

Intro: Well, we are almost to the end of our series through the OT book of Ecclesiastes. We have been dealing with the quest of the main character of the book, which reflects our quest in life as well: we are all after the... "The Point of It All: [All of us want to] Find Reason to Live in an Unreasonable World." I want to invite you to open you Bible to Ecclesiastes 10. That's on page 558. (If you don't have a Bible, please grab one as a gift from us...)

As you turn there, I want to take a quick poll. How many cereal lovers do we have out there?

- There are 2.7 billion packages of cereal sold every year – that's enough boxes to wrap around the Earth thirteen times.
- Of the more than 294 million people in the U.S, 49% start their day with a bowl of cereal.
- Breakfast cereal is the third most popular item sold in grocery stores after carbonated beverages and milk.
- What's the cereal with the highest nutrition score? Post – Shredded Wheat. The lowest? Crunch Berries Cap'n Crunch
- Now why did I share that with you? There's no real point. I just thought you might want to know that useless information. But we are going somewhere with this reflection on cereal...

I love cereal. I eat it for breakfast a lot of mornings, but I eat it almost as frequently as a late night snack. There is only one thing I do not like about cereal, and maybe some of you can identify with this. The only thing I do not like about cereal is going to the grocery and deciding which brand, or usually, brands to buy. Anybody feel me on this one? When I walk down the cereal aisle, unless I am on a mission for a particular craving, I usually have a huge dilemma on my hands. Let's be honest, the cereal aisle can be at once, both exhilarating, because of all of the options, and intimidating, because of all of the options. The average grocery store now carries over 250 varieties of cereal.

First, I have to go through and evaluate every single brand. Why is that? Because they are always coming out with new brands: Take cheerios for example. Everyone has had a bowl of yellow-boxed cheerios, right? As American as apple pie. Then they came out with Honey Nut Cheerios. Then Apple-Cinnamon cheerios. Today they have added: Multi-grain, Banana Nut, Chocolate, Dulce de Leche, Cinnamon Burst, Yogurt Burst, Frosted, Fruity, Oat Cluster, Peanut Butter , and for good measure, Multi-grain Peanut Butter Cherrios. Who knows what they'll come out with next week? And that's just cheerios. Then, all of these other questions begin to swirl in my head? Should I go healthy? Maybe Life, or Kashi with Blueberries, or Oatmeal Squares? Or Should I go not-so-healthy? Maybe Apple Jacks, or Cinnamon Toast Crunch? Should I get something in between like one of my current staples, Honey Bunches of Oats w/ Peaches? Do I want to stick with an old classic, or do I want to try something new? Do I want both? When I go into the cereal aisle, I've got be prayed up before I show up to take care of business.

Now, let's make the leap from the ultra trivial to the ultra crucial. In contrast with the hundreds of cereal options in the grocery store, when it comes to choosing which path we're going to walk in life, there are really only two options. The Bible consistently sets forth, from the Old Testament to the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament, two paths: the path of wisdom and the path of foolishness. According to God's design, there are really only two ways to live.

"Two Ways to Live"
Ecclesiastes 10:1-20
May 6, 2012

And we're going to be challenged this morning to...

The Point: Choose the path of wisdom by cultivating a heart constantly renewed by grace.

Trans: That's where we're going... The first thing chapter 10 teaches us is this:

I. Our conduct flows from the character of our heart (10:1-3).

- So many people live under the false impression that Christianity is a religion that prescribes a list of moral do's & don'ts. With that assumption, people then try to live a moral life as a means of appeasing God and winning his favor.
- But, biblical Christianity runs so much deeper than that. These first three verses are going to teach us that God is primarily focused on the heart.
- Look at **verse 1**. He's continue his thoughts on wisdom and folly where we left off last week in chapter 9 and he lets us know that a little foolishness can go a long way. He does so by comparing it to something as small and inconsequential as flies that can take ruin something designed to give a pleasant and beautiful smell by making it stink.
- I believe the church needs to take this to heart. It's easy for us to look at the major sins around us, the ones that cause the most destruction to ourselves and others and ignore what we view as little sins or as some people call them, "respectable sins." Respectable sins might include ingratitude, discontentment, anxiety, pride in all of its varied forms, anger, impatience & irritability, judgmentalism, lack of self-control, envy and jealousy, and sins of our tongue.
- Our lives are designed to be a pleasing aroma to God, but like this costly perfume, they can be quickly contaminated through a little foolishness.

Now, **verse 2**. This verse, in my estimation, is the key verse of the passage. If you miss everything else, and I hope you won't do that, but if you do, don't miss this verse. What is he saying here?

- This talk of the right and the left is not a political statement. Left vs. Right, Democratic bent? What? Republican bent? That's what I'm talking about...
- This is not a strike against left-handed people. If you are left handed, we love you. We need more left handed people in this church. You are welcomed here!
- [In ancient Israel, the right hand signified the place of honor and power, whereas the left was a place of weakness and instability. Added to that, the right was oftentimes connected with moral purity, whereas the left was connected with moral perversity.]
- The main idea is that the directions of their hearts are moving in opposite directions.
- Our heart will incline us, lead us, move us, to live in a particular kind of way. This is **INCREDIBLY IMPORTANT** for us to understand.
- Jesus says it like this in the gospel of Luke: **"For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."** (Luke 6:43-45)
- Think about the picture here. Jesus is saying, what is going on in the inside will naturally and necessarily come out on the outside. When Jesus speaks of fruit, he is talking about our behavior, but he says our behavior flows from our the character and quality of our hearts.
- Paul Tripp, in his great book *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change*, lays down what he calls the...
- **Principle of Inescapable Influence: "Whatever rules the heart will exercise inescapable influence over the person's life and behavior."** – Paul Tripp Did you get that? (Repeat)
- Now, here's some presuppositions I'm going to work from moving forward: 1) Whatever rules our hearts will exercise inescapable influence over our lives. 2) What rules our hearts is often something other than Christ. 3) Thus, we all are consistently in need of heart change. We are all imperfect sinners who are a work in progress.
- Is there any room for doubt about this? Just look at our city. In the past week, we've had controversy, if not, corruption among city officials and a report of 600 pounds of marijuana being trafficked through the city.
- What has the power to change the wickedness within us? Not a set of rules that leads to behavior modification, but the gospel that leads to life transformation.

Behavior Modification vs. Gospel Motivated Transformation

Behavior Modification

- How it Works: Keep rules through self-effort.
 - Example... Do this. Don't do that.
- Why it Doesn't Work: Grounded in improper motivations (guilt, people pleasing, self-glory)
 - Why some kids go bonkers... the heart was never in the behavior. They were not moved by proper motivations...
- What it Produces: Temporary change through moralistic behavior
 - It produces little religious Pharisees

Gospel Motivated Transformation

- How it Works: Obedience through dependence on grace.
 - Example: Do that in the strength God supplies as you abide in Christ (Jn. 15) True, God-glorifying transformation in your life will not happen apart from Christ.
- Why it Works: Grounded in the proper motivations (love, the pleasure of God, God's glory)
- What it Produces: Lasting change through grace motivated obedience.
 - We expect the gospel to transform lives. It's just what happens when Jesus gets a hold of someone's life.
 - Sure it may be a bumpy road... Explain sanctification. Progressive, supreme climb...
 - Whereas behavior modification produces little Pharisee, gospel motivated transformation produces maturing disciples of Christ

So here's the good news. It doesn't matter how you came into today; God is not finished with you. If you have never received the gospel, then you need God to radically transform your life and give you the grace to begin walking the path of wisdom. If you have received the gospel, then you need God to continue transform your life and give you the grace to keep you walking the path of wisdom. Let me show you how this works practically.

How People Change. Heat Thorns Cross Fruit (Lane/Tripp)

- **Heat: Our daily situations in life.**
- **Thorns: Our ungodly response to the situation.**
- **Cross: God's redemptive power to bring change.**
- **Fruit: Our godly response to the situation.**

I believe this is a framework we can apply in any situation. Let's just take a few possible scenarios since you arrived at church this morning.

- Let's say you walked in this morning and saw someone with the same shirt on you just bought and were planning to wear next Sunday. (We call that heat) What's your first response? Oh no she didn't. I know she be trying to copy my style. I make that shirt look good. She had to get that to make her look good. I'm going to have to take that back and get something more fly. (That's what we call thorns). OR here's a different response: You could go up to that person and say, "Oh, we have the same taste girl, you lookin good in that. You make that look good. How about you wear that to church on May 27 and we can be twinkies." (That's what we call Fruit) It was enabled by the cross which takes down our pride, envy, and ego and replaces it with humility, love, and kindness.
- Ok, that probably didn't happen to anyone this morning, but it could have. Let's take something more tangible, the situation right now: listening to a sermon....
- This is applicable across the board: what happens when you face the heat of your lunch order being incredibly slow? What happens when you face the heat of your 5 year old having a meltdown this afternoon? What happens when you face the heat of your boss breathing down your neck at work? What happens when you face the heat of your friend or your spouse sinning against you?
- The cross can enable us to bear lasting fruit that glorifies God in every situation.

That's verse 2. Now, we'll pick up the pace. I promise...

- **Verse 3.** The person who lives a foolish life broadcasts their folly by the way they live their life. It's evident to all. "Just by walking down the street the fool announces himself." (Enns)
- **Verse 3** could be translated, "Even when the fool walks along the road his heart is deficient." That teaches us that one's foolishness is a clear indicator that something is lacking or deficient or not right in a person's heart.

Trans: In verses 4-20, we're going to look at some case studies in wisdom, and I want us to remember the principle of inescapable influence and the heat, thorns, cross, fruit structure as we look at what it means to...

II. Live wisely through a heart transformed by grace (10:4-20).

First, how should we respond...

- **Responding to Offense & Injustice (4-7)**
 - Responding when offended (4).
 - Thorns... Impatience, anger, frustration or Fruit... Patience, Self-Examination
 - Proverbs 15:1: "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."
 - Verses 5-7 basically say what we continue to hear in Ecclesiastes: The world is not always fair. Because of the error of the ruler of a land, fools are elevated to positions of power, while those who we would think belong there are often missing.
- **Working with Wisdom (8-11)**
 - Sharpen your ax. Prepare well. That way when you exercise your skills and gifts on the job, your work will be easier, more efficient and more effective.
 - When we work smarter, it brings success (10) This is a commendation of someone wisely using the abilities they have been given with.
 - The timing of applying wisdom... (limits of wisdom... dead flies...) (11)
- **Watching Our Mouth (12-15)**
 - Verse 12. The speech of the wise brings grace. The speech of the fool brings destruction. "the lips of a fool consume him."
 - Jesus was a wise teacher... Luke 4:22 "All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth."
 - Verse 13. When a fool begins to speak, for the appetizer he serves up foolishness, for dessert he delivers what the ESV calls "evil madness" and what Peter Enns calls "terrible irrationality." It goes from bad to worse. The consequences can be devastating.
 - Verse 14. The fool goes on and on and on, running his trap, talking all that noise, but in the end, there's really nothing profitable in all of his many words.
 - Be leery of people who love to hear themselves talk. Spend time with the wise. "Whoever walks with the wise grows wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm." (Prov. 13:20)
- **Exercising Leadership (16-20)**
 - This is the kind of leadership we should be looking for.
 - This is the kind of leadership we should be exercising.
 - You may say, "I'm not a leader." Yes, you are. You better be. No, really. No one looks up to me. I don't lead anyone. Why not? Are you supposed to be proud of that. Live a life that is capable of leadership.
 - Let's not reduce our notion of leadership to leading the masses, though it should certainly not be less than that. We have servant leaders in this church. Families need leaders. People need leadership in their life. They need guidance, direction, wisdom, a godly example, and mentorship.
 - These principles in 16-20 are applicable to a variety of leadership roles.
 - So what do we learn? Maturity over age (16-17).
 - Woe! This is the wrong time and the wrong aim... Morning.. to get drunk and waste the day away (Margaritaville) They feast when they should be governing and leading and working.
 - Happy! Proper time for strength.
 - Laziness has bad consequences (18-19). We need leaders and to be leaders that are willing to work hard.
 - Is there anyone who would consider you a leader in their life?
 - We need this. This is the command to make disciples... When you walk in wisdom, your life will give evidence of maturity, progression. People will see something exemplary in your life.

Conclusion:

So, how can we stay on the path of wisdom?

- **We need a heart remade by grace** (Gospel regeneration) John 1:12; John 3.
- **We need a heart renewed by grace** (Gospel sanctification)
 - Remember the centrality of the word and the gospel.
 - Psalm 1:2, "BUT HIS DELIGHT IS IN THE LAW OF THE LORD & ON HIS LAW HE MEDITATES DAY & NIGHT."
 - Keep your heart through a constant rhythm of practicing repentance and faith.
 - Prov 4:23: "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life." (Proverbs 4:23)
 - Guard it. Watch it. Examine it. What rules your heart?

God wants to change you from the inside-out. Have you experienced this gift of a new heart and new life in Christ? If so, are you daily being renewed by his grace?