

ECCLESIASTES
Ecclesiastes 7:13-18
“Crooked Made Straight”
April 28, 2024

Ecclesiastes 7:13-18

**¹³ Consider the work of God:
who can make straight what he has made **crooked**?**

¹⁴ In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.

¹⁵ In my vain life I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing. ¹⁶ Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself? ¹⁷ Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time? ¹⁸ It is good that you should take hold of this, and from that withhold not your hand, for the one who fears God shall come out from both of them.¹

This is God’s Word.

Let’s begin with a nursery rhyme.

There was a crooked man, and he walked a crooked mile,
He found a crooked sixpence against a crooked stile;
He bought a crooked cat which caught a crooked mouse,
And they all lived together in a little crooked house.²

The crookedness of the world is seemingly everywhere. But we’re not looking at nursery rhymes. We’re looking at Solomon’s despairing

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ec 7:13–18). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

² Gliori, Debi. *The Darling Kindersley Book of Nursery Rhymes* (London: DK Publishing, 2001).

words in chapter 7. This forces us to face what is called a theodicy. What is a theodicy? It is a term based on the Greek for God and justice coined by the German philosopher Leibnitz in 1710.³ It is what everyone here has struggled with when considering the goodness of God.

This is what Solomon was facing and sought to answer, but even in his answer seemingly creates more questions.

A theodicy is man's attempt to describe how God can be so good and yet allow evil to exist in this world. You've faced the questions. You've likely asked the questions. They come at various times throughout life and are often met with less than adequate answers. Questions like:

- If God is so good, why does my loved one have cancer?
- If God is so good, why didn't I get the raise?
- If God is so good, why did the Holocaust happen?
- If God is so good, why do bad people continue to win?
- If God is so good, why did my friend die?
- If God is so good, why do the good suffer?
- If God is so good...why?

Real questions. Hard answers.

Let's consider together...

1. The reality of the crooked
2. The response to the crooked
3. The rescue through the crooked

THE REALITY OF THE CROOKED

It takes no stretch of imagination or deep thought to realize that we live in a crooked world. This reality is affirmed in scripture and begins in the Garden of Eden and is proven through the curse upon Eve and Adam

³ Bartholomew, Craig G. *Ecclesiastes: Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 258.

and all their descendants. Solomon laments as he looks to the lives of those around him that crookedness seems to be the norm.

No one here is a stranger to suffering. Yet, many may be struggling with what to do with God amid such. I think of Scottish theologian Thomas Boston. He lived in the late 1600s and early 1700s. This pastor served over a quarter of a century in the same rural parish. His perseverance to serve is laudable, but his perseverance through suffering is what brings him to the forefront today. Boston had a melancholy demeanor. He even struggled with depression and discouragement at times. Perhaps more than others. He did not experience good health and his wife faced chronic physical and mental bouts as well. Yet, their deepest valley was not in the regular church stuff and the struggles of living in the cool, rural areas of 18th century Scotland. It was in that of their ten children, six died.

One son hit them very hard. They had lost a son they named Ebenezer. Now, for many of us today, that seems like a strange name. Perhaps we think of Ebenezer Scrooge and that may be why the name has disappeared from current use. Yet, the name is biblical and means “Hitherto hath the Lord helped us” and comes from 1 Samuel 7. Young Ebenezer died at birth. Boston and his wife were expecting again and she gave birth to another son. He wanted to name this son Ebenezer as well, but he paused. He believed naming the boy Ebenezer would be a testimony of their hope in the goodness and faithfulness of God. But a question ran through Boston and his wife’s minds. What if this boy died, too? What if they had to bury another Ebenezer? Could they even handle this? Too much.

By faith, Boston named the boy Ebenezer “The Lord has helped us.” Sadly, this boy was sickly and despite the prayers of his parents, he died.⁴

⁴ Ryken, Philip Graham. *Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 162.

In Boston's *Memoirs*, he wrote, "It pleased the Lord that he also was removed from me."⁵

Boston's response is far from how many would respond. Some would accuse God. They would abandon faith. They would walk away from the church. Turn in their ordination. Deconstruct. Yet, Boston believed something that turns our head, makes us ask "How can you find peace?" during such? Boston believed in the goodness of God. He did not revel in the valleys and crooked points of life, but recognized that if God be sovereign over all, he must be sovereign OVER ALL...even if it is not understandable from our end.

A superficial faith will never lead to this level of peace. This level of peace must not be equated to being happy with the hardships. Boston preached after this and other great difficulties and his timeless sermon title "The Crook in the Lot" reveals his understanding of God's goodness in the midst of difficulty. The theodicy he was facing, centered on Ecclesiastes 7:13.

THE RESPONSE TO THE CROOKED

Thus, consider the work of God...the sovereign God...the God of gods, Lord of lords, King of kings...the God of scripture...the God of history...the God of hope and control and love and purpose and all that scripture reveals...Consider the work of God. Who can make straight what he has made crooked? Only God. Thus...though we may not understand, may not be able to mentally make the equation work out, God alone is ruler. And the kingdom of heaven is not a democracy.

Note that when Solomon references the crooked, he is not speaking of something morally sinful for God will never be the author of such. He is rather speaking if difficulties in life, unplanned circumstances,

⁵ Boston, Thomas. *The Complete Works of the Late Rev. Thomas Boston of Ettrick*, ed. Samuel M'Millan (London, 1853; repr. Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, 1980), 12:205

challenges, unfair realities, and that which comes from living in a fallen world.⁶

It should be noted that Solomon has spoken about this straightening of the crooked prior.

Ecclesiastes 1:15

**What is crooked cannot be made straight,
and what is lacking cannot be counted.**⁷

From this word to the statement in chapter seven there is a deeper truth Solomon is declaring. He wears an “it is what it is” theme and yet, in six chapters he has shifted from an empty “the crooked is not going to change” to “who can change the crooked? Only God.” There’s a huge difference in perspective when you leave God out of the equation.

In this chapter the Preacher says something that would awaken the dozing congregant. The routine listener would look up. It’s a challenging passage and has confounded many for centuries.

Ecclesiastes 7:16-17

Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself?¹⁷ Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time?⁸

At first glance it seems that Solomon is accepting a philosophy of moderation. Don’t be too righteous. Don’t be too wicked. Just slide into the middle lane and don’t disturb the norm. Yet, this is not what I believe is being advocated here.

I do see Solomon calling people to not be “overly righteous” meaning don’t be self-righteous. It is also the warning not to seek righteousness

⁶ Ryken, 162.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ec 1:15.

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ec 7:16–17.

and wisdom as one's end goal. The emphasis here is that wisdom cannot solve all the problems that man faces. Some things are simply inexplicable from a human perspective.⁹

Since we tend to be people who overcompensate on everything, to not be too self-righteous, focused on doing good so that we get good things, to abandon such would lead many to wickedness and folly.¹⁰ I have met many who have landed here. Willing sinfulness and evil is never God's desire for us.

So, it's not a focus to live in moderation, but a reminder to live freely under the sovereignty of God. Perfect righteousness will never be experienced this side of heaven, but do not stop pursuing such. Just be sure to pursue God and godliness, even when you're walking your crooked mile.

THE RESCUE THROUGH THE CROOKED

The despair of Solomon as revealed in this book can leave us wanting. Sure, we relate, but we long for some good news, right? I mean, the good die young. Yep. We know. Heard that song, too. The evil seem to prosper. Seems so way too often. So, who can make the crooked straight?

Why suffering? Why difficulty? We can spend days dissecting why we think these things happen. Ultimately, we must rest in the reality that God knows why he has put those crooked things in our paths. We must recognize that God alone can straighten the crooked.¹¹

So, when you awaken longing for the sun to shine, but it seems to always be dark. This new day has not fixed the problems of the crooked yesterday, go to Ecclesiastes 7:13...

⁹ Shaw, Benjamin. *Ecclesiastes: Life in a Fallen World* (East Peoria, IL: Versa Press for Banner of Truth Trust, 2020), 102.

¹⁰ Shaw, 102.

¹¹ Ryken, 169.

“Consider the work of God.”

Not the work you want him to do for you today, but the work already done. Thomas Boston had a “crook in his lot” as he said. You may as well. But remember...so did Jesus. The crook in Christ’s lot...the crooked way was in the shape of a cross, and the suffering of this Savior was in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus asked the Father, “If it is possible, take this cup of suffering away from me.” In other words, if there is a way to make Calvary and cross straight and not crooked (painful, full of suffering, needful) then please do it. There was no other way.

The wages of sin is death. The crooked cross remained the only way. This thirty-something years old, yet eternal Son of God, God the Son, must bear the weight of humanity’s crookedness, the sin we own, and die on the crooked cross. Jesus trusted the Father, waiting for him to straighten things out at the right time – on the third day when he was resurrected.¹²

For his glory. For our good. The crooked has a purpose. Ultimately, in God’s timing, it is made straight. Not easy...but straight. Without the cross, apart from the sacrifice of the perfect son, our sin remains unpaid. Through Christ’s journey down a crooked road to a crooked cross, the way has been made straight for our redemption, our ransom, and our rescue.

The hard questions may remain unanswered this side of heaven, but a deeper trust in the sovereign good, holy, righteous God can occur when we surrender fully to Christ.

Ebenezer – THE LORD *HAS* HELPED US.

¹² Ryken, 169.