faith in Christ, we find that our love of sinful pleasure separates us from understanding the pleasures that God has for us; pleasures which are much, much better. Let me give you a few verses from 2nd Timothy chapter 3, verses 1 and following, which will confirm this for us. “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power.” “And from such people turn away!”

You can see from these verses that what characterizes unbelievers is their selfish sinfulness in pursuing their own pleasures in rebellion to God’s good instructions to them about that which would really give them righteous pleasure. Notice how it is that many people are so proud that they make pleasure their god rather than God. We are not to run with such people it says here. There are consequences for living this kind of lifestyle. Turn with me to Hosea 4: 6 and following. A principal of truth is given to us here that we need to remember. “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” “Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.” “The more they increased, the more they sinned against Me; I will change their glory into shame.” “They eat up the sin of My people; they set their heart on their iniquity.” “And it shall be; like people, like priest.” “So I will punish them for their ways, and reward them for their deeds.” “For they shall eat but not have enough; they shall commit harlotry, but not increase; because they have ceased obeying the Lord.” “Harlotry, wine, and new wine enslave the heart.” In the NAS, it says, they “take away the spirit”.

There are grave consequences for pursuing sinful pleasures. The glory of our spirit and the health of our bodies are taken away. The Lord rewards us with punishments according to our deeds; our children are forgotten, and our glory is turned into shame. And our spirit is taken away. That is why we really cannot find real pleasure in anything. What is the remedy for this? It is to know and believe that God gives pleasures that are much better than these, and so to forsake the sinful pleasures. Moses is a good example of this. Turn to Hebrews 11: 24. “By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin.” There it is; Moses

chose. He chose by faith to forsake Egypt, which is the type and the picture of the World. Verse 26 says, "He esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward." "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible." Where was the pleasure in all this? It was found in walking with God. He, by faith, was seeing Him who was invisible, and God was giving Him many good things, many spiritual blessings. He was a good man who God could bless richly.

Turn with me to Psalm 16. How can we come to have the enjoyment of spiritual things, so much so, that we will forsake all sin and cast down all idols, and find meaning and satisfaction in this life? This psalm tells us. We pray to God. "Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust." "O my soul, you have said to the Lord, You are my Lord, my goodness is nothing apart from You." "As for the saints who are on the earth, they are the excellent ones in whom is all my delight." Verse 5 says, "O Lord, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You maintain my lot." "The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; yes, I have a good inheritance." "I will bless the Lord who has given me counsel; My heart also instructs me in the night seasons." "I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved." "Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will rest in hope." "For you will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption." "You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." This is most definitely where righteous pleasures are always found. They are found in Jesus Christ our Lord who is right now, seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

3rd – It is the good gift of God when we can see that God is sovereign in the outcome of all of our labor. (Verse 26)

"For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that He may give to him who is good before God." "This also is vanity and grasping for the wind." It is truly amazing is it not, to realize that God knows very well how to reward a person according to their works? He gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to the person who is good in His sight. These are most definitely spiritual blessings. And we have seen, that the only way that a person comes to be seen by God as good, and blessed according to their works, is by their exercising ongoing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is how you will come to have the wisdom, and knowledge, and joy which only God can give. Once God undertakes to provide salvation for you, the person trusting in Christ, He also undertakes to cause all things to work together for good to you, the one whom He has called into fellowship with Himself. The wicked person may store up riches and possessions like the sand upon the sea shore. But God has ways of using their collecting and gathering; even though they have stored all of it up for themselves, to be given to those who are good in His sight. Let us not live lives of vanity, boasting in our own wisdom and strength and riches. Rather let us be satisfied with Christ and store up treasure in heaven.

God holds the outcome of all of your labors and your decisions to do things in His sovereign hands? Will you not bow to this and be satisfied with what He is giving you now, rather than thinking that there is something that you are missing in life? Was David ever happier than when he cared for a few sheep in the wilderness and wrote the 23rd Psalm? Was he happier and more satisfied when he became king? I think not. For he says there: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." And he ends that psalm by saying, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Let us enjoy fellowship with Christ every day of our life; not just when we attain our highest earthly glory.