

**Ecclesiastes 2: 4-11; “I Made my Works Great”, Sermon # 6 in the series –
“Remember Your Creator”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
September 20th, 2015, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

In our last study we saw that Solomon had turned to the pleasures of laughter and mirth because he had become tired of the painful experience of acquiring wisdom. It was not that he desired to abandon wisdom. He chose, rather, to pursue the experiences of madness and folly, being guided by wisdom, so that they wouldn't ruin his life; but rather, bring real satisfaction and fulfillment to it. He did desire earthly happiness, but he was having trouble finding it. Here in verse 4 we find him continuing and refining this pursuit, of earthly happiness and satisfaction, by means of great works. If you will remember, he was testing himself; he was testing these experiences to see if he could find lasting pleasure and satisfaction in them. The test that he now turns to is in regard to the subject of great works. Certainly, he thought, there will be something in regard to my ability to do these great works that will bring me tremendous and lasting satisfaction. He believed that there would be a great sense of accomplishment that would come to him as he wisely labored to build things, and accumulate riches and possessions. However, the object that Solomon had in mind was not simply this. His greater object in this pursuit, as we see it in verse 9, was to “become great and to excel in his greatness more than all who were in Jerusalem before him”. He would do this by building, acquiring, and gathering. So, as we go with Solomon in his journey, everything we want to learn from him will center around those three things; building, acquiring, and gathering. Three things, but we will take them as two points. Let's join with him in his pursuit and see if we can see ourselves in him; trying to find meaning for our own lives through these same ways of living. And let us see if we can come to the right conclusion about each of these pursuits in relation to what will make us truly great in the eyes of God. Perhaps God will give us the grace to know the truth that will set us free as we study this.

First of all - Solomon became great by becoming a builder. (Verse 4)

He built himself a very great estate. “I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards.” “I made myself gardens and orchards, and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them.” “I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove.” Certainly Solomon had the money to do this. He had the time to do it. He had the ability to do this in a way that would greatly impress other people. He did not have to go into great debt in order to do it. He had a perfectly clear conscience in relation to this work of building that he pursued. This was something that God had given him the ability to do, being a great king whom God raised up, and he knew that God had granted this ability to him. I want you to turn with me to 1st Kings Chapter 7. We can see here some of things that Solomon built. In Chapters 5 and 6 we find him, after making great preparations in building the temple of the Lord.

Here in verse 1 it says, “But Solomon took thirteen years to build his own house; so he finished all his house.” “He also built the House of the Forest of Lebanon; its length was one hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits, with four rows of cedar pillars, and cedar beams on the pillars.” “And it was paneled with cedars above the beams that were on forty-five pillars, fifteen to a row.” “There were windows with beveled frames in three rows, and window was opposite window in three tiers.” “And all the doorways and doorposts had rectangular frames; and window was opposite window in three tiers.” “He also made the Hall of Pillars; its length was fifty cubits, and its width thirty cubits; and in front of them was a portico with pillars, and a canopy was in front of them.” “Then he made a hall for the throne, the Hall of Judgment, where he might judge; and it was paneled with cedar from floor to ceiling.” “And the house where he dwelt had another court inside the hall of like workmanship.” “Solomon also

made a house like this hall for Pharaoh's daughter, whom he had taken as wife." "All these were of costly stones cut to size, trimmed with saws inside and out, from the foundation to the eaves, and also on the outside to the great court." "The foundation was of costly stones, large stones, some ten cubits, and some eight cubits." "And above were costly stones, hewn to size, and cedar wood." "The great court was enclosed with three rows of hewn stones and a row of cedar beams." "So were the inner court of the house of the Lord and the vestibule of the temple."

Now, you can see that each of these houses was a great work in itself. Solomon began in the right way. He built the Lord's house first and then his own house. This is one of the great principles of building in the Christian's life. "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added." It is not a good thing when the order is reversed. Turn with me to Haggai Chapter 1. In verse 2 the prophet confronts the people of Israel and says, "Thus speaks the Lord of hosts, saying: 'This people says, 'The time has not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built.'" "Then the word of the Lord came by Haggai the prophet, saying, 'Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses and this temple to lie in ruins?'" "Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Consider your ways!'" "You have sown much, and bring in little; you eat, but do not have enough; You drink, but you are not filled with drink; You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes." "Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Consider your ways!'" "Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified, says the Lord." "You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away." "Why?" says the Lord of Hosts." "Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house." "Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit." "For I called for a drought."

You can see here can't you, the first principle of building is do the works that you do, for the Lord, and to the Lord, and to continue to do so in the maintenance of the Lord's work? Solomon had the first order right, but then in 1 Kings it says that he went on to spend 13 years in building these other houses. I think that he spent the same kind of money on detail in those works as he did in the work in building the house of the Lord. From the aesthetic vantage point, in order that he might seem great in the eyes of men, this might seem good. It was certainly impressive. But from the standpoint of the Lord's evaluation it would not be so good perhaps. Why? Because the works that Solomon was doing needed to be done to the glory of God, not his own glory. And Solomon lost track of this in his search for earthly pleasure and satisfaction. In the case of the people being preached to in Haggai, they placed a greater priority on getting their own houses fixed up and looking impressive rather than the Lord's house. I believe that this is sometimes the case with us today. We are concerned to separate our own earthly concerns from the concerns for the Lord's house and the furtherance of His kingdom and glory. This is truly not right, neither is it the way to live as a Christian. "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10: 31) What was Solomon's problem? He was too concerned with his own greatness and the way the people thought about him. He was looking to be remembered forever by men instead of by God. If this you, my friend, I think that it will be wise to re-evaluate your priorities. For you will surely be disappointed seeking for earthly glory and fame. But you will never regret investing your time and money in helping to build the kingdom of God.

2ndly- Solomon was one who acquired and gathered many possessions, and even many people. (Verse 7)

"I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house." "Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me." I suppose that we could say that the servants of that day were somewhat like the household appliances that we have in our houses today; except of course, they were persons. Our servants are all those

appliances and devices that make life supposedly simpler and easier. In the practical sense of having these conveniences at our fingertips, we should feel that we have it all. Solomon certainly did. He had “greater possessions than all that were in Jerusalem before him”. He had something that we do not have today. He had the personal element of being served by other people, his servants, and therefore he had enjoyment in a place where he had all the comforts of his household and business. His servants no doubt waited on him hand and foot; they awaited each and every one of his commands. His riches and his wisdom allowed him to use these blessings of people waiting upon him, in the right way. He did not abuse them; he used them wisely. And yet it was still not enough to bring him happiness. Why was this? I am sure that he asked himself this question as well. I think that the reason that he was not happy and satisfied in a lasting sense was that he was trusting in his riches rather than in God Himself to bring him happiness.

Turn with me to Psalm 49. We can see here what Solomon’s problem was. And it may be our problem as well. “Hear this, all peoples; Give ear, all inhabitants of the world, both low and high, rich and poor together.” “My mouth shall speak wisdom and the meditation of my heart shall give understanding.” “I will incline my ear to a proverb; I will disclose my dark saying on the harp.” “Why should I fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity at my heels surrounds me?” “Those who trust in their wealth and boast in the multitude of their riches, none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him – for the redemption of their souls is costly and it shall cease forever – that he should continue to live eternally and not see the Pit.” “For he sees wise men die; likewise the fool and the senseless person perish, and leave their wealth to others.” “Their inner thought is that their houses will last forever, their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names.” “Nevertheless man, though in honor, does not remain; He is like the beasts that perish.” “This is the way of those who are foolish, and of their posterity who approve their sayings.”

Now you can see the problem with the wicked rich, here in these verses. They deceive themselves. “Their inner thought is that their houses will last forever.” They think that doing their works, having their servants wait on them, and spending their money all will last, but it does not. The honor that they will receive for these works will not last, and it will fail to redeem them from their sins. Salvation is something that the rich man cannot buy. It is something that even the earthly, worldly wise man cannot figure out. The reason? The cost is much greater than they can imagine. It is the cost of the blood of the Son of God. This is why it is so important not to trust in riches, but in God who gives the free gift of salvation at great cost to Himself. His Son’s precious blood, worth more than all the world of men, redeems us from sin and from the grave. God gives us the true riches as well. It is the riches of Christ’s grace that are the true riches. This is why it says in verse 16, “Do not be afraid when one becomes rich, when the glory of his house is increased; for when he dies he shall carry nothing away.” “Though while he lives he blesses himself (for men will praise you when you do well for yourself), he shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light.” “A man who is in honor, yet does not understand, is like the beasts that perish.” This is no doubt describing the wicked rich. But what a foolish thing it is for the Christian person, the believer, to live with an attitude that is similar. This is what happened to Solomon. He knew that he was given his wisdom and his riches from God. Yet he would attempt to find pleasure in blessing himself. Whether he was conscious of it, or not, he was trying to win the praise of men rather than God. This is a very bad mistake in living the Christian life.

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 3, verse 10. Listen to the Apostle Paul and his way of building. “According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it.” “But let each one take heed how he builds on it.” “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” “Now if

anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is." "If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward." "If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet as through fire." These verses may have a primary reference to ministers or it may also be applied to all Christians who are striving together with ministers to build Christ's Church. They are either building to the glory of God upon the foundation of Christ, or they are using worldly wisdom and methods in their helping to build. Each man's work will become clear on the last Day, the Day of judgment. At that great hour, the fire of searching judgment will test each man's work to see of what sort it is. The Christian, on the Day of Judgment, will not be judged for his or her sins; they will be judged so that they will receive a reward, or not receive a reward; depending on how they spent their life.

Solomon used great and lasting materials in the building of the temple and these houses that he built. He used gold, silver, and precious stones. He consciously tried to avoid using those materials which would not stand the test of fire or time. These would be the wood, hay, and straw of the text. But spiritually speaking Solomon, because of his attempting to find meaning in life in and through the building of these great works to his own glory was really building with wood, hay, and straw. I hope that you and I can see that this is not the way to build Christ's kingdom; it is not the way to lasting happiness and satisfaction in life. If you fall into it, you will only hurt yourself. Verse 18 of 1 Corinthians 3 says, "Let no one deceive himself." "If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise." "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." "For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their own craftiness'; and again, 'The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.'" "Therefore, let no one boast in men." "For all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come – all are yours." "And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

What was Solomon's conclusion after he had built all of these works and acquired all of these possessions? Even though his heart had "rejoiced in all of his labor" (verse 10), "He looked on all the works that his hands had done and on the labor in which he had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping after the wind." "There was no profit under the sun." What then is the answer to how a Christian should live his life? It is found in 1 Timothy 6: 17-19. "Command those who are rich in this present age to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things 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." Let me ask in closing if this is the way that you are living? If you are not living this way, if you are trying to live like Solomon was, at that season in his life, you may have pleasure for that time in the labors of your hands, and the things that those labors will acquire. But in the end you will think yourself a fool, because you have neglected the true riches and especially being rich toward God. When a person is rich toward God he will never really lack for anything, even if in an earthly sense he is very poor. Let us ponder this truth and pray that God will help us to live to His glory.