

## **Wisdom for a Weary World**

Westview Church | Ecclesiastes 9:13-10:20 | Pastor Brett Toney | December 21, 2025

### **Show Don't Tell**

One of my favorite phrases in all the hymns that we sing is from “O Holy Night.” The phrase is, “the weary world rejoices.” It captures so well the tension of Advent. Weariness from living in darkness and vapor that experiences the spark of joy at the first light of the dawn of a new day. The Son appears! And there is a similar glimmer here in Ecclesiastes 9 and 10. As Solomon closes in on the conclusion of his wise, goad-like words that comprise this vexing book, he offers wisdom for a weary world. He has made plain that while wisdom *cannot* deliver you out from under the sun, it still provides the best path forward in navigating life. He’s lifting our heads above the fog to show us the wise way forward. He is saying, “Walk wisely! Reject folly that it may go well with you!” In this we can see the contrast clearly from the first half of the book that brought us down into the valley of “*hebel*” and this second half that is showing us that “yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.”

I think of this section we’re look at this morning like my first job. I reclaimed screen-printing screens for my mom’s t-shirt business. There is a big difference in how you get trained in for a new job. One approach is being told, “Go clean the screens,” and you have to figure it out. You probably won’t do it right. The other way is someone saying, “Come here. Let me show you step-by-step.” Wisdom proverbs like what we have here are the step-by-step. Having brought us low and laid waste to wisdom as a means of deliverance, Solomon now walks with us to show us step-by-step. It’s like a cave guide with the understanding and tools to show you the safe way forward through the darkness. Solomon leads the way forward, not trusting in wisdom but walking in it.

### **Reading the Bible’s Wisdom**

Now, before we get into what Solomon is saying here, some guiding principles for reading the Bible's wisdom would serve us. Every genre of writing has certain principles to understand properly what the author meant to communicate. There are different principles for Genesis than Leviticus than Romans than Revelation. And there are different principles for proverbial wisdom like what we have in the book of Proverbs and what we have here. So, real quick, here are three guiding principles.

1. *Proverbs are vapor apart from the fear of God.* Ecclesiastes has shown how wisdom won't deliver and all is subjected to the fear of God. If you have no regard for the holiness of God, the coming judgment of God for all who refuse to repent and believe on him, if you have no fear of God, proverbs like these will be an effort in futility.
2. *They are principles, not promises.* Ecclesiastes has shown how wisdom breaks in a world of futility. Proverbs are not promises to claim. They are not guarantees. They are not formulas where if you do X you always get Y.
3. *Jesus is the Wisdom of God.* Like all of Scripture, Proverbs point to the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is the wise man forgotten and despised (9:13-16). There is no corruption in him (10:1-7). He didn't take the easy way of folly (10:8-11). Jesus spoke words of life, not corruption (10:12-15). He fulfilled all wisdom by spending his life for the benefit of others (10:16-20).

### **Wisdom is the Better Way (9:13-18)**

Keeping those principles in mind, let's turn to our passage. We look first at 9:13-18 as Solomon makes his point that wisdom *is* the better way. He makes this point in two ways: first by illustrating it with the parable in v.13-16 and, second, by the summary statements of v.17-18. This parable might not click with us as much since we don't have kings bringing siege-works

against our city. But imagine you find your infant daughter not breathing. You call 911 and Crystal police arrive in a minute. The veteran officer applies first aid, and your daughter's life is saved. Yet you show no gratitude to the officer, forget his name, and he receives no accolades. His wise training is still better. It is still worth it, even if he is despised. Wisdom is like following Jesus in all of life. It may not be met with great honor and prestige in this life. You may be despised, rejected, and forgotten, yet following Jesus is the better way. He is the wise old man.

Solomon underscores the point of the parable with the summary proverbs of v.17-18. We live in a world of bluster, click bait, and hot takes, yet wisdom is easily overlooked as unimpressive. Or, v.18, some put their confidence in the weapons of war; they trust in chariots and horses. Nevertheless, all it takes is one sinner to do great harm. One traitor can make those weapons worthless. But those who fear the Lord know wisdom is better. Carrying on as fools won't make the vexation of life go away. It will just add to our sorrows. So walk wisely, especially by looking to the unimpressive way of following Christ—unimpressive in the world's judgment. Don't put your confidence in worldly tools that can be undone by a single fool, but walk wisely by faith in Christ.

### **Following the Way of Wisdom (10:1-20)**

However, Solomon isn't just saying, "Go and be wise." He continues by saying, "Come here. Let me show you." And so we read in chapter ten of a series of proverbs very similar to what we read in Solomon's book of Proverbs. I wrestled a fair bit with understanding a structure or organizing themes here. Or if maybe Solomon is just listing out examples of wisdom as a sampling of his larger work. It seemed like every resource I consulted had a different idea. My best effort is to see that he wants to drive home the real-life value of wisdom over folly. Wisdom is the better way, so here is what it looks like to be following the way of wisdom. So, I looked at

these proverbs organized under four, high-level banners that point either to the benefit of wisdom or the error of folly.

First, “Folly Corrupts the Whole,” v.1-7. Verse 1, one dead fly ruins the perfume. Verses 2-3, one wrong turn broadcasts to all you’re a fool at heart. Verse 4, one unguarded reaction worsens your position. Verses 5-7, one foolish ruler is a detriment to society. We can be dismissive of our own folly, but Solomon is bringing light to how it corrupts everything. Godly wisdom would have you be marked by humility that yearns to root out folly wherever it is revealed. This is why knowing and being known in your Discipleship Group is of such value. Those brothers, those sisters are gifts from God to you to help you follow Christ in all of life lest folly corrupts the whole.

The second banner, “Wisdom is an Advantage,” v.8-11. Solomon gives four examples of how life will go better, simpler, easier if you will but give attention to wisdom. These four proverbs could be connected to more modern, familiar sayings like: You made your bed, now sleep in it. You reap what you sow. Work smarter, not harder. Play stupid games, win stupid prizes. Kids, this is especially the kind of wisdom your parents try to give you. Learn from *their* mistakes, not from your own. Wisdom will be an advantage to you, so learn from it. You will be guarded from so much heartache and struggle if you will pay attention to the wisdom of your father and the instruction of your mother.

The third banner flies over v.12-15; it is “Foolish Words Lead Astray.” So much of wisdom deals with how we use our words. James 3 memorably imparts this very same kind of wisdom, describing how if we can wisely wield our words, so much of life will be better. To the contrary, our words set ablaze a whole forest. James concludes, “By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.” Our words reveal so much about what we think of

ourselves. Or as Solomon describes it, the fool's words are his own demise, v.12. The fool's words go from bad to worse, v.13. The fool is one who goes on and on, v.14, about what he will do, yet no one knows what will be, and so should say, "If the Lord wills," James 4:15. Such folly is wearisome to the fool—he's all talk but doesn't know the way to go, v.15. This banner reminds me of a quote often attributed to Abraham Lincoln, "It is better to remain quiet and thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt." We can so easily get over our skis when we let our words run wild. We do well to bridle our tongue lest we follow it to our own demise.

Fourth and last banner, "Wisdom Benefits Others," v.16-20. A nation is well served not by a childish or debauched ruler but one who is temperate and suited to the office, v.16-17. The wisdom of diligent work is a safeguard to all under your roof, v.18. Or, v.19, wisdom uses material things for their intended purpose. Bread isn't for gluttony but laughter, sharing a meal with others. Wine isn't for drunkenness but gladdening life. Money isn't to be exalted as a god but a tool that accomplishes everything. We can get tripped up on this positive statement about money, but it is similar to Jesus' parable of the shrewd manager in Luke 16. Jesus concludes that parable saying, "Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings" (Luke 16:9). Finally, v.20, be careful of what a little birdy may tell others. Even your foolish thoughts about others will have a ripple effect. Look to the benefit of others in meekness, not your own self-promotion.

## **The Table**

There you have it: wisdom for a weary world. But let me tell you, Friend, if you take this section and think the primary application is to go and do these things, live like this, embrace wisdom and reject folly like this—you very well may be deceived. You may walk right into the

snare that will bring death. The God of wisdom has fashioned creation and his creatures to image his wise, judicious judgments about life. And when you live life in line with the principles of godly wisdom, your life will generally go better. Not always—we've seen how Ecclesiastes breaks the principles of Proverbs—but generally, yes, your life will go better. And you may be inoculated in self-reliance by such wisdom.

You may think, "I'm doing what God said to do." And all the while you have not looked on the Wisdom of God—not the principles but the person. Jesus Christ is wisdom incarnate. And the wisdom of God is that Wisdom himself would be despised and rejected like the poor man who delivered the city or the Son of Nobility made to walk in dishonor like a slave. The wisdom of God is that this man, the man Christ Jesus, would be crucified that fools like me might be made wise unto salvation. So, as we come to the Table, Church, may we not look within to carry out the wisdom for a weary world but look to Jesus, our all wise God who bore our folly to make us wise to God ways. *That* is what makes a weary world rejoice.