

Teach Us, *Qohelet* (Part 17)

Ecclesiastes 9:11-18

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Qohelet is a wise elder who gathers his grandchildren to share his wisdom and help them learn through his mistakes. He pursued (and obtained) wealth, intelligence, power, and fame, much more so than we could ever do. So his conclusions at the end of it all are worth our consideration, and we should consider his opinion valid and valuable. But after six months of listening to *Qohelet*, has he won you over yet? We have a natural resistance to accepting advice from our elders. Likely even *Qohelet*'s own grandchildren were rolling their eyes in dismissal at his lectures, that's why he keeps having to repeat himself. We don't like being told what to do. We think to ourselves that we can become wise by experiencing everything ourselves. We may think it's wise to learn from our own mistakes, but it's wiser still to learn from the mistakes of others. We all like to think we know better, so we don't take advice. And this leads us to repeat the same mistakes as our elders. As I grew older, I found that my father became wiser in my eyes because I realized that he did know what he was talking about, and I just didn't want to listen. It is this tendency for us to dismiss wisdom that *Qohelet* addresses in today's passage.

But first, in vv. 11-12 *Qohelet* continues to talk about how the world doesn't work the way we expect it to. The fastest doesn't always win the race, the strongest doesn't always win the battle, the wise don't always have food, the brilliant don't always have wealth, and the learned don't always have favor. The world is not fair, but is instead chaotic and cruel. This is why we put our hope in Jesus, who will come to fix the world. In the beginning, the world was formless and void. When God created the world in Genesis 1, He provided form to the chaos. He separated the light from darkness, the sky from the waters above and below, and the land from the sea. Then He filled the emptiness, creating lights in the sky, animals to fill the sky and sea, and animals on land. And it was good. But when man rebelled, creation became chaotic again, and man was cursed to empty meaningless toil. So we need Jesus to come back to restore order and fullness to creation. But until then, we need to realize that the world is still broken and that pursuing wisdom and righteousness will not guarantee a smooth life. Still we should pursue wisdom, while looking forward to Jesus' return.

Then in vv. 13-18 *Qohelet* tells a parable to make the point that although wisdom won't guarantee a smooth life, we should resist the urge to reject it because it will still help us navigate

life. The first point he makes is that wisdom is great. This example of wisdom *greatly* impressed *Qohelet* (v. 13) because wisdom can give a small city victory over a *great* king with *great* siege works (vv. 14-15). Thus wisdom was far greater than the power of the enemy king and his massive weapons. But the second point is that wisdom is not highly regarded (vv. 15-16). The wise man was not remembered nor his wisdom heeded. This is because we have a natural tendency to reject wisdom when it is offered to us. *Qohelet* experienced this rejection firsthand because his own son Rehoboam did not listen or learn from him. Rehoboam was a fool who went on to lose much of the kingdom after failing to heed the wisdom of his advisers (1 Kings 12:1-14). The source of this reluctance to heed wisdom is our stubborn rebellious pride. History teaches us what mistakes not to repeat, yet the same mistakes keep being repeated because people don't listen. This rebellious attitude originates all the way back to Adam and Eve. In Genesis 3:6 we see that Adam and Eve think they can gain wisdom by disobeying God and eating the fruit. They failed to realize that obeying God is wisdom. They didn't have to experience evil for themselves to gain wisdom. Instead they should've trusted God's wisdom and obeyed Him. Obedience to God's word is wisdom.

Let us combat this rebellious attitude and listen to wisdom. We have people of all ages at this church, so let us learn from each other. Do you have someone that can speak wisdom into your life, or do you resist all advice? My sister was someone from whom I accepted wisdom. When she called me out on always being late, I listened and made an effort to be punctual. Find someone who is further along on this journey and learn from them, just as Paul called the Corinthians to follow him as he followed Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). I listen to the wisdom of Pastor Richard, and he listened to the wisdom of Dr. Fox. So wisdom is passed down from generation to generation as long as we listen. And yet, I also know what it is to resist wise advice, the temptation to dismiss such encouragement. That's foolish of me. Let us instead be receptive to guidance, and listen to God's wisdom.