

Proverbs 23-07-19b

We'll pick up our study now in Proverbs chapter 11, when pride comes then comes shame. Over and over again, really beginning in the introduction, the first nine chapters, there is a clear cut choice. It reminds you of what Jesus said about himself, I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

That has to be taken in context, doesn't it? Because Jesus said, peace I leave with you, my peace I give you, not as the world gives. And there is a peace that passes all understanding. And yet, in a different context, Jesus says, I have not come to bring peace, I've come to bring a sword.

But the presentation of God's wisdom, the gift of God's truth, inevitably divides the human race, inevitably divides the people of God into those who respond and those who don't. That was metaphorically presented in the first nine chapters, looking at the two ladies. You have lady wisdom and you have the crafty harlot.

To whom will the young man listen? There is the allure and the appeal to the flesh represented by the harlot. Let's have a lot of fun. It's stimulating, it's inviting, it's alluring to do something that's illicit and secret and sneaky.

It has a stimulating effect that there's an adrenaline rush that comes with it. I've got these delicacies and dainties that come to my house and we're going to have some fun. Lady wisdom has also prepared her table and set the meal in anticipation of the visit of the wise young man, the one who chooses to learn.

She has also mixed her wine, but this is not a wine that is going to deceive and distort and subvert the young man. It is healthy, it is for his benefit, it is a balanced and nutritious course. It is the course of life and not death.

The sexy mincing steps that lead to death are one side. The appeal of wisdom in the open, in the light, as opposed to the darkness, is toward life. So there is a clear choice.

And these dichotomy proverbs that say there is this or is that are a reminder that all of these reflect the choice of faith or the choice of self-interest to love God or to love ourselves. So we can either use dishonesty and deceit, and many times deceit and dishonesty are simply a matter of emphasis. We just leave out inconvenient truths.

We emphasize things that might have an element of truth but by themselves leave a false impression. I'm only going to tell part of the story and not all of it. On the other hand, you have full disclosure, honesty even when it is at the cost of short-term gain to ourselves.

So dishonest scales versus a just weight. That's a choice that we personally make, both implicitly and in the course of circumstances and in our conversation, in our influence

and effect on others. When pride comes, shame comes with it.

With the humble, there is wisdom. It is a choice we make. Are we going to be arrogant or are we going to be humble? And that humility comes with advantages and blessing from God.

Verse 3, the integrity of the upright will guide them, but the perversity of the unfaithful will destroy them. So anytime you come to these contrasting lines, two-line contrasts, we see that there is a choice. What am I choosing between? I'm choosing between honesty and dishonesty.

I'm choosing between self-interested pride or arrogance versus humility. Humility is necessary for God's love. The kind of love that is sacrificial to self requires humility and it requires faith.

I have to trust that if I don't take care of myself, if I don't look out for number one, God is going to do it. It's a choice. Here in verse 3, what am I choosing between? Integrity, preserving an upright path versus unfaithfulness and perversity.

There is a lot of perversity on display in the world and you can hardly think of a better description for it. The things that people do, the kind of music, the kind of personal appearance, the kind of clothing, the kind of activities, the kind of things that people take videos of and post and brag on and put on their social media account, the things that they say about themselves and about others, the kind of celebrations they engage in, the kind of flag that they wave, it's perverse. It just seems to be almost intentionally designed to shock and undermine, attack and erode away traditional values associated with integrity, with character, with hard work, with genuine concern for one another, looking out not only for our own interests but also the interests of others.

The mind in us that was in Christ Jesus, Philippians chapter 2. It's just the opposite of that and it's an in-your-face, overt perversity that takes pride in being perverse, makes perversity a feature and something that they want to be admired for. The integrity of the upright, and notice this, it guides. Integrity is a guide.

We come into kind of a murky situation. There's two or three different ways to proceed. Well, what is the way of integrity? It is probably not going to be as profitable or as advantageous.

You know, somebody gets passed over for a promotion or feel like they did at work. And maybe the actual reason for it is you're just not as good at the job. You don't have the qualities of leadership that the other person has that was promoted and you were not.

But you say, well, they're a different color than I am, so I'm going to make an issue out of my color, whichever way it is. Maybe the person of color got promoted and you're Caucasian or something and you didn't get promoted. And you say, well, it's reverse

discrimination.

Or the other way around, it's discrimination. You're not promoting me because of this and the other. And the actual reason and in a calm, reflective evaluation, you know, that person really is better at supervision, at designing a plan and accomplishing a purpose and achieving a goal.

They're a better time manager. They're a better resource evaluator and in deploying and managing resources. They just really are kind of gifted at that.

They're better at it than I am. But you choose to make an issue of something else. You choose to use a perverse way of trying to get yourself promoted instead of a simply operating in integrity.

A pastor of long ago acquaintance used to say, if God doesn't promote you, you're not promoted, which is a way of saying, trust God for the time and place of your promotion. Be content with what you have, work quietly with your hands as much as it is up to you, live peaceably with all men. And let God promote you.

It goes along with what we read earlier about in Jesus words, don't try to set yourself in a high place, go to the lowest place and wait for someone to come and find you and move you up. Because if you exalt yourself, you're going to be humbled, if you humble yourself, you will be exalted. For whom is that true? People of faith, people who are asking and seeking and knocking, taking their situation to God in prayer and trusting him.

Do you seriously think that those who have that heart are going to languish very long in a low place? No longer than this life for sure. What did Jesus tell people during his earthly ministry? When the kingdom comes, the last shall be first and the first shall be last. I would rather be last in this life and first in the next.

I would rather be lowly in this life and exalted with opportunity and chances for service and function and proximity to the Lord Jesus to be able to sit on the fringes of that hidden man, a Bible class he's going to give. The deeper truths he's going to reveal, that's what the manna is. The manna is spiritual food.

Wouldn't you love to be qualified? Because you've learned enough foundational truth in this life, both in class and by experience, to understand when the Lord Jesus says, all right, you, you and you and you come up here on the mountain. I've got some things I want to share with you. Like he did with his disciples, the teaching on the hill, when he called them to himself, when he went into the inner room and left the crowds outside and said, when they said, explain to us the parable of the sower.

And he did. Wouldn't you love to be in that group? How do you get in that group? Humility. God resists the proud.

He gives grace to the humble. The level of faith I have in that and the dedication to it that will let me tolerate inequity, injustice, bad treatment. Somebody does get promoted over me and they are an example of, of incompetence and rascality.

And I really did deserve it. Well, would I rather that God give me that little petty promotion in this life and I've got nothing by way of advantages or blessings or opportunities or inheritance in the next? Keep your job in this life. Let me walk with the Lord Jesus in white in the next.

Let me be a pillar in the temple of God with a new name written on me. I can wait. I am happy to do mundane chore now because I have total confidence.

I know whom I have believed. I was just rereading. I wasn't going to talk about this, but I've changed my mind.

I found a paper I wrote way back in 1997. I was finishing up seminary and I had to read a book and then write a paper reflecting my response. The book was called The Myth of Certainty.

I don't remember who wrote it, but this guy was a Christian author and he was saying, you know, people want to be sure of things and that's a mistake because you're operating out of reason instead of faith. And what you should do is just live with your doubts and just go on and do stuff anyway, even though you doubt. I had a very visceral reaction against that message.

And I wrote a 10-page paper explaining my response to this unbiblical approach. We can be certain of all kinds of things. I am certain of my salvation.

I am certain that the Lord Jesus is the son of God. I am certain like the Apostle Paul, as what brought this to mind is quoting what he said. I know whom I have believed.

I am utterly convinced that he's able to keep what I commit to him against that future day of his return and of the inception and operation of his kingdom. I am certain of that, Paul says. I have no doubt.

I don't know what tomorrow holds. I don't know whether I'll be healthy or unhealthy. I don't know if I'll be well off or impoverished.

I don't know if I'll be attacked or oppressed. I don't know if I'll be promoted and recognized. I don't know a lot of things, but that's not the area where persuasion and conviction matters.

I am certain that the promises of God are true and inviolable, that what God has said he will do. I am certain that the Lord Jesus is going to return and judge me. And that there will be wood, hay and stubble that makes a very hot flash fire.

But my hope and my dedication and my endeavor is to pursue the creation of gold and silver and precious stones in my life that will survive that fire and be a part of my eternal life, both now and in the ages to come. There is no doubt in my mind. So to title a book and to claim that certainty about anything is a myth, that's a non-starter for me.

We are to be certain. We are to hold convictions about things that are absolutely true. And my point in my paper was, and what was omitted in this book, is where does that certainty come from? It is the word of God assured to me, illuminating my life and my soul by the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit.

If you don't have the Holy Spirit and if you're not really too sure what the word of God says, okay, maybe for you certainty is a myth. And one of the points I made in that paper is, if someone doesn't believe in certainty, there's no way to convince him that it exists. And if you have certainty yourself, there's no way you can prove it to anybody else.

If you don't believe in certainty, you're never going to have it. If you do believe in certainty, you can have it yourself, but you can't hand it to someone else because it is as personal as the presence and power of the Holy Spirit and the word of God in your own soul. I have absolute certainty about all kinds of things and it is no myth, but everybody has to arrive at that by themselves.

And there is no certainty and there is no conviction apart from the word of God and the spirit of God. Scientists can be convinced that the universe is expanding, new piece of evidence comes in, well, it's, or that it's not expanding and then they get new evidence that says it is. They say, well, it's going to, it's going to fluctuate and it's going to, it's cyclical.

And then they get new evidence that says it's not, they don't believe Einstein's theory of relativity. And then they're forced to admit that it's true because of measurements. And certainty in the scientific world is subject to change by the introduction of new evidence.

The word of God, grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of God stands la Olam, forever. It does not change any more than God himself changes. And thank God he is unchangeable.

What if he changed his mind about our salvation? What if he changed his mind about sending Jesus back? What if we were just left in this quagmire to, to die a miserable death and never be resurrected, never have the opportunity to see the kingdom of the son or the kingdom of the father, never a chance to, to see the beautiful glow of light from the throne of the lamb in the new Jerusalem and the opportunity to dwell there in, to pick and eat the fruit off the tree of life growing on each side of the river of life. Never had the opportunity to partake of God's new work in the ages to come, to be a part of it, to be like the angels, to be involved. How much joy do you think Gabriel and Michael and the other angels of God have in doing their job at God's behest, fulfilling their

appointment as faithful messengers and faithful operatives, uh, performing things in God's grand demonstration in human history to be an angel that's involved.

Even the one that said, I'll go be a lying spirit in the mouth of the prophet. I'll fool the king so that he goes to his destruction. But the, to deliver the wonderful news of the birth of Jesus Christ to Mary and to Joseph, to deliver the news to Zachariah that, that his son, John the Baptist is going to be the forerunner and be the new Elijah, the final great prophet of the old Testament age to be involved and be, be found faithful.

It is required in a steward that a man be found faithful. Well, that's our opportunity. We cannot imagine the things that God is going to do.

God isn't going to rest on his laurels and eternity. And we're all just going to sit around and watch old home movies of human history. God moves forward.

God does new things. There's, there's an infinitude of his character that we can explore in new and unimaginable ways. What a great privilege to be a part of it.

Well, you can't be a part of it if you don't believe it's coming, if it's not a reality and you don't therefore think I need to be prepared, I need to work and turn this momentary light affliction to my advantage, grow my faith, practice the promises, um, lay hold of righteousness by faith, be found faithful in this brief earthly life so that I can be useful and involved and functional and have a ringside seat for all of the wonderful things that God and the Lord Jesus Christ are going to do in the future ages. I want that more than anything. Who in their right mind, wouldn't you really want to be back in the rear with the gear, you know, washing dishes while the great work of God is going forward outside you're back there.

Well, hand me another saucer. I got another dirty fork here. That's all I'm good for is, you know, doing mundane potato peeling instead of out there being an integrated and frontline functionary that's, that just, there is no greater opportunity than to be, you know, the experiencing God.

People say, well, join God in his work. If you want to join God in his work, be a faithful believer, cultivate humility and not arrogance, cultivate honesty and not perversity, cultivate integrity and not rascality. Look at verse three, the integrity of the upright will guide them.

The upright have integrity, uprightness and integrity. Go hand in hand. And that gives us insight.

We face a decision. There's two or three or four possible choices. Well, what is the way of integrity? What is the most self-sacrificial and beneficial to other believers path? That's the way to go.

It guides us. It's a light on our path. Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

But the perversity, the unfaithful inevitably leads us down roads of destruction. Even if it achieves a short-term gain, you end up in destruction. Verse four, riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.

This is a partial quote from chapter 10, verse two, treasures of wickedness profit nothing, but righteousness delivers from death. And you can't believe the number of commentators that come to this and say, well, you know, this is sort of a guide for practical living. You know, if you live a righteous life, the claim is that you won't die so soon.

You won't die the sin unto death or whatever. Instead of recognizing that deliverance from death is deliverance from the loss that occurs at the point of physical death. You are delivered.

This is what Jesus was talking about in John 11. The one who lives and believes in me will never die in the sense that death is not a loss, it's a gain. I am entering into my eternal inheritance at the point of death.

This momentary light affliction is no more. Whatever suffering and whatever circumstances I had to endure through here, that's over with. I am entering in.

I am the prodigal return. The fatted calf is being slain. I've got a robe and a ring.

I'm in the house at the feast. My weary days are o'er and the eternal reward that is promised to those who are faithful, I'm entering into it now. Call this death, bring it on.

This is a transition to a far better state. For whom? For whom? Not everyone. Righteousness, the accruing of righteousness by faith.

And you can do it in the smallest ways. It reminds me, I saw a demonstration, we were in Branson, went into a shop and in the shop window, they had a 3D printer going. Takes those things forever.

I saw another video later on how it's made or whatever. And they had to speed the thing up and you could see the little clock going around and around and around as this thing made a vase, a 3D printed vase. And it took the thing like 12 hours to make it.

But you know how those things make what they make? One little tiny droplet at a time. This little thing is computer controlled and it's got an X-axis and a Y-axis and it puts a little droplet of plastic, melted plastic in a spot and then it moves. And so it's, you know, just a little drop here, a little drop there.

And it takes it a long time, layer by layer to build up. And it knows when to use one and when not. They make sculptures.

They make, you know, all kinds of things that are 3D printed, but it takes time. And it is tiny little increments, little bitty droplets over time build up into whatever it is they're making that is useful or aesthetically pleasing. That's what righteousness is like.

The little expression of faith when I hurt and I think, well, I'm going to do this or I'm going to do that, I'm going to do the other because I'm out of sorts. I'm grumpy. I'm, I'm in pain.

I deserve some consideration. I'm going to go rant. I'm going to go dump on somebody.

I'm going to go be ugly. I'm going to, if I'm in pain, I'm going to make somebody else suffer. Make, make life painful for them.

And the little decision that says, you know, the fruit of the spirit isn't that choice, it's over here. Um, I could clothe myself in sackcloth and ashes and let everybody know I'm in misery, but I'm going to wash my face. Remember what the scripture says? You know, instead of advertising, wash your face, put on your good clothes.

Feel bad, look good. And so many of you all do that. So many people of my acquaintance do it every single day, hours of the day.

It's not easy. How do we accomplish it? By faith, trusting that God has a purpose in whatever we're going through long term, short term, there's a purpose in it. And every time I acknowledge that God is in control, which Nebuchadnezzar failed to do, this life is of my own making, this success is of my own efforts, fruit.

God says, you're going to eat grass until you figure out who's in charge. But that tiny expression of faith, that's one of those droplets. And minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, that righteousness is permanent.

It never goes away. When you express that faith, when you trust God in a difficult circumstance, that little droplet of righteousness is permanent. It's eternal.

Momentary light affliction, eternal weight of glory. Little bit of affliction, heavy weight of glory. And every time we trust God in affliction, every time we trust God when it's hard, we trust God when we can't figure out why.

We commit ourselves to the hands of a faithful creator. We're not real sure what he's up to, but I know whom I have believed. I'm going to commit this to him against that day.

That is the righteousness that delivers from death. We don't suffer loss at death. We inherit a great gain.

We share in the inheritance of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the firstborn among many brothers. Who is a true brother? When Jesus looked around, somebody said, hey, you know, your mother and brothers are outside.

What did Jesus say? You see these people here who have sacrificially come and are listening to the teaching, trying to incorporate it into their lives. This is my mother and sisters and brothers. Those who are seeking to do the will of my father, that's my family.

And you find that that's true even in Christian fellowship. Your family is any like minded believer that suffers with you, celebrates with you, worships with you, appreciates the Lord Jesus with you, investigates the word of God and thinks about it. And that's that's our family.

And that is our inheritance. That's our future delivers from death. The scripture has so much to say about integrity.

It's I've got I've got about thirty five references on integrity. To have integrity is to lay hold of righteousness by faith. It guides us.

Chapter two, verse one, my son, if you receive my words, you remember that that we memorized to one through six in Proverbs. That's integrity. And by laying hold of God's words and and guarding them in faith, you get to verse nine, then you will understand righteousness and justice, equity and every good path.

People have a lot to say about equity. You want to understand equity? Proverbs two, one through nine. Proverbs three, three, let not mercy and truth forsake you.

Bind them around your neck, write them on the table of your heart. Notice we have to write them ourselves on the table of our heart in three, three verse four. That is the way that you will find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man.

Proverbs four, twenty three, keep your heart with all diligence for out of it spring the issues of life. Proverbs four, twenty five through twenty seven, let your eyes look straight ahead and your eyelids look right before you ponder the path of your feet and let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left.

Remove your foot from evil. That's integrity. Proverbs chapter 10, verse nine, he who walks with integrity walks securely.

He who perverts his ways will become manifest, will become known. You can't hide that for long. Twelve, twenty two, lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal truthfully are his delight.

Proverbs 13, verse six, righteousness guards him whose way is blameless, but wickedness overthrows the sinner. There just is no stability. There is no future in it.

Proverbs 14, verse 30, a sound heart is life to the body, but envy is rottenness to the bones. I want to have what that guy has. I want to be with that person.

Is I want to have that success? I want to have that position. I want to. Paul Simon, one of

his early songs was Richard Corey.

Look at the look at the lyrics to that song. Even Paul Simon knows that truth. Proverbs 15, verse 21, folly is joy to him who is destitute of discernment.

I had to make a bumper sticker out of that and then put it on my mirror. But folly is joy to him who is destitute of discernment. But a man of understanding walks uprightly.

If you have any notion of the way God's world works and the way the future is going to unfold, we'll walk uprightly. A man of understanding. Otherwise, folly is a joy to us.

Remember in the New Testament where it talks about those whose glory is their shame. Spots in your love feasts and so on. Proverbs 16, 11, honest weights and scales are the Lord's.

All the weights in the bag are his work. We saw that earlier. This is integrity.

Proverbs 19, verse one, better is the poor who walks in his integrity than one who is perverse in his lips and is a fool. Notice how often speech is implicated in perversity. Can't hide it.

It comes out in conversation. Proverbs 20, verse seven, the righteous man walks in his integrity. His children are blessed after him.

Those of us who are descended from or associated with people of integrity know this is true. It's a blessing. Proverbs 21, verse three, to do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.

This comes out again. Remember in first Samuel, to heed is better than the fat of rams. God desires mercy and not sacrifice.

Well, Proverbs 21, verse three, you see this truth reflected a bit later. To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice. Psalm 15, one through five.

Lord, who may abide in your tabernacle? Who may dwell in your holy hill? This is that future look that I mentioned earlier. He who walks uprightly and works righteousness and speaks the truth in his heart. The truth is in his heart and he speaks it, but it starts in the heart.

He works righteousness. He who does not backbite with his tongue. Does not do evil to his neighbor, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend.

In whose eyes a vile person is despised, but he honors those who fear the Lord. Notice it is in his eyes where a vile person is despised. You can recognize, you can discern that someone is vile, but it's in your eyes.

It's not on your tongue. It's not a flag you print and wave downtown in front of a crowd. In your discernment, in your eyes, you are cautioned.

You are discreet. You are careful around someone who is a vile person. Who is vile, but he's despised in your eyes.

It's for your purposes. He who swears to his own hurt and does not change. He who does not put out his money at usury, nor does he take a bribe against the innocent.

He who does these things shall never be moved. These are descriptions of a life of integrity. And you can bank it if you are a person endeavoring to acquire and manifest the Christian virtues of faith and hope and love.

Proverbs 24 verses three through five, who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive blessing from the Lord and righteousness from the God of his salvation. Proverbs 25, 21, let integrity and uprightness preserve me.

Oh Lord, for I wait for you. I'm sorry, these are Psalms. I think I said Proverbs, that's Psalm 24, three through five, Psalm 25, 21, Psalm 26, one vindicate me.

Oh Lord, for I have walked in my integrity. I have also trusted the Lord. I shall not slip.

If you want a real parallel to this whole section of Proverbs in the Psalms, you can go to Psalm 49 and it is an expanded version. It is an expanded description of these truths. But we'll stop and close here for tonight.

But these truths are something about which we can be absolutely certain. They are something in which we can place our faith. We can count on God to vindicate those who believe and practice the positive side of these expressions of truth, these ways of wisdom.

And we can expect that we and anyone else who disregards them and fails to heed them is going to find themselves on the negative side. There will be loss. There will be sorrow.

There will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. If we think we've got something else figured out, if we just get distracted and deflected and deceived into thinking, you know, the ways of the world will work for me, not for us. We belong to God.

And these are the positives and negatives of faithfulness, obedience versus unfaithfulness and perversity. These are absolutely true. They will never not be true for you and for me.

And when you think about the positive, why wouldn't you? What is there to lose? What is that? I'm always trying to remember the exact wording of that aphorism. He is no fool

who trades what he can't keep to gain what he cannot lose. Something like that.

Chester Denner, one of those guys, said that. He is no fool who trades what he can't keep anyway to gain what he cannot lose. And nothing in this life is going to last.

So why invest in that when we have the opportunity for that eternal weight of glory? Well, we'll pick up here in the Proverbs and pick up our pace a little bit next time, but we'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for these wonderful promises, these descriptions that chasten us, that warn us and encourage us. We know that the example you have given to us of a wise earthly father who rebukes us when we need it and trains us in the way that we should go is but a reflection of your divine investment in our lives and your desire for us to grow, to mature, to succeed, to enter into those realms of blessing and opportunity that you have prepared for us through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray that we can represent him well on this earth. Others will see the light in our lives and be drawn to you and to the Lord Jesus as we speak the truth, as we live the truth, and as we look for that wonderful day when the Lord Jesus returns to take us to himself and present us faultless before your throne. We ask and pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.