

Sunday, December 13, 2020 pm

Studies in Ecclesiastes (31)

Wisdom is better...

Ecclesiastes 9:11-18

Tonight, we continue our study from the book of Ecclesiastes. We continue to examine observations of Solomon as he seeks the meaning of life, finding that all worldly paths are vanity. In the latter half of this book, Solomon continues to extol wisdom and our need to remember God. In this latter half, we find a number of topics addressed in a form similar to the Proverbs, but often in greater detail.

In our last lesson we noted how God is in control, all are going to die (recurring theme in this book), but in life there is hope if we live wisely and with a proper disposition. Tonight, we find more practical observations contrasting wisdom with folly.

I. No guarantees in life (11-12)

- a. "I returned and saw under the sun" – this is the Hebrew way of saying, "Something else I observed under the sun is". He is continuing to learn as he observes. Learning never ends.
- b. Life has a way of changing plans and outcomes, even with something that seem obvious. Can you think of a time in recent history where this is true? (Like 2020) He gives 5 examples:
 - i. The race is not to the swift – the fastest runner does not always win. In the Olympics, "the agony of defeat" is sometimes witnessed with a stumble, a mistake or an injury. The "favorite" in a horse race may be "scratched" at the last moment because of tendonitis, etc. Think also of the "tortoise and the hare".
 - ii. The battle is not to the strong – if anyone understood this, it should have been Israelites. All Solomon had to do was think of his father in his youth against Goliath, or the fall of Jericho, etc. Again, things happen that change the outcome of a battle.
 - iii. Nor bread to the wise – it is possible for the wise to have to go without a meal. Think of a disaster that strikes.
 - iv. Nor riches to men of understanding – while wise men usually garner wealth, because they use their wisdom to save, invest and to not spend or go into debt foolishly, that is certainly no guarantee. Paul describes riches as uncertain – 1 Timothy 6:17
 - v. Nor favor to men of skill – or ability. While ability gives you advantage, there are times your skills will not work, OR possibly even though you are the best qualified for a promotion, you are passed over for whatever reason, right or wrong.
 - vi. The POINT – Time and chance happen to them all.
When life moves along, we have normal expectations, and we ought to. BUT, things happen – like pandemics, disease, earthquakes, wars, riots, etc. Things that are OUT OF your control.
In preparing a project, man may try to think of every conceivable problem and prepare for it, but there is ALWAYS the chance of something you did not plan for

happening. The story of redemption is one where often the underdog (aka -the remnant) often excels.

- vii. For man does not know his time – vs. 12 gives us another reminder of the uncertainty of life. As James 4:13ff – your life is a vapor, so do not neglect God in your plans.

Life can throw you curve balls. And if you are unprepared it can be disastrous. And sometimes life is cruel – primarily because of evil that is so prevalent. Natural calamities are one thing (and frustrating), but how much more of our troubles are the result of pure evil?

NOTE: This is not saying that we should not make plans or use our resources to achieve the expected outcome, BUT it is saying, don't be arrogant and realize that life is uncertain. WE have heard the expression, "Expect the unexpected." See also, 1 Corinthians 10:12, "Therefore, let him who thinks he stands, take heed..."

II. **An example of inequity (13-15)**

- a. Wisdom seen that ***seemed great*** – impressed (NASB). Not necessarily for good, but it leaves an impression. Do we learn from what we see happening around us, or from our own experiences?
- b. A little city with few men, besieged by a great king. But a poor, wise man delivered the city with his wisdom. BUT no one remembered him.
- c. NOTE: An alternate reading of the original states rather than the poor, wise man delivering the city, it could read, "*Present in the city was a poor wise man who might have saved it with his wisdom, but nobody thought of that poor man.*" (Jewish Tanakh -1985), or *and should find in it a poor wise man, and he should save the city through his wisdom: yet no man would remember that poor man.* (Septuagint, LXX – English Translation, Brenton)

This actually makes more sense in the verse. The man was poor, but because of it he was ignored.

- d. Both interpretations are worthy of consideration and true.
 - i. How often are those who achieve something not recognized because of their lowly status?

Far too many are "too good" to say thank you and give credit where it is deserved (especially when that means they do not get the credit themselves). We sometimes see it in business and especially in politics (where one party takes credit for all the good and blames the other for all the bad, AND so does the other party). Such is a product of ingratitude, pride and even selfishness – all qualities that are condemned in scripture.

We look at externals and disregard their wisdom and knowledge.
 - ii. Also, there are times that one with true wisdom and solutions is ignored because of their lowly status. Sometimes the lowly cannot even a hearing to offer their thoughts and concerns. As a result, no solution is offered and disaster or failure results.

Example: Christianity has the answer to many of today's inequities and problems, but because of hatred of the truth and God, we cannot even get a hearing, much less fair consideration.

III. **Wisdom is better (16-18)**

- a. **Wisdom is better than strength** – the one who is wise will find solutions. He invents ways around his lack of strength to move something.

Proverbs 24:5 says, *A wise man is strong, Yes, a man of knowledge increases strength;*

- b. **Nevertheless, the poor man's wisdom is despised** – this is Solomon's observation based upon the previous analogy.

Consider Jesus – He was physically poor, but will you ever find greater wisdom. Yes, many did follow Him, but consider some who did not.

- In Nazareth, as He taught in the synagogue the people were astonished and said, *"Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands! Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?" So they were offended at Him.* Mark 6:2-3 – as a result, Jesus could not do many mighty works there.

- A greater example – consider the wisdom of God. It is better than the thoughts of men (Isaiah 55:8-9), yet to so many (wise in this world) it is a stumbling block and foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:21-23)

When it comes to wisdom, we need to accept and consider it regardless of where it originates. This is not to say we ignore the wisdom of leaders and the successful. It simply means there are also others with wisdom worthy of consideration.

- c. (17) **Words of the wise spoken quietly should be heard** – here Solomon makes an observation the wise have learned – you don't have to shout to get your point across. In fact, at times it is detrimental.

I here think of one who with calm wisdom diffuses a potentially explosive situation. He calms down the angry by being calm.

Truly this is better **"the shout of a ruler of fools."**

James 1:19-20 notes, *So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.*

- d. (18) **Wisdom is better than weapons of war** – can anyone deny that war is a bad thing. Would we not be better off if we prevented the war in the first place? Wisdom will do that! And if there is war, wisdom will seek to bring the quickest resolution, with the least amount of damage.

- e. **One sinner can destroy much good** – hypocrisy, an act or word uttered without thought, even if uncharacteristic, can do great damage.

Paul warned, "a little leaven leavens the whole lump" (1 Corinthians 5:6)

Think of Achan who took a few items from Jericho (Joshua 6-7) which resulted in a defeat at Ai.

Peter's act of hypocrisy as recorded in Galatians 2:11-13 resulted in many others following him. Think of the damage done to his attempts to defend the salvation of Gentiles.

So much more could be said about these verses and wisdom. It is so applicable in so many ways, both spiritually and with life in general. As Christians, we need to think before we act.