

Proverbs 22-09-07a

Good Wednesday evening. Welcome to the Bible study here for Wednesday evening at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 7th of September 2022.

We're in the book of Proverbs. We are looking at the call of wisdom to the simple at the close of chapter one. We'll review this section, verses 28 through 33, and look at some parallels and some fascinating species of vocabulary that are used here and will turn up again and again in the book of Proverbs as we proceed.

Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and study, and we'll begin. Father, we're grateful for the church that you have created from individuals, in many cases scattered at a distance, and yet we enjoy fellowship. We are blessed and encouraged by the presence and participation of each one.

We're grateful that you have called us through your Spirit and gifted us and blessed us in so many wonderful ways. We're grateful for this opportunity to spend time in fellowship in your word, and we pray that your Holy Spirit will bless it to each heart and that we will come away edified, strengthened, encouraged, and motivated to invest the time that remains to us in this life in a way that pleases you and glorifies the Lord Jesus. We pray it in his name.

Amen. Proverbs chapter 1, verse 20 and following. Wisdom sings out outside. She raises her voice in the open squares. You are familiar with the subsequent verses here, and in the interest of time, I will let you peruse those or review them at your leisure.

I just want to make two points about this section, and one of them is this could easily have been the rabbi or the teacher or the prophet or some other individual that God has commissioned to call out to evangelize, if you will, on behalf of wisdom, and that is not the case. Wisdom herself is calling out in the public square. I think the reason for this is manifold, but it creates accountability directly to wisdom itself. And as soon as you think about John chapter 1, verse 1, you realize that this is accountability to God himself.

There is no excuse to be offered that the teacher was inadequate or insufficient, that the message was not clear, that it was not accessible, that it was drowned out by noise, by distortion, by corruption, by human failure of any kind. Wisdom appeals directly in public to the individual hearers, wisdom herself. God does not establish teachers or priests or rabbis or other prominent individuals as an intermediary for his word. It comes directly.

Now, obviously there will be agency. There will be some sort of communication in terms of a human voice, someone to explain, someone to expound, but the appeal of wisdom is direct, and this creates accountability and it also relieves us of guilt. It would be very difficult for any teacher, any pastor to do the job to which he is called if he felt like by failing he was sending people irretrievably into error, into danger, into failure. If it depended on me, in other words, it would be daunting.

And this was one of my initial hesitations about changing direction, going to seminary, becoming a pastor, because it's a heavy responsibility if you look at it as though if I fail—and you don't want to fail, obviously, you don't want to be erroneous, you don't want to be a stumbling block—but God deals with individuals directly. And where there is human failure, whether it is parents who fail, pastors who fail, governmental leaders who fail, elders in the family who fail, it does not create an excuse, it doesn't create an impassable barrier for others.

God will work around failure. God creates and implements good despite human failure. In many cases he incorporates it into his plan. He has already allowed for it. He has already compensated for it. And in particular, for those of his children who are asking and seeking and knocking, he will work it together for good. Romans 8:28 through 30.

So it is a comfort, whether you're a parent, whether you're in some advisory or teaching capacity, whether you're a family member, whether you have a communication function or gift, to realize that we can do what we do heartily as unto the Lord, knowing we are going to fail from time to time. Hopefully it's not a pattern, it's not a prevailing characteristic, but nobody can hit a home run every time they're at bat. Nobody except the Lord Jesus.

And knowing that we have to rely on God's grace and on God himself to surmount and overcome the weakness of the earthen vessel in which the treasure is carried. The treasure is still there, and the treasure is going to arrive however many cracks there are in the clay bowl used to convey it. And I cannot tell you what a comfort that is for me and for others like me who are doing our best, but we will inevitably err and fall short.

And there are times after class when I really have to wrestle with a feeling of not having done a good job. And this is my comfort. God will transcend because the information is coming from him to each receptive human heart. That's why it is wisdom that cries out directly in the streets.

And no amount of noise, no amount of distraction, no amount of human interference is going to be able to stop the word of God, which is alive and powerful, and a sharp sword that never needs sharpening. It is sharpened by God, and it will do God's work in God's way and in God's time. We want to be faithful stewards. We want to be good vessels in which to carry truth, in which we can speak truth in love.

But sometimes we have a conversation and we want to try to share God's perspective, biblical viewpoint, and so on. And we come away and we say, "I so messed that up. I did this. I did that. I failed to do this. I failed to do that." Our hindsight is always better. "Oh, I should have said this. I should have not said that."

My encouragement from long experience is relax. If you feel like you let some sinfulness get into the conversation, confess it and move on. If you feel like you didn't adequately prepare and there was some sort of failure, confess it and move on, knowing God is in his heaven and there is no hungry and thirsty soul that he will not fill and feed despite us.

Don't. It's actually—I've concluded this, and this is another comfort for myself—it's actually pride to think that I can get so much in the way of the word of God that it can't do its work and fulfill its gracious functions in the lives of believers. If I do nothing more than read it, if I encourage other people to read it, if I get them interested in looking at the page, however egregious my faultiness in presenting it, if it's the word of God, it is transcendent. You can't keep it down. You can't trip it up.

You can't, unless there are people who are, uh, actually in love with erroneosity and bogosity. People who love the truth have a truth detector from God in the person of the Holy Spirit, and they'll keep asking and keep seeking and keep knocking until they find it. And if I am not a good source, if you are not a good source, God will never let the seed of the righteous go begging bread. Those who are hungry, he will fill.

If the judgment at the sheep and goats is whether or not we fed the hungry, whether or not God's people were fed by those who were able to do so, how much more God himself is going to ensure that no one feeling after him, looking for him, is going to be coming up short. So it is a waste of time to beat ourselves up. And you know, hindsight and coulda, woulda, shoulda, there's no profit in that. Learn from it. Try to do better next time. But no, God is in his heaven, and wisdom is talking right past us, straight into the hearts, into the ears, into the minds of people who are looking for it.

So wisdom cries out. She raises her voice in the open square. Now this call is made to the simple, and it is a call to turn. There are other ministries of wisdom to those who are already attuned, already recognizing the value of truth and are on the road, narrow road, looking for that straight gate. There is a different kind of appeal.

This particular appeal, and this is my second point, is to those who have not yet recognized how essential God's word is. Wisdom is God's word, right? So to those who have not yet recognized it, to those who are accepting some form of substitute, to those who have been distracted, deflected, deceived, disarmed, wisdom is calling out.

And I saw an interesting translation of verse 23. Her call, in quotes, begins in verse 22: "How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? Scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge." And because of the change from the second person to the third person, you notice, "How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity?" For scorners—and this moves to a sort of a third-person description—and it is a subtle but effective change, because if you continue to talk in the second person, you can make it difficult for someone to change their mind because of the accusative form. "You need to change."

And so when it talks about scorners and fools, someone to whom you are speaking can say, "Well, I don't think of myself as a scorner. I don't want to be a fool. So let me think about this third-person description a little more." But perhaps better, and I think I favor this translation now that I've thought about it and done some more study. In verse 23, this seems to be an imperative: "Turn at my rebuke." But perhaps a better translation is, "Scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge, turning away at my rebuke." And this continues to be a description of the scorners and the fools. They are turning away at my rebuke.

So you might actually begin verse 23 one line down at the word “surely.” So scorers who delight in their scorning, fools who hate knowledge, these scorers and fools turning away at wisdom's rebuke. Wisdom says, “I am going to pour out my spirit, my ruach, on you, and I will make my words known to you.” And this transitions into the warning section.

This is not a promise of the word and the Spirit to those who are willing to turn. This is the spirit and the words of wisdom that come upon those who are turning away at this call, who love their simplicity, who delight in their scorning, who are haters of God's word, God's knowledge, God's truth. So wisdom says, “If you will not heed the call, turn in your ways and respond, then I'm going to make you hear my words another way. And I'm going to pour out my spirit on you in the negative sense.”

You're going to hear the words of judgment, and there is going to be a spirit of burning and of judgment and of accountability. And it kind of makes sense because the tenor of this entire section is to warn against those who are recalcitrant, who are unrepentant.

So I like this, and that's how I have it marked in my Bible now. “Scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge, turning away at my rebuke.” It puts you in mind of what Jesus said about casting your pearls before swine. They have already turned away, and you're throwing them out there toward the swine, and they turn to tear you to pieces. They don't turn because they're interested in the word. Their turning is a turning away from the pearls and unto your personal destruction. And you see this today with cancel culture, et cetera.

But because I called and you refused, because I stretched out my hand and no one regarded, because you disdained all my counsel and would have none of my rebuke, here is the spirit and the words that wisdom is going to pour out. And it's a whole different message. It is not a message of preservation and blessing and opportunity and ultimately eternal life. It is a message of judgment. These words and this spirit are the nature of judgment and negative consequence.

They will call on me and I will not answer. They will seek me and they will not find me. Why? Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord. And we dwelt on this last time, choosing the fear of the Lord. It is a choice, and they choose to turn away at her rebuke.

So the turning away of the simple in verse 32, this is where we left off. The turning away of the simple—and see the symmetry. This is why I like this. You look at 32 in comparison to 23: they are turning away at my rebuke, and this turning away of the simple will slay them. And the complacency of fools will destroy them.

And complacency here is very interesting. It's one of the first of the vocabulary words we want to pursue tonight. And complacency has the idea of inactivity. Here it has a little bit of a different connotation. I'm going to pull this up and give you the Hebrew right quick. The turning away, this is shuv. We've talked about that verb already, but the word complacency is shalvah. It's related to the word Shiloh, and it is quietness, ease, prosperity.

We're going to see this in Proverbs 17, verse 1, one of my favorite Proverbs. You know, better is a morsel in the corner of the housetop and quietness with it than a banquet downstairs, a house full of feasting with strife. I'd rather be alone in a corner of the rooftop where there is quietness, peace.

And this goes to the words of Peter in much later days, and also the psalmist time after time, where it seems that those who disregard God dwell in quietness and ease. They seem to have peace. I was taught in Sunday school as a child that the wicked could never be happy. You know, there's no happiness except with the Lord. And they're always—they have a lack of peace and they're going to be troubled.

And JKS used to sing a song, “You'll never find complete peace of mind until you find the Lord.” And it's actually not true. There are those who have seared their conscience with a hot iron. They have habituated themselves to the ways of darkness and the ways of godlessness, and they are at peace. And they say, “Look, everything is fine. I'm doing well. I'm not suffering consequences. I'm not laying awake at night, scratching my head about my life.”

And of course there is a spectrum. There are people who are miserable. They hit rock bottom. And this is one of the things God uses to turn them to himself. But there are those who are settled in their choice to disregard God, and they're at peace. And it is that peace, it's not just complacency, it's their self-satisfaction. “Look, I chose a

way apart from God and I'm doing great." And that is going to slay them. That false sense of security, that short-term notion that, "Well, my life's going fine," that is going to end them. It will destroy them.

But whoever listens to me will dwell safely and will be secure without fear of evil. And that last phrase is worth looking at. It doesn't say without an attack from evil, without consequences of evil, without the presence of evil, without many of the effects of evil: without fear of evil. We can recognize it. It may be present. It may be near at hand.

In Matthew chapter 26, we are looking at the Lord Jesus and the presence of Judas in the midst of his 12 total disciples. Jesus knows that there is a devil in the company, a thief, a ne'er-do-well, a betrayer, but Jesus does not fear him. It's an important distinction. We can recognize the presence of evil near at hand, but we are without fear because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.

And even when it is present and near at hand, think of the 23rd Psalm. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death," what's the next line? "I will fear no evil." Why? "Thou art with me." And the presence of God in our hearts, in our souls, in our lives is substantively wisdom. The word of God, the truth of God, the promises, principles, and doctrines that we understand from God's word, they secure us. They keep us. And we fear no evil.

That brings us to chapter 2. But before we start it, there is in these first nine chapters of Proverbs a beautiful symmetry. And I want to point this out because we have some detail and some illumination on this call of wisdom, because there is another woman who also raises her voice in the streets. Turn over a few pages to Proverbs chapter 7.

Seven, eight, and nine are an expansion of this initial appeal of wisdom. In chapter 7, this exhortation that we saw in the earlier part of chapter 1: "My son, keep my words, treasure my commands within you." This is how chapter 2 is going to begin, right? "My son, if you will hear my words, if you will treasure, hide my commandments with you, keep my commandments and live, keep my law as the apple of your eye, bind them on your fingers, write them on the tablet of your heart."

"Say to wisdom, 'You are my sister,' and call understanding your nearest of kin, your near kinsmen, in order that they may keep you from the immoral woman." Wisdom and understanding will keep you from the immoral woman, from the seductress who flatters with her words. In the same way that wisdom is personified, the seductions of the world are here personified.

This is not a literal material warning against harlots. This is another metaphorical representative woman. And as such, this is very valuable for us, especially if you're in the half of the population that's not a man and you think, "Well, I can slide for the next several lessons because I don't have to worry about harlots. I'm not subject to their enticements." This is the allure. This is the seduction of evil, of falsehood.

And in the same way that wisdom can be found in many parts and in many ways, as Hebrews, the first chapter says, God spoke, God delivered his word many different ways in Old Testament days. And in the latter days, he spoke by his Son. In the same way, evil and that which is not part of God's plan and purpose does not yield and submit itself to God. Similarly, it takes many forms, but there are characteristics, and these characteristics are what we want to watch for.

It is so easy to be deceived. If you've ever been hornswoggled, if you've ever been boondoggled, if you've ever been phished—and I am an IT guy and I know all about these scams, and I have been scammed twice to my shame—I did not pay enough attention to a couple of little red flags that were waving in my head, and they outsmarted me. They deceived me. I thought one thing and it turned out to be something else.

So to understand the characteristics of a deception is useful for all of us, particularly when it comes to evil versus wisdom. Evil will pose as wisdom. It will pose as from God. Satan masquerades as an angel of light, and so on. So watch for these characteristics as we look at these passages, and we're going to look at this in a little bit of detail, and then we'll give it a light touch when we work our way forward over the next several weeks through the the early chapters, the single-digit chapters of Proverbs. But we're going to cover this now because it is of a piece. It is symmetrical with the warnings in chapter 1 and again in chapter 2.

So look at this. They will keep you from the immoral woman, chapter 7, verse 5, from the seductress who flatters with her words, and it is always talking. The snake didn't use pictures in the garden. He deceived Eve with his words. The seductress who flatters with her words.

For at the window of my house I looked through my lattice. It's very interesting. This word lattice only occurs twice in the Old Testament Scriptures. Once is here and once is in Judges, when the victory song is being sung after Jael pounds that tent peg through Sisera's head, and then there is a celebration song that Deborah and everybody sings, and they picture Sisera's mother looking through the lattice of her window wondering why she does not hear the sound of Sisera's chariot outside in the courtyard.

And so, at the window of my house, looking through the lattice. And the reason this is important is there is a contrast. Wisdom is out in the open, standing on the walls, in the open squares, open and visible. Everybody knows who she is, where she is, and what she is saying.

This, in order to observe it, is out in the residential area. Why would we even have this verse? You could say, "Well, why is it here? Why couldn't I just skip verse 6 and say wisdom and understanding will keep you from the seductress. I saw a young man getting seduced, etcetera." Why are we told that the speaker was looking through the window and through the lattice?

Well, this is kind of a privacy fence. You know, they didn't have glass in those days, and so putting a lattice over makes it difficult to see in. Why do you need that? Because this is not a place where you have public visibility, and you don't want somebody watching you change clothes, or a lattice is what Bathsheba needed when David was up on the roof and she didn't have it.

But this tells us that the setting is well off the beaten path. This is in the quietness of a residential area, in an area where if anybody is walking through the streets, you don't want them looking into your house. So this is, this is not quite the alley, but it is very far from the open square. Looking through the lattice, I had to get my face up to see out and observe this scene.

And I saw among the simple. This is the very same word we had in chapter 1. "How long will you simple love simplicity? Why won't you turn? Because you turn away at my rebuke. Here are the consequences." Well, those who turn away at wisdom's rebuke, here is that simple youth.

And it says, "I perceived among the simple," and this is the group of the simple, "a young man." It says, "I saw among the simple, I perceived among the youths." The youths here, the word youths is the word *ben* in the plural, among the sons, among the sons, the *banim*. And these are the sons of Israel.

And the reason this description is added—it could just say, "I saw a simple *na'ar*," which is the next word, a simple youth—but it says among the sons. This is those who should be believers, those who should be responsive to God's word. They are sons. Sons of what? Sons of Israel. And this is important when you get to the description of the woman.

Those who ought to know better in Israel, with the Levitical system, with the wisdom of God, the presence of God, the promises of God, information about God readily available from the father and from the mother, from the culture, from the society, from the observance of the law, this son ought to not be simple. But there are a group of simple sons, and this guy is one of them. And he's a youth, *na'ar*.

The *ne'arim* that this, this is like the end up getting clawed by bears when they disrespect Elisha. So he's naive, inexperienced, and needs wisdom and understanding to preserve him from this seductress. But he doesn't have them. Why? Because he did not receive a love of the truth. He chose not to listen. It's a choice. We saw that in chapter 1.

So he was passing along the street near a corner. Her is somewhat doubtful. This is near a corner. Why a corner? Remember in chapter 1 that the youths that were calling out, "Come join us. We'll lay in wait for blood. We won't spread the net in the sight of the bird. We're going to hide ourselves and spring out and pounce." Well, this woman is doing the same thing at a corner. She isn't seen until he's right on top of her.

He's walking along. She's around the corner. When he gets to the corner, she surprises him, as it were. He doesn't see her coming. That's the main idea. He doesn't see it coming. It's a corner. So he took the path to her house, passing along the street near a corner. He took the path to her house. Notice, in the twilight, in the

evening, in the black and dark night. How many ways does it need to emphasize to us that there is a lack of illumination on this path?

What do you know about darkness and light? Turn with me quickly. We're about to take our break, but turn over to John chapter 3. When I say John 3, what's going on? What is John 3 about? You know, this verse 1, Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night. John 3:16 and so on.

John chapter 3, verse 17: God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but the world through him might be saved. He who believes in him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already. Why? Because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

And this is the condemnation: that light has come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light. Practicing evil tells us there have been prior decisions, a pattern of bad choices previously. Practicing evil. This is a series. This is a pattern of decisions.

Everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light lest his deeds should be exposed. Some of us want our deeds exposed. Remember the prayer of David in Psalm 51: "Search me, O Lord, and know my heart. Try me and see if there be any wicked way in me. Purge me with hyssop. Wash me. Make me whiter than snow. Try me and see if there be any wicked way."

The repentant, those who are interested in God, those who respond to the rebuke and the call of wisdom, want this stuff exposed and eliminated. Scan me and find the cancer and get that stuff out. I do not want to perish.

Others have the opposite. They love evil. They enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. It's gratifying. It's stimulating. It's, uh, it feeds ego. It satisfies their own standards of what's right and what's wrong.

Everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light. He who practices the truth comes to the light so that his deeds may be clearly seen that they have been done in God.

Notice Jesus speaking to Nicodemus here is characterizing sons of Israel. If they have been practicing truth—and you get the idea that Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus and some others were actually practicing truth even among the scribes and Pharisees—and when the light appeared, they were drawn to the light. It's interesting, Nicodemus comes by night. It's like a moth to the flame. Uh, we're going to see more about moths here shortly.

But this is how seduction takes place. If we do not practice the truth, if we do not continually revisit the truth, if we don't look for the light and come to the light and live in the light and walk in the light as he is in the light, so that we have fellowship and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, keeps on cleansing us from our sin, that's a pattern. That's a choice. And the opposite is what we see in Proverbs chapter 7, to which we will return after the break.