As we continue with our series of messages from the Book of Ecclesiastes, please open your Bibles to Ecclesiastes chapter seven. And let's read verses 1-10.

Ecclesiastes 7:1-10 (NKJV)

1  A good name is better than precious ointment, And the day of death than the day of one's birth;
2  Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, For that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart.
3  Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better.
4  The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.
5  It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools.
6  For like the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool. This also is vanity.
7  Surely oppression destroys a wise man's reason, and a bribe debases the heart.
8  The end of a thing is better than its beginning; the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.
9  Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools.
10  Do not say, “Why were the former days better than these?” for you do not inquire wisely concerning this.
INTRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION: A man was driving down a country road one day when he spotted an old man sitting on a fence rail watching the cars go by; so he decided to stop for a minute to talk to the man.

The traveler said, “I could never stand living out here. You don't ever see anything, and I'm sure you don't travel like I do. I'm on the go all the time.

The old man on the fence looked at the stranger and said, “I can't see much difference in what I'm doing and what you're doing. I sit on the fence and watch the cars go by and you sit in your car and watch the fences go by. It's just a matter of how you look at things.”

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In these first ten verses of Ecclesiastes chapter seven, Solomon gives us a whole different perspective on life than we are used to. In these verses we are going to see seven “comparative statements. These statements are very easy to pick out because in each Solomon tells us “this is better than that.”

First of all, Solomon tells us.....
I. A Good REPUTATION Is Better Than Good PERFUME (v.1a)

ILLUSTRATION: When Linda and I first met, one of the things that attracted me to her, in addition to her beauty and her personality, was her fragrance. She wore some of the best smelling perfume I had ever smelled. And after all these years she still wears that perfume and I still love the fragrance. (not going to tell you what it is)

1. Why do we wear perfume or cologne? Because we are concerned about the impression we make on others. I mean, do any of you ladies want to be known as “Stinky Sally”? Do any of you men want to be known as “Rancid Rick”? No, you want to attract people, not flies; so you put on some good smelling perfume or cologne.

2. Chances are you are very picky about which perfume or cologne you will wear, especially you ladies. You probably stand there at the fragrance counter and spray at least a half-dozen perfumes on your wrists before deciding which one is just right for you.

3. Solomon is telling us there is something far better than a good perfume and that is a good name. Even the best perfumes and colognes will wear off after awhile, but a good name will stay with you all through life and even after your dead and gone.
4. LISTEN CAREFULLY! Solomon is saying a good perfume and a good name are both nice to have, but if you have to choose which of the two is better, choose to have a good name.

5. Are you making a good name for yourself? When other people think of you, what character traits come to mind?

- Are you known for being honest or dishonest?
- Are you known dependable or undependable?
- Are you known for your hard work or for laziness?
- Are you known for being warm and friendly or for being cold and unfriendly?
- Are you known for being loving or unloving?
- Are you known for being forgiving or unforgiving?

5. It has been said, “It takes one a lifetime to build a good name; it takes five minutes to destroy it.”

6. A good reputation is better than a good perfume.

Next Solomon tells us..................
II. One's DEATH DAY Is Better Than One's BIRTHDAY (v.1b)

1. If Solomon is right, why don’t we ever have “death day parties with death day cake and death day balloons?” And why can’t you find any “Happy Death Day cards?” And why don’t we sing “Happy Death Day To You?”

Surely Solomon got this all backwards. Surely he meant to say, “the day of BIRTH is better than the day of one’s DEATH.” But look closely at what he says in the context of the verse: He says, “the day of DEATH is better than the day of one’s birth.”

2. At face value, this seems like a dark, cynical statement doesn’t it? It sounds as though Solomon is saying death is a welcome deliverance from a meaningless existence.

3. But I think we need to view Solomon’s statement from an eternal perspective rather than earthly. From an eternal perspective, the day of a believer’s death is the best day of all. The day of our death takes us away from the pain, and suffering, and sorrow of this life and ushers us into the sweet presence of Jesus Christ.
4. Remember how the apostle Paul struggled with this? In comparing life with death, Paul found it hard to decide which is better. In Philippians 1:21-23 Paul said,

21 For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

Thomas Boston writes, “The day the Christian dies, he enters a better world, with higher perfection, greater purity, deeper rest, better company, and better employment than the world he entered on the day he was born.

A GOOD REPUTATION IS BETTER THAN A GOOD PERFUME. ONE'S DEATH DAY IS BETTER THAN ONE'S BIRTHDAY.

Thirdly, Solomon tells us....... III. FUNERALS Are Better Than FESTIVALS (v. 2)

2 Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart.

1. What Solomon is saying is that It will do us more good to go to a funeral than to go to a party.

2. Festivals and parties certainly have their proper place and time in our lives. When you go to a festival or party your thoughts are on the present moment.
3. At festivals and parties you aren't thinking about how brief life is; you are focused on having a good time and enjoying yourself.

4. We live in a society that doesn't like to think or talk about death. That is why going to a funeral benefits us more than laughing it up at a party. A funeral causes us to reflect on the brevity of life and to think about our own mortality. A funeral causes us to think, “One day my life will end and that will be me in that casket.”

5. Charles Spurgeon once wrote:

“It is much nearer to us than we think. To those of you who have passed fifty, sixty, or seventy years of age, it must, of necessity, be very near. To others of us who are in the prime of life, it is not far off, for I suppose we are all conscious that time flies more swiftly with us now than it ever did. We are flying, as on some mighty eagle's wing, swiftly towards eternity.”


A GOOD REPUTATION IS BETTER THAN A GOOD PERFUME.
ONE'S DEATH DAY IS BETTER THAN ONE'S BIRTHDAY.
FUNERALS ARE BETTER THAN FESTIVALS.

Fourthly, Solomon tells us.....
IV. SORROW Is Better Than LAUGHTER (vs. 3,4)

3 Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better.

4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

1. I love to laugh, don't you? I love to be around people who like to laugh. I think most all of us would prefer laughter over crying, wouldn’t we?

2. But what Solomon is saying is that there are some benefits we receive in sadness and sorrow that laughter cannot bring.

3. Sorrow makes us keenly aware of our weakness and our need for God. Sorrow makes us more appreciative of our blessings. Sorrow brings us closer to GOD. In sorrow we learn things about God's peace and comfort we might never know otherwise.

4. Remember in Ecclesiastes 3:4 Solomon said, “There is a time to weep and a time to laugh.” God doesn't condemn laughter, in fact Proverbs 17:22 Solomon says, “A merry heart (laughter) is good medicine....” But we must remember, we gain a greater understanding of GOD and eternal things in times of sorrow than in times of laughter.
A GOOD REPUTATION IS BETTER THAN A GOOD PERFUME.
ONE'S DEATH DAY IS BETTER THAN ONE'S BIRTHDAY.
FUNERALS ARE BETTER THAN FESTIVALS.
SORROW IS BETTER THAN LAUGHTER

Fifth, Solomon tells us....

V. CRITICISM From A WISE MAN Is Better Than PRAISE From A FOOL (vs. 5,6)

5 It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools.
6 For like the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool. This also is vanity.

1. Solomon is saying that “praise from a fool” might stroke your ego and make you feel good for the moment, but the criticism of a wise man will make you a better person in the long run.

2. Solomon compares the “praise of a fool” to “the crackling of thorn bushes under a pot.” Think of throwing dried up thorns into a fire. They will cause the fire to flare up briefly, but the flames will soon die down.

3. You and I may like the praise and flattery of those who always agree with us and always tell us what we want to hear, but their words are of little or no use. Their words don’t help us to become a better person.
4. But there is great benefit to having someone care enough about us to “speak the truth in love,” even if it hurts. If we take their criticism in the right spirit, we can actually grow and mature into a better person.

A GOOD REPUTATION IS BETTER THAN A GOOD PERFUME.
ONE'S DEATH DAY IS BETTER THAN ONE'S BIRTHDAY.
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SORROW IS BETTER THAN LAUGHTER.
CRITICISM FROM A WISE MAN IS BETTER THAN PRAISE FROM A FOOL.

Sixth, Solomon tells us….

VI. **FINISHING** Is Better Than **STARTING** (v. 8a)

8a The end of a thing is better than its beginning;

1. In a race, they don’t give out ribbons and trophies at the starting line, do they? NO, they give out the awards to those who finish the race.

   In a job, they don't give out bonuses to those who start a project, do they? NO, they give bonuses to those who finish.

2. Far too often, people look for “shortcuts” to success in life. They want convenience rather than commitment; instant gratification rather than perseverance.
3. When you are in school, the easy way is to cheat on test rather than to study hard and earn your grades fair and honest.

When you married, the easy way to get a divorce or to have an extra-marital affair rather than to stick it out and get through the tough times.

When you are at work, the easy way is to cut corners on the job, rather than to do it right and do it well.

4. What Solomon is saying is there is nothing more rewarding or satisfying than to complete something fairly, honestly, and completely. It may take more time, more commitment, and more effort, but the end result will be worth it!

A GOOD REPUTATION IS BETTER THAN A GOOD PERFUME.
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FINISHING IS BETTER THAN STARTING.

And finally, Solomon tells us....
VII. **PATIENCE** Is Better Than **PRIDE** (v.8b)

v.8b The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

1. In our fast-paced American society, patience is not one of virtues. We want everything NOW! We want the fastest computers, the fastest internet speed, the fastest cell phones, the fastest coffee makers, and the fastest microwaves. Things like stop lights....detours....slow drivers....and people who write checks at the check out instead of using a debit card, drives us nuts!

2. Richard Hendrix makes this observation:

   “Second only to suffering, WAITING may be the greatest teacher and trainer in godliness, maturity, and genuine spirituality most of us ever encounter. GOD is interested in character development so He will test our patience to develop perseverance. He frequently does this because life is marathon, not a sprint. GOD is building patience in us so we will go the distance in our marriage, our ministry, and the Christian life.

3. **A patient spirit is better than a proud spirit.**
Back in 1983 Coach John McKay's USC Trojan football team was trounced 51-0 by the Notre Dame Fighting Irish.

When Coach McKay walked into the locker room he saw his dejected players sitting on the benches hanging their heads in shame. They were not accustomed to losing a football game, let alone to take a drubbing like they got that day.

Coach McKay stepped up on one of the benches and said, “Men, I know you are disappointed in today's loss, but look at this way: There are over 800 million Chinese people who don't even know you played a game today. Its all about perspective.”

When you and I look at life from an earthly perspective, sometimes it seems like we are getting “clobbered” by all of our trials and troubles and sorrows. But when we look at those things from an eternal perspective, we will realize our present difficulties are just a fleeting moment compared to the bright, eternal future God has in store for us.

Its All A Matter of Perspective!