

Proverbs 23-09-06b

Let's pick up our study now. We are endeavoring to finish Proverbs chapter 11 and move into chapter 12. And so we have looked at this notion of the wise of heart.

It is central to the theme of the book, wisdom and foolishness tied to righteousness and wickedness, or acceptability versus rejection and judgment from God. And that's why you have so many of these wrapped in the inclusio of the Lord. So as we finish this chapter and we see the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life.

This fruit harks all the way back. If you keep your finger here and turn back to Proverbs chapter one, this was introduced to us back in verse 31. Looking at these who reject God, when your terror comes like a storm, your destruction comes like a whirlpool in verse 27, distress and anguish come upon you.

They will call upon me and I will not answer. They will seek me diligently, but they will not find me because they hated knowledge and they did not choose the fear of the Lord. You see that this wisdom, this knowledge is inextricably tied to the fear of the Lord which leads to righteousness.

They would have none of my counsel. They despised my every rebuke. Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way and be filled to the full with their own fancies for the turning away of the simple will slay them.

Simplicity and foolishness are synonyms and they tie metaphorically to those who are not righteous, who have rejected righteousness and God's wisdom. The complacency of fools will destroy them, but whoever listens to me will dwell safely and will be secure without fear of evil. It is such a wonderful thing in a world of increasing danger on all fronts and in various categories to be secure and have no fear of evil.

Even if evil should come, it doesn't cause us to quail in a terrified and fearful fashion because we are in the hands of God. He will never suffer the righteous to be moved. So we wanna know what righteousness is.

And as you remember back in verse seven, while you're in chapter one, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction. So those who despise wisdom and instruction cannot become righteous because they are so inextricably linked. So back to our passage here in 11:30, the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life.

This also speaks of blessing by association because someone who is righteous and has this fruit, the consequence of their way of life, it spreads, it multiplies, and it benefits others. Their foliage casts shade, provides shelter. Their fruit feeds others and makes provision for them.

So there is this horizontal benefit that comes by association with the righteous. The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life. And you can't help but think forward to the one who bore our sins in his own body on the tree, he who knew no sin.

No one was ever righteous like the Lord Jesus. And the cross upon which Christ the Lord was crucified the righteous one bore our sins becomes the tree of life for us. And you look all the way forward to the tree of life that is going to line the river of life in the new Jerusalem and provide its fruit.

Who is it that is going to be able to walk down that avenue illuminated by the presence of the lamb and have free and full access to the fruit of the tree of life? Those who are citizens, who are qualified to enter the gates of the new Jerusalem and dwell within it and move about and enjoy its wonders and its blessings and its opportunities. And that closeness to the Lord Jesus himself and God the Father, that new Jerusalem, one of its primary characteristics is the tree of life. Different fruit every month, still going to be something analogous to time.

Time will pass, but there will be no night. The lamb is the light, but there are months that go by. There will still be, this tells us there will be sequence.

There will be order. There will be structure. There will be responsibilities that are tied to the passing of time.

Just as there were feasts that defined the calendar in Israel. There will be something like that in the eternal future. We will mark some kind of time as evidenced by the changing of the fruit every month in the tree of life.

It's fascinating to think what an opportunity and what a privilege it will be. If you ever get discouraged and need motivation for sticking with it, persevering, enduring the momentary light tribulation so that we can inherit the eternal weight of glory, go over and read about the new Jerusalem and think about the real and present opportunity to qualify to be a dweller within and not be in the darkness outside, not be at the distance waiting for the creaking wagon bringing the leaves of the tree of life out for the healing of the nations. So the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life.

What a privilege if we can lay hold of righteousness to not only be blessed, but to be a blessing, to find that God uses our presence or our efforts or our prayers or our speaking the truth in love, just our encouraging presence, sometimes without saying a word, to be a blessing to others. The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life. The tree doesn't always have an inkling of what's gonna happen once the fruit falls.

Somebody might gather that fruit and carry it away to nourish and benefit somebody else, to be used in some productive way. We don't always know, but to be a tree, a source, a stable, fixed, healthy blessing that benefits others by God's grace and through

God's power is such a privilege and such an opportunity. It is a blessing now, it is a blessing in the future, and it reaches into the eternal future.

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life. You could just sit and look at verse 30 for 15 minutes and not exhaust it. When you think about all of the references to fruit in scripture, you have the fruit of the hands in Proverbs 31.

31, you automatically think of the virtuous woman. The virtuous woman considers a field and buys it, and she plants a vineyard in verse 16. And in verse 31, give her of the fruit of her hands and let her own works praise her in the gates.

So you go to 31 on the virtuous woman and look at verse 16 and verse 31 together. She obtains this field. It has potential.

She supervises it. She ensures that it is worked, that it is properly used, that this asset and this resource reaches its full potential in verse 16. And then in verse 31, she is going to receive, give her, it says, of the fruit of her hands.

She is going to share in the prosperity and the blessing that comes from her diligent stewardship. Let her own works praise her in the gates. The gates are the place of public judgment, aren't they? This is where court cases are decided.

This is where reputations are noted and taken into account. Let her works praise her. She doesn't stand in the gate and praise herself.

Her works, what God is able to do in and through the virtuous, the righteous, the wise, it takes wisdom to take this field, to obtain it, to pay for it, to turn it into a productive, fruitful, beneficial, you know, the field, it's not a garden. She's not just picking turnips for her own use. It's a field.

It is going to produce fruit that benefits many, many people. That's the fruit of the hands, just as one example. Proverbs talks about the fruit of the mouth.

So you have in Proverbs 12, 14, a man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth. Are we careful with our speech? Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer. Keep the door of my lips, set a watch on my tongue.

Otherwise, the wayward tongue is set on fire by the flames of hell itself. A man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth and the recompense of a man's hands will be rendered to him. As opposed, remember, if you've got a long history, similar to mine, you may remember the three kinds of sin, just for convenience sake.

There's mental attitude sins, overt sins, and sins of the tongue. You can generally categorize sin by, is it a sin in thinking? Is it a sin in doing? Or is it a sin in talking? So

you've got mental attitude sins, sins of the tongue, and overt sins. Look at the contrast in chapter 12, verse 14.

A man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth, meaning this is goodly fruit, pleasant fruit, nutritious fruit, healthy fruit, not poison, bitter, bile, hellfire type of talk. And the recompense of a man's hands will be rendered to him. So instead of sins of the tongue, you have beneficial speech.

Instead of overt sins, you have acts of kindness, acts of chesed, acts of ahav, of loyal love. That benefit others. Where do these come from? What's the one that was left out? Mental attitude, instead of there being sin in the heart, there is righteousness and wisdom.

Remember the wise of heart we just saw? The wise of heart are going to have beneficial speech and beneficial actions. And this is reflected by the fruit, the fruit of his mouth. Proverbs 13, two, a man shall eat well by the fruit of his mouth, but the soul of the unfaithful feeds on violence.

There is benefit to self. We are edified, we are built up by being careful in what we say. Thinking before we speak.

Remember the old thing, you know, engage your brain before you put your mouth in gear. That's actually backwards from the automotive metaphor because you actually select your gear and then you engage the clutch, you engage the engine. So really it's, you know, put your brain in gear before you engage your mouth, if it were a proper, but it works, it's memorable the way it is.

A man shall eat well by the fruit of his mouth. A man is going to be recompensed. He's going to benefit by care in his speech, but the soul of the unfaithful feeds on violence and you are what you eat.

If you feed on violence, you are going to become violent. This has implications for what we choose by way of entertainment. The righteous man is speaking and this is fruit that benefits him and others.

The unfaithful man feeds on violence. Instead of an outward direction of blessing, it is an inward direction of harm and cruelty and violence. That's 13 too, we'll see it before long.

Proverbs 18, verse 20, a man's stomach shall be satisfied from the fruit of his mouth. It's parallel to 13. A man's stomach will be satisfied by the fruit of his mouth in speaking wisdom, in speaking righteousness.

This has the idea of speaking truth to one another in love, conversation that focuses on what builds up, on what edifies, on what is God honoring and reflects our Christian faith and our Christian hope and our Christian love. Fruit of the mouth. Fruit means beneficial

fruit, healthy fruit.

And in producing this fruit, he himself has his own tummy filled. A man's stomach shall be satisfied from the fruit of his mouth. From the produce of his lips, he shall be filled.

The produce of his lips. He's producing and it comes back to benefit him. Benefits others, benefits him.

That's 18, 20 of Proverbs. The next verse continues. Death and life are in the power of the tongue.

Fruit of the lips. Death and life are in the power of the tongue and those who love it will eat its fruit. Those who love to talk are going to consume the fruit.

So be careful how you talk. If your lips are producing evil and violence, that's what's gonna go inside. If your lips are producing what is edifying and upbuilding, if you are not a tail bearer, verse 13, if you conceal matters that need to be concealed and you do not talk about those, you don't create division and bitterness and suspicion and feed that which is on the downgrade, fruit of the lips is positive, it comes back to us.

The judgment with which you judge others is the judgment with which you will be judged, says the New Testament, says the Lord Jesus. Be careful. And when we are positive and fruitful, I know people that I have never heard a critical word about anybody ever escape their lips.

It's a remarkable thing. It is, as the citations say in the Marine Corps, an example worthy of emulation. That I think I've never heard that person say a bad word about anybody, ever.

And that's a wonderful thing. That is going to benefit the person and benefit everyone with whom that person is in contact. So fruit, this is the outworking.

This is the abundance. This is the benefit that the righteous produce. And notice this is in connection with others.

This is in the horizontal realm. It is in the community, in the fellowship. There is an inevitable consequence of how we talk to those around us.

It is inescapable. It is inevitable. And it is described by these terms.

So how careful should we be when we are talking? How thoughtful should we be to ensure that what we say, how we say it, whether we say it, reflects wisdom and therefore reflects righteousness. The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life. So in the ancient world, the fruit of trees, such as figs, were medicinal.

Remember the poultice of figs that is prescribed when Hezekiah turns his face to the

wall? He's got this incurable, infected boil or whatever, and poultice of figs. So it has a medicinal value. So now we come to the second section here, which is so interesting.

I heard this from the time I was old enough to understand English in Sunday school. He who wins souls is wise. So got to get out there and do the work of evangelism because you will win a soul.

Win souls for Jesus is the common understanding. But there was no Jesus. There was no gospel of salvation per se in Israel in this date.

So what could Solomon have meant when he puts this proverb in here? He who wins souls is wise. Well, there are six other places where this verb and this noun are put together. Soul, you may recall, is nefesh in Hebrew.

And the verb to take is lakak. So lakak, nefesh is the combination. What does this mean? We look six other places in scripture.

So you find it in 1 Samuel 24, when David is talking to Saul and he says, moreover, my father, see, see the corner of your robe in my hand? I cut the corner off of your robe and I did not kill you. Know and see that there is neither evil nor rebellion in my hand. And I have not sinned against you, yet you hunt my life, you hunt my soul, you hunt my nefesh to lakak it.

You are hunting my life to take it. Nefesh generally means life. There's really not the correspondence people like to make that in the New Testament where you have suke or psyche, that it's the soul, it's the center of your inner self, your true identity, your thoughts, your motivations, you know, your inner invisible self.

Nefesh has the idea of life. Man became, when God breathed into his nostrils, the breath of life, the breath of chayim, you know, when they say lachayim, to life, la, to, chayim, life. God breathed into Adam's nostrils, the nefesh.

Man became a living nefesh. He breathed into his nostrils, the breath of life, and man became a living nefesh, a living life. So we're looking at these occurrences.

You can go to 1 Kings 19.10. I've been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts. The children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, torn down your altars and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, you know, from the chapter location, 1 Kings 17 is where Elijah is introduced, and you go right to the end of 1 Kings, and then in 2 Kings, here comes Elisha, very, very hard on the heels of the opening in the days of Ahab and Jezebel.

So 1 Kings 19, you know, this is Elijah. I've been very zealous for you, but these people have torn down your altars, killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they seek to lachak my nefesh, to take my life.

Take a life means to kill in these first two passages. It means the same in verse 14 of that same chapter when God comes back. Remember, there's a repeated visitation conversation with God and Elijah.

He says the very same thing in verse 14. In Psalm 31.13, I hear the slander of many, fears on every side. They take counsel together against me.

They scheme to take away my life, my nefesh. You could translate it soul, but what's he talking about? They're scheming to kill me. You think about the Lord Jesus with the Pharisees taking counsel together on how they might kill him.

Same thing in our book, Proverbs 1.19. So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain. It takes away the life of its owners. Lachak nefesh.

You find it in Ezekiel 33.6. Remember the watchman on the wall in Ezekiel? If there's a sword coming and he doesn't blow the trumpet, the people are not warned and the sword comes and takes any person from among them. He is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand. Lachak nefesh.

If people die because somebody didn't give the alarm, I will require it, says the Lord. So in every other use in the Old Testament, we would come to this and say, well, based on the other six usages, he who takes lives is wise. He who kills others is wise.

And I think, aha, here's the Bible's second amendment support. I keep a weapon in my home. Somebody comes in and I take his life, I'm wise.

Is that what this means? This is why we have the first, second, and third rules of Bible interpretation, which are context, all three. So the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life. It would be an antithetical bi-cola here, wouldn't it? It would be antithetical.

Well, he's a tree of life, but he also takes lives. It just depends. Is he in a good mood? Did you surprise him? Did the gun go off? What exactly happened? In the context of the righteous flourishing like foliage, up in verse 28, being a tree of life, in verse 30, he who, and this isn't take in the standard Cal stem here.

It's our friend, the O-E infix. This is a participle. This is the one taking lives, taking them in hand.

And this has the sense of take in order to preserve. Remember when you used to, at least my mom taught me this prayer when I was little. Now I lay me down to sleep.

I pray the Lord, my soul to keep. And if I die before I wake, what's the next line? I pray the Lord, my nefesh to lakak. I pray the Lord, my soul to take.

To preserve, to take in hand for benefit and for good. That's what this means. To be a tree of life as the righteous and to preserve the lives, to take responsibility, to be

sacrificial and beneficial with regard to the lives of others, that's wisdom.

When in doubt, what is going to benefit the life of others? Something, remember in James, to try to retrieve those who are falling into the fire, hate the garment spotted by the flesh. But if you see someone in trouble, you endeavor to preserve them, to rescue them. You don't want to partake of the defilement or the corruption, but there's no getting around it.

Lakak means to take, nefesh is life. So what does it mean to take a life? Well, what does it mean to take your soul in the child's prayer? To take in hand. Now, if you take it in hand for destruction, the way Saul wanted to do to David, you are seeking to take my life, you want to take it away.

But if you are a tree of life to those around you and you are taking someone's life, you are taking it for benefit. You are guarding it, you are keeping it. That's the only thing it can mean.

And just because there are six other uses of this combination, those are typically not the participle. This is, taking a life is a momentary act, right? You pull the trigger, the bullet flies. In the words of Sledgehammer, guns don't kill people, bullets kill people.

But at the moment that the bullet enters and passes through and puts a hole in your heart or your aorta or hits your major artery in some fashion and takes your life, that's a momentary, once you were alive and now you are dead, you have been shot dead. You die then or very soon thereafter. But taking the I-N-G, the one continuing to take responsibility, to take oversight, to take care of lives.

Remember how compressed these aphorisms are. There is great compression here. There are things that are implied, there are things that are to be interpolated and extrapolated.

Remember the man, the fruit of the lips is going to feed him, beneficially so. It doesn't say, well, if the fruit is good, then it is going to benefit him when it goes into his belly. You have to understand that while there is such a thing as evil fruit of the lips, there is the wicked tongue set on fire by hell.

But the fruit of the lips in the context is good fruit, healthy fruit, beneficial truth. So the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life. And think of it this way, he who is wise, what is he going to do with the lives of others? And this is lives, plural.

So the idea here is that wins is not in there. This is the one taking hold of, taking hold of lives, plural. The one taking hold of lives is wise.

For us, this means taking into consideration the lives of others. If you are a tree of life and you are benefiting others, if the fruit of your lips benefits others, if your actions are

like foliage that provides shade and coolness and comfort to those who are weary and in need of rest and in need of shelter, in need of Sukkot, in need of a booth, you are taking those lives into account. You are taking them in the sense of taking responsibility, realizing that you have an effect, that you make a difference.

And that is wisdom. And what is wisdom? If foolishness is wickedness, what is wisdom? Righteousness. You can't say he murdering people is righteous.

So what does it mean to be taking these lives? It means responsibility. You've got them in your hands and you're doing something beneficial. Look at the first half.

Look at the other verse that goes with it. Now, verse 31. If the righteous will be recompensed on the earth, how much more the ungodly and the sinner? The righteous are gonna be recompensed on this earth.

How much more? Now, how do you take this? If the righteous will be recompensed. It's very interesting to look at this in Hebrew. What goes with what here? In Hebrew, this begins with the word *hen* and it means behold, look.

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, behold is here. It's a shame that it doesn't seem to be translated here. It says, look, the *tzaddik*, the righteous in the earth is repaid also like the wicked and the sinner.

There is going to be justice in the earth. Now, who is the subject of payment or repayment of allotting wages? The wages of sin is death. The outcome, and this whole section has to do with outcomes.

You look back up at verse 25. The generous soul will be made rich. He who waters will also be watered himself.

Who is the one bestowing these riches? Who is the one granting this water? Remember how condensed and compressed these are? This is obviously the Lord in heaven who alone has the power to recompense the righteous and the wicked. So the unspoken subject of the verb is the Lord. You have it in verse 25.

Who is going to cause the fall for the one trusting in riches in verse 28? Who is the one that ensures that the righteous flourish like foliage in that same verse? The implied presence and power oversight and taking in hand of lives throughout this section is the Lord. And the Lord takes these lives in hand and assures these outcomes. So the righteous will be recompensed on the earth.

How much more the ungodly and the sinner? How much more? A lot of this is pretty interpretive translation. Hebrew literally says, look, the righteous on the earth, he is repaid. Also the wicked and the sinner.

That's what it says. They are repaid. It's not a law of physics.

It is the overt action of God who sees and knows. Well, that brings us to chapter 12. And that's probably a good place for us to pause and take about a week's worth of break.

So next Wednesday we will embark. But remember, wisdom is righteousness. Wisdom produces righteousness.

Wisdom is the foundation and the ground. Lady wisdom calls out, turn you at my reproof. Listen to me.

It is the way of life. It is the way of blessing. The alternative is seductive.

It is appealing. If you are only thinking superficially, if you're not looking ahead to consequences and results, if you are not taking into account God in heaven, who sees and knows and will repay, I will repay, saith the Lord. God is not unrighteous to forget our work of faith, labor of love, patience of hope, but he will not leave the wicked unpunished.

It's the same truth, Old Testament and new. And if we remember that and want to be righteous, that righteousness, that righteous life, righteous fruit of the lips, righteous fruit of the hands, being a tree that benefits others and creates blessing by association, one believer can preserve an entire household from discipline and judgment. Paul says in the New Testament, for the sake of one, God will preserve the whole household.

So what is cause and what is effect? I can't just try to be righteous. I cultivate a heart characterized by wisdom. Let the word of God cleanse and refresh and renew.

Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a right spirit within me. Now my instinctive reflex behavior will be righteousness, will be wisdom.

I will act in accordance with the wisdom that comes from God. That is the cause leading to the effect. It does not work the other way.

And anyone who is fooled into thinking otherwise is indeed the fool. And all of the deleterious effects are going to be manifest because foolishness inevitably leads to and becomes wickedness. You can't be foolish and not be wicked.

You can't be wicked and not be foolish. They are inextricably linked just as wisdom and righteousness are linked. This is why the book of Proverbs is so important.

This is the wisdom that leads to and produces our righteousness. We'll close here in a word of prayer. We'll start at verse one of chapter 12 next time.

Father, thank you for making your wisdom and your power available to us, especially in this age with the added benefit of the indwelling and filling of the Holy Spirit to lead us

into that truth, to help us understand it, perceive its application and its effect in our daily lives, in our speech, in the works of our hands, in the attitudes that we allow to persist in our hearts. We pray that in the light of these things, we will find them persuasive, that we will see clearly how to proceed and how to live that life that causes us to be characterized as a tree of life and not as that which dries up and is carried away by the wind. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.