

02-04-07b Ecclesiastes

Let's resume our study now in Ecclesiastes chapter 10. And we've seen that flies of death, and you just think about the flies hovering around a carcass. They saw a lot of this in the ancient world, much more than we do.

Something that is putrefying and rotting is going to be surrounded by a cloud of flies. And so if you take a look at your perfume pot, and it's surrounded by flies of death buzzing or falling back first into your ointment, it doesn't matter how much ointment you have, instead of smelling good, it is going to smell bad just because of what you see and what you hear. And we've all had this experience.

We know that a lot of good work can be spoiled in the eyes of people by one malfunction or one mistake or one little folly that outweighs the wisdom and honor. Keep in mind that that's not always even genuine folly. This is in the mind of the one measuring.

You can kill yourself doing something and trying to get it exactly right and fulfill every obligation. You overcome incredible obstacles. You climb mountains.

You wade through rivers. You go through the sleet and the snow, and you get something done as good as any human being could have possibly gotten it done, but some part of it doesn't meet the expectation of the person doing the evaluating, and you might as well just dump the flies in the ointment because you think about the Lord Jesus Christ. He was perfect, and people were dissatisfied.

So Solomon is really turning his gaze here to wisdom and its treatment and the nature of wisdom as it exists under the sun. We've already seen that genuine wisdom is found in the shadow places, the places that are not obvious. It's not valued.

Even when it delivers a city, the man who delivered the city by his wisdom is quickly forgotten. He remains poor. He's not rewarded.

The wisdom doesn't necessarily change his circumstances in life. In fact, just the contrary. Oftentimes it is going to be drowned out by the shouting of the ruler among fools.

Solomon is going to talk about this at some length because we need something to encourage us. Solomon has called us in these first many chapters, he said, you know, here's life, it's under the sun, how are you going to end up with something in your hand? The way is wisdom. We've gotten that much in our first nine chapters, right? We know that for this life to count, we have to live it in the sight of God.

We have to do what we do heartily as under the Lord. We have to value wisdom because that's what God values, and that is what is going to survive the setting of the sun. But what are the

obstacles to that? It's one thing to say that and say, okay, fine, I'm going to live today and tomorrow and the next day, I'm going to do that in wisdom, I'm going to have you thrown in my hand, I recognize there's a time for this and a time for that.

Well, there are assaults. They showed a movie last night, I saw just a couple of minutes of it, it was Prince Valiant. The part of it that I saw was where Prince Valiant was there and he had unwittingly led the Lady Fair and her chariot into an ambush.

They had a guy waving that was supposed to be the friend waving and greeting and he was actually dead and there was a guy sitting behind him on his horse propping up his head and his arm with a stick and he was waving and the guy was just dead as a mackerel and it was all a ploy, it was a deception. So he begins to realize that something is amiss and so he yells and he says, let's get out of here. Then all these guys come up on the ridge and the part that sticks in my mind is all of the arrows.

The archers stand up and they let the arrows fly and all of the arrows are flying through the air and so he sticks his shield up over his head and it's like all these arrows just sticking it. You can have noble intentions, you can be trying to march forward in a worthy cause, but you are going to get the slings and the arrows. Obviously Satan knows the real objective of our Christian life.

He is not fooled by the overemphasis on evangelism or the overemphasis on experience or the overemphasis on prosperity or the overemphasis on God's sovereignty or any of the other aberrations and distractions of this life. He knows why we are here and you can take to the bank the knowledge that if the enemy discovers someone who really is on the road to accomplishing God's plan in this life, you are going to meet opposition, you are going to meet resistance, there is going to be attack. What kind of attack is it going to be? It's going to be attack on your weak area, your Achilles heel, the chinks and cracks and seams in your armor.

Well that's different for each one of us, but there are weaknesses that are common to man and one of them is we all are sensitive in the area of recognition. We want our work to be recognized. If we do something well, if we do something wisely.

You know the syndrome, think about a grade school classroom. If the teacher asks a question, if a child knows the answer, what do they do? They raise their hand and maybe they get called on and so then the teacher asks another question and they are going to raise their hand, it doesn't matter how many times they get called on if they know the answer and even as an adult. I have seen adults in seminars where the speaker will ask a rhetorical question and you see people twitching, they are wanting to raise their hand, they know the answer and if we know something, this is why gossip is so popular, because if you know something it is the thrill of being the person that knows and saying the answer, saying whatever it is.

That's a part of our nature. So where are we vulnerable to attack? If we have wisdom, if we have knowledge and we are around people who don't or we are attacked by people who don't

understand why we do what we do, we are going to be impelled by our nature and compelled by the very fiber of our being to want to justify, to vindicate, to say, to explain, to get people to understand, well, but don't you see this is wise, this is right, I am doing the right thing. So Solomon is talking about the function of wisdom under the sun and he says, look, don't get hung up on recognition, don't think that your wisdom is going to be prized, you are the poor man in the city and even if you deliver the entire city by your wisdom, plan on being forgotten, don't look to that for your peace.

This is why our scripture reading this morning was Psalm 62 and there are a dozen other psalms we could have gone to with the same emphasis, but we have to recognize that our deliverance, our salvation, our strength, our fortress is in God and when we do the right thing, He is the one whose opinion counts, His evaluation is the only thing that counts. If you look to people, you will be disappointed, we deceive, we dissemble, we forget, sometimes we should have and if we had thought about it, we would have recognized someone and we just fail because we don't have the strength. Remember toward the end of the psalm where David says, God is strong and God is merciful, God has the power to be consistent in His mercy and consistent in His justice, we don't, we fail each other even when our intentions are good, we disappoint each other, we cause each other to stumble even when we don't mean to because we are just flawed.

It's amazing sometimes to think that God even messes with us, but He does and it's a wonderful tribute to His grace, but we have to remember that when we try to walk not in the counsel of the ungodly, we try to not stand in the way of sinners, we try to not sit in the seat of this cornfield, we try to delight ourselves in the law of the Lord and meditate in it, we try to do what's right and walk the path of wisdom, you can expect that there is any number of possible outcomes. You may be recognized too much for your wisdom, you may be flattered, you may be promoted beyond what you should, people may make too much of it and lead you down a path of falling through pride, or you may be not recognized at all and you run the risk of falling through hurt feelings and feeling insulted, feeling neglected, feeling unappreciated. Wherever the chinks in our armor are, the enemy knows this and if you are trying to walk the way of wisdom, the Word of God promises that you will meet resistance.

The closer you get to walking that narrow path, the more you are going to be assailed because the last thing Satan wants is for the plan of God and the glory of God and the power of God to be manifested in the babes and infants in whose mouths God has ordained strength. So people are going to find any little aberration, whether it's real or imagined, if you can you are doing things right, maybe you slip. We all have a flaw somewhere, people will dredge it up years later.

I remember you back when you fouled up, I remember you when you, don't be telling me about how valuable all this Word of God stuff is, I knew you when. And they are going to take your pot of perfume that God has given you through His Word and they are going to see nothing but the flies of death. And that little folly, real or imagined, is going to outweigh the wisdom and the honor

and so you can't measure the wisdom and honor in your life by what people see or what people say.

Keep Psalm 62 in mind, it is God, God is my refuge, God is my strength, God is my fortress, God is my deliverance and no other, He alone. Look at verse 2 of chapter 10 of Ecclesiastes, the heart of the wise inclines to the right but the heart of the fool to the left. This is a fascinating verse and again the Hebrew in this whole first section of chapter 10 is difficult and the commentators just split and go every which way.

If you get a parallel Bible and look it up in two or three versions you will see lots of different translations. The idea here though is fairly well expressed because you do have the directions of right and left and the heart inclining to one or the other. This has a visual and a metaphorical component.

If you think about someone actually walking down a road, why do you go down a road? We don't just walk roads because we are Willie Nelson and we are on the road again and we like the road just for the road's sake. People get on a road because they are trying to get to a destination. Well the heart of the wise inclines to the right but the heart of the fool to the left.

Well there are two ways of looking at this because you say well if I turn in either direction I'm not traveling my straight line anymore. So from a human point of view people say well come see, come saw. You go this way, you go that way.

It all comes out about the same. Each to his own. You take the high road, I'll take the low road and we'll see who gets there first idea.

And so from a directional point of view, under the sun, people looking at your life, they say well you're taking your path and I'm taking my path and we're both kind of going around in circles. Who knows whether anybody is ever going to get to the destination. But directions have significance.

Directions have meaning, don't they? And we have from the Latin, what is the word that means the direction right in Latin? Dexter. Dexter is Latin for right. What's the Latin word for left? Sinister.

So this idea from ancient times has come all the way down to the present where we say someone is dexterous. We're saying he's right handed. He's right.

And even our word right, if you trace it back, it originally goes back to the idea of the direction or the hand, the right hand. When you say well you're right, you're saying you're right handed, you're on the right side. You're on that directional side that is good.

Sinister, we say what a sinister plot, these sinister criminals. Well they're on the left. And there is even a stigma for left handed people.

People always kind of, not to hurt anybody's feelings if they're left handed, I have some left handed people in my family. But there's been sort of a suspicion, a superstition about the left and left handed people and it goes back to ancient times. So the heart of the wise inclines to the right.

Well right and left, who knows which one is any better in real terms. You know, when you come to a fork in the road, people say well go right and you can't go wrong, is a play on that same idea. What the word of God is saying is, you may not be able to tell the difference in the direction that you take if you go right or left in this life, but in the unseen world, the heart of the wise, seriously it's true.

If you go right, you can't go wrong. And if you're inclining to the left, the left is the non-blessed side. It's the bad side.

It says in verse 3, even as he walks along the road, the fool lacks wisdom. He lacks sense is the idea. In fact the New International Version translates it as sense.

The fool lacks sense. But the idea here is, literally it says his heart is lacking, his lev. The idea being that the will and the thought process that results in decisions takes place in the heart.

And so if your heart is lacking, it means you can't commit yourself to the right way. So as the fool walks along the road, and again we're getting the literal view here, the fool lacks heart and shows everyone or demonstrates to everyone that he is a fool. This would seem to contradict what we just saw, that a little foolishness can outweigh a lot of wisdom and a lot of glory, and that the shout of the fool and the ruler among fools is heard over the quiet words of wisdom.

But when he walks along the road and the fool shows everyone what a fool he is, again you've got two sides of the coin. Solomon is sending two channels at the same time. It's like stereo.

You've got the right and the left being sent simultaneously. In the world, something can be declared to be foolish. Paul said, we are fools for Christ's sake.

God has used the foolishness of the cross to save us and to confound the wise. So there are people who are looking at those who are actually wise and saying that they are foolish. And people say, you're walking down the road, you're bumping into the curbs, you're demonstrating to everyone what a fool you are.

That's the human view. The divine view, people that may look like they're getting ahead and getting by and being successful are in fact the true fools. And the shout of the ruler of fools is heard above the wisdom of the wise.

So it all depends on what is your definition. How do you define a fool? The fool has said in his heart, there is no God. God says to the man who was going to bed at night with all of his possessions and his lands and he says, I'm going to build even greater barns, what does God

say to him? Thou fool, this night thy soul will be required of thee.

So there's a play on the meaning here. How do you define fool? Paul said, we are fools for Christ's sake. So when it says he demonstrates to everyone that he is a fool, well, who is the everyone? If it's everyone walking under the sun and they say, well, you're foolish for not taking advantage of this opportunity that may compromise your integrity.

You're foolish for setting the priorities that you set. You're foolish for sticking with the values that you have instead of doing what the rest of us are doing. You're foolish to resist these trends in culture.

You're foolish to deny yourself obvious pleasures and obvious gratifications that are here for the taking. Whose definition are we using when someone is kaseel, when someone is a fool? Well, God's definition of fool and man's definition of fool are often exact opposites of one another. The heart of the wise inclines to the right, the heart of the fool to the left.

Even as he walks along the road, the fool lacks heart. Do you really think that God does not see and that God does not know when people prosper and when people get over and when people are not prioritizing his plan and his word and his purpose? Well, of course he does. Verse 4, if a ruler's anger rises against you, do not leave your post or position is the way most English translations take this.

If the ruler's anger or temper rises against you, do not abandon your post because, and you can take your pick, the New King James says conciliation, the New International Version says calmness, and the New American Standard says composure. The idea here is not losing your cool. Do not be thrown off stride when someone's anger rises against you.

Why would someone's anger, why would the ruler's anger? This is mashal, from the verb mashal, it's not the king, it's not melek, and it's not the prince, it's not shultan, this is mashal, this is someone in authority, someone who has oversight over you, is angry. Why would they be angry? Because they think you've done something foolish, they think you're being a fool, and their temper rises against you and they say, look, I told you what I wanted to have happen and you've done a foolish thing here, you haven't done it, your priorities are not right, you've been foolish and you didn't follow my guidance and follow my instructions, and so their anger rises, their temper rises. Well, what is your choice in this case? You can think, oh no, I'm going to lose my job, oh no, I'm going to lose this relationship, oh no, this family member or this spouse or this parent or this good friend or this person of influence in the organization that I'm a member of, or whatever it may be, whoever is mashal, whoever is ruling, whoever has some authority or some oversight, is angry with me, and what's our first instinct? I am going to suffer for this, this is a bad thing for this person that has authority to be angry with me, and it rattles us.

We say, I should have done something different, maybe I can do something different, maybe I

can make amends, I need to change my course, I need to change my method of operation here because I have infuriated this person. What is Solomon saying here? He said, keep in mind what is the measure of foolishness. People are going to say that you're foolish, people are going to call you a fool, whose definition of fool counts? Psalm 62, God is my rock, God is my refuge, God is my only source of strength and deliverance.

And he says, do not abandon your position. If you have chosen not to walk in the way of sinners, or actually stand in the way of sinners, walk in the way of the ungodly, or sit in the seat of the scornful, if that's the position that you've taken, don't abandon your position because somebody gets mad. Anger is not a measure of whether you have been wise or foolish in God's eyes, is it? The anger of men, whether they're in authority or not, their anger, their dissatisfaction is not the measure.

People tend to think, well, if I had done what God wanted me to do, I'd be blessed. I wouldn't be getting all of this. But just stop and think.

Think about history. Think about biblical history. How many times did the apostles incite anger? How many times did the Lord Jesus Christ infuriate the powers that were? How many times are we going to infuriate the powers that be if we're doing the right thing? And it may look like a risk.

It may look like, you know, I could suffer loss here. There could be serious consequences because I have upset this person. Solomon says, if someone in authority has their anger come up against you, do not abandon your position.

Don't leave your post. Don't change your direction because your steadfastness can allay or put to rest great offenses. If God wants you to be where you are, just remain steadfast.

Don't respond to anger with anger. Don't get defensive. Don't get self-justifying.

Don't try to pacify with flattery or with extra work or with some sort of compensation. And validate someone's anger. Give credence to someone's anger as though you really had fallen short when you've actually done the right thing.

Do not leave your post. Do not abandon your... If your position is right and someone gets upset over it, that is just too bad. It's too bad.

It's not their opinion that counts. Don't let yourself be greatly moved. Don't let yourself be moved at all.

I love the old gospel song that the Statesman Quartet sings, I shall not be moved. Jesus is my Savior. I shall not be moved.

I am in His love and favor. I shall not be moved. Just like a tree that's planted by the waters, I shall not be moved.

Solomon goes on to say in verse 5, there is an evil I have seen under the sun, an error proceeding from the ruler. Folly is set in great dignity or in high position while the rich occupy low ones or a lowly place. I have seen slaves on horseback while princes go on foot or walk on the ground like servants.

You can be a prince or a princess. You are royal family. You are royal priesthood.

You are family of God. You are united with Christ in His death, His burial, and His resurrection. You are an heir according to promise of Almighty God.

And yet you may, as a result of your steadfastness and your faithfulness in this life, you may be walking on foot while fools are on horseback. You may be in low position instead of in high. This flies in the face of the whole idea of your five paragraphs of super grace, blessing and so on.

If you are faithful, that you are going to prosper in your profession and prosper in your private life and prosper materially and prosper in all these different areas. Probably not. You know the old nursery rhyme that says, if, no it's not if ifs and buts were fruits and nuts what a Christmas we would have, it's if wishes were horses beggars would ride, if turnips were watches I'd wear one by my side.

You may end up being in low position. Because human authority is often illegitimate and founded in foolishness. And fools will honor fools.

Folly can be set in great dignity as it says in the New King James, while the rich sit in a lowly place. Are we rich? Does our Father own the cattle on a thousand angel blessings in heavenly places in Christ? Yes we are. Do not let it vex your righteous soul.

People don't see that and don't understand it and don't appreciate it and in fact we'll do just the opposite. Solomon says I've seen slaves on horseback while princes go on foot like slaves. Just remember verse 8 and this is back to the idea of accomplishment.

People can make great excavations. They can dig great holes in the ground but they can just as easily fall into it. They may have great power.

They may break through a wall but you know snakes like to fall because it's warm and you can break through a wall and say look at this great feat I actually broke through this wall I overcame this obstacle here I just busted I didn't go over it I didn't go under it I just went right through it and the wall didn't defeat you but the snake next to the wall did. The digging the labor involved in digging the hole didn't get you but you lost your balance and fell into the pit that you dug. Whoever quarries stones may be injured by them.

All of these are feats of strength. All of these are massive undertakings aren't they? And if you start to glory in your work I am the great hole digger. I am the great wall breaker.

I am the great stone quarrier. I am the great log splitter. I can do these massive deeds of visible accomplishment.

Beware that the log does not crush you. Beware that the stone does not injure you. Beware that the snake next to the wall does not bite you.

Beware that you are not trapped in the hole which you have dug. It's another way of saying what Solomon has already said. Do not just go through life pronouncing yourself good in your work and forget that there is an evaluation on the divine level that supersedes what people say and what people see.

If the axe is dull, verse 10, and its edge is unsharpened, more strength is needed but skill will bring success. You know they have a saying now when you are talking about somebody, we have all of these euphemisms for someone that seems foolish. They are not playing with a full deck, they are one brick short of a load, the lights are on but nobody is home, or they are not the sharpest knife in the drawer type of thing.

Well here you have if the axe is dull and its edge is unsharpened, more strength is needed but skill will bring success. You are having to use inferior tools but your skill overcomes the dullness of the blade. And then verse 11 goes on to say if a snake bites when it is not charmed, there is no profit for the charmer.

Or the New King James says the babblers are no different. Verse 12 says the words of a wise man's mouth are gracious but the lips of a fool shall swallow him up. The words of his mouth begin with foolishness and the end of his talk is raving incoherence.

Well all of these taken together and we will go through with a little bit of enlightenment from the Hebrew when we look at these in detail. But I want to get an overview here of what Solomon is saying. What is his subject? We are walking through life, we are trying to walk down that narrow road.

The wise heart is going to incline to the right. People may think that we are turning off and bumping into the curbs and that we are getting off the track and we are not making progress, that we are foolish and they will say so. They will pronounce us foolish and their anger will rise against us.

That is going to happen. Count on it. The enemy does not want us to succeed, especially the closer you get to the heart of God's plan and to the fulfillment of God's purpose, you can count on opposition.

You can count on being attacked in weak areas and our weak area is our pride. It is our self-esteem, it is our ego. We don't like to be ill thought of, we don't like people being mad at us, we don't like people construing our wisdom for foolishness and we easily fall into the self-defense

mode.

We want to use our lips and we want to start babbling on about how we are not as dumb as we look, we really did have a plan, we really do know what we are doing, there is a reason and we want to try to allay the suspicions, we want to calm people's anger, we want to pour water on the fire, we want to get along, we want people to appreciate us and understand that we are really smart, we are not dumb, we are really wise, we are not foolish, we really are moving down the road straight, we are not bumping into the curbs, we are not just like the fool and we are just bumping into the right curb instead of the left curb, we are not making the same conservative error to the same degree that the liberals are making in the liberal area, whatever it may be. What is the point? Solomon is turning this every different way to try to get us to see that we have to live our lives based on a light that comes from beyond the sun, from beyond the standard of measure of this life. Think about it, how many times have we had our peace disturbed, how many times have we had our joy dampened because we let the opinions of people and the judgments of people and the actions of people and the anger of people throw us off stride.

It is going to happen and it is going to move us a little. Remember David, I shall not be greatly moved, I am already moved a little bit, but I am not going to let this slide me clear off my mountaintop here. I have been shaken, but I have not been knocked off.

And as he thinks his way through, he focuses his mind on God, God is my strength, God is my only source of deliverance. He is the only thing that counts, it is his judgment that counts. We have to consciously set against the viewpoint of this world, the viewpoint of the scriptures and the viewpoint of God himself.

We have to make that happen so that we can say with David, I shall not be moved. I will not walk in the counsel of the ungodly. I will not stand in the way of sinners.

I am not going to sit in the seat of these scorners that are calling me foolish. I am not going to sit in that chair and join them and verify and validate for them that I am a fool by sinking to their level, sitting down across from them and babbling in foolishness. Words from a wise man's mouth are gracious.

How do we respond to people who count us a fool? Gracious words, quiet words. Even if they are drowned out by the shout of the fool, we are not allowed to raise our voice. The quiet words of wisdom should be heard, not the shout of the ruler among fools.

It is an encouragement, it is a challenge, but it is the way of wisdom. This is the how-to for bearing fruit, achieving righteousness by faith and accomplishing the main reason for which God has left us in this life. We push against that resistance.

We exercise our muscles of faith and hope and love against this challenge and against this resistance. Jesus says in Luke, it is impossible but that offenses will come against us. We are the

little ones.

We are the children of God. Remember what John says? Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them, for greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. But we have to recognize the source of our strength and we have to claim it.

We have to not sink to the level of those that attack us with foolishness and accuse us of foolishness, when in fact they are the ones who walk in darkness. This goes all the way back to chapter 2, verse 14 of Ecclesiastes. The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness.

Even though one fate seems to befall them both in this life, there is a difference, because God knows how to judge who has been faithful, who has been wise, and who has been foolish. That has to be our standard of measure as well, or we will lose our motivation. We will lose our strength.

Well, plenty to think about there and lots of encouragement. I commend your attention again. Psalm 62, a calm resolve to wait for the deliverance of God.

In many cases, that deliverance is not going to be visible until the Lord Jesus Christ returns, but faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. Let's close in prayer. Father, we do thank you for the strength that you have made available to us through your word and through your spirit.

We pray that we will be ever mindful of its availability and of our responsibility to claim it and to be sustained by your grace so that we are not deflected, we are not slowed down, we are not rendered ineffectual by the foolishness of this world. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will convict us, will encourage us and strengthen us and comfort us as we go through each day so that we can focus our lives and focus our efforts on maintaining a straight walk through that gate that leads to life and to the glorification of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray it in his name.

Amen.