

**Ecclesiastes 3: 7; “A Time to Tear and to Sew”, Sermon # 15 in the series –  
“Remember Your Creator”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall, on  
August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

The truth that Solomon had learned here, and learned well, is that there are times and seasons for everything that God has purposed in regard to what godly people will learn in this life. Unbelieving people may or may not see some of these truths, but they will refuse to see that God has specific plans and purposes for every life that He creates. God has ordained, in both a general and a specific sense, that every godly person will come to understand that His ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts than our thoughts. He has purposed that we who know Him will come to know that He is wise in the way and the timing of all that He does. Think about Isaiah 55: 8 and what it says, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord.” “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” This verse is the explanation of why God commands all men to seek Him while He may be found and call upon Him while He is near, and not to put it off a day longer. People who are wicked, people who are sinful and unrighteous, are to “forsake their own way”, they are to forsake their own thoughts; that is, in regard to how their own life is supposed to be lived. And they are to return to Him. Sin always takes a person away from God. But if that person will return, He will pardon them. People, both saved and unsaved, do not understand that this is what they need to do, unless they stop and consider God, and what He reveals about Himself. The book of Ecclesiastes was written so that people will come to see the futility and the vanity of all that they will attempt to do and to accomplish apart from God, living life under the sun. But it is also meant to lead us to consider God Himself, after we have seen that vanity. We are to see God as being all wise; the One who can teach us the right way to live, and the right way to react to everything in our lives. God has a time and a season for everything that He plans and does in relation to us as people. And He expects us to learn from Him, not to argue with Him and to fight against Him. But even if we do, He is still stronger than we are. He will be faithful to show each one trusting in Him and looking to Him for wisdom; just what is the right way.

The truth that I want to lay before you is this. In God’s holy mind, there is a time for us to react to what we see happening to us, and things going on around us, by tearing our garments and our hearts; and then there is also a time for us to react by sewing new garments and sewing up what has been torn apart. The complementary truth is found for us in the second part of the verse which tells us that there is a time to keep silence, and a time to speak. These relate to each other in that the time of silence is appropriate for the time of tearing, and the time of speaking is appropriate for the time of sewing. In order that we will not go too fast and miss any of the truth that is here for us, we will only focus on the first part of this verse. We will look 1<sup>st</sup> at the time for tearing and then 2<sup>nd</sup> – We will look at the time for sewing.

**1st - There is a time for Tearing.**

The time of tearing, I believe refers to the ancient practice of men rending their own garments. This is the way that the King James version reads: “A time to rend, and a time to sew”. Men wore robes in those days. They wore more loose fitting longer one-pieced garments. And we should understand that it was the custom of those times that when a man came into a situation where he was experiencing great fear, or grief, loss or uncertainty, in regard to the things or people that he held as precious in his life, that he might tear or rend his robes. He was saying in effect: I wish that this situation had never come to pass in my life. I am distressed and I wish that I could change it, but I cannot. I am forced to accept it now, but if there is anything that I can do to change it or reverse it, I will try. The Scripture bears this interpretation out in

many places, but let's look at just a few. The first instances are found in the book of Genesis chapter 37. They concern the reaction of Reuben and his father Jacob to the apparent death of Joseph. You remember the story; of how Joseph's brothers hated him. They hated him for his dreams of his supposedly ruling over them someday in the future. They hated him because their father seemed to love and favor him more than them. When Jacob sent Joseph to seek their welfare as they were taking care of the sheep over by Dothan, they saw him coming and said to themselves, (vs. 19) "Look, this dreamer is coming!" "Come, therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, 'Some wild beast has devoured him.'" "We shall see what will become of his dreams!" "And Reuben heard it and he delivered him out of their hands, and said, 'Let us not kill him.'" "And Reuben said to them, 'Shed no blood, but cast him into the pit which is in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him' – that he might deliver him out of their hands, and bring him back to his father." That is what they did, and then they sat down to eat a meal.

Reuben then wandered off somewhere after the meal and wasn't there when a little later, Judah and the rest of his brothers sold Joseph for twenty shekels of silver and the Midianite traders took him to Egypt. Then in verse 29 it says, "Then Reuben returned to the pit, and indeed Joseph was not in the pit; and he tore his clothes." "And he returned to his brothers and said, 'The lad is no more; and I, where shall I go?'" "So they took Joseph's tunic, killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the tunic in the blood." "Then they sent the tunic of many colors, and they brought it to their father and said, 'We have found this.'" "Do you know whether it is your son's tunic." "A wild beast has devoured him." "Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces." "Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days." "And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, 'For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning.'" "Thus his father wept for him."

Why did Jacob tear his clothes? It was because he thought that Joseph had been torn to pieces by wild beasts and that he would never see him again. Jacob was torn in the emotions of his heart because he thought that he had lost his dear son. He loved him because he was the son of his wife Rachel, and he had been looking for God to bless him and his whole family through such a promising and dutiful young man. And it grieved him greatly that he would never see him again. Why did Reuben tear his clothes? Because he knew that he could not deliver Joseph and that he would not be able to give an answer for the lad when he next saw his father. I'm sure that they both thought that it was a time to tear, but for different reasons. They had both lost someone who was very important to their lives, but in the case of Reuben there was a great deal of selfishness bound up in the reasons for his tearing his clothes. He did feel some compassion for his brother, but even though he stopped his brothers from killing Joseph, he still counseled that he should be thrown in the pit.

If he had truly loved Joseph he would have told his brothers that their thoughts were not right toward him and that he would have no part in their wicked plans, and that they should repent of their wicked schemes. This he did not do. There is a time and a season for every purpose under heaven. This was a time to test the love of Jacob for Joseph, and the love of the brothers for Joseph, which was non-existent, and the love of Reuben for Joseph, which was a selfish love. In this case there was a selfish tearing of clothes that was going on because God wanted to show Reuben his own sinful selfishness ahead of his showing his brothers their sinful malice. God ordained that these events would come to pass so that He might bring Reuben to see himself better later. He would come to a more sincere repentance later on, and God would also be able to use him later on in helping to bring his brothers to repentance, years later. Reuben was somewhat tender in his conscience. He was somewhat sympathetic and sensitive to Joseph's plight, but he was still not where he should be, in terms of his resisting the counsel of

his brothers to do evil to Joseph. He was sorry that Joseph had apparently been killed, but not sorry enough that he would not go along with his brother's deception of Jacob.

There is a reason for this, and we should take notice of it. There is a tendency in our hearts to want the approval of the people around us more than we want the approval of God. We want to be accepted by our peers. We do not like to have to reprove them for their sins. But it is the state of our hearts and what we do in relation to other people that is the thing that God is looking at. It is whether our hearts are torn by grief over what our sins do to other people, and whether we see that they dishonor Him, and hurt other people; that is the issue. Turn with me over to Joel chapter 2, verse 12, and you will see what righteous tearing and rending consists of. A judgment day was about to come upon the children of Israel; the day of the Lord was about to come upon that generation. The Chaldeans were going to come upon them like locusts to destroy their society. But even at that critical time, God still tells them through the prophet, "Now therefore, says the Lord, "Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." "So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful." If we are able, by grace, to see that our hearts are rent by our realization of what our sin has done to dishonor God and how it has hurt other people, let us apply to Him for grace. For if we can just come to realize the greatness of the grace which God has stored up for us in Christ, then as we confess our sins and mourn over them, and resolve to forsake them, we shall find mercy and forgiveness. We shall even find restoration and blessing coming to us to make us into the kind of people that God is pleased with. There is a time for this kind of tearing, this kind of rending. And we should understand that it will take a quiet careful evaluation of our hearts to come to that point.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – Let us see that there is also a time to sew.**

To sew is to take pieces of cloth that have been cut out in specific shapes, and using thread and needle, those pieces are put together to make a garment which pleasing either for ourselves or for someone else to wear. Once again, I believe that this relates to our hearts. When your heart has been rent by conviction of sin, and when your heart has been broken and made contrite by the providential ordering God who has permitted difficulties and trials to come into your life, will you not remember that there is also a time to sew? There is a time and a purpose under heaven for sewing; for taking the torn pieces of the experiences of your life and putting them all together again; your loving God fashioning them into a beautiful garment which you can joyfully wear. It is only a believer in Christ who can do this. It is the garment that is formed by your experience of what God has done for you through these things. Turn with me over to Romans 8: 28, and you will see this. "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." God is the One who cuts all these pieces of fabric out for you, dear believer, in His providential ordering of all the events in your life. If you are wise you will believe that He also knows how to sew them together to make a beautiful garment.

He has given us the pattern of what He is doing in His Son. He has shown the pattern to us, in His word the Bible. He has taken the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, His dear Son, and has through His life, and death, and resurrection, made a perfect seamless garment of righteousness for you to wear by faith. He has done all of these things so that you may participate in the process of His making this garment. This garment is not identical to the garment of salvation, but it is linked to it. The garments of salvation were made by Christ Himself, out of His sufferings and His righteous life. And these are imputed to you by the exercise of your faith in Him. But this garment that I am speaking of is like an article of clothing which goes right along with it in a wedding; like a train, or a veil. It is the garment the you will wear on the day that you see the Lord Jesus face to face. It is the garment that the church will wear on her wedding day, as is spoken about in Revelation 19: 7 and 8. "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for

the marriage of the Lamb has come and His wife has made herself ready.” “And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.” You see, the Bride made herself ready. And the way she does so is by righteous acts and righteous responses to heart rending situations which you go through. God, in this amazing work, has made you the tailor or the seamstress, as you go through this life. You are to take the pieces of the fabric of your many experiences with people and situations in life, experiences that may have been difficult and painful, and by faith you are to sew them together. You are to do all your righteous acts by faith. Using the needle and thread of prayer and meditation upon all these pieces that God has cut out in His providence for you, you begin to sew a garment of righteousness; a garment made up your life’s experiences, and your hopefully righteous responses to them. You will be making a linen garment which you can wear for that Day when you see Christ face to face.

Sewing is a very quiet and contemplative work. But in the end something is produced which is truly beautiful. Let your life be given to spiritual sewing. There is still time for it. When you engage in this holy work of sewing you will find that it is one of the things which Christ died for, in order that a holy garment might be produced. Isaiah 61: 3 says that Christ died in order to “console those who mourn in Zion”. He will give them “beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness”. The garment of praise is no doubt something He died to give you; but something also which you work on, in living out your Christian life to the glory of God. I hope that you will be a good tailor or a good seamstress; a good worker with the cloth that the Lord gives you, and produce many such garments.