

October 10, 2021

“Valuing True Wisdom”
Lesson 6 of Unit

Ecclesiastes 9:13-18
Ecclesiastes 10:1-4

Intro

Today’s lesson comes from the book of Ecclesiastes, the fourth book in the OT group commonly called the “wisdom” or “poetry books. The five in this section are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs (or Song of Solomon). Ecclesiastes is traditionally said to be the work of Solomon, since there are many verse that show an interest in wisdom, and the speaker identifies himself as “son of David” and “king in Jerusalem”. But as you study today’s and next week’s passages from this book, don’t think of the ideas coming from a king. Think of Solomon as taking off his crown and simply being a fellow human being who is trying to make sense of what this life is all about. Think of Ecclesiastes as a spiritual journal, where he has recorded what he thinks. His ultimate goal is to understand how this life and God’s presence in it fit together.

Read Ecclesiastes 9:13-18

1. vs. 13: The verse includes the phrase “under the sun”

The phrase is used roughly 30 times in Ecclesiastes

The phrase places a perspective—things “under the sun” must be here on earth

“Over the sun” would be in the heavens, in God’s realm

Some of what happens here on earth can be pleasing and satisfying

Beautiful scenery, time with family and friend, enjoyable activities

Some of what happens here on earth can also be discouraging and depressing

Wars, negative situations, disease, crime

Solomon is about to comment on an example of wisdom that seems to be good, even impressive. But as he reflects on it, he begins to wonder about it.

2. vs. 14: Solomon describes a small city with few people

A king surrounds the city, and is going to attack it

Think of this city as much smaller than most of the cities you have in mind

Town in OT Israel were usually small, usually with populations not above 1,000 people

If a “powerful king” came against such a small city, they were in trouble

Siegeworks were the frequently ramps built from trees and stones mixed with earth

They were needed to get the battering rams at the higher parts of the city walls

These had to be broken down to allow the army to enter the city

3. vs. 15: The story takes a turn

A wise but poor man somehow saves the city by his wisdom

There is a similar story in 2 Sam. 20:14-22, where a wise woman saves the city of Abel Beth-maacah from being destroyed by Joab

We aren't told what this man did, but his wisdom saved them

However, nobody "remembered" this wise man

This suggests that he wasn't thanked, that no commemoration was celebrated

A parallel with how God is treated fits here

People can call on God for help, accept His help, and then forget to thank Him

4. vs. 16: Solomon's conclusions about this series of events

"Wisdom is better than strength"

It wasn't military strength that saved the city; it was the wise man's wisdom

"The poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are no longer heeded"

The people immediately forget that his wisdom saved them

This shouldn't be the result, but it is

This can and does happen often enough in our world

This can cause us to get cynical if our wisdom is disregarded

How might God think of us when we disregard His wisdom?

5. vs. 17: This verse and the next discuss the value of wisdom

Vs. 17 refers to the character of a person who is considered wise

A person considered wise is frequently speaks calmly and quietly

They aren't the first to talk usually, and definitely aren't the loudest

"The quiet words of the wise"

This wise person is contrasted with a "ruler of fools"

Just because someone is in charge doesn't mean they can't act foolishly

This ruler uses "shouts" rather than the "quiet words" of the wise

There is an obvious teaching here:

We should strive to be more like the quiet wise person than the foolish shouter

6. vs. 18: This verse contrasts the actions of wisdom and the sinner

The person who uses wisdom can accomplish more than "weapons of war"

This isn't saying that weapons of war are always wrong to use

It is saying that wisdom is better

A wise person can get to a better result than by using weapons

Wisdom comes from God

A person using wisdom is employing God's view, not man's

Weapons of war are man's way of solving an impasse

The second half says that "one sinner destroys much good"

One person who lives life contrary to God's ways can cause a lot of damage

The person of wisdom in the first half is decreasing friction

Wisdom builds up

The sinner "destroys"—they make things worse, not better

Read Ecclesiastes 10:1-4

7. vs. 1: In the book of Ecclesiastes, vs. 10:1 is the next verse after 9:18

Solomon is still talking about the actions of the wise and the sinner from 9:18

This verse is a specific example showing the impact of “a little folly”

Perfumes have a pleasing aroma (most of them, to most of us, at least!)

A couple of dead flies can give the perfume a bad smell that can't be removed

A “little folly outweighs wisdom and honor”

This could be applied in two ways

- 1) The person committing the folly can ruin the wisdom and honor of another
- 2) The person committing the folly is ruining their own honor or reputation by the folly of their actions

8. vs. 2: This verse contrasts the viewpoints (“the heart”) of the wise and the fool

They go different directions (right or left) because of their views

They have different ways of thinking about and approaching life

In Biblical examples, to be on the right side usually indicates favor or power

Jesus puts the sheep on the right, but the goats on the left

We say that a person's most trusted advisor is their “right-hand man”

The wise goes to the right—toward that which is wise in God's eyes

The fool goes to the left—away from God's wisdom and teaching

9. vs. 3: “Walking along the road” refers to one's daily routine

The foolish person displays their foolishness daily

Every action or communication that shows foolishness is observed

Note that those observing the fool consider him to be “stupid”

Better to walk in wisdom, quietly

Prov. 17:28 says, “Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is considered prudent.”

10. vs. 4: This verse is about how to practically apply wisdom in a given situation

“If a ruler's anger rises against you”

We might include or substitute “boss” here as well

The person's thought in this situation might be to leave, either for good or for the day

This teaching counsels against rash actions

“do not leave your post”

Why not?

“calmness can lay great errors to rest”

The person who acts in haste frequently makes a situation worse than it was before

Prov. 15:1 says, “A gentle answer turns away wrath”

This is the opposite action to “leaving your post” / acting in haste

There are obviously exceptions

Some people won't change no matter how calm and submissive are your actions

In the two verses following today's lesson (10:5-6), Solomon notes that not

everyone who is in a place of authority deserves to be there.

Application: This lesson was titled “Valuing True Wisdom”. What are wisdom’s values, at least from this text? It can have exceptionally positive results, like saving a city from an enemy. It is called “better than strength” and “better than weapons of war”; anything that is “better” than something else is worth looking closely at.

Though this passage doesn’t specifically refer to it this way, the wisdom referred to is God’s wisdom. His wisdom is always the right way to go. How right and true a way is are never affected by how anyone responds to it. Truth is truth, even if someone won’t accept it. Smoking cigarettes is a danger to one’s health, even if there are a lot of people who smoke. Since wisdom is from God, how He views our actions is far more important than how other people do (assuming we are walking wisely, and not foolishly like the person in 10:3!)

Prayer: Father God, it is sometimes difficult to live for You in this fallen world. Remind us at those times that You are still in control, and that following Your wisdom is the correct path. Help us to stay focused on You and on what truly matters. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

.
.