

The Superiority and Vulnerability of Wisdom in an Inscrutable World –

Eccles 9:10 – 10:20

Introduction – Growing in wisdom often times means learning to handle wisdom with wisdom. It means acknowledging the complexities of life; that several different things are true, even things that appear to be incongruent with one another on the face of it. “Nothing ventured, nothing gained” and “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush” might be one example. And so, Solomon commends wisdom, but it is as if he warns that it must be used with, well, with wisdom.

Why Work So Hard? (vv10-12) – Understanding God’s exhaustive sovereignty in the wrong way can lead to a “it just doesn’t matter what I do” mentality. Understanding the inscrutableness of God’s ways the wrong way can lead to a “why even try then” mentality. But Solomon exhorts us to work hard with all our might now knowing that the outcome ultimately only lies in God’s hands. We only know that we can work hard today because today is the only opportunity to be faithful, prudent, and successful. Tomorrow doesn’t exist until tomorrow, and we might be dead (v10, also John 9:4). We do this knowing that while there are general ways in which the Lord works, there are no guarantees like we might expect with a vending machine – not under the sun.

Time and Chance – chance here is not referring to “chance” in the ultimate sense, but “occurrence” in the sense that much of what happens in our lives could never be planned by us. We know our duties; we do not know the outcome (Deut 29:29). We are to plow in hope, but not with a sense of absolute guarantee. Seek the blessing, but rest in God’s sovereign care. How many times could we look back and thank God that He said “no” to our requests.

Wisdom Might Not Win the Day (vv13-18) – Solomon lays out a little scenario: the lesson is either of ingratitude or of rejection. If the latter, then v17 explains that while there was a wise man with answers to save a city, his wisdom was discarded because he was poor, quiet, even politically weak. No one remembered his words, they were despised (v16). Wisdom would have saved the city, but “one sinner destroys much good” (v18). Most trust in horses and chariots even though the faithful are told to trust in the name of the Lord. On a personal level, being honest, being just, being merciful, might not look like the safe way out. But we have been exhorted to work with all our might.

The Superiority and Vulnerability of Wisdom – As we go about doing our work with all our might, the following proverbs could be described as goads to keep us on track, or as well driven nails to secure us in place (Eccles 12:11).

Dead Flies (10:1) – Wise men and women are always vulnerable to folly. And that foolish act may be all it takes to ruin all of one’s wisdom.

Foolishness Becomes Obvious (vv2-3) – The fool in Hebrew proverbs is not someone with an intellectual problem, but with a moral problem. The wise man’s heart (core commitments) is at his fingertips and he uses them skillfully. A fool’s heart on the other hand causes him to fumble and blunder.

Wisdom is Patient (v4) – The wise servant learns to not panic at the first sign of trouble, whether from the hand of God directly or from those God has placed in authority.

When Folly is Ruling (vv5-7) – Wise men do not always make it into the places of power under the sun. And when nobles fall into sin they start imposing wicked ways upon the people, appointing other fools to rule with them.

Wisdom Does Not Protect from All Danger (vv8-10) – Under the sun there is always danger and risk. One never knows all of the consequences of one’s actions. But wisdom embraces risk understanding that not using that which is dangerous is dangerous in itself (v10). We may not bury our talent in the ground and claim obedience (Matt 25:24-25).

The Fool’s Tongue (vv11-15) – The fool thinks he has it all figured out and talks a lot. The wise man is the one who confesses ignorance of the future and trusts in God. This applies particularly to those who love conspiracy theories, and especially those that speak of the latest Last Day’s madness, the mark of the beast in our product scanners, killer bees, the not-so-secret plans to rebuild the Temple, and China’s impending invasion of Israel.

Childish Kings (vv16-19) – Beware of the flashy, extravagant and lavish ruler – all noise and no action. He will get himself into power and forget the exhortation of God to work with all his might. Instead, in a place of power and privilege, he will seek fast women and good times. He will pervert the pleasure of feasts – but the bill will come due (v19c).

Armchair Quarterbacks (v20) – Rulers appear very foolish at times. At other times we are foolish to act as though we know all that went into their decisions. We must be careful with our tongue toward those God has placed over us. And remember, far too often that foolish ruler represents us quite well.

Vulnerable Wisdom – And so we are to work with all our might, seeking and applying wisdom. And applying wisdom takes wisdom because we live in the mist. Even Jesus, Who is Wisdom Incarnate, came into this world of folly knowing that He must entrust Himself fully into the purposes and will of His good Father. These words should come from our lips as well – “not my will, but Yours be done,” not in despairing submission, but rather with a fierce hope in God and not in this world “under the sun.”