

PROSPERITY AND ADVERSITY

(Ecclesiastes 6:1-7:15)

...Usually it is a joy to go on a journey. Maybe it is a family vacation, a get-away, or a study trip. Often it takes a lot of planning, energy and time to succeed in arriving at the destination. But, what if you never arrived, yet you kept going and going...this is the plight of men and women who think prosperity apart from God is what life is all about. Such a goal is unworthy, elusive, and will never satisfy your heart. This is not the path to enjoyment...
...Solomon tells us that it was God who ordained the incapacity of worldly things to yield enjoyment. In fact, often worldly prosperity only increases the emptiness and dissatisfaction of life.
...Man, by himself, does not know what is "good for him." We think all we need are the "blue skies of life..."

TWO CONTRASTING OPPOSITES OF LIFE TEACHING US THAT LIFE IS NOT WHAT IT MAY SEEM. For, adversity might be far better for us than prosperity!

I. Prosperity May Not Always Be Good For Us. (6:1-12)

- A. You can have a great amount of possessions and yet lack the ability to enjoy them. (vv.1-2)
...Such a situation is a heavy burden for man to bear. (v.1) Many today suffer from this as they attempt to enjoy possessions, but find they have nothing but a deep emptiness inside.
...This book pounds home over and over again, enjoyment does not come with increased goods, rather, it is God's gift. If He withholds it, no amount of human effort can get it.
- B. You can have a very long life, with many children and even this will not meet the deepest hunger of your heart for contentment. (vv 3-6) Without God's gift of enjoyment, nothing will satisfy.
 - 1. Solomon tells that even a still born baby is better off...he has "more rest." (v.5)
 - 2. And at the end, both the wealthy man and the stillborn end up at the same place.
- C. Try as hard as you may, you are incapable of finding joy by your own effort. (vv7-9)
 - 1. Your appetite will never be satisfied...even though you have much. (7)
 - 2. Your toil (work and activity) is designed to satisfy man's appetite for pleasure and contentment, BUT hard work and a desperate drive to satisfy along these lines will never work. It cannot produce lasting pleasure.
 - 3. There is no difference between the wise, the poor, and the fool. (v.8)
...Therefore, we need to be content with what God has given to us. (v.9)
- D. The reason for this is given: Man is up against God's unchangeable decree. (vv 10-12)
...for God has "named" or planned everything. (10)
...Man cannot contend with God. (10) God alone knows what is really good GOOD for man. (12)
...So given our narrow view of life, don't complain to God, rather accept the reality that we are not wise enough to know what is good for us, then trust God to choose the elements we need!

II. Adversity Is Not Always Bad. (7:1-15) ...for hard times shape us. In these proverbs

Solomon lists the good things that can happen during our days of trouble and affliction.

- A. A "good name" outlasts the laughter and mirth of a wealthy man, even if trouble finds you. (1)
...for a name has an influence beyond its owner. Like perfume, but better. A poor man can have..
- B. The lesson of deep sorrow is that "death and a funeral can lead to the right view of life. (2)
...such things often provide a "mellowing of the heart." The crucial issues of life are faced...
- C. Sorrow can lead to gladness. (vv3-6) Adversity can teach us what success never could!
...here he contrasts the fool with his songs and laughter with the wise who have mourned.
- D. In a number of afflictions, the point is made, "wait for God's timing, don't be impatient." (7-9)
- E. In the midst of life today, don't imagine that the old days were better. ((10)
- F. The truth of the matter is that affliction is the appointment of God. (13-14)
 - 1. God tells us that "when times are good, be happy." Have a party!!!
 - 2. Further, He tells us when times are "bad." Remember, "God has made the one as well as the other, and you cannot know your future." In the school of adversity, God has many lessons to teach us. He weaves all of this together in our lives for His Glory.
 - 3. So you can never say...prosperity is a sign of God's blessing and adversity is not...
...The contrasts of life are deliberately planned by God so that we would ultimately develop a simple trust and dependence in God. Both prosperity and adversity come from our Father.

LESSONS FOR OUR LIVES: