

# THE END OF A THING...

**Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit (Ecclesiastes 7:8).**

*J.P. Thackway*

Solomon had gone into the world as a backslider. The tragic words of 1 Kings 11:1, "But king Solomon..." introduce us to his fall – "But king Solomon loved many strange women, etc." Devotion to his foreign wives led him to revere their heathen gods together with Jehovah. Syncretism in worship and sensuality in behaviour took him away from the Lord.

Finding "an aching void, world can never fill," Solomon nonetheless sought satisfaction in all things "under the sun," apart from Him who is above the sun. His experiment is chronicled in the book of Ecclesiastes. This autobiography was written, we believe, after he repented and was restored. His "vanity of vanity, all is vanities" is wrung from his own bitter experience. As one writer put it,

Solomon probably repented in the end; for Chronicles make no mention of his fall. Again Ecclesiastes is probably the result of his melancholy, but penitent, retrospect of the past; "all is vanity and vexation of spirit:" ... God having made him His Jedidiah (beloved of Jehovah), "visited his transgression with the rod, nevertheless His lovingkindness He did not utterly take from him" (Psalm 89:30-36).

The book reaches its climax with the words of 12:13, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." This is Solomon's other verdict: if the world is empty and futile, that which alone satisfies is the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom.

Therefore our text is illustrated by Solomon himself: "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof..." Solomon is an example of his own proverb. Let us remember this when we see someone go away from God. Or a sinner going from bad to worse. Or some situation becoming desperate. There is hope. Every outcome in providence, or the Lord's dealings, proves the truth of this verse. We have here, then, a good maxim or proverb to remember for the New Year.

Let us apply it to ourselves in these ways,

## **1. God Has A Goal**

"The end of a thing." This phrase does not mean "finish," rather, "fulfilment or outcome." This is always God's way in providence: He begins because He has an end in view.

1] God aims at something definite.

"The end of a thing." Every providence is purposeful. There is method, order and eventual accomplishment. The Most High pursues His way unerringly, and never wavers nor falters. Things do not happen of themselves, nor do they proceed of themselves to an uncertain conclusion. God systematically works towards His goal; this is how He interpreted His dealings with Israel in the wilderness, "to do thee good at thy latter end" (Deuteronomy 8:16).

2] It is so encouraging.

Remember this when events in your life seem haphazard, or just going round in circles. They are not - providence is *linear* – it goes towards its predetermined target for you. As the Lord said to the exiles in Babylon, "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end" (Jeremiah 29:11). If it were not so, there would be nothing better for us than the vanity and vexation the world suffers.

3] We have evidence for this in other realms.

What has the Lord ever begun that He has failed to complete?

a] Creation

"Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them" (Genesis 2:1). Those six literal days of creation ended with everything in existence at the dawn of history. By the seventh day, the first Sabbath, "God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made" (2:2). Every Sabbath day that returns testifies to a God who pursues His end inevitably and unerringly.

b] Redemption.

"It is finished" (John 19:30) are the Redeemer's words of triumph and achievement. The long preparation for "the seed of the woman" (Genesis 3:15) was over, with its sometimes uncertain course, and much opposed by the "the seed of the serpent." Every type and shadow fulfilled, every prophesy and prediction accomplished – the work was done, and was crowned by the resurrection. Every Lord's Day – the continuing Sabbath on the first day of the week – testifies to a God who finishes what He intends to do.

c] The inward work of grace.

"Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). The operation of God that gives repentance and faith – uniting us to Christ – to the final work of resurrection that gives us the new heavens and the new earth, is one gracious work. Nothing and no one can thwart or turn Him back. With Watts we can say,

Tell of His wondrous faithfulness,  
And sound His power abroad;  
Sing the sweet promise of His grace,  
And the performing God.

Our Lord's second coming will testify to the fact that God always reaches His objective.

God, then, has a sublime record of bringing to its goal everything He undertakes. And it is exactly the same in His providential dealings which we are considering. "I will perform ... all things which I have spoken ... when I begin, I will also make an end." "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord" (1 Samuel 3:12; Revelation 1:8).

## **2. The Goal Is Better**

"Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof." Compared with its beginning, Providence is usually better by the time it has reached its end.

1] This implies something about the early stages.

"Better is the end" - but not necessarily early on. How true this is. In fact, when Providence begins, it can seem very much worse. It can appear to have made a mess of things, seem out of control, appear even frightening. Think of the early experience of Job and his, Joseph and his brothers, Moses when he first confronted Pharaoh, David a fugitive from Saul, Onesimus absconding from Philemon. And in our experience it is often the same. Remember this, dear reader, for your comfort – your situation can be so grim and awful. However, do not let the devil deceive you into thinking it is the end of the story. It will get better because this is God's way.

2] God exercises our faith this way.

"Better is the end of a thing." He teaches us by this to look to the end, the goal that He will accomplish in us and for us. This is what all God's promises are for: to raise our hopes to expect things to lead to a good end. And His faithfulness will ensure that we are not disappointed. For instance,

"Though thy beginning was small, yet thy latter end should greatly increase" (Job 8:7).

"But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10).

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalm 30:5).

"Thou, which hast shewed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth" (Psalm 71:20).

"Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness" (Psalm 112:4).

"For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee" (Isaiah 41:13).

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:28,29).

Jer.31:17 there is hope in thine end, saith the LORD. We can live with the immediate if we look for the ultimate.

3] Everything is moving that way.

Better is the end. Setbacks are not disasters, delays are not denials, and reverses are not losses. By this very route, the Lord gets to His goal.

Cf the e.g. mentioned earlier. Job 42:12 the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning; Jas.5:11 (heard – seen). Joseph, Gen.50:20. Moses and Pharaoh - things turned and Moses called the shots. David, Psa.57:2. Onesimus, Philemon v.15. So for us, Gen.49:19; Ruth 3:18.

3. THE GOAL IS WORTH WAITING FOR

v.8 and the patient in spirit than the proud in spirit. Two possible responses to “a thing.” The patient in spirit is also better.

1] It honours God.

The patient wait for God and prove His faithfulness.

2] And enjoys peace.

Because we don't judge rashly, cf Gen.42:36. Was that peace? Can only judge rightly at the end. Only meekness and patience bring peace. Psa.66:11 Thou broughtest us into the net. ¶ Lion and mouse.

With patient mind thy course of duty run:

God nothing does, nor suffers to be done,

What thou wouldst do thyself, couldst thou but see

The end of all events as well as HE.

3] So things can only get better.

As we move nearer toward the end that is better than the beginning.

Prov.23:18 For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off. When prayer will be answered, the Lord will appear, providence will show us its goal, and our hearts will rejoice. “Lord, bring me to that better end, and give me that better spirit of patience.”