

# Finished or Finished Well

8.23.26

Message 7

Ecclesiastes 7:1–14 (CSB)

## WISE SAYINGS

<sup>7</sup> A good name is better than fine perfume,  
and the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth.

<sup>2</sup> It is better to go to a house of mourning  
than to go to a house of feasting,  
since that is the end of all mankind,  
and the living should take it to heart.

<sup>3</sup> Grief is better than laughter,  
for when a face is sad, a heart may be glad.

<sup>4</sup> The heart of the wise is in a house of mourning,  
but the heart of fools is in a house of pleasure.

<sup>5</sup> It is better to listen to rebuke from a wise person  
than to listen to the song of fools,

<sup>6</sup> for like the crackling of burning thorns under the pot,  
so is the laughter of the fool.

This too is futile.

<sup>7</sup> Surely, the practice of extortion turns a wise person into a fool,  
and a bribe corrupts the mind.

<sup>8</sup> The end of a matter is better than its beginning;  
a patient spirit is better than a proud spirit.

<sup>9</sup> Don't let your spirit rush to be angry,  
for anger abides in the heart of fools.

<sup>10</sup> Don't say, "Why were the former days better than these?"  
since it is not wise of you to ask this.

<sup>11</sup> Wisdom is as good as an inheritance  
and an advantage to those who see the sun,

<sup>12</sup> because wisdom is protection as silver is protection;  
but the advantage of knowledge  
is that wisdom preserves the life of its owner.

<sup>13</sup> Consider the work of God,  
for who can straighten out  
what he has made crooked?

<sup>14</sup> In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity, consider: God has made the one  
as well as the other, so that no one can discover anything that will come after him.

## Solomon's Proverbs

A. Notice that in your Bible, the margin is offset a little to show us it's a different type of writing.

1. Ecclesiastes 7 begins differently than the previous parts.
2. Instead of a conversation or a speech, we have collected sayings and proverbs of the preacher.
3. These proverbs are wisdom sayings.

B. **Wisdom gives us guidance during uncertain times.**

1. The more uncertainty we have, the more wisdom we need.
2. When we aren't sure exactly what to do next, wisdom guides and directs us.
3. **Proverbs are not step-by-step instructions, but guidelines.**

- a. In our day and time, we like detailed coordinates and addresses that can guide us specifically to the door, the driveway, or the address we want.
- b. But does anyone remember the days when you traveled by vague directions?
- c. Go to the 3<sup>rd</sup> stop light, and there will be a slight turn to the right and the second drive...
- d. Past the third tree on the good part of the dirt road, there will be a red barn and usually some horses standing in the field....

4. Solomon is combining what he has discovered about life and death into some wisdom for us.

C. Solomon does not sound like a motivational guru.

- 1. He sounds like a man who, after doing it all, seeing it all, owning it all, focuses more on death and grief than life and happiness.
- 2. He's in the last quarter of life and is interpreting life through a cynical lens.
- 3. What he says isn't wrong, but sometimes it's incomplete.

What kind of wisdom does a man in the last quarter of life give us?

## Wisdom for Living and Finishing Well

A. Not all criticism is bad, and not all praise is valuable. Vs 5

<sup>5</sup> It is better to listen to rebuke from a wise person  
than to listen to the song of fools,  
<sup>6</sup> for like the crackling of burning thorns under the pot,  
so is the laughter of the fool.  
This too is futile.

- 1. We live in an age that is full of criticism.
  - a. The 24-hour news cycle created the possibility of 1-hour of news and 23 hours of commentary, all of which is critical.
  - b. Social media is one post followed by hundreds or thousands of posts, some critical and some praising, all from people we don't know.

2. We live in an age of unprecedented instruction, construction, knowledge, praise, and criticism.

- a. Yet, most of us are not capable of handling criticism and praise appropriately.
- b. I know for myself that I have allowed criticism to wreck a day or weeks.
- c. There are Google and Facebook reviews that, by name, call me out and criticize.

3. One of the dangers I see in the younger generation is that we have surrounded them with the wrong kind of praise and the wrong kind of criticism, so that they struggle to know how to healthfully respond to either.

- a. If we are going to live and lead in a wise manner, we have to have a healthy relationship with criticism and praise.
- b. Because not all criticism is bad; in fact, it might save your life.
- c. Not all praise is good: in fact, it might kill you.

4. How can we tell the difference?

- a. Does the praise or criticism/rebuke align with God's word?
- b. Is the motivation out of love or a lesser motive?
- c. Am I mature enough to not allow it to go to my heart and identity in Jesus?

B. Greed is destructive. Vs. 7

<sup>7</sup> Surely, the practice of extortion turns a wise person into a fool,  
and a bribe corrupts the mind.

- 1. The guidance here is straightforward:
- 2. The love of money and wealth (last week's sermon) turns wise people into fools.
- 3. The writer says a bribe "corrupts" the mind.
  - a. It poisons, it hardens, it turns something good into evil.
  - b. This applies to rich and poor.
  - c. If we are to finish well, then we must have a healthy relationship to wealth.

If we are to finish well, we need a healthy relationship with anger.

C. Anger turns wise people into fools. Vs. 9

<sup>9</sup> Don't let your spirit rush to be angry, for anger abides in the heart of fools.

1. Anger is not sinful.

- a. Jesus was angry and flipped tables, twice.
- b. Ephesians 4:26 tells us to be angry, and sin not.
- c. When does anger become sin?

Ephesians 4:26–27 (CSB) <sup>26</sup> **Be angry and do not sin.** Don't let the sun go down on your anger, <sup>27</sup> and don't give the devil an opportunity.

Psalms 4:4 (CSB) <sup>4</sup> Be angry and do not sin; reflect in your heart while on your bed and be silent. *Selah*

2. Anger is sinful when:

a. **Our anger is disconnected from God's heart.**

- 1. Injustice toward the poor is worth being angry.
- 2. The new bill in Massachusetts that permits abortion up to birth is something worth being angry about.
- 3. Abuse of power, privilege, the suffering of the innocent- there are a lot of things to be angry about.
- 4. But this isn't usually where our anger is directed.

b. **Our anger is selfish.**

- 1. Most of what we are angry over is because someone hurt us, disappointed us, slighted us, criticized us, and wronged us.
- 2. These are not biblical reasons to stay angry forever.
- 3. **When we live all our days in anger, it gives the devil an opportunity and stunts the fruit of the Spirit.**

c. Anger controls my life.

- 1. Both Psalms and Ephesians teach us the necessity to confront our anger.
- 2. Psalms says "reflect in your heart while in your bed" and Paul says don't let the sun go down on your wrath.

3. We must sit with our anger, and prayerfully discern what the root is.
4. Often, anger is a secondary emotion.
5. There is a root; there is something deeper that needs to be healed.
6. C.S. Lewis wrote, “I sat with my anger long enough until she told me her real name was grief.”

Prayer for the angry.

## God’s Sovereignty Gives Comfort Vs. 10-14

Ecclesiastes 7:13–14 (CSB)

<sup>13</sup> Consider the work of God,  
for who can straighten out  
what he has made crooked?

<sup>14</sup> In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity, consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that no one can discover anything that will come after him.

A. What does a man who has explored it all think about towards the end?

1. He thinks about the sovereignty of God.
2. He thinks about how God was in control the whole time.

B. This leaves a lot of questions unanswered.

1. Why do the righteous suffer while bad people prosper?
2. Why does God allow the rich to get richer and the poor become poorer?
3. Why do kids get sick, and enemies invade, and why does evil appear to prevail?
4. Believing that God is sovereign does not answer these questions.
  - a. It also doesn’t mean that we attribute evil to God.
  - b. God did not cause the Holocaust or your child to become sick.
  - c. God is not a moral monster.

C. But at the end of the day, the creation must lift our hands and declare, “God is God.”

1. He has ways I do not understand.
2. There are mysteries we cannot solve.
3. There is an end appointed, a season ordained, a path of righteousness set before us.
4. And for all of our attempts, our understanding will always fall terribly short.
5. What we do with this realization determines if we walk in faith or in cynicism.

D. There is wisdom and peace in trusting God's sovereignty.

1. There is a profound peace when a believer can declare, "I don't have the answer, but God does."
2. There is a peace that issues from the faithful declaration, "God is good and I trust Him."
3. One of my favorite newer songs is "Trust in God."
  - a. "I sought the Lord, and He heard, and He answered..."
  - b. Then it says, "That's why I trust Him..."
  - c. I understand the sentiment, and I have no problem singing and worshipping in that song.
4. But I want it to be known that I trust Him because He is God.
  - a. I trust Him because He is trustworthy.
  - b. Because He holds the whole world in His hands.
  - c. I trust Him because He is God.
5. There will be times in our lives, if we are going to finish well, when we declare with Job: Though He may slay me, I will trust in Him.
  - a. I will trust Him when times are good, and when times are hard.
  - b. I will trust Him when I have full health, and when my health is fading.
  - c. I will trust Him, even when my therapist tells me I have the right to be angry.
  - d. I will trust Him.

## How is your Journey?

### A. How is your journey?

1. Are you angry?
2. Are you greedy?
3. Are you struggling with trusting God?
4. Is your integrity intact?
5. What are you struggling with?
6. Where are you winning?

### B. Good news: It isn't where you start, but how you finish.

1. Solomon started strong and finished weak.
2. You don't have to be that way.
3. And today can be the day everything changes for the good.