

“Learning to Soar”
Ecclesiastes 10:1-11
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An old native American story tells of a brave finding an eagle egg. Not being able to return the egg to an eagle's nest, he decided to put it in the nest of a prairie chicken. Then sat on this eagle's egg along with her own. Soon the little eaglet hatched alongside the prairie chickens.

As he grew up, this eagle, thinking he was a prairie chicken, did what the other chickens did. Clucking and cackling he scratched in the dirt for seeds and insects to eat. He flew like a prairie chicken was supposed to, flapping his wings and flying a few feet off the ground.

One day the eagle saw a magnificent bird far above him in the cloudless sky. Hanging with graceful majesty on the powerful wind currents, it soared with scarcely a beat of its strong golden wings. “What a beautiful bird!” said the eagle to one of the chicks. “What is it?”

“That’s an eagle, the chief of birds,” the chicken clucked. “But don’t even think about it, you could never be like him.” So, the eagle never did and died thinking he was a prairie chicken.

Friends, this story points to us a tragic truth. Many people, though meant to fly like eagles, live like prairie chickens. They scratch around in the dirt, settle for mediocrity, and live shallow lives, thinking all the while, that because everyone else is doing it, it must be the way to go. Sometimes even as Christians, believers in Jesus Christ, we settle for flying just a few feet off the ground because we don’t want to be different from other people we know.

This morning, we continue our journey through the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes. About 1000 years before the time of Jesus, Solomon was king over Israel. He was the wealthiest and wisest man of the ancient world. He wrote Ecclesiastes as kind of a journal, reflecting on what he had learned during his lifetime.

We have explored the first nine chapters so far, and I would sum up what Solomon has said this way: “People tend to live like prairie chickens.” The phrase he uses is an “under the sun existence.” This involves living life like everyone else seems to do, without really thinking about

God or eternal things that are beyond the sun. Solomon’s conclusion is that though this kind of lifestyle may involve lots of money, education, relationships, entertainment and pleasure, in the end, it is empty. It doesn’t satisfy. It lacks substance and significance. Oh, there’s plenty of activity, noise, and busyness, but it eventually ends up being a boring, monotonous cycle, where people just go through the motions of living.

Yet, Solomon believes, and I agree, that within each of us there is an eagle heart saying, “It’s not supposed to be this way.” There is a longing for something more, for something that really matters. When we don’t know where to find that, when we don’t know how to soar like an eagle, despair sets in.

Many folks live lives of quiet desperation. Some of them begin to see death as the escape from this trap and may even attempt suicide. Others use alcohol, drugs, and even food to deaden the pain. Others attempt to have a more intense prairie chicken existence.

They desperately try to fill their lives with more activity, more relationships, more entertainment or more sensual pleasure hoping that maybe happiness is just around the corner. Some folks have found that having \$1 million doesn’t make them happy, but for some reason think \$2 million might.

Solomon describes thinking significance and happiness can be found “under the sun,” apart from God, as folly or foolishness. It is foolish to think you can make it in this life just fine without God. And it is extremely foolish to think you can make it in the next life just fine without God.

Our text today is Ecclesiastes 10:1-11. Here Solomon addresses a number of topics, which point to a big contrast. On the one hand we have the folly of being content with a mediocre, shallow, everyone else is doing it, prairie chicken existence.

Yet, life doesn’t have to be that way. By God’s grace we can begin to live as He desires. As we learn to soar like an eagle, like God intends us to do, we gain perspective and understand what life

is rally about, what really matters. As a result, when we devote ourselves to those things, we find a lot more joy. Let's pause and pray that the Lord would enable us to hear and understand what His Word means for each of us today.

Today we are going to walk through Solomon's reflections of life in this passage. **Ecclesiastes 10:1 As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.** Now I don't think I have ever smelled a bottle of perfume with dead flies in it, but I suspect you get the point. Those rotting flies will negate the good smell of the perfume. It will stink.

In the same way, one foolish mistake can ruin the reputation, ruin the life, of an otherwise wise and honorable person. A few moments of sexual pleasure with someone who is not your spouse can destroy a marriage and a whole family. Stealing just one time from your employer or cheating on just one test can do great harm to your career. One instance of rage can cause you to do or say something you will regret the rest of your life. Folly, foolishness is a powerful force.

Ecclesiastes 10:2 The heart of the wise inclines to the right but the heart of the fool to the left. Now, this may seem like a great slogan for the Republican Party, but it really has nothing to do with politics. The word "right" is a symbol not for political conservatism, but for things that are worthy of our effort. Pursuing these things will get us beyond the prairie chicken existence. Going to the left symbolizes the things that will keep our lives shallow and make them even more empty.

Here Solomon is not referring to a one-time mistake someone makes, but to a lifestyle devoted to things which do not bring us closer to God, and which fail to bring significance and true joy to our lives. Only a fool, Solomon says, will follow this path.

Ecclesiastes 10:3 Even as he walks along the road, the fool lacks sense and shows everyone how stupid he is. Oh, often the fool can fool many other people for a while. Folks will often be impressed with someone who excels in some aspect of prairie chicken existence.

The person who makes a lot of money, gets elected to a political office, keeps in great physical shape,

or has a lot of knowledge of a particular topic is admired until folks realize that this is all that person has. Then they start to see how empty that individual's life is and how foolish it has been to devote his/her whole life to traveling down a dead-end road.

In contrast to the way of a fool, Solomon notes a characteristic of a wise person. **Ecclesiastes 10:4 If a ruler's anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great errors to rest** or as the NLT puts it, **If your boss is angry at you, don't quit! A quiet spirit can overcome even great mistakes.** Human nature is to scream back and squawk in the same angry tone as the wild-eyed boss, kind of prairie chicken style. The wise person, someone trusting in the Lord, learns to soar above the situation, keep perspective, and not blurt out "what really I feel like saying," because it usually will only make matters worse.

Solomon then turns his attention to what seems to be one of his pet peeves. **Ecclesiastes 10:5-7 There is an evil I have seen under the sun, the sort of error that arises from a ruler: Fools are put in many high positions while the rich occupy the low ones. I have seen slaves of horseback, while princes go on foot like slaves.**

I don't know about you, but I share Solomon's frustration. The people who are elected or appointed to a political office, the folks who get the promotion at work, the individuals who receive the awards at school, are not always the best folks.

Flashy fools often climb the ladder faster than solid, humble, wise people do. I think that is a problem in the evangelical church today. Recently it seems there has been an epidemic of high profile, well-known, pastors resigning because they have fallen into some type of sin. For example, there is Steven Lawson, reformed Baptist pastor of Trinity Bible Church in Dallas, one of my favorite authors, 70 years old. He had to resign from his church last year because of an inappropriate relationship with a woman in her 20s.

Then there is Josh Buice, a Baptist pastor from Douglasville, Georgia and founder of G3 Ministries. He was seemingly a wonderful Christian leader. Last May he had to resign his

position because for three years he was making anonymous social media posts attacking and slandering other Christian leaders, some of whom were supposedly his good friends. When confronted about the posts over those three years, he continually lied and denied they were his.

Why do things like this happen? Why do respected spiritual leaders end up doing things that shock even the secular media? Part of the answer is that all pastors are human, *surprise!* And thus have a sinful nature. Every one of us, not just pastors, but everyone in this room, is capable of doing very rotten things. If you don't think you are, you are fooling yourself.

Second, I do believe pastors and church leaders are sometimes targets of spiritual attacks. Satan is certainly delighted when those who have been proclaiming the truth of Jesus appear to be nothing but hypocrites.

Yet, there is another reason for the frequent failure of pastors which is seldom mentioned. Churches sometimes select the wrong type of people to be their leaders. When a congregation is looking for a pastor, they frequently choose a man with a charming personality, who is a dynamic speaker. They also prefer that he be good-looking.

Now, those are not bad things, pastors who are rather dynamic speakers are usually better than those who are extremely boring speakers. Yet, when we look at the qualifications for church leaders which God gives in the Bible, 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 2, the emphasis is not on abilities, but on *character*. The Bible says that when we choose spiritual leaders, we should be looking for people who are goodly, who are spiritually mature, and who have solid character.

Now, even a leader of solid character is capable of falling into serious sin. Yet, I am afraid some churches are so concerned about having dynamic or competent pastors and leaders that they put character on the backburner and, as a result, end up paying a huge price. That is a mistake we must avoid.

We have tried to do that here at Chisholm Baptist Church. We are choosing Pastor Matt and Pastor Bryan, to be our next generation of leaders, not primarily because of their amazing gifts and

personalities, but because they have demonstrated godly character.

Solomon then moves on to another observation. **Ecclesiastes 10:8-9 Whoever digs a pit may fall into it; whoever breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake. Whoever quarries stones may be injured by them; whoever splits logs may be endangered by them...** What Solomon is saying there is that a wise person keeps perspective. Not trapped on the ground like the prairie chicken, but soaring like an eagle, the wise see things as they really are.

They realize life is never safe. Even very productive work and activity can be dangerous. We can be successful, reach our goals, and still experience tragedy. Yet, it would be extremely foolish not to take risks. If no one digs wells many folks will die of thirst. Life always includes risk. The wise person weighs which risks are worth it, and which are not.

There is also a warning here about putting our confidence in a job or career. A job may be a great blessing. You may find going to work each day very fulfilling, and plus you get a paycheck every couple weeks which allows you to pay the bills.

Yet, that same job can eat you up in all sorts of different ways. The wise person knows that God alone, not a job, is worthy of our trust and loyalty. Having the right perspective is so important. **Ecclesiastes 10:10 If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed but skill will bring success.** Or at the NLT puts it **Using a dull ax requires a great strength, so sharpen the blade. That's the value of wisdom; It helps you succeed.**

As I read those verses, I could not help but think of the Sven and Ole story. They are logging out in the woods and Sven gives Ole a chainsaw and tells him to cut down trees. At the end of the day, it seems Ole had worked very hard, but there were only three trees down. When Sven asks him why, Ole responds that the saw just doesn't seem to work right. Sven takes the saw, pulls the cord and as it starts Ole says, "What is that noise?"

Friends, wise people will find success. It is true, that in our country those who follow what the Bible teaches, who leave the ground with the prairie chickens and get an eagle's perspective,

are often financially successful. They make a lot of money or are successful in their careers as they are given positions with more and more responsibility. Yet, that is not what God promises her. Sometimes faithful Christians, who are very wise, don't make much money. Sometimes they don't get promoted at work. From a worldly viewpoint they are not very successful. Some of these folks are sitting in this room.

But remember the one who truly determines success is God. Those of us who will one day hear the Lord say, "Well done good and faithful servant," are far more successful than all the rich and famous celebrities whose so-called accomplishments really mean nothing in the end.

Solomon closes this section with this thought **Ecclesiastes 10:11 If a snake bites before it is charmed, there is no profit for the charmer.** I don't know how much Solomon knew about snake charming, but he probably knew more than I do. Yet, I think all of us can get the point. Having a snake that you think is going to make money for you is no good if it bites someone before the performance. People are not going to pay to get bitten.

Failing to understand consequences is folly. Yet, people in our very sophisticated culture do this all the time. A student doesn't study for a test but is shocked when she gets a bad grade. Parents get divorced but cannot understand why their children are struggling with different emotional problems. A man speak harshly to his wife every day and is baffled as to why she doesn't seem very affectionate anymore.

The wise person understands the consequences, understands that the Apostle Paul is right on when he says in **Galatians 6:7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.**

Now I need to say that when we turn to the Lord, He often chooses to soften or even eliminate some of the consequences which we deserve. I know I have made mistakes where God has graciously kept me from reaping what I had sown. Yet, the basic principle is still true. The wise person recognizes there will likely be consequences of actions and words, while the fool tends to be oblivious to this reality.

Friends, the question I have for you today is this: Are you soaring like an eagle, or living like a prairie chicken?

I am convinced of three things: **#1** As a human being made in the image of God, the Lord wants you to soar like that eagle. **#2** Though you may be happy living like a prairie chicken right now that happiness will not last. One day you will realize that the things which seem important today really are very empty and insignificant. **#3** If you want to soar like that eagle, if you want to obtain a realistic perspective on life, if you want to experience true joy and fulfillment, it is possible. You don't have to live a prairie chicken style existence, where you are content with mediocrity and just do things because that is what everyone else does.

How can we escape that type of life? By turning to the Lord. If you are not a Christian, a believer in Jesus, this means that as God enables, you need to stop trusting in yourself, stop thinking you are good enough the way you are, and place your trusting in Jesus Christ and in what He accomplished for you through His life, death and resurrection.

If you are not sure what that means or what it involves make sure you give me a call. Maybe you are already a believer in Jesus, have been one for year, but many days you still are stuck down with the prairie chicken. What you need to do is to ask God for the grace to soar. Ask for the grace to stop worrying about what everyone else is doing or thinking, and to instead trust and follow the Lord Jesus wherever He leads. If you want to do that, but don't know how and where to start , give me a call.

Friends, the next time you see an eagle soaring against the blue Minnesota sky, I want you to remember, by God's grace, that can be you. Not literally, but figuratively. You can soar as God intended. And remember that marvelous promise the Lord gives us in **Isaiah 40:30,31 Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.**

May our hope be the Lord each day.