

**Wisdom and Folly**  
**Ecclesiastes 7:1-18**

We're back in Ecclesiastes, so you may feel like you're walking into the middle of a movie. So let's do a quick review.

In the first 6 chapters, the "Preacher/ Teacher" is giving a perspective about life "under the sun" and he says that it is "hevel" – i.e. smoke, mist, an enigma, transitory, vanity.

That is true for the believer and the non-believer.

Life goes off script. We cannot explain everything and we won't always, if ever, know why God allows hard things to happen.

So how do we cope?

Well, some go after pleasure, wealth, sex, entertainment.

Some get into philosophy. Some get into work. All of those are ways to fill the void or try to bring some stability and coherence to life, or at least some personal satisfaction.

But they all fail in themselves and by themselves when they are not connected to the God who made us for eternity. The preacher points out that death is the great equalizer, thus to find real meaning and wisdom, we must begin with the end in mind- we're all going to die.

Wisdom comes by living in the "fear of God" and acknowledging the "hevel", and the God who is in control in the midst of it. God has ordained a time for all things – chap 3. The path of wisdom and faith is to trust (fear) God even in the midst of the hevel. **The wisest thing you can do is to realize that not even being wise will tell you everything you want to know. - David Gibson**

The "preacher" has located our true meaning in the providence of God and in our acknowledgement of the providence of God. He's going to come back to that again in Ecclesiastes 7, and he's going to mention our embracing the reality of God's providence as a key to living wisely in this life, to being wise in this life, and to experience meaning in this life.

Michael Eaton gives a helpful breakdown of this chapter and 8:1

- I. **Instruction from sufferings 7:1-6**
- II. **FOUR DANGERS 7:7-10**
- III. **THE NEED FOR WISDOM 7:11-12**
- IV. **LIFE UNDER THE HAND OF God 7:13-14**
- V. **DANGERS ALONG THE WAY 7:15-18**
- VI. **THE NEED FOR WISDOM 7:19-22**
- VII. **THE INACCESSIBILITY OF WISDOM 7:23-24**
- VIII. **THE SINFULNESS OF MAN 7:25-29**
- IX. **WHO IS REALLY WISE 8:1**

That's a lot of stuff, so it will take two weeks.

There are numerous comparisons in the form of proverbs, so it seems like the preacher is jumping around, but it is a meditation on the instructiveness of suffering and death. He intends to show that by looking at these hard things in life we can actually grow in wisdom.

By presenting a series of Hebrew word plays, opposites, contrasts, dangers, and real-life scenarios, the Preacher is showing us true wisdom and the folly of trying to make sense of life apart from God. And he is revealing the difference between wisdom and folly along with the characteristic traits – actions and attitudes that reveal the heart of wisdom and folly. – Derek Thomas

While we may all have a good intent, it is our actions that reveal the heart of wisdom or the heart of folly.

Chapter 7 shows us that if we want wisdom we must understand that DEATH is holding out an invitation to us. It also shows us that wisdom is good: it is sensible, upright and beautiful, and we have only a limited grasp of it in this life. It is better to have it than to not have it, but it won't be perfect.

Here's a take away from 7:1-15: Adversity or Affliction is Not Always or Necessarily an Evil

#### I. Instruction from sufferings 7:1-6

1 A good name is better than a good ointment, And the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth.

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

3 Sorrow is better than laughter, for when a face is sad a heart may be happy.

4 The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning, While the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure.

5 It is better to listen to the rebuke of a wise man Than for one to listen to the song of fools.

6 For as the crackling of thorn bushes under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool;  
And this too is futility.

These verses sound odd, don't they? This is like jumping into the deep end with lead boots.

What's in a name? in the OT culture it is more than a mere label, but it intended to express an underlying nature. What is in view is not simply a name, but a reputation which flows from character. He's saying that if you look good on the outside, but people roll their eyes or hide their wallets, wives and children when you arrive, then you are in the path of folly. You may smell good on the outside, but the inside stinks and even a good ointment won't cover the stench.

Would you rather go to a funeral or a birthday party, or even be there for a birth??

Before you answer, just consider that your response doesn't indicate if you're a kind person or a fun-loving person or a normal person. It indicates if you're on the path of wisdom or folly.

#### Death is an evangelist (Gibson).

*He looks us in the eye and asks us to look him right back with a steady gaze and allow him to do his work in us. Death is a preacher with a very simple message. Death has an invitation for us. He wants to teach us that the day of our coming death can be a friend to us in advance. The very limitation that death introduces into our life can instruct us about life. Think of it as death's helping hand.*

He's not saying that death is better than life, per se, but that death is a better teacher. When life is coming to an end everything else comes into focus. When we are born and as we are young we lack so much perspective about what is valuable and worthwhile. Death changes the price tags on everything. It shows what is really worth our time, talent and treasure. In the house of mourning we can learn the wisdom to know that this will be our end one day.

Birth is great, but it is about potential; death is about what we actually did. Death is more revealing about the person than birth.

O LORD, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am! (Ps. 39:4, 7)

There are two types of people at a funeral:

- Those who find it grim and want to get back to what they were doing to mask the reality of life
- Those who know that will be them one day and ask themselves, "What will they say about me? What kind of person do I want to be? What kind of impact do I want to make?"

The first is a fool, the second is a man or woman who has learned wisdom.

The wise woman or man is not morbid, s/he is a person of depth of soul and character.

The foolish perspective is seen in the words of Billy Joel 🎵

"I'd rather laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints The sinners are much more fun – Only the Good Die Young"

It is also seen in the tagline of the film FAME – "I'm gonna live forever". Well, when they did the TV series remake, they used different actors because they didn't live forever. They got old and tired. And so it goes.

It's an invitation to be a person who realizes that living a good life means preparing to die a good death. – David Gibson

Will you heed the message of death? If you know Christ, then death has no power over you; it has lost its sting, so it can lead you on the path of wisdom. Do you use sorrow to let it teach you or do you waste it by moaning and complaining?

RFK announcing the death of MLK Jr in 1968. My favorite poet was Aeschylus. He once wrote, "And even in our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart, until in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God."

There is another approach that the Christian will take in order to acquire wisdom. The Christian will judge rebuke as better than frivolous praise (7:5–6). Rebuke is good because of where it can lead—Hebrews 12:11 – "godly discipline seems painful but it can yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

The Parenting Class has talked about the need to teach children about the need for discipline when they are 2 and 3 so they won't destroy their lives when they are 16.

## II. FOUR DANGERS 7:7-10

For oppression makes a wise man mad, And a bribe corrupts the heart.

8 The end of a matter is better than its beginning; Patience of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit.

9 Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, For anger resides in the bosom of fools.

10 Do not say, "Why is it that the former days were better than these?"

For it is not from wisdom that you ask about this.

- **Bribe** – the warning is real because, as they say, "Everyone has their price". Temptation is real, but the Preacher says, "Prove the saying wrong. Don't give in to the bribe."
- **Impatience** – foolish people embrace arrogant whining rather than embracing patience and wisdom. To see a project through to its end is better than to be the kind of person who starts and never finishes.

- **Anger** - If you adopt the long-term view to get things done, you can run into frustrations that can light your fuse. Remember that “anger resides in the bosom of fools.”
- **Nostalgia**- The wise man does not idealize the past. It is foolish to dwell upon the past as the ideal from which we have declined. “What’s wrong with the world?” “Things aren’t like they used to be.” “Remember the good old days?”

This IS A PARTICULAR SNARE FOR THOSE OF US OF A “CERTAIN AGE”.

If you think the past was better then you need to ask yourself, “Do I believe that God is no longer in control?”

If you think you’re living in a world where things are getting worse all the time, then cheer up: at least you’ll be dead before things get really bad.- David Gibson

The Biblical perspective isn’t one of looking back to the good old days, but rather it is setting our hope fully on the grace to be revealed to us when Christ appears. 1 Pet 1:13

### III. THE NEED FOR WISDOM 7:11-12

Wisdom along with an inheritance is good And an advantage to those who see the sun.

12 For wisdom is protection *just* as money is protection,

But the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the lives of its possessors.

An inheritance was certainly viewed as a good thing, especially when it involved the land. It was a source of stability for those who received it. So too, wisdom is good to receive and pursue. It doesn’t solve everything, but acting according wisdom can certainly give us fewer regrets in life.

Biblical wisdom is a function of character and experience. It involves know-how. It entails skill, observation, contemplation, experience, and discernment. These are qualities that cannot be bought or memorized. They are capabilities that must be developed over time. – Jeff Meyers

Here’s a good take away question for life: “Given my past, present, and future goals, **WHAT IS THE WISE THING TO DO RIGHT NOW?**” We’re never too young or too old to ask ourselves that question.

### IV. LIFE UNDER THE HAND OF God 7:13-14

Consider the work of God,

For who is able to straighten what He has bent?

14 In the day of prosperity be happy,

But in the day of adversity consider-

God has made the one as well as the other

So that man will not discover anything *that will be* after him.

Prosperity and adversity are in the plan of God. One brings joy, the other brings wisdom, if we let it. God is sovereign over both. Embracing the hevel, and God’s providential control in the midst of it is an aspect of wisdom. The back and forth between prosperity and adversity keeps us dependent on God and rather than depending on our own devices and know how.

Zach Eswine gives the following advice:

Let the tough stuff sink in. Don’t run from it. Don’t use god-talk to pretend it doesn’t exist. Set your heart and mind on the awful thing. No evil thing can ultimately win. The foulest thing will reveal something true about the nature of life and the nobler purposes we were made for. Take time, lots of time, the time needed to grieve, ask questions, wrestle with it, work it out, and come to terms. Why? **Because though this is a mystery, we need to stand on this truth, that no matter what happens in our lives, God holds on to us and maintains his purposes for us. ... This means**

that something larger than our prosperity and something larger than our adversity has a hold on us

The true test of faith is found in how you understand the times of trouble and disaster (7:14). Will you recognize their origin in God's will even if this means confessing that God's ways are inexorably enigmatic to you?

The Christian who genuinely fears God will repudiate any attempt to manipulate God's disposition of his future. God frustrates our attempts to discover what he does, specifically when we predict what he will do (7:14c). Solomon points out that his life is "vaporous" (7:15a). It is hebel. Jeff Meyers

### WISDOM IS SOMEONE WE MEET

I don't mean to go to this well so often, but with Good Friday being only 10 days ago and this table is before us, I'm reminded of Jesus praying in the garden.

His soul was grieved to the point of death, yes, but he dealt with it in prayer and came to the place of saying, "Not my will, but Thy will be done."

That is the response of faith and trust.

When we respond by faith in a similar way, God uses that to extend the suffering and resurrection of Christ to those around us. 1 Pet 3:14-15

But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, 15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;

Don't be fooled into thinking that the cross was easy for Jesus because he was God. He was not immune to temptation, pain and anguish and sorrow.

His suffering was real, and He chose it so that we would not have to be cut off forever.

Let His death teach us that death is defeated and through the TABLE we actually enter the House of Feasting.

Consider this as we come to the Table

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