

A Better Life

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help, and the Lord's enabling this morning, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, Ecclesiastes chapter 7.
- We're just continuing our study in this book, the book of Ecclesiastes. And I'd like us to consider verses 1 to 13, but if we just take as our text the verses 11 and 12, Ecclesiastes 7 and verse 11.
- Wisdom is good with an inheritance, an advantage to those who see the sun. For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money, and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it.
- I'm sure that many of you in here have heard of the 1970s comedy sitcom, The Good Life. And as you know, The Good Life, it was a comedy about a couple called Tom and Barbara Good. And back then, in the 1970s, comedy was funny and clean, unlike the filth and swearing that we hear nowadays. But The Good Life, it's about Tom Good, who was a plastics designer who then turned 40. And at that milestone age in his life, he decides to leave his job and pursue a life of self-sufficiency, in which Tom and his wife Barbara, they seek to live off the land and live their lives in this self-sufficient manner. And the comedy is all about the joys and the miseries of seeking to become totally self-sufficient. It's all about being self-sufficient and living the good life.
- [1 : 5 4] But you know, in this sermon called Ecclesiastes, the preacher, who is Solomon, he's reminding us that a self-sufficient life is not a good life. But what Solomon means by being self-sufficient, he's not talking about living without paid employment. No, for Solomon, being self-sufficient means living your life without God. And in his sermon, Solomon is reminding us that to live your life without God, it's foolishness, it's vanity. That's why Solomon, he opens his sermon in chapter 1 with the statement, vanity of vanities, says the preacher. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. The promise of a good life, Solomon is saying, it's all vanity if we think that we can live our lives self-sufficiently without God. Because to try and live a self-sufficient life that doesn't depend upon God for his grace and for his goodness and for his guidance, to try and live the good life without God is to live your life without perspective. It's to live your life without an eternal perspective. And if you're not living your life with an eternal perspective, then Solomon is reminding us here that you're living your life in a foolish manner. Because what's wise and what's of the utmost importance, what's of eternal value, is your relationship to God through Jesus Christ. That's what's of eternal value.

And in these opening 13 verses of this chapter, Solomon presents to us a list of proverbs. Now a proverb is just a wise saying. And it's wise because it makes this contrast between wisdom and folly. And the purpose of a proverb is just to make us realize the importance of wisdom over folly. And by using this list of proverbs in verses 1 to 13, Solomon wants to teach us how to live a good life. He wants to teach us how to live a better life. How to live a better life with an eternal perspective. And Solomon shows us that what a better life looks like, he shows us by repeatedly using the words, it is better. It is better. You'll see that all the way through these verses. Solomon repeats the phrase, it is better. He's wanting to show us how to live a better life. And so using this list of proverbs, Solomon shows us what a better life looks like by highlighting four things to us. He highlights a better day, a better destination, a better direction, and a better decision. Four things. A better day, a better destination, a better direction, and a better decision. So we look first of all at a better day.

Solomon wants us to live a better life. He talks about a better day. Look at verse 1. He says, a good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death better than the day of birth.

Solomon opens this section of his sermon by emphasizing to us that we will live a better life when we have an eternal perspective upon the day of our death. We will live a better life when we have an eternal perspective for the day of our death. But Solomon, he introduces this topic of living a better life by saying that a good name is better than precious ointment. And with this proverbial statement, Solomon is making a contrast of values. He's saying that a good name and a good reputation is worth far more, and it outweighs far more than the value of precious ointment.

A good name is better than precious ointment. And you know, we have an occasion in the Bible where this is clearly seen. Because when you go to Mark chapter 14, we're told that Jesus was in Bethany, and he was in the house of Simon the leper, and he's sitting there eating with him. And as they're all reclining at the table, a woman comes in with an alabaster box of precious ointment. And Mark tells us that this precious perfume, it's very expensive. But this woman, she comes in, she comes behind the feet of Jesus, and she breaks this alabaster box and pours the precious ointment over the head of Jesus.

[6 : 42] And as you would expect, everyone sitting there looking at this woman, what she's doing, they become angry, and they start asking, why was this ointment wasted? And to justify the question of the disciples, they say the alabaster box, it could have been sold for over 300 denarii and given to the poor.

In other words, they're saying, we could have sold this and made a year's wages, and then given it to the poor. But it has just been wasted. But you remember what Jesus says about the woman.

Leave her alone. She has done a beautiful thing to me. And she has done what she could. And then Jesus says about the woman, this is so interesting. Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her. And what Jesus says is what Solomon is saying here, that this woman's name and her reputation was more valuable and worth far more than precious ointment.

Her reputation with Jesus was worth more to her and even more valuable to her than the most expensive of perfumes. And her name was more precious to her because she could see that knowing Jesus and being known by Jesus was of eternal value. And that's what we're being reminded of here, that our name and our reputation before Jesus, knowing Jesus and being known by Jesus, that should be of infinitely greater value to us than all the valuables of this world. Knowing the precious name of Jesus as our Savior and having our name known to Jesus, having our name in the Lamb's book of life, it should far outweigh all the riches of this world. Because the truth is, my friend, the only one who can make the day of your death better than the day of your birth is Jesus. And that's what Solomon is saying here. A good name is better than precious ointment and the day of death better than the day of birth. And you know, when Solomon speaks about the day of our death, he's not being negative or cynical or pessimistic. He's just being realistic. Because that day will come. How and when, we don't know.

But the truth is, it will come. And the day of our death, it will come because on the day of our birth, we were born in sin. And David was reminding us of that in Psalm 51, that even at the point of our conception, we were conceived in guiltiness and sin, we were born in sin, we were born with the sin of Adam, we're born with this sentence of death upon our lives. And the Bible states to us, the wages of sin is death. Physical death, spiritual death, eternal death. But of course, we don't want to talk about death. Especially our own death. It's not something we want to think about. We want to put death as far away from us as possible, into the distant future. Because we can't imagine not being in this world.

[10:11] But it's a reality which we must all face. And it's a reality that's coming to us all. And Solomon is saying to us here, you will live a better life when you have an eternal perspective upon the day of your death. You will live a better life when you live with an eternal perspective, knowing what will happen at the day of your death. And the only way that you can make the day of your death better than the day of your birth is by trusting in Jesus as your Savior. It's far more precious than all the riches of this world. My friend, Jesus is able to make the day of our death better than the day of our birth. And he's able to do that because he lived the perfect life that we could not live. And he died the death that we don't have to die. He died our death. He conquered death. He defeated the grave. He atoned for sin. He averted the wrath of God. He came that we might have life. And have it more abundantly. He came to bring life and immortality to light through the gospel. My friend, Jesus came so that he would make the day of your death better than the day of your birth. And you know, every time a Christian dies in our congregation,

I'm always reminded of the words of our catechism. The souls of believers are at their death, made perfect in holiness, and they do immediately pass into glory. And their bodies, their bodies still being united to Christ, do rest in their graves until the resurrection. The death of a Christian, it's a better day than the day of their birth. My friend, Jesus is the only one who is able to make the day of your death better than the day of your birth. So whilst you're on mercy's ground, whilst you're still in this world, will you not trust him? Will you not commit your life to him?

Will you not make him your Lord and Savior? Will you not cast your lot in with him? And say, yes, Lord, I want to follow you. Solomon, he's encouraging us to live a better life by possessing an eternal perspective. And he does so by telling us about a better day, but secondly, about a better destination. A better destination. Look at verse 2.

It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting. For this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of face the heart is made glad. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. Now this cluster of proverbs, it follows on very closely from what Solomon was saying just in verse 1. Because Solomon, he wants to make a further contrast between the day of our birth and the day of our death. And he makes the contrast by suggesting a better destination. He says that it's better for us to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting. He says sorrow is better than laughter, because the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. And with this Solomon, he's presenting to us two contrasting destinations. He's talking about the house of mourning and the house of feasting.

And what we have to see is that there are people gathering in the house of mourning because of the day of someone's death. But there are people gathering in the house of feasting because of the day of someone's birth. The contrast is between gathering for someone's death day and gathering for someone's birth day. And the contrast is quite stark because in the house of mourning, Solomon is reminding us of the solemn reality of death. He says there are tears, there's heart, heartache, there's brokenness, there's sadness, there's sorrow and crying. The house of mourning, it's a place of pain and hurt. But in the house of feasting, there's a birthday party, there's a celebration, there's joy, there's laughter, there's music, there's dancing, there are smiles and singing, there's the celebration of someone's birth. Now before you think that Solomon is condemning the celebration of birthdays, he's not. Birthdays are happy occasions. The day of someone's birth is a happy occasion. It was happy first of all for the parents of that person. And there is rejoicing on the day that a child is born and there's a celebration and that joy continues throughout their life.

[15 : 24] Because we celebrate the day we were born every year. And it's good to celebrate these occasions and enjoy them. But the reason Solomon is making this contrast between the house of mourning and the house of feasting, the place of the day of someone's death and the place of the day of someone's birth, the reason he's making the contrast is because at a birthday party there is a celebration and feasting and sometimes drunkenness and there's the temptation just to forget about the realities of life and the need to live a better life. There's the temptation to just live for the moment and forget about the need to live life with an eternal perspective. And that's what Solomon is stressing to us here with these Proverbs. That we will live a better life when we have an eternal perspective upon the day of our death.

And Solomon's point, it's realistic. It's not pessimistic. His point is that we should always have the day of our death in our minds. Not always in the forefront. But it should be in our mind. We should live our lives with eternity in view. Because we're all moving closer towards eternity.

We're a lot closer to eternity than we were last Lord's Day. I don't know how old some of you are. But the demographic of the congregation is that most of you are over 50.

And the sad reality is that you have lived more years than you have left. But are you using those years that you have left?

Are you using them wisely? Are you living your life with an eternal perspective? Are you living your life as a disciple of Jesus Christ?

[17 : 27] And you know, this is why Solomon is stressing that the house of mourning is better than the house of feasting. Because as Solomon says, in the house of mourning, we're reminded of our end.

And he says that we should be wise and take that to heart. No one likes to go to the house of mourning. No one enjoys going to a funeral. No one likes to attend a wake.

But it's in the house of mourning that we see the reality of life. And the reality of death. And we need, Solomon is saying, we need to be wise about death. We need to take it to heart.

We need to take our own death into consideration. We need to think about it. We need to prepare for it. We need to be ready for when it's our turn. We need to take death seriously.

Because many today, they just block out the reality of what death is. And they feed themselves this lie that when someone dies, they become a twinkling star in the sky.

[18 : 28] You know, we need to take death seriously. And see it for what it is. That physical death is the result of spiritual death. And it concludes, if we are without Christ, it concludes with eternal death.

And Solomon's hard-hitting point, his point is that every funeral, every time we gather in the house of mourning, it should be a reminder of our own funeral.

Every funeral should be a solemn warning to us about the frailty and the shortness of our own life. But you know, many of the people in our community, they just don't take these things to heart.

They sit and I see them. You think the minister doesn't see you. I sit and I see them and they just have no thought towards the reality of death.

Maybe you're one of them. You sit at a funeral and you're confronted with the reality of death and yet it makes no impact on you. You sit there without a care or a concern for your own soul or your own death.

[19 : 43] And even would I be right in saying that that's because your heart is hardened to the prospect of death and the reality of your own death. You hear the voice of death breaking into our community so often.

Maybe even into your own home and your own family. But you put it far away from you. And you say to yourself, not me. Not now. Not today. Not today. And you know.

Our unique form of a funeral service. Where we have this procession. And we carry the coffin. The remains of someone.

We carry them away from the church towards the cemetery. You know, it's one of the most solemn things that we will ever do in our lives. And yet what amazes me is that in the face of death, you hear the sound of talking.

And it's people, they're not talking about death and the need to prepare for eternity and close in with Christ. They're talking about everything but. They're talking about the weather, the sheep, crafting football work, being part of a procession, carrying the remains of a loved one, being confronted with our greatest enemy, death.

[21 : 08] It's the most solemn thing that we'll do in our lives. And yet for many, death and eternity, no place in their mind. My friend, we need to do as Solomon is urging us here.

We need to lay these things to heart. We need to apply it to ourselves. We need to reflect upon the reality of death.

And live our lives with an eternal perspective. Because that's the only way we will ever find comfort in life. And peace in death. And hope for eternity.

If we're trusting in Jesus. Jesus Christ is the only one who's able to make the day of your death better than the day of your birth.

I'll say it again. So please listen to me. Jesus Christ is the only one who is able to make the day of your death better than the day of your birth.

[22 : 14] So whilst you're on mercy's ground. Close in with him. Lean upon him. Trust in him. Look to him. Confess him as your Lord and your Savior.

Because time is short. And eternity is long. Solomon is encouraging us to live a better life.

Have an eternal perspective. And he's talked about a better day. A better destination. But then thirdly he talks about a better direction. A better direction.

Look at verse 5. He says. It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise. Than to hear the song of fools. For as the crackling of thorns under a pot.

So is the laughter of the fools. This also is vanity. Surely oppression drives the wise into madness. And a bribe corrupts the heart.

[23 : 17] And so in this cluster of proverbs. Solomon uses the contrast that's made between wisdom and folly. He says. Verse 5. It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise.

Than to hear the song of fools. And with this Solomon. He's making the contrast. Between receiving the song of fools. Or the scolding of the wise. And he's asking us.

Which is better? Which is of more benefit to you? Is it hearing the song of the fool? Or is it hearing the scolding of the wise? And Solomon says.

That the scolding of the song of the fool. It's the song of praise and flattery. Which you're made to feel good about yourself. And you enjoy the admiration and the approval of others.

But as everyone knows. The song of the fool is a fleeting experience. It has no eternal value. And Solomon says down in verse 6. He says that the song of the fool. Is like thorns rapidly burning in a fire.

[24 : 16] Because in the ancient world. Thorns they were often used as fuel. Under the cooking pot. And they would burn rapidly. So that their.

Well. They would burn rapidly. And their usefulness would be very short lived. And Solomon says. That's what the laughter of a fool is like. That's what the song of the fool is like.

The laughter and the song of the fool. It's like a sudden flame. With lots of sparks. It's accompanied with plenty noise. But it soon dies down. And it's quickly extinguished.

And Solomon is asking us. Which is better? Which is of more benefit to you? Which has eternal value upon your life? Is it hearing the song of the fool? Or is it hearing the scolding of the wise?

And the scolding of the wise. He's pointing to scripture. The wisdom of God. In telling you about eternity. And you know.

[25 : 14] There's a biblical example. Of this. Again in Mark's gospel. In Mark chapter 6. In that chapter. We have the account of King Herod's birthday.

And it's very fitting. With what Solomon is saying. But if you remember King Herod. He married a woman. Called Herodias. And Herodias was actually. His brother's wife.

And John the Baptist. He was put in prison. Because he preached against Herod's unlawful marriage. To Herodias. And of course Herodias. She wanted to silence John. She wanted to put John the Baptist to death.

But you know. King Herod's conscience bothered him. And he kept John the Baptist safe. Because he enjoyed listening to him. In fact. We're told that. When Herod listened to John the Baptist preach.

He heard him gladly. He knew what he was saying. Herod knew what John was saying. And speaking into his life. Herod knew that he should listen.

[26 : 14] To the scolding of the wise. But we're told that on his birthday. In the house of feasting. Along with all of his superficial friends. And the laughter of fools.

Herod listened to the song of fools. Because when Herodias' daughter. When she came in. And she danced before the men. At the birthday party. And she pleased Herod.

And all his guests. Because of the drunkenness. And because of the party. And because of the bravado of the king. Herod foolishly said to the girl. Ask me for whatever you wish.

And I'll give it to you. And without hesitation. She asked for the head of John the Baptist. And because of his party. And in order to please his guests.

Herod listened to the song of the fools. And he failed to listen. To the scolding of the wise. In fact by beheading John the Baptist.

[27 : 12] Herod silenced the scolding of the wise. And you know my friend. When King Herod sought the praise of others. Over the preaching of John the Baptist.

He ignored his God given conscience. And he silenced the scolding of the wise. He listened to the song of the fool.

And it had eternal consequences. Herod never heard the gospel again. And he was never given another opportunity again. And you know that passage in Mark chapter 6.

Of King Herod. It's a warning to us. It's a warning to us. Not to listen to the song of the fools. But to listen and take heart. Take to heart the song.

The scolding of the wise. We're to listen to the warnings of scripture. We're to take into account the wisdom of God. Because the wisdom of God.

[28 : 11] It presents to us a better direction. A better way. Yes a narrow way. But a better way. The wisdom of God presents to us a better direction.

A heaven bound direction. Not a hell bound direction. It presents to us this way. The right way. The way in the footsteps of Jesus.

That's why Jesus says to us in the gospel. I am the way. The truth. And the life. No man comes to the father. Except through me. My friend.

The wisdom of God. Presents to us a better direction. Through Jesus Christ. And that's what Solomon is stressing to us. You need to live a better life.

You need to have an eternal perspective. Upon your life. By looking to Jesus. And in order to possess a better life. Solomon says to us. He speaks about a better day.

[29 : 10] A better destination. A better direction. And then lastly. A better decision. A better decision. Look at verse 8.

He says. Better is the end of a thing than its beginning. And the patient spirit. Patient in spirit. Is better than the proud in spirit. Be not quick in your spirit.

To become angry. For anger lodges in the bosom of fools. Say not. Why were the former days better than these. For it is not from wisdom.

That you ask this. Wisdom is good with an inheritance. An advantage to those. Who see the sun. For the protection of wisdom. Is like the protection of money.

And the advantage of knowledge. Is that wisdom. Wisdom preserves the life of him. Who has it. This close. These closing proverbs.

[30 : 06] They re-emphasize to us. The need to have wisdom. In fact. Each of these proverbs. In this chapter. In Solomon's sermon.

They remind us. That it's better to have godly wisdom. Than to live like the fool. It's better to have. An eternal perspective. On life.

Than to live your life in vanity. And you know. It seems that Solomon. You can summarize. What he's saying here. In the words of verse 12. For the protection of wisdom.

Is like the protection of money. And the advantage of knowledge. Is that wisdom preserves the life. Of him. Who has it. Solomon says that. Wisdom is precious.

And you have to guard it. You have to protect it. Just like money. We have to keep it safe. You have to treasure it.

[31 : 02] Because godly wisdom. It preserves the life. Of the one who has it. Godly wisdom. Causes us to live. A better life. And to live with. An eternal perspective.

My friends. Solomon's sermon. Called. Ecclesiastes. It's all about. Making a better decision. To live. A better life. And you know.

The contrast. Between wisdom. And folly. And the need. To live this. Better life. And the need. To live our lives. With an eternal perspective. You know.

That was just the emphasis. Of Jesus's ministry. That's what Jesus taught. That's how Jesus taught. You know. When Jesus preached his.

Sermon. The sermon on the mount. He taught about living. As citizens of the kingdom. Living as citizens. Of the kingdom of heaven.

[31 : 58] He taught about living. With an eternal perspective. And then at the end. Of his sermon. You come to Matthew chapter 7. He's preached about. The need to have.

An eternal perspective. And then Jesus. Speaks about. He asks his. Hearers to consider. What kind of. Hearer they are. And Jesus says.

Everyone who hears. These words of mine. And does them. Will be like a wise man. Who built his house. Upon a rock. Because when the rain fell.

He says. And the floods came. And the winds blew. And beat on the house. It did not fall. Because it had been founded. On the rock. But.

Says Jesus. Everyone who hears. These words of mine. But does not. Do them. They will be like. A foolish man. The foolish man.

[32 : 52] Who built his house. Upon the sand. Because when the rain fell. And the floods came. And the wind blew. And beat against that house. It fell. It crumbled.

And Jesus says. Great was the fall of it. Great was the fall of it. Jesus concludes. His sermon on the mount. With an illustration.

Of the wise. And the foolish builder. And like Solomon. Jesus presented. The stark contrast. Between wisdom. And folly. And what we have to see.

Is that. In their sermons. About living. Life with an eternal perspective. Living the better life. Living the good life. What we have to see. Is that. Both Solomon.

And Jesus. They are calling us. To make. A better decision. To live. A better life. Make a better decision.

[33 : 48] To live. A better life. They are both calling us. To live wisely. To live better. To die better. To die a better death.

By making. A better decision. To trust in the Lord. For our salvation. My friend. Far better for you.

To cast your lot in with Jesus. Jesus. And make him your Lord and Savior. Than to be lost for all eternity. Far better for you.

To be on the side of Christ. When the end comes. Far better for you. To be a sheep than a goat. Far better for you.

To be on the solid rock. Than on the sand. Far better for you. To close in with Christ. Whilst you are on mercy's ground. Whilst you still have time.

[34 : 51] Whilst there is breath in your lungs. Whilst there is still hope. Far better for you. To live a better life. To die a better death.

Far better for you. To trust in this Jesus. Who has done. For you. For you. Exceedingly. Abundantly. Above all.

More than you could ask. Or even think. You close in with him. You trust in him. You give him your all. You follow his footsteps.

You lean upon him. You love him. Because he loves you with an everlasting love. And that's what Solomon is telling us here. You want to live a better life.

Think about a better day. The day of your death. Think about the better destination. The house of mourning that reminds you. About the solemn reality of eternity.

[35 : 51] Think about a better direction. A heaven bound direction. Think about a better decision. Better decision. To leave here.

Deciding to follow Jesus. My friend. Make a better decision today. Live a better life. By committing your life.

Into the hands. Of the Lord. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord our gracious God. Lord. May give thanks for.

Even the warnings in life. The warnings Lord. That come to us. In thy word. That we might do. As Solomon was saying. That we might lay them to heart.

That we might take them to ourselves. That we might prepare for eternity. O Lord bless thy truth to us. We pray. Bless us in the week that lies ahead.

[36 : 50] A week that is unknown to us. But help us Lord. On this day. To make this day a new day. Where we close in with Christ. Where we cast our lot in with him.

And that we make him our Lord and Saviour. For time and for eternity. Go before us then we pray. Bless us we ask thee. For we ask it in Jesus name.

And for his sake. Amen. Amen. We shall conclude by singing the words of Psalm 116. Psalm 116.

Page 395. We're singing from the beginning down to the verse mark. 6. This is the psalmist's prayer.

And his confession. He confesses in verse 1. I love the Lord because my voice. And prayers he did hear. I while I live will call on him who bowed to me his ear.

[38 : 04] Of death the cords and sorrows did. About me compass round. The pains of hell took hold on me. I grief and trouble found. Then. Upon the name of God the Lord.

Then did I call and say. Deliver thou my soul O Lord. I do thee humbly pray. What's his testimony? God merciful and righteous is. Yea gracious is our Lord.

God saves the meek. I was brought low. He did me help afford. We'll sing these verses of Psalm 116. To God's praise. I love the Lord because my voice and prayers he did hear.

I while I live will call on him who will be his ear.

All death accords and sorrows did. About me compass round.

[39 : 27] The pains of hell took hold on me. I grief and trouble found.

Upon the name of God the Lord. God merciful and helpless is.

And righteous is, yea, gracious is our Lord.

God saves the meek I was brought, Lord. He did me help afar.

Amen. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.