

*A Black Suit is Better than a Party Dress*

Ecclesiastes 7:1-14

Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:10

Bethany Baptist Church

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I've officiated several funerals in the past year.

Just between you & me, I've thought about funerals a lot in the past year!

Can I share something with you that you might find *odd*: I *appreciate* a good funeral.

Don't *mistake* my meaning. A family loses a *loved one*. *People* mourn. And I hope you understand the theology here: *death* is the outcome of *sin*.

But w/o minimizing these things in any way, I **do** *appreciate* a good funeral.

Can you think *why*? **(PAUSE)** Because a careful funeral not only gives *closure* to a family & *honor* to loved one, it gives *serious pause for reflection* to every thoughtful soul that's gathered.

In fact, a wise old man once wrote: *It is **better** to go to a house of mourning, than to go to a house of feasting.*

It's better to take that *dark suit* out of the *closet*, than send the *bright party dress* back to the *cleaners*.

**Turn w/ me to Eccl 7:1-14.**

We have come to the *half-way* mark, and a *transition*, in Solomon's documentary on his personal *pursuit of fulfillment*: *satisfaction under the sun*.

*He hasn't found it!* (He isn't really going to...*under the sun*.)

But the wise king has learned a lot, and he's now he's moving from describing his *searches* to sharing his *conclusions*.

This morning, Solomon weaves his wisdom around the idea of "*better than*." In the original text, **seven** statements in these **14 vs** begin w/ the word *better*. As in... *It is **better** to go to a house of mourning, than to go to a house of feasting.*

While we unfold the text, look for key words like *wisdom* & *foolishness*.

**Five *lessons* the king learned from his *search for meaning*.**

***Today:***

- 1. A funeral is better than a party (vv.1-4).**
- 2. A rebuke is better than a song (vv.5-7).**
- 3. The end is better than the beginning (vv.8-10).**

***Next Lord's Day:***

- 4. Wisdom is better than wealth (vv.11-12).**
- 5. Contentment is better than complaint (vv.13-14).**

**These five lessons *add up* to one big truth: God is in control, full-time!**

**A funeral is better than a party (vv.1-4).**

1. Solomon immediately offers his first *better than* proverb: *a good name is better than a good ointment*. Let's talk about the *ointment* part, *first!*
  - a. *Ointment* was a fragrant, oily liquid, often used as a *perfume*, or even a *deodorant!* It covered up *bad body odor...* Never a *bad thing*.
  - b. So what's the connection between your *name* & your *ointment!*?!?
  - c. Well, Solomon isn't talking about that whether you name your son something *trendy* or hopelessly *hick!* A *good name* here implies your *reputation*; what people around you *think of*, when they *think of you*.
    - i. The *Bible* (& human *experience*) teach that a *good reputation* is laid, *a brick at time*, of things like *dependability, honesty, hard work, fairness, kindness, generosity, wisdom, ... godliness*.
    - ii. **Prov 22:1** – *a good name is to be more desired than great wealth*.
  - d. Think of the difference between your *reputation* & your *deodorant*: *being known as genuinely godly is better than just covering up what's bad underneath (a dirty armpit still stinks when the roll-on wears-off)!*
2. Then Solomon lays a *second "better than"* saying beside the *first*: (**read 1.b:** *and the day...*). What's the *connection?* *The idea of lasting benefit*.
  - a. Birth introduces you to *who knows what!* A baby's future is filled w/ big questions. Will he choose the *path* of the wise or the *broader path* of the fool? *Destruction* or *life?* Certainly years of difficulty lie ahead (Job): *As surely as sparks fly up, so a man is born to trouble*.
  - b. But for the wise man, shrouded in a *good reputation*, the day he dies is simply his time to *cross over* to *eternal comfort*. So Paul could confidently write, *for to me, to live is Christ & to die is gain*.

3. The Preacher uses the next **3 vs** to explore the benefits of the *day of death*, but he *shifts his focus* from the *departed saint*, to his *mourning friends*. The Scripture says a *funeral is better than a party!* Better to put on your *black suit* and sit quietly, than *slip on your fav party dress!* **Read vv. 2-4.**
- a. Solomon has already reminded you (**ch3**) that there is a *time to die*, a *time to mourn*.
  - b. So a funeral is *better* because it confronts you with the *inevitability* of what you already know: *you'll be in that box someday soon*. Funerals force you to *wrestle with that*. Pastor Chuck Swindoll writes, “*a 30 min. stroll in a cemetery will do you more good than a weekend in Vegas!*”
  - c. **V.3** assures us that mourning isn't a *bad thing!* The bereaved learn lessons in trusting that God is *in control*. A sorrowing *countenance* can reflect a *heart* that is doing business with *eternal truths*.
  - d. When I *officiate a funeral*, my *preaching goal* is to address the *living*, not the *dead*. My experience has been that *funeral congregations* are the *most attentive groups* I stand before, and I don't want to *waste* that solemn *opportunity*. What better time to tell someone that *life is short & judgment is real & eternal life* is offered to those who *still live!*

4. But some people, sadly, don't want to *come to grips* with *eternal issues*. Even though they *must!* God solemnly calls such a man or woman a *fool*. Rather sport that *little black dress* than wear that *sad black suit*...
- a. The fool is living only *under the sun*; w/o regard to God or eternity. That's God's *defn of a fool*, isn't it: *The fool has said in his heart, there is no God* (Psa 53:1).
  - b. The Heb term translated *mind* in **v.4** is really the word for *heart* – a much *bigger idea* in the Bible than simply your *thoughts*. Is your *life* wrapped up in *foolishness* or founded on *wisdom*?
  - c. Do your *plans* include *eternity*? Do your *priorities* include the *kingdom of God*?
  - d. *Where is your mind*? What are you *planning for* this year? Maybe you've planned for your *next vacation* or *next car* or even *retirement*, but have you planned for *eternity*? Are you investing in *imperishable riches*? *Where is your heart*? My lost friend, stop **putting** *what really matters* **out** of your mind!

***Beware friend, death is the end of every man, and the living must take it to heart.***

**A funeral is better than a party, and a rebuke is better than a song.**

1. Hey bro, Solomon wants to know *what's on your playlist* this week! What do you like to *listen to*? Here's another "better than" saying: **(read v.5)**. A *rebuke* is better than a *song*.
  - a. A *rebuke* is a form of *confrontation*, when someone tells you you're *wrong* ( → *sinning*). A *rebuke* *appeals to your conscience*.
  - b. A *song* appeals to your *feelings* (often to *pleasure*).
  - c. A *fool* cares about *fun*, but not about anything *eternal*. He sings his song for you...*under the sun*. (Remember what that *means*?)
  - d. A *wise friend* cares about your *soul*, enough to *rebuke* you if needed. Scripture says *faithful are the wounds of a friend*. Our Lord Jesus said, "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private."
  - e. Pastor Swindoll reminds us that the *wise man* (and his *rebuke*) comes in many packages: *parent, spouse, boss* (that performance appraisal), *officer* (who pulls you over!), *judge* (who sets your fine!), ...sometimes your *pastor*.
  - f. Beloved, a *rebuke* is better than a *song*; who'd you rather listen to, a *godly* friend, or *Lady GaGa*!?!
  
2. Solomon has a great *sermon illustration* of the *fool* & his *party tunes* (**read v.6**)! The *song* (*laughter*) of a fool is like the short-lived *popping & crackling* of *poorly fueled fire*. A lot of *noise* but not much *lasting heat*; it won't do you *much good*. You'll be eating *cold uncooked stew* for dinner!
  - a. A feel-good, *ignore the issues*, life-style is *futility* (see it in **v.6**) – one of Solomon's favorite *conclusion key-words* about life lived *under the sun*.
  - b. Here's Scripture's point: You should have listened to those *hard to swallow* words of your *wise friend*! (PAUSE)

1. What *lures* a man from the *path of wisdom* to the *freeway of the fool*? Here are a **couple** of *examples* of how a *wise man* can turn *foolish* (**read 7**).
  - a. Solomon has written often about *corruption & oppression*. Because man is sinful, oppression is *everywhere* & there *no solution* under the sun! A man who is troubled by *injustice* but won't *understand it & address it* God's way will go *crazy* w/ cynicism & doubt!
  - b. Here's a *second* common cause of *spiritual heart disease*: the *bribe*. A bribe entices you to ignore the *law* & your *conscience* for personal gain. The attraction of *riches & advantage* can lure you off the narrow way. And the man who *accepts the bribe* can fall under the power of the *one who offers it*.
  - c. O *foolish friend*...you will wish that someone had *warned you*...

**A funeral is better than a party, a rebuke is better than a song, and the end is better than the beginning.**



**The *end* is better than the *beginning* (read v.8).**

1. The next pair of *better than* verses are all about *patience*.
  - a. At the *beginning* of a project, it's easy to get *anxious*. How *long* will this take? How *much* will it cost? Can I even **do** this? What if all *goes south – then what?* (small pause) But when the matter is *completed*, you feel *free*! “Why was I so *anxious*!?!”
  - b. The *patient* man knows how to *wait* to see things *all the way* to their *conclusion*. His *patience* is grounded in *God's sovereignty*; he believes the promise of Rm 8:28: *For we know that God causes **all things to work together for good** for those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*
  - c. That's enough to tell us, *right there*, that *patience* is a mark of *wisdom* – seeing the world & what concerns me, *God's way*. We also remember that *patience* is a fruit of God's Spirit (along w/ *love, joy, peace, etc.*), as He works in the soul of the *redeemed*.
  - d. The *opposite* of *patience* is...*haughtiness* (**v.8**)? Well, if you said *impatience*, that good too! But here Solomon contrasts *patience* with ***pride***.
    - i. *Impatience* believes ***my schedule*** is more important, ***my needs*** are more pressing, ***my ideas*** are more useful. ***Me! Me! Me!*** The *impatient* man is a *proud* man.
    - ii. But *patience* understands how to *defer*, and to *wait*. The *end* will be better!
  - e. Solomon then explores **2** expression of *proud impatience*.
2. The *first* expression of *impatience* is *anger* (read v.9).
  - a. Are you one of this muttering *Type-A drivers* that *seethes* at every *red light*!?! Hey, glance in your *rear-view mirror* at **v.8**. *Cool* your jets & *hang* in there, pal, *it'll turn green*!
  - b. Seriously, the *wise rebuke* from God' Word (**9**) is that *impatient anger* is the evidence of a *fool*. He doesn't trust God in *life's delays*.

3. Solomon's *second* expression of *impatience* is *looking back* (**read v.10**).
- a. Have you ever wished for the *good old days*! God says, *don't!* In fact, it's not wise *at all*...
  - b. Impatient people *yearn for yesterday*. They are *anxious* w/ the present & they *glorify* the past. You **can't** go back; it probably wasn't *as good as you remember!*
  - c. More to the point, please listen to me if this verse troubles you, **God made today & He put you here in it!** You see the *implication* of Solomon's *theology*, don't you? To *focus* on the good old days, and *lament* today, is a form of *complaining against God*.
  - d. Beloved, *trust* Him; the *conclusion* to which God will bring all matters (v.8) is **better** than the *past*. The *end* is better than the *beginning*...

**A funeral is better than a party, a rebuke is better than a song, the end is better than the beginning, and (for next Sunday – Lord willing) wisdom is even better than wealth.**

**I googled it! According to the NFDA (Natl Funeral Director's Assoc), the average cost of a funeral is somewhere north of \$8000.**

Beloved, if you don't *plan ahead*, your funeral will be *eternally* more costly than **\$8000**.

If all you want is to *party...to laugh*; if you won't bring yourself to think of *life & death & eternity*, the cost to your soul will be *too great* to imagine!

**...pray...**