

Living Under Providence – Ecclesiastes 6:10-7:14

Read Ecclesiastes 6:10-12:

Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what man is, and that he is not able to dispute with one stronger than he. 11 The more words, the more vanity, and what is the advantage to man? 12 For who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow? For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun?

- 1) What is the preacher's basic point in this introduction? What reality is he driving home to us?**
- 2) Why do we need to be reminded of the stark difference between God and us?**

The preacher goes on then to give guidance on how best to live in light of God's control and our lack thereof. He seems to point us to the good in things we would rather not face. Read Ecclesiastes 7:1-6:

*1 A good name is better than precious ointment,
and the day of death than the day of birth.
2 It is better to go to the house of mourning
than to go to the house of feasting,
for this is the end of all mankind,
and the living will lay it to heart.
3 Sorrow is better than laughter,
for by sadness of face the heart is made glad.
4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning,
but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.
5 It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise
than to hear the song of fools.
6 For as the crackling of thorns under a pot,
so is the laughter of the fools;
this also is vanity.*

- 3) How do you typically respond to the harder, darker times of life? If they are good for us, why are they so hard to face?**
- 4) What are some of the advantages these hard realities hold for us?**

The second half of the proverbs here focus on ways we try to control or escape these hard realities. Read v7-10:

*7 Surely oppression drives the wise into madness,
and a bribe corrupts the heart.
8 Better is the end of a thing than its beginning,
and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.
9 Be not quick in your spirit to become angry,
for anger lodges in the heart of fools.
10 Say not, "Why were the former days better than these?"
For it is not from wisdom that you ask this.
11 Wisdom is good with an inheritance,
an advantage to those who see the sun.
12 For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money,
and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it.*

- 5) The preacher shows how many things that promise escape are damaging for us. Do you see the pursuit of any of these things in your life? Are there other ways you tend to try to escape or control the unpleasant parts of life?**

As the preacher wraps up his proverbs, He reminds us that, while this wisdom is beneficial, it is limited. We are still creatures, fully dependent of the Creator. Read v11-14:

*11 Wisdom is good with an inheritance,
an advantage to those who see the sun.*

*12 For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money,
and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it.*

13 Consider the work of God:

who can make straight what he has made crooked?

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.

- 6) The preacher presents God's control over all things, and our lack thereof, as something we must resign ourselves to and make the best of. But he did not have the benefit of seeing these things in light of the finished work of Jesus. How does Jesus alter our view of God's providence? How does his work give new meaning to the darker realities of this world?**
- 7) What role do we play in each other's lives as a church in walking through life under God's providence?**

PRAYER