

Ecclesiastes 7:1-24, The Pleasure of Pursuits

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. Welcome to anybody that's never been here before. Welcome to those who have. And a special welcome to Caymana Fabro, the son of Angelica and Frolyn Fabro in the back there. Welcome again.

Baby number one. Amen. If you are just joining us this morning and wondering where we're at, we've been for the last 10 weeks in a series on wise living, wise living as it's been called. How are we to walk in wisdom as kind of what I've been pondering on the last few weeks? How are we to walk in wisdom or what does it look like to walk in wisdom?

Or when looking to be satisfied in this life, what defines the wise and what sorts of pleasurable pursuits define the foolish?

The pleasure of wisdom. Or put another way, how are we to find pleasure in wise living?

[1 : 30] Where is your pleasure if you are to walk in the way of the wise? This morning's chapter brings us to the preacher's proverbial writings as a way of describing for listeners what it looks like to find things like pleasure and or joy, satisfaction when it feels like there is none to be found.

When you're on ground. When you're on ground level and you look around and you're like, I don't see it. The author here is writing today, giving wisdom on where you can actually search for your joy or your pleasure.

I divided the text in three ways, starting with verse one through 12. I just call it the surprise of pleasure. The surprise of pleasure.

As this section of the book seemingly has little organization, we are met with literature, wise sayings that cover the matters of life.

Or I might even add matters of the heart. Five surprises concerning wisdom in verse one through 12.

[2 : 52] The first surprise, I would say, would be the surprise of death. Verse one and two. The surprise of death as seen in the significance of even the name is better than oil.

Incidentally, the word for name in the text and the word for oil have the same root words. But in other words, the preacher is saying that the name that you want is the name that echoes after death.

Not like these aromas which dissipate. I mean, they're good for the moment. They might get you in the door. You smell good. But then later on, you got to take a bath or something.

And you dare not put more on after you've showered, right? I mean, before you shower, right?

That's weird. That's weird. Just as a good cologne smells good and it fades.

But verse two then clarifies, 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.

[4 : 01] Verse two. It's wise to seek the reputation that lies beyond the grave. Since a name can be forgotten, it's best to not spend time celebrating what will eventually die out.

That's what the author says. The surprise of death is that the more you consider it and understand it, the better you are able to live your life.

Those that are living, consider it and lay it to heart. Or you get the surprise of grief in verse three through four. Kohelet prefers sorrow instead of laughter, saying that it is better to be sorrowful than to laugh.

It's much to be gained from somber reflection, as he's emphasizing here, of death and grief. Yet the inner heart, the inner heart is made right when facing sadness, making better decisions, having gone through a few things.

Or the surprise of rebuke in verse five through six. As we see, it is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the songs of fools.

[5 : 29] We see the fool's response and the advice to the wise. It is better to hear this advice given by the wise than to hear it, than to treat it like a fool, to hear it like a fool and to go about your way and laugh like it's nothing.

Or how about the surprise of danger? Verse seven through 10. This one's a little longer. Kohelet focuses even on the less than beneficial effects of the struggling life.

I can go around the room and ask something about what you're struggling with, and I'm sure you'd get a bunch of details. Things that we need to pray for. Things that we would probably be surprised about.

But there's beneficial effects to the current struggle as there's dangers that he mentions here, especially if you ever find yourself living under a political climate that is less than desirable.

The question here is how is one to walk in wisdom when everything around you seems to point elsewhere, especially if they affect you and your family and those you love the most.

[6 : 49] How are you to walk in wisdom or to have a godly perspective in lieu of danger and death or turmoil of the day?

You see, the surprise, again, is that everyone seeks comfort and justice in some way. But the preacher concedes to the point. He says, surely, surely, verse seven, oppression drives the wise into madness and a bribe corrupts the heart.

Yes, oppression will drive the wise mad and being taken advantage of would anger anyone. But the danger of allowing these corrupt things to sleep in the heart or allowing anger to be lodged in the heart in verse nine.

You see that verse seven and then jumping down to verse nine. A bribe corrupts the heart. And then verse nine, be not quick in your spirit to become angry for anger lodges in the heart of fools. The surprise is for those who are walking in faith to see the end game, to keep the end in mind, to look to the long goal and not solely focus on the immediate.

[8 : 03] To understand the greater joy or to understand the greater fulfillment within any circumstance. That's where verses eight and 10 sit.

There are all sorts of danger that lie in wait along the way. As we all journey, but pleasure sought is not the removal of that danger, per se.

Because compared to this light momentary affliction, there's something greater that lies ahead. The idea, as verse 10 puts it, the idea that yesterday is better than today, Kohelet warns, is far from wisdom.

Because the idea of thinking that, man, I wish we were back in, you know, Uncle Rico. You know, I wish I was back in 1975. Basically what you're saying is the suggestion is that God doesn't know what he's doing up to this point.

The suggestion is that you kind of would have done it differently and better. Well, you're also suggesting that God is not sovereign.

[9 : 27] And you're also suggesting that there's a need for a replacement. Lastly, you have a final surprise, verse 11 and 12, of the pleasure of wisdom.

It's how the preacher calls himself Kohelet, compares wisdom to money. After the inheritance received, in the face of difficulty, grief, and danger, even death, we are reminded that the advantage of wisdom, or the advantage that wisdom has.

The analogy drawn in these two verses here is wisdom is actually unlike money, but he draws an analogy of money since, well, it's believed that the author has money.

So, of course, he would look at what is around him. He carries with it, the wisdom that you are to receive carries with it continued prosperity for the one that is to gain it.

The perseverance through life, even after life. The pleasure of wisdom, but unlike money, is protection of the soul, whereas money only protects some of the things you see.

[10 : 45] And as the preacher says in verse 12, it preserves life for whoever has it. Do you have wisdom today? Or at least are you seeking wisdom today?

The surprise, the surprises that we have mentioned, death and danger, wisdom, they're all meant to push you to Christ.

Surprise. Okay, I need Jesus. We see the testing of faith. Perseverance that promotes godliness. Triumph and tragedy. Both come and they go, but what are their purpose and their place in the life of those who are seeking to be wise or to walk in wisdom?

What's the purpose? While it may seem that there is something crooked in the lot that we've been given, you can find pleasure in the one who is to be considered.

[11:53] That is God. Fulfillment. Joy everlasting. As he encourages you, man, lay this to heart. But then next we get the second section.

After the surprise of pleasure, we see the seasons of pleasure. And I've already hinted at some of these, but the seasons of pleasure. We see the seasons as you weigh the seasons of your own lives.

How do you see the current status of the situation you're in? I would argue it's most of the battle is about perspective. Look at verse 13.

He hearkens back to chapter 1, verse 15. 1, verse 15. What is crooked cannot be made straight. And what is lacking cannot be counted.

But then in verse 13 of chapter 7, he says, consider the work of God. Who can make straight what he has made crooked? I like that because in the first chapter, he he's more so looking at it from a perspective of man, looking at circumstance, looking at life, pondering things that have gone wrong and injustice even.

[13:13] But then in this chapter, he inserts God to say, but but if you're really going to ask the real questions, you have to insert the almighty into the point.

The point being that God is in control of all times and seasons, even down to the lot you are handed. I had a chance to preach at a retreat last week, and I think I preached two sermons and then did a concert.

And I asked the students. I did a game with the students where we put we put items around the room and we marked them with different value of of of money.

And I put on the screen. You have one hundred thousand dollars. You have to spend. You can't come back with any of the money. And each student had to go around and then they had to make a case for why they chose certain things and certain things.

I put up there like the best Jordans for the rest of your life, the best new Jordans. And I marked it really low. So you'll be really tempted to get it. Right. And then I'll say cure for cancer.

[14:27] Sixty thousand. And the point being that, well, one, you can't accomplish the main things by yourself. You're going to have to talk to someone else to get this stuff accomplished.

But two, what do you value when you pay for the dream home on this side? When you pay for your dream home, is is is that the main thing you need right now or paying off debt, which was marked a little bit higher than your dream home?

The point being that most of the kids came up and they were like, well, I I got my money, but I mean, I still need I had on one sheet the baddest chick in the world.

I mean, you need a girl, you know, I'm saying I was like, yeah, sure. OK, but what's important? Where is your value system? Where does it lie?

Why? If God is in control of every season of your life. Then what you are handed.

[15:31] Is owing only to him and what you are given is meant to be given back to him. Everything, whether it's one hundred thousand dollars or whatever analogy that could fit with.

So the earlier chapter signifies this fleeting meaninglessness, chapter one of life. But then God comes in and he brings meaning to what is crooked.

One student came up to me that day and said, I you don't know what I've been through. I've been from home to home every day and I feel like nobody ever wants me.

I was like, all right, we're going to go through Joshua and we're going to talk about the God that wants you. The lot you are handed in life. The preacher here weighs the course of life in the sovereign hand of God.

He weighs it, I would argue, in three ways. The before, the during and the after. Before who can make straight what he has made crooked.

[16:35] You see what he did there? Verse 14, in the day of prosperity be joyful. And in the day of the adversary consider God has made the one as well as the other.

The author, the preacher says, look back at what God has done. If you're trying to figure out what is, look back at who is and has always been.

Or the during. Leading us to this during. While you consider the one who has made everything, you can come to an understanding of what's happening around you.

Something of an understanding. Maybe you don't know the full scope of everything, but you get the idea because you know the one that brought you there. This is why Romans 8:20 can say about the creation in Paul's proverbial language for the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope.

Or even the same chapter verse down in verse 28, he can come back after considering this creator who's subjective, objects the world in hope can speak of the current situation and say, and we know that for those who love God, some things work together.

[17:53] The things that you put your might into work together. No, he comes back and he says, all things work together for good for those who are called according to the purpose of God.

The fulfillment of pleasure and joy in life encompasses before. It encompasses the during and it looks forward. To the after the idea of lingering on and agonizing over that which you cannot change decisions made even even sin.

We have a great and mighty savior. Us lingering on these things doesn't change God's ultimate plan.

Verse 15, you'll notice that while Kohelet is encouraging listeners to consider God's work and sovereignty, you see his own struggle with with the sovereignty of God. I like that because at least he's being real.

Right. I mean, he's got a sovereign. You know what I mean? I mean, yes, he is. But come on, man. Like, you know, he's he's at least giving the readers a hint. He said, no, I've done this. I'm there with you.

[19:09] I'm in the trenches with you. He once again returns to that all familiar refrain of Havel in vain. Take a look.

Verse 15, in my vain life, I've seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in evil doing. In other words, he says, in my passing vapor of life, I've seen it.

I've witnessed this. I've seen all sorts of things that God is still in control. But to those who seek to be wise. While many people take many routes dealing with life's pressures.

The preacher here warns of self-righteousness and pragmatism and pridefulness and even the presumptuousness of a person. Whose whose whose pleasures are derived from their own fixations.

Verse 16 through 18 warns against the extremes of righteousness and the toying with sin. We are pointed to the spiritual life. But what he doesn't do is what stoics of the time would have called the golden mean.

[20:18] Which provided a middle ground between virtue and vice or throughout passions or they threw out the passions of ultimate pleasure.

And they said, you know, just there's you know, there's something in the middle. You can never get to it or you'll never fail. But you'll never really know. The right the righteousness spoken of in this passage is a righteousness of religiosity.

The preacher is trying to stir the listeners away from worldly hedonism. Worldly practice of finding pleasure. Legalism is trusting in a system more than trusting God.

Or even he's stirring them away from the presuming of sin. That you can just sin and just not go to the one that has something to say about it.

And wisdom he calls for today is is not a strategy for success. Lest you be deceived, as he says, and destroy yourself. Or not a wisdom that thinks lightly of sin, but fears God.

[21:29] Since the sole issue is is not a moderation of righteousness, but a motivation behind the pursuit. The issue is your motive behind your pursuit in righteousness.

What's your motive? In this season of life. Today, people are satisfied with merely looking wise, looking righteous.

Mostly because they fear man and not God. They desire a life that is fulfilled and satisfied outside of the confines of God. So, no, they will not consider God.

And they will not consider what he's done before and what he's doing right now and what he's going to do. In the life of the believers. Within any season of life. It is within the fear of God as to how the wise enjoy life.

I mean, I always ask my students this, but I mean, who's going to school today talking about I enjoy God? Who's who's going into work saying, you know, or at least putting up a status.

[22 : 41] I enjoy God. For the most part, his point, does your life leave no room to whom you enjoy? Can we clearly identify you and enjoyment of the God that you say you serve?

Look at the after in verse 18 as we move on here. Verse 18. It is good that you should take hold of this and from that withhold not your hand.

For the one who fears God should come out from both of them. If you fear God, sounds simple, but it's true. You don't have to worry about the extremes of sin or the extremes of righteousness or self-righteousness, but you can enjoy God.

Lastly, verse 19 through 24. I just call it the strength of pleasure. The strength of pleasure. Finally, perhaps we can appreciate the preacher's words in verse 19 through 24 concerning the path of wisdom.

That the way in which success is seen within this path is only only to the strength of the Lord. What a way to shut this down.

[23 : 58] Do you have the strength of the Lord? Do you rely on the strength of the Lord? Do you know what the strength of the Lord is? Verse 20 lets us know that the problem with every living person, first of all, is sin.

See that there? Verse 20. Or check out how verse 21 and 22 lets us know even our own propensity towards sin, even if we're not watching our own hearts. Nothing can be done outside of the power of God.

You cannot make one step of faith without the strength of the Lord. Whatever joy, whatever success, whatever pleasure you gain or have or understand is only owing to God and the work of his hands.

You notice the number of times he's mentioned the word heart in the text. Almost as if it's amongst everything. We are to be told like Christ told the people in the sermon in Matthew 6:21, for where your treasure is, there your heart is also.

It would seem that the root of our pursuit of pleasure in this life is a heart issue.

[25 : 16] It's the heart that blinds us from seeing the ultimate treasure, from knowing this joy that is to be yours or walking in faith. Within our own strength, we only know defeat.

We only know failure. We only know displeasure. This is the reason why we have to continue daily to run to the mercy seat of God.

Because as mentioned in verse 20, surely I don't know anyone that is truly righteous. I don't know anyone who does good.

I don't know anyone who never sins. If wisdom and righteousness go together, as D.A. Carson would say, then no one is truly wise because no one is truly righteous.

If wisdom and righteousness go together, then no one is truly wise because no one is truly righteous. If verse 23, as it exclaims, I have tried to be wise in my own strength, but wisdom is far from me.

[26 : 17] I tried it. I tried to do it, but it escapes me. We are to once again consider what is truly fulfilling to find out where true wisdom lies.

Now, even though wisdom is afar off from Kohelet, it was still something that he pursued. So I just wanted to squash that one right there.

Yes, it's not easily obtained. And no, you'll never get a corner on the market of wisdom of God. But are you pursuing it? And do you fear God? To understand being that the understanding is being that whatever is gain can only be gained by the strength of the Lord.

It's interesting considering even the words of Paul in Philippians 4, 11 through 13, not that I'm speaking of being in need, for I have learned that in whatever situation I am content.

I know how to be brought low and I know how to be, how to abound and in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.

[27 : 25] I can do all things through him who, finish it, strengthens me. For even Paul's personal standpoint of life, those who are pursuing wisdom is found in him who works all things for his own purpose.

I ran across, you probably heard this Persian analogy of wisdom, kind of a tongue twister, which is the reason why I liked it so much.

He says it like this. He who knows not and knows not that he knows not is a fool. Shun him. He who knows not and knows that he knows not is a child.

Teach him. He who knows and knows not that he knows is asleep. Wake him. He who knows and knows that he knows is wise.

Follow him. I believe the preacher in the text might be adding another line to that axiom. A preacher might be saying he who knows that he knows that he knows not.

[28 : 35] That's the one that seeks the strength of the Lord. Or as J.I. Packer would say it. Weakness is the way to the life of Christ. It is to this point that Paul again mentions to Titus what it means to live in wisdom.

Even as a young leader, he says, speak of no evil of no one to avoid quarrel, to be gentle, quarreling, to be gentle, to show perfect courtesy toward all people.

And what's the reason he tells them to do this? Because in verse three of Titus, he says, because we ourselves were once foolish. We ourselves were slaves. We were we were slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days and malice and envy.

Hated by others and hating one another. And then he says at the end, verse four and five. But when the goodness and the loving kindness of the Lord appeared, he saved us.

Not because of the works done by us in righteousness, but because but according to his own mercy, by the washing and regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. What we have this morning, ladies and gentlemen, what we have this morning is a savior, sustainer throughout any of life's surprises.

[29 : 48] Despite whatever season of your life. Who is saving his children, sanctifying them by the grace that comes through the strength of wisdom to know how we are to worship him.

And he's seeking those who will worship him in spirit and in truth. And so I leave you as Kohelet, as the preacher leaves you in verse 24.

And perhaps when you are considering even your life this week. That by faith. And with the strength of God.

The pleasure of godly wisdom. Can be yours. That verse 24, which has been a far off and deep, very deep.

Who can find it out? Let's pray.