

Ecclesiastes 7: 10-12; “The Former Days Better than These?” A Bible Study prepared for the evening of November 24th, 2010, and delivered By Pastor Paul Rendall to those present at his home.

Verse 10 is a continuation of the theme of our last study; that it is better to be patient in spirit than proud in spirit. It is better to have the self-control of being able to receive rebuke than to have anger residing in your bosom against those who lovingly and righteously rebuke you. “Anger resides in the bosom of fools.” The anger mentioned here is not the righteous anger mentioned in Ephesians 4: 26 – “Be angry and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your anger.” A wise man will patiently hear a rebuke; take it as an oil to his head, and believe that he has something more to learn; not only from God Himself in the Scriptures, but also from wise men who are attempting to live out the Scriptures. (Psalm 141: 5) “Let the righteous strike me; it shall be a kindness.” “And let him rebuke me; it shall be as excellent oil; let my head not refuse it.” “For still my prayer is against the deeds of the wicked.” Prayer is, after all, the best first response to “the deeds of the wicked.” For you are then asking the Lord to help you and deliver you from the calamities that come to your life. You are not simply trying to be delivered from present difficulties in order that you might find personal peace. You do want that, but you are asking for wisdom on how God can be glorified in and through them, and how you can learn what He wants you to learn by them, as you are going through them. Now tonight we find that there is a question which comes to the mind of the one who is passing through various trials and difficulties in this life. The question is this; “Why were the former days better than these?” And the answer comes back from Solomon the Preacher; Do not ask this question, for you do not inquire wisely concerning this. So what we want to do tonight is to ask ourselves 1st of all – Why is it unwise to inquire about the past being better? And 2^{ndly} – What is the remedy for anxiety about the present? And 3^{rdly} – What will give us peace of mind and heart, both now and in the future? And certainly then, after our study, we can pray that we would live out the answers given to us in our text.

1st of all – Why is it unwise to inquire about the past being better? (Verse 10)

We certainly live in a generation where this question very naturally comes to the minds of every lover of godliness and peace. There not only seems to be, but there actually is a greater instability in the life of our nation at this period of time that we are living in, than in previous years. Both politically and spiritually, we are adrift from our godly foundational moorings. We are going from calamity to calamity in the time in which we live in this nation. The first and foremost reason that it is unwise to inquire about why the past was better is because the the Lord’s sovereignty is over all things. We will talk more about that in our next study on verses 13 and 14. But right now, let’s turn to Psalm 11 to see a similar question coming from David. “In the Lord I put my trust; How can you say to my soul, ‘Flee

as a bird to your mountain’?” “For look!” “The wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow on the string, that they may shoot secretly at the upright in heart.” “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” The foundations of righteousness and truth are destroyed by the sinfulness of ungodly people. They believe that things would be better if there were no God and no Christ. Godly people ask the question, what will we do if these foundations are completely destroyed? We need to realize, however, that God’s judgments are upon whole societies in our day because of their national sins. And these judgments of His are not only abroad, but they are here with us as well. Shall the United States of America escape when she pays so much more attention to other things than God and His Word; God and His commandments? I think not. But we who have lived during the long times of peace and prosperity following World War II can remember when times were much better. That was a time of general morality and church going. It was a time when many people went to church because it was the right thing to do, and doing what was right seemed to be on the ascendency. But not everyone knew why they went to church.

A closer look would have brought to light the fact that something more was needed in our society than a general morality. What is needed was conversion to Christ; to have our sinful hearts changed by the grace of God; to love not only peace and prosperity, but God Himself. There was a problem, a deep-seated problem in this country, even then. The former days were better outwardly; God gave us prosperity and peace, but we did not use it wisely; to seek His face and read His word in the way that would have built godliness into our lives. Turn with me to Ezekiel 16: 49 and you will see a situation somewhat resembling our country’s. “Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.” Now, we probably all know that the original Sodom was destroyed because of their unnatural sexual sins; their homosexual sodomy. But we may not have known, unless we had read it here, what led on to their committing those grosser sins which brought about their final destruction. It was their great pride. They thought of themselves as great and mighty people in their fallen discernment of things. They had fullness of food. They were wealthy and it led to their being intemperate. They abused the good gifts of God that were given to them. They ate too much, they drank too much, and they thought about their bodily appetites too much. They did not seek to cultivate spiritual things through the revelation given to godly men like Abraham. And they were idle. They did not think that it was a good thing to have to work at anything. So they sat around long enough that their fallen hearts gave them sinful things to do whereby their sensual lusts could be fulfilled in every conceivable way. And furthermore, they were not interested in helping poor people in need. No one could tell them that they were wrong in this. They were haughty enough to think that they get everything that they wanted out of life by being tricky and perverse.

Is this where our country is now? I think that we are a long ways down the road toward it. There are, no doubt, still many people left in this country who are pursuing godliness, but sometimes it looks like that we are out-numbered 20 to one. There are still many people who like to work hard, but there are also many who would like to live off of others, or off the government. There are some who do consider the true needs of the poor and try to help them, but many only criticize and ignore their plight. But should this cause the Christian to think that God cannot change things in our society for the better? No, God is sovereign, and we do not inquire wisely if we think that things were better in the former days; when we were only looking at things in an outward sense. If our greatest goals have only been personal peace and making money, and watching sports and TV, we should expect that our view of the past will be skewed. We must learn to focus on what God would have us to do presently. We must pursue the knowledge of God, and study to live it out, and convey it to others. What we are seeing now in our society is the destruction of the foundations of much of even a general morality in our society; and then if that goes; well we feel edgy about it. What will the righteous do? Things used to be better we think; but were they really?

2ndly - What is the remedy for anxiety about the present?

Verse 11 of Ecclesiastes 7 says, "Wisdom is good with an inheritance, and profitable to those who see the sun." The remedy for anxiety is divinely given wisdom. The reason that we become anxious about the state of things in our nation is because we believe that when general morality declines and common grace is not as evident in the lives of people around us, that God is not in control. This can be the very real experience of a person who is concerned with doing righteousness and living by faith in God. As Christians, we must learn to entrust ourselves and everything of concern in our life, to God. "For I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I've committed unto Him against that Day." (2 Timothy 1: 15) We can be very thankful for the Lord's sovereignty in relation to judging and overthrowing man's wickedness. We should praise Him every day for it. God is sovereign over the worst of men. And He is also sovereign in relation to bringing about good things for the righteous. If you will turn back again to Psalm 4 it says this: "The Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men, the Lord tests the righteous, but the wicked who loves violence His soul hates." "Upon the wicked He will rain coals; fire and brimstone and a burning wind shall be the portion of their cup." "For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness; His countenance behold the upright." Let us be thankful that God is God even when the wicked prowl about on every side, and vileness is exalted among the sons of men. (Psalm 12, verse 8)

When God tests the heart of the righteous, what is He looking for? He is looking for wisdom. But He is looking for wisdom in relation to the grace which He gives to every one who trusts in Him. When you are trusting in Him you will hopefully also be seeking wisdom from His mouth. Turn with me to Proverbs 2,

verse 6. “For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly; He guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints.” Then you will understand righteousness and justice, equity and every good path.” “When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you, to deliver you from the way of evil, from the man who speaks perverse things, from those who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in darkness; who rejoice in doing evil, and delight in the perversity of the wicked; whose ways are crooked, and who are devious in their paths, etc.” Now, we should notice that God is very much active, very much watching over you; soul and body when you are trusting in Him. But there is something that you must do as a Christian to know and realize the Lord’s care over you in a society where morality is increasingly not in evidence. You must pay attention to the fact that it is from His mouth that knowledge and understanding come. And you must believe that He will indeed give you knowledge and understanding experientially in your heart and mind in relation to His written revelation to you in the Bible. This is where He has stored up wisdom for you; but you must seek it for yourself and store it up when you find it. He will be a shield to you if you will walk uprightly. But if you compromise with sin, then this wonderful sense of protection and provision will vanish and your prayers will be hindered. God is faithful and proves His faithfulness every day to His saints who are seeking to find Him in order to obey Him.

Many verses will confirm this but let us take one. Psalm 84: 11 – “For the Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.” “O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in you!” Do you see how preciously strong our great God is. He is compared with the sun which is continually shining in His strength. He comes forth as a champion every day to shine his light and his warmth and His heat to all and every creature. But He is a Sun in a special sense spiritually, to His people. His faithfulness in His care over every detail of your life may not be clearly seen by you, but because He is giving you wisdom through His word in relation to all the experiences of your life, and you are reading it and storing it up; then you come to prove to yourself that His grace and His truth are sufficient for you in every situation of life. You are proving to yourself that He is faithful. “No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.” It is only our compromises with sin that will hinder the reality of good things which the Lord has stored up, from being given. Every good thing is promised to those who will walk uprightly. This means loving God enough to pursue righteousness and peace through and by His grace which we know is found in Jesus Christ.

3rdly – Let us ask - What will give us peace of mind and heart, both now and in the future? (Verse 12)

“For wisdom is a defense as money is a defense, but the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it.” What will give us peace

of mind both now and in the future is “wisdom with an inheritance” it says in verse 11. Wisdom gives us what is both strong and lasting. When money is stored up, it can be passed on to your family as an inheritance. If used wisely by the children it will help and protect them in times of misfortune where many things are not going right, and not going smoothly. Spiritual wisdom, when sought from God’s word is just like this for the soul as well. It defends us against the worldly wisdom of proud men, and the lack of any wisdom in any fools who try to lead us away from worshiping our God and serving Him. If anger rests in the bosom of fools; peace and contentment are the portion of the godly man. The person who would be guided by the Word is sitting at the Lord’s feet, spiritually speaking, seeking wisdom in listening to His word; and this good part; this good portion, shall not be taken from them.(Luke 10: 42) They have stored up treasure in heaven, and even if they die, they will still find it awaiting them on the other side. The fool will only find that he has lost everything and the terrors of hell await. Let the excellence of wisdom be that which you strive to find. I will turn you to 2 more verses in closing. The first is Colossians Chapter 2, verse 1. Paul says, “For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all the riches of the full assurance of understanding to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father, and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” In the Father and in our Lord Jesus Christ are to be found all the spiritual riches of understanding; the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. When you believe in Christ; you should soon come to realize that every good spiritual thing is to be found in Him and comes to you through Him. You have been set upon the path of righteousness and you begin to pursue wisdom. When you continue to believe in Him for every good thing; you will begin to growing in wisdom.

Look also at 2 Timothy 3: 10-15. Here Paul says, “But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured.” “And out of them all the Lord delivered me.” “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” “But evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.” “But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” You see; all of these truths tie together. Wisdom is a defense as money is a defense. Store it up. Money may fail, but wisdom never will, for it gives life. And this is because Christ is your life and He will bring this about in you. Wisdom gives life to those who have it because Christ is risen from the dead and He and the Father give it to those trusting in the Word. May wisdom be the protective shade over your life. (As it says in the margin of Ecclesiastes 7: 12) May it be to you what it was designed to be by God for

every one trusting in Him; that which gives you the advantage; that which will always be profitable to your soul; that which gives you life and peace in every situation that you find yourself in.