

Ecclesiastes 9: 1-6; “In the Hand of God”, A Bible Study
prepared for The Evening of August 17th, 2011, and Delivered by
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We have seen in our last study that finding out the work of God is not easy; indeed sometimes it is impossible. We have been speaking of trying to understanding God’s work of Providence; the way that He leads and guides us, and how according to His all-wise purpose he brings us into all kinds of different situations in our lives, in order to teach us more about life and about Him. Sometimes the way that God orders things for the righteous person is in accordance with the way that you would think that things would happen to a wicked person, and visa-versa. It doesn’t seem to be fair or right for things to fall out in this way, when the righteous has entrusted themselves to God. Also, we have seen that God’s enacting justice on the wicked is not always seen in a timely fashion, from our impatient human perspective; and neither is the righteous man vindicated in his righteousness, in a timely fashion, we think. This is hard for us to bear; and so we sometimes come to think about these things, in our hearts; in the same way as Solomon was pondering them in his heart; in these verses that we are studying tonight. We are tempted to believe that it does not make any real difference to be righteous, when “all things come alike to all”. But, I want you to take a closer look. Solomon is saying that it does, very much, make a difference whether you are righteous or wicked. It makes all the difference in the world. The righteous and the wise and all their works are in the hand of God, in the best of senses; while the wicked and their works will perish forever. And so, you and I need to learn not to “judge the Lord by feeble sense”, as William Cooper has said in his hymn. The lesson of tonight’s study is that the believer in God (the one who is righteous and wise) must come to understand, by faith, that he and all of his works are in the hand of God for his good. But at the same time the believer should understand that there may be times where his faith will be tested, and he may come into circumstances where he may think that God does not love him, and that he cannot see God’s good hand in the providences that he is experiencing. Let’s hear Solomon’s 3 major declarations in these verses. First – Love and hatred are in God’s hand for good, to the righteous. (Verse 1) Secondly – There is one event which happens to both the righteous and wicked, but a living dog is better than a dead lion. (Verses 2 and 3) And Thirdly – The living shall be remembered and have a reward after they die, whereas the dead will be forgotten and their works will perish. (Verses 5 and 6)

First of all– Love and hatred are in God’s hand for good, for the righteous. (Verse 1)

“For I considered all this in my heart, so that I could declare it all: that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God.” “People know neither love nor hatred by anything they see before them.” I believe that what

Solomon is saying is this; that when you look at your own, or other people's outward circumstances, you cannot conclude that God's loves them or hates them as persons. Just because a person is rich is no indication of God's eternal love and favor being upon them. And just because a person is poor, is not an indication that He does not love them and does not care for them. A person can be rich or poor and be in God's favor. He can be rich or poor and not be in God's favor. God's favor is not shown to people based upon their outward condition. It is shown based upon His own purpose and grace which has been granted to those whom He has chosen in Christ from all eternity. They do not know His love or His hatred by anything they see before them. Turn over to Romans Chapter 9, verse 10. "And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, 'The older shall serve the younger.'" "As it is written, 'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.'" "What shall we say then?" "Is there unrighteousness with God?" "Certainly not!" "For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.'" Now, let's turn over to Exodus 33, verse 16 and we will see where this quote that I just gave to you comes from. The assertion of Solomon in our text is that the righteous and the wise and all of their works are in the hand of God. This is not true of people who do not know God; who are not His people by faith in God and Christ. Those who are rejecting God and His word of truth in the Bible are not wise. They are not in His hand for good, but rather for judgment. But let's look at this from the standpoint of the good in this first point. Verse 16 - "For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in your sight, except You go with us?" "So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who are upon the face of the earth." "So the Lord said to Moses, 'I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name.'" "And He said, 'Please, show me Your glory.'" "Then He said, I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you." "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." "But He said, 'You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.'" "And the Lord said, 'Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock.'" "So it shall be while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by." "Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My shall not be seen."

Now the truth is; that God showed His favor to Moses and to all the elect among the nation of Israel based upon His own purpose in grace. It had nothing to do with their good works, or their being disposed to be better, more holy people, than other people. God is gracious to whom He will be gracious and He is shows compassion to those whom He will, in terms of their being "in His hand." This is

shown to us, by way of visual demonstration in these verses which we just read. No one can look upon God's face and live. He is holy; perfectly holy, and we are not. But He chose to show mercy to Israel and to have them to be His special people in the Old Testament times, because this was His Sovereign choice. They were in His mighty hand, for good. But you will notice that Moses could not look upon God and behold His goodness and glory without his being placed in the cleft of the rock and being covered by His "hand" while He passed by. This being placed in the rock is a picture of salvation; being placed in the work of our Lord Jesus Christ who was, and is, the Rock of Israel, who was smitten and afflicted by God as a substitute for sinners in relation to keeping the Law of God on their behalf. The Law came by Moses, but grace and truth come through the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ would bear Moses' sins in His body on the cross, becoming a curse for him, so that he (at this critical Old Testament time) could see God and His glory. Moses was typically and spiritually, but also really and actually placed in this cleft of the Rock and was then enabled to know God's love and favor and know and see this great revelation of God. Moses knew God's love for Him and the Elect people among the nation, by what God did for him here.

Turn over to Deuteronomy 33 and you will find this verified. "Now this is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death." "And he said: "The Lord came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, and He came with ten thousands of saints (that is; angels in this first usage of the word); from His right hand came a fiery law for them." "Yes, He loves the people; all His saints are in Your hand; they sit down at Your feet; everyone receives Your words." This is how Moses looked back on it at the end of his life. But, we must also see that there were times when Moses did not see and did not sense the love of God for him and the people based upon God's providential ordering of things. Let's back up a few chapters, to Exodus 5. Moses has done what God commanded him to do; He went to speak to Pharaoh and commanded him in the name of the Lord, to let the children of Israel go. Instead of letting them go, the Pharaoh made their labor harder. Look at what the children of Israel's response was to Moses, when they realized that this had happened. Verse 20 – "Then, as they came out from Pharaoh, they met Moses and Aaron who stood there to meet them." "And they said to them, 'Let the Lord look on you and judge, because you have made us abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us.'" "So Moses returned to the Lord and said, 'Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people?' "Why is it You have sent me? "For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all." You see; He did not know love or hatred by all that was before him, at that particular point. Why did God permit these things to take place? Because He had a purpose which was very great and manifold. He was testing and building faith in Moses and all the Elect people among the nation of Israel. It seemed as though He did not care.

It seemed as though His power was not great enough to deal with Pharaoh and bring Israel out. But this was simply not true. There was much more to be learned about God. And such is the case, often, with you and I. We cannot see God's love in permitting all the difficulties in relation to our coming out of bondage to the world or our own flesh. We cannot understand why the devil's schemes prevail for a time. We do not see that, through all this, He is gently leading and teaching us. At times, it might seem to be a hard and impossible way; to persevere in faith and do the things that He has called us to do. But He is with us every step of the way.

Now 2ndly - There is one event which happens to both the righteous and wicked, but a living dog is better than a dead lion. (Verse 2-4)

“All things come alike to all: one event (or fate, in the NAS) happens to the righteous and the wicked; to the good, the clean, and the unclean; to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice.” “As is the good, so is the sinner; He who takes an oath as he who fears an oath.” “This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing happens to all.” “Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.” The one event; taking a look at the context of these verses, is death. It happens to the righteous and the wicked. It happens to the both those who know the Lord and those who don't. It happens to the religious; those who sacrifice to God and take oaths in His name to serve Him”; and it happens to those who are unclean and sinners who do not worship and serve God. This, Solomon sees as a great evil. He sees it this way because he knows that there really is a difference between the way that the righteous and the wicked live; but because both die physically, he knows that it appears to many people (himself included, at points) that there is no difference, and that somehow when all men die, there is no difference in the outcome of their life. They have died and can no longer pursue whatever “madness” of earthly pleasure or satisfaction which they chose to pursue. And so Solomon observes this as the reason that the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; full of the madness of sinful thinking; because they have been deceived into thinking that there is no reward for being righteous. They, by nature, apart from the grace of God, are pursuing sins and selfishness of all different kinds. These people who continue in this madness have no hope when they die. They are without hope and God.

But Solomon reproves this way of madness with this one statement in verse 4. “But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.” Now this cannot simply mean that if you are alive and living as a dog lives that you are somehow better off because you are still physically alive. How would this bring hope? Only in one sense; if something changes. A person would have an earthly hope of a few more years of drawing breath and having their material needs provided for a little longer. But still, eventually death would come. This would only gain a little time for a little more madness. But to have real hope, a person must have God, and His promise that He will care for them now, and

after they die, as well as in this life. Hebrews Chapter 9, verse 27 says, “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.” “To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time apart from sin, for salvation.” This brings hope and life. Those who are living are those who trust in His promise of Christ for salvation. They are joined to all the living. Even if they are then in a dog-like condition because of poverty and sickness, they are still in a better condition than a dead lion; a man who has had wealth and power; perhaps even a king on the level of Solomon, and yet dead in trespasses and sins, or backslidden from God. I think that Solomon saw this, and thought of himself. There had been madness in his heart for a long time; even as a believer in God. Let us check ourselves to see if we are pursuing some worldly pleasure or sinful madness in our hearts or lives which is keeping us from having an assurance of eternal life. Let us confess it and forsake it.

And then Thirdly – The living shall be remembered and have a reward after they die, whereas the dead will be forgotten and their works will perish. (Verses 5 and 6)

“For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten.” “Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun.” You can see here that those who are dead physically have no more opportunity to have a reward for all of the madness which they have pursued in this life. All of their love, their hatred and their envy, will be forgotten; not too long after they have died physically. For the living, they know that they will die physically, and believe rightly; that there is a reward still coming. God will remember them. Their love for God and His commandments will be remembered, and rewarded, because their trust was in God and His promises of mercy and grace and help in Christ. Sometimes our faith grows very low, like Solomon’s did when he realized that a good portion of his life had been devoted to vanity. He no doubt felt more like a dead lion than as a king should feel who had been given so much grace and so many precious promises from God. But through it all he learned to seek God and His kingdom and His righteousness. Let us do the same. Let us close by looking together at Matthew 6, verse 25 and following. “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on.” “Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?” “Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly father feeds them.” “Are you not of more value than they?” “Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?” “So why do you worry about clothing?” “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” Verse 33 – “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about

its own things.” “Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” Ah, the righteous are indeed remembered and will have a reward; both in this life and the next. Not so, with those who pursue only the madness of sin in this life. The righteous know that they die; but there is so much more to come. A New Heavens and a New Earth in which dwells righteousness.