

Ecclesiastes 7-8

Good morning and thank you for joining us! Would you please turn in your Bibles to Ecclesiastes 7?

King Solomon is a man on a mission. In fact, I bet you know the name of the mission! **PLAY CLIP**

SHOW PIC This could've been the original mission impossible! Solomon's trying to find the meaning of life, but he has limited his search to things "under the sun"-the things that are physical and material. **CLOSE PIC** Solomon has experimented with science and philosophy, and pleasure, and business, and fame, and religion and he's come up empty.

He's got incredible wealth, and long life, and a large family, and great power. And what is the conclusion of this mission impossible-that everything under the sun is vanity. It's just all emptiness.

For Solomon, **SHOW PIC** life is a wild goose chase without a goose. **CLOSE PIC**

Whenever you're trying to find fulfillment under the sun, life is a let down.

Ecclesiastes does eventually figure life out, we'll see it when we get to chapter 12. I'm gonna spoil it for you. **Ecc 12:13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:**

Fear God and keep His commandments,

For this is man's all.

Life takes on meaning when we look beyond the sun in the sky and fix our gaze upon heaven.

But before Solomon draws that conclusion, he's going to hop us down a few more rabbit trails.

We're studying chapters 7-8, and the title of this morning's message is Mission Impossible
Let's pray

Chapter 7

1 A good name is better than precious ointment, Pause here.
Precious ointment was the currency of the day. So he's saying there's great value in a good name.

I want my name to be a good name. Because there's some names when you hear 'em they just stink right? You hear that name and **SHOW PIC** inside your mind it's like you just ate a dozen lemons. You hear that name and you recoil. **CLOSE PIC**

But for the follower of Christ, we should have a good name, because we're representing our King. Let's read all of v1

1 A good name is better than precious ointment,
And the day of death than the day of one's birth;

Yikes. You know we have to remember as Christians that this life of ours is a pilgrimage. We are not home. We're ambassadors. We are away from home.

The bible describes us as foreigners and pilgrims. A foreigner is away from home, a Pilgrim is headed home. That's what we are- away from home, but we're heading home.

I'm convinced, because I've been with enough people making that passage into eternity, that for every follower of Christ the Lord is on the other side.

He's the Good Shepherd, and He takes us. And what expectancy we have in a world that is so troubled, it's so hopeless. But because Solomon has wandered from God, he doesn't have that hope.

2 Better to go to the house of mourning
Than to go to the house of feasting,
For that is the end of all men;
And the living will take it to heart.

SHOW PIC As torturous as it might sound to you at first, if you've ever been to a Chuck E Cheese, it's still better than going to a Funeral Home. **CLOSE PIC**

And yet Solomon says that funerals are more beneficial than birthday parties. Why? A funeral forces us to face the inevitability of death head-on.

As Christians we don't need to live in constant fear of death, but knowing our life is short should cause us to maximize what God has given us.

3-4

3 Sorrow is better than laughter,
For by a sad countenance the heart is made better.

4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning,
But the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. The person who laughs and parties his way through life is a fool because they never get serious about life. Look this life is a gift that God has given us-we should make the most of it in the good times and the bad times.

Psalm 90:12 So teach us to number our days,
That we may gain a heart of wisdom.

5 It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise
Than for a man to hear the song of fools. Rebuke is often hard to stomach, but when rebuke comes from a wise person, it's profitable.

6 For like the crackling of thorns under a pot,
So is the laughter of the fool.

This also is vanity. This is an interesting picture. **SHOW PIC**
When you try to use thorns as fuel, you hear 'em crackling but they don't produce any heat. It burns out quickly, and doesn't produce anything. **CLOSE PIC**

7-8

7 Surely oppression destroys a wise man's reason,

And a bribe debases the heart.

8 The end of a thing is better than its beginning;

The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

Remember when Jesus turned water into wine? At the time in rural Galilee, the wedding planners would serve the good stuff first. Then they brought out all the cheap wine for later, after everybody was a little tipsy and their taste buds had gotten numb.

You know, this is the way it is with this world's pleasures. I hope you know that the more we taste, the more we try to enjoy, or the more we try to experience, the more bored with it we become.

Oh, in the beginning it's thrilling, but how quickly it loses its thrill.

But with God's blessings, it's just the opposite. The end of a thing is better than its beginning. The longer you stick with the Lord, the better it gets.

God has saved the best for last, because one day we'll draw our final breath and spend eternity with Him. Imagine what it's going to be like. So yeah for Christians, the end is better than the beginning.

9 Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry,

For anger rests in the bosom of fools. Have you noticed it doesn't take any practice to get angry? **SHOW PIC** I've never met a parent who had to teach their kid how to be angry. It comes naturally to us. **CLOSE PIC**

But it takes patience and self discipline to yield to the Spirit, to do what's right.

10 Do not say,

“Why were the former days better than these?”

For you do not inquire wisely concerning this. Have you noticed that when we get nostalgic, we have a selective memory?

It's been said that the good old days are the result of a bad memory, and a good imagination!

Rather than long for the good old days, we need to make the most of today.

11-13

11 Wisdom is good with an inheritance,
And profitable to those who see the sun.

12 For wisdom is a defense as money is a defense,
But the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it.

13 Consider the work of God;
For who can make straight what He has made crooked? Here's the key to serving God. It's not to try to bend His will in our direction. Serving God is doing His will, in His timing.

14 In the day of prosperity be joyful,
But in the day of adversity consider:
Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other,
So that man can find out nothing that will come after him.

It was Wiersbe who said “God balances our lives by giving us enough blessings to keep us happy and enough burdens to keep us humble.”

Remember what Job said to his wife in Job 2:9 Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!"

10 But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

That's a good question that we all should ask ourselves. We love God's blessings, but how do we react when He sends adversity our way—are we ready to accept trials as well?

So often when adversity occurs, we think our world is collapsing and that everything is going wrong when, in reality, the Lord is birthing something new within us.

15 I have seen everything in my days of vanity:

There is a just man who perishes in his righteousness,
And there is a wicked man who prolongs life in his wickedness.
We see this too don't we? We see the righteous suffer, and the wicked prosper, and it doesn't make sense. So he concludes...
16-18

16 Do not be overly righteous,
Nor be overly wise:
Why should you destroy yourself?

17 Do not be overly wicked,
Nor be foolish:
Why should you die before your time?

18 It is good that you grasp this,
And also not remove your hand from the other;
For he who fears God will escape them all.

What Solomon declares here is basically the philosophy the Greeks called “The Golden Mean”-which is “In everything, moderation.” Don’t be too good, don’t be too bad. Just be somewhere in the middle.
And that’s what the world still says.

But what does our Lord say? Revelation 3:16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot,[fn] I will vomit you out of My mouth.

Either be hot for Jesus or get into the world where He can convict you. But don’t be lukewarm.

It’s been said a lot of Christians have too much Jesus in them to be at home in the world, and too much of the world to be at home in Jesus.

19-20

19 Wisdom strengthens the wise
More than ten rulers of the city.

20 For there is not a just man on earth who does good
And does not sin. The pressure is off when we realize we’re all sinners, saved by the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ.

21 Also do not take to heart everything people say,

Lest you hear your servant cursing you. How we need to remember this verse! Solomon knew that we tend to take the words of others about us too seriously.

22 For many times, also, your own heart has known
That even you have cursed others.

We've all been guilty of saying the wrong thing at the wrong time.

I know this, I don't want to be judged by my worst moments do you? Which means, we shouldn't judge others by their worst moments either.

23 All this I have proved by wisdom.

I said, "I will be wise";

But it was far from me. Like everything else he had tried, Solomon realized that wisdom wasn't the ultimate answer. Wisdom has its limitations.

24 As for that which is far off and exceedingly deep,

Who can find it out? Again here's the wisest man in the world, and he says he doesn't know everything. There's things he tried to figure out, but it was driving him to frustration and madness.

It's the thirst for intellectualism, to know everything, that causes many skeptics to refuse Christ. Why does God.....

Look, we will never know the depths of God.

Isaiah 40:28 Have you not known?

Have you not heard?

The everlasting God, the LORD,

The Creator of the ends of the earth,
Neither faints nor is weary.
His understanding is unsearchable.

You can present the best arguments for Jesus' existence, or the fossil records which demonstrate a worldwide flood, but ultimately there must be faith willing to be placed in God.

Now some people will say they're not willing to put their faith in the unseen. Which is ironic because they have faith their paycheck will be directly deposited-they don't see that? They have faith the gas pumps have gasoline inside of them that they can't see right?

25-26

25 I applied my heart to know,
To search and seek out wisdom and the reason of things,
To know the wickedness of folly,
Even of foolishness and madness.
26 And I find more bitter than death
The woman whose heart is snares and nets,
Whose hands are fetters.
He who pleases God shall escape from her,
But the sinner shall be trapped by her. In his unsatisfying search for wisdom, Solomon had come to the painful understanding that feminine charms can nullify a man's wisdom.

Remember this is what happened to Solomon. 1 Kings 11:3 And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. 4 For it was so,

when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David.

27-28

27 “Here is what I have found,” says the Preacher,
“Adding one thing to the other to find out the reason,
28 Which my soul still seeks but I cannot find:
One man among a thousand I have found,
But a woman among all these I have not found.” Solomon could find a rare man in a thousand with wisdom; but not even one woman.

Now it’s important to know that this speaks more about Solomon’s choice of female companionship than it does about the relative wisdom of men and women.

Realize, there were 1000 women at Solomon's disposal every single day of his life, every single evening of his life. And since he was king, none of these women are going to say no to him. Which proves this, you can give a man all the sex he can handle and it will not increase his respect for women.

29 Truly, this only I have found:
That God made man upright,
But they have sought out many schemes.” Solomon understood that God made man without sin. But within each of us is a sin nature isn’t there?

Chapter 8

1 Who is like a wise man?

And who knows the interpretation of a thing?

A man's wisdom makes his face shine,

And the sternness of his face is changed. a wise man knows not to take life under the sun so seriously so that he can't laugh. A wise man becomes grateful for small things.

Want to know a simple test if you're a wise person?

SHOW SLIDE You know a person is wise when they lower their expectations for this life and intensify their hunger for God.

CLOSE SLIDE

Now the next several verses are gonna describe civil obedience, being under earthly authority

2-3

2 I say, "Keep the king's commandment for the sake of your oath to God. 3 Do not be hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand for an evil thing, for he does whatever pleases him."

There may come a time when civil disobedience is called for, but we shouldn't be quick to pull the trigger.

Notice if you resist authority, make sure that you're on the side of righteousness, that your reasoning is good and godly.

4 Where the word of a king is, there is power;

And who may say to him, "What are you doing?" Disagree with his policies if you like, but don't disrespect the king's position. He's still the king, he still has authority over you.

5 He who keeps his command will experience nothing harmful;
And a wise man's heart discerns both time and judgment, In other
words, obey the laws and you'll have no problem. **SHOW PIC**
remember, if you drive a speed limit, you don't have to worry
about the police **CLOSE PIC**

Of course if it's in our best interests to keep the king's command,
how much more important it is that we listen and hear God's
word!

Folks we must never forget God gave us His word for our good.
He's a wonderful King.

6 Because for every matter there is a time and judgment,
Though the misery of man increases greatly. You know, there may
come a time when we need to express our opposition to civil
authorities, but wisdom looks for the right time in the right place,
in the right way to do so.

Approach a leader the right way, at the proper time and you'll get
better results than if you catch him at the wrong time and
approach him in the wrong way.

7 For he does not know what will happen;
So who can tell him when it will occur? Waiting for the right time
and you may just find that some situations take care of
themselves. You may not even need to act.

8 No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit,
And no one has power in the day of death.

There is no release from that war,
And wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it. No matter what title someone may possess, no one has absolute control over another person. There are limits to authority.

And the reminder here in v8 is that death takes orders from no man, not even the king. Life and death are God's domain, not the kings.

9 All this I have seen, and applied my heart to every work that is done under the sun: There is a time in which one man rules over another to his own hurt. Now we're told in **Romans 13:1 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.**

You know this is what blows our minds. God is willing to use evil rulers and wasteful government to accomplish His purposes.

10 Then I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of holiness, and they were forgotten^[fn] in the city where they had so done. This also is vanity. Solomon mentions the guy who never missed a trip to the temple to practice his religion, but was wicked in heart. But once this man died, he was forgotten. And his so-called religion in worship was nothing but vanity,

11 Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. You know, you run that red light, you may think you got away with it. You just breathe a sigh of relief. Then you get that

letter in the mail 2 months later with a little picture of you-guilty as charged!

We don't always reap in the same season that we sow. There's a delay. There's an in between time between sewing the seed and reaping the bounty.

And this in-between time can easily affect both the wicked and the godly. The in-between time can embolden the evil man because he thinks he's gotten away with his crimes, his sin.

Also this delay in reaping can discourage godly people because we think, oh, I've done what was right and there's no result, there's no reward.

Hey never forget, one day there is gonna be a payday-that's what the next 2 verses talk about.

12-13

12 Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. 13 But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he does not fear before God. Judgment will come. 2

Corinthians 5 9 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

No matter the result of our actions under the sun, ultimately we answer to the Lord.

14 There is a vanity which occurs on earth, that there are just men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked; again, there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity. Solomon continues on this theme of injustice, it seems like the wicked always prosper while the righteous suffer.

And this adds to life's confusion and perplexity. And with an under the sun viewpoint, it can lead someone to think life is meaningless.

Look you watch the news long enough and we can draw this same conclusion. Wicked men drag out their cases in our justice system with endless appeals, or often walk away on a technicality.

15 So I commended enjoyment, because a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry; for this will remain with him in his labor all the days of his life which God gives him under the sun. Life is so frustrating, he says you might as well just enjoy whatever pleasure life may afford you. So u know what, eat that ice cream before bed. Enjoy the ballgame.
16-17

16 When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth, even though one sees no sleep day or night, 17 then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot

find out the work that is done under the sun. For though a man labors to discover it, yet he will not find it; moreover, though a wise man attempts to know it, he will not be able to find it. No matter how wise a person might think they are, they'll never have answers for why things take place the way they do. They enroll in a mission impossible-trying to understand all of God's ways

Job 38 God asks Job over 70 unanswerable questions, showing Job that God's ways are past our finding out.

We'll never fully understand what's happening under the sun, but our loving heavenly Father has promised us this: **Philippians 4:6 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.**

See the closer we draw near to God, the less time we spend trying to figure Him out. We're so awestruck by His majesty, His power, His mercy and grace, we're not trying to figure Him out, we just want more of Him.