Men's Conference | Session 3

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Preacher: Jim Hamilton

[0:00] I would invite you to open with me to Ecclesiastes chapter 7 and we're going to look at Ecclesiastes chapter 7 verses 1 through 14 in this final session that we have together.

He flew. He could tell you the kind of plane he flew and he could tell you all the technicalities of the situation I'm about to describe. But it was a turning point in his life. And he was deployed.
He was overseas and he was in a mountainous region. And there was a threat that required all the aircraft at this particular base where he was located to get off the ground and into the air.
Because there were projectiles incoming and so forth. And he describes how because of the immediacy of the situation and because there were so many planes taking off, he was not as up to speed on the route as he normally would have been.
And so almost immediately after takeoff, he realized that they were heading straight into a mountain. And he narrowly averted.
[1:33] You know, it's one of those situations where with all his might, he is yanking on the stick to keep this plane from disintegrating as it is propelled into the side of the mountain.

And he talked about how prior to that, he was kind of on the fence. He had grown up in the church. He knew what was right.
But the appeal of being with his buddies and pursuing worldly pleasure and kind of being the big man Navy pilot, all of that was very, very powerful.
And after that near-death experience, words that his father had spoken came back to him. On a trip home to see his family, his dad had said to him, you're going to have to figure out what kind of man you want to be and then be that man all the time.
And the passage that's before us here in Ecclesiastes chapter 7 confronts us with death. And it's as though Solomon is saying to us, you need to think about what kind of man you want to be before your day comes to die.
[2:55] In this section of the book, you know, I sort of walked us through chapters 1 through 3 in the previous session.

I think the next broad section of the book starts in 316 and runs through 612. And I would just draw your attention to the way that 322 ends with the words, who can bring him to see what will be after him?
And then 612 ends with the words, who can tell man what will be after him under the sun? I think there's sort of twofold message here.
Who can get people to think about the judgment that they face after their lives? And then also, who can get people to think about how they're going to be remembered under the sun on earth after they die?
So these are the kinds of thoughts that Solomon is exploring. And I think that this is an occasion for us to contemplate the difference between what David Brooks calls resume virtues versus funeral virtues.
[4:13] You know, resume virtues, it's all the stuff you achieve, all the stuff that you want to put down as something that you've accomplished. And usually, you're presenting a resume to somebody that you want to either offer you a job, or in my case, I typically now send my resume to my employer every year, and I want them to see all the great things I've done, so that maybe they'll be happy to keep me around, and maybe give me a raise even, this kind of thing.

Or maybe I'll send it to a publisher. And I want that publisher to be impressed with all the stuff that I've accomplished, so that they'll want to publish the book that I'm proposing, something like that.
So there are resume virtues, and I think that to a large degree, the book of Ecclesiastes is communicating, all of that is breath and a striving after wind.

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And then there are funeral virtues. And you can imagine a situation where somebody might have a lot of resume virtue, and they got no funeral virtue. Who is going to stand at their funeral and speak to their character?
Who is going to weep when they're gone? These kinds of funeral virtues, these are things that arise out of relationships. These are things that arise out of the way that we sacrifice for one another, the way that we're devoted to one another, the way that we are committed to one another when times are good, when times are bad, when people are in need, and it produces things that don't really show up on a resume.
So I think this is what Solomon has in mind as he starts into chapter 7. And it's almost like ending in 6.12, who can tell man what will be after him under the sun?
[5:55] Now he's going to reflect on the moment of death. So when he says in 7.1, Ecclesiastes 7.1, a good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of birth, I think he's thinking about a funeral situation.

And the precious ointment that he's talking about is probably the kind of ointment that they would put on a body in the ancient world to mask the smell of decay before they put it in the ground.
And what he's communicating is, it's better for you to have a good reputation when your day comes. It's better for you to have a good name than for you to have the kind of wealth or success or attainment that would make it so that they can cover up the stench of your decaying corpse with precious ointment.
A good name is better than precious ointment. While we're reflecting on this, I want to share with you a text message that my wife shared with me.
My in-laws, my wife's parents, they are not believers. And I would ask you to pray for Wayne and Brenda. Brenda is dying of cancer, and their whole lives they have rejected the gospel.
[7:17] We've repeatedly tried to share the gospel with them. They have repeatedly rebuffed us. And my father-in-law's brother has just died, and my wife wanted to go visit and comfort him in this time of grief.

And her father texted her back, and this is what he said. My brother passing is not a time of grief. We weren't close at all. I was telling your mother that I cannot remember a single time of joy passing between Tom and me.
That kind of statement comes out of a certain way of living. And we don't want to live that way. We don't want to live in such a way that we think about our relationship with our brother, and he dies, and we don't feel grief.
That is no way to live. A good name, Ecclesiastes 7.1, is better than precious ointment. I'm sure there's responsibility on both sides, for both Tom and Wayne.
But we want to look at something like that, and we want to recognize, I need to be the kind of person that people are going to grieve over when I die, and I need to be the kind of person that seeks to bring about reconciliation, to make peace, to build strong relationships, to love people.
[8:39] A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of birth. Why would Solomon say, the day of death is better than the day of birth?

There are scholars that you can read, famous scholars, who write commentaries in prestigious series. Like, you can go look at the International Critical Commentary on Ecclesiastes, and the author of that commentary will basically say, these are the words of a cynical skeptic who has given up on life.
Something to that effect. I don't think that's the deal at all. I think that Solomon is operating out of a biblical worldview, and I think he's recognizing the day of death is better than the day of birth because it takes you that much closer to the resurrection.
I think this is coming out of the perspective that says, you fear the Lord, you die, your spirit goes up to God, you face the judgment, and then comes the reward, or the consequence.
But if you're fearing the Lord, if you're walking with God, if you're repenting of your sin, the day of death, it's like what Paul says. For me, to live is Christ, to die is gain.
[9:51] And then he says, I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far. I think that's the perspective out of which Solomon says, the day of death is better than the day of birth.

And here again, what we're seeing is a perspective that's arising out of the broader biblical storyline, and that's informed by biblical theology, and that is shaping this man's identity.

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This is not a man who's living for the here and now. This is not a man who's saying, when I die, everything is over. And when I die, I've lost everything that matters to me. This is a man who's saying, you want a good reputation.
That's better than having a lot of wealth, a lot of money, and the kind of precious ointment that can mask the decay of your stinking corpse. And the day of death brings you closer to the Lord.
And then it's like he speaks to the living in verse 2. It's almost like he talks to us. I was talking to my 18-year-old son, and we were talking about the temptations that he's facing as a freshman in college, living away from home.
[10:59] And he's telling me about what his teammates are doing on the weekends. And he's talking to me about how, you know, you walk into one of these rooms, and the music is pounding, and everybody is ecstatic and euphoric, and the girls are scantily clad, and the alcohol is flowing freely.

And it's a situation that's just rife with temptation. And Solomon writes here in verse 2, it is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting.
And the reason, the rationale for this is because when you go to the house of feasting, you walk into one of those atmospheres, and you can feel the pounding of the music in your chest.
And there are all these things to look at that you probably shouldn't be looking at. And there are all these things that are tempting you to do things that you know you, it's really hard to remember.
I want to be pure on my wedding day. It's really hard to remember. I want to have kids someday that respect me. It's really hard to remember. I want to be a good man that people mourn at my passing, at my funeral.
[12:16] It's hard to remember all that in the house of feasting. So it's better to go to the house of mourning and consider, what kind of life do I want to live? What kind of legacy do I want to leave?

I think that it will matter more, on the day of the funeral, it will matter more that we have been faithful than that worldly people looked at us and thought we were successful.
Faithfulness will matter more than worldly success on the last day. 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.
I suspect that the pastors here at First Baptist Mustang feel like I do, I would rather preach a funeral than a wedding. I'd rather preach a funeral because it's such a great opportunity for the living to lay it to heart, for the living to recognize things like, death is awful, death is horrible, and death is in the world, death is in the world because of sin.
And if you hate death, you should hate sin. And if you mourn the passing of this person that you've gathered to lament the fact that their life is over, if you mourn that, you should direct your energies at holiness, and you should flee to the only Savior, the Lord Jesus.
[13:53] The living will lay it to heart. This idea of laying it to heart, it's almost like you're taking the experience that you're having of the Bible being proven true.

Through one man, sin entered the world, and death through sin. Every funeral proves the Bible is true. Every death proves the Bible is true.
And the living take that information and they put it on their hearts. And in this context, verse 3, sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of face, the heart is made glad.
The gladness here is a gladness that is on the other side of that recognition, I am going to die, and I need to pursue a righteous course of life by grace through faith.
The sadness of face, you might think of an ugly cry at a funeral. Someone recognizes, death is awful, this person that I love is now gone, I will never have another conversation with this person, and this is horrific that they're now dead.
[15:08] Their corpse lies there, there's no air, there's no breath in the lungs, there's no brain activity, there's no pulse, that thing that was alive moments ago is now dead.

It's awful. By sadness of face, the heart is made glad. There's a beneficial result from the mourning. And as a result, verse 4, the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning. But the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.
Solomon is saying, it is folly to just mirthfully party your life away. There's wisdom in recognizing, I'm going to die, death is real, and I need to recalibrate my expectations and order my life such that a good name will be mine on the day of death.

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verse 5, it is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools. Again, you can imagine these scenes where the party is happening and everybody's singing along to the music and everyone is being distracted from what's real, from what's lasting, from what matters. [16:41] And they're just being, they're just experiencing the sensory overload of pleasure. And Solomon is affirming, as many statements in the Bible do, that it's better to be rebuked than to be distracted by all of that pleasure.

In verse 6, I think he's talking about the coming judgment. Verse 6, for as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fools. These thorns apparently are like kindling being used to light the fire, to ignite the flames that are going to bring about the conflagration of judgment.
And Solomon is saying, when you hear the laughter of fools, you should hear the flames crackling among the thorns. That's what the laughter of fools communicates.
This also is breath or vapor. vapor. The parties, the house of mirth, the house of feasting, that is all a vapor.
It's brief. And you should not give yourself over to it. Now, I think he's going to change direction. I think that statement, this also is vapor, is like a punctuation mark. This also is vanity at the end of verse 6.
[17:58] I think that's like the close of this first unit which is reflecting on death. we talked about how the previous section, 3.16 through 6.12 is bracketed by that statement 3.22, who can bring him to see what will be after him?

And then 6.12, who can tell man what will be after him under the sun? I would also note that that whole unit, 3.16 through 6.12, is concerned with injustice and oppression.
And I want to take you through these statements because of their relevance for what we're about to see in chapter 7, verse 7. So look at 3.16. Solomon writes, Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness.
And in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness. So in the ancient world, in Old Covenant Israel, the place of justice would be the king's throne.
You remember how once Solomon is enthroned, people start bringing their cases to him. And Solomon is saying, in the place where justice is supposed to be established, there's wickedness.
[19:13] I think in part he's recognizing wickedness in himself and in all of the appointed officials who are to oversee the establishment of righteousness in the land. He's recognizing people are corrupt.

And this is just a reality. Depraved people do depraved things. Corruption, if you've got a human being, you've got a place where corruption is possible.
Some people look at this and they say, well, this is proof that Solomon didn't write the book because if Solomon wrote the book, why is he critiquing the fact that there's injustice and wickedness in the world?
As the king, isn't he in perfect position to address this injustice? And I want to say to those people, just how shallow are you? I mean, come on.
I understand that academics who write commentaries, they've never really led anything in most cases, so they haven't really had to deal with people, but they did have to go to faculty meetings, right? And they no doubt saw corruption and injustice and wickedness in those faculty meetings.
[20:18] This is ridiculous. Solomon can't change the human heart. Solomon can't make it so that every official that he appoints is going to be somebody that resists all corruption in every form.

He doesn't have that power. To have that power would be to be able to bring about the new Eden. In other words, there's only one person that has that power and his name is Jesus.
So look at how he responds to this in verse 17. So he says, you know, where there's supposed to be righteousness, there's wickedness. Verse 17, I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked.
That's his response to it. Corruption is everywhere. God's going to judge. And that's the way that he's trying to get people to recognize it doesn't pay to be corrupt because I'm going to face judgment.
It doesn't pay to be wicked, to take a bribe or to show partiality. God's going to judge me. Look at 4.1. Again, I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun.
[21:21] And behold, the tears of the oppressed and they had no one to comfort them. And on the side of their oppressors there was power and there was no one to comfort the oppressed.

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Oppression and injustice go hand in hand.

People are exploiting others. They're taking advantage of others for their own benefit. And what Solomon is saying is those people are going to be judged. Look at chapter 5, verse 8.
If you see in the province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and righteousness, do not be amazed at the matter. It's kind of like he's saying, what do you expect from human beings?
For the high official is watched by a higher and there are yet higher ones over them. And then, and then essentially in verse 9, I think he's saying what we need is a king who's going to work and keep the garden.
So verse 9, this is gain for a land in every way, a king committed to cultivated fields. We need a king who's going to work and keep the garden but we also need to recognize and not be amazed by the presence of oppression and the violation of justice and righteousness.
[22:33] Now all that material in chapters 3 through 6, it's all, Solomon is opposing oppression and injustice by insisting you're going to die and face God.

And he returns to this topic in verse 7 of chapter 7 in the context of considering death. So chapter 7, verse 7, surely oppression drives the wise into madness.
It drives you crazy to see weak people exploited. And I would challenge the men in this room, I would challenge all of us to recognize that women in the sex industry are being exploited. Pornography is a massive temptation and what we need to recognize is that these women are not getting their jollies by being used by the porn industry. These women are being trafficked, they're enslaved, they're being oppressed and abused and taken advantage of.
This is not the way they want to be treated. And we need to hate that oppression. We do not need to indulge our fleshly lusts on the abuse of these women.
[23:56] Surely oppression drives the wise into madness. You should think that's somebody's daughter, that's somebody's sister, that's somebody's granddaughter, that woman is loved by somebody.

And you should think, I want what's good for that woman. I want her to have a great marriage. I want her to be able to have children. I want her to be able to nurture children.
I want her to be an honored mother of many and become a grandmother someday. We should not just indulge our fleshly lusts on the oppression.
It should drive us nuts that people are being treated this way. It should drive us into madness that these women are being used in this way. Surely oppression drives the wise into madness and a bribe corrupts the heart.
Why is it, do you think, that these women are being used this way? Why is it, do you think, that government officials don't make porn illegal?
[25:01] Why is it that they allow these things to happen? Probably because they're getting money. Probably because their pocket is being lined by the money that's being made.

A bribe corrupts the heart. The money that people make keeps them from doing what's righteous. And this takes us back to chapter 7, verse 1.
A good name is better than precious ointment and the day of death than the day of... Can you imagine on the day of your death it being known this person was a pornographer? This person indulged his fleshly lusts at the expense of countless...
This person ruined the lives of many women and many children. Nobody wants that reputation. We want the reputation that we defended the weak, that we stood up for the needy, that we were manly, and that we protected women, not took advantage of them.
So I think verse 7 kind of stands between verses 1-6. 1-6, it's like this reflection on how it's better to go to a funeral than to a feast.
[26:22] And then verse 7, it's almost like he reaches back into the previous section and draws in oppression and injustice and bribery and all those things again, as if to say, once again, you don't want to be somebody that participates in injustice and oppression because you're going to die.

And then in verses 8-14, he's going to return to reflecting on how the end is better than the beginning. So verse 8, better is the end of a thing than its beginning.
Now the language that he uses here is really interesting because the word for beginning is the same word that we find at the very beginning of the whole Bible. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

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And this is one of the places, there are several of these, where beginning and end are used right next to each other. Another place like this is Isaiah 46, 10, where the Lord says that he is the one who declares the end from the beginning.
And the use of these two terms together, beginning and end, in places like this and Isaiah 46, 10, and there are other places, it prompts some people to write of Genesis 1-1, beginning implies end.
[27:41] And I think that's right. In other words, I think that the way that Moses' words, the creation account, anticipates the new creation. It anticipates where creation is going.

And I think Solomon is plugging in to that way of thinking here in Ecclesiastes 7-8. And he says, better is the end of a thing than its beginning.
This is true of all creation. At the end of all things, God will have something even better than the very good creation that he started with. because at the end of all things, the creation will have seen the redemption accomplished by Christ.
It will have seen people who rebelled against God, but who were chosen by him, delivered by him, and they have now been resurrected and glorified by him, and they will never again rebel against him.
So the end of the thing is going to be better than the beginning of the thing. And by faith, by faith, Solomon is ready to say, the end of life is better than the beginning of life.
[28:50] It's really a lot like what he said in verse 1, a good name is better than precious ointment and the day of death than the day of birth. He's reaffirming that now saying, better is the end of the thing than its beginning.

Again, because to live is Christ, to die is gain. The end of the thing brings you that much closer to the Lord, that much closer to the resurrection, that much further into the new creation.
Better is the end of a thing than its beginning. We all need to pray that the Lord would make this true of us. We do not want to be people. You know, as I get old, I do not want to be somebody that is constantly lamenting my lost youth.
I do not want to be somebody that is trying to make myself look younger than I actually am. I want to be embracing what the Lord brings me. And this is so counterintuitive for us because particularly as men, we want to project strength, we want to project capacity, and it's natural to us.
The other night I had dinner with a guy, a long time friend, and we were about the same age, and I went home and I told my wife, he looks like a skinny old man. And I said to her, I don't want to look like a skinny old man.
[30:12] And you know, he's kind of stooped over and he's like wasted away. I don't know if he's been sick recently or what, but I'm thinking to myself, I want to eat right, I want to exercise, I want to maintain vigor and health and strength for as long as I can.

But at the same time, I need to recognize I'm not getting any younger. And I am going to be a skinny, well, I mean, I hope, better to maybe be a skinny old man than be a fat old man, but whatever.
I'm going to be an old man. And we don't want to be people that are essentially saying, true life is only to be had in your youth.
We want to be people who are wise and who talk like this, better is the end of a thing than its beginning. And the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.
I think this is, this line is going in the same direction. Patience teaches you to recognize as I get older, my appetites change, my desires change, my capacities change, and there are ways in which that's better than the way it used to be.
[31:25] Better is the end of a thing than its beginning and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. He wants to be the constant peacock. You know, the feathers are out, he's always showing off, and it's all pride, and it's all breath, vapor.

And we might say in that context, vanity. Verse 9, be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools.
Now, I think that in this verse, the anger that's in view is an anger in response to death. There's a guy in our church who played football at Indiana State University, and one of his teammates plays for the Indianapolis Colts.
And the guy in our church, he's become a kind of, he's a barber, and because he's got a teammate on the Colts, he winds up cutting the hair of a bunch of guys on the Colts. So he drives, about once a week, he drives from Louisville up to Indianapolis, and he gives haircuts to a bunch of guys on the

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Colts.
And one of the guys on the Colts, this guy, he's an evangelist. I mean, he's always talking about Jesus, and he's always talking to these guys about what's lasting in life, and, you know, the gospel, those guys need the gospel.
[32:48] Recently, a couple of years ago, I heard a stat about guys that play in the NFL that went something like this. I think these are the details. Five years out of the league, 80% of guys that played in the NFL are either divorced or bankrupt or addicted to drugs or all three.

Five years out of the league, bankrupt. You know, they don't know how to deal with money. They don't know how to have relationships, and they wreck their lives. And this guy, my friend, Nehemiah, he's sharing the gospel with one of these guys that plays for the Colts, and the guy begins to relate how he and his wife, they had a baby born dead, and he's angry at God.
And he is rejecting the gospel because of the death of that child in the womb of his wife. And I think that's precisely the kind of thing that Solomon has in mind when he says here in Ecclesiastes 7, verse 9, be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools.
it's obviously not something to rejoice in, but we cannot look at circumstances like this and get angry at God. We cannot look at tragedies, at sorrows, and blame God for these things.
And then verse 10, I think he returns to this idea that he communicated in verse 8, better is the end of a thing than its beginning. Verse 10, say not, why were the former days better than these?
[34:26] It was better when I was young. It was better when my kids were young. It was better when I was newlywed. It was better that summer of my 18-year-old baseball career. Say not, why were the former days better than these?

For it is not from wisdom that you ask this. Wisdom says, the Lord has appointed whatever I face today for my good.
Wisdom says, the trial that I'm going through is God wisely doing what's necessary to conform me to Christ. Wisdom says, if the Lord takes something away from me, I can trust him.
I can trust him. He's good. I don't know what he's accomplishing. I may not understand why he's taking this away, but I trust him. And that kind of wisdom glorifies the Lord.
Recently, in our church, there was a young couple who had a baby born and the poor child only had half of a heart.
[35:35] And he had, he went through all these horrific surgeries as they tried to rebuild the rest of his heart and they tried to keep him alive long enough for him to grow and develop and maybe receive a heart transplant and eventually the poor child died.

And as I was reflecting in the funeral, I was reflecting on what it is that makes children so wonderful. And it's so glorious to see the young child run to the arms of its mother, leap into the arms of its father. And it's glorious to see the child begin to grow and eventually they start talking and then they start playing ball or they start doing things, drawing pictures and then they can form sentences and then they start reading books and then they grow to be, they grow to be young people with all this promise, with all this hope.
And so to have that all cut off before any of it really starts is devastating. And these faithful people, they're living out what Paul says in Romans 5, 1 through 5.
Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him, we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.
[37:10] The glory of God is going to be seen when that child is resurrected from the dead and reunited to his parents. And we don't know what that's going to look like. I don't know, is a child going to be resurrected at the age at which he died?

Or is he going to be rejected, sorry, resurrected, the full grown man that he would have become? I don't know. Is he going to be rejected, resurrected as a child? I keep saying rejected, sorry.
Is he going to be resurrected as a child and then in the resurrection his parents get to watch him grow to full manhood? I don't know what it's going to look like. But it's going to be glorious. It's going to be so glorious, in fact, that Paul says, Romans 8, 18, I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.
He continues in 5, 3, not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character and character produces hope.

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These dear people, they're rejoicing in the Lord like Job in the death of their son. They're not happy about him dying, but they're trusting the Lord and in that, they're glorifying God.
[38:26] This is exactly, I think, what Solomon is talking about when he says in verse 10 of Ecclesiastes 7, say not why were the former days better than these, for it is not from wisdom that you ask this.

Verse 11, I think, I think verse 11 is envisioning a scenario where perhaps something has happened like the death of a beloved father. And, and you can imagine someone saying in response to that, I'd rather have my dad alive than have the inheritance that he left to me.
And, and perhaps even feeling like because I'm so undone over my father's death, I don't even want this inheritance. And Solomon counsels in verse 11, wisdom is good with an inheritance.
An advantage to those who see the son. it's actually a blessing to receive an inheritance. It, it, it's a, it's a perspective that recognizes I cannot be so fixated on the loss of my father that I don't think about what my growing children, what my growing family, and what their children might need going forward in the future.
It's a recognition, again, I don't live for what I used to have. I receive what the Lord gives. I adjust to changing circumstances and I, and I respond to all these things with biblical wisdom.
[39:56] Wisdom is good with an inheritance, an advantage to those who see the son. Four, verse 12, 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 acknowledges if you've got wealth, if you have means, you can, you can provide for your protection, whether that takes the form of, of hiring bodyguards or, or buying guns or hiring a good lawyer, whatever.
There's all kinds of things that you can do with money to protect yourself. And Solomon is saying, the protection of wisdom is like that. Having wisdom enables you to be protected.
the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it. I think that life goes beyond just protecting your life now.
I think wisdom here preserves the life of him who has it into the life to come. And then in verse 13, he returns to that statement back from chapter 1, verse 15.
[41:07] Ecclesiastes 7, verse 13, consider the work of God who can make straight what he has made crooked. Chapter 1, verse 15, what is crooked cannot be made straight.

Who can make straight what God has made crooked? So Solomon is reflecting on the way that we learn wisdom at funerals.
And he's, and he's reflecting on how to respond with wisdom to the funeral, to the deaths of people that we love. And he concludes in verse 14, in the day of prosperity, be joyful.
It's kind of like he's saying, when your child is alive, rejoice. When your father is alive, rejoice. When your wife is alive, be joyful.
Enjoy it. God gives you good gifts, relish them. And in the day of adversity, consider. If the child dies, if your beloved wife dies, if your father dies, if your mother dies, in the day of adversity, your best friend dies, consider, God has made the one as well as the other.
[42:22] It's like Job. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. We go forward trusting the Lord, receiving what he gives, believing that he's going to use this for our good, he's conforming us to the image of Christ, not saying, I want it to be like it used to be.

God has made the one as well as the other. And then verse 14 concludes with the words, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him. I think what he's saying is, you have to trust the Lord.
You have to trust the Lord regarding what's coming at the judgment, regarding the legacy that you're going to leave on earth. You have to trust the Lord. You can't find out anything that will be after you.
We can't somehow look into the future to see how we're going to be remembered. We have to trust the Lord. That statement, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him, I think this is kind of the theme statement of this unit of the book, which is chapter 7 and 8.
so he's going to repeat this. Look down at chapter 7 verse 24. That which has been is far off and deep, very deep.
[43:40] Who can find it out? Now notice how in 714, he's looking forward. You can't find out anything that will be after you. In 724, he's looking backwards, that which has been.

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Who can find it out? It's kind of like he's saying, you can't know history exhaustively, and you can't know the future exhaustively. You can't find these things out. You're going to have to trust the Lord. And then he's going to repeat this word find or found seven times in 725 through 29. And it's all communicating.
There are limits to what we can find out. And then look at chapter 8 verse 17 where he's going to repeat the idea that you can't find it out three times in 817.
Then I saw all the work of God that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out, even though a wise man claims to know.
[44:46] He cannot find it out. This is Solomon, the man to whom the Lord said in 1 Kings chapter 3, he tells him, verse 11, because you have asked this and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word.

I give you a wise and discerning mind so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. The Lord gave Solomon understanding like the breadth of the seashore and Solomon is saying you can't find out the work of God and that's implicitly saying you're going to have to trust him.
It's really I think a lot like what Paul says over in Romans 11 when he says in verse 34 who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid for from him and through him and to him are all things to him be glory forever.
So we can't find out what's been in the past we can't find out what's going to be after us but we can know this we're going to die we're going to die and we're going to leave a legacy we're going to die and Ecclesiastes 7 1 a good name is better than precious ointment and it's better to go to the house of mourning than it is to go to the house of feasting because we have wisdom to learn at the funeral. So we want to resist all oppression we want to resist all corruption Ecclesiastes 7 verse 7 because those things are not going to lead to joy on the other side they're certainly not going to result in a good name after we die and we want to contemplate the judgment when we hear the laughter of fools verse 6 we want to hear the crackling of thorns and we want to respond to the changing of our bodies the changing of our opportunities recently my friend Paul Aiken who's the provost at Southern Seminary he talked about his father Danny Aiken who was the president of Southeastern Seminary Seminary and he talked about his father Danny Aiken is just retired from being the president of the seminary and he said he asked his dad how are you doing and Dr.
[47:20] Aiken said not very well and Paul said well what's going on and Dr. Aiken said they came yesterday and took my master key away from me he had a key that would open every building and every door on the campus of the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary!

and they took it from him and you know Paul said at one level it's just a key but at another level it's a symbol of power it's a symbol of authority it's a mark of the stature of his office and he resigned and they took it from him and that's something that we want to have hearts of wisdom to respond to with joy praise the Lord that I no longer bear those burdens praise the Lord that it's now someone else's responsibility to lead this institution praise the Lord that Danny Akin completed his course with no public scandal he was faithful to the end praise the Lord that he's now free from all of those burdens all those responsibilities to love his children and grandchildren in his declining years praise the Lord for the new opportunities before him we want to respond to our changing opportunities our changing responsibilities even our changing physical capacities with wisdom and we should pray that the Lord would take this message and seal it to our hearts as he conforms us to Christ and we deal with decline let's pray together father we want to finish well we don't want to end in scandal because we refuse to let go we don't want to end in a situation where it's time for us to leave and we won't leave and people have to hound us out of office perhaps even with accusations of wrongdoing to make it where we finally go away Lord keep us from that folly and Lord we pray that you would help us to recognize that as we age and as our tolerance for risk diminishes perhaps we become overly cautious perhaps we we do not lead out of confident joyful desire to honor you but instead choices are made out of fear driven by pride a desire not to be seen as a failure or as presiding over any kind of decline
Lord we pray that you would give us the wisdom to recognize that it's good for us to relinquish the authorities that we have when the time comes and we pray Lord that you would help us to think about about the funeral day and we pray you would use it to make us faithful and help us to aim to

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hear the words well done good and faithful servant rather than aiming to hear the accolades of people who measure by worldly standards things that are but vanity but breath vapor so Lord we pray that we would be people who love you and who want to be conformed to the image of Christ people for whom life is Christ and death is gain and we pray Lord that you would reconcile us to your sovereign appointment to what what you mean for us to do what you mean for us to accomplish what authority you mean for us to carry
Lord grant that we would be ambitious for your glory ambitious for your kingdom and ambitious to be faithful to be Christ like Lord I pray that you would teach us the wisdom that Solomon communicates in this book of Ecclesiastes and I pray that thereby you would be conforming us to the image of the one who is greater than Solomon Lord we pray that you would make us better husbands better fathers better sons better brothers better friends as a result of our time in your word we pray that you would renew our commitment to the lasting things and deepen our appreciation of the truth of your word and help us to come back to the scriptures again and again and Lord give us courage and strength vitality and and a holy desire to make war on sin to hate the things that would lead us astray that would destroy us make us holy we pray and we ask all these things in Jesus name amen do for we have an let's let's say let's let's come out them fathers'dorie

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