

The House Of Sorrow

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Someone lamented to me not too long ago that he felt like he'd been attending a lot of funerals the last few years. While it may seem true, we need to remember that funerals are not just opportunities to mourn, but to learn and mature. It might feel like there are a lot of funerals these days, but I highly doubt that people are dying at a greater rate than they have at any other time in history. Death serves a grand purpose, designed by God to elucidate the truth of our mortality, the brevity of life, and the ultimate judgment that comes upon every person. So if I must attend funerals, how can I walk away from the experience a better person? Consider some lessons from Ecclesiastes 7.

Funerals are a learning experience

“It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, because that is the end of every man, and the living takes it to heart” (7:2). It is often stated that funerals help us appreciate life more. Indeed, when we spend time with those who are mourning the loss of a loved one, it teaches us in the most poignant way to enjoy life and not waste it with frivolity or grudge-holding (**Ephesians 5:15-16**).

“Sorrow is better than laughter, for when the face is sad a heart may be happy” (7:3). The word sorrow means *“melancholy, or thoughtful sadness”* (Deane, 156). Introspective sadness often has a purifying effect on our souls – it sobers us, grounds us in reality, calms our mind, engenders self-reflection and moral honesty. The result of melancholy, then, is deeper contentment. When the initial pain wears off, sadness leads to contentment and acceptance of in injustice and suffering. It helps us lead more mature lives. In contrast to this, laughter is sometimes used as a tool to hide how miserable we are on the inside (**Proverbs 14:13**).

“The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning, while the mind of fools is in the house of pleasure” (7:4). This verse is the natural conclusion to the preceding thoughts. If it is more fulfilling and worthwhile to mourn, than a wise person is found in the house of mourning. Only fools spend all of their time playing, laughing, and engaging in senseless frivolity. They have completely closed their minds to reality – never seeing the world for what it is, and only ignoring the pain and suffering of people around them. Fools lack the sense and ability to show compassion for their friends who are mourning, just as they lack the strength to cope with the problems of their own lives!

Your end is better than your beginning

“The end of a matter is better than its beginning; patience of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit” (7:8). The end of a matter is better because of its perspective. When all has been said and done, and all testimony given, it is at this point that accurate judgments can be made. Often, it is best to wait until a situation pans out before rushing into it head first. In dating, marriage, conversion of a friend or family member, in school and work, and in almost every facet of life it is better to be patient and let things naturally run their course.

Don't waste life on bitterness

“Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, for anger resides in the bosom of fools” (7:9). Anger leads us to do irrational things – usually what we will later regret. This is why Paul put it so eloquently when wrote, *“But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth” (Colossians 3:8).*

“Do not say, ‘Why is it that the former days were better than these?’ For it is not from wisdom that you ask about this” (7:10). Miserable people always think the days before were better than the present. What a person like this fails to realize, though, is that every age has its ups and downs. The past was never as perfect as he remembers it, and the present is probably not as bad as his pessimistic attitude perceives it. We need to be careful not to dwell too much on “the good ol’ days” because those days are gone. Instead of dreaming about what was, we have an obligation to improve what is – to make the present a better time and use our good influence to make “the good ol’ days” now.