Living with the End in Mind: Learning to Love Life’s Limitations

Ecclesiastes 7:1-25

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How should we live in this world when life eludes our control? One option is to try to flee reality and numb the pain to avoid the problems. The other option is wisdom as found in Ecclesiastes 7. We can learn to live wisely amid all the brokenness of this world. But we’ll learn that even wisdom has its limitations. In fact, the wisest thing you can do is to realize that not even being wise will tell you everything you want to know. In this chapter we’ll learn how to live with the limitations of wisdom itself.

1. The Invitation of Death (1-6)
   1. As surely as a good reputation is better than a precious ointment, the day of death is better than the day of birth (1).

We all understand the immense value of a good reputation, but how is death better than birth?

* + 1. Birth is all about potential; death is all about fulfillment for the believer; fulfillment is better than potential!
    2. The day of your death is a better teacher than the day of your birth.
       1. The day of our birth most of our observations are superficial:
          1. “Isn’t he cute!”
          2. “I wonder what he’ll be like…”
       2. The day of our death reveals the true person:
          1. “He was so like Jesus!” “He was so kind, so generous, so loving…”
          2. “He loved \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”
       3. The day of our death is better than our birthday in the sense that the coffin is a better preacher than a crib.
  1. Therefore, stop trying to escape life’s harsh realities by trying to drown them, laugh them off, or pretend they don’t exist (2-6).
     1. Attending a funeral will do more for your soul than going to a party (2).
     2. It is true that laughter can be the best medicine, but that’s only true for those who’ve first learned how to grieve (3).
     3. There are two types of people at a funeral (4-6).
        1. The fool:
           1. The fool tries to drown his sorrows in entertainment (4).
           2. The fool tries to drown his sorrows in music (5).
           3. The fool tries to drown his sorrow in empty laughter (6).

The fool lives like he’ll live forever, but in reality his life vanishes like smoke.

* + - 1. The wise:
         1. The wise learns to open his heart to grieve (4).
         2. The wise learns to hear rebuke (5).

The wise learns to listen to death’s invitation to consider his ways.

The wise asks, “When it’s my turn, what will my life have been worth?”

The wise asks, “Is my life worth emulating?”

* + 1. Application:
       1. A person who lives this way is not morbid.
       2. What characterizes a person like this is depth; depth of soul and depth of character.
       3. Ecclesiastes is an invitation to be a person who realizes that living a good life means preparing to die a good death.
       4. The wise person is fully alive and fully engaged with their family, the world around them, and the goodness of creation because they know that they have it all on loan – it’s a gift – and one day God will simply call them home, and when He does, they’re ready to go.
       5. We can also learn from death through the ways that others have already been deeply shaped by it. No one who tastes death up close and personal is ever the same again.
       6. Greif expresses love. Someone else’s grief can give voice not just to your own grief but also to your love. When we grieve with those who grieve, we not only minister to the grieving, but our own hearts find growth and healing.
       7. Death teaches us that life is finite and those we love are finite, and that we love them more deeply than we realize, and that we must love them well.

1. The Limitation of Wisdom (7-25) – Even wisdom has its limitations (23), but that doesn’t mean that wisdom isn’t better than folly.
   1. Wisdom is better than the alternatives (7-12).
      1. Wisdom is better than extortion (7).
         1. Even a wise person can be reduced to a fool if he loses sight of his values.
         2. Become a person whose values exceed the value of money.
         3. You can keep your heart from being corrupted by the love of money by visiting the funeral home and listening to death’s sermon about money.
            1. Illustration: The transformation of Ebenezer Scrooge: Scrooge was a man who saved money and used people, but when he was confronted with his own death, he learned to use money to save people.
      2. Wisdom is better than impatience (8).
         1. Being a person who sees a project through to its completion is much better than being a person who starts and never finishes.
         2. When we get to the end of our lives, we want to be people who have patiently, consistently cut a clear path that others can follow.
      3. Wisdom is better than anger (9).
         1. Those who obsess over control are usually very angry people.
         2. Listening to death’s sermons will put our lives in perspective; those things that anger us now come into proper perspective through the lens of our fast approaching death.
      4. Wisdom is better than nostalgia (10-12).
         1. Maybe the past was better than the present, but when you start asking, but when you start asking why it was better what you are doing is denying God’s presence in the present.
         2. Nostalgia can be a form of escapism by taking a vacation in the past instead of grappling with the present or looking to the future in faith.
         3. Nostalgia is always bittersweet; it’s a longing for what is lost.
         4. Nostalgia springs from our desire for eternity; we’re created for heaven, a place where we will truly live happily ever after.
         5. Wise people realize that God has made us to long for Him and for heaven don’t look backward when they get nostalgic; they allow the feeling to prompt them to look to heaven.
   2. Wisdom has limitations (13-25).
      1. The wise in this life will never fully understand why God does what He does (13-15).
      2. Those who rest in their own wisdom and their own righteousness will be destroyed just as those who live a wicked life (16-17).
      3. Those who live wisely understand the value of wisdom without ever forgetting that they are still sinners in need of the grace of God (18-22).
      4. Wisdom will never allow us to fully understand or fully control this life, but we can rest in the control of God, the Source of all wisdom and knowledge, the Almighty God Who rules the universe (23-29).
         1. You can live well and die well, but you cannot know all things completely.
         2. God knows all, so don’t make wisdom an idol by seeking it apart from Him!

Conclusion:

1. Are you letting God deepen you through grief?
2. Wisdom is certainly the best path, but is your pursuit of wisdom for yourself, or is your pursuit of wisdom to know and become more like God?