

# Wisdom, Stupidity, Striving After Wind

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 28 August 2016

Preacher: Michael Down

[ 0 : 00 ] words that he said to me in our friendship. And I've invited Michael to come and to speak to us from the book of Ecclesiastes to continue our sermon series, Ecclesiastes, Chasing After Wind.

And so I hope you're very blessed by Michael and his preaching this morning through the power of the Spirit of God. So why don't I pray for Michael and then we'll hear a word from the Lord.

Our Father, thank you so much for this brother in Christ. I ask, Lord, that you would bless us greatly through him and his ministry and that he in turn may be blessed, may be encouraged. Thank you so much for the incredible wisdom and power from your word, that though it comes through a diverse group of people, though it comes through many different preachers, many different teachers, yet it still contains tremendous wisdom.

Lord God, where would we be without it? We would be lost without your word. And so I pray this morning that you would instruct us, you would counsel us, Lord God, and direct us towards Jesus Christ, the author and the fountain of all wisdom.

Amen. Thanks, Dave. Am I on here? Check, check, check. Well, thank you for that introduction.

And it's always great to be here at Squamish. My wife was just saying to some of your leaders how much we enjoy coming here and being with you guys.

[ 1 : 20 ] And it is diverse but a beautiful community. So let's get stuck in here. We are in Ecclesiastes, as Dave mentioned. In chapter 9, we're going to go from verses 13 all the way through to chapter 10, verse 20.

So the whole of chapter 10. We're starting in Ecclesiastes 9 from verse 13. It's page 558 in your pew Bibles, if you're using your pew Bibles.

Okay, let me read it for us. I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. There was a little city with few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siege works against it.

But there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that man. But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.

The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good. Dead flies make the perfume's ointment give off a stench.

[ 2 : 48 ] So a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor. A wise man's heart inclines him to the right, but a fool's heart to the left. Even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense, and he says to everyone that he is a fool.

If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your place, for calmness will let great offenses to rest. There is an evil that 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. He who digs a pit will fall into it, and a serpent will bite him who breaks through the wall.

He who quarries stones is hurt by them, and he who splits logs is endangered by them. If the iron is blunt and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength. But wisdom helps one to succeed.

If the serpent bites before it is charmed, there is no advantage to the charmer. The words of a wise man's mouth win him favor, but the lips of a fool consume him.

[ 3 : 54 ] The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is evil madness. A fool multiplies words, though no man knows what is to be. And who can tell him what

will be after him?

The toil of a fool wearies him, for he does not know the way to the city. Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning. And happier you, O land, when your king is the son of nobility, and your princes feast at the proper time, for strength and not for drunkenness.

Though sloth, the roof sinks in, and through indolence the house leaks. Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money answers everything. Even in your thoughts, do not curse the king, nor in your bedroom curse the rich.

For a bird of the air will carry your voice, or some winged creature tell you the matter. There's a long passage. There's a lot going on here.

I understand you guys have been going through Ecclesiastes, and one of the things Dave was telling me that you've been looking through, and if you're just joining us here, maybe you've been on holiday, or you're not usually at Squamish Baptist, obviously you're very welcome here.

[ 5 : 05 ] But as I understand, what you've been going through in this text is the idea that without God, the lives that we live, and in our pursuit of happiness, always ends up being futility and emptiness.

And so we're approaching this book knowing that we are, as humanity, we're a people, we're a species, that though created by a good and loving God, have abandoned and rejected Him. And we now live in a world where He has withdrawn Himself somewhat, as we have rejected Him. And so what the author of Ecclesiastes is essentially saying, as he sums up his message, is that without God, as we pursue life, as we try to find happiness and lasting joy, and peace, what we end up doing is finding emptiness and nothingness in life.

So we're looking at each portion of this book through that lens. How do we find the good life? As I believe it's been put to us.

How do we find that? wisdom is this crucial pillar for what it means to live in a way that is meaningful, and in a way that is wholesome, and in which we find lasting joy and peace.

[ 6 : 40 ] Now, when you're studying the Bible and you're reading through the Bible, if you're looking through maybe a letter, an epistle, or something like that, you find that each little chunk of it, each paragraph, builds on the next thing.

So you have this said, therefore this, therefore this, and it goes on and on, because this, because that. And you have this building of logic as it goes down. I find with the poetic parts of Scripture, you often don't find that that's the case.

I often don't find that that's the case. And instead, you tend to get one kind of theme repeated. So you have a message, and it's like this. But also do you see it here, and here, and like this, and like this.

And that's often the way that poetic bits of Scripture work. So let me just try to run through briefly the text that we have and try to draw out for you what I think the main thrust of it is saying.

And then what I'll do is show you what I think, how that applies to us and how we can put that into practice and into thought in our own situations.

[ 7 : 48 ] So he begins the text here from verse 13 telling a tale. He doesn't actually tell the tale of a poor man who was yet wise and saved his city from a great siege of a king who was going to save it.

So this wisdom that this poor man had saved the city, even against great military might. And then through in chapter 10 here, it goes on to basically repeat that same idea.

Do you see the value of wisdom? Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off the stench, and so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

And there's a theme of that in these first four verses here. Even just a little bit of folly can outweigh wisdom. And then he goes on from verses 5, 6, and 7.

He's saying, you can find foolishness even in the highest places. In the highest places and the lowest places. You will find it.

[ 8 : 58 ] And then from verses 8 downwards, the preacher gives us these different expressions that, again, make the same point. That foolishness is a really bad thing.

That if you don't have wisdom, there are going to be some serious consequences. And like a lot of biblical expressions and poetry, the language here is often a little bit confusing.

Sometimes you read it first. You're like, what on earth does that mean? Like when one who breaks through a wall will have a serpent bite him. What does that mean? But essentially it's this idea that with folly, all of your efforts are going to end up bad.

Whatever it is that you do, no matter what you try, if you're foolish, you will end up having some bad calamity. If you dig a pit, I think the context here is like, if you're trying to get someone else to fall into it, you're going to find you end up falling into it.

If you smash down someone's wall, a serpent will bite you, kind of out of nowhere. If you're foolish, if you haven't taken the time to understand wisdom, what is right from what is wrong, you will not escape your own folly.

[10:14] That goes on. If the iron is blunt and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use much strength. So if you don't know how to sharpen, you're foolish. Everything is going to take more effort as it goes on.

Very kind of similar expressions saying similar things. Lips of a fool can consume him. The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness. In verse 14, a fool multiplies words.

Though no man knows what is to be. You can talk on and on and on with foolishness. But if you don't know the future, if you don't know what is to be, then you don't know what is to be. The toil of a fool wearies him because he doesn't know the way to the city.

Like somebody lost kind of wandering around. That's what it's like to be in this situation of being foolish. Now terrible is when the land is ruled by a foolish leader and how great it is when it isn't. If there's ever such a land that has been ruled by a great ruler. So this is what we have in this section. This repeated idea. And some of them are easier to understand than other, these expressions.

[11:25] But like good Hebrew poetry is just repeating this, this very simple and distilled idea, which is simply this. If you are not wise in understanding right from wrong, then you are going to face serious calamity.

You will not find a joyous and a satisfying life unless you first can understand right from wrong. If you can understand truth from falsehood.

And so the kind of context of this, then as we bring it into our own lives, is, well, do we know right from wrong? As humanity, without God.

And the book of Ecclesiastes very much has the view that in fact we do not. And I think the common view in our society, probably, I mean it's hard to sum up something like this, is that without God, without the wisdom that God provides, our lives would be kind of vaguely lacking something at the worst.

That maybe there would be some kind of nostalgic sense of, well, we're vaguely prosperous, but there's just something that we can't put our finger on that's missing.

[12:39] This kind of, hmm, like it's just a lack of wholeness in our life. But actually, what the book of Ecclesiastes is saying, what it's saying here is actually, there's going to be serious calamity.

You're going to be in serious trouble. Your life is going to be meaningless and chasing after wind, striving after the air if you're not able to separate what is truth from what is falsehood.

So let me just kind of go through some of the ways I think as a society we have, or just as our society, but as humanity, we have sought to pursue wisdom outside of God.

And one of the first ways that I think we do it, one of the most immediate ways, is simply through our own thinking, our own desire to pursue right from wrong and try to understand what is wise. It's just to say, I can understand it on my own good wisdom. And that's probably the number one way that in our society, we look to find what is true and what is right.

[13:47] And this maybe is, in an immediate sense, like kind of appealing, like maybe I can figure it out. Maybe there's a way that I can just believe what it is that I want to believe, and that can provide me with enough wisdom and enough truth to get by.

Let's think about the way that that plays out. In 19th century southern states, there was very much this way of thinking.

There was no pope in Rome in the southern states. There was all kinds of little churches springing up here and there. Everybody had their own, you know, you would say it was like your own religion. Like what church do you belong to? What doctrine do you believe? And there were all kinds of different kind of solo preachers would invent their own kind of understanding of the scriptures that were just like way off base.

And everybody had their own doctrine. And everyone was allowed, you know, freedom of religion was the big push. And each individual person could come up with their own ideas. Look, what came out of that was a society that, you know, they really thought about it and they decided that it was perfectly acceptable, the vast majority of them, to own other human beings.

[15:08] Out of that thinking, slavery flourished. They thought about it in their wisdom. They thought it through and they came up with this idea that it was perfectly wise and okay to have other people be owned.

That's how far off base they got through that thinking. That each person could just come up with their own doctrine and their own thought and just leave behind what God was saying. And there are just so many other examples of that kind of thing. But let's not forget that it was out of that thinking. Not out of biblical thinking. There was, for a while, there was quite a lot said. People would, you'd often see it on the internet and different memes than that. Oh, nowhere in the Bible does it condemn slavery. Actually, it absolutely does. 1 Timothy lists enslavers as the lawless and the unrighteous.

But out of their own thinking, they came up with this awful doctrine. And it was out of that. Can you imagine such a thing? There was a point where more than 50% of households in some of the states one time owned slaves.

[16:22] Imagine that. You walk down the street. Half the people you know. that's how bad that society became. Because they thought that they could find wisdom in their own thinking.

Humanity does not have a good record. It has a terrible record of finding real truth through its own thinking. Another one that we often come up with.

Rather than our own doctrine, maybe we leave behind the idea of coming up with a doctrine. Maybe we just go with what we feel is right. Maybe we just go with our own feelings. Maybe we can bypass God and bypass real truth and wisdom by just feeling our way out of a situation.

An example you could give to this one is think about, for example, in Rwanda in the 90s where you had two tribal factions that became at conflict with each other over the distribution of wealth and of land and cattle and so on.

And you had one group that felt so angry at the other group that they wanted to literally wipe them off the face of the earth as a people group.

[17:38] And that was their own impulse. That was what their anger and their hatred determined that they should do. They decided they would do what they wanted to do.

And out of that came the Rwanda genocide. Thousands of people were slaughtered. This is the folly that we have outside of God.

Our own impulses do not create wisdom. Our own thinking, our own doctrine does not create wisdom. Okay, so, does that mean instead we should follow religious leaders that we should be, we should instead devote ourselves to the study of religion?

We can go back to the 9th century. Think about the Crusades. What happened there where people said, you know what, we're just going to devote ourselves to the Pope and whatever it is that he says, whatever it is that he commands to us, we will say that's what we'll do and we'll follow him. And so then out of that came the Crusades. Again, thousands of people were killed because they weren't Christians or in another way of saying that is thousands of people were killed in the name of pursuing the gospel of grace, of hope and of forgiveness and peace.

[19:04] people were killed in the name of that because they thought they could find wisdom in religion and not in God. Another effort that we've had is in science that we can think our way into wisdom.

We can just pursue study until we find what life is about and what meaning is about through study. An example of the foolishness of this comes from right here in Canada in the early 20th century. The province of British Columbia began to legislate in favor of an idea called eugenics which is essentially the idea that the process of evolution and of survival of the fittest and natural selection was being stunted by our own compassion that humanity was destroying humanity and that instead we should be focusing on what type of genetics we want to see reproduced and so what happened was people who were mentally ill were told that they couldn't reproduce and there were forced sterilizations and the sad fact of the matter is that I don't have the figures for BC but in Alberta about 2.5% of their population were natives but yet that same group represented 25% of the forced sterilizations people who were forced on the operating table to be sterilized so they couldn't have

kids.

That's where our own thinking got us where we decided we could science our way out of the issue and out of the problem of our folly and our foolishness.

Humanity has a terrible, terrible record when it comes to wisdom and it's a serious thing. Our coming up with our own ideas for our own utopia is not this benign harmless thing it's a really evil and terrible thing because you see what it produces and you see where it leads and we don't have to go far back in history or far away geographically to see that.

[ 21 : 28 ] We're often very proud of our own culture. We say that we've progressed that we've moved forward that we've left behind the ways of old the human rights abuses of old.

world. The terrible fact is that in former times legislation said certain types of ethnicities and races were not persons.

They were human beings but under the law they weren't persons. The laws in our own land said women were not persons even though they were human beings. Yet in our own laws today we say unborn human beings do not count under the law as persons.

In our own society today we can look at things like the enormous spikes in sex crimes and things like that. Sweden known as particularly a liberal country has seen a 500% spike since 1990 in assaults of that nature.

We have to really think about the society that we live in and whether or not we really have found true wisdom by our apparent progression. Because I think we have not when we are teaching and telling our kids that the only standard for good and right human sexuality is consent.

[ 22 : 52 ] That all you have to do is decide whatever it is you feel like pursuing and then just get some kind of consent. It doesn't have to be good for that person.

They don't have to be sober. And then we wonder why there are all these abuses. we haven't solved our problem of folly and foolishness.

We are still deeply, deeply ignorant of how to create a joyful and a meaningful society. We have not found any way outside of God to do that and to find that.

And it truly is sad. And the book of Ecclesiastes is absolutely a book of lament at where the world is. And it is a sad thing.

So where does that leave us? If not in any of these things, if not even in religion, not in our own thought, not in our own impulses, not in our pursuit, not in our brains, and our pursuit of knowledge and science.

[ 23 : 56 ] If we can't find wisdom in any of those things, where then do we find wisdom? And the beauty of the gospel is that Christ is truth.

Christ is wisdom. He was the first man to come and be truly wise and live a life that was truly right, where he knew right from wrong and lived it out and showed it.

And not only that, but he made the blind to see. And so he comes and he offers us that exact same opportunity and chance that we think we are rich, we think we have prospered, but he invites us instead to say, look at yourself.

You are pitiful, blind, naked, and poor. Come from me, I invite you by salve for your eyes that you may see by ointment without price. And that is the beauty of the gospel, that Christ has come and given us this opportunity to really know wisdom from falsehood.

world. And without that, we are lost and we are at sea, and we go round in circles as human beings, trying to find ways of right, trying to find a way to this kind of impossible utopia that just seems always kind of one election away, one ruler away, one set of ideas, one philosophy away, and we just never quite get there.

[ 25 : 26 ] And that is a sad fact of the matter. Okay, let me pray for us. Ending a little bit earlier today, I think.

Father, I'm so thankful that you have given us an opportunity to know true wisdom. I'm thankful that you have not left us in our ignorance. I pray that we would not sit here proudly, trying to understand our way.

to a good life, but rather instead that you would anoint us with real wisdom that comes only from the Spirit, that we would know right from wrong.

I pray that you would give the town of Squamish and the people of this faith community that wisdom. I pray, Lord God, that you would help us to see what's wrong with our society first in our own hearts and that that would lead us in an encouraging way to go and preach the gospel and

spread the message of salvation.

I pray these things in the name of Jesus. Amen. God bless God. Amen. Amen.

[ 26 : 52 ] Night morning. Am! Amen! A lull night.

Hello, friends, friends. Thy night. The day came today. Kind thing with Move Thank you.  
Thank you.