

Proverbs 23-09-13b

Okay, let's pick up our study and we'll pick up our pace slightly here in chapter 12 of Proverbs. I hope you're beginning to see that the initial impression you get of just random sayings popping into somebody's head and they jot them down as they appear is the furthest thing from the truth. This is very carefully structured.

If you take a quick look at these last two verses that we just saw, there is a chiasm here, chiastic structure, you know, a symmetry. So the first line in verse two and the last line in verse three are symmetrical. So if you read them together, a good man obtains favor from the Lord or good obtains favor from the Lord and the root of the righteous cannot be moved.

And then inside that sandwich bread, you have the negative evaluation. A man of wicked intentions, God will condemn and he will not be established by his wickedness. So there is a kind of a time bound idea here that in the present, certain consequences are going to be fulfilled and then it looks more generally toward the eternal future.

The root of the righteous cannot be moved. You get the idea that that immovable root is going to eventually bring forth something that is going to sprout and leaf out and bear fruit in the future. And it looks ahead in the same way that the man of wicked intentions is going to be condemned by God.

And you get the idea that this is in some sort of judgment scenario, some face-to-face judicial encounter. And in this life, he's not established by his wickedness. He doesn't sink a root that is immovable in this life and he's going to be condemned in the next.

So there is a hidden structure and you have to kind of be patient and soak in these Proverbs a little bit and think about their imagery. We're in such a hurry. It's difficult for us sometimes to slow down and savor and digest what is in a passage.

But we're encouraged to do so by the structure here. So now we come to this first section I mentioned, which begins in verse four. And this is the section on an excellent wife is the crown of her husband.

The word crown there is actually a wreath, a garland for the head. And this is an ornament, a visible accoutrement that garners respect. And impresses people who see it.

Not everyone is qualified to wear a wreath of victory or a crown that indicates that they have been successful or have authority and are recognized. And so that is gonna be contrasted with the inward effects of the crown disgraceful woman. So I'm resisting the temptation to... It's so much fun to look at the Hebrew words that are involved here.

But in essence, it says an excellent wife and the word excellent is kail, C-H-A-Y-I-L. I'll

just give you that one word because this is the word that is used of David's mighty men. This is a word for strength, for power.

And you can read this a powerful woman, a strong woman, a woman to be contended with. This word is sometimes translated army. Yeah, the strength of Israel in the context of armed conflict is the army.

And this woman isn't just dainty and well decked out and has nice earrings. She runs the household with a firm hand. You think about the Proverbs 31 woman that we'll eventually get to who is in charge and gets things done.

But this is a kail woman. This is a woman of strength. And I don't know why they just said excellent.

Excellent is a terrible translation. And you'll see your New King James says, literally it is a wife of valor. Valor doesn't get it either.

Valor is bravery. This is not brave. This is strong.

Kail, this is power. Power directed under control, doing useful things. And in this case, beneficial things.

And this woman is the crown of her. Remember I told you we get both words for Lord in this chapter. This is the word Lord.

It's not Ish, it's not Adam. It is Baal, Baal. She is the crown of her Baal.

It does sound terrible. That's why they didn't translate it that way. They know better.

Nobody wants to be saying I'm married to Baal. But Baal in Hebrew means master. And of course, you know, I could be hung on a street corner lamp somewhere.

A worthy wife is the crown of her master, her Lord. But they weren't squeamish about the roles that God assigned in marriage because with privilege comes responsibility. And you're held accountable in ways that people who are under authority are not.

Any officer knows this. Anybody that's ever held a commission, senior enlisted know this. Non-commissioned officers, NCOs know this.

The more responsibility you have, the more power you wield, so to speak. You know, the higher you go, the harder you can fall. You know, they seldom impeach people at low levels.

They impeach people way up at the top. And, you know, when the house that's built on the sand falls, great is the fall of it. So in the same way, and I've used this analogy many times, but I think it fits, there were 13 tribes in Israel, right? Don't get tripped up on the

trivia question.

How many tribes in Israel? 13. There are 13 tribes because the Joseph tribe, the 11th son of 12, Joseph, there's Joseph and Benjamin, the Rachel sons, he splits into two, Ephraim and Manasseh. So there's 13 tribes.

There are 12 tribal areas that are assigned for dwelling. Who doesn't get a territory assignment in Israel? The Levites. The Levites are assigned to tend to the ritual life in Israel, the sacrifices, the feasts, the tabernacle, and later the temple.

And that is their heritage. And they get little dwelling spaces among their brethren and in the precincts of the tabernacle proper, the courses of the priests that persist all the way down to Jesus day. You remember John the Baptist is from a family, a priestly family, and his daddy Zachariah is in one of those 14 courses, but they have no assignment of territory.

They're special. They have an assignment. They get to go places where nobody else in Israel gets to go.

They can walk around in the holy precincts. Some of them get to go into the holy place and swap out the showbread and light the candlestick and swap out the incense and the altar of incense that's in front. They get to see the veil, right? Other people don't get to do that.

So is Levi superior? Members of the tribe of Levi, they're better, smarter, handsomer, higher intellect. But what is it about them? There is nothing special about them, except that they have been given that assignment. They are no less and no more than any other Israelite, but they have a specific assigned function.

Not all of the sons of Aaron are priests. Some of them are basically hewers of wood and haulers of water, like the Jebusites became, they're the Gibeonites. Keep getting those two mixed up.

I did it a couple of weeks ago. But I say that to say this, if the husband gets the assignment of having authority in a marriage and authority in a home, it isn't because he's smarter, handsomer, better, more capable. It's just the assignment.

Because the woman gets the subordinate assignment and it is subordinate. There is an order and sub means you're under something. Everybody is under.

Remember Paul talking about this? The woman is under the man and the man is under Christ. And Christ is under the father. If the Lord Jesus Christ can submit to his father, even though he is in fact co-equal and co-eternal, he voluntarily subordinates himself to the will, purpose, and plan of the father.

If the Lord Jesus can do it, we can do it. Right? And it isn't a commentary on our quality. In fact, our failure to respect that order and understand those divine appointments and those divine structures, we're about to get to is a problem.

See, I finished that sentence. That's a problem. We're about to come to Timothy in chapter two.

Paul is gonna say, I command first of all, I command first of all, that prayer be made for all those in authority. Kings, we saw this on Sunday. Who is the Caesar at that time when Paul writes this to Timothy and tells his church, you pray for everybody in authority.

Every king above you, you pray for them. Who's the Caesar at that time? You remember? Starts with N and ends with ERO. Are you kidding me? Pray for Nero? And I will confess that there have been times in the past and times in the present where I look up the governmental chain of authority and I have great difficulty figuring out how to pray.

And we're gonna be talking about that this Sunday because there is an art to praying for people you consider to be nefarious types of whatever political stripe you are. Few years back, Christians, some of us had a hard time praying for Mr. Trump. Now there's people that have a hard time praying for Mr. Biden or name your senator or your mucky muck up in the government somewhere.

But there is a way to pray. Lord, I consider him to be a nefarious type. So please hem in their evil and work that which is not good into good.

You can work all things together for good. Whatever's going on up there in the smoke-filled back rooms and these under the table dealings and whatnot, work it together for our liberty and your glory because Paul is gonna go on to say what the purpose of those prayers is. Look at the purpose, you can figure out how to pray.

And you don't have to pray, oh God, please bless, fill in your nefarious type here. You can pray, you should not ever pray to bind Satan. That's not our prayer.

But you can ask God to hem in quite a few other people on this earth. Stitch them in, put them in a straitjacket where they can't do their wicked intentions that are gonna come under judgment. There's all kinds of things you can pray for those that have the rule over you, if they're good or if they're not.

But it is a matter of discernment. So coming back to our passage here, this strong woman is a crown of her husband, but she who causes shame is like rottenness in the bones. What was shameful in Israel? It persisted all the way down to Paul's day.

Women who would come to church and pray with their head uncovered in that day and in that culture, the head covering was a sign that you were married and you were under the authority of your husband. That veil said, I'm spoken for, there is a man in my life

who is my husband and he does the talking for our family. I don't talk.

And all of the angst that's been about, well, can women pray in public and can they teach in church and all the rest of it? We'll get to that in the next chapter of Timothy. And it makes absolute sense. Everything is fine.

Nobody has to light their hair on fire or their covered head on fire. But it is a matter of respecting God's authority. I do what I do because I love the Lord and I respect his judgment.

I may not particularly agree with it. Remember what happened to the guys in Israel that thought they could approach like the Levites and they offered strange fire before the Lord. They tried to offer strange fire.

God's fire came out from the altar and they were consumed. What does it say? A man of wicked intentions, you get consumed. The brutish man, the consumed man, not a good ending.

So these thoughts are woven through these verses and it becomes a theme. It's not a patchwork. It is a carefully constructed, artistically designed symmetry.

So this strong wife, look, she can be strong. This is Chayil. This is the word used of Israel's greatest warriors.

David's mighty men were Chayil. The guys that slew Goliath's brothers were Chayil. That's the kind of woman this guy's married to.

And he ought to be down on his knees, thankful for it. She is a wreath of glory on his head. But she who causes shame.

Now, how can a woman cause shame to her husband? By taking his pants and putting them on herself. By talking out of turn. By speaking about him behind his back.

And I can't tell you the level of things that I heard working on computers in offices that were peopled by women who were married. I'm under this desk. This woman can't work at her desk because I'm under there working on this computer.

So she goes to the next cubicle and she's killing time until she can get back to her work. And so she's talking to this other gal and they're talking about their husbands. And I wanted to get up and leave.

In fact, there was one occasion, I can tell you the office, I can tell you where and when I was. And I actually got out from under the desk and I said, ladies, could you hold this conversation until I'm done? You're just giving me the willies. I don't wanna hear this.

I would hope to God when I get married, I never have a wife that talks this way. It's just,

it's awful. And shameful.

And I think, do these guys know the kind of women they're married to? And what kind of hellish home life does this bring about? A woman can be a shame to her husband in any number of ways. And it doesn't just, it doesn't say it puts a cow pie on his head instead of a wreath. It rots his bones.

It destroys him on the inside. A strong woman is an asset and a great partner in a marriage. This woman that causes shame destroys the high heel of her husband.

Not only does she not have any, but she destroys his. Your bones, that's what holds you up. You don't have strength without good bones.

Remember, there was a great pitcher, strong, had a fastball close to 100 miles an hour, but he got cancer in the bone in his arm and that bone snapped on live TV and that arm started whipping around and it was an awful thing to see. Without a bone, and he never threw another pitch. Couldn't heal up from it.

Rottenness of the bones. A cancer in the bones. This is deterioration and corruption in your bones that you can't escape.

You can't fix it. They had no cure from then till now for this kind of deterioration. So how careful would she be? And this is, remember, this is an example.

This is like the other things in the Bible. This is not only talking about women. Anyone who is in partnership, you've got coworkers, you've got friends, you've got family members.

Are you strong? Are you supportive? Are you a positive member of that team, whatever it is? This is just an example. Marriage is an example. It can be any relationship between believers.

Are you positive and contributory and supportive and an asset? And when people think of you, they think, you know, that is the icing on the cake. That is the crown on the head of this effort. That just, that puts the glory right on top.

Or are you something that produces rot and corruption? And all of us have worked with people that we wished were gone. You're not helping. Your presence is deleterious.

It is, you're weakening the whole effort. You're distracting, you're deflecting, you're not taking responsibility. You're getting people to be subjective and eyes on each other and suspicious, and there's talking behind the back.

And, you know, here's a meeting going on and people are texting under the table about the person who's trying to hold the meeting. And it's just the worst thing, especially in a Christian context, most especially in a Christian context. People of God should never be a

part of this.

Last thing in the world we should ever have anything to do with. It is rottenness to the bones. It will destroy a church.

It will destroy an organization. It will destroy an effort. It will destroy a family.

So that is what this verse four begins with. Where does this kind of thing come from? We'll look at verse five. The thoughts of the righteous are right.

Now, you think, well, that's a tautology. Of course, if you're right, your thinking is right. That's just, that's an obviousity right there.

You're not telling, how can this be inspired scripture? Stop and think about it. How do I know whether or not I am righteous? People might look at me and see me doing some good things. And they would say, well, there goes a righteous guy.

Look at that righteous act he did. He's a part of a righteous team. He's going to a righteous church.

He's in a righteous nonprofit organization. He wrote a righteous book. He gave a righteous talk.

He's got a righteous podcast or a righteous spiel on Twitter or whatever. Now, it's not Twitter anymore. It's X. What do they say now? If you're not tweeting, what are you doing? X-ing? You can't tweet anymore because Twitter's gone.

I don't know. I guess you just, you X. You X out. You X out something.

It's the X files. You're filing something out on X, whatever it is. People can look at something and say, well, you're a gift to the church.

You're a righteous person. Here's a righteous example. No, that's not what God says.

God says, whether or not you are righteous, that's your thought life. And you've got to be disciplined in your thought life. If you're harboring bad thoughts, if you're constantly going to the negative, if you're mumbling under your breath and you're making mental note of every little shortcoming and failure and what I don't like and shouldn't have done this.

If you are righteous, the thoughts of the righteous are gonna be right. That's why God judges the thoughts and intents of our heart. You can do a right thing.

I think the Pharisees were famous for their outside righteousness. And Jesus said, inside, you're full of dead men's bones. You're washing the outside of the dish and you're corrupt on the inside.

You're a whitewashed tombstone. Great paint job, but there's rust and corrosion underneath. So it's not a tautology.

It's not an obviosity. It is an exhortation and a reminder that if we want to know what we're really like, what are we like when we're alone? What do we think about? What are the thoughts and intents of our heart when nobody's looking? What is the inner man? That's how you know if you're righteous or not. The counsels of the wicked are deceitful.

If people are not forthcoming, if they don't want to tell you what was talked about, if they do everything behind closed doors and are telling you one thing and you find out entirely something else was the actual reason, the actual cause, the actual conversation, what did y'all talk about? I walked by and I heard my name. Oh, we were just saying, you know, we like your shoes. And you find out later, oh no, there was all kinds of criticism and negativity going on there.

Well, deceit, not telling the truth, not being what you see is what you get is wickedness. You can't say, well, I was being tactful. I was trying to be kind.

It was a little white lie. Deceit is hand in hand with wickedness. That's what the Bible says.

If you can't tell the truth, you need to go back to the well and get some righteousness and offload the wickedness because deceit and wickedness are inextricably linked. If you're wicked, you're deceitful. If you're deceitful, you're wicked.

Do you never see one without the other? That's what this verse says. So this is good for personal examination, judge myself so that I don't get judged. Am I having to be furtive? Am I having to make sure nobody is looking and then I'll think or do or speak or whatever? If there's deceit, whatever's involved there, that's wickedness.

Just take that to the bank and do something about it. Having identified it, fix it. Get back on the righteousness side of this.

So the thoughts of the righteous are right. The schemes and plans and operations of the wicked are, there's always deceit involved. There's untruthfulness, not forthcoming, lying.

The words of the wicked, notice you get the thoughts and the counsels first, then you get the words because from the heart springs the stuff that's on the tongue. Anytime there is a sin of the tongue, you can trace it back to a sin in the heart first. So you got two things to confess.

Anytime something bad happens verbally, you can confess that sin, but you better go track down what was the perversion of heart that made that come out of my mouth in the first place. And if we want to be truthful, if we want the fruit of our lips to be

righteousness, we've got to fix the heart first. You can't just try to control your tongue.

You got to fix the heart, the tongue will follow. The words of the wicked are lie in wait for blood. One of my translation guys here has translated this and I wanted to read it so that I get it right.

The words of the wicked are a bloody ambush. That's another good way to translate this. The words of the wicked are a bloody ambush.

When they talk, sooner or later, somebody's going to get caught by surprise and hurtfulness is going to result. Somebody is going to be cut by that sword of the tongue and end up bleeding. It's a bloody ambush.

But the mouth of the upright will deliver them. And the them there seems to be the victims of the ambush. It doesn't say by their mouth will the upright deliver themselves.

The them here, the referent for that pronoun is those who are being ambushed by those with a wicked tongue. And so what does this tell us? This is some practical wisdom right here. If we're in a context where people are bad mouthing somebody and laying in wait and ambushing them to their hurt, this says, if you are an upright person, you should speak up.

You should speak up on behalf of someone who is being wrongly ambushed by people who are running their mouths, undermining someone's character, destroying their reputation, setting them up for a fall, trying to get them fired or not promoted to be shunted aside and not given opportunities and privileges in a work environment. Whatever it might be, this proverb is practical. The upright's mouth ought to deliver these people that are being snared and attacked by the mouth of the wicked.

So the words of the wicked are an ambush for blood. I'm gonna hurt somebody talking. Think about social media and all of the hideous, corrupt things that are posted and said in that context.

You have to kind of choose your battles there. I can't deliver public figures that are many levels above my head. But this is in a personal context.

The mouth of the upright will deliver these targets, these objects of derision, scorn, backbiting, hurtful talk. And we consider ourselves to be upright. Well, don't let somebody run their mouth with no response.

You can say, look, that's not fair, that's not right. And I'm not gonna stand for that. I'm not gonna stand for that kind of talk in my company.

If you're gonna talk about that person in that way, you go off somewhere else and do it. Don't do it in my presence. I don't countenance that.

I don't engage in it. I'm not gonna listen to it. And you ought to be ashamed of yourself for talking that way.

And we have to stand up and be counted and not just be passive and tolerate this kind of talk that hurts people. Gotta use some judgment in that. But then you get to verse seven.

The wicked are overthrown and are no more, but the house of the righteous will stand. And this is one of the promises we rely on when we stand up in opposition to the wicked. We just see the words of the wicked trying to ambush people, trying to get ahead by cutting others down.

And what confidence do I have that I'm not just gonna become their next target and I'm gonna end up being ambushed and I'm gonna fall? And these wicked are just gonna turn their attention to me if I speak up. And a lot of people are cowed into silence by fear that the wicked will damage them. Well, that's why this exhortation is followed by a promise.

If we stand up for what is right and we trust God as we're doing it, we do it prayerfully, we do it carefully, we do it judiciously, but we do it. We go to God and say, Lord, I'm claiming your promise that these wicked are gonna be overthrown and be no more, that you're gonna take care of me. I am doing my best to follow what your word tells me, but I'm doing it in faith because these are destructive people.

And it's like getting between fighting cats sometimes. All you're gonna do is get yourself scratched up and we say, well, I'm just gonna stay out of that. I'll let them run their mouths and see how that turns out.

We're not allowed to do that. We are to speak up if we are upright. And if we're worried about that derision and attack coming our way, we've got a promise from God.

I don't know about this person that was previously being spoken of, being ambushed, but I know about myself. And if I am upright, and if I am righteous, then I've got God's promise that my house is gonna stand. These people can't knock my house down if its founder and builder is God.

And if I'm founded on the rock of the Lord Jesus Christ, why should I fear what man can do unto me? And this is where the rubber meets the road of faith, where it's not faith in the abstract, pie in the sky and by and by. This is, I'm in the thick of living here, and there are people who may be out to get me because I spoke up on behalf of somebody who was getting attacked and should not have been. And I'm gonna go to work tomorrow, and I'm gonna trust that God is gonna work this out and my house is gonna stand.

What we sometimes discover is this is the means by which God gets us out of a really bad place and into a better one. Maybe you do lose your job and you end up in a better

job. I can tell you that there's been a sequence of employment in my life where I thought, now this is the job.

This is such a great job. God's gonna leave me here till I retire. And then weird things happened and bad words were being spoken.

And I ended up losing that job and thought, well, I'm gonna be twisting in the wind for some time to come. I'm getting older, I'm harder to hire. And I ended up falling backwards into a job, the job I have now that I've had for 20 odd years.

I wouldn't trade it for the world. But in order to be in this job, I was exited involuntarily from my last job. And I initially didn't take it well.

But passages like this told me, God is in his heaven and he is never gonna suffer the righteous to be moved. I'm not righteous because I invented righteousness. I'm righteous because I know where to go get it.

I know where it comes from. And it is Christ who has been made my righteousness and my peace and my sanctification. And I'm just gonna hang on to him and weather this storm.

And God worked those things together for good. This is the kind of faith, I don't like using myself as an example, but it's the kind of faith we have to have. If we take the word of God to the bank, you got to trust that God's gonna deliver on his end.

I'm gonna place my faith in him and I'm expecting him as God to fulfill his promise. And many of us can attest that that kind of faith has never been disappointed ever. God is not going to let somebody who puts genuine faith in him come up short.

It's never happened and it never will. He's God. He knows the end from the beginning.

But that's the practicality of this. This is a whole lot different going through it slowly and carefully now than it was when we just blew through the 14 verses, isn't it? Doesn't this look different? It holds together. It's got a theme.

It's got a purpose. It's got application. It confronts me.

It instructs me. Am I gonna take this instruction and this rebuke to heart or am I going to hate that kind of rebuke and instruction and end up getting incinerated, basically? That was the introduction. I'm about to give you some rebuke and correction and instruction.

You may not have been doing this in the past. You might not have appreciated some of these things in the past. Take it on board or you're gonna be on the wrong end of these symmetries, these comparisons.

A man will be commended according to his wisdom. Remember we saw the wise of heart

up there in the end of chapter 11. He who takes a hold of souls is wise.

He who troubles his own house will inherit the wind. The fool will be servant to the wise of heart. Wisdom is a good thing.

The wicked are overthrown and are no more. The house of the righteous will stand. A man will be commended according to his wisdom, but he who is of a perverse heart will be despised.

Jesus put it in different terms. The last shall be first and the first shall be last. Even in the household of faith, people who are commending themselves and trying to get ahead by perversity and by deceit are going to end up despised.

The very thing they seek, which is adulation and approval, they're gonna get the opposite. Well, that is that section verses four through eight. We'll come and look at the second section and move into the second half of this chapter next time.

But there is so much to be gained by taking this word of God into our souls and letting God the Holy Spirit show us where it is pertinent and where it applies as we live hour by hour, day by day, negotiating the slings and arrows of what seems to be outrageous fortune. There is practical wisdom here and God's presence and God's power and God's promises lie behind pursuing wisdom, listening to instruction, endeavoring to be upright, endeavoring to be the righteous by trusting that what God says he will do. We'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for these wonderful promises, these truths that pertain to us because we are your children. We live in this life, but we are headed for an eternal future and the things that we learn here will serve us both now and in the ages to come. We pray that we can better understand them and learn by experience to put them into practice so that we can be prepared now and in the ages to come for life and service in your presence.

We ask these things in Jesus' name, amen.