



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Fortune Cookie Living

THE GOOD LIFE

Ecclesiastes 7:15–29

Tim Badal | November 6, 2022



Turn in your Bibles please to the book of Ecclesiastes. We've been in this series we've entitled "The Good Life," looking at the life of Solomon. He wrote this book as an old man, but during his life, Solomon had everything anyone could ask for. He had all the power, prestige, and pleasures of what seemingly should have been a good life. Yet at the end of his life, he came to the realization that he hadn't found what he was looking for. The world advertises fulfillment, satisfaction, and contentment, but he didn't find that. So he wrote this book as a cautionary tale for us to know where to find the good life.

What we've been learning throughout this entire series is that the good life—I mean the really good life—is found in a relationship with Jesus Christ. We can try to find the good life, as Solomon says, "under the sun," or we can enter into a relationship with the God Who created us, then see from His perspective what the good life is all about.

So this morning we find ourselves in Ecclesiastes 7:15-29. We studied the first part of this chapter last week, so we'll pick up where we left off. Solomon is telling us that there are some key truths we need to know about the world and how we live that will impact us pursuing the good life in our daily activities.

As I was studying this passage, the thought of fortune cookies came to mind. Did you know that three million fortune cookies are eaten every day, with over four billion being eaten annually in the United States of America? At the end of the meal every Chinese food experience, it is a staple, to get that Pacman-shaped cookie with that little note inside. Now, would you believe that almost all the fortune cookie messages you read come from one individual? He's one of the executives from Wonton Foods and his name is David Lau. David writes messages that are intended to get us thinking. He says most of his messages in the cookies come from his view of life's experiences. In fact, most of them come from watching children.

I think the book of Ecclesiastes is also designed to get us thinking and we'll see that in our text today. Through some short, pithy proverbs, Solomon will move us to ask some tough questions about ourselves to understand the world we're living in.

Many commentators say this is a difficult text. I'm going hopefully boiling it down to some truths we can understand. One commentator said this which I think it's apropos:

This is one of the passages that sends preachers pacing in their studies, wringing their hands, asking the question, "What does it mean? How do we preach it?" The temptation will be either to skip over it altogether or to preach on just a few verses. This is one of the more difficult and perhaps one of the most notorious passages in all of Ecclesiastes. Yet it is an extremely relevant passage that deals with some of the more perplexing questions we face. Why do some people die young, while some criminals live to a ripe old age? Therefore, it will be worth our while, and that of the church, to put some hard work into understanding and proclaiming the message God sends us in His Word.

That's what I want to do this morning. I want to bring this difficult passage down to the clear message I believe our Lord and Savior wants us to see and apply to our lives, so we in fact can live the good life. Let's look at a couple of these proverbs that pack a punch.

Life isn't fair.

First, Solomon says, "Life isn't fair." It doesn't take a child very long in this world to come to the same conclusion Solomon did. Look at what he says in verse 15: *"In my vain life I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing."*

Right from the get-go, Solomon packs a punch with this thought: our lives are not fair. Now, we can get upset and all worked up about that, but the simple fact is clear: life isn't fair. We've seen this over and over again. Some people are born with good looks, others are not. Some are born with a silver spoon in their mouth, others are born into poverty. Some experience a good, long, healthy life, while still others have great difficulties because of medical conditions or other issues they face on a daily basis. Some of us have had it easy, but for others there has been setback upon setback. Some have even been beaten up or abused by others. So we wonder why it is that some seemingly have it good, while others do not.

Solomon however "sweetens the deal" regarding the craziness of this reality by saying, "The good have it bad, because they die young. At the same time, the evil have lives that are prolonged, so they can do more evil."

Here's the fundamental question. Why is it that some who live their lives so well have it so bad, and why is it that some who live their lives so sinfully and arrogantly seem to coast on by? In asking this, Solomon wants us to think and realize that one of the reasons we can't find the good life in this world is because life isn't fair. Life is not a fair broker. It's not equitable in its dealings with us as individuals and as a society. He goes on to ask, "What is the answer to this lack of fairness?"

¹⁶ Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself? ¹⁷ Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time? ¹⁸ It is good that you should take hold of this, and from that withhold not your hand, for the one who fears God shall come out from both of them.

Wait a minute. Did I just read that right? Solomon has said we should strive for wisdom, now he very clearly tells us that we don't need to be too wise. Even more, he just told the church—he just told every Christ follower for the rest of this age—that he shouldn't be too righteous. There are some kids right now who are thinking, "I like that verse. The next time I do something bad, I'm going to tell Mom and Dad, 'Hey, the Bible says I don't need to be too righteous.'"

Now what Solomon is saying is actually quite profound. He is telling us that we should not view our godliness, our righteousness, as a *quid pro quo*. By that I mean we should not think, "I'm going to be righteous, because if I am righteous for God, then God will be good to me. I will be holy for God, therefore God will make me happy. I will be faithful to God, therefore God will make life fair for me." But that's not how God works.

Now, other religions teach this. In Hinduism and Buddhism there is a doctrine called karma. When you do good, good is returned to you. You do bad, bad is returned to you. You serve well now, then when you're reincarnated you'll be in a good place and in good standing, but if you commit crimes and hurt those around you, you'll come back as a lower creature. While those ideas are popular in those two religions, it's totally contrary to what the Word of God says.

Solomon is very clearly saying, "Your godliness is not going to make you immune to the things this world faces. No amount of faithfulness will make this world any more fair." It's important that we recognize this. Let's be honest. Some of the reasons why we do the spiritual things we do is that in the back of our minds, we believe, "If I do this, God will in fact do that." Solomon says that's not the case. Stop pretending with your faith. Stop projecting a false sense of security, thinking your fairness in life is created by your faithfulness in life.

Notice that he goes on to say this is also true of wisdom. In other words, he's saying, "Don't make yourself too wise because you cannot outsmart your circumstances." By that I mean you can't by wisdom escape the troubles you face. There are certain things in this life that you'll never be prepared for. There are certain things you won't be able to mentally grasp.

I've said this over and over: my life has been defined by a singular event—the death of my brother. Although my parents were wise and righteous, they were not immune to that event and the difficulties it brought. No amount of wisdom or righteousness could get them through that. They needed to realize that at times it sure seemed life was not fair.

The system is flawed.

If we're really honest, this little message in this book rings true in all our lives. Yes, Solomon; yes, world. Life isn't fair. But why? What is the reason? That's when Solomon moves on to the second "fortune cookie" message for us. Life isn't fair, because the system is flawed.

We see this in the troubles we face.

Listen, in some ways the cards have been stacked against us. As we look at the inequities of life, we need to not blame God which is what we're actually doing. We get a bad medical report. We get a bad grade in a class. We have a friend stab us in the back. Then right away we say, "God, it's Your fault. You've created this problem." The Bible is clear, in this passage as well that it's not God Who is to blame—it's us. Notice what Solomon tells us in verse 20: *"Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins."* The problem in our world today isn't God—it's us. It's our sin.

Twice in this book we're reminded that we are crooked. We have a bend that keeps us from walking the straight and narrow, if you will. If you turn back to Ecclesiastes 1:15, you'll remember what we read there: *"What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted."* You might recall that when we were studying this, I showed you a picture of an unfinished puzzle. I told you life is like that unfinished puzzle. The problem is we don't have enough pieces to finish the puzzle. The system is flawed, but the flaw is not God. He's perfect and amazing and greater than anyone could ever ask for or imagine. The flawed system is the result of our own flaws. The Bible says we are all sinners and have fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). We bring this flawed nature into our world. As a result, as we're seeing here, "good" people face great troubles. That's what makes life not feel very fair.

Remember our study back in Genesis when we looked at the life of Joseph. Here was a young man who seemed to be faithful in every situation. Even when times of temptation or troubles came, he was faithful to God. People abused him and brought great inequities into his life, not because he was bad or had done some wrong to merit this treatment. It was the flawed world that brought trouble his way.

We see this in the way we treat one another.

In verses 21-22 Solomon says, *"Do not take to heart all the things that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. Your heart knows that many times you yourself have cursed others."* We know how flawed our world is when we hear other people talking about us. No doubt at some point in your life, whether you've been aware of it or not, there's someone who has backstabbed you. Someone has spoken biting words behind your back to cut you down. In your anger you thought, "That's not fair. I don't deserve that." Solomon is saying here, "Wait a minute. You're not that different from that person. You're flawed as well. Just as you're pointing one finger at him, there are many fingers pointed back at you."

This is why the world doesn't have peace. It's why we face issues like racism and hatred. This is why our news reports are filled with accounts of murder, theft, rape, abuse and assault. Our world is flawed because of sin. Now there's one other way we see this flaw.

We see this in the ways we're tempted.

Third, we see our flawed world through the ways we're tempted. Solomon gets really personal by telling us where he himself is tempted. He says in verse 26, *"And I find something more bitter than death: the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her."*

Some of you may be new to our study in Ecclesiastes, so let's just be honest. Solomon had women problems. Not a woman problem, but women problems. It wasn't the fault of the women. He had brought them into his life. He was known to have hundreds of wives and even more concubines. This guy could not control his libido. As a result, he put himself in situations that ensnared him.

Every time you and I, like Solomon, face temptations, we are reminded of the truth that we live in a flawed world. We ourselves add to them. So it's important to realize that while we're considering how unfair life is, we also are part of the problem.

Yes, we will often face troubles in our lives, but haven't we brought troubles to other people as well? As finite and broken people, we don't live up to our commitments. We don't do what we say we're going to do. We hurt people with our words and by the way we treat them. We can be tempted, but at times we can also tempt others to do things they shouldn't do.

Our wisdom is finite.

So we find that life is flawed and unfair. Now the third message from Solomon that we can pull out of this text is that our wisdom is finite. As we live out our flawed existence in a world that makes no fair distinctions, it seems from a cursory view that if we just used our heads, we could figure this thing out. If we could use the wisdom God gives us, then everything would be okay.

We need to remember that Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived, second only to Jesus Christ of course. Now we see in verse 25 what he has to tell us: *"I turned my heart to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the scheme of things, and to know the wickedness of folly and the foolishness that is madness."* As we read on, we find him admitting, "I couldn't find it." Even Solomon's immense wisdom could not give him the answers he sought. His wisdom was not sufficient to address the issues that loomed large in his life. And it's the same in our lives as well. This is so important to realize as we study Ecclesiastes. It might be easy for us to simply sum up the book by saying, "Get wise, then the good life will come." Now, there is truth to that. Wise living can at times lead us to the good life. But we should never worship wisdom. That was the error of the Greeks in the New Testament. We need to be people who see that wisdom is a tool God has given us so we might avoid a life of foolishness.

It might be easy to think that more wisdom will mean fewer problems. And yes, there is immense value to living wisely. We're told in verse 19, *"Wisdom gives strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city."* Wisdom is important. As a father of three, I want my boys to be filled with wisdom. But wisdom has its limits. You and I can't figure out life on our own. We don't have enough brain power. We don't have the spiritual capacity to find the good life by using our heads. The wisdom we gain from failed experiences is not enough. That's what verses 28-29 are saying. Not one in a thousand, men or women, are going to find the good life through wisdom alone.

Faith is the key.

So this passage leads us to one final "fortune cookie" message. In this important passage of Scripture, we're reminded of one more truth. Yes, life isn't fair. Yes, the system is flawed. Yes, our wisdom is too finite to bring us all the answers. But the key to all this is faith.

This is where our text leads us to communion. As believers, we know we're lost, because we come into life apart from Christ, but now Christ has given us new life in Him. He's given us the ability to see from a new perspective. We no longer have to look only at the things that are "under the sun," but we also have gained a heavenly perspective from "above the sun."

So as we look down at the small lot of where we are, we realize, "Yes, apart from Christ, life will always be unfair and frustrating." But when we put on Christ and make Him our goal, He promises to give us the abundant life we're seeking—not only in this life, but in the life to come.

Remember, friends, what God did in sending Jesus was to bring heaven's answer to the lostness of our world. In a few weeks we'll be singing, "Joy to the world, the Lord has come. Let earth receive her King." Brothers and sisters, when God sent Jesus Christ to us, He sent the answer because God knows better than any of us that life isn't fair. He knows better than any of us that the system is flawed. God knows more than anyone that our wisdom is finite. That's why He sent the infinite One, the matchless One, the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

So as difficult as this text is, it's actually a microcosm of the entire gospel. We who are broken, we who have a need, we who don't have the answer have now been invited to bring Christ into our lives. If we will do this, God never promises that all our problems and issues will be resolved, but He does say this: "I have a great many things in store for you, so if you will trust Me and depend on Me, I will lead you in My wisdom. Instead of walking in the dark, I will lead you in My light." I love what Solomon says in Proverbs 3:5-6: *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."*

God will make our paths straight when we learn to lean on Him and not on our own understanding. Some of us are at the end of ourselves. We need to give our lives to Jesus. Others of us need to invite Jesus into our lives in new ways, so we no longer will live this life on our own. I want you to take a few moments to prepare your hearts and be reminded of what Jesus did. He is the answer to our unfair and flawed lives. He is a better answer to the finite and foolish things we think will answer the most perplexing questions today. Take some time to remember what Christ did, so you can have the good life.

Village Bible Church | 847 North State Route 47, Sugar Grove, IL 60554 | (630) 466-7198 | www.villagebible.org/sugar-grove

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