

February 12, 2017

**“What is Better?”****Focal Passage: Ecclesiastes 7:1-12 (NASB)**

Cross References: Proverbs 1:7; 4:6-7; 13:18; 14:13, 29; 15:31-32; 19:20; 22:1; Ecclesiastes 2:1-3, 26; Matthew 5:21-22; Philippians 3:7-14; Colossians 2:2-3; James 1:5-6

**Lesson Idea:** We should seek to maintain a good name and possess the wisdom of the Lord.

**BIBLE IN A YEAR READING PLAN**

Feb 5 Leviticus 14-15	Feb 6 Leviticus 16-18
Feb 7 Leviticus 19-21	Feb 8 Leviticus 22-23
Feb 9 Leviticus 24-25	Feb 10 Leviticus 26-27
Feb 11 Numbers 1-2	Feb 12 Numbers 3-4

**Background:** from David Guzik: *Ecclesiastes*

**A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death better than the day of one’s birth:** At the end of Ecclesiastes 6:1-12, the Preacher was in a mournful, discouraged mood as he considered the meaninglessness of life in a world without eternity and accountability in the world beyond. He continued that tone by coupling an obvious truth (a good name is better than precious ointment) with a more startling statement (the day of death better than the day of one’s birth).

This comes from the deep and pained sense of meaninglessness that the Preacher suffered under. It made him feel that death was better than life.

“Nothing in the first half of verse 1 prepares us for the body-blow of the second half... Instead of reflecting and arguing, he will bombard us with proverbs, with their strong impact and varied angles of attack.” (Kidner)

Even the day of one’s birth is ominous, despite all the hopes and potential in a baby’s birth. Children come into the world uttering the human sound – a scream. “Before ever a child speak, he prophesies, by his tears, of his ensuing sorrows.” (Trapp)

From a New Testament perspective, we have mixed feelings about the Preacher’s outburst, “*The day of death better than the day of one’s birth.*” On the one hand, the day of death is glorious for the believer – our battle is over, our sorrow is over, our uncertainty is over – and all things are new. On the other hand, we rejoice in the meaning God has given us with this life on earth. We agree with the Apostle Paul in Philippians 1:23: *For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.*

“Death is the end of dying. On the day of the believer’s death dying is for ever done with. The saints who are with God shall never die any more. Life is wrestling, struggling; but death is the end of conflict: it is rest-victory.” (Spurgeon)

“Consider it spiritually, and, dear brethren, what is a good name? A good name is a name that is written in the Lamb’s book of life, and that is better than the sweetest of all ointments.” (Spurgeon)

**Ecclesiastes 6:1-12**

*1 A good name is better than a good ointment,  
And the day of one’s death is better than the day of one’s birth.*

*2 It is better to go to a house of mourning  
Than to go to a house of feasting,  
Because that is the end of every man,  
And the living takes it to heart.*

*3 Sorrow is better than laughter,  
For when a face is sad a heart may be happy.*

*4 The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning,  
While the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure.*

*5 It is better to listen to the rebuke of a wise man  
Than for one to listen to the song of fools.*

*6 For as the crackling of thorn bushes under a pot,  
So is the laughter of the fool;  
And this too is futility.*

*7 For oppression makes a wise man mad,  
And a bribe corrupts the heart.*

*8 The end of a matter is better than its beginning;  
Patience of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit.*

*9 Do not be eager in your heart to be angry,  
For anger resides in the bosom of fools.*

*10 Do not say, “Why is it that the former days were better than these?”*

*For it is not from wisdom that you ask about this.*

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

*12 For wisdom is protection just as money is protection,  
But the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the lives of its possessors.*

**DISCUSSION:**

- V 1. What does it mean to have a “good name?” Why is that better than a good ointment [“fine perfume” –NIV]? (see Proverbs 22:1) Why would Solomon say that the day of one’s death is better than the day of one’s birth?

**NOTE:** from Guzik:

***Better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting:*** Solomon knew our tendency to simply ignore or wish away death. It is better to be

squarely confronted with the reality of death, and the house of mourning is a fine place to take it to heart.

It seems that the Preacher has rejected his previous hope of finding the meaning of life in pleasure, accomplishment, and wisdom. Now there is only death, and one should not ignore it. *So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.* (Psalms 90:12)

- v 2. Why would he say that a house of mourning is better than a house of feasting? How do the living take this “to heart?”
- v 3. In what ways is sorrow better than laughter? How can the heart be happy when the face is sad? Why would he say that “a sad face is good for the heart” (NIV)? (see Proverbs 14:13)

**NOTE:** from Guzik:

***Sorrow is better than laughter:*** The Preacher goes against all intuition; who among us would say this? Yet he is determined to sweep away our illusions and wishes about the meaninglessness of life in his under the sun premise.

Rejecting Solomon’s general premise, we do not believe that sorrow is always better than laughter. We do not reject it because we prefer an illusion or a wish; we do it out of firm confidence in a God to whom we answer in eternity, and who has promised to reward good and punish evil there. Even so – there is often more wisdom in the house of mourning than in the house of mirth.

- v 4. Why are the wise found in the house of mourning while fools are found in the house of pleasure? How would you apply this verse to our society? (see Ecclesiastes 2:1-3)
- v 5. Why is a wise rebuke better than listening to a song of fools? What is more prevalent in our society today? Why? (Proverbs 13:18; 15:31-32)
- v 6. What is his opinion of the laughter of a fool? Why?

**NOTE:** from Guzik:

***It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools:*** The Preacher continues his previous thought, that man finds wisdom in adversity and suffering than in ease and comfort. The laughter of the fool is nothing more than a momentary sound, leaving nothing of substance behind.

“The pun ‘Like the sound of *sirim* (thorns) under the *sir* (pot, cauldron)’ is caught by Moffatt’s *Like nettles crackling under kettles*. Thorns were a rapidly burning, easily extinguishable fuel in the ancient world.” (Eaton)

“They make a great noise, a great blaze; and are extinguished in a few moments. Such indeed, comparatively, are the joys of life; they are noisy, flashy, and transitory.” (Clarke)

- v 7. What kind of oppression do you think Solomon has in mind here? How does it make even a wise man lose control? How do people try to corrupt other people’s hearts today?
- v 8. Why is the end better than the beginning? What does “patience of spirit” look like, and how would you contrast it with “haughtiness of spirit?”

**NOTE:** from Guzik:

***Surely oppression destroys a wise man’s reason:*** For all of Solomon’s praise of the instructive role of adversity, he also understood that suffering also had its limit. It could destroy a wise man’s reason.

***Do not hasten your spirit to be angry:*** After two proverbs celebrating patience, the Preacher warns us against impatience leading to anger. Living with an under the sun premise may easily make a person impatient and then angry, and anger rests in the bosom of fools.

- v 9. Why would people be “eager” in their hearts to be angry? What does Solomon say that kind of anger shows about a person? (see Proverbs 14:29; Matthew 5:21-22)
- v 10. What does Solomon say about the danger of nostalgia? What is wrong with thinking the past was better than the present? How can this become a problem in the church? (see Philippians 3:7-14)
- v 11. What did Solomon consider to be good? What happens to someone’s inheritance if he doesn’t have wisdom?
- v 12. Why is wisdom an advantage in all things? How does wisdom preserve people’s lives? How do you get wisdom? (see Proverbs 1:7; 4:6-7; 19:20; Ecclesiastes 2:26; Colossians 2:2-3; James 1:5-6)

**APPLICATION:**

- ✓ What are you doing to maintain a good name?

✓ How are you seeking wisdom?

Lesson by Bro Stan