

Daily Bible Study

“Words of Wisdom”

Ecclesiastes 7:1-12

June 23 – June 29, 2013

MONDAY –As we now take for our text, **Ecclesiastes 7:1-12** we are entering a chapter where Solomon gives us some “**Words of Wisdom**”. This passage contains wise words of advice from a man who had learned from his observations of life. In this chapter, which we will only introduce this week, he calls his readers to make some comparisons, heed some warnings, and also make some considerations. Actually, the opening verse of the next chapter, **Ecclesiastes 8:1** summarizes the whole of this **chapter 7** as it speaks about the result from hearing and learning from the wisdom given. (*Who is like a wise man? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man’s wisdom makes his face shine, and the sternness of his face is changed.*”) Wisdom truly does *make the face shine* as the heeding of and application of wisdom changes a person from within. Ultimately we understand true wisdom is found in Jesus Christ, wisdom personified, (**Proverbs 8:22-31, John 1:1-14**). It is actually to Jesus that Solomon and the whole of Scripture point us. Read our text: **Ecclesiastes 6:1-12**: “*A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of one’s birth; 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 take it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools. For like the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool. This also is vanity. Surely oppression destroys a wise man’s reason, and a bribe debases the heart. The end of a thing is better than its beginning; The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, For anger rests in the bosom of fools. Do not say, “Why were the former days better than these?” For you do not inquire wisely concerning this. Wisdom is good with an inheritance, and profitable to those who see the sun. For wisdom is a defense as money is a defense, but the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it.*”

Suggestion for Prayer: God, help me to look to Jesus Christ and to hear, heed and apply His Words of Wisdom. I ask You to change me through the power of Your Word.

TUESDAY – **Ecclesiastes 7:1-2**: “*A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of one’s birth; 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 take it to heart.*” As we begin this text we find the opening verse has a parallel in Solomon’s **Proverbs 22:1**: “*A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, loving favor rather than silver and gold.*” The

difference in the two texts is that here Solomon uses *precious ointment* as his comparable object rather than *silver* and *gold*. A good name was highly valued in Hebrew culture (**Job 18:17, Proverbs 10:7**) and should be in any culture. Perfume or *precious ointment* was also highly regarded (**Psalms 45:7, 133, Amos 6:6, Matthew 6:17, 26:7**) and we find in Scripture it is often used metaphorically to speak of an anointing by God. Solomon is here using these images to compare inward character and values versus outward appearances and show. A man’s character and reputation are transparent to all who would look and see but perfume can be used to make us “smell” like something we are not. Remember that Jesus referred to the Pharisees as “*whitewashed tombs*” outwardly “smelling” good but inwardly smelling rotten of death and dead man’s decaying corpses. Solomon may also be using perfume to link to the following portion of the verse dealing with death and funeral mourning. Remember the story where Jesus, the “richest” poor man to ever lived spoke of his body being anointed with perfume for His burial (**Matthew 26:6–13**)? A poor man in the things of this life may not have expensive perfume applied to his body but he can have a good name; character and reputation that will count for so much more. Solomon is again reminding us of death and trying to have us take its certainty to heart as we learn lessons. Just like *a good name is better than precious ointment* so is *the day of death* better than *the day of one’s birth*. He is telling us that eternity matters and the legacy of righteous character is better than a “fake cover” in this life that lacks the substance of integrity. The “*day of birth*” may actually be contrasting a “birthday party” in our vernacular against the somber and sobering reality of a funeral. Solomon says; live in such a way (*the living will take it to heart*) that you will be prepared to die. Eternity and what’s invested in it is far more important than riches, fine perfume, or anything in this temporal life.

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, help me understand eternity is where I need to invest my energy and resources. May I be a person of Godly character like Jesus in how I live this life You have given me. Help me learn this lesson and live with the wisdom (skill) of having learned it.

WEDNESDAY – **Ecclesiastes 7:3-6**: “*Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools. For like the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool. This also is vanity.*” We continue this look into the “funeral” of a man which Solomon told us reveals more of a person’s true character than any birthday party ever will; just like the fragrance of perfume versus real substance. He continues this theme using the picture now of *sorrow* and *laughter* and *mourning*. We have all heard the cliché; “our disappointments are often God’s appointments”. Please listen Beloved, YOU and your fallen human nature will barely allow you a thought for God during times of great blessing, but when things begin to go wrong we are “forced” to go to Him and look to Him. As Keith Green said, God’s people are often “asleep in the light” all warm and comfy, lost in their “American Dream”. The Hebrew word translated as *sorrow* can also mean “vexation or anger”. We are seeing the intensity of grief or

bitter disappointment as Solomon expressed in **5:17**. There is much to be gained by sober reflection on death and those who do reflect realize that the same end awaits them, and their hearts are turned from folly. There is both a temporal and eternal reality in view here. It's better when in the temporal current life we are made sad and our illusion of temporal bliss is shattered and we are forced to turn heart and mind to God. But more important still is when we are given a sorrow that *produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted*; rather than *the sorrow of the world which produces death* (**2 Corinthians 7:9-10**). We need to be crushed with REALITY and run to Jesus in repentance and faith. Sadly, even many Christians who have repented and believe are still running the wrong way on the track as they "*chase the wind*". *It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise...* **Proverbs 27: 6** tells us, "*Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful*". Why do we always push away from this? We like the *song of fools* as they sing to us all we want to hear to reinforce our bad decisions and unwise choices. The *crackling laughter of the fool* which is sometimes even true of us Beloved is the wrong response to the advice of the wise. A fool sees the rebuke of a wise man as empty, missing the real picture and they think he has no idea what he is talking about. Solomon says the fool and his "viewpoint" can make an impressive display of intense fire, but his wisdom and choices will never last long enough to cook anything of substance to nourish us like food *in a pot*. When we receive the *rebuke of the wise* we may feel that we are being roasted, but in the end it produces something that will nourish and sustain us. Solomon's dad understood this truth and wrote of it in **Psalms 141:5**.

Suggestion for Prayer: *God, help me not laugh like a fool at the rebuke of the wise. Help me be humble and see the wisdom from Sacred Scripture and the life of Jesus, the living Word. Only a fixed vision of these realities will change the way I live here and now; God help me!*

THURSDAY – Ecclesiastes 7:7-9: "*Surely oppression destroys a wise man's reason, and a bribe debases the heart. The end of a thing is better than its beginning; The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, For anger rests in the bosom of fools.*" I would draw our attention in this particular portion to the middle phrase which I see as the foundation of the point Solomon is here presenting; *The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit*. It appears Solomon is speaking about vulnerability here and how we need to be careful about we are influenced in our thinking and decision making. We all like the shortcut to our desires and here we learn the long haul is better. Beware of the shortcut! There are no shortcuts to holiness. Here Solomon speaks of extortion and bribery being shortcuts to getting something done but *oppression* and *bribes* can cloud our judgment (*destroys a wise man's reason*) and distort our thinking (*debases the heart*). We need not encourage the corruption already in our hearts and we can easily be embittered and become cynical in our own "wisdom". Amid the pressures of life, bad decisions through wrong means would be easy to make but a big picture view (*The end of a thing is better than its beginning*) with a *patient spirit* help us resist. There is a political flavor to these verses as they are written from the

perspective of *King Solomon*. Behind this text are the admonitions not only of biblical texts but of all ancient Near Eastern wisdom that those who hold political power should shun all corrupt practices. But whether we are in positions of political power or not the truths here apply to us in whatever sphere we wield power, influence, and decision making. *Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, For anger rests in the bosom of fools* reminds us as Warren Wiersbe says, "It is far better that we wait patiently and humbly for God to work out His will than that we get angry and demand our own way". When we are living in God's wisdom the *end of a thing is better than its beginning*. The beginning of sin leads to a terrible end—death (**James 1:13–15**) while if God's work of sovereign grace in salvation is at the beginning of what we do, He will see to it that we reach the end with "success" complete in Christ (**Philippians 1:6**). The Prodigal Son started with happiness and wealth, but ended with suffering and poverty until God worked salvation in his heart (**Luke 15:11–24**). Beloved, God always saves *the best wine* until the last (**John 2:10**), but Satan and sin want you to think you need "Your best life NOW".

Suggestion for Prayer: *Father, thank You so much for giving me repentance. Faith, and life in Jesus. Help me live patiently and wise as I look to Jesus and follow His example of bearing the cross and pain as He looked forward to the joy set before Him (Hebrews 12:2).*

FRIDAY – Ecclesiastes 6:10-12: "*Do not say, "Why were the former days better than these?" For you do not inquire wisely concerning this. Wisdom is good with an inheritance, and profitable to those who see the sun. For wisdom is a defense as money is a defense, but the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it.*" When life is difficult and we are impatient for change, it is easy to look back and long for "the good old days" when things were better. In Scripture we see the when the foundation was laid for the 2nd temple, the old men wept as they remembered the old Temple and its far more superior grandeur and glory. They were thinking of "the good old days" but some of the people were singing and this was wonderful to them and there was a mix in the "noises" (**Ezra 3:12–13**). Live and make the most of *today* in the will of God and do not be paralyzed by yesterday's failures or hypnotized by tomorrow's "dreams" which may never come. The Hilaire Belloc wrote, "While you are dreaming of the future or regretting the past, the present, which is all you have, slips from you and is gone." Scripture does command us to look back and remember (**Isaiah 46:8–9, 1 Corinthians 11:24–25**), but *Do not say...* don't dwell on the past making unwise comparisons between present circumstances and past events (**Psalms 42:4**). Wisdom helps us see life clearly and one of the marks of maturity is the ability to look at life in perspective and not get out of balance. When you have God's wisdom, you will be able to accept and deal with the changing experiences of life. *Wisdom with an inheritance is good*. Those who possess both money and wisdom are under the protection of both. Wisdom however will guide us through difficult times while money often vanishes in hard times. We should thank God for the rich treasure of wisdom that like a "shelter" to those who obey it gives greater protection than money.

Suggestion for Prayer: *God, help me every day of life see & obey Your wisdom, Jesus Christ.*