

July 14

Scriptures: Read Ecclesiastes 10, 11 & 12

Key Verse: “Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”
(Ecclesiastes 12:13b)

Overview

In Solomon’s continuing comparison of wisdom and folly, he begins by telling us, through the analogy of the dead flies (10:1), how just a little folly in a wise man’s life can destroy all the good that wisdom had accomplished; it can also ruin his reputation as a wise man. The wise man and the fool are quite different (10:2). The fool parades his folly so that his foolishness is evident to all. Solomon considers it as a great evil if a ruler, not perceiving this, raises the fool to a high position, while the truly wise and noble one, who should have been promoted, is placed under the fool’s authority. In spite of this situation, the fool’s high position is not to be envied, since it will put him in danger and he will suffer from injury or disgrace. That which is difficult and causes the fool to fail will not do so with the wise man, for because of his wisdom, he will succeed in all his endeavors (10:5-10).

As in the Book of Proverbs, Solomon stresses here the folly of a fool’s tongue; his words can cause great harm to others and destruction to himself (10:11-14). Laziness is also destructive. If a king is lazy and childish and the other leaders are drunkards, it can ruin the kingdom. They have their priorities in the wrong place. Rather than seeking wisdom and justice and attending to the needs of the people, they selfishly indulge in worldly pleasures and love money as the answer to everything (10:16-19).

Even in a corrupt world, the wise person can live a happy life. Solomon points out various practical ways that this is possible. The wise person’s words should be gracious (10:12), and he must watch what he says, lest an informer report him to another who may harm him (such as a corrupt king, 10:20). Solomon also advises the wise: “Cast your bread upon the water, for you will find it after many days” (11:1). Traditionally this verse has been understood to mean that benevolence and charity will influence the happiness of the giver, and he will benefit from it. When an evil comes to him, those friends whom he had once helped will now help him (11:2).

Solomon teaches that one must not be overcautious. This can also apply to charity or business investments. If one reserves his money in case of a misfortune, he is missing out on many benefits. Since nature is unpredictable and man can do nothing to change it, the time for taking any action is always uncertain, but one must still get out and get the work done and trust God to make it profitable. If one continually worries about the weather, he might not sow or reap, and then there would be no growth or harvest (11:3-6). Believers should not be hesitant about spreading the gospel; they should just do it, and God has promised to give an increase. This is an investment that cannot fail. God’s Word does not return void, and therefore we can trust Him that souls will be saved.

In the conclusion of the Book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon gives his final recommendations based on what he has learned during the course of his search for meaning in life. He still advocates that

one should enjoy his life, but now he adds that it must be done while keeping in mind that “God will bring you into judgment”. Therefore, pleasure must come only in God’s way, not through debauchery (11:9-10). Therefore, the Preacher admonishes young people to “remember [their] Creator in the days of [their] youth” (12:1). He longs that young people live godly and enjoyable lives while they can, before old age comes and many enjoyments cease (12:2-5, allegories on aging), and before the time of death when “man goes to his eternal home” and “the spirit [returns] to God who gave it” (12:5-7).

The Preacher’s purpose in writing Ecclesiastes and many proverbs has been to teach wisdom and truth, which came from the “one Shepherd”. These wise words serve to not only admonish us, but also to be like “goads” to prod and move us to spiritual awakening and action; they also serve as “well-driven nails” that we might be spiritually grounded in the unshakable truth of God’s Word (12:11).

The grand conclusion is to “fear God” with a reverential awe of His greatness and holiness and “keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (12:13). Man was created to glorify the Lord, and our purpose in life cannot be fulfilled unless we do just that (i.e. fear God and keep His commandments). Unless our purpose in life is fulfilled, we can find no true happiness or enjoyment. Therefore, without God, truly “all is vanity”.

Prayer

We long to glorify You, oh God, for You are worthy of all praise. Thank You for Your Word which clearly shows that only You give us meaning. Who better can we turn to for purpose in life than our Creator?