

Proverbs 23-08-30a

Good Wednesday evening. This is the 30th of August, 2023. It's Wednesday night.

Bible study in the book of Proverbs. We resume in chapter 11. This is a chapter in which we have spent some time and made a number of observations because it is the first full chapter of Proverbs after the extended introduction represented in the first 10 chapters.

And what we learn here and observe is going to help us in the remainder of the book. So we've covered about the first 15 verses here. There are a total of 31 in the chapter.

We'll make a couple of additional observations. I learned a couple of new things as I keep looking at this chapter and it just unfolds like a blossoming rose before me. And I wonder if I'm ever going to be able to leave this chapter.

It's just very fulsome, fraught with layers of meaning and interconnections. And there is structure, there's order, there's great beauty, and it is designed to be memorable. It's very difficult to get across from Hebrew into English, just how beautifully structured and designed for memory this is.

But we'll take a crack at it. Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and study and we'll get started. Father, we come to the pages of your word and find that it is far more than a two-dimensional page with words.

It is such a wonderful revelation that is fulsome and beautiful and engaging and so beneficial. It is an oasis of living water for our souls. It comes to our mind in the hands of the Holy Spirit and informs us and encourages us and motivates us and empowers us to live a life that is beyond the normal, the immediate, and the ephemeral.

We, unlike Solomon's plea in Ecclesiastes, we find that we can escape the circularity and the mundane nature of this world and enter into the eternal realms through these wonderful truths. We pray that as we look at them together tonight, that your Holy Spirit will illuminate them for us, help us to understand them and see their pertinence, help us to remember them and see their applicability as we move forward into what remains to us of this life in preparation not only for service and function here and now, but also in the ages to come. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. You'll remember that this section begins with the name of the Lord, talking about what delights him and what he considers to be repugnant, and the opening salvo in this chapter is justice and fairness in humans dealing with each other, specifically the people of God dealing with each other. So dishonest scales are an abomination to the Lord, but a perfect stone is one way to translate it, is his delight.

And this sets the tone that we are going to see the realm of human interactions, different kinds of people coming in contact with each other, different sorts of transactional contact

that is involved. And for example, in the weights and scales, you have the idea of business that is put forward to represent all kinds of human trucking with one another. Not just business, not just someone coming to buy wheat or oil, but how fair are we? What is our attitude toward others? Do we weigh issues and opinions and perceptions fairly? Do we try for balance? You can remember Paul saying toward the close of one of his letters, let your moderation be known to all.

The Lord is at hand. To not be extreme in our opinions, in our evaluations, to attempt to give people the benefit of doubt while at the same time, even as we are attempting to be harmless as doves, we need to be wise as serpents and to recognize when there is actual wrongdoing, there is actually something to be avoided. Touch not the unclean thing, hate the garment spotted by the flesh and place distance between ourselves and that which would corrupt or otherwise deflect and distract us, but not to be an extremist, not to be so polarized and so antagonistic that we end up becoming the very thing that we criticize.

So it all opens there. And I want to share with you, I warn you in advance, I'm going to do just a little bit of Hebrew here just to give a flavor. I was going back looking at verses two and three, and it is similar in Hebrew to the pithy sayings that we have in our own language that alliterate or become memorable because of their form.

You know, one in the hand is worth two in the bush or a stitch in time saves nine or other sayings that endeavor to communicate a truth, but they do so in a form that is designed to stick in our mind. So let me just use verse two as an example. When pride comes, then comes shame.

And this is almost a rhyming saying in Hebrew, you have the word for pride, which is Zadon, Z-A-D-O-N. And then you have the word for coming or going, which is bow. So when Zadon comes, then comes, and you have v'yobo, it's the same verb both times, when pride comes, then comes Kalon, Q-A-L-O-N, Zadon, Kalon.

When Zadon comes, you've got Kalon. Zadon comes, then comes Kalon. So when pride comes, then comes shame.

But then it says, with the humble, and this is Tzinuim, and then there is no verb, it's just V'et Tzinuim Chakma, Chakma, which is the common word used throughout the Psalms and Proverbs for wisdom, that which equips you for successful effort and function. And the idea is that this isn't just pride somehow coming into your heart. This is the proud coming, because when you think about the parallelism, the humble, these Tzinuim, that's more than one, and the humble comes.

So pride comes, this could be pride in a group, this could be pride in an individual, but with this pride coming in, in whatever container it is housed, it could be our soul, it could be somebody else, but it comes, it arrives. It wasn't here before, now it is. And when it

comes and arrives, shame is hard on its heels.

It's got a friend. Pride comes and shame is right behind it. But when the humble come, and this is a really interesting word.

This word for humble is only used two places in scripture. Here, and remember, what does the Lord require of you, O man, but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly. The only other place this root is used in the whole Old Testament, to walk humbly.

So this is not just momentary humility or, aw shucks, I know you're admiring me and you're proud of me, or you see my accomplishment and I'm just kind of kicking my sandal toe in the dirt because I'm humble. It's parallel usage tells us that it is an attribute of walking. Just like when you get to Ephesians four, walk circumspectly.

It is pattern of life, mode of life, characteristic over time, climate versus weather, it's not just an episode. It is an ongoing observation you can make about someone. So you have Zadon comes, with it is Kalon, but with the humble, wisdom.

It's not even a verb. And you get the idea that this is a compressed, condensed, this is a zip file of information, that this pride is contained in a group of people. There are people who are of this nature and inevitably that attempt at self elevation is going to result in embarrassment and shame.

You think of the words of the Lord, when you're invited to the feast, don't go up and take the head chair, lest the host come up and ask you to move because he's got a more important guest, take the least seat and wait for the host to come and promote you. God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble, humble yourself under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt you in due time, self exaltation inevitably is going to lead to shame. Waiting for God to promote, doing the things that please God, going back to verse one, a perfect stone.

Maybe I'm just a rock, but I'm going to be a perfect rock in my dealings with others, I want to be as fair, if it costs me something, so be it, but I want to be the Lord's delight. He will ensure that I don't come to shame. The righteous will not be ashamed.

Paul, you know, he closes an exhortation saying that we be not ashamed at his coming, so there is a forward movement of ideas here, what is it that is repugnant to God, what is it that pleases him and delights him? Well, arrogance is repugnant and it's going to result in shame. Humility is going to result in the imparting of wisdom and the attainment of wisdom and functioning and living in wisdom, which has temporal and eternal benefits, but that wonderful alliteration that you have, it's not quite a rhyme, but it just, in the Hebrew mind, this would have stuck, Zadon, Katon, Kalon, rather, Zadon, Kalon, and then the Tzinuim Chokmah, Tzinuim Chokmah. So that's verse two.

In verse three, it says the integrity, the Tumat, and this is related to a word Ta'am that we're going to see when we pick up in a new verse tonight, but this integrity of the upright, the Yishrim, Yashar is to be straight, to be, or Fas would be the equivalent in Greek. The integrity of the upright will guide them, but the perversity of the unfaithful, the Bogdim, will destroy them. Just as an aside, if you ever study Hebrew, there is a little memory aid, Bogad Kifat, and these are letters in Hebrew that will take an emphasis point, take a dogish forte.

So a soft B is an empty B, it's a bait, and there's no dot in the middle. And so that's a V sound, which is the soft form, but bait, and gimel, and dalet, and kaf, and pay, and tav, Bogad Kifat, but Bogad is the verb that we have here, but it's Bogdim, the ones who are perverse and are unfaithful, their perversity will destroy them, the Bogdim. So I only say this to say, by way of application, we can't really memorize the Hebrew and get the benefit.

If you think about the day in which David and Solomon expressed these points of wisdom, collected them, gathered them, and propagated them, there was no written Bible at all, so if someone was going to live by the words of God, it had to be in their memory, it had to be something that they heard the scribes read at the temple, or that was shared by those who had previously memorized it around their dinner table, or in the later days after the captivity in synagogue, but people didn't have a Bible. We are so blessed, you can't move without seeing Bibles, they're everywhere. I've got stacks of Bibles, I've lost count of how many Bibles I've got, I'm sure there's over four dozen Bibles in this house, easily, not counting electronic copies and YouVersion and these things you can get on your phone, we have Bibles everywhere, and we tend to forget that the people of God, up until the days of the printing press, did not have their own copy of Scripture.

99.9% of believers had no written copy of Scripture, so to what do we resort? What does the Holy Spirit use as the other 50% of the power of God in the life of a believer when you've got no Scripture? Thy word have I hid in my heart, I've memorized it. So what we can do by way of interpretation and application of our observation here is find memorable ways to tuck the word of God away in our heart so that it will come to our mind the way these aphorisms and punchlines of fables come to our mind. You think about, who was that duck that thought the sky was falling? And, you know, yeah, Chicken Little.

We have these little stories that say, you know, don't panic, don't jump to a conclusion and misinterpret. And you can tell how memorable it was for me, but I haven't thought about it in a while. But we want to try to find ways.

This is why personal reflection in the word of God, going over scriptures, having a little morning devotion, just read through the Psalms, read through the Proverbs, and let them

percolate and lodge in our thinking so that they can return to our mind via the influence and ministry of the Holy Spirit for grace to help in time of need. This is how God can answer our prayers for wisdom, for guidance, for insight, for self-control. How can I keep myself from being impulsive? How can I keep myself from misjudging others and not using a fair weight, from being carried along by every wind of doctrine or every wind of political and social opinion, or by the superficial arguments of people who say, well, this has to be right.

Look at this selected evidence. We need the word of God as our anchor, as our rock, and we are so easily deceived. We are so easily convinced that we are right and others are wrong.

And it is scary. I have been impressed with this in recent days as I read opinions and responses to questions and everything from the, I've been reading up, I want to hear everybody's objections to the pre-tribulational rapture. Oh, it's recent.

Nobody had ever heard of it until John Nelson Darby heard some crazy gal going off with some vision she had in 1828. And then nobody had ever heard of the rapture or pre-tribulation exit of the saints until, you know, the 1800s. It's late.

It's false. It gives people an incentive to not be charitable, to not be interested in social activism, activism, activism. I think that's something else.

And so it is decried on so many grounds. And so I'm reading this hair raising collection of arguments against the notion that there is a distinction between the exit of the church and the second coming of Christ. And I say, well, you know, there, I can name five distinctives off the top of my head between the rapture and the second coming.

No, there's only one last Trump. And Paul says there's going to be the Trump of God at the rapture and the, you know, the seventh trumpet's going to herald a return and the people back and forth, back and forth. More so than the correct answer or the best answer or the most persuasive answer to that question is to stand back and see how dogmatically persuaded we can be by our opinion and become unteachable.

No longer question the dogma, no longer question the position, aren't open to even hear another side. That is dangerous. The humble here to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly.

Humility is the opposite of arrogance. And everybody that has a different opinion from the right one, if you pick any issue and there are 17 different opinions, at least 16 of those are going to be wrong, possibly all 17. And so what's going to follow for everyone who got it wrong? Shame.

And to arrogantly assume that you are right and everyone else is wrong and be unwilling to entertain other views. What is the better path? I will listen to what you have to say,

and then I will go to the word of God and especially in the realm of essentials, I will ensure that my understanding is solidly founded on the rock of the Lord Jesus Christ as he is revealed throughout the pages of scripture. We've seen so many times how Jesus told the Pharisees, you search the scriptures because you believe that in them you have life and it is they that testify of me.

The Old Testament scriptures testify of Christ. The two on the road to Emmaus, he opened to them the scriptures and explained all things concerning himself from the Old Testament scriptures. So how fruitful is it to begin to dismiss some or all of the Old Testament as unenlightened, humanly originated? These authors are the six men of Hindustan that we saw last Sunday.

They only had a part of the revelation and so we can't take what they say to the bank in terms of spiritual truth. So this is the value of Proverbs. They will open their meaning, they will inform us, they will guide us, they will enable us to lay hold of righteousness by faith if we begin with humility, if we cultivate teachability.

So as we pick up now, this is going to be the theme. The first 15 verses are in great detail, but in verse 16, a gracious woman retains honor, but ruthless men retain riches. This seems a bit disconnected when you first examine it, but the other side of this is going to appear down in verse 22.

As a ring of gold in a swine's snout, so is a lovely woman who lacks discretion. Let's just slip down to verse 22. As a ring of gold in a swine's snout.

Notice so is, is in italics and you can cross it out. And as is in italics. So a ring of gold in a swine's snout, a lovely woman who lacks discretion.

The word lacks there doesn't mean she just didn't happen to have any. This word means to turn away from, to treat as not valuable. This is a woman who turns away from, who rejects, who abandons.

And the word for discretion, this comes from a verb that literally means to taste. Some, you'll find some translations that say a lovely woman who, who lacks taste. Which is, is an interesting comparison because the verb actually means to taste.

You taste with the taste buds, but it isn't used that way in Hebrew. It is used, well, maybe it is, but I'm not real sure how we came to say, you know, that's tasteful decoration or tasteful in its aesthetic. But it comes from the idea that your taste buds allow you to discern between foods.

And so in its metaphorical sense, to taste a thing is to discern it, to have discretion, to reject what is bad and to accept what is good. And so a woman with, with exterior beauty, this is Yaffe, Y-A-P-H-E. That's one of those soft pays that doesn't have a dogish in the middle.

So, but it's an Isha, Isha Yaffe, who has turned from discretion. Now this is very interesting to me in the allegedly hyper-patriarchal world of the Old Testament and of Hebrew society and culture, because it doesn't say she's turned aside from her husband's opinion or her husband's guidance or her husband's authority. This is a lovely woman who is not discerning for herself.

Tasting is something you can only do for yourself. There are people who tell me certain foods are really wonderful. Well, not when I taste them.

My taste works for me. And no amount of somebody else telling me, I could have the Commandant of the Marine Corps come and tell me that certain foods taste good. And I'm sorry, sir, but that's not how it tastes to me.

Taste is individual. And this is pertinent because you think, well, is this just picking on women? It doesn't say a handsome man that turns from discretion is swine-like or whatever. But notice the next verse, previous sequence.

Verse 16 says, a gracious woman retains honor, but ruthless ones retain riches. Then verse 17, the merciful man does good for his own soul. And taken in context and taken together, this is men and women.

Mercy requires discretion. It requires discernment. You can't be indiscriminately merciful.

God is not indiscriminately merciful. There is some common grace that is dispensed. There is a universal dispensation of God's grace that affects people that are directly related to him and those who are not.

There are also principles that apply universally for mankind. So to express the idea that this is pertinent across all people, here are women who are representative. And although they seem to have an advantage, a lovely woman seems to be advantaged above women who might be considered plain.

You think of Rachel and Leah. And the general understanding is that Rachel was the attractive younger sister and Leah was plain. Her name itself seems to mean, you know, cow eyes.

And that Jacob was attracted by the younger and more vivacious woman. But it is wasted, according to Scripture, these seeming advantages. And so the beauty of a woman is put for any apparent advantage that someone, man or woman, might have.

Someone might have a talent. They might have a gift. They might have a leg up in terms of inherited wealth or a favorable position or they're quote unquote lucky in some way.

But those who turn away from discernment and discretion and rely on that conferred advantage that they receive through no effort or fault of their own, no choice of their

own, is taking that advantage like putting a gold ring in a swine's snout. So this is what we do with all Scripture, isn't it? We look at a specific example in Israel and we extrapolate general principles, general doctrines, general guidance and wisdom that applies to a wide variety of situations of which that is one specific example. So a ring of gold in a swine's snout? Pig doesn't know what to do with that gold.

By the way, it doesn't say in his ear. What did they do with rings in the snout of an animal? That's what you tie a rope to and lead it in a direction it may not want to go, right? And beauty in a woman who lacks discretion or any advantage for someone who is relying on that without discernment and discretion can lead you down a road you don't want to go. And remembering, of course, that swine were unclean animals in Israel and that advantage is in no way going to be valuable in God's economy.

You become something that is not acceptable in God's sight or in God's community. So it unfolds. The more you think about it, the more aspects of application are revealed.

So this is our guiding principle for understanding and interpreting the Proverbs, is realizing that these aren't just quick little aphorisms about specific situations. And if that situation doesn't come up, I'm not a beautiful woman, so I can ignore this proverb. Well, do I have advantages that I was born with and I did not choose? Am I relying on those to succeed and get by? Am I turning away from discernment and discretion? Am I no longer operating on the basis of other attributes that I was born with, i.e. taste buds, with which I should be discerning what is good for me and what is not? And to rely on a superficiality and an externality rather than the discernment that ultimately only comes from God is going to be the fate of the pig with a gold ring in his nose.

It's very interesting to look at nose rings in scripture. The first reference to them is back in Genesis 24, where Abraham's servant is sent to find a bride for Isaac. And when he meets Rebecca, he gives her a nose ring that weighs half a shekel.

And I'd kind of forgotten how big a shekel is. I thought, gracious sakes, is this going to be like a swine snout nose ring, some great big gate ring or something that's going to distort her nose because it's so heavy? But I'm happy to report that after looking up the weight of a shekel in the Old Testament, it was a half shekel, actually, this nose ring. And a shekel in those days was about 0.4 ounces.

So this is two tenths of an ounce of gold in this nose ring. She could safely wear it without, you know, looking like a eubangee or something with the stretched out ear lobes and the, you know, kind of horrifying effect that that much, you know, I think of a shekel like a gold brick. And I thought, well, wow.

But nose rings are also in the list of excessive ornamentation and garments in Ezekiel that God says he is going to take away and in place of beauty, Yahweh will be burning a brand, a burn scar for these women that instead of glorious hair, they're going to be bald

instead of all of their ornate garments will be nakedness and instead of a beautiful belt, there will be a rope, meaning they're being hauled away to be ignominious slaves and so on. But the idea here as we read each proverb is to take our time and taste it, savor it, think about its representative value in wider contexts. You can't brush one aside because you're not rich or because you're not a murderer of parents like the passage in Timothy we saw on Sunday and say, well, that doesn't apply to me.

I can safely skip over this. These are principles embedded in pithy examples. They're designed to be memorable and they're designed to come to our minds when we need them so that we can live a life that pleases God.

Well, there are some wonderful things coming up in the last half of this chapter and we'll see them when we come back from our break.