**Ecclesiastes 9:11-10:20**

The author of Ecclesiastes, QOHELETH in Hebrew, continues talking wisdom as he has done throughout large parts of the book.

Wisdom is the greatest asset we can have in life, apart from God himself. But there is a word of caution here about wisdom. We should not count on wisdom to guarantee us a life of ease, comfort, success, prosperity, or security. It certainly helps, but there are precious few guarantees in life.

If it was indeed Solomon who wrote both Ecclesiastes and most of Proverbs, then it seems likely that what he wrote in Proverbs was from earlier in his life. Proverbs is more optimistic about the results of wise living. Ecclesiastes seems more realistic. “The race is not always won by the swift, nor the battle by the strong,” and so on. Wisdom is not a guarantee in a fallen world. It’s not that God is unjust, but the world is corrupted from the goodness God intended. You can do everything right, you can live wisely, and still get run over by a log truck on your way home. That’s just the nature of a fallen world. Disaster can happen to even the most upright and wise of persons.

And wisdom may not be heeded by others. QOHELETH tells this little story about a small town besieged by a king’s army. “A wise but poor man saved the town.” We don’t know anything about the origin of this story, though it seems likely that the original readers of Ecclesiastes knew what he was talking about.

But many Bible scholars think this verse should be translated as “a poor, wise man COULD have saved the town.” Meaning his words were unheeded, perhaps because he was poor. In this case, it’s a story about prejudice. Wisdom is unheeded because it comes from someone the world did not respect. The world values many things more than wisdom: Attractiveness, wealth, power, fame, and so on. Those things are often held in higher regard than wisdom!

Nonetheless, wisdom is still the best asset we have, aside from God. It is more powerful than any weapon or army. QOHELETH goes on to talk more about the nature of wisdom and what wise people do.

First, we should never measure wisdom by volume. We should not measure wisdom by the number of words spoken. Verses 13-14 of chapter 10: “What a fool says, from beginning to end, is foolish and full of nonsense, yet he talks on and on.” The pastor said in his sermon that never seemed to end… Nor should we measure wisdom by the volume in which the words are spoken. “The quiet words of a wise person are more valuable than the shouts of a fool.”

I would advise you to remember both of those things when you go to the polls on election day. Wise people don’t need to shout others down and they don’t need to go on talking forever. I’m just kidding, of course. If there were any politicians out there who spoke quiet words of wisdom and knew when to quit talking, they already lost in the primaries.

On the subject of not talking too much, QOHELETH also says this, “Do not curse an influential person, even in the privacy of your bedroom, because a bird may carry your words and report what you say.” Perhaps this is the origin of the expression, “A little birdy told me…” It does seem kind of self-serving for King Solomon to say this, but there is wisdom in it. Once our words are out of our mouths, we have no control over where they will end up. Sometimes, “silence is golden,” as we say proverbially.

Second, a little folly can undo a lot of hard work. “One dead fly can spoil the whole container of perfume,” QOHELETH says. “A fly in the ointment,” as we say. Or “One bad apple spoils the bunch.”

How many people have worked hard to establish themselves as good, respectable, upright people only to have that work undone by one momentary lapse of judgment? A brief outburst of anger? A little white lie or a convenient half-truth? “Hey, Will Smith, did you ever think that maybe you SHOULDN’T have slapped Chris Rock?” Right?

“Fools let you know they are fools. He reveals his lack of wisdom everywhere he goes. He declares to everyone he is a fool.” Unfortunately, I think we all know that fools are a part of life. I heard someone talking about the biblical concepts of wisdom and foolishness one time. Their advice was that you can always correct a wise person when they do wrong, and that you should likewise receive the correction of a wise person. But often the best you can do with fools is to limit the damage they can do. Don’t put them in places where they are likely to cause great harm, like Congress. Because you can’t correct a fool. You can’t set them on the right path because they don’t receive correction. I think that’s something for all of us to consider. How open are we to receiving correction from others? When we mess up, will we receive the rebuke of trustworthy people? Because fools do not.

“A wise person doesn’t overreact to anger. If the ruler’s anger is aroused against you, don’t leave your post. Stay calm.” It takes a lot of self-control not to get angry when someone is angry with us. But it usually does a lot to defuse the situation.

Wise leadership brings stability to a society, but foolish leadership brings disaster. Fools elevate fools. “Foolish leaders put fools in high positions.” I believe the modern terminology for that is “filling out the Cabinet.”

“How unfortunate the kingdom whose princes feast in the morning.” This is a way of describing people who use their position for personal benefit. We see plenty of examples of that in our political leaders. They always seem to end up far richer when they leave office than when they got there.

But QOHELETH is also not a social revolutionary. He doesn’t want to see the world turned upside down. Reformed, yes, but not in upheaval. Verses 8 to 11 of chapter 10 are basically a warning about what can happen in turning the world on its head. “If you dig a pit, you might fall in. If you tear down a wall, you might get bit by a snake living in the stones,” and so on. There’s a danger in trying to topple the social order. Some of the early leaders of the French Revolution ended up in the guillotine themselves. Leon Trotsky, one of the leaders of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia fell out of favor when Joseph Stalin took control of the party and he was later assassinated and erased from history in the Soviet Union. If you play with fire, you might get burned, as we say.

In the middle of the warning is a word of wisdom about preparation. “If the axe is dull, it takes more strength.” We have to “sharpen the axe,” meaning that the proper skills, knowledge, and preparation make the work easier.

The last words of this chapter say, “bread and wine make a person happy, but you need money to buy them.” To QOHELETH’s way of thinking, money is basically a blessing from God. It’s not evil or bad. When used properly, it can help you to enjoy life. But the problem comes when we view it out its proper place. If we see money as the ultimate good, if we put it in the place of God, if we make it an idol, if we love it rather than using it, then we find it can be a “root of all kinds of evil,” as Paul says.

As he has done all through the book, QOHELETH shares a great deal of wisdom. And wisdom can help us to succeed in many areas of life. It is one of our greatest assets. But the warning at the beginning of this section must be kept in mind. This world is a fallen world. It is not the orderly place God intended. And as such, wisdom has its limits. If we count on wisdom to make things go right, we just might end up disappointed.