

Wise Preacher Reflects on Aging Well

This is part two of a two-part article. Find part one at [this link](#).

1. Injustice's mystery and judgment's certainty. "I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there, and the place of righteousness, that iniquity was there" (Eccl. 8:10)

Here, the Preacher notes the perplexing presence of injustice in expected places of justice, adding to the perplexity of life's contradictions. Despite occasional injustice, ultimately, those who fear God will find well-being.

"Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him" (8:12).

2. Shared fate and simple joys. "Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do" (9:7).

"For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten" (9:5). The Preacher ponders the finality of death and the cessation of earthly experiences, reinforcing the theme of life's fleeting nature. He also urges his hearers to make the most of life's opportunities and fully engage in the present, recognizing death's inevitability and limitations.

"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going" (9:10).

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3. Foolishness versus wisdom. “A little folly outweighs wisdom and honor” (10:1b).

“The words of a wise man’s mouth win him favor, but the lips of a fool consume him” (10:12).

This section deepens the contrast between wisdom and folly, warning that even slight foolishness can undermine one’s reputation and achievements. The Preacher uses a practical analogy to show how wisdom leads to success with less effort, unlike the inefficiency of folly.

“If the iron is blunt, and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed” (10:10).

4. Life’s uncertainty and the call to diligence.

“He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap. ... In the morning sow your seed, and at evening withhold not your hand, for you do not know which will prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good” (11:4, 6). The Preacher cautions against excessive caution and inaction in the face of uncertainty, advocating for proactive engagement with life despite the inability to control every outcome.

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“As you do not know the say the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything” (11:5).

The Preacher then invites his hearers to accept human limitation and mystery, acknowledging that not all of God’s

purposes and methods are comprehensible to us. "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, 'I have no pleasure in them' ... The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccl. 12:1, 13.)

The Preacher ends his message by warning young people to live wisely and productively before old age sets in and they face their ultimate judgment.

He eloquently and metaphorically describes the dissipation of youthful strength and vigor in the following passages:

1. "Before the sun, and the light, and the moon, and the stars, are darkened, and the clouds return after the rain" (12:2). This imagery suggests the diminishing of light and vitality, symbolizing the decline of life and energy as one ages. The returning clouds after the rain can imply ongoing difficulties or the recurring troubles of old age.
2. "In the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look through the windows are dimmed" (12:3). Here, the "keepers of the house" are often interpreted as hands or arms that shake with age; "the strong men" are legs that can no longer support as well, "the grinders" are teeth, and "those who look through the windows" are eyes, all depicting the physical decay associated with aging.
3. "And the doors on the street are shut—when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low" (12:4). This may symbolize isolation or withdrawal from the bustling activity of life, a decrease in the senses (hearing and sight), and a general lowering of one's engagement with the world, perhaps due to hearing loss

and reduced social interaction.

4. "They are afraid also of what is high, and terrors are in the way" (12:5a). This reflects the fears and anxieties of vulnerability in old age, including a fear of falling or obstacles that were once easily navigable.
5. "The almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along, and desire fails" (12:5b). The blossoming almond tree, with its white flowers, may represent the graying of hair. The grasshopper, a creature that once leaped energetically but is now dragging itself, mirrors the loss of vitality. "Desire fails" speaks to the waning of human appetites and passions.
6. "Because man is going to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets" (12:5c). This is a direct reference to death and the finality of life, with mourners traditionally preparing for or participating in a funeral procession.
7. "Before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern" (12:6). These images all depict the irrevocable nature of death. The "silver cord" and "golden bowl" could symbolize the preciousness of life, which, once broken or snapped, signifies the end of life. The pitcher and the wheel breaking hinder the flow of critical water sources (essential for life), further symbolizing the cessation of life's sustaining forces.

The overall theme of this section reflects the inevitable decline and frailty associated with aging leading up to death, using vivid and somewhat allegorical imagery to convey these universal human experiences.

The Preacher aptly illustrates the fleeting experience of our earthly life with an admonition to live a life of wisdom that will be rewarded on Judgment Day.

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