

The Flies In The Ointment

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] this service from Storway Free Church this evening and I pray that as we worship together that you will know and that we will know together the Lord's blessing as we seek his Holy Spirit to guide us in our worship. Before I begin the worship, one announcement for our own folks.

This is for the parents of Sunday school children and also tweenies. The pick-up times for the next set of GoTeach materials will be in the MA Hall and they can be picked up next Friday from 2 to 3 p.m. or also Saturday 10 to 11. Friday 2 to 3 or Saturday 10 to 11. And I want to give thanks at this point to all the teachers who are involved in teaching the children and the tweenies.

It's been a wonderful provision over the last while, really since the lockdown firstly and then the restrictions when we cannot yet meet in Sunday school as they used to. The teachers and those who've helped them have done a tremendous job with the online and the provision of materials by video and so on. So we're really truly grateful to you for that. And also the parents for their support of the Sunday school and the tweenies and all the other activities involving young people in the congregation. We give thanks to God for your contribution and for your willingness to go on providing for us in this way. So let's begin our worship and we're singing first of all this evening from Psalm 100. Psalm 100 in the Scottish Cytar to the tune Old Hundred. It's a well-known psalm.

It's a psalm that, like many other psalms, calls upon those outwith Israel who were given these psalms, of course, to come and worship this God. And that's so important for ourselves as we sing these psalms. We're conscious of the fact that they have an evangelistic emphasis as well, such as here, all people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice. A call upon all of humanity, indeed, to come and worship the God we know as our God. So we'll sing the psalm, all people that on earth do dwell.

sing to the Lord with cheerful voice. A call upon them, O people that on earth do dwell.
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.

[2 : 36] Him, send with mirth, His praise foretell. Come ye before Him and rejoice. Know that the Lord is God indeed.

sing to the Lord with cheerful voice. Without doubt it, He did us make. We and His flock
He doth us feed. And for His sheep He doth us take.

O enter then His gates with praise. Approach with joy His courts unto.

His mercy is good. Praise, Lord, and bless His name always. For it is seemly so to do. For why the Lord our God is good, His mercy is forever sure. His truth at all times firmly stood. And shall from each to each endure.

Let's now read from God's word. That's in the book of Ecclesiastes. And tonight we're reading chapter 10. And we're going to look at this chapter, and the whole of the chapter, later on in the service. So that's Ecclesiastes, chapter 10 from the beginning.

[4 : 52] We can just read the last two verses of chapter 9 as well, because as we'll see, the final verses of chapter 9 actually run into chapter 10.

So chapter 9, verse 17.

And he says to everyone that he is a fool.

And a serpent will fall into it, and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a 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.

[6 : 32] The words of a wise man's mouth win him favour, but the lips of a fool consume him. 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. Happy are you, O land, when your king is the son of the nobility, and your princes feast in the proper time.

For strength, and not for drunkenness. Through 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 thought, 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 the matter.

[7 : 39] Amen, and may God add his blessing as we once again read this portion of his word. Now let's join together in prayer. Let's call upon the Lord together.

Gracious Lord, and our Heavenly Father, we come to you, O Lord, and are conscious of our need, that your Spirit should guide us in our worship, as at all other times.

Forbid that we should rely, O Lord, on mere custom, the fact that we have done this previously, the fact that we know so much of your word, and so much of the process of our worship already.

Lord, we pray that your Spirit will open up your word to us this evening, that your Spirit will open our minds to receive, and to think upon it, and to believe. That your Spirit will give us inwardly that stilling of our heart, to issue forth in love and affection for you, and our commitment to you, and to your ways.

We pray that your Spirit, Lord, will bring to us things which will strike our conscience, so that whether it be for good or bad, we will know the truth affecting us inwardly.

[8 : 51] We bless you, gracious one, that your Spirit takes the things of Christ, as Jesus himself promised, and shows it to your people. We bless you that your Spirit, in the ministry of your Spirit and your people, glorifies Christ, brings him the praise and the honour, and holds him forth as that Saviour who is so adequate to save, so replete with grace, so full of mercy, and so wonderful in compassion.

We pray, O Lord, tonight, that we will know this, renewed in our hearts, and that we will know it, O Lord, for these days to come, that these things may remain with us, and be in practice by us.

We ask, too, O Lord, tonight, that you would overlook our sin in your mercy, but we do come before you, once again, to confess our sins, and to confess that our sins are far more numerous, and much deeper than we ourselves can appreciate.

We would say with the psalmist, with David long ago, against you and you only, have we done this evil in your sight. We pray, Lord, that you'll bless us tonight with your forgiveness, that as we come to confess our sin, it may not be in a mere matter of form or formality.

Lord, help us that our hearts will be engaged in it, that we will be honest and serious with you as we come to use these words of confession. And, O Lord, we pray that we will know in return, your own answer, through your word and spirit, that our sin has been cleansed, that we have been forgiven and washed, made clean, as we require to be.

[10 : 38] We ask that you would grant us blessing, Lord, today to equip us for these days ahead. And we begin this week, Lord, on your day, as we always do.

We thank you for that pattern that is set for us, that we begin this week with worship and with our hearts focused upon the Lord. We pray, Lord, that that will truly strengthen us and set us up for these days ahead.

We pray, Gracious One, as we come towards the end of this year in our own experience as a people, that we will once again reflect upon all that has happened and especially help us, Lord, to reflect upon all that you have been to us, on your faithfulness that is so new to us each morning with your mercies.

Help us, we pray, to reflect upon what has happened in your providence with the COVID-19 pandemic and the way in which that has caused so many difficulties throughout the world.

Help us, Lord, to realize that under your own sovereign rule, these things have come to pass as you purposed from all eternity. Enable us then, we pray, to cling all the more tightly to you and to your promises, to draw near to you and to seek that you would abide with us.

[11 : 56] Lord, we think of these disciples long ago who came to know you as one risen from the dead and when you came to reveal yourself to them, you, Lord, impressed upon them who you were and the response was that you would remain with them.

We pray, O Lord, that that will be our own experience and our own desire in life, that you would remain with us and be our companion through each and every day and through every experience.

We pray tonight, Lord, for ourselves as a people, as a congregation of your people. We thank you for all that you have been to us over these past months, for the way that your gospel remains with us and for the way, Lord, that we are so concerned to come together in this way, though we're not able to do it as much as we'd like physically.

Yet we thank you, O Lord, that your word is free and goes forth freely. We thank you that your spirit is not confined, that your truth has not changed. We pray that tonight, Lord, your word will come to us with that power that will indeed come to invade our hearts and minds and do us good.

We ask that you would bless us as a congregation and our testimony for you, the various ways in which, Lord, we seek to make your name known to our contemporaries.

[13 : 22] We pray that you would further establish us in the righteousness and in the holiness that your word enjoins. We thank you for the privilege of being a people who testify to the Lord and to seek to give you the honour that is due to your name even in our witness publicly.

Bless us in all our activities, we pray. Grant that as the Sunday school and the tweenies and other activities go on with our children, with our young people, that you would bless them, O Lord, as they hear of those wondrous things out of your word that you have done and are doing.

We ask that your salvation will be known to them and made precious to them, that they themselves will rise up and call you blessed and, Lord, that others will call them blessed because they have revealed Jesus to them.

Bless the parents, we pray. We thank you for all the parents of the younger families that we have. We pray for them and ask that you'd bless them as they diligently seek to set before their children the standard of your own word.

O Lord, may they see that this is not in vain and that their young children, as they grow up, come to appreciate the things of God and come to live them out in their own lives.

[14 : 39] We pray too for the older ones and ask that you'd bless the youth fellowship, those who are in the upper stages of secondary school age and we pray that you'd bless them too. We ask that you'd bless all who are engaged as teachers and helpers and for Marianne and her work with the older ones as well.

We pray for them all and ask, O Lord, that you'd bless them. Now, we do also pray, O Lord, for others that we know in our community who help us in our times of need and we pray tonight that you'd bless those who work with those with addictions of various kinds.

We pray that you'd remember the work of Road to Recovery and all who are involved in that both here, locally and elsewhere and ask, Lord, that those who receive the support that they themselves require that they would be benefited from that and that you would grant to them blessing, especially spiritually and morally so that they will go on in you of strength.

We pray to you, Lord, for the street pastors. We thank you for those who give of their time to go out week by week and we pray that you'd bless them. We pray that you'd keep them safe in their times of interaction with people go out, not only in the streets but also to the castle grounds.

Here we ask, O Lord, that the contacts they have made and will continue to make will lead to much blessing in the lives of those they meet. We pray that you would strengthen themselves as street pastors both here and throughout the land, O God, as they serve you in this way.

[16 : 15] We pray, too, that you'd bless all who care for us in our time of need, who attend to our well-being in health and in mental health as well. Bless them, we pray.

Bless the hospital and the care homes in Bethesda. We commit them all to you and ask that you'd be pleased, O Lord, to lend them your blessing at this time. Remember those, we pray, who may be facing difficulties they cannot share with others, matters which are private to themselves and yet hurt them and grieve inwardly over many things in their lives.

We pray that you'd bless them and we pray that you'd bless those who mourn the passing of loved ones, especially as we come to this time of year when poignancy of these events of loved ones taken from the scene of time press themselves more fully upon our hearts and minds.

O Lord, lend us, you would pray, your comfort, your consolation, your upbuilding and guidance and strengthening by your spirit and by your truth. Lord, we ask that you'd bless us now and help us as we remain attentive to your word that we will know we are led by yourself to speak and to hear of the things that God has done.

Hear us and receive our thanks, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Now for the children this evening, I want to just spend this week and next week as well, God willing, thinking about the birth of Jesus.

[17 : 46] I've been looking for some wicks at the I am sayings of Jesus and tonight we're looking at the birth of Jesus. If we think of the likes of Luke chapter 5, where you find a description there, Luke chapter 2 rather, of the birth of Jesus, we'll find especially there and also in Matthew's gospel how Jesus was born into the world.

We read there in chapter 2 of Luke that there were some shepherds out in the field at night and that an angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone round them and they were filled with fear and the angel said to them, Fear not, for behold I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all people for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour who is Christ the Lord.

Where does the story of Christmas begin? Where does the story of Christmas really begin in the Bible or in history? It doesn't begin in the event that I've just read there from Luke chapter 2.

It begins a long, long way back before that. The story of Christmas is of course the story of Jesus. The coming of Jesus into the world, the Son of God coming into the world to be given the name Jesus because he came to save his people from their sins.

But the story of Christmas, the story of salvation begins way back in Genesis chapter 3. In Genesis chapter 3 God actually took Adam and Eve and placed them before him to speak to them about what they had done when they sinned against him and when they had committed this great evil against what the Lord had actually set before them.

[19 : 41] they were not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil but that's what they did and then death came upon themselves and upon all who came after them and that's why we ourselves still know of death in the experience of humans.

This is what God said actually to the serpent. In Genesis 3 verse 15 I will put enmity between you and the woman between your offspring and her offspring he shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.

That's really the first account that God gave of a saviour who would come to be born into the world as the offspring of the woman and in that announcement that's really what was fulfilled when Jesus came into the world.

One who was born from a woman his mother Mary and who had been promised all of these years from that time in Genesis 3 onwards through the prophets through other ways in which he was which he was promised to come by God and in Luke chapter 2 we find that finally after all these years the saviour was born.

Thousands of years passed and yet God kept his promise. Now that tells us that God always keeps his promises. Every single promise you find in the Bible that's addressed to the people of God whatever it's about you can be absolutely sure that God will keep that promise.

[21 : 19] God will be faithful to his promise. God will not actually be short of fulfilling his promise and that's what he did with the coming of Jesus into the world. He was fulfilling the promises the things that he had promised about a saviour and about salvation that's what he was actually doing.

And God keeps them exactly he just doesn't keep them generally he keeps them in an exact way because in the Bible in the Old Testament as time went on things began to be revealed about the saviour which came to be actually seen when Jesus was born.

Things about who he would be what he would be called what he came to do what he would do by way of dying and even that he would actually come to bring life from the dead to those that placed their trust and confidence in him.

and that passage that I read in Luke chapter 2 refers to this as good news. The shepherds were terrified first of all because the glory of the Lord in the form of a really bright light would have been shone around them and in the middle of the night they would be terrified over that.

They knew that was something very unusual something that had come from eternity something supernatural and then this voice from the angel said don't be afraid for I bring you good news.

[22 : 53] Now that's the word in the New Testament that is the same word for gospel. The gospel is good news that's what it means it's the good news about Jesus.

And the good news is that God has done exactly what he said he would do sending a saviour into the world whose name would be Jesus who would save his people from their sins.

That's why it says in Luke chapter 2 that he brought them good news of great joy. Great joy. That's really what should mark our lives if we come to trust in Jesus what we're doing is really trusting in the one that God has provided to save us from our sins and what greater reason is there for joy than that.

Today I hope that that will be the meaning of Christmas for you yourselves as children. Yes it's great to get presents it's great to get a happy time at Christmas time and there's absolutely nothing wrong with enjoying those things that we have in these times of happiness.

But the joy especially that we need to know is the joy of being saved the joy of knowing the Saviour the joy of knowing Jesus the joy of having our sins forgiven the joy of knowing that when we come to leave this world we're going to go to be with this Jesus who came into the world and died and rose from the dead and is now in heaven at God's right hand.

[24 : 36] So there today is something about the birth of Jesus and spoken about a long long time before it happened because that was God's promise that although we had brought death into the world through Adam and Eve God had said I'm not going to leave you like that I'm going to send a Saviour I'm going to send my son his name will be Jesus and he will save his people from their sins.

So let's say the Lord's Prayer now together Our Father which art in heaven hallowed be thy name thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil with thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever Amen Now if we turn for a short time this evening back to Ecclesiastes Ecclesiastes chapter 10 we're going to look at the whole of the chapter here for a short time There are many sayings that we use in ordinary speech and everyday speech that actually come from the Bible Maybe they're not exactly the way you find them in the Bible but you can very often tell well that's come from the Bible and there are two of them actually in this chapter in the first verse and in the last verse because the first verse says dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench and you know the saying the fly in the ointment the last verse says don't actually curse the king or in your bedroom curse the rich for a bird of the air will carry your voice and if you've said something to someone and they'll say well who told you that very often you can say a little bird told me you don't want to say who told you you just say a little bird told me that's coming from the Bible from the last verse of Ecclesiastes chapter 10 and when you come back to the first verse of the chapter what you find there is a description of what sometimes happened when those who were making perfume actually found that a fly or flies very common in those times in those places in hot countries and of course in those times when this was written you wouldn't have had very elaborate factories you wouldn't have had sterile conditions where flies couldn't get in very often this would be in an open room or in something like a shed whatever but they would be making perfumes mixing all these things together that made up the perfume flies would be attracted and sometimes in a big batch that had been made of perfume flies would actually get caught and die and spoil the whole thing that's what it says there dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench especially if you didn't discover it first of all no use keeping that then if dead flies have got into it or flies have gone into it and they've died you've got to throw it out even the whole batch however long it's taken you in those days that would be no use for leaving it would just be infected and the stench would have gone through the whole thing it's no use for perfume you pour it out and that's the situation that's described in a spiritual way all the way through this chapter it follows on from the final verse the final words indeed of the previous chapter one sinner destroys much good so the point really is that it only takes a very small amount of foolishness to spoil a big batch of wisdom well you can do that you can find that and apply it to an individual life such as my own life and yours and we'll see some of the people in the bible of whom this is through later on in our study tonight but it's true in an individual sense we'll also see from our study it's true in the sense of a lot of people together even governments that doesn't take much even if a government has been very good and very wise gone about things very successfully

and very well and to the advantage of many people a little act of foolishness a wrong decision that affects people drastically will spoil the whole thing and that's why again we're coming through the chapter to really see how this is applied through the chapter throughout the rest of the chapter so that we've come to the conclusion we actually need wisdom all the time we need to be seeking wisdom from God the ability that God alone is able to give us how to handle our lives how to deal with certain situations even then we know of course we're going to make mistakes we know that sometimes we'll be acting foolishly but it's a warning to us just to remind us that even a little foolishness if it affects a lot of people or affects our own life drastically it's going to spoil even much that we may have done in the use of wisdom previously we need that wisdom we need that wisdom from God that the Bible speaks of because we don't have that wisdom ourselves in our fallenness in our sinfulness

God provides the wisdom through Christ through our relationship with Christ through the Holy Spirit working in our hearts and it's interesting that he says here in verse 2 a wise man's heart inclines him to the right but a fool's heart to the left the left and the right in the old times used to be symbols of wisdom and of foolishness the right hand side was associated with strength or with wisdom the left hand side with foolishness it doesn't say anything it's nothing to do with being right handed or left handed it's simply a way of in Old Testament times distinguishing between what is right and wrong between what is foolish and what is wise and what it says is a wise man's heart inclines him to the right inclines him towards wisdom towards what is right and the word heart there is important it's not just to do with emotions or feelings or inner feelings like that it actually has to do with the mind it has to do with the mind and with knowledge and that's why here in the wisdom books of the Old Testament

Ecclesiastes Proverbs Psalms as well there is so much emphasis laid on knowledge knowledge of God knowledge of the ways of God knowledge in the way that leads to the fear of God as we've seen already in Ecclesiastes and that's really so so relevant as we're finding these Old Testament books so relevant for the situation that we actually face today because we've come to the situation where as a society especially in a western society although it's really throughout the world as well sadly but the basis of people's decisions the basis of people's conclusions whether it's about themselves about gender about all of these issues is not what I think but what I feel it's what I feel that determines who I am what my identity is and that's completely contrary to the Bible that's taking life under the sun that's taking God out of the equation out of the picture and as we'll see tonight again when you take God out of the reckoning out of your calculation if you try and look at things without God without God's word without the standard that God's word provides for us you're left to our own self and if you're left to your own self this is the kind of thing that you come up with any society that displaces God with human wisdom comes to such conclusions as these

[32 : 52] I feel this about myself therefore this is who I am that's where you lead you find people coming to the conclusions and I'm saying this with care because I'm not saying without compassion without concern without knowing what I'm saying without being careful of what we say but you know the kind of idea you find where people will say well I think that actually I'm a woman trapped in a man's body or a man trapped in a woman's body you see where that begins you don't actually put that person away in a way that doesn't love them in a way that doesn't really give them the opportunity to express what they feel and express how they are but this is where everything comes from in that sort of situation in that sort of conclusion I feel this about myself therefore this is who I am my identity comes from my feelings whereas the Bible tells you your identity comes from the knowledge that you have from your mind from the mind that God has given us that needs to be renewed and is renewed in Christ so that your identity comes as an individual who you are is who God created you to be but who you are spiritually is who you are in Christ

I am in Christ therefore that is what defines me whether I see myself as a man or a woman male or female that's just by the way I wasn't going to say too much on that but I think it's important that we realise that the Bible is so up to date in addressing the questions of our age and gives us lovingly and tactfully information material that we can actually set before people in trying to actually converse with them as to how we should see a human identity and who we are and what that means so here we are with this emphasis then on wisdom and the need for wisdom and there are three areas it's important that we distinguish the theme or the principle of the thing and then it's much easier then to see all of the things in the chapter that aren't necessarily clear and there are some verses there that even some of the best commentators are struggling with so there's no point in me trying to actually bring out the meaning of them if they're struggling with them but here's a principle for us when we're studying the Bible like we said in the first verse of the chapter that really establishes the theme a small drop of folly or foolishness is enough to spoil a great batch of wisdom first of all it's applied to government wisdom is necessary for effective government verses 4 to 7 and also verses 16 to 19 secondly wisdom is necessary for everyday life for the things we meet with in our everyday lives and the ordinary things of life if you like for effective government for everyday life and thirdly for edifying speech verses 12 to 14 and also the final verse verse 20 so wisdom for effective government for everyday life and for edifying speech let's look at these in turn and we won't go into them in much detail just looking at the way that the theme is brought out that stands at the beginning of the chapter look first of all at wisdom for effective government there's in verse 4 you can see if the anger of the ruler rises against you do not leave your place for calmness will lay great offenses to rest this looks like the kind of ruler that's autocratic that's overbearing it's not something that just now and again he loses his control loses temper it's something that is a hostility something that's a constant autocracy or overbearingness hostility from the part of government from the part of a ruler or you could expand that into a government what it's saying is you don't respond in the same way as the ruler acts towards you of course in those days it would be dangerous anyway to try and respond by giving back the same kind of anger even if the anger of the ruler is obvious against you it could leave it could make you exposed even to losing your life so you don't do that but you don't give up you don't just leave your relationship with the person that says don't leave your place don't act hastily don't be a fool don't actually do things rashly because he says calmness will lay great offenses to rest that brings up things you find in the book of Proverbs for example

Proverbs chapter 15 and verse 1 a soft answer turns away wrath but a harsh word stirs up anger the tongue of the wise commends knowledge but the mouths of fool pour out folly you can find the same in the New Testament when you come to Romans chapter 12 for example you'll find the apostle Paul there dealing with the possibility of vengeance even if we're badly dealt with where he's saying don't actually act in vengeance towards anyone who mistreats you in that way Romans chapter 12 you remember how he says from especially from verse 17 repay repay no one evil for evil but give thought to what is honorable in the sight of all if possible so far as it depends on you live peaceably with all beloved never avenge yourselves but leave it to the wrath of God for it is written vengeance is mine

I will repay says the Lord to the contrary if your enemy is hungry feed him if he's thirsty give him something to drink for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good isn't it amazing how often the Bible brings us things which are so very very difficult for us to follow and to apply which is why we need the wisdom and the grace of God to do it it's very difficult to withhold retaliation it's very difficult not to actually act vengefully towards somebody even in your thoughts then you see the Christian doesn't need to act with vengeance towards anyone because I have a God who acts for me and I can leave it to him and I can place everything in his hand and I can say well Lord you know the truth you know the reality and rather than me stirring up something that's going to cause massive problems for your people

I leave it to you Lord even if it takes all the time in the world to the day of judgment God will take vengeance where he needs to and I can leave that there I can leave it with him and here is what you find the wisdom here of Ecclesiastes as well calmness will lay great offenses to rest now that connects with the New Testament as I've said in Romans 12 but also with that wonderful word that Paul uses that's translated in the ESV by self-control or in the older version the AV by temperance self-control and you go to Galatians and you see it there in the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians chapter 5 one of the elements of that fruit of the Spirit is self-control and if I'm not in control of self if I just lose the plot if I erupt frequently in anger and even once or twice or once in anger at that moment itself

[41 : 19] I'm not acting as a Christian should I'm not acting as somebody who can leave things safely with God so here he's saying you need wisdom individually but also for effective government the anger of the ruler rises against you and that's then taken further in verses 5 to 7 because it talks here about an inverted order where rulers actually don't have the wisdom to rule properly this is what you actually get it says here in verse 5 there is an evil that I've seen under the sun as it were an error proceeding from the ruler in other words he's finding fault with the government with the person in charge a person that's not acting the way they should and have caused problems a person who's not fit to govern a person who has made bad appointments or a government or a cabinet that's really full of self-serving and has self-serving officials as well as you find verses 16 there to 19 when you read through them once again you can see the state of things when from the top there's corruption reaching down into the lower echelons of government because that's all about having a good time having lots of parties spending lots of money especially public money in ways that are not fit really to benefit anyone but themselves here is princes feasting not at the proper time and not for the right reason feasting in the morning woe to you oh land when your princes feast in the morning when all is set on is having a good time and just using the resources at their disposal for their own self-advancement self-service and then of course you go on to speak about neglect verse 18 though through sloth the roof sinks in and through indolence the house leaks bread is made for laughter wine gladdens life money answers everything what that is saying is here's a picture of a government that's just gone to rack and ruin don't care for anything but themselves and their own good time they're saying well there's plenty of money money's the answer let's just have more money let's have more wine let's have more good time let's have more parties let's spend it on ourselves and sadly throughout the world today that's what you still find but you see the problem is or the problem stems from the fact that God has been sidelined that's the whole point isn't it of Ecclesiastes as we said life under the sun vanity of vanity says the preacher futility vanity if God is left out of things then what happens is that society gets turned upside down see what he's saying here in verses 5 to 7 and also verses 16 and 17 when your king is a child when those who aren't fit to govern are actually placed in government or if you see back at verse 5 folly is set in many high places the rich sit in a low place

I've seen slaves on horses and princes walking on the ground like slaves now this is frequently mentioned in the prophets of the Old Testament how society comes to be inverted upside down from what it should be from the way God would have it to be think for example of Isaiah Isaiah chapter 3 where you find in verses 1 to 5 where God is saying the Lord of hosts is taking away from Jerusalem support and supply mighty man soldier judge prophet diviner elder all the people of wisdom he's taking them away he's removing them the captain of 50 the man of rank and I will make boys their princes and infants shall rule over them that's really a way of saying incompetence is going to take over incompetence is going to rule when wisdom is put aside when God is put aside when disobedience actually comes to gain the ascendancy this is what God then brings about the youth will be insolent to the elder and the despised to the honourable then when you go further on in Isaiah just to give you one more example of Isaiah 59 we looked at this passage some time ago where it says there in chapter 59 and from verse 9 all the way through to verse 15 that for justice is far from us righteousness does not overtake us we hope for light and behold darkness and for brightness but we walk in gloom we grope for the wall like the blind we grope like those who have no eyes we stumble at noon as in the twilight and on it goes negative all the way through it's depressing to read it it's all the way through there to verse 14 13 transgressing and denying the Lord and turning back from following our God speaking oppression and revolt justice is turned back righteousness stands afar off for truth has stumbled in the public squares and uprightness cannot enter truth is lacking and he who departs from evil who lives a holy life in other words makes himself a prey makes himself a target does it sound familiar?

of course it does it's right up to date society becomes more and more upside down from the standard that God has set us the more we turn away from God and that's the great dilemma that we have as a people that's what has led to the kind of conclusions people come to whether it's about gender or whatever the basic problem is that God has been pushed aside God has been put out of the public square God is no longer relevant to our lives either individually or collectively or publicly or governmentally when did you last hear anyone in government coming publicly to say you know we need to seek God's help we need to turn to God we need to pray to God we need to set a day of prayer we don't any longer do that as a nation we may do it as churches we did one ourselves as a church not so long ago but how sad is it that those in government with things actually coming to be so upside down through abandoning the ways of God that they cannot see it just like Isaiah saying we are looking for life but darkness we grope for the wall like the blind we cannot find our way you see a little foolishness spoils a lot of wisdom you might say all the wisdom that's gone in the past from our Christian heritage and all the things that have been provided from that Christian heritage that we still have in our land and are grateful for and are thankful for education health various other things that we know today are valuable to us in our communities where have they all come from well they've all come ultimately from God but they've come from the application of God's truth and the principle of God's truth to ourselves as a people as a society and that's what's being pushed aside the Bible is no longer relevant the Bible is no longer fit for purpose what do you find instead we find an upside down society you see we need wisdom for effective government because Ecclesiastes is telling us even a little bit of foolishness spoils much wisdom let alone a great dollop of foolishness what is that going to do but corrupt and lead us astray further so pray pray for our government we're doing that anyway pray that they will be given wisdom pray that God will turn them to see himself to see the relevance of his word and of his law relevance of the gospel the importance of Jesus Christ as the wisdom of God the gospel as God's provision wisdom for our people not just for individuals in our land wisdom for effective government let's say more on that but I want to move on to secondly wisdom for everyday life not just on the part of those who rule but also for each and all of us together as individuals and from verses 8 to 11 you find a series of very short references very short pictures if you like that really are used to convey this to us so if we go through them very briefly and then we'll come to the summary point again where this little drop of foolishness spoils much wisdom let's see what they say he who digs a pit will fall into it what it's really saying there is in those days when you when you dug a pit for an animal to trap an animal that you could then use for food it's important that you remember where you actually dug it usually covered over with a net and then with leaves and so on but maybe one of those days you go out and in your foolishness you say you don't say anything

about where where the trap was put and you just stumble into it yourself a little lapse a little foolishness and it spoils the whole thing and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall if you were in those days the walls made of stone and you wanted to either repair them and take them down and then repair them or else shift one to somewhere else you'd have to be very careful because in amongst all these spaces between the stones little serpents little poisonous serpents could be lurking and if you didn't take care if you just went at it without thinking without using wisdom you could actually get bitten and even poisoned by the serpent stones and logs he who quarries stones is hurt by them he who splits logs is endangered by them you know the danger when you're splitting logs sometimes they can jump up and hit you in the head hit you in the face or you can hurt your hand or if you're in those days you might be splitting or quarrying stones very often that will be up on a hillside perhaps and if you're not careful as you're quarrying the stones one of them could roll down the hillside and there's somebody there just enjoying a nice walk and that stone hits them and kills them a little foolishness a little lack of thought a little carelessness and it's gone spoils the whole wisdom whole batch of wisdom if the iron is blunt and one does not sharpen the edge he must use more strength but wisdom helps one to succeed but wisdom is an advantage for success could be translated well that's a picture of somebody using an axe again or a knife and doesn't actually sharpen the edge of it and just goes on using it and it gets more and more blunt and the more blunt it gets the more effort you've got to put into cutting the thing you're cutting with it and so you're using more energy instead of having the wisdom just to say to you look let me just pause for a minute

I'm going to sharpen this axe and going to sharpen this knife and that makes things a whole lot better instead you just batter on you don't take the time and you can apply that to life in all sorts of ways looking back over my own life I can say that before I finally came to yield my heart and my mind to Jesus this is what I was trying to do I was trying to do it with my own efforts trying to better my own life trying to actually improve things knowing that God was speaking to me through his word and showing me my sins and showing me that I needed what I didn't have I first of all tried to go about it by manufacturing it by creating myself well I'll cut this out of my life I won't do this anymore I won't use this kind of language anymore or I'll stop doing this and then within a day or so or less I'll be back doing the same things just cutting away you see with the same knife I wasn't actually stopping just to sharpen the edge to do those to do it the way God would have me to do it is that how it is with yourself tonight are you battering away at your own self at your standing at your need for righteousness at your need for acceptance with God are you just battering away in your own style in your own way and you know it's just leading to more effort and it's not getting you any further well here is what God is saying give up on that sharpen the edge of your axe go to Jesus give it over to him and instead of exerting all that effort into trying to make yourself righteous accept his righteousness instead of that receive him and he will give you everything that God requires of you see a serpent then goes on he goes on serpent bites if a serpent bites before it is charmed there's no advantage to the charmer well in those days they knew about how a snake can be charmed through music you've seen video of that

[55 : 16] I'm sure where somebody playing on a whatever it is like a chanter or whatever and the snake rising up out of the basket and being charmed well what this is saying is if the man tries to catch the snake before it's completely charmed it's going to bite him it's going to be poisoned it's impatience that does that he just didn't wait to see the thing through he didn't have the wisdom applied at that moment to doing what he knew he ought to have done you see all of those whether you think of the pit or the serpent or the stones or the logs or the blunt axe or the snake charming it all amounts to try to illustrate for us this a little folly a moment's indiscretion a little bit of lack of thought or a carelessness over something can undo so much wisdom because friends we are living in a dangerous world and I don't mean a world dangerous in a physical sense though there is some of that dangerous especially in a fallen world dangerous in a moral sense dangerous in the sense that there are so many pitfalls there for you and I that we need to actually have God's wisdom in order to know how to deal with or how to avoid there are many moral snares and that's one of the things that is true for all of us whatever stage of life we're at it's not just young folks who fall into the trap of immorality or adultery or whatever else it is that's set before us as a moral snare this world is full of dangers for the Christian for every one of us whatever our standing is and here it is

Ecclesiastes giving us this wonderful nugget of truth tonight use wisdom use what God offers you through the gospel use what God gives through his Holy Spirit wait upon God ask God for more wisdom ask him at the beginning of every day Lord take me through this day without causing for myself or for others some disaster something that will bring your cause into disrepute something that will blacken my own name or the name of somebody else whole lot of different ways in which this can be applied we need wisdom for everyday life a little folly a tiny little drop of foolishness and it can undo a whole batch of wisdom in our lives think of I mentioned earlier those in the Bible that you find mentioned Noah for example the last thing you find in the Bible about Noah is a pretty disgraceful episode here was a man a man of God a man of integrity a man who had withstood all the mockery round about him building this art years before the flood came yet at the end of his life he planted a vineyard he got drunk and there was a really seedy element as you find described in Genesis

Gideon Gideon in many ways a spiritual hero in the book of Judges who was raised up in order to bring relief to the people of Israel at the time from the threat of the Midianites from the from being held in thrall to their enemies and Gideon was used as a leader to lead them against that to deliver them from that and yet at the end of his life people wanted to make him a king he refused that but he then made an ephod which became a snare to himself and to his family set it up as an idol there's the end of that person that good man's life and yet that little drop of foolishness has undone so much of what has happened before you can say the same David in the episode with Bathsheba and others in the Bible too and so we need to be careful that we seek wisdom every day to keep us not just to guide us not just to equip us and empower us but to keep us to enable us to know what not to do what not to say as well as what to do and what to say and that brings us to the final point and this has taken a bit longer than I anticipated but the third point is we need wisdom as well as for effective government and everyday life we need it for edifying speech verses 12 to 14 the words of a wise man's mouth win him favour that's probably better translated the words of a wise man's mouth are gracious and the Bible has so much hasn't it to say about purity and quality of speech because the Bible recognises

God knows and has given us through his word how important it is for us to think about what we say how we say it what not to say and how not to say things purity quality of speech if they're all the Bible without really looking at the passages let me just say the Bible has pictures of destructive words when we use words destructively the Bible compares that to weapons of war or to fire or to poison because that's the effect it has morally and spiritually if our speech is not edifying you remember the Apostle Paul's words to the Colossians to the Ephesians to the Colossians sorry in verse chapter 4 verses 5 to 6 walk in wisdom towards outsiders making the best use of the time let your speech always be gracious seasoned with salt so that you may know how you ought to answer each person and that leads on to the final point in the chapter which again has to do with edifying speech even in your thoughts do not curse the king not in your bedroom curse the rich for a bird of the air will carry your voice in other words he's telling us very often what you actually start working on in your mind comes out in your words and if it's not edifying speech if it's going to be destructive speech very often it's going to make its way towards its target so it's really saying to us don't even do it in your mind try and keep up with wholesome positive thoughts even towards those who you may feel tempted to react to or to take vengeance upon

Ephesians 5 tells us look carefully how you walk not as unwise but as wise making the best use of the time because the days are evil therefore do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is that applies to our speech as much as to anything else because very often it's really our speech that either does good to people or actually works destructively towards other people in the second world war there was a very famous campaign which went under the title careless talk costs lives and there were some wonderful posters eight posters I think all together by a man called Cyril Kenneth Byrd who went by the name of Fugas and he was the artist who drew these wonderful posters and they were all with this particular emphasis careless talk costs lives if you google that you'll find pictures of some of these posters and there's always in them either a couple of people having a conversation and underneath there'll be a little a little statement saying well it's alright if I tell you and then as you look at the background there is an image of a window with Hitler and Goebbels just leaning over the window listening you see careless talk costs lives that was so important during the second world war so important that nothing was said that would act in such a way as people would lose their lives over it and that is so true in the spiritual and moral realm as well in the spiritual warfare that you and I are engaged with friends remember careless talk costs lives that's why it says in this chapter that the words of a fool consume him the end of his talk is evil madness the beginning of his words is foolishness a fool multiplies words you know the most difficult one of the most difficult things especially for those of us who preach is to stop talking and it's difficult even in conversation to stop yourself interrupting someone else and one of the things

[64 : 47] I really find frustrating in listening to interviews carried out nowadays by people whether it's on radio or television is an interviewer who cannot keep his mouth closed until the question he has asked has been answered that's rude it's not proper interviewing technique but as a feature of life one of the things that demonstrates how difficult it is for us not to talk at times when that really should be what we be doing careless talk costs lives and it takes wisdom and it takes an increasing amount of wisdom from God to enable us to attend to our speech to other aspects of everyday life and all the way through to the upper echelons of government and we pray that God will bless once again our thoughts on his word let's pray gracious God we give thanks for the direction that your word gives to us for all of these areas of life even from the top of society and government through to ourselves as we seek to live as citizens we thank you for the wisdom that you promise to give and that you give in response to those who come to you because we know your word sets before us that if anyone lacks wisdom let him ask of God who gives abundantly and who does not threaten in response we pray for wisdom and we ask Lord in our day that you would give your people that wisdom that would enable them to conduct themselves wisely what they do and what they say and what they refrain from doing and refrain from saying give us we pray that wisdom so that we may all the more glorify your great name receive us now we pray for Jesus sake

Amen we're concluding our worship tonight by singing this time from Psalm 141 in the Sing Psalms version Psalm 141 and it's on page 185 verses 1 to 4 we sing to the tune Selma O Lord I call to you come quickly I am in need and when I cry to you for help to my appeal give heed verses 1 to 4 these first four stanzas of Psalm 141 O Lord I call to you come quickly to my lead and when I cry to you for help to my appeal give heed like incense may my prayer before your face arise the raising of my hands be like the evening sacrifice keep watch

Lord on my mouth and guard my lips I pray let not my heart to evil thoughts be drawn and led astray keep me from taking part in what the evil do let me notice their choicest foot lest I be false to you now make grace and mercy and peace from God the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore

Amen once again once again thank you for joining us this evening and I trust that you will know and have known the Lord's blessing as we've looked at his word and worshipped him together may God keep you safe and well during these very critical times thank you thank you to everyone to you and