

In Pursuit of Wisdom – *Eccles 7:1-14*

Introduction – Solomon was known as the wisest man on earth. A double portion of wisdom was granted to this Son of David as he ascended to the throne to rule God's people as king. Proverbs is his book of collected wisdom, and chapter 7 of Ecclesiastes is written in this familiar style.

The Pursuit of the Better – Wisdom comes through patient searching and considering in the atmosphere of fear and submission to God (Prov 1:5-7). Solomon plays with words, and gives us deeper, riddle-like assessments of the world around us. It is the glory of kings to figure these things out (Prov 25:2). He gave us a deep question at the end of Chapter 6 (v12) and this chapter seeks to lead us towards answers. As we have done in the first two sections, we should keep the end of the argument in mind. The goal is not a stoic mysticism or nihilism, but rather a profound enjoyment of the vain life God has given to us (8:15).

Where is it Better to Find (vv1-4) – It is easy to agree that a good name is better than precious ointment, but harder to see that the day of death is better than the day of one's birth (v1). Ointment is good, and so is the day of birth, the house of feasting, laughter, and the house of mirth. This is not a contrast of bad and good, but of good (even very good) and better. A man who knows how to weep, mourn, and experience appropriate sorrow is a man who will also know the meaning of solid laughter. A man who knows what to learn in the days of affliction, or rightly reflect at a funeral service will be a man who knows how to richly rejoice and celebrate at times of feasting, the birth of a new son or daughter, or some new success. It's not necessarily true the other way around. One learns more true wisdom at the passing of a loved one than at the birth of a child. Laughter runs deeper when one has also walked the path of sorrows (v3). The point is not that a wise man is someone who will never smile or enjoy himself. But the wise person will not seek to anesthetize himself in the face of a crisis with frivolous pleasures. Jesus wept at Lazarus's grave and so how much more is weeping appropriate for us when a loved one dies.

With Whom is it Better to Listen (vv5-7) – The crackling of thorns makes a lot of noise but not very much heat. In the same way, the songs and laughter of fools makes a lot of distracting and immediate pleasure, but it is in the end empty and fleeting. The "sophomore" in all of us does not want the words of rebuke, but that is exactly what leads us to wisdom (Psalm 141:5). The best coach or teacher is not necessarily the one who entertains you, but the one who pushes you, corrects you, and demands of you; this is the one who bestows wisdom upon you.

The "*oppression*" that destroys a wise man's reason may be the afflictions of life, or more likely, the "*bribe*" of ceaseless, escapist entertainment (i.e. 200 plus channels and one remote). This is like the seed sown among the thorns, later strangled by "*the deceitfulness of riches*" (Matt 13:22).

In What Way is it Better to Acquire (vv8-12) – We are a people given to whining because we have abandoned patience. We have abandoned patience because we are arrogant; we truly believe we deserve it all and we deserve it now. "*I'm spending my children's inheritance*" is the bumper-sticker mentality all around us. The proud man boasts at the beginning but gives up before the end, quickly finding some new thing to now boast in. The patient man waits and perseveres to the end. He is not quick to anger (James 1:19f), as he waits, listening and considering. And he is not foolish to fall into an escapist nostalgia that everything was perfect back in the "*good ol' days*." Wisdom is found with patient hope for future grace.

An inheritance, in the Hebrew mind, was particularly land, and it is good to have the stuff of the earth with wisdom. Both take time to acquire and, in essence, must be given. Like money, wisdom protects us, but unlike money, wisdom gives life (Prov 8:35).

Wisdom in the Crooked (vv13-14) – Returning to the question of 6:12, we come to the conclusion of the matter here. Try as we might, we cannot bend the way of the world in a different direction than God has ordained. We must receive our prosperity with thanksgiving towards God – and we must consider the same in times of receiving adversity. The foolish women in Job's day sound like our fools today (Job 2:9-10). This wisdom is not natural, it is not easy, and in fact it is only found with great cost. But the end of this wisdom is life, abundant life in Jesus Christ Himself (Col 2:3). In Christ, we are told that God loves to bestow this wisdom upon those who ask, especially in times of trials and affliction (James 1:2-5).