



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Lessons from Mike Black

Ecclesiastes: 9:13 – 10:7

Lesson 12 of 16

2007-08

"Under The Sun, **Use Your Mind**"

TRANSCRIPT

We are tonight in the ninth chapter in the book of Ecclesiastes beginning in verse thirteen; and so the book is drawing to a close. This is life ‘under the sun’, and not New Testament theology. It is life on the *horizontal plane*: Or insights by a very ‘powerful mind’ into this life as we see it and as we know it through our senses.

This summer my wife rented a movie, *The Devil Wears Prada*. I’m not endorsing the movie’s content by any stretch of the imagination, but I am endorsing the wonderful performance by Meryl Streep. She is simply a remarkable actress, for she becomes the character she portrays. I know nothing about the lady personally, but what an amazing gift. In this particular story, she plays a high-powered fashion magazine editor. She is the endorser of the fashion world. And as I watched this character unfold, I thought of our Teacher in the book of Ecclesiastes. From all outward appearance they seem to have it all. Everything. With the exception of everything that would allow one to enjoy life on the inside – peace, joy, satisfaction, happiness. The things that only the Lord can give to a ‘man under the sun’.

You see, when you live by your gifts and your talents only, this life ‘under the sun’ will exhaust you. It will wear you out. You will not be a fulfilled person, no matter what you have; or think you have. Life here, left to yourself, is just a big mirage: And this is, in effect, what our Teacher has been telling us over and over again. He was a man who seemingly had it all; and yet he was joyless, without contentment or peace. This has been our lesson to this point.

Tonight, we pick up in Ecclesiastes chapter nine, and the structure of our lesson falls out into four parts. The first section (9:13-16): *The instability of people around us*. The second section (vs 17&18): *Wisdom, folly, and weapons*. The third section (10:1-4): *Miscellaneous proverbs on wisdom and folly*. And fourth, our final section (vs 5-7): *Small things that create great problems*.

The appeal tonight will be to the mind: The mind of the believer. This is the content of what the Teacher seems to be indicating through our passages.

Now, let's look together at our text and I'll be reading from the NIV.

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 siegeworks against it. Now there lived in this 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.

Ecclesiastes 9: 13-18

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.
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:

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Fools are put in many high positions,
while the rich occupy the lowly ones.
I have seen slaves on horseback,
while princes go on foot like slaves.

Ecclesiastes 10: 1-7

May the Lord add His blessing to the reading and teaching ministry of His Word tonight. Let's bow before the Lord of the Word together, shall we?

Father, we're very grateful to be together tonight and we are mindful of this season of the year; the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ whose goodness, whose mercy, whose purity, and wisdom span not only our lives, but the ages—That those who have believed in Him shall never perish but have everlasting life.

Lord, we desire to draw close to Your wonderful truth tonight to know Him more fully. We listen to the Word of God as it comes to us from this great ‘powerful mind’: as he appeals to us to **use our minds**; to live our lives with skill and wisdom; to take his counsel and his advice and to not forget it. May we be better equipped; more able, and more sure to live the precious days that You has given us ‘under the sun’ to the honor and glory of Christ our Savior.

Lord, bless our families. We pray for them. And we pray for our loved ones who do not know our Lord and Savior; for we pray with the help of the Spirit and the enablement of the Word of God that they would be reached and brought to the truth.

We pray for the infirmed. We ask, O God, Your grace and mercy in every circumstance and in every situation knowing Your all-wise providence rules and governs everything that touches our lives.

As Your Word, that goes forth from Your mouth and never returns void but always accomplishes the purpose whereunto you send it, like so Lord, use Your Word tonight in our midst to build us up and to refresh our faith: So that in every case Christ might be glorified. It is to that end that we pray, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Well, let's begin our study tonight by looking at Ecclesiastes chapter nine beginning in verse 13 and *the instability of people around us*. "I saw under the sun this example of wisdom that greatly impressed me." This serves as an introduction to the example story that follows in verses fourteen through sixteen. Now, here he provides a parable unlike the others that we have reviewed in the past. I want you to notice that this is not about what people should *do* but rather about what people are *like*. The key figure here is 'the poor but wise man.' Observe that he is weak in every way to this powerful king who seeks to take over his city. Notice the contrast: We have the poor simple man contrasted to the great king. We have the contrast of huge siegeworks to a simple town with few inhabitants. All advantages to the king: But he doesn't prevail.

Remember, we learned last week from verse eleven, "The race is not to the swift, or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned;..." Well, what happened? Well, to our surprise, the prevailing skill of our single weak fellow is unimportant. It left no impression whatsoever upon our 'man with the powerful mind'. But one single fact did. This poor but wise man, who singlehandedly saved the town, was forgotten. Though his actions and skills were significant, over time they were forgotten by the people in the town: And that's what our Teacher remembers. His point: 'Wisdom is wonderful in the here and now; in the short run. But meaningless and empty over time.' Because you're going to be forgotten. Remembered by friends and family, to be sure, but forgotten over time. The things that you sacrificed for others will not be remembered over time. They will not be appreciated over time.

Note the end of verse sixteen "...and his words are no longer heeded." We remember here Joseph, who singlehandedly saved all of Egypt. And yet as great as that feat was, he was not to be forever remembered. His name did not live on in honor or in infamy: But in Exodus 1:8 it says that he was forgotten and that he was remembered no more by the leadership of Egypt.

Now we as Christians labor not that we will be remembered or admired or appreciated. Rather we labor and serve every day for an invisible Christ, 'under the sun'.

One thinks of the Apostle Paul: And I have a couple of passages to bring to your attention. First, turn to 2 Timothy 4. Do you think the Apostle Paul was broken and discouraged at the end of his life because he was thrown into a Roman prison? Do you think he was discouraged because the churches he had planted had run amok; covered over by Judaizers who sought to change his sound teaching of the grace of God by adding works of the Law? You think that broke Paul? Well, think again. Look, right here, 2 Timothy 4:6-7. He says, “For I am being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” Notice the four *I*'s. ‘I'm being poured out; I have fought; I have finished; I have kept.’ No matter what the course of his life took ‘under the sun’, he ever remained the faithful man.

You see, we are not spiritually ‘born again’ in this world to change the world. We are ‘born again’ to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. We are to be the people of the ‘light’ and the ‘truth’ and the ‘salt’. We are to be the faithful people of God. That's what we're about. We bring glory to Him by living that way; to Him who chose us; to Him who redeemed us and to Him who empowers us. And notice that Paul made it all so personal; for it was his faithfulness to the Lord that was all that really mattered to him.

Now, we live that way—we will do well. You want to live life here on the earth ‘to eat, to drink, to laugh, and to love’ (to use our ‘man with the powerful mind's’ vocabulary)? Well then, give your life away. Give it away. But lay your life at the feet of Jesus and you'll get it back over, and over, and over, and over again. See, ‘under the sun’, whatever else you do, you **use your mind**. You feed on that!

Next, verses seventeen and eighteen begin a new section and there is no obvious connection with its discussion of *wisdom* and the preceding story. Two ‘*better than*’ proverbs promote wisdom over folly and physical power.

In verse seventeen are “The quiet words of the wise” vs ‘the loud words of fools’. More particularly, it is ‘the wise’ vs ‘a leader among fools’. Observe also we are to ‘*heed*’, (Don't miss that), ‘Heed the words of the wise’ to hear and to act upon them.

Tremper Longman suggests that the effect of the word ‘*heed*’ is a statement that the lessons of the wise are worth hearing. Now, this puts the burden on me personally (and on any other teacher of the scriptures). So I thought about that and put some thoughts down late into the night. I said to myself, "Teach the truth. Teach with conviction. Teach with clarity. Never bore people with the Word of God. Be prepared. Be logical. Be organized. Be forward moving. Get to the end. One doesn't have to have great gift. Just look at me. But deliver the goods."

Now, what follows are just my opinions. I am not representing The Chapel here. I am just speaking my own convictions: ‘There is a famine for good teaching everywhere. The Christian church is in desperate need of biblical instruction. Everywhere. But for anyone who has considered teaching remember; it's a call to sacrifice. Sacrifice to study; to be a student all over again. And if you're not prepared to stop and concentrate then you're lacking what it will take to be efficient and to get the job done’.

Now the second proverb (vs18): The evaluation of wisdom as opposed to weapons. He tells us it takes very little to destroy something good. Some commentators have suggested this is a link to our parable that we looked at previously (vs13-16). The advantage of wisdom over war. But I don't think so, because our teacher with ‘the powerful mind’ didn't tell us how the poor wise man saved the city. Or what he did to the mighty king or his weapons to win. Wisdom, skill, know-how, fresh thinking tactics can be more effective than just weapons. Weapons in and of themselves can do nothing without the right implementation and strategy. That's the point.

If I were to take you out to play golf and outfit you with the most expensive clubs available: With brand-new custom fit metals just for you; and now you go play with that set of clubs. Do you really think you could beat Tiger Woods playing with his game in the 60s? Not a chance! You see, it's the skill. It's not just the weapons you use.

This high praise of wisdom here is contrasted to the latter half of verse eighteen. It takes only one type of personality to cause a lot of trouble; and he is identified – notice your text – as the “sinner”: The man who misses the mark morally. He's a problem because he has a corrupt heart. He was spoken of for the first time in

Ecclesiastes 2:26. And there he had a cursed life; for God cursed him by taking all of his hard work and labor and gave it to the upright who pleased Him.

In chapter seven, verse twenty-six, this same personality will seek out, find, and be ensnared by the immoral woman. That's his heart. Therefore, for you and me, we are to be on guard; we are to watch out for this kind of man. He will be forever defined by the way that he behaves. That's the point. 'Under the sun' **use your mind**.

Next, in chapter 10, verses one through four, we have the third portion of our outline: *Miscellaneous proverbs on wisdom and folly*. Verse one: "As dead flies give perfume a bad smell, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor." *Perfume* here is the 'good': And in the ancient Near East it would probably be a sweet-smelling oil. *Dead flies* illustrate the foolishness that makes the sweet smell of perfume—STINK. The point of the proverb: It only takes a little to spoil something worthwhile. Notice wisdom and honor mentioned here are wonderful and highly valued but just a small amount of folly can spoil them. The idea that we should remember: 'It takes far less of an effort to ruin something than to create it. Good things can be marred in a single moment'.

Let's think about that for a minute: Esau, for a simple bowl of stew, sold his birthright (Gen 25:34). Miriam and Aaron soiled their testimony due to their arrogance claiming to have an equal standing with Moses (Num. 12:2). Moses losing his temper, striking the rock twice (Num 20:11). David, mighty David, for his one night of lust and adultery, brought a sword into his own home. The application for us as believers is readily apparent: 'Walk in the Spirit' (Gal. 5:25); 'let this mind be in you that is in Christ Jesus' (Phil. 2:5); 'walk in holiness; lest no man see the Lord' (Heb 12:14). That's our application. I can still remember hearing on reel-to-reel tape the voice of the late great Donald Gray Barnhouse; so powerful and resolute. And he said something like this back in the '50s: 'Christians can make great fools of themselves.' Now that should be all the application that we need. So my friends, whatever else you do 'under the sun', **use your mind**.

Verse 2. "The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left." The idea of the proverb is that the wise man's heart leads him aright. The fool's heart on the other hand leads him astray. The proverb here is 'good versus bad'. The right hand is the place of virtue. The Latin word *sinister* means 'left hand.' Biblically, our Lord put the sheep on the right, the goats on the left. Blessings come from the right hand and they're different than the blessings from the left hand. And that's why I want you to tab to Genesis 48.

Genesis 48:13, to be specific for I want you to look there to supplement our lesson tonight. 'Joseph took Ephraim on his right towards Israel's left hand and Manasseh on his left toward Israel's right hand; and brought them close to him. And Israel reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger; and crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Manasseh's head, even though Manasseh was the firstborn.' So what you have here is the younger actually getting the touch from the right palm and the older receiving the touch from the left palm. Don't miss that with the *crossing of the arms*. Joseph tries to dissuade his father, but old man Jacob (Israel here) knew what he was doing, and he pronounces the blessing of significance: The blessings go to those who don't deserve them (Don't miss that). The blessing on the right hand that did not come naturally.

But *under the cross* (the crossing of the arms: The greatest of significance to us as believers) *under the cross* is not a natural blessing. *Under the cross* the blessing do not come to the natural heir.

Now let me ask you: How is it that you are in Christ Jesus tonight? Is it because you're smarter? Is it because you possess more gift, more talent? Eric Alexander, our friend from Scotland, when visiting with us a couple of years ago told us about growing up in his country; and just life around his household. His mother always imploring him to do as his older brother. Eric said: "He was really the standard for me. He was smarter. He had such talent. Better than me in every way as brothers go." Later, the older brother became a Christian. That one single life had the greatest of impact and influence on the entire family: Particularly Eric, who became a believer himself. Then God and His

providence took Eric's brother early in his Christian life and then look what He did: Eric the weaker; Eric the less significant, was raised to a man of great blessing ‘under the sun’. Eric became best friends of the late Jim Boyce with a ministry going far beyond his St. George Tron Church (Scotland), and onto the Americas: Certainly a ministry far beyond anything Eric could have ever imagined or expected.

So here it is; teaching us again, and again, and again—the lesson that you and I are only a product of *grace*; *under the cross*: Not the natural heir. We are really quite weak and really quite insignificant. But God in His grace makes us whatever we are for whatever He wants us to be.

Robert Murray McCheyne, who died in his late 20s but led a lasting revival in Scotland, said: ‘It was not so much with great gifting that God blesses *but with great likeness to Christ*. Become more and more like Him and watch what He does with you.’ Many people know doctrine but have no hearing, because they're not like Christ. And people recognize that. It's Christ in your life that people see. That's what's so attractive. That's where the power is.

The next proverb, verse three: ‘Even as the fool walks along the road, he lacks sense and shows everyone how stupid he is.’ First, we understand the word "road" not as an actual literal road, but rather as a metaphor for life. The point: The word "walk" is a picture of his matriculating through life. We recognize him and we say: ‘There's a fool. Boy, that is a fool. Look at his behavior’. But if we take the word "road" literally, and we are permitted to do that in this verse, it doesn't diminish that interpretation at all from our ‘man with the powerful mind’. The fool – notice – can be recognized by his gait for some have a distinctive manner in their walking; the way they carry themselves. So, think about the specific attributes of the fool that can be known; and the first and foremost attribute of a fool mentioned here: He *lacks sense*.

Now, two other proverbs that use that phrase "*lacking sense*" – put these in your margin right here – Proverbs 6:32: The adulterer: "A man who commits adultery lacks judgment;..." (*that's your NIV: "Lacks judgment."*) "...whoever does so destroys himself." And the second; Proverbs 7:7 is of the simpleton who is controlled by his

feelings; not by the word of God: "I saw among the simple, I noticed among the young men, a youth who lacked judgment." And he then becomes the prey to the temptress. So using this phrase "lacking sense" (or translated in the NIV "lacking judgment") we have the picture of two separate personalities. One feeds his appetite actively: He's on the prowl for women. The second; the man is easily led astray by women. Both are fools.

Notice also in our proverb, (vs3), the words "*shows everyone*." The sense of the word is *proclaiming*. Just listen to him and he will tell you the kind of man he is. His character cannot be concealed. Now put in your margin right here Proverbs 12:23. 'A prudent man keeps knowledge to himself, but the heart of fools blurts out folly.' You see, this man has thoughts and can't wait to tell you about them. But don't waste your time trying to engage him or persuade him. He's not interested in listening. He's interested in talking. Proverbs 18:2. "Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions." The bottom line: Whatever else 'under the sun', **use your mind**. See this person and avoid him.

The fourth proverb, verse four, is not connected in any way to the first three. The word "*ruler*" was used back at the beginning of our study (9:17). There the word referred to the civil authority; the man of power. In this context it is the same. Our verse refers to dealing with an irate superior. The counsel: Stay out of his way. 'Mr. Big' is angry.

Back in chapter eight in verse two through verse nine we were to respect his power, appeal to it for virtue, always stay in the presence of the king. Never leave: But don't be an anarchist.

But in 10:4 we have a specific situation: What to do when the king is angry at you? The answer from our 'man with the powerful mind' is one word: "*Calmness*". A quiet word 'breaks the bone'. You're not to throw a fit or to leave your place where God has placed you: Storm out—Slam your car door—Burn rubber down the road. On the contrary: You are to remain calm and stay put. Your demeanor, which others are watching, will soothe the situation. That's his counsel. That's the way to be wise.

Next, in verses five through seven, our fourth and final section illustrates that it only takes *a small decision to create a great problem*. "There is an evil that I observed under the sun, an error that originates from the ruler. The fool is placed in important decisions while the rich sit in lowly places. I observe slaves on horses, nobles walking on foot like slaves."

Now, let's first observe that our teacher describes this lesson ahead of time as "*an evil*" (vs5a). He did the same for us previously in chapter five verse thirteen and chapter five verse sixteen. The word *evil* here is normally designated by a '*mistake*' that comes through negligence, forgetfulness, or by accident (words that are more '*appealing*' to you and me living 'life under the sun'). Then next, feel the '*calamity*' around the word "*error*", (vs5b), for it results into a more serious repercussion: And its author, we are told, is a "*ruler*"; the one in authority. The specifics of this "*error*" are laid out for us in verses six and seven. Namely, the '*fool is placed in an important position*' while the '*rich sit in lowly places*'. Now, what is of great interest to us here is the contrast. Notice your text—it's between the "*fool*" and the "*rich*". The word "*rich*" here is in the place of the word *wise*. And no one really can give a clear explanation for the use of the word *rich over wise*. In the majority of wisdom literature, the rich are depicted as arrogant, self-willed, self-determined who pay no attention to God or to His Word and who die with big funerals—Wonderful funerals. That's the rich in wisdom literature.

'Our man with a powerful mind' obviously doesn't favor one man over another, but the clear point to the text here is that we have wrong people in wrong positions. So, when I'm confused about the word "*rich*" I'm going to let the context interpret that word for me. That's what I will attempt to do tonight. The "*fool*" here should be given no authority or responsibility. Now, we understand that. He's a guy like Haman in the book of Esther. He should be avoided by the *wise* never to be given a high place or position. But how about the "*rich*"?

Well, in my opinion, the “*rich*” are the producers; the producers in a society in an organization and on a team. They are ‘the rainmakers’, if you will. They are the ones who get the job done. They are rich in talent; rich in drive; rich in energy. So, this is a call for the very competent to be moved to the top. I think that's his counsel and good advice for life ‘under the sun’. The ‘keys to the company’ shouldn't be handed to someone just because of their name or their pedigree. They should not be given positions if they are not godly people.

Now, if you look at Absalom, for example, you see a lot of fine qualities. Patience. Drive. Motivation. Ambition. But take a look at his character: He would have been a disaster. A kingdom to himself for himself. And people like that, it's my experience, ‘blow up’. And you know what? When they do, they take a lot of people with them. And you just think about that when you look at your political leaders today.

Verse seven. Back when our Teacher lived, the privileged individual rode on a horse. David's son, Adonijah, sought David's throne by gathering chariots and horses with 50 men to run ahead of him. Now that's just comical if you know anything about the hilly terrain around Jerusalem. It's like driving a Formula One racecar in Manhattan traffic. You would look great at the red lights; particularly when you put it in neutral and rev up the motor. Imagine the exhaust and the sound ricocheting off the buildings in Manhattan. Boy, that'd be great: But then the light turns green and you move forward—ten feet! And then you stop. And then you move forward five feet; and you stop; and you move forward ten feet; and you stop. That's what this is: It looks great, but it's just not practical.

Esther 6:6-11. Mordechai was led around the city by Haman as he rode on the king's horse. The idea of the Teacher: Servants walk—nobles ride. That's the idea. However, here we have the exact opposite; underscoring the ruler's error. A chaotic society is what he's created. And his point: It's madness. It's all out of whack because of his decisions. A government that rewards the lowly and punishes the productive is an unbiblical society.

Now in our lesson tonight, the appeal throughout has been the same: While ‘under the sun’, **use your mind**. And this is where we want to leave it for tonight. It is your life: **Use your mind**.

Do you really want wisdom? Do you really want to know wisdom and be wise? Then let me offer to you Jesus Christ: Wisdom for the ages. I say to you: “Do not leave this auditorium without knowing for sure that He is the Christ. That He is the Savior.” And what better season than now as we remember His Incarnation. He came to save a people from their sins. And that's what He did. That's why He came. Would you, in the quietness of your heart, make that commitment and make it right now?

I appeal to your mind. I appeal for you to think. You know who the smartest guy in the room is? He's the man or the woman who loves Christ the most. He came for sinners. May God regenerate your soul through your response to the teaching ministry of the Word tonight. May you come to Him as your Savior as you have heard that Word, and move forward in response to It. That's my prayer. That's my plea. **Use your mind** in your life: These fleeting few years of your life ‘under the sun’.

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