

Proverbs 22-01-04a

Greetings, welcome to Wednesday Night Bible Study at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 4th of January, 2023. We are back in the book of Proverbs, starting chapter 4. Proverbs chapter 4. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study, and we'll begin.

Father, it is such a wonderful comfort to remember that it is not by might nor by power, but by your Spirit that we are enabled to live, that we are freed from the power of sin. We are cleansed when we acknowledge our sins. You forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

We're so grateful for the opportunity to leave the past behind us and to press forward toward the mark of the high call that you have issued to us through the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for this portion of your word. We ask your blessing on it as we look at it together and fellowship around it.

May your Holy Spirit impress it on each heart and activate the power in our souls for renewing our minds, clearing our vision, and enabling us to live in a way that is pleasing in your sight and glorifying to the Savior. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

All right, we have the fourth chapter of Proverbs before us. You will remember just the last two verses of chapter three, just to give us a little bit of context. Remembering that there are no chapter divisions in the original.

These are a helpful addition. I like them. I agree with them for the most part.

And the marker here is, hear my children. It begins kind of a new section, but it is preceded by what we saw in chapter three that concludes in verse 34, surely he scorns the scornful. This is a constant theme in scripture that God is going to return to us what we choose.

If we choose him, he chooses us. If we choose life, he gives life. If we choose forgiveness and freedom and opportunity, if we choose the Lord Jesus Christ, he grants us freedom and opportunity in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Those who choose darkness are given over to darkness. Read the last half of Romans chapter one, when people suppress the truth in unrighteousness, if they know that he is God, but they do not acknowledge him as God, they are not thankful, they empty their minds, their imaginations are vain and their foolish hearts are darkened. God is gracious and is not oppressive.

He doesn't force anyone into relationship with himself. He has created us with free will and he respects the choices that are made in that free will and what we choose is what we get. So if people scorn, they're going to get scorn in return.

God will scorn the scornful, but to the humble, he gives grace. And as you know, this is repeated in the new testament in a couple of places. James most memorably, God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

Humility is recognition of our insufficiency, looking to God for his sufficiency. The wise shall inherit glory, but shame shall be the legacy of fools. The word legacy here in Hebrew is interesting because it means to lift up or exalt.

And so this is kind of a noun form. So it is, it's actually kind of a participle. And so there are people who are famous and there are people who are infamous.

There are people who deserve respect and honor and appreciation for the way they live their lives. I think of George Washington in that regard. There are others who are infamous.

Benedict Arnold, John Wilkes Booth, Lee Harvey Oswald, any of those come quickly to mind. And fools are, if they are noted at all, it is going to be because they are examples of shame. I would not want to be remembered for shameful behavior, but this is the, this is the uplift.

This is the only way they gain any prominence at all is shame. And that is a shame. Well, that brings us to chapter four, hear my children, the instruction of a father and give attention to know understanding.

If you pay attention, you will know, you will know how to understand and you will gain understanding. Understanding is the difference between hearing or reading material and digesting it and mastering it so that we can put it to use. It is knowledge that's not only resident, but useful.

In olden days gone by, you would hear talk of gnosis in the Greek being knowledge and epinosis being knowledge that you've got. Epi means upon, right? So epinosis, you've got a grip on it. You can take that, you can wind it up and make it go.

You can use that knowledge for practical and beneficial purposes. It's this is the idea to know understanding is to have the kind of knowledge that bears fruit and creates beneficial results. Anybody, I'll take a show of hands on this.

Anybody not want beneficial, useful knowledge? Is there anybody that's want to raise their hand for ignorance and wrongheadedness, calamity, shame? This follows hard on the heels of the legacy of fools. If you don't want to be notable for your failures, if you don't want to be famous for shame, this is how to avoid it. Give attention.

If you want to know understanding, this is the purpose. Pay attention. Why? Verse two, for I give you good doctrine.

I give you good information from God. This isn't just practical wisdom on how to use a tool or how to accomplish a task, how to make food or fix something that's broken. This is doctrine and this is doctrine in the theological sense.

This is the word of the Lord presented in human terms. It's practical. It is supposed to be used.

It's not abstractions. It's not pie in the sky. This is where the rubber meets the road.

This is how God teaches us to live life. So you want that? The father here says, pay attention. Do not forsake my law.

So pay attention. And once you've got it, don't ignore it. Have you ever been taught a thing, been told a thing, you know a thing, but you forsake it, maybe under pressure, maybe due to distraction, and you pay for it.

I think all of us have had that experience. And you say, why didn't I use what I know? I knew better. I had a rule for myself that I would always do it this way.

I'll give you a quick example. We've got a wonderful wood-burning stove here, and I am religious. I am fanatical.

I am a Calvinist when it comes to wearing the welding gloves that I've got laying right by the stove. Anytime I open the door to put in a log, to use a poker to rearrange what's in there, this thing gets hot. Once or twice, I got in a hurry, and I thought, you know, I can just open this door.

I'll just do this real quick. I'm not going to use the glove. And I've got the scars on my forearm to prove the lack of wisdom.

Wisdom is, wear the glove. Forsaking the wisdom is, I've got a good excuse not to. And sooner or later, you pay for it.

Sooner or later, when you cut the corners, when you ignore the wisdom, it costs. This is his point. How much more so in the spiritual realm? We know that we should examine ourselves regularly to see if we're in the faith.

What have my attitudes been? Have I sinned against a fellow believer? Have I been inconsiderate? Have I said what I shouldn't say? Have I done or failed to do something that has been detrimental to my fellow believer? Am I being sacrificial to self and beneficial? Have I exercised and expressed the fruit of the Spirit? Love, joy, peace. You can't get three, four verses into the Sermon on the Mount before Jesus says, blessed are those who practice peace. It's not make peace.

You don't have to go find two cats fighting and try to separate them. If you've ever done that, you know the result. This is not, I'm going to go find some conflict and I'll go in and

resolve it.

This is poieo combined with irene. It's irene poieo. It's a compound word.

Poieo is to make or to do. This is peace doers. My path through life gives peace, reflects peace.

I do peace. I don't do conflict. I don't do argument.

I don't do harsh infliction of my opinion on others. I do peace. This is blessed are the peace practicers.

Makers, in my opinion, is a very unfortunate translation because it licenses people to go around sticking their nose in conflicts that they're not a part of. And it's like separating cats in a fight. I did that once.

And I've also got the scars to prove that. Blessed are the peace practicers. My life is an oasis of peace.

And when people come in contact with me, they can share that peace. They can bask in the blessing of that peace. They're not going to come away from me with conflict, with trouble, troubled mind, troubled heart.

Coming in contact with me, if I'm a peace practitioner, I am an oasis of peace. I'm a source of peace. I give you good doctrine.

Do not forsake my law. Don't compromise it. Don't make an excuse and forsake it.

This is one place where you and I need to be religious. No exceptions, no excuses, no lapses. Do not forsake my law.

Now in verse three, this is very fascinating. When I was my father's son, notice in verse one, hear my children. This isn't children.

It's sons. It can be extended. Obviously, when you see the children of Israel in scripture, this is B'nai Yisrael.

These are the sons of Israel. The Bible is a patriarchal book. It is unapologetic about that.

Obviously, this is a metaphor. The part is put for the whole. If I say I'm extending the hand of friendship, I'm extending the right hand to fellowship.

Hopefully, it's not just my hand that is fellowshiping with somebody. It is put for me and all of those with me. We shake hands.

But you can say I'm extending a hand of friendship or the right hand of fellowship. Well, when you say sons of Israel, these are the leaders in Israel. They are the heads of

households.

They are the heads of clans. They are the heads of tribes. They are the elders over the entire nation.

Sons is put for everyone. But who is accountable? Who is God looking to to ensure that this takes place? He is delegating through a system of authority that He Himself created. He Himself identifies as what? The Father.

Jesus Christ identifies as what? The Son. Son of God. Son of Man.

Does this mean God's got no use for women? Obviously not. But people can take a thing and mess it up by choosing to be narrow in their interpretation. I want to read you something from a commentary closing the preceding chapter.

If you remember in verse 9 and 10 of chapter 3, this is our application example. This is what we don't want to do. Look at chapter 3 verses 9 and 10.

Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the first fruits of all your increase so that your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine. You give to God, He will give to you. So people have viewed this as, you put a quarter in the machine and candy is going to come out.

Of course, a quarter, you can tell how old I am. You put a dollar fifty in the machine and a can of coke will come out. And people have said, oh this is terrible.

So there's a commentary, a commentator named Huibre, W-H-Y-B-R-A-Y. Apropos of verses 9 and 10, Huibre remarks that we have here, the most blatant expression in the Old Testament of the principle of duodess, which is Latin, meaning the offering of gifts to God solely in order to elicit material rewards from Him. God says, give me gifts, I'll give you gifts.

It's tit for tat. You give to me, I'll give to you. Huibre is of the opinion that this attitude colors verses 5 through 8 as well, which is, trust in the Lord with all your heart.

Don't lean on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge Him. He will make your paths straight.

Do not be wise in your own eyes. Fear the Lord. Depart from evil.

Health to your flesh, strength to your bones. All of this is, you do what God wants you to do and He'll do for you what you want Him to do. It's a transaction.

You're buying God's favor with your obedience and with your sacrifices and gifts. He invokes this Latin principle, duodess. This is D-O space E-T, I'm sorry, D-O space U-T space D-E-S.

You can look it up. I'm sure that's in Wikipedia or something. Duodess.

Huibre invokes this Latin principle that drips with selfishness and greed and applies it harshly to the daily tasks of the ancient Israelite. This is our commentator now speaking. This is the word biblical commentary.

And I like what he has to say here because it applies to so many things that you hear today. Of course, they sought material blessings. Would we like to receive material blessings? Are you praying to God, Oh Lord, please don't bless me with enough money to pay my bills.

Please don't keep my car running. Please don't let me have appliances that make my life easier. Is anybody praying that prayer? Of course, we appreciate material blessings.

The ancient Israelites appreciated material blessings just as anyone would. Of course, they sought material blessings, but this must be put in the broader context of the covenant relationship with the Lord, which provides such motivations. Have you read Deuteronomy? Remember Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim? If you are faithful, here are all the blessings I will heap on you.

If you are unfaithful, here are all the curses that will follow you to a dusty, thorny thousand yards of ground glass grave. The prescriptions in chapter three, verses one through 12 of Proverbs promised the benefits of the good life. If the Israelite remained faithful, you can find this in Deuteronomy chapter 30, verses nine and 10, which says, the Lord, your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, in the produce of your land for good.

For the Lord will again rejoice over you for good as he rejoiced over your fathers. If you obey the voice of the Lord, your God to keep his commandments and his statutes, which are written in this book of the law. And if you turn to the Lord, your God with all your heart and with all your soul, this will be the result.

Now, do you think that if you adopt a mercenary spirit and say, well, I want to be rich. I want to be prosperous. I want to be affluent.

Therefore, I'll do some kind of mechanical obedience to these laws. What does Deuteronomy say? If you turn to the Lord, your God with all your heart and with all your soul, this has to be dedication and love of God for real, not superficial, not transactional, not buying off God in heaven like somebody would do with sacrifices to Baal or Molech. But you have to have a little bit of intelligence about this.

The fact that God promises to bless and to favor and to prosper those who seek him with all their heart doesn't mean that material blessing is now their only motivation. It is a concomitant. It is a side effect.

It is something to appreciate, but it doesn't change the appreciation for God himself that brings us to claim and trust in these promises in the first place. Do you see what I'm saying here? It isn't, oh, I'm going to appease God like the pagans appease their gods. I'll sacrifice a pig and dance around a fire and hoop and holler, and hopefully the volcano won't spew lava all over us and destroy our village.

This is not the kind of thinking. We have to rise above these kind of crude exaggerations and caricatures of what God's promise entails. I mean, do I need to belabor this? These prescriptions promise the benefits of good life if the Israelite remained faithful.

In a deeper sense, one can even speak of a sacramental view of the universe. The goods of this world are a sign of divine pleasure, a sign that the covenant relationship is in good order. Do people stay married because each anniversary one of them gives the other one an expensive piece of jewelry or a nice watch? Do we do marriage because of the gifts we get on our birthday at Christmas? Are we buying off our spouse with necklaces? You know, seriously, somebody could come in and try to make that claim, but they really don't understand that these are expressions of something that pre-exists and survives just fine without those things, right? Though he slay me, yet will I trust him, Job says.

But Job received wonderful blessings from God before his time of trouble and more blessings from God after his time of trouble. But in the midst of his time of trouble, when all of those things had been ripped away in a very painful, catastrophic fashion, it didn't change Job's heart toward God. He had questions.

He had uncertainties. He was confused. But it did not change his faith in God.

He never doubted. He said, naked came I into the world and it looks like naked I'm going to go out. That's okay.

This is the difference. This is where Huibre and others like him, I think, miss the mark here. So these are signs of divine pleasure, a sign that our covenant relationship is in good order.

If you don't get a gift from your spouse, we need to look and see, is there something wrong? Have I given offense? Am I not living up to my side of this covenant and this relationship? Lack thereof would be a sign of trouble. Presence thereof is a sign that things are in good order. But it's a sign.

It's not the substance of the relationship, right? I think we understand this. These signs, these blessings, are not solely for the sake of reward, nor are they infallible signs. Just because you've got a good thing going with the Lord, He's favoring us and we are honoring and loving Him, doesn't mean that we're going to be universally prosperous.

It's not an absolute mechanical sign. It is a frequent sign. It is a common sign, but it's not

automatic or infallible.

It is always possible to exaggerate and to become legalistic in such matters. But the sages question, often enough, human motivation. Look at Proverbs 21, verse 2. Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts.

This is a variation on the theme. There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death. Well, you could put Proverbs 21, 2 with that.

Every way of a man is right in his own eyes. How many times have we talked about our internal compass that we trust so much, and we don't realize that it has been influenced by something that we're unaware of? And well, this just feels, you know, Debbie Boone, it can't be wrong if it feels so right. Oh, yes, it can.

Sorry, Debbie, but you light up my life is a bad set of lyrics. Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts. And He may weigh our heart and decide that the very best thing for us is not too much prosperity.

Because weighing our heart, He says, you know, you're doing fine with what you have. If I give you too much, it will blind you, distract you, lead you off the path. I do not want to put more on you than you can bear by way of prosperity.

We can be done in by too much. The Apostle Paul had to be given a thorn in the flesh to avoid being pulled away from his apostolic mission. My strength is sufficient for you.

My strength is made manifest in weakness. And lest he be exalted beyond measure, God gave Paul hardship. Like Captain Kirk says in one of these movies, when a guy offers to take away his pain by some kind of Vulcan mind meld or whatever, Kirk says, don't touch me.

I don't want you to do that. I need my pain. My pain is part of what makes me who I am.

You take it away, I don't know what I would be. God weighs the hearts, and we have to trust Him that He knows what He's doing and that His level of provision, His level of blessing, His level of healing. That's a very interesting choice if you're watching this Chosen thing, whatever else you want to think about it.

One of the disciples, is it Nathanael, that Jesus doesn't heal and he walks with a staff, and they just had an episode where they go out two by two and they're healing, and this guy that has the staff and the Jesus of the Chosen tells him, I do not choose to heal you. And he's really puzzled because he's watching Jesus heal the multitudes and he's still clumping along with the staff. And then they have him go out with his partner and he heals a lame man.

And he's standing there leaning on his staff, watching this guy that he himself healed.

But he's got so much empathy for this guy because he knows what it's like to not be able to walk well. And that's a very nice fictional expression of some actual divine truth.

I'm not endorsing or disendorsing the Chosen, but I will say that there is some very interesting and in some ways compelling writing that is done in it. But this is the principle. God knows what He's doing.

He weighs our hearts. So it is always possible to exaggerate and become legalistic in such things. But the sages question often enough human motivation, like Proverbs 21.2, and should not be categorized so crassly.

The careful reader will detect in chapters one through nine, wave after wave of statements about the beauty and the desirability of wisdom. It is personified or nearly personified as a desirable woman, more to be desired than riches, confers more by way of quality of life than anything else you can think of. There is an idealism and an enthusiasm about wisdom, which correlates easily with the thrust of Israelite religion.

Relationship with God, being His covenant people, when the Israelites are thinking properly and appreciating what they've been given, and the uniqueness of their nation above all others, being selected by God for His presence and to be a testimony to Him in the Old Testament day. The Israelites who caught that understanding were very enthusiastic about it. What a privilege, what a great nation to be in, what a great life to live, what a great opportunity that the God of heaven is present with us, and even in prospect they could enjoy Immanuel, coming ultimately to fulfillment, of course, in the incarnation which we have just celebrated.

Perhaps one sign of this idealism is the manner in which the text will suddenly speak of wisdom in the style of personification, like verses 16 through 20 of this chapter 3. She is a tree of life, she is an ornament of grace, her ways are ways of pleasantness, all her paths are peace. I remember a pastor talking about this, and I have shared this since. There are times when you're reading the Apostle Paul when he's just straining the ability of language to express what he wants to get across.

He starts getting elliptical, and he starts leaving out words, and he goes in long sentences because he's just trying to get across the fulsome understanding of what God has revealed to him, and language is just almost insufficient. You get that same idea here in Proverbs, that the value and the benefit of this wisdom from God just stretches the limits of human communication. So that's why Proverbs keeps switching.

It'll personify wisdom, then it'll describe wisdom, and then it'll compare wisdom, and then it will talk about the results of having this wisdom and trying to get us to realize that there is no greater calling than to come to know God personally through this wisdom. This is why John begins his gospel saying that wisdom, that word, became flesh. Not as a woman, not personified as lady wisdom as here in Proverbs, but as the Lord

Jesus Christ himself.

And how much more can we access and exploit the blessing and the opportunity that comes through this wisdom when we see it in the life and the words of the Lord Jesus himself. This is why there is no better place to be in a New Testament study than in the Gospels. Well, this is our introduction to chapter four, hear my sons.

And he begins by talking to a group, but very quickly he's going to recognize that despite his efforts, despite his passion, despite the intensity of his desire to get this across, he's going to narrow down. And by the time you get to verse 10, hear my son. And he gets back to the singular.

Now he's talking to the individual son. Well, he's going to mention the mother here in verse three and his own father. And that's where we'll pick up when we come back from the break.

But just know that because you are here, because you have prioritized understanding God's word, these wonderful opportunities and blessings apply to you. But this scripture, these verses, this wisdom has content. There are promises and principles and doctrines.

And it is that content to which this father is going to turn in chapter four. And that's what we'll begin to look at when we come back from the break.