

A Black Suit is Better Than a Party Dress – Part 2

Ecclesiastes 7:1-14

Reading: Matthew 6:24-34

Bethany Baptist Church

July 7, 2019 (p.m.)

April 1, 2012

Palm Sunday

Turn w/ me to Eccl 7:1-14.

We have come to the *half-way* mark in Solomon's *pursuit of meaning & happiness*.

Solomon's lesson this morning is *framed-up* on the repeated idea of "*better than.*" In the Hebrew text, **seven** statements in these **14 verses** begin w/ the word *better*.

The overall idea here is that the *wise man* understands that the *God of the Bible* is in control of every detail of life, and because He is, *eternity matters*.

We'll unfold the wise old king's chain of *interlocking proverbs* like this:

Five lessons the king learned on his search for meaning.

(last Sunday):

1. **A funeral is better than a party (vv.1-4).**
2. **A rebuke is better than a song (vv.5-7).**
3. **The end is better than the beginning (vv.8-10).**

(this morning):

4. **Wisdom is better than wealth (vv.11-12).**
5. **Contentment is better than complaint (vv.13-14).**

Solomon's lessons boil down to this: God is King, in life & death, in good times & bad!

...pray...

I'd like to start w/ a *brief review* of what we saw last week:

1. A funeral is better than a party.

- a. Solomon uses the first 4 vv to explore the benefits of the *day of death*, spending most of his attention on those left here to *mourn*. The Scripture says *it is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting*, → a *funeral is better than a party!*
- b. A funeral is *better* because it confronts you with the *inevitability* of what you already know: *death* is even more certain than *taxes*.
- c. God calls the man or woman who won't *come to grips* with *eternal issues* a *fool*.

2. A rebuke is better than a song.

- a. Hey friend, pull out those *earbuds* for a minute & *download* some *wise words* to your *smart phone*: (**read v.5**). A *rebuke* is better than a *song!*
- b. A *rebuke* is a form of *confrontation*, when someone tells you you're *wrong* (→ *sinning*). A *rebuke* *appeals to your conscience*.
- c. Few of us enjoy *confrontation*, but a *wise friend* cares enough about you to *rebuke you*, if needed.
- d. Without *loving accountability* & *confrontation*, even a *wise man* can grow *foolish*.

3. The *end* is better than the *beginning* (read v.8).

- a. The next pair of “*better than*” verses are all about *patience*. The *patient* man knows how to *wait* to see things *all the way* to their *conclusion*. His *patience* is grounded in *God’s sovereignty*; the NT assures us that *God works all things after the counsels of His will*.
- b. So the patient man *humbles himself under the mighty hand of God*, but the *impatient man* is a *proud man*.
- c. Solomon explores *two expressions* of *prideful impatience*. The *first* is *anger (9)* & the *second* is *looking back (10)*. *Looking back* is *bad*? Just don’t forget: ***God made today & He put you here in it!*** Don’t be guilty of *complaining against God*.
- d. Beloved, *trust* Him; the *conclusion* to which God will bring all matters (**v.8**) is ***better*** than the *past*. The *end* is better than the *beginning*...

A funeral is better than a party, a rebuke is better than a song, the end is better than the beginning, and wisdom is even better than wealth.

Wisdom is better than wealth (read vv. 11-12).

1. King Solomon was *wealthy* and Solomon was *wise*. God gave him *both*! They are *two* of his fav *themes*.
 - a. *No doubt about it* – an *inheritance* is *useful*, but you have to be *on guard* against things like *greed* & *misplaced affections*.
 - b. *Wealth* is good, but *wisdom* is *even better*! The Heb text (**11**) could be translated **3** slightly different ways here, and *all* of them make some sense; did Solomon mean *like* or *together with* or *better than*?
 - i. *Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing.* (NIV)
 - ii. *Wisdom, together w/ an inheritance, is a good thing.* (KJV, NASB)
 - iii. *Wisdom is better than an inheritance.* That translation seems to fit the *tone* of all of Solomon's *better than* comparisons, and it works well with what he's *about to say* in **v.12**.
 - c. So wisdom is an *advantage*, even when compared to an earthly *inheritance*; even one like *Solomon* inherited from *David*, & *God*!
2. Both provide types of *protection*.
 - a. The term *protection* or *defense* translates the Hebrew expression for *shade* – like the *dense, dark, cool shade* of *big oak* on *sweltering August afternoon*.
 - b. An *inheritance*, applied carefully, can *shade, shelter* you from *many of this life's concerns*. *No doubt about it*!
 - c. But *wisdom* takes *protection* to a whole other *level*. Only *godly wisdom* (= *knowledge*; **v.12**) can keep you from the pitfalls of this life. *Money* won't keep you from *pride, doubt, discouragement, greed, resentment, impatience, anger, complaining* (Eccl); **wisdom can**.
 - d. Consider our author, *Solomon*. What good was all his *wealth*, when he set aside his *wisdom*, as his foreign haram *wooed* him into *idolatry*? *Money* is **not** an *insurance policy* against *foolishness*.

A funeral is better than a party, a rebuke is better than a song, the end is better than the beginning, wisdom is even better than wealth...contentment is better than complaint (read vv. 13-14).

1. Solomon mentions God, *directly*, for the *first time* in this text. With all this *attention to wisdom*, we had to talk about God *sooner or later*, because true wisdom *evaluates life from God's point of view* (2x).
 - a. Solomon **defined** wisdom that way in **Prov 9:10**: *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*
 - b. The King of Israel has brought us back to the *King of the Universe*, and has joined *wisdom to fealty*. Wisdom not only *sees* God's hand in human affairs, it *bows & kisses* His hand. (Pause)
 - c. Brothers & sisters, you can't *change* God's *unchangeables*!

2. Consider what *God has done* in your life:
 - a. Has he *given wealth*? ... Has he *taken it away*?
 - b. Do you have an *inheritance*? ... Or *none*?
 - c. Is your road *smooth*, ...or *difficult*?

 - d. *Hey!* do you think you can *change* His plan?
 - i. Can you make yourself another *inch taller*?
 - ii. Can you *extend your days* another **24 hours**?
 1. The Lord Jesus taught: "*Which of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?*" (Matt 6:27)

 - e. Now, Solomon also understands *human responsibility*.
 - i. If life offers you *choices & things you can improve* – **do it!** If you make a *mess*, *clean it up!*
 - ii. But *that* isn't the main idea here, the main idea is the *much greater truth* that God is ultimately in control over your life, including its *difficulties*, and you *can't* change His plan.

3. **V.14** leaves us w/one last *contrast*: *prosperity & adversity*; *good days* versus *bad days* – let's **read that again (v.14)**.
- Enjoy** the *good days*. *Thank God* for His blessings. Don't forget that *joy is a fruit of the Spirit*.
 - But what about those *bad days*? Don't be *stubborn*, don't be *impatient*, don't be *angry*, don't *complain*.
 - Isa **45:9** – *Will the clay say to the potter, "What are you doing?"* I read your **FB** posts (so does the *Lord*), some of you should *tape this text* to your *keypad*! Remember, *prosperity* or *adversity*, the King is still *on His throne*!
4. All of which is *designed* so that we *depend on God*. Solomon ends w/ a *truth* that is very similar to the end of **ch.6: read 6:12 & 14b. 6:12** - *After him* – the *future*; **now 7:14** - *man can't discover what tomorrow has in store*.
- We don't know the future, but *God does*.
 - God not only *knows* your days, (**v.13**) He **bent** your days. Like a blacksmith *heating & pounding & tempering* a piece of *fine & useful* steel, God has **forged** your days, from *eternity past*!
 - Psalm 139:16 – *In Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them*.
 - Romans 8:28,29 – *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God , to those who are called according to His **purpose**, for those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, **so that** He would become the firstborn among many brethren*.
5. Here's Solomon's *big lesson*: if God *knows & shapes* all your days, with *eternal purpose*, it only makes sense to *depend on Him*.

Contentment is better than complaint.

Wisdom is better than wealth.

The end is better than the beginning.

A rebuke is better than a song.

A funeral is better than a party. Small pause. **That's wisdom!**

*In closing, I'd like to return to that **hard to ignore** theme in v.4: the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, while the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure. → A funeral is better for you than a party...*

1. Solomon spends a lot of time reminding you that God is *sovereign* (He has *made our days*). He is *King*. He is your *ruler & judge* because He *made you*. And He is *holy*. He expects you to *serve Him*, and *everyone*, young or old, is *accountable* to Him.
2. But left to yourself, you *don't* live for Him. You lie, you lust, you covet, you *worship what you've made*, you *don't* worship the *One who made you*. God is *king*, but we are *rebels*. The Bible sums us up like this: *there is none righteous, not even one*.
3. Eventually, every rebel will *stand before the King*; *there is a time to die*. *Judgment* will be exacted. No *second chances*. *Hell* will be proved a *terrible* but *just* reality.
4. *Is that all there is?* If it were left up to *us*, that would be *it*; we *can't do better*.
5. But God is *love*. In love, He sent His *only Son* to *live* for us & to *die* in our place; *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*. Because He was *God*, Jesus lived a *sinless life*. Because He was *man*, He understands our *weaknesses*. God's plan was that Jesus would die *in the place of sinners*, a *substitute*. There are only *two* people who can be punished for your sins: *you*, or Jesus *in your place*.
6. Jesus *died* (crucified), but Jesus didn't *stay* in the *grave*! God raised His Son on the *3rd* day. Because of that, God offers to do the same for you; you can have *new life & eternal life* because of the *death & life* of Jesus. "*He who believes in the Son has eternal life.*"

7. That's the *good news* of the Bible: *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*. The good news leaves you with a *choice*:

- a. To *ignore* what Jesus did for sinners, and *continue* to live as a rebel. Solomon says that's what a *fool* does; his heart never looks beyond the *here & now*.
- b. Your *alternative* is to become a follower of Christ. To *repent* of your *rebellion*, & *trust* that Jesus' *death* paid for *all your sins*. Here's how Jesus described the *faith & repentance* He expects from you: "*If any man wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me.*"
- c. That's your *choice*, friend. *Follow Christ, and live...or chase your own pleasure, and perish.*

*It is better to go to a house of mourning
Than to go to a house of feasting,
Because death is the end of every man,
And the living takes it to heart.*

...pray...

Christian. Trust God for the details of every day, *prosperity* or *adversity*! He made them *all*.

Not in Christ (not *certain*)? Consider your *two choices*. Can I help you?