

The Way to Handle the Limitations of Life

Lesson for Sunday, July 7, 2024

TEXT: Ecclesiastes 8:1-17

INTRODUCTION:

- ⇒ If you asked a group of people to define *wisdom*, their responses would likely be as varied as the individuals themselves. And each would probably contain a measure of truth.
- ⇒ The *Life Application Study Bible* offers a simple and sensible definition that appears to be pulled right from the pages of Ecclesiastes: *Wisdom is the ability to see life from God's perspective and then to know the best course of action to take.*
- ⇒ In this definition we learn these important aspects of wisdom:
 - You must know God. One cannot see from His perspective if he doesn't know the Lord.
 - It's implied you must know the Word of God, since that is where God has clearly spoken.
 - Wisdom is perceptive and practical. You must perceive God's will and then know how it is to be fleshed out in every day life.
- ⇒ In today's text, Solomon sings the praises of wisdom. The key to dealing with life's limitations, challenges, and inequities is to live wisely – to see life from God's perspective and then to know the best course of action to take.

OUTLINE:

1. Seek to be wise (vs. 1)
 - a. Sometimes life is not fair. This is a fact of life. The wise person will seek to rise above the situation and be victorious in life, in spite of its many injustices.
 - b. Wisdom analyzes and interprets the meaning of things (1a).
 - i. Children have a habit of asking frequent questions. "Why?" Their little minds seek to investigate and understand everything they see.
 - ii. As adults, we continue to seek to understand what things are and why they happen the way they do.
 - iii. In our search for understanding, we must always remember what God's Word teaches: God is the source of wisdom. *Therefore, the person who seeks understanding and wisdom must seek God.*
 - c. Wisdom brightens a person's outlook on life and softens his or her countenance (1b).
 - i. No one is like the wise man because wisdom changes a person.
 - ii. Wisdom makes a person's face shine. It literally changes one's countenance or demeanor. The unjust circumstances of our world can darken a person's whole outlook. They can fill an individual with frustration and despair.
 - iii. Wisdom can change that. When a man sees his circumstances, trials, and challenges from God's perspective, it transforms his outlook on life. His burdens become blessings and his stumbling blocks become steppingstones.
 - iv. Second, wisdom changes the hardness of a man's face. It softens its hard appearance or its sternness. While people are masters at disguising their true feelings, others show every emotion on their faces. Some expressions reveal hearts that are heavy, full of concern, bearing crushing burdens. Other faces are hardened from years of trouble and sorrow. Q: How much wisdom is reflected in your face?
2. Obey authority (vs. 2-7)
 - a. Solomon now applies wisdom to a specific area of life: submitting to and following authority. Conflicts with authority will inevitably arise in all of our lives at some point. A wise person's heart will know the right time and the right way to deal with authority.
 - b. Principle (vs. 2): Solomon first issued a direct order that should be generally followed: "Keep the king's commandment." Even though Solomon was a king and could perhaps be accused of being biased, he spoke totally within the teaching of Scripture and the commands of God in this area. See Romans 13:1; 1 Peter 2:13-15.

- c. The admonitions (vs. 3-7):
 - i. Do not avoid your duty (v.3a).
 - ii. Do not join those who plot evil lest you be punished (3b). Consider the example of Solomon's father in 1 Samuel 24:6-7.
 - iii. Remember that authority cannot be challenged without consequences (4). Count the cost.
 - iv. Be wise and choose the right time and way to question authority (5-7). Notice specifically what the wise person considers in this situation:
 - 1. There is an appropriate time and way to handle every matter (v.6a).
 - 2. A person must be patient (v.6b).
 - 3. No person knows the future; that is, no person can tell what will happen (7). The wise person will always commit the matter to God and trust God to show what the best plan of action is.
 - d. God's Word is perfectly clear: We should obey those in authority with one exception – when they command us to disobey God.
- 3. Keep in mind the limitations of the human race (vs. 8).
 - a. Solomon used common illustrations to help us grasp two additional limitations we face:
 - i. No person has the power to stop the day of his death (v.8a). We can do nothing to force the wind into action or to stop it or to regulate its temperature. So it is with death.
 - ii. No person who practices wickedness can stop its enslaving power (v.8b). Solomon reminds us that we are in a war. Life is a battleground, not a playground. The foolish believe they can dabble in sin and walk away whenever they choose. In contrast, the wise recognize the limitations of the flesh and run from Satan's snares.
 - b. In light of death's unpredictability, the most important thing we can do in this life is to prepare for that inevitable day. We would be wise to face each day with the realization that it may be our last.
- 4. Observe and think deeply about what goes on in the world (vs. 9-14).
 - a. Even with his extraordinary measure of wisdom, there were things Solomon could not understand. He spelled out these realities to his readers:
 - i. Some people – especially leaders – oppress and hurt others (9). Even though oppression is unfair and harmful and hurtful, it is a reality of life.
 - ii. The wicked are often buried in honor (10). The evil and the ungodly in our world are often eulogized with great honor and praise.
 - iii. Delayed justice leads to increased lawlessness (11). When justice is not speedily and consistently executed, people are emboldened to break the law.
 - iv. God-fearing people have a brighter future than the wicked (12-13).
 - b. Vs. 14: Solomon summarized his analysis of life's injustices with one broad statement: the righteous often get what the wicked deserve, and the wicked often get what the righteous deserve. This element of injustice adds to the futility and frustration of life.
 - c. Praise the Lord that we know better days are coming when God will execute perfect justice. This should impact us in at least three ways:
 - i. It should stir us to live thoughtfully and respectfully (Titus 2:12-13).
 - ii. It should motivate us to be faithful.
 - iii. It should console and comfort us in these evil days.
- 5. Enjoy the life God has given (vs. 15-17). (THIS IS SOLOMON'S APPLICATION!)
 - a. Solomon implores us not to allow life's inequities to snatch the joy and meaning from our lives (17). How are we to follow Solomon's advice?
 - b. Living daily with the awareness that each day is a gift from God (15a).
 - i. *Eating and drinking* refer to the simple pleasures and necessities of life.
 - ii. In light of all these evil and unjust conditions in our world, there is nothing better that we can do than to simply appreciate & enjoy what God has given us.
 - c. Experience joy that comes from God to those who truly trust Him and work hard (15b).
 - i. Many things in life are meaningless and empty, but it is still possible to have joy.

- ii. If we truly trust God and work hard as we go about our duties, we will be given a sense of accomplishment by the Lord.
- d. Recognize that an endless quest to understand all things can cause sleepless days and nights (16).
 - i. Solomon observed both the business and the *busyness* of people in their activities, noting that many did not get adequate rest.
 - ii. His statement can also be understood as an admonition not to let the pressures of life and work rob us of the rest needed by our bodies and minds.
- e. Remember that no one can fully comprehend all of Gods works (17).
 - i. No person can discover all that God has done. No matter how hard we try, we cannot find the answer to all of life's questions.
 - ii. No person can know everything. One of the great underlying truths of *Ecclesiastes* is the sovereignty of God. In the end, Gods justice and righteousness will prevail. We must believe the promises and trust the faithfulness of our sovereign Lord.