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“Chasing After The Wind”

Be Sensible

ECCLESIASTES 10:1-20

Introduction

1. As we have seen over the last few weeks, the book of Ecclesiastes is Solomon’s account of his search as to what makes life meaningful, what gives it purpose.
2. Early on he declared all to be meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

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3. However, Solomon recognized one bright truth which he keeps coming back to again and again:

“And I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness” (Ecclesiastes 2:13, NASB95).

“Wisdom along with an inheritance is good and an advantage to those who see the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 7:11, NASB95)

“For wisdom is protection just as money is protection, but the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the lives of its possessors.” (Ecclesiastes 7:12, NASB95)

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“Wisdom strengthens a wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city.” (Ecclesiastes 7:19, NASB95)

4. Just last week in Ecclesiastes 9:18, we found him saying, “Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.” (Ecclesiastes 9:18, NASB95)
5. Here in chapter 10, Solomon looks at the folly or sin which can destroy much

good.

6. His advice to us: "Be sensible. Live wisely."

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A. GUARD YOURSELF AGAINST FOOLISH IMPULSES (VV. 1-3)

"Dead flies make a perfumer's oil stink, so a little foolishness is weightier than wisdom and honor. A wise man's heart directs him toward the right, but the foolish man's heart directs him toward the left. Even when the fool walks along the road, his sense is lacking and he demonstrates to everyone that he is a fool." (Ecclesiastes 10:1-3, NASB95)

1. Here in verse 1, Solomon sets forth the principle on which the previous chapter ended: it takes less to ruin something than to create it.

"Dead flies make a perfumer's oil stink, so a little foolishness is weightier than wisdom and honor." (v. 1).

2. In other words, "what dead flies are to perfume, folly is to the reputation of the wise person."

a. This is the advantage which folly enjoys in our lives — It appeals to the vicious side of us.

(Illus.) — How many of us have seen a child who took the time to create something (Legos, building blocks, a drawing, etc.) only to have a brother or sister come along and destroy in seconds.

b. A foolish impulse, a reckless moment is all it takes.

c. Two examples stand out in Scripture:

1) Esau selling his birthright to Jacob in a weak moment for a bowl of stew (Genesis 25:27-34).

2) Moses, Aaron and the striking of the rock at Meribah, costing them their entrance into the promised land (Numbers 20:1-12).

3. Solomon's statement in verse 2, that "a wise man's heart directs him toward the right, but the foolish man's heart directs him toward the left" is reminiscent of Jesus' separation of the righteous from the unrighteous at

judgment.

“All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.” (Matthew 25:32–33, NASB95)

- a. Here in Solomon’s example, the fool, because he doesn’t have wisdom in his heart, gravitates toward that which is wrong (the left) and gets into trouble.
 - b. The wise man tends toward those things which are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute (Philippians 4:8).
4. Sadly, here in verse 3, Solomon tells us that a fool is so lacking in sense that he demonstrates to everyone, through his actions, he is a fool.
- a. In Proverbs 18:2, Solomon wrote, “A fool does not delight in understanding, but only in revealing his own mind.” (Proverbs 18:2, NASB95)
 - b. Four verses later, in Proverbs 18:6, Solomon reveals that a fool, through what he says, not only creates trouble for himself but endangers others as well.

“A fool’s lips bring strife, and his mouth calls for blows.” (Proverbs 18:6, NASB95)

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B. MAINTAIN YOUR COMPOSURE (VV. 4-7)

“If the ruler’s temper rises against you, do not abandon your position, because composure allays great offenses. There is an evil I have seen under the sun, like an error which goes forth from the ruler— folly is set in many exalted places while rich men sit in humble places. I have seen slaves riding on horses and princes walking like slaves on the land.” (Ecclesiastes 10:4–7, NASB95)

1. Maintaining your composure may protect you when tempers flare(v. 4).
 - a. Solomon advised that the wisest course of action when confronted with

a king's (superior's) "anger" is not to "abandon your position, because composure allays great offenses."

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b. Solomon had something to say about this in Proverbs:

- 1) "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city." (Proverbs 16:32, NASB95)
- 2) "By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue breaks the bone." (Proverbs 25:15, NASB95)

2. Solomon had also seen errors issuing from a ruler who lacked character and courage.

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3. He described the errors of this ruler in verses 6-7:

"folly is set in many exalted places while rich men sit in humble places. I have seen slaves riding on horses and princes walking like slaves on the land." (Ecclesiastes 10:4-7, NASB95)

- a. Such an individual will put fools in high offices and qualified people in low offices.
- b. With incompetent people advising him, he is almost certain to govern the nation unwisely.
 - 1) Solomon's own son, Rehoboam is one example of such a leader (1 Kings 12:1-24).
 - a) Instead of following the advice of his father's wise counselors, he listened to those who were young and inexperienced.
 - b) As a result, he lost over 80% of his kingdom shortly after becoming king.
 - 2) In the book of Esther, Xerxes, the king of Persia, placed such a man in a position of great authority — Haman, the Agagite (Esther 3:1).

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- c. Twice in Proverbs, Solomon wrote of the people's response to such leaders (Proverbs 28:12; 29:2).

“When the righteous triumph, there is great glory, but when the wicked rise, men hide themselves.” (Proverbs 28:12, NASB95)

“When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, but when a wicked man rules, people groan.” (Proverbs 29:2, NASB95)

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C. MAKE PROPER PREPARATION, DON'T GET IN A HURRY (VV. 8-11)

“He who digs a pit may fall into it, and a serpent may bite him who breaks through a wall. He who quarries stones may be hurt by them, and he who splits logs may be endangered by them. 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. If the serpent bites before being charmed, there is no profit for the charmer.” (Ecclesiastes 10:8–11, NASB95)

1. In verses 8-9 Solomon strung together four proverbs which set forth the potential dangers inherent in representative daily tasks — digging a “pit,” tearing down “a wall,” quarrying “stones” and splitting “logs” — dangers which could only be averted by applying wisdom or prudence.
2. There are two ways to understand this:
 - a. One is that Solomon is advising us to use forethought and preparation.
 - 1) There are risks involved with any activity especially one that involves strenuous physical exertion.
 - 2) The person we call “accident prone” usually has himself to blame, rather than his luck.
 - b. Another to understand this is that Solomon sees the intended consequences of our deeds coming back on us.
 - 1) In speaking of digging a pit, Solomon may have had something his father, David, had written in the Psalm 7.

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2) In verses 15-16, David spoke of a man who had engaged in mischief and violence against him and had not repented (v. 12).

3) In these two verses he wrote,

“He has dug a pit and hollowed it out,
And has fallen into the hole which he made.
His mischief will return upon his own head,
And his violence will descend upon his own pate.”

(Psalm 7:15-16, NASB95)

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4) Like his father, Solomon also wrote in Proverbs 26:26-27 of a man who sought to cover his own hatred and wickedness:

“Though his hatred covers itself with guile,
His wickedness will be revealed before the assembly.
He who digs a pit will fall into it,
And he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him.”

(Proverbs 26:26–27, NASB95)

5) The prophet Amos saw the lurking serpent as God’s coming judgment upon His people (Amos 5:18-20).

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3. In log-splitting (v. 9) a man can either use wisdom and sharpen his ax or leave it unsharpened and exert more energy.

a. Applying wisdom to using an ax makes it easier to succeed.

b. “Wisdom has the advantage of giving success.”

4. In the example of the snake charmer (v. 11), a man’s wisdom or skill has “no profit” if it is not applied at the proper time — “if the serpent bites before being charmed,” the “charmer” is in trouble.

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D. BE CAREFUL WITH YOUR WORDS (vv. 12-15)

“Words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious, while the lips of a fool consume him; the beginning of his talking is folly and the end of it is wicked madness. Yet the fool multiplies words. No man knows what will happen, and who can tell him what will come after him? The toil of a fool so wearies him that he does not even know how to go to a city.” (Ecclesiastes 10:12–15, NASB95)

1. Solomon began these verses by contrasting the words of a wise man with those of a fool.
2. He gives us four characteristics of a fool’s words:
 - a. They are destructive (v. 12).
 - 1) A wise man’s words are “gracious” (v. 12a), they “win him favor” (Proverbs 13:15).
 - 2) A fool’s words are self-destructive (i.e., they “consume” him, v. 12b)
 - 3) The fool blurts out whatever is on his mind, without stopping to consider who he or she might hurt.
 - ❑ Ultimately, Solomon says it is the fool who is hurt the most.
 - b. They are unreasonable (v. 13).
 - 1) From beginning to end, the fool’s speech is “folly” and “wicked madness” (v. 13).
 - a) What he says doesn’t make sense.
 - b) The longer he talks, the crazier it becomes.
 - c. They are uncontrolled (v. 14a).
 - 1) Solomon said he “multiplies” his words (v. 14, cf. 5:3; 6:11).
 - 2) In Proverbs 10:19, Solomon wrote, “When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise.”
 - d. They are boastful (vv. 14b-15).

- 1) Solomon tells us that fools multiply words even though “no man knows what will happen” or “what will come after him.” (v. 14b).
- 2) They speak of the future as if “they either know all about it or are in control of what will happen.”
- 3) In Proverbs 27:1, Solomon said, “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.”
- 4) Mark Twain once said, “It is better to keep your mouth closed and let people think you are a fool than to open it and remove all doubt.”
- 5) Solomon added one more item about such an individual. It is that he is ignorant of the obvious — “he does not even know how to go to a city” (v. 15b) — compare this to “He doesn’t know enough to come in out of the rain.”

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E. PRAY FOR COMPETENT LEADERSHIP (VV. 16-20)

“Woe to you, O land, whose king is a lad and whose princes feast in the morning. Blessed are you, O land, whose king is of nobility and whose princes eat at the appropriate time—for strength and not for drunkenness. Through indolence the rafters sag, and through slackness the house leaks. Men prepare a meal for enjoyment, and wine makes life merry, and money is the answer to everything. 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.” (Ecclesiastes 10:16–20, NASB95)

1. In verses 16-17 Solomon contrasted . . .
 - a. The sorry state of a nation whose leaders are incompetent and undisciplined (v. 16)
 - b. With the fortunate (blessed) state of a nation whose leaders are competent and disciplined (v. 17).
2. In the former, the leaders are immature and indulgent:

- a. The king is childish — he is “a lad” (v. 16).
- b. The leaders he gathers around him reflect his immaturity and take advantage of it — they “feast in the morning” (v. 16), and are given to “drunkenness” (v. 17).
- c. They use the taxes for their own selfish purposes and to build their own authority.

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3. The second set of leaders are true noblemen who put the good of the country first (v. 17a).
 - a. They are temperate — they “eat at the appropriate time — their eating is “for strength” (17b).
 - b. They use their authority to build the nation.

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4. In his third proverb (v. 18), Solomon further describes these immature leaders as being lazy.
 - a. Because they are immature, they enjoy the privileges of their position and ignore the responsibilities.
 - b. Thus they are responsible for the ruin of the state and the loss of its protection.
 - b. Sagging “rafters” and leaking roofs describes the state of the nation.
 - c. In their merrymaking, they deplete state funds.

“A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes life merry, but money is the answer for everything” (Ecclesiastes 10:19, NIV84).

- d. The clause “money is the answer to everything” (“money answers everything,” NKJV, ESV) means that the rulers *think* money can meet all their demands.
5. In spite of their irresponsible leadership, Solomon warns us against criticizing such inadequate leaders:

- a. We must not curse either “a king” or “a rich man,” even in our bedroom.
- b. The reason: the report may get back to them — “a bird” may tell them (i.e., an unknown source may disclose our secret criticisms).

Conclusion

1. In chapter 9, Solomon told us two things:
 - a. Death is unavoidable (9:1-10).
 - b. Life is unpredictable (9:11-18).
2. In spite of this he wants us to know that life is certainly worth living.
3. What we must do is avoid folly and live by God’s wisdom.
4. As a matter of fact, Solomon has been telling us that the best thing we can do is trust God, do our work, accept what He sends us, and enjoy each day of our lives to His glory.
5. Tonight, are you willing to trust God with your life? Will you follow Him wherever He leads you?
6. If so, you have a dwelling in heaven prepared just for you.
7. If you haven’t taken this step yet, will you do so tonight.
8. Come to Christ and let Him take your sin.