

Proverbs 23-08-30b

Let's pick up our study now in Proverbs, and we're going to pick up our pace just a little bit here as well. We're kind of straddling the section here beginning in verse 16 with the gracious woman and extending down to the lovely woman in verse 22. The gracious woman retains honor, but the one who departs from or turns aside from discretion is like a pig with a gold ring in its nose.

And there is structure here that I will not elaborate, but the symmetries here are all designed with a purpose, and that is to get these things to stick in our mind. So along with the gracious woman, her opportunities are in the realm of beauty and discretion and grace. To be gracious is something that she can do with what she has on hand.

A woman doesn't have to go out and chase riches, doesn't have to try to impress others with riches, and should not try to impress others with exterior beauty alone. This is why you have the New Testament parallel that women shouldn't try to adorn themselves with a lot of fancy exterior things. Nothing wrong with all of us fixing ourselves up and trying to be respectful of what God has given us by way of a physical body and interaction with others to not be slovenly or sloppy or unkempt or look like we just rolled out of bed and have done nothing with ourselves.

It is not a screed against cosmetics or fixing hair and so on. It is that this is what someone relies on for success. In the same way that the man, the ruthless, who are retaining riches, they feel like they've got to have this for success.

I will impress others by gaining riches. They will have to take me into consideration if I gain enough. This will let me be competitive and be well thought of and so on.

So you have the gracious woman in verse 16 and you have the merciful man who does good for his own soul. And this is paralleled with the woman in the previous verse. And verse 18 goes on to say, the wicked does deceptive work.

He who sows righteousness will have a sure reward. And this empty profits, sheker and zakar, empty profits and sure wages, is also expressed in verse 4 of this same chapter, riches do not profit in the day of wrath. Righteousness delivers from death.

And this idea of, are you pursuing things that are not going to survive death? You're short-sighted. This is one of the themes of Kohelet, Ecclesiastes, that you assemble all of this stuff and then when you die it goes to someone else. That's very short-sighted.

It's very limited. You're just thinking about the one day of life, so to speak. This was also in chapter 10, verse 16.

The labor of the righteous leads to life, the wages of the wicked to sin. This idea of sowing that is presented here anticipates the future. I think I mentioned that last time.

You have a similar notion in Hosea chapter 10, verse 12. Hosea 10, 12 says, sow for yourselves righteousness and reap in mercy. Sow in righteousness and reap in mercy.

Break up your fallow ground for it is time to seek the Lord till he comes and rains righteousness on you. Anticipation. You sow with an expectation.

You plant seed in hope of a good crop and to not be short-sighted and not be thinking only of today and only of the immediate and the short term is the idea here. It is also possible instead of planting righteousness, you can be planting iniquity. We'll find this in chapter 22, verse 8. He who sows iniquity will reap sorrow and the rod of his anger will fail.

And I've quoted Galatians 6, 7, and 8 for you before, I believe that's the right reference. Be not deceived. God is not mocked.

Whatsoever a man sows, that will he reap. You can sow righteousness. You can sow iniquity.

The contrast between life and death as a result of how we invest our efforts is found in the next chapter, chapter 12, verse 28. In the way of righteousness is life and in its pathway there is no death. And chapter 21, verse 21, he who follows righteousness and mercy finds life, finds righteousness and honor.

Put you in mind of what Jesus said, to him who has, more will be given. So, if you follow righteousness, you're going to find righteousness. If you sow righteousness, you're going to reap righteousness.

And life and death here are not simply physical life or physical death. This is throughout the Bible, the ideas of life and death transcend simply are you breathing and conscious to talk about are you fruitful? Are you productive? Are you bearing fruit? Is there going to be posterity and future as a result of your health and vitality or not? Are you operationally dead? Are you fruitless? Are you a tree planted by the rivers of water bringing forth its fruit in its season? Or are you a bramble that is going to be blown away by the wind? And this idea in verse 20, those who are of a perverse heart are an abomination to the Lord. And we've seen this bracket here, this inclusio of abomination and reference to the Lord himself back in verse one.

And that then brings us to verse 21. So, this is basically kind of a new section here. We've seen that it is linked back with the reference to the gracious woman and the lovely woman that lacks discretion.

But it begins kind of a new section here. And verse 21 is really, this is not a good idea here. I can't even say it's a bad translation because it's not a translation at all.

When you see the words, though they join forces, just scratch all that out. In Hebrew,

this is Yad L'Yad. Yad is the word for hand.

So, literally it is hand to hand. That's where they, and so they say, well, this must mean the wicked are shaking hands or joining hands, joining forces if the hand represents your strength and so on. But that's not what this means.

This is a figure of speech that means count on it. When people say, this is a bit, not something I would use as an expression, but people say my hand to God or raise your right hand and swear. So help me God.

But this is my hand to your hand. I will affirm this with a handshake is roughly the idea, but we don't have an exact equivalent in our culture. But this is hand to hand.

I assure you, you can count on this. This is a solid truth. Hand to hand, count on it.

The wicked will not go unpunished, but the seed of the righteous will be delivered. And that is the summary statement for this entire preceding section that talks about the contrast between the upright and the wicked, the just and the unjust, the righteous and the perverse. Those who value wisdom and those who are self-seeking.

All of this is summed up. And notice the wicked will not go unpunished. And we need this assurance because you can look around in the world and say, there is an awful lot of wickedness and perversity and injustice that doesn't seem to get a recompense.

And in time, that is absolutely true. You have to believe in an afterlife. You have to believe in a resurrection and a judgment.

You have to believe that God is going to call to account those who have spent their entire life oppressing others and pursuing self-gratification. If there is not an afterlife, then there truly is unrectified injustice. And when God says, vengeance is mine, I will repay.

Well, what if somebody dies and they haven't been repaid? If there is not an afterlife, God is not telling the truth. So the emphasis on assurance, believe me, the proverb says here. My hand to your hand, hand to hand.

Take my hand in affirmation. The wicked will not go unpunished. Notice, will not go unpunished.

It doesn't say they have not gone unpunished. What about all the wicked people that you've seen in the past and they went to their grave and never seemed to get a comeuppance? They will not go unpunished, but the seed of the righteous. Seed of the righteous.

Did we not just see something up above? He who sows righteousness in verse 18. Anticipation of the future, something down the road. There is a resurrection of the just.

It is going to become explicit in the unfolding revelation when you get to Daniel chapter 12. Those who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to a resurrection of righteousness and some to a resurrection of shame and contempt. It is an Old Testament truth.

And that then leads to verse 22. This, by the way, we've gone 11 and a half chapters when we get to verse 22 here. And this is the first similitude.

This is the first simile, if you will. This is like that. You would think surely by now we would have hit one, but this is the first one in the book of Proverbs that implies that a lovely woman without discernment who has turned away from discretion is like a ring of gold in a swine's snout.

First simile in the book. There will be some others. Then it goes on in verse 23 to talk about the fate of the just and the fate of the wicked that has just been summarized above.

There is prosperity for some and there is wrath for another. And remember when the Bible talks about wrath, this is not somebody bringing destruction on their own head. One of the signal and definitional ideas espoused by postmodern Christianity, Reconstruction Christianity, and so on, the progressive notions, is that God is like Jesus and never punishes anybody, never really judges anyone, never holds anyone to account.

He just lets them go their own way and they sort of self-destruct. It's judgment is basically self-induced misery. And Jesus just went to the cross to show people how ugly their selfishness and self-centeredness and myopic wickedness is.

Can't you see how cruel and heartless you are? Look at me bleeding up here unjustly and as a result of your sinfulness. That there is no transaction on the cross that satisfies the righteousness and justice of God and affects reconciliation and provides cleansing power. You got to do away with John and Paul and Peter, all three, if you do not want to believe that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's son, cleanses us.

You've got to infigurate and metaphoricalize and do a bunch of abstractions and spiritualizations to take away from the work of Christ on the cross. Same thing here. Notice the expectation of the wicked is not destruction or death or self-harm.

It is wrath. Whose wrath? If there is anger, somebody has to be the person generating this anger, someone who is angry. This expectation is God's wrath.

God is going to be angry. God is going to pour out the vials of His wrath. And the wrath of God is entirely and conspicuously absent from this pervasive and growing fallen-from-grace kind of Christianity.

That is an enemy of the cross, because it redefines the cross. The cross is the central truth of Christian faith. Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.

1 Corinthians 10, 8-13, I believe is the reference, if memory serves. I give this to you, Paul says, as a first importance. Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.

He was buried and He was raised. He became sin for us, He who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. He that hath the Son hath life.

He that hath not the Son of God hath not life. The wrath of God abideth on Him. The wrath of God.

Failing to do what we have every opportunity to do, failing to respond to the grace and the love of God expressed on the cross, John 3, 16, instead of receiving God's mercy, God's grace, God's love, God's restorative power, God's life, God's future, being numbered with the sanctified ones, the alternative is not an absence of help, an absence of attention, it is wrath. Circle it. The fate of the wicked, the expectation of the wicked is wrath.

There's a very representative figurehead for progressive Christianity, his name is Keith Giles, and he has written an entire, and made videos, and gotten an entire thing going about what it says in Revelation about the wrath of the Lamb. And he says, this is designed to wake you up to the fact that lambs don't get angry, and that this is a, it's sort of an irony that is designed to tell you that Jesus never gets angry. The wrath of the, why isn't it the wrath of the lion? It's the wrath of the Lamb.

Well, it is the Lamb as it had been slain. He didn't slay himself. This is the Lamb that was slain.

He is worthy to receive glory and honor and riches and blessing. Remember the song of the 144,000? Worthy is the Lamb to be worshiped and glorified. Well, those who refuse to do that receive the wrath of that Lamb who is worthy, and yet his worthiness is not recognized.

And they say Jesus had no wrath. Well, only if you excise the book of Revelation and read the end of Revelation and see what happens if you detract and take away from the words of this book. Wrath is coming if you take away the wrath of the Lamb and try to redefine it into a little non-essential concept.

The expectation of the wicked is wrath. And this should be a helpful motivation for us. If we tolerate wickedness in ourselves, if we commune with wickedness in our periphery, you can expect to share in that wrath.

Those who are in the periphery of the righteous receive blessing by association. Those who remain and refuse to leave the periphery of those who are designated for God's

wrath will share in that wrath. It is a biblical concept.

This is why those who were unclean and corrupted and defiled had to go outside the camp of Israel. Blessing and provision and the presence of God are inside the camp. If you are defiled, you've got to go outside the camp.

And if you want to go outside the camp, then you are going to suffer the fate of those who are in the darkness, which is outside. You will share. There is one who scatters, verse 24, yet increases more.

And there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty. This is that counterintuitive nature of God's economy. When you scatter and give away, and there is a time to do that, Solomon tells us in one of his other works, there is a time to scatter and there is a time to gather.

But there is one who scatters, yet increases the more. That unselfish spirit is something God honors and blesses. But the one who withholds more than is right, think Ananias and Sapphira in the early chapters of Acts, that is going to lead to poverty because God will not support, God will not bless.

So you have this complex of observations about those who are generous and those who are stingy, those who are pursuing righteousness and discernment and discretion, who are seeking to lead a life that pleases God in all of its different facets. And these observations cluster around those categories, the righteous and the wicked, the just and the unjust, those with integrity and those who are perverse, those who focus on God and His purpose and plan, those who focus on themselves and their purposes and their plans. And these are a cluster of observations and predictions about what is going to happen in each of those cases.

So you can also see in verse 25 here, the generous soul will be made rich. He who waters will also be watered himself. It's a variation on that same theme.

And you have this also reflected back in verse 17. The merciful man does good for his own soul. He who is cruel troubles his own flesh.

And you have the soul, you have the nefesh, and you have the basar. You have the immaterial and the material. And in both the material realm and in the realm of the spirit, in the realm of the thought life, there is going to be either prosperity or trouble as a result of either being generous, love that is sacrificial to self and beneficial to others.

This is an Old Testament expression of that idea. So when you think about all of these things and see the resonance and the way that these truths are turned in the light to reflect different facets and different aspects, what is the thrust? What is the conclusion that we draw? It is a wonderful thing to come back and review these and read them often enough that they become familiar, that they become internal, that they will come

to our mind when we see examples in our own lives, in the world around us, in the experiences of people, and in opportunities and circumstances and situations that face us. Well, I could do this, but isn't that really me looking out for number one? Isn't this me holding on to more than I should? Isn't this me trusting in riches instead of trusting in God? Isn't this me going off half-cocked and not looking for the way of discernment? Isn't this me trying to get along and succeed and progress by a means that doesn't please God, that may in fact be an abomination to God because it's really not right, it's really not fair, it's really not honest, it's really not just? It doesn't lay hold of righteousness by faith, it lays hold of advantage by effort, by calculation, and by association, as we saw in the first half of this chapter.

I will end up telling tales out of school, I will end up betraying confidences, I will end up undermining others for my own benefit and my own gain. Maybe I shouldn't do that, but if I'm not going to do it, I feel I'm in a precarious situation, I'm vulnerable, I could be taken advantage of, I could be exposed, I could end up in poverty instead of availing myself. Well, I've got to entrust myself to the hands of a faithful creator.

I've got to believe the promises that God will reward righteousness and look after the just and preserve the way of his saints. And I will not come to harm. And I don't need to fear what man can do unto me.

I don't need to be reticent and concerned and worried about the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. I have a father in heaven who is actively going to fulfill his promises if I fulfill the criteria to receive them. It's a choice.

It's a decision. These contrasts are sharp, aren't they? There's not a lot of gray area between having integrity or being perverse, of being righteous or being wicked, of being selfish or being generous. This is the kind of world Marines really like because it's black and white.

It is either this or it's that. It's not 50 shades of gray or 256 shades of gray. You're either this or you're that.

And if you cannot declare yourself to be upright, you know, this is why we have plumb bobs. This is why we have levels. We're looking for an exterior reference to tell us regardless of how something appears.

Have you ever been hanging pictures on the wall and you're standing right up there and you're trying to get the string or the wire on the hanger, on the nail, and when you're looking at it, you think, well, that looks straight. You step back eight or 10 paces and it is way out. It's an inch lower on one side than it is on the other.

What do I need in order to make sure it is straight? I've got to step back and get the references of the baseboard and the corner and the ceiling and the door frame and other

straight and level things in the room. I need objective references to tell me if this thing that looks right to my eye when I'm right up close to it is in fact straight. We are so blessed that it isn't persuasive arguments.

It's not human reason. It isn't the kind of thing where we just have to sort through and try to use Occam's razor and, you know, reductionism. I don't see any logical fallacy, so this must be right.

Resort to the best explanation. The simplest thing is usually the best. The more complexity, the more likely it is to be wrong.

People wind up with grand conclusions that are based on Occam's razor, for example. Just because something is complex as a hypothesis or an explanation doesn't mean that it's wrong. And just because something is simple, it doesn't mean that it's right.

Simple according to what criteria? We are adrift in a sea of relative reality, relative righteousness. Well, I'm a good person because I'm not nearly as evil as that guy over there. What a gift that God has given us objective truth rooted and grounded in absolutes.

And to the extent that we resort to it in scriptures such as the Proverbs, this gives us perspective. This gives us the ability to discern the better things, to have our senses exercised to discern good and evil, to understand what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. All of this is based on knowledge of the scriptures.

In the day that Solomon collected these Proverbs and published them amongst the people of Israel, it was to give the people under his care, under his charge, the word of God so that they could pursue righteousness, so that they could inherit eternal life, so that they could have a future hope, vindication, justification. Their momentary light affliction would be replaced by an eternal weight of glory. It is the same Old Testament and new.

There is a God in heaven of absolute righteousness and the consequences of pursuing it or rejecting it are being turned in the light here. Different aspects, different facets, different outcomes. And to judge in the short term is like standing too close to the wall when you're hanging a picture.

You don't have the perspective. How can we gain it? How can we step back? We need reference to what is truly upright, what is truly smooth and level. That's the purpose of this chapter.

So as you continue in verse 26, the people will curse him who withholds grain, but blessing will be on the head of him who sells. You can't help but think back to Joseph in the days when he gathered the grain. There was a time to gather it in the seven years of plenty.

And then there was a time to sell it in the seven years of famine. And if someone has more than they need, notice that there is a time to scatter. Back in verse 24, there is one who scatters yet increases the more.

And you get the idea that maybe he's just giving it away for free. But notice the generous soul in verse 25 will be made rich. He who waters will also be watered himself.

The people will curse him who withholds grain. And you get the idea that we're going to get another aphorism related to him who will just generously give it away. But it says, blessing will be on the head of him who sells it, who makes it available fairly.

Now, if he's going to sell this grain, what are the conditions under which he will be blessed? What does verse one say? Do it fairly, fair market value. Don't have to give it away, but you don't. You've seen people that during a hurricane or other natural disaster, suddenly two by fours are \$60 a piece and plywood to protect your windows is \$125 a sheet.

And people just mark things up because there is demand. Those people are going to suffer enormously at the judgment. Those who loot because law enforcement is busy trying to rescue people and these who break into stores because prosecutors no longer arrest and charge people with theft when they vandalize and shoplift.

You think, well, there's no consequence. They wore masks. They're not identified.

They're never caught by law enforcement. Do you believe the Proverbs? What do you think is going to happen to those people? Believers or unbelievers? Especially believers. Can you imagine having placed your faith in Jesus Christ for your salvation, but you're willing to loot because you feel a sense of personal injustice.

You feel that people have been unkind and unfair to you. So you're going to balance the scale yourself. Well, this belongs to me.

These people have more than they need. Oh, insurance will pay for it. They'll restock the shelves.

I can get this and I deserve it for some imaginary reason. You can be assured that wrath is coming and justice will be served for every single one of these crimes, large and small. I don't have to watch video footage, security camera footage of this and get frustrated and shake my fist in the air and get upset that there's unanswered crime that is rampant and cities that have been burnt to the ground in the name of this cause or that idea or this injustice or that cause.

I am absolutely more interested in making sure that I am not going to be destined for the same kind of wrath. Those people are certainly going to find coming their way. God is not unrighteous to forget our work of faith, our patience of hope and our labor of love.

And he will also not let those who perpetrate evil and crime and wrong and injustice off. There is wrath coming. The expectation of the wicked.

So fret not thyself because of evil men, Scripture says. What does this do? We say, well, I know this academically, but I just can't help. What does it do? Placing our faith in the justice and righteousness of God in the coming judgment where God will recompense.

Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. What does that do? The space in my heart and soul that would be taken up with frustration and angst and preoccupation with the downward spiral of culture and civilization, I can let that go. I can't do anything about that anyway, unless I, which I have actually considered just in the abstract, wouldn't it be satisfying to become a vigilante and to hunt down people who do these kinds of things and serve them the justice I think they deserve? You can fantasize these just in your face wicked people.

You see them in our government. You see them at congressional hearings being so bald-faced wicked. It's just evil.

It is the ugly unmasked face of evil right there on your screen. And you think, you know, I'd like to take that self-confidence and that arrogance and that knowledge that they're going to get away with what they're doing and there will be no answer to it. I'd love to wipe that smirk off their face when they are engaged in pillorying and savaging somebody who's about to become a Supreme Court justice or someone who's giving testimony before Congress with regard to actual wrongs that have been perpetrated.

And these people by their questions and by their misdirection and their deflection are heinously, egregiously evil. And I think I'd love to go in there and wipe that smile off your face, wipe that smirk, that self-assured knowledge that you can do this and you can take up your time. And then I think, I am becoming the very thing I hate.

I am letting them take my peace. I'm letting them deflect and distract me. If I remember what God says about the wrath that is coming to the wicked, I can become humble and recognize that I need to be more concerned about whatever wrath might be coming my way, wickedness I might have perpetrated, a lack of sensitivity, a lack of generosity, me doing evil with my mouth and my attitude and my words.

I can't get the boards out of somebody else's eye in many cases, but I can certainly work on the ones that are in my own. And to trust the promises of God, the future predictions that are contained here, frees up space in our minds for productive, useful thought, a clean room in which the Holy Spirit can bring to my mind doctrine that is profitable for doctrine and reproof and correction and instruction for me in righteousness. The more I focus on that guy over there in subjectivity, the less I can be aware of my own faults and shortcomings.

I'm in mote detection mode instead of beam removal mode, right? That's what Proverbs is useful for. As we read these descriptions, we love to talk about the comeuppance of the wicked, but in what sense and in what ways do I qualify for these same aphoristic truths? I need to ensure that I am upright, that I am sowing righteousness, that I am not turning away from discretion and discernment, that I'm using my taste buds the way God intended, not for self-gratification, but for nourishment and sustenance and upbuilding of my strength so that I can do what God put me here to do. Humility is the key.

Recognizing that that perfect stone is what delights God. And me getting in the business of changing the scales and trying to benefit some and short others on my own judgment, at my own behest, and largely for my own gratification is just as bad as anything you read in this chapter. Read this chapter, soak in it.

The more I read this, the more convicted I become, the more cautious I become, the more interested I am in my relationship with God and those in my immediate periphery in terms of the positives that God has, by His grace, enabled us to lay hold of and let God and His wrath deal with that which is outside. We are in a toxic culture of blaming, shaming, criticizing, fault-finding, and nothing pleases Satan more than us getting caught up in that attitude and that environment. It's a great thing to turn off the sewer sluice from the outside world and go to God's word and be cleansed, to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

This is God's goal in giving us this truth, just as it was when He gave it to His people in the Old Testament day. We'll close here in a word of prayer. We're going to get into chapter 12 next time.

We've got verse 30 and 31 left, but you can see those for yourself. The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life. He who wins souls is wise.

Is this evangelism? What does it mean? We'll cover that and move into chapter 12 next week. Father, thank You for the truth of Your word. Thank You for the power and the grace that You have made available to us through the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the presence of Your Holy Spirit, the cleansing grace contained in Your word, we pray that as we reflect on what we have seen in this portion of Scripture, that God the Holy Spirit will help us to see its meaning as we move forward in the days ahead. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.