

Gracious & Cautious

August 18, 2013 ~ Ecclesiastes 7.15 – 8.17

Overview

- ❖ Omit reviews next 3 weeks ~ last message will be comprehensive
- ❖ We're returning to cruising altitude for the next 3 messages
 - ❖ 32 vss today / 38 next week / 18 and 6 to close out the book
 - ❖ We'll overlook many concepts in remaining chapters (*save time*)

Outline for Today's Message

1. Similarity in structure and content of **Ecc 7.15-29** and **Ecc 8**
2. Unique emphasis upon graciousness in **Ch 7**
3. Unique emphasis upon caution in **Ch 8**

5 Similarities in Text Portions – (handout orientation)

1. Unfairness on earth (**black** lines)
 - ❖ **Read 7.15** and **8.12-14** (*the just perish and the wicked thrive*)
 - ❖ Compare & contrast **8.12a** & **8.13a c**/length of days – prolonged or not
 - ❖ The eternal heavenly & temporal earthly perspectives are shown
 - ❖ *III: WSJ article c/Mugabe and Zimbabwe (MDC drops fight)*
 - ❖ “The only bright spot in Robert Mugabe’s reelection is that he is 89. It won’t be long before the evil man dies and goes to hell. – Paula Dowling .. For once, I agree with you. – Barbara LeBey .. Except for those of us that don’t believe in Hell. I tend to believe he’ll die and end up in the same place as Mother Theresa, Gandhi, and every other saint. The same place as Hitler, Idi Amin and Osama Bin Laden. In other words, there really is no penalty to pay for the evils these men and women commit. He’ll have had a longer life than many of his victims and end up in the exact, same spot. It’s quite depressing to think about. – John Gower”
2. Limitations of man (**orange** highlights)
 - ❖ **Read 7.24** (heavenly plans), **7.27** (earthly motivations)
 - ❖ **Read 8.7** (know future), **8.8** (control death), **8.16-17** (only God knows)
3. Rewards for faith (**green** lines)
 - ❖ **Read 7.18c** (fears God escapes), **7.26** (pleases God escapes)
 - ❖ **Read 12** (fear God, fear before Him)
4. Punishments for sins (**red** lines)
 - ❖ **Read 7.16b** (destroy yourself), **7.17b** (die early), **7.26d** (trapped by her)
 - ❖ **Read 8.13** (not well w/wicked, nor prolong days)
5. Instructions in wisdom (**yellow** highlights)
 - ❖ **Chapter 7 vss 16** thru **22**
 - ❖ **Chapter 8 vss 2** thru **9** and **15**

Instructions in Graciousness (Chapter 7)

- ❖ Instructions begin here right after unfairness in life is pointed out
 - ✧ Each admonition is followed up with a warning (**vss 16 and 17**)
- ❖ **v16a** ~ “Do not be overly righteous, nor be overly wise”
 - ✧ These are not synonyms for the same thing ~ there’s a difference
 - ✧ “What does it mean to be overly righteous? How is that even possible?”
 - ◇ We know it’s a bad thing / Christ was perfect (*not too righteous*)
 - ✧ “Do you remember what Jesus told His disciples?” (**Mt 5.20**)
 - ◇ “Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees .. you will .. not enter .. the kingdom of heaven.” not a challenge
 - ✧ So to be “overly righteous” is to be self-righteous ~ or not righteous at all
 - ✧ Being “overly wise” is mentioned by Paul in **2 Cor 10.12-13 (Read)**
 - ◇ So to be “overly wise” is to go beyond our limits ~ or not wise at all
 - ✧ **v16b** ~ “Why should you destroy yourself?”
 - ◇ In making these 2 errors we declare ourselves to not need to be saved
 - We declare ourselves righteous & wise apart from God / don’t need Him
- ❖ **v17a** ~ “Do not be overly wicked, nor be foolish”
 - ✧ This verse makes more sense / except maybe for the “overly wicked”
 - ◇ The associated penalty is “Why should you die before your time?”
 - ◇ Foolishness often leads to this / No need for excessive foolishness
 - Ill: Texting ~ cell phone in hand – head in back seat – drove under trailer
 - “There but for the grace of God, go I...”
 - ◇ The wicked aren’t always fools / But “overly wicked” live dangerous lives
 - Jesus said to Peter in **Mt 26.52**, “Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword” | Criminals often die violently
- ❖ **Read v20 – 22 ~ We All Sin yet Regard Sins of Others as Worse**
 - ✧ “There is not a just man on earth || who does good || and does not sin”
 - ◇ This can be read in 2 ways with || after earth or after good
 - Both forms are true in different contexts (**Ps 14** – “none righteous”)
 - ◇ Context tells us that the just man sometimes sins ~ relative justness
 - ◇ **v22** ~ “your own heart has known ..” / A fact that needs no proving
 - ◇ This reminds us of **Mt 7.3** when Jesus said, “Why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?”

Xition: Three concepts not covered in Ch 7 ..

Roads Not Taken in Chapter 7

1. Wisdom of **v23a** compared to **v23b-24** ~ former attained / latter not
2. Provocative statements about 1:1k and 0:1k in **v28** but not addressing
3. **v29** c/original righteousness and evil ingenuity of man

Instructions in Cautiousness (Chapter 8)

- ❖ I only highlighted two small sections of instructions (**vss 2-3** and **v15**)
 - ✧ But the caution we'll speak to unfolds over first **13 verses**
- ❖ Let's begin with the rhetorical questions of **v1**
 - ✧ "Who is like a wise man? .. Who knows the interpretation ..?"
 - ◆ Two wisdoms were mentioned in **v23** of **Ch 7**
 - There's a wisdom that can be grasped – and another that cannot
- ❖ Now we'll cover the instructions in vss 2-3
 1. "Keep the king's commandment for the sake of your oath to God."
 2. "Do not be hasty to go from his presence."
 3. "Do not take your stand for an evil thing, for he does whatever pleases him."

1 ~ "Keep the King's Commandment"

- ❖ This is timeless biblical instruction from Solomon to citizens
 - ✧ We are to obey our leaders because it's what God would have us to do
 - ◆ i.e., ".. for the sake of your oath to God."
 - ✧ "But to what extent does this admonition bind us?"
 - ◆ Thomas Hobbes wrote "Leviathan" in 1651 ~ "divine right of kings"

2 ~ "Do not be Hasty to go from His Presence"

- ❖ This phrase is a euphemism for anger and a breaking of fellowship
 - ✧ Solomon tells us to not abandon loyalties hastily
 - ✧ III: Gladiator ~ Maximus doesn't take hand extended by son of Caesar
 - ✧ III: UP co-worker (Ravi) ~ dropped badge on boss' desk and walked out
- ❖ Solomon addresses our question "to what extent" in the text that follows

3 ~ "Do not Take your Stand for an Evil Thing"

- ❖ This is a warning and a given ~ If we take a stand it must be the "right" one
 - ✧ It is not enough to be "against" something ~ we must be "for" something else
 - ◆ Or we might be – "Out of the frying pan – into the fire..."

Xition: The clear instruction has been given .. Now comes advice on application ..

Advice on the Instructions on Caution

- ❖ **v4** ~ Solomon's counsel relates to life in a monarchy
 - ✧ In a traditional monarchy the king is the ultimate authority (*no branches*)
 - ✧ But the advice still applies – because the power still exists (*distributed*)
 - ✧ *!!!: Monarchy* like a coniferous tree ~ Democratic republic like a deciduous
 - ❖ **v5a** ~ The obedient are not attacked ~ They're not noticed
 - ✧ *!!!: Battle* ~ Avoid the horizon ~ Don't allow enemy soldier to see silhouette
 - ❖ **v5b** ~ “A wise man's heart discerns both time and judgment”
 - ❖ **v6** ~ “Because for every matter there is a time and judgment”
 - ✧ This text clearly states there is a time for “every matter” / including rebellion
 - ✧ Solomon – though he was a king – did not advocate a “divine right of kings”
 - ◇ He knew evil at the highest levels would sometimes need to be opposed
 - But as a king he knew the power he wielded and he warns us of it
 - ◇ *!!!: Co-worker* ~ “Would he come back? ~ He won't get the chance..!”
 - ❖ **v7** ~ “.. does not know what will happen, so who can tell him when ..”
 - ✧ Man cannot foretell future ~ that is God's domain (wisdom beyond us)
 - ✧ But some men will try and convince us they have this type of wisdom
 - ◇ “Why?” ~ Because they want us to join their cause as rebel soldiers
 - ❖ **v8** ~ “No one has power over the spirit ..”
 - ✧ God is ultimate authority over earth / loyalties must always be to Him
 - ❖ **v9b** ~ “There is a time in which one man rules over another to his own hurt”
 - ✧ Two forms – One is here (*rebellion*) and the other in **Ecc 7.7**
 - ◇ “oppression destroys a wise man's reason.” ~ “Both happened to Solomon”
 - ✧ In God's world, in God's time, tyranny is overthrown
 - ✧ And God uses human agents to accomplish His will in doing so
 - ✧ But note what's said in the heart of **v5**
 - ◇ “a wise man's heart discerns both time and judgment”
- ☐ “Be gracious towards others – you're a sinner too ..”
- ☐ “Be cautious opposing rulers – they don't carry a sword for show ..”

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 . . .