

CHASING THE WIND
“Fool’s Gold” Ecclesiastes 10
July 9, 2023

INTRO.: (gold rush) In 1848 John Sutter was having a water-powered sawmill built along the American River in Coloma, California, approximately 50 miles east of present-day Sacramento. On January 24th his carpenter, James W. Marshall, found flakes of gold in a streambed. Sutter and Marshall agreed to become partners and tried to keep their find a secret. News of the discovery, however, soon spread, and they were besieged by thousands of fortune seekers. Literally, thousands of Americans (mostly men) borrowed money, mortgaged homes, or spent their life savings to take advantage of an opportunity they never dreamed possible. In a society that was becoming increasingly based on wage labor, the idea that a person could alter his destiny by collecting gold off the ground proved irresistible. (With his property overrun and his goods and livestock stolen or destroyed, Sutter was bankrupt by 1852.)

From the East, prospectors sailed around Cape Horn or risked disease hiking across the Isthmus of Panama. The hardest took the 2,000-mile overland route, on which cholera proved great killer. By August 1848, 4,000 gold miners were in the area, and within a year about 80,000 “forty-niners” (as the fortune seekers of 1849 were called) had arrived at the California goldfields. By 1853 their numbers had grown to 250,000. Some estimate it was as high as 300,000 people came to California looking to get rich. Although it was estimated that some \$2 billion in gold was extracted, few of the prospectors struck it rich. The work was hard, prices were high, and living conditions were primitive.

People were willing to take the risk of sacrificing everything to get rich. There are some today who are willing to do the same. Some ended up with far less than they hoped. Some may be chasing “fool’s gold” and not what is truly most valuable. Pyrite is called “Fool’s Gold” because it resembles gold to the untrained eye. The United States Geological Survey (USGS) explains that “Fool’s Gold can be one of three minerals. The most common mineral mistaken for gold is pyrite. Compared to actual gold, this mineral will flake, powder, or crumble when poked with a metal point, whereas gold will gouge or indent like soft lead. In addition, actual gold will leave a golden yellow streak when scraped on a piece of unglazed porcelain. Pyrite will leave a dark green to black streak. You can tell what is and what isn’t real gold by testing its properties.

The Bible has much to say about fools and the difference between a fool and someone who is wise. Solomon uses the words “fool,” “fools,” or “foolish,” 24 times. I would say he is trying to make a point. We want to look at the characteristics of a fool from Ecclesiastes 10 but also, in contrast, the characteristics of a wise person. So, how does Solomon describe a fool? I think we all would want to make sure it isn’t a description of us, although I must admit that I can be guilty of some of these characteristics at times. This is a church filled with *messed up* people! Solomon says you can tell a fool by their: walk, words, and work. This chapter is made up of many short proverbs: short sayings that make a point. As we read through this in unison see how many you can pick up.

Ecclesiastes 10 As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor. The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left. Even as he walks along the road, the fool lacks sense and shows everyone how stupid he is. **4** If a ruler’s anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great errors to rest. There is an evil I have seen under the sun, the sort of error that arises from a ruler: Fools are put in many high positions, while the rich occupy the low ones. I have seen slaves on horseback, while princes go on foot like slaves. Whoever digs a pit may fall into it; whoever breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake. Whoever quarries stones may be injured by them; whoever splits logs may be endangered by them. If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed but skill will bring success. **11** If a snake bites before it is charmed, there is no profit for the charmer. Words from a wise man’s mouth are gracious, but a fool is consumed by his own lips. At the beginning his words are folly; at the end they are wicked madness, and the fool multiplies words. No one knows what is coming— who can tell him what will happen after him? A fool’s work wearies him; he does not know the way to town. Woe to you, O land whose king was a servant and whose princes feast in the morning. Blessed are you, O land whose king is of noble birth and whose princes eat at a proper time— for strength and not for drunkenness. If a man is lazy, the rafters sag; if his hands are idle, the house leaks. A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes life merry, but money is the answer for everything. Do not revile the king even in your thoughts, or curse the rich in your bedroom, because a bird of the air may carry your words, and a bird on the wing may report what you say.

You can tell a fool by their:

WALK

The first thing Solomon talks about is how little foolishness does there needs to be to get one’s life off course or to cause damage. Since this is the case we want to make sure we aren’t acting and living the part of fools.

Ecclesiastes 10:1 As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.

Ladies, how many dead flies would you want in your perfume? How many would it take to ruin the perfume? I was reminded of how little it takes to ruin something good with my old *running shoes*. I had purchased some nice shorts to go with my polo shirts that I could wear to the office during these hot summer days. On Wednesday, with temperatures predicted in the 90's I wore shorts, polo shirt, and my old *running shoes* that looked okay on the outside. The only problem was that I had been using those shoes to do yard work the day before when the grass was wet and combined with the many times I had run in them, how do you think they smelled? It was so bad that I couldn't stand the smell. I went and bought another pair of shoes on clearance and then had to air out my office. Just from that pair of *running shoes*. I don't think there is anybody here who wants to be considered a fool.

Solomon begins with this idea of a person's "*walk*." When I refer to "*walk*" I'm talking about the general way that we live.

Ecclesiastes 10:2 The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left.

What does he mean that the heart of the wise goes to the right but the heart of the fool to the left? He's not talking about a political stance.

What is the significance of *right hand* in Scripture? (Philip Graham Ryken)

*Used to convey blessing (Jacob to Ephraim: Genesis 48:13-20) *Associated with authority and honor in reference to Jesus:

Psalm 110:1 The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."

Luke 22:69 But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God."

Acts 2:33 Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

Acts 5:31 God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.

Acts 7:56 "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

Ephesians 1:20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,

Colossians 3:1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Hebrews 1:3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

1 Peter 3:22 who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

*Final judgment

Matthew 25:31–33 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. **32** All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. **33** He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Right hand = strong & good

Left hand: weak & bad

Why does Solomon refer to the "*heart*" of the wise and "*heart*" of the fool? As we look at Scripture everything in life follows the "*heart*."

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; . Who can know it? (NKJV)

Psalm 14:1 The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good.

Look at what the Psalmist prays for:

Psalm 19:14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Psalm 51:10 Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Psalm 86:11 Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.

Psalm 139:23–24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. **24** See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

As Solomon continues it gets even worse for the fool.

Ecclesiastes 10:3 Even as he walks along the road, the fool lacks sense and shows everyone how stupid he is.

Since his heart is wrong, the fool lacks any sense of direction and continues to show others the foolishness of his ways. He can't even see what everyone else sees. The fool is on the wrong road and seems to have no idea even though everyone else can see it. This is why we need to pray for hearts to be changed. When God gets a hold of a person's heart their direction changes. Parents we need to be careful that we don't just concentrate on behavior but ask God to change the heart! When you pray for Vacation Bible School and these young people and families, pray that God would change hearts!!!!

Look at what Jesus said to the religious leaders:

Mark 7:5–8 So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with ‘unclean’ hands?” **6** He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: “ ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. **7** They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.’ **8** You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.”

Deuteronomy 6:5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Matthew 22:37 Jesus replied: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’

You can tell a fool by their walk (we all need a heart transplant); by their:

WORDS

I remember years ago hearing this quote: “Better to be thought a fool than open your mouth and remove all doubt.”

What does Solomon say about the mouth?

Ecclesiastes 10:12 Words from a wise man's mouth are gracious, but a fool is consumed by his own lips.

Ultimately, any conversation about wisdom comes back to what a person says. A fool loves to hear themselves talk. His words actually consume him, which means they are self-destructive.

Plato, “Wise men speak because they have something to say; fools because they have to say something.”

Proverbs 10:19 When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.

James 3:3–12 When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. **4** Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. **5** Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. **6** The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. **7** All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, **8** but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. **9** With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. **10** Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. **11** Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? **12** My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

Contrast this to the wise person whose words are “*gracious*.” Their words are full of favor, messages of blessing on others. Even when one has to confront another who is living in sin, the truth is spoken in love.

James 1:19 My dear brothers, take note (command: to know, to understand) of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,

The fool's speech has a downward trend as time goes on. His words are self-destructive, without grace, and then eventually wicked or evil.

Ecclesiastes 10:13-14a At the beginning his words are folly; at the end they are wicked madness—and the fool multiplies words.

Once again, what is the source?

Matthew 12:34 You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.

Before I came to faith, I had a terrible mouth. My language was not good, full of cursing and things that were not morally right and pure. So, I tried to clean up my language which wasn't very effective because my heart had not changed. Jesus made all the difference in my life.

Solomon says the downward trend continues: a fool's words are self-destructive, without grace, leading to evil and wickedness, and then presumptuous, thinking they can predict the future.

Ecclesiastes 10:14b No one knows what is coming— who can tell him what will happen after him?

To say we can predict what is going to happen today or tomorrow is arrogant. For the believer, we do know what the future holds after we pass from this earth. Absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

My conclusion on our words is that apart from Jesus we have no chance to use wise words. I don't know about you, but I still need to apologize for some of what I have said. The only problem is that once it is out of my mouth the damage is done.

From Philip Graham Ryken: A wise person:

- *offers verbal praise and audible thanksgiving to God – not cursing but blessing Him
- *when he speaks to people, he uses more words of encouragement than criticism
- *Speaks the truth with his neighbor, not stretching it for personal advantage, but saying what needs to be said in a loving way.
- *speaks with gentleness, never in unrighteous anger
- *Knows how to use reconciling words like, "I'm sorry" and "Please forgive me."
- *Speaks words of love and affection

You can tell a fool by their walk (we all need a heart transplant); by their words (the downward file and we need a change of heart) and by their:

WORK

How hard it is to find a good worker today?

Ecclesiastes 10:15 A fool's work wearies him; he does not know the way to town.

A fool is trying to get out of work and he gets tired trying not to work. Any work is tiring for the fool resulting in incompetence. Things that should come easily are a struggle, hence the phrase, "he doesn't know the way to town."

One has said, "It is so bad that they would get lost even if you put them on an escalator."

There are results for one who fails to work:

Ecclesiastes 10:18 If a man is lazy, the rafters sag; if his hands are idle, the house leaks.

The follower of Jesus should be the best worker possible because they have a different boss.

Colossians 3:23–24 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, **24** since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

What changes one's work ethic? It is a heart change! None of what I spoke about this morning can take place without Jesus Christ. It takes a heart change to have our walk change, our words change, and our work change.

SO WHAT???

Living apart from Christ is like gathering *fools gold* and pretending its real gold.. People were willing to sacrifice greatly during the gold rush of the mid 1800's. They left their families to get rich and many died, but few got positive results. Those who had success found that this is temporary at best. As we look forward to Vacation Bible School let us pray for changed hearts. Let's make sure that we're looking to Jesus. What is the foundation of my life?

Matthew 7:24–27 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. **25** The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. **26** But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. **27** The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

*To be wise, and not a fool, begins with a personal relationship with God. How would I describe my relationship with God?

*What evidence is there in my life that I have had my heart changed?

*What is one area of my life that, by God’s grace, I want to see changed? To whom will I be accountable?

*What Scripture will I meditate on and memorize this week?