

# THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

NOVEMBER 2ND-3RD, 2019 // BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

## BETTER (ECCLESIASTES 7:1-10)

"A good name is better..." (1a) what matters truly is not "how you smell", it's your character!

- It's quite possible for you to look amazing on the outside, but on the inside be shallow.
- "...and the day of death better than the day of birth" (1b)- your day of birth is all about your potential, at your death people reflect on the reality of your life.

"...it's better to go to the house of mourning than...feasting" (vs. 2)

- Given the choice, most of us would rather go to a dinner party than to a funeral.
- But Solomon tells us a funeral is actually "better"- because the living will "lay it to heart".
- Funerals are wake up calls and remind us of the brevity & fragility of life- most people at parties aren't the least bit concerned with death.

"...the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning" (vs. 4a) - a wise person isn't morbidly obsessed with death, they just familiar with the reality of it and live in light of it.

- "...the heart of fools is in the house of mirth" (vs. 4b)- a foolish person just wants to have a good time, and as a result they don't take life as seriously as they should.

A rebuke isn't fun to experience, but much good can come out of it. It's our natural tendency to never want to hear criticism or negative feedback and only praise, but Solomon tells us that a rebuke from someone who is wise is better than someone "singing our praises" who might be a fool! Solomon compares the laughter of fools to the crackling of thorns on a campfire- you hear noise, but you don't get much good.

- This is actually a play on words- in Hebrew, "pot" is sir, and "thorns" is sirim.
- What he's saying is that the talk, laughter, and praise of a fool doesn't have any real value.
- While it may feel better in the moment to have lots of praise or have someone laugh at your jokes, if that person is a fool, it doesn't mean anything.

"Oppression drives the wise into madness, and a bribe corrupts his heart" (vs. 9)- when oppression or injustice happen to us, we want a quick and easy way out.

- So things like taking a bribe appear to be a quick way to get things done, but it turns a wise man into a fool and encourages his corruption.
- It's better to wait and let God work things out.

Verse 8 warns us against the desire for immediate gratification.

- In our world, we have everything we want instantaneously, so the temptation is to be impatient and take the easy way out when things are painful or difficult. Sin feels good in the beginning, but it ends in death. Taking up our cross to follow Jesus doesn't always feel good now, but it ends in eternal life.

Don't be "quick in your spirit to become angry" (vs. 9).

- One of the primary marks of a fool that's only living for the temporary is that they "give full vent to their anger" (Prov. 29:11).
- Outbursts of anger might feel good in the moment, but their long-term effects are absolutely disastrous. Anger "lodges in the heart of fools"- it controls them.

When life is difficult, confusing, or painful- one way we escape is to long for the "good old days".

- But it's "not from wisdom that you ask this"- the "good old days" never existed, they're a combination of a bad memory and a good imagination!
- We can't go back in time, we can't skip difficult seasons, but we can live in the moment.

## SEEING CLEARLY (ECCLESIASTES 7:11-18)

Once we "get off the treadmill" of life under the sun, we gain the ability to look at life in perspective and not get out of balance.

- When we have God's wisdom, we're able to accept and deal with the various experiences of life in a way that pleases Him.
- We begin to see things as they really are from an eternal perspective, not just from how they feel in the here and now.

Real wealth is not just having money- someone can have money but lack wisdom and waste it.

- Wisdom "protects" and "preserves" (vs. 12).
- God's wisdom is a shelter to those who obey it; it gives far greater protection than money.
- Just having knowledge isn't enough- we need wisdom to implement that knowledge.

Sometimes it seems like "the work of God" in our lives is "crooked".

- It doesn't make sense to us and it seems completely wrong.
- Foolishness is raging against God and holding to the delusion that we can correct Him and improve upon His work. Wisdom is resting and trusting in His sovereignty.

The reality is, some of our days will be full of joy, and others will be marked by sadness.

- Wisdom gives us perspective so that we're not discouraged when times are difficult or arrogant when things are going well.
- We can't lose sight of the reality that God's redemptive plan is at work even in difficult times.

When we're not thinking of the bigger picture, it gets discouraging to see wicked people prospering and righteous people suffering (vs. 15).

- The wicked appear to prosper only if you take the short view of things.
- Vs. 16 is a bit confusing- it seems like he's telling us to not get too carried away.

In Hebrew, the verb is reflexive, meaning its action is turned back or "reflected" on the subject.

- What he's saying is this- "don't claim to be righteous and don't claim to be wise."
- In other words, he's warning against self-righteousness and the pride that comes with thinking we've arrived and we know it all.
- False wisdom & self-righteousness are both marks of a fool.

We're not to view ourselves as righteous apart from God, but we're also not to cave into worldliness because it looks easier.

- How do we keep ourselves from pride and stay motivated to stay away from wickedness? We fear God (vs. 18)- "the one who fears God shall come out from both of them"- the fear of God keeps us from wickedness and folly.

## WISDOM GIVES STRENGTH (ECCLESIASTES 7:19-29)

Stronger than "ten rulers who are in a city" is the wisdom of God (vs. 19).

- Someone who is wise fears God and therefore doesn't fear anyone or anything else.
- Wisdom also recognizes that we're sinners and we're not righteous apart from God (vs. 20).
- Godliness is not puffing out our chest in pride, it's bowing our head in humility and lowliness because we're nothing without Him!

Wisdom also gives us the strength to handle what people say about us (vs. 21-22).

- A wise person pays no attention to the gossip of the day because they understand it doesn't mean anything and it's pointless (and it's sinful!).
- Not only that, it can lead to great grief when we ourselves become the topic of gossip.
- But lest we get too judgmental, Solomon reminds us that we too have done the same thing.

Wisdom also allows us to be at peace with our own inability to grasp the meaning of all that God is doing in this world (vs. 23-25).

- Solomon searched for the reason ("scheme") of things, but found no final answers to all his questions (vs. 25).
- The wiser a person, the more comfortable they are saying, "I DON'T KNOW" or like Solomon, "who can find it out?" (vs. 24).

Wisdom also gives the strength to know where we're weak and to recognize the wickedness in ourselves and in the world (vs. 26-29).

- Solomon had a vice- at its best it could be described as a love addiction, at its worst, a sex addiction (700 wives, 300 concubines).
- Through this vice he had been led astray and into the worship of false gods.

And now near the end of his life as he reflects on his journey, he expresses remorse and regret of the fact that he'd been seduced by women.

- He concludes that the whole human race is bound by sin and 1 man in 1,000 is wise- but not 1 woman! We have to be careful with this text.

Clearly, the Bible teaches that women and men are "co-heirs of grace" (1 Pet. 3:7), and BOTH made in God's image (Gen. 1:27).

- Even Solomon spoke highly of women in Proverbs (31:10, 12:4) and in Song of Solomon.
- So women aren't more foolish or wicked than men.
- It's just that Solomon's vice and addiction kept him from finding what he was after and he never personally found a woman who was righteous.

But he ends the chapter reminding us although God made humanity "upright", we've all gone astray and sought out many schemes (vs. 29).

- Solomon's particular flavor of going astray and "seeking many schemes" was love and sex addiction- but ours can be anything that seeks to find meaning apart from God.
- Wisdom is understanding where we're weak and that our schemes ultimately will lead us to suffering, regret, and remorse.

## WE'RE AFTER THE WRONG THINGS (PROV. 9:10)

### HOW DO WE FEAR THE LORD?

1. **Know that He is holy**, and apart from Him, we are not.
2. **Trust in the cross** as our only hope.
3. **Surrender and follow** in obedience.