

**ECCLESIASTES**  
**Ecclesiastes 7:1-12**  
**“It Is Better”**  
**April 21, 2024**

**Ecclesiastes 7:1-12**

- A good name is better than precious ointment,  
and the day of death than the day of birth.**
- 2 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.**
- 3 Sorrow is better than laughter,  
for by sadness of face the heart is made glad.**
- 4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning,  
but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.**
- 5 It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise  
than to hear the song of fools.**
- 6 For as the crackling of thorns under a pot,  
so is the laughter of the fools;  
this also is vanity.**
- 7 Surely oppression drives the wise into madness,  
and a bribe corrupts the heart.**
- 8 Better is the end of a thing than its beginning,  
and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.**
- 9 Be not quick in your spirit to become angry,  
for anger lodges in the heart of fools.**
- 10 Say not, “Why were the former days better than these?”  
For it is not from wisdom that you ask this.**
- 11 Wisdom is good with an inheritance,  
an advantage to those who see the sun.**
- 12 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. <sup>1</sup>**

This is God's Word.

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In this passage, the writer who has loudly declared his frustration with all that he is experiencing in life and the oppression and overwhelming unfairness that seems to reign in so many lives and circumstances, comes to a point opposite of what many would do. Many would allow their frustrations to push or draw them away from God – blaming him, laughing at him, making fun of those who hide in their religion – to actually being drawn closer to him. This is wisdom.

As with other wisdom writings in scripture such as the book of Proverbs, Solomon uses the poetic back and forth teachings of comparisons and contrasts to teach. This is good, but this is better. Better is this than that. And so forth.

Solomon goes where many today do all they can to avoid. This is the cultural black hole that even Christians will try to ignore until they cannot.

What seems dark, will lead to light. Three things to consider today.

1. **Death the enemy**
2. **Death the evangelist**
3. **Death the emancipator**

## **DEATH THE ENEMY**

In the Hebrew, the words of Ecclesiastes 7:1 become a wordplay in the layout. Literally “Good name better than ointment good.”<sup>2</sup> That’s the set

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ec 7:1–12.

<sup>2</sup> Bartholomew, Craig G. *Ecclesiastes: Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 246.

up, but the second portion of verse 1 comes with the gut punch “your day of death is better than your day of birth.”

How in the world is one’s day of death better than the day of birth? One is often celebrated with parties, prefaced with showers, gender reveals, family gatherings, laughter, colorful decorations, cake, food, and friends. The other is shrouded in black, sad music, old photographs, lamenting, and often depressing gatherings.

Death *is* the enemy. What do we do with enemies? We either run from them or fight them.

Medical advancements over the last century have made our average life span longer and certainly more comfortable. Yet, these technological steps forward have also carved out space for us to live as if we are not going to die.<sup>3</sup>

Not only is death the enemy, but it can bring us to a crisis of belief, a moment of decision.

## **DEATH THE EVANGELIST**

### **Ecclesiastes 7:2**

**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.** <sup>4</sup>

Funerals interrupt our lives. They get planned most often within just a couple of days. There is a scramble to get everything needed, secure the right rooms, get the casket or the urn of choice, put together a slide show, write an obituary, ensure the pastor is available, get the music chosen, take into consideration those out of town, picking those to speak at the service, ensuring others do not, and more. Regardless how prepared a person may be for a funeral, they aren’t.

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<sup>3</sup> McCullough, Matthew. *Remember Death: The Surprising Path to Living Hope* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 34.

<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ec 7:2.

Funerals may have times of laughter and people may reunite after not seeing each other over time...but even in those moments of reconnection and smiles, there is a dead body in the room.

We have adults in our neighborhoods and families who have never been to a funeral. We have parents who will not take their children to funerals for fear of “scarring” them. We avoid the word death. Our family members do not die. They just pass away. They’re not dead, just departed, graduated, gone home, in a better place.

Theologian Carl Trueman shared in one of his books that when he saw Disney’s version of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, he was shocked at the ending. He says, “I remember my jaw hitting the floor some years back when I watched Disney’s version where the Hunchback does not die but lives happily ever after. The point of the (original) story was that Quasimodo is the guy with the hump who dies at the end and it’s all terribly sad.”<sup>5</sup> We hate death so much, we’ll change the story to avoid it. Happy endings for all!

People die. Death is not a disease to be eliminated. Our success in treating a wide variety of once-fatal problems (which is good, and you should take your doctor-prescribed medicines) has blinded us to the fact that everyone dies and everyone dies of something.<sup>6</sup>

### **Ecclesiastes 7:8a**

**Better is the end of a thing than its beginning,<sup>7</sup>**

Don’t misunderstand the point here. The end of a thing is not better because something is over. The end is better in this case because it the culmination of a thing.

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<sup>5</sup> Trueman, Carl R. *Fools Rush In Where Monkeys Fear to Tread: Taking Aim at Everyone* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012), 169-70.

<sup>6</sup> McCullough, 39.

<sup>7</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ec 7:8.

Go to a funeral. Why? So, you can get ready for your own.

When we go to a funeral, we should think about our reputation.<sup>8</sup> It's inevitable because we will be forced to wonder what others will say about us when we die. How we treated others and lived our lives will be on full display with no opportunity for us to interject. Honest reflection will be shared...or silence will reign. Yet, as Christians we should be thinking more about our heavenly reputation than our earthly one.<sup>9</sup>

As followers of Christ, if we live like the lost, we will live short-sighted. We will long for accolades and earthly pleasures and applause. And, we may get it, but like all our accumulated treasures and stuff that Solomon stated will be left to others after we die, so too will the earthly praises. The earthly reputation fades and rusts. The eternal one lives on.

Death is an evangelist and forces an answer to the question – what will you do with this life? What will you do with the one who *is* life?

## **DEATH THE EMANCIPATOR**

When we use the word emancipator Abraham Lincoln comes to mind. His Emancipation Proclamation issued on January 1, 1863, as our nation approached the third year of the Civil War, declared “that all persons held as slaves...are, and henceforward shall be free.”<sup>10</sup>

This historic document declared freedom for those who were enslaved, considered less than human, and turned property into persons.

Death is the emancipator. Death is that which sets free the prisoner. Death releases the enslaved. Death redeems the guilty. Death unshackles the sinner.

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<sup>8</sup> O'Donnell, Douglas Sean. *Ecclesiastes: Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2014), 136.

<sup>9</sup> O'Donnell, 136.

<sup>10</sup> *National Archives and Records Administration*, National Archives and Records Administration, [www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured-documents/emancipation-proclamation#:~:text=President%20Abraham%20Lincoln%20issued%20the,and%20henceforward%20shall%20be%20free.%22](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured-documents/emancipation-proclamation#:~:text=President%20Abraham%20Lincoln%20issued%20the,and%20henceforward%20shall%20be%20free.%22). Accessed 11 Apr. 2024.

But, not just any death.

Jesus Christ died on the cross. Others had died on crosses, but Jesus died on **THE** cross. The one cross that would hold the Son of God, God the Son, the perfect human, the Good Shepherd, the Friend of Sinners, the Promised One, the Messiah, the Christ. He died because the wages of sin is death and it always has been. Thus, death must happen. Someone had to die.

Jesus's death is the death that set the prisoners free – that's you and me. That was what he said he came to do. He declared that in Nazareth in the Luke 4.

And because of Easter, because of the Resurrection, we know that our Redeemer lives and for those who surrender to Christ, repent of their sin, and receive the gift that Christ offers, we can go to a funeral and find life.

### **John 11:25-26**

**<sup>25</sup> Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, <sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"<sup>11</sup>**

Do you?

Our prayer today – Lord, teach me to live with the reality of my death so that I can live in the gladness of your love.<sup>12</sup>

It is better to go to a funeral than a party.

It is better to be rebuked by the wise than to sing along with fools.

It is better with Jesus than without. Do you believe this?

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<sup>11</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 11:25–26.

<sup>12</sup> McCullough, 21.

