

Plain Talk on JOB and ECCLESIASTES

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Chapter 1

Thinking Is Important

Do you realize how important it is for a person to think?

"Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things" (II Timothy 2:7). This is the way Paul wrote to Timothy. Paul was saying to Timothy, "Make use of the great gift, the gift of understanding; of the capacity to understand, which is yours as a man." This is a portion of the Bible that we seldom study to discover the truth that is in it. I should like to share with you some of my thinking about the importance of understanding the ways of God. We oftentimes have a feeling that if God does it, we should leave it to Him; that God in Himself is invisible and His ways are inscrutable. But this does not recognize why God gave us the Bible nor does it recognize the meaning of the Scriptures. We read in the Bible that the hidden things belong to God, but the things which are revealed belong to His servants. God has revealed some things to His people. Human beings can prosper because He has made us in such a way that we can think.

Thinking is one tremendous advantage that all men have in living. Even before we start doing anything we think. At any given moment in our lives there are different things we could do. It would make a difference which one we did. Living is done by responding to the situation we are in; relating ourselves to the environment around us and to the elements that are there. There is the inanimate matter that we call the world, the earth. There are plants and we relate ourselves to them. We hoe the weeds, and try to raise beans in the garden. There are animals all around and we pay attention to them; there are insects and we adjust to those. There are living organisms that can get into the blood and into tissues of the body, causing sickness and even death. We have to be careful about that. There are people and there is God. No person can live who does not relate to these things.

Everything that happens to a person in living seems to occur as events in a stream of affairs. This happens because something else happened first, and that happened because this happened, and so on. Yet the course of event, while it follows along in a stream, is not fixed or predetermined. It is always flexible. The course of events is actually coming to pass. When you talk to someone, do you have all of your words memorized beforehand? Is it not true that you have an inward impulse which you try to express, and you use words to that effect? You could use different words. Scarcely anybody will ever repeat the exact words he has said; have you wondered about that?

The burden in your heart is unformed until you utter words. After you have uttered them, you have done something. Just as it is in conversation, so it is in living. When you get up in the morning, the day is before you unformed. Into that day you will move. You may say there are many things you have to do. Perhaps so. But you will exercise a certain veto power over the things that happen during the day. You will do this and you will not do that, and some days you will do differently. In the events as they happen in your life there is something of a creative aspect. It is true that each of us is in some sense self-made.

It makes a difference what I choose to do. I get to know what will happen if I do this or I do that, and this enables me to become wise in what I do. This is where thinking comes in. Thinking is based in the capacity that human beings have, which enables them to stop before acting so that they can figure out what would happen if they did this or if they did that. If I read the Bible and pray, certain things will follow; if I do not read the Bible and I do not pray those things will not follow, but maybe something else will follow. Thus I get understanding. Living is a matter of choosing from all the present alternatives the one I am actually going to do. In this way I determine what my harvest will be.

Human beings want to live and to be safe; and they are always one way or another conscious of that. We take certain action in order to be safe. Everybody wants to be healthy, so we do certain things in order

to be secure. All of us want to have some joy and some satisfaction. This search for understanding in living leads to promoting good living, and having peace and having joy. God wants this for us. We shall be thinking on these things together as we enter into our study of Job.

What a person thinks does make a difference.

Chapter 2

Knowledge Is Necessary For Understanding

Can you see that a person needs to *know* something in order to be able to understand it? "If there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Philippians 4:8). The Bible encourages us to think. God approaches our minds to show us the way. He urges us to be wise and to do the wise thing by showing us the way. When I was in Brazil, on one occasion I was standing on the street of one of the cities, when an old woman started talking to me. She patiently explained what I should do. I did not understand one thing she said. She was talking in Portuguese. Unless you know something of the language, you could not understand anything. Understanding is when we put two and two together.

Paul was concerned that believers should understand the Gospel, that they might grow. And this is really what we have in mind. When writing to the people of Corinth, Paul was concerned that people should understand.

And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air (I Corinthians 14:7-9).

Paul went on to write:

For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful . . . Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue (I Corinthians 14:14, 19).

It is important to understand, that we might grow in spiritual matters. In understanding several things are necessary. It is important and necessary for thinking that we know certain data. In the providence of God things are consistent: salt will be salt, water will be water, fire will be fire, electricity will be electricity, and they will stay that way. These events are related to each other in a cause/effect relationship so that when you are able to trace the cause or the relation, when you are able to see that if you do this that will follow, then you are able to reason. Reasoning is a matter of tracing these relationships, which leads to more understanding. It is important to reason out things. If you know this is true and that is true you can put those things together as you reason. You can compare and seek relationships between them. The Lord asks you to do that, that you may understand.

You remember how God said, "Come, let us reason together." Then He offered something to think about. Reasoning will discover new aspects of what we know. That is what logic is. When you speak of reasoning and logic, some will think this means that you will not have faith. Such persons do not understand either reasoning or faith; because reasoning, putting two and two together in trying to understand how things are, simply shows what is possible in the situation that you already know. In this way reasoning is limited: reason cannot discover any new truth. For that matter it cannot deny it. Reasoning only puts things together.

It is as though you had a limited number of bricks, and as you wanted to build a house it would be reasoning that you would build the wall this high and the other wall that high, and put the roof on this way. Reasoning would not change the bricks, but would think about the bricks, placing them in certain ways, adding them up in certain ways. Reasoning cannot discover anything new. When the architect starts to build he can only use the bricks that are there. And that is the way it is with reasoning.

You may need to be helped here, because you may have the idea that you would be a better Christian if you did not reason; but that is not true. You will be a wiser Christian if you reason. Some may say they go

by faith rather than by reasoning; but faith exercises reason. Reason leads to faith when you deal with God.

Centuries ago there were some very wise people, the Greeks. They lived on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea in Europe. But with all their wisdom and with all their logic there was one thing no Greek ever figured out: he never figured out that North America was over here. Yet the Indians over here knew it all the time. This is something like the Gospel because though you may think and reason and use logic in every way, if you do not have certain experiences with God you will never be able to figure Him out. No man by searching can find out God. When the Apostle Peter came to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as Christ and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus answered and said, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." He had not figured this out by human reasoning.

Thus to be able to think it is necessary to have certain data. I need to know certain things, and these things will enable me to understand. The more I know from personal experience the more understanding I have. This is the creative element in daily experience. This is the meaning (and we will come to it later) about saying that "you must be born again." A person who is not a Christian cannot understand the deeper meaning of the Gospel.

Chapter 3

Knowledge Of Spiritual Things Is Necessary For Understanding The Gospel

Do you realize that we depend on the Bible for our knowledge of the Gospel?

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalms 119:105). Many times these words have been an expression of a believer's confidence. Truly every person who knows the Gospel as a Christian knows how wonderful it is to have the Scriptures as a source of that information and insight, which makes our Christian living strong.

In a recent study we pointed out that a person needs to know some data in order to understand any situation. Just as I need to know the language if I am to understand a person talking, so I will need to know the names of the various tools and items involved in repairing a car if I am to be able to talk to a mechanic about what should be done in repairing an engine. Likewise, I need to know something about music if I am to play a piano. The more one knows the better one can understand.

We are thinking together concerning what it means to know about understanding things. We shall be looking at a portion of the Bible wherein the problem of understanding is raised and discussed. Our entire interest is in the soul of man. A person can have an interest in his body physically, or in his money financially. A person can have an interest in his country nationally, and so on. But our interest is about the soul of man and this requires special knowledge. We would bring to our minds now the fact that the Bible tells us some of the things we should know in order to understand about the soul.

The Bible reveals the nature of the world in which we live; and the Bible reveals the nature of man. As we read the Bible we begin to understand ourselves. The Bible does not tell us everything but it tells us something of the nature of God, in relation to the world that He has made, and to man, whom He has created. And the Bible tells us something about the Gospel. Everything we know about the Gospel originates in the Bible. The whole universe, from the earth beneath to the stars above, was made by God with a design. Furthermore, the fact that God made them shows us that all things are supposed to work out for good, since God is a benevolent Being.

There is an element of responsibility involved in creation. God created the world and planted the garden, and then put man in the garden to dress it and to keep it. This means that everything man was, and is, and has, was given to him. Man is, therefore, expected to be responsible to God for what he does. When we come to the questions that are raised in the book of Job, we will find that Job had in mind that whatever his understanding of his circumstances, of one thing he could be sure. Things were not haphazard: all was under control.

Other things are set forth in the Old Testament with reference to creation. For instance, man was created in the image of God; man is not just an advanced animal. Apparently God had in mind something before He made man in His own image. It is true that man fell into sin. This is brought out early in Scripture and never changed. It involved all men. The Bible tells us plainly there is no man that sinneth not. But the Bible also tells us something that is wonderful: the grace of God in Christ is greater than all the sin of man.

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool (Isaiah 1:18).

Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.

This brings to mind something more the Bible tells us: man can be redeemed, and delivered, and saved from sin. The book of Job records that Job's friends suggested that his troubles were due to his sin. But Job raised the question, "If this is because of sin, why does not God forgive me?" Job knew very well this was what God would do.

The plain, clearcut testimony of Scripture is that God, in His grace, will bring man to Himself through Christ. When we think of understanding the ways of God, the Bible gives us all this data and much more related to this. The Bible gives us this to help us understand the experiences we are having. In addition to what the Bible reveals to us, God in His providence allows history to record certain results of the Gospel.

There is much about ancient times that remains hidden. No one will ever be able to dig it out. But even in the Old Testament days there are several things that are plain: the nation of Israel is an historical fact. Regardless of criticism, Israel and the Jews of modern time, is an historical fact. Christianity is also a fact. Regardless of what one may think of Christianity, it is a fact. Christianity is a massive testimony of the power of God in Christ Jesus. Spiritual experience on the part of the individual believers in Christ is glorious. All of this helps us when we try to understand.

The Bible reveals certain specific things for us we find nowhere else in the world. Several times Scripture repeats this statement:

Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit (I Corinthians 2:9-10).

God has revealed what we need to know in order to understand Him; and He has revealed this in Scripture.

Chapter 4

The Old Testament Is A Source Of Spiritual Knowledge

Do you realize how important the Old Testament is ?

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." These words open the Old Testament record. They serve as the beginning of the thinking of many people about all that is true. One might suppose that every human being would know that in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth, but that is not true. This statement is an affirmation on the part of believing people. In the book of Job we shall raise the question as to why people suffer; the problem of pain. How can we understand that good people suffer? Job was a believing man and he suffered. If you and I are going to understand pain we should approach the problem as believers, from the way the Bible presents it.

God is the Creator and Designer of what is. "In the beginning God" is tremendously important. "Created" is a special word. The word "made" is used many times, whereas "created" is used only a few times. Another special word with reference to the body of man is "build." Scripture records that God "builed" (literal translation) a body – "fashioned" it out of the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7). But the Hebrew word for "create" is seldom used in their literature. It is used more often in the first chapter of Genesis than anywhere else in the Bible; it means to bring something into existence out of nothing. Later on the word "made" is used, but that is different. The word "make" is used when you take material and make something out of it.

The six days set forth in the opening verses of Genesis imply an orderly procedure; not the relationships in which everything is of equal value or the kind of relationships that would happen if they all came at the same time; but there is one thing first, something second and something third, and so on. This orderly procedure reveals the wisdom of God. It is practical. It may sound simple to us but notice that first God created the earth, then He created the plants, then the animals, then man. The plants have to have the earth to grow on, the animals have to have the plants to eat, and man has to have the animals to get along in his living.

Studies of the first two chapters of Genesis have been made by learned men and they have noticed the order of creation and been impressed by it. Something else we have in this section of the Old Testament that will help in understanding things is the word *sin*, which is real. Sin is destructive; it hurts; and although God made the heavens and the earth, they can be ruined by sin. Man can be tempted by sin, as was Adam. And sin is under the judgment of God.

Now let us take the case of man. When one is trying to understand the nature of man and one wonders about things in the Old Testament, one should remember that man was created in the image of God, and this creature is to work. He has an operation to perform. Man has dominion over the earth; he is to fill and replenish it. Man is responsible; he can turn to the right or to the left; he can come to God or turn away from God. With this liberty goes responsibility, and God will judge him for how he does.

There are certain other things said about man that are worth noticing; he is a social being: it is not good for man to be alone. Also, he is a sinful person. Because of having fallen into sin, man's natural mind goes to sin as the sparks fly upward. God will judge sin. This needs to be emphasized because some people have the idea that even if there is a God, He would not destroy what He has made. However, the Bible teaches that God will destroy in judgment. God brought on the flood. However in the course of the destruction of sinful men, God delivered Noah and his family. Let us consider the Tower of Babel, which belongs in this general picture. At the Tower of Babel it is evident that man will never succeed so far as living in this world is concerned. Human limitation is obvious at all times.

In trying to understand the Old Testament where we find all of this true about man, we come to the

covenant with Abraham. This brings to mind Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, the four patriarchs. The one great testimony they have for the world is that they believed in the living God and He blessed them. Following their records we have the history of Israel. There are many variant details but the general idea is brought to mind that God redeemed these people and led them. God did all of this in His grace, yet nothing could keep Israel from failing away from God. Israel is the outstanding demonstration that man in the flesh, natural man, cannot, will not, do the will of God.

The Old Testament, while it showed what to do, had no power to enforce obedience. It is like your mirror on the wall. The mirror will show you that your face is dirty, but it will never clean your face. All the Old Testament pointed forward to the coming of God's great Savior, the Messiah, Whom the New Testament calls Christ. This is what we have in the Old Testament that helps us to understand the ways of the Lord.

Chapter 5

The Believer Exercises To Reason To Learn The Gospel

Do you realize that the believer reasons to learn what is available for him in the Gospel?

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind (II Timothy 1:7).

This was the assurance Paul gave to his young protégé. We do not have to be blindly afraid of things. ". . . but of power (we can get things done), . . . and of love (we can do them for other people), . . . and of a sound mind" (we do not have to be afraid to think about these things). It is a common feeling that if we have implicit faith and trust in God we will not need to reason, but that is far more superficial than one realizes. That would be like saying that going to a doctor's office would make one well, but there is the matter of taking the medicine and following his instructions. There are those who feel that reasoning about your faith is a sign of unbelief. It is true that many persons in the course of reasoning end up in unbelief, but that means, in my judgment, they never had faith in the first place. Where you really put your trust and confidence is actually a form of real faith. The believer reasons about his faith to learn what is available for him in the Gospel, because there could be much available for him he does not know about.

There are many people who do not pray as specifically and as earnestly as they should because they do not realize it makes a difference. If they really knew the Gospel they would pray. When we understand it the more earnestly and intelligently we really plead the promises of God, and the more closely we can walk with Him in His ways.

The study of Job and Ecclesiastes belongs to a particular type of literature that in the Bible is called wisdom literature. The Bible as a whole is loosely organized as to subject matter. The early books of the Bible have to do with history and the next books are what we call wisdom literature. Several books after that are poetic literature, and then a number of books are prophetic. In the Pentateuch and succeeding books, which tell of events and of ritual, of things people did, much is revealed. In wisdom literature the mind which believes seeks to understand the ways of God. The word "wisdom" in the Greek and in the Hebrew is the same as what we mean by "philosophy", the "love of wisdom."

In poetic literature, such as we have in the book of Psalms, the mind which believes seeks to worship God. In prophetic literature in the prophets, both major and minor; the mind which believes seeks to communicate the Word of God. In the book of Job the question is raised, "Why do the righteous suffer?" The general problem of pain or of evil is discussed in the book of Job. In the book of Proverbs, the question is raised "What is true?" What insights are always valid? In the book of Ecclesiastes the issue being considered is "What is good?" "What is of the greatest value?" This is a problem of ethics. All of the wisdom literature focuses its attention upon the affairs of the natural world. Some feel keenly that there is not much there about the grace of God, or about the person of the Lord Jesus Christ; but there are certain things in this wisdom literature that are important for us to learn. Chapters 1, 2 and 3 of the book of Job are very important to our understanding of the book as a whole.

Chapter 6

Job Was A Godly Man

Do you know that Job is referred to as one of the most godly men in Old Testament times?

No one knows anything conclusive about the authorship of the book of Job. Many years ago scholars searched to see if they could find out anything about the authorship of this book. There were some who wrote about the problem of authorship a few hundred years after our Lord Jesus Christ was here upon earth, but no one has ever been able to settle the questions. The name "Job" is given to the book because Job is the principal character in the study, but no one suggests that he was the author. It is generally thought this is a very old manuscript; it may well be the first Old Testament book to be written. Some think that Moses may have written it. But others believe that it was probably written before the time of Moses.

There is no mention in the book of anything that had to do with the ritual of the Levites. There is nothing about the tabernacle, nothing about the temple in the book. The word "altar" is not used and the word "sacrifice" is not used. There is no mention of the ritual of the Levitical priest. But, because we do not know who wrote it, should this weaken the importance of the book? I think not. The New Testament authors did not concern themselves about who wrote any of the Old Testament Scriptures. New Testament writers were satisfied with the authenticity and the truth of the Old Testament Scriptures.

The question could be asked at this point: "Was Job an historic person?" He was so referred to in the Old Testament. Certain of the prophets spoke of Job as a righteous man. He is referred to in that way in the New Testament. James writes "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy" (James 5:11). Some may think that does not matter. Perhaps, so far as Job is concerned, it would not matter; and perhaps so far as the problem of Job is concerned, it does not matter very much. But so far as the book is concerned it does matter; because if you say Job was not historical you raise a question as to whether Satan is historical, since he is mentioned in the book.

One significant revelation in the book of Job is that Satan has dealings with God. If one says Job can be written about as if he were a real man when he really was not, then it would follow that Satan can be written about as a real person, when he really is not. That would be definitely confusing. In the opening chapter Job is referred to, God is referred to, and Satan is referred to. If we accept God as real and Satan as real, we must take Job as real, and let it go at that. This will help in all the study of this book.

The main issue in this book is the problem of pain, of suffering; or one could put it in a broad sense and say: the problem of evil. "If God made the world and God is good, why is there pain and suffering? And especially why do the righteous suffer? Why would God allow evil in the world?" These are the questions that cluster together in connection with this study in the book of Job.

The story is quite simple. The book opens with Job being described as a very righteous person. Satan is then seen in the presence of God, accusing Job of being insincere in his obedience. God challenges Satan to test Job, and allows him to do so in the destruction of Job's goods, and in the destruction of Job's family. The second time around in the confrontation when Satan says that Job has not yet been hurt enough, God permits Satan to afflict Job with the loss of his health.

Out of that situation most of the book is developed. Job's friends come to sympathize with him and to help him by talking things over. They offer a natural explanation to Job of his trouble. They say he did wrong, and that is why he is having trouble. Job argues that they are wrong in their explanation. This goes on for quite a few chapters in the book. Finally, a fourth person by the name of Elihu (a younger man), claims they are all wrong. He says Job's friends have the wrong idea about suffering altogether; and Job is wrong because he is trying to understand God.

The Lord Himself then rebukes Job for trying to understand Him. Job accepts the rebuke, humbles himself before God and is finally richly blessed. The interesting thing about the book, as we shall see when we look into it, is that the question which was raised at the very outset, "Why do the righteous suffer?" is never really answered. But it is dealt with in a way for each of us to profit thereby.

The style of the book is that of a dialogue; a dialogue that permits both sides of the argument to be fully presented. As we go into the study of this book it will be important to keep in mind that Job was a good man. Various people will explain the book in different ways, but I believe confusion comes into our thinking if we do not accept it, as it is actually written. The fact that Job was exceptionally good throws the problem of suffering plainly into the control of God. There is far more to it than Job's own experience, but Job never knew that. Yet the fact that the problem of suffering is brought into the control of God, becomes, in the course of this book, the ground for the eventual answer for all of us.

Chapter 7

The Real Cause For Events Is Not Always Obvious

Do you realize that often we do not know the real reason for things happening as they do?

Our interest in the book of Job will be not so much in Job as a man as it is in his problem of suffering. While we read about him, we will be thinking about ourselves and about our friends. We will be interested to see if we can understand the ways of God when real trouble comes. We know this book was written not as a biography of Job but as a discussion of the problem of suffering; and yet it is important to note what is recorded in the situation about Job and about his friends. In the very first verse we read:

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil (Job 1:1).

This is the description of a good man. That he was perfect meant that he was well-rounded, complete and the Hebrew conception of righteousness was of a man who was upright. To say that he feared God meant that he worshipped God, and to eschew evil meant he avoided the wrong. The life of Job was marked by worship of God and service to his fellow man; there was no evil in this man. We learn that he was wealthy and that he had seven sons and three daughters and verse 3 ends by saying "This man was the greatest of all the men of the east."

We read in verses 4 and 5 that he was careful in his religious observances; he was anxious to have the blessing of God. In verses 6-12 we get insight into something that is strange but very important; we are given insight into what is going on in the spiritual world. It is as if a curtain were pulled back and you were allowed to look behind the scenes. Here we find Satan in the presence of God and they are talking about a man on earth. That man is Job, who is being held up as an illustration before Satan of what a righteous person would be. The Lord said unto Satan, "Hast thou considered my servant Job?"

Satan accused Job of being insincere, and he insinuated that Job's religious habits are a sham, that he walked with God in order to be prosperous. The Lord then allowed Satan to take away Job's possessions to see if that would shake his faithfulness. What happened was shocking to Job. Sudden calamity which struck Job thus was inspired by events in the spiritual world. This would be a warning to us. When we see something happening to somebody we should be slow to judge on the basis of what we see; there are always other things we do not know about.

Job's oxen and asses were stolen, as were his camels; his sheep and those taking care of them were destroyed in what was an electrical storm. His sons and daughters were killed by a tornado. All at once Job's possessions were wiped out.

This, of course, is introducing the situation to us. The common tendency in a situation like that would be to complain against God. How often has it happened that when suddenly something occurs unexpectedly people will ask what they did to cause it. It may be that person did nothing; it did not come for that reason. It is common when these sudden calamities occur to feel that God is somehow "taking it out on a person." Many people feel that God is punishing them and when they have their own sense of righteousness in some degree like Job, they can be filled with the idea they did not deserve it, and they may become rebellious against God. However, we are told in verse 22, "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." This is very important.

Remember, Job did not know about Satan's interest. He did not know that Satan had insinuated to God that if God allowed him (Satan) to take away everything Job had, Job would turn against God. Even so, Job's integrity was such that he sinned not, nor charged God foolishly. Do you sometimes have the feeling that calamity brings a soul nearer to God? And have you noticed that it does not work that way in every case? When some persons have trouble, they become bitter. The more trouble they have, the more bitter

they become. Calamity can bring a believer closer to God, but it can drive an unbeliever away.

Chapter 8

Troubles Never Come Singly

"It never rains but it pours."

Troubles never come singly. In chapter 1 the record showed Satan and God talking about Job, who was not aware of it. There are those who wonder if it would not have helped Job to have known about Satan. It may seem that it could have helped Job, but I bow my head and my heart before Almighty God who does all things well and note that God did not tell Job. God did not reveal to Job the spiritual significance of what was happening. Job was simply challenged face to face with the issue of trusting God. We should not miss the lesson here. God does not reveal all the inner meanings of every situation to each believer. The believer can read the Bible and there can learn certain principles that will guide him. Believers are encouraged to put their trust in God, even though they may move forward without knowing where they are going.

Many times the believer will be like Abraham who, when he was called, went out not knowing whither he went. Abraham knew God, but he did not know where he was going. This is what happened to Job. In the conversation between God and Satan reported in chapter 2, Satan insinuated that the loss of things did not really hurt Job. But if Job lost his health and suffered pain, then God would learn that Job did not really trust in Him. God then permitted Satan to afflict Job's body.

So went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes (Job 2:7-8).

Later we read that Job described this and said there was not a spot he could put his finger on that was not inflamed with some form of irritation and sores. Job's wife suggested to him that he turn against God.

Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die (Job 2:9)

His suffering was so bad she felt he would be better off dead.

But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips (Job 2:10).

This is a remarkable statement, and this is what we are to understand about Job: a man with faith like that "can" suffer; suffering does come to good people. Later Job's three friends came in sympathy to comfort him. They meant well although they were wrong in what they thought.

And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they lifted up their voice, and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven. So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great (Job 2:12-13).

They were both kind and wise.

If there is any one thing that can be really distressing it is when there is real suffering in the home and someone comes and starts talking ceaselessly. The person coming in can seldom understand the misery of the person who is having the trouble. Job's friends sat down quietly and waited for Job to talk.

Chapter 9

To Be Downhearted In Trouble Is Not Sin

Do you realize that if a believer were in deep trouble he could be downhearted and this would not necessarily be sinful in his case?

In chapter 3 is recorded Job's lament about his circumstances. At the end of seven days of silent communion in sympathy and in distress, Job opened his mouth and gave expression to an eloquent statement of natural reaction to personal suffering. Job began by saying in effect "I wish I had never been born." This frame of mind is not unusual. It is natural when one faces an impossible situation. When trouble is so big it cannot be handled, the sufferer could just wish he were dead. This is a form of withdrawal, and those who have studied psychology will recognize this technique. When a person cannot win and does not want to lose, he may seek to handle it this way: he may just play dead, so to speak.

Job went on to say,

Why died I not from the womb? Why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly? Why did the knees prevent me? Or why the breasts that I should suck? For now would I have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept: then had I been at rest (Job 3:11-13).

In the next few verses Job pays tribute to "the pale loveliness of death." He dwelt on the fact that he just wished he were dead. If he were dead, then he would not be hurting.

There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest (Job 3:17).

Job's suffering was so acute he could not endure it.

Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in (Job 3:23)?

He wondered why God would let a man live under those conditions.

The tragic truth for Job was that he had feared the very thing that did happen. It was like a man who feared that at a certain point he would slide off the road, and did his dead level best not to slide off the road, but did slide off into a ditch. The very thing he, tried to avoid did happen. This was the way it was with Job. The Scriptures do not present any criticism against Job for his lament. In other words, it would not be a sin for you to cry "Ouch"! when you are hurt. It is no sin to wish you were dead.

Notice also in Job's lament there was not one breath of criticism against the sovereign God. Never at any time did Job blame God, although he was crushed under his suffering. Many face this kind of thing, and it is well to have in mind that when the Lord Jesus Christ is with you, He is touched with all the feelings of your infirmities. Most Christian people know this. Some have already learned that the only way they can carry on day in and day out, is because the Lord Himself is with them.

Chapter 10

Pain Is A Problem For A Believer In God

Can you see how the reality of pain can be a very real problem to a person who believes in a good God?

The Bible tells us "Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). Jesus of Nazareth said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Peter wrote on one occasion, "Though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations" (I Peter 1:6).

Believing people may have trouble. Everywhere in the world there is pain and suffering. Whether pain entered into the world because of sin is not too clear from the records we have. It appears that as the curse was pronounced upon mankind the woman felt pain was to be associated with her (Genesis 3:16). Pain is often associated with sin and with judgment. Pain is also associated with punishment, just as health and joy are associated with righteousness, and with wisdom. This is the common public feeling. Discipline and punishment are usually inflicted by bringing some pain to bear. Perhaps this is what sometimes prompts the reaction when one hurts, to ask, "Why am I being punished?"

When things are going wrong and there is grief and sorrow, we nearly always feel that something must have been done wrong, and that this is punishment. Everything is usually smooth and pleasant when action is proper. The opposite is true when action is wrong. It is true that pain sometimes follows evil, but not always. There can be certain pain which is constructive; the training of an athlete, for instance. Players may get hurt in practice, yet all is done in order that some day they may win. Also, one may actually have pain in order to eventually derive benefit; this would apply to dental work.

There also is tragic suffering; the suffering that comes when it is not the sufferer's fault. The temptation then comes to blame God and feel He is not fair. A person may wonder what he or she did to deserve the suffering; and the answer may be that nothing was done to cause it. Tragic suffering is not the meaning of pain, and the entire book of Job was written with this in mind. Jesus of Nazareth faced pain in the Garden of Gethsemane, and He came through in peace. The believer may find it difficult to understand suffering because he believes God is good, and he knows God is almighty. He may wonder why God allows suffering.

We think of the cry on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Jesus of Nazareth did not doubt His Father, but He was giving expression to the suffering that was in Him. He was suffering because of the sins of other people. Believers in Christ know about this whole matter of chastening and of pain, "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Hebrews 12:6). Paul was able to write that he rejoiced in tribulation because of the result. The usual, natural way of thinking that you suffer because you did wrong, is not absolutely true. It is possible to suffer when you did no wrong; but it is always under the control of God. The believer can commit himself to God, and God will keep him.

Chapter 11

It Is Natural To Assume The Person In Trouble Has Sinned

Have you ever felt that trouble is a sign that the person must have sinned?

"Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind" (John 9:2)? This is a question people asked Jesus of Nazareth concerning the man who was born blind. The Lord Jesus said, "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents" (John 9:3). On one occasion when they came to Him about certain Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices, the Lord Jesus asked this question, "Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things" (Luke 13:2)? He then made it plain that was not the reason why. Spiritually minded parents of children in real trouble often wonder if they have done wrong and the trouble could be punishment and that is why this particular idea needs to be thought about. God in His providence has prepared the book of Job for us in order to face this whole question of the meaning of suffering.

In chapter 4 we read the first statement from one of Job's friends; a man by the name of Eliphaz, who will give his opinion as to why Job is having this trouble. He does it gently, expressing his opinion that Job must have sinned.

If we assay to commune with thee, wilt thou be grieved? But who can withhold himself from speaking? Behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands. Thy words have upholden him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees. But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled (Job 4:2-5).

In other words, "You have preached to others about how they are to live; will you object now if I tell you what to do?" Eliphaz raises the question, "Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? Or where were the righteous cut off" (Job 4:7)? Eliphaz underscores the idea that Job never saw an innocent person in distress. He continues, "I have seen the wicked like that. I have seen them in trouble." He winds up by accusing Job, "There must be something wrong in your life."

That sounds so true that if we are not careful we will accept it. But Eliphaz is wrong. Innocent people had been in distress and wicked people had gotten away with their wickedness but he does not admit that. A man can preach about this and tell people when they do right, they will not be hurt; that anybody who is hurt must have done wrong. But that is not true.

Eliphaz had had a spiritual experience:

Now a thing was secretly brought to me, and mine ear received a little thereof. In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men, fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up (Job 4:12-15).

He thought because of this spiritual experience he had better insight than anybody else. Many people have that feeling.

Eliphaz continued:

Shall mortal man be more just than God? Shall a man be more pure than his Maker? Behold, he put no trust in his servants; and his angels he charged with folly (Job 4:17-18).

He pushed Job to admit that because he is a man, he is probably wrong; and because God is God, He would certainly be right. And if God has let suffering come upon Job he must have deserved it. Eliphaz went on to say in effect, "I have seen the weakness of men. This is their lot."

Eliphaz pointed out that man, being as weak as he is, does wrong; and God, being as great as He is,

does right. So Job must have deserved it. Then he went on to give his advice, "I would seek God and unto God would I commit my cause." He then discussed how great God is – almighty, wonderful in all His works. Eliphaz assured Job that God would be gracious. It would be to Job's benefit if he would submit to God's chastening.

Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty (Job 5:17).

Finally Eliphaz concludes:

Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good (Job 5:27).

Eliphaz said many true and good things, but he missed Job's problem altogether because he was assured his own analysis was correct. This was the moralizing of a self-righteous Pharisee who was secure in his own righteousness. This was theoretical preaching of the letter of the word; the kind of preaching a man could do in natural pride. It would be of no help to any person in trouble. If someone should say, when you are in trouble, it means you must have done something wrong: that is not true. The book of Job is set up for us to have this in mind.

You will remember at the beginning we were told that Job was a good man. He had done well. And when Eliphaz made this long speech and said profound things, he did not understand Job's situation. This will become clearer as we study further.

Chapter 12

Being Told What Should Have Been Done Is No Help To The One In Trouble

Have you ever had the feeling that being told by someone else what you should have done is usually of no help?

In chapters 6 and 7 we read what Job had to say when he had been offered this advice: that he must admit he had sinned. In Job 6:1-9 Job continued his lament, repeating that he wished he were dead. He said in verse 5, "Doth the wild ass bray when he hath grass? Or loweth the ox over his fodder?" In other words, if the wild ass were satisfied with food do you think he would make a noise?

Oh, that I might have my request; and that God would grant me the thing that I long for! Even that it would please God to destroy me; that he would let loose his hand, and cut me off (Job 6:8-9)!

Job then set out his reaction to the words of Eliphaz: "To him that is afflicted pity should be showed from his friend." Job pointed out how his friends had missed the point. "For now ye are nothing; ye see my casting down, and are afraid" (Job 6:21). By "nothing" Job implies they are of no help to him. It is so easy to sit in judgment and to think when someone is in trouble he must have done something wrong. "How forcible are right words! But what doth your arguing reprove" (Job 6:25)? This is sharp insight.

Eliphaz used many right words when he talked about the righteousness of God; when he talked about the greatness of God; when he talked about the blessings of virtue and the destruction that would come upon sin. Many of the things Eliphaz said were right, but they did not fit, in Job's case Eliphaz missed the point.

As Job continues, he gives expression to the fact that he is under no illusion about man's condition. He knows how frail man is and he feels it in himself. He points out that he is made to "possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed" to him; he points out that his "flesh is clothed with worms and clouds of dust; his skin is broken, and become loathsome. His days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope."

Therefore I will not refrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul (Job 7:11).

He would not try to hide his distress. Even in his sleep he is afflicted by nightmares. Are you acquainted with the awful distress that nightmares can bring? Job's remarks are:

Then thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me through visions: so that my soul chooseth strangling, and death rather than my life. I loathe it; I would not live always: let me alone; for my days are vanity (Job 7:14-16).

Job knows he has sinned, but then he raises a question: why did God not forgive his sin? He knew enough about the grace of God to be confused by this very fact: if he has sinned, why did not God forgive him? The friends apparently did not think of that. We shall be thinking together more about this. What we have been noting just now in Job's answer, is the fact that he was looking for grace which belongs to God.

Chapter 13

It Is Natural For A Person In Trouble To Feel He Must Have Sinned

Do you realize that many people have the feeling when they are in trouble, that they must have done something wrong?

In chapter 8 we have the report of an argument. His friends are suggesting to Job that the reason why he is suffering is because he has done wrong, but this is not so. The book of Job emphasizes that in understanding the ways of God, His ways are not our ways; His thoughts are not our thoughts. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His thoughts higher than our thoughts; and His ways are higher than our ways.

We encounter the second of the friends, Bildad the Shuhite, in chapter 8. His general theme is that God is righteous and gracious. God does not condone evil, but He will forgive Job if Job will confess. Bildad has a theme about God and he is preaching it. He points out that history will confirm this to be true. He comes to the conclusion that Job must be a hypocrite.

So are the paths of all that forget God; and the hypocrite's hope shall perish (Job 8:13).

This was his only way of explaining Job's continuing suffering.

Behold, God will not cast away a perfect man, neither will he help the evildoers (Job 8:20).

This implies that God would bless Job if he were everything he should be. This is true, but the book brings out that it does not always follow.

Some years ago when I had been preaching about certain matters someone said, "You make it appear as if a person walking in the ways of God will have trouble"; and I said, "Yes." This person then said in all sincerity, "I just do not believe it. I believe if you live right everything will go well and you will be happy all the time." Do you recognize what that person was insinuating about Jesus Christ? That He must have done something wrong to have been betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter, and condemned by Pilate; then crucified by the Roman soldiers.

We should always keep this in mind: "In this world you shall have tribulation."

Bildad was simply repeating the same general position that Eliphaz took, arguing by deduction that since God is good, Job was in trouble because he had done wrong. He should stop being a stubborn hypocrite; he should know God will not cast out a good man. This line of argument sounds good but it is false. Throughout all of this we are trying to understand the reason for suffering. The dialogue in this book of Job will show that the suffering experiences a person may have are not related directly to his personal conduct.

Chapter 14

Blessing Cannot Be Based On Never Sinning Because "All Have Sinned"

Would you understand that blessing does not depend upon a man being right before God because no human being ever is?

In our last study we noticed how Bildad, in talking to Job, stressed the righteousness of God. In chapters 9 and 10 we have Job's answer.

I know it is so of a truth: but how should man be just with God (Job 9:2)?

Job pointed out not only God's righteousness, but the inability of man to ever hope to meet God's standards. We might keep in mind that His Son, Jesus of Nazareth, did. Job said about God, "Which doeth great things past finding out; yea, and wonders without number" (Job 9:10).

After Job had pointed out how great God is, he pointed out his own limitations:

How much less shall I answer him, and choose out my words to reason with him? whom, though I were righteous, yet would I not answer, but would make supplication to my judge (Job 9:14-15).

Thus Job said that even if he felt right he would not attempt to stand before God; he would throw himself on God's mercy.

If I had called, and he had answered me; yet would I not believe that he had heartened unto my voice (Job 9:16).

Job's humility here was remarkable.

If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse. Though I were perfect, yet would I not know my soul: I would despise my life (Job 9:20-21).

Job's thinking was far beyond Bildad's when it came to esteeming how great God is. Having said this he came again close to his problem, "This is one thing, therefore I said it, He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked" (Job 9:22). And this is what confused Job. After all that had been said about God's righteousness and how He is against evil, Job had noticed that both the perfect and the wicked die. He did not understand this. He finally said:

If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean; yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me (Job 9:30-31).

Job said his case was hopeless before God.

For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment (Job 9:32).

He would never try to argue with God. Then Job points out some of the limitations that belong to his time in the days before the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world: "Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both" (Job 9:33). A daysman is one who stands between two contending parties and reconciles them. This is a picture of what Jesus Christ does for the believer. Job had no mediator. Job is stating that when Bildad stresses the greatness of God, he, Job, is way ahead of him.

In chapter 10 Job pointed out that despite his desperation he would yet speak his thoughts. He was puzzled about his whole experience.

That thou inquirest after mine iniquity, and searchest after my sin? Thou knowest that I am not wicked; and there is none that can deliver out of thine hand (Job 10:6-7).

In effect he asked what God was trying to prove by dealing with him in this way.

Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about; yet thou dost destroy me (Job 10:8).

Since God created him, why would God destroy him? Have you ever wondered why God would let certain things happen to you? This was what Job was thinking. He could not understand the situation.

We remember Satan's accusation earlier and what God had done about that, but Job does not know about that. From this we can learn that if you are in trouble it could have spiritual meaning. God could be letting Satan test you to show your integrity. We can appreciate Job's words here in verses 18-22 when once more Job wished he had died when he was born. Job knew that his friends are all wrong because their argument was based on the notion that man can be right in God's sight. No one is ever right in God's sight. So the reason for suffering is not because God is trying to make us perfect; we never could be. So Job is just wondering why? why?

Chapter 15

A False Accusation Can Persist A Long Time

Have you ever noticed how persistent a false accusation can be?

We know that God will judge sin; I am personally satisfied that He will one day destroy the wicked. But the big point being brought out in the book of Job (and all the way through the Bible) is that now, in this world, is not the day of judgment. This is what is being brought out here.

In chapter 11 Zophar is heard. His argument is simple; Job's refusal to admit sin is arrogance on his part. Zophar argues that Job is self-righteous, stubborn and willful. Zophar begins by stressing the greatness of God: "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection" (Job 11:7)? Of course, nobody can; least of all Job. Zophar tells Job God is not demanding half of what He could.

But oh that God would speak, and open his lips against thee; and that he would show thee the secrets of wisdom, that they are double to that which is! Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth (Job 11:5-6).

Zophar told Job he was not having nearly as much trouble as he deserved. This sounded impressive, but it did not meet the issue. Then in verse 14 he called on Job to repent and to confess. One wonders how this affected Job for them to accuse him in this way. Zophar continued, emphasizing the blessing that comes with repentance.

For then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot; yea, thou shalt be steadfast, and shalt not fear (Job 11:15).

That preaching sounded so good but it was out of place here. This was not Job's problem. This man wound up by saying,

Because thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away: and thine age shall be clearer than the noonday; thou shalt shine forth, thou shalt be as the morning. And thou shalt be secure, because there is hope; yea, thou shalt dig about thee and thou shalt take thy rest in safety. Also thou shalt lie down, and none shall make thee afraid; yea, many shall make suit unto thee. But the eyes of the wicked shall fail, and they shall not escape, and their hope shall be as the giving up of the ghost (Job 11:16-20).

This is true and hell is the final answer for it, but this was not the situation with Job.

If you have endured the kind of suffering Job experienced, of being falsely accused of hypocrisy with insinuation of sin, have you ever noticed how persistent an accusing rumor can be? Often when being accused of doing something falsely, even to deny it is to establish it. Insinuations need no basis in fact, they can be made up out of whole cloth, as we say. They are generated out of a frame of mind, a certain animus. Out of that kind of evil frame of mind can come evil suggestions, and there is no way to get rid of them. This is what happened to Job. His friends goaded him, yet he stood up in his integrity and insisted they were not talking about him. If this should happen to you, turn to God for help. Learn to know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior. He will be your Advocate before the throne of grace.

Chapter 16

A Believer In Christ Involved In Unending Trouble Looks To God

Have you ever wondered what a believer in Christ thinks about who is having unending trouble with no relief in sight?

All of Job's friends agreed on one thing: the inference from their several different points of view was the only solution to the problem; Job must be at fault. Each of them spoke a certain truth, but in each case the truth did not apply in the case of Job; so Job now extended his remarks in rebuttal in three chapters. He began with a note of sarcasm,

No doubt but ye are the people, and wisdom shall die with you. But I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you: yea, who knoweth not such things as these (Job 12:2-3)?

Were he living today he would probably have said, "I am not so dumb myself." He implied that what they had been saying was common knowledge.

He that is ready to slip with his feet is as a lamp despised in the thought of him that is at ease (Job 12:5).

In this poetic way Job commented that it was easy to come to the conclusion that the man who is having trouble must be wrong. He pointed out that everyone knows God is Almighty: no one needs to argue that.

But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee (Job 12:7).

Everybody can see that God, who made nature, is righteous and fair.

Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this (Job 12:9)?

It can be seen in providence; God operates according to the law, "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap."

Surely, I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to reason with God (Job 13:3).

Job then spoke directly to these friends of his.

But ye are forgers of lies, ye are all physicians of no value. Oh that ye would altogether hold your peace! And it should be your wisdom (Job 13:4-5).

Job bluntly said that they should stop talking.

Will ye speak wickedly for God? and talk deceitfully for him? Will ye accept his person? Will ye contend for God (Job 13:7-8)?

In the midst of acute pain Job stoutly affirmed:

Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him (Job 13:15).

Job prayed to God to grant him relief and mercy; he asked God for help. Then he raised a question of

why God would take issue with man. He pointed this out: if you cut down a tree it can sprout again, but if you cut off a man he is done for. Man does not amount to anything as frail as he is. He ended his remarks by again saying what he had said before: oh! that God would hide him in the grave. Job was not opposed to God, but he was hurting and saw no relief. He did not understand.

Chapter 17

Sarcasm Is A Cheap Device For One Who Has A Weak Argument

Have you ever been involved in an argument in which the person losing the argument cast sarcastic reflections on the other person?

Nearly everyone has had the experience of arguing. There are times when one has engaged in an argument, pointing out that the other person was wrong, only to have him refuse to concede he was mistaken, and assume the attitude that you thought of yourself as being smart. In our study we are being given insight into the ways of people in their thinking and discussions together. In this dialogue between these friends and Job we see how Job has answered one after another of them in a strong way.

In chapter 15 is the report of Eliphaz making his second speech. It is shocking to find that he does not try to answer Job. Instead, he makes disparaging remarks to Job.

Yea, thou castest off fear, and restrainest prayer before God. For thy mouth uttereth thine iniquity, and thou chooseth the tongue of the crafty. Thine own mouth condemneth thee, and not I: yea, thine own lips testify against thee (Job 15:4-6).

Yet Eliphaz did not show why. Job had been making his point clear, but his friends were not answering him. Eliphaz fell back on what he had said in his first talk. He claimed special knowledge because he had had spiritual experience; now he claimed special knowledge again.

With us are both the grayheaded and very aged men, much elder than thy father (Job 15:10).

He was saying that all the older people that understood agreed with him: the consensus of the wise and experienced was on his side and Job was wrong. That was no argument, nor answering what Job had talked about. That was covering everything Job has said with a blanket of accusation. Eliphaz went on to say,

What is man, that he should be clean? and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight. How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water (Job 15:14-16)?

Eliphaz was saying Job knew that man was no good and he was just a man; he must be wrong. That was a rather poor way to end the argument by simply saying the other man must be wrong because he is a human being. After all, Eliphaz was a human being, too.

The wicked man travaileth with pain all his days, and the number of years is hidden to the oppressor (Job 15:20).

There is nothing wrong with that, but the implication was: Job is in pain, therefore Job must be wicked.

He shall not be rich, neither shall his substance continue, neither shall he prolong the perfection thereof upon the earth (Job 15:29).

Again the insinuation was that since Job was in pain he must have sinned.

Every statement Eliphaz made was true in a general way. Nobody could argue against it. But the point at which we can see the weakness in his whole argument is that he made this fit Job. This is what gives us second thoughts. When we look into New Testament we can see that Jesus of Nazareth suffered. When

anybody says that if someone suffers he must have done wrong, we can think of Jesus of Nazareth, who was in trouble yet He had done no wrong.

Eliphaz made no attempt to answer Job, but stubbornly stuck to his interpretation by inference. He started out figuring from his own thinking that Job must be wrong, and there he stayed. That was not true. This is the great truth that is being brought out in our study of Job.

Chapter 18

Criticizing The Person In Trouble Is Easy To Do

Do you realize how easy it is to criticize the person who is in trouble?

We can see how part of the suffering that Job endured was because of his own uncertainty about things. This shaken confidence, this loss of morale (almost like demoralization in a sense, although Job did not give in all the way) was aggravated by loose criticism. Most of us have heard the expression "the rich can do no wrong" and that seems to be the common feeling of people. As a matter of fact often it seems true. The story is told of a man who was talking about these matters; he pointed out a poor man could stand on the city streets and lecture for an hour on how to turn sand into gold, and nobody would pay him any attention. He was poor, useless. But, the man added, when a rich man sneezes, they set it to music. It is also easy to kick a man when he is down, everybody else is doing it.

This seems to have been the case of Job; this was part of his suffering. Eliphaz had dismissed him as a bag of wind. Now we see Job's first reaction to this.

I have heard many such things: miserable comforters are ye all. Shall vain words have an end? Or what emboldeneth thee that thou answerest? I also could speak as ye do: if your soul were in my soul's stead, I could heap up words against you, and shake mine head at you (Job 16:2-4).

It is a common thing when one is in trouble to have people give advice, suggesting if he had done this, he "should" have done that. Job answered in effect: "If I were up there where you are and you were down here where I am, I could easily talk the way you do, too."

But I would strengthen you with my mouth, and the moving of my lips should assuage your grief (Job 16:5).

We should all keep this in mind. When someone is in trouble the last thing that person needs is criticism; then is the time for an encouraging word. In the Gospel there is always a promise; there is a balm in Gilead that will heal the sore. We can always speak a good word to the man who is in real trouble.

Job tells how bad his trouble was.

I was at ease, but he hath broken me asunder: he hath also taken me by my neck, and shaken me to pieces, and set me up for his mark (Job 16:12).

Job felt as though he had been taken by the neck, the way a dog would take a rat and shake it until it was dead. He felt that God had set him up for a target, and now was shooting His arrows into him. This is the way a man feels when he finds that everything is going against him.

My face is foul with weeping, and on my eyelids is the shadow of death; not for any injustice in mine hands: also my prayer is pure (Job 16:16-17).

We should not think that Job was saying he never did wrong. That was not the point. Job was claiming he did not do anything to bring on this trouble.

Oh that one might plead for a man with God, as a man pleadeth for his neighbor (Job 16:21)!

This, of course, was written before the Gospel was known. Believers have One pleading with God, an Advocate, even Jesus Christ the righteous. Job apparently did not know about that; he only knew –

When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return (Job 16:22).

Throughout his ordeal Job felt he did not deserve what was happening to him, but he did not know for sure that he was right. This was part of his trouble.

Chapter 19

No Doubt The Wicked Shall Be Destroyed

Do you realize there is never any real doubt that the wicked shall be destroyed?

Yea, the light of the wicked shall be put out, and the spark of his fire shall not shine (Job 18:5).

These words were spoken by Bildad, whose accusations against Job also were not justified. However, Bildad knew a great deal of truth. Many of the things he said were true. It is common for us to be conscious of the fact that some things are in line with God's will, and we say they are right; but there are some things out of line with God's will: contrary to His purpose, and we say they are wicked.

It is common for us in our ordinary speech to speak of right and wrong, but in the Bible we read of right and wicked. In the book of Amos the figure that indicated the function of preaching righteousness was the figure of the plumbline; of a carpenter holding up a plumbline to see whether the wall would be straight up and down, true perpendicular. So it is not so much right and wrong, as it is right and wicked; because the Hebrew meaning of the word "wicked" is "crooked", something that does not run straight along the line of God. When we say a man is crooked we have in mind he is not straight; if he is straight we have in mind he is right.

God made everything right, but sin entered into the world. So some of that which God has made has become wicked: "All we like sheep have gone astray." "Astray" means we wandered off the straight and narrow path. We speak of losing one's way, and this is the Bible meaning of the word "lost." In the New Testament the figure of a person being lost is not so much that the man is some place where no one knows where to find him, but is lost on the highway. He has lost his orientation, as it were, and does not have his bearings. The Lord Jesus said, "I am the way": those who walk with Him walk in the will of God. So it is a basic elementary idea that doing right, by walking in the way of the Lord will lead to blessing: and that is good.

Job's friends thought he did wickedly, otherwise he would not have been hurt. There is such a thing as being wicked, which leads to disaster, but this is not always true immediately. It can be delayed. As Job replied in every case against all criticism, his invariable answer was "No, no"; and he was right. Job's trouble came because of a conflict in the spiritual realm between God and Satan. Job was simply a case in point. He did not know how it happened or what was the matter, but he knew he had not done anything wrong to deserve such suffering. But Bildad was not convinced of this. He stated Job could say what he liked, but God punishes the wicked.

How long will it be ere ye make an end of words? Mark, and afterward we will speak. Wherefore are we counted as beasts, and reputed vile in your sight (Job 18:2-3)?

Bildad had eloquent things to say about the punishment and the destruction of the wicked:

Yea, the light of the wicked shall be put out, and the spark of his fire shall not shine. The light shall be dark in his tabernacle, and his candle shall be put out with him. The steps of his strength shall be straitened, and his own counsel shall cast him down. For he is cast into a net by his own feet, and he walketh upon a snare (Job 18:5-8).

The wicked walk right into a trap.

His roots shall be dried up beneath, and above shall his branch be cut off. His remembrance shall perish from the earth, and he shall have no name in the street. He shall be driven from light into darkness, and chased out

of the world (Job 18:16-18).

That is the way it is with the wicked: God is against him.

He shall neither have son nor nephew among his people, nor any remaining in his dwellings. They that come after him shall be astonished at his day, as they that went before were affrighted. Surely such are the dwellings of the wicked, and this is the place of him that knoweth not God (Job 18:19-21).

There is no question about this description of the fate of those who oppose God. It is eloquently, completely done. Yet we have to admit it did not apply to Job. In neither his first nor his second speech did Bildad understand Job's problem. He harped on a truism that nobody denies, but it just did not fit. There are many cases today where a person may have his wickedness pointed out to him without hearing anything about the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who came to seek and to save the lost.

Chapter 20

A Person In Trouble Can Lose Many Friends

Do you realize that when a man becomes unfortunate many turn away from him?

Job's answer to Bildad is set forth in chapter 19. Job was experiencing prolonged rejection by everyone. By this time he was filled with despair. Probably the most obvious form of suffering is physical. But there is another form of suffering which we call emotional, and perhaps this is even more common. It is the suffering experienced when one has lost something or when one has been defeated. There is still another form of suffering, that I would call personal. This is even more subtle. It varies and can be manipulated. People can make it worse or they can make it better.

Job is preparing to answer Bildad. He will discuss further the plight he is in because of his suffering.

These ten times have ye reproached me: ye are not ashamed that ye make yourselves strange to me (Job 19:3).

His friends had treated him in an impersonal manner, feeling that he had done something wrong. We learned in chapters 1 and 2 that what happened was between God and Satan; Job had nothing to do with it. But his friends would not believe him.

And be it indeed that I have erred, mine error remaineth with myself. If indeed ye will magnify yourselves against me, and plead against me my reproach; know now that God hath overthrown me, and hath compassed me with his net (Job 19:4-6).

Job did not know why, but he did know his trouble came from God. So he told them that if they judged him they also judged God. Job complained this trouble kept him from praying.

Behold, I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard: I cry aloud, but there is no judgment (Job 19:7).

Job felt that God has reduced him to such a state he could do nothing.

He hath fenced up my way that I cannot pass, and he hath set darkness in my paths. He hath stripped me of my glory, and taken the crown from my head (Job 19:8-9).

Many people who have trouble are rendered incapable of doing anything.

He hath destroyed me on every side, and I am gone: and mine hope hath he removed like a tree. He hath also kindled his wrath against me, and he counteth me unto him as one of his enemies. His troops come together, and raise up their way against me, and encamp round about my tabernacle (Job 19:10-12).

Job was made to feel that God was bringing all the forces of heaven against him. This was not true I am sure, but he felt that way. Then Job suffered the supreme loss: his friends were taken away.

He hath put my brethren far from me, and mine acquaintance are verily estranged from me (Job 19:13).

I suspect of every loss a person can have, nothing is worse than losing his friends. This happens sometimes when their confidence in you is shaken. It has been described in this way:

"He who steals my purse, steals trash. Tis something, nothing twas mine, tis his, but he who filches from

me my good name, robs me of that which does not make him rich, but leaves me poor indeed."

Job continued his lament:

They that dwell in mine house, and my maids, count me for a stranger: I am an alien in their sight. I called my servant, and he gave me no answer; I entreated him with my mouth. My breath is strange to my wife, though I entreated for the children's sake of mine own body. Yea, young children despised me; I arose, and they spake against me. All my inward friends abhorred me: and they whom I loved are turned against me (Job 19:15-19).

We are reminded of Jesus of Nazareth. This is part of the peculiar suffering that can come to a person when everything is against you. And this is when God, who is closer than a friend, closer than a brother, becomes a comfort to the soul.

Chapter 21

Insinuation Is Often More Damaging Than An Argument

Do you know that when a person has no actual evidence against another but wants to make a case against him, he might do this by insinuation?

Just now our study is in chapter 20 and here we have the second speech of Zophar. Also in this chapter we read an eloquent description of the plight of a wicked man. In presenting this, Zophar made no attempt to answer Job's argument nor did he even recognize it. The whole thesis of what Zophar said can be seen in these words:

The triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment . . . This is the portion of a wicked man from God, and the heritage appointed unto him by God (Job 20:5, 29).

The insinuation is plain: Zophar is seeking to explain Job's suffering. He points out something that should be self-evident to everybody: God will punish the wicked. Job is being punished: he must be wicked. Zophar explains why he talks at all.

Therefore do my thoughts cause me to answer, and for this I make haste. I have heard the check of my reproach, and the spirit of my understanding causeth me to answer (Job 20:2-3).

Zophar is saying he has an inward understanding and his judgment prompts him to make this comment. He then proceeds to talk about the hypothetical wicked man.

As we read through chapter 20 we find that every comment Zophar made about a wicked man is true, yet the whole discussion is beside the point; it is superfluous. There is no man there to whom this applies. Job probably feels that it is slanderous to him because the intimation is that he is the wicked man. All the way through their discussion this is the only answer the friends have to the problem. They stubbornly insist upon it; they feel sure of their ground. This could be a very salutary thing to examine.

Knowest thou not this of old: since man was placed upon earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment? Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds; yet he shall perish for ever like his own dung: they which have seen him shall say, Where is he? He shall fly away as a dream, and shall not be found: yea, he shall be chased away as a vision of the night. The eye also which saw him shall see him no more; neither shall his place any more behold him (Job 20:4-9).

The rest of chapter 20 continues Zophar's statement on the lot of the wicked man, a display of the ultimate frustration, futility, emptiness of the wicked. It would be misleading for one to read this with a view of understanding what may happen to certain people we know, or to help understand why some suffer unbearably. In the meantime, Job was bearing the agony of a puzzling distress. He now has the additional hurt of being misunderstood and indicted by one who was trying to help.

Chapter 22

The Prosperity Of The Wicked Shows This Is Not The Day Of Judgment

Can you understand that the prosperity of the wicked is proof that God is not yet dealing with them in judgment?

As we have been studying in the book of Job, trying to get insight into understanding the ways of God, we are now in chapter 21. Here is Job answering the last speaker, Zophar. He does this by pointing out the occasional prosperity of the wicked. It does happen that sometimes the wicked do prosper. That denies the inference that if you once take the position that because God is good He will reward virtue and He will punish vice, nobody will argue with you. This seems so obviously true. But the facts of life contradict this assumption. The natural inference would be that if anybody is having trouble he must have done wrong. But this is not spiritually true. You would not get that idea if you would look to God; you get that idea by looking at the processes of nature. Job had noted the fallacy of this inference.

Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power? Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them. Their bull gendereth, and faileth not; their cow calveth, and casteth not her calf. They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave (Job 21:7-13).

The wicked do not have lingering illnesses. The good fortune of wicked people actually inclines them to arrogance and prompts them to be insolent to God.

Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? And what profit should we have, if we pray unto him? Lo, their good is not in their hand: the counsel of the wicked is far from me (Job 21:14-16).

This is the reaction of the natural man in prosperity; he gets the feeling he does not need God. We know from our personal experience there never has been a man who does not need God. But the natural man is inclined to leave God out.

Job then protects himself against misunderstanding; he had no doubt about the ultimate destruction of the wicked.

Lo, their good is not in their hand: the counsel of the wicked is far from me. How oft is the candle of the wicked put out! and how oft cometh their destruction upon them! God distributeth sorrows in his anger. They are as stubble before the wind, and as chaff that the storm carrieth away. God layeth up his iniquity for his children: he rewardeth him, and he shall know it. His eyes shall see his destruction, and he shall drink of the wrath of the Almighty. For what pleasure hath he in his house after him, when the number of his months is cut off in the midst (Job 21:16-21)?

Job said he knew that in His own good time God would deal with the wicked. Though this did not clear up Job's problem, it was enough to act as a rebuttal to Zophar. Job pointed out that in the providence of God different things happen to men both good and bad. God deals with the greatest men on earth even as He deals with all men. Compare verse 23 with verse 25; in verse 23 Job said "One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet." Then in verse 25, "And another dieth in the bitterness of his soul, and never eateth with pleasure." Both die, and in verse 26, "They shall lie down alike in the dust, and the worms shall cover them." Their experience in this world was different, but Job points out that death happens to men in the same general category. Two men may both be prominent men: one may turn out well, the other may turn out bad. The same is true with reference to other classifications. Job is pointing

out that in the providence of God, God lets the same experience come to all people.

In verses 27-34 Job speaks about his friends; he understands the thinking of these friends so well he cannot have confidence in them.

Behold, I know your thoughts, and the devices which ye wrongfully imagine against me (Job 21:27).

Job knows what they are thinking and he knows how they have it figured that he is to blame, and he is sorry because this disqualifies them. Job knows the truth they were emphasizing but he also knew it did not apply to him.

How then comfort ye me in vain, seeing in your answers there remaineth falsehood (Job 21:34)?

This "falsehood", I would say, would be "fallacy." There is a mistake in it. Since he recognized that there was fallacy in their thinking, he could get no real help from them.

Chapter 23

Some Will Claim No One Can Understand God

Have you ever noticed how some people will claim that one can never understand anything about God and His ways?

This is the present interest in our studies. Sometimes we hear people say they do not understand the Bible, or the ways of God. And frequently those with this frame of mind lose interest and will not try to understand. Presently we shall notice Eliphaz making his third talk. He was perhaps the senior among the group since his ideas seem more profound. For instance, in the first four verses of chapter 22 his remarks can be divided into several sections quite simply. The first thought is: God is great, transcendent, above everything. We do not even count with Him.

Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous? Or is it gain to him, that thou makest thy ways perfect? Will he reprove thee for fear of thee? Will he enter with thee into judgment (Job 22:2-4)?

Eliphaz is implying that Job was all wrong when he thought that God cared about him. He was, of course, wrong. To say that God is infinite was true enough. But the word "infinite" means both large and small, so proportion is not involved. When we think of that which is large, God is larger; and when we think of that which is small, He can deal with things even smaller than that. Some years ago when reading about these matters I read about the various units of living organisms. I suppose the biggest living thing we know is an elephant. Now the ordinary house fly is about half way between in the size of living organisms and there are organisms which are as much bigger than the fly as an elephant and there are living organisms that are as much smaller than the fly as the elephant is bigger. In any case, when we say that God is infinite, He is just as much concerned about the small as the big. Along this line, it would be theft if you stole a thousand dollars; it would also be theft if you stole a penny. Because God is infinite, He would be as interested in your taking a penny as He would be interested if you took a million dollars that was not yours.

This is because He is infinite.

When Eliphaz claimed that Job was too small to count with God, he was wrong. It does matter to God about each one of His people. Eliphaz insisted in verses 5-11 that Job was wicked. But to say that God is just and will punish wickedness is not enough. In the New Testament we read that "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9). The righteousness of God not only condemns the wicked; but the righteousness of God saves the obedient. We need to keep that in mind.

In verses 12-20 Eliphaz spoke about God being so much more than we can comprehend. What he said was true but the way he expressed it was wrong. To say that God is beyond our sight (which is true) overlooks the fact that God revealed Himself in the Lord Jesus Who could say, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father."

Finally, in verses 21-30 Eliphaz gave sound advice but Job did not need it. Here again Eliphaz was wrong when he implied that turning to God would bring prosperity. In Hebrews 11:35-40 we find that while some people worshipped God and were obedient and blessed, others who were also obedient were tortured. So Eliphaz was wrong in his approach to Job's problem. Much that he said was eloquently true, but it was not valid in this case.

Chapter 24

A Believer In Christ Can Trust Even When He Does Not Understand

Do you realize that a believer in God can trust Him even when the man does not understand what God is doing?

We have Job's rejoinder to the words of Eliphaz in chapters 23 and 24. In verses 1-7 we find the heart cry of Job.

Oh that I knew where I might find him! That I might come even to his seat (Job 23:3)!

Job wished that he could discuss his trouble with the Lord, in which case he believed the Lord would be sympathetic to him. He seemed to be intimating to Eliphaz he did not understand what Eliphaz was saying, but he felt sure he would understand what the Lord would say. Job thought that God would not emphasize His greatness to overwhelm him; that is what the friends had been doing. Job had the feeling God would strengthen him:

Will he plead against me with his great power? No; but he would put strength in me (Job 23:6).

Job felt that if he could only talk with God he could come away from that communion with God better able to bear his burden. And he was right.

Job admits that he personally has not been able to find God:

Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him (Job 23:8-9).

Job has run the gamut of his consciousness and he cannot find God; however, he could say, "But he knoweth the way that I take." How wonderful it is to have that confidence. He then expresses the testimony of a good conscience as to his behavior before God. Job was aware that God knows that we have not done perfectly; this implies that God will be merciful. God will be gracious in His dealings with us.

Job had worshipped God, and he knew that counted. He had obeyed God to the limit of his ability, and he knew that counted; and he had trusted God, and he knew that counted. And so Job, while he admits that he has never been able personally to see God or to feel that he could really grasp the reality of God in his own consciousness, knew that God saw him.

One of the earliest glimpses of spiritual truth that ever came to me was when I was driving the cows home late one night, going through the field under a starlight night and meditating upon these matters. It suddenly came to me to think of this: I cannot see Him but He can see me. I had not learned this verse, "He knoweth the way that I take" but I looked into the sky and said, "If God is up there, He knows me. I do not know Him but He knows me." And this is what Job had: the testimony of an honest conscience in his attitude toward God.

In chapter 24 Job touches on the things that the friends have been bringing out over and over about the wicked. Job admits that the prosperity of the wicked troubled him. I suspect it still troubles many people. The wicked are recognized by their cruel oppression. Some remove landmarks and cheat poor people with regard to their farms. They take flocks away violently. They drive away the ass of the fatherless. They take the widow's ox for a pledge. They turn the needy out of the way.

They cause the naked to lodge without clothing, that they have no covering in the cold. They are wet with the showers of the mountains, and embrace the rock for want of a shelter. They pluck the fatherless from the breast, and take a pledge of the poor. They cause him to go naked without clothing, and they take away the sheaf from the hungry; which make oil within their walls, and tread their winepresses, and suffer thirst. Men groan from out of the city, and the soul of the wounded crieth out: yet God layeth not folly to them (Job 24:7-12).

Job knew about the wicked and their cruel oppression. Job noticed how these wicked are ungodly in their treatment of others; yet God did not deal with them at that time. Job was confident that God would do so eventually. The human problem was that He was not doing it now. So the argument went on, and moved toward a climax. The friends were running out of ideas, and Job was answering them one after another.

Chapter 25

Losing An Argument Does Not Mean The Person Will Change His Mind

Have you ever noticed that even when a man loses an argument it does not mean he will change his mind?

Job's friends never deviated from their first theory that Job must have sinned, because that was the only way they could understand his suffering. But Job never did deviate from his insistence that he did not. In the course of his argument he admitted that he might have sinned, inasmuch as there is not a man who has not, but he asks, "If I have sinned, why did not God forgive me?" When it was suggested that God was destroying him because of his wickedness, Job gave a marvelous answer.

For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth . . . yet in the flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another (Job 19:25-27).

At this point we come to a turn of events in the course of this argument. The friends had run out of ideas. Bildad had exhausted his argument and his short address conceded nothing. I am reminded of a common saying among the boys on the farm, "A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still." Every accusation that had been brought against Job was not right. Bildad followed his usual style and dealt indirectly; he emphasized two things about God, showing one of the unhappy features of all arguments.

We can get into an argument with a person and soon we are not talking about the same thing. We say one thing and put the pressure here; the other person says something else slightly different and puts the pressure there. Neither wants to take the time to concede the validity of what the other says; that is the way the argument goes.

In chapter 25, in Bildad's short address, there is a profound statement about the greatness of God. In verse 2, "Dominion and fear are with him." God is sovereign. He is majestic: He is high and holy, and He is to be bowed down to. "He maketh peace in his high places." High places were the places of worship.

God is omnipresent: everyone is in the presence of God. Bildad told the truth about this, and it was refreshing.

How then can man be justified with God? Or how can he be clean that is born of a woman? Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in his sight. How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm (Job 25:4-6)?

Part of this is true; no human being can be worthy of God. Man in himself is just a creature of dust. But this did not apply to Job, and Bildad would not admit he was wrong. He took refuge in talking about self-evident truths. Eventually in the book of Job we will get an answer to this matter of understanding the ways of God that the friends could not offer.

Chapter 26

In Time Of Trouble The Only Refuge Is God

Do you realize that for a man who is suffering and in perplexity, and does not know for sure what is happening, the only refuge if he is a believer in Christ is God?

In this book, step by step, first one speaker and then another has dealt constantly with the one question as to why Job is suffering. The friends were wrong in their analysis; but Job still does not know the answer. Chapters 26 through 31 comprise one speech on the part of Job. They represent the summary of his thoughts. They were eloquent and are enriching to all who read them. Job's thinking is summarized after all the dialogue that has been taking place. He still does not understand why it should have happened the way in which it did.

Job pointed out in the first two verses of chapter 26 that God's greatness can be seen in creation, and in the latter part of this chapter there is a brief sketch of nature. Job indicated that the very fact that nature is as tremendous as it is, indicates the greatness of God. He states that even the natural world goes beyond human understanding. In chapter 27 he said in effect that he would never admit their false inferences about him in their attempt to explain what was happening.

God forbid that I should justify you: till I die I will not remove mine integrity from me (Job 27:5).

Unfortunately, Job was still not looking in the right direction. He ended the chapter emphasizing the fact that he knew full well how God will deal with the wicked.

I will teach you by the hand of God: that which is with the Almighty will I not conceal (Job 27:11).

In chapter 28 Job summarized the problem itself. He began by noting:

Surely there is a vein for the silver, and a place for gold where they fine it. Iron is taken out of the earth, and brass is molten out of the stone (Job 28:1-2).

This is a way of saying that somewhere in this situation lies the truth.

Whence then cometh wisdom? And where is the place of understanding? seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air. Destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof, . . . and he knoweth the place thereof (Job 28:20-23).

Job did not doubt that, but it was not any help to him. Finally Job mentioned something that indicated he did have an idea where wisdom and where understanding could be found.

Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding (Job 28:28).

This was the general truth that Job knew; but he still did not see how it applied in his case. In chapters 29, 30 and 31 Job reviewed the whole situation. He began by reviewing his former glory.

Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me (Job 29:2).

In those days everybody appreciated him,

The young men saw me, and hid themselves: and the aged arose, and stood up. The princes refrained

talking, and laid their hand on their mouth. The nobles held their peace, and their tongue cleaved to the roof of their mouth (Job 29:8-10).

Everyone respected him,

Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him . . . I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgment was as a robe and a diadem (Job 29:12-14).

This is an eloquent description of an honored person. Job remembered it with his pathetic plea, "Oh that I were as in months past."

His present affliction caused him to be despised by others.

But now they that are younger than I have me in derision, whose fathers I would have disdained to have set with the dogs of my flock (Job 30:1).

The children of people who did not amount to a thing now held him in derision.

And now am I their song, yea, I am their byword. They abhor me, they flee far from me, and spare not to spit in my face (Job 30:9-10).

In chapter 31 there is a wonderful description of integrity. Job had carefully done what was best. If doing right would have guaranteed blessing, Job would certainly have had it; but it did not come. He ends discussion of his problem in his perplexity with these words, "The words of Job are ended."

Chapter 27

Often A Young Person Understands Better

Have you ever noticed that sometimes a young man may understand things better?

Our study in the book of Job is moving on to its conclusion. At this point in chapters 32 to 37 we hear a new voice: the voice of a young man by the name of Elihu. He speaks plainly and humbly at the beginning; we can immediately understand as he says some profound things. Elihu affirms that the way the other men have talked has caused him to speak out.

Now Elihu had waited till Job had spoken, because they were elder than he. When Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of these three men, then his wrath was kindled . . . I am young, and ye are very old; wherefore I was afraid, and durst not show you mine opinion. I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom. But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding (Job 32:4-8).

God gives even a young man understanding.

Great men are not always wise: neither do the aged understand judgment. Therefore I said, Hearken to me; I also will show mine opinion (Job 32:9-10).

Elihu admitted that he was full of the matter, and he had to say something about it. He had an immediate way of answering both groups; he was aroused against the three friends because they did not have an answer for Job. But now he will point out in chapter 33 that Job had been talking about himself and his righteousness. To the three friends Elihu said he kept quiet because they were older, and were supposed to know. But he sees how that great men are not always wise. They had not answered Job, and so Elihu felt he had to say something.

Elihu said to Job that he had been dwelling upon his righteousness and complaining about his suffering and pointed out

Behold, in this thou art not just: I will answer thee, that God is greater than man. Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters (Job 33:12-13).

Job apparently expected God to justify His course of action, and this God does not do. At this point Job was off on the wrong foot; he had the wrong idea about things. Elihu then showed certain insight into God's way of doing things.

In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction (Job 33:15-16).

But sometimes God instructs man in pain, "He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain."

Elihu then said that this man who is suffering should pray unto God and God would be favorable unto him.

Lo, all these things worketh God often times with man, to bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living (Job 33:29-30).

God sometimes reveals His will to man by revelation in his own heart and soul; and sometimes God

reveals His will to a man through chastening experience. But God is always trying to help man.

Elihu points out in chapter 34 that the implication of Job's argument was to put the blame upon God.

For he hath said, It profiteth a man nothing that he should delight himself with God (Job 34:9).

In this Job was mistaken.

Yea, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment (Job 34:12).

Elihu then said that Job would have been far wiser if he had accepted the suffering as chastisement:

Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more: that which I see not teach thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more (Job 34:31-32).

The implication is that Job should have been humble about it. To be sure, he did not understand, but instead of puzzling over the matter and almost asking God to justify His actions, Job could have looked to God, yielded himself, and accepted this suffering as chastisement. Job could have asked God to show him what He wanted to show him. This Job should have done.

In chapter 35 Elihu points out that all of Job's talk about being righteous was beside the point, because the righteousness of man is not that important. God is so great and His ways so far beyond us He is not impressed by the things we do. The important thing is our attitude.

Elihu concluded his remarks in chapters 36 and 37 where we have a wonderful description of God.

Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out: he is excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice: he will not afflict. Men do therefore fear him: he respecteth not any that are wise of heart (Job 37:23-24).

God is marvelous and wonderful but men cannot comprehend Him; He goes far beyond man's range of understanding. So Elihu has brought in a new line of thought. He has dismissed the three friends as simply not meeting the issue. He has also rebuked Job because he was absorbed in his troubles and failed to look toward God. We should never look at our troubles too much, but look toward God.

Chapter 28

God Hears Every Discussion About Himself

Do you realize that when any argument is going on about the truth of God, God Himself is present to hear it?

When Elihu had finished talking, Job did not say anything at the moment. And we now come to a portion of the book that is ascribed to the Lord. We are not told how this was done, but looking at chapters 38-41 we see the Lord's participation in this discussion. The challenge to Job is:

Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me (Job 38:3).

This called upon Job to face the issue of the discussion that would be set forth.

Throughout chapters 38 and 39 there is an eloquent discussion about the wonders of nature, which implied that nature was far beyond Job's understanding.

Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding (Job 38:4).

This was designed to make an impression on Job as he looked out upon the natural world with all of its wonders. Inasmuch as Job could not understand it, it would follow that he could not understand God.

Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him (Job 40:2)?

If a person were trying to understand the ways of God and reason with Him, would he be trying to tell God something? In order to comprehend the ways of God one could start by seeing if he could comprehend the ways of nature.

Then Job answered the Lord, and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer yea, twice; but I will proceed no further (Job 40:3-5).

Job put his hand upon his mouth because he was not fit to make a single comment. Job was speechless when his attention was drawn to the marvelous display of God's wisdom in nature.

The Lord then challenged Job's attempt to reason things out. Until now we have not had our attention brought to the fact that there was one aspect of Job's whole discussion that really was not acceptable. Job tried to reason through the meaning of his suffering upon the premise of his own integrity. He was having trouble, and what was he thinking about? He was thinking along the line, "I have not done anything to deserve it." But that was really beside the point.

When a man thinks like that he believes he will receive blessing because of his work. When that happens a man can get proud. Elihu intimated it but the others did not catch this point. They did accuse Job of being arrogant in his affirmation of his righteousness, but that was not the mistake Job was making. When Job said he had acted righteously, he told the truth. When he said he had not done anything that was contrary to the will of God (intentionally on his part), that was the truth. The point the Lord was bringing out now was that by thinking about that, Job was missing the bigger problem.

This comment on the part of the Lord was not to discredit Job's personal character, but to emphasize that it is not possible to understand the ways of God. Right here we can note: we cannot ever understand the ways of God by referring any situation to ourselves. We are not that strong.

In the latter part of this portion, from chapter 40, verse 6 through chapter 41, the Lord shows forth the

mighty works of nature, emphasizing that if Job cannot explain these, he could never hope to understand God's sovereignty.

Chapter 29

A Person Can Get Into An Argument About Matters Of Which He Is Ignorant

Can you understand how a person may get involved in an argument over matters with which he is not acquainted?

Job was completely silent when he faced the Lord.

Then Job answered the Lord, and said, I know that thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge (Job 42:1-3)?

Can we understand the meaning of those words? Talking about things one doesn't understand actually prevents a valid interpretation. Job had been using words in talking about things he knew nothing about. That is the way to become confused. Some people think they do not talk about their trouble; however, thinking that goes on in the mind is actually a dialogue. A man can spend time thinking and not get anywhere because he is thinking about things that he does not know. Job spoke of "things too wonderful for me, which I knew not." This was part of his problem.

I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes (Job 42:5-6).

When Job says "I abhor myself" this is language to be understood in its context, and in its usage. It is like the word "hate" in the New Testament. A man recently said that he was having trouble reading the New Testament because the Lord Jesus said a person should "hate" his father and his mother; however, the Lord was not talking about hating them as such, but by comparison with God. We think much more of the things of God than we do about any human being. When Job had his attention focused upon God his opinion of himself faded so that the problem of his suffering was largely gone.

Chapter 30

It Is Not Wise To Worry About Matters That We Cannot Understand

Do you realize that a person can be worried about matters which he can never understand, and do you know that this is not wise?

All through the book of Job we have been raising the question, "Why do the righteous suffer?" "Why did Job suffer?" That is never answered yet we are given a solution for the problem of suffering. We do not have to be worried about it any more since God holds all things in His hands. The answer lies in trusting God, Almighty, omniscient, merciful and gracious.

Let us look at these closing verses before we make general remarks about the message of the book. There is history in chapter 42, verses 7-10. We are told that God told Job's friends to go to him and have him pray for them. The friends did as the Lord told them to do, and the Lord also accepted Job,

And the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before (Job 42:10).

This is very important. These were the people who had misunderstood him, falsely accused him and argued with him; but when he prayed for them God blessed him.

So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning . . . (Job 42:12).

We finish the book with the feeling that Job did not lose anything, he was none the worse for his experience. But that is really not very important. The important thing is the discussion that had gone on, and the final solution of it.

A brief summary of the idea that was set forth in this book will help us to understand this revelation of understanding the ways of God. The problem Job faced never changed; it was that way all the way through the book. "Why do men suffer?" Job asked, "Why am I hurting; why did this happen to me?" The argument of his three friends was simple: because you did something wrong; because you sinned. In other words, the suffering was punishment. They were wrong; that was not true.

Then we come to the next general thought in the book: the gentle rebuttal of Job; his answer to these friends. Look again at the first chapter and you will understand why he was in trouble. Job was never told, and this should make us thoughtful. There are things going on in our lives that God does not open the heavens to tell us about. There will be things going on in our lives that we have general principles for our guidance, but we will not be able fully and totally to understand. Job argued that his conscience was clear, that he had done nothing wrong. He was right, but this did not help him.

At this point they said, "There is no man that sinneth not," after which Job said, "Even if I have sinned, why doesn't God forgive me my sin?" He knew that much about the grace of God, that God would forgive. And Job had another argument: the friends argued that the fortunes of life are the direct result of conduct: virtue brings blessing and vice brings disaster. But this does not work out, because sometimes wicked men prosper, sometimes righteous men prosper. Sometimes wicked men suffer and righteous men suffer. And they all wind up in the grave.

The young man, Elihu, was then heard from. He contended the friends were wrong, though he did not discuss nor explain why. But Job was wrong on several counts: he was wrong because he was looking at himself. He had integrity but that was not the thing to consider. A person is on poor ground when he starts with the feeling that he has always tried to do the right thing, and so should be appreciated or helped because of it. The Lord Jesus Christ was perfect and they took Him to the cross. The servant is not greater than his Master. Job was wrong when he tried to understand suffering by looking at himself. That is not

where the answer is found. And he was wrong because, when trying to think about God's hand he was trying to compass God in his mind, to comprehend God. There is much more to God than we can see or understand. He could have trusted God but this he did not do.

So we come to the end of this book wherein the question of understanding the ways of God was brought up. Here was the answer: the solution of the problems of living does not come through rational explanation but in devotional worship. A person can never be able to figure out why, but he can look up and trust. Trusting God is the answer to all of the problems of suffering.

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Chapter 1

A Thing Is Good If It Is Useful To Produce A Good Result

Do you realize that the value of anything is determined by its use; by its function?

Jacob and Esau were the twin sons of Isaac and Rebecca. In many ways they were in sharp contrast to each other as their actions are reported in Scripture. Paul wrote in the book of Romans, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Romans 9:13). Does this mean that God is partial? No, because God is no respecter of persons. What, then, was the difference in them? Did He love Jacob before Jacob ever was, and did He hate Esau before he was born? The fact that He said these words before they were born revealed that God knew what they would do. As Jacob lived his life, God could approve him, and as Esau lived his life, God would disapprove him.

When we think of the difference between these two men we should remember the occasion when Jacob had been working in the field, and toward evening had prepared a meal for himself. Esau had been hunting, and came by hungry. He asked Jacob for the food. Then Esau made a trade with Jacob: he traded his birthright for the meal. In this action between the two of them the big difference can be seen. Jacob appreciated the blessing of God and would go without food to get it; Esau did not regard the blessing of God highly.

This is a clue to much in understanding the ways of God. After all, God accepted Abel and did not accept Cain. If we are to understand the ways of God we shall have to recognize that there are some whom God approves, and some whom God does not approve.

In the book of Job we faced the general question, "Why do things happen to us as they do?" We are so often helpless because of circumstances. Such things as war, pestilence, famine and calamity represent unfavorable circumstances. They are very hard to bear. The conclusion in Job, as we were studying the problem of suffering, seemed to be grounded in the sovereignty of a benevolent God. If we are able to trust God and rest in Him, that would affect us with reference to all that happens to us in the providence of God.

The question which we shall be studying now in the book of Ecclesiastes will be: what should I do, which way would be best for me? This point comes up when we recognize some things are in our grasp, and there are several different ways to handle them. I have a piece of land: what kind of crop will I have? Shall I put potatoes in there or shall I try to have beans on that ground? It will be my choice as to what I will plant. This is a basic question that we face again and again in all walks of life. We approach this problem of choice in the matter of making up our minds as to which is the better course of action. There are several truths we should consider. We can think of this problem also with reference to spiritual matters. One thing we should remember at the very outset: difference is actually there, it is real. Not everything is like everything else. Some things are good, some are bad; some things are better, some are worse. The road we take does make a difference.

Recognizing difference is the basis of intelligence. Whereas one road will take you east and another will take you west, it is not the width of the surface or whether the road is straight or whether it winds that matters; the difference is where it goes. You have the Bible. Will you read it or not? What you do makes a difference. Take for instance the privilege of praying: people can pray, and people can go through the day and not pray. It makes a difference. To see the difference between reading the Bible and not reading the Bible; between praying and not praying, is important. It is wise. We sometimes say that choosing the good is virtue.

Follow this clue and a soul will be led directly to Christ Jesus. Is there a God or is there no God; is there eternal life or no eternal life? If a person is in favor of the things of God, turn this way; if he is in favor of eternal life, come this way. Blessing or no blessing; which do you want? Blessing? Then come

this way. If you want the blessing that comes from reading the Bible, then read it. Anyone who will think along these lines and recognize the differences, can be led step by step directly to the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is "the way, the truth and the life."

Chapter 2

Magic Is Like Science In Its Aim

Did you know that science and magic are very much alike?

The Apostle Paul once said, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (I Thessalonians 5:21). By testing things we learn what is good, and what is not good. When we have learned what is good and what is not good, then we should hold fast to that which is good.

Science and magic are very much alike. Each has to do with getting something done. Let us consider magic first. Some people will rub a rabbit's foot, thinking they will get certain results. We call that magic. There are some who will put a horseshoe over the door, thinking that will bring good luck. That is magic. There are others who, if they want beans in the garden, plant beans; and if they want wheat in the fields, they plant wheat. That is the scientific thing to do. In all cases persons want to get something done. The difference is that in planting beans a person is actually planting something that will produce beans; whereas rubbing a rabbit's foot has nothing to do with the situation that the person faces. Things are different. If you want what is good, choose what is good.

The question I want to raise here is this: how will I know which is the good way? How would I know whether the tea is sweet? I should taste it. How would I know if the water is cold? I should put my hand in it. I find out things by testing. Have you ever thought how much the words "test" and "taste" are alike? You test a thing by trying it out to see what the result would be if you used it. That is the meaning of the word "science", which comes from a Latin root that means "to know." Experimental science is to take a small portion of whatever the problem is, and test it in a small situation that will not be too expensive. Test it: taste it. If you want to know whether or not that particular water is hot or cold, sip it, test it, taste it. In that way you will know.

This is very important. If you want to learn the ways of God (and we are now going to be thinking with reference to the ways of God, as to how to get His blessing) we will be thinking about disposing of those things that are in our hands. We can do any one of several things. Does it make a difference? Yes, it makes a difference. If we want to know what the difference is, we should try it out. Knowing is based on observation: watching for results. If we have items one, two, three and four then we should watch and see what will be five, six, seven and eight. This is observation. This is what happens in experience. That is why, when a person has experience we feel he has seen things.

There are some people who have lived a long time, but have not had much experience. They lived, but they did not look. Some people have lived only a short time but they have had a lot of experience. They paid attention when things happened. Now it is not always necessary to experience everything for oneself. We can learn from others. We sometimes say "Experience is the best teacher." What do we mean by "best"? Experience is a real teacher, but it can be very expensive. And waiting for experience to happen can be very slow. Furthermore, if one limits oneself to one's own experience it can be costly because if one has not had experience along certain lines, this will not help. When you try out your experience in a particular way, this is controlled experience. This makes possible specific knowledge, and more and more of it. We say that controlled observation increases knowledge. Experimenting to find out things is an intelligent procedure.

While we think about that and experiment to find out things we can have something else in mind. It has been customary among people when they have studied and experimented, and when they have tried and watched, to write their results. Another can read the results that people discovered by looking at their experiences. If we read the results of others' experiences we can get wise. A wise man can learn from anybody, whereas a fool probably never does learn from anything. This makes a difference. Reflection on knowledge discovers truth. To think about what we have found out makes good sense. We get all the data

together, and then we study it; we read results. We have experiments going on, and we have the results all before us; then we study these results.

Things actually are as they are. For instance, we start out with the idea that faith in God is important. No one will question that. Faith comes from the Bible, where we read "The entrance of thy word giveth light." "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing y the Word of God." If we read the Bible we will have faith in God, which is important. This is scientific thinking on the matter of faith.

Truth is basic to wisdom. Truth comes from the relationships in things. Let me show you again how you can discover for yourself what is really true. Suppose we start like this: God is. God can be known in Christ Jesus. This is the testimony of Christian people. Christians everywhere will say that in the face of Jesus Christ they came to know God. God can be known in Jesus Christ. A person can accept Jesus Christ; men have done it. To receive Jesus Christ is to receive God; to receive God is to be blessed. It would be wise to seek God and to obey Him.

Chapter 3

To Understand Any Event One Must Look Beyond Appearances

Can you understand that if a man looks at what happens and has in mind only what he can see, he will never understand?

There is much in life about which man can do nothing. This was considered in the book of Job under the general heading of such a question as this: why do things happen to me as they do, things over which I have no control. And we learned that this question is never explained. But the soul is taught that we can trust God. We will now recognize that there is something else, a limited something, within the hand of man. There is something man can do; a limited scope of choice is given to him. He comes to a point in the road which leads into two directions, and he can make his choice, right or left.

A man might face a particular situation in his life, not knowing for sure what to do, and could see two or three different ways in which it could be done; he then has to make a choice. In the area of a man's choice the concept of value is pertinent. This problem, what is the greatest good?, is considered in the book of Ecclesiastes. The word "Ecclesiastes" is the same word from which the word "ecclesiastical" comes. Both comes from the word that means "the Preacher", and for that reason many people speak of this book as the book of "The Preacher." There is a simple story back of this book. It can be easily picked up: it indicates there was a young man who was wealthy and well educated. He became king, and he faced the problem of what is the greatest good? This man could have anything: he had the money; he could do anything: he had the freedom, the power; and he was a learned man: he could think through things. So, with all this opportunity before him, he decided to find out what is the greatest good by research.

This is the one book in the Bible that is based on experimental research. If anyone should say that the Bible never makes use of science, that means he never looked into the book of Ecclesiastes. If you think of science as being a project for observation, that you might discover how things happen and what will happen if you do this or that, you will find that in the book of Ecclesiastes. There is a sense in which it is the most modern book in the Bible. It is a book of any culture that is scientifically minded; a culture that is inclined to find out by actually testing. From a philosophical point of view I would say this is the most pragmatic book in the Bible. Nobody knows who the author of this book is.

Many people think that Solomon may have written it, partly because the young man described would fit Solomon so well. But there is no indication that would indicate that is necessarily so. And here is probably as good a place as any for us to face the significance of the authorship of the book. Does the fact that nobody knows the author make a difference as to the validity of that book? The New Testament writers knew and read the Old Testament that we read; and they knew it. No New Testament author ever gives us the final word on the authorship of any Old Testament book. The New Testament does not give us any definite word about it. The New Testament usage of Old Testament material implies that the form of the words in the Old Testament is what counts.

There is one characteristic of this book that is very important. The whole outlook is on the human level. Many true, valid observations will be made from a human level that will be found inadequate, because the spiritual is not included in the thinking. We shall find from the very first this man starts by saying:

The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:1-3)?

That phrase "under the sun" will give the perspective that is in the book. A human being once decided what was going on in this world, and he felt that all was vanity, vanity.

Chapter 4

Seeing Clearly What Actually Happens In This World Is Discouraging

Have you noticed that a man who sees clearly what is happening in this world is inclined to be discouraged and disgusted?

In the book of Ecclesiastes the investigator who was trying to find out the answer to the question, "What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?" is called the Preacher. Perhaps this is fitting for undoubtedly many who preach are very much like this man. This man studied problems and carried on experiments; he got all the information he possibly could. He noted results of experiments and he drew conclusions, but he never did find what he was looking for. It is another case where many true things are discovered and many true things said, but the knowledge of the truth never comes. One might wonder why that is in the Bible; it is an illustration, a demonstration of something.

We take a look at things from a human point of view and we add up things from a human point of view. Ecclesiastes should be a warning to us: you will never see any purpose in your life and you will have nothing to work for, if all you do is look at this world. It is discouraging. We shall see what this man discovered, and we can learn by following him as he reports; we will be brought back to this statement: "all is vanity."

One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits (Ecclesiastes 1:4-6).

In those three verses we have a graphic description of the ongoing affairs in this world. It is one continuous round. If a man who lived in our time had written this he would probably have referred to "the rat race" of men: and that is what this man felt. An unfinished cycle of events, a regular merry-go-round. Do you feel that way as you go about your work; is there an element about it that makes you feel it is a treadmill existence? If that should be your experience, let me say this book is reported by a young man who studied this whole question. He makes it plain at the outset that the ongoing human affairs is a lot of activity getting nowhere.

All things are full of labor; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:8-9).

How true we can feel that to be: futility, uselessness, an endless emptiness with no meaning in it. When we say history repeats itself we are not talking about spiritual matters, but we are talking about the natural things in this world that can be seen. Isn't it pathetic to hear, "the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing?" Have you ever noticed that people who try to see enough never see it, and those who try to eat enough never eat it? They always want more. Like the waves of the sea, they wave and roll and never get anywhere. That is the way life is.

The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us (Ecclesiastes 1:9-10).

Like a revolving door, life just goes round and round; or it is like the fashions: sometimes they change but they always return to the old ones. This is also true even in daily affairs; things are repeated over and

over again in the same way.

There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after (Ecclesiastes 1:11).

On the human level there is no permanence. All of us leave our footsteps in the sands of time.

This is the way the Preacher was affected and it can give us a very discouraged feeling. But we can be thankful we know the Lord.

Chapter 5

Increase Of Knowledge Does Not Increase Happiness

Do you think if we knew more we would be happier?

In trying to understand the ways of God, the wise believer will accept the will of God. When there are things he cannot do anything about he will simply trust in God. Now we are facing the second great question in human thought: considering alternatives, what is the best thing to do? This Preacher will tell us in verses 12 to 18 about his first experiment.

In verse 13 he said, "I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven." He began his search by philosophical examination concerning all things that are done under heaven. "This sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith." He pathetically admitted that he was challenged to do this because it seemed that man cannot help but try to understand how things go. At this point the author told "I tried", but that was like so many men who say, "I don't understand but I will try."

This man said, "I didn't understand and I tried and now I wonder what is the use." This is where he had the feeling he should try to find out why and what would be the right thing to do. But it did not help.

I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit
(Ecclesiastes 1:14).

This is the picture of a man taking a cold look at everything. Is that the way it is going to be with you? Let me remind you again that the Bible does not stop here. The Bible tells us what is the situation here under the sun, but remember, the Bible points beyond the sun into eternity, and into the very presence of God. When you enter into the spiritual world it is entirely different; but when you are in this physical, human world, it is like this: all is vanity, emptiness and vexation of spirit, trying to do things and getting nowhere.

That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered
(Ecclesiastes 1:15).

"Wanting" here means "lacking", "missing." The results of human effort are nothing. There is no chance to change the natural factor. Human nature will always be the same.

I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly (Ecclesiastes 1:16-17).

This man decided that with all the opportunity he had, he would find out. He plunged into everything and tried all varieties of experiences: wisdom, madness and folly. There was nothing satisfying in all of that, and in verse 18 an amazing statement is made that we can carry with us as long as we live. "In much wisdom is much grief." The more we know the more we hurt, and "he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." We have to think sometimes that there is much truth in the old saying that "where ignorance is bliss, tis folly to be wise." However, all of this is "under the sun", and we need to bear in mind that believers in Christ have a Gospel that points in another direction. We come to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is not "under the sun"; He is in the presence of God. This is where we find the soul really satisfied. In this world there will never be satisfaction. The more we learn the more grief we have. But in the world to come, when we get to really know Him, we can have joy and peace in the Lord.

Chapter 6

Seeking Pleasure Brings No Satisfaction

Have you noticed that the person who seeks pleasure always finds less than he is looking for?

We have recognized that God's providence controls much of what happens to us. There is some part of life that is within our hands; and we are now studying about that aspect of living in which we seem to have some choice, some power to decide what is to be done. In our last study we noticed the report of the writer's first experiment in which he was searching for the answer as to what is the greatest good a person can do, and in that report we noticed he tried wisdom with the result that he came to the conclusion the more you know, the more you hurt.

The writer was now ready to begin his second experiment, about which we read:

I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity. I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it? I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life (Ecclesiastes 2:1-3).

This is what he undertook to do. It had been tried before, and if you are acquainted with the experience of others you will know that in the history of the Greek thinkers they went through a stage in which they tried to figure out what was the best way to live. They developed three different lines of thought: there was the group called the Stoics (who are mentioned in the New Testament) and they were "good for goodness sake." Then there were the Epicureans (referred to by Paul in I Corinthians 15:32), "Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die." Inasmuch as life is short and uncertain, enjoy it while you can is the Epicurean view. Also among the Greeks were what we call the Cynics. This man was following in the same general direction, trying to find out what is the best thing to do by trying it out. He entered into his research in a systematic fashion. The record gives a description of the different things he did to enjoy himself: far more than just drinking wine. He wanted to see if one could get satisfaction by seeking pleasure. "I made me great works" (a man would get pleasure from building great things.) "I builded me houses" (undoubtedly that is the reason some people build big homes. They get enjoyment out of it). "I planted me vineyards." (So he had large vineyards to enjoy.) "I made me gardens and orchards" (this would be impressive). "And I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits" (that, too, would be enjoyable). "I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees." (He prepared an irrigation system to make these orchards and gardens prosper).

He went about all of this to thoroughly enjoy it. "I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house." (A large staff of people were his employees). "Also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me." (He had large herds of cattle, great and small, probably including camels, donkeys and other kinds). "I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces." (So that if money would be a pleasure, he acquired a fortune). "I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts." (He enjoyed the arts).

The record shows that this man allowed himself to be unrestrained, uninhibited. "So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me." (He tried to be intelligent in what he was doing). "And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labor." (In other words, he indulged himself). "Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun"

(Ecclesiastes 2:4-11).

He finally came to certain conclusions in verses 12-17. In verse 13 he said, "I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness." Then he points out that while that is true, "the wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness." He then noticed something, ". . . one event happeneth to them all," and "As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise?" He then saw that the wise and the fool all wind up in the grave, and he comes to this conclusion:

Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit (Ecclesiastes 2:17).

This is the report of a man who tried to find out if pleasure would be satisfying. He learned that in having a good time there is always that "hangover" afterwards.

Chapter 7

Accumulating Things Is Discouraging Because All Is So Temporary

Do you realize how discouraging it can be to gather things together, knowing that you cannot take them with you?

The investigator's report now is dealing with what can be known as the third area of interest – that of accumulating things.

Yea, I hated all my labor which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labor wherein I have labored, and wherein I have showed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity (Ecclesiastes 2:18-19).

This man was smart enough to understand that some foolish person could come along and carelessly spend or waste everything he had accumulated. This was discouraging. It is frightening to think of how people can waste away what someone else carefully accumulated. It is discouraging and this is what this man felt.

For what hath man of all his labor, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath labored under the sun? For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity (Ecclesiastes 2:22-23).

A man who works hard should himself enjoy his works now.

There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God. For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I (Ecclesiastes 2:24-25)?

The man who is producing the results is the one who should enjoy it while he can.

For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit (Ecclesiastes 2:26).

This word "sinner" simply means that the man is disobedient; doing what he wants to do instead of doing the will of God. Such a man is actually working for other people.

So the writer makes this observation: "This also is vanity and vexation of spirit." This remark emphasizes the emptiness of misplaced effort. Therefore the writer emphasizes the best thing a person can do is enjoy what he has while he is getting it together.

Chapter 8

Despite Apparent Chaos All Is Under Control

Has it ever occurred to you that as things happen, regardless of how mixed up they may seem, they are all under control?

After the Preacher's three big experiments he set out some of his observations. There was no particular answer to the question of what is the greatest good. But there were observations about reality and living, from which you and I could benefit. These observations would help us to understand what this intelligent young man learned, while he was trying to figure things out. In the first eight verses of chapter 3 the course of providence is noted. This is the way things happen day in and day out. There is nothing put together quite so compactly on this subject, as we find here in Ecclesiastes.

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8).

This is what the writer saw when he looked around. One cannot really count on being guided by events; anything can happen and it usually does. So he repeats that a person should enjoy the fruit of his labor at the time he is doing it.

What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboreth? I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it (Ecclesiastes 3:9-10).

Getting anywhere in this world requires hard work by the sweat of your brow.

He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end. I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life (Ecclesiastes 3:11-12).

That lake that looks so lovely, that mirrors the clouds so beautifully, could drown your boy. There is much in this world that is treacherous.

And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labor, it is the gift of God (Ecclesiastes 3:13).

A great blessing is immediate satisfaction. When there is work to be done the worker should try to enjoy it. The farmer should enjoy not only the harvest time but also the growing period of crops.

I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him. That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past (Ecclesiastes 3:14-15).

God's part will be permanent. Man's work is uncertain, unstable and largely pointless.

And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there. I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work (Ecclesiastes 3:16-17).

God will judge. Man needs to realize he is only a creature limited and futile.

So that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity . . . Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him (Ecclesiastes 3:19, 22).

The writer came to this conclusion after looking around in the world as he saw it.

Chapter 9

Sharing In Many Human Affairs Often Leads To Unhappiness

Have you ever noticed how wide experience in the affairs of men often makes a person unhappy?

To get the message of this book it is important to remember a phrase that occurs over and over again, "under the sun." This is a book written from the point of view of a man on earth; this is the natural point of view. We are asking ourselves the question; what is the greatest good that a person can do; where can he find the greatest satisfaction?

The author of Ecclesiastes was a person who sought the answer to this question by looking at men. In chapter 4 we read much that is true, but we cannot find all that we need. This is reported for us so that we can have a thorough look at what is on earth. This wise man looked around at human beings and reported what he saw.

He saw the oppression of the poor and the weak. Among men there are strong people and weak people; there are rich people and poor people; people with advantage and those without. The writer saw people who had the advantage treat those without advantage in a harsh, unjust way.

So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter (Ecclesiastes 4:1).

This is what he said and he came to the following conclusion,

Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive. Yea, better is he than both they, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun (Ecclesiastes 4:2-3).

To endure such oppression, to have to put up with this when there is no comforter, would be unendurable. This could be the case of a man whose boss gives him a hard time; or a laborer who has extra work piled on him with the boss almost inviting him to quit, or perhaps a wife whose husband heaps abuse on her, and never shows appreciation for her hard work.

It was characteristic of Jesus of Nazareth that the poor sought refuge in Him. In the Old Testament God is pictured as the One who cared for the poor.

Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbor. This is also vanity and vexation of spirit. The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh. Better is a handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit (Ecclesiastes 4:4-6).

It is better to have less than to face jealousy and envy.

Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun. There is one alone, and there is not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother: yet is there no end of all his labor; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither saith he, For whom do I labor, and bereave my soul of good? This is also vanity, yea, it is a sore travail (Ecclesiastes 4:7-8).

At one time he saw a man living alone, who had no dependents. He saw that this man never stopped working. There was no end to his labor. ". . . neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither saith he, For whom do I labor?" Here he could see the futility of being alone. This was another evidence showing the truth of Scripture (Genesis 2:18).

This writer saw the advantage of fellowship, that two are better than one. He noted that if they fall down, the one will lift up his fellow; if they should be cold the two can be together and can help each other. In conflict the two can withstand the enemy, ". . . a threefold cord is not quickly broken." Here we are reminded of the Gospel: a believer in Christ is never alone (John 14).

Chapter 10

While Praying A Person Should Be Careful Of His Utterances

Has it ever occurred to you that a person should be very careful what he says when praying?

In our study of understanding the ways of God we have come to chapter 5. This is a very important chapter because of the insight it gives to us but, as we have mentioned before, we shall not find the answers until the end of the book. During the course of his research this investigation saw much that made him sad and saw some amazing truth.

Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil (Ecclesiastes 5:1).

"Keep thy foot" means to step lightly, go carefully. When a person walks into the house of God he should be reverent, silent, thoughtful, careful. "The sacrifice of fools" is the sacrifice of the lips. How would a man be a fool with his lips? When he lets his mouth talk without meaning what he says. That is foolish. It would be better to remain quiet. "For they consider not that they do evil."

Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few (Ecclesiastes 5:2).

Does that mean it is wrong to pray for a long time? No. I would say rather it means that in prayer we should listen more. We should not talk so much. We should wait; let God talk to us. Communion is good. Jesus of Nazareth spent the whole night in prayer. We could have in mind that He may well have been silent before God while His Father was showing things.

For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words (Ecclesiastes 5:3).

When we read the word "fool" we should keep in mind somebody who does not recognize reality; "the fool hath said in his heart there is no God", that sort of thing.

When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy thy work of thine hands? For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God (Ecclesiastes 5:4-7).

The word "fear" means not so much to be afraid as to be appreciative of; to be considerate of; to have God in mind. When the writer says "Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin" he has in mind that while the mouth is what we talk with, we can also talk in our mind. We can be thinking: we do not always have to utter out loud. How can one do this? The importance of reading the Bible cannot be over-estimated. Read the history of the Bible; the Psalms; find out about Moses, Abraham, David and Daniel; and later about Peter and Paul. And in the meantime, be conscious of God. "Fear thou God" and go slow when you go into the presence of God. This amazing passage has its own message for each of us.

If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they (Ecclesiastes 5:8).

Do not let this upset you; God sees it: and He knows what to do. The writer makes an amazing statement about the accumulation of wealth.

Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field. He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity (Ecclesiastes 5:9-10).

Experience teaches this is true.

The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, . . . but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep (Ecclesiastes 5:12).

The man who has much and tries to hoard it is always afraid he will lose it, so he cannot sleep; but the man who works hard and produces can go to sleep.

There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt (Ecclesiastes 5:13).

There is such a thing as keeping all your riches – advantage of position, and of friendship – for yourself, and that will hurt you. We were born without money and we will die without money, and this emphasizes the importance of having joy day by day.

It is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion . . . For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart (Ecclesiastes 5:18-20).

Everything this man has seen is true, but the answer is not yet clear. He has not yet looked in the right direction. We know that the answer is with God. While this man was trying to learn what was good, he found many things that were sad. All that was true of this world "under the sun."

Chapter 11

The Success Of Any Venture May Depend On One Element

Have you noticed that it can happen that a man may have so much and yet get nowhere, because of one thing he does not have?

Trying to understand the ways of God by looking at the experiences of people is really illuminating and revealing. One can learn much by observation. This is what the man who wrote the book of Ecclesiastes did. Many things are the way we see them; yet we may not see the key to the whole matter, nor understand what makes the difference. This writer found out many things that were true, but he never did really get hold of the key to reality.

In chapter 6 there is a straightforward statement of a profound truth.

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: a man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honor, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease (Ecclesiastes 6:1-2).

Sometimes people save money until they have much. They have more than they could ever use, but it is of no value to them because they do not use it. This can be true with friends; unless we share with them and enter into things with them, the friendship has no meaning. This is also true with the Gospel. Many people know that heaven is real, and that if a man believes in the Lord Jesus Christ he will go there: yet knowing all that, some people never enjoy it because they do not receive Jesus Christ as their Savior. The writer of Ecclesiastes would say this is vanity and an evil disease.

If a man beget a hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also that he have no burial; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he (Ecclesiastes 6:3).

The writer described then how a person could be blessed and receive many benefits, but if in his heart he is not given over to that which is right and good; and if, when all is said and done nobody appreciates him, it is as if he were of premature birth. For regardless of how much blessing a man may receive, this is no real fortune unless the man is personally worthy of the blessing.

Yea, though he live a thousand years twice told, yet hath he seen no good: do not all go to one place? All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled (Ecclesiastes 6:6-7).

What does this say to us? Long life alone is not enough. Some live to be eighty or ninety years of age while others may live briefly, yet those who live briefly often give more of themselves. There is a story told about an old Greek by the name of Alexander the Great. He had a wise teacher who watched Alexander the Great as a young man come into prominence and do great things. One day the teacher asked, "What do you intend to do next?" To which Alexander replied, "I am going out and conduct a campaign against this part of the world, and I shall subdue it. Then I will cross the river and capture that section of the world." When the old teacher asked what he would then do, he replied, "I will go on to the farthest reaches, out to India, and I will subdue that part until I have the whole world under my control. Then I will sit down and rest." To which the wise man said, "Why don't you sit down now and rest?"

Many times a person will say, "When the time comes, I will turn to the Lord." This writer would say, "Why not now?" Good fortune lies in good understanding. It is not in having what you want, but in understanding what is. Realizing one's own limitations is better than having wishes and wants that are infinite and unfilled.

Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what is man the better (Ecclesiastes 6:11)?

What would be good for man?

A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth (Ecclesiastes 7:1).

Many things increase vanity, but a good name is better than any treasure. Things have a way of fading and the desire for them may change, but a man's personal standing, his reputation, are important. A good name is better than precious ointment.

Chapter 12

Good Judgment Means More Than Silver And Gold

Do you realize that it is better for a man to have good sense than it is to be rich in money?

Throughout the book of Ecclesiastes we can see that this man saw much truth, but he did not get the answer he was seeking. He learned first of all that there is value in sadness and sorrow, and that many people in daily life have found this to be true.

It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart (Ecclesiastes 7:2).

Why? Because death is the end. It is better to remember that a day is coming when I will die.

Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better (Ecclesiastes 7:3).

Some people may think this is morbid; but the truth of the matter can be seen in human affairs.

The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools (Ecclesiastes 7:4-5).

This may seem to be a harsh way to look at the world, but we are reminded of Paul's words: "We glory in tribulation." Have you ever wondered about that? It is the part of wisdom to remember that this world is coming to an end, and even in the good things the paths of glory lead but to the grave. That is one reason why we can rejoice in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ came into this world to seek and to save the lost, and "Whosoever believeth in Him shall never perish but have everlasting life."

The writer now notes the value of patience and meekness. This truth is expressed in several sentences, each of which can be remembered with benefit.

Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit (Ecclesiastes 7:8).

It is common to put much emphasis on the beginning of things, perhaps because in many cases we do not finish what we start.

Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools (Ecclesiastes 7:9).

Jesus of Nazareth on occasion became angry. We read He looked upon the Pharisees with anger, being grieved with the hardness of their hearts. However, God is slow to anger and quick to forgive. The writer warned against "flying off the handle" at every little thing. And if you do get angry, be quick to forgive. Paul said about that, "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." Harboring a grudge is foolish.

In verses 11-22 we learn the value of wisdom, which is good with an inheritance. If you should inherit money you should be smart if you inherited good sense. "For wisdom is a defense, and money is a defense: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it".(Ecclesiastes 7:12). It is good to be smart and to have money; but it is better to be wise than to have money, because being wise will give you life.

In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him. All things have I seen in the days of my vanity:

there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that longeth his life in his wickedness (Ecclesiastes 7:14-15).

We cannot tell by the way things are happening moment by moment just how all will turn out.

Chapter 13

Quiet Observance Will Enable One To Learn Much

Did you know that you can really learn if you will just look and keep quiet?

The writer of the book of Ecclesiastes had been watching and studying people, trying to learn from their actions, what is the greatest good. Reading his report is like scanning through the leaves of the notebook of an observer. Finally he summarized his research, and this is what he wrote:

All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me . . . I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason of things, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness . . . Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions (Ecclesiastes 7:23-29).

He could not find confidence in man; not in anyone. This is the way in which it came to him. There is another old story that has to do with Alexander the Great who had an old teacher by the name of Diogenes. At one time the king found hanging at the entrance of Diogenes' place a lantern lit in the daytime and he asked, "Teacher, why do you have this lantern here?" And Diogenes answered, "I have been looking for an honest man, but never could find one by the light of day; so I lit the lantern to see if that would help me." Jeremiah wrote "Cursed is the man who putteth his trust in man." The writer of Ecclesiastes would tell you he had hunted and hunted, and could not find his answer among men.

We are not quite ready to learn the final answer of the book as yet, and in chapter 8 there are more observations of truth. The writer phrases his interest again: "Who is as the wise man? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing?" Then he wrote "a man's wisdom maketh his face to shine." It is good to have good sense, it is fine to exercise oneself along the line of being careful and understanding and intelligent about things.

I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God. Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him. Where the word of a king is, there is power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou? Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing: and a wise, man's heart discerneth both time and judgment (Ecclesiastes 8:2-5).

The writer then made an observation about the misery of man. He finds that the misery of man is because men do not know what, and they do not know when.

For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be? There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it (Ecclesiastes 8:7-8).

This is part of man's misery. It is all the more discouraging because it is endless: "There is no discharge in that war." Even when one is in control there is no guarantee of success.

All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun: there is a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt (Ecclesiastes 8:9).

The writer continues to write about these matters:

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil (Ecclesiastes 8:11).

These are observations of things that are true. The investigator found it all added up to the fact that man is in misery because he is so limited. Also he saw the vanishing, the passing away, of the wicked.

Though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: but it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God (Ecclesiastes 8:12-13).

In his report the investigator admitted he saw something that was hard for him to take.

There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity (Ecclesiastes 8:14).

In the light of this he arrived at a natural conclusion:

Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labor the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun (Ecclesiastes 8:15).

But we should not be misled by that. Paul touches on this theme when he writes, "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners." But this is a tempting conclusion; it is always frustrating to notice that there can be good men treated like they were crooks, and crooked men treated as though they were honest.

The man's research led on to see the infinite range of the works of God.

Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun (Ecclesiastes 8:17).

Man can never find it out, because God's ways are infinite.

In chapter 9 we see something about the mortal nature of man and this is something man cannot overcome.

There is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all (Ecclesiastes 9:3).

One thing will happen to all: everyone will die, the righteous and the wise as well as the fool.

All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; add he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath (Ecclesiastes 9:2).

This is frustrating and it amounts to an insurmountable obstacle for man. The value in being alive is brought out in these words: "A living dog is better than a dead lion . . . for to him that is joined to all the living there is hope" (Ecclesiastes 9:4).

There is yet in this report no way of knowing what really is good. How glad we can be that the Lord Jesus Christ came to show us the grace of God, and we can turn to Him from this unhappy world and rest in Him.

Chapter 14

In Spite Of Chaotic Conditions It Is Possible To Find Satisfaction

Do you realize that in spite of the mixed up nature of this world it is yet possible to gain much satisfaction here?

Our study in the book of Ecclesiastes may seem to be somewhat discouraging, yet there is a lift of spirit in the fact that it is an open, honest look at the world and its affairs. The writer has seen much that is sobering; he has seen good and bad things, but always limited and inadequate, although always true. But now he includes something that is encouraging.

Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works (Ecclesiastes 9:7).

What we see here is the value of the here and now.

Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labor which thou takest under the sun. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest (Ecclesiastes 9:8-10).

There may be many things in your home that are not the way they should be, but do your part. In the office there may be things not the way you like to see them and there may be many discouraging things, but work out things and turn in a good job. If you do your best you will find satisfaction in that. But in all honesty he again draws attention to the uncertainty of affairs.

I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all (Ecclesiastes 9:11).

The writer saw that there is no respecter of persons. Man also knows not his time. He then says something that will sound rather frustrating to us:

For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them (Ecclesiastes 9:12).

As he continued his research he saw something else that gave him sober thoughts: the true value of good judgment.

This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it seemed great unto me: there was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it: now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man (Ecclesiastes 9:13-15).

How often that happens. A situation arises and it gets to be a tight spot; somebody comes and actually leads people through to better things. And he is forgotten.

Then said I, Wisdom is better than strength: nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard (Ecclesiastes 9:16).

He was useful as long as he could help and the moment he was through helping, they were through with him.

The words of wise men are heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good (Ecclesiastes 9:17-18).

I suspect the thought will come that he did not get anywhere, which is true. This is what he was learning. Thank God we are not limited to this world. When we come to chapter 10 we are nearing the end of his research. Verses 1 to 15 summarize the whole thing; the contrast between a fool and a wise man.

Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savor: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honor (Ecclesiastes 10:1).

One can meditate upon that.

Yea also, when he that is fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to every one that he is a fool (Ecclesiastes 10:3).

We can tell a fool by the way he acts.

If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offenses (Ecclesiastes 10:4).

Do not confront the leader, if he is the head man and he rises up against you. You would be smart to give in since you do not have any power. You should give in.

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun . . . Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place. I have seen servants upon horses and princes walking as servants upon the earth (Ecclesiastes 10:5-7).

He calls that an evil and it surely is.

A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him (Ecclesiastes 10:14)?

Some people will talk and talk as if they could tell you everything, when actually they do not know much. This is the contrast between a fool and a wise man. Good leaders are of a great value. "Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child" (Ecclesiastes 10:16). If a ruler is childish that is bad.

Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes cat in due season for strength, and not for drunkenness (Ecclesiastes 10:17)!

And when that is true for a country, it is also true for a church, a family, and in your own life.

By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through (Ecclesiastes 10:18).

The result of laziness is obvious. He saw also the value of money.

A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry: but money answereth all things (Ecclesiastes 10:19).

Everyone would be wise to remember the truth in:

Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter (Ecclesiastes 10:20).

These have been the notes the observer made while looking at life.

Chapter 15

The One Essential Element For Real Satisfaction

Do you realize that in this world, as mixed up as it is, there is one thing any one could do that would bring real satisfaction?

As we come to chapters 11 and 12 we shall see that the writer sums up many of the limitations he has noted, showing us that in every direction we look the prospect is not good enough. Chapter 11 speaks of the limitations of human knowledge.

As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good (Ecclesiastes 11:5-6).

The writer said that all the research he did had indicated that one never really knows ahead of time how things will turn out. Decisions cannot be made on the basis of what we know because we do not know enough.

Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun: but if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity (Ecclesiastes 11:7-8).

We can learn and we can understand, but some things we do not know. We can walk in the light, but we have to walk some in the dark. In verses 9 and 10 we see the limitations of youth. There are those who think if one has youth, he has everything.

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity (Ecclesiastes 11:9-10).

What the young do does matter. They are all filled with expectation; so little experience causing them to have little doubt about the future. But harvest is coming. So this man, who had been young, looked around, watched young people; and he had seen. Youth passes away and people mature; in every one of them there will be a showdown. Youth may be great enough for its feelings while it lasts, but the harvest is coming. This is the limitation of youth.

In chapter 12:1-7 is written one of the most beautiful passages of Scripture: a poetic way of paying tribute to the limitation of age:

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; while the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: in the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, and the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low; also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:1-7).

Evening time in life: it has some beauty but the night is coming. Age has much that from a human point of view might be honored, but it is short, and it is running out. What we learn here is that dependence upon being young is not the answer to the problem. Human knowledge is limited; understanding is limited. Youth is limited, it will pass away. And age is limited. In verses 9 to 12 we have the limitations of human understanding:

And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd. And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh (Ecclesiastes 12:9-12).

Yes, human understanding is good; the more we can learn, the better it is; but even at its best, it is still lacking. So here we come to the last two verses and throughout this entire book of Ecclesiastes we could never settle on any one thing that was the best way of doing. Everything was always something limited, always something inadequate. Now these are the last two verses:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

The writer could have started out with that; how often that is true in life! When after a long search a person finally comes to where he faces God: he could have started there. Man can never make it; in the world one will never get it. That was the conclusion of this examiner, this student, who looked around all over to find the best way. He finally came back to this: help must come from God. In His Word, in His law, according to His will, God must help. Isn't it wonderful to know the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ? God did help; He did send His Son, and we can turn to Him, to an understanding of the ways of God. We can turn to Him, look upon Him and trust in Him.