

Ecclesiastes- Chapter 7

Let's be turning in our Bibles if you haven't already to the seventh chapter of the book of Ecclesiastes. We have been systematically working our way through this book, probably with a little more speed than what we tackle a book study in the New Testament, but I don't believe this is the kind of book that lends itself towards focusing on a few verses at a time.

This is a book that is trying to show us the futility of life without God so that in the end we understand that the only thing that lasts and is worthwhile is our service to God. Doing things his way.

We've been on quite a roll here recently looking at different types of people living life under the sun. Solomon has been showing us in chapter 5 what he calls the sickness of following after wealth. That is to say, the love of money. In it we saw that the love of money brings mental and physical stress and in the end the person dies like the one who didn't have any at all.

In chapter 6, Solomon showed us two more types. The man who has all the wealth in the world, but no ability to enjoy it. Everybody else is living off them and they are happy, but he himself has no joy at all. Has no peace of mind.

And the second man of chapter 6 was the man that had 100 kids and lived a long life and yet at the end of his days no one wanted anything to do with him. Solomon tells us that man would have been better to have died at birth than to waste a life like that.

That's the kind of people we have been looking at. Solomon shows us the worst of the hearts of people who are seeking to serve themselves under the sun instead of living life under heaven.

Now when we come to chapter 7 we have before us a long chapter. There are 30 verses here and

to be honest much of this chapter isn't as narrative like as we have seen so far. Here Solomon gets a little proverbial so to say. When you look at the book of Proverbs it is a collection of thoughts. You may have a few verses that run together at times, but you often have verses next to one another that don't really have much to do with the context of the verse before it. Makes it a difficult book to preach through for that reason.

This chapter has much of the same feel at least in part. Now because of the length of the chapter we don't have time to make it through the end of today, so we are going to split this in two parts.

Carla has a little something special planned to go along with Greg's lesson that will follow me today, so we are going to try to stay on track this morning and leave ourselves a little extra time room at the end.

Let's begin by reading the first 9 verses which will be the text we will consider this morning.

Ecc 7:1 A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth.

Ecc 7:2 It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.

Ecc 7:3 Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.

Ecc 7:4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

Ecc 7:5 It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.

Ecc 7:6 For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity.

Ecc 7:7 Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad; and a gift destroyeth the heart.

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

Ecc 7:9 Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.

Let's look to verse 1.

Ecc 7:1 A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth.

I want you to think for a moment what ointment is. It is perfume. Something to make a person smell good. You might go to the store and there is that section of really cheap stuff, right?

Now perfume and cologne usually throw me into a headache so I try to avoid them, but even aftershave that watered down cologne so to say you look up at the shelf and there is the \$6 bottle of Bruit and the then there is the \$3 knock off Dollar General. I'm going to opt for the knock off. It's just cheap ointment with little smell. Bottle lasts a whole month or more.

But, in this verse this is not cheap ointment. This is not some rose water. This is precious ointment. This is that expensive stuff. Not even that kind of expensive stuff that you pay a couple of hundred dollars for.

Some of you might do that and if you smell that bad, I might suggest you just take a shower instead of opting for the Eau de Toilette because the shower is much cheaper. That said as expensive as that \$200 bottle of Chanel is, that is nothing compared to the cost of precious ointment.

You remember the incident with Jesus not long before his betrayal?

Mar 14:3 And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box,

and poured it on his head.

Mar 14:4 And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made?

Mar 14:5 For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her.

That woman we are told was Mary the sister of Martha in the Gospel of John, but here you see this ointment was worth 300 pence. That's nearly a year's worth of wages for the average person. This kind of ointment was a luxury. This isn't something that was wasted on just any occasion, often it was used when someone died to anoint the body with.

So here in Ecclesiastes chapter 7, that is the kind of precious ointment that we are talking about. Something of great value. Great worth. Something that wouldn't be squandered and wasted. This ointment was the same as having money in the bank.

The man we begin with in Chapter 7 is quite the opposite of the man in chapter 6 who fathered so many and lived a long life yet in the end no one wanted anything to do with him. That was a man who didn't die with a good name. He died with such a bad name his kids didn't want anything to do with him.

Solomon says to have a good name is better than precious ointment or wealth. That is the underlying thought here. Perhaps you have known people just like that.

Maybe they didn't have a lot of money, but anyone you mention his or her name around people have nothing to say but good things about him. Tell you stories of how he stopped and helped them out when they were broke down by the side of the road. Lent them gas money because they were out on the road and left their wallet at home. Helped out their kids. Whatever it was, and even though he or she never had a lot of physical wealth, they cared

about others and it showed. They were honest. They were just. Salt of the earth type of people and when he or she dies people come out to pay their last respects and tell stories of how great they were. You know this guy. You know this woman. Maybe it is you. I hope that it is. In fact, knowing you, I know that it is and it should be.

If someone said to you, would you rather have a million dollars and a bad name or die an average Joe with a good name, I think most of you would say keep your money you old fool, I'd rather die the average Joe.

That's the kind of fellow that Solomon is talking about here.

Solomon says when it comes to the man who dies with a good name the day of his death is better than the day of his birth. I want you to think about that for a moment. When Heather and I had our children there was a lot of happy people around. Turns out, Heather and I were two of them. There was grandparents and aunts and uncles and even friends that came to celebrate Austin and Sara's arrival.

Those were joyous times, but in the grand spectrum of things there wasn't a lot of people around whose lives were truly affected by their births. As joyous as they might have made us, they sure weren't bringing joy to our neighbors or people at the restaurant or anywhere else we dragged them. You see, all of their lives went on just the same. Our children had no impact on their lives.

But you know what, as our children grow and they themselves seek out a good name for themselves, they begin to have a real impact on others. From the outside, you begin to see the difference that they make in the lives of others for the better.

I'm somehow reminded of the old movie It's a Wonderful Life and seeing the impact old George Bailey had made on others because he

was seeking to do what was right. What was good.

That is what Solomon is saying here. When you have sought out living a life of goodness then your impact on the world is shown in the fact that there will be far more that mourn your death than celebrated your birth. Again, your impact on the world was very little when you were born. Your impact on this world during your life that is what matters. That is what is of value. That is what allows one at the end of his or her life to have a good name.

That is what was missing from the man in the last chapter with a 100 kids and a thousand years, that should have been mourned by many at the end of his days and was mourned by none.

Let's read on.

Ecc 7:2 It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.

The house of mourning is speaking about going to what we would think of as a funeral. There were no funeral homes in this day and time. People would come to the homes of those that had lost loved ones and mourn with them and not for a day, but rather for days.

That is the very picture that we see with Jesus coming to Mary and Martha 4 days after Lazarus had been buried. There were people there still mourning Mary and Marth's loss with them. Their house, though it had been the scene of much feasting and celebrating in times past had now become a house of mourning.

Now if I said how many of you all would rather go to a birthday party today or a funeral, I suspect that everyone would say they would much rather go to a birthday. No one wants to go to a funeral unless they have too.

Solomon though here is teaching to us there is a value in going to a house of mourning rather than to a house of feasting. Sure, you might go to a birthday party and have a good time. Might eat a lot of good food. Have some good cake. Laugh a little, but you are going to leave the birthday party and go home and life will return to normal.

I've never been to a birthday party or even a wedding party that changed my life- well except for my own wedding. That one did. But that was more the wedding and not the party. The party was fun, but had we no party at all we would have still been married just the same. Just less pictures in the album.

There is a value in going down to the house of mourning though that can change a person's life forever. That is why Solomon says the living will lay it to his heart. The one that goes to the house of mourning will look at the brevity of life of the one that has passed whether his days were few and short or great and long and begin to ponder their own days. Look to their own life and begin to evaluate where they stand in life before others and more importantly before God. The wise man will go to the house of mourning and begin to ponder their own eternity.

I have never heard of a single person saved at a birthday party, but I have seen people confess their need of Christ at a funeral. I've seen people come to grips with the fact that the only hope they have of ever seeing a loved one again is seek after Jesus. You see nothing causes the living to evaluate his or her own life more than losing someone he or she loved who died with a good name.

Maybe you have seen these very things play out before your eyes a time or two. Maybe it has been you.

Let's read on.

Ecc 7:3 Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.

We could look at this verse in the context of the last verse. We can laugh at a party, but all the comedy in the world does very little to change a man's direction in life. We've already seen in this book that laughter brings no lasting meaning to a person's life.

But here again we are shown that it is those times of sadness that the heart is made better. Here Solomon is not saying there is happiness in grieving, but rather that in these times of sorrow and grieving we ourselves become better people.

If we could summarize what Solomon is saying in this verse and even into the next it would be that we learn more from trials than we do pleasure. I imagine most of you can look back on your life and see the same thing.

Even as something as simple as playing on a soccer team or some other sport. To get good at something, to make oneself better, you have to go through the adversity of training.

Spiritually we often talk about the highs of life being called mountaintop experiences and we are thankful for those experiences, but we don't grow on the mountaintop. Our spiritual growth comes in the struggle of the climb.

This is what Solomon is teaching to us in these proverbs.

Let's read on.

Ecc 7:4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

Our verses here are not saying anything is wrong with celebrating. Not saying anything is wrong with laughter. Our verses are just speaking

about the fact that those things that come easy, don't really make us better on the inside.

This verse, in particular, is just saying the same thing we have seen. A wise person will learn and grow in times of trouble, sorrow, and mourning. A fool though will always seek out the good times and learn nothing at all from the house of sorrow.

Our next verse is also about growing in a way that most of us don't like. Look here.

Ecc 7:5 It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.

Solomon tells us something we know, but sometimes don't like. It is better for us to hear the criticisms of those that know something, than to be celebrated by a bunch of people who just want to slap us on the back and say a good job.

Sometimes I think about someone like Tiger Woods who, despite what you think of him, one has had quite a career in playing golf. Few people have accomplished what he has. Yet, he's got coaches. Someone to help him, mentor him, tell him what he's doing wrong.

How many of you all would like to tell Tiger what he's doing wrong? We'd much rather say. Good job Tiger. Good job.

Telling someone good job is actually the easy thing to do. It's not always for the best though is it? You ever heard someone take the stage that thought they could sing. Maybe it was me singing a special. But you thought to yourself when they started, hasn't anyone told them they couldn't carry a tune in a bucket.

It's better to know the truth about how we are doing and a wise person will learn from that counsel and grow. That is how we should look at it. Not criticism. Counsel to grow and get better. It's hard sometimes to swallow, but it is

for the best. A wise person will grow from it and not grow angry from instruction.

Ecc 7:6 For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity.

Most of you have started a fire at some point in your life. You might have even tried to cook something over a campfire. You know when you first start that campfire you go out and get some twigs and maybe some dry debris that is going to catch fast. You get that fire lit and you hear the crackling and popping of the fire getting started.

When you first start that fire, now is not the time though to put your pot on top the fire is it? You could put a kettle of water on a grate over a bunch of burning twigs and you will never boil that water. There is just not enough heat being released to do the job. To boil the water you have to build the fire up, getting it going. It's only then you have enough heat to get the job accomplished.

Solomon says this is the same with the laughter of fools. Those guys that sing your songs and slap you on the back and say great job. It all sounds good, but you can't cook on the fire their building. It burns out too fast. There is no sustenance behind it.

Oh, my friends, may God grant us the wisdom to know the difference in the sounds of a crackling thorns under a pot and the heat of true wisdom given by the counsel of the wise.

Let's read on again.

Ecc 7:7 Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad; and a gift destroyeth the heart.

We have two phrases here in this verse that are related. One describes the way of the wise the other the way of the fool.

There is some debate on how to best translate the word oppression. Some say it would be better translated extortion. Some stick with oppression. The idea is either way that someone who is trying to bribe someone or oppress someone to get what they want will cause a wise man to go nuts. He knows what is going on. He won't be fooled.

A fool though will look at the Trojan Horse at the cities gate and roll it right into the city. There is a reason why all those pop up adds that promise a gift card to Amazon for clicking here are called Trojan horses.

The promise of a gift causes some people not to use their brains. As the ancient Roman poet Virgil once wrote, "beware of Greeks bringing gifts." When someone starts treating you nicely out of the blue and bringing you a gift, there might be more behind it.

Let's read on. We have a few more verses to go.

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

This gets back to some degree to what we said in the beginning. When we were born we are incapable of anything really. Our impact is little. As we listen to wise counsel and as we grow in wisdom our end is greater than our start. The one who is patient in spirit is the one who has grown through tribulation. That person who has grown through the school of hard knocks and come out the better is far better off than the one who just assumes they know it all and has seen nothing.

Let's look to one more proverb,
Ecc 7:9 Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.

Simply put a foolish man is one who is quick to anger and a wise man is slow to wrath. No one shows their foolishness faster than someone who is angry at the world over the smallest of things. Every time you see them, they are ranting about something. That's not the mark of wisdom folks. That is the mark of foolishness.

Now we are leaving off in the middle of this discussion and since most of these are proverbs it is hard to just pick a stopping verse, but I want to spend some time on verse 10 next week that we really don't have time for this morning.

But as we look back on what we have read today let's ask ourselves the questions that Solomon is trying to help us realize today.

Are we seeking to live a life with a good name more than the gains of this earth? Will people mourn us when we are gone because we made a difference in their lives.

Are we learning from the trials of this earth to be better people? Can we tell the difference between the words of the wise to correct us and the words of foolish praise?

Are we learning to guard our mouths in peace or prone to foolish anger?

Solomon wrote these things I suppose nearly three thousand years ago, but the nature of man hasn't changed one bit. Let us draw from his wisdom.