

Ecclesiastes: Living with Reality - Pt. 3
Some Unlikely Gifts
Ecc. 7:1-11:6
July 15, 2018

I. A “PROVERBS-LIKE” section. (7:1-11:6)

- A. Looking for the “SCHEME of THINGS.” (7:25)**
- B. The VALUE of WISDOM. (7:11-12; 8:1; 9:13-18)**

As we read chapters 7-11 we find a format more like Proverbs. Pithy wise sayings that give us good sound bite advice. The teacher is seeking to figure out reality. He knows that wisdom is good, and he wants to use it to understand the issues that he sees all around him.

1. Of the many “proverb-like” sayings in chapters 7-11, what are some that speak to you specifically?
2. Who do you know that is wise? How do you know that they are? What does wisdom look like?

II. A DOSE of “Ecclesiastes-like” REALITY. (7:1-11:6)

- A. Humans are PRONE to WANDER. (7:29)**
- B. The PERSISTENCE of “HEVEL”. (7:6,16; 8:10,14;9:9; 10:1)**

Yet while they read a little like Proverbs, these chapters are filled with what we have come to see in Ecclesiastes - a bold pronouncement that reality is a difficult place to live. Despite the value of wisdom, it doesn't take us far enough.

3. Why do you think human beings are “prone to wander”?
4. How does the idea of “hevel” make sense to you in your own life? What have you liked to for substance and meaning that has disappointed you?

III. Some UNLIKELY GIFTS. (James 1:17)

- A. The gift of WEAKNESS/LIMITATION. (7:13-14,20-24; 8:7-8,16-17)**
- B. The gift of DEATH. (7:1-4; 9:1-3; 11:7-12:14)**
- C. The gift of “HEVEL”. (1:2; 12:8)**

This tension between the desire to understand and the inability to understand is a challenging place to be. Even more challenging is to see that our presence there is a gift from God. We are used to seeing good things, things we want, as gifts. But Ecclesiastes reminds us that sometimes the gifts we really need don't look like gifts when we first unwrap them.

5. How can you best know what the gifts of God are in your own life? Has the answer to that ever surprised you?
6. How has coming near to death, be it your own, or that of a loved one, shaped you and the way you live?

IV. Why these GIFTS are GOOD...(Rom. 8:28)

- A. The NEED for DECONSTRUCTION. (7:23-24; 8:16-17; Heb 12:26-29)**
- B. The GIFT of "DIS-ILLUSIONMENT". (7:29; II Cor. 4:16-18; 12:8-10)**
- C. A ROAD toward HUMILITY. (11:5; Job 42:1-6)**
- D. Joyfully PRESENT in the NOW. (9:7-10; 11:1-6; Phil. 1:6; Rom. 8:28-30)**

Weakness? Limitation? Death? Hevel? How can these be good? Granted, it takes a different perspective that what we normally have to see it, but all these things serve a purpose in the process of being formed into the image of Jesus. Sometimes to build a spiritual life we have to start by tearing down all our presuppositions.

7. Jeff shared about "deconstruction" and "disillusionment". When have you experienced those things? Were they gifts to you? Why or why not?
8. "We tend to think God wants to improve the life we have, when in reality He wants to make it totally new." What's your reaction to that statement?