

“Wisdom and Its Benefits”

Ecclesiastes 7:13-29

If you have your Bible with you this morning, let me invite you to open it with me to the seventh chapter of the book of Ecclesiastes. In this chapter, Solomon emphasizes the importance of wisdom. From here to the end of chapter 12, he uses the words ‘wise’ and ‘wisdom’ some 35 times, which is more than twice as many times as it is found in the first six chapters. He uses those words around 18 times in chapters 7 and 8 alone. His theme in chapter 7 is the practicality of God’s wisdom. He answers the questions that he raised at the end of chapter 6. There, he asked the question, “Who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life?” The answer that he gives here in chapter 7 is that only God knows what is good for man. Sin has left humanity void of wisdom. Sure, there is knowledge aplenty. Through education, man has learned how to manipulate his surroundings. Yet he doesn’t have the wisdom and power to save his soul. He needs God!

The wisdom advocated for in this chapter shows us how we ought to evaluate life. Solomon has already explained for us how prosperity is not always good. To be wealthy is by no means the answer to a heart that’s empty on the inside. Well, in chapter 7, he will also explain for us how adversity is not always bad. Some of the most insightful seasons of life are the tough times.

You will notice that a key word in these verses is the word ‘better’ which he uses seven times. Unlike the first half of the book, he is now writing in a proverbial style whereby he gives brief, simple statements that offer insightful principles for handling life. The Preacher gives us at least seven comparative proverbs where he mentions that certain things are ‘better than’ others. Through the use of these proverbs, he compares one thing to another to show us what is better for our lives from wisdom’s point of view. From verses 1-12, I pointed out to you what I have called:

- the absurdities of wisdom
- the admonitions of wisdom
- the advantages of wisdom

Beginning in verse 13 through the end of chapter 7, King Solomon describes wisdom and its benefits.

1. The TRUTH that wisdom perceives (7:13-14)

“Consider the work of God: who can make straight what He has made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.”

Notice the command that you and I are given there in verse 13—“Consider the work of God.” The word ‘consider’ there translates a Hebrew word that means to inspect, to look at something carefully in order to perceive. The command is a call for us to carefully observe the way that God works.

Solomon tells us in Ecclesiastes that he took careful notice of the world around him. Remember what he said back in the third chapter. He had studied the seasons of life and learned that there was a time for everything under heaven.

3:1—“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.”

He then goes down the list and shows us how there is a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted. He mentions a positive and corresponding negative.

When he considered the work of God, what was it that he saw that he calls us to carefully consider? According to the Preacher, wisdom perceives the truth that

God is sovereign over all of life. God is in control when things are going well in life, and He is still in control when it seems that the bottom has fallen out of life. The God on the mountain is still God down in the valley.

Maybe you remember the little song we used to sing when we were children, “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands.” Do you remember how it goes? When things are going well in life, we have no problem believing that. I mean as long as I have a job, as long as my kids are healthy, as long as the sun is shining, I don’t question whether or not God has my world in His hands. However, there are seasons and circumstances when we find it harder to believe.

Those are the seasons of life in which it is harder to see how He has our world in His hands. Yet the Preacher says that in those times, we must consider the work of God, for who can make straight what He has made crooked? The word ‘crooked’ there doesn’t refer to something that is contrary to God’s will. He’s not saying that God is the One who is responsible for evil. Rather, he is referring to some difficulty in life that you and I would change if we had the power, but are really helpless to do so. For instance:

- someone we love is diagnosed with cancer
- your company has to make unexpected layoffs and you lose your job after years of faithful service
- you suddenly lose a spouse and are left by yourself to raise three small children

When things like this happen, when the day of adversity comes knocking at your door, the only substantial hope you have to cling to is the truth of God’s sovereignty and His providential wisdom.

Look at what Solomon says in verse 14:

“In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.”

The NLT says it this way: “Enjoy prosperity while you can, but when hard times strike, realize that both come from God. Remember that nothing is certain in this life.” When the clouds begin to build and the raindrops begin to fall, God is still good. Wisdom enables us to keep this truth in mind when things don’t go according to our plans.

Proverbs 19:21—“Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.”

The same God who sends blessing in the form of sunshine is the same God who sends it in the form of rainclouds. It is He who is sovereign over both the day of prosperity as well as the day of adversity. Both should be opportunity for you and me to worship Him.

Job reminded his wife of this truth:

Job 2:10—“Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this Job did not sin with his lips.”

Wisdom recognizes and understands this truth. But this is not all that wisdom does. Notice a second benefit that Solomon mentions:

2. The BALANCE that wisdom provides (7:15-18)

“In my vain life I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing. Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself? Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time? It is good that you should take hold of this, and

from that withhold not your hand, for the one who fears God shall come out from both of them.”

In addition to helping us perceive what is truth from what is false, wisdom also provides us with balance. One of the traits of spiritual growth in your life is the ability to look at life in perspective and not go off the deep end.

All of us know the importance of balance. Have you ever lost your balance and fell over? Many of you probably saw the Wallendas on television the other night. The world was nervously watching as they attempted to tightrope walk across New York’s Times Square. They walked a quarter mile on a wire that was strung 25 stories above Midtown Manhattan. They had to be balanced to be successful!

Another benefit of wisdom is the balance it brings.

Warren Wiersbe—*“God balances our lives by giving us enough blessings to keep us happy and enough burdens to keep us humble. If all we had were blessings in our hands, we would fall right over, so the Lord balances the blessings in our hands with burdens on our backs. That helps to keep us steady, and as we yield to Him, He can even turn the burdens into blessings.”*

After Solomon had looked around and done his careful investigation of life’s mysteries, he explains for us what he saw. He said, “I saw a righteous man who died way too young, and I saw a wicked man who seemed to live a long and prosperous life.”

Perhaps you've expressed it this way: “Why does it seem that the righteous suffer while the wicked go on living?” A young person who loves Jesus and is full of so much potential dies before their time. At the same time, another person who has lived a reckless, ungodly life lives on and on.

Solomon says, “I’ve seen it all.” We’ve seen it happen too, haven’t we?

To navigate these waters, we need wisdom from above. If all we have is an earthbound view of life, we will come up short. Listen to the Preacher's instructions in verse 16:

“Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you you destroy yourself?”

Then, he says in verse 17:

“Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time?”

When he refers to being ‘overly righteous,’ he is not saying that you and I should not pursue holiness. The idea that he is getting at is the one who ‘makes himself’ righteous and wise. Therefore, it is self-righteousness that he is warning us against. He is saying, “Don’t be self-righteous, and don’t be unrighteous.” Don’t rely on your own wisdom and morality, neither should you throw caution to the wind and right your own rules and do whatever you feel like doing.

On one hand, you have the Pharisee who relies upon his own self-righteous outlook on life. He considers himself righteous because he doesn’t do certain things. At the opposite end of the spectrum is the person who has cast off all moral restraint. No one tells him what to do.

Notice the end result of both of these approaches to life is self-destruction. There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. (Prov. 14:12)

Wisdom provides the kind of balance that fears God! The one who truly fears God will avoid both extremes. The one who fears God is the person who has fled to Jesus Christ as his refuge. God’s wisdom sends me to Christ’s arms! Only in Christ is a sinner made righteous.

Not only does wisdom help me perceive what is true, and not only does it provide me with balance, notice third:

3. The **STRENGTH** that wisdom produces (7:19-22)

“Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city. Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins. Do not take to heart all the things that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. Your heart knows that many times you yourself have cursed others.”

Strength to deal with the problems we have (v. 19-20)

“Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city. Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.”

In what way does wisdom provide us with strength to face life’s problems? For one, it gives us skill. The word ‘wisdom’ used here in verse 19 and throughout the chapter translates a Hebrew word whose root meaning is ‘skill.’ It used frequently in the Old Testament to describe the skillfulness of a worker.

- it is used in Exodus to describe the artisans who built the tabernacle from various materials
- in Ezekiel 27 it is descriptive of sea captains and sailors who piloted their ships upon the turbulent seas
- used to describe God’s work in creation

Proverbs 3:19—“The Lord by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens.”

According to a basic Hebrew understanding, the ‘wise’ are those who have the strength and skill to bring order out of chaos, who take raw material and turn it

into something useful, who have the ability to navigate chaotic situations such as storms at sea or to turn a chaotic situation to one's advantage.

The Preacher says that wisdom produces strength in the life of the one who has it. He says that it is the kind of strength that can't be matched by ten city officials. Most ancient cities in Solomon's day would have been fortunate to have one wise leader to protect the city, let alone ten. Yet he uses the analogy of a city that has ten good leaders who govern its affairs. He says that the one who is wise is better than a well-governed city.

Philip Ryken—*“Wisdom governs thought; so the wise person knows how to think about things in a God-centered way. Wisdom governs the will; so the wise person knows what choices to make in life. Wisdom governs speech; so the wise person knows what to say and what not to say. Wisdom governs action; so the wise person knows what to do in any and every situation. Take hold of wisdom...”*

It is the strength that comes from God, strength to prevail, strength and skill to navigate the challenges of life.

Strength to deal with the people we know (v. 21-22)

“Do not take to heart all the things that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. Your heart knows that many times you yourself have cursed others.”

There is not a righteous person on earth who never sins, which is something the Preacher calls attention to in verse 20. It is the same truth that is stated elsewhere:

Isaiah 53:6—**“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way.”**

Romans 3:23—“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Wisdom has a solid understanding of this truth, and it will help provide perspective in our relationships with others. It shows me that everyone else in the world has the same basic problem as me—sin.

That’s why Solomon says we ought not take to heart every single thing that a person says about us. He describes a scene in which someone overhears their trusted servant talking bad about them. Have you ever eavesdropped into a conversation, and what you heard was cause for concern because things were being said about you?

Blaise Pascal—*“If all men knew what each said of the other, there would not be four friends in the world.”*

Wisdom understands that all have sinned, that all come short of the glory of God, including you. We live in a fallen world. We all struggle with a fallen nature that shows itself in a moment of weakness, frustration, or anger. If you were honest, you too have said things about others that should have been left unsaid.

One of the ways that wisdom produces strength in our lives is that it enables us to not be too concerned about what others say, good or bad. Instead of taking offense or being inflated with pride, wisdom teaches us to respond with appropriate humility and grace. Think of how Jesus:

Isaiah 53:7—“He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth.”

Wisdom perceives what is true, wisdom provides us with balance, and wisdom produces strength. Notice finally:

4. The INSIGHT that wisdom promotes (7:23-29)

“All this I have tested by wisdom. I said, ‘I will be wise,’ but it was far from me. That which has been is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out? I turned my heart to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the scheme of things, and to know the wickedness of folly and the foolishness that is madness. And I find something more bitter than death: the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her. Behold, this is what I found, says the Preacher, while adding one thing to another to find the scheme of things—which my soul has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I have found, but a woman among all these I have not found. See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.”

The perplexities we often experience (v. 23-25)

“All this I have tested by wisdom. I said, ‘I will be wise,’ but it was far from me. That which has been is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out? I turned my heart to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the scheme of things, and to know the wickedness of folly and the foolishness that is madness.”

King Solomon had devoted his entire life to the pursuit of wisdom. He is admitting that when it came to possessing the answers for the perplexities of life, he didn't have any.

He has been on a quest for wisdom that he cannot find on his own. Left to himself, Solomon is unable to explain the purpose of life, or why everything matters.

Wisdom gives us insight into how we are to live with what we don't understand. That doesn't mean that we are given answers into life's perplexities. There are some things that you and I will never understand. However, it does mean that I'm given great and precious promises that guide my steps.

The pitfalls we must escape (v. 26-29)

“And I find something more bitter than death: the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her. Behold, this is what I found, says the Preacher, while adding one thing to another to find the scheme of things—which my soul has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I have found, but a woman among all these I have not found. See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.”

The one thing that Solomon says he did find was what any of us will find when we choose to live our life apart from God—bitterness and death. What he says at the close of chapter 7 is from a lesson that he himself learned the hard way in life. He says that wisdom offers insight into the trap of immorality, seduction, and sexual sin.

Earlier in his life, Solomon went looking for love in all the wrong places. He went on a quest for that which he thought would make him feel life was worth the living. What he discovered was nothing but a fleeting thrill. He found himself involved with women who could not give him what he wanted deep down inside.

Notice in verse 26 that Solomon describes a woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters. Much like he does in Proverbs, he is using personification to describe the deceptive nature of sexual immorality. In other words, rather than freedom, she brought him greater bondage. Rather than liberty, she brought him chains.

Keep in mind that this is the same man who had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. There were more than a thousand women in his harem. If he was with a different woman each night, it still would have taken him three years to know each one individually. And in all of that illicit experience, he tells us here that he found absolutely nothing to satisfy the searchings of his soul.

The wisdom of God has determined that marriage is a unique relationship between one woman and one man who are totally committed to one another for all of life. Solomon missed out on the joy of God-blessed monogamy. In time, he came to realize that the man who fears God, the one who truly lives according to the wisdom of God, he will avoid the trap of immorality. He sums all of it up in verse 29 by saying:

“...God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.”

The word used for ‘man’ is the Hebrew word ‘adam.’ In the beginning, God made Adam morally upright. He was made in the perfect image of God. When he sinned against God, the man fell and plunged the entire race into sin.

Romans 5:12—“...sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.”

It is the Preacher’s way of saying, “Look, life sure is full of problems and frustrations, but God isn’t the One to blame—we are.”

Ray Stedman—*“The trouble of this world is not with God, but with man. Because we will not heed the wisdom of God in the Word of God, we seek to circumvent what He is telling us and try to find the richness of life despite or apart from the rules of life that He has set forth. It cannot be done.”*

He says that the inevitable discovery of an honest search is that true life can never be found except where God says it is found—only through a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. The wisdom of heaven is inseparably linked to Him. He is the true and better ‘Adam’ who perfectly obeyed the law of God and satisfied the demands of the law by dying in the place of sinners like me and you. If in Adam all have died, then to be in Christ is to be made alive.

Jesus is the truth that wisdom perceives! Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but through Me.”

Jesus is the balance that wisdom provides! He has become our wisdom, righteousness, and redemption.

Jesus is the strength that wisdom produces! Through His abiding Spirit, He has come to live His life through us. That means that I will never be in a situation as a Christian where I lack wisdom. With His Spirit inside me and His Word beside me, I can do all things through Christ who gives me the strength.

Jesus is the insight that wisdom promotes! It is His Spirit who opens my mind to understand the Scriptures and gives me keen insight into the situations that confront me on a daily basis.

The only question that remains for me to ask is this one: “Do you know Jesus in a personal and intimate way?” Have you been born again? Do you rest in the confidence that your sins have been forgiven, that Jesus paid your sin debt on the cross, and that He has truly made you alive? If not, then come to faith in Him today while you have the opportunity. He will save you and make you wise.