

Wednesday, September 4

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Ecclesiastes 7:1 - 9:18

7 1 A good reputation is more valuable than costly perfume. And the day you die is better than the day you are born. **2** Better to spend your time at funerals than at parties. After all, everyone dies— so the living should take this to heart. **3** Sorrow is better than laughter, for sadness has a refining influence on us. **4** A wise person thinks a lot about death, while a fool thinks only about having a good time. **5** Better to be criticized by a wise person than to be praised by a fool. **6** A fool's laughter is quickly gone, like thorns crackling in a fire. This also is meaningless. **7** Extortion turns wise people into fools, and bribes corrupt the heart. **8** Finishing is better than starting. Patience is better than pride. **9** Control your temper, for anger labels you a fool. **10** Don't long for "the good old days." This is not wise. **11** Wisdom is even better when you have money. Both are a benefit as you go through life. **12** Wisdom and money can get you almost anything, but only wisdom can save your life. **13** Accept the way God does things, for who can straighten what he has made crooked? **14** Enjoy prosperity while you can, but when hard times strike, realize that both come from God. Remember that nothing is certain in this life. **15** I have seen everything in this meaningless life, including the death of good young people and the long life of wicked people. **16** So don't be too good or too wise! Why destroy yourself? **17** On the other hand, don't be too wicked either. Don't be a fool! Why die before your time? **18** Pay attention to these instructions, for anyone who fears God will avoid both extremes. **19** One wise person is stronger than ten leading citizens of a town! **20** Not a single person on earth is always good and never sins. **21** Don't eavesdrop on others—you may hear your servant curse you. **22** For you know how often you yourself have cursed others. **23** I have always tried my best to let wisdom guide my thoughts and actions. I said to myself, "I am determined to be wise." But it didn't work. **24** Wisdom is always distant and difficult to find. **25** I searched everywhere, determined to find wisdom and to understand the reason for things. I was determined to prove to myself that wickedness is stupid and that foolishness is madness. **26** I discovered that a seductive woman is a trap more bitter than death. Her passion is a snare, and her soft hands are chains. Those who are pleasing to God will escape her, but sinners will be caught in her snare. **27** "This is my conclusion," says the Teacher. "I discovered this after looking at the matter from every possible angle. **28** Though I have searched repeatedly, I have not found what I was looking for. Only one out of a thousand men is virtuous, but not one

woman!**29** But I did find this: God created people to be virtuous, but they have each turned to follow their own downward path.”

8 1 How wonderful to be wise, to analyze and interpret things. Wisdom lights up a person’s face, softening its harshness. **2** Obey the king since you vowed to God that you would. **3** Don’t try to avoid doing your duty, and don’t stand with those who plot evil, for the king can do whatever he wants.**4** His command is backed by great power. No one can resist or question it. **5** Those who obey him will not be punished. Those who are wise will find a time and a way to do what is right, **6** for there is a time and a way for everything, even when a person is in trouble. **7** Indeed, how can people avoid what they don’t know is going to happen? **8** None of us can hold back our spirit from departing. None of us has the power to prevent the day of our death. There is no escaping that obligation, that dark battle. And in the face of death, wickedness will certainly not rescue the wicked. **9** I have thought deeply about all that goes on here under the sun, where people have the power to hurt each other. **10** I have seen wicked people buried with honor. Yet they were the very ones who frequented the Temple and are now praised in the same city where they committed their crimes! This, too, is meaningless. **11** When a crime is not punished quickly, people feel it is safe to do wrong. **12** But even though a person sins a hundred times and still lives a long time, I know that those who fear God will be better off. **13** The wicked will not prosper, for they do not fear God. Their days will never grow long like the evening shadows. **14** And this is not all that is meaningless in our world. In this life, good people are often treated as though they were wicked, and wicked people are often treated as though they were good. This is so meaningless! **15** So I recommend having fun, because there is nothing better for people in this world than to eat, drink, and enjoy life. That way they will experience some happiness along with all the hard work God gives them under the sun. **16** In my search for wisdom and in my observation of people’s burdens here on earth, I discovered that there is ceaseless activity, day and night. **17** I realized that no one can discover everything God is doing under the sun. Not even the wisest people discover everything, no matter what they claim.

9 1 This, too, I carefully explored: Even though the actions of godly and wise people are in God’s hands, no one knows whether God will show them favor.**2** The same destiny ultimately awaits everyone, whether righteous or wicked, good or bad, ceremonially clean or unclean, religious or irreligious. Good people receive the same treatment as sinners, and people who make promises to God are treated like people who don’t. **3** It seems so wrong that everyone under the sun suffers the same fate. Already twisted by evil, people choose their own mad course, for they have no hope. There is nothing ahead but death anyway. **4** There is hope only

for the living. As they say, "It's better to be a live dog than a dead lion!" **5** The living at least know they will die, but the dead know nothing. They have no further reward, nor are they remembered. **6** Whatever they did in their lifetime—loving, hating, envying—is all long gone. They no longer play a part in anything here on earth. **7** So go ahead. Eat your food with joy, and drink your wine with a happy heart, for God approves of this! **8** Wear fine clothes, with a splash of cologne! **9** Live happily with the woman you love through all the meaningless days of life that God has given you under the sun. The wife God gives you is your reward for all your earthly toil. **10** Whatever you do, do well. For when you go to the grave, there will be no work or planning or knowledge or wisdom. **11** I have observed something else under the sun. The fastest runner doesn't always win the race, and the strongest warrior doesn't always win the battle. The wise sometimes go hungry, and the skillful are not necessarily wealthy. And those who are educated don't always lead successful lives. It is all decided by chance, by being in the right place at the right time. **12** People can never predict when hard times might come. Like fish in a net or birds in a trap, people are caught by sudden tragedy. **13** Here is another bit of wisdom that has impressed me as I have watched the way our world works. **14** There was a small town with only a few people, and a great king came with his army and besieged it. **15** A poor, wise man knew how to save the town, and so it was rescued. But afterward no one thought to thank him. **16** So even though wisdom is better than strength, those who are wise will be despised if they are poor. What they say will not be appreciated for long. **17** Better to hear the quiet words of a wise person than the shouts of a foolish king. **18** Better to have wisdom than weapons of war, but one sinner can destroy much that is good.

2 Corinthians 7:8 - 16

7 8 I am not sorry that I sent that severe letter to you, though I was sorry at first, for I know it was painful to you for a little while. **9** Now I am glad I sent it, not because it hurt you, but because the pain caused you to repent and change your ways. It was the kind of sorrow God wants his people to have, so you were not harmed by us in any way. **10** For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There's no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death. **11** Just see what this godly sorrow produced in you! Such earnestness, such concern to clear yourselves, such indignation, such alarm, such longing to see me, such zeal, and such a readiness to punish wrong. You showed that you have done everything necessary to make things right. **12** My purpose, then, was not to write about who did the wrong or who was wronged. I wrote to you so that in the sight of God you could see for yourselves how loyal you

are to us. **13** We have been greatly encouraged by this. In addition to our own encouragement, we were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was about the way all of you welcomed him and set his mind at ease. **14** I had told him how proud I was of you—and you didn't disappoint me. I have always told you the truth, and now my boasting to Titus has also proved true!**15** Now he cares for you more than ever when he remembers the way all of you obeyed him and welcomed him with such fear and deep respect. **16**I am very happy now because I have complete confidence in you.

Psalms 48:1 - 14

48 **1** How great is the LORD, how deserving of praise, in the city of our God, which sits on his holy mountain! **2** It is high and magnificent; the whole earth rejoices to see it! Mount Zion, the holy mountain, is the city of the great King! **3** God himself is in Jerusalem's towers, revealing himself as its defender. **4** The kings of the earth joined forces and advanced against the city. **5** But when they saw it, they were stunned; they were terrified and ran away. **6** They were gripped with terror and writhed in pain like a woman in labor. **7** You destroyed them like the mighty ships of Tarshish shattered by a powerful east wind. **8** We had heard of the city's glory, but now we have seen it ourselves— the city of the LORD of Heaven's Armies. It is the city of our God; he will make it safe forever. Interlude **9** O God, we meditate on your unfailing love as we worship in your Temple. **10** As your name deserves, O God, you will be praised to the ends of the earth. Your strong right hand is filled with victory. **11** Let the people on Mount Zion rejoice. Let all the towns of Judah be glad because of your justice. **12** Go, inspect the city of Jerusalem. Walk around and count the many towers. **13** Take note of the fortified walls, and tour all the citadels, that you may describe them to future generations. **14** For that is what God is like. He is our God forever and ever, and he will guide us until we die.

Proverbs 22:17 - 19

22 **17** Listen to the words of the wise; apply your heart to my instruction. **18**For it is good to keep these sayings in your heart and always ready on your lips. **19** I am teaching you today— yes, you— so you will trust in the LORD