

Sunday, January 10, 2021 pm

## STUDIES IN ECCLESIASTES (32)

### Living Life – Part 1

#### Ecclesiastes 10:1-10

Tonight, we continue our study through the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon's quest for the meaning of life. WE have devoted considerable time to this search as he is wisdom determined the vanity of putting your trust in anything of this life. And in the latter half of this book, we find numerous gems of wisdom about every aspect of life – from wealth to poverty, from rulers to subjects, and of course from wisdom to foolishness. We have also addressed that event that we all must face – the great equalizer of this life - DEATH.

In our lesson tonight, we want to notice a few miscellaneous observations about wisdom and foolishness. This is much like the proverbs, many of which Solomon wrote and are recorded in the book by that name. Proverbs were short, wise sayings about life. In many of these he makes an observation about life, and then follows it up with some moral application. Chapter 10 has a number of these which we will notice in 2 lessons. Part 1 tonight, and part 2 next month.

#### I. **Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's ointment (1)**

- a. A dead fly can ruin a dish or a perfume. It can cause it to spoil and thus be wasted. How many dead flies would you need to find in a bowl of soup before you lost your appetite?
- b. So does a little folly to one respected with wisdom.  
The point: Just a little bit of foolishness can destroy one's influence and even all the good he has done. This is actually a continuation from 9:18 which we noted last month.
- c. The bottom line is that actions have consequences. That is why we must ALWAYS be alert. Consider the example of David – what is most known for is his sinful adultery with Bathsheba. This in spite of all the good he did, both before and after. And as Nathan told him, it caused a blemish against God and Israel.  
WE can think of many examples of leaders who in spite of all the good they have done, ONE indiscretion threw away all that they had accomplished.

#### II. **A wise man's heart is in his right hand, but a fool's heart at his left (2)**

- a. For some reason, probably because of its usefulness, the right hand has always been associated with wisdom, good, strong and reserved values.  
Conversely, the left is often associated with foolishness, poor decisions, weakness and reckless thinking and behaviors.  
We see also in Matthew 25:32-33 dealing with the judgment. The sheep on the right hand, and the goats on the left.
- b. The point: A wise man thinks before he acts. His heart is good and reserved.  
Whereas a fool is more unrestrained and reckless. His actions are the OPPOSITE of the wise.  
Think of how Jesus contrasted hearts in Matthew 12:35 – a good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things..., but an evil man brings forth evil things.

#### III. **Even when a fool walks along the way (3)**

- a. He lacks wisdom, and he shows everyone he is a fool. This is descriptive of the one whose reputation is that of foolishness. When people see him, foolishness is what they associate with him.
- b. There are some individuals whose actions and words just cry out foolishness. They act and dress in such a way as to draw undue attention to themselves.  
In this age of social media, there are some who will do almost anything to draw attention to

themselves – and I am talking foolish, dangerous, hateful, filthy, and outrageous things – just to get more likes and followers. And they are HIGHLY successful. For some, this becomes what they are known for.

Sometimes young people make decisions while young that will follow them the rest of their lives – they deface their bodies crying for attention.

- c. The Bible speaks of some foolish actions that we see very prevalent even today:
- i. Proverbs 1:7 says, “Fools despise wisdom”. Proverbs 1:22 says “fools hate knowledge”
  - ii. Proverbs 3:35, *The wise shall inherit glory, But shame shall be the legacy of fools.*
  - iii. Proverbs 10:18 says that whoever spreads slander is a fool. In the latter part of Ecclesiastes 10, Solomon gives examples of this (our next lesson)
  - iv. Proverbs 10:23, *To do evil is like sport to a fool, But a man of understanding has wisdom.*
  - v. Proverbs 12:13, *The way of a fool is right in his own eyes – he thinks only about his views (refuses to consider others)*
  - vi. Proverbs 12:16 – *a fool’s wrath is known at once* – He doesn’t control his temper and acts rashly
  - vii. Proverbs 14:9 – fools mock at sin
  - viii. Proverbs 18:2 - *A fool has no delight in understanding, But in expressing his own heart.*
  - ix. Etc.
  - x. Consider also these that spiritually God considers foolish:
    1. Those who exchange the truth of God for idols - Romans 1:22-23
    2. Those who deny there is God – Psalm 14:1
    3. Those who reject and mock the message of the cross – 1 Corinthians 1:18, 23

#### IV. Do not leave your post (vs. 4)

- a. *If the spirit of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your post* – sometimes rulers and those with authority (such as an employer) become angry at those below them, and maybe even lose their temper. They act or speak rashly (see the fool above).  
Solomon tells YOU to not leave your post (or abandon your position – NASB). Another way of saying this is, “Don’t quit!”  
While there is a time when walking away is the right thing to do, it should not be a rash decision.
- b. *For conciliation pacifies great offenses* – NASB uses the word “composure” - Solomon’s point is – defend yourself rather than quitting. And the best way to do that is by remaining calm. You are more likely to be heard if you do not join in the fray, but maintain your composure and dignity and CALMLY explain your side (even if you were wrong)  
This goes back to the fool who acts rashly, not thinking of the consequences of his actions.
- c. **Consider:** By you remaining calm at least 3 things happen:
  - 1) You get the chance to reasonably defend yourself - thus you are acting with dignity and wisdom.
  - 2) You post or position is not abandoned – if you are doing something needed, those depending on you are left without your service. Consider how this relates to a “post” or “position” – militarily, you have left your city vulnerable.
  - 3) Your reputation precedes you – if you are known as someone who quits at the first sign of adversity, that is something hard to overcome when you are looking for that next job. (Who is going to recommend you?)
- d. THE POINT in this – the wise think before they act. They don’t speak rashly or act rashly
  - i. Proverbs 6:16-19 – among the 7 things God hates are “feet that are swift in running to evil” (vs. 18)
  - ii. Proverbs 14:16, *A wise man fears and departs from evil, But a fool rages and is self-confident.*

- iii. Proverbs 19:2, *Also it is not good for a soul to be without knowledge, And he sins who hastens with his feet.*
- iv. Proverbs 21:5, *The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, But those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty.*
- v. Proverbs 29:20, *Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.*

**V. Folly set in great dignity (5-7)**

- a. Vs. 5 – In typical Solomon fashion, he speaks of an(other) evil under the sun.
- b. Error proceeding from a ruler: This is proceeded by describing foolish inequities.
  - i. Folly set in great dignity, while the rich sit in a lowly place
  - ii. Servants or slaves riding on horses (exalted), while princes are walking about like the servants.  
NOTE: Solomon is not here talking about honoring or promoting someone who is worthy (we need to show appreciation to the front-line workers who are simply doing what needs to be done). Rather his point is foolishly putting exalting someone while ignoring those who would be of greater help (like the poor man whose wisdom was ignored because of his standing in our last lesson – Eccl. 9:14-15)
- c. The POINT: Foolish decisions have consequences. There are many circumstances where the UNQUALIFIED or lesser qualified are promoted or put in positions of authority, while passing over the one that OUGHT to be there because of their qualification. Sometimes nepotism (hiring family) or some other external factor is given preference over the wise decision. The result is often a less productive entity – a company, organization OR government, etc. Sometimes, in our democracy, we the people, put into office those who are less qualified because of self-serving promises rather than the best qualified. ONE example in the Bible is that of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. 1 Kings 12:1-24. When he became king, rather than heeding the advice of the elderly and WISE, he listened to his friends (the young men) and the result was a divided Israel. Proverbs 19:10, *Luxury is not fitting for a fool, Much less for a servant to rule over princes.*

**VI. Anticipate the unforeseen (8-9)**

- a. We have seen this message throughout the book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon gives 4 examples of things happening that are unforeseen, or possibly the result of carelessness.
  - i. One digs a pit and falls into it
  - ii. A person breaking through a wall only to find a pit of vipers and he is bitten (serpents living in walls is not as uncommon as we might think in that part of the world)
  - iii. One quarrying rocks that split and he is hit and wounded by some of it flying
  - iv. One who is splitting wood and something happens that again causes injury – possibly a broken axe or the splintering wood flying and hurting him.
- b. As we live our lives, we must always anticipate problems and the unexpected taking place. AND we need to exercise caution (and safety) as we work
  - i. This is true physically - a wise worker takes precautions to limit the possibility and extent of accidents. That is why we wear safety equipment, do some inspecting before start a job, AND work being aware of the hazards.
  - ii. And SPIRITUALLY – we just need to be cautious. Remember the warning of Jesus to His apostles in Matthew 10:16 – *“I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore, be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.”* Colossians 4:15 says to walk in wisdom toward those who are outside.
- c. NOTE: Sometimes vs. 8 is seen as the ungodly scheming against others and it backfires.

- i. One reason for this is what Solomon taught in Psalm 7:14-16 - *Behold, the wicked brings forth iniquity; Yes, he conceives trouble and brings forth falsehood. He made a pit and dug it out, And has fallen into the ditch which he made. His trouble shall return upon his own head, And his violent dealing shall come down on his own crown.*
- ii. And what Jesus taught – Matthew 15:12-14 where Jesus is told by His teachings that He offended the Pharisees. Jesus used this analogy and could have been noting that both they and their followers would fall into the ditch that they had dug to entrap Jesus and His followers. They certainly tried to entrap Jesus and it always backfired.
- iii. Thus, we can see that such is a true observation, HOWEVER, the best reading of our text is simply as a call to be cautious and act with wisdom in whatever you do in life.

**VII. A dull ax (10)**

- a. Still dealing with acting wisely, Solomon gives another illustration - A dull ax requires one to use more strength to cut.  
In life, how many times do we make a situation more difficult because we do not plan from the beginning? How many waste time because they don't read the directions before they start assembling the product? Most directions say at the very beginning like – READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS ENTIRELY BEFORE STARTING! How true that is – whether assembling furniture or baking a cake!
- b. ***But wisdom brings success*** – the wise man will take a couple of minutes to sharpen the ax first, and as a result he will save time and energy in cutting the same piece of wood.  
The one who takes a couple of minutes to READ THE DIRECTIONS and gather the necessary tools (usually described IN THE DIRECTIONS) before he begins will be more likely to succeed on the first try and finish much more quickly.
- c. ***Spiritually***, if we want to be effective in serving God and reaching others, we need to prepare. And we need to READ THE DIRECTIONS – God's word (2 Timothy 2:15 – handle His word accurately) 2 Timothy 2:21 speaks of the one who cleanses himself to become a vessel of honor will be prepared for every good work.

And thus we see the value of wisdom in this life, both physically and spiritually. Ecclesiastes (and Proverbs) is such a practical instructor for life. Take all these things into consideration, and your life on earth and your preparing for your life AFTER earth, will flow more smoothly. Think about it!