

“Consider the Work of God”

Sermon Notes

➤ **“Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace; behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face”**

- William Cowper (1773)

**3 keys to deepen your faith in Christ no matter what's ahead in 2021...*

1. Recognize the providence of God (v.13; Matthew 10:29-31)

2. Rejoice in the providence of God (v.14; Luke 10:21-22; Romans 5:3-5; James 1:2-4)

3. Revere the God of providence (vv.15-18; Mark 14:35-36)

Next Week: Ecclesiastes 7:19-29 - “God Made Man Upright, But They Have Sought Out Many Schemes”

MEFC Community Group Study Guide

For the Week of January 31st-February 6th

Getting Started

1. Though most people would just as soon have it that 2020 never happened, as Christians, we recognize that God “works all things according to the counsel of his will” (Ephesians 1:11). Pooling your thoughts together as a group, what different evidences of God’s grace can you identify that came to pass over this last year? These may be on the spectrum anywhere from minute to massive, from personal to global. See how many you can name.

Digging Deeper

2. R.C. Sproul famously said:

“If there is one maverick molecule in the universe, one molecule running loose outside the scope of God’s sovereign ordination, then ladies and gentlemen there is not the slightest confidence that you could have that any promise that God has made about the future will come to pass...If God is not sovereign, then God is not God.”¹

Do you believe this? If so, please share with the group about your journey in coming to such convictions. Are there any texts of Scripture in particular that have been especially helpful for you in forming your views?

Open Your Bible to Ecclesiastes 7:13...

3. Read carefully through Ecclesiastes 7:13. Is there anything in your life God has “made crooked” that, if you had the opportunity, you would make “straight”? What is it? Share with the group a bit about what it’s been to live in light of this aspect of God’s difficult providence in your life?

4. The Apostle Paul expresses his experience of something God made crooked in his life as he recounts the struggle with his “thorn in the flesh” in 2 Corinthians 12:1-10. Consider this case study together. Why did God give Paul this thorn (vv.1-7)? Though Paul describes his thorn as “a messenger of Satan” (v.7), what context clues indicate that this thorn was ultimately the work of God? Do you have thoughts as to what the “thorn” may have been? What did Paul do about it (v.8)? How did the Lord Jesus answer him (v.9a)? What, then, was Paul’s conclusion about his ordeal (v.10)? Do you think about what God has “made crooked” in your life (see question 3) this way? What about Paul’s story is helpful to you in the midst of yours?

¹ <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/rc-sproul-through-years/> . Accessed 1/29/21 @ 5:15pm.

5. Ecclesiastes 7:14 indicates that the day of prosperity *as well as the day of adversity* can be met with joy in the heart of a believer. Why? What answer does the text give? Does this stoke the fires of joy in your soul as you ponder the Preacher's point? Take a look at how Romans 5:3-5 and James 1:2-4 provide an important angle on how to receive suffering and adversity as a gift in the Christian life (Philippians 1:29). According to the Apostle Peter, what do suffering believers have to look forward to in the future (1 Peter 5:10-11)? As if being inspired by the Holy Spirit wasn't enough, what right have the apostles earned to speak on a topic like this one?

6. When we come to Ecclesiastes 7:15, the Preacher points to the bitter reality of saints who suffer and sinners who thrive. Why do you think the Lord so frequently allows the phenomena of "a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing"? Can you think of any practical examples? How ought we to process such realities?

7. One of the most difficult passages in Ecclesiastes is found in verses 16-17. What does the Preacher mean by "be not overly righteous"? Why does he warn the reader to "not make yourself too wise"? How does this square with other clear biblical texts unambiguously calling us to righteousness (Matthew 5:6 and 5:48) and wisdom (Proverbs 4:5-9)?

8. Ecclesiastes 7:18 concludes with yet another summons to "fear...God". Close your study by walking back and forth through the book noting each instance where we see this call issued to the reader (3:14; 5:7; 8:12-13; 12:13-14). How many motives to develop the fear of the Lord can you find in these verses? How about these: Psalm 25:14, Proverbs 1:7, and Luke 12:4-5?