

Proverbs 23-07-12a

Greetings. Welcome to Wednesday night Bible study at Grace and Truth Bible Church. After a long period of distraction and inactivity, we are back in our Proverbs study.

We'll be picking up in Proverbs chapter 11, where we left off several weeks back. But we have some fresh perspective informed by our recent studies in some ways. And I think it is profitable.

It is going to help us in this section of Proverbs that begins in chapter 10 and extends through chapter 23. This first section of Solomonic Proverbs formerly attributed to him. We've seen chapter 10, we're in chapter 11, and that is where we will pick up.

Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship on our study. We'll the divine power that you have placed at our disposal in our hearts, on our lips, through the presence of your Holy Spirit and the availability of the word of truth. We thank you for how easy it is to read it, to think about it, to speak about it with one another.

We don't have to wait for an apostolic visit. We don't have to wait for a pastor to preach or teach in an isolated occasion. It is near to us.

We can open a copy of it anytime, anywhere. We have an abundance of resources to aid in our understanding of its context, its meaning and its purpose. We thank you for our fellowship where believers of like mind can share in the investigation and the fellowship that we enjoy as a result of what you have provided us is a wonderful blessing.

We thank you for that. And we ask your blessing on us as we look at this portion of your word together. May it enrich, motivate, and encourage each one of us to love and good works, to draw closer to the Lord Jesus Christ and through him to you yourself.

And we pray it in Jesus name. Amen. Let's begin by reading our passage.

It re-familiarizes us with the nature of these proverbs. They are aphorisms that at the surface level and at first glance seem to be nuggets of practical wisdom, pragmatic observations of what works and what doesn't, what benefits and what inhibits or harms. So we've seen the introduction to this section back in chapter 10, verse one, and the reintroduction of what we saw at the beginning, which is the father and the mother exhorting a young son in the ways of truth, in the ways of wisdom, and reminding him that this is the path to life and peace because it reflects right relationship to God, the God of Israel, the God of creation, the God of wisdom.

In the latter part of those first nine chapters, we saw wisdom personified as a woman. We saw the alternative personified as the crafty harlot. And if you stop and think about this, remembering what has been criticized in recent days as the patriarchal nature of Hebrew culture and Israelite nation function, where the man is addressed, even these

proverbs are addressed to a young man.

It doesn't say, Oh, daughter of Israel, be wise and follow these aphorisms. It's all addressed to a young man. If you canvass the earth, which I have done, reading introductions and summaries and Bible dictionary, new treasury of scripture knowledge, anything you want to read, introduction to the Old Testament, the formal commentaries on the observe and affirm and notice that these collections are presented and formally addressed to a young man.

We saw this in those early chapters. Young man, don't be a fool. Don't listen to the crafty harlot, follow the lady of wisdom, heed her call, dine at her table, partake of her offering of wisdom.

This is life and health and success and honor with God and men and so on. But the formal structure, the form which is reflected in the structure is that of a young man on the cusp of adult life. And here is the call to wisdom.

And you think, well, it seems to be leaving the young ladies out by a huge amount. You got to get to the very last chapter of the book before it talks about a wise woman and all the rest of this is to a young man. What's going on here? And so it is looked at askance by those who want to understand the equal value and worth and properly so of all human beings, regardless of their maleness or femaleness into which they were born and designed by God and assigned by God.

So what's going on with this? Well, take a beat and consider that the appeal that is being made to the young man is from a woman. In both cases, you could say, well, here's the crafty harlot trying to seduce the young man down a bad road. But here is the gray bearded wise sage who is calling from a school of wisdom and saying, young man, come and listen to my patriarchal elderly wisdom, which I've gathered over the years.

And I am an elder in Israel. I sit in the gate. I'm like Job.

I'm like Lot. I'm like Abraham. I'm like those who dispense justice and are a part of the structure and the ongoing virtuous life of Israel.

But if you will notice, wisdom is personified as a woman. We haven't talked about this before, but I've been, as Kenny says, I've been noodling over this for the intervening weeks. And it struck me that if you're all affirmational about the patriarchal wisdom, why isn't this an old gray bearded dude that says these are the proverbs of Solomon? Why doesn't it keep affirming? I am the king.

I'm the patriarchal authority here. I'm the highest and the greatest of the men in the land. I and my cabinet, my trusted advisors, we're dispensing this.

Or if Solomon is receiving it from his father, why isn't it David sitting there saying, listen

to me, don't listen to that harlot who's trying to seduce you down a bad road. See how evil women are. They need to be in subjection.

They need to be in their place. That's not it. The appeal of wisdom is from a woman.

So why do you think that is? Why is wisdom personified as lady wisdom? She has prepared her table. She has mixed her wine. She has done this, that, and the other.

She calls out in the open square. She appeals to the young man. Why a woman and not a gray beard? Why do you think that is? Given the divinely ordained patriarchal structure, and it is divinely ordained, by the way, regardless of what people want to say, patriarchal society goes back to Adam was formed first, then Eve.

It would have been easy for Eve to have been formed first and Adam to have been born to her or something. People married their siblings and their aunts and uncles and cousins. There was a lot of what would later be termed incest in the early days because everybody had to marry a sister in the first few generations.

What else was there? It could have happened any old way. It could have been Gaia, the mother earth, births you and then swallows you. You're born and created and then she swallows you up and you're buried in the earth of Gaia.

There's all of these womanly myth legends. But I'm back to my question. God inspired this collection of Proverbs and this introductory structure and wisdom is personified as a woman.

Why? If a woman is making the appeal and you are an Israelite young man, what would be required in you by way of an attribute or a characteristic to respond to the call of a woman? What would be required? How about humility? How about not getting on your high horse and saying, well, I'm a man in Israel. Why should I listen to this woman calling to me? I'm going to go to the sagacious old men for my guidance. The fact that lady wisdom is calling out and a young man would respond to her.

This isn't even the young man's father calling out or his grandfather or the clan leader of his portion of Israel or the elder of his tribe. It's a woman calling out. It is an unexpected source of guidance and authoritative wisdom.

It's an unexpected source. It's an unlikely source. It's a source that is going to be rejected by the proud.

And because the proud resist it, what does God do with the proud? If the proud resist God and his wisdom, God is going to resist the proud. To whom does God give grace? The humble. This is like the initial filter, the sword that divides.

There are two kinds. And how many dichotomous sayings have we already seen in the

Proverbs? A rich man is this way. A poor man is this way.

The proud are this way. The humble are that way. The arrogant are this way.

The humble are this way. The perverse are this way, but the man of integrity is this way. Right away, there is a split.

You are this or you are that. And these aphorisms emphasize that. We saw it in chapter 10, verse 1. A wise son, he got a glad father.

A foolish son, the mother's in grief. Treasure of wickedness profits nothing. Righteousness delivers from death.

There is this division. What do you choose? What are your expressed values? What do you prioritize? What is your goal? And it's one or the other. So if you remember our introduction, and I'm in a way reintroducing Proverbs because we've had such a long hiatus.

But one of the primary misunderstandings, one of the primary obstacles to the acceptance of Proverbs as a canonical book and to the acceptance of it as divinely inspired wisdom to which we should turn and appeal and spend time is, well, this is just, these are just sayings of the wise that anybody could say this stuff. A little is better than a lot if it's given in peace instead of chaos. And these are just sort of practical sayings.

They don't seem to rise to the level of inspiration. This is more observation. Over time, people of integrity do better than people of wickedness.

And the fruits of wickedness eventually are going to catch up with you. But if you do the right thing, you know, and God seems to have generally superintended, but these are just generalities. And there are many exceptions.

Sometimes the righteous do starve and sometimes the wicked do prosper. And you can't really take these to the bank. They're just kind of, you know, most of the time it kind of pertains.

It's more often than not this will happen and that will happen. But you can't really take these to the bank. You can't rely on them.

You can't look at them the way other inspired scripture communicates. I was told this in seminary. When we got to the wisdom books in general and Proverbs in particular, they said, now, you know, these are generally true.

I, all of the red flags and alarm bells went off in my head at once. What if neither is there salvation in any other? There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. What if that's just generally true? What if whosoever believe in them shall not perish, but have everlasting life? What if that's just generally true?

What if God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble is just generally true, but not always true.

Is this a different kind of scripture? That's just sort of inspired, sort of true, sometimes true, but sometimes not that to me, if it's not always true, if it's not as inspired as every other word that proceeds from the mouth of God, it reminds me of the, of the old saying, somebody quoted this past week. It was actually in my Timothy commentary, which my dad had used before I got it. And the commentator in the introductory section for first Timothy one quoted the old aphorism.

If he is not Lord of all, he's not Lord at all. And my dad just crossed it out because that's not scripture and B it's off-putting, you know, the Lord is the Lord, whether you think he's the Lord or not. And if you haven't made him the Lord of all in your life, that doesn't make him any less, the Lord, it makes you an idiot.

But it doesn't mean he's not Lord at all. And of course there's context and such, but in the same way, if this is not the inspired word of God that you can place faith and confidence in and make a matter of daily practical application, then if it's not, if it's not fully inspired, it's not inspired at all. There's no sort of inspired, sort of true, sometimes pertinent in scripture.

All scripture is God breathed and equally so all scripture is profitable and equally so for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. So when people come to these and, and say, well, you know, this is very similar. You can find almost identical sayings in the wisdom literature of the Canaanites or the guidance to a man commit another Egyptian ancient literature that they have uncovered.

You can go to the Ugaritic, which they have deciphered and translated. And there are similar sayings in the Ugaritic. And you say, well, I find it in these Ugaritic wisdom books and I find it in Proverbs.

So it's the same. No. Negative.

Absolutely not. It is not the same. This is the inspired word of God.

It is every bit as inspired as the red ink in Matthew chapters five, six, and seven, or anywhere else in the new Testament, any other apostolic writing, any other prophetic writing, any other mosaic writing. These Proverbs are inspired by God just as valuable, just as profitable. So how do we account for the fact that they are aphoristic? They seem to be generalities about life.

Just point your finger on the page and put it down and read something. Whoever hides hatred, this is verse 18 of chapter 10. I just pick it at random.

Whoever hides hatred has lying lips and whoever spreads slander is a fool. Is this always

true or is it generally true? As I look around in society, is anybody hiding hatred in their heart? Are they telling lies? Hatred automatically results in telling lies. Somebody spreading slander, are they intrinsically foolish? And their foolishness manifests itself in other ways.

People come to these and say, well, how true is it? As I look around in society, the rich man's wealth in verse 15 is his strong city. The destruction of the poor is their poverty. So the poor are going to be destroyed because they are poor.

The rich are going to have a strong fortress because they are rich. We talked about that one in particular. What does it actually mean? In verse 24, the fear of the wicked will come upon him and the desire of the righteous will be granted.

So every righteous person, when they have a desire, it's going to be granted. Every wicked person, if they have a fear, it's going to come upon them. They're afraid of snakes, so they're going to be bit by a snake.

They're afraid of sharks, so they're going to have their leg bitten off, etc. And people say, see, this might be sort of a generality. It might be an expectation.

Maybe it's taking a long view. Maybe it's on average or whatever, but you can't really invest this with the same level of inspiration. Here's my suggestion.

Here is my point. When we have a difficulty like this and we say, hmm, it's kind of a head scratcher, I can see people's point that they can give examples and anecdotal information where what Proverbs says does not appear to have come true. So it must be a generality and can't always be true.

What do I do about that? When we come to any difficult passage, what is the first thing we look at? I've got a difficult verse. I've got a difficult section. I've got a difficult concept that is expressed in a verse.

Where do I look for help? You know the answer to this. What are the three rules of scriptural interpretation? They all start with C and they all end with text. Context, context, context.

Before we got to chapter 10 and before we get to chapter 11, 12, 13, all the way through this section that goes to 23:16, I believe, these sayings, what prepared us for them? The mother and the father make appeal to the young man. Lady Wisdom makes an appeal to the young man. And what is that appeal? Fear God.

Dedicate your life to God. What is the beginning of wisdom that was given to us in the first nine chapters? What is the beginning of wisdom? The fear of the Lord. So here's my suggestion in summary.

It is a mistake to take these Proverbs and try to find their truth in society, in culture, in general experience. That's not what they're for. They are not descriptive of how life works generally or particularly.

That is not their purpose. They don't say, you will find as you observe that the lazy end up starving in winter and the prudent and industrious who lay away things in the summer. Any old Aesop's fable can tell you about the grasshopper fiddling away in the summertime and the ant industriously laying away.

I can still remember the illustration in one of my children's books. Here comes this grasshopper and there's snow on his head and on his shoulders, and he's wrapping his little thin coat around him, coming up to the ant burrow and saying, have you got anything I can eat? That doesn't take inspiration. And it's not always true.

There's people that fritter away all kinds of opportunities and miraculously they still do well. That is not the purpose of these. And these are not aimed at generality or at descriptive characterization of anything.

To whom are these addressed? My son, Proverbs 2, if you receive my words, you remember the rest of it. This is the receptive heart pictured and personified as a young man on the cusp of life, but by no means limited to him. In the same way that lady wisdom doesn't have to be a lady.

It's a personification for a specific purpose. You have to have the humility to listen to a woman communicating wisdom. And if you get your elbows out and say, well, but women don't run Israelite society.

I'm a man and I'm going to inherit my father's bounty. And I'll sit in the gate. I'm going to do this.

I'm going to fight in the army. I'm a young man. Why would I listen to a woman? That attitude is going to immediately preclude absorbing and benefiting from this wisdom.

It's done on purpose. You've got to be willing to listen to what God has to say from an unexpected source. This is what the Pharisees missed when Jesus came along and when they were observing his disciples.

Well, this is not what the Messiah looks like. He's humble. He's unassuming.

He doesn't come from the wealthy and the elite. He's not elite. Why do you think the elite hate Mr. Trump so much? He doesn't come from their stock and they hate him for it.

And they'll find any other thing about him to hate. And it's not hard to find things that are off-putting, but their primary objection to him is he's hoi polloi. He and his family built themselves.

They're not the Vanderbilts. They're not the Rockefellers. They're not the old money.

They built their empire on working hard in real estate, pushing for the deal, the art of the deal. He dealt his way to prominence. He dealt his way to financial success, dealt his way to prominence, dealt his way to TV shows, dealt himself all the way into the White House.

And they hate that. And people who are comfortable as elite are only comfortable around the elite. And they are immediately going to oppose, resist, and try to crush anything that doesn't meet their standards.

That's what happened to the Lord Jesus. Can any good thing come out of it? It's Jesus of Nazareth. Nothing good could come out of it.

Galilee? It's the equivalent of having a thick Southern accent and then trying to go into the hallowed halls of New York and Ivy League and Princeton and Harvard and Yale. Try going to law school when you've got an accent like J Vernon McGee or Jimmy Carter. Those people will just exclude you out.

It takes humility to recognize objectively what comes from God and to have a heart that is seeking it. And when you find it, you don't care what the outward trappings are. There is a recognition signal that passes.

God gives grace to the humble. You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart. Searching for the wrong reasons? Jesus said, you seek me because you ate of the loaves and were filled.

You got some kind of personal satisfaction out of me, and that's why you're looking for me. You didn't see the sign and that sign of divine power and its reflection of the Old Testament, God who provided manna for his people in the wilderness. You didn't make that connection because that's not what you're looking for.

So back to the purpose and the meaning of these Proverbs. These aphorisms are not designed to be descriptions of go along to get along. Here's how you can get ahead in life.

Here's how you can make your way and be successful and avoid destruction, avoid calamity, avoid hardship. That's not what they're for. These are to be taken on board by people of humility and people of faith.

These are promises to and for the humble, faithful, nobody else. Why is it that they are generalities and you find many exceptions in and around culture, society, life, history? Why do they not seem to be universally true and always true? How universal and how ubiquitous is humility and faith? I don't care what these Proverbs are doing for that guy over there or not doing. I don't care how true it is for him.

That's not the purpose for me as hopefully a humble and faithful believer. These are for me in the same way that we have seen in recent weeks and recent studies that the apostolic witness is not something I should go forth and try to create a society, a culture, a community, a band of disciples that I'm going to go push these things onto and try to get them to come on board. The witness of scripture is for me.

The only disciple I have any control over is me, myself, and I. And it is the spirit indwelling me. It is the word of God as it affects me. These Proverbs are for me individually.

They are for you individually. And guess what? They are always true for you if you are humble and faithful. Always true.

He who has a slack hand becomes poor. There's a lot of people that have inherited money and their hand is nothing but slack. You can think of some very highly placed political people who have sons that are complete ne'er-do-wells and have nothing but a slack hand.

And I don't see that they've become poor. Certainly not yet. You say, well, give it time.

They can die rich. This saying is not for them. It's for me.

When I get up in the morning and I have a choice between being lazy and having a slack hand or having a diligent hand, this is a choice for me. And I can take this proverb to the bank. If as a child of God, as related to the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ, if I do not have a diligent hand in pursuing the opportunities that have come to me, I will become poor.

That's a promise from God to me who ought to know better. And it will always be true. It is just as true as I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No man comes to the Father but by me. I don't care if other people think it's true. I don't care if other people seem to have escaped its predictions.

It doesn't matter. It is for me. That's what these first nine chapters have inculcated.

My son, you've got to receive my words and hide my commandments with me. You've got to incline your ear and apply your heart. You've got to lift up your voice.

You've got to seek it for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure. Then you will understand the fear of the Lord. Then you will find the truth of this wisdom and knowledge of God.

That's what these are for. Don't let anybody tell you, well, you know, they're not always true. They're just kind of generalities.

And in many cases, they're kind of shallow and vapid, and they don't have any more force than an Aesop fable or you know, an Uncle Remus saying, or, you know, Aesop fable, or, you know, a stitch in time saves nine, one in the hand is worth two in the bush. No, that is a faulty perspective on wisdom literature in general, and the Proverbs in particular. These are absolutely irrevocably true for those to whom they are purposed and given.

And that's us. If we are seeking, if we are asking, and if we are knocking, you can have confidence that blessings are on the head of the righteous. I am going to pursue personal righteousness because I want God's blessing.

And I have the affirmation in Proverbs chapter 10, verse six, that God's blessing is going to descend on my head. I may not know the exact form that blessing is going to take, but you can take it to the bank. It is always true that God gives grace to the humble and God blesses the righteous.

The world may not see the blessing, but I will experience the blessing if I am righteous. But if I've got a wicked mouth, the flip side and the concomitant in verse six, violence is going to come my way. There's going to be disruption and hardship coming my way if I don't control my tongue.

Think about James, the wagging tongue that's set on fire by the flames of hell and all of the destruction that it can cause. The man who bridles his tongue has brought his whole body into subjection, learning not to talk out of turn, learning not to say too much, learning not to blab when you ought to conserve, to advise when you ought to simply be present, to meddle when you ought to pray, right? Bridle the tongue. The mouth of the wicked tongue creates disruption, violence, destruction.

What does violence do? It disassembles, it deconstructs, it messes things up that were designed to be orderly and structural and permanent. It just goes in and stirs that all with a big stick. So for me personally, I am going to do everything I can to avoid a wicked mouth.

What do I know about the wicked mouth? I think about the tongue, I think about the lips, and all of those repeated observations we made in the past in Proverbs about the tongue, the lips, the mouth, and organize those things. I don't want a wicked mouth because it is going to be covered in violence. It's like a little kid that's got grape jelly all over their mouth.

Anytime somebody looks at you, that's what they're going to see. You're a disruptor. You're a curse and not a blessing.

That's not what I want to be, and it is always irrevocably, inviolably true for us. Take any of these Proverbs. Start again in chapter 11.

Dishonest scales are an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight. I don't care about some guy in Oshkosh, Bogosh, Wisconsin somewhere and whether his scales are just. For me, ensuring that I am absolutely and scrupulously fair and just in my business dealings, that my weights are honest, that my scales are honest, a just weight is His delight.

The word weight there is actually stone. It's a right stone because stones were used as the weights, kind of like those little jug-shaped things they have for balance scales that are gram weights and so on. It's a righteous stone.

This stone has a valid weight, and when you say, this is going to give you a shekel's worth or this is going to give you so much in terms of bushels or whatever, it's absolutely fair. And for me personally, I don't care about the other guy over there, although if I find out that he is dishonest and he cheats, that gives me another opportunity to make personal decisions. I'm not going to go into business with, partnership with, I'm not going to be associated with, I don't want my name linked with somebody that I know for a fact uses dishonest scales.

I want to use a just weight and everybody associated with me. As for me and my house, our stones are going to be perfectly weighed. And it's always true.

And God is going to find me to be an abomination if I am willing to compromise and cheat because I'm not really interested in his approval. I'm interested in ungodly gain, right? It's always true. It's never not true for me.

Verse two, when pride comes, then comes shame, but with the humble is wisdom. I say, well, I see proud people all over the place. They don't seem to be ashamed.

I don't care about that. For me, if I allow arrogance to start taking its place and motivating me, I am going to be ashamed. That's a guarantee.

That is 100% true. It will never not be true. With the humble is wisdom.

Do you notice with the humble is wisdom? The humble will receive wisdom from the Proverbs, from lady wisdom. Listen to a woman who would do that. The humble, somebody who recognizes the value of what she is offering and it's preference over what the crafty harlot is offering.

The integrity of the upright, verse three, will guide them, but the perversity of the unfaithful will destroy them. This is guidance for me. I want to cultivate integrity, not perversity.

If there is perversity in my life, like the hand that offends or the eye that offends, I want to pluck it out, cut it off, get it out of my life because perversity is linked to unfaithfulness and the perversity of the unfaithful will destroy them. I don't want to be

destroyed. And this is absolutely 100% always true for me.

Do you see how this works? Don't let anybody tell you that these are generalities and sort of widespread observations of how things often work. They are totally true. They are essential.

This is why the father and mother emphasized them so much in those early chapters. This is why lady wisdom cries out in the street. Listen to my appeal.

Heed my instruction. This is life and death for you. These are kind of good general practices to follow.

No, I reject that outright on the basis of the word of God. This is essential for us, and it is personal and intensely so. Each one of these sayings is a promise from God on the positive side, and it is a reckoning of judgment on the negative side, and you can count on it.

God's personal character and integrity stand behind each one of these expressions. Now, when I go to the Proverbs and read them, I'm wanting to find out a way to make sure I match and comport and align with these truths because the negative side of these will absolutely come to pass. The positive side of these will absolutely and irrevocably come to pass in my life because I am a person of faith and humility.

I am related to God through Christ, and this is life and death material for me and for you. We'll see more when we come back from the break.