

3 Walls of Wisdom

(Ecclesiastes 7:15-29)

12/5/18; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

This time of year always reminds me of one of my more humiliating moments in life.

For years, my dad did a good job of concealing his Christmas presents from me.

The main reason being that I was a kid with limited ability to reach into high places like the attic or high shelf..

Yet as I grew older, I grew taller and a little bit smarter.

That, combined with the fact that our small house didn't leave a lot of room to hide anything made it easier for me to get a peek at what I was getting.

So one year, I took a look at the usual hiding places for my gifts and noticed a Foot Locker..

Foot Locker always had the best stuff for any sports fan..

Shoes, jerseys, jackets..

So I really couldn't help myself..

I grabbed that bag off that top shelf and opened it up to find a Carolina Panthers sweatshirt..

The Panthers had just become a new NFL team, and their apparel was selling like crazy..

I was excited to see the sweatshirt and ready for Christmas Eve, when I usually opened my presents..

Yet, Christmas Eve came and all my presents were opened but no sweat shirt..

So I figured that Dad was waiting for Christmas morning which was sometimes the case...

But Christmas morning came and no Panthers sweat shirt..

Then on Christmas evening, we all gathered at my dad's sisters house for Christmas dinner..

And as soon we got there and entered, there was my cousin wearing that Panthers sweat shirt.

As I would find out later, she had called and asked my dad to get the shirt for her son, which he had done and kept in his closet..

He took it to her Christmas Eve and she wrapped it and gave it to her son on Christmas morning..

You see, life lesson #1..

Just because you think a gift is for you, that doesn't mean it is..

Well, the same can be said of God's wisdom that he gives to us in the Bible..

And what I mean by that is this..

God does not offer wisdom to us a gift to us so that we can win at life..

In fact, many people have found God's wisdom on a shelf and though it was just a gift to bless them, but it turns out that they were wrong too..

You see, God's wisdom doesn't exist to just make our life better..

Yet that is how many people look at wisdom..

They see God's wisdom as gift meant for man's glory.

Yet, that is not the case.

God's wisdom exist to glorify Him.

God's wisdom exists to reveal how unlike God we are.

God's wisdom exists to point to his intelligence and knowledge and understanding and reasoning.

God's wisdom primarily exists to reveal God's character and to draw people to worship and glorify Him..

You see, if we view God's wisdom as the key to our comfort and security, we actually make wisdom our servant, and in doing so, we set ourselves over God.

Instead of seeing ourselves as servants of God, we see God as our servant..

He provides wisdom to us, we succeed, and man praises us instead of God.

But that is not the point and has never been the point of wisdom..

We are hungry dogs around the table of God and we simply are grateful for any wisdom that slips off God's table into our lives..

With that understanding of wisdom, we now return to the book of Ecclesiastes..

And though this book isn't seen as a book of wisdom like Proverbs, we have found much wisdom in the the first 6 1/2 chapters of it..

Remember, Ecclesiastes is book by the same author as the book of Proverbs..

Solomon wrote this book under the inspiration of God in the same way that he wrote the majority of the book of Proverbs..

Yet, the distinction is this..

Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes as an older man.

He wrote it after he was able to live by the wisdom of Proverbs..

The words of Ecclesiastes were breathed out by God to Solomon at a much older age..

And that makes Ecclesiastes an interesting study..

If Proverbs are the words and principles that guided Solomon in life, what is the result of the life that he lived?

Well, the end result is exactly what Solomon says all throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, and it is simply this...

Life is a vapor.

Life is like soap bubbles..

You blow them up. They drift off and they pop.

And its not that they were meaningless..

Now you enjoyed dipping in wand, sucking in a deep breath, blowing out to make the bubble, and you even enjoyed watching the bubbles drift off..

None of those things were bad.

They all were necessary in making a bubble.

The only issue is that the enjoyment is quickly over..

And Solomon has found frustration in that..

You see, Solomon wanted a full life.

He wanted rich satisfaction, but nothing can provide that in a world that passes like a vapor..

Solomon uses the word futility..

Life is frustrating in its brevity, and for a while, Solomon is tempted to say..

Well, what is the point of life? What is the point of being wise?

And last week, we began to answer that question about what is the point of wisdom..

And we said this..

The path of wisdom is generally speaking a path of blessing..

And if we are able to practice and learn from wisdom, we can avoid pitfalls that others experience in life..

One commentator defined wisdom this way..

“Wisdom is the God-Given ability to see life with rare objectivity and to handle life with rare stability,”

Another commentator describes wisdom *as the steering wheel of life..*

Wisdom is the ability to keep the car between the lines while also teaching us to steer clear of trouble..

Yet with that said, we must remember also that wisdom is no guarantee of prosperity and blessing..

Because here is another foundational truth of wisdom...

Wisdom is the path of blessing in life, but God always has the final say..

In other words, you can make all the wisest choices in life, but still find trouble...

If you don't believe me, ask Abel..

He did the right thing.

He did the wise thing.

He brought the right and wise sacrifice to God but his brother killed him..

If you still don't believe, ask Job.

Job was a wise and righteous man, yet Satan destroyed his family and life in an instant..

If you still don't believe me, ask Jesus.

Jesus was the most righteous and wisest ever, but he was murdered in his 30s..

In other words, wisdom is not a guarantee of future prosperity..

Look back at verse 13 from last week..

13

***Consider the work of God,
For who is able to straighten what He has bent?***

In other words, you can have all wisdom but God still retains all the sovereignty..

Now, this reality is part of Solomon's frustration in the book of Ecclesiastes...

He knew the wisdom of God.

He was the world's richest man.

He was the king over Israel..

Yet, despite those incredible advantages in life, he still found things in the world that he couldn't control or understand..

And that is really the starting point for this entire book, and we have listened to his frustration and hopefully benefitted from it..

Yet, despite the limitations of wisdom, Solomon never abandons wisdom..

Last week, he even started to give us a list of wisdom's benefits, and tonight we dive further into the benefits of wisdom...

God is telling us tonight that life is a vapor..

God is also telling us that He is in control..

But God is also telling through Solomon that living by His wisdom is still the better way..

So let's dig into Ecclesiastes 7:15-19, and we will find what I call 3 Walls of Wisdom..

In other words, we are going to see that the wisdom of God becomes a form of protection in our lives..

And it is a form of protection in three areas of life that we all need protection in..

So, let's begin in verses 15-18 with this..

I. Wisdom Keeps Us Steady (15-18)

Let me read these verses to us..

15 I have seen everything during my [k]lifetime of futility; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness. 16 Do not be excessively righteous and do not be overly wise. Why should you ruin yourself? 17 Do not be excessively wicked and do not be a fool. Why should you die before your time? 18 It is good that you grasp one thing and also not [l]let go of the other; for the one who fears God comes forth with [m]both of them.

In verse 15, we see an apparent problem in life.

And the problem is easy to identify..

Some good people seem to die early and some wicked people seem to live a long life.

Now, this is not a problem if you understand human nature as described in the Bible..

The Bible would say that none are righteous, that none are good..

Therefore, it is amazing that anyone even makes it to adulthood..

However, we also recognize that there are people who do the right thing, live the right life and yet meet sudden disaster...

There was a Christian missionary a few weeks back killed by the very people he went to share the gospel with..

He was young guy in his 20s, zealous for the Lord, sacrificing and risking his life to get to this group of people on a remote Indonesian island..

Yet, they killed him one day after he landed on their beach...

And we as people recoil at such news..

Why didn't God protect a young person with such passion and promise?

And the answer is we don't know..

And on the other hand, why does God allow people who reject him and his word to live so long and even prosper while they are alive?

I mean this is a constant complaint of both believers and unbelievers to God?

Why do the good die young?

Well in response to that apparent injustice in the world, you find two opposite reactions...

In verse 16, you will find people who turn up their righteousness in order to avoid an early death, and you will find people who will turn up their evil in hopes of extending their life...

Well, God warns us here to avoid both extreme reactions..

In other words, just because you see a righteous person die at a young age, don't assume if you can be more righteous than them that you will make it longer..

And just you see an evil man live longer, don't assume if you can be more evil that you will also extend your life..

Both responses are out of balance.

The truth is that every life begins and every life ends under the sovereignty of God.

God has numbered our days, and sometimes the righteous get a shorter life and the wicked get a longer life.

Ultimately, we don't know why either happens, so you can't overreact to what you observe in the world..

Your righteousness or your lack of righteousness has no bearing on how many days you are given.

God determines the number.

We are simply called to live out those years for his glory, whether they are long or short..

Don't panic over everything you see in the world...

Don't over react to everything you hear...

Be balanced in your view of life, and the reason is simple..

You don't know everything that God is up to...

When we go fishing and boat riding, John Andrew loves to ride the waves in the boat...

Yet, years of driving a boat have taught me the dangers of the waves..

Some are higher than you think and you spear them instead of floating over them..

Some simply give out undue the weight of the boat
and you sink..

The best path in the waves is to stay in the troughs
or in the middle of the waves...

Life is very similar..

The waves of life can lead to overreaction.

Wisdom tells us to ride the troughs..

To stay balanced and under control..

You are going to see good young people die.

Don't try to outdo their goodness in hopes that you
live longer..

You are going to see evil people live long and prosper..

Don't try to copy them in order to live longer...

Verse 18 simply says...

***18 It is good that you grasp one thing and also not
[l]let go of the other; for the one who fears God
comes forth with [m]both of them.***

In other words hold on to both truths and simply fear the Lord and you will live exactly the number of days that God has ordained for you..

And not only that, you will avoid the panic and overreaction that the world often experiences...

So wisdom keeps us balanced...

A second protection of wisdom is that...

II. Wisdom Keeps Us Strong (19-22)

Let's read verse 19-22...

19 Wisdom strengthens a wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city. 20 Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins. 21 Also, do not [n]take seriously all words which are spoken, so that you will not hear your servant cursing you. 22 For [o]you also have realized that you likewise have many times cursed others.

In verse 19, God paints a picture of wisdom through the pen of Solomon..

Wisdom is like a high wall for an ancient city.

Wisdom is like a row of cannons on that city wall..

If a single ruler makes sure the city is protected, 10 rulers increase those protections 10 times..

The same is true of wisdom..

Wisdom protects you, and in this passage, the focus of protection is physical protection..

Verse 20 reminds the reader that you in a world of sinners..

20 Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins.

And for that reason, you are surrounded by people who are capable of great evil against you..

Wisdom offers protection from evil people..

This is why we lock doors at night.

This is why we are aware of our surroundings.

This is why we buy alarm systems and install cameras..

We want protection from those who have the capacity to harm us...

Now that doesn't mean we don't trust the Lord to protect us, it simply means that wisdom points us to do what is humanly possible to protect ourselves...

Some people lift weights to grow stronger and protect themselves, but wise people read the Bible to gain wisdom and grow stronger in order to protect themselves..

At first glance, you may wonder what verses 21 and 22 are doing here..

21 Also, do not [n]take seriously all words which are spoken, so that you will not hear your servant cursing you. 22 For [o]you also have realized that you likewise have many times cursed others.

Yet this also relates to the idea of how wisdom strengthens us.

In a world full of sinners, words are weapons..

People are going to criticize you.

It is unavoidable in this world, yet wisdom tells us to simply let it go.

First of all, their criticism of you may be a valid.

Yes, they may say it wrong.

Yes, they may be rude.

But overall, they may be right.

And if they are right, let it go and see it as helpful.

But even if the criticism is unjustified, it is best to simply let it go.

Besides, verse 22 asks ‘have you ever criticized someone unjustly?’

If so, you realize how hypocritical it would be for you to lose your composure over someone's unjust criticism of you.

It is best to simply extend grace and move on with your life.

The NT is clear.

Love covers a multitude of sins..

Therefore, it is best to love your critic by covering your mouth and controlling your tongue.

But let's be clear.

It takes a lot of inner strength to do that.

Strength that can only come from the Lord as you study and live by his wisdom.

A third and final protection of wisdom is found in found in verses 23-29...

III. Wisdom Keeps Us Sane (23-29)

Let's read verses 23-29...

23 I tested all this with wisdom, and I said, "I will be wise," but it was far from me. 24 What has been is remote and exceedingly [p]mysterious. Who can discover it? 25 I [q]directed my [r]mind to know, to investigate and to seek wisdom and an explanation, and to know the evil of folly and the foolishness of madness. 26 And I discovered more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are chains. One who is pleasing to God will escape from her, but the sinner will be captured by her.

27 "Behold, I have discovered this," says the Preacher, "adding one thing to another to find an explanation, 28 which [s]I am still seeking but have not found. I have found one man among a thousand, but I have not found a woman among all these. 29 Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices."

As Solomon wraps up chapter 7, he returns to the idea that wisdom has limitations...

Though Solomon was granted wisdom by God, wisdom still fell short to explain everything that Solomon observed in the world..

And to illustrate this point, Solomon turns to two examples of women...

Now this is quite ironic considering the fact that Solomon had 1000 women in his life..

700 wives and 300 concubines were connected to Solomon..

So when Solomon say that wisdom fails to explain the foolishness of a woman who traps and snares, he is actually referring to his own lack of wisdom to be trapped and ensnared by over 1000 women...

And when he says that he can't find one wise woman among 1000, he is not saying that wise women don't exist, he is saying that he lacked wisdom in choosing a woman 1000 times...

Contrary to what some people have said about this passage, these verses don't put women in a bad light, they put Solomon in a bad light..

You see, Solomon had been given much wisdom, but his own sinfulness limited his use of that wisdom..

A foundational truth about wisdom is that wisdom falls short at times because the world and the people in it are fallen..

And this is important to remember so that we don't blame God when things don't go according to the wisdom he has given...

Case in point, let's say you do all you can to raise your children to know and fear the Lord...

Let's say that Proverbs 22:6 has been your parenting motto..

6

***Train up a child [d]in the way he should go,
Even when he is old he will not depart from it.***

But let's you you do your part as a parent but in the end, the child departs from the Lord and from the faith..

How do we explain that?

Well, the issue isn't with God's wisdom.

The issue is your child's sinfulness.

You see, the reason that Solomon had failed mightily with women is not because he lacked God's wisdom on marriage and relationships.

The reason he failed with women is due to his own sinfulness..

This is why you can't give the book of Proverbs to someone and it instantly change their life.

God's wisdom cannot override man's sinfulness apart from a work of God on the heart..

And we need to remember that so that we can deal with things we see in the world...

Look, my favorite saying is that "people are crazy."

I say it often when I see some pretty horrible things happen in this world..

What I mean by that is that sin is so powerful and so pervasive that it can ruin lives in an instant..

And in order to keep my sanity and maintain a proper perspective on the world, I have to constantly remind myself that this world and the people in it are broken..

When a man like Solomon, who had more access to the wisdom of God than anyone in world history...

When a man like that falls into a life-style of sin, we should all be warned..

But we should also note that the problem isn't wisdom, the problem is sin.

Look again at verse 29..

29 Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices.”

In other words, wisdom helps us walk an upright life as long we don't give in to the crookedness of our sin..

But also, wisdom about the sinfulness of keeps us sane while we live in a crazy world..

Wisdom protects us and helps us continue on when we want to throw up our hands and quit.

Conclusion

Let's stick a couple truths in our pocket and take them home with us tonight..

#1 - Balance is not a bad word.

To be a moderate in politics is not good.

To ride the fence in some areas of life is not wise..

However, balance in terms of God's truth is very beneficial..

We live in a culture of extremes..

If you remember the days after 9/11, flying was an incredible ordeal..

And why was that the case?

Well, since the terrorists had used commercial jets to do their evil, commercial planes were now seen as terrorist weapons..

And government overreacted to that in a big way.

Now clearly, some correction was needed to prevent more terrorists from doing similar things, but officials went to the extreme and holiday travel in 2001 was almost non-existent..

But overreaction is not limited to government, we also tend to overreact ourselves more often than we problem want to admit..

And it often happens in the church and even in pulpits..

People see the effects of alcohol in the world and vow to never to touch the stuff and will preach against it forever..

People see the effects of smoking or television or movies and vow to never go near them again..

You know what I have never seen in the pulpit?

I have never seen a preacher talk about the dangers of fried food and vow to never touch a piece of fried chicken again..

But the point is this..

Your experiences and convictions about certain issues don't need to be law for everyone else..

If the Bible doesn't have a verse to support your views, make sure you stay balanced in your view of it.

#2 - *Self- control is a good word.*

The greatest display of strength is not the ability to fight off others..

The greatest display of strength is the ability to control yourself.

Wisdom gives you the strength to say no to yourself while saying nothing to the world..

When faced with criticism and insult from others, the wise person controls his tongue and emotions and simply walks away..

You don't need the last word in every exchange.

And in some conversations, you don't need any words..

That is not to say that you walk away in anger.

No, wisdom walks away while extending forgiveness...

#3 - Sin is the worst word.

Sin corrupts everything it touches.

It defies human logic at times.

It even leaves us speechless at times.

Sin even has the ability to pull us away from the wisdom of God..

Yet, sin is not the final word.

You see, Christ frees us from the power of sin.

Repentance and faith in Christ opens our world to the wisdom of God.

Where sin and confusion reigned in our life, now things begin to make sense...

This is the power of the gospel..

It gives the believer power to overcome sin while helping him or her make sense of the fallen world in which they live.

This is why we read this in 1 Corinthians 1...

30 But [u]by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, [v]and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption

In others words, the beginning of wisdom is found in Christ.

But the sum of all wisdom is also found in Christ.

And if you ever hope to grow in wisdom, that also comes from Christ as well..

All roads may lead to Rome, but all wisdom leads to Christ.

Let us pray.