

## Refuge City Church — March 12, 2023

### “The Significance of Adversity” (Ecclesiastes 7)

#### Introduction

- **LAST WEEK:** Solomon had us reflect on the things we believe bring us satisfaction.
- **TODAY:** We reflect on something most of us try and avoid at all costs.

#### “The significance of adversity” [Verses 1-13; proverbial wisdom statements]

[Verses 1-4] “A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of birth. 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. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of face the heart is made glad. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.”

- **QUESTION:** Is experiencing adversity better than avoiding it? How does our response to adversity affect our character?
- “*House of mourning*” represents death/funeral.
  - We’re going to reflect more on the purpose of life at a funeral, then we do at a party.
    - In our moments of laughter, fun, and parties, we don’t contemplate life, purpose, and the value of a life well lived.
    - We tend not to reflect on the blessings of God when we’re pinning the tail on the donkey.
    - *Secular perspective:* strong absence of thought; drink & party to forget.
  - Death comes to all, and sometimes a lot quicker than we realize. Not a single person can avoid it.
- **Death brings reflection.**
  - **2 Corinthians 7:10**, “For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret [a change of mind; joy], whereas worldly grief produces death [anger/bitterness; regret].”
  - **Psalms 90:12**, “So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.”
  - **Verse 3:** “Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of face the heart is made glad.”
    - **ESV:** “...for by sadness of face the heart is made glad.”
    - **NLT:** “...for sadness has a refining influence on us.”
    - [song: refiner’s fire] **Zechariah 13:9**, “[I will]... test them as gold is tested.” [expose the impurities]
  - **PRAYER:** “God, grant me the wisdom I need to live the remainder of my days for your glory and purpose.”
  - **Psalms 30:11**, “You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness,”
- **Rebuke/Discipline presents consideration.**

[Verses 5-6] “It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools. For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fools; this also is vanity.”

- How easy is it to be rebuked when you've done something wrong? To be disciplined because you acted on your own accord without considering the outcome?
  - **Proverbs 17:10**, "A rebuke cuts into a perceptive person more than a hundred lashes into a fool."
- In the moment, it's difficult and may come with a dash of humility, however, it benefits those who consider the wisdom offered. ["how have I sinned against the Lord?"]
  - **Hebrews 12:11-13**, "For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed."

### - **Waiting offers surrender**

**[Verses 7-13]** "Surely oppression drives the wise into madness, and a bribe corrupts the heart. Better is the end of a thing than its beginning, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools. Say not, "Why were the former days better than these?" For it is not from wisdom that you ask this. Wisdom is good with an inheritance, an advantage to those who see the sun. 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. Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked?"

- We understand that both oppression and prosperity have their merits and problems.
  - **Proverbs 30:8-9**, "Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, "Who is the Lord?" or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God."
- It's a *matter of perspective* and how we respond to them.
- Why be so quick to aim for prosperity and wealth, when we don't have the perspective of living without, or the wisdom to live with it.
  - Patience and learning = wisdom
  - We need to find our contentment in the season that God has set us in.
- Why do we constantly long for the good old days? Were the 50's truly better than than today? [Leave it to Beaver vs. black struggles in the south]
  - The Israelites desire to leave Egypt because of the oppression they faced, **vs.** The Israelites desire to return to Egypt because of their perceived 'lack of provision' in the wilderness.
- It comes down to the perspective of the heart.
- Solomon is known for his connection of wisdom to money
  - **Proverbs 2:4**, "if you seek it [wisdom] like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures..."
  - Let us find wealth in the wisdom we gain in seeking the face of God.
  - Let us accept humility in our seasons of want, so the Lord can provide us what we need.

- **1 Corinthians 10:12**, “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”
- **Proverbs 11:2**, “When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.”
- **Verse 13**: “Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked?”
  - It is completely up to the Lord to decide what He wants for our life in a given season.
    - Some try and straighten out what God has designed to remain crooked, or vice versa.
    - We try and create this alternate reality where we are in control of our own life and destiny...*vanity!*
  - Why do we fight against what God has ordained for our benefit? [comfort vs. wisdom]
    - **Proverbs 3:5-6**, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”

### **“Proper Balance” [Verses 14-18]**

“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. 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. 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? 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.”

#### **- Life is about proper spiritual balance.**

- The inevitable question that all ask at one time or another, “Why was their life cut short, and that ‘piece of toe-jam’ is allowed to live long without any consequences?!”
  - We tend to look at life through ‘short-sided’ glasses.
  - There is a sin-problem in this world, and God’s wisdom should allow us to see beyond ourselves.
  - Let us not forget that we serve a just God, who has determined the course of life for everyone, past, present, and future.
  - **Proverbs 9:10**, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.”
- **[Summarize verses 19-29]**
- Avoid the self-perceived wisdom [gossip] of others, who have not sought the Lord for understanding.
  - Yet, don’t rely completely on your own understanding either, lest you fall into self-righteousness.
  - We need a proper balance of wisdom and righteousness, and therefore should look no further than our perfect example of Jesus Christ.
  - **1 Corinthians 1:27-30**, “But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and

despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,”

- We need a proper view that because we live in a fallen world, people will try and entice us to sin. [“desires of the flesh, desires of the eyes, pride of life.”]
  - Our aim & desire is to please God [wisdom]. But we have to act on the wisdom given [righteousness].
  - We were made in the image of God [upright], and a proper view of man’s sinful nature should enlighten us to the schemes, traps, and pitfalls that this world puts before us.

### **Conclusion**

- Remember these three things [that no one likes to experience]:
  - *Death brings reflection.*
    - Don’t try and avoid the inevitable. Use it as an opportunity to reflect on what God has given you, and how He sees you.
  - *Rebuke presents consideration.*
    - Release your pride, and accept the correction of the Lord. He wants to bless you with wisdom that could not have been found otherwise.
  - *Waiting/Patience offers surrender.*
    - It’s ok to receive the wisdom give from others, but be slow to act on it until you’ve put it up against the wisdom found in God’s word.
- We need wisdom in this world. But only the wisdom that can be given from God. Who gives freely to those who ask.
- Remember, we may not fully understand all that happens in this world. But we serve a just, faithful, and loving Creator who does.
  - When adversity comes, seek the face of God and His wisdom to walk you through it. Don’t avoid it.
  - Seek a proper, Christ-centered balance in life between wisdom, humility, and the pursuit of His righteousness.
    - **Philippians 4:12-13**, “I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”