

Proverbs 23-07-12b

We're ready to resume our study in Proverbs, and we have reviewed the concept of the inspiration and therefore the applicational value for us personally. As with so much of Scripture, the idea that people bring to it is, well, I should apply this to a community, or I should apply this to a group or a culture, or I should try to build some sort of interactive peopled structure of some kind where we can pursue and enforce these values, when they are personal and individual. And that's why the appeal is to the young man.

If we lack wisdom, listen and learn. But the young man is just a metaphor for the believer. And why a young man? Why not a young woman? Because each of us, man or woman, girl or boy, has authority over our own soul.

We are captain of our ship and master of our fate in the sense of we decide to establish the priorities and the goals and the values that dictate and define our life. And in that sense, everyone is a young man with options, with godly counsel and wayward opportunities being presented. All of us are in the position of a young man leaving home and beginning to make his own way.

And it is a useful picture for all of us, young, old, man or woman, that we can't look to someone else to make these decisions. If it was a young woman, you could say, well, shouldn't her father be making these choices? If it was a woman, you could say, why isn't her husband making these choices? But because it is pictured as a young man who is faced with the option, it represents all of us. Because ladies who are married or unmarried, whether they are daughters or wives, whether they are young or old, the older women, whether they are late in a married life, whether they are widows, an old man or a very young man who's not yet left home, it doesn't matter.

The picture is put there because it is a picture of options that are available to be chosen. And there are appeals made from a good side and from a bad side, from righteousness and from evil, from prudence and from foolishness, from the long view and the short-term view. Momentary stimulation and pleasure, only to be supplanted by the sexy steps that lead down to death and to Hades and to destruction and following that way that is perverse and can only end in judgment, in death, in non-productivity, in loss of opportunities.

That's true of everyone, of either sex, of any age. When you make the choices of pursuing the folly offered by the crafty harlot, anybody is going to end up in that Sheol and that Hades of fruitlessness, wasted opportunity, loss of blessing and reward, loss of fellowship and opportunity with God. It is always true of all of us in any condition.

But in the same way that the wisdom is being offered by Lady Wisdom, and you have to see, you can't judge it by its source, you've got to judge it by its content. Wouldn't it have been great if religious Israel had judged the Lord Jesus by the content of His teaching and not His superficial origins and the fact that He had no form or comeliness that He should be desired? What if they had been willing as a nation to listen to the witness of the apostles? Galilean, though they might be, Nazarenes, though they might have been. To listen to the content, to judge it against the standards of Scripture and of faithfulness to God and consistency with the characteristics of God.

This, by the way, is something to keep in mind for things such as the doctrine of the Rapture, or dispensations, both of which are being widely attacked in recent years as being innovations that are late and therefore automatically faulty. Well, the early church didn't say anything about a Rapture, and then Darby made it up and some girl had a vision and this guy heard about it and then Scofield picked it up and popularized it, but they just led everybody down a primrose path. This hasn't been the traditional understanding.

You could hear the exact same arguments being made by the Pharisees about Jesus' teaching. Well, this Jesus is saying things that we don't find in the law of Moses, and the humble heart goes to God and asks and seeks and knocks and requests to be led in the right way by the Spirit of God. Will God not give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him? Those Pharisees who did inquire and did have the humility ended up being like Nicodemus and Sanhedrin members like Joseph of Arimathea and were able to see past the superficialities.

Well, that is the nature of life itself, and all of us have this opportunity to be instructed. And the variety of situations and the variety of choices that are reflected in the Proverbs, that's why there are so many Proverbs. And as you riffle down through them, you say, well, this is not something that is facing me today, this is not a part of my current circumstance, but regularly reading through the Proverbs, you go through and you read five or six and then number seven you think, oh wow, this is me right now. This is me at work. This is me at home.

This is me trying to judge an opportunity with those who are outside. This is me in relation to the fellowship of the faith and the brotherhood within the body of Christ, and so on. And these are choices that I face, and here is divine guidance that absolutely 100% pertains to me.

So let's pick up where we left off in Proverbs 11, verse 4, and this is a bit of review because it's been a while. Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death. There are times when I have choices that might cost me financially. I will never forget, and I think I've used this illustration sometime in the distant past, but Patty and I worked for a wonderful godly man, a Christian man in Dallas in the early years of our marriage, and he sold software. And I remember one occasion in particular where the client didn't really pay attention during the presentation and the sale of that software, with several thousands of dollars involved in the commission on that sale because it was a big company, and the man for whom we worked at the time sold it in good faith, explained it as best he could.

These people had some sort of expectation that was not fulfilled, and they came back and were just irate, and it was beyond your 30 days trial or whatever else. The check had been cashed, the money had been spent, and this was several months down the road, and these people suddenly decided that they didn't want to use this software anymore and they were pounding the table demanding a refund. They had no legal recourse whatsoever. They were beyond the time of return and the rest of it, but our boss, being a man of integrity and a man of faith, said, "I don't want you to be unhappy," and he had already spent part of this commission, but he scraped together enough to give them a full refund and allowed them to return the software.

And it was a deep problem for him to do so, but he did it because it was right, and God blessed him and his business prospered, and he went on to become—as small as we were, it was him and me and Patty—and as small as that company was, he became the number two dealer in the nation for that real estate software. And God blessed him because of his integrity, and he trusted God for it. He said, "This is the right thing to do. It doesn't matter about—I could push a point about the fine legalities—but I would rather sacrificially return this money and take the hit than be guilty of any kind of taking advantage," or he just erred on the side of righteousness, so to speak.

And it is a fulfillment of this word: "The integrity of the upright will guide them." And he felt like this was the path of integrity back in verse 3. "The perversity of the unfaithful will destroy them." Riches do not profit in the day of wrath. The day of wrath is the day of judgment, and on the day of judgment there is going to be a lot of wrath because there is a lot of bad activity that is going to be judged. Who do you think is more prevalent, the wicked or the righteous? Do you think there is going to be more reward or more penalty at the judgment? The judgment is called the day of wrath because it is so largely going to be wrath that is dispensed by the justice of God. Riches will not profit in that day, but righteousness will deliver from death: operational death, death of reward, death of opportunity, death of fruitfulness and reflecting the glory of God, death of service and function in the kingdoms that are to come, delivered from all of those things.

Verse 5: "The righteousness of the blameless will make smooth his way," will make his way aright. It will direct. Righteousness is a guide, but the wicked will fall by his own wickedness.

I am not worried about taking this proverb and trying to say, well, I see a wicked man over here and he hasn't fallen by his wickedness. I know wicked men who lived their whole life wickedly and they have died and they never did suffer any kind of penalty. I don't think this proverb is really true. I don't think this proverb necessarily holds. I think it was just somebody's generality. That is not the purpose of this proverb. This is addressed to those of us who have eyes to see and ears to hear and a heart that is seeking the Lord, and for us this is always true. And I can rest with confidence in the promise of God that righteousness will guide me.

If I've got options, what is the path of righteousness? What is the path of love? What is sacrificial to me and beneficial to someone else? That is going to be the better way, because that's the right way, that is the righteous way. And I have a promise from God that it is going to result in blessing, it is going to result in further divine guidance. If I follow a path of wickedness, I'm going to trip and fall.

Going my own way, trying to chart my own course based on what I think is beneficial to me, that's never going to end well for me. I don't care about the other guy. For me, this is always true.

Verse 6: "The righteousness of the upright," not only will it direct his way aright, but it will deliver them, the upright will deliver them. And notice it has changed from singular to plural. "The righteousness of the blameless will direct his way aright," in verse 5, that's singular.

Now in verse 6 we have the plural. “The righteousness of the upright ones,” plural, “will deliver them. But the unfaithful will be caught by their,” plural, “lust.”

And so we find intrinsically that the unfaithful will be embedded within this by implication and by the singular and plural, and there are some things we decide for ourselves and there are other things that apply when we are a part of a group. And we should, as upright people, as righteous people, be endeavoring to associate with others who share those values and distancing ourselves from those who don't. If I am trying to pursue righteousness individually, but I am associating with the unfaithful, they are going to be caught by their desires, their lust, and if I'm associating with them, I'm going to be dragged down along with them.

With whom do I associate? With whom do I partner? With whom do I spend time? Where is the group? I want to be in the group of the righteous and the upright, not the group of the unfaithful and the lustful. There is guidance here for me that always pertains. It's never not true.

Verse 7: “When a wicked man dies, his expectation will perish, and the hope of the unjust perishes.” What is the flip side of that? If I am not wicked, and if I am not unjust, then guess what? My hope and my expectation does not perish. They say there is no suggestion of resurrection and expectation of future life in the Old Testament. I don't know where they get that. It's shot through if you observe a lot by watching.

And what's the point of saying the wicked man dies, his expectation will perish? Why don't they just say, well, when any man dies, his expectation perishes because he's not coming back. Whatever your expectation is, that's all over with at the point that you die. So make hay while the sun shines. Try to fulfill your expectations while you're alive.

The whole point of saying that when the wicked dies, his expectation perishes, and when the unjust dies, his hope perishes. The whole point of that is this is not true of those who are just and righteous. They have an ongoing expectation. They have a future hope. It's implicit in the observation. This is only true for the wicked and the unjust.

All of your plans, and I'm going to build more barns, and do you not know that your soul is required of you, as Jesus put it. All of their hopes and dreams and plans for expansion and improvement and greater riches and wealth and opportunities and whatever else it might be, when they die, it's all over. But for the righteous and for the just, there is a future expectation.

And as our special music said tonight, our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. And when we stand on that solid rock, we have a hope that is built on the future expectation, because Christ was raised, we will be raised, there is new life, there is new opportunity, there is blessing, reward, opportunity, service, a whole new heaven and new earth in which to dwell. And that expectation does not perish when we die.

Those promises are of God. He is the author of eternal life. He is the grantor of eternal life. And that life is in His Son.

Verse 8: “The righteous,” notice singular, “the righteous one is delivered from trouble.” What form does that deliverance take? I say, I've got trouble. I've got this ongoing trouble. It's health trouble. It's financial trouble. It's professional trouble. It's relational trouble. It's trouble of this stripe or that sort.

And this says the righteous is delivered from trouble and it comes to the wicked instead. You know, you can go to the psalmist: why do the wicked prosper? What is the meaning and truth of this proverb for you and for me? Assuming we are humble and seeking and faithful, what is the truth of it? The righteous is delivered from trouble. Well, I'm in trouble right now.

What did Jesus say about trouble? In this world, you shall have trouble. That's what Jesus said. In this world, you shall have tribulation. Tribulation is trouble. But be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. My trouble is not going to last beyond this life. Generally, it doesn't even last as long as this life, but certainly not beyond this life. Why? That preceding hope, the hope of the just, the hope of the righteous. There is no troubling in the life that is to come.

The righteous is delivered from trouble. That future hope gives us present deliverance. Remember Paul talking about being delivered in this present evil age? Our hope and our expectation gives us peace and confidence. The power of that trouble is broken. Its effect on us is diminished to the vanishing point because we are not overcome by the world. Jesus has overcome the world. Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world. And there is no trouble that can overcome us. We are overcomers and we are heir to the overcomer promises.

So we are delivered now because we have that future hope. In the same way that we possess our eternal life now but we don't experience it, we have our promised guaranteed deliverance from trouble. It is our possession now. God may let that trouble persist for our good and His glory, but I've got deliverance in my hand. I possess it and I can take it to the bank. This is not going to last forever. I am delivered from trouble and it is going to land upon and forever be the possession of the wicked instead.

Verse 9: "The hypocrite with his mouth destroys his neighbor, but through knowledge the righteous will be delivered." This is a wonderful instruction for me. Do I find myself destroying somebody in my periphery with my mouth? Do I make it my business to try to go around and destroy the reputation of someone, damage them, undermine them, undercut them, destroy people's faith in them? And why am I doing that?

It is one thing to warn. Remember our earlier lesson exhortation about dishonest scales and what God thinks of them and a just weight? If I know that someone is using a dishonest scale, is it fair for me to warn somebody in my periphery? I don't think you want to go down there. My experience is that is a place of dishonest scales and not a just weight.

That is not the same as a hypocrite with his mouth destroying his neighbor. There is hypocrisy. There is unconfessed and unaddressed sin in the life of someone who is busy destroying somebody else instead of getting the beam out of his own eye. This is a hypocrite who is busying himself tearing down others with his mouth. That is not the purpose of genuine and heartfelt and loving warning.

If there is a ditch and nobody has put a bridge out sign, is it right to warn somebody? You know that bridge is out. I don't think you want to walk down there. That's dangerous. That is a well-meant, well-intentioned, loving act. It is opposite to the hypocrite who takes a bridge out of his own eye and takes his eyes off of himself and doesn't want to address his own issues because he is busy destroying somebody else. This is the beam in the mote idea.

But through knowledge the righteous will be delivered. I can share knowledge. The righteous can deliver and be delivered through knowledge. Notice it's not wisdom. This is knowledge. You want to be careful about this. Here are the facts about that. This progressive Christianity movement, this deconstruction, reconstruction, here are the facts. Here is where Scripture is being twisted. Here is where biblical truth is being omitted, ignored, or twisted and repurposed.

They are quoting the Bible the way Satan quoted God to Eve, but the purpose for which it is being used is malfeasance. It is misdirection. It is deception. It is leading someone down a bad road. Using Scripture to do it. Hath God not said? He did say that, but as I have said so many times, for every biblical truth there is at least one other biblical truth that balances it and prevents us from taking it to an extreme.

All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable, but when somebody starts proof-texting or taking things out of context, we need to search the Scriptures and find other Scripture that bears on that same question. Does Scripture say bear one another's burdens? Yes, it does, but within two verses it also says each one should carry his own load. There is a time to build and there is a time to tear down. There is a time to gather stones. To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under heaven, and the purposes vary. Right? Ecclesiastes.

So it is important to not just quote all of the verses that talk about building up, gathering stones, a time for peace. There is also a time for war. There is a time for casting away stones. There is a time for tearing down. There is a time for opposites. And as you quote Scripture, even as you look at these Proverbs, there are times when we have to keep them in context and make sure that we are applying them to ourselves and not attempting to foist them on someone else. Through knowledge the righteous will be delivered.

Verse 10. "When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices; when the wicked perish, jubilation." This is in the city. But there is an implicit caution in here, isn't there? When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices.

I heard an interesting comment by John MacArthur because there was someone talking about what the church should do in an urban setting and what the church should do in the city. And they were talking about, you know, you need to be culturally sensitive and you need to recruit artists who will come in and tell you what music to play and what decor to use and what color the upholstery ought to be. For the urban church, you have to try to incorporate the elements and make it blend with the city and be one with the city, and this is what will bring people in.

And I loved John MacArthur's response, and somebody had cleverly interleaved the guy that was talking about how culturally sensitive the church ought to be and how well it ought to blend in with the city culture with John MacArthur. He said, "You want to know what the city dictum is from Scripture? If the mighty works that had been done in you, Chorazin and Bethsaida, if they had been done in Tyre and Sodom and Gomorrah, they would have turned in sackcloth and ashes and repented. You haven't repented, therefore you're in line for destruction."

MacArthur's point being, it's not a matter of poverty being a virtue in and of itself or oppression automatically conferring virtue. I'm oppressed, therefore I deserve those things that come to the virtuous or to the righteous or to the just or to the poor in spirit. Poverty does not confer victimhood and therefore an automatic need for the church or the individual believer to go and try to relieve the poverty, relieve the oppression. There's people that need to be poor. You make those people rich and you're giving them power to be even more evil than they are in the first place.

This is not true of all poor people, but poverty in and of itself is not a virtue. Oppression in and of itself is not a virtue. That is not the basis for being the recipients of brotherly love, brotherly concern, giving the coat and the cloak, going the extra mile. Just because somebody wants you to carry their stuff a mile, look at what Jesus said in the context. Any old body that wants you to carry something a mile, you don't just drop what you're doing and do it. Any old body that asks you for a coat, there is a context and there is a set of conditions that pertain.

If somebody is in need and they genuinely ask you for a coat and you recognize, boy, this coat is not going to meet this need, there's more I can do here. I want to meet this need as though it was Jesus Himself asking me for this coat. If the Lord Jesus needed a coat and I said, hey, take a cloak, you need some sandals, you want a loaf of bread, what else can I give you? You need a staff? Are you a little creaky? Do you need a place to stay? If it was the Lord Jesus, if you've done it to the least of these My brethren, you have done it unto Me, right? These My brethren. Not any old body that needs a coat. You do it to these My brethren, who are His brethren, those who are related to Him spiritually and by faith, by love, by humility, by response, by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

And to eliminate all of those conditions and all of that context and just say, you know, here's a nefarious drug-addicted person who ran out of money to buy some more crack cocaine and they're asking me for a \$20 bill, well, I should give them \$40. No, that is not what Scripture is saying in any way, shape, or form. By the blessing of the upright, verse 11 of chapter 11, the city is exalted.

When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices. In verse 10, "By the blessing of the upright, the city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked." This is talking about the blessing-by-association effect, that when the righteous are blessed, when it goes well with the righteous because God is invested in them, they are the 10 in Sodom. God tells Abraham, you can find 10 righteous people, this whole city will persist and survive. Ten righteous. If it goes well with them, the whole city is spared. Blessing by association.

And the city can rejoice and they don't even know why they are prospering, why they are benefiting, why they are preserved, why they are receiving blessing. They may or may not recognize the city generally is not filled with righteous people. There is salt and light in that city. There is a remnant. There is a faithful few.

And the whole city will rejoice because it is suddenly going well. And they probably don't even know why. But the whole city will rejoice because it is going well for the righteous. God is looking out for the righteous. For that righteous person to be blessed, He is going to bless that whole city so that they can dwell in a blessed city. God is targeting the righteous and the rest of these people are in the periphery.

God can do it with a household. He can do it with a village. He can do it with a town. He can do it with a city. He can do it with a county. He can do it for a state. How many righteous are there? To what extent does God want to bless and cause it to go well with them? The city rejoices. They are not really sure why, but hey, everything is going great. Look, unemployment is down. Income is up. Crops are burgeoning. Cows and goats and sheep are proliferating in abundance. The grapes are thick and heavy.

Look at the land of Canaan and the clusters of grapes. Remember the grapes of Eshcol that were so huge? Those clusters that the spies brought back from the land? And the land is prospering. Why is the land prospering? God is fitting it for occupation by His people. It is not a land of parched dryness. God prepared it in advance so when the Israelites came in, there were fruitful fields. There is abundance. There are grapes. There are animals. There is milk and honey flowing in this land.

And the Canaanites are celebrating. Why? It is going well with the righteous. That is why. By the blessing of the upright, the city is exalted. Remember what Jesus said about Capernaum? Capernaum, you think you are going to be exalted to heaven, but you are going to be dragged down to Sheol. You think you will be exalted for your own sake? It is the blessing of the upright that exalts a city, not the city's pursuit of excellence.

It is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked. Over and over again, the wicked mouth is covered in violence. It drags down an entire city. The strife, the division, the backbiting, the gossip, the nefarious personal attacks, the ad hominem, the vicious, pernicious hatred, the constant carping, the vitriol, the bile that spews from the mouth of the wicked, destroys an entire city.

So how does it apply to me personally? I will not be that mouth. I will not be that negative effect. I want to be the positive effect. I would rather see the rising tide float all boats, and God is sending that tide to me because I am being faithful and obedient. I want to have a beneficial effect on those around me, not a destructive, judgmental effect.

Verse 12: "He who is devoid of wisdom despises his neighbor, but a man of understanding holds his peace." You want to backbite? You want to talk bad? You want to undercut, diminish, attack the reputation of your neighbor? That's devoid of wisdom. If you're smart, you keep your mouth shut. It doesn't matter what you know about your neighbor. People love to share inside information. I want to be the first to tell you. Did you see? Did you hear? Did you know? Devoid of wisdom, attacking a neighbor, despising the neighbor, and this despicable attitude works itself out in speech, because look at the contrast: hold your peace.

Hold on to your peace internally. Don't let anyone rob us of our peace. See the context in verse 13? "A tale-bearer reveals secrets. He who is of a faithful spirit conceals the matter." You don't have to tell everything you know. There is a time to let people know, to warn them that the bridge is out, to warn them of dishonest scales, to warn them that the wicked are active in an area. We have to judge whether sharing something we know is going to be instructive or destructive. Is it helpful or is it hurtful? Does it glorify God or does it make an issue out of me, an issue out of sin, an issue out of subjectivity, eyes on people?

I love telling a tale. Oh, we're creating a controversy. There's a dust-up. Isn't this fun? It's exhilarating. It's stimulating. Everybody's talking now that I found out. I was taking out the trash and this is what I saw through the window of my neighbor's house. Oh, this and that. He who is of a faithful spirit doesn't bear tales.

Well, this is a good place to pause because verse 14 is controversial, to say the least. "Where there is no counsel, the people fall, but in the multitude of counselors there is safety." You may have heard this addressed in the past by those who are adamantly against a multitude of counselors. That's a good fresh place to start.

But if you don't take anything else away from the pair of lessons that we've had tonight, remember, every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, and that includes every word of every one of these proverbs, is directly applicable, it is true, it is pertinent, and it is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction for me. I'm not worried about society. I'm not worried about culture. I'm not worried about the church, capital C. I'm not worried about those guys over there.

For me, these things are absolutely true between me and the Lord God in heaven. If I pursue righteousness and justice, faithfulness, humility, obedience, if I endeavor to be someone of whom God is legitimately pleased and proud, all of these wonderful positive blessings accrue. I have hope. I have purpose. I have confidence. I have peace. There's none of these that are not true for me.

If I get on the negative side of it, every single negative consequence is true for me. I am the wicked. I am the faithless. I am the tale-bearer. I am the hypocrite. I am the one pursuing unjust gain for myself of whatever kind. Maybe I just want to be notorious. Maybe I want to be recognized. Maybe I want everybody to see my face on YouTube. Maybe I want people to buy my books. Maybe I want people to talk about me in elite circles. That's gain. That's riches. That's treasure for some.

If I start pursuing that, all of the judgments, all of the negative side will accrue. My effect on those around me is going to be horrific. It is going to be negative. It is going to be corrosive. It is going to erode. It is going to tear down and not build up. I am not edifying. I am destroying by my perversity and my bad choices. Every single proverb, crack open the Proverbs, put your finger down in a page. That's for me. That's for you. Between me and the Lord God, it is absolutely always unequivocally true. You can count on it, just as with every other Scripture. Important to understand as we go through these Proverbs.

Well, we'll see more next time. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word. Thank You for the confidence that we can have, the endorsement of the Lord Jesus Himself, that every word is important. It is all inspired. As the Apostle Paul tells us, it is profitable. It is God-breathed. It enables us, as we rightly divide it, to be workmen who do not need to be ashamed.

We pray that as we process the truth of Your Word in our own souls, that God, the Holy Spirit, in His enabling and empowering function, will illuminate our path, lead us into that truth, supernaturally invest us with the love and the power to live the life to which we have been called. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.