

WHEN HARD THINGS HELP

FEBRUARY 26, 2006 - ECCLESIASTES 7:1-14

MEMORY VERSE:

Ecclesiastes 7:13-14, "Consider the work of God: who can make straight what He has made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him."

INTRODUCTION

In chapter six, Solomon communicates to us that prosperity from this world's perspective is not necessarily a good thing. In the first part of chapter seven, he begins to demonstrate that adversity is not necessarily bad. Solomon uses a series of proverb sayings to illustrate this point and drive home the old adage, "No pain, no gain." God is the Potter and we are the clay and without the searing heat from the Potter's kiln we only become a useless lump of clay. The Lord is saying trust me, even in the difficult and hard to explain times, because I am using these to draw you to me, refine and develop your character and teach you to live wisely from a Godly perspective.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. In verses 1-6, what are some of the comparisons that Solomon makes regarding the circumstances and situations of life? How do death, mourning, sorrow and rebuke benefit us?

2. What dangers does Solomon warn against in verses 7-9? Give some examples from today's world that still support these conclusions?

3. What does Solomon mean by his statement in verse 10? How do we sometimes distort the "good old days?"

4. In verses 11-12, would you agree with Solomon's thoughts in regards to wisdom and wealth? Why or why not?

5. Read verses 13-14. State these verses in your own words and describe how we should view the circumstances of this life from God's perspective. Why don't we always look at life from this point of view?

OUR WALK WITH GOD

1. Describe a time when you were frustrated that God did not intervene to "fix" a difficult or painful situation? Why did you feel frustrated? How has your perspective changed since we have been in this study of the book of Ecclesiastes?

2. Describe a time when you learned a significant life-lesson through an adverse situation. What did you learn about God's character and sovereignty during this life changing lesson?

ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS FOR THE WEEK

"The world seems out of control and I have to depend on the Spirit of God to help me through. But ultimately I know that God is in control of everything. Nothing that happens in my life falls outside the bounds of His reach. He corrals every seemingly random and stray event and brings them together for good in my life because I love Him and have been called according to His purpose. That means that I am free to live paradoxically in this world, free to embrace the truths of God's kingdom in the face of every contrary teaching of the majority. Free to be a contrarian for Christ and His kingdom.

Ecclesiastes helps us see that God's plan is good and clear but sometimes mysterious. When we know what we know, it doesn't matter, because to God it is not a mystery. He is the Author of the Book of Life, and He knew the ending before He set the beginning in place. Therefore, it is okay for Him to know and for us to not know, because He is God and we are not. And we choose to let Him be God in our lives."

David Jeremiah, "Searching for Heaven on Earth"

"Pride is a sin of whose presence its victim is least conscious. There are three tests by means of which pride in your heart can soon be discovered. These three tests are:

1. *Test of Procedure:* How do we react when another is selected for an assignment we expected, or the office we coveted? When another is promoted and we are overlooked? When another outshines us in gifts and accomplishments?
2. *Test of Sincerity:* In our moments of honest self-criticism, we will say many things about ourselves and really mean them. But how do we feel when others, especially our rivals, say exactly the same things about us?
3. *Test of Criticism:* Does criticism arouse hostility and resentment in our hearts, and cause us to fly into immediate self-justification?"

J. Oswald Sanders