**BCM Bible Study: April 14/15, 2021**

**Ecclesiastes 7-8**

Follow-up:

* Were you able to listen to God successfully? Did you learn anything either way?
* Was it difficult to give away some of your wealth?

**Read Ecclesiastes 7:1-12** What seems to be the common theme of these passages?

These sayings all center around wisdom and its relationship with folly. As such, each of these sayings can be directly related to wisdom. For example, verse 9 advises against being swift to anger or letting your anger control you.

* What other qualities of wisdom can we glean from these passages?
* Many of these sayings conclude that how a situation ends is more important than how it begins. Do you agree with this statement? Why?

**Read Ecclesiastes 7:13-14**

* Do you find it hard to praise God on days of adversity?
  + What about on days of prosperity?

**Read Ecclesiastes 7:16-20** Does the concept of being overly wise or righteous seem foreign to you?

The concerns of this passage are with those who try to take control of their lives- trying to hard to be perfect to the extent that we live a joyless existence, which ironically would have been in vain explicitly because it is joyless. Life is meant to be enjoyed and obsession on the currently unachievable will lead only to stress and disappointment. Only God can relieve us of our sin, and our own attempts to do so will fail.

* Do you find it hard to forgive yourself when you make a mistake?

“The devil always sends errors into the world in pairs--pairs of opposites. And he always encourages us to spend a lot of time thinking which is the worse. You see why, of course? He relies on your extra dislike of the one error to draw you gradually into the opposite one.” (CS Lewis)

* Can you think of some examples of the situation described in this quote?
  + Do you find yourself making this mistake?

**Read Ecclesiastes 7:23-29**

Lets focus for a moment on verse 26. Like most wisdom literature, Ecclesiastes was written towards a male audience of educated elite, young men being trained for government service. These passages serve heavily as a warning to these men to not fall into the trap of being led astray by their foreign wives like the many men who had done so before them. This weakness in regard to spouse can be found as far back as Genesis with Adam and Eve.

* Have you ever made a foolish decision or changed your views on something for romance-related reasons?

**Read Genesis 3: 17-19**

* What similarities do you see between this passage and the issues discussed in Ecclesiastes?

Turning our attention to verse 29 (back in Ecclesiastes) shows us another realization from the teacher- that we have diverged from God in our pursuit of “many schemes”.

* What things do you pursue in life? Do these things bring you closer to God?

**Read Ecclesiastes 8:1-9**

* Have you ever disagreed with someone who has authority over you?
  + Have you done this with God?

We may often find ourselves under the authority who may misuse their power. This can happen on multiple levels, as near as our parents or as far as the government. While frustrating, it is never good to act hastily out of emotion. With patience, the best path to proceed will present itself. God sets all things right in the end, and always knows the correct path to take however confusing it may be.

* Do you find it difficult to control your emotions or to practice patience?

**Read Ecclesiastes 8:10-14**

* Have you ever decided to do something because you thought you could get away with it?

One thing that can make it easier to give into temptation is the lack of perception of the consequences of giving in. Many sins have immediate, obvious effects of pain and sorrow while many others have effects that are essentially invisible. The negative effects only show their face once we find ourselves trapped within them. A snake is much more dangerous when you don’t know it’s there.

* Do you allow yourself to commit actions that are biblical incorrect because you don’t see a reason why they are wrong?
* Have you ever had the opportunity to benefit from doing something wrong?
* Do you feel cheated when others succeed by doing wrong?

**Read Job 40:2-14**

* Do you get angry with the Lord? Do you blame him for your suffering?
  + How does Jesus’ suffering on the cross illuminate the heart of God amidst our suffering?

**Read Ecclesiastes 7:13-14 and Ecclesiastes 8:15-17**

* Does it bother you to not be able to know something? **Read Ecclesiastes 7:21-22** 
  + Does curiosity ever lead you to places that were better off left alone?

Our limited ability to understand the world around us comes very much as a blessing- I do not believe someone could survive the turmoil of knowing every sin everyone has committed in our time on this earth. Ignorance is bliss, as they say.

* What keeps you from being able to relax?
* Do you ever take God’s gifts for granted?

Conclusion:

We again visit how wisdom has relative value when compared to folly, but this time we make the important clarification that wisdom taken too far is ironically unwise. We were not made to have the level of wisdom that God has- and attempting to reach for it is certain to fail. Because our perception of the world is limited, we may be upset when things go contrary to our wishes- but God knows better than us what leads to good, and what leads to evil. Acceptance of this can lead you to a more joyful life, even if you are not particularly gifted. Appreciation for what God has given us and eyes that recognize the good in a given moment are qualities that lead to happiness.