

**Ecclesiastes 8: 1 – “Who is like a Wise Man?”, A Bible Study  
prepared for the evening of April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011, conducted by  
Pastor Paul Rendall at the Rendall home.**

We have seen the Preacher Solomon searching to find wisdom all through the writing of this book. Let me review this with you for a few minutes. In Chapter 1, verse 13, he says that “he set his heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven.” And he succeeded in finding out that earthly wisdom, the wisdom that comes from searching to understand the management of earthly things and building an earthly kingdom is vain. In Chapter 2, verse 18 he says, “Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me.” “And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool.” Life goes on, he says and eventually the person who has managed earthly things wisely has to die and leave what he has done. And so Solomon saw in verse 3 that there was a season for everything, a time for every purpose under heaven.” He concluded in verse 12 that “there was nothing better for men than to rejoice, and do good in their lives;” to “eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God.” He saw in verse 14 that “Whatever God does shall be forever”. He saw that it was wise to remember that “God requires an account of what is past.” (Verse 15) He relates in Chapters 4-7 that there is a wise and righteous way of walking through this life, but he was still having a hard time understanding what the advantage was, of being wise, over being a fool. In Chapter 6, verse 7, he says, “All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the soul is not satisfied.” “For what more has the wise man than the fool?” But he was able in chapter 7, verse 1, to say that “a good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of one’s death better than the day of one’s birth.” In Chapter 7, he is really beginning to draw some important conclusions. Verse 11 – “Wisdom is good with an inheritance and profitable to those who see the sun.” “For wisdom is a defense as money is a defense.” “Wisdom give life to those who have it.”

Now he really speaking spiritually. Now He is considering the work of God in His providence in relation to men. God is the author of true prosperity as well as adversity. God has appointed the one as well as the other.” (Verse 14) “He who fears God”, he says in Chapter 7, verse 8, will escape from being overly righteous and from trying to prolong life through wickedness.” Even just men, he says, do not continually do good. Even they sin at times. (Verse 20) And then he comes to one of the great conclusions of this book. “Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.” He is not only referring to Adam here; he is referring to himself and all other men in verse 29 of Chapter 7. This leads us to tonight’s verse. “Who is like a wise man?” Solomon answers his own question by stating that it is the one, “who knows the interpretation of a thing.” So this evening we want to think first about the wisdom of the interpretation of a thing. And then second we want to look at the change which results from having this interpretation.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – Let’s think about the wisdom of the interpretation of a thing.**

“Who is like a wise man?” “And who knows the interpretation of a thing?” When Solomon says, “Who is like a wise Man”, I believe that he is referring to those who have been wise with the wisdom which comes from above; from God; those who have been able to receive and to understand what is wise in God’s sight; godly men who had gone before him and who had been recorded in the Scriptures. We will look at one of them in just a minute. But there is a decided difference between the wisdom which is from above and the wisdom which is earthly. James Chapter 3: verse 13. “Who is wise and understanding among you?” “Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.” “But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.” “This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly sensual, demonic.” “For where envy and self-seeking exist,

confusion and every evil thing are there.” “But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.” This is what Solomon needed to learn more than anything. He had been given wisdom from God when he was very young, and he was wise in earthly things beyond all men of his generation; maybe all men in history except our Lord Jesus Christ. He had also found the Lord, and he knew God as his God from a young age. But as we have seen in past studies he was quite deficient in his faithfulness to God’s Word to him as king. He was very self-seeking in terms of building his own kingdom rather than God’s. His wisdom in regard to earthly things actually led him to stray from the Word of God which was revealed to him in the Scriptures. He did not know the interpretation of a thing. What Solomon is speaking about here when he says “the interpretation of a thing”, is that he is talking about being a truly wise man in relation to the Providence of God and the Word of God. It is being wise in relation to what God does in His providential ordering of things and what He says in His Word. In the Old testament times there were certain men who were wise in this way, and they knew the interpretation of a thing. One of them was a man named Joseph.

Turn with me to Genesis Chapter 40, verse 1. “It came to pass after these things, (the attempted seduction of Joseph by Potiphar’s wife and his refusal to lie with her which resulted in his being thrown into prison, where he was put in charge of everything there because he was so faithful) that the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their lord, the king of Egypt.” “And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief butler and the chief baker.” “So he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison, the place where Joseph was confined.” “And the captain of the guard charge Joseph with them, and he served them; so they were in custody for a while.” “Then the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison, had a dream, both of them, each man’s dream in one night and each man’s dream had its own interpretation. “Who knows the interpretation of a thing?” Joseph did, because he was given this ability by God. But notice that each man’s dream had its own interpretation. The interpretation would be favorable to one man and unfavorable to the other. Notice how the king of Egypt is offended with both, but will only show favor to one of them. So, too, there is a particular Providence of God exercised toward you. And you may not understand it. Indeed it may make you very sad as you think of it, because you do not know the outcome. Now you can see, that very much of the outcome of these men’s lives was related to the interpretation of these dreams. They are not wise enough to interpret their dreams on their own. They needed a wise man. Let’s see who that wise man was. Look down at verse 6. “And Joseph came in to them in the morning and looked at them, and saw that they were sad.” “So he asked Pharaoh’s officers were with him in the custody of his lord’s house, saying, ‘Why do you look so sad today?’” “And they said to him, ‘We each have had a dream, and there is no interpreter of it.’” So Joseph said to them, “Do not interpretations belong to God?” “Tell them to me please.” So they tell their dreams to Joseph and he faithfully interprets both. The interpretation of the chief butler’s dream was favorable. Within 3 days, Pharaoh would “lift up his head and restore him to his place.” (vs. 13) In the case of the chief baker’s dream, Joseph interpreted it that, “his head would be lifted off from him and they would hang him on a tree; and the bird would eat his flesh from him.” (vs. 19) These things then actually came to pass, just as Joseph had interpreted.

But notice that Joseph said to both that interpretations belong to God. Only a wise man like Joseph could know the interpretation of the thing. And yet, even though Joseph had asked the chief butler to remember him when he was restored, he did not, but Joseph was left in prison. He could interpret for others, but for himself he could not interpret favorably for himself. God would act after two full years to bring Joseph up out of prison and this unjust bondage that he was in. Pharaoh had a dream and he could not interpret it. And then in Chapter 41, verse 9, it

says, “Then the chief butler spoke to Pharaoh, saying: I remember my faults this day.” “When Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and put me in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, both me and the chief baker, we each had a dream in one night, he and I.” “Each of us dreamed according to the interpretation of his own dream.” And so he related it to Pharaoh, and Pharaoh called Joseph to come to him. In verse 15 he says to Joseph, “I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it.” “But I have heard it said of you that you can understand a dream, to interpret it.” “So Joseph answered Pharaoh saying, ‘It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace.’” Joseph went on to give Pharaoh the interpretation of his dream and what he should do in order that Egypt would be saved in the coming famine. Listen to Pharaoh’s response. “And Pharaoh said to his servants, ‘Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?’” “Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you.’” “You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only regard to the throne will I be greater than you.” “And Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.’”

I hope that you can see from this that it is only God who can give you the answer of peace in relation to the future outcome of your life. How does he do this? The Bible is very clear on this. God has a providence in regard to each and every life created by Him. But, an interpreter of His will, both decretively and providentially is necessary. Our faces becomes stern because we do not understand God or His ways, and sometimes do not know what the wise or right thing is, to do. Who is like the wise man? The answer of peace is found in the gospel. Those who have come to know the Lord Jesus have an interpreter, both of God’s providence and the Scriptures. They have a greater than Joseph. They should turn to Him for the interpretation of their life and their eternal destiny. Turn with me to John Chapter 1, verse 18. “No one has seen God at any time.” “The only begotten Son (or God) who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” This word “declared” in the verse is the word ἐξηγήσατό, and it means “has explained” Him. It is the word from which we get our word “exegesis”. To do exegesis on the Greek text of Scripture is to attempt to study the word meaning and the syntax of the verses so that they can be explained correctly and interpreted correctly. This is what the Lord Jesus has done; He has exegeted and thereby interpreted the Father. He is the One who knows the interpretation of a thing in regard to the meaning of life and God’s will, His ways, and His Providence. If you believe in Him you will have your sins taken away. The Father will no longer be angry with you; no longer offended by you. You may have failed Him badly, but Jesus can give you a favorable interpretation to your life. But you must find grace through Him. Let’s now look at the second point of verse 1.

**2ndly - We want to look at the change which results from having this interpretation.**

“A man’s wisdom makes his face shine, and the sternness of his face is changed.” Now in applying this, we need to see that the only way that you and I can become wise in relation to providential events which God brings into our lives is through someone interpreting, not our dreams, for that was for Old testament times, but interpreting what we should do in the various situations of our lives, in light of the Scriptures. We have seen that Jesus Christ interprets God to us. He is the One who is all wise, and He is the One who can bring us to the place where we are wise, and our wisdom will make our face shine. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 1: 18. “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” “For it is written: ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.’” “Where is the wise?” “Where is the scribe?” “Where is the disputer of this age?” “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.” “For Jews request a sign, and Greeks wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks

foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” He is the interpreter that we have found who knows the interpretation of the meaning of life. Verse 30- “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption—just as it is written, ‘He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.’”

Now you might remember that there was someone in the Old Testament whose face shone. Who was it? You are right. It was Moses. His face shone, but the sternness of his face was not changed. Why was that? It was because Moses represents the law. The people saw him coming down from the mountain where he had been talking with God, and his face shone. But they were afraid of him, it says in Exodus 34: 30. The law came through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” (John 1: 17) The law cannot save you, nor take away your fears. It can illumine you to the righteousness and holiness of God, but it will always be stern with you because it is demanding what God demands of you; perfection. But that perfection He has only found in Christ. Christ alone has perfectly kept God’s law. He alone illumines your darkness with His light. He alone binds up your wounds of sin and pours His balm into your wounded heart. He is the One who causes your face to shine with His wisdom which leads to salvation and holiness. He is the One who changes the sternness of your face to beam with joy because you know that all wisdom and grace and power and peace are found in Him. Wisdom for every situation is found in Christ and His Word. The Bible and His Spirit are the interpretation of a thing. Let’s close by looking at Job 33: 23 – 26. “If there is a messenger for him, (an interpreter, a wise and holy man), a Mediator, one among a thousand, to show man His uprightness, then He is gracious to Him, and says, ‘Deliver him from going down to the Pit; I have found a ransom; His flesh shall be young like a child’s, he shall return to the days of his youth.’” “He shall pray to God, and He will delight in Him, He shall see His face with joy, for He restores to man His righteousness.” That is what makes the believer’s face to shine, and causes the sternness of his face to change. It is Christ who has become the interpretation of a thing to us.