

- **\*READ Ecclesiastes 7:1-14\*** Some might say that this life under the sun is simply a series of choices and decisions that define who and what we are as individuals. The Preacher poses a question in **6:12** that directs our minds to pondering these choices and decisions and whether or not there is actually a better way of living this life. *“For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, during the few years of his futile life? He will send them like shadow. For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun?”* This is a good question! Who is it that actually knows what is better for man to do? Does a man have the ability to know such a thing? Jeremiah would answer that it is not within man to direct his own steps. (**Jeremiah 10:23**) So if man cannot do so then where can we look to the better way?
  - While Ecclesiastes might not have every single answer to every single question that might be posed by man as to the better way of living, **7:1-14** does give the reader some insight into the wisdom of God so that we might understand what is the better way of living life under the sun. Throughout these verses, the Preacher presents numerous examples of things that are better than other things. Some of these statements we would probably chalk up to plain old conventional wisdom. However, some of these things might actually be a little counterintuitive to what we might think is true. Some of these comparisons suggest that things we might think are bad are actually being beneficial to us. They might not make sense to us at first glance, but hopefully we can dive in and see God’s wisdom all throughout this text.
  - As we work our way through these verses over the next few minutes, I hope that we will all carefully consider the wisdom behind each of these points and why the mind of God dictates that these things are so. God’s desire is truly for our betterment in this life, and through the acknowledgement of His superior wisdom, each of us can truly benefit from living the better life under the sun. Let’s consider these verses and all the wisdom of God that can help us to make better decisions and live better lives.
- I. A good reputation is better than wealth. (v.1a)**
- A. We have probably all seen either in a movie or maybe even in real life, a father looking his son in the eyes and reminding him of his last name and how that last name carries with it something special. The point is that our name can either be a point of pride or embarrassment. What do we think of when we hear certain last names? What do you think of when you hear the last name Jordan? Bush? Scharzenegger? Manning? Mozart? With all of these names comes to mind different imageries in our minds and that is because these names represent certain people and their reputations. When The Preacher mentions a good name, I am convinced he is referring to our reputation, and it is better for us to have a good name than to have wealth.
  - B. Wealth isn’t something that we always earn, but as long as we have it...we are wealthy. Our names are not exactly earned, but we can certainly ruin our last name through shameful living. Just because we have the right name doesn’t mean that we are free from any responsibility towards it, especially as Christians. If we wear the name of Christ, we must give every effort to represent it well.
  - C. The Preacher, through the wisdom of God, says that we ought to strive to have a good reputation because it is far more beneficial than wealth. Money can only get us so far in this life, but being someone who is godly in their character and in turn has a good reputation can take each of us a long way. Most importantly, our money won’t do anything for us when it comes to getting to heaven, but our name...our reputation who has a lot to say about that. It will only be those people who have good names who are written in the book of life. There will be no buying our way into that book, but we will only be there through righteous and godly living. (*“rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven.”* **Luke 10:20**)

## II. The day of death is better than the day of birth. (v.1b)

- A. This is certainly one of those instances where we scratch our head and wonder how such a thing could be so. How can the Preacher say that dying is better than birth? Is this an absolute statement? To that, I would say no, this is not an absolute statement, but if we live life a certain way then it absolutely can be true.
- B. This life is full of many sorrows that sometimes make life miserable and nearly unbearable. In fact, we know that Job cursed the day of his birth as he was in the pits of misery from the afflictions of Satan. (*“Let the day perish on which I was to be born” Job 3:1-3*) However, for those who are faithful to God, we have the hope that this life will only be temporary and then we will be able to go on and live with God in eternal bliss in heaven. Paul said it extremely well in **Philippians 1:21-26** when he stated how torn he was between continuing to live in this life with its struggles but where he could serve the Lord and others or going on to glory to be with Jesus and receive his reward for his faith. May we strive to have this kind of faith and recognize that the day of our death can be a day for rejoicing if we will continue to faithfully serve our God in this life.

## III. A funeral is better than a party. (vv.2,3)

- A. Much along the same line of things that might seem counterintuitive to our thinking, the Preacher says that a funeral is better than a party of feasting and celebration. I don't know about you, but I don't think I quite enjoy funerals as much as I do parties, so what could the Preacher be getting at? How could a funeral possibly be better or maybe even more beneficial than a party?
- B. I think the answer lies in the purpose that the funeral can serve. When we are at a party, what are our minds focused on? I know for me, I tend to be focused simply on what is going on around me and having a good time because parties are a time to escape from the negative parts of life and relax a little bit. There is a place for that I suppose, but I think the funeral serves an even bigger and more important role in that it brings us back to reality to remember that his life isn't going to last forever, and at some point the funeral will be our own. The funeral is “the end of every man.”
- C. Funerals are opportunities for us to ponder and reflect upon our lives and the way we are using the time that God has given us. For this reason, I think the Preacher's words, “sorrow is better than laughter” are well stated. When we sorrow, we contemplate life and it is in that moment that we often seek to make positive changes. Laughter doesn't have that same impact on us. So may we give a strong effort when we are faced with death and funerals to consider our lives and use the negative parts of life in a beneficial way and to the glory of God.

## IV. The rebuke of the wise man is better than the praise of the fool. (vv.5,6)

- A. While a little different, but still on the same thought of not exactly being something that we enjoy or appreciate, the Preacher goes on to say that the rebuke of a wise man is better and more beneficial to us than the song of praise from a fool. No one likes to be rebuked, right? No one enjoys being corrected. No one likes to be told they are wrong, but if that correction is coming from someone who is wise and has our best interest at heart then can't we appreciate that a lot more? I would certainly think so.
- B. On the other hand, we love to be told that we are right. We love to be told that we are the greatest thing since sliced bread, but what good does this praise do for us if the praise is coming from someone who couldn't find his or her way out of a cardboard box? It truly does us no good.
- C. I fully recognize and understand the natural inclination to want to surround ourselves with “yes men” who will always tell us that we are good, right, and great but this truly does us no good because sometimes we need to be questioned about what we are doing. Sometimes we need to be asked why we do something a certain way. Sometimes we need wise people to tell us that there is a better way. We aren't made stronger and wiser by the song of fools, but we are made stronger and wiser by those who are strong and wiser who seek to pull us up to where they are.

## V. The end is better than the beginning. (v.8)

- A. You might be thinking that we just talked about this with death and funerals, but let me suggest that **v.8** leaves room for much broader application that just with the day of our death. In fact, the end of many things can be found to be much better than the beginning.
- B. Think to some of the greatest things you have experienced in your life and think about their endings. I think about high school, college, jobs, and such. Often at those points we stop and are saddened that they are finished and we won't experience them any longer. However, I think the Preacher is trying to show us that these endings are good for us because they give us the opportunity to look back and learn and grow.
- C. When we reach finishlines, we get to look back and be proud of the fact that we actually finished something that we have started. How often do we regret those times where we began something and failed to finish? Those feelings are not enjoyable, but neither are endings at times. However, at the end we can at least look back and be proud of what we have accomplished. And often those accomplishments didn't come easily. We often go through growing pains and struggles as we seek to accomplish good things in this life. Often, in the beginning, we regret starting out on these endeavors, but the end brings about relief and fulfillment because we reached the finish lines. *("Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting. He who goes to and fro weeping, and carrying his bag of seed, shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his sheaves with him." Psalm 126:5,6)*

## VI. Patience is better than arrogance and pride (vv.8,9)

- A. Probably the most clear cut out of this list is what is said by the Preacher in **vv.8,9**. We know well that pride is evil and of the devil and will only bring about our destruction. (**I John 2:16,17**) We get that pride and arrogance are wrong, and that we ought to be patient and wait for things in their good time, but why do we seem to struggle with this so much?
- B. I think one reason is because we get so focused on what we want and feel as if we need that we aren't willing to go about things the right way. Instead of planting seeds of the pure Gospel, we try to lace the Gospel with something that we think makes it sweet and more attractive to people. When we do such a thing, all we are doing is leading those involved to destruction. *("Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling." Proverbs 16:18)*
- C. Anger often appears alongside pride and arrogance because we think that things ought to be a certain way and when they're not then it is time for us to blow up until we get our way. This type of attitude and way of living will only lead to more problems, and it will make it evident to others that we are not among the wise, but we are a part of those who are fools. (**v.9**)

## VII. The present is better than the past. (v.10)

- A. There are certainly still many people even to day to exclaim that things in our day are so much worse than how things used to be. While there might be some truth to that statement, the Preacher seems to indicate that such proclamation does no good at all. In fact, it is not in their wisdom that they say such things, but it is from their foolishness.
- B. The truth is that we often focus on how great things used to be while conveniently forgetting the struggles of the past that were just as present then as they are now. We are simply wanting to go back and dwell on the best times to avoid what we are currently going through. When we allow ourselves to focus so much on the past, we often fail to see the golden opportunities of the present. Even if there are currently difficulties in our lives, let's never forget that there are always things in which we can rejoice because we serve a loving and merciful God who will strengthen us even in difficulty. *("Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. and let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete lacking in nothing." James 1:2-4)*

### VIII. Wisdom is better than wealth. (vv.11,12)

- A. This is now the second time that we have seen where the Preacher props up something as being better and greater than wealth. The first time we saw him speaking about a good reputation being better, and now he is saying that wisdom is better, as well. Now, this isn't to say that wealth is inherently a bad thing...it can serve as a protection in certain ways as the Preacher makes mention in **v.12**, but it is still inferior to wisdom and knowledge in our lives.
- B. In fact, great wealth without wisdom can lead to many problems in our lives. The wise fool can easily find himself in the pit of ruin because of his foolish behavior, and money will only be able to serve as that defense to a certain extent. On the other side, one can be extremely successful in life with knowledge and wisdom alone. The Preacher says that knowledge and wisdom preserve the lives of its possessors. **(v.12)** The ultimate places where this is the case is in the day of judgement where money and wealth will do no one any good at all. *"Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, But righteousness delivers from death."* **(Proverbs 11:4)**

### IX. Contentment is better than disappointment. (vv.13,14)

- A. Finally, the Preacher closes this section by reminding the reader of the importance of learning content in this life. As the Preacher has already mentioned previously, there are things that God has done that we have no ability to change. What He has set as being so, we have no ability or power to change.
- B. Therefore, we have a choice as to how we will approach and react to this life. We can either wallow in our self pity and be resigned to a miserable life full of nothing but disappointment, or we can accept the blessings of God along with the difficult days. We can choose to be like Job who was willing to fall down and worship God on the worst day of His life acknowledging that He is a good God who gives and takes away. **(Job 1:20-22)** Again, even the worst of times, we can seek and find the goodness of God, and we ought to be content with that great blessing.

The words of the Preacher from **Ecclesiastes 7:1-14** are far reaching to so many different corners and facets of our lives, but might I say that they can be summed up by saying that the better life under the sun is found in humbly ourselves to see and react to this world as God would have us to. Our lives are made so much better when we simply take a breath and consider if what we are doing is being done according to the wisdom of God or the folly of man's foolishness. May each of us take these words to heart so that we can all live better lives under the sun to the glory of our loving and great God. **\*PRAYER\***