

**Ecclesiastes 3: 22; “To Rejoice in Your Own Works”, Sermon # 24 in the series –
“Remember Your Creator”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall,
on June 11th, 2017, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

How is man different from the animals? We have seen in previous studies that not only are there some things in which men and animals are similar, but that in some ways, men are even worse than animals in their sinfulness. “God tests them”, it says in verse 18, “that they may see that they themselves are like animals, or beasts.” Man, when he falls into sin, becomes like a beast and something worse than a beast. Man when he is righteous, is like God. Animals do not have the issues of sin and righteousness in the sight of God to deal with. And yet they are affected by man’s fall from His original righteousness. They die physically, like we do. But they are not affected, spiritually, by the eternal issues which men and women are affected by. As far as I can determine, when the beast dies, its spirit does go downward to the earth. It ceases, and that is the end of it, as far as I can see from the Scripture. The preacher of this book says, “Who knows”, in verse 21, but it is spoken from an existential vantage point. It is spoken in the context of a man who is looking at things from the vantage point of his own experiential evaluation of them. He wouldn’t be able to draw a definitive conclusion about the matter from that vantage point.

But, as Christians, we have the Scripture, and its knowledge and wisdom goes deeper and further than our own observations of things, no matter how knowledgeable; no matter how wise we are in ourselves by our own observation. We have no knowledge or assurance that the spirit of animals continues on after they die. But with man, when he dies, there is not an end of things. We do know from the rest of Scripture that his spirit will continue on either in heaven or hell. He will go to one of these two places based upon his works. Salvation is by grace through faith alone, and not by the works of the law, but faith without works is dead. Animals have nothing to do with faith or works. But man has everything to do with faith and works as it is only man who was created in the image and likeness of God.

So what I want to do this afternoon is to speak about what it means to rejoice in your own works. “Nothing is better than this”, says Solomon. “For that is his heritage.” It is that which will be his portion and lot, both in this life and into all of eternity. If this is the lasting heritage of each one of us, then we ought to think more about it. There is a difference between the rejoicing of those who are worldly-minded, and those who are heavenly minded. First, I would like us to think about the idea that we should righteously evaluate our own works, because God will. And then second, I would like us to remember the fact that each of us will be judged by our works. And then, third, I would like us to examine our hearts to see what we are to rejoice about in relation to our works. And that will be about all the time that we have.

1st of all - I would like us to examine the idea that we should righteously evaluate our own works, because God will.

“So I perceived that nothing is better than that a man should rejoice in his own works.” A man’s works are those things that he does and accomplishes, and builds, by using the strength of his thoughts, his words, and his deeds. There is nothing better, Solomon is saying, than that a person should be able to look at what he has built, with his hands, or with his life, and he is able to see that he has done a good job of building what he has built. He should be able to see that it has been skillfully and carefully built, and He should be able to examine his own work and rejoice that that it has benefited himself and others, and that his work has been done to the glory of God. In other words, a person can rejoice in his evaluation of his own works if his conscience has been clear in regard to what he is building, in the sight of God and men. Of course, he can rejoice anyway, even if he has only had an earthly or selfish motive for building; but he will not be able to rejoice forever, as the righteous man will be able to rejoice, if his motives for what he has been building are sinful motives.

All diligent men use their hands to build things, but when they are doing this, they are working with their minds, thinking and reasoning to themselves, that they do have a goal for what they want to achieve, and they did achieve it. Sinful men do not like to think about their conscience in relation to their works. But they should remember that all of their thoughts and reasonings, and the work that results from them, are the lasting heritage of any person. Everyone builds something with their life. But the consequences of the building of the righteous and the unrighteous person are vastly different in their outcomes. The outcomes are vastly different because of the motivation in the heart of the builder. That motivation is something that God evaluates. Turn with me to Genesis Chapter 11, verse 1. “Now the whole earth had one language and one speech.” “And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there.” “Then they said, ‘Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.’” “They had brick for stone, and they asphalt for mortar.” “And they said, ‘Come let us build ourselves a city, and tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.’” “But the Lord came down to see the tower which the sons of men had built.”

Now the thing that I want you to notice is the motivation of the men who were attempting to build this tower. It says in verse 4, “Come let us build ourselves a city and tower.” And then further on, it says, “Let us make a name for ourselves.” The building taking place here was for themselves. It was not to God and to His glory that they worked so hard. It was to themselves and their own glory that they worked. And that is why the Triune God, who came down to look, could not take pleasure in it. And after they came down and evaluated the work, God worked to confuse the language of the workers so that they would not be able to accomplish what they had intended would last for a long time. This is the same way it is with many unbelieving people. There are some very skillful and knowledgeable people who do not understand that God does look at their motivations for what they are doing. They build something for themselves, for their own glory, and their own name, and then, although they rejoice in it for a while, they cannot rejoice in their works forever. It is not wise for the Christian to build with these kinds of motives working in the heart and mind. There is nothing wrong with skill and knowledge. It is the motivation of the heart that God looks at in the building.

But let us now turn to 1st Chronicles 29, and you will see the kind of motivation of heart and mind that God can bless. David wanted to build a temple for God, and yet, because he had been a man of blood, God had told him through the prophet that it would not be him who built the house, but his son Solomon. But this did not stop David from preparing for the building by his own works. It says in 1st Chronicles 29: 1 – “Furthermore King David said to all the assembly, ‘My son Solomon, whom alone God has chosen, is young and inexperienced; and the work is great, because the temple is not for man but for the Lord God.’” “Now for the house of My God I have prepared with all my might: gold for the things to be made of gold, silver for things of silver, bronze for the things of bronze, iron for things of iron, wood for things of wood, onyx stones, stones to be set, glistening stones of various colors, all kinds of precious stones, and marble slabs in abundance.” “Moreover, because I have set my affection on the house of my God, I have given to the house of my God, over and above all that I have prepared for the holy house, my own special treasure of gold and silver: three thousand talents of gold, of the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver, to overlay the walls of the houses; the gold for the things of gold and the silver for the things of silver, and for all kinds of work to be done by the hands of craftsmen.” “Who then is willing to consecrate himself this day to the Lord?” Then it goes on to tell of all that the people gave, and when you come down to verse 9 it says, “Then the people rejoiced, for they had offered willingly, because with a loyal heart they offered willingly to the Lord; and King David also rejoiced greatly.”

Do you see the great works going on here? Do you see the willingness and the motivation of their hearts? It was, that this work that they were doing, was not to be for themselves, but for the Lord. And I am saying that this is the best motivation for all the works that the Christian builds

with his thoughts, his words, and his deeds. There is nothing better than this; to be able to rejoice in one's own works. I think that the Solomon who wrote the book of Ecclesiastes was a man who had forgotten the days of old. He was very much into doing "his own works". He could rejoice in them, in that they were designed well, executed well, and they not only looked good, but they were good. But the Lord had to bring him to the place where he could see that without a loyal heart; loyal to God Himself, all of these works were vanity and they would come to nothing at last. "Only one life, too soon is past; only what's done for Christ will last."

Now, 2nd – I would like us to remember the fact that each of us will be evaluated by God and judged according to our works.

"So I perceived that nothing is better than that a man should rejoice in his own works, for that is his heritage." A man's heritage is that which he has, which is lasting. It is his portion or his lot, it says in the margin. Turn with me over to Romans Chapter 2 and verse 1. "Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things." "But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things." "And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?" "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" "But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 'who will render to each one according to his deeds': eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness – indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also to the Greek." "For there is no partiality with God."

Here we have the Apostle Paul telling all men who will read, or hear his letter read; that they are working at something in relation to eternal life. And they need to take heed, he is saying, that they are not hypocrites in what they are working at or for. Some of those who he was writing to had become high and mighty judges, but they were not themselves doing what was right. You see, God knows our hearts, and He will "render to every man according to his deeds", no matter who he is. You will say to me: But salvation is not by works, but by grace. I will answer you: Yes, it is true; but a faith without works is dead, and a faith that is living will come forth with good works and will build what he builds with his life, to the glory of God. And he will be more concerned about whether he himself is being faithful; than he is in judging others around him who are apparently falling short in some way.

Turn with me to Romans 14, verse 8. "For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord." "Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's." "For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might Lord of the both the dead and the living." "But why do you judge your brother?" "Or why do you show contempt for your brother?" "For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." "For it is written: 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God.'" "So then each of us shall give an account of himself to God." "Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or cause to fall in our brother's way." Turn over with me, also, to 2nd Corinthians 5: 7 – "For we walk by faith, not by sight." "We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." "Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him." "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to he has done, whether good or bad." "Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences."

There it is. When we do the works that we do, if we are doing those works out of our loyalty to God, if we are pursuing after holiness and repenting of all the sins which we find in our own hearts

and actions, then we are most certainly coming to the place where we are working out our own salvation with fear and trembling. This will require having a loving, humble, and helpful attitude toward people around you, but it will be something that you will be able to rejoice in, as you look at yourself and your works.

And then 3rd – I would like us to examine our hearts to see what we are to rejoice about in relation to our works.

I think that this rejoicing begins in our heart, and it continues in our conscience as we go about to live our lives to the glory of God, and to do works which are pleasing to Him. Turn with me to Acts Chapter 24, verse 10. Paul has been asked to defend himself in a trial. He has been accused of being, “a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes”. They also accused him of profaning the temple. These were serious charges; but now, let’s see how Paul defends himself. “Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him to speak, answered: ‘Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself, because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship.’ “And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city.” “Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me.” “But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and the Prophets.” “I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.” “This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.”

Now, Paul could live in the way that he lived, in great danger from the attacks of malicious unbelieving people around him, because he studied to live with a clear conscience toward God and men. This is something to rejoice in, in relation to all that you believe and all that you do for God. People will oppose you at various points. But you will be able to rejoice in your God and continue to do the works which are pleasing to Him. Turn to 2nd Corinthians Chapter 1, verse 12. “For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you.” You see, Paul did not live his life based on fleshly wisdom; the wisdom which came from his own vain thoughts, which would have led only to his own fleshly and vain works. He could never have rejoiced in that. But he could rejoice that his conscience was clear in relation to his thoughts, his words, and the works that he displayed toward the Corinthian believers. It was his work to teach, and preach, and live out the gospel of Christ before them. And even though persecuted by those who did trust in their own works for salvation, he knew that God would give him a greater grace.

Turn over to Galatians 6, verse 2. “Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” “For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.” “But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.” “For each one shall bear his own load.” These truly are the things that last. It is when we can rejoice in our own works; whether they are the things that we physically build with our hands, or whether they are the things which we build with our life; if they are built with the glory of God and Christ in mind, if they are built because we love the church and the brethren and would see others saved, then that is something to truly rejoice over. May each of us come to that blessed place where our works will be evaluated and our Savior will say to us: “Well done thou good and faithful servant.” “You have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things.” “Enter into the joy of your Lord.” This is the heritage of the righteous.