

Proverbs 23-05-03a2

Good evening. Welcome to Wednesday night study at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We're in the book of Proverbs.

We've been looking at chapter 10. We're going to endeavor. I'm going to endeavor.

I'm going to effort to finish the chapter and get us set up for chapter 11. There are some pertinent points by way of application tonight. We're turning the corner from our observation and interpretation into the application side.

What is the use and the point of studying these if it does not have an effect and to condition our thinking and our planning and our purposes and our function. So we'll take a look and see how that plays out given what we've observed in the structure and the content. And we'll do that as soon as we ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study.

Shall we pray? Father, thank you for granting us another day and another opportunity to spend this time together being nourished and strengthened through the truth contained in your word. We thank you for the presence and power of your Holy Spirit and ask that you will bless us and equip us through his ministry in bringing your word to our hearts and minds with understanding and with an awareness of how it should affect the way that we think and decide. We pray that as a result our lives will be a beacon of light that reflects your glory and draws others to you and to the blessings that are to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray it in his name. Amen. Looking at our content in chapter 10, we've seen about three fourths of the chapter.

We saw that there was a section headed up by the wise and foolish son in verses 1 through 5. We saw a second section in verses 6 through 11 that contrasts the righteous and the wicked. We saw a third section in verses 12 through 18. And this structure may change slightly because as I've continued, this chapter is deep.

I don't know if you've noticed, but as soon as you start with the assumption that it's not just a patchwork and a confetti storm of individual proverbs, it starts to align like a hologram, like a three dimensional picture. And when you do so, you're on your own. There is no commentary.

I've got some of the best commentaries. One of my favorite authors for Old Testament, Everett Fox, has done some wonderful translations of the five books of Moses and Give Us a King, which is the Samuel King's area. And Robert Alter is another one, A-L-T-E-R.

He's done a similar wonderful reinterpretation, retranslation of Old Testament scripture. And in many cases, he's done the same sections as Everett Fox. I was browsing

somewhere and for one dollar, I discovered one I didn't even know existed.

It's the Wisdom Books by Robert Alter. And he has some wonderful insights from the original language. But I wanted to read you something that he said about chapter 10, specifically verse 15.

If you remember, it says, the rich man's wealth is his strong city. The destruction of the poor is their poverty. And so Alter has a footnote.

He translates it. The rich man's wealth is his fortress city. The disaster of the poor, their privation.

His note, I'm reading, not to pick on Robert Alter, I love him, and of course, he could probably pick right back. But this is typical of so much of what you find in commentaries on the Proverbs, and even the best guys, I have trouble finding what I'm looking for. Here's what he says about verse 15.

The rich man's wealth is his fortress city. The disaster of the poor, their privation. He says this verse illustrates how the conventionality of wisdom in these Proverbs tumbles into truism, since what is said here, after all, is that the rich man can depend on his wealth for security, whereas the poor man's poverty makes him miserable.

So he's saying it's an obviosity. It's sort of a, it doesn't really say anything that isn't from Captain Obvious. If you're rich, you've got a fortress city.

If you're poor, that's the problem. And that it doesn't have, you know, is this inspired scripture? He's got another comment later on that if you look at chapter 11, verse 8, and I'm just going to give these now so that I don't have to revisit them later. But our new King James in Proverbs chapter 11, verse 8 has a similar contrast.

The righteous is delivered from trouble and it comes to the wicked instead. And if you look at this in Hebrew, and I think that it's a wonderful observation from Robert Alter, he translates this, the righteous is rescued from straits, from being stuck between a rock and a hard place, so to speak, rescued from straits, S-T-R-A-I-T-S. And the wicked man comes in his stead.

So if you could imagine a tight place and the righteous is there, the righteous is delivered and the wicked man comes along and gets stuck in the very same place. It seems to be the idea, according to Alter. So here's his note.

The righteous is rescued from straits and the wicked man comes in his stead. In this instance, the two versets create a miniature narrative with an almost comical didactic effect. The just man is rescued or more precisely extricated from a tight spot in which he was jammed and the wicked is promptly popped into that spot.

This little narrative, of course, does not readily correspond to observable reality. This little story doesn't correspond to observable reality. It's a nice thought, but it isn't what really happens, is Alter's point.

Well, I believe that we have the same problem here we've had in other portions of wisdom literature where we are underestimating the wisdom. It's flying over our heads when we make this kind of observation instead of spending some time on it. So what I want to do as an exercise, and once you see how this works, this is something you can do in your own investigations anywhere in the Proverbs, anywhere in the wisdom literature.

I think this is a great example of our Yogi Berra hermeneutics. You can observe a lot by watching. Just pay attention and respect the context.

Respect that the author of this is God Almighty. He isn't the author of truisms and patent absurdities and obviousities. It's not going to be bad if God wrote it.

So let's return to chapter 10, verse 15. The rich man's wealth is a strong city. The destruction of the poor is their poverty.

Better to be rich than poor because you can build yourself a strong city. If you're poor, your privation is going to be your undoing. Well, what have you told me I didn't already know from human wisdom? Here's the thing.

If you stop and think, the rich man's wealth is his strong city. If you're just blowing through and you say rich means you have money, wealth means you have assets, right? That's what we think of. What does the context of chapter 10 tell us that wealth and riches are? Well, let's go back to verse 2. The treasures of wickedness profit nothing.

But righteousness delivers from death. In the New Testament, remember when Jesus says, what will a man give in exchange for his soul? You know, what is your life worth? To be delivered from death, people will pay enormous sums. They'll pay a ransom.

They will spend money on procedures and surgeries and life extending therapies of various kinds. There isn't a price that you can put on your health and your life. It's inestimable.

And so what is contrasted at the very opening of this chapter? You can have treasures of wickedness. What is that going to get you? At most, it's going to be ill-gotten gains, money. You embezzle, you steal, you deceive, you big deal.

You engage in whatever nefarious efforts in order to gain treasures of wickedness. But righteousness is put in contrast to that. You have the treasures of wickedness, whatever that may temporarily garner, even in terms of experiences, pleasure, stimulation, short-term gratification.

But righteousness counterbalances that. It comes in exchange for that. So that is treasure.

Righteousness is treasure. Look at verse 3. Verse 3 tells us, the Lord will not allow the righteous soul to famish, but he will cast away the desire of the wicked. How much money would it take? How much treasure would you have to expend to ensure the security of provision to where you would never lack for any good thing? What would it take? And instead, you have not allowing the righteous soul to famish.

So because your soul is righteous, your needs are met. You don't have to worry about, is there money? Is there motive? Is there opportunity? Is there somebody who's going to look after this need? Your righteous soul is going to be looked after by God himself. This is behind the Sermon on the Mount and on Jesus' teaching about, you know, look at the lilies.

They toil not, neither do they spin. Yet Solomon in all his glory was not adorned as one of these. Take no thought for what you will eat or what you will drink or what you will wear.

Your Father in heaven knows what you have need of. Instead of relying on a supply of money and treasure to obtain these things, God himself, the almighty creator God, is looking after these areas of life. Look at verse four.

He who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich. If you are diligent, God is going to put something in your hand. The most quick example to come to mind is Ruth returning as a Moabitess with her mother-in-law, Naomi, and coming to the fields of Boaz.

She has a diligent hand and God ensures that she comes to his field. And he says, you be sure and come back to this field and go to no other because I will make sure. He doesn't just hand her bags of grain and send her home because she's related to his kinswoman.

He gives her the ability to work with her diligent hands. And so it's not charity, it's opportunity. And this is what we hope to provide, is opportunity so that people can earn their own way.

We are to earn our bread by the sweat of our brow. The New Testament says, he who does not work does not eat. It's not outright gift charity.

It is opportunity to the diligent hand and diligent hands make rich. So now you are rich. Now you are wealthy.

How? Not treasures of wickedness. It is diligence. Look at verse five.

He who gathers in summer is a wise son. A wise son recognizes an opportunity and exploits it. Recognizes opportunity and exploits it.

So here it is summertime and gathering takes place. If you gather, you have supply in store. And you're not going to lack for any good thing.

So you have that which is stored up. You have a similar idea in verse 14. Wise people store up knowledge.

And you get the idea that this summer is not just a traditional, actual, chronological summer. This is a time of opportunity. And if you're wise and if you're diligent, you gather while you can.

There are periods in our lives where we have great opportunity to spend time reflecting on the word of God and soaking up truth and understanding. Other times it is a period of hecticcy and busyness and duty calls and things must be done. And we don't have the luxury of the kind of reflection and dwelling in the secret place of the Most High in terms of ruminating and reflecting on truth.

This is a time of application. It is a time of expenditure of that which we've stored up. And we have these seasons.

Sometimes Elijah is running and going in the strength of the food God gives him for 40 days and 40 nights. Other times he's by the brook Cherith doing nothing and ravens are bringing his food and the brook is supplying his water. There are different seasons and different times.

So you can continue all the way through. In verse 6, righteousness leads to blessing. Blessing is fullness.

Blessing is treasure. Blessing is supply and that which God grants to us in his grace. You look at verse 7, we have an effect that is memorable to others.

Our name is brought to remembrance. We are a blessing to the minds and hearts of others. You go to verse 8, where the wise in heart receive commands.

This is a wonderful thing to know what it is you're supposed to do. We'll see more about this in just a moment. Verse 9, your integrity leads to security.

He walks with integrity, walks securely. You've got safety. You don't worry about the arrow that flies by day or the pestilence that comes by night.

You're not worried about the snare of the fowler or the perilous pestilence. Pandemics can come and go. Violence in the streets can come and go.

Governmental overreach and under appreciation for the working class can come and go. But our security is in God and our integrity is our security. This is riches.

You can't buy this. It is a gift from God. It is built into the plan and purpose of God.

Verse 11, your righteousness ends up being a well of life. It's going to spill out in your speech and speech is conversation with others. This is blessing by association.

You can't offer water from the well of life unless you have access to it first. Verse 12, the problems that sin causes, guilt and regret and shame and being dragged down into the past and all of the negative effect, the corruption, the negative effect that we have on others through sin. Love covers that sin.

This is quoted in the New Testament. Love covers a multitude of sins. Love covers all sins, it says here.

And where does this love come from? It's not an abstract. We know that in our age and in our souls, the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. So we know how to cultivate this love, how to have a quantity and a supply of it that we can express to others.

This is riches. You can't get this, Jerry Reed famously saying, you can't get that at your local five and dime. It's something that only God can supply.

And you can continue through this chapter, verse 13, having the understanding from God, this gives us wisdom in our speech, we store up knowledge. And so by the time you get to verse 15 and he says, the rich man's wealth is his strong city. What kind of rich man with what kind of wealth? Well, how about righteousness, satisfaction, knowing when to do what, where and how.

Having the wisdom to gather when it is time, having your head blessed, having your name as a blessing. All of these things that we reviewed in these first 14 verses, when you come to verse 15, what does context tell you this wealth is? This is why it's a hazardous thing to just go picking a proverb out of thin air and saying, well, that's just trite. That's a truism.

That's sort of a self-evident waste of time to even say not so. Look at the context. By the time you get to verse 15, if we are rich with the wealth of righteousness, integrity, character, diligence, love in our New Testament understanding, we would look at the fruit of the spirit.

With joy and peace and patience, that's treasure, that's our strong city. Why do you need a strong city? You don't need a strong city in times of prosperity and times of summer when you're gathering and everything is great. You need a strong city when you're under attack, right? So what is our fortress when we're under attack? It is God and everything that God provides.

Psalms 91, blessed is the man who dwells in the secret place of the Most High and abides in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of my God, he is my refuge and my fortress, my help in time of trouble. And all the rest of the things we saw, deliverance from snares

and pestilences and so on, that is invaluable.

Things that money truly can't buy, our wealth, as detailed in this first part of chapter 10, creates and sustains this fortress. But the ones who lack this, who are spiritually impoverished, have not availed themselves of what God offers and provides, this is going to be their destruction. Life is an expenditure of time and effort to no eternal purpose, no ultimate value.

It is spitting in the wind, it is sand in the desert blowing across and leaving no good behind, no permanence, no value, no reflection of the glory of God. The poverty destroys the poor. So I don't want to be poor, I want to be rich.

And my goal is to be rich and wealthy, not with material goods, but with the riches that have been detailed in these first 14 verses. This is the way Proverbs works. And it's fun to find a proverb that seems to be a trite truism and then excavate the context and find out that this isn't too low to be worth studying.

It is so high that I've got to spend a lot of time studying it to reap its benefit and mine its treasure. That's how these work. Well, I want to take a slightly different angle in looking at this content because chapter 10 is our working pattern.

It is the design that helps us understand the way all of the rest of Proverbs is going to work, especially up through chapter 23. There is a lady named Kathy Caprino, C-A-P-R-I-N-O, and she wrote an article, put it on her website. She's a she's a counseling guru woman.

She helps women in the workplace and one thing or another. Her article was reprinted in, I think, Forbes and a bunch of other places. And the title catches your interest right away.

The top 10 things people desperately desire but can't seem to obtain. 10 things that people desire the most that they want out of life, desperately desire, but can't seem to obtain. This was the fruit of a survey that she gave to over 700 of her counselees and clients.

And here are these 10 things. Number one, unsurprisingly, happiness. I want happiness.

And for each of these, there is also an obstacle or a challenge to achieving it. So people say, well, I want to be happy. I want to I want happiness in my life.

What is the obstacle or challenge to that? Not knowing what I want to do. Not knowing what I want to do. I'll come back to this in a moment.

Number two, money. I want money. What is the obstacle or challenge? Well, I don't have enough time or enough money to do what I want.

There's stuff out there that I think would make me happy, number one, but I don't have the money or I don't have the time. I don't have the opportunity. There are things that keep me from doing what I want to do.

Although, number one, I don't really know what I want to do. I just want to do something that will make me happy. You begin to see a pattern as you go through these.

So happiness is number one. Money is number two. Number three, freedom.

Yeah, no, there's not a W in freedom, freedom, the obstacle or challenge. The challenge is to find my true purpose, quote unquote. I need to find my true purpose.

Who am I? Why am I here? So that I can enjoy my day to day work. You think, how does that relate to freedom? Well, I want to be free to pursue my true purpose. I'm doing drudge work.

I'm a drone. I'm in a cubicle. I have to do this job that I'm kind of stuck in.

I don't have upward mobility. If I were free of constraint, I would go find my true purpose. People that take a sabbatical and want to go find themselves, quote unquote, this is kind of what they're doing.

I'm just going to cut loose. I'm going to get a pup tent and a donkey and I'm going to roam the country or ride the rails or hitchhike or whatever until I until I can figure out what it is that defines me and what I want to do. Freedom.

So ten things people desperately desire, and these are in order of what were mentioned the most by these. Almost all of these 700 people mentioned these things. Number one, happiness.

Number two, money. Number three, freedom. Number four, peace, peace.

What is the obstacle or the challenge? It is lack of clarity about who I am and what is my purpose. I don't have peace. I'm troubled because I'm not sure I'm doing what I should do.

I don't know what it is I should do. I don't know who I am. I don't know what my purpose is.

And if you're writing these down, did you notice that happiness challenge was not knowing what I want to do? The money challenge was I don't have time and money to do what I want, and I'm not sure what that is, but I think if I had time and money, I could figure it out. Number three, freedom. The challenge is to find my true purpose.

That was number one. What is my purpose? Why am I here? Peace, lack of clarity about who I am and my purpose. Over and over again, people keep coming back to I don't

know my purpose.

I don't know who I am and why I'm here. I think if I could find my purpose, I would be happy. I would have peace.

And then I would just need to get enough money to accomplish it. Number five, unsurprisingly, after happiness, money, freedom and peace, number five is joy. I want joy in my life, not just contentment.

I want joy. What is the obstacle or challenge? How to find the right role or position that would bring me joy? Same thing, I don't know my purpose. I don't know what I should be doing.

If I was doing something that fulfilled my purpose, I would have joy. But I don't. I need to find the right role and I'm not in the right role.

I don't have the right position. I don't know what the right one is. But if I could find it, I would have joy.

Number six, balance. Balance. The challenge or obstacle to balance is.

I need more flexibility so that I can balance my need to make money and have benefits with my home life, my relationships, my desire to travel, my search for my purpose and my identity. I can't do it. I don't have the flexibility to get this goes back to freedom.

I think these really very closely overlap. I think she might have had to stretch this to get 10 things. It sounds to me like there's only about three or four things.

But anyway, balance. I need balance. I need flexibility so that I can balance my work life.

And remember, she works mostly with ladies in the workplace and they would love to be at least they think they would love to be home with their kids, but they've got to work because they've got a two income family and whatever. And and so how do I balance work life with home life? I can't always be at the soccer practice. I can't always be at the the recital or whatever it might be.

Balance. That was number six. Number seven.

Fulfillment. Once again, it seems like these are overlapping fulfillment, the obstacle or challenge to fulfillment is. Not knowing how to use my potential in the best way for myself and others, I feel like I have potential, I have a contribution I could make, I've got skills, I've got talent.

But I'm having trouble finding how I can use my potential, how I can be my best self to be happy with myself and be a benefit to others. So number seven is fulfillment. Number eight.

Confidence. Confidence, which is the opposite of uncertainty and doubt, confidence, the challenge or the obstacle. I want to offer something now, I want to do something now, but I constantly feel like I'm not quite ready, I'm not prepared, I don't have the wherewithal to confidently step forward, to step into a role, to tackle a challenge.

I lack confidence. I would love to be accomplishing things. I would love to be conquering mountains and wearing my 10-league boots and getting where I want to go.

But I'm not sure that I won't fail. The guy in the arena that errors and comes short again and again, I don't want to be him. I want to go in and immediately succeed.

And I don't have the confidence that I can go in and knock that thing out the first time. Confidence, that's number eight. Number nine, what people most want, desperately desire, but can't seem to obtain.

Number nine is stability. Stability, and I would call this security, stability, security. The obstacle or challenge is to figure out what to do to stay afloat, to have a bridge to the future and to retirement.

Where am I going to be in the future? I want some security. I want stability. It would be great to have a plan, to have savings, to have my IRA or my pension or my whatever it might be so that I can predict that I will not be needy or in trouble down the road in the future.

So this stability, I would call security. I would even call it hope for the future, confidence, confident expectation that the future is going to be good. People have a great uncertainty about how things are going to turn out and where they're going to end up.

And number 10, and especially considering that this was a largely women clientele that were being polled on this, I would have thought this might have been higher up, men and women, but especially women, passion. I want passion in my life. I want to feel passionately about what I'm doing.

I want to enjoy passionate relationship, be passionate about my hobbies, passionate about my work, passionate about life in general. The obstacle or challenge is that feelings of ineptitude. I'm not in a place where I can hold up my end of a passionate relationship.

I might end up being a disappointment. This goes back to lack of confidence, lack of security, feelings of ineptitude. This is low self-esteem.

I'm not good enough. I'm not worthy. There's something wrong with me.

The passionate interactions, whether it's hobbies or work or endeavors or relationships, don't come to me because there's something wrong with me. I'm not who I should be.

Maybe if I could figure out my purpose and be going after that and be driven and purposeful and successful, then passion would come to me from like-minded people.

And negativity, there's too much negativity. There's criticism. I criticize myself, others, just negativity in the environment.

Those are the 10 things. Now, I think there is great traction. There are probably some other things.

If you did a different survey with a different group, but this is pretty close to what most people want. But the point being that there are many different ways that you can look at psychology. I read a boy, I would never recommend it.

It's like a 15 page article that I could have written in one paragraph that basically said the two things that people want are something of an antithesis. People want to belong. We have a need for community, for fellowship, for brotherhood, for connection, for communication, for being with others where we feel one with.

We're approved. They approve of us. We approve of them.

This sense of community, we have a deep inbuilt desire for that. And you can obviously think of already application in terms of our spiritual journey and quest and the provision of God for connection, unity, brotherhood, being one in Christ and having an eternal and divine foundation for such a met need. But at the same time and counterintuitively, we have a desire for individuality to achieve something that makes us feel special or accomplished or that is different and distinct from the group.

We don't want to just blend and meld and be indistinguishable. We we want to be together apart. We want to be a a special part of a group that is has uniqueness and has an individual contribution that only we can make.

And once again, when you look at Christian fellowship and you look at what a wonderful opportunity we have in the fellowship of the church to to be united, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of us all. And yet we are individually gifted. We have individual strengths.

We have unique opportunities to uplift and encourage and be a blessing to those in the group. But secular psychology says these are the two fundamental driving forces. Even before you get to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, these are the things that define us.

Well, we're going to pause here and take our break. And when we come back, I think you can anticipate and have probably already observed that even in this single chapter of Proverbs, every one of these felt needs, every one of these most desired, desperately desired things is provided by God through wisdom, righteousness, integrity, the opportunities that God gives us, the supervision of our lives, the provision of meaning

and purpose and definition for each of us individually and collectively. God knocks every single one of these out of the park for us if we are only willing to receive commands.

Remember the wise in heart in verse eight, it has the humility to recognize that God knows best. And to receive those commands, all of these benefits accrue. People who look to themselves to try to figure these out, they desperately desire it, but they can never seem to attain it.

It is provided by God, amply, cup full and running over if we are amenable, if we are receptive, if we are humble, if we are asking and seeking and knocking, every single one of these comes to us and transcends the material, transcends the temporal, transcends the temporary, the ephemeral, that which comes and goes, the grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of God that we put on our souls abides forever. Well, we'll see this more fully when we come back from the break.