

“Life is Full of Foolish Things”

An Exegetical Sermon from
Ecclesiastes 7:4-18

Homiletics
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Read

ECCLESIASTES 7:4-18

- 4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.
- 5 It is better to heed a wise man's rebuke than to listen to the song of fools.
- 6 Like the crackling of thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of fools. This too is meaningless.
- 7 Extortion turns a wise man into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart.
- 8 The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride.
- 9 Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools.
- 10 Do not say, "Why were the old days better than these?" For it is not wise to ask such questions.
- 11 Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun.
- 12 Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor.
- 13 Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked?
- 14 When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future.
- 15 In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: a righteous man perishing in his righteousness, and a wicked man living long in his wickedness.
- 16 Do not be overrighteous, neither be overwise-- why destroy yourself?
- 17 Do not be overwicked, and do not be a fool-- why die before your time?
- 18 It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. The man who fears God will avoid all extremes.

Pray "Father open our ears now and allow us to hear only the words that you have for us as we turn our attention to you. Please help me to be your vessel, give your word and Spirit free reign in our lives. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen"

Introduction:

Life is full of foolishness! During this past week I took some time to research just a few foolish things that I thought we all could enjoy together. Here is one that I consider important as Ohio State fans (we) prepare to head out west to attend the Fiesta Bowl.

The ten gallon hat that (the big cowboy hats that are often seen on cowboys), really can only hold 3/4 of a gallon of liquid. That is an amazing exaggeration, isn't it? It is less than 1/10th of the actual claim.

Here is another foolish thing that I read about as many people prepare for the release of the new Hollywood blockbuster "King Kong" that is reportedly three hours long. The longest film that contains no dialogue ever made consisted of a man sleeping for eight hours. It is titled "Sleep" and was made by the late and well known pop culture artist, Andy Warhol.

In the field of art, I found another fascinating story that a painting by the famous artist Henri Matisse titled Le Bateau (the boat), was installed upside down when it was placed on display at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City where it hung for 47 days and was viewed by well over 100,000 people. Evidently no one noticed that it was upside down, because no complaints were ever expressed.

While this was not an attempt to deceive people, the job title found on Al Capone's business cards were. Did you know that in 1927 this famous Chicago gangster made over \$105 million dollars all while telling those who he gave business cards to that he was a "Second hand furniture dealer".

And finally in my 'foolish file' today, I read about the longest sermon on record. This sermon was delivered by a minister in West Richmond, Washington in 1955. The declamation lasted for 48 hours and 18 minutes. A congregation of eight was still present at the sermon's conclusion.

Today I do not have that long. So I will be brief in delivering the following message, but I would ask that you 'hold on' as we start off exploring the foolishness of life at it is displayed for us in the book of Ecclesiastes. I believe this book was written by Solomon at or near the end of his life and in this book he takes on the role of an old teacher providing guidance to a young student. As he Looks back over his life and

provides Sage advice. This is a book of wisdom as inspired by God into the heart of the smartest and richest of Israel's Kings. The teaching style as found in Ecclesiastes reminds me of spending time with my Grandpa Kinner as a young boy. I was born on his 50th birthday and we always shared that day and many good times together. He was a quiet man, but was always trying to teach me the important lessons of life. I miss the way he confronted foolishness when he saw it. He never said a word he just gave a stern look over the top of his glasses which was always enough to get my attention. The look on his face was evidence enough to what he was thinking in these moments. Perhaps you know someone who looks at foolishness in this way (give the look). It always had a sobering effect on me. So let us now examine verses 4-10 together and see what Solomon saw as foolishness and how God encourages us to live wisely because without God's instruction in our lives...

I. Some People Live Foolishly

Verse 4 states :

"4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning,
but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure."

This verse conveys the necessity that we take life seriously. Do you know of anyone who does not want to live responsibly or who needs a wake-up-call? You may say things like "He/She just needs to get married" or "grow up". Or as my uncle Butch would say, "Hey stop your messin' and get down to work". He is always accusing everyone of messin', and he himself is a very hard worker.

Verse 5 says:

"5 It is better to heed a wise man's rebuke than to
listen to the song of fools."

This verse points out the importance of who we choose to listen to in our lives. I recall as a young man being encouraged to follow the advice of my Grandfather over that of my crazy high school buddies. We all need to be sure we learn to listen to the right people in our lives, people that teach and correct us, not those that urge us to join them in foolish living.

Next in verse 6 we read:

"6 Like the crackling of thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of fools. This too is meaningless."

We see the need to **Give it Time**, the crackling thorns here may have made it sound as if dinner would be cooked up quickly, but anyone who as ever been camping would tell you that bristles and twigs while they burn quickly and brightly for a moment they do not give off enough heat to cook over. It takes time to get the big logs burning. This is true in our lives isn't it. Get rich quick schemes rarely work and those slow serious workers almost always move ahead. True growth requires time, and wisdom provides the ability to get past the small twigs to the big logs that make a difference.

Verse 7:

"7 Extortion turns a wise man into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart."

Simply put "Remember your families values". If I were to ask if anyone here has ever given or received this advice as you went to college or had a child that moved away to take a job, I hope that many hands would go up. Have you encouraged someone or have you ever been encouraged to "remember who you are", regardless of the surroundings that you find yourself in. It is foolish to get somewhere through lying, cheating or stealing and we see plenty of this in our world today.

Verse 8:

“8 The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride.”

To be succinct “Think with long-term goals in mind”. As with a 401k plan the early you start planning for the future the better off you will be later on. Do not just live for today, plan for the future to live wisely.

Verse 9:

“9 Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools.”

You know if I had a nickel for every time in my life that an older man of faith encouraged me to take things in stride and not be a hot head, I would be filling the offering plate with change every week! Many times those that have been around let the hot heads talk themselves out or simply ignore certain problems until they go away. Taking a “wait and see” attitude and being even tempered is very wise and I must admit that I am still challenged to grow in this area of my life.

So far what we have seen in this passage is a fantastic list of encouragements for those that are young in the Christian faith.

- 1) Take life seriously (stop messin)
- 2) Heed Correction (from the right people)
- 3) Give your work time (no quick fixes)
- 4) Keep your families values (don't sacrifice values for position)
- 5) Think long-term (plan for the future now)
- 6) Take life in stride (learn to be even tempered)

I hope that many of us here would agree with these six things are “wise lessons for life”, but let's not forget verse 10!

“10 Do not say, "Why were the old days better than these?" For it is not wise to ask such questions.”

God's word never has something to say to just one group of people. For those of us that are older in our faith, this is an encouragement for us. We are not to give up on the next generation and simply revere our own 'glory days'. We must never stop teaching the next generation the importance of living wisely as God's word instructs because...

II. Living Wisely is Important and has Benefits

(Joke to illustrate point - Inductive)

A woman walked up to a little old man rocking in a chair on his porch.

"I couldn't help noticing how happy you look," she said. "What's your secret for a long, happy life?"

"I smoke three packs of cigarettes a day," he said. "I also drink a case of whiskey a week, eat fatty foods, and never exercise."

"That's amazing," the woman said. "How old are you?"

"Twenty-six," he said.

Look with me at verses 11 and 12

"11 Wisdom, like an **inheritance**, is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun. 12 Wisdom is a **shelter** as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor."

Did you notice in verse eleven the word **inheritance**; this is a gift from a family member that provides you with many benefits. As I stated earlier, true wisdom is a gift of God to His children. In verse 12 notice the word **shelter**. This is like shade in the desert that provides you with the ability to buy food, housing and if needed medicine. In a desert the sun will kill you in a very short time, but the simple presence of shade can

extend your life for many days. Therefore living wisely provides the benefit of adding both to the quality and duration of human life.

I have a friend who is a graphic artist. She once told me that a person with ordinary vision can distinguish about 150 different colors. However, the expertly trained eye can distinguish more than 100,000 colors tints and shades.

Training in God's word and seeking His wisdom can help us to see many things in our lives much more clearly and make a huge difference in the way that we live. Living wisely as our God instructs us can add years of joy and peace to our lives.

There are many benefits to living wisely, but then for each of us there are those times when the rug seems to be pulled out from under where we stand. We each can probably think of someone that we know who has faced a health issue or trial that seems to be living wisely but still facing adversity. Simply put...

III. Wisdom cannot explain everything

On September 11, 01 I sat that morning and watched the World Trade Towers burning and I reached for the phone. I called my father who lay recuperating at home after surviving a life threatening triple bypass operation. As the news reporters searched for answers, I remembered my mother's sobbing at the hospital during Dad's surgery. She kept asking me questions. "Why did this happen to your father, he has never smoked, drank or chased women, he is a good Christian man, why is God allowing this to happen?" As a Biblical Studies graduate from a Christian college, I remember thinking that I had never been provided these answers on a test and that since my parents did so much to support me in school I really should provide Mom with a suitable answer to her question.

Let's look at verses 13-15

“13 Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked? 14 When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future. 15 In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: a righteous man perishing in his righteousness, and a wicked man living long in his wickedness.”

The reality of these verses can clearly be seen in the midst of tumultuous times. When the shelter that we thought wisdom was to provide disappears where do we run to for shelter?

There are many that become frustrated with God because they are living in accordance to His instruction and yet still face hardship, trials and death. It is good for us to remember that,

while living in God's wisdom provides many benefits to our lives...

*Righteous living is not a guarantee of long life nor is wicked living a guarantee of a short life.

*We must always remember that God alone is sovereign and He is the arbiter of life and death, **therefore...**

IV. A Right Relationship with God Provides Stability in Our Lives

Consider the Old Testament book of Job. In this narrative we find Satan in heaven's throne room. He protested the fact that Job revered God because of the many advantages that God's wisdom had provided him. He had a large family (10 children) much wealth a thriving business and a fancy home. Given less prosperous circumstances Satan was sure that Job would turn away from his faith in God. God accepted this challenge "all that Job has is in your hands", He said to Satan. Job may have questioned what he had done wrong in his life, but he never blamed God. He never turned on God and never cursed God. His faith in God withstood the trials of life. I ask you would God have such confidence in your faith today?

Can we hear verses 16-18 more clearly now from this perspective?

"16 Do not be overrighteous, neither be overwise-- why destroy yourself? 17 Do not be overwicked, and do not be a fool-- why die before your time? 18 It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. The man who fears God will avoid all extremes."

Some of us need to see the benefits that living wisely offers. For others of us we need to realize that there are limits to what wisdom can provide. Regardless of which camp you find yourself in we each must seek God. Fearing God will result in avoiding the extreme views of living foolishly or loving wisdom. We need to Love God alone and always seek Him regardless of what comes our way in this life.

The Psalmist expressed it this way in Psalm 34

"I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.

This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles.

The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.

Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.

Fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing.

A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all.”

Psalm 34:4, 6-9, 19

Conclusion

To conclude I would like to read for you two quotes that are excerpts from a speech by the late Martin Luther King Jr. These remarks make up part of a eulogy that he delivered at the funeral of three young girls that were killed as the result of a foolish act in the bombing of a Church and I believe that they echo the nature and get at the very heart of the scripture we have been examining today.

“May I now say a word to you, the members of the bereaved families? It is almost impossible to say anything that can console you at this difficult hour and remove the deep clouds of disappointment which are floating in your mental skies. But I hope you can find a little consolation from the universality of this experience. Death comes to every individual. There is an amazing democracy about death. It is not aristocracy for some of the people, but a democracy for all of the people. Kings die and beggars die; rich men and poor men die; old people die and young people die. Death comes to the innocent and it comes to the guilty. Death is the irreducible common denominator of all men. “

“Now I say to you in conclusion, life is hard, at times as hard as crucible steel. It has its bleak and difficult moments. Like the ever-flowing waters of the river, life has its moments of drought and its moments of flood. Like the ever-changing cycle of the seasons, life has the soothing warmth of its summers and the piercing chill of its winters. And if one will hold on, he will discover that God walks with him, and that God is able to lift you from the fatigue of despair to the buoyancy of hope, and transform dark and desolate valleys into sunlit paths of inner peace. And so today, you do not walk alone.”

Closing Prayer "As we come before you Father I implore my brothers and sisters today not to look away from you and be foolish. Nor to look past you and be wise in our own eyes, but to daily look to you for you alone are what we seek. In Jesus name, Amen".