

A GRAVE DIGGER DIES ON DUTY!

Today's Text: Ecclesiastes Chap. 10

Extracts:

He who digs a pit will fall into it, and whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a serpent. He who quarries stones may be hurt by them, and he who splits wood may be endangered by it. If the ax is dull, and one does not sharpen the edge, then he must use more strength; but wisdom brings success [Eccl. 10: 8-10]

Daniel Obi was a well-known man in the village of my childhood. He was a gravedigger. That was his job and that was his business. Whenever somebody died, the bereaved family would pay Daniel to dig the grave where the corpse would be buried. Rain or shine, day or night, he was always there. It always amazed me that while everyone else would be crying, Daniel would be smiling. He was fond of joking, "Grave digging is my business. The more people die, the happier I get!" One day, there was a sharp noise from the public cemetery. A report soon came to the village elders that while digging a grave, Daniel suddenly collapsed and fell into it, dead! One of the elders burst out laughing and said, "Daniel has finally dug his own grave!"

That story came back to me as I was meditating on the theme of today's lesson. Daniel's business was to bury other people. Even though he was not responsible for their death, his attitude did not suggest love or caring. He was emotionally detached and counted more his personal gains than anything else. In that sense, we are not any better than Daniel. Some of us are busy digging the downfall of others. By our words and deeds, we are destroying lives, careers and relationships, and enjoying it all! We are standing in the way of the progress of colleagues, subordinates and spouses, and celebrating it all! However, like Daniel, we may soon find ourselves buried in the graves that we have dug for others since "whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and he who rolls a stone will have it roll back on him" [Prov. 26: 27].

How do we know that we are gravediggers? What are the dangers that we put ourselves into? How do we get out of such a self-destructive path? These and more are the issues that we shall examine in today's lesson.

1. Here come the gravediggers!

A gravedigger is a person who uses his or her *God-given opportunity or position* to hurt rather than help *less favoured* others. In the word of God, “exaltation [or promotion] comes neither from the east nor from the west nor from the south, but God is the Judge; He puts down one, and exalts another” [Ps. 75: 6-7]. That suggests that no matter where we find ourselves in life (head of household or government or business or cause, etc.), we have been anointed by God for a purpose, His purpose. Therefore, we shall all be held accountable to Him for our records [Prov. 24: 29; Gal. 6: 7].

You will know a gravedigger when you come across people with the following characteristics, among others:

a) *It is a business!*

Enterprise owners are very rational in pursuing business opportunities. Since a major drive is to operate profitably, entrepreneurs focus on optimizing opportunities and minimizing threats and losses. Therefore, emotions and feelings play a secondary role. In like manner, gravediggers are plotting the downfall or obstructing the progress of their perceived competitors or rivals or enemies. In their own view, survival is at stake and that is not the time for any other consideration.

For example, in king Saul’s consuming desire to kill David so as to prevent the lad from becoming the next king of Israel, he killed 85 priests for granting David sanctuary [1 Sam. 22: 6-18]. Saul gave up the comfort of his palace to sleep in the wilderness in pursuit of his singular goal to eliminate David [1 Sam. 24: 1-3; 26: 1-3].

b) *It is a sport!*

Some people can afford to give up food or comfort just to watch their favourite sport on television or go to any part of the world to watch live their favourite sports, such as the Soccer World Cup or the Olympics. Such people celebrate when their teams win and are very sad when they lose. Put in another way, they celebrate when their opponents *lose*. In like manner, gravediggers are glad at other people’s calamity [Prov. 17: 5], just as “to do evil is like sport to a fool” [Prov. 10: 23].

Take the example of adulterers. The word of God says, “This is the way of an adulterous woman: she eats and wipes her mouth, and says, ‘I have done no wickedness’” [Prov. 30: 20]. What a sport! When adulterers play “hide and seek” on their spouses, they are digging their graves by lowering their standing in society and putting at risk their spiritual integrity and sexual health. Yet, it is fun and game for the adulterers.

2. But that grave that you are digging may be yours!

If we were to know for one brief moment that that grave that we were digging could be ours, I wonder how many of us would continue digging. The word of God says emphatically, “He who digs a pit will fall into it” [Eccl. 10: 8; Prov. 26: 27]. According to Ecclesiastes Chapter 10, here are some of the ways by which we dig our own graves:

a) *Misuse of high positions*

The word of God says, “dead flies putrefy the perfumer’s ointment, and cause it to give off a foul odour; so does a little folly to *one respected for wisdom and honour*” [Eccl. 10: 1]. A person of honour and wisdom is occupying a high position. Just as flies are attracted to a perfumer’s ointment, so are evil people also attracted to a person occupying a high position. They come for largesse by way of contracts, advice, promotion or gossip. Just as flies can die and putrefy in the perfumer’s ointment when she *allows* them, so also can evil people corrupt those in high position who do not have the fear of God. In the end, just as the ointment is useless to the perfumer, so will foolish people in high positions lose such positions or honour and respect. They have dug their own graves.

A good example can be found in the reign of Jehoram, Jehosaphat’s firstborn and successor. Before his death, Jehosaphat, a highly respected and God-fearing king of Judah, had bequeathed money and real estate to all his children and the kingdom to Jehoram. As soon as “Jehoram was established over the kingdom of his father, he strengthened himself and killed *all his brothers ... and also others of the princes of Israel.*” God was angry with him and sent a letter by the hand of the prophet Elijah to tell Jehoram that for killing his brothers who were better than himself, that he would die of an incurable “disease of your intestines, until your intestines come out by reason of the sickness, day by day.” He died a painful death and was not allowed to be buried in the tombs of the kings. Moreover, with all his sons and wives captured and taken away in exile by the Arabians and Ethiopians, he was left with only his last-born son [2 Chron. 21: 1-20]. He dug his own grave.

b) *Walking by sight, not by faith*

The word of God says, “a wise man’s heart is at his right hand, but a fool’s heart at his left” [Eccl. 10: 2]. It is well established that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom and that a fool is a person who believes that there is no God. We also know that the human heart is at the left side of the chest. Therefore, the verse above suggests that the wise person does not rely on the human heart, that is, does not walk by sight, but on the spiritual

heart, that is, walks by faith. So, when we act without first hearing from God, we are digging our own graves.

Take, for example, Joshua's covenant with the Gibeonites. These people who were close neighbours came to Joshua, pretending to be ambassadors from a far country, and asked for a peace treaty with the invading nation of Israel. Joshua and his people signed a peace treaty with them "but they did not ask counsel of the Lord." By the time that they discovered what they had done, it was too late to undo it. So, contrary to God's command to destroy all the pagan inhabitants of the new land, they could not kill the Gibeonites by virtue of the covenant [**Josh.9: 1-26**]. They dug a grave for themselves by walking by sight instead of by faith.

c) *Plotting other people's downfall*

The word of God says, "He who digs a pit will fall into it, and whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a serpent" [**Eccl. 10: 8**]. Many of us specialize in putting others down or destroying what we cannot control. It may be due to envy or as a way to cover up our lack of self-confidence. In most bureaucracies, people hide under rules and regulations to inflict serious harm on innocent people, both staff and clients. They delay processing of cheques, annual leave, promotion, licenses, etc. Some officials cash in on clients' impatience to extort bribes and gratification. Most times, the perpetrators get what they did not bargain for. They wind up as the losers!

A good example is the story of the gallows that Haman had built to hang Mordecai. Haman, an Agagite, was next in rank to King Ahasuerus of the great Persian Empire. Queen Esther, the king's wife, was the niece of Mordecai, a Jew who was a member of the king's security staff at the gate [**Esth. Chaps 1-2**]. In spite of his high position in the empire, Haman was unhappy because Mordecai "did not bow or pay him homage," and "Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus- *the people of Mordecai*" [**3: 1-6**]. As he did his planning, including tricking the king to sign an irrevocable decree to destroy all the Jews in the empire on a specific date, the hand of God moved in favour of the Jews and Mordecai. So, at the time that Haman was going to execute his plan to hang Mordecai in the gallows that he had built in his own house, his plot against the Jews had been uncovered. He was arrested and "they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai" [**7: 10**]. In addition, his official position and estate were inherited by Mordecai [**8: 2; 10: 3**]!

d) *Overwork*

We are also told, “He who quarries stones may be hurt by them, and he who splits wood may be endangered by it” [Eccl. 10: 9]. Here, we are being reminded of occupational hazards. Many of us work so hard that we neglect both our bodies and our spirit. We hardly go on vacation. We hardly sleep. We hardly eat well. We virtually worship work, such that even our beds are littered with files and unfinished tasks brought over from the office! What we hardly want to admit is that *nobody is indispensable!* When we fall sick and cannot come to work, when we die on duty like Daniel the gravedigger, there are others to take our place almost immediately. So, it is not our strength or tenacity “but wisdom (that) brings success” [v. 10].

Look at how Jesus handled the case of His disciples whom He had sent out to preach. When they came back, they told Him what they had done and taught. He told them, “*come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest awhile.*” He said that because “there were many coming and going and they did not even have time to eat” [Mk 6: 30-31]. That is a ‘best practice’ example for those of us who are workaholics. *If you do not rest properly, you cannot work properly.* To do otherwise is to dig a grave for yourself.

e) *Laziness*

The chapter of Ecclesiastes that we are examining also said, “because of laziness the building decays, and through idleness of hands the house leaks” [Eccl. 10: 18]. Laziness means exerting less than we are capable of.” Some of us are scared of higher responsibility. For example, some young people who have lived on their parents’ or older siblings’ pocket money all their lives are scared to move into their own apartments or get married for fear that they could lose those privileges. Some employees refuse transfer or promotion if that would make them learn new skills or expose their innate fears. Some people who may accept promotion because of higher remuneration may wind up carrying their lower jobs upstairs by refusing to delegate to their subordinates. Alternatively, they may bring policy issues to the shop floor in the name of participative management! All those are signs of laziness!

How does laziness dig a grave for us? By postponing what we can do now, even when we are doing nothing now, we are neglecting what *ought to be done now*. The building decays and the house leaks. That building can be a project, a business, education, proper raising of your children, investing in your marital relations, etc. You may be digging your grave for “he who sleeps in harvest is a son who causes shame” [Prov. 10: 5]. Moreover, “the lazy man (who) will not plow because of winter ... will beg during harvest and have nothing” [Prov. 20: 4].

3. Conclusion: the Law of Holes

From the forgoing, we can see that grave digging is not as far fetched as we think. For example, a good parent may have honest intentions when she pampers her children but the outcome in the long run may be a disaster for her sense of achievement. Such children may wind up in prison or as paupers and social misfits. If she then winds up with stress and high blood pressure in old age (if she can make it!), she dug her grave a long time ago. Therefore, you may need to pay attention to the following points:

- ❑ Examine your attitude to all those around you-at home, school, work, office, church, club, etc. Are you into unholy alliances and rumour clubs that are hurting or putting other people down? Can you explain the sources of your income to your family and trusted friends who look up to you for leadership integrity?
- ❑ How much attention do you give to helping underdogs within your authority lenses, to empower them to excel? Do you share only work and responsibilities without also sharing the benefits with your fellow labourers?
- ❑ What drives you? God or self? Let God be on your side for a change so that you can walk by faith and not by sight.
- ❑ Stop digging graves for others because the next one you dig may be your own!

According to the Law of Holes, if you find yourself in a hole, stop digging. However, let me add that if you cannot stop digging, dig to find Jesus and make Him your personal Lord and Saviour. Right now, He is asking you to only hunger and thirst after righteousness so that you shall be filled; to be pure in heart so that you shall see God; and to bless those who revile and persecute you and reel false accusations against you so that your reward shall be great in the kingdom of God.

To dig otherwise is to dig your own grave!