

Chasing after the Wind

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Ecclesiastes 4, 9 & 10 | April 2, 2017

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I. Introduction to this Study

We continue our Lenten series Chasing After the Wind, a common refrain throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, which describes the futility of running after worldly things.

This week, we're chasing after the wind of power.

II. Connecting with One Another

Recall a time you were pleased with a leader. Why were you pleased with him or her?

How about a time you were let down. Why did you feel that way?

III. Study the Text

- a. Before engaging this week's text, spend some time reflecting on the previous four weeks of our study, where we addressed the futility of chasing after wisdom, pleasure, wealth, and achievement. What struck you in those studies and/or sermons? (To recap, turn to Ecclesiastes 1.12-18, 2.1-11, 2.12-26, and 4.1-12 – study guides can be downloaded at gspc.org/recent-messages)

How has recognizing the futility of wisdom, pleasure, wealth, and achievement prompted you to chase instead after the disciplines of solitude, fasting, simplicity, and guidance?

- b. Read Ecclesiastes 4.13-16

These verses depict "the short-lived popularity of the great." When have you seen this "short-lived popularity"? In politics? In popular culture? In ministry?

Why do you think popularity is so short lived?

- c. Notice how Solomon characterizes the "old but foolish king." The conjunction "but" is used to contrast what has already been mentioned, in this case signaling a conflict between "old" and "foolish" (elsewhere Solomon asserts the honor of the elderly: Proverbs 16.31, 20.28-29, see also Job 12.12-13).

How would you describe the king Solomon discusses? (Think about this before continuing)

William Brown writes, "The king's foolishness is defined by his refusal to accept advice. He, too, is a loner by intent. And so by such hardness of mind, the ruler

makes himself vulnerable to being replaced by one who is receptive to wise counsel, a mark of wisdom (Proverbs 11.14, 15.22). Solomon suggests that even a former prisoner from an impoverished background can rise up and replace the king."

Time permitting, read Joseph's rise to power in Genesis 37-41 and/or Rehoboam's disastrous policy in 1st Kings 12.1-19, for examples.

- d. Derek Kidner concludes, "Solomon, with his way of bringing a scene vividly before us, pictures the teeming mass of men, and sees them on the side of the newcomer, young as he is, and innumerable as they are. Yet he too will go the way of the old king, not necessarily for his faults, but simply as time and familiarity, and the restlessness of men, make him no longer interesting. He has reached a pinnacle of human glory, only to be stranded there. It is yet another of our human anticlimaxes and ultimately empty achievements."

Let's update our above question: Why does *Solomon* think popularity is so short lived?

- e. Read Ecclesiastes 9.14-18

Compare and contrast these verses with 4.13-16. How do they address similar themes? How are they different?

- f. "In a world in which wisdom is no longer recognized for what it is, the wise have no voice and folly becomes the norm... Wisdom, in short, can thrive only in the best of all possible worlds. Solomon's world is not one of them."

Is our world one of them? In other words, does our culture give voice to the poor, but wise among us? Or, has folly become the norm?

- g. Zach Eswine comments, "A good leader is hard to find and is often found in unexpected places, like a stable or a carpenter's shop, or on a cross like a thief. Sometimes true wisdom looks nothing like those who possess power and position, but instead like a poor carpenter who loved his enemies and for which his enemies killed him. Sometimes the triumph celebrated reveals the folly honored. Sometimes the true king goes unnoticed by the foolish. Jesus came as the poor wise man that delivered the city. He is the prince who walks as a servant while lesser men ride in honor under the sun."

Where could Jesus' humble wisdom confound the powerful in our culture?

- h. Read Ecclesiastes 10.5-9

What do you think Solomon means by "the rich" in verse 6? Is he referring to financial gain? Or something else? (Try answering before continuing)

Zach Eswine concludes, "'Rich' refers here to the one who worked long and hard, and from such work and faithfulness wealth came. Solomon's point is that an erring leader overlooks this kind of faithful character and places impatient, wandering, slothful, get-rich-quick schemers tragically in charge."

Where have you see this happen? What was the result?

Spend some time reading and meditating on the following passages, thinking through how each clarifies the use of power:

Mark 10.35-45

Matthew 4.1-11

Luke 14.1-14

John 13.1-17

Philippians 1.1-11

- i. Greg Boyd refers to Jesus' use of power as "power under" rather than "power over": "The contrast between the "power over" kingdom of the world and the "power under" kingdom of God is "Lion power" versus "Lamb power." The kingdom of God advances by people lovingly placing themselves *under* others, in service to others, at cost to themselves... We are to engage in this behavior not out of duty to an abstract ethic, but because the life of the one who came under all humanity on Calvary is pumping kingdom life through our veins."

How could you use your "power under" to serve others this week?

IV. Pray

- a. Ask God to give Good Shepherd a passion for "power under" to serve others, rather than a "power over" to rule them,
- b. Lift up any areas of your life where you are tempted to use your power inappropriately,
- c. Pray for our upcoming Holy Week gatherings – that God would use His people to beckon others to the good news of Jesus' sacrificial death and life-giving resurrection!