

The Ubiquitous Loud Folly That Spells Ruin

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[0 : 00] But we're going to turn now to our reading for this morning, and we are back in the book of Ecclesiastes after a couple of weeks away. Ecclesiastes, and we're in chapter 10. So I'll give you a moment to turn that up. Ecclesiastes 10.

And we're reading from verse 12. Ecclesiastes 10, and from verse 12.

The words of a wise man's mouth win him favor, but the lips of a fool consume him.

The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is evil madness. A fool multiplies words, though no man knows what is to be, and who can tell him what will be after him.

The toil of a fool wearies him, for he does not know the way to the city. Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning.

[1 : 18] Happy are you, O land, when your king is the son of the nobility, and your princes feast at the proper time for strength and not for drunkenness.

Through sloth, the roof sinks in, and through indolence the house leaks. Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money answers everything.

Even in your thoughts, do not curse the king, nor in your bedroom curse the rich. For a bird of the air will carry your voice, or some winged creature tell the matter.

Well, amen. May the Lord bless to us his words this morning. Well, do you open your Bibles with me to the passage Paul read for us here, the second half of Ecclesiastes chapter 10, which we will get to in a while.

Well, but we're going to be looking at that under the heading of the ubiquitous loud folly that spells ruin.

[2 : 33] Now, the world that we live in, the world under the sun, as Ecclesiastes calls it, is a world full of mysteries that are beyond us. But also, a world full of mess that's obviously all around us.

And our preacher never tries to hide that reality from us, quite the reverse. He confronts reality head on, constantly. And last time as we studied chapter 9 and 10, we heard him plainly warning of a life that is complex and unpredictable.

And therefore, a life that easily will make fools of us, will ridicule us. And indeed, more than that, we need to realize that our human hearts are corrupt and are all too predictably corrupt.

And so that can easily be the ruin of us. And so left to ourselves, life will certainly ridicule and ruin us. It will make fools of us, and ultimately, it would floor us.

But thank God, mercifully, we're not left to ourselves, are we? God has given his wisdom to mankind. We saw that in chapter 9, verse 16. Wisdom is better than all the might of men.

[3 : 54] The weapons of war. But alas, as that verse goes on to say, all too often that wisdom is despised, and it just goes unheard. And you see, that's why these chapters are here to warn us not to refuse that wisdom from God.

Because it's only by receiving that wisdom that we'll be rescued amid all the snares of this very unpredictable fallen world. If we refuse God's wisdom, then life will ridicule us.

It will make a fool of us. Just look at verses 17 and 18 there at the end of chapter 9. Wouldn't these two verses alone do a power of good if they were taken seriously in Moscow, in Washington, in Brussels, right now?

The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than a shouting of a ruler among fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war. But one sinner destroys much good.

Well, we saw, didn't we, the sad reality in the second half of chapter 9, last time, that God's wisdom is powerful. It's available. But alas, it is ignored.

[5 : 06] It's lost in the arrogant bellowing which is so often lapped up by fools. And we saw in the first half of chapter 10, likewise, that just a little human folly, as verse 1 says, can outweigh a huge amount of true wisdom and honor.

And our world of humanity makes such a fool of itself again and again and again as a result of these things. Rejecting God's wisdom, whether it's in personal life or in public life, will ridicule us amid the snares of this unpredictable and fallen world.

But more than just ridicule us in life, it will ruin us in the end. That kind of folly has ultimate consequences. Refusing to be hearers of God's word, speakers of God's word, will lead to utter ruin in the end.

I mean, the snares of our very predictably fallen human hearts. It's not just folly. It is ultimately fatal. Look at verse 12 of chapter 10.

The lips of a fool consume him. Verse 13. The beginning might just seem like a little foolishness, but look where it ends.

[6 : 24] It ends in evil madness. And so here you see in the second half of chapter 10, the message is just the same. The only way of rescue from the ridicule and the ultimate ruin is the way of God's wisdom.

It's his word of saving revelation. But what we see here is the emphasis moves on from the folly of not hearing God's words of wisdom to not speaking God's words of wisdom.

Verse 12. The words of a wise man's mouth are literally a grace. Every believer is to speak so as to manifest and to lead to the grace of God, which is the very opposite of a fool's self-destruction.

But of course, in order to speak wisdom from God, you've got to first hear wisdom and know that wisdom from God. And the problem is that we live, don't we, in a world full of the loud shouting of rulers among fools.

We live in a world, as verse 14 echoes here, where the multiplying words of folly, of sheer ignorance are all around us. Just think of the sheer volume of the opinion formers, the advertisers, the media, the agenda pushers that are all around us, shouting all the time.

[7 : 54] We live in a world full of ubiquitous, loud folly. And if we listen to these siren voices of the culture all around us, it will lead us to ruin, to evil madness, to ultimate self-destruction.

Because that's where our culture is headed for. Hence, the task of Ecclesiastes, the preacher here, is to patiently and persistently refute the loud folly of the culture all around, to speak a contrary word, which is a contentious word, and a largely unwanted word most of the time, even among the people of God.

And that's what he does all the way through this book, as we've seen. And that is what every biblical prophet does, every man of God, as Moses was called, and every true prophet who followed him. And it's still what every true prophet and preacher is to do today. Paul gives a charge to Timothy, doesn't he, and to Titus. As for you, man of God, flee from this kind of folly and pursue a ministry of truth, however difficult it is.

And difficult it will certainly be, and distasteful to many people, even within the professing church. Because, as Christians, we also live in the world, and we imbibe constantly, unconsciously perhaps, this ubiquitous loud folly, which will ruin people, ruin us.

[9 : 24] Unless we are shepherded truly, by the words of the one shepherd, as Ecclesiastes calls him at the end of chapter 12. Words of truth from God, which he says there, by the way, are like goads and nails.

In other words, they're extremely uncomfortable, and they're unwanted. And that's why Paul has to command Timothy, isn't it? Invoking the presence of God, and Jesus Christ, and the elect angels. When he says to you, your job is to publicly rebuke falsehood in the church. As for you, man of God, fight the good fight, guard the good deposit.

In other words, go on speaking truth that counters the ruinous folly all around. And he commands Timothy, doesn't he, in 2 Timothy 2 verse 2, to train and equip other men who likewise will be able to weather that kind of true ministry.

Which he says will mean sharing in suffering as a true soldier of Jesus Christ. A shepherd must be a soldier willing to do battle, to be attacked by those outside the church, and even by those inside the church, according to Paul.

[10 : 36] Who in fact have been seduced by the world, by its deception. Who've been snared by the devil, is what he says. And that manifests, says Paul, in the church, in all sorts of ignorant

controversies, and quarrels, and foolishness.

You see the shouting of rulers among fools, the multiplying of words of folly. Nothing changes. And of course, desertion.

If you read the end of 2 Timothy chapter 4, it's so telling, isn't it, that so many of Paul's colleagues and his congregation deserted him when he fell foul of the civil authorities because he wouldn't count out to them and when he was imprisoned by them.

Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me, he says. Indeed he says, no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. Paul's so controversial, you see.

His ministry embarrasses us with our friends, with our neighbours. It's giving us a bad witness. That's what they thought. But the truth is, according to Paul, they were in love with this present world.

[11:48] They've been hypnotised, they've been brainwashed by the ubiquitous loud folly that promises a rich life and a happy life, but actually spells spiritual ruin.

And that's the reality. Paul is always saying, isn't it, in these last days, there will be terrible times. People will not endure sound teaching, but instead, having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves those who suit their own passions, who will turn away from listening to the truth and will wonder after myths.

And nobody will think it's myths, of course, because the vast majority all around will believe them. The broad consensus agrees with us. It's only the cranks, it's only the ones on the fringes who say other things.

And they are kind of dangerous voices. Disinformation is going to have to be silenced. See, it's drowned out by the loud shouting of rulers among fools, the multiplying words of fools.

And so Paul says to Timothy in his life, as for you, man of God, and all who follow in your train, endure suffering, do the work of a true evangelical, fulfill your ministry, teach, correct, reprove, train in real righteousness.

[13:14] That's why Paul says to Titus that Christian leaders must be able not only to teach the truth, but to rebuke those who are wrong, to wield that necessary negative, not to shy away from those goods and those nails that people find so uncomfortable and unpopular, the kind of unwanted words that ruffle people and embarrass them, even make them angry.

The Lord's servant is not to be quarrelsome, of course, not seeking quarrels, not seeking fights, of course not. Paul says he's to patiently endure evil, show dignity, integrity, and sound speech, but nevertheless, he has to declare God's truth, to exhort, to rebuke with all authority.

Let no one disregard you, says Paul. Why does Paul press that sort of thing so frequently, so firmly to men like Timothy and Titus and the next generation of leaders?

Well, precisely because he knows that their ministry is going to be very hard and unpopular within the churches themselves, not just outside.

And so they need to be steeled for that task. The vast pressure of the siren voices of the world all around, its ideas, its assumptions, the cultural norms, the pressure for conformity in order to be accepted in the workplace, in society, among your friends, in your family, it's going to be intense.

[14:52] Paul knows that. Many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another, says the Lord Jesus himself. The love of many will grow cold because of these very things.

Because the ubiquitous, loud folly of the culture around us is powerful and pervasive. And many, including many Christians, says the Lord Jesus himself.

will fall under that spell of delusion. But it will spell ruin. It will spell spiritual ruin now. And unless people are rescued from it, it will spell eternal ruin, says Christ and all of his apostles.

The end point of evil madness is eternal misery. And that's why, says Paul, the urgent, persistent task of true ministry is to patiently and persistently teach the truth of God amid such a sea of lies.

Patiently enduring evil, correcting opponents, yes, with gentleness, trusting that God may perhaps grant repentance to lead them back to a knowledge of the truth so that they might escape, he says, the snare of the devil after having been captured to do his will.

[16:16] 2 Timothy 2, verse 25. I think many in the church would have been shocked to hear Paul say that to them. Don't you? That they were snared and doing the will of the devil.

You'd be pretty shocked if I said, that must be true of us in our fellowship. You'd be shocked, wouldn't you? But you see, Paul is warning us all that every one of us is in danger all the time just because the pressures are so great from the world, from our own flesh, from the devil himself.

And the only defense that we have, the only way for the church to be equipped and defended against the ubiquity of the sheer folly that shouts so loudly all around us is the ministry that Paul is enjoining on Christian leaders, a ministry of the whole counsel of God.

That's what he urged on the Ephesian church overseers, wasn't it, in Acts chapter 20, to protect the flock from wolves, he said, who are going to arise from your own number, from within the church. The only protection for the whole church, therefore, is that they are all deeply taught, truly taught, so that they will know the difference between truth and error.

[17 : 35] They need the whole counsel of God, not just a simple gospel that just says, oh, let's avoid these issues, these are non-gospel issues.

Don't want to tackle those in case we have disunity or people disagree. No. The whole gospel must be applied to the whole of life. There is no part of life, no personal part of life, no part of public life, where the lordship of Jesus Christ does not rule and where his writ does not run.

He is lord of all in heaven and earth. And so right through the Bible story, God's people have been commanded, haven't they, to keep the whole commandment as Moses puts it.

because man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Jesus himself said that, didn't he, to the tempter in the desert.

And you see, the preacher here in Ecclesiastes ends his book with exactly the same injunction. Fear God, keep his commandments. This is the whole duty of man. In other words, live by the whole counsel of God.

[18 : 43] And that's what Paul tells the Ephesian church. Walk as children of light, not as mindless but as wise, understanding the will of God.

Ephesians 6, take up the whole armor of God, the whole gospel, all its teaching, all its implications, because that is your armor as you live among the battles for truth in a world that is full of lies, loud lies.

the parallel passage to the Ephesians one there in Colossians chapter 3 says, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly so that you can be people who teach and admonish one another and able to live true and thankful lives in Jesus' name.

You see, the thoughtful, happy Christian, the faithful Christian, the thankful Christian who stands firm, who's able to walk in wisdom in the middle of a world full of folly, is the one who has developed a truly Christian mind.

He's able to think clearly, can discern the difference between truth and lies, wisdom and folly, and therefore is able to defend their own soul and others from the danger of ruin.

[20 : 05] The whole counsel of God must dwell in us richly. It's no good just being superficial, you see, having a text for this thing or that thing.

If our words are to be wise, if they're to lead to the grace and the truth of God and away from the destruction of folly, then we need to be truly grown-up Christians in our thinking.

Brothers, Paul says to the Corinthian church who thought they were so impressive, didn't they, so superior with all their talk about spiritual gifts and so on, he said to them, don't be children in your thinking.

Be infants in evil, but in your understanding, be mature. In understanding, be men, as the old version puts it.

That was the title of a great book by T.C. Hammond which was such a staple of students a generation ago. In understanding, be men. What he's saying is if Christians are to stand, if they're to survive, if they're to lead others out of folly and into wisdom and into salvation in a world that is full of deluded folly, we cannot be immature wimps in our understanding and in our thinking.

[21 : 17] We need to be men. We need to be mature. We need to be grown up. We need to be robust and real about the warfare that has to be waged for the kingdom of God and for the church of Jesus Christ so that we'll be people who speak words of grace, words that lead to blessing and salvation and not the opposite, not just joining in the easy path that leads to destruction.

But what we speak will come from what we are listening to in life. The character of what we really build our lives upon will shape the character of what our lives become.

It's very simple, isn't it? What we take in is what we will put out. And that's why Psalm 1 that we sang begins with that triple negative. Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, who stands not in the way of sinners, who sits not in the seat of scoffers, but his delight is in the instruction of the Lord.

The opposite. That's the mouth, isn't it, that's going to speak with wisdom, with grace. Words that will protect, words that will preserve both ourselves but also others from the very predictable snares of our fallen human nature.

But left to ourselves without these warnings, without God's word, from the psalmist, from the prophets, from Ecclesiastes, from Christ, from all of his apostles, without that, our foolish hearts will all too easily propel us towards ridicule and ultimate ruin.

[23 : 01] And that's what these verses here are warning us, aren't they? If we do reject God's wisdom, if we just succumb to the ubiquitous loud folly that's all around us, it really will ruin us in the end.

So look here, he puts before us again these pictures, doesn't he, to show us the path of folly, to show us where it leads both in personal life and in public terms. Here's the way of folly that will consume you in the end.

Look for verses 13 to 15. He's speaking here, isn't he, about the path of personal folly. Someone whose whole philosophy of life is totally adrift, dangerously adrift.

It may seem early on, verse 13, that it's just a bit silly. The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolish. It's just a bit frivolous, just a bit lightweight.

Devil may care. And we might just think, oh, he's just a youngster. He just wants to be in with his friends. Or she's just being a bit with it.

[24 : 03] She's just expressing these so-called progressive views about things just like everyone else. But surely they'll just grow out of it, won't they? They're young. Well, the preacher says, don't be naive.

Look where it leads. The end of this talk is evil madness. Unless something decisive happens, people do not grow out of it. They grow into their folly more and more.

Ian Proven comments on this verse. It says, at the heart of human existence there is a madness that leads us to value what we should not and to despise what is truly valuable.

Isn't that true? And you see, when that is nurtured by the loud folly which is entirely ubiquitous in our world, in our schools, in our universities, our young people today are being groomed in the path of foolishness leading to evil madness.

that is a common enough story, isn't it? Even among those who are brought up in the knowledge of the true wisdom of God's faith because they begin to resist it.

[25 : 17] They think they know better. In fact, all that is happening is they are just drinking in the loud folly of the world around them. They think they are acting with autonomy in charge of themselves but actually all it is is just sheer crowd conformity, isn't it?

I guess that was the younger son in Jesus' parable in Luke 15. He gleefully just joined the prodigal lifestyle.

Maybe just looked a little bit foolish to begin with but it ended up in a very dark place, didn't it? And it so often does. And parents today cannot be naive.

It is your responsibility under God to protect your young ones from the loud folly all around by prioritizing in their lives time for them to have and to hear the quiet wisdom of God.

Time for that to be heard by them, to be taught to them, to be learned by them, to dwell richly in them. That alone is what will save them from ridicule and ruin. If you don't prioritize church and Christian fellowship for your young ones, you will harm them.

[26 : 32] And you may harm them permanently. If you think that playing football with our friends is more important or going to parties is more important than being nurtured in the way of life everlasting, you will reap what you sow.

It's not just youngsters, of course, that we must have special concern for them. The problem is universal. Look at verse 14. Foolish people who talk endlessly, multiplying words, thinking that they're in control of life, thinking they've got their whole life sussed out and sorted, but in fact, it's just sheer fantasy.

No man knows what's to be. That's a repeating truth. We've seen it before in chapter 6, verse 11. Chapter 8, verse 17. Man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun.

Only God knows, and if you ignore him, you're just deluding yourself. No one can think that they've got life taped in that way. And even Christians can delude themselves like that.

That's what the Apostle James rebukes, isn't it? You think you'll go here, go there, do this and do that, make a profit, and yet you have no idea what tomorrow will bring.

[27 : 54] Your life's just a mist, he says. It appears, and then it vanishes. What you ought to be saying is if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or do that.

But you boast arrogantly, he says, and all that boasting is evil. Evil madness, you see? Some people are very self-assured, aren't they? Very self-confident.

And it can be very wearisome, particularly if they call themselves Christians, and they can't stop telling you what you ought to be doing in your life, what you ought to be doing in your church, how you can sort this out and that and all the rest of it.

I'm sure you've met plenty of folk like that as I have. Always remind me of Winston Churchill's definition of a fanatic, someone who can't change their minds and won't change the subject. Very tiresome.

But in the end, look at verse 15, it wearies even the foolish person themselves. The toil of a fool wearies him. Because they're shown up, aren't they, to be utterly lacking in the reality department.

[28 : 54] For all the fine words, for all the multiplied words, he can't even find his way to the city. He doesn't really know where he's going in life at all. He's clueless, utterly useless in the basic things of life that really do matter.

And that's so often true, isn't it? People who are fettered as being the cutting edge of opinion formers, whose words we're all supposed to listen to as wisdom, and yet in fact, what you find out is very often in their own personal lives, they're in complete shambles and disarray.

Think of the government minister pontificating on TV daily, telling us all as a nation exactly how we've got to behave, keeping the rules and so on. We've got to trust him because he knows best. And it turns out not even his own wife and children can trust him because he's having an affair with one of his aides, and when he's rumbled publicly, he just abandons them. Or a pontificating prince, preaching wokery to the world, but having fallen out with all his entire extended family, leaving utter chaos in his wake.

Are these the people who can lead us reliably in life? They don't even know the way to the city themselves. They're lost. We all need to be careful, don't we, as Christians too.

[30 : 12] Nothing worse than a Christian who's always spiting pious sounding words. And yet, there's not a person who's just exposed by total lack of deeds that actually count in down-to-earth reality in life.

Sure, you know the sort of person, person who every time you have them round to your house, they talk incessantly about the great things God's doing in their life or the great things they've done for God. They've eaten at your table a hundred times perhaps, but they still don't know the way to the kitchen to help with the washing up.

Never mind the way to the city. See, our fallen nature naturally propels us to that kind of ridicule, that kind of ruin. the lips of a fool consume him.

In the end, it's very different from the beginning. The beginning, it might just look like a little bit of irritating foolishness, but it ends up in evil madness that ruins life.

And the preacher is saying, and the whole Bible is saying, that, friends, is a real danger for every one of us unless we are hearers and doers and speakers of God's true wisdom in all its fullness, however challenging that is, however uncomfortable it may be at times, and however much it is at odds with this present world.

[31 : 38] And unless that is true of us and our words, our testimony will not lead anyone to grace, the grace of God's salvation and away from the folly and the ruin.

But you see, what is true in the sphere of personal life can also be seen just as clearly in public life and that's the focus of verses 16 to 20. He's showing us here the part of public folly that also leads to ruin in any society and in any culture.

Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child. Woe to any society whose leading lights are foolish and immature and juvenile in their understanding of the things that really do matter in life and who are so upside down in their thinking that they feast in the morning just when they should be focused on the work of the day.

And so there's an irreparable neglect of their duties. There's no responsible government. It's the antithesis, isn't it, of what any land needs. Verse 17, men who know what their true priorities are. The son of nobility here, it's not a statement about class, it's a mark of competence. It's somebody who's equipped to know how to conduct themselves, to bear responsibility and to reflect that in their own example of wise behavior, not foolishly weakening themselves and making it clear to

everybody, not least their enemies, that they're utterly incapable of running their own country and defending it.

[33 : 22] Well, is that not very salutary for the whole of our Western world today? It seems that Mr. Putin, for one, and no doubt President Xi of China, looks at the West today and concludes from our leaders that they have no idea how to strengthen themselves.

But actually, they're reeling around like drunkards. Absolutely no threat to his pretensions. In fact, entirely dependent on him for all the oil and gas that we need to heat our homes and do everything else in life.

Look at verses 18 and 19. These verses describe the inevitable consequences of weak and foolish government. And it is a picture of Western culture, our culture, down to a T.

And by the way, don't forget that in a democracy, we elect our leaders. We get the leaders that we choose and that we deserve. But these verses describe a culture of indolence through arrogance, a society that thinks it knows everything that's inspired by its own rhetoric with all the arrogance and all the immaturity and the superficiality of that.

Verse 19 reads, literally, for laughter they prepare food and wine that brings joy to the living and money answers both. Money pays for it all. Well, we know that the preacher's no ascetic.

[34 : 51] He's extolling, very often, isn't he, the right use of all God's gifts, food and wine and all the rest of it. But the implication here, you see, is that money that should have been used for the upkeep of the house has been squandered on partying, on frivolity, on needless frippery.

And as a result, the whole roof sinks in and the house is soaked. Reminds me of the Royal Bank of Scotland with their enormous new headquarters and all their executive jets and all the rest of it just before the bank went absolutely bust with an enormous bang and needed massive bailouts from governments, which means from you and me, from our taxes.

Caused havoc for millions of people in the great financial crisis and many, many other institutions like it. And indeed, whole societies just the same because our society for decades has lived just for hedonism, just for pleasure, just for self-fulfillment.

More and more in total denial about reality and especially in denial about the sinfulness of the human heart and therefore gaily casting off the restraints of a repressed past, what Tony Blair called the forces of conservatism that have to be expunged and put away forever to liberate us. into the modern world. But if in fact, you see, those hated forces are the values and the beliefs from a time when God's wisdom and God's word of truth and justice and righteousness were much more heeded, were much more cherished and which actually brought about the liberty and the health and society that built Western civilization, if as a society we throw off and we disregard those things and care nothing for these boring old ancient things like those old roof beams.

[36 : 54] What do they do anyway and what's the point of them in a modern world? if our society thinks like that and just parties on we shouldn't be surprised, should we?

When the roof caves in and everyone in the whole house is drenched by the shocking elements of reality leaving us cold and wet and thoroughly miserable.

See, what began just as a bit of foolish things in the 1960s? Well, it ends in evil madness.

And friends, that is how empires and civilizations and cultures die. Gradually, as they slide into delusion and dissolution through arrogance and indolence.

and then all of a sudden, very suddenly, as the roof falls in and there's an almighty crash. If you read your history books, you'll see it's always the same and it will be the same again and in fact that is happening today in the western world right now.

[38 : 10] You're seeing it. And the preacher says it's obvious. The whole Bible tells us this. Ignore the reality that this is a moral universe and that the edifice of our civilization is held up by restraining walls of God's truth and God's wisdom.

And instead, erode those walls, even directly attacking them, rupturing them. And you will find that the parts of society that we do still approve of and we do still cherish, they will also collapse along with the bits that we have thrown away as being passé and old hat and oppressive and restrictive. Because in public life, just as in personal life, it's words of true wisdom, it's words of God's wisdom that are grace and that are life and that bring health and righteousness and real justice.

But it's the lips of fools, the ideologies of those who live with the fantasy of their own power to control life and to predict life. It is that that leads only to ruin, to evil madness and to societal collapse.

Well, friends, look around us in our society, in our culture, in our land today, our civilization. The whole of the Western world, it's not a very bright picture. What is the response of the wise believer to this?

[39 : 47] Well, care and restraint for one thing, because the more hostile, the more corrupt a culture becomes, the more dangerous it becomes to talk unwise. Look at verse 20.

Even in your thought, do not curse the king, nor in your bedroom curse the rich, for a bird of the air will carry your voice. Some winged creature will tell the matter. Raging and cursing against the regime, even in private.

Well, it can bring danger of reprisals, can't it? It's one of the features of a totalitarian regime, that there's ears everywhere, that there's surveillance, there's snooping, little birds carrying secrets to the authorities.

So it's dangerous even to think the wrong thing, even in private. Well, never mind Russia, but in Canada today, there are people who've had their bank accounts frozen by a liberal government because they made supportive comments about that trucker's protest on social media and a little bird, Twitter, told it to the authorities.

Seems extraordinary, doesn't it? But thought crime is becoming a very real thing, even in our own culture. Daring to question the loud values of today, whether it's about climate change or gender matters or all sorts of things, will get you cancelled.

[41 : 15] And that will happen more and more. I'm sure it's just a matter of time before Orthodox Christian churches will be blocked from social media, from YouTube and so on. The new online harms bill that the government is proposing at the moment is a license to censor even more by the powerful tech companies who are all extremely and militantly woke.

So we need to be wise, don't we? That's what Jesus says, wise as serpents as well as innocent as doves. Not ranting, not angry cursers, but nevertheless persistent in speaking words of true wisdom, even if it's costly.

Because we know, because God tells us, that the quiet words of God's wisdom are better than the loud clamor of our society's ruling elites. And we know that God's words spoken with wisdom are grace, as verse 12 says, that they lead away from the self-destruction of the world's folly and they lead to salvation.

To use Alexander Solzhenitsyn's words, written when he was expelled from the Soviet Union, we must live not by lies, refusing to affirm the destructive folly of a culture around us.

It's pervasive. But rather, as Paul says to the Ephesians, living as wise, making the best of every opportunity because the days are evil.

[42 : 47] In evil days, keep trusting the wisdom of God, even if it is largely unheeded and largely unheard. Hear his words. Accept his words.

Live by his words, not by the lies of evil madness. And go on speaking his words. That's the only way to keep our personal lives free and safe from ridicule and ultimate ruin.

And it's the only way that our public life may be kept from ruin as a nation and as a culture. Although it may well be that it's too late for that.

Our world is adrift in folly. Our world has turned God's truth into a lie and therefore it has taken the path towards evil madness and ultimate destruction.

But friends, we as Christian people, if we cherish God's word, we know the way to the city. We know the way to the only city, the city of ultimate sanity and of ultimate safety.

[43 : 53] We know that there is a path from folly back to wisdom and to salvation even for those who have been great fools. And they can find it through Jesus Christ who is our wisdom, who is our righteousness and our holiness and our redemption.

Listen to the promise of the prophet Isaiah about that path as we close. A highway shall be there and it shall be called the way of holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it.

It shall belong to those who walk on the way. Even if they're fools, they shall not go astray on this path. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing.

Everlasting joy shall be on their heads. They shall obtain gladness and joy and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

That is the road away from the ubiquitous loud folly that spells ruin. We know it. We walk on it.

[45 : 06] And we need to keep on it and keep bringing others to it. For the days are evil. Let's pray.

Oh Lord, whose wisdom is better than every weapon of man which alone can save us from the folly and the evil madness that lurks deep even in our own hearts.

Grant, we pray, that in fearing you alone we may know that true wisdom that it may dwell richly in our lives and on our lips so that we may be led and we may lead others in that way which is the way everlasting.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.