



GracePoint: A Weekly Sermon Discussion
8 - God Seeks What Has Been Driven Away

Announcements:

3/13 @7:30 -

Prayer

3/14 @6:30 -

Grace Group

3/17 @8:30 -

Sunday School

3/17 @6:00 -

Family Night

PSALM 11

ICE BREAKER: Can you think of a time where something has been “lost in translation”? What happened?

READ: Ecclesiastes 3:15

It turns out that the final portion of this verse is very (very) hard to actually translate into English. As a way to illustrate this, let's look at the way that a few translations have approached it:

ESV: “and God seeks what is driven away.”

HCSB: “God repeats what has passed.”

NIV: “and God will call the past to account.”

KJV: “and God requireth that which is past.”

Usually we look through something like this (what is called reading the passage in “parallel”) and we can at least try and understand the confusion, but this one seems all over the place! So today what we will be trying to do is get to the bottom of all of this! My goal today is to give what might be a bit more of a technical lesson, to try and help you see how I personally would approach this passage.

One of the first things that we should do is just try and get to the bottom of what is happening in this verse. Assuming we don't know the original Hebrew, the next best thing that we can do is find the most basic outline that could fit all the above options. Here we see that the verse basically says: “And God (does something) (to something)” Knowing this we can tackle the two things that people seem to be debating. What God does and what he is doing it to!

The range of meaning as to what God does is rather hard to pin down. He “seeks” “repeats” “calls to account” and “requires”. But what does all this mean? To try and spare you from just pulling out a Hebrew-English dictionary, let's ask: What might be the thought that could tie all of these thoughts together? Who can call someone to account? The one who rules over it. Who can require something of someone? The one who makes the rules. Who can cause things to repeat? The one who rules over time. And who has the power to make sure that all that is sought after is found? Only God. In other words, while there is a range of meaning for all of these things, what they all can get us to see (and I think what Solomon wants us to understand!) is that God is the one exercising sovereign control.

Over the past. This is what the (to something) portion is all about. It is things that have passed. The things “driven away” here by the passing of time (see the larger context). In other words, while we are forced to walk down the never ending one way street of time, God has sovereign control over even that. He rules, he will judge, he is the one that makes the time of mourning turn to a time of laughing and vice-versa. Solomon, in this section, wants us to see who God is, not just now, but who he is, was and always will be! It is a much more lofty view than we might normally hold.

But with all that being said, we can then ask the most important question: What does this all mean? And truthfully, this is why I would much rather write a sermon on a passage than translate it, because we can be more particular and try and figure out the full meaning and don't have to worry about being too “wordy”. Ultimately what I would say that this passage means is something along the lines of: “God is concerned with all that goes on in the passing cycles of time that he controls. And each time and each season is given by him, controlled by him, and ultimately falls under his sovereign control. So we can have confidence in this: Past, present, and future; God sees, knows, controls and will remember.” Ultimately this passage, along with its larger context (something we can never forget about!), should cause us to worship the God of all time!

DISCUSS:

1. What do you usually do when/if you run into a difficult passage like this?
2. What comfort do we find in knowing that God is the one who rules over all the events that happen in all times?
3. To be transparent, I think that this is a case where the NIV and the KJV both got it a little more right with the thoughts that God will “call to account” or “require”. What in particular do you think this is getting us to see? Why is this thought important?
4. The final thought that this passage should get us to have is one that Solomon has been harping on for a while, God is God and we are not. How does this passage highlight that?