



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

Safe in the Hands of God

February 28, 2021

Ecclesiastes 7:13-18

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Consider the work of God:

who can make straight what he has made crooked?

¹⁴ In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.

¹⁵ In my vain life I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing. ¹⁶ Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself? ¹⁷ Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time? ¹⁸ It is good that you should take hold of this, and from that withhold not your hand, for the one who fears God shall come out from both of them.

(Pastor prays)

Not too long ago, one of my friends at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary put a devotion book together called, "Always in the Hands of God." I would commend it to you. It's a daily reading of Jonathan Edwards' writings. Jonathan Edwards was a man who suffered greatly in the world but was used greatly by the Lord, which I think is important for us as believers in the 21st Century because we may suffer greatly in this world. But even still, we want to be used greatly by the Lord, trusting that our lives are always in God's hands.

Do you believe that? I want you to. I want you to walk with confidence, and live with joy, and wake up in the morning with hope in God's love for you in Christ! Because we live in a fallen world that strips that all away. It can feel like we are living in another universe when we see

things like the Equality Act that passed in the House and will go to the Senate. I won't go into detail here except to say that professing Christians are going to need to be strengthened in faith and resolute in doctrine and, like never before, trust that we are always in the hands of God! I think the preacher helps us with that here in Chapter 7. There are 12 loosely connected proverbs, sayings, aphorisms. Then in verse 13, he seems to turn our attention to viewing the world, to look at how the world works and, more importantly, how we fit into this world at this time in history.

Now today, I pray that this passage washes over your soul and refreshes your spirit that you might rejoice in our good and sovereign God because...

Your Life is Safe in the Hands of God

I want this sermon to be a help, that you might approach this week with joyful confidence in our good and sovereign God. There are 4 things I see here that we need to do more of. Let's start off with something good.

You need to enjoy life more

Let me show you where I get that. It's right there in the first phrase of verse 14. See what the preacher says, in the day of prosperity be joyful. Now, lest you think we've dropped off into the "prosperity gospel," a literal translation might be, in the day of good - be in the good."

There are large and small times that God gives us as gifts to enjoy. And if you run past those times or waste or squander those times, then they are gone. This is mostly why we take pictures and post them on Instagram. These are good. And it's right to acknowledge God has given us these moments of laughter, happiness, success, and affection. God gives us the fellowship of a good friend, the smile of a grandchild, the taste of a good cup of coffee, and the sound of a well-tuned American V8. The preacher says, you only have so long to live and God has given us His good and common grace on earth as a reminder of His goodness. Every gift is from God as one voice in a cosmic chorus singing, "our God is good." And His goodness finds its ultimate display at the cross of Jesus where sinners are saved.

I know things are bad all over but you need to enjoy this life God has given you a little more. Because your life is safe in the hands of God. Enjoy this life a little more.

You need to be still a little more

Let's read the whole verse and see what the preacher says. ¹⁴*In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.* In the day of good – be in the good. And in the day of adversity or evil, consider. That means to *sit, see, look and think*. God has made the one as well as the other so that man may not find out anything. Verse 14. You ought to circle that verse. It's been helpful to me. This is a clear and beautiful description of an ongoing life of ups and downs and through it all we trust. Consider. We look and see that it's God, our God, who is good and in control and working.

But I want to push on this a little further. In the bad, hard, hurtful and even tragic times, the preacher says, consider and see God. It's the same thing as back up in verse 13. Consider the work of God. Who can make straight what God has made crooked? You can't fix it! Get the issue or person in your mind, the bad job, the wayward child, the friend who has gone off the deep end, the hateful parent. This text doesn't say to run in there and fix the situation. You are an observer and are to consider or see. You are to stand and watch. As an observer you are not responsible, God is. You are not responsible for saving a person or fixing a person or salvaging a situation. And if you don't watch out, you're going to drive yourself crazy trying to fix a problem.

And God does good things and hard things and painful things. Verse 14b says so that you might not find it out. So that you are reminded that you aren't God. God is God. And this good God who reigns over everything will keep on reminding us that we are not the masters of our own destinies! He governs His creation; He arranges the times and the seasons, and He controls the future. And He is working all things together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose.

But being still doesn't mean doing nothing. Being still means actively trusting and genuinely praying. It means you worship sincerely and patiently, are honoring in the suffering. It means you are slowly growing in confidence because your life is safe in the hands of God. Enjoy life a little more. Be still a little more.

You need to reject karma a little more

Let me show you what I mean. Now remember that Solomon wrote this as an old man. Look what he says in verse 15. ¹⁵ *In my vain life I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing.* Solomon says, I have seen it all! I have seen it all, and life isn't fair, and to think it should be fair will absolutely drive you insane.

I said to reject karma because I feel like this is sort of like what most people believe. Do something good or kind and maybe one day someone will do something good or kind to me. And the preacher says that's terrible theology. Because sometimes the good die young and the rotten people get ahead. And we are the worst with little chirping cliches that sound good but are really nothing more than baptized karma. What goes around comes around. Work hard and good things happen. The early bird gets the worm. Good things come to those who wait.

But if you live long enough you find out that none of that is true. And if you buy into this mindset then something terrible happens. Your first question is, what did I do to deserve this? And at the core of that question is a heart that believes "I've been good and I deserve better." It's a sign that we've forgotten ourselves. We've forgotten that we actually deserve so much worse and yet God in His grace has loved us and called us and saves us on the merits of Jesus and His death on the cross, and it's grace.

We do not do good and right things in the hopes that maybe someone will do something good for us one day. We do good and right things because someone has already *done* something so radically unbelievable for us at the cross that all we want to do is live for Him! We don't pay anything forward. Everything has been paid in the finished work of Jesus at the cross. It's grace! And that launches me right into the fourth point.

We need to study grace more

Here is a long passage that is easily misunderstood. But for our purposes, in verse 16 - 17, there are 2 things that lead to destruction. Let's read and see them. ¹⁶ *Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself?* ¹⁷ *Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time?* I'm going to give you 2 words that are the opposite of grace. Legalism. Antinomianism.

Legalism is in verse 16. Here is the person who is convinced of his own righteousness and falls into a works-based salvation. If you do right, you go to Heaven. If you do wrong, you go to Hell. And that's the very opposite of the Gospel .

The Gospel reminds us of what verse 20 says: There is not a righteous person on earth who does right and never sins. It's why we need the great exchange. Christ gives us His righteousness and takes our sin on the cross. We are saved by grace. Run away from legalism and also reject antinomianism. Verse 17 says that is the anti-law.

Here is the person who says since God's grace covers me and forgives me, I don't have to be careful and live by what the law of God says. This is the person who would be comfortable in having Jesus as savior and not necessarily as Lord. And both of these positions fall off the edge and miss grace altogether.

And the greatest reminder of grace is the fear of God. Verse 18 says, *for the one who fears God shall come out from both of them*. You fear God because He is a holy and loving creator and we are wretched sinners with no hope. If you are outside of Christ, that's your story. You not only commit sins; you are a sinner. And yet, Christianity teaches that God is not just judging and angry about sin, He is also loving, kind and gracious and gives us Jesus, the very son of God who is all God and all man. He lived perfectly in a way that we cannot. At the cross, Jesus is crucified, and there is where the judgment goes on Jesus and His righteousness comes to anybody who will believe so that any sinner that repents of his sin and puts his faith in Jesus is saved.

The fear of God leads to the grace of God. For any of you who are not Christians, Come to Jesus. If you will, your life will be safe in the hands of God. To believers, I want this to be a ministry to your heart. I want you to be reminded that when there are things that are terrible and your life is hard, your life is safe in the hands of God.

(Pastor prays)