Making Sense Out of Life's Puzzle

ECCLESIASTES 7:13-20 (NKJV)

As we continue with our series of messages from the Book of Ecclesiastes, please turn with me in your Bibles to Ecclesiastes chapter seven; and let's read verses 13-20.

**ECCLESIASTES 7:13-20 (NKJV)**

13 Consider the work of God; for who can make straight what He has made crooked?

14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, so that man can find out nothing that will come after him.

15 I have seen everything in my days of vanity: there is a just man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs life in his wickedness.

16 Do not be overly righteous, nor be overly wise: why should you destroy yourself?

17 Do not be overly wicked, nor be foolish: why should you die before your time?

18 It is good that you grasp this, and also not remove your hand from the other; for he who fears God will escape them all.

19 Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten rulers of the city.

20 For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.
INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION: If you drop by to see Miss Marjory, one of the first things you will notice in her living room is the card table with a large jigsaw puzzle sitting on it. Now I’m not talking about one of those 20 piece jigsaw puzzles anyone can put together in five minutes. I’m talking about one of those complex puzzles with a thousand or more tiny pieces that takes many hours and a whole lot of patience. In fact, these puzzles are so challenging it requires a team effort from Miss Marjory, Vermelle, LaRue and Rebecca.

Miss Marjory, I’ve got to hand it to you. You all have a whole lot more patience than I do. If I tried to put one of those puzzles together they would have to put me in a straight jacket.

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As Solomon continues his search to Find Meaning In This Meaningless World he has come to realize that life is like a giant jigsaw puzzle. Sometimes the pieces just don’t seem to fit together.

In our scripture text this morning, Solomon tries to help us Make Sense Out of Life’s Puzzle.
First of all there is...........

I. The Puzzle of God's PROVIDENCE (vs. 13,14)

13 Consider the work of God; for who can make straight what He has made crooked?

14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, so that man can find out nothing that will come after him.

1. Let's face it: Sometimes God's ways are quite puzzling to us aren't they? It takes a tremendous amount of faith to accept God's prosperity as well as His adversity in our lives.

2. Job reminded his wife of this great truth after they had lost everything and she told him to curse God and die.

   Job said, “Shall we indeed accept good from GOD, and shall we not accept adversity?”

   Earlier Job had said, “The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”
3. It is easy for us to **accept good things** from the LORD. It is easy for us to **accept His blessings** and **His riches** and **His forgiveness** and **His mercy** and **His grace**.

But when it comes to accepting **trials, and hardships, and troubles, and adversity, and sorrow, and suffering,** now that's a different story isn't it?

4. **Warren Wiersbe writes:** “**God balances our lives by giving us enough blessings to keep us happy and enough burdens to keep us humble. If all we had were blessings in our hands, we would fall right over, so the LORD balances the blessings in our hands with burdens on our backs. That helps to keep us steady, as we yield to him. He can even turn the burdens into blessings.”**

   (BE SATISFIED by Warren Wiersbe, ppg. 89,90, Charlot Victor Publishing, Colorado Springs, CO, Copyright 1990)

5. Pay particular attention to **verse 13.** “**Consider the work of God; for who can make straight what He has made crooked?”**

When we think of that word “**crooked**” we think of something that is **evil, or dishonest, or immoral.** Is Solomon suggesting that GOD is the author of evil?
Absolutely NOT! GOD cannot and would not ever bring evil into our lives.

What Solomon means is that in His Divine providence GOD allows some trouble or difficulty to come into our lives that we wish we could change, but we can't. “Who can make straight what He has made crooked?”

6. This happens to all of us. Sometimes we struggle with physical limitations we wish we could change, but we can't. Sometimes we have difficult personal or family issues we wish we could change, but we can't. Sometimes we are thrown into some very unpleasant situations and we wish we didn't have to deal with them, but we do.

What is that one thing in your life you would change if you could? Did it ever occur to you that burden or that hardship is in your life for a reason?
7. LISTEN CAREFULLY! If there is a particular trial you are dealing with or a particular burden you are carrying, and you have begged and pleaded with GOD to remove it from your life, and He hasn't done it; don't assume that it means GOD is angry with you or that He is punishing you for some sin.

Perhaps the reason why you can't “make straight what GOD has made crooked” is because GOD is using that trial or burden to build your FAITH and TRUST in Him. Maybe you have been “stuck” in the same place in your spiritual life for a long, long time, and in His divine providence GOD knows that difficult trial or burden is the very thing that will get you “unstuck” and get you moving forward again in your walk of faith.

Now here's the second puzzle, and that is........
II. The Puzzle of Unfair Suffering (v.15)

15 I have seen everything in my days of vanity: there is a just man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs life in his wickedness.

1. Solomon is bringing up an issue here that has puzzled man in every generation since Adam and that is: Why do good people often suffer while bad people often prosper?

-Why do innocent murder victims get cut down in the prime of life, while the one who murdered them gets to live out the rest of his or her days in prison at the expense of the tax payers?

-Why do innocent people often die in accidents caused by drunk drivers, while the drunk often walks away with hardly a scratch?

-Why does that decent Christian man or woman have their lives cut short by cancer, while the sinful scoundrel seems to live forever?

-Why do loving, caring, Christian parents have a child taken from them in death, while the ungodly parents get to see their child grow up and live a long, prosperous life?
2. In our way of thinking it ought to be the other way around. Shouldn't righteous people live to a ripe old age and evil, wicked people have their lives cut short?

3. But here is where an eternal perspective helps us to make sense out of this puzzle.

   -If the righteous man or woman is taken from this world in the prime of his or her life, where do they go? They go to be with the LORD, don't they? “To be absent from the body is to be present with the LORD.” In other words, as tragic as their premature death may seem from a human standpoint, their death brought an end to all suffering here on earth, and hastened the beginning of their eternal life.

   -BUT, if the unrighteous man or woman is taken from this world in the prime of his or her life, what becomes of them? They enter into an eternity of punishment and torment, where they will be separated from GOD for all eternity.

4. You see, this is the only way we can make any sense of this **PUZZLE OF UNFAIR SUFFERING**.
III. The Puzzle of RELIGIOUS LIVING (vs. 16-20)

16 Do not be overly righteous, nor be overly wise: why should you destroy yourself?

17 Do not be overly wicked, nor be foolish: why should you die before your time?

18 It is good that you grasp this, and also not remove your hand from the other; for he who fears God will escape them all.

19 Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten rulers of the city.

20 For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.

1. These are some of the most misunderstood and misinterpreted verses in all the Bible.

   - Some interpret these verses to mean “a middle-of-the-road” approach to Christianity is acceptable.

   - Some interpret Solomon to mean that “SIN in moderation is OK.”

   - Others believe Solomon is saying “Be sorta righteous, but don’t over do it!”

2. Well, you can’t be “sorta righteous” any more than you can be “sorta pregnant.” If one is “sorta righteous” wouldn’t that mean he is “sorta saved?” (Partial obedience to GOD is TOTAL DISOBEDIENCE! )
3. So what does Solomon mean when he says, “Do not be overly righteous?” He is warning against religious fanaticism or self-righteousness.

4. Solomon is telling us, “Don't be overly righteous in your own eyes. And stop trying to impress others by appearing to be super righteous.

5. Have you ever met someone who was so righteous in their own eyes they thought they could actually impress GOD with their religious sounding prayers or their laundry list of good deeds?

Illustration: I once knew a woman who was so righteous in her own eyes that if JESUS came to our Church and we took a group picture with HIM after Church, this woman would have stood right in front of JESUS blocking HIM out of the picture.

6. When Solomon says, “Do not be overly righteous” he is warning us not to allow religious duties and religious observances become a substitute for our relationship with GOD HIMSELF.
7. Now what about the “flip side of this coin?” What does Solomon mean when he says, “Do not be overly wicked?”

Let me tell you what he does not mean. He does not mean, “Its OK to be a little wicked, but just don't over-do it”

8. NO, what Solomon means is that we are all sinners, but we should not use the excuse “well I'm only human” to sin even more. The fact that we are sinners should spur us toward holiness, not toward more sin and compromise.

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C O N C L U S I O N

Well I opened my message with an illustration about puzzles, now let me close with one.

When you first pour a box full of puzzle pieces out on the table none of it makes sense. That pile of pieces just looks like hundreds and hundreds of unrelated pieces.

But then as you start to put the puzzle together you see how one piece connects to another and eventually a picture begins to emerge. But its not until you have connected all the pieces that the puzzle looks like the picture on the box.
Sometimes in our frustration we try to “force” a piece into place that doesn't work. You see, every piece has its proper place, and it must be put together according to the pattern.

That is the way it is with life. Right now all of our experiences, all of our trials, all of our sorrows and losses, looks like a bunch of random, disconnected puzzle pieces. And while the puzzle of our life may make no sense to us, it makes perfect sense to GOD, because He knows what the final picture of our life is going to look like.

Now, if GOD knows what the final picture of my life and yours is going to look like, shouldn't we put all of our FAITH and TRUST in HIM?