

Teach Us, Qohelet (Part 18)

Ecclesiastes 10:1-20

Pastor Edward Cheng

November 18, 2018

We live in a time where chaos is the norm. The world has not calmed down. Leaders of countries continue to spread hate. Fires continue to grow and to ravage Northern and Southern California with the death toll and head count of missing individuals increasing with every news report. Nearly buried in all the news about the fires, a couple of weeks ago there was a shooting at a bar in Thousand Oaks, a city north of Los Angeles. At the same time, our own church leadership continues to receive news about the difficulties of being a Christian in China, forcing our missionaries to take extra precautionary measures to keep themselves and the people around them safe from the increasing strictness of government regulation.

But it goes without saying that times are both good and bad; like a wheel, it's a never ending cyclical mix between the two elements. We learn this familiar message from Qohelet who tells us that the world is just as awful as it is wonderful. This has been Qohelet's message throughout the book, and demonstrates the strength of his wise counsel. He is worth listening to, and his wisdom (really, God's wisdom) is worth following. This is what we see in chapter 10.

As we break down verses 1-20, we find Qohelet focusing on wisdom and its place in our lives. In verses 1-3, he makes clear the difference between foolishness and wisdom by comparing the two to left and right. The two are so different that it is not possible for there to be any gray area; you're either pursuing wisdom or you're not. Similarly to how the stench of dead flies pollutes the pleasant smell of a perfume, you cannot remove one from the other. To pursue foolishness would taint the pursuit of wisdom. The two are not compatible and leave no room for anything inbetween.

In verses 3-7, Qohelet goes on to express the importance of thoughtfully placed wisdom in leadership roles. Too often we see fools placed in positions of power due to their wealth, while those rich in wisdom are frequently disregarded and found in lowly positions. Unfortunately, it is commonplace to equate wealth with power regardless of how wise the individual may be. But it is because of such things that we need to pray for God to impart wisdom upon our leaders whether that be our government leaders or our church leaders.

In verses 8-11, Qohelet speaks of the power of wisdom in our everyday lives and everyday jobs. In every job there is a certain amount of assumed risk. The one working with stones is liable to get injured by one; the one who cuts wood is likely to be injured by debris.

And yet, when one does these what is mundane and routine *with wisdom* a different outcome is produced. We see this in v. 10. Whereas an axe wielder may find his axe dull, with wisdom, he will find success. Wisdom works (!) as Qohelet tells us, even in our jobs that are mundane.

Between verses 12-15, focus is placed on communication. Fools will tend to babble, speak words that have little value and lead those around them astray; on the other hand, the wise know when it is good to be reserved in speech and listen versus when it is good to speak up. A previous pastor at CCGC was a prime example of wisdom exercised through reservation. During pastoral meetings, he would typically remain quiet throughout the discussion and listen to the thoughts and opinions of those weighing in on the topic at hand. It wasn't until the end of the meeting when he would offer a well thought out opinion that would carry a lot of weight and usually end up becoming the final deciding factor of the discussion.

Running within the same vein of timing, Qohelet teaches about wisdom demonstrated through prudence in verses 16-20. Qohelet goes on to say that a land led by a prince who feasts in the morning is led by an individual who lacks proper work ethics. In the mornings, there's too much to be done to be lazing about and indulging. Morning is a time to be productive and get started on the day's work, otherwise it's too easy to allow responsibilities to slip and much needed tasks to go undone. It is knowing the difference between when it's time to relax versus when it's time to work where wisdom through prudence shines.

While the world around us continues to teeter between good and bad events and experiences, it is good for us to ingest the teachings of Qohelet in order to glean what we can when it comes to God's wisdom and living in it.