

## **The Strength of Wisdom**

Ecclesiastes 7:19-22; James 1:5-7

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We might expect that Solomon the wisest mere man who ever lived might have a few things to say about wisdom. He devoted an entire book of the Bible (namely Proverbs) to wisdom. Solomon gave his heart to know wisdom according to Ecclesiastes 1:17. Have you given your heart to know wisdom? Is wisdom in applying God's truth to your life so important to you that you seek for it and want it more than riches, honor, health, life, power, or pleasure? God told Solomon to request from Him anything that he wanted when he first became king of Israel (1 Kings 3:5). Solomon requested an understanding heart rather than fame, fortune, or victory over his enemies (1 Kings 3:9). The Lord answered the prayer of Solomon in giving him a wise and understanding heart, and added riches and honor to Solomon as well, because he had sought that which was most important (1 Kings 3:11-13).

What would you ask from God if He were to make the same offer to you? Solomon asked for that which he deemed most important: wisdom. In humility, Solomon confessed he was just a little child and apart from God's grace he could not rule God's people for the glory of God or for the good of God's people. He knew he didn't have within himself what was needed. May the Lord God drive us to see how ignorant we are and how foolish we are by nature, and how we can do nothing without Christ. We cannot live, move, breathe, see, hear, speak or anything else without the power of Christ. And we cannot do anything to please God (absolutely nothing) without the grace of Christ. Hence, the need to come to Christ as did Solomon and to cry out to Him as little children that do not really know what is best for us. How do we know we are little children? We kick and scream so much against the good and wise providence of God when things in our life do not work out the way that we planned. Like children we act as though this pleasure, this honor, or this person will make us happy, if we can only obtain it and hold on to it. Dear ones, Flee to Christ who offers to you His wisdom (James 1:5-7).

The main points from our text this Lord's Day are the following: (1) Wisdom Gives Courage to the Weak (Ecclesiastes 7:19-20); and (2) Wisdom Gives Tough Skin to the Sensitive (Ecclesiastes 7:21-22).

### **I. Wisdom Gives Courage to the Weak (Ecclesiastes 7:19-20).**

A. Solomon had earlier pronounced wisdom better than earthly riches (Ecclesiastes 7:11-12). Now Solomon says that wisdom is better than mere physical strength. Wisdom gives a man, woman, or child a courage that mere physical strength cannot give. The wisdom that comes from heaven above causes you to fear God (which is to take God seriously, to reverence God, and to stand in awe and wonder of God) and to fear God more than you fear any man or any circumstance. That heavenly wisdom causes you to stand for the truth and to defend that precious doctrine revealed by Christ in His Word when everyone else has long fled the battlefield. That heavenly wisdom gives an inner power to those who are by nature weak or timid, so that they stand like a Daniel in the lion's den, or like a David before Goliath, or like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego before the king and the fiery furnace. If you are lacking in courage to stand for what is right, it is heavenly wisdom that you need; for "wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men which are in the city" (Ecclesiastes 7:19). Since the comparison in Ecclesiastes 7:19 is with those who are mighty men in strength, it would seem that the particular kind of strength that wisdom gives is a moral courage that allows one who has it to do amazing things (like a puny David standing toe-to-toe with that enormous giant, Goliath). Perhaps many of us are more like Nicodemus—afraid to come to Christ in the brightness of the day, and so we come to the Lord veiled and concealed by the darkness of the night. We need a healthy dose of the courage

that caused the prophet Elijah to stand fearlessly before King Ahab and 850 false prophets and to declare to them that the Lord God of the Bible is God alone. But interestingly, that same courage that made Elijah stand like a giant in their midst was soon after overcome by his fear of Queen Jezebel, who threatened his life so that he fled in fear from her presence. The strength of wisdom that is manifested in courage is there for those who seek it by faith in Christ, as was true with Peter in walking on the water. However, like Peter, when we take the eye of faith off of Christ, we can sink just as quickly into the sea of fear as he did. Since the strength of wisdom is found in courage, let us consider what courage is not and what it is.

1. Courage IS NOT the absence of fear. What is there to be courageous about, if there is nothing to fear? To the contrary, one who is courageous actually recognizes and confesses his/her fears to God. The one that is courageous does not pretend as if he/she is not afraid.

2. Courage IS fearing God more than we fear anyone or anything else. Courage is taking God so seriously as to His power and love that the devil, man, illness, loss of family or friends, death, or any other circumstances in life are faced with confidence, knowing that our Father is right there with us. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me" (Psalm 23:4). Courage is standing in such awe and wonder of the mighty God and His promises, that we are certain in even the most fearful trial that He will work everything out for His glory and for our good. We do not know how He will do so, but rather than worrying about it, we cast that fear upon the shoulders of Almighty God and rest confidently in His goodness, wisdom, and power. We are so often like Elisha's fearful servant who woke up one morning to see the Syrian armies surrounding the small city of Dothan. What we need is for our eye of faith to be opened to behold the mighty hosts of heaven that the Lord sends forth to defend His people, who shall inherit salvation.

a. Dear ones, when you face a person or a situation that tempts you to flee in fear or worry, it is at that very moment that you have a decision to make: Will you believe the devil who utters the lie, "There is no one who can help you now?" Or will you believe the Lord who cannot lie, "So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Hebrews 13:6)?

b. I don't know what fears you face today, but this I can tell you, you have nothing to fear from man or any circumstance you face, if you fear the Lord your God and cast all your worries and cares upon Christ who cares for you. Consider what King Jehoshaphat did when he feared the attack of the far more numerous Moabites and Ammonites against Jerusalem: Read 2 Chronicles 20:1-12. The Lord defeated these enemies without one weapon being raised in battle by God's people. God caused the enemy to destroy themselves, while God's people simply stood there in faith with child-like reverence, awe, and wonder of their mighty God. Dear ones, fear and worry are sins of idolatry, for your fear is rooted in believing that the giant you face is greater than not only you, but even greater than the Lord Himself. Forsake that fear of torment, and rather embrace that peace of God that passes all understanding—a peace that will guard (like a garrison of soldiers) your heart and mind through Jesus Christ your Savior (Philippians 4:6-7). Dear child of the living God, this is the strength of wisdom that is mightier than 10, 100, 1,000, or 1,000,000 strong men. Our real battle is not against flesh and blood, but against those enemies within us in the form of sin and those enemies of the soul that we cannot see with these eyes. The battle is ultimately waged not out there in front of us where we can see it with these eyes, but is ultimately waged in our minds (Ephesians 6:12). Thus, we must fight this enemy, not with physical strength or mere natural resolve or mere natural determination of the will, but with the power, courage, and faith in a resurrected Savior, who overcame all His enemies and is reigning in power and glory at God's right hand.

B. Why is man in his own strength not able to win the battle against these enemies that wage war against his soul? Solomon tells us in the next verse: "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Ecclesiastes 7:20). The fact that we are yet sinners, while in these mortal bodies, means that we have a natural handicap that disables us from defending ourselves against the might and power of these

enemies that would destroy us.

1. It is not just the wicked and immoral non-Christian that is a sinner. It is not just true of the most sinful among men or the weakest among men, but is even true of the justified child of God according to Solomon. For of whom does he here speak? Solomon says, "For there is not a JUST MAN (a justified man) upon earth." And if this is true of those who have embraced Christ and the gospel of salvation by faith alone as their only hope of eternal salvation, how much more it is true of those who are without Christ? We have all sinned in the past, but we are all sinning now in the present as well. "If we say that we have (in the present) no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). "If we say that we have not sinned (in the past), we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (1 John 1:10). Even those who have looked in faith alone to Christ alone, trusting only in His merit and obedience to save them, are not able in their own strength to go forth in battle against the enemies of their soul and to win that battle. Like Peter, who did not heed the warning of the Savior nor prepare himself for the great battle he was about to face in denying the Lord Jesus, you too will fall with an enormous thud to the ground, if you, like Peter, do not watch and pray that you enter not into temptation. None of you, who have been declared righteous by God now and for all eternity, can rest upon your past victories thinking the battle is now over. Dear ones, when you come to Christ by faith, the battle has just begun. This is an excellent verse to demonstrate the universal corruption of all men.

2. Note further that those of whom Solomon here speaks are not only justified by faith, but are also those who do that which is good and pleasing to the Lord ("that doeth good" Ecclesiastes 7:20). Now no one before being made alive to Christ by the Spirit of God can do anything that pleases Him, for without faith in Christ "it is impossible to please him" (Hebrews 11:6). The testimony of the Holy Spirit, as spoken through the mouth of Paul, is absolutely true of all of you before God raised you from that spiritual grave, and gave you faith to embrace Christ and His righteousness: Read Romans 3:10-12. But after being declared righteous by God, you were given the grace (through the mediation of Christ) to please Him by your loving obedience to His commandments and law (Ephesians 2:8-10). Thus, again Solomon is emphasizing that you who are justified by faith alone and who walk in the good works God has ordained for you from all eternity ARE YET SINNERS in continual need of the grace of God and in continual need of the wisdom and courage of Christ to war against the many temptations, sins, and enemies that you yet face as a Christian.

3. The Word of the Lord here in Ecclesiastes 7:20 is meant by Solomon to humble you, to knock you off your high horse, and to show you that you are no match for the enemies you face without a living, growing faith in Christ. Dear ones, your faith in Christ may not yet be a mature faith, but even that growing faith that is only the size of a mustard seed (if placed in the Lord Jesus Christ) can move those enemies that seem like huge mountains before you (Matthew 17:20). Beloved, a healthy, daily review of your own sin and what you deserve according to God's justice for that sin and corruption (but do not receive due to God's rich mercy in Christ Jesus) is a necessity to your deep humility before the Lord in crushing pride, conceit, self-righteousness, and self-sufficiency. As the Psalmist declares, "If thou, LORD, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared" (Psalm 130:3-4). There is no divine wisdom or courage where there is no humility due to our own sin and corruption. There is no power to war against your enemies where there is no humility in confessing your weakness. It is not by your might or by your power, but "by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6).

## **II. Wisdom Gives Tough Skin to the Sensitive (Ecclesiastes 7:21-22).**

A. Heavenly wisdom not only gives you courage to face the various enemies that war against the soul—those enemies that would lead you to think yourself wiser than God, more just than God, or more loving than God when you see the just man suffer and the wicked man prosper (as mentioned by Solomon in Ecclesiastes 7:15-16)—but heavenly wisdom also gives you the grace to be tough in a good sense, rather than being overly sensitive as to what others say about you or as to how others treat you. Are you given to allow

what others say about you to devastate you, to crush you, and to destroy you, so that you either become sinfully angry and seek personal vengeance against that person or you sulk, pout, and feel sorry for yourself in how poorly you have been treated? In either of these responses on your part, you make yourself even more vulnerable to the attacks of the enemy, and make yourself ineffective to serve your great King. Here Solomon says it is wise not to take to heart everything that is spoken about you or spoken against you (“Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken” Ecclesiastes 7:21).

1. Obviously, there are at times words spoken to you that you may not want to hear (because they are words that reveal your sin), and yet you must hear if you would be wise, for the wisdom that comes from above is “easy to be intreated”, or easy to be persuaded of wrong or sin that has been committed (according to James 3:17). Those who are truly wise are revealed to be so by taking to heart and repenting of those sins brought to their attention. Those who are fools are revealed to be so by refusing to take to heart and to repent for sins they have committed.

2. However, Solomon seems to speak here in Ecclesiastes 7:21 of words that are spoken against you that are not true, that are not fair, that are not kind, and perhaps are even slanderous. You have at times such a curiosity to know what others have said about you (whether good or bad). After others have engaged in a conversation to which you were not privy, you subtly ask questions like, “Oh, I saw you talking to so and so, did he have anything interesting to say?” You begin fishing for information in clever ways to find out what might have been said about you. You may have one ear at a table listening to one conversation, while with the other ear listening to another conversation in which your name is mentioned. Solomon says it is wise that you do not take to heart all that is spoken about you or against you, which also means that it is foolish to be so curious to know what everyone thinks and speaks about you. For if you do know what others have said about you, you may be hurt badly by what you know (in certain cases, ignorance is indeed bliss). It is heavenly wisdom for you not to be too concerned about the words of others. It is heavenly wisdom for you not to be so sensitive that you are crushed and devastated by the unkind words spoken to you or spoken behind your backs. It is heavenly wisdom to have tough skin concerning such words, and yet to have a very tender heart (rather than becoming bitter and resentful). When you receive the unjust and unkind words of others, you have a choice: Will you be angry and vindictive toward the bearer of those words, or will you be humbled and pity the bearer of those words?

3. There is a time to protect your good name when it is slandered, for “a good name is better than precious ointment,” says Solomon in Ecclesiastes 7:1. The time to defend your good name is especially when the slander is so destructive that it hinders you from effectively serving Christ, because your credibility has taken such a hit by what has been said. But dear ones, you cannot go through life, and expect to find the joy of the Lord, if you are so defensive about every little thing someone says about you that you do not like. You will live in a constant state of defensiveness and in constant pain over how others have mistreated you. You cannot wear your feelings on your shirt sleeves, so that anyone who happens to brush up against you damages your feelings. The problem in such a case is not so much an issue of protecting your good name, but rather an issue of protecting your pride. You must grow in the grace to be ill-spoken of without feeling a need to defend yourself or without railing against those who do so. Dear ones, if anyone ever had the right to defend His good name, it was the Lord Jesus Christ, who was the sinless Son of God. And yet, even He who was perfect did not see the need to do so when He was unjustly condemned. How much less should we feel the need to do so (1 Peter 2:21-23)? That wise, young Covenanted Minister, James Renwick, summarized it so well when he wrote in one of his letters, “Let us be lions in God’s cause, and lambs in our own” (p. 35). So often we are quicker to defend our own name and to be silent in defending the name of Christ. If our name suffers shame, so be it; but let not the name of Christ suffer shame by our words or our deeds. At another point, Mr. Renwick writes, “And when the world frowns the most, I know, it is the time wherein the Lord smiles most upon His own” (p. 130). Dear ones, how will you ever be able to suffer patiently when persecution for Christ really costs something, if you can’t endure even the unjust or unkind words spoken against you?

B. Finally, Solomon reminds you that heavenly wisdom takes into account and remembers your own sins in having spoken unjustly and unkindly against others. Are you going to be so quick to be injured by the words of others when you have committed the very same offence against others? Obviously, the fact that I have sinned in doing so, does not justify others in their sin of doing so against me. But the Spirit of God would slow you down and humble you by pointing out again your own tendency and proneness to sin. Not only ought you to remember your own sins when you are falsely accused, so as to be humbled before the Lord, but you ought also to remember who has ordained these very words to be spoken against you, for His most wise, holy, and good purpose: your heavenly Father. The response of David is an example to us all (2 Samuel 16:5-10). Dear ones, just as you need tough skin on your hands if you are to avoid great pain in using a shovel to move a lot of soil in the yard, so much more do you need tough skin if you are to avoid the unjust and unkind words of others. Let it be your wisdom from heaven above to be both courageous in the Cause of Christ and tough-skinned in your own cause. To the degree that you do not manifest the courage of wisdom and the tough skin of wisdom, to that same degree you will suffer the loss of the joy, peace, and blessed contentment of the Lord Jesus Christ in your lives.

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