

The Wisdom of a Fool

In ancient times, a ruler employed a fool, or jester, to entertain. By the Middle Ages, a fool was a familiar figure in the king's court. He served not simply to amuse, but to criticize the master or mistress and guests. The fool's status was one of privilege within a royal or noble household.

Many courts throughout English royal history employed entertainers and most had professional fools, sometimes called licensed fools. The entertainment they provided included music, juggling, clowning and the telling of riddles.

This background sets the stage for a story told during the medieval period.

The king was a very smart man; sure, wasn't he the king? The fool was a fool, a proper fool. The king would laugh at the fool, who said such foolish things.

One day, the king handed the fool a staff. "Take this staff," he said, "and keep it until you find a bigger fool than yourself."

Years passed. The king became ill, and lay on his bed, dying. His family, his courtiers, his ministers, his servants, and the fool stood around his bed. The king said, "I have called you to say goodbye to you. I am about to leave you. I go on a long journey. I will return no more to this place."

The fool stepped forward. "Your majesty, one question before you go. In the past, whenever you went on a journey to faraway corners of your kingdom or to some other country, you always sent heralds, police and soldiers ahead of you to make preparations for your journey. May I ask what preparations your majesty has made for this long journey you are about to undertake?"

"Alas!" replied the king. "I have made no preparations."

"Then," said the fool, "take this staff, for at last I have found a bigger fool than myself."

No doubt, this story prompts sober reflection as we consider the destination we desire as life as we know it draws toward its conclusion.

One day, a group of people will go to a cemetery, hold a brief service, get in a car and return to their earthly dwelling place. All except one. That one will be me. That one will be you. There is an appointed time for each of us.

Have we made preparation?

For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? (Mark 8:36).