

A Happy Person Has a Good Name

Ecclesiastes 7:1-6; Revelation 3:1

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A good name is better than a famous name. A good reputation is better than a legendary reputation. It is not how well known your name is that promotes your happiness, but rather how pure and godly your name is that promotes your happiness. It is not how your name is viewed by people that determine your happiness, but how your name is viewed by God that determines your happiness.

Many in the world have names that are so well known that children and adults alike use them in the course of the day (whether the name be George Bush, Bill Clinton, Abraham Lincoln, Queen Elizabeth, or Oprah Winfrey). Whether it is a name associated with politics, entertainment, sports, business, or religion, most people want their names to be remembered (if nothing else, to at least be remembered by their family and friends). If you are going to have some work done on your house, do you look for a company to do the work that has the most famous name or a company that has the most dependable name? When considering a potential spouse, do you want someone that has a name that is well-known or someone that has a name that is known for faithfulness?

Your name, dear ones, is precious to you (or so it should be). You defend your name, if it is maliciously slandered by others (or so you should). When your name comes up in a conversation, with what do people associate your name? Is your name associated with faith in Christ, love for Christ, and obedience to Christ? Is your name associated with strife or peace, with love or bitterness, with pride or humility, with contentment or complaining, with submission or power trips, with fairness or double standards?

Dear ones, a happy person is one who has a good name (or reputation). For a good name says something about the godly character that upholds and supports that name. And only those who strive to be holy as God is holy can know the joy of the Lord. From our text this Lord's Day, Solomon gives three qualities that greatly promote your joy in the Lord: (1) A Good Name (Ecclesiastes 7:1); (2) A Godly Sorrow (Ecclesiastes 7:2-4); and (3) A Teachable Heart (Ecclesiastes 7:5-6).

I. A Good Name (Ecclesiastes 7:1).

A. In the first six chapters of Ecclesiastes, Solomon has sought to demonstrate the vanity of pursuing a lasting joy and happiness in the things or persons of this world. In the last six chapters, Solomon will seek to demonstrate the satisfaction of pursuing a lasting joy and happiness in Christ and through the graces He supplies to those who take hold of Him by faith alone for their eternal salvation. In the first six chapters, Solomon generally tells you WHERE YOU WILL NOT FIND THE JOY OF THE LORD. In the last six chapters, he generally tells you WHERE YOU WILL FIND THE JOY OF THE LORD.

B. If you would have the joy of the Lord, you must first have "a good name." So many people today seem to think they will be happy when they have made a name for themselves in some area—when people know their name and respect them. But dear ones, it is not making a name for yourself that will satisfy your soul. It is having "a good name" that will satisfy your soul. What is "a good name?"

1. A name is good based upon the character of the one who has that name. For a name stands for and represents a person. Thus, a name will be only as good as one's reputation, one's character, and one's trustworthiness. If one has a reputation of being fair and honest, true to his/her word even when it hurts, able to see and confess his/her own faults as well as the faults of others, humble yet courageous, gentle yet firm in the truth of Christ, not only knows the truth but speaks the truth and lives the truth in love for God

and for his neighbor, such a person will have a good name in the judgment of all faithful Christians. A good name is evidenced by practicing what you preach and walking what you talk. A good name is not attached to a sinless saint. But it is attached to a forgiven sinner who endeavors to be the same person in private that he is in public. That which he believes he earnestly prays he may practice as well. The Lord Jesus said concerning the Church of Sardis, "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead" (Revelation 3:1). This Church had a good name (in the opinion of some at least), but that name was contradicted by the character and works of that Church. May this not be true of you, dear ones. The Church of Sardis had a name in professing an orthodox faith, but it was a dead orthodoxy. The Church's profession was true, but the Church denied the power of godliness. Are you faithful in preparing to meet and to enjoy the Lord daily in secret worship and family worship? Are you a man/woman of your word? Are you the same person in private that you are in public? Do others know that even if there is a disagreement with you that they will be treated fairly? Does love for Jesus Christ and obedience to Him characterize your life? Do you suffer for being a jerk or for being a Christian? Do the things that you suffer from others make you humble or bitter, break your heart or puff you up with pride? Dear ones, a good name is inseparable from KNOWING and PRACTICING what is faithful and true to God's Word.

2. A name is good because it is highly esteemed by God, even if it is not so esteemed by man (Luke 16:15). It is ultimately God's evaluation that counts, not man's evaluation. For example, in King Ahab's judgment, Elijah the Prophet did not have a good name. In fact, Ahab asked Elijah (1 Kings 18:17), "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" But in God's judgment, Elijah had a good name because he was the Lord's loving and faithful servant, even if King Ahab and others did not like the message of repentance that Elijah brought. Now that doesn't mean you should have no care at all about what others think about you. You should strive not to offend others. Paul commands, "Give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). Dear ones, we do not have a good name if we only speak the truth, but do not speak the truth in love. If, however, others are offended with us, let it not be the manner of our presentation that offends, let it rather be the truth of Christ that offends

3. A name is good ultimately because of God's undeserved grace through Jesus Christ. The reason anyone has a good name is not fundamentally because the one who bears it is by nature a good person. For as Paul says in Romans 3:12, "there is none that doeth good, no, not one." One who has a good name is one who gives all glory to Christ for his/her good name. One who has a good name will be like John the Baptist who said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). When the apostles were interrogated by the Jewish Sanhedrin in Acts 4, they marveled at the knowledge and wisdom of these men in answering their questions, "and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). Is it evident by your speech, by your conduct, by the use of your eyes, by the use of your ears, by the use of your mouth, by the use of your hands and feet, that your life is being transformed through the time you spend with Jesus?

C. Solomon says that "a good name is better than precious ointment" (Ecclesiastes 7:1). In Proverbs 22:1, the same Solomon says, "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches." Are you so wrapped up in gaining riches, promotions, and honors in this world, that you have forgotten how your name (and ultimately the name of Christ) is viewed by God and others? Is there (in your judgment) a value placed upon your good name that even all of the riches of this world could not be given in exchange for it? Is your good name for sale? At what cost? And if your good name is of such value, what about the good name of others? If you would not have your good name unjustly attacked or unfairly dragged through the mud, how can you do so to the good name of others? How careful you should be not to misrepresent the position or statements of others (even when you disagree with the positions or statements of others). How careful you must be not to draw conclusions about others from mere suspicions. How careful you must be not to share information about others that is not necessary or profitable to share. You can tell that you know the value of a

good name to the degree that you not only protect your own good name, but also protect the good name of others as well. Dear ones, a good name and a good conscience before the Lord and before man is something that no one can take from you. Your wealth may be taken. Your health may be lost. Your esteem in the eyes of the world may take a hit. You may even be robbed of your freedom to speak God's truth, but no one can rob you of your good name. You can sell it, but no one can rob you of it. Don't sell your good name regardless of the price. Your good name is more valuable than anything in this world. It is a good name and a good conscience before the Lord and before man that issues forth in the joy of the Lord. For one who sells out his name to obtain some advantage in this world will know only shame, dissatisfaction, and emptiness. When a good name is more important to you than the things of this world, you will find true satisfaction and contentment in a good name, even when you do not have or even when you lose money, lose a job, or even lose a loved one.

D. Solomon concludes this first verse with these words, "A good name is better than precious ointment; AND THE DAY OF DEATH THAN THE DAY OF ONE'S BIRTH." There is a connection between what Solomon has just said about the value of a good name over precious ointment, and what he now says about the value of the day of one's death over the day of one's birth. How is the day of death better than the day of birth?

1. There is only value in the death of one who has a good name, because his name is written in the Book of Life there in heaven. How can it be said that death is better than birth for one who is condemned to hell? It cannot. For death in that case brings the loss of everything, and only ushers one into the place of torment, where he/she suffers forever in never being able to pay the penalty of his/her sin against a holy God. However, death for the one who has a good name (because he/she has been purchased by Christ and brought to Christ through faith) is of incomprehensible gain, and ushers one into the very presence of Christ to enjoy Him and the benefits of heaven forever.

2. The day of death for the one with a good name, who trusts Christ, loves Christ, and obeys Christ, is better because he leaves behind him a testimony for all who are wise to emulate (Proverbs 10:7). At birth one merely assumes a name given to him/her by parents, but at death one leaves behind a name (a reputation and a life) that is filled with memories of God's undeserving grace to an unworthy sinner, and one's faithfulness to Christ and service to family and friends (to those within the church and to those outside the church).

3. The day of birth is a day of festivity, wherein people would (in ancient times) anoint themselves with the precious oil of gladness, but the day of death is a day when all that is left behind of a person is his/her name or memory. From the perspective of one who leaves behind a good name and who ascends to heaven to receive a new name, the day of death is better than the day of birth. For the day of birth brings one into a world of sin, pain, and trouble (Job 5:7). But the person with a good name at death loses the pain, sorrow, tears, temptations, and sins of this world and gains the joy, peace, happiness, and final victory over temptation and sin forever and ever. The person with a good name who dies and goes to be with the Savior no longer walks by faith, but looks upon the Savior in all of His glory and majesty. The person with a good name leaves behind the perishable riches of this world and gains the imperishable and everlasting riches of heaven. It is in these ways (and so many more) that the day of death is better for the person with a good name than the day of birth. Dear ones, what memories will you leave behind at the day of your death? Will they be rotten memories or precious memories? Your name will live on in the lives of family and friends if it is a good name, but your name will be bitter in the mouths of all that utter it if it is a name of strife, a name of bitterness, a name of unfaithfulness, a name not to be trusted, or a name that fell away from the truth.

II. A Godly Sorrow (Ecclesiastes 7:2-4).

A. A second grace that promotes the joy of the Lord in your life is not only A Good Name, but also

A Godly Sorrow. And yet, I would suggest that A Godly Sorrow does not stand by itself in promoting joy in your life, but is also a characteristic of A Good Name. In other words, although A Good Name, A Godly Sorrow, and A Teachable Heart will each one be important in advancing the joy of the Lord in your life, there is also a sense in which A Godly Sorrow and A Teachable Heart also further define what it means to have A Good Name. In other words, one who has A Good Name is one who has both A Godly Sorrow and A Teachable Heart.

B. The connection between A Good Name and A Godly Sorrow is seen in the advantage of the day of death of one who has a good name over the day of his birth (in Ecclesiastes 7:1) and in the advantage of godly sorrow in the life of one who has a good name over the foolish mirth of one who does not have a good name (in Ecclesiastes 7:2-4).

1. In Ecclesiastes 7:2,4 Solomon compares the advantage of a house of mourning over a house of feasting. A house of mourning is a house in which one has just died, whereas a house of feasting is a house in which there is cause for great celebration (due perhaps to a birth, as in the previous verse or due to a wedding).

a. You find both of these houses mentioned in Jeremiah 16:5-8, where God warns Judah of His judgment that will fall upon them, in which there will be death (but no consolation) and in which there will no longer be joyful celebrations. It is interesting to note the practices used by those who mourned the death of family and friends in verses 6-7: lamentation, cutting of the flesh, shaving the head, consolation by means of bringing a meal for the bereaved (“tearing” means “breaking in two” as they would do when eating bread together). Some of these acts in the house of mourning were lawful as lamentation, comforting the bereaved by bringing a meal to share with them, or even shaving the head (Isaiah 22:4). Whereas other practices used in the house of mourning were prohibited by the Lord because they were associated with pagan practices (as is corroborated as well by sound Reformed commentators). Practices that were forbidden by God because of their pagan association with mourning for the dead were these: cutting oneself, imprinting marks upon oneself (perhaps a tattoo), and removing the hair between one’s eyes (Jeremiah 16:6, Leviticus 19:28; Deuteronomy 14:1). Notice that these practices in mourning were specifically condemned because of their association with pagan worship (although cutting oneself with a knife just to see blood or just to inflict pain would always seem to be a violation of the Sixth Commandment). Just as removing the hair from between the eyes by shaving the hairs so that there is a space between the eyebrows rather than one continuous flow of hair from one eyebrow to the next is not unlawful in itself (except when superstitiously associated with pagan ceremonies of mourning over the dead), so likewise making a mark upon one’s body (or a tattoo) is not unlawful in itself (except when superstitiously associated with pagan ceremonies of mourning over the dead—the tattoo may become sinful due to its immoral content, or due to its immoderate use, or due to its vain, self-glorifying motive). Now someone could get carried away with his/her eyebrows so that it becomes pure vanity, just as one could get carried away with a tattoo, so that it likewise becomes pure vanity. But these practices in the house of mourning were condemned by God, because they were used superstitiously in pagan worship to mourn for the dead.

b. Now don’t miss the point in Ecclesiastes 7:2,4. Solomon is not condemning times of feasting and celebration, as if such times were sinful in themselves. The Lord Jesus Himself attended the celebration associated with a wedding (in John 2), and there He performed His first miracle in changing water into wine. Furthermore, a great feast was made in Christ’s honor by Matthew (called Levi in Luke 5:29), and the Jesus even assumes the lawfulness of feasts and such times of celebrations when He says, “But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed (Luke 14:13-14). Solomon is simply commending the house of mourning as being of greater profit to one who has a good name.

c. Why? “For that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart” (Ecclesiastes 7:2). Between the two houses, Solomon says that the greater issues of life, death, and eternity are laid bare before you in the house of mourning. For when you see a loved one die or when you attend the

burial of a loved one, you see your own mortality. You see your own powerlessness to save yourselves from death. You see that you are going to leave everyone and everything in this life behind at death. That being the case, what is most important in life is preparing yourselves for death—not partying and forgetting that you are going to die. Again Solomon is not condemning celebration (especially celebration that remembers the goodness of the Lord to you), but rather he is pointing out the greater value between the two of seriously reflecting on the shortness of life, and the importance, therefore, of not simply making a name for yourselves, but of having a good name that reflects the mercies of God to you, and that reflects your faith in Christ, love for Christ, and obedience to Christ.

2. The thrust of Solomon’s point is further emphasized in Ecclesiastes 7:3: “Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.” Just as the Lord Jesus used hyperbole (or exaggeration to some extent) to emphasize the truth in the Sermon on the Mount, so likewise does Solomon here as well. Consider the hyperbole of Christ in Matthew 5:38-42.

a. It should be clear that Solomon is not talking about sorrow in general, but rather is talking about a godly sorrow in particular that causes one with a good name to see in death and hell what his sins justly deserve, and to see in the calamities that God brings upon the earth (by way of war, hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, earthquakes, famines, pestilences, terrorism, economic collapse etc.) what your sins justly deserve every moment of the day. A godly sorrow is better than a foolish mirth, because you see our need of a Savior, you see you are unable to rescue yourselves from death and hell, you see how you have so often offended your most holy and most merciful God by your neglect, by your ignorance, by your forgetfulness, and even by your willful disobedience, and you see that Christ is your only hope of eternal salvation. Dear ones, a godly sorrow leads you to repentance, and not to mere regret. A godly sorrow leads you to do what you ought to do, rather than merely to think about what you ought to do or merely to talk about what you ought to do. A godly sorrow is necessary in the life of one who has a good name. Without a godly sorrow, there will be no good name. For without a godly sorrow there will be no fear of God, there will be no holding God in awe and wonder before your eyes, there will be no taking God seriously in anything you do. Without a godly sorrow for sin and the consequences of sin, there will be no comfort and no joy. For Jesus promised only to those who mourn (and have a godly sorrow) over their sin that they would be comforted (Matthew 5:4).

b. Dear ones, just as you should not forget to laugh and to enjoy Christ and the many blessings He has given to you in this life, so you should not forget to mourn over your sins and the sins of others, and so you should not forget what your sins justly deserve from a holy and righteous God (apart from the grace of God). For if you do not begin there, you will never make it to the step of enjoying Christ or anything else with which He has blessed you. Dear ones, you only appreciate what you have in this life to the degree that you realize you justly deserve none of it due to your sin. A godly sorrow is necessary to a good name.

III. A Teachable Heart (Ecclesiastes 7:5-6).

A. Finally, we come to a third grace that promotes the joy of the Lord in your life: A Teachable Heart. But a teachable heart is also a characteristic of one who has a good name. A teachable heart naturally proceeds from a godly sorrow. For a godly sorrow despises the pride and arrogance in one’s own life. A godly sorrow knows that without the power of the Holy Spirit, sin and error will abound in one’s life. Dear ones, rebuke and correction are not the way of death or destruction to you, but rather the way of life and prosperity (Proverbs 15:10). It is your pride that hates to be corrected, not your teachable heart. What a sad conclusion to hear the regretful and remorseful cry of one who has not had a teachable heart (Proverbs 5:7-12). Do you hate to be corrected? It may not be a pleasure to you, but are you thankful with all your heart that God so loves you that He rebukes you through His Word, through His providence, and through family, friends, ministers, and elders?

B. The best of men/women are not above the necessity of reproof (because we are all sinners, even after our conversion to Christ). Oh how pride is revealed when you can give reproof to others, but cannot receive it from others (especially when you are in some position of authority as a boss, or as a supervisor, or as a parent, or as a husband, or as an elder). You reveal whether you are wise or foolish by whether you receive and apply reproof to a teachable heart. This is also a characteristic of one who has a good name. A fool (that is, one who does not have a good name), Solomon says, will laugh at reproof (or perhaps be angry at reproof), but he will not receive it and apply it to his own life. Such a person will be consumed and destroyed by his pride and by his unteachable heart, just as thorns quickly are consumed in a fire. Dear ones, do you want your name to be remembered? Pray that God gives you a teachable heart. Do you want your name to be forgotten? Continue to exhibit an unteachable heart that despises correction, rebuke, and reproof, even if it comes from one who is under your authority.

C. Dear ones, all those who leave behind a good name when they die shall receive a new name in heaven above (Revelation 2:17). But dear ones, there is only a new name in heaven for those who had a good name upon earth. Your joy upon earth is promoted by a good name, and your joy in heaven is promoted by a new name. Don't despise, ignore, or neglect your name. You will only do so to your own misery. Rather cherish and value a good name. You will do so to your own joy.

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