

Ecclesiastes 10
A Meditation on Folly

The lead voice of this Book of Ecclesiastes, called himself the Preacher and he has a thesis which is:

Life is empty; life is vain; life is meaningless; life is futile; life is frustrating; life is trivial; life is without satisfaction, and it goes off script.

When that happens people try to solve the problem or fill the void with all sorts of things – work, pleasure, philosophy, pragmatism, entertainment...

Those attempts to import meaning don't work.

The wisest thing you can do is to realize that not even being wise will tell you everything you want to know. - David Gibson

In Chapter 10 The Preacher gives some insights into foolish and wise living and leadership. Ironically, the problem arises big time when Solomon dies, and the choice is made between two men, one being one of his sons, who makes a foolish decision as a leader. 1 Kings 12

Chapter 10 may seem like it doesn't relate to chapters 1-9, but it is a meditation on Folly – in life, leadership and followership.

The bible says more about being a follower than about being a leader

Folly is traced to a fault in the heart – it is the invisible inner part of a person. (San Andreas fault line in our hearts)

All of the traits of the foolish man/ woman flow from issues of the heart.

It's an issue of where the heart is leading you.

When you think heart, don't think emotions, but think, emotions, affections, desires, our mind and our will.

WISDOM IS TO BE PREFERRED TO FOLLY, but no one stumbles into wisdom. It must be sought and pursued. Folly is the default mode of the human heart.

FOLLY v. 1-3

Dead flies make a perfumer's oil stink, so a little foolishness is weightier than wisdom and honor. 2A wise man's heart directs him toward the right, but the foolish man's heart directs him toward the left. 3Even when the fool walks along the road, his sense is lacking and he demonstrates to everyone that he is a fool.

it doesn't take much to knock down what took a long time to build

EX: sand castle ; dominoes, house of cards ;a computer crash after working on something for hours; an ill spoken word, even in jest at a party can ruin everything, etc... trust in a relationship

One aspect of the hevel of life is that even wisdom can be undone by one foolish act.

A perfumer's oil can be ruined by a small fly.

The wisest woman or man is vulnerable to folly – this is hevel.

Wisdom is superior to folly, but it is not impermeable to folly. Even a generally wise person can give a foolish word or do a foolish thing. No One is Perfect. THAT'S WHY WE NEED A SAVIOR.

v. 2 There is a bias toward the right side or right handedness in scripture. The heart toward the right is wisdom, toward the left is folly. In the OT the "right" is the position of power, blessing and glory – Gen 48:14, Isa 41:10 "God's righteous right hand") "Sinister =of the left hand"

The fool loves rowdy song 7:5, shallow laughter 7:6, he is lazy 4:5, talkative 5:3, unreceptive to advice 9:17, morally blind 2:14 with a fatal malady at heart 10:2

v. 3 – the fool cannot conceal himself. His inner deficiency will come out in public.

The fool cuts across socio-economic and cultural lines – he may be a ruler or in the temple. The fool has a talent for deceit, is often confident, clever, and dismisses attempts to discipline him. He rebels against religion, or at least formal structure to follow his own views or interpretations. He does what is right in his own eyes and leans on his own understanding. He thinks he is big and invincible even though the universe shows him how small he really is. His foolishness will become apparent once he steps out in plain view.

FOLLY IN HIGH PLACES 4-7

4 If the ruler's temper rises against you, do not abandon your position, because composure allays great offenses.

5 There is an evil I have seen under the sun, like an error which goes forth from the ruler- 6 folly is set in many exalted places while rich men sit in humble places. 7 I have seen slaves riding on horses and princes walking like slaves on the land

v. 4 – don't stomp off in a huff because of the anger of a ruler / boss. It can be soothed with a calm forbearance that neither panics in fear nor deserts in bitterness – Eaton Meyers – You can defuse a volatile situation with self-control and calm maturity. This is the power of wisdom over against the folly of a powerful ruler.

“Blessed are the meek...”

No ruler or leader is perfect. Human governments, ordained by God, have no choice but to rely on imperfect people.

Public support earns private influence.

I HAVE SEEN v. 5-7

Curious reversals happen in life. Don't put faith in the permanence of human affairs.

EX: there was a time when someone needed to be accomplished to be famous, BUT today people are simply famous for being famous, having accomplished nothing.

Folly / silliness is set in exalted places, while the rich (noble) are in humble places. Beware of the spin that tries to pass off anyone in power as being wise.

Point to remember*** God does not automatically remove foolish leaders from our lives. Nor does he give us immunity from becoming foolish in our leadership – No leader is exempt from becoming entrapped in folly. Pray for leaders and for yourselves as parents, teachers, managers, coaches, etc. Pray that we take the words of Ecclesiastes to heart. - Eswine

This may be the result of folly on the part of the “king” v. 4

“A king may put foolish favorites into office over those who are more qualified. Such strangers to the fear of God are called fools.” - Walter Kaiser

These verses sound curious and even offensive to us, but we should hear them in the context of Solomon's culture. In the OT we see “the rich” in a negative light at time- Prov 28:6. Elsewhere the term “rich” refers to those who have been faithful, fair, patient, and hard-working. – Prov 10:4; Prov 28:20

Eswine v. 6-7 p 197

Notice that the Preacher does not contrast the rich “in a low place” with the “poor” but instead with folly “in many high places.” The Preacher uses the word “rich” here, not to identify material possessions, but to identify the true, steady, and faithful character of a person from which a measure of wealth generally comes. “Rich” does not refer to the lottery winner or to the heir or the thief. “Rich” refers here to the one who worked long and hard, and from such work and faithfulness wealth came. The Preacher’s point is that an erring leader overlooks this kind of faithful character and places impatient, wandering, slothful, get-rich-quick schemers tragically in charge.

Even the slave is not as we conceive of it in our minds, but in the OT context it would be criminals, debtors or war captives. The point is that it was NOT normative for them to be in a place of ruling or leading.

Scripture DOES show numerous cases where the poor or even slaves are raised up: Joseph in Egypt; the people of Israel are delivered from slavery; We who were slaves to sin have been freed, etc.

FOLLY IN ACTION v. 8-11

8 He who digs a pit may fall into it, and a serpent may bite him who breaks through a wall. 9 He who quarries stones may be hurt by them, and he who splits logs may be endangered by them. 10 If the axe is dull and he does not sharpen its edge, then he must exert more strength. Wisdom has the advantage of giving success. 11 If the serpent bites before being charmed, there is no profit for the charmer.

The bible deals with real life in folly and wisdom

v. 8 there is a risk in folly; things may boomerang on you.

- fall into the pit you dig for someone else
- break through a wall and are bit by a snake.

v. 9-10 There are risks in certain occupations as well.

Wise preparation leads to success.

The wise see danger and avoid it; wise men take danger into their calculations.

WORK SMARTER, not harder

These proverbs are generalized. You can do your best to plan and prevent danger, but in life things just happen. But it is prudent to plan ahead. – Boy Scout motto – “be prepared”

EX: putting together something purchased at IKEA – following the directions is wise.

EX: teams on THE AMAZING RACE – the directions / instructions are often pretty detailed and if you skip something you get penalized.

THIS IS HARDER FOR SOME THAN FOR OTHERS.

FOOLISH TALK v. 12-14

12 Words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious, while the lips of a fool consume him; 13 the beginning of his talking is folly and the end of it is wicked madness. 14 Yet the fool multiplies words. No man knows what will happen, and who can tell him what will come after him?

Foolishness or wisdom is often first seen by our words.

Pilgrim’s Progress – TALKATIVE from Prating-Row

A slight smile played across Christian's lips. "This man, with whom you are so taken, will captivate a multitude with his words provided they are not familiar with him." "To all who know him, he is the very stain, reproach, and shame of religion. Bunyan, John. Pilgrim's Progress

True wisdom found in the fear of God will restrain and guide our hearts, words, and actions.

There is an inner heart attitude that underlies the words of a fool. That attitude will show itself through words and action.

The words of a fool swallow him up.

It is an attitude that says, "I know better than God or any counselors" Biblically, the fool is not just dull, but hard hearted. If the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, then foolishness begins with an ungodly perspective, i.e. God is not taken into account, or if he is, then it's not a God who is to be obeyed. It is a God who is made in his own image.

Either we are made in God's image, or he is made in ours.

The pity is that the fool has no idea what he is talking about. He has no idea what the future holds. *His unbelief and failure to consider that there is a future judgment, wherein the totality of life will be reviewed, puts him at such a huge disadvantage compared to the devout, wise man that he is to be pitied.* Kaiser Jr., Walter C. Coping with Change - Ecclesiastes (Kindle Locations 2278)

The fool can't see what he is bringing on himself by his babbling. He has the problem of thinking that he can predict the future.

"A theme in Ecclesiastes is that it is the wise man who confesses ignorance of the future and who trusts God for it ...the wise man knows he is never in a position to stop trusting God (Ecc 8:16-17) He admits that he has no leverage over God and does not make brash claims about what he is going to accomplish" – Meyers (2791)

v. 11 – dead snake charmer is of no use. So too a man who "wants to be wise" but takes no steps in that direction. "I WANT TO" without "I WILL" leads to "I WISH I WOULD HAVE. "

FOLLY AND INCOMPETENCE v. 15

15 The toil of a fool so wearies him that he does not even know how to go to a city.

– the Fool won't acknowledge the hevel of life and insists on toil – he wearies himself with trying to find ways to control God. It is his speaking that wearies him.

Meyers – the fool doesn't even have sense to go ask counsel of others in the city.

Whether it is that or that the fool's lack of good sense becomes evident in all areas of life, If he can't get from home to town then why trust him when he spouts off on the big issues of life such as the hereafter? (Kaiser)

Either way, be quick to hear and slow to speak. Seek counsel of those around you.

FOLLY IN NATIONAL LIFE

16 Woe to you, O land, whose king is a lad and whose princes feast in the morning. 17 Blessed are you, O land, whose king is of nobility and whose princes eat at the appropriate time-for strength and not for drunkenness.

18 Through indolence the rafters sag, and through slackness the house leaks. 19 Men prepare a meal for enjoyment, and wine makes life merry, and money is the answer to everything. 20 Furthermore, in your bedchamber do not curse a king, and in your sleeping

rooms do not curse a rich man, for a bird of the heavens will carry the sound and the winged creature will make the matter known.

v. 16-20 the truth about obeying kings is not a blank check for approval of everything that rulers do – Kaiser.

Woe and blessings come to a land depending on the character of the king.

It is a “woe” when leaders use up resources to indulge themselves. They don’t eat at the right time and drink for drunkenness, not strength.

A good thing done at the wrong time can be a bad thing. Feasting is not wrong, but it is when the time is to be spent doing other things.

Here’s a warning to leaders – parents, bosses, teachers, etc – **When you shirk your duties to pursue your own desires, the impact goes far beyond you alone.**

EX: a driver, train conductor, airline pilot etc who drinks or is overly fatigued before driving endangers many lives.

Reckless maintenance of justice (laziness) is compared to a leaking roof – CHAPPAQUIDICK;

** Jesus shows a different model and value of leadership – humbles himself, washes the feet of his disciples, is obedient to the point of death on the cross.

v. 19 – it takes money to provide for the feast and the wine, so labor and be diligent. There is a time for feasting and a time for work. If you are feasting when you should be working, your house will fall apart.

v. 20 don’t unwisely oppose a ruler through disloyalty. You never know where your words may end up.

“if these walls could talk”; “little pictures have big ears” “A little bird told me”

** APPLICATION – Eswine

Folly leads us to overlook what is small but needful to chase after a bigger dream but in the end will leave us barren. Folly looks for notoriety, not responsibility. Folly looks for instant gratification, not long-term gain. Folly looks for attention for self rather than service for others.

FOOLS FLOCK TOGETHER

It is easy for even good leaders to get sucked into foolishness when they are exalted and even subconsciously come to believe that they are not like other people. The limits that apply to others don’t apply to them.

EX: Sad example of Bill Hybels, Bill Cosby, Matt Lauer, countless politicians, preachers, celebrities, athletes, etc.

The foolish leader or follower thinks to him/herself “The rules don’t apply to me. I can do dangerous things and not have to take precautions.”

Rulers may be foolish, but so can followers. It is easy to think that we can do a better job than the one who is ruling.

A small lapse in judgement can have big consequences, whether you are a ruler or a follower.

Foolish leadership or rash rebellion and insubordination have a way of becoming public. Even a wise person’s life can be undermined by an indiscretion. People are harsh and quick to judge even

when the indiscretion is small and not habitual. We tend to judge each other quickly and forget that we all have feet of clay.

Trust is hard to build and easy to break.

If wisdom has any power to protect us, it is in admitting our own limitations and vulnerabilities.

There is wisdom in keeping in mind the message of the Gospel – “We are bigger sinners than we dare admit, but through Christ are more loved and forgiven than we dare imagine.”

The wisdom of God is revealed in the cross – 1 Cor 1:18ff. Though it seems like foolishness to the world, it is the wisdom and power of God.

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