

Understanding The Scheme Of Things

Ecclesiastes 7:23 – 8:1 NIV

Knowledge speaks-Wisdom listens. Words to the wise: if you are tired of falling behind in the rat race, maybe you should stop trying to be the lead rat.

Two young engineers applied for a single position at a computer company. They both had the same qualifications. In order to determine which individual to hire, the applicants were asked to take a test by the department manager. Upon completion of the test, both men missed only one of the questions. The manager went to the first applicant and said, "Thank you for your interest, but we've decided to give the job to the other applicant." "And why would you be doing that? We both got 9 questions correct," asked the rejected applicant.

"We have based our decision not on the correct answers, but on the question you missed," said the department manager.

"And just how would one incorrect answer be better than the other?" the rejected applicant inquired.

"Simple," said the department manager. "Your fellow applicant put down on question #5, 'I don't know.' You put down, 'Neither do I.'"

Some people will try anything to be the lead rat, won't they?

Here is some worldly wisdom from one of the leading financial magazines:

Under the heading of financial tips, the editors recommend attending church, and here's why: "Church provides lucrative networking opportunities that can increase your business. Your income can grow, assuming you don't blow all your cash on helping the poor."

Solomon provides us a sample of such wisdom in today's passage.

²³ All this I tested by wisdom and I said, "I am determined to be wise"— but this was beyond me.

²⁴ Whatever wisdom may be, it is far off and most profound— who can discover it?

²⁵ So I turned my mind to understand, to investigate and to search out wisdom and the scheme of things and to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the madness of folly. (Ecclesiastes 7:23-25)

How does he do it? How does God manage all that he does? For example, prayer: just the millions and millions of prayers; answering this one and that one without making another one void because of the answer to mine. I am determined to figure this out. Right!

Solomon described the search, the earnest, long search that he undertook to investigate all philosophies, seeking to discover the secret of life. He said that he was determined to figure this out, so he turned his focus toward himself to understand the scheme of things.

Did he go to far? Bad idea or not? Is the truth in us? Are we capable of understanding the scheme of things? Can we even know ourselves, let alone the mysteries of God?

How many times have you heard someone say, "No one understands me"? The implication is, "I alone understand me." There is probably no one thing that humans are more confident of than this notion that we know ourselves.

However, I believe that scripture is clear, that if there is one person in this world you do not know, it is you; you do not understand yourself.

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9)

The intellect and emotion of the human is so intertwined, it would be like sorting out all those prayers that I just mentioned, and then, categorizing them as good or bad.

We will be puzzled and confused if we try to solve the riddles of life by thinking we understand ourselves.

Remember, this is a man whose gift was wisdom, and he said that figuring this out was beyond him.

Take God out of the picture. What might life look like to those who believe in chance happening?

Have you ever looked at a piece of modern art and asked, “What was the artist thinking?”

Artists who think there are no absolutes, that life itself is an accident, convey that sense of randomness on canvass.

According to Solomon, they could be painting the central theme of this book, that apart from God, life is meaningless and unfathomable.

In verse 25, he basically said that he was diving in to understand and investigate – the question that we have to ask and answer is: did he participate, or was he simply an observer in his investigation of wickedness and folly?

In verse 26, he reveals his discovery; and in verses 27-8:1, makes a conclusion based on his discovery.

The discovery:

²⁶ I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare. (Ecclesiastes 7:26)

In the first chapters of Proverbs, wisdom is personified as a woman calling out warnings in the streets and at the gates to a city, forewarning the youth about many snares, including the trap of seduction.

¹⁶ It (wisdom) will save you also from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words, ¹⁷ who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the

covenant she made before God. (Proverbs 2:16-17)

That’s the warning Lady Wisdom gives to the young men of her city. But we are not talking about an ordinary young man diving in to understand and investigate. This is King Solomon, the man with the gift of wisdom—who, by the way, had 700 wives and 300 concubines.

The Oakridge Boys sang, “Trying to love two women is like a ball and chain...” What was Solomon thinking?

²⁷ “Look,” says the Teacher, “this is what I have discovered:

**“Adding one thing to another to discover the scheme of things—
²⁸ while I was still searching but not finding— I found one upright man among a thousand, but not one upright woman among them all. (Ecclesiastes 7:27-28)**

These two verses had me scratching my head for a couple of days for two reasons. One: how am I going to handle this and not get into trouble; and two: how am I going to handle this and not get into more trouble?

Out of a thousand men, Solomon found only one upright, but not one woman. Really?

How about Lady Wisdom in the first part of Proverbs? Well, she wasn’t a real woman. Okay. How about the Proverbs 31 woman? King Lemuel wrote that. It wasn’t Solomon.

Okay. I might be in trouble. Why couldn’t Solomon find any upright

women? Where was he looking and what was he looking for?

Well, we know what he was looking for. He told us in 24 and 25: wisdom, the scheme of things, the stupidity of wickedness, and the madness of folly.

Now we have to determine where he was looking. I am going to guess that he was looking in his surroundings; the people that he dealt with day after day, month after month...

Do any of you watch any of the remodeling shows on TV? Some of them are down to earth and offer good advice and procedure on ‘How To.’

But, many of them are not even in the same universe as we are. What I mean is this: in my best years of income, there was no way that I could spend 20,000 to remodel my bathroom or 50,000 to remodel my kitchen. Folks that can afford that don’t live in the same world that I do.

In Solomon’s world, with whom would he have been rubbing elbows? And why did he have all these women?

I would call the people that Solomon dealt with ‘High Rollers:’ people who could afford 20,000-dollar bathrooms. Does this make them bad people? Not necessarily.

But, to afford a 20,000-dollar bathroom, you would probably be pretty shrewd in business dealings. And, not many women of that day would be business people, so to keep using those 20,000-dollar bathrooms, women would have to be pretty shrewd as well.

A couple other passages may shed some light on Solomon's discovery's and conclusion: in 1st Kings,

¹ King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. ² They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. ³ He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. ⁴ As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. (1 Kings 11:1-3)

Most of Solomon's wives were probably political alliances to consummate treaties. And the concubines were not necessarily surrogate mothers, like Hagar was to Abraham. It appears that in David's and Solomon's courts concubines had domestic duties in the palace.

In his search for the scheme of things, as he grew older, his wives turned his heart after other gods.

One more place I want to look before we hear Solomon's conclusion.

The Song of Solomon: if I understand this book correctly, the Song of Solomon, in poetic form, is the courtship, marriage, honeymoon, and concludes in the later years of the married life of Solomon and Shulamith. I am aware of the controversy

and the many interpretations of this book. The Jews called the Song of Songs "the Most Holy Place" of scripture and wouldn't allow it to be read by the young and immature. This book of the Bible is about love, sex, and marriage; all of which is made by God.

I want to take you to a scene in the 7th chapter that may shed some light on what was happening in Solomon's life.

¹¹ Come, my lover, let us go to the countryside, let us spend the night in the villages. ¹² Let us go early to the vineyards to see if the vines have budded, if their blossoms have opened, and if the pomegranates are in bloom— there I will give you my love. (Song of Songs 7:11-12)

To make a long story short, Shulamith has figured out that if she is going to get much personal, intimate time with Solomon, she is going to have to be creative. She is suggesting a get away; get him out of town: away from where he is pulled in every direction. She has made the plans, booked the reservations, packed the bags, and given incentive.

This was her husband, but he also belonged to a nation. He was king, with all the baggage and responsibilities that came with it. When she married him, she got him with baggage, warts and all.

I mentioned 'living in a different world' earlier. Presidents and kings live in a world of demands and stress that I can only imagine. This get away in chapter 7 might be a clue as to what happened to Solomon; he may have got so caught up in

being a wise king that he forgot to be a husband and father, and a slow erosion led to idolatry in his search of the scheme of things; in his investigation of wickedness and folly. As he grew older, most everyone around him were probably superficial in their friendship or political allegiance, easily encouraging his heart to grow cold toward both men and women.

And now we have his Conclusion:

²⁹ This only have I found: God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes. ¹ Who is like the wise man? Who knows the explanation of things? Wisdom brightens a man's face and changes its hard appearance. (Ecclesiastes 7: 29-8:1)

In his search for wisdom, the scheme of things, the stupidity of wickedness, and the madness of folly, Solomon found that the trouble of this world is not with God, but with man. Because we will not listen to the wisdom of God and the word of God, we seek to find ways to circumvent what he is telling us, to find the richness of life apart from the rules of life that he has set forth. It cannot be done. The inevitable discovery of an honest search is that life can never be found except where God says it is found -- in a relationship with him. Knowledge speaks- Wisdom listens.

So, stop trying to be the lead rat in the race, fear God and keep his commandments. This brightens a man's face and changes his appearance.