

# The Better Things of Life

## Lesson for Sunday, June 30, 2024

TEXT: Ecclesiastes 7:1-8

### INTRODUCTION:

- ⇒ ASK: What is the best life advice that anyone has ever given you?
  - Aren't you thankful for people that God has put in your path that have helped you navigate though life successfully?
  - This is how we ought to view Solomon in his wisdom literature included in our Bibles.
- ⇒ For much of Ecclesiastes, Solomon has been quite a downer! He was probably not invited to too many parties! But to conclude that this book of God's Word is depressing is to miss much of what Solomon was trying to communicate.
- ⇒ While Solomon has spent time warning us of a wasted life, he also includes important instruction on how to make your life count. Today is one of those texts.

### CONTEXT:

Solomon begins this chapter by evaluating seven of life's everyday experiences. In many aspects, life can be reduced to an unending series of choices. Every day we make literally hundreds of decisions. The majority are not necessarily choices between right and wrong. Rather, they are choices between what is good and what is best.

In these comparisons, Solomon was writing to help us recognize that in many situations, the less desirable option is actually the better choice. Some of his conclusions in these verses are unconventional when compared with traditional ways of thinking. However, we must remember that true God's wisdom often runs contrary to the accepted ideas of people (Isaiah 55:8-9). Solomon was counseling us to choose the *best* over the *good*.

### OUTLINE:

1. A good name is better than a fine perfume (vs. 1a).
  - a. Solomon stresses the value of a good name compared to the value of riches and prosperity.
  - b. What did he mean by "a good name"? A person's name represents their reputation in the eyes of others.
  - c. Precious ointment or fine perfume was a luxury usually reserved for those who had an abundance of financial resources. For that reason, possession of costly oils was a symbol of wealth and material prosperity.
    - i. Do you remember when Mary of Bethany anointed the feet of Jesus with her fine perfume (Jn.12:1-8)?
    - ii. The sacrifice she poured out upon Jesus was valued at a year's wages.
  - d. Solomon's point: If one must choose between a good name and a lifestyle of extravagance, choose the good name. It is the better choice.
2. The day of death is better than the day of birth (vs. 1b).
  - a. The second statement is most perplexing: the day of a person's death is better than their day of birth!
  - b. Admittedly, this declaration sounds irrational. But if you meditate on the statement for just a minute, you too can conclude that for the Christian believer, death is indeed a promotion.
  - c. For the believer, the day of one's death is a friend, not a foe. It is an occasion for celebration:
    - i. The believer leaves this world and moves directly into the presence of the Lord.
    - ii. Their toil, trials and suffering all lie behind.
    - iii. The believer is set free from the old nature that is so prone to sin.

- d. Many people will sacrifice their good name for worldly success, possessions, or pleasures. As believers who are called to be a light to the world, our good name is to be treasured far more than these things.
3. Funerals are better than festivals (vs. 2).
    - a. Any reasonable person will quickly admit that going to a festival is more enjoyable than a funeral. Solomon anticipates our natural objection:
      - i. Attending a funeral is better than attending a feast because death is every person's destiny.
      - ii. Funerals remind us of this brutal fact: we cannot escape death. The fate of a mourned friend or loved one is our fate as well.
    - b. The wise person will listen with his heart at a funeral and take stock of his life. The occasion makes the reality of death come to the forefront.
  4. Sorrow is better than laughter (vs. 3-4).
    - a. Once again, Solomon's claim that sorrow is better than laughter seems absurd at first. But just as with the last point, he offers some clarification for his statement.
    - b. Solomon wants us to understand that sorrow brings benefits to our lives that laughter cannot. Some lessons are learned only through suffering.
      - i. Sorrow refines the soul (3b). As tears wash the dirt and pollution from our eyes, so sorrows can cleanse the impurities from our soul.
      - ii. A wise person thinks about death and mourns, but a fool thinks only of pleasure in the here and now (4). Fools are more inclined to block out serious contemplation of difficult and painful things. The wise person takes sorrow to heart. This individual allows the truth of the situation to sink in, no matter how distressing it might be, and then attempts to apply some lesson to his or her life.
    - c. Certain lessons can only be learned through suffering and tears. Therefore, we need to allow sorrow to perform its work in our imperfect, immature hearts.
  5. Criticism from a wise man is better than praise from a fool (vs. 5-7).
    - a. No one likes to be corrected. People prefer flattery to fault-finding.
    - b. Nevertheless, the Teacher wants us to recognize that we gain far more from wise criticism than from foolish flattery.
    - c. Wise people not only accept constructive criticism, they invite it and humbly welcome it. They are thankful for the person who cares enough about them to confront them.
    - d. Consider what Solomon wrote in Proverbs 25:11-12.
    - e. When constructive criticism is properly given – at the right time, in the right spirit, and with the right motive – it is a beautiful thing. Notice why it is more profitable:
      - i. Rebuke is more profitable because laughter will quickly pass (6a). Thorns burn quickly and make a lot of noise when they are burning, but they do not generate any heat or fuel. They produce nothing that is useful. So is the song of fools.
      - ii. Rebuke is more profitable because pleasure is meaningless and short-lived (6b).
      - iii. Rebuke is more profitable because it may protect a wise person from extortion and bribery (7). Solomon reminds us of the protective power and purpose of a genuine, well-intentioned reprimand. He uses the area of financial dishonesty as an illustration.
  6. Finishing is better than starting (vs. 8a).
    - a. There is great value in seeing things through to completion. Most people will testify that there is a great deal of personal satisfaction found in achieving a goal or reaching an end. A person who perseveres until a job is completed is a person who uses his or her time wisely.
    - b. Sadly, many people's lives are nothing more than a daily string of unfinished projects.
    - c. In a spiritual sense, we must recognize that the important things in life are not quickly completed. It is not always easy to live the Christian life. Nor is it always easy to remain at a difficult job or to remain faithful and constant in our marriages.
    - d. Note how important finishing and completing a task was to Jesus: John 4:34

7. Patience is better than pride (vs. 8b).
  - a. Solomon completes his previous thought about finishing being better than beginning by referring to patience: staying with a task until it is finished requires perseverance and endurance.
  - b. The king's referral to patience also sets up his next thought that keeping rather than losing one's temper calls for patience instead of an eruption of pride.
  - c. It is helpful to remember that the root of all our problems is pride.

TEACHING TIP:

- ⇒ This lesson sets up perfectly for group work! Divide your class into groups and assign each group a point of the lesson (or two). Give them 5 minutes to work in their groups and then allow them to present their part to the entire class.
- ⇒ Your job is to moderate and keep them on track Biblically.
- ⇒ The work in this kind of teaching is mostly in your preparation. You will have to develop each point so that someone coming in cold to a Sunday morning can easily navigate through it.
- ⇒ Challenge each group to do three things:
  - Read their text.
  - Explain their text.
  - Develop one specific application from their text.
- ⇒ As groups list their points and applications, write them on the board. When it is time to wrap up, challenge each member to choose at least one application they will strive to do this coming week.