

Series: Coming to Grips with Reality

VBC

Pastor John Johnson

Ecclesiastes 9:13-18

December 13-14, 2008

“The Reality of Forgetfulness”

INTRO

Forgetfulness-it is one of those painful reminders of our frailty

-Heather at times can't remember which hospital she is in—*but she has a good excuse right now*

-but I don't for all of my forgetfulness—that shows up in moments like Thursday—when I turned off the water to my sprinkler system—only to find—I had forgotten where my shut off valve was and shut off the water to my neighbors house

-or lost reading glasses (if I told you how many I have misplaced this year alone—it would be embarrassing)

-I have gone on long searches—only to find them on my head!

Solomon writes about a different sort of forgetfulness—one with potentially devastating consequences (read 9:13-18)

-Solomon is writing about wisdom-we would expect this

-wisdom was his natural habitat—his base camp from which he explored life

-and in his exploration--there was something that impressed him—impacted—maybe better confounded him about what wisdom can do -and how it is treated

-there was this incredible mismatch

-on one side—this small, insignificant backwater town—Yellville, Arkansas; Drain, Oregon

-comprised of just a few no names—of no importance

-on the other—a king of some magnitude, superiority

-who had an intimidating army

-and he surrounded, encompassed—to mount an assault—lay siege

-this would be the Greeks facing the Persians at Marathon

-the island of Papua New Guinea staring at the 6th fleet

-the Detroit Lions matched up to the Giants

-in World of Warcraft—this would be Westfall surrounded by the horde

- one can visualize battering rams, heavy spearmen, slingers
- and one wonders why?
- it all seems like overkill—but maybe Solomon is using hyperbole to make a point
- that against the most impossible odds—the city triumphed!

- for a savior of sorts emerged
- a man who was neither impressive nor mighty—as the world counts strength
- for he was poor, impoverished—to emphasize it was not his rank, position, wealth that saved the town
- it was something else...read vs. 15
- through some masterstroke, some shrewd act—
- maybe through diplomatic shrewdness, military cleverness
- his wisdom delivered the city from this invincible grip

Illus-it's not out of the realm of possibility—history is the story of wise men saving cities

- the wise woman of Tekoa, who tossed the head of a fugitive over the wall—appeasing the surrounding army (2 Sam 20:15-22)
- maybe he tossed a head over
- or convinced the army everyone had cholera

- the Spartans who were far outnumbered—but in their shrewdness they almost defeated the Persians
- David—by his wisdom—took down Goliath

So what is the point?

- in every text—there are at least four questions we must ask—

1-WHAT IS THIS SAYING ABOUT LIFE?

- Solomon is underscoring something he discovered about wisdom

A-WISDOM IS VALUABLE

1-for wisdom can take on the world

- hold its own against the world's might
- calm advice can overcome the loud outbursts of this world-vs 17
- understanding and discernment are superior to the brute force of the flesh-vs 18
- wisdom can take on our enemies--as Pro 21:22 puts it--the wise can pull down the stronghold of the mighty

- wisdom will save us from our own enemies
- from the ways of wicked men-Pro 2:12
- will save you from the adulteress-2:16

2-foolly is no match for wisdom

- wisdom is better than folly-as light is better than darkness-2:12-14
- while fools stumble in the darkness-trip over their self-made obstacles, suffer through their self-inflicted wounds

3-wisdom—when pursued, found, and internalized

- a-can give one the *light to see*—the skills for steering through life
- b-the *spiritual horse sense* needed to understand our surroundings, pilot ourselves through the challenges of life
 - enable us to see that the more you talk-the less people listen
 - that if you spend time with the hot-tempered-you become hot-tempered-22:24
 - but if you walk with the wise—you will become wise-13:20
 - that if you go next door too often—the door will close-25:17
 - that if you dig a ditch for someone—you will fall into it-26:27
 - that the more you give-the more you gain-22:9
 - if you tend a tree-you will eat its fruit-27:18
 - if you waste your life—you will go hungry

4-without wisdom—we bang our shins, scrape our elbows, put the boat in the water without putting back the drain plug, buy without reading the fine print, drive into foreign cities without maps, live a life of excuses, in a moment of weakness buy an Airedale

- fools miss the lessons, waste the experience, become witless

God knows there are more than enough without it

Illus-every week I look forward to Only In America in The Week—to remind me of our “sapiential deficiency”

- like a jury this week that awarded a NY city detective 4.5 million-after he fell off a chair and shot himself in the knee
- police in Montgomery, NJ-who laid siege to a closed bank after a shadowy figure was seen through the drawn blinds
- and after a tense, 2 hour standoff, they discovered it was actually a life sized cardboard figure

-hence—Solomon devoted his life to wisdom—“applied his mind” to observing life, writing his summations

-and the world came to his door—and leaders were overwhelmed

-and he exhorted them—as he does us—to pursue wisdom as one who seeks for silver and gold (Pro 2)

-but in a fallen world—Solomon discovered a certain down side to wisdom—and that is the point of this story

-that for all the benefits of wisdom—

B-WISDOM IS VULNERABLE

- wisdom can only see so far-can only explain so much-3:11
- does not guarantee wealth and security-9:11
- while wisdom allows a person to get on in the world— it cannot forestall death
- in the end, the wise man is as naked as the fool-2:14-16

- and here is perhaps one of its greatest vulnerabilities
- wisdom can be forgotten—even dismissed eventually
- especially if comes from the margins—the poor, the unimpressive, the unimposing

- once the danger passed—the poor man went back to his obscurity
- like Joseph—who in his obscurity saved the cupbearer by his wisdom—and then it says in Gen 40:23—“however, he did not remember Joseph; he forgot him”

- so here’s the second question—

2-WHAT DOES THIS TEXT SAY ABOUT US?

- we forget
- we suffer a certain amnesia—especially when it comes to wisdom

- though wisdom warns us to avoid unfaithfulness—impurity--we forget—and make really bad choices
- though wisdom teaches us that wealth has no guarantee of permanence—we nonetheless give too much of ourselves to its pursuit
- though wisdom reveals the inevitable fall that comes when one becomes full of pride-we nonetheless get caught up in our self importance
- though gentle answers turn away wrath (15:1)—we forget—and try to rely on harsh words to change people
- though wisdom warns that there is a way that seems right to a man—but its end is the way of death (14:12)—we still take it

3-WHAT DOES THIS SAY ABOUT GOD?

- that He is saves us by His wisdom
- that even like the story
- He in His poverty—came to save us from our perilous situation
- who from the beginning was marked by wisdom-Lk 2:52
- who came as one greater than Solomon-Matt 12:42
- who had wisdom resting on Him-Isaiah
- in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom-Col 2:3-4
- and by the wisdom of the Cross He delivered us

- disarmed the powers of darkness-Col 2:15
- transferred us from the domain of darkness—into the kingdom of light-Col 1:13

- by His wisdom—He saved us from our sins

4-WHAT'S THE UNDERLYING EXHORTATION?

- don't forget--remember Who has saved you—what saves you

- we need this exhortation—because memory has the power to make us or ruin us (Buchanan, Rest of God)

- busyness has a way of eroding our memory

- destroying the time we need to remember well

- reflection, meditation, contemplation, attentiveness almost seem like archaic terms today

- but when we forget-faith deforms into something else

- Christmas warps into something else