

INTRODUCTION:

1. [Image] If you found out when you were going to die how would it change how you lived today? Some of us might choose to ignore it. To live as if we had no idea and try as hard as we could to never think about out. Others of us might choose nihilism and give up. They might decide that since they will die, nothing matters. Some might choose to embrace hedonism and just do whatever they want since they are going to die tomorrow. Others might live fearlessly. Knowing their death is off in the future could be freeing. Or some may try to escape it. They might do everything in their power to avoid death. We might all handle it differently, but all of us would be affected by it.

2. [Need] Now I can't tell you when you are going to die. But I can tell you that you will. All of us in this room are going to die one day. It could be this afternoon, or it could be in 50 years. But the fact is that it is coming. And I think this should change how we live today.

3. [Subject] Our passage this morning is all about how we should live because our death is coming. The entire book of Ecclesiastes is about death, but today we have lots of practical wisdom on how they should affect us here and now.

4. [Text] Ecclesiastes 7

5. [Preview] Three things we need to know because we are going to die.

Point 1 in your bulletins if you like to take notes. **Because you are going to die, be wise. Because you are going to die, be wise.**

Realizing that we are going to die should cause us to be wise.

It should make us live intentional lives.

To act, talk, and live as if our deaths are around the corner.

These first 13 verses are a series of very practical proverbs.

And all of them are instructions on how we should live wisely.

At first glance, they might seem unconnected,

But I think they are all tied together by the theme of preparing for death.

Let's dive in and look at them.

Verse 1 **"A good name is better than precious ointment,
and the day of death than the day of birth."**

A good name here means a good reputation.
And having a good reputation is better than expensive luxury items.
For them having ointment, or oil was something rich people had.
You might say a good reputation is better than a fancy car.

But the second half knocks us flat on our backs.
The day of death is better than the day of birth.

But the obituary is more important than the birth announcement.
Wisdom understands that the upcoming day of death is more significant
than your birthday.

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."**

He keeps going.
He tells us that it is better to go to funerals than to parties.

Now when I was growing up I never went to a lot of parties.
I actually went to none because I was a weird homeschooled kid.
But I did go to a lot of funerals.

It was not fun to sit my freshmen year at the joint funeral of two
classmates.
They died in a car wreck from driving out on a gravel road.
It was a closed casket.

It was hard.
But good for my soul.
Because death is where all of us will end.
And if we are wise we will sit in the pews during a funeral and think.
We can sit there and let the reality of death sit in our hearts.

Verse 3 **"Sorrow is better than laughter,
for by sadness of face the heart is made glad."**

He goes on to say that tears are better than laughter.
The wise understand the necessity of crying.
They understand the significance of suffering and pain.

What does he mean by "sadness making our hearts glad?"
Do any of you use humor as a defense mechanism?
I can tend to do this.
If someone says something that is harmful I will probably make a joke.
Because I would rather laugh than have to sit and face the sorrow.
But the wise understand that sorrow that acknowledges reality is better
than laughter which tries to avoid it.

Verse 4 **"The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning,
but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth."**

This verse continues the same thought.
He describes the location of where our hearts should be.
It is not that we should always be in these places.
But it is that our hearts should be formed by them.
The wise person lives as if they are going to die.
The wise person lives as if everyone is going to die.
While the fool just wants to laugh and party

Verse 5 **"It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise
than to hear the song of fools."**

When they ask for feedback they just want praise.
Even if they need to be rebuked because it would help them.
Like a boss who just wants yes men below him.
This is a fool who wants pleasure and joy no matter the cost.
But the wise would rather be rebuked,
Even by something like death.
Because it will help them become wise.

Verse 6 uses a metaphor of what this foolishness is like.

Verse 6 **"For as the crackling of thorns under a pot,
so is the laughter of the fools;
this also is vanity."**

If you got a bunch of thorns or grass or weeds and started a fire.
Then over that fire you put your pot because you were going camping and
going to make some dinner.
The storms are going to make a bunch of cracking noise.
Going to sound like a fire,
It might even somewhat look like a fire,
But it probably isn't going to help you cook your dinner.

Fools can make a lot of noise with laughter, false Joy, and Carpe Diem,
YOLO pleasure-seeking living.
But it is vanity.

Because all of us are going to die we need to be wise.

A good way to be wise is to sit and contemplate death.
Because every single one of us will die.

He transitions here in verse 7.

He wants to get even more practical about how we can live wisely.
Okay, I guess I need to be wise and understand that I'm going to die.

I should sit and meditate on that fact but now what?

He wants you to see that being a wise person doesn't automatically mean that you will live wisely.

There are things that can take us off track.

Verse 7 **"Surely oppression drives the wise into madness, and a bribe corrupts the heart."**

Oppression and bribery are shown as two things that can ruin the wise. Oppression here probably means the wise are being extorted or blackmailed.

Being powerlessly crushed.

Or on the other side being bribed.

Their wisdom does not free them from making bad decisions

Verse 8 **"Better is the end of a thing than its beginning, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit."**

The most important part of a race is the end.

The most important part of a football game is
who has more points when time runs out.

The most important part of your life is not how you started
but where you end.

Are plenty of examples of books or television shows that start out great.
But they have a terrible ending
and it ruins all of it.

And this is why we need patience instead of pride.

If the beginning of your life was really great,

You should have some humility because it's not over yet.

The beginning of your life, or if your life currently is not that great,

You should be patient because it's not over yet.

Verse 9 **"Be not quick in your spirit to become angry,
for anger lodges in the heart of fools."**

Fools are those who let anger lodge in their hearts and carry it around with them always.

If there is anger in your heart

 You will always find something to be angry about.

You have access to more information than our ancestors could ever dream.

And if you're an angry person,

you have access to trillions upon trillions of things that can make you angry.

Or you can be wise and be slow to anger.

Because everyone is going to die.

And death will review that much of what makes you angry wasn't worth your time or your heart.

This next verse might be my favorite in the chapter,

And for some of you, this might be your least favorite verse.

Verse 10 **"Say not, "Why were the former days better than these?"
For it is not from wisdom that you ask this."**

If you believe that today things are worse than they've ever been.

Or that today our culture is more sinful or lost than ever before.

This verse says stop it.

That is not wisdom.

That is foolishness nostalgia.

Some of us might need to memorize this verse.

This might need to become your new life verse for a season.

At least until you get some of these phrases out of your vocabulary.

And here's your warning, or public service announcement.

If you say something to me like,

“the former days are so much better than today,”

I might pull up my Bible and read this verse to you.

Because this is a major way that Christians live unwisely

I was almost tempted to preach the entire sermon on this verse

but I'm not going to.

I do think some of us might need to meditate on this verse a little longer.

Verse 11 **“Wisdom is good with an inheritance,
an advantage to those who see the sun.”**

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.”**

These verses don't just mean that the wise are good with their money.

This means that even when the wise get a big inheritance

They handle their money as if they're going to die.

Their wisdom is what protects them not their wealth.

As we talked about last week, wealth just disappears.

[Transition] But there is a problem. We can be as wise as a human being could possibly be, but we are still going to die.

Point number 2 **Because you are going to die, you need more than wisdom. Because you are going to die, you need more than wisdom.**

Wisdom is not enough.

Wisdom alone does not solve the problems of our world.

And it cannot solve our greatest problem,
Which is the fact that all of us will die.

Verse 13 **"Consider the work of God:
who can make straight what he has made crooked?"**

To be human is to die.
We will never escape death no matter how wise we are.

Verse 14 **"In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity
consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may
not find out anything that will be after him."**

And you never know what today is going to be.
You don't know what tomorrow will bring.

In our house every morning my boys love to do the calendar.
We tell them what day it is.
What the weather is like.
What are activities are going to be and how they're feeling so far.

Now no matter what magnet, with its pretty art, I put on the calendar it will
not change whether the day will be a day of joy or a day of adversity.

When we have good days we should be grateful and enjoy it
when we have bad days we have to acknowledge God made this one too
and we can't fix it.
All of our wisdom cannot change what God decrees or allows.

Verse 15 **"In my vain life I have seen everything. There is a righteous
man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who
prolongs his life in his evildoing."**

What greater argument is there for the limitation of our wisdom?

There are people who are really wise and really righteous and yet they die. A 28-year-old pastor has dedicated his life to caring for the poor, yet has a brain aneurysm and drops dead.

While an evil selfish murderer lives to be 98, comfortable with no one ever finding out the truth.

Is the oldest problem in the world. The problem of evil.

But the reality is because you're going to die you need more than wisdom.

So Solomon actually argues something that seems strange at first.

Verse 16-17 **"Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself? Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time?"**

What does that mean?

On the surface, it seems like he is saying that we should not be righteous. That we should avoid wisdom.

But look again at what he actually says.

"be not OVERLY righteous."

"too wise."

It is not that we avoid righteousness, but that we shouldn't overly seek it. Again what does that mean?

Well, let me give you an example from church history.

Many of you know I love church history and the church fathers.

Right now I am reading some of the desert fathers.

These are men and women who are the forerunners to monks and nuns.

They read passages like when Jesus tells the rich young ruler to sell everything and follow him,

Then they sold everything and moved out to the desert so that they could focus on prayer and Jesus.

And when you read some of them you get a lot of wisdom and see their righteousness.

But others I just wonder.

Some seem to be seeking to be overly righteous.

They fast all day.

They decide to not sleep.

They stay in their room alone as much as possible to remove temptation.

Their question for righteousness actually can hinder them from getting it.

That is what I think Solomon has in mind here.

Becoming overly obsessed with appearing righteous can lead us to missing out on the good that God has given us.

But we also need to be careful that we are not overly wicked and sinful.

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 shall come out from both of them."**

He wants us to understand that trying to be righteous on your own

it's only going to get you so far.

And I'm trying to do whatever you want,

Sinning as much as you want that won't get you very far either.

We need to grasp the truth in our hands.

And ultimately we have to fear God.

We have to accept the limitations of our wisdom.

We have to make sure that as we stumble through life

bouncing between righteousness and sin

That we are always living out of fear, respect, and love for our God.

Verse 19 **"Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city."**

And we need more than wisdom but wisdom is still good.

Wisdom can give us strength.

He doesn't want us to think that he has changed his mind that wisdom is worthless.

It is still good and it's still useful.

Verse 20 **"Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins."**

He bursts our bubble here in verse 20.

He wants us to understand and recognize that wisdom can't get us to perfect righteousness.

Doing our best can't get us to sinlessness.

Wisdom isn't enough.

Verse 21-22 **"Do not take to heart all the things that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. Your heart knows that many times you yourself have cursed others."**

He drops another practical nugget here in verse 21.

But I think this is not just to tell us that how we should react we hear people saying negative things about us.

But it's a reminder how there's things that we know and yet we forget in the reality of life.

We know that sometimes we speak negatively about others.

Maybe we just need to vent or want to complain.

But it might not be that serious

So we wouldn't want them to hear what we're saying because it doesn't fully reflect what we mean.

Yet when we hear people speak about us the way that we speak about others it can crush us.

Cuz even though we're wise even though we know better it doesn't completely change our hearts.

Verse 23-25 ***"All this I have tested by wisdom. I said, "I will be wise," but it was far from me. That which has been is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out? I turned my heart to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the scheme of things, and to know the wickedness of folly and the foolishness that is madness."***

And wisdom isn't enough because we can't get enough wisdom.

This is part of why I believe that Solomon wrote this.

He was the wisest man who ever lived.

Not just because you read a lot of books but because God himself gave him wisdom.

And yet no matter how much he tried to seek it still felt far off from him.

It was always just out of his reach.

Wisdom is good and wisdom is necessary but wisdom is not enough.

Wisdom alone cannot save you from death.

Wisdom cannot deal with our deepest need for salvation

[transition] Because wisdom is not enough we need something else. If you have been looking ahead I hope you can guess.

Point number 3. **Because you are going to die, you need Jesus. Because you are going to die, you need Jesus.**

This is our deepest need as human beings.

We need Jesus.

We are completely stuck and lost and miserable without him.

No matter what you try to chase,

No matter how righteous you try to be,
No matter how much fun you try to have,
You need Jesus.

Now, these next couple verses are hard.

Some commentaries called them the most difficult verses in the entire book.

Because on the surface it looks like the Bible is saying some rather demeaning things about women.

It seems like the Bible is saying that there aren't any righteous or morally good women in the world.

Now before we get verse 28 I think we need to wrestle with verse 26.

Because how we identify the woman in verse 26 is going to impact what Solomon is talking about later.

And I think that ultimately these verses are about how we need Jesus.

Verse 26 **"And I find something more bitter than death: the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her."**

So who is this woman?

If you notice it seems as if he's using figurative language.

He's not describing a woman whose heart is literally made out of traps.

Her hands are not giant metal bear traps.

So it is a figurative woman

This description should sound familiar to you if you read a lot of Proverbs

The Book of Proverbs repeatedly describes Folly and Wisdom as women.

It also personifies other sins like adultery as a woman.

So he is not thinking of a particular woman here

nor is he saying that all women are terrible temptresses

Instead, I think he is describing Folly.

The entire context of this passage has been about wisdom and folly.
So he does not want us to fall into the elaborate traps of folly.

Verse 27-29 **"Behold, this is what I found, says the Preacher, while adding one thing to another to find the scheme of things—which my soul has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found."**

What do we do here?

Again I think we need to look at the context

We need to pay attention to the genre.

This is wisdom language and Hebrew poetry.

He takes a thousand people to examine

He only finds one man who is kind of righteous

And he doesn't find any women who were righteous.

The point is not that men are righteous and women are not righteous.

His point is that nobody is really righteous.

Remember verse 20 that there's not a righteous man on Earth.

I think this whole section is meant to make us see how much we need Jesus.

Verse 29 **"See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes."**

This verse is a reminder of our fall.

In the garden, Adam and Eve were made righteous and without sin.

But they sought out schemes to sin.

And every single human being since,

Man and woman,

Have sought out our own sinful scheme.

What can rescue us from our schemes?
Who can make us righteous?
Only Jesus.

Only Jesus can bring salvation.
We are all stuck in our sins.
We are stuck in our bad habits that we can never escape on our own.
Jesus is the only way we can be saved.

And rest assured that you need saving.
All of us are going to die one day.
And when you die you are going to stand before God for judgement.

All of your words, deeds, and thoughts will roll out like a scroll while God takes a look.
There is no weighing to see if the good outweighs the bad.
It only takes one bad thought to leave you deserving of judgment.

But the wonderful news is that Jesus died for you.
He died to pay the penalty for our sins.
He died so that you can find freedom.

And He died so that we can live.
Jesus did not just die on the cross,
He walked out of that tomb.
He destroyed death.

He was resurrected so that we can live again.
We can face the reality of death with hearts full of hope.
If you do not know Jesus, put your faith in Him.
All you have to do is believe.
I, Rob, or any of our elders would love to talk to you more.
Or just listen if you have questions.

CONCLUSION:

1. [Summary] Because you are going to die, you need to be wise, but wisdom isn't enough. You really need Jesus.
2. [Challenge] You are going to die one day. It might be today, it might be decades from now. Put your hope in Jesus. Because no one else can save you.