

The World's View of Wisdom

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[0:00] Ecclesiastes is one of the wisdom books of the Bible. And particularly in the world, we've seen how wisdom comes through being realistic about our world, through facing up to the facts of reality, and also, or particularly being realistic about our place in the world in relation to God.

Recognizing that the greatness of God, that the fear of the Lord has been a constant refrain through this book. And so throughout this book, it's been commending wisdom.

Ecclesiastes has been encouraging wisdom, both in our general approach to life, but also in the specifics and in the details of day-to-day life. We're going to hopefully see both of those things this morning.

And really our passage kind of focuses in on this main point, which is to say, how will the world view this wisdom? So a big kind of theme, I think, of this morning, of this passage is, how does our world respond to wisdom?

I'm sure if we were to go out and ask most people on the street that we would bump into, would you like to be a wise person? Most of them, I imagine, would say, yes, absolutely.

[1:13] Most people would say, yeah, wisdom is a good thing. And yet, this passage is going to highlight to us that in practice, our world and each one of us, as people who are part of that world, so often doesn't seek, so often doesn't value wisdom.

And that if we want to be wise, it's not always the thing that will be well received, nor is wisdom always the easiest voice to hear, but it is something of ultimate value and always worth pursuing.

So that's kind of the big chapter of what we're going to be seeing in these verses. I think the way the passage works, if you have a look in your Bibles, you'll have noticed, as Daniel was reading, there's lots of short little proverbs, particularly there in chapter 10.

I think there's about 17 in total. It can almost read as if it's a little bit kind of shotgun approach, little bits of everything. We're not going to have, you know, 17 different points digging into each one of those.

We're going to spend most of our time in the verses from chapter 9, seeing really this world's approach to wisdom. And then we're going to group those proverbs in chapter 10 under a few headings, which will hopefully kind of join them together and help us see how to live out that wisdom.

[2:34] But let's start off. So yeah, so with that said, do have your Bibles open in front of you if you can. We're going to be looking at that a lot, obviously, as we go through. But let's start off with what is the headline, really the main point for this chapter, which is laid out for us from chapter 9, verse 13, down into the start of chapter 10.

And that's this. This is kind of the headline for this morning. Wisdom is of utmost importance, but often neglected. And that's what this passage wants to make us aware of.

That's what this passage wants to help us respond rightly to. Wisdom is of utmost importance, but often neglected. And the preacher, whose words we have here in Ecclesiastes, the preacher gives us this kind of headline illustration, this example of wisdom.

This might be a historical example that he's seen firsthand. This might be a theoretical example. We don't really know. But it's there in verse 14. Do have a look there. There is this small city about to be overwhelmed by this powerful king and all of his military might.

But we read on, verse 15. There was found in it, found in the city, a poor wise man. And by his wisdom, he delivered the city.

[3:55] So first thing there, again, that we see, wisdom is of utmost importance. Wisdom matters. As verse 18 says, wisdom is better than weapons of war.

Here is the value of wisdom, the importance of it. We see here, it saves the city. It is vital. But really, the main emphasis, I think, in these verses is that even though wisdom is so precious, the preacher sees how in his day, just as in our day, wisdom is also so frequently neglected.

And we're shown here how it's neglected in three particular ways. The first one is that wisdom is often forgotten. What happens to this wise man who delivers this city, this man who saved so many people and made such a difference?

Well, the second half of verse 15, yet no one remembered that poor man. Humans are so desperate to make a name for ourselves, to be celebrated and renowned.

And yet the preacher is telling us that great wisdom often is not rewarded in that way. But it is so often and so quickly forgotten. Wisdom, then, that means isn't measured by what people say about us after the event.

[5:11] Wisdom is not kind of the path to personal glory and respect. Instead, if wisdom is often forgotten, what's important is simply to do what is wise at the time.

Do what is right in the present, despite how people might respond to that in the future. And so there's the first little thing. Wisdom is often forgotten. Secondly, we see here, as well as the world neglects wisdom, that wisdom is often ignored.

Verse 16 here, even though wisdom is better than might, the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard. Or verse 17, the same idea which shows that wisdom is often quiet, while foolishness shouts loudly and is heard in its place.

Wisdom is often, wisdom is drowned out often. By the loudest voices or simply the quantity or volume of information and opinion that pours over us at every moment of our lives.

One author says about our age that we have never known so much and understood so little. It's easy for all of us, isn't it? Simply to listen to the loudest voice rather than listen for the wisdom in the content of what is said.

[6:30] I think this is so relevant to us today to remember that our world, our society, is not geared up to amplify wisdom. Rather, it is controversy.

It is shock. It is saying something new that kind of grabs the airwaves and the attention, isn't it? But often wisdom's voice is something that needs to be listened more carefully for so that it is not ignored.

Wisdom can be forgotten, ignored. Lastly, in these verses here, it can be easily undone. Verse 18, wisdom is better than weapons of war. Again, the utmost value, the power almost, the strength of wisdom.

But that verse goes on. But one sinner destroys much good. And that's pictured then in chapter 10, verse 1. Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench.

So a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor. That the wise course of action, the results of wisdom, can so easily be undone when foolishness is brought in.

[7:42] That's the picture in chapter 10, verse 1. You have your expensive perfumed ointment. It doesn't take that many dead flies in that before you decide it's ruined. And you'd rather not kind of be rubbing that on your face anymore.

Or you can save up money through wise investment. Or you can build up a relationship, relationships through wise interactions. It doesn't take much foolishness to see that all come crashing down again.

And that is so important because chapter 10, verse 2, shows us again the importance of wisdom. That it makes all the difference in the end.

A wise man's heart inclines to the right, but a fool's heart is to the left. That's not a political statement before anyone gets too excited. That is simply saying that wisdom and foolishness are two distinctly different paths ending in two very different places.

So again, wisdom is of utmost importance. It makes all the difference. But it is often neglected in our world. Neglected in those ways. Forgotten, ignored, undone.

[8 : 57] And as always here, Ecclesiastes wants us to have this accurate picture of the world we live in. Again, we said at the beginning, Ecclesiastes wants us to face up to the facts.

Particularly in how our world approaches wisdom. Yes, wisdom is good. It is vital. But be aware of how our world neglects it.

And that's certainly not something that's written to make us proud here this morning. But we're to remember we are part of this world. We live under the sun. That refrain that we have through Ecclesiastes.

We are prone to these same errors in terms of our attitude toward wisdom. So the question then comes, where will we look for wisdom? What will our approach be?

How do we make sure we're not neglecting that which is so valuable? Are we simply content to follow the crowd and go with the loudest voices? The first articles that come up on the web.

[9 : 57] The first videos that are sent to us on social media. Well, this passage warns us these voices are often not offering wisdom. In fact, they can actually just be drowning it out.

We can think of that in so many examples, can't we? The biggest personality in class or the loudest voice at work is not always offering the wisest approach to life.

Or the famous person, the great actor or the incredible musician. That does not always make them the expert in geopolitical situations.

And yet those are the voices that we'll hear and the people who will be asked those questions. The people who get the airtime, the online opinions, the algorithms promote are not necessarily the voices we should be listening to.

Often quite the opposite. Or again, the people who are so eager to promote themselves, to build a name for themselves, to be recognized. Well, actually the Bible tells us that often true wisdom is forgotten.

[11 : 00] That it is the humble, it is the poor man in these verses who everyone forgets. That he was the one who had the wisdom and should be listened to.

Where will we look for wisdom? As this passage makes clear, that is an incredibly important decision. And we cannot just go with the flow of the world around us.

So what is the answer? Where should we look? Well, as we put Ecclesiastes, this wisdom book, into the big picture of the Bible, we're pointed ultimately to the cross as the pinnacle of God's wisdom.

We're told in the Bible that the cross of Jesus Christ is the ultimate wisdom to align our lives to. Now the Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians in the New Testament.

He says, But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God.

[12:06] Now so where do we see ultimate wisdom, true wisdom, God's wisdom? The wisdom that is at the very heart of the universe. We see it at the cross, where God's perfect wisdom makes a way for sinful people like us to be brought back to him, the holy God.

That the problem, the solution to the problem, man's estrangement from God, that no other wisdom can solve. And yet which God has demonstrated to us at the cross.

Again, how does the world respond to that wisdom? Well, as we've seen in these passages, it is often neglected. The cross where Jesus dies, it looks weak. Paul says it looks foolish.

It looks like the opposite of wisdom. It is so often forgotten. You know, what relevance could something like that have in our modern world today? It is so often ignored.

Drowned out by all the noise our world provides. All the supposedly more kind of modern or enlightened views of life and how to get forward. But again, the Bible tells us that the cross where God himself suffers and dies to take the penalty for our sins is the ultimate wisdom and is of utmost importance.

[13:20] Because again, as we've seen in Ecclesiastes, it makes a difference to everything. It defines our path, not just in life, but for the whole of eternity.

It's really easy, I think, day by day for us to think, if we really do stop and think about it. Can the cross really be all that important? Because it feels like, and it's true, that so many people in our world don't give it a second thought.

Surely the important things are the things that make the headlines. But we see here in Ecclesiastes, we shouldn't be surprised by that. That is so often people's approach to wisdom.

What is of utmost importance is neglected in our world. The wisdom of God is so often ignored and passed over. But the Bible is telling us this morning, make sure that we don't make that same mistake.

Make sure that you don't neglect that. The wisest thing we can possibly do is to build our lives on the foundation of the cross. The power of God and the wisdom of God.

[14:29] And it is doing that, it's keeping on coming back to the cross that then enables us to live wise lives. As we look to God's wisdom, we're able to show that wisdom in our own life. Knowing that it doesn't mean, again, being realistic as Ecclesiastes helps us.

It doesn't mean everyone will say, if we live wisely, wow, that's brilliant. You're great. Let's recognize your wisdom. Let's build a statue of you somewhere. Godly wisdom might look foolish to the world in us.

Just as God's wisdom looked foolish to the world in the cross. And yet as we look to God's wisdom, we're able to live out true wisdom in our lives. Whatever people might say about them.

Why would you move your family to Vietnam to be a missionary? As we've been hearing about recently from the Pattersons. Why would you give up every Sunday morning to come to church?

Why would you give financially to the work of the gospel in various different ways? Humanly speaking, none of those things are good investments of time or resources.

[15:31] They look foolish. And yet we're able to do that secure in God's wisdom and his work for us. Perhaps even it's just the mundane aspects of life which Ecclesiastes deals so well with.

Perhaps you're working a lot at home. Perhaps you're responsible for bringing up children. Parenting, a job that requires an incredible degree of wisdom in countless decisions day by day.

And yet so much of that will be forgotten. And that will not be shouted about from the rooftops. Again, if our idea of wisdom is what will give us a name and respect and reward, we'll be disappointed because our world often neglects wisdom.

But knowing the rescue God has given us, the wisdom of the cross and building our lives on that, finding our security in the outworking of God's perfectly wise gospel plan, that is what enables us to live lives of quiet wisdom, of humble wisdom, of realistic wisdom, of often overlooked wisdom.

And yet being able to do that because our hope is in what God has done for us, and not what people say about us. That trusting in the ultimate wisdom of the cross has made all the difference.

- [16 : 49] It has set us on that path to eternity with God through what he has done. We're now able to walk on that path with wisdom on the journey. And so for the rest of our time, we're going to see, hopefully kind of practically, a few pictures of what that looks like and understand what living with wisdom in light of the wisdom of God looks like in these Proverbs of chapter 10.

Living in light of the wisdom of the cross. Four headings that we're going to group these under. Don't worry, we're going to be really short, really quick on each one of these. The first is authority. Reading from verse 5 onwards.

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun. Verse 5 of chapter 10. There is an evil which I have seen under the sun. As it were, an error proceeding from the ruler. Folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a low place.

I have seen slaves on horses and princes walking on the ground like slaves. Really, this is wisdom when the wrong people are in authority. When things have been turned upside down, and the wrong people are leading, that wisdom is not where it should be.

This idea is picked up again in verses 16 and 17. Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning. Happy are you, O land, when your king is the son of nobility, and your princes feast at the proper time.

- [18 : 17] The idea here is that it's important to listen to the right people. It's important to have the right people in authority. You don't want a fool. You don't want a child. You don't want someone who's just going to feast and party and not do the job they're supposed to be doing, looking after your country or your workplace or your school or your family or whatever else it might be.

And yet, again, here the preacher's clear. We often don't get the right people in authority at whatever level that might be. We talked more fully about this, I think, three weeks ago in chapter 8, authority and injustice.

You can find that online if you missed it. So we're not going to repeat everything now. But what does wisdom look like in relation to potentially foolish human authority?

Well, above all, it means remembering that we have a perfect, ultimate authority. Here we see if the wisdom of the cross is our guide and our hope, then we can know we have Jesus in his perfect wisdom as our ultimate authority.

And Jesus is not there by accident. If Jesus is our king, we have one who is entirely suited, entirely fitted for that role.

- [19 : 37] One who is not just seeing what he can get for himself, feasting while neglecting his people. But in Jesus, we have the very one who went to the cross for us.

We relate wisely then to human authority when Jesus is our true authority. Again, do listen back for the kind of more specifics on that from chapter 8 a couple of weeks ago.

But authority there is just kind of one snapshot of living with wisdom in our world. Second one is preparation. I think as Elvis Presley would put these at this section, wise men say only fools rush in.

That's the message of verses 8 to 11. I do have a look at these proverbs here. These are kind of examples of really being, people being hasty, rushing into something, and not being to their harm.

These people kind of getting involved in jobs, but not really having thought it through, and it works out badly for them. Perhaps verse 10 is the most obvious example. If your axe is blunt, you know, sure you can get going straight away to chop through some wood or cut down a tree.

[20:47] But if you take that bit of time to prepare and sharpen the axe, it's a lot easier. It's a lot quicker. You don't have to use so much strength in it. That wisdom in preparing helps you succeed.

Similarly, verse 11 is a great example. If maybe not in our everyday experience, but if anyone is planning on grabbing a snake, this proverb says to make sure that it is fully charmed first.

You know, make sure you've played the flute long enough before you grab it. Otherwise, you're going to get bitten. Preparation is wise. That's the point of this little block of proverbs.

Again, what has that got to do with our day-to-day life? We're probably not going to be heading out catching snakes this afternoon. Well, again, the wisdom of the world so often tells us, look, you need to get there first.

You need to instantly have a view on that issue or you need to get going with that. There's no time to waste. Our world looks up to and encourages us to be kind of go-getters or trailblazers who will achieve something impressive, who will push on ahead and think about the problems later at whatever the cost of that might be to ourselves or to others.

[22:02] But true wisdom, wisdom grounded in the gospel, the wisdom of the cross, is able in very practical ways to think more carefully, is able to weigh up actions and words and opinions because we see actually we don't need to be first.

We don't need to make a name for ourselves. We are not striving for recognition and so having to rush into whatever is the latest thing, but rather can think carefully.

And actually, Ecclesiastes tells us it's as we think carefully, as we take that step back in wisdom, that that actually sets us up to true success as we move forward again.

So preparation and wisdom. And the third kind of group of these Proverbs is similar. Authority, preparation, verses 12 to 14, talks about speech.

The words that we use. Our speech is a massive focus in the wisdom literature of the Bible. When we went through the book of Proverbs a number of years ago, as a church, before COVID it was, but the sheer amount of material in that book on what we say was so striking, overwhelming almost.

[23:20] Again, here we see how words used wisely get good results. We're in favor. But foolish words cause so much trouble, not least verse 13 and 14, because there are so many of them.

Verse 13 is a great picture, I think. Perhaps you've experienced this where someone starts talking to you and you think, I'm not quite sure if I'm tracking with this, but I'll see where this person's heading.

And by the time they finish talking, you are sure that you're not tracking with them and you just think this person has lost the plot. Just that their quantity of words is going on and on and on has proved not wisdom, but foolishness.

Or verse 14, another example, the fool just keeps on talking with great confidence, even though neither he nor anyone else knows what is actually going to happen.

Again, that theme of wisdom in Ecclesiastes, being realistic about all limitations and knowing what is going to come next. Or perhaps our final verse as well, verse 20, words which are so quick to criticize, forgetting that often hasty words spread more quickly than we'd like.

- [24:34] Again, there is so much we could talk about in terms of speech and how to do that wisely. But again, if we're centered on the wisdom of the cross, we come back to that same point of security, that we don't need to be the one always having our opinions heard.

We don't always need to be the loudest voice in the room, putting our case across. Rather, we're able to have that quiet, humble wisdom, which really is at the heart of this passage.

Because we are not trying to make a name for ourselves, but resting in Jesus' love for us, demonstrated through the wisdom of the cross. Maybe kind of challenging things to think about, I think here.

Are you always kind of the biggest slice in the pie chart of words spoken in any conversation? Are you always the voice kind of cutting across others to be heard and get your opinion in?

The Bible tells us to take that really seriously. That is something to think about and be careful of because wisdom often whispers. Wisdom doesn't need to be the first to speak.

- [25:46] Wisdom listens. Wisdom celebrates what others have to say. Wisdom doesn't need to be the person who has had the best idea or who knows the most. Because again, wisdom is not trying to make a name for itself.

It's not trying to build ourselves up. Rather, wisdom has already found its place and its hope and its security and its identity in the cross and the wisdom of God where he has demonstrated his love for us.

So authority, preparation, speech. The last little topic touched on in chapter 10 is laziness. Verse 18, through sloth, the roof sinks in and through indolence the house leaks.

The lazy person can't be bothered and yet there are consequences to that. Here the example is kind of building consequences but there are consequences in various areas of life when we just can't be bothered to do the things that need to be done.

Verse 19 carries on. You know, the lazy person doesn't want to work. It's just bread, wine and money. And we saw last week that encouragement to enjoy good gifts from God but here we're talking about the opposite of what we saw last week.

- [27:02] Last week we read whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might and yet here the picture is a purposeless and aimless life. Nothing being done with all their might.

Simply not being bothered and yet the Bible tells us again that the wisdom of God shown in the cross is something that motivates in life in response to the great love that God has shown us to give everything for him.

Later in that same letter to the Corinthians where Paul speaks about the wisdom of the cross he goes on to say so whether you eat or drink or whatever you do do all to the glory of God.

Wisdom calls us then to work hard especially in our service of Jesus our King. It's a great chance again for me to be able to say that I'm so grateful within this church for the hard work the unseen work often probably the not that fun work that so many people put in whether that is on building projects whether that is in the creche whether that is on admin things whether that is just relationships and spending time with one another.

There is so much that goes on and there will continue to be more to do. It's a real encouragement here that that hard work often overlooked and undervalued that hard work is wisdom.

[28:31] Living with wisdom focused on the cross moves us from laziness and living for ourselves and our comfort to instead be giving our very best for the glory of God.

And so just those four quick things there authority preparation speech laziness we could talk about each of them for weeks couldn't we? I think they're simply here to give us this portrait of wisdom how it changes our priorities and helps us live out an understated wisdom in our day-to-day lives as we strive to live that out it won't always get us recognition it won't always be listened to or approved of our wisdom can be undone by just a moment of foolishness from ourselves or from others the world neglects wisdom in a whole host of ways we should be realistic about that we should be on guard about that in our own lives in our own attitudes to wisdom and yet we can live out that humble wisdom even when it is not valued or respected by continuing to look to the ultimate wisdom of God seen in the cross again a wisdom neglected or rejected by the world but a wisdom the wisdom of the cross that makes all the difference as it makes forgiveness possible it leads us back on that path to God and a relationship with him through the work of Jesus and finding our eternal hope and value in him enables us however imperfectly to live out wisdom in the world as we live here as his people living wisely for the good of others and for the glory of God let's pray together

Heavenly Father we thank you that your word the Bible reveals wisdom to us we thank you that that is so often wisdom in the mundane wisdom in the day to day wisdom in every aspect of life but all is done in light of the pinnacle of wisdom which is the wisdom of the cross of Christ where in your perfect wisdom you opened a way for broken and sinful people like us to come into your presence the perfect and holy God and so Lord we do thank you this morning for the wisdom of the gospel and Lord we recognize that the wisdom that wisdom of the cross is so often and so frequently neglected by our world that it seems like foolishness that it seems weak Lord we confess that all of us at times lose our focus on the cross and we start to think that wisdom is found elsewhere in things that seem more impressive or we think that wisdom is within us and our own efforts or intellect or we seek to find wisdom in the same places that all the world is looking for wisdom and we forget Jesus

Lord we pray once again that you would help us not to neglect Christ crucified the only ground of true hope and security and the ultimate wisdom in our universe and from that focus Lord that focus on Jesus that focus on the cross might we be able to live wisely in every different area of life so we've thought about authority about preparation about speech about laziness just so briefly this morning but please would you help each of us to see how living wisely in every aspect of life in light of the wisdom of Jesus is possible please may that point others to you and please may it be for your glory and pray these things in Jesus name Amen