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*Life Under the Sun*, Part 57 Ecclesiastes 7:19-22

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I invite you to stand as we invite God's blessing and open His word. "Father in Heaven as we open Your word now, we are praying that You would be the One who would teach us. We are asking that every single person here will hear from You. We pray that You will be so powerful, so profound, and so present during this time period that everyone of us would be affected. We ask Lord for hearts to be changed and for miracles to take place. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen."

Please be seated. Years ago I read about how to become righteous. First, you had to ask Jesus into your life, because it's a foolish journey without Him. Second, with His help, you begin the process of overcoming every sin in your life. And that was done by resisting temptation; learning to yield the will to God's will and then asking Him for His power to help you to overcome. The idea was that if you resist a temptation long enough, you would gain the victory over that sin in your life, and you would be righteous in that area of your life. Do that with every sin in your life, and you will be living a sanctified life before God; you would become holy as He is holy. You would become sinless, and this would be the road to glory. It would be the hope of glory.

It is all very logical, it makes sense. If you have no sin, you must therefore be righteous. So, it's logical. But is it Scriptural? And that's what we are going to study today. Please turn in your Bibles to Ecclesiastes chapter 7. We are continuing our series called, "Life under the Sun" and we are going to look at verses 19-22. Verse 19 says this: "Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten rulers of the city. For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin. Also do not take to heart everything people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. For many times, also, your own heart has known that even you have cursed others."

The first part of the passage, verse 19, says: "Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten rulers of the city." The New International Version writes it this way: "Wisdom makes one wise man more powerful than ten rulers in a city." The Amplified Version adds a little bit, and it says: "True wisdom is a strength to the wise man, more than ten rulers or valiant generals who are in the city." So this wisdom is a powerful thing. Wisdom gives an individual greater strength than ten rulers. Wisdom gives an individual greater strength than valiant generals. We'll see this in principle in Psalm 127. Let's turn there please. Psalm 127, verse 1, it says this that, "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it. Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain."

So you have a house under construction. If the Lord is not in it, it's not of any good. It's in vain. You have a city that's being guarded; unless the Lord is guarding the city, the watchmen do it in vain. Now that principle applies in many areas of our lives. And today we are looking at it in the realm of theology. We are talking about premises. What is our understanding of something, and then what are our logical conclusions regarding that premise. So wisdom can make an individual wise, and in that wisdom they are more powerful than ten rulers in the city. Wisdom can make a man wise, and he can become more

valiant than generals. And unless God is in the building, unless God is in the protecting, the building and the protecting are not going to be of any use.

So a wise man in a city that is filled with God will be able to withstand powerful people, powerful influences, things that could be destructive. And in the realm of theology, there is a bunch of that. There are many, many voices. Many, many folks saying, "This is the way, walk in it. This is what is truth, embrace it. And anything not this, please, it is wrong. You must follow this way." After the second service a woman spoke to me, and she said a couple of weeks ago during a sermon I said something, and her husband said, "That's wrong." I told her to tell him, "He is my hero." I disagree with him, but I want him to be thinking! And I said, "Now, tell him to go and find in the scriptures where I am wrong. And if I am, tell him to come to me because I will correct it." I want a right theology, do you not?

And we can only have a right theology if we are thinking for ourselves. We must be wise! And the only way we can be wise is to get wisdom that comes from God. Paul mentions that to Timothy. Let's look at that. In Second Timothy chapter 3, Paul is writing to a young Pastor who is pastoring at the church in Ephesus. And in the letter he says this, we begin with the verse 14: "But as for you, continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them." "...from whom you have learned them." Verse 15: "...and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

So Timothy is told, true wisdom comes from God, brings His blessings, makes you wise unto salvation. True wisdom regarding salvation in Christ comes from reading the Bible, and then Timothy specifically is told to continue in the things he has learned and that he is assured of. He is told to remember the source of his learning, the Holy Scriptures, and to hold on to the idea that salvation is through faith in Christ Jesus. Well, it raises some questions for us. Here is the question: What is the source of your learning? Why do you believe what you believe regarding God? What is your picture of God? What is your concept of God? What is He like? What is He not like? What does He expect of you? How do you have that information? Where did it come from?

Now most of us would like to say, "Well it came to me from the Holy Scriptures." Well then, let's do a little work. Let's do a little thinking. Think about some of the pictures of God. Did those come to you from a passage of Scripture in the Bible? Can you actually show me that passage of Scripture? Can you show somebody else that passage of Scripture or are you more willing now to admit that perhaps our concepts of God might have come to us from our family? Might have come to us from what the church told us? Might have come to us from experiences in classes where we have been in school? Is it possible that we could have a concept of God that sounds like it's from the Bible; it's got enough Bible sprinkled into it that it might be right, and yet in reality we don't know the source of that, and it might not even be a Scriptural understanding or concept regarding God?

Extremely important that we have a Biblical understanding of salvation through faith in Christ Jesus! God's wisdom answers those questions. God's wisdom comes from Him to us in the Holy Scriptures. The

mission statement, the vision of the Collegedale Community Church is very simple. It's to "grow in God." And people have asked me for years, you know, what's my purpose as a pastor? It's very simple! For ten and a half years, I've had one goal in mind, and that is to help you understand the Word of God! And, in understanding it, to encourage you to read it on your own, so that you know the source of why you believe what you believe regarding God! Folklore theology which is the theology, "Well, we heard it enough that it must be true. Enough people say it, it must be right." Folklore theology is not Biblical theology! We need to know a "Thus saith the Lord!" What does He say about Himself? He is a being we do not know! And we can create all kinds of things about Him that sound good that sound logical and we can devise all kinds of systems as to how to please Him, and how to become righteous.

Well, let's go back to Ecclesiastes chapter 7. And I don't know if you coughed it or not, but there is a very strange verse, verse 20. I am going to read it slowly so you catch it. "For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin." Perhaps that's a little foggy? In the New International Version it says, "There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins." "There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins." Do you believe that is scriptural? ...or do you think the author made a mistake? Boy, it got quiet! What does a righteous man look like in the scriptures? Do you know, the Bible speaks of one; clearly identifies that he is righteous. In fact, it goes on to say, "He is perfect."

Let's look at him. Genesis chapter 6 verse 9, it says: "This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God." Now, let's look at that in the New International Version: "Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God." The Amplified Version adds a little more, it says: "Noah was a just and righteous man, blameless in his evil generation, Noah walked in habitual fellowship with God." So if we put all of this together, we discover Noah was perfect. Noah was blameless, he was just, he was righteous, and he was in habitual fellowship with God.

Now, how many of you here think Noah will be in heaven, let me see your hands? Yeah, he's arrived. I mean he is there. You can't get a better description of a good life than what we just read. Now, that's before the flood. Let's go after the flood to chapter 9. Chapter 9 of Genesis and we'll read verse 20, it says: "Noah began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard. Then he drank of the vine and was drunk and become uncovered in his tent." That means, 'naked.' He got drunk, naked and crazy! And we don't know if he howled at the moon, we don't know any of that, but we trust it wasn't on the Sabbath, so it was okay. How many of you still believe Noah is going to be in heaven, let me see your hands? ...but wait the minute, it said, "He was perfect." It said, "He was blameless, just, righteous, and in habitual fellowship with God."

Are you telling me that drunkenness and holiness are compatible? They are not! But, the Bible does say that there is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins. Now some of you may be thinking, "I have been looking for that verse my whole life!" Now, I have found a reason! Listen, if you don't have Jesus in your heart, if He is not your Savior, look, don't play church. Just live a life that

takes you to hell, because that's where you're going. Don't fool around. But if Christ is in your heart, you're not going to want to lead that life. I just want to get that out there because people are always saying, "But, but, but..." Look, as one author said, "When it comes to salvation, leave your *but* out of it." Jesus comes into the heart. He changes the person! They'll want to obey. If Jesus is not in the heart, all the obedience that person has means nothing! Is that clear?

So what should I emphasize as a Pastor? Getting Christ in the heart! If you have Christ in the heart, He'll change things! And then people will seek to obey. And if you are struggling with some aspect of sin, come talk to me! I'll help you or I'll find people who can. But to try to keep people involved in a struggle when they don't even have Christ in their heart, is senseless. "There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins!" So, let's test that with empirical evidence. Can you name one person in the Bible that is described as never sinning? Jesus doesn't count! There is none, there is not one! Now someone might say, "But there is no sin of Daniel recorded in the Bible." I agree with that, but there is no Bible text that says, "Daniel never sinned." There is no Bible text that names a person in the Bible as never sinning.

I really struggled at a funeral. The woman that had died was an older woman. And she was a very merciful, kindhearted individual. She was so much the grandmother type of personality that even old folks called her "grandma." And she was one of these Dorcas ladies, 7am, 7pm, she is at the Dorcas, folding clothes, helping people. And she didn't just hand out clothing. When someone came who was 16 years old and pregnant, and no good things on the horizon, she would call me and say, "Pastor, we got to do something for this girl." I mean she wasn't just handing out clothes and arguing about where they should be stacked. She was a sincere hearted Christian woman, and she died. I was standing at her graveside and I was thinking about her. She was so sincere. She was so careful in her life to be a blessing to other people. And yet, I knew she was not sinless. I knew this lady had sinned. Not grievous sins, but I'd seen her short with her spouse. Not a lot, but it had happen. Enough to let me know she was not perfect!

And yet she died! And I am going to stand there, and I am going to tell that family, "Praise God for resurrection, we'll see her in heaven!" And it downed on me. I have never met a human being who had ever arrived! I've never met that person, and neither have you! That person doesn't exist. And yet, so many of us are trying to become that person. Why? It simply can't happen, and I'll tell you why as we go on in the scriptures. But, let's go back to Ecclesiastes chapter 7. What is this all about? And is this in the Bible? Oh yeah, it is! Ecclesiastes 7 verses 21 and 22: "Also, do not take to heart everything people say lest you hear your servant cursing you for many times also your own heart has known that even you have cursed others."

Well what's the point? If I believe that becoming righteous the road to glory is a process of me overcoming every sin, it will have a tendency to cause me to be very focused on me! And I will, whether I actually do or not, I will actually begin to believe that in some areas I have arrived; I have overcome in that area. And if I see you in that area, I will consider myself better than you. And instead of the plan of

redemption creating in me humility before God, it creates arrogance inside of me, a self righteousness and a judgmental spirit towards other people. And right here, we are told: look, even the best still sin! And when you hear someone cursing you, don't get all upset because you know darn well you have cursed other people too! It is the Old Testament version of this: "If you are without sin, than you be the first one to cast the stone," you see? And so, God's plan of redemption is to bring humility to us to the point, where if I believe God forgave me, I know I can forgive you! If God can love me, I can love you. That is God's plan of redemption.

Now, it will help us if we understand in verse 20 what a righteous man actually means: "For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin." What does a righteous man mean or a just man mean in the scriptures? It's true, the word 'righteous' means 'holy'. The word 'righteousness' means 'being holy.' All that's true! But what does it mean here? This is when it's fun to take a concordance, look up the word. Go to the back to the dictionary, what does it mean in the Hebrew? Get a nice Vines dictionary that has the Hebrew and the Greek, and look it up and study it. Would you be interested to know that the word 'righteous' here means 'loyal?' So is it possible for me to be loyal to my spouse and still irritate them? Oh, I know how. And you do too! Is it possible to be loyal to God and still fail in sin? Absolutely! That's the human experience of a person who has embraced Christ! They are seeking to please God, yet, they have a major problem! And the major problem in our life is not sin. The major problem in our life is we are sinful! It's us! And we can't change that.

Now let's rehearse something. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were placed there. How long could they have stayed in the Garden of Eden? How long? For eternity, right? It was fully equipped. Had they met the conditions for eternal life, they could live it, right there! What was the condition for eternal life? Obedience! How much obedience? A perfect life of obedience! All their life of obedience! Now they didn't struggle with thoughts; which is a whole another struggle. Have you ever been in church praying, been at home praying, and all of a sudden, whew, "Where did that come from?" And you wonder, "Wow, at what point is God going to consider this a sin?" You know, I didn't generate that did I? Well yeah! It's part of you! And so, some people are so earnest, so desirous with their list. When you overcome every single thought, and every single thought in your mind is holiness, come talk to me! You'll have something to share with me.

Our problem is we are sinful. Adam and Eve were not. They could live in the presence of God forever, on one condition: they didn't sin. Not once! They sinned once, and they are out! That broke the condition. So the condition for eternal life for them was a lifetime of perfect obedience. What is the condition today for eternal life? Same thing! It is a lifetime of perfect obedience! Now, at the first service we had a number of little children here, and I asked them: "Have you ever sinned?" "Yes!" You and I have been disqualified from ever having righteousness on our own. I was disqualified so many years ago; I don't remember my first sin. I don't even recall. I was disqualified from haven long before I ever understood much about heaven. I am sinful, and I sin. So, Jesus comes along; Jesus lives a lifetime of perfect obedience; it is His righteousness. When I accept Jesus as my Savior, what do I get accounted to me? His righteousness which is a lifetime of perfect obedience to God!

That's why it's been said from this pulpit many times, "When you embrace Christ as your Savior, when God looks at you from heaven, He does not say, "There is a forgiven sinner!" He says, "There is somebody who's never ever sinned!" Because it is Christ's righteousness that is ours! Now, let me ask you a question. We can kind of get that a little bit when it comes to justification, all right? "Jesus died for us, took our place on the cross, now we are set right with God. We've got everything going for us." You know, "The law has been satisfied, everything is all right. Justice and mercy kiss at the cross," on we go, "Now we can have peace with God." But, we have to live a life! Sanctification! Ahhh, 'sanctification' means 'set apart for a holy purpose.' And so I learned that everything in my life must be set apart for a holy purpose. And I become sanctified, and ultimately, I will reach a point where even if Jesus were to stop interceding for me, "It's okay because I have arrived!" "And then He will come and take me to Glory – and I will be glorified!"

Look at First Corinthians chapter 1 and we'll read verse 30: "But of Him, you are in Christ Jesus who became for us wisdom from God!" So that all that wisdom we are talking about comes to us from God in Christ. So "...He became wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption!" Jesus gets us started, Jesus stays with us, and Jesus ends us. It's Jesus all along the way! He is our sanctification! He is our justification! And when He comes, He will glorify us and we will live with Him for eternity! It's all about Jesus! Look at verse 31: "That as it is written, He who glories, let him glory in the Lord!" If you want glorying in something, glory in the Lord! Glory in this! Not that "I no longer drink alcohol, though I am grateful I don't! But I want to glory in the Lord who took that from me!" Glory in the Lord!

Glory in the Lord and focus on Him, and not on ourselves. Look at Colossians chapter 1 verse 27: "To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you the hope of glory!" Do you want to know the way to glory? Do you want to know the hope of glory? It is Jesus Christ! "Him we preach warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man perfect in Christ!" Perfect in Christ! If Jesus is my Savior, what am I in the eyes of God? Perfect! I already have arrived! I am there! And the rest of my life is lived seeking to please the God who has saved me! Everything changes when Jesus becomes my Savior instead of my example. He saves us! The Bible says, "There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins!"

But there was a man. Christ Jesus who was on earth and He never sinned. He is our wisdom; He is our righteousness; He is our sanctification; He is our perfection; He is our redemption. There may be ten rulers in the church? There might be generals, high up in the church who will tell you this message is 'heretical!' Figure it out! Study the scriptures for your own! Let God's wisdom help you to stand on the principles and teachings of His word and His word alone! And it's time to let folklore go where it should go! That's the way! Why do you believe what you believe? Why do you hope in what you hope in? May it be founded on the scriptures!

I'll tell you what happens when Jesus comes into the heart. There is a beautiful circle that is formed. God and the individual are no longer separated. And their arms opened to other folks, and other folks join that circle. You become a member of a huge family! And in that family, everyone holding hands in that circle, looks at one another and says: "I knew if God could save me, he could save you! I knew it!" And there is a hope in that circle. There is a welcoming spirit in that circle! There is not judgmentalism in that circle! There is not smallness in that circle! There is largeness in that circle. People think of big concepts. We focus so much on little things when it's about us that we forget the major things! Do you want to know the two things that are major? Only two! There are these: "Love God," and number two: "Love others!" Everything else will take care of itself!

Jesus came to save us! Jesus came to be our righteousness! Jesus came to take our death upon Himself and to give us His life! Jesus came so that you could learn to love God and learn to love other people. Jesus came to give you the hope of glory! Is there anyone here today that would like to say, "Lord, I want that hope! I want Christ in my heart; I want to do this right; I want to embrace Your plan, and I want to do it right now!" If you want to say this to the Lord, I invite you to stand!

"Father in Heaven, thank You for Jesus! We invite Him into our hearts to be our Savior, to be our righteousness, to be our sanctification, to be our hope of glory. We thank You in His name, Amen!"