

STUDY SEVEN IN THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES “THE MID-LIFE CRISIS”

STUDY NUMBER SEVEN – Eat, Drink and be Merry: for Tomorrow We Die 9:1 – 10:20

Text:

v. 1 So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God’s hands, but no man knows whether love or hate awaits him.

v. 2 All share a common destiny – the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. As it is with the good man, so with the sinner; as it is with those who take oaths, so it is with those who are afraid to take them.

v. 3 This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun. The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their heart while they live, and afterwards they join the dead.

v. 4 Anyone who is among the living has hope – even a live dog is better off than a dead lion!

v. 5 For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten.

v. 6 Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun.

v. 7 Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favors what you do.

v. 8 Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil.

v. 9 Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun – all your meaningless life that God has given you under the sun – all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun.

v. 10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.

v. 11 I have seen something else under the sun: The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all.

v. 12 Moreover, no man knows when his hour will come: As fish are caught in a cruel net, or birds are taken in a snare, so men are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them.

v. 13 I saw under the sun this example of wisdom that greatly impressed me:

v. 14 There was once a small city with only a few people in it. And a powerful king came against it, surrounded it and built huge siege works against it.

v. 15 Now there lived in that city a man poor but wise, and he saved the city by his wisdom. But nobody remembered that poor man.

v. 16 So I said, “Wisdom is better than strength.” But the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are no longer heeded.

v. 17 The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools.

v. 18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

10:v. 1 As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

v. 2 The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left.

v. 3 Even as he walks along the road, the fool lacks sense and shows everyone how stupid he is.

v. 4 If a ruler’s anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great errors to rest.

v. 5 There is an evil I have seen under the sun, the sort of error that arises from a ruler:

v. 6 Fools are put in many high positions, while the rich occupy the low ones.

v. 7 I have seen slaves on horseback, while princes go on foot like slaves.

v. 8 Whoever digs a pit may fall into it; whoever breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake.

v. 9 Whoever quarries stones may be injured by them; whoever splits logs may be endangered by them.

v. 10 If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed but still will bring success.

v. 11 If a snake bites before it is charmed, there is no profit for the charmer.

v. 12 Words from a wise man’s mouth are gracious, but a fool is consumed by his own lips.

v. 13 At the beginning his words are folly; at the end they are wicked madness –

v. 14 and the fool multiplies words. No one knows what is coming – who can tell him what will happen after him?

v. 15 A fool’s work wearies him; he does not know the way to town.

v. 16 Woe to you, O land whose king was a servant and whose princes feast in the morning.

v. 17 Blessed are you, O land whose king is of noble birth and whose princes eat at a proper time – for strength and not for drunkenness.

v. 18 If a man is lazy, the rafters sag; if his hands are idle, the house leaks.

v. 19 A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes life merry, but money is the answer for everything.

v. 20 Do not revile the king even in your thoughts, or curse the rich in your bedroom, because a bird of the air may carry your words, and a bird on the wing may report what you say.

INTRODUCTION:

Willa Cather says, “There are only two or three human stories and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before.

The lobster grows by developing and shedding a series of hard protective shells. Each time it expands from within, the confining shell must be sloughed off. It is left exposed and vulnerable until, in time, a new covering grows to replace the old. Times of crisis, of disruption or constructive change are not only predictable but desirable. They mean growth.

Mid-life is the time when “sometime” becomes “now”.

Gail Sheehy in her book Passages displays a cartoon drawn by Jules Feiffer that describes much of the sequence of life that we experience:

When we are being dragged to school at 5, we are crying, “I am not ready!” When we are dragged off to camp at 10 years of age, we are saying, “I am not ready!” When we are drafted at 19, we are saying, “I am not ready!” When we are married at 23, we are saying, “I am not ready!” When we become a father at 24, 25, 26 and 27, we are saying, “I am not ready, not ready, not ready, not ready!” finally, at 50, we run away from our wives, kids, and grandchildren and we can hear them crying, “George, Daddy, Grandpa!” And our response is “I’m not coming out until I am ready!”

Thus far in our series of studies we have heard Solomon express the words that depict a mid-life crisis in chapter 1 when he says, “Meaningless, meaningless, utterly meaningless, everything is meaningless.” We raise the question, “Is that all there is?” Solomon makes three critical observations in chapter 1:

1. What is the gain from my labor?
2. What is new under the sun?
3. Who is going to remember me after I am gone, anyway?

This forced us into chapter 2 where we discussed the “Success Syndrome; Work, Wine and Women.” Here Solomon first pursues the path of pleasure and then pours himself into projects, only to face the ultimate frustration that everything he has acquired has to be left to someone who won’t appreciate it.

In the third study we raised the issue: “Whatever will be, will be.” Here we find a man in quiet desperation, constantly bumping up against the eternal purpose of God which is standing as a restraining fence or roadblock in the pathway of his own personal plans.

In study #4 we talked about being caught in the corporate squeeze – a man looks up. Here we discussed the matter of the oppression of others for selfish advantage. We talked about the problems of going it alone and the need for fellowship, and also the need for counsel and advice. Solomon ended our fourth study with some warnings with regard to being overzealous in religious matters while under the stress of the circumstances in chapter 4.

In study #5 we talked about the love of money being the real problem. When a man is viewing life selfishly rather than socially, it is easy for him to be snared and motivated toward a money madness. We discussed together the misfortunes of having a fortune.

In study #6 we talked about the “wisdom from the pits or digging out of depression, thinking through trauma.” Here Solomon is sharing fragments of advice through these two chapters to deal with the problem of being down and really not wanting to go on any further.

This brings us now to study #7 “Eat, Drink and be Merry: For Tomorrow We Die”, chapter 9:1 – 10:20.

v. 1 So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God’s hands, but no man knows whether love or hate awaits him.

Jennings points out, “Yes, verily, even the very hairs of his head are all numbered. No joy, no happiness, no disappointment, no perplexity, no sorrow so infinitesimally small, let alone the greatest, but that the one who controls all worlds takes the closest interest therein and turns in his love everything to blessing, forcing all to work together for good and making the very storms of life obedient servants to speed his children to their home.”

Baxter points out, “Finally, in chapters 9 – 12, we have the quest reviewed and concluded. Looking back over the way he has come, the Preacher now says, ‘For all this, I laid to my heart, even to explore all this, that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God. With these words he commences a review, after which he submits his final conclusion. First, he faces us once more with the fact that all things come alike to all. Then in view of this, he reaffirms that the true good is not to be found in pleasure or the absorptions of this present life, nor in human wisdom, though wisdom is admittedly superior to folly.’”

Solomon says, “So I reflected on all this,” that is, all of the things that he has worked on in the first eight chapters, and he concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God’s hands. They, first, are in God’s hands and then what they do are in his hands.

John 10:28, 29 “And I give eternal life to them and they shall never perish and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My father who has given them to me is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”

Solomon goes on to say, “and what they do are in God’s hands.” This takes us back to chapter 3 where Solomon makes it clear there is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven.

“But no man knows whether love or hate awaits him.”

From the manner in which things happens his life, a man cannot tell whether God’s attitude toward him is one of love or of hatred. Everything is still before them. This means practically anything may happen to a man. The love and the hatred referred to must be thought of as attitudes of God, for God was just mentioned as having all issues in hand and the words that follow suggest that he may send anything. No man has a certainty as to the next thing that shall befall him.

v. 2 All share a common destiny – the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. As it is with the good man, so with the sinner: as it is with those who take oaths, so it is with those who are afraid to take the.

Veldey points out, “All things, earthquakes, tempests, pestilences, etc., come alike to all, just so death is an event common to all and sweeps away all distinctions, whether morally and ceremonially clean or unclean, religions or irreligious, sincere and insincere, it is an evil above all evils, that the heart of man makes this fact a reason for madly persisting in evil while they live and after that to the dead they go. In the face of the one event death, sin is madness, nevertheless, while there is life there is hope of salvation. The vilest, so long as he lives, has hope. The noblest, who dies unconverted, has no hope. The living know they shall die and may be led to consider their ways.”

Solomon has been reflecting upon all the events that happen in men’s lives and cannot explain them from the standpoint of being worthy or unworthy, or whether God is expressing love or hate by any of these happenings.

v. 3 This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun. The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead.

Psalms 5:15 “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin my mother conceived me.”

Romans 3:23 “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”
And afterward they joined the dead.

Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

v. 4 Anyone who is among the living has hope – even a live dog is better off than a dead lion!”

We express the thought: “where there is life there is hope.” A living dog, which would be a contemptible cur, who roams the streets as a scavenger, would even such a one as this, while he is still alive would have the advantage over the regal lion, whose carcass lies in the thicket.

v. 5 For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing: they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten.

The thought is merely that a living person has the distinct advantage of knowing that he will die and be able to arrange many a thing in his life and prepare to meet the issue. But for the dead every opportunity for action or achievement of any sort is a thing of the past. The dead know not anything at all, neither have they any reward, for the memory of them is forgotten.

They have no further reward as far as this life is concerned but in the future there is reward.

II Timothy 4:6 – 8 Paul says, “I am ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight; I have finished the course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day, and not to me only but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

Solomon has already spoken back in chapter 1 about the frustration of not being remembered. Chapter 1:11 “There is no remembrance of men of old and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow.”

v. 6 Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished: never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun.

As far as this life is concerned, they are out of it all. All this has long since perished, neither have they any portion any more in anything that is done under the sun.

The love, the hate and the jealousy have vanished with the demise of the individual and they will no longer have a part in any of the activities that happen under the sun.

v. 7 Go eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favors what you do.

The command given in light of the previous observations are to buy up the opportunities now, to eat food with gladness and drink wine with a joyful heart, for it is right now that God favors what you do.

The command that is given is directed against the tendency to brood and to ponder over the vexatious problems that mark the age of the author and his readers. The summons to eat bread and drink wine is directed against the idea of yielding to grief and for that reason the two qualifying phrases are added, “with joy” and “with a merry heart.” The possessives “your bread” and “your wine” imply that these are gifts of God to which one can rightly claim title. The whole of the commandment approves itself as eminently sane, for from every point of view, it is better policy to enjoy what may be enjoyed than to brood over insoluble difficulties. We have seen this thought in several other parts of the letter:

2:24 “A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too I see is from the hand of God.

3:12 “I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That every man may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil – this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it, so men will revere him.”

3:22 “So I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work, because that is his lot. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?”

5:18 “Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him – for this is his lot.”

6:12 “For who knows what is good for a man in life, during the few and meaningless days he passes through like a shadow? Who can tell him what will happen under the sun after he is gone?”

8:15 “So I commend the enjoyment of life because nothing is better for a man under heaven than to eat and drink and be glad, then joy will accompany him and his work all the days of the life God has given him under the sun.”

v. 8 Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil.

The white garments become the emblems of purity and festivity and the use of oil is a symbol of joy, as it is in Psalm 45:8 and Isaiah 61:3. Grief always induced men to go about with hair unkempt and face unwashed, and joy expressed itself in a shining countenance, the effect of which was heightened by the anointing of the head and the face with oil and then properly smoothing and arranging the hair.

v. 9 Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun – all your meaningless days, for this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun.

The suggestion, strictly speaking, is not directed to the married but to the unmarried. We do not find “thy wife” but “a wife”, which implies choosing a woman to become a wife. The one to be chosen is the one that is loved and so the injunction practically bids a man to bask in the sunshine of her love. This is, without doubt, one of God’s choicest gifts, one that is well-calculated to make this vain and toilsome life far more bearable. The fact that God cannot disapprove such an attitude and that he actually gives his sanction to it is made clear by the expression, “this is thy portion in life.”

v. 10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.

Colossians 3:23 “Whatever you do, do your work heartily as for the Lord rather than for men.”

John 9:4 “I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day, for the night is coming when no man can work.”

Pentecost points out, “With the will you can obey the master. With the heart you can love the Lord. He said that whatever you do, do it as to the Lord, from the heart for you serve the Lord Christ. Housewife, as you work in your home, do all that dusting and cooking because you are the Lord’s servant and this is the Lord’s will. You serve the Lord Christ. If it is God’s will for you to be a housewife, then you are tested on how you perform a housewife’s function. If it is God’s will for you to be a secretary, you are tested by what kind of a secretary you are. If in his will, you are a student, you are tested by what God’s will is for you today, what you do in school. If it is God’s will for you to be in business, you are tested by what you do at the office. You are there as a servant of the Lord, no matter what he gives you to do and your love for him should transform that which is routine and burdensome and monotonous so that it becomes your joy. One of the secrets of dealing with

monotony is a personalization of what you are doing. If you are doing it for an organization, that's one thing. If you are doing it to please a person, that's something entirely different. I know that husbands couldn't employ somebody to do what housewives do from early morning till late at night, working around the house, in the kitchen, with the children, keeping the home going. Why do they do it? They are personalizing it. They are doing it for their husband. They are doing it for their children. And what they couldn't be hired to do they do out of love. Why did the apostle Paul endure all those beatings, stoning, imprisonments, shipwrecks and the weariness of all his travels as outlined in II Corinthians 11? The love of Christ constrains us. He personalized all he did. Everything he did was to please a person."

Leupold points out, "One thing the Preacher by no means advocates and that is a supine attitude, a drifting along, a doing of nothing, on the claim that it avails nothing – a purely defeatist attitude. There is work to be done. The strength that we have is to be used and where opportunity of putting it to use presents itself, such an opportunity is to be utilized. Solomon is therefore emphasizing only what no one questions, that in this life certain resources that are at our disposal may achieve certain results. When this life is terminated, there is absolutely no opportunity of making up for the tasks left undone, no matter how many and varied our gifts may have been."

Philippians 3:10 – 14

"That I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead; not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet. But one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

There is a poetic piece written by an unknown author that well describes what is in this verse. It is called "Be the Best":

"If you can't be a pine on the top of the hill,
 Be a scrub in the valley, but be the best little scrub by the
 side of the rill.
 Be a bush if you can't be a tree.
 If you can't be a bush, be a bit of the grass
 And some highway happier make.
 If you can't be a musky, then just be a bass,
 But the liveliest bass in the lake.

We can't all be captains, some have to be crew.
 There's something for all of us here.
 There's work to be done and we've all got to do
 Our part in a way that's sincere.
 If you can't be a highway, then just be a trail.
 If you can't be the sun, be a star.
 If isn't by size that you win or fail.
 Be the best of whatever you are."

There are three commands, then, that Solomon has given here as a result of his observations and with the grave in view:

1. Go eat your food with gladness and drink your wine with a joyful heart.
2. Enjoy life with a wife whom you love all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun.
3. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave where you are going there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.
- 4.

v. 11 I have seen something else under the sun: The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all.

Solomon now introduces something else which he has witnessed under the sun, then he makes five statements:

1. the race is not to the swift
2. the battle to the strong
3. nor does food come to the wise
4. or wealth to the brilliant
5. or favor to the learned
- 6.

Having made all these statements, he says, "but time and chance happen to them all."

Romans 9:16 "So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy."

Even as we have learned back in chapter 3, "there is a time and season for every activity," in all of these different instances cited here. God may let things transpire that overthrow those who have apparently had all resources and gifts at their disposal. He may let something meet them and cross their path, events that interrupt their prosperous course and alter it permanently.

v. 12 Moreover, no man knows when his hour will come: As fish are caught in a cruel net, or birds are taken in a snare, so men are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them.

Jesus often said, “My hour is not yet come.” And then when he came to that time just preceding the cross, he announced to his disciples, “My hour has come.”

For man, he knows not when his hour will come.

He uses the illustration of the fish that are caught in a net and birds that are taken in a snare. “And so men are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them.”

v. 13 I also saw under the sun this example of wisdom that greatly impressed me.

Now Solomon is going to give an illustration of wisdom that had impressed his heart as he observed it.

v. 14 There was once a small city with only a few people in it. And a powerful king came against it, surrounded it and built huge siege works against it.

v. 15 Now there lived in that city a man poor but wise, and he saved the city by his wisdom. But nobody remembered that poor man.

v. 16 So I said, “Wisdom is better than strength.” But the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are no longer heeded.

Solomon describes a small city that has just a very small population and a powerful king came up against it. The king with his army surrounded it and built a siege work against it, in order to get up on the protecting wall of the city and do battle. And in the 15th verse he says, “There lived in that city a man poor but wise, and he is the one who saved the city by his wisdom. But nobody remembered the poor man.”

God’s patterns are not predictable. Chance has at least as much influence on our well-being as human endeavor. Still if we have the choice between power and wisdom, we should choose wisdom. The Preacher illustrates this conclusion by the story in these last verses.

Solomon’s conclusions are in the 16th verse: “So I said, ‘Wisdom is better than strength.’ But the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are no longer heeded.”

v. 17 the quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools.

James 3:14 – 18: “But if ye have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And this seed, whose fruit is righteousness, is sown in peace by those who make peace.”

v. 18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

J. Vernon McGee points out, “But one sinner destroys much good. There is a tremendous influence exerted by the life of one individual and the influence is more potent when it is in the wrong direction. History will bear this out. Adam sinned and his sin affected the entire race of mankind. Achan sinned and because of him an entire nation went down in defeat. They had to deal with the sin of Achan before they could achieve a victory. Rehoboam’s sin split the kingdom of Israel. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira brought the first defect into the early church. From that day on the church was not as potent as it had been from the beginning. You and I have an influence either for good or for bad, no matter who you are, you occupy a place of influence. For none of us lives to himself and no man dies to himself. Every person is a preacher. No one can keep himself from being a preacher. You are a preacher whoever you are. It may be a very small circle but you are affecting someone.”

10:v. 1 As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

Kidner points out: “Verse 1 puts in a vividly unpleasant form, the principle on which the previous chapter ended, that it takes far less to ruin something than to create it. This, incidentally, is part of the advantage enjoyed by evil and of its appeal to the vicious side of us. For to put it as bluntly as Solomon does, it is easier to make a stink than to create sweetness. But in this verse, it is the sudden lapse of foolish impulse that is the trouble. And there are endless instances of prizes forfeited and good beginnings marred in a single reckless moment, not only by the irresponsible, such as Esau, but by the sorely tried, such as Moses and Aaron.”

Many of the Biblical characters had a tremendous reputation till the dead flies got into the ointment pot. Perfumes were commonly kept in sealed alabaster jars or cruses under the watchful eye of the perfumer or apothecary. I have often wondered how those winged bugs ever happened to fall into the vat. It certainly wasn’t planned. Only one answer: carelessness. The cover wasn’t replaced. Neglecting caring for the perfumed oils and spices allowed dead flies to drop in. At

first it wasn't noticed but under the heat and pressure of daily living there arose a mighty stink. Leave the lid off your thought life and the lustful flies will start the mental rot. Neglect the sealing of your heart to impure motives and desires and it won't be long before the aroma is sickening. Don't excuse, forget or become careless about the specks, fragments, mites, and miniatures in your personal life. Plug the hole in the dike of your personal holiness and daily devotions to Almighty God. It has been the neglect of these little follies that has washed out many a good and great man for God. King Solomon writes this as a personal testimonial with life fouled up by sin and folly, how he wishes those dead flies had never got in.

Solomon and Shulamith in the "Song of Solomon" make a commitment to each other as lovers to 'catch the foxes for us – the little foxes that are ruining the vineyards, while our vineyards are in blossom. My beloved is mine and I am his. He pastures his flock among the lilies.'

Lydia Howard puts it in poetic fashion called "The Camel's Nose":

"Once in his shop a workman wrought
 With languid head and listless thought,
 When through the open window space,
 Behold, a camel thrust his face.
 'My nose is cold,' he meekly cried.
 'Oh let me warm it by thy side.'
 Since no denial word was said,
 In came the nose, in came the head.
 As sure as sermon follows text,
 The long and scraggly neck came next.
 And then as falls the threatening storm,
 In leapt the whole ungainly form.
 Aghast, the owner gazed around
 And on the ugly invader frowned
 Convinced as closer still he pressed,
 There was no room for such a guest.
 Yet more astonished heard him say,
 'If thou art troubled, go away,
 For in this place I choose to stay.'

O youthful hearts to gladness born,
 Treat not this Arab lore with scorn.
 To evil habit's earliest wile
 Lend neither ear nor glance nor smile
 Choke the dark fountain 'ere it flows
 Nor e'en admit the camel's nose."

I Corinthians 5:6 “Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.”

Hubbard points out, “Folly has dangers and wisdom has limits. Those twin points are made in this proverb. Folly is so powerful that a little of it, like a bad smell can overwhelm large amounts of wisdom. Folly is also dangerous because it heads us in the wrong direction.”

v. 2 The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left.

Some politicians have taken this verse out of context here and pointed up the fact that it is the wise who are conservative and the fools who are liberals.

In essence, what Solomon is saying is that the wise inclines to those things which are right and to the submissiveness to authority and the obedient heart, and the fool turns from these and in rebellion and disobedience creates some real problems for himself and for others.

v. 3 Even as he walks along the road, the fool lacks sense and shows everyone how stupid he is.

It doesn't take long for an individual to observe and he will be able to tell that the fool lacks sense and shows everyone how stupid he is.

Solomon uses the illustration of walking along the road and that even this, if observed carefully, can show these things.

v. 4 If a ruler's anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great errors to rest.

If the authority over you gets angry, don't turn tail and leave. Solomon says, “calmness can lay great errors to rest.”

James 1:19 “This you know, my beloved brethren, but let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.

James 1:20 For the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

It is when we can control our tongues and remain calm in the midst of the adversity of anger against us, that great errors can be laid to rest. The principle here is to respond rather than to react in a stressful set of circumstances.

v. 5 There is an evil I have seen under the sun, the sort of error that arises from a ruler.

v. 6 Fools are put in many high positions, while the rich occupy the low ones.

v. 7 I have seen slaves on horseback, while princes go on foot like slaves.

Solomon here is witnessing to many of life's discrepancies.

v. 8 Whoever digs a pit may fall into it; whoever breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake.

v. 9 Whoever quarries stones may be injured by them; whoever splits logs may be endangered by them.

There is the possibility that while doing a good deed by digging a pit you may fall into it. Or when tearing down a house you may be bitten by a snake; or you may be in the constructive project or quarrying stones and be injured by them; or splitting logs for a fire and be endangered by them.

Solomon takes four experiences of life here, experiences of good activity that can end in injury.

v. 10 If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed but skill will bring success.

Before going out to work, the ax needs to be sharpened and it will make the work that much easier and the skill of sharpening and working with a sharp ax will bring success.

v. 11 If a snake bites before it is charmed, there is no profit for the charmer.

The snake charmer works to gain an audience and also makes money from his performance. But if it bites before it is charmed, there is no profit for the charmer. He will probably lose his life in the process.

v. 12 Words from a wise man's mouth are gracious, but a fool is consumed by his own lips.

McGee points out, "When my daughter went away to college, I gave her that same advice. I told her she would have the greatest opportunity of all of her life to make some wonderful friendships. But I advised her to be careful in choosing her friends. There are some people who will try to destroy you. There are people who are like the snake or the serpent. If you are nice to them and can keep them charmed, things will go well. But be very careful how you act in their presence. This is good advice, my friend, but it is a middle-of-the-road course, as you can see.

Solomon again revealing the fact that a wise man speaks words which are gracious and a fool is consumed by his own lips. His words reveal the depth of his character and life style. An unknown author wrote the following poem called “The Builder Versus the Wrecker”:

“I watched them tearing a building down,
A gang of men in a busy town.
With a heave and a ho and a lusty yell
They swung a beam and the side wall fell.

I asked the foreman, ‘Are these men skilled,
And the kind you’d hire for you to build?’
He laughed and said, ‘Why, no, indeed,
Just common laborers is all I need.
They can easily wreck in a day or two
What has taken the builders years to do.’
So I said to myself as I went on my way,
‘What part in the game of life do I play?
Am I shaping my deeds to a well-made plan,
Carefully measuring with a rule and a square, patiently doing
The very best I can,
Or am I a wrecker who walks the town,
Content with the labor of tearing down?”

v. 13 At the beginning his words are folly; at the end they are wicked madness –

There is a progression in his vocabulary: First they are folly and then they are wicked madness.

v. 14 and the fool multiplies words. No one knows what is coming – who can tell him what will happen after him?

In the multiplication of words the fool tries to tell what is coming and so Solomon raises the question, “Who can tell him what will happen after him?”

v. 15 A fool’s work wearies him; he does not know the way to town.

He is busy in a lot of ways but he really doesn’t know the time of day or he does not have enough sense to come in out of the rain.

DeHaan points out, “Unqualified men in high positions are filled with a false bravado because they do not know what will happen to them. In actuality they are often short-sighted and subject to delusions. And Solomon compares them to a man

who cannot even follow the road signs to the city. Today we would say that they don't know enough to come in out of the rain."

v. 16 Woe to you, O land whose king was a servant and whose princes feast in the morning.

They give themselves over to satisfying pleasures they were denied while servants and spend much of their time feasting instead of ruling over the people properly.

v. 17 Blessed are you, O land whose king is of noble birth and whose princes eat at a proper time – for strength and not for drunkenness.

How different everything in the land could be if the princes were of the type they ought to be. As far as disposition is concerned, the king should be noble, literally, son of nobles. That is to say, descended from them but primarily one who really merits the name.

There is a process that seems to go on in the realm of leadership. The first is power, which leads to privilege, which leads to personal advantage, and that issues in pleasure.

v. 18 If a man is lazy, the rafters sag; if his hands are idle, the house leaks.

Many times the Lord indelibly inscribes upon our minds illustrations of a truth in the most unique way. I was reading and preparing this particular series of studies in the Pacific Northwest during the month of August while speaking for some youth camps. We were staying in the missionary cabin, which is a small cabin with several bedrooms and a kitchen and small bathroom. The roof of the cabin had not been properly cared for and on the day that I was reading and studying these verses, the rains were falling, and as a result, we had a wet floor in the kitchen area. We had gathered quite a number of buckets to put under the various leaks and while I was reading this verse, behind me I could hear the music of the drops as they hit the bottles and the buckets, catching the water that was coming through the roof.

v. 19 A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes life merry, but money is the answer for everything.

Leupold points out, "Whatever other things their heart may desire, they have money in their pockets, and it may procure the other embellishments for the banquets which were apparently very sumptuous. This is what is meant by 'Money pays for everything' or 'Money meets all demands,' literally, 'Answers all things.'"

v. 20 Do not revile the king even in your thoughts, or curse the rich in your bedroom, because a bird of the air may carry your words and a bird on the wing may report what you say.

The tenth chapter concludes with a command about the control of the tongue, not to revile the king, even though these experiences of the previous verse are true; not to revile him in your thoughts nor curse the rich in your bedroom.

I Peter 2:17 says, “Honor the king.

Leupold points out, “The rendering curse may be a bit too strong. It means to speak lightly of. It was not safe to make even a frivolous remark about such unworthy rulers. The author counsels the most extreme caution: ‘Do not permit yourself to harbor seditious thoughts about the king; for such thoughts, if they are allowed to sour the mind, as they surely will if they are brooded over, may unexpectedly betray a man into an ill-advised utterance and his very life will be endangered in consequence.’”

Hubbard points out, “Jesus too believed that God’s people should have the wisdom to deal with life’s problems. When he commissioned his disciples, he gave them this advice: ‘Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. So be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.’ (Matt. 10:16). That is about as practical as one can get counseling persons to guard against persecution without becoming bitter or hostile. This awareness of God’s kingdom also taught us how to deal with human government, the theme of which Ecclesiastes gave more than passing attention. God’s kingdom requires us to be citizens responsible to our earthly governments, while it also insists that our first loyalty is to the Lord who created us and redeemed us. We respect our governors but we do not fear them. They too, with all their pomp and power, are subject to God’s authority. They govern best when they govern according to his will. We serve our governments best when we encourage them to do this. Finally, Jesus took his pupils beyond the wisdom of the older preacher when he instilled in them a stronger sense of the power of love.

“So much of what Ecclesiastes said dealt with shrewd conduct. Jesus knew that getting along in life was more a matter of concern than cunning. He spurred his disciples to pray for their enemies and to do good to those who mistreated them. Make love your aim not just success. Make love your aim because love is success by God’s measurements. Those were Jesus’ exhortations. He, who knew God’s ways perfectly because he himself was God, knew that God’s ways are the ways of love.”

CONCLUSION:

For the man or woman going through the mid-life crisis there is the difficulty of recognizing that the grave could possibly be the end, and as result of that, one needs to adopt the philosophy: “Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.”

We have seen some of Solomon’s reflections in these two chapters that relate to this kind of thinking.

What are the lessons that we have learned from this particular study?

LESSON #1: The righteous and the wise and what they do are in God’s hands.

LESSON #2: Eat your food with gladness. Enjoy life with your wife. And what your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.

LESSON #3: No man knows when his hour will come, either of trial or death.

LESSON #4: The quiet words of the wise are to be heeded more than the shouts of the fool.

LESSON #5: A little folly spoils the whole life.

LESSON #6: Do not revile the authority that is over you.