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THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON

Three thousand years ago, King Solomon wrote some beautiful poetic words which were an allegory about aging. Since I am 94.5 years old and the warranty on my parts has long expired, I recently read his wise insight about getting old and it did not cheer me up. His advice and the literal meaning follow, so you can come to your own conclusion. And I hope you read the following with a sense of humor. From Ecclesiastes, Chapter 12:

‘Remember your Creator in the days of your youth before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you say - I find no pleasure in them’ (When it’s hard to enjoy life because everything that works hurts.) - ‘before the sun and the light and the moon and stars grow dark’ (when your eyesight fades and you have to have cataract surgery and get reading glasses.)

‘When the keepers of the house tremble’ (when your legs and knees tremble) ‘and the strong men stoop’ (when arthritis and osteoporosis make you look like the Hunchback of Notre Dame.)

‘When the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades’ (when your grinders, molars, fall out and you can’t even hear yourself eating);

‘When men are afraid of heights’ (because you might fall and break your hip);

‘When men rise up at the sound of birds’ (because you can’t sleep and keep rising up to go to the bathroom 3 or 4 times a night and those dadgum sparrows wake you up before daylight);

‘When all their songs grow faint’ (because your hearing fades and you have to get hearing aids and even then people’s words get distorted and you say, “Hunh?” or “What did you say?” until folks give up and quit talking to you.

‘When the grasshopper drags himself along’ (If you haven’t died by now, you are dragging yourself along with your walker like a dying grasshopper, old man.)

‘And desire no longer is stirred’ (No comment.)

‘Then man goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets’ (Your funeral is drawing near, grasshopper.)

‘Remember him’ (Our great Creator and Savior) ‘before the silver cord is severed’ (Your spinal cord and nervous system stop functioning.)

‘or the golden bowl is broken’ (Before you fall and fracture your skull or start getting early-stage dementia.)

“Before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well’ (People who invest everything in this brief life and in these temporary bodies are foolish, foolish, foolish!)

‘And the dust returns to the ground it came from’ (From dust you came and to dust you will soon return.)

‘And the spirit returns to God who gave it’ (Your body returns to dust, but your spirit rises to to be judged.)

‘Meaningless! Meaningless! says the Teacher, everything is meaningless.’

Everything is meaningless and purposeless and empty without God.

(This is the message of Ecclesiastes in a nutshell.)

If you will read Ecclesiastes, you will have to admit that Solomon’s poetry is a lot more pleasant to read than the literal meaning of his words. And God thought highly enough of this difficult book to include it in His timeless Word.

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HAVING TROUBLE SLEEPING?

One of the inconveniences brother Solomon mentioned about growing old was the problem of sleeping at night. Are you having that problem? I certainly have at times. Meditating on God’s “precious promises” in the night watches has helped a lot to relieve anxiety and bring His peace. God has graciously given us these faithful promises:

- “I will both lie down in peace and sleep; for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.” (Psalm 4:8)

- “When you lie down, you will not be afraid; yes, you will lie down and your sleep will be sweet.” (Proverbs 3:24)
- “So He gives His beloved sleep.” (Psalm 127:2)

FLY YOUR PLANE

(My friend Alice Monroe leads the regional ministry of The Compassionate Friends from her mountain retreat and home west of Grand Junction. The Compassionate Friends states its purpose as: Supporting Family After a Child Dies. Alice was an RN, a pilot, and a wife and mother. Her 16-year old son died in an automobile accident, and through that awful experience God led her into a ministry to others who have lost their children. Following is Alice’s devotional from last month’s newsletter.)

“Fly your plane,” the flight instructor repeated over and over again, time after time, during every lesson. Only three words. Words are powerful. Sometimes they can save a life.

Learning to fly was an adventure, just like life. But sometimes things can go wrong, like an engine failure, and you start hyperventilating. That’s when those three words reverberate in your mind loud and clear, “Fly your plane.” It’s amazing how those words give you the gift of regaining some control even if you’re crashing. Pilots are known for landing a plane safely, speaking in a calm, cool voice to the controller all the way to the ground.

“Fly your plane” was repeated so many times that you can even hear your instructor’s voice, like he is sitting on your shoulder, even if you are in the cockpit alone. It happened to me twice.

Flying over Wyoming, I suddenly lost all my navigation tools. Nothing looked familiar on the ground. The control tower in Rock Springs was not answering my call. I was in trouble. The words, “Just fly your plane” came rushing in. Hyperventilating and panic quieted down. I still had my floating compass. I took a heading that might bring me to our valley. After two and a half hours of flying in the dark, it did.

When my son died, I knew this time I was crashing. This would not be survivable. No one had ever instructed me in the Art of Grief. But somehow, some way, those same words helped. “Fly your plane.” Maybe if I could keep flying my handicapped, broken life, I might survive.

This time, I had to learn *after* the crash. I had to learn from others who had survived the crash of

losing their child. It took time. It took people who cared. It took hearing repeatedly from my grieving heroes these words: “You will survive this. You will live and laugh again. And one day, you will become a flight instructor for others.” Words have power.

Alice

WHO DECIDES WHETHER YOU GO TO HEAVEN OR HELL, YOU OR GOD?

From the beginning, God decided to create little critturs made in His image and to give them free will. He didn’t want automatons, He wanted creatures that would choose to love Him without coercion. But of course they would love Him unless there was some strong inducement not to love Him, to reject Him and choose the way of independence.

(Please understand that this is my perception of God’s reasoning and while it is not from Scripture I believe it aligns with Scripture. See what you think.)

So God made life on earth to be a test. Would humans choose God or reject Him? And God made the way of independence and rebellion so attractive that it would be very costly to choose Him. It would be like death to people’s self-interest: “Take up your cross, die to yourself, and follow Me.”

Mysteriously, God loved the creatures He made with all His heart. He loved them so much that in order for them to live with Him forever He made the ultimate sacrifice: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

God did His part. There is nothing else that He needs to do to provide His creatures a way to come to Him. Now the ball is in our court.

I’ve told you before that when I go yard-saling with my sister and daughter on Friday mornings that I try to witness at every yard or garage. I smile at the person or persons and say, “Hey, I would like to ask you a question. I used to be a minister years ago, and I like to ask everyone, ‘Are you sure you are going to heaven when you die?’” Again, I smile at them and say, “Are you sure?”

This is such a fun thing for me, and I get very interesting responses. Last Friday, one young mother laughed and said, “I don’t really know. Can someone really know whether they are going to heaven?” Boy, we had such a good conversation.

On the other hand, two responses last Friday

were pretty hostile. It doesn't bother me, and I feel compassion for men and women who have utterly rejected the loving invitation from their Creator to come to Him and receive life. It's like offering a canteen of water to a man dying in the desert and have him defiantly throw it back at you.

But one lady's response to my question is pertinent to this topic. When I asked, "Are you sure you are going to heaven when you die?", she responded, "It's not up to me." I said to her, "Oh, yes it is. It is completely up to you." I then tried to explain how God has done His part by sending His Son to die for our sins, and now it is up to us to believe and accept His kind offer.

Some years ago I attended a 3-day seminar in Los Angeles featuring Heidi Baker, Bill Johnson, and Randy Clark, three of my heroes. Randy Clark started his teaching by giving away several of his latest books. One morning he held up one of his books and asked, "Does anyone want this free book?" Many voices cried out, "Yes, yes, I do!" He said, "OK, you can have it." After a few moments, he started again, "I want to give this book to someone, does anyone here want it?" Again, many people hollered yes.

Once again, Randy started to repeat the same words, but a tall young man ran down the aisle, jumped up on the stage, and grabbed the book out of his hand. Randy said, "God has offered you forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life through the death of His Son on the cross. But you have to take it, to receive it by faith. You have to believe it in your heart and confess it with your mouth or the transaction has not been completed."

Who decides whether you go to heaven or to hell, you or God? You do. God has done His part. All you have to do is to decide, to choose Christ, to believe. You do.

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WHY I TRY NOT TO BE DISTRACTED BY POLITICS

Jesus was born into a social and political situation that is hard for us to imagine. His little country had been conquered and enslaved by the mighty Roman empire. Rome installed an evil king, Herod, who was known for his cruelty. He slaughtered the innocent babies in the village of Bethlehem, and later he murdered his own wife and

two sons because he thought his rule was threatened.

The great majority of Jews, even the Bible scholars, were sure that when the Messiah came he would be a political and military leader like King David who would lead the nation to rise up, with God's help, and liberate the chosen people from the awful shackles of occupation and slavery.

When Jesus showed up, they tried time and again to make Him their King. He tried to explain that God had something different in mind - an inner, spiritual Kingdom, the Kingdom of God. Even his closest disciples who heard Him preach for three years did not understand. "Lord, when you become King, can my brother and I sit at your right and left hand and help you rule the nation?"

One of the 12 was Simon the Zealot. The Zealots are defined as: "A Jewish revolutionary group violently opposed to Roman rule over Palestine." A generation after Jesus' death and resurrection, the Zealots finally had their way. They convinced the nation to rise up in rebellion against the hated Romans. So in 70 AD, Roman General Titus led an army that destroyed the nation of Israel, killed over a million Jews, destroyed the temple, tore down the wall around Jerusalem, and led most of the surviving citizens out of the land to be dispersed throughout the world for the next 2,000 years.

As a reward for his military victories, General Titus became Emperor of Rome, and his son, Domitian, also became Emperor and was one of the persecutors of the early Christian church.

I don't think that God's plan has changed and that He wants you and me to bring in a political kingdom. But it appears to me that the spirit of the Zealots has infected our nation and a lot of Christians believe that, "My political party is the godly party, and the other political party is the evil, demonic party. So being faithful to God means that I have to focus my influence, time and money on politics. We have to win - - - for God!"

Why do we Christians try so vehemently to attain political power? Don't we realize that Christ could have chosen power, He could have called out legions of angels, but He chose the way of weakness and vulnerability? Power corrupts. Am I saying that we should abdicate our role as citizens and not fight for Christian values? No, but we need to be careful how we go about it. If our political struggle leads us to hate people, vilify them, curse them, talk about them as if they are evil, then we

are following the way of the devil, not the way of Christ. "Our enemy is not flesh and blood."

Consider: the persecuted, powerless church always won more converts than the powerful, victorious church. In a slow, incremental process, the persecuted church won out over the mighty Roman empire. But once the church became dominant, then came the reign of the mighty Popes with their pageantry, their political power, their armies and eventually their Inquisition to torture those who didn't bow down to their god (no longer the God of the Bible). We don't believe in a Pope over the church, but we lust to have a political Pope who will crush those godless heathens that don't believe in our God. This path leads eventually to religious wars in which we kill our enemies.

When I go out yard-saling on Fridays, I don't ask people how they voted and try to recruit them to the correct side, God's side. I talk to them about Jesus. Jesus is the Savior, not the leader of a political party. Jesus is the one who rescued me from the sins and addictions that were destroying my life. He is the one who gave my life meaning and purpose. He is the one who gave me eternal life.

Jesus gave us our marching orders in The Great Commission and The Great Commandment:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself." (Mark 12:29)

"Go into all the world and make disciples, teaching them to obey everything I commanded you." (Matthew 28:19)

Paul wrote to the church folks at Corinth, "'I'm afraid that your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ." (2 Cor. 11:3) Please, dear friends, don't get distracted from what is primary.

I would like to thank each of you for your support of this ministry.
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