

Ecclesiastes 3: 6; “A Time to Gain”, Sermon # 15 in the series – “Remember Your Creator”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall, on August 14th, 2016, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

In the King James Version, verse 6 reads – “A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away.” The words “gain” and “keep”, and the words “lose” and “throw away” are related to each other in this verse. In other words, if a person gains something, he hopes to keep it forever; if he loses something, he may have wanted to be able to hold on to it, and was not able to. Or, it was no good to him anymore, and so he throws it away. The verse is saying that there is a time and a place for all of these things. In this fallen world of sin; there is a time for keeping and a time for throwing away. We want to look at this verse in terms of what a person should want to gain in this life and what he should want to lose, in terms of God’s view of things. If we think about this from Solomon the Preacher’s point of view, we should remember that he has been striving to find the meaning of life in the things that he labors for. We have seen that he came to the conclusion that it was vanity. Now, the Lord knew that Solomon would come to this point. The Lord knew that Solomon would come to the place where, after he had labored hard to build great works for himself, that he would still end up with this feeling of emptiness and vanity.

The things that the Lord would have us to gain and to keep, are the things that He freely gives by His creative power; and still more importantly, they are things that He gives us by His grace through our Lord Jesus Christ. Does this mean that it is unprofitable to labor at all? No, by no means does it mean this. But each of us has to be brought to the place where we learn to seek to find our greatest satisfaction in all of our labor, by learning to labor for those things which will glorify God. The fruit of those labors will last forever, and they will bring us great and lasting satisfaction. And so, there is a time to gain and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to throw away. We want to look at the subject of gaining and keeping first, and then we will turn our attention to losing and throwing away. In each of these points I will do this by looking at the things related to the physical realm first and the spiritual realm following that. The first point is that it takes labor to gain and keep things. The second point is that it takes real discernment to know when to throw things away.

1st - It takes labor to gain and keep things.

There are some good verses which I think that we should look at, in this regard, in the book of Proverbs. Let’s begin by turning to Proverbs 14: 23. Remembering that Solomon wrote this book as well as the book of Ecclesiastes, let’s listen to what he says here: “In all labor there is profit, but idle chatter leads only to poverty.” Now here is a principle of truth that does a man in good stead. It is a principle which, if it is improved, will really accomplish things, both in time and for eternity if we will couple it with faith in Jesus Christ. It is a profitable thing to labor because in labor you are working to accomplish something. You are not just standing around or sitting around. You are not just talking about doing something. You really are doing something, working toward the accomplishment of a goal. Whether it is a little task, or a long involved project, your labor will be profitable. Whether it is taking care of children, working on projects around the house, working hard at your full-time job, engaging in the good works which the Bible commands, it will pay off. You will succeed in getting things done if you work at it, and it will be profitable. There will be gain. But, most certainly this will not take place if you do not labor and work at what you would like to see accomplished. If you only talk about it, it will tend to poverty. Now, look over at Proverbs 10: 4 and 5. “He who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.” “He who gathers in summer is a wise son; he who sleeps in harvest is a son who causes shame.” Not only is laziness and inactivity unprofitable for a person; it is shameful in the life of the believer. It is like the worker who is sleeping in the time of harvest, when he should be out in the fields working.

Action is the key to accomplishment. Mere talk is the lazy man's action, and it will only lead to poverty. Learning to take the initiative, to do things with the knowledge that you have, is very important. Oftentimes you will be learning, simply by the attempts at doing something. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all of your might. Don't hesitate, don't procrastinate, simply look carefully, and begin to do. Now when I say this, I am not saying that you should labor at sinful things. God forbid that you should do that. Proverbs 15: 27 shows us the truth of this. "He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house, but he who hates bribes will live." Those things that you do and pursue are meant to be done for God and for His glory. This may require some thought. It may even require much careful thought; but it does not involve procrastination in doing His will. It is God's commandment that for six days out of 7 that you work and do all your labor, and the seventh is a Sabbath to the Lord. In New Testament times, now that Christ has come, the Day of rest is the first day of the week instead of the last. Christ was raised from the dead on the first day of the week to show that He fulfilled all the Law of God; that He bore all of the righteous punishments of God against us, for we who believe. This was His passion. This was His work. And there was, and there is, great profit in it. Believers trust in Christ's finished work for their salvation. They rest in it, and not in their own works.

But once we have believed in Jesus, there is great profit in doing the good works which God commands, by the power of the Holy Spirit. We trust in Christ's imparted grace to enable us to do those things which the Bible commands; not to merit favor, but to gain in being conformed to His blessed image. There is great gain for the believer and others around him when they learn to labor spiritually. Our Lord Jesus shows us what we as believers ought to be working for if we would really see times of gain in our lives. Listen to John 6: 27. "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him." The gain that we are looking for in our labors as believers is the gain which accrues to the kingdom and cause of God and Christ. Earthly labors will have their wages and their rewards, but spiritual labors will have their rewards, both here, and to all eternity.

God's word instructs us most certainly about what kind of a life will bring us great gain. 1st Timothy 6: 6 says, "Now godliness with contentment is great gain." "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." "And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content." Godliness, we are told here is a means of great gain, but it is not found by trying hard to attain to worldly wealth. The time of this life is not given us to pursue after earthly riches, but rather heavenly riches. Look at what verse 9 of 1st Timothy 6 says: "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition." "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." Great gain is found in godliness with contentment. And godliness is pursuing the things which are found in verse 11. "But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and gentleness." And again, here, we see the great gain which comes through pursuing good works. Verse 17 says, "Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who gives us all things richly to enjoy." "Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." The time to find earthly gain is now, if you would be a worldling. But there is no eternal inheritance for such a person. The only time to find eternal gain is now and it will be very sad if you do not pursue it because you would rather have the world, and the passing pleasures of sin. And this leads me to the second point which is:

2nd – It takes real discernment to know when to throw things away.

I do not know how it is with you folks, but Jenni and I are savers. This is good in some ways I believe, but in other ways it is not. We have real trouble getting rid of things. It is hard for us to

throw away earthly things of our past. I am sure that there is a time to keep and a time to cast away with regard to earthly things. Things are stored up in people's attics or in their basements, or in their closets because they do not want to give them up. They are too valuable, usually in terms of the memories that surround these objects, or clothes, or pictures, or papers that lie there in boxes for decades. There is a time for either throwing these things away or giving them away. That time is when you find that they will not be read or used ever again, and they are valuable only to yourself in terms of sentimentality. There are some things that ought to be saved because they would be appreciated, read, or used by others, even if they cannot be used or appreciated or read by ourselves. And sometimes there are things which would be valuable to others which we do not find valuable ourselves. But what we must at all costs realize, is that we cannot take any of this stuff with us when we die. It will all be left behind, and it will all perish, either with the passing of years or be burned up at the last Day when Christ comes back and cleanses the earth with fire. What is truly most important now, is to have the discernment to keep what is good and valuable, and to cast away those things that are not of lasting significance or value.

A good question to ask yourself is this: Are you willing to look at what is set before you every day as an exercise in learning to judge what is of lasting value and what is only of temporary and earthly value? There are spiritual and eternal truths and realities in relation to obeying the particulars of God's word which will require that you struggle through the issues of what your obedience to Christ will mean for you personally. There is a time to gain Christ and a time to lose your self-oriented life every day, when you are a believer. You can see an indication of this in Philippians Chapter 3, verse 7. Paul, having listed his reasons why he might have confidence in the flesh as a Jew in verses 4-6, now makes a statement of how he came to think of things related to his gain and loss sheet. "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ." "Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if by any means, I may attain to the resurrection of the dead." "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me."

You see how he has put his own gains, the things that he would strive for, if he lived for himself, in the loss column; and how he deliberately puts finding and knowing more of Christ in the gains column. He knows that winning Christ will become the ultimate gain if he can serve Christ more completely. That is true Christian self-denial. And that is true Christian attainment. There is a time to gain and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to throw away. Have you come to the place where you are resolved to "know and win" Christ; the Christ who died for you, so that you could live for far better things than what the people of the world live for? This is a joyful pursuit; just the way to live the Christian life. Let me attempt to explain to you the Lord's work in casting away. Proverbs chapter 10, verse 3 – "The Lord will not allow the righteous soul to famish, but He casts away the desire of the wicked." What a precious truth this is; that the Lord will not allow the righteous soul to famish. He will by His Holy Spirit be directing your attention continually to things which will be profitable for you. The question is: Will you, in your heart, be led to do what He is directing you to; the consideration of how His power might be more active in your life; that you might be able to have fellowship with Him in His sufferings, and be made conformable in your heart's experience to His death. There are experiences of walking with Christ closely which a casual more worldly minded believer will not find unless they seek them. This is why Proverbs 3: 5 is in the Bible. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."

I wonder if each of us remembers that grand verse which is found in Psalm 37: 4 – “Delight yourself in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.” Ask yourself now: What are the desires of my heart? Is my heart only set on earthly goals or things that will not last. Perhaps you find yourself failing in your sanctification in this way. Remember the verses farther on from the ones that we just looked at in Philippians 3? Verses 13 and 14. “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” This is a part of what it means to cast things away. If you are going to be useful to Christ, both now and in the future, then you must forget those things which are behind, and reach forward to those things which are ahead. You should not allow yourself to be afraid of getting older. If you are pressing on to know the Lord, you will, by His grace, be growing wiser in accordance with Scriptural truth by putting the Bible’s principles into practice in your life.

But what will you then pursue, once you have thrown away your idols; those things which were more important to you than knowing God and following Christ? Well, I believe that you will want to join with your brethren in those efforts to sanctify yourselves (to dedicate your life to being a godly person), and to promote Christ’s kingdom. And, in this regard, you will join in with your brethren in sanctifying the worship of the Lord with renewed purpose. You will join the battle to cast out the rubbish from the worship of God. Turn with me over to 2nd Chronicles 29: 1. “Hezekiah became king when he was twenty-five years old, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem.” “His mother’s name was Abijah the daughter of Zechariah.” “And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father David had done.” “In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them.” “Then he brought in the priests and the Levites, and gathered them in the East Square, and said to them: ‘Hear me, Levites!’” “Now sanctify yourselves, sanctify the house of the Lord God of your fathers, and carry out the rubbish from the holy place.” “For our fathers have trespassed and done evil in the eyes of the Lord our God; they have forsaken Him and have turned their faces away from the dwelling place of the Lord, and turned their backs on Him.” “They have also shut up the doors of the vestibule, put out the lamps, and have not burned incense or offered burnt offerings in the holy place the God of Israel.” “Therefore the wrath of the Lord fell upon Judah and Jerusalem, and He has given them up to trouble, to desolation, and to jeering as you see with your eyes.”

Well, Hezekiah had it in his heart to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel that God’s fierce wrath might turn away from them, and so he said to the priests and the Levites in verse 11 – “My sons, do not be negligent now, for the Lord has chosen you to stand before Him to serve Him and that you should minister to Him and burn incense.” In verse 15 it says: “And they gathered their brethren, sanctified themselves, and went according to the commandment of the king, at the words of the Lord, to cleanse the house of the Lord.” “Then the priests went into the inner part of the house of the Lord to cleanse it, and brought out all the debris that they found in the temple of the Lord to the court of the house of the Lord.” “And the Levites took it out and carried it to the Brook Kidron.” So we find that they sanctified the worship of God by removing the rubbish, and moreover they did something else which was very needful. Verse 18 – “Then they went in to King Hezekiah and said, ‘We have cleansed all the house of the Lord, the altar of burnt offerings with all its articles, and the table of the showbread with all its articles. (This word “articles” is translated – “vessels” in the King James) It says then in verse 19: “Moreover all the vessels, which king Ahaz in his reign did cast away in his transgression, have we prepared and sanctified, and behold, they are before the altar of the Lord.” In applying this to ourselves we will strive for this: What others have cast away in their transgression, in terms of the worship of God, we will cleanse and bring these good things back into the worship of the Lord which was set up and established before by our forefathers. Let us covenant together now that we have brought reformation to our church, that we will bring it to other people and other churches as well. Let this be a time to gain and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to cast away.

