

02-04-21a Ecclesiastes

The Word of God is the food for our soul. It is the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ, communicated to us by God the Holy Spirit. He transmits to us the will of God the Father.

He manifests to us our Savior. He speaks with these words that are before us in the pages of Scripture. And the goal of our Bible study is to seek to transfer some of the wealth of truth that's contained in God's Word into our soul, not so that it can sit behind glass to be stared at, but so that it is incorporated into our thinking and becomes a part of the fabric of our frame of reference.

We measure what we see and what we decide against these absolute divine truths. It is imperative that we engage in the study of God's Word with a soul that has been cleansed and prepared by God the Holy Spirit, by acknowledging our sins, by laying aside every weight and the sin that does so easily beset us, by recognizing that there is no more important activity, although this is not the only activity, and it does not constitute our spiritual life. We can have no spiritual life apart from this function.

If you think about the total number of hours in a week and the amount of time that we actually get to spend in the intake of God's Word, it is a very small percentage, but it is so critically important. So let's pause at the beginning of our study and ask God's blessing and seek the ministry of God's Spirit. Shall we pray? Father, we know that we have no strength, we have no ability, we have no wisdom, we have no merit or worth whatsoever apart from Your grace.

We thank You that You have made complete provision for us in every area of life. You have neglected nothing. You have failed in no area.

If there is any shortfall in our life, we know that it is only our failure to avail ourselves of Your grace and Your provision. We pray that as we study Your Word this morning, God the Holy Spirit will reveal the truth contained therein, that we will understand it rightly, that we will construe these sometimes difficult passages as You intended them, that the power of Your character and Your plan and Your purpose will be conveyed to our souls in such a way that it will influence our thoughts and activities in the days, weeks and years ahead. We pray that in all things our Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified and we ask it in His name.

Amen. For our Scripture reading this morning, turn with me to Proverbs chapter 14. Proverbs chapter 14.

You may have noticed something of a pattern or a prevailing trend in our Scripture readings on Sundays in our study of Ecclesiastes, and they very often, although not always, but very often have come from the Psalms and the Proverbs. This is intentional. It is, I think, very helpful to see thinking and divine truth that was current and was discussed in the days that Solomon lived.

Psalms, of course, largely were written by David and by members of David's, what they would call

in the modern day, his worship team. I never cease to be amazed at some of the ways that the church has developed appendages and things, but we have today worship teams. There are drummers and music leaders and guitar players and people who decide which praise choruses are going to be sung and assemble the overheads to put on the projector and that sort of thing.

But in ancient Israel, God himself designed the logistics for worship, and he designated the portions of the tribe of Levi to serve in the area of music and in orchestrating, literally, the musical aspects of the worship of God. And David had, in addition to his own inspired writings, we have, of course, especially the first 50 Psalms are all ascribed to David and many others afterward, but then you have a mix of songs by the Kohathites and by others who wrote lyrics. We've lost the music, at least temporarily, to these, but at any rate, these were part of the word of God that was communicated in that generation, circa 1000 B.C., when David and Solomon lived and ruled in Jerusalem.

These were the thoughts and the points of doctrinal truth that were communicated to the people of Israel through David and through those who superintended the worship and communication of God's word in Jerusalem and to the surrounding nation of Israel. So, I think, especially when you're seeking to recover the thinking and the communication that Solomon is putting out to that same audience, that to see the other parts of the word of God that were available and were current in that day can be very illuminating. This is one such passage, Proverbs, of course.

These were assembled by Solomon and collected and put forth in his day. And the subject here is wisdom, the contrast between wisdom and foolishness, and that is at the center of what we're studying in Ecclesiastes 10, what Solomon is talking about there. So, we want to pay close attention here to the statements made about wisdom and about foolishness.

The Proverbs, this particular chapter, and of course the chapter and verse divisions are somewhat arbitrary. They did not exist when Solomon wrote it, at least not in the form we have them today. But we begin here in chapter 14.

A faithful witness does not lie, but a false witness will utter lies. A scoffer seeks wisdom and does not find it, but knowledge is easy to him who understands. Go from the presence of a foolish man when you do not perceive in him the lips of knowledge.

The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way, but the folly of fools is deceit. Fools mock at sin, but among the upright there is favor. The heart knows its own bitterness, and a stranger does not share its joy.

The house of the wicked will be overthrown, but the tent of the upright will flourish. You'll notice each of these, you know, you have to really stop and meditate on each little two-line proverb because they seem to jump from subject to subject, that each of them has a facet of truth that requires reflection and meditation. And to read them so quickly, we just can't really get the sense.

It's not like narrative. And I'm going to stop right here. And because there is a connecting thread through all of these, it's a little bit difficult to see when we read them in English.

It's somewhat easier, I say easier, I guess if you go through all the work of learning Hebrew, then it's easier. But let's start back at the beginning and just take a little bit closer look at these. The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish pulls it down with her hands.

You have a contrast between wisdom and foolishness in the area of household. The wise woman builds her house. Something is edified.

Something is constructed. Something is built up. The foolish woman pulls it down with her hands.

It is not difficult for any of us, I think, to look around in our experience and see places where it does not matter what kind of house it is. There are people that have very lavish provision from God and have a lot of prosperity and do not have the capacity to appreciate it. And because they do not have wisdom, and this is the wisdom of God, this is divine viewpoint, it is living heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men, no matter how wonderful and lavish and prosperous a household is, a woman without wisdom will tear it down.

Even if it continues to exist, the happiness and the benefit and the blessing that ought to come from a prosperous household erodes away. The foolish woman pulls down her house with her hands. Then it talks about a man in verse 2. He who walks in his uprightness fears the Lord, but he who is perverse in his ways despises him.

You remember early in chapter 10 of Ecclesiastes, what did it say about the wise and the foolish man trying to walk in the way? Remember the directions? We had the right and the left. The wise man's heart tends to the right. The foolish man's heart tends to the left.

Well, this sort of illuminates that idea, doesn't it? He who walks in his uprightness fears the Lord. The one who is tending to the right, who's going in the right direction, as we say in English, is one who fears the Lord. But he who is perverse in his ways despises him.

It isn't just that your heart tends to the left and you're not making progress down the road. It says something about your attitude toward God. Do you fear the Lord or do you despise the Lord? Part and parcel of being foolish, of lacking wisdom.

In other words, there's a direct correlation between our level of wisdom and our level of fear of the Lord. How do you end up being a fool? Despising the Lord. How do you end up being wise? Fearing the Lord.

What's our proverb? The fear of the Lord is what? The beginning of wisdom. Beginning there is reshit. It's the same word that occurs in Genesis 1.1. Be reshit, in the beginning.

If John 1.1 was in Hebrew rather than in Greek, it would also have but reshit. In the beginning

was the word. In the beginning God created.

Well, the beginning, if you want wisdom to be created in your soul, it starts with the fear of the Lord. In the mouth of a fool is a rod of pride. So you'll notice we started out with environment in verse 1. This is where you live.

I'm not sure I can even use that illustration because I can't find a delicate way of expressing it. There's so much wealth of material from my background in the Marine Corps and growing up with a Marine for a father that I can't really use as illustration material because it's not suitable for public consumption in terms of its vocabulary. But you can look in a hamster cage and hamsters have a place where they have to relieve themselves.

That is not where they sleep. They don't sleep. They pick a corner of the cage and that's where they do their business.

But they don't sleep there. They sleep someplace else. They keep those two things separate.

And there is an old aphorism and I can't even approximate it in acceptable English, but even animals know enough to keep those two places separate. There is a place for living and resting and you don't mess that up. Well, this is an environmental concern.

If you are foolish, you are going to wreck your environment. There's going to be cursing by association. No matter how much blessing you receive, you're going to have no capacity to appreciate it and it's going to be torn down.

You're going to destroy any good thing that you have through foolishness. So verse 1 talks about the environment that a wise or foolish woman uses as the illustration. Verse 2 is lifestyle.

Anytime you see walking and the path and the road and that sort of thing, this talks about lifestyle, the pattern of decisions that you make. How do you get through the day? What are your priorities? What direction are you headed? If you have uprightness, if you have righteousness, which comes by faith, faith comes by hearing, hearing by the Word of God, then you're going to be making progress in the right direction. Your heart is going to tend to the right.

If you're foolish and you despise wisdom and despise the Lord, your way is going to be perverse. Those two things go hand in hand. So not only is your environment going to be messed up, but what's going to happen to you in the future? Where are you going to be? This is one of the interview questions when I sit down and interview job applicants, which I've had to do many, many times.

When I have interviewed people under my command when I was a platoon leader or squad leader, whatever. One of the questions that is very revealing about someone, a lot of times people don't catch in an interview the flaw that is going to come up after they hire someone and say, oh boy, this person interviewed so well and they turned out to be such a pain in the... pain

when it comes to actually being an employee. Well, one revealing interview question is where do you see yourself a year from now? Where do you see yourself five years from now? Because it's one thing to say, well, what do you like in a job and what are your skills, what are your strengths, what do you know how to do? But there's a difference in the environment that you like to have and the things you like to do and where are you trying to go in life? It's a completely different area of thinking.

Where are you going? So a good question to ask is where do you see... We can ask ourselves this. Do we have a plan? Are we aiming toward a goal? You know, the old thing about the idea of hamartia in Greek, the idea of missing the mark, there's an old truism that says if you aim at nothing you're going to hit it every time. And it is important to have an objective.

This has been the problem with deploying our military forces and trying to be a buffer between warring factions is that if you don't have a clear military objective, if you're saying, well, I just want to try to calm the situation down, that's not a clear... You know, you need a hill to take, you need a bridge to seize, you need a bunch of land to go take control of with the infantry. To try to stand in the middle of two fighting individuals, this is like trying to separate cats. I mean, you're just going to get scratched up in the process.

You have to have an objective. Where are you going? What road are you walking down? Hopefully, for us as believers, we know what defines the narrow road that goes through the straight gate that leads to life, and that's our goal. We are trying to do what we do heartily as unto the Lord.

We want to be that good and faithful servant that enters into life and seizes it abundantly. So that's what verse 2 is talking about. If you're walking in uprightness, that reflects the fact that you fear the Lord.

Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. But he who is perverse in his ways despises him. People think, oh, if I could just get... Churches are in the business of trying to straighten out people's ways.

Say, if I can get you to fix your lifestyle, this will draw you closer to the Lord. And it's just backwards. If someone is perverse in their ways, it is because they have already despised the Lord.

And don't work on their lifestyle. Work on their attitude toward the Lord. Speak the truth in love and talk about relationship with God.

Don't waste time saying, you know, you need to clean up your act here. You need to quit shacking up and you need to quit being deceitful and get off of drugs. Those all may be wonderful, healthy things to do, but that's not the core of the problem.

The core of the problem is no love for the Lord. Verse 3, now we get into the area of verbal activity. What do your lips do? And we're going to see this in a big way in Ecclesiastes chapter 10 this morning.

In the mouth of a fool is a rod of pride, but the lips of the wise will preserve them. Are you going to beat somebody down with a stick or are you going to build them up with healing and with something that mends and preserves? And this is a danger that everybody faces. The tongue is set on fire with the flames of hell, James tells us, and it is true.

And a moment of inattention in bridling the tongue can cause a lot of grief and a lot of regret and a lot of pain. And when we wind up using our tongue as a rod of pride, you know, we get our backup, and out comes some smart remark or some comeback or something that you just want to chase the words and try to grab them before they hit somebody's ears and it's too late. The rod of pride, well, guess what? When you see the rod of pride in action, you are the fool at that point.

All of us can relate, I think. But the lips of the wise will preserve them. Is it a rod that beats down or is it a life preserver? Is it something that heals and brings together the breach? We saw in Ecclesiastes 10 last time about the wise man in the presence of the ruler who is being an idiot to stand his ground and to try to heal the breach, to try to pull together these disparate things that have caused the ruler to go off.

Verse 4, Where no oxen are, the trough is clean, but much increase comes by the strength of an ox. Initially you say, hmm, like Arsenio Hall. Things that make you say, hmm.

But think about it. This is another way of saying what we have in the New Testament expressed by the Lord Jesus. To him who has, more will be given.

But to him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. What does the ox do? The ox plows. You plow the field.

You plant the grain. The grain grows up. And you take grain and you thresh it and you bring it into the storehouse.

And what do you do? With part of it, you feed the ox so that he is healthy and he can go plow more ground, grow more grain that you can thresh and store and feed to the ox so that he can grow. And it's a cycle. To him who has, more will be given.

You feed the ox with the very grain that he himself is working to help you grow. But if you've got no oxen, the trough, what's the trough? That's where the ox eats. If you don't have an ox, you can't feed an ox.

And you really have no need for a trough. So, what does Paul say? The laborer is worthy of his hire and do not muzzle the ox that treads out the grain. And this is talking about the area of

teaching of the Word of God and that the elders who teach are worthy of double honor and that sort of thing.

Much increase comes by the strength of an ox. So if you have the means, what's the point here? What does the ox represent? There is no agricultural process without the ox. Where there's no ox, you're not going to have anything to put in the trough.

So, essentially, everybody starts with an ox. You don't chop up the ox and eat it just like you don't kill the goose that lays the golden egg. You don't sacrifice something in the short term.

You've got to be looking ahead. You've got to have a long term view and say, you know, I can't butcher this ox and have steak today and have no means of growing grain to have something to eat tomorrow. Where there's no ox, there's going to be no grain to put in the trough.

Don't butcher the ox. What does this mean by way of application? Don't do something impulsive in the short term that makes it impossible to have any long term prospects. What did we see in the first verse of chapter 10 of Ecclesiastes? Flies of death spoil the oil of the perfumer, spoil the ointment.

A little folly wrecks the fruit of a lot of wisdom. We have to be diligent. We have to have a long term view.

Most of what we do that is foolish is because we get short sighted. Anger has no ability to look ahead. Bitterness doesn't look ahead.

It's gratification of the moment. I want to lash out. I want to get back.

I want to defend. I want to inflict the same kind of pain that I'm feeling. I want something to change.

And it doesn't have patience. It doesn't have forbearance. It doesn't look ahead.

And we slaughter the ox. And when we slaughter the ox, guess what? We just killed fields full of grain and we're not going to have anything to feed any future ox that we might try to get because we've interrupted the cycle. In terms of the intake of the word of God, the seed of the word that's sowed in the ground that produces the 30 fold, 60 fold and 100 fold increase that glorifies God, there is a means by which that cycle goes forward. And one of the first things we do when we leave the path of wisdom and head down the path of the fool, when we stop fearing the Lord and we start despising the Lord is we stop paying attention to His word.

We stop prioritizing the intake of His word. We stop making time to meditate on His word. We get too busy.

We get too distracted. We get too caught up in other things, events, people, something going on

in ourselves. The first thing to go is the place of God's word.

God is not visible. We don't have an idol that we can polish. We don't have something tangible.

So what is it that represents God in our lives? It's His word. The place of God. You know, you can say, Oh, how I love Jesus all day long.

But what do you do with His word? Do you prioritize the intake of God's word? Do you prioritize setting aside time to reflect His word in prayer? Evening and morning and at noon will I pray and cry aloud and He will hear my voice? Psalm 55, 17. The grist for that mill of prayer is the word of God. You can't pray intelligently.

We talked about this Friday night when Jesus and Luke is talking about faith. If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could uproot trees and tell them to be planted in the sea. How does that work? We don't uproot trees.

Faith is not just the ability to trust. Faith in Bible terms is the appropriation and application of God's word. If God's plan and purpose for an apostle called for uprooting a tree, he could genuinely speak it.

He could speak people back from the dead. He could speak withered limbs into existence. Apostles that Jesus made that promise to could do those impossible things.

And in the realm of daily activity today, things that are impossible by human measure are eliminating rancor and bitterness, eliminating insecurity, eliminating fear, eliminating all of the things that plague man's fallen nature. It is a bigger miracle than moving a tree and planting it in the sea. We can do that by faith because we know it's a part of God's plan.

But faith is always exercised with God's word as its object and with God's plan as its objective, the fulfillment of God's plan. Same thing here. To make sure that that agricultural cycle of growth and production is not interrupted, we can't slaughter the ox.

Verse 5, A faithful witness does not lie, but a false witness will utter lies. Well, at first you say, well, this seems like a master of the obvious kind of a statement. A faithful witness does not lie.

What's the point here? Don't fool yourself into saying, you know, I'm a faithful witness. If you are a faithful witness, you don't lie. You will be consistent.

You will have integrity. You can't say one thing and do another. If you are a faithful witness, guess what? There shouldn't be any lying going on.

If you are a false witness, it doesn't matter what you say. The fruit of your lips is going to be lies. You're going to deceive.

You're going to put the best face on things to vindicate yourself. You're going to fail to

communicate things that people need to know because you don't want to look bad. And don't fool yourself into thinking that you're a faithful witness when you're not.

A faithful witness does not lie, so look for the lies. If there's lies, guess what? You're not a faithful witness, so don't tell yourself that you are. This is still in the area of verbal sin.

A scoffer seeks wisdom and does not find it. And how many people have we known that seem to be seeking, seem to be asking questions? I've had correspondence with people. I've exchanged emails with people.

I have people in my family who have friends and their friends seem to be asking questions. And a lot of times, people will relay these questions to me because these people seem to be seekers and seem to be on a quest for knowledge. But at heart, they are scoffers.

And years go by and these people with all the questions and this seeming spark of interest never make any progress. Why? They seek knowledge and they don't find it because at heart, they are scoffers. This goes back to verse 2. If you're perverse in your way, you can ask all the questions.

What about the heathen and laws of physics? Did Adam have a belly button? All of these things. Did the original trees that God created in the garden have annual rings in them? People seem to be asking questions and provoking thought and so on, but the bottom line is, do you fear the Lord? Are you seeking God or are you just asking these questions with an ever learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth? Go from the presence of a foolish man when you do not perceive in him the lips of knowledge. How do you know when it's time to depart from the presence of a foolish man? It's going to be expressed in speech.

You do not perceive the lips of knowledge. There is a time to separate. We sometimes say, well, you know, I should maintain this acquaintance.

I should try to keep on trying to answer these questions and invest myself and spend time and talk to the neighbor over the back fence or this, that, and the other because it may be that the glimmer's spark of interest is going to be fanned into a flame here. The Bible says, we speak the truth in love. We are ready to give an answer to every man that asks us a reason for the hope that's in us, but you don't have to wheedle and you don't have to cajole and you don't have to develop false friendships.

There are churches, as we speak, throughout the United States that are telling their congregations, cultivate friendships, cultivate relationships, spend time, make excuses to be with people, bring them along on activities, invite them to functions, so that at some point you can bait and switch. You're offering them friendship, you're offering them fellowship, you're offering them activities, but what you really want to do is slip them the needle of truth. And it's false.

It is a falsehood. You're not coming up front and saying to this person, if you're interested in God,

if you're interested in the things of God, I would love to speak the truth to you in love, but I'm not going to be a false friend. I'm not going to appear to be interested in you and appear to be wanting to spend time with you, but my real agenda is to convert you.

My real agenda is to drag you from the highways and byways into the feast and all the other justifications that people use for this. God says, go from the presence of a fool when you perceive that he does not have the lips of knowledge. What are the lips of knowledge? Asking the right questions.

Wanting to know about God and not just stringing you along as someone who is a scoffer. The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way, but the folly of fools is deceit. And it is deceitful to act like you're... and to try to deceive yourself into thinking that you're interested in someone and that you're going to maintain a friendship and you're going to make all of these representations to them.

You're going to invite them to the luncheon so that they'll hear the speaker. It's deceitful. It's foolish.

It's not going to bear fruit in God's plan. Well, we could go on, but you see that the idea of wisdom and foolishness is practical. It manifests itself.

It makes itself evident in the daily affairs of our existence. It's not an abstract. And that's critically important.

Let's return over to our study now in Ecclesiastes 10. Because remember, these are aphorisms and sayings and teachings that are available to people in Solomon's day. When he calls people to the genuine wisdom that sees that there is more to life than what you see under the sun, that there is a wisdom that is hidden in the shadows that will give you something in your hand eternally, something in the future, which David well understood.

He said, goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and after my life, I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. David understood that there was something beyond the setting of the sun. Solomon is as Kohelet, the one who assembles the people and is trying to give them the distillation of his experience and his wisdom from God.

He's saying, you've got to wake up and smell the coffee. Don't get caught up in this life and wind up being the fool who's constantly turning left and going down the wrong road. So in chapter 10, we've already seen that the wisdom from God is precious.

Don't let a little foolishness spoil a great amount of wisdom. You can spend years learning the Word of God, but if you let foolishness come in, it evaporates for the length of time that wisdom is reigning in our soul. All of that wisdom, all of those hours and days and weeks and years of Bible study is for naught.

The presence of God the Holy Spirit in our soul is for naught when we don't listen to Him, when we don't let Him speak the truth of Jesus Christ in our souls. A little foolishness, just like a little leaven can leaven the whole lump. These are the flies of death in the ointment.

A wise man's heart tends to the right. It's right-handed, it's dexterous. That's the hand of strength.

That's the side of favor. That's the side of blessing. The fool's heart puts him at the left, sends him to the left, sends him down the direction of corruption.

Even when a fool walks along the way, he lacks wisdom and declares he is a fool. Well, what we want to pick up this morning is recognizing that all of this is taking place in the heart. Wisdom and foolishness are characteristic of the heart.

What does the Bible say about our heart? The wise man's heart is at his right hand. The fool's heart is at his left. The lips manifest what's in the heart.

We found that out in our Scripture reading, didn't we? You find out that someone is a fool because you don't discern the lips of knowledge. So, the heart is manifest in the speech. Well, what does the Bible tell us about the heart? We're going to spend a little time again.

The passages I'm going to give you are all from the Psalms and Proverbs because, again, these are things that would have been known in Solomon's day. Take a look at Psalm 10, verse 6. Psalm 10, 6. He is talking. You really need to read the introductory section here.

Why do you stand afar off, O Lord? Why do you hide in times of trouble? This is Psalm 10. The wicked in his pride persecutes the poor. Let them be caught in the plots which they have devised, for the wicked boasts of his heart's desire.

That's verse 3. It comes out of his mouth, doesn't it? He has a heart's desire. It comes out. He blesses the greedy and renounces the Lord.

The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God. God is in none of his thoughts. These ought to be familiar concepts.

His ways are always prospering. Your judgments are far above, out of his sight. Isn't this what Solomon is saying? Sometimes the wicked seem to prosper all the way to the end of their life.

And the judgment of God is not evident and manifest during his days on the earth. As for his enemies, he sneers at them. He has said in his heart, I shall not be moved.

I shall never be in adversity. His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and oppression. Under his tongue is trouble and iniquity.

So, out of the treasury of the heart comes forth either good or ill. The speech reflects what's in the

heart. So, Psalm 10 here tells us a lot about the heart.

From verse 6, we find out that the heart is the seat of thinking. This is where we set our goals and our priorities. This is where we establish our values.

He's thinking, I will not be moved. I will never be in adversity. That's a thought process.

And the Bible says that goes on in the heart. Look down at verse 11. As we read on forward, you get down to verse 8. He sits in the lurking places of the villages and the secret places.

He murders the innocent. His eyes are secretly fixed on the helpless. He lies in wait secretly as a lion in his den.

He lies in wait to catch the poor. He catches the poor when he draws them into his net. So, he crouches.

He lies low that the helpless may fall by his strength. He has said in his heart, God has forgotten. He hides his face.

He will never see. Arise, O Lord. O God, lift up your hand.

Do not forget the humble. Why did the wicked renounce God? He has said in his heart, you will not require an account. What is the characteristic of the wicked and the fool? No accounting for God.

He despises God. He doesn't think God will judge. He doesn't think God sees.

He says, I will not be moved. I can do this and everything will be great. That goes on in the seat of thinking, which is the heart.

Skip down to verse 16 and following. The Lord is king forever and ever. The nations have perished out of his land.

Lord, you have heard the desire of the humble. You will do what? You will prepare their heart. You will cause your ear to hear, to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may oppress no more.

God will prepare the heart of the humble. Humble, a good way to translate that into modern English, is teachable. You know, we tend to think of humility being sort of a toe in the dirt, hang dog, sort of an oh, I'm not worthy thing.

Humility, biblical humility, is teachability. Ability to perform metanoia, to change the mind, to recognize a place of deficit or a place of error and change. That's humility.

The rod of pride in the mouth of the fool, there is no ability to change. There is no desire to

change. And it comes out the mouth as a rod that beats down others.

To acknowledge error and try to go in a different direction. So all of this takes place in the heart. Turn over to Psalm 37.

We're going to look at Psalm 37, 31 in its context here. Psalm 37, verse 30. The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom, and his tongue talks of justice.

Why? Verse 31. The law of his God is in his heart. None of his steps shall slide.

What a close relationship there is between what comes out of our mouth and what goes on in our heart. It will manifest. Well, this is a good place for us to pause and take our break.

We have a number of other passages from the Psalms and from Proverbs that are going to tell us about the nature of the heart because that is what it's all about. When we come back and we finish looking at the heart, we're going to see one of my favorite biblical forms of communication, which is a neat little chiasm that Solomon employs in the middle of chapter 10. And right at the center of that chiasm, as always, is the point of emphasis.

And a lot of these obscure points that are made in chapter 10 are going to become quite a bit clearer to us when we look at that. But the background and the setting for this chiasm and the truths that it communicates is the heart and the tongue and the decisions that we make that determine whether we are wise or foolish. Do we have a heart that is characterized by wisdom and does that come out in our speech? Do we have a heart that is foolish? And that comes out in our speech.

And by extension, from our Scripture reading this morning, that is a reflection. Whatever we may say and however we may fool ourselves, what comes out of our mouth and what exists in our heart reflects whether we fear the Lord or despise the Lord. That is the telltale.

Telltale has taken on a life of its own, but it's an old nautical term. You used to have little strips of ribbon that were sewed to a sail. And the helmsman or the officer of the watch, whoever is determining the trim of a ship, would look up at the telltales and it would show, by looking at this series of bits of ribbon or bits of cloth, how they were pointing and flapping, would show the invisible wind as it moved across the sail.

It could get optimum power and optimum speed out of the ship by looking at the telltales. In many cases, these would be the reef points. They had little strips that would be used to reef a sail.

And when you have the sail unreefed, those reef points are hanging down and they serve as telltales. And you can look at the reef points and see the invisible wind, see the effect of the invisible wind, and it tells you whether you need to change the angle of your rudder or need to change the trim of the sails. And the telltale of what's going on in our heart is what comes out of our mouth.

And that, in turn, tells us where we stand in terms of fear of the Lord or despising the Lord. Well, it's a fruitful place of meditation. So we'll pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to see some fascinating things about the heart and then we're going to take a look at that structure in Ecclesiastes 10.