

Season 9: Ecclesiastes

Episode 11: Eternity Shapes What We Know (9:13-11:6)

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Sarah: This season, we're really thankful for the sponsorship of ten of those.com *Clothed With Strength*, written by Sarah Allen, details the short biographies of four fairly unknown women and yet women who were used mightily by the Lord in the 18th and 19th centuries. It's a wonderfully inspiring read, seeing their courage and God given strength in the face of much suffering, weakness and opposition, and how the Lord used these different women to bring significant change and freedoms to the lives of women around the world. Grab your copy at 10ofthose.com

Felicity: Welcome to Two Sisters and a cup of tea. My name is Felicity and I'm in the States and I'm here with my sister Sarah, who is in the UK, and we're excited to be carrying on in *Ecclesiastes* for this season. We're going to be finishing off chapter nine, moving through chapter ten and getting to the start of chapter eleven. We're excited. Sarah, great to see you.

Sarah: You too. Tell me about your biscuit triumph this week.

Felicity: It has been a triumph. An old classic has been brought into the gluten free delights, the custard cream. I know a genuine custard cream. It's got crunch, it's got flavor. It's not quite as good as the actual one, but in terms of gluten free strong, I would say nice.

Sarah: For those who don't know what a custard cream is, it's one of the cheapest biscuits you can find in the UK. It doesn't taste of cream or custard. I would say it's just like a sandwich biscuit, isn't it? With two layers of biscuit and one layer of kind of buttercream almost in the middle.

Felicity: Yeah, it just goes really well with a good cup of tea.

Sarah: No. I'm so pleased. That's brilliant. Felicity, in the last few weeks, we've had quite a few questions about how long we spend in a book before we press record, and I wondered whether you could just help our listeners understand a bit about our process and what it looks like for us.

Felicity: Yes. Let it be known that this is not the first time that we have opened up chapters 9, 10 and eleven here. We have been kind of marinating in *Ecclesiastes* since the summer. And so when we're getting to our passage for this episode, we've had a fair amount of time reading it and we've been talking to each other about it, and we've got a kind of Google doc that we go back and forth with one another as to what we're thinking. So as we get to the point where we're having this conversation, we have spent a fair amount of time just kind of mulling over it, really, and sharing our thoughts a bit. But these conversations that we have, they're not scripted, these are our responses, these are our genuine conversations in response to the text. And that's not to say that we're kind of experts in this. I think it's true that anyone who was to sit down and spend some time marinating and mulling and talking about parts of the Bible, then their understanding would increase as well. And actually the desire increases as well, doesn't it? Does that ring true for you?

Sarah: Yeah, definitely. And I think if there's any listeners out there who've been listening from right the beginning of our journey back in season one and I hope they'd say a similar thing, that actually we are continually growing in how we open the Bible together and how we talk about it and how I feel like I really have been on a bit of a growth spurt in this journey with you. As to how I handle the Bible and what it looks like to do that more and more. So I guess we're always a work in progress, aren't we? But it's an encouragement that wherever you are on your journey, you're opening the Bible with someone else. And we love to encourage everyone to do that. There's always room to grow, isn't there? And whether you're just starting that journey or whether you're a fair way in, there's the joy that the Lord is always going to be at work. And I just think it's never ending, really. That isn't it?

Felicity: Yeah. And so it's worth giving it a go, isn't it? As ever, we would encourage you to do that, but shall we get into our passage today? So we are. Chapter nine, verses 13,

through to chapter eleven, verse six. I'm going to read it for us. I also saw under the sun this example of wisdom that greatly impressed me. There was once a small city with only a few people in it, and a powerful king came against it, surrounded it and built huge siege works against it. Now there lived in that city a man poor but wise, and he saved the city by his wisdom. But nobody remembered that poor man. So I said, wisdom is better than strength, but the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are no longer heeded. The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouts of a ruler of fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good 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 fools walk along the road, they lack sense and show everyone how stupid they are. If a ruler's anger rises against you, do not leave your post. Calmness can lay great offenses 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've 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 axe is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed. But skill will bring success. If a snake bites before it is charmed, the charmer receives no fee. Words from the mouth of the wise are gracious, but fools are consumed by their own lips. At the beginning, their words are folly. At the end, they are wicked. Madness and fools multiply words. No one knows what is coming. Who can tell someone else what will happen after them? The toil of fools wearies them. They do not know the way to town. Woe to the land whose king was a servant and whose princes feast in the morning. Blessed is the land whose king is of noble birth and whose princes eat at a proper time for strength and not for drunkenness. Through laziness, the rafters sag because of idle hands, the house leaks. A feast is made for laughter. Wine makes life merry, and 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 in the sky may carry your words, and a bird on the wing may report what you say. Ship your grain across the sea. After many days you may receive a return. Invest in seven ventures, yes. In eight. You do not know what disaster may come upon the land. If clouds are full of water, they pour rain on the earth. Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where it falls, there it will lie. Whoever watches the wind will not plant. Whoever looks at the clouds will not reap. As you do not know the path of the wind or how the body is formed in a mother's womb. So you cannot understand the work of God, the maker of all things. Sow your seed in the morning and at evening let your hands not be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.

Sarah: Fantastic. Thank you, Christy. Well, it's a fairly eclectic mix of proverbs again here, isn't it? But I guess it's important to see it in light of the context of the rest of chapter nine that we're just coming out of. So last time we were seeing that death is certain, but it's at an uncertain time. We don't know when it will happen, and the kind of encouragement to seek to live wisely. And here, really, there seems to be a big push on live wisely because it's better than a life of folly. And being faithful, even when we don't know what the future holds, it counts for much.

Felicity: Yeah, I think that's right. We sort of have a series of contrasts going through these proverbs, really, don't we? I feel like because we're coming at it from chapters one to nine, we're reading it therefore with our eyes wide open to what wisdom is and therefore what folly is. And I feel like this is a much more visible wisdom than if we just kind of parachuted in at this point. And so we have things like the fact that wisdom is cited as being better than strength. At the end of chapter nine there and then as we move into chapter ten, we have this idea of quiet words, of wise better than shouts of fools, I feel like comes back again to this idea of just being careful with our words. That's been a reverberating warning throughout, which.

Sarah: Has been it has it again at the end of chapter ten, doesn't it? With them in chapter ten it's even with your thoughts, do not revile the king even in your thoughts because you don't know who's going to translate that or where your words end up in that. It's really exposing that, isn't it? But there's definitely yeah, there's the real contrast of words from the

mouth of the wise are gracious but fools are consumed by their own lips and that is just a theme in Scripture, isn't it?

Felicity: Words, words.

Sarah: James picks that up, doesn't he? With our words being like a yeah.

Felicity: And it's interesting that, isn't it? Actually then, because it is spoken about so much in Script, that kind of does give weight to the fact that we need to really be careful about what we say, that words can cause damage and can build up. And I think all the way through here there's a kind of visibility of wisdom and folly. It's kind of obvious. If you look at the start of chapter ten, we've got this verse three the fools walk along the road and they lack sense and show everyone how stupid they are. And this kind of idea that it is apparent whether you're walking wisely or not. And I just think that's quite a helpful thing to see, that in the nitty gritty, the reality of life wisdom is visible and that's a desirable path to walk.

Sarah: I wonder whether it's only desirable as we kind of steep ourselves more and more in the wisdom, though, as in the more that we've been in this book, the more that we want to live wisely. I think that's the way I feel like my heart is being inclined to kind of desire it more and so we're more quick to spot the folly. So reading all this on my words, I have been much quicker to see the folly of my words. And that's how the word works on our hearts, isn't it? Like it brings to attention the folly that flows out and we seek to kind of grow in wisdom. And I guess that begs the question, well, how taking it to Jesus then, actually as the one who is the very wisdom of God, he's the one who's going to help me to grow in wisdom ultimately.

Felicity: And this is something that Karen Sewell helped us with, I think when we were talking to her. This idea that as we are reading this and as wisdom is becoming more desirable and even more so, as we see it very much kind of in the midst of real life, like the frustrations and the brokenness of the world, our hearts are being primed to receive that perfect wisdom of Christ. Not just his words, but actually he himself. And I think that as we then see this and we desire and our hearts are inclined more to what God is saying in terms of what it is to walk wisely, then I'm more inclined to accept that I want the wise one, the ultimate teacher and shepherd.

Sarah: Yes, definitely. But also seeing Him in these words as well, isn't it? Seeing that actually he did fulfill these words, he did live in a way that was wise with his words. And what particularly struck me was chapter ten, verse twelve, it says words from the mouth of the wise are gracious and doesn't that describe Jesus? His words are always gracious when they're even in the face of a lot of testing and trials. But fools are consumed by their own lips. At the beginning their words are folly, at the end they are wicked, madness and just that really struck me with the kind of trajectory that we see his enemies in the Gospels. Their words begin to begin with a folly, by the end they're crucifying Him. Like the kind of trajectory of folly is that words multiply words and only produce more evil in that. And I think that it really struck me actually the kind of truth of that for Christ's own life and how it ended up.

Felicity: Yeah, I think that's so right. And then actually if you then sort of follow it through, especially if you think chapter ten, verses six and seven, you get this picture of the fools are in high positions and the wiser in the low positions, the richer in the low positions. And that is exactly, isn't it? So following that through, then the foolish, those against God, against wisdom, they ended up kind of ruling in that moment. But ultimately we have this great reversal that's going to happen where Christ is king like he will reign. I think that's just a helpful so the wisdom that we are standing on, the wisdom that we're desiring and that we're being encouraged to pursue here that is right and good and ultimately the best way that we can be running.

Sarah: Yeah and it's building our lives on this wisdom which actually then when Jesus talks about what it is to build life on wise living, he talks about building on that solid foundation, doesn't it? That he is the wisdom we build on. And so all that we're reading here points us drives us forward to Christ and we seek to build our lives on Him and that then inclines our hearts to want to then live out the wisdom that we're seeing here. I feel like it's a kind of cyclical thing, doesn't it? And I think it's really helpful just how practical some of this as well is as well, particularly at the last bit where the big picture is we don't know, we don't know what the future holds and we've really seen that through the whole book, haven't we? Only

God can understand the one who's the maker of all things but in light of that, just get on with it, get on with life. Sow your seed like don't keep checking the weather, just crack on and have a go at living life and fearing God and just making it count, I guess.

Felicity: Yeah, I think that's exactly it and it brings to mind the previous chapter when he says that the Lord has already approved what you're about to do as in he already has given you this gift and so therefore live out this wise life in accordance with what he has given you and what you have before you. And yeah, I think that chapter eleven, those six verses there is a real kind of prompt to basically get on with it. We see the Lord, we know that he's in control and we can therefore trust this wisdom which we're more and more persuaded is trustworthy and this side of the cross even more so because we have Jesus in view and therefore we can sow your seed, don't let your hands be idle with purpose. We do what we've got to do.

Sarah: Yeah, I think it's praying to that end, isn't it? I've just been thinking about how this does challenge my heart. Am I seeking to really pray for this kind of wisdom? Because it is really into the kind of every detail of life stage, isn't it? This isn't kind of out there wisdom, it's not big picture, we're sitting in the big picture but actually just some really helpful and straightforward details of what it looks like to live wisely in this world, isn't it? This world that is broken and that is fleeting, as we've seen the whole way through the book. And actually just that simple prayer of Lord, please keep growing me in wisdom to live in a way that obviously honors you and is obviously in contrast to folly, I guess.

Felicity: And I think that's exactly it. Praying that then we would see what is the wise path, but our hearts would be inclined to the right to the Lord. And as we see that, would we take steps forwards in that direction. I think there's so many degrees of that, aren't there? In terms of what are our eyes seeing, what are we primed to be eager for, what are our hearts inclined towards? And then what are we actually doing with our hands and our feet and our words? And I think that's right and recognizing again and again that it is a heart level thing, this. I think often we can look for wisdom and we ask people advice and we're just kind of wanting someone to tell us what to do. But wisdom literature here is operating on a much deeper level, presenting us with a desirable picture of wisdom, which we would then pray that our hearts would want to pursue.

Sarah: Yeah. And I think as we then seek to actually extend those words of wisdom, for example, to someone else, just thinking practically, like, what does this look like to encourage someone else with a word of wisdom? Well, ultimately, we're wanting to encourage people to fix their gaze on Christ in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found, aren't we? So it doesn't just mean reciting a proverb to them, but actually with our Jesus kind of gospel glasses on it's actually well, actually, how am I encouraging this friend today to build their life on the foundation that is Christ, who is the very wisdom of God and Christ crucified, that is the very wisdom of God. Like, just how we kind of encouraging and pushing each other towards Jesus in this. And that's the joy of reading this as New Testament believers, isn't it, that we have this fulfilled and we can do that?

Felicity: Yes. So true. Shall I pray that we would be doing such things?

Sarah: Yes, please.

Felicity: Heavenly Father, we praise you so much that you give us such a real picture of our world and such a solid foundation of wisdom in Christ. We praise you so much that as we read this book, we know that that path of the wise is exactly where we want to be running. And so, Father, we pray that you would incline our hearts that way. Would you help us to see with our eyes what is the way to run? And as we do that, Father, we pray that not only would we be running that way, but we would be wise in encouraging others in it as well. Please help us to present Christ, to present wisdom, to just give great desire to run this way. And we pray that in Your name. Amen.

Sarah: Amen. Well, next week is our final episode of season nine. Can't believe we're pretty much at the end here. It's been a big book and I'm really excited to kind of wrap it up next week with you. In the meantime, I wonder whether you're listening right now, whether you could think of someone today who you could encourage with some quiet words of wisdom that point them to Jesus. There's the challenge for today. That's my challenge today as well. And we really look forward to wrapping up the season with you next Friday.

Felicity: Absolutely. We will see you then. Goodbye.

Sarah: Bye. This season has been sponsored by ten of those.com.