

When Folly is Honoured

Ecclesiastes 9:13-10:7

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Introduction:

Today as we continue our sermon series in Ecclesiastes, I want to begin our scripture reading with Ecclesiastes 9:13.

- Some of you may notice that this overlaps with the portion we looked at last week...indeed it does!
- I have done this several times in Ecclesiastes because there is such a flow of ideas here that one passage often links into those on either side of it...
 - Of course, it was meant to be read in one sitting—
 - We divide it up because it would take us a long time to expound the whole book in one sitting!

I would remind you that last time we looked at *Going on for the Lord* when things come into our lives to discourage us...

- There were five things we looked at that have potential to discourage us...
 - That the wicked often go unpunished...
 - That the wicked sometimes prosper and the righteous suffer...
 - That we are all going to die anyway (so why bother doing anything)...
 - That even our diligent, skilful work may fail in this vain, unpredictable world...
 - That our best service may never be recognized or appreciated in this world...

Now it is this last section that serves a dual purpose of concluding the list of those things that discourage us...

- but also introduces us to a new subject...
 - that folly is often honoured—
- *That*, you see, is why our best service often goes unrecognized and why people don't listen to us if we have something wise to say...
 - So you see, last week we were looking at how it is hard for you if you are the one who is wise...
 - But this week, we are going to look at the every prevalent problem of honoring folly instead of wisdom.

Let's proceed now with our scripture reading...Ecclesiastes 9:13 – 10:7:

Ecclesiastes 9:13-10:7: This wisdom I have also seen under the sun, and it *seemed* great to me: ¹⁴ *There was* a little city with few men in it; and a great king came against it, besieged it, and built great snares around it. ¹⁵ Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that same

poor man. ¹⁶ Then I said: “Wisdom *is* better than strength. Nevertheless the poor man's wisdom *is* despised, and his words are not heard. ¹⁷ Words of the wise, *spoken* quietly, *should be* heard rather than the shout of a ruler of fools. ¹⁸ Wisdom *is* better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroys much good.” ^{10:1} Dead flies putrefy the

perfumer's ointment, and cause it to give off a foul odor; *so does* a little folly to one respected for wisdom *and* honor. ² A wise man's heart *is* at his right hand, but a fool's heart at his left. ³ Even when a fool walks along the way, he lacks wisdom, and he shows everyone *that he is* a fool. ⁴ If the spirit of the ruler rises against you, do not

leave your post; for conciliation pacifies great offenses. ⁵ There is an evil I have seen under the sun, as an error proceeding from the ruler: ⁶ Folly is set in great dignity, while the rich sit in a lowly place. ⁷ I have seen servants on horses, while princes walk on the ground like servants.

May the Lord bless the reading of His holy Word.

So again, as I said in the introduction,

- In this passage Solomon shows us how folly is often honoured and wisdom is despised...
- In the account he gives at that end of chapter 9, we see the sad reality that...

I. The masses gravitate to folly even though wisdom is such an excellent thing.

A. Solomon was greatly impressed with the excellence of the wisdom he saw in a poor wise man that saved a city by wisdom...

1. It is really quite a remarkable story when you look at the details!
 - It seems to be an actual event and not just a parable...
 - This is what happened...
 - a. For some reason, a great king (probably, this refers to an emperor)—
 - came with all his forces—with great military might—against a small city.
 - It is a picture of overkill—
 - It is like a bully who brings ten big friends with him to beat up a little girl...
 - He builds great snares around this little sparsely populated town—perhaps in a display of great anger...
 - The situation looks totally desperate.
 - b. But then there is this poor man—who is equipped only with wisdom...
 - And somehow—perhaps by diplomacy?
 - perhaps by outwitting the emperor?
 - ***Somehow***, by wisdom, he delivers his city.
 - His wisdom must have been remarkable to pull this off against such odds.
2. Solomon marvels at the power of wisdom and the usefulness of it...
 - It strikes him that it is better than strength (vs. 16) and better than weapons of war (vs. 18).
 - By it, great armies can be overcome by one individual!
 - Such wisdom is truly remarkable!

3. We might think of the wise woman of Abel when Joab began attacking the walls of the city...

- 2 Samuel 20:16 tells what she did:

- **2 Sam 20:16-22: Then a wise woman cried out from the city, “Hear, hear! Please say to Joab, ‘Come nearby, that I may speak with you.’ ” When he had come near to her, the woman said, “Are you Joab?” He answered, “I am.” Then she said to him, “Hear the words of your maidservant.” And he answered, “I am listening.” So she spoke, saying, “They used to talk in former times, saying, ‘They shall surely seek guidance at Abel,’ and so they would end disputes. I am among the peaceable and faithful in Israel. You seek to destroy a city and a mother in Israel. Why would you swallow up the inheritance of the LORD?” And Joab answered and said, “Far be it, far be it from me, that I should swallow up or destroy! That is not so. But a man from the mountains of Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri by name, has raised his hand against the king, against David. Deliver him only, and I will depart from the city.” So the woman said to Joab, “Watch, his head will be thrown to you over the wall.” Then the woman in her wisdom went to all the people. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri, and threw it out to Joab. Then he blew a trumpet, and they withdrew from the city, every man to his tent.**

- How much better this was this woman than a great army!

- Yes my friends, wisdom is a very powerful, very excellent thing!

- It has the capacity to a tremendous amount of good!

- It was by wisdom that Joseph, a slave who was a prisoner in Egypt,

- was able to save Egypt and the whole surrounding region from what would have been certain starvation!

- That is what wisdom can do.

➤ Surely that which is so powerful and so excellent ought to be held in the highest regard!

B. But Solomon observes how wisdom is hardly esteemed at all, but rather despised!

1. It is again a very remarkable thing—

a. At the end of verse 15, Solomon says that nobody remembered the poor wise man...

- Think of it!

- He saved the whole town—and it was only a small city where the citizens surely knew one another...

- But this man who delivered it is completely forgotten...

- He had no holiday named after him, no parade, no reward...

b. In fact, we are told in verse 16 that his wisdom is despised and nobody even listens to him afterward...

- You would think he would have been given a seat among the elders at least—or given an office as an advisor to the chief magistrate...

- But it appears that even his neighbours on the street have no interest in drawing from his wisdom!

2. This is a very sad display of the misshapen values of the general populace in this fallen world.
 - a. We are simply not attracted to wisdom—
 - We avoid it when we ought to run to it...
 - As it says in verse 17...
 - **Ecc 9:17: Words of the wise, spoken quietly, should be heard rather than the shout of a ruler of fools.**
 - b. Just look at this in our society...
 - Do you find people looking for wisdom—even in mundane matters?
 - Do they look for real answers? real solutions?
 - Even when they want to lose weight—what do they do?
 - They look for some pill or some fad diet...there are thousands of them.
 - They go after the glitzy programme and gullibly believe all kinds of empty promises—*they hear the shout of fools.*
 - What they really need to do is stop eating so much...
 - But if someone tells them that, they despise him...
 - I used to work at fitness centre—I knew the owner quite well...
 - And it was hilarious when someone would come in and ask him what they could do to lose weight, and he would tell them, “don’t eat.”
 - And they would say,
 - “No, but I mean, what machines can I use and what programme can I get on?” And he would say, “Don’t eat.”
 - He had plenty of business and he did not want people who weren’t serious about things...
 - They would often depart in disgust.
 - They wanted a magic solution and were ready to fork out hard earned cash to foster the delusion.
 - But isn’t that the way we are?
 - We know what we need to do—our time is out of control and we need to follow a schedule...
 - But we don’t want to do *that*—we want programmes and methods, but we don’t want the *discipline* of wisdom.
 - We want to sleep in when we feel like it and we want to go and hang out on Facebook when we ought to be doing our work...
 - So we avoid real wisdom and we listen to fools.
 - c. Think about it—who does our society honour?
 - 1) We honour celebrities who do not fear God.
 - We actually get advice from them because they are popular faces in the movies—because they are loud and showy...
 - We imitate them and gravitate to them to learn about relationships even though they don’t even know how to stay in a relationship!

- 2) And what do teens do—
 - They listen to the cool kid—Cooly—he has all the answers...
 - What kind of clothes does Cooly say you have to wear?
 - How does Cooly say you have to do your hair?
 - How does he say you should treat your parents?
 - What does he say about relationships, school, drugs, sex?
 - Do you remember me talking about him before?
 - If you pursued wisdom and the fear of God the way teens follow Cooly—man you would be godly!
 - Teens will cry out against their parents if they think Cooly might not approve of something they do or wear!
 - What if they had that same fear of God?
 - “But Dad, we can’t watch the hockey game today—it’s the Lord’s Day!”
 - Many teens will stand up against their parents for Cooly, but where is the teen that will stand against them for the Lord!
- We listen to rulers of fools!
 - Who else do we listen to?
- 3) We listen to someone with a degree in psychology or psychiatry who does not fear God at all—possibly does not even believe in God...
 - And we go to them for counsel and help about our sin...
 - And they tell us what we want to hear—that our problem is not sin, but chemical imbalances—we have *sexual desire disorder*...
 - And they give us pills that make us feel better.
 - And it is all made to sound very scientific.
 - But all we end up doing is numbing our minds without ever facing our problems, and without repenting.
 - We don’t want to hear about repentance...
 - We don’t want to repent. It is too hard.
 - We know what we really need to do—but we avoid it.
- Who else do we listen to?
- 4) We listen to everything we are taught in school or read in the news instead of what we hear from God’s word at church...
 - One of the most remarkable things is how many people actually swallow the evolutionary dogma—
 - The voice propagating this dogma is so loud that it completely keeps people from seeing the extreme folly of what they are saying.
 - They are such fundamentalists—they don’t even want anyone to think!
 - They try to make it seem like they are thinking simply by saying that they are...

- But just stop and think about it...
 - *I evolved from an amoeba???*
 - By a process of random mutations?
 - Do you realize how many mutations that would take?
 - And if they are totally random, most of them would be destructive rather than beneficial...because all the mutations we know about are destructive!
 - So there would have to be millions of bad ones that were not of any use and did not have a survival benefit for every one that did...
 - It is as insane as taking a booklet—the amoeba—
 - and making a lot of typos and random mistakes when you are copying it, and ending up with an edition of the Oxford dictionary...
 - They will tell you that...given enough time—anything can happen!
 - But we are talking about a whole library being formed from mistakes made in copying an amoeba—
 - And we are talking about changes that are even more complex and more ordered than books—
 - We are talking about eyes forming by random processes—by mistakes—by mutations!
 - By mutations that in the initial stages had no survival benefits.
 - We are talking about something that starts out as a blob or a lump of some kind that keeps being reproduced until finally it turns into eyes or hands or ears—
 - There is nothing quite so ludicrous—really—truly!
 - But this is called real science!
 - And there is so much noise, and so many professors and so many journals and books that it must be true!
 - We follow rulers of fools.
 - They dominate the landscape of this foolish world.
- Rulers of fools carry so much authority in our society!
- We need to face up to the real problem...
3. The real problem is that we reject Jesus Christ—the wisdom of God...
- He calls and we do not answer!
 - His voice sounds and we drown it out by listening to the voice of fools.
 - Jesus Christ is the little poor man who saves the city by His wisdom—
 - That is what He was when He came into the world!
 - He came and He did miracles to show that He had power and wisdom to save—and people were okay with the miracles...
 - but then they forgot Him and would not listen to Him.

- It was fine for Him to save you from blindness or leprosy...
 - but when He says that He is the bread of life and that we must feed upon Him to be saved—that is when we go away to listen to Ophra or to Cooly or to the atheistic scientist.
- We are like the Gadarenes where Jesus went and cast a legion of demons out of a man—
 - and was promptly asked to depart by the people of that region.
 - That was a great act of folly for them!
 - How much good He might have done them—but they were not looking for true wisdom.
 - We bring great damage to ourselves when we reject Jesus—when we refuse to listen to wisdom.

TRANS> So I have something to say to you about this...

II. See to it that you don't gravitate to folly along with the masses!

- Think about it!

A. It only takes a little folly to ruin a life of wisdom!

1. At the end of chapter 9—in verse 18, it says:

- **Ecc 9:18: Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroys much good.**
 - Wisdom is a powerful force for God—but folly is a powerful force for evil.
- All it takes is one general out of ten to spoil the best laid plans of an army.
 - All it takes is one foolish heir to the throne to completely ruin a kingdom.
 - All it takes is one Joseph Smith to start the Mormons or one Charles Russell to start the Jehovah's Witness Cult—
 - All it takes is one foolish CEO to bring a business into ruin through scandals and craft...
 - All it takes is one ungodly minister to sow seeds of corruption that will ruin the next generation.
 - One foolish woman on the phone for a week can ruin a church that took years to build.
 - It is much easier to destroy things than to build them!
 - How easy it is for corrupt leaders to overthrow morality—
 - Once the gates are opened for the acceptance of adultery, homosexuality, fornication, blasphemy, and abortion...
 - how quickly the masses run for it.
 - Don't go with them...but rather fear God!

➤ One fool can cause so much destruction...

2. But so can one act of folly cause ruin in your own life...it can spoil a life of wisdom.
 - a. That is what is taught in verse 1 of chapter 10:
 - **Ecc 10:1: Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's ointment, and cause it to give off a foul odor; so does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor.**
 - What a powerful picture this is...
 - I told you before how important perfume and ointments were to people in Solomon's day...
 - They spent a lot of money on making themselves smell nice.
 - But all it takes is one fly to make a bottle of expensive perfume smell like a locker room!
 - The perfumer had to go to great lengths to gather his spices and to extract them—but one fly ruins it all.
 - b. A beautiful life of wisdom for God can be brought down by a single act of folly.
 - A godly man can ruin his marriage, his influence on others for Christ, and a lot of other things by a one night stand!
 - A fellow can put his family in bondage to debt by a single stroke of a pen.
 - A woman can lose her friends by flying off into a rant.
 - A father can sever his relationship with his wife and children by indulging in porn—even though he goes to church and nobody knows—
 - he loses his voice with his kids—even if they do not know what he is doing and it is all in secret.
 - If he does not fear the Lord, how can he expect to pass the fear of the Lord on to them?
 - A youth can ruin his reputation by giving in to one act of rebellion.
 - He can end up in prison or even dead from one bout of drunkenness.
3. Solomon is telling you here that you can make your whole life or the life of a whole society stink by a little folly!
 - a. I plead with you to think before you act!
 - When temptation comes knocking—ask yourself...
 - Is it worth it?
 - Is it worth it to sever my walk with God to indulge in this temptation?
 - Is it worth it to ruin my witness to my co-workers and to lose the authority by which I might otherwise witness to them?
 - Is it worth it to lose my influence on my family—just so I can indulge in some folly?
 - b. Folly is not always a malicious thing—it is more often a selfish thing...
 - The fool does not go out to hurt people—
 - But he gives in to impulsive disobedience that **does** hurt others...

- He spends money he does not have, he drinks even though it is ruining his life, he eats even though he has had quite enough.
- He is self centered and thinks only of what he wants at the moment and so hurts himself and others and brings reproach to the Lord...
 - He does not care in the moment how his selfish spending will take from his wife what he might have given to her...
 - He does not care that his porn keeps him from looking his own son in the eye to warn him about the seductress.
 - Oh, he means no harm!
 - He flatters himself with that!
 - but the truth is, he brings much harm!
- He also has a rash disregard for holiness and so brings God's displeasure down upon him and his family.
 - He puts it out of his mind that God will judge adulterers and fornicators...
 - he seemed to get away with it and it seemed to cause no harm.
 - He forgets that God is holy and will not tolerate such things—he never really repents—but kids himself that he is repenting.

TRANS> You can pretend that a little folly won't hurt anything...but the Word of God says it makes your life stink!

- If you want to smell like a locker room to those nearest to you—indulge in a little folly!
 - You won't get away with it!
 - Don't kid yourself!

B. Solomon shows that folly saps your strength...

1. He praised wisdom for its amazing power—with the poor-wise-man that saved the city...
 - but in v. 2 he shows that a fool weakens his own heart by indulging in a little folly
 - Look at what it says—Ecc 10:2:
 - **Ec 10:2: A wise man's heart is at his right hand, but a fool's heart at his left.**
 - a. In the Bible, the right hand is always the place of strength—
 - People are saved by the right hand, the right hand is the place of authority, it is by the right hand that blessing is bestowed...
 - This is so because most people are right handed...
 - And the point here is that when you add a little folly to your life, it is as if you are using your left hand—or your non-dominant hand to go through life!
 - Why would you do that?
 - Why would you weaken yourself just to indulge in a little folly?
 - You need all the strength you can get to live for the Lord!

- You are like the chap Solomon talks about later who tries to cut wood with a dull ax.
 - What is the point of it? You only make it harder for yourself.
 - That is the way of the fool!
- b. Don't forget that you can also weaken yourself by the folly of neglect...
 - If you neglect prayer—you are going through your day with weakness!
 - Why would you want to do that?
 - Do you choose Facebook instead of prayer?
 - Watching a movie instead of prayer and reading God's word?
 - What folly—what a foolish choice!
 - If you do not discipline your children—you are parenting with your left hand.
 - If you discipline then inadequately, you weaken yourself and will probably end up saying that you tried biblical discipline, but that it does not work...
 - How foolish!
 - God's word is not something we try to see if it works—it is something we obey with faith in God!
 - If you do not encourage them and instruct your children and point them to Christ, you are trying to parent with your left hand...
 - I tell you—they need Christ—direct them to Him!
 - Don't just fuss at them, lead them to Christ to pray for strength!
 - Why would you neglect such a powerful resource?
 - And bitterness...it is like a heavy chain that you lug around.
 - Why drag yourself around with bitterness instead of going to your brother and making things right with him?
 - Why cripple yourself, why handicap yourself?
 - Is it just that you don't want to work through problems?
 - But now you have to go through life with your left hand!
- 2. With your strength sapped by folly, you won't be able to do what you want to do...
 - You won't be able to go where you want to go—you will never get there.
 - That is what verse 3 is about...
 - **Ecc 10:3: Even when a fool walks along the way, he lacks wisdom...**
 - The fool never gets any closer to where he wants to be in life.
 - He is always in a hedge of thorns—blaming the thorns.
 - a. That is the irony about folly...
 - You indulge in folly, often, because there is something you want—and it seems easier than wisdom at the moment...

- but in renders you incapable of getting what you really want.
- You end up depriving yourself.
 - You never get anywhere.
- The fool is always craving riches and honour and acceptance and good experiences—good sex, good food, good wine,
 - but he ends up losing all these things—or at least any pleasure from them—because of his folly...
 - He obtains riches by taking advantage of people, but then he can't enjoy his riches...
 - He tries to have good sex by porn or prostitutes, but he ends up with worse and worse sex.
 - Or he can't discipline himself long enough to finish a project—he starts building something, but he quits before it's finished.
- b. And it is embarrassing because everybody can see this about you...
 - They see that you never reach your goals—that you never obtain what you want...
 - As the rest of verse 3 puts it,
 - **Ecc 10:3-b: And he shows everyone *that he is a fool.***
 - If you see someone trying to walk to the corner store to buy some candy...
 - And you observe that they keep getting diverted by different things and keep getting distracted—and they really want the candy but they never get there...
 - You know that they are a fool.
 - Everyone can see that!
 - It's really rather pitiful, isn't it?
- 3. Now some of you, hearing this, are feeling discouraged...
 - You are saying, "That's me—that describes me."
 - I am not going to tell you it doesn't! It may indeed describe you.
 - What matters is *what are you going to do about it?*
 - I want to tell you that there is something you can do about it!
 - I am telling you that Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God!
 - He restores you from your folly to the fear of God!
 - You can come to Him for forgiveness and for a new walk.
 - Of course you can't change in your own strength...
 - Jesus makes that clear when He said, "Without me you can do nothing."
 - So come to Him—don't go on without Him!
 - He has plenty of grace to help you in your time of need.

III. But let me warn you not to be duped by the world.

- Perhaps hearing this message you can see how foolish your folly really is...

- Perhaps you can see how it stinks up your life and saps your strength and keeps you from going where you really want to go in life...
 - Well I know it is not pleasant to see that, but if you can see it,
 - it is cause for rejoicing—
 - Because you can go to Jesus for grace to help...
 - He came to save...
- A. But I want to warn you that the world is constantly honouring folly!
- Don't let that deceive you!
1. The danger is that after seeing clearly the folly of folly from God's word today, you will go from here and then again be drawn into world's way of thinking!
 - a. We saw how the world did not honor the wise man who saved his city—
 - and how they would not listen to him...
 - We saw how instead they listen to the voice of fools...
 - That is what the general populace does according to God's word.
 2. Well now in verse 5-7 Solomon tells us more about this!
 - a. He tells us that it is a great evil of society to elevate fools—to put them in places of honour!
 - He points out that rulers do that!
 - They will appoint some friend or some relative to a high post when that friend or relative does not have the wisdom needed to serve...
 - In fact, he is not even one who is there to serve, but only to benefit himself.
 - Solomon calls it a great evil!
 - b. And in a democracy like ours,
 - we are the ones who put such men in office...
 - We give honour to fools and immoral people who don't fear God!
 - We honour Hollywood stars who are very foolish and corrupt, in palaces and we admire and almost worship them...
 - Such persons are put on horses, and men who are truly worthy and wise are made to walk like servants or slaves.
 - c. Everything is disordered...
 - We call evil good and good evil...
 - We punish righteousness and we reward wickedness...
 - We honour corruption and we despise incorruption...
 - Until Jesus exposed them, the foolish Pharisees were exalted...
 - In our society, immoral people, sexually perverted people, sexually confused people—are constantly honoured...
 - There has been so much talk about that at the Olympics this year.

3. I want to warn you not to be duped by all this honouring of fools!!
 - Don't be afraid to call perverts perverts and those who do not fear God fools because that is what they are—that is what God calls them!
 - Part of the folly in our society is that we pretend like nobody is a fool.
 - But the Bible teaches us that there are fools and that they can be identified.
 - The world can honour them and make lots of noise about doing so, but let us measure things by the Word of Christ...
 - not by the praise of men!
 - Don't let the world define who is honourable and who is not because the world is wrong.
 - God's word is truth...
 - Christ is the wisdom of God, and His word is truth.

B. So who then is the wise man according to scripture?

1. Well, let's listen to what the Man whose wisdom surpassed that of Solomon had to say about it...
 - He describes the characteristic of the man of wisdom whose life will not end up a miserable wreckage in the end...
 - In Matthew 7:24-27, this is what He said, concluding His sermon:
 - **Matt 7:24-27: Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: ²⁵ and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. ²⁶ But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: ²⁷ and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.**
2. The wise man is the one who hears Christ!
 - He hears Him and does what He says—he comes to Him to be saved.
 - That is the man whose life will not come to ruination!
 - Jesus' sheep hear His voice and come to Him and He gives them eternal life and they shall never perish.
 - Jesus is not esteemed by our world because people don't want to repent—they don't want wisdom...
 - The voice of the world is very loud, but if you are wise, you will listen to the voice of Jesus who speaks through His Word by the Holy Spirit.
 - You will come prayerfully and reverently to the scriptures, and you will do what He says to you in the word.
 - You will not be particularly honoured in this world if you do that,
 - But that's okay—neither was Jesus much honoured,
 - Yet, He is the one who was raised from the dead and who is now reigning at God's right hand, giving life to all those He came to save.
 - He takes us, sinners that we are, and gives us life and wisdom.

- Don't let the world deceive you.
- Jesus is the one who has life in Himself and who gives life to all who come to Him.