

The Wisdom Literature

Lesson #19

Ecclesiastes 6:1-8:15

Outline

I. **Explaining The Plan Of God (6:1-8:15)**

- A. An evaluation of man's outward fortunes explains inequalities in providence (6:1-7:14).
- B. An evaluation of man's character explains inequalities in providence (7:15-29).
- C. God's righteous government removes inequalities in providence (8:1-14).
- D. Conclusion (8:15).

Notes

Ecclesiastes 6:1-7:14

- Riches without enjoyment (6:1-6).
 - A man may possess wealth, honor, numerous children, long life, and virtually every outward good that anyone could possibly imagine; yet he can still be a very broken, dissatisfied, and unhappy person. People's circumstances are not always what they seem to be.
 - Prosperity without the divine gift of enjoyment is nothing. In fact, God-given wealth without the God-given power to enjoy it is a "severe affliction."
 - Solomon gives a very vivid illustration of this fact. He states that death at birth is preferable to long life and riches without the ability to enjoy them. A stillborn baby is free from all the suffering of the joyless rich man and has more rest than he does. The baby remains unnamed, unrecorded, and unremembered.
 - If even the longest life eventually terminates having yielded no enjoyment, not to mention any prospect of anything to follow, what is the profit of all those years? It was nothing but a compounded sorrow. Material possessions are for our pleasure and joy.
- Labor without satisfaction (6:7-9).
 - A man's labor may also be continually aimed at his insatiable desire for pleasure, but it will be to no avail. They will not satisfy the soul.
 - No man, be he wise, poor or rich, can satisfy his desires on his own. We need to learn to be content. Making do with what we have is better than striving for what we do not have, for all the wishing for what we want is futile.

- Questions without answers (6:10-12).
 - The reason riches fail to yield any happiness rests upon the unalterable ordinance of God. Mortal man, the creation of God, cannot set aside or overcome that divinely established connection between earthly possessions and the dissatisfaction with those possessions apart from knowing God.
 - Man will certainly try to wrestle and contest God's decision to link these two; however, the more he talks, the more empty and unsatisfactory the situation becomes. All words are useless; man might just as well acknowledge his limitations and begin immediately to fear God.
 - No one really knows what the future holds except God. Therefore, no one can say what the real advantage will be of one or another for himself or others. Make the best of what life has dealt you.
- Comparisons of adverse circumstances which teach worthwhile lessons (7:1-14).
 - A good name is better than precious ointment. It is best to die with a good reputation. Money can buy ointments, not a reputation.
 - Attendance at a funeral is better than attendance at a festive party. Any day when we can take stock of life is a good day.
 - Sorrow is better than laughter. Our hearts are made better.
 - Wisdom is better than folly. Fools learn that you only go around once in life, so get the gusto out of life and do not let it slip through your fingers.
 - A rebuke from the wise is better than the song of fools. A fool flatters while the wise rebukes. Nobody likes to be told they are wrong.
 - Patience is better than anxiety. If we patiently endure, the end will be worth it.
 - The present is better than the past. The former days were not any better. Every age has its problems.
 - Wisdom is better than hasty judgment.
 - Wisdom is better than money. You are better off without money if you do not know how to use it.
 - Trusting God for tomorrow is better than knowing about tomorrow. All of God's plans work for our good.

Ecclesiastes 7:15-29

- The wicked and the righteous (7:15-18).
 - Although men appear to be treated irrespective of their character in the providence of God, the just perishing in his righteousness and the evil man apparently prolonging his life in wickedness is "judging a book by its cover." Do not be wicked just because the wicked seem to prosper.

- The danger presented next is the fact that there is a kind of righteousness that causes spiritual and mental harm. There is also a wisdom which fosters pride and produces a false foundation upon which to build a life. This kind of righteousness is called self-righteousness. It questions God's dealings and judgments. It elevates man and leads him into arrogance.
- It is the fear of God that is the best protection against either absurdity. True wisdom that comes from the fear of God is better than grasping the folly of fools. Neither man's folly nor a conceited and strained righteousness will serve as a guide to the real needs of men.
- Wisdom leads to proper attitudes and conduct (7:19-22).
 - True wisdom will be better protection against all these errors and excesses than ten rulers or sultans in a city. It is far better than strength.
 - In fact, rather than being too self-righteous, no one is without fault in deed or word. Men universally fall short of God's glory. This kind of wisdom not only opens up the meaning of eternity (3:11), but it also gives men and women a self-control that will not resent the ill-advised slander, abuse, and curses of others.
 - It is foolish to be overly concerned about and troubled by what others think and say about us in their unguarded, unkind, and foolish moments. We will surely be disturbed if we allow this to get to us.
- Man is unable to grasp what God is doing in the world (7:23-25).
 - Solomon set out to explore everything using wisdom. He wanted to understand all facets of life -- the perplexing contradictions as well as the transparent joyous experiences, the deep riddles along with the self-evident truths.
 - However, the secret things of God are always a little distance from man's reach; at least until that time when God chooses to disclose the deep, deep mysteries (Deuteronomy 29:29).
 - Solomon can see the value of wisdom and extols it honestly and sincerely while at the same time humbly confessing that he is helpless before the infinite wisdom of God. He wants to know, but cannot discover it.
- Man is able to grasp the extent of human wickedness (7:26-29).
 - Although Solomon did not find out all the deep mysteries of God, he did discover how far men and women are removed from their original design. There is little comfort for men, and less for women.
 - Solomon stated that from his own observations, he has found fewer wise women than men. In his pursuit of wisdom and evil, he discovered mankind to be perverse and crooked. Wise, righteous people are scarce because man chooses to be disobedient and sin.

Ecclesiastes 8:1-14

- An examination of authority (8:1-9).
 - Wisdom that comes from the fear of God can solve the enigmas found in this section of the book. It can dispel gloom and brighten man's otherwise hard looks.
 - A wise man realizes that chief among God's agents of justice presently available is the divine institution of human government. Human government is God's ordained means of rectifying most current disorders.
 - When rulers and judges carry out that divine mandate, both they and their people are blessed by God, and a considerable amount of man's present distress is alleviated. Unfortunately, those in authority are not always faithful to their mandate. In vs. 9, it has to be sadly conceded that rulers often inflict injustices on their subjects.
 - Ignorance of the plan and times of God increases man's misery; man is particularly miserable because he cannot avoid death. God has vested the control of all things in His own hands and not in the hands of mortals. And because he is ignorant of God's workings, man, not God, is responsible for all the misery endured on earth as he tries to do things contrary to God's will.
- An examination of inequity (8:10-14).
 - Even though men may be wrongly encouraged in their evil deeds by the abuse of power and position by those in authority, the wicked who receive honorable burials and are delayed in receiving the proper administration of justice will nevertheless be judged because they do not fear God.
 - There will be a day when you will be able to discern the difference between those who feared God and those who refused to hear Him. Then a most exacting justice will be meted out. The wicked may appear to be getting away with murder, but sin with impunity will finally be judged by the living God.
 - The just desserts of the wicked often seem to fall on the righteous God-fearer while the rewards of the righteous appear to drop in the lap of the wicked. This is only understandable by the wisdom found in the fear of God, the plan of God and the ability to enjoy life as offered by God to all who trust Him.

Ecclesiastes 8:15

- God commends enjoyment as one of His most excellent gifts to the men and women who fulfill the previously mentioned condition of fearing Him. This gift of enjoyment, including eating, drinking, and receiving the joy of life, will stay with them, so get on with the business of living.

- The gifts of God are not dangled on a string before men's eyes, only to be retracted just as they seem to come within reach.
- God really intended that men should come to a proper enjoyment of the good material gifts placed in this world by Him, and that the gifts should be a source of constant satisfaction when everything is properly related to the Giver Himself.
- Such enjoyment is meant to accompany man all the days of his earthly life. The reception of those gifts and the confident contentment in the provision of God are to be preferred over all the restless activity of men, which is devoted solely to accumulating possessions and using wicked methods to obtain them.