

**Ecclesiastes 3: 7b – “A Time to Keep Silence”, Sermon # 16 in the series –  
“Remember Your Creator”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall, on  
August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

The last time that we were together around this text, I spoke to you about the truth that there is a time for tearing and the time for sewing. I attempted to show you that the time of tearing relates to the times in our life when something or someone is torn out of our life and we are upset about it, and we don't understand why. In Old Testament times, the way that men expressed their grief or sorrow, fear or frustration, over a situation of great loss, was to tear their garments. We looked, last week, at the responses of Reuben and Jacob to Joseph's supposedly having been killed by a wild beast. This gave us examples of the differing motives behind their each tearing their garments. Reuben's was a selfish motive for tearing his clothes. It was reflecting the fact that he would not be able to give to his father Jacob a reason for the apparent death of Joseph, since he knew that he was guilty of having counseled his brothers that Joseph should be thrown into a pit, instead of the brothers killing him. His motive for tearing his clothes was because he felt guilty, and because he was afraid. Yes, he had wanted the brothers to let Joseph go, and not harm him, but he did not want it badly enough to reprove them about it. He was not definite enough about doing the right thing. He did not seek diligently enough to turn his brothers away from doing anything bad to him. He needed to rend his heart and not simply his garments. Jacob's motive for tearing his clothes was because he thought that he would never see Joseph again. He loved him greatly and he valued him highly. His heart was truly rent. God approved of Jacob's motive, but He did need to teach Jacob to rest in His providential care, and not to think that all things were against him when He brought apparently frowning providences to bear in his life. God was doing Jacob good even in these very difficult and trying times. There was always a smiling face behind the frowning providence.

The other truth that we looked at in the last sermon, a truth that relates to this, was that there is a time for sewing. There is a time for taking all the things which God has providentially ordered in your life, the things that have been hard for you, the things that have been most difficult for you, and to put them together as pieces of fabric are put together by a tailor or a seamstress; one who is making a set of clothes. As someone who is sewing lays out a garment, so you as a Christian should lay out all the providential orderings of God in your mind's eye; and thinking of the pattern that God has given to you in Christ, you should sew them together in a way that will glorify Him. You will be making for yourself a linen garment of righteous thoughts and righteous deeds, using the material of imparted grace that the Lord has given to you. For, even as the Lord is causing all things to work together for good in your life as a Christian, He would have you to think about these things and to lay them out and put them together in a pattern, to sew a garment most beautiful, out these pieces. If you will work on this garment; if you will think about these providential orderings in your life, with faith and love to God working in your heart, you will indeed bring forth a beautiful garment that you will be wearing on the Day when you see your Lord face to face.

This is where the second half of verse 7 will help us. For there is a time to keep silence and a time to speak. Being silent and speaking are related to this spiritual sewing that I am saying that you need to engage in. As a spiritual tailor or seamstress, when you are torn either by difficult providences or by a sense of your own sinfulness, it is at that very time that you ought to be silent. And then later when you have begun to put together these providential orderings of God in your mind and sew them together, then it will be the time for you to speak. So let us examine the material which God has given to us, once again.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – God would have us to understand that there is a time to be Silent –**

We need very much to remember that our God is a God who searches our hearts; that He, the Almighty, the all-wise God, looks at all of our motives. You may have heard this verses many times, but I would have you to consider it more carefully now, in relation to our study at this time. Turn

with me over to Jeremiah chapter 17, verse 9. Verse 9 says this: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” “I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.” I want to begin here because I want you to see that our God is a God who is watching very carefully over the souls of His dear children. He searches their hearts in order to give to them according to their ways and the fruit of their doings. As we look, each at our own heart, I think that we should apply this truth to ourselves in this way: My heart is deceitful above all things, and it is desperately wicked. This is how I am, in and of myself, apart from the grace of God. In my flesh, that sinful part of my nature which would lead me to act on my own, independently of God’s word, His wisdom, and His strength, there is no good thing as it says in Romans 7: 18. “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.” And verse 21 – “I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.” This is where the battle is joined in regard the Christian’s keeping their heart. They cannot know their own heart as well as they would like to know it. It is that tricky. It is prone to wander and prone to be deceived, apart from grace.

But, as a Christian, I can take real comfort and encouragement from the fact that there is One who does know my heart – The Lord. And in thinking about this verse this I should be convinced that the Lord searches my heart, even to give to me according to my ways, and according to the fruit of my doings. He knows my sinful weaknesses and tendencies. He knows how I can overcome them. He always knows what to give and what to bring to me so that I might grow in respect to righteousness and truth. And so you see, the Lord is not sitting idly by and not interacting with you. He is always very near to you and working in you, and with you, by the power of the Holy Spirit if you are a Christian. This is something that you can silently rejoice in. God is thinking of how He can do you good. This is the greatness of the New Covenant grace which we find in Jesus Christ our Lord. Turn with me over to Jeremiah 32: 40. “And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me.” “Yes, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will assuredly plant them in this land, with all My heart and with all My soul.” This is speaking in the context, of the conversion of the Jews as a nation in these New Testament times; their being brought into the Church and into all of the blessings of the New Covenant (the Everlasting Covenant) which Christ has purchased for them. But this principle of doing all of His elect people good applies to us Gentiles as well, for Christ has broken down the barrier between us, and so all of the same covenant blessings belong to us as well.

It is through Christ that God does you good, and He doesn’t turn away from doing good to you. But He would have those who believe in Him to learn when is the time to be silent, and when is the time to speak. So let’s look at this for a few more minutes. The time to be silent is first of all when you realize what a great and holy God you have. Turn with me over to Habakkuk chapter 2, verse 18. Here, the judgment of God against the worshipers of idols is evident. “What profit is the image, that its maker should carve it, the molded image, a teacher of lies, that the maker of its mold should trust in it, to make mute idols?” “Woe to him who says to wood, ‘Awake!’” “To the silent stone, ‘Arise!’” “It shall teach!” “Behold it is overlaid with gold and silver, yet in it there is no breath at all.” “But the Lord is in His holy temple.” “Let all the earth keep silence before Him.” In other words, when we consider how high and holy a God He is, it ought to move us to silence, so that we would know and serve Him as the only true and living God. Perceiving His perfection of holiness ought to cause us to hold Him in reverence and awe. We ought not to be hasty to speak or to conclude that there are more gods than one. There are not. And so our God is to be approached with reverence. He is in heaven. He is infinitely greater than we are. He is infinite in understanding and majestic in His holiness.

Look over at Isaiah 57: 15 with me. “For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble

spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.” You can see here that we can fairly deduce from these words that a humble person is not one who is always speaking, but he is one who is listening for God’s voice and waiting upon Him. Often the reason that we are always trying to speak to every situation around us is because we want to be an authority on all the issues, when it is not God who needs to listen to us, but we need to listen to God. It is God’s authority in his word that we need to submit to. This does not mean that we cease praying, as I shall show you in a few minutes, but rather our silence is a heart attitude of humility which we are continually cultivating. It is a heart attitude of having God’s word speak to us, and in this holy way we listen to Him. Often we do not realize that God is carefully examining our hearts to see if we are the silent humble listener and learner before Him. And perhaps we do not see that we are sinning against him, which is why we do not sense His presence and know his favor in a greater sense.

The wicked surely do not know or understand that God is examining their hearts, but the believer should. Turn with me over to Psalm 50, verse 16. But to the wicked God says, ‘What right have you to declare My statutes, or take My covenant in your mouth, seeing you hate instruction and cast My words behind you? When you saw a thief, you consented with him, and have been a partaker with adulterers.’ “You give your mouth to evil, and your tongue frames deceit.” “You sit and speak against your brother; you slander your own mother’s son.” “These things you have done, and I kept silent; you thought that I was altogether like you; but I will rebuke you and set them in order before your eyes.” That is how God views the wicked who do not know the time when to speak and the time to be quiet. But the righteous knows, or he will come to know, when to be silent. Turn with me to Psalm 62, verse . “Truly my soul silently waits for God; from Him comes my salvation.” “He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved.” The soul of a Christian knows that the all-important help and deliverance for all the situations of difficulty that he faces is with God and comes from God. God is his defense; He is his strong tower as it says in the margin. The Christian can remain calm; trusting and resting in God because his soul is silently waiting for God. He is silently waiting upon God so that God will teach him what he should do, and even eventually the things that he should say in regard to people around him.

In this particular case, David was being persecuted and hounded by evil men. It could have been those loyal to Saul, or it could have been those loyal to his own son Absalom later on after his sin with Bathsheba. I tend to think the latter. But look at how they use words against him. Verse 3 – “How long will you attack a man?” “You shall be slain, all of you, like a leaning wall and a tottering fence.” “They only consult to cast him down from his high position; they delight in lies; they bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly.” There is a time to be silent before God, and it is when men are persecuting you. Again, this does not mean that you should be silent in prayer, for verse 8 says, “Pour out your heart before Him....” But it is being silent in terms of your murmuring and complaining in a way which questions his wisdom, and will not trust Him for his grace. Verse 5 – “My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him.” “He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be moved.” Let me ask you if this is you my dear Christian friend? Do you “silently wait for God alone” in relation to everything that other people attempt to do to you that is wrong? Or are you such a person of action that you believe that you have to speak up continually in your own defense? Are you tempted to use the same sinful tactics that they use, to get back at them?

It is making progress in holiness when you realize that there is a time to be silent. Christ, it says in Isaiah 53: 7, “was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.” Why was Christ silent? He could have defended Himself. He was sinless in everything that He did. He was silent because He was bearing the punishment which our sins deserved. He would be silent knowing what our sins deserve. And He willingly volunteered to bear those sins in his body on the tree. The time to be silent is when you realize that you are sinful and you are under the conviction

of sin. The time to be silent is when you are humbly looking to God, through Jesus Christ your Lord, for mercy and deliverance for yourself or for others.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – God would have us to understand that there is a time to speak.**

There is a time to wait silently before the Lord; to hush and still the sinful groaning complaining spirit and to know that He is God. But there is also a righteous complaining and groaning in which you are not silent, but you speak. That is why you should be cultivating your prayer life. In Psalm 142, verse 2 it says: “I cry out to the Lord with my voice; with my voice to the Lord I make my supplication.” “I pour out my complaint before Him; I declare before Him my trouble.” So prayer is always good in every time and in every place. But what about our words before other men? Well, we must always be those who are conscious and careful in our speech. There is perhaps not any other subject which is more spoken of, in the whole Bible, in relation to our being righteous and holy. Our speaking and our words are very important to God and to other people. It is good for us to remember that we are created in the image and likeness of God. God does all things by the word of His power. And it is good for all believers to be warned by the word of God, and also to be encouraged by the word of God. Turn with me to Psalm 19, verse 10. Here we find that the Psalmist showing us the desirability of the word of God to help us as a believer, in all things. Speaking of the things that we will learn to do if we will receive His word, it says, “More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.” “Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward.”

So the Psalmist knew that it is good that he be warned by the word of God, and that there would be a great reward in keeping the word of God. And so he goes on to ask this very important question in verse 12 – “Who can understand his errors?” Well, the answer should come to us; we do not understand our errors well, especially in regard to the things that we say and speak. He goes on to say, “Cleanse me from secret faults.” “Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me.” “Then I shall be blameless, and shall be innocent of great transgression.” He sees that there are secret faults within him; he sees that there are presumptuous sins lurking there, in the way that he thinks and speaks within his heart. And he knows that these might actually break out in his speech. And so he prays to be kept from them. He says, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.” This is where wholesome speech begins. It begins in the heart by the prayerful consideration that I might be kept back from saying what would not be good to say. And then wholesome speech comes to fruition by your having the moral courage to speak up and say things that would be good for edification.

You can see this if you will turn over to Ephesians 4: 29. “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.” A corrupt word is a word which has the bad effect of turning your own thoughts, or thoughts of others, to things which will not be good for them to think upon, or which would have a hurtful or harmful effect upon your hearers; that of dwelling upon things that are either untrue, hurtful, or sinful. We are exhorted here not to let any word like this come out of our mouth, but to only let such words come out of our mouth as will edify; which will build up the hearers; words which will impart grace to the hearers. To impart grace these words must show forth your love of God and His truth, and your love for the eternal welfare of the person who you are speaking to. So let us pray and ask God that He would so work in us that we will guard our heart, and that He will guide our tongue in the things that we say, so that we will be more and more be speaking in this righteous way.