

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



April 1, 2012

Solomon on Fools

On April Fool's Day it is appropriate that we pay homage to the honoree by looking at what Solomon had to say about him in his Proverbs.

“The wise shall inherit glory, but shame shall be the legacy of fools” (3:35).

The origin of April Fool's Day is obscured in history. Some point to a celebration that began in Persia in the sixth century B. C., still observed in modern Iran. Wherever it originated, the fact that it is a worldwide tradition to play practical jokes on others on this day suggests a universal human appreciation for the naivete of the fool. By taking advantage of others' gullibility, we make ourselves look smart and savvy, and get a few laughs in the process.

In Solomon's Proverbs, the fool gets a lot of attention. Studying the verses that address this character can be a useful exercise in learning how to avoid his mistakes and his fate.

The first clue we learn about what drives the fool's personality is his self-centeredness. “A wise man fears and departs from evil, but a fool rages and is self-confident” (14:16). He is so sure of himself, so convinced of his own intellect and insights, that he refuses to consider opposing opinions (1:7; 12:15;

23:9; 10:8). Even when he is chastened for his folly by those who want to help him, he refuses to listen to the rebuke (15:5; 17:10).

Consequently, the fool never learns from his mistakes. He may be stuck on a trajectory that is obviously futile, but he will never admit that his own stubbornness is the cause (27:22; 13:19). He will ride the train wreck all the way to the bottom before he'll acknowledge his error. It's a sorry sight to behold: “As a dog returns to his own vomit, so a fool repeats his folly” (26:11).

There is a time to speak and a time to remain silent, but the fool can't distinguish between the two, and usually errs on the side of saying too much (12:23; 18:2; 29:11). Despite all his other idiosyncrasies, he could do himself a huge favor by simply keeping his mouth shut (17:28). But, alas, he is too enamored with his own opinions to recognize the wisdom of that approach.

Why can't the fool see the damage he is doing to himself? Solomon attributes his blindness to *self-deceit*: “The wisdom of the prudent is to understand

his way, but the folly of fools is deceit” (14:8). There is a perverse kind of reasoning that allows the fool to rationalize his troubles. “The eyes of a fool are on the ends of the earth” (17:24); that is, his thinking is so abstract, so theoretical, so “out there,” that he fails to see the obvious right in front of him.

What the fool refuses to see is usually glaringly obvious to others, who prefer to steer clear of him (14:7). They know that he cannot be trusted with important tasks (26:6), and that hanging around with him will bring nothing but trouble (13:20).

Whatever advantages the fool may possess through the course of his life will be squandered by his inability to see beyond himself (21:20). Sadly, his fate is predictable: shame (3:35), bondage to others (11:29), and ultimately destruction (1:32).

Before we get too smug in our criticism of the fool, let's remember that there is a little foolishness in all of us. We all must heed Solomon's admonition to “forsake foolishness and live, and go in the way of understanding” (9:6).

– David King