

Sermon 23: 1 Kings 11:9-43: The Chastening of the Lord

OUTLINE

Sin and suffering
3 chastening rods

INTRODUCTION

We come to the last message in the life of Solomon and the question that immediately jumps into our mind is: did Solomon go to heaven? If 1 Kings 11:1-8 was all we were told then we might say no. However, the book of Ecclesiastes is a memoir of a sort written by Solomon and it is credited to be written by him at the end of his long life. The book describes the futility of the many things Solomon engaged in and how the meaning of life is to love God and keep His commands, Ecc. 12:13-14, 'The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.' Solomon returned from his backsliding. He began well and the blessing of God fell on him and the nation, but then he sinned, and the chastening of God fell on him and the nation. This final section of Solomon's reign focuses us on God's judicial response to Solomon's sins. This must not be overlooked. Yes Solomon went to heaven, but the suffering and destruction he suffered and caused others to suffer is highlighted by God punishing Israel.

As we close the life of Solomon I thought it would be appropriate to think about suffering and its relationship to sin in the life of a believer. Solomon went to heaven, fine, but his sin caused terrible pain for himself and others. As Christians we are not so crass as to think that as long as he got into heaven everything is ok. God is glorified or defamed by the holy or sinful lives of His saints. God is holy and takes sin in the lives of His children seriously. We will talk about the connection between sin and suffering generally and then look at the 3 chastening rods God used against Israel.

Sin and suffering

V9-13, 'And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice¹⁰ and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods. But he did not keep what the LORD commanded.¹¹ Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, "Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant.¹² Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son.¹³ However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen.'"'

Our text opens with the anger of God. God is holy and just. The sin of Solomon is amplified by the fact that God had appeared to him twice, and that he had been instructed by God not to do these very things. One commentator talks about how Solomon destroys certain fallacies about why we sin. The example fallacy is destroyed, if only we had better examples and heroes we would be better people, Solomon had David and still sinned as he did. The experience fallacy is destroyed, if you only you have lively experiences of God's presence then you won't sin, God appeared to Solomon twice. The educational fallacy, if only people were better educated they would not sin, Solomon was the wisest man in the

world and commanded by God specifically. God sees his sin, is angry at it and now acts to punish it.

During the time of the Puritans there was a group of antinomians who thought to defend Calvinism against the Arminians. They wanted to defend that a true believer can never lose their salvation so they taught that God sees no sin in the Christian, that the imputed righteousness of Christ makes God 'blind' to any sin the Christian may commit, and therefore there is no chastening on account of sin in the Christians life. In their zeal to defend the Christian's salvation they twisted the truth about how God sees a Christian's sin. God does not become blind, or unholy or unjust when someone is justified. God sees the sin in a Christian's life as well as He sees it in the life of an unbeliever. God's holiness hates the sin in the believer as much as in the unbeliever. These antinomians tried to say that in the OT God saw the believer's sin and chastened them, but in the NT He did not. They tried to teach that the justification in the NT is different to the one in the OT. I want to argue that although there are some differences between the NT and the OT there are also many things that are the same. God acted against the sin in Solomon's life, how does He act against our own? Let's list all the ways sin and suffering are connected and mark the ways things are the same and the way they are different.

We can begin by making a categorical statement: all suffering is related to sin in one way or another. In the new creation there will be no suffering due to sin, but during this fallen age sin and suffering are intimately linked.

Firstly, suffering and death entered the world through the fall of Adam. Standing as a representative of the human race much like an ambassador represents a nation he plunged us into sin and brought God's judging hand against us. Our condition of weakness and death and disease and environmental catastrophes is all due to the sin of Adam. In one sense all sin can be traced back to this first sinner. It is important to note when trying to understand Israel's suffering that the kings of Israel stood in a similar representative role and were able to bring physical suffering upon the nation by their sinful actions. If the king and Israel were obedient to God's laws they would have enjoyed certain paradise type physical benefits. But if they sinned they would earn curse like rewards. Israel was different to what you and I will experience in NZ because God is dealing with us on the basis of common grace not a covenanted grace. The punishments mentioned in v14-40 are direct punishments for the sins Israel had committed.

The question is often asked could Adam have died before the fall, could he have fallen off a cliff and died? The best response I have heard goes something like this: the same laws of gravity and other laws are the same, but God's providential protections would have kept Adam from destruction and harm. We cannot know this for sure, the strength of this view is that it does not seek to make the Garden a radically different world to the one we are presently inhabiting.

Secondly, much suffering is a case of cause and effect where we experience pain due to the type of universe we now inhabit. If people are selfish and they drive too fast failing to control themselves or pay attention to the road because they are texting, and they go through a stop street and crash into your car. You will experience suffering due to the folly of their actions and the nature of the universe. The world we live in is no longer a paradise where we are kept from all pain by miraculous providence. God has given human beings a certain amount of freedom and this includes the freedom to love or kill another. It is not a freedom without consequences but one that will one day be rewarded for all they have done in the body. This liberty comes with a certain amount of risk. If we are God's children we are told that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him. This means

that He will determine the way this fallout hits your life, He will make sure you are not tempted beyond what you can bear with no way out. God's love does not keep us from all suffering but turns all suffering to good. The devil's actions against the saints which are controlled and permitted by God would fall into this category.

Thirdly, and speaking specifically of God's discipline in our lives you need to recognise the two different types of discipline God applies. I like to call these the proactive and the reactive chastenings of God. Firstly, the proactive chastenings. These are God's fatherly ways with His children where, not in order to destroy them but in order to bring them into closer conformity to Christ He allows and uses difficulties to try and refine us. 1 Pet. 1:6-7; James 1:2-4; and Heb. 12:5-11 are examples of this. Job who was not being punished for any particular sin would be another good example of God proactively working out His good purposes in our lives through suffering. The suffering is in relation to our sinfulness more than our sins. By trial and suffering we are refined and sanctified, but these are not responses to specific sins we have committed. Secondly, we need to speak of God's reactive chastening. This is those actions by God in response to specific sins where He acts in holiness and justice but as a father to discipline not a judge to destroy. A loving frown uses suffering as an intervention to restore an erring son to the way of life. This is the suffering that Solomon will be afflicted with. This is not only an OT thing but also a NT thing. 1 Cor. 11:30-32 indicates that God does sometimes punish sin in this life in order to save our souls, 'That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.³¹ But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged.³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.'

So let us say you are suffering in some way right now, why are you suffering? I don't know, neither will you unless God reveals by prophecy exactly what He is doing. Is God using your suffering as a witness, to refine you, to recompense you for sin, etc, you will not know. What you can know is that He is your father, that he is powerful and in charge, that he is working all things together for good, that He is with you in it all, etc.

I want to stress that God's fatherhood implies this reactive discipline in our lives. As we use discipline in love to correct and instruct our own children, so God does for us. It is a mercy for a little amount of pain to be used for restoring purposes than to be destroyed in greater pain later. Pain has a wonderful way of breaking through the distracting haze that clouds our brains and keeps us fixated on sin, it calls us back to our senses. We are not told for sure but it appears it worked in the case of Solomon he was finally restored. You will notice in the punishments announced by God that they are mixed with mercy. This is because God is dealing with Solomon as a son not as a criminal. He is spared the full vent of God's anger.

God is able to curb His holy wrath towards us because He satisfied His holy justice by the death of His Son. Any kindness, gentleness, mercy and restraint we know is because God poured out His unrestrained anger on sin upon His Son on the cross. To callously sin thinking that God won't kill His kids is to forget the way He had to kill His own Son because of your sins.

All suffering is in one way or another connected to sin, to Adam's, another's or your own. But all the suffering we have ever felt has always been a restrained dealing with sin. God has been able to mix gentleness in His justice in dishing out suffering towards sin, always able to temper it and give less punishment than it deserves because from the first sin Christ was promised as the one who would pay for all sin in full. All pain since the fall speaks to us in the gentle tones of God's kindness reminding us of a worse suffering that lies ahead. All

pain is God's tenderness calling us to flee the wrath to come to accept the discipline to learn the lesson, to take Christ as the one who will be our whipping boy and spare us the final punishment. For one day sin will get its full desserts.

3 chastening rods

Verse 14-40 tell us of the three chastening rods God would use as a partial punishment against Israel. V14-22 records the rising up of an old enemy, the Edomites, the grand irony is that the Egyptians who Solomon married to secure peace with become the very ones who nurture this future enemy. V23-25 record the rising up of a marauding band from Syria, this is an ominous thing because Syria will be absorbed into Assyria and take the 10 Northern tribes into exile. V26-40 record the rise of Jeroboam the man who would divide the 10 Northern tribes from the Southern tribes, and who will change the religion of the North into idolatry. The wonderful blessing of God of having peace on all sides is removed. Turmoil within and without are the punishments of God against sin.

What started off so promising ends off with a very pedestrian ending, v41-43, 'Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, and all that he did, and his wisdom, are they not written in the Book of the Acts of Solomon?42 And the time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years.43 And Solomon slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David his father. And Rehoboam his son reigned in his place.'

How do we process the life of Solomon? We must thank God for the life of Solomon because being the best of men he reminds us of our fallenness and need for God. He is a man who struggles with the same idols of the 21st century, money, sex and power. We must thank God for this strong warning of our weakness and take heed lest we think we stand. We must thank God for the One greater than Solomon. If Solomon were our hope then we would be lost, but he is not Christ is. Christ is wiser than Solomon, holier than Solomon, richer than Solomon, a more faithful husband than Solomon, He is the obedient Son of David who will forever sit on the throne of Israel and will perfectly rule and will constantly secure by His perfect life eternal peace and blessing. Solomon brought heartache and punishment upon his people by his sin; Christ took the guilt of our sin and so the punishment due our sin upon Himself. And by His obedience He has secured for us eternal life and an everlasting kingdom where there is no sin and no suffering.