

# Embrace Limitations

August 11, 2013 ~ Ecclesiastes 6.10-7.14

## Overview of Progress

- ❖ First 2 message presented opposing worldviews in **Ecc 1 to 3**
  - ✧ Vain Repetition from **1.1 to 2.23**
  - ✧ Purpose & Meaning from **2.24 to 3.22**
- ❖ Next 2 messages gave perspectives on relationships (**Ecc 4 – 5.7**)
  - ✧ Value People in **Ecc 4**
  - ✧ Revere God in **Ecc 5.1-7**
- ❖ Last time (3 weeks ago) we learned to Seek Satisfaction in God alone

## We're Halfway Through

- ❖ III: Hump Day: Commercial w/camel walking around cubicles (1/2 way point)
- ❖ **Ecc** consists of 2 halves
  - ✧ First half denoted by “grasping for the wind” – man limited in ability – “**DO**”
  - ✧ Second half denoted by “not knowing” – man limited in knowledge – “**KNOW**”
  - ✧ A key to understanding **Ecc** is to see these 2 limitations throughout
- ❖ **Ecc 6.10** marks the middle of the book and the theme
  - ✧ **v6c** ~ “Man .. cannot contend with Him who is mightier than he.”
  - ✧ “A man's got to know his limitations ..” ~ Clint Eastwood quote
  - ✧ Solomon was a wise and capable man ~ “image of God” ~ yet limited
  - ✧ III: Monopoly – Eldest brother competing with father

## Men are Limited Creatures

- ❖ **Read v10** ~ Our limitations are inherent because we're “created beings”
  - ✧ Yet mankind resents limits ~ Even Adam & Eve resisted imposition of limits
    - ✦ Even in a sinless state the seeds of rebellion landed in fertile soil
- ❖ **Read v11** ~ “The more words, the more vanity ..” (ESV)
  - ✧ III: “Don't waste your breath” ~ We cannot win an argument with God
  - ✧ God created words ~ He's their master ~ He knows everything ~ Truth
- ❖ **Read v12** ~ Two rhetorical questions
  - ✧ “Who knows what is good for man in life ..?” ~ **KNOW / DO**
  - ✧ “Who can tell a man what will happen after him ..?” ~ **DO / KNOW**

**Xition: The unspoken answer is .. God alone ..**

## 7 “Better Than” Proverbs

- ❖ Solomon implies in **6.12** man cannot know what to do or what is coming
- ❖ Yet, he goes on in **Ecc 7.1-12** to do just that . . .
  - ✧ He gives instruction (**do**) and declares what to expect (**know**)
  - ✧ This can seem odd to the reader that detects it ~ we must study it
    - ◇ A key can be to focus on his use of the word “**better**”
    - ◇ He’s declaring some things as “**comparatively better**” than others
- 1. **v1a** ~ “good name is bt precious ointment”
- 2. **v1b** ~ “day of death bt day of birth”
- 3. **v2a** ~ “bt go to house of mourning than house of feasting”
- 4. **v3a** ~ “sorrow is bt laughter”
- 5. **v5** ~ “bt hear rebuke of wise than song of fools”
- 6. **v8a** ~ “end of a thing is bt its beginning”
- 7. **v8b** ~ “patient in spirit is bt proud in spirit”

### 1 ~ **v1a** “A good name is better than precious ointment”

- ❖ Here an intangible is contrasted with a tangible and preferred instead of it
  - ✧ In reality the “good name” proves more lasting than the ointment’s effects

### 2 ~ **v1b** “the day of death is better than the day of one’s birth”

- ❖ The 1<sup>st</sup> “**better than**” proverb was an easy one with which to agree . . .
  - ✧ But this one can be puzzling - even shocking
- ❖ But let’s return to this one after we’ve covered **\*6** . . .
  - ✧ If death is viewed as achieving a goal or ending a journey it is a good thing
    - ◇ But many don’t see it as that ~ they see death only as failure – it probably is
  - ✧ !!!: Katie Nissen ~ Memorial service ~ happy for Katie / sad for family
  - ✧ “**Death is the end of dying. On the day of the believer’s death dying is for ever done with. The saints who are with God shall never die any more. Life is wrestling, struggling, but death is the end of conflict: it is rest – victory.**” - *Spurgeon*

### **\*6** ~ **v8a** “The end of a thing is better than its beginning”

- ❖ “**Why would the end of something be better than its beginning?**”
  - ✧ You’ve reached the end (*you’ve succeeded*)
  - ✧ !!!: Northwest Passage (water across North America) ~ Fountain of Youth
  - ✧ We don’t always complete projects or journeys (*we fail to complete some*)

**Xition: The first 2 better thans gave no “proof” statements ~ next 3 do . . .**

- 3 ~ **v2a** “**Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting”**
- ✧ Proof ~ “for that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart”
    - ◇ It is good to be reminded of death ~ it is helpful
  - ❖ “It is better to go to a funeral home than to a wedding reception”
    - ✧ Feasting is not bad ~ **Ch 3** “a time to” ~ laugh ~ dance ~ weep ~ mourn
  - ❖ III: Co-worker c/Katie N ~ Changed subject very quickly / didn’t want to think on it
    - ✧ How people view death reflects how they view God & life
- 4 ~ **v3a** “**Sorrow is better than laughter**”
- ✧ Proof ~ “for by a sad countenance the heart is made better”
  - ❖ Both are appropriate in their time / But sorrow heals hearts
    - ✧ “Laughter is good medicine” ~ **Pr 17.22** “A merry heart does good, like medicine”
    - ✧ Laughter is good in celebration ~ But it only masks true sorrow or pain
- 5 ~ **v5** “**better to hear the rebuke of the wise than .. to hear the song of fools”**
- ✧ Proof ~ “.. like the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool”
    - ◇ Thorns burn brightly and make a lot of noise but they’re not a good fuel
  - ❖ In **Prov 12.1** Solomon says that “those who hate to be rebuked are stupid”
    - ✧ Whereas “the songs of fools” are empty and meaningless
- 7 ~ **v8b** “**The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit”**
- ❖ Patience leads to success where the impatient have long since fallen away
    - ✧ The patiently determined in life will achieve much more than others

### Two More Sayings Mixed In

- ❖ **v7** ~ “oppression destroys a wise man’s reason ~ a bribe debases the heart”
  - ✧ Wisdom is destroyed by oppressing others and accepting bribes
  - ✧ We think of wisdom as something under our control ~ God gives and takes
- ❖ **v9** ~ “do not hasten to be angry” ~ Solomon presumes control over anger
  - ✧ Just as with any sin, anger is one that people indulge in by choice
  - ✧ III: Pot boiling over ~ Turn off burner or remove pot ~ or just let it go

### An Unwise “**Better Than**” Saying

- ❖ **v10a** ~ “Do not say, ‘Why were the former days better than these?’”
  - ✧ **v10b** ~ “You do not inquire wisely concerning this.”
- ❖ We have a very popular saying c/this, “**The good old days!**”

- ✧ This is a pessimists' view of life ~ Forget the good and focus on the bad
- ❖ **Ecc 6.12** read, “who knows what is good for man in life”
- ✧ Stating “the former days were better than these” is making a value statement
- ✧ It vastly oversimplifies a very complex world and casts judgment upon it

### Wisdom is Good

- ❖ In **Ecc 2.12-16** Solomon laments the limits of wisdom
- ✧ Yet here he affirms the value of wisdom despite its limits
- ❖ Wisdom is of benefit to all living that possess it
- ✧ Wisdom is ‘like’ money but better ~ An excess of money can corrupt its owners
- ✧ But there can be no excess of wisdom ~ **knowledge yes – wisdom no**

### Parallels between 6.10-12 and 7.13-14

- ❖ It was difficult to choose the text and then the title for today
- ✧ A message on only **Ecc 6.10 to 12** was very tempting
- ❖ But these portions of text obviously tie together
- ✧ **(6.10c)** “cannot contend with Him ..” vs “Who can make straight ..” **(7.13b)**
- ✧ **(6.12a)** “all the days of his vain life” vs “In the day .. in the day ..” **(7.14a)**
- ✧ **(6.12ac)** “who knows .. who can tell?” vs “Surely God has appointed ..” **(7.14c)**

### Embrace Limitations

- ❖ The sermon title instructs us to “**embrace**” the limitations of creaturehood
- ✧ It is not enough to endure them ~ grudging acceptance is not God’s way
- ❖ In **Acts 9.1-5** Jesus blinded Saul and then called to him from Heaven
- ✧ “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”
- ✧ And he said, “Who are You, Lord?”
- ✧ And the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.”
  - ✦ It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”
  - ✦ Jesus was just stating a fact ~ He was making Saul’s life miserable
- ❖ We must resist the desire to DO or to KNOW what God has withheld from us
- ✧ He guides us with His wisdom and reveals what’s necessary | That is enough

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling,

And to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,

To God our Savior, who alone is wise,

Be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever.

Amen \*pause\* Go in peace . . .