

## Proverbs 23-09-20b

Let's pick up our study now in Proverbs chapter 12, we're looking at verse nine. Better is the one who is not well thought of, lightly esteemed, in some cases even dishonored. And you get the idea that unlike what we saw in the parallel passages, there are people who deserve to be lightly esteemed because they are unrighteous, they are indolent and lazy or shiftless, or they do the wrong thing, they're not stepping up in faith and obedience.

And God is going to lightly esteem those who do not place their faith in Him, those who are not obedient and so on. But in this case, because of the structure of Proverbs, because of the parallelism, this is in fact a righteous man. And those who lightly esteem him are those who are in contrast here.

These are the ones who honor themselves, who pursue vain things, and they look down on someone and make an issue out of the fact that he's working for himself, that he's working hard. And this one who is slighted, but is working and providing for himself is what we derive from the context. That is good compared with the one who honors himself, but lacks bread.

You can circle that little phrase there, lacks bread, because as we move through the next few verses, we're going to see that this is not an isolated proverb. It cannot and should not be taken out of its context, nor should the next verse, which is verse 10. A righteous man regards the life of his animal, but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.

And pet owners from that day to this have comforted and encouraged themselves that the Bible supports those who are kind to animals. And that is certainly a true principle. It's not, it doesn't by any means exhaust what is going on here.

Nothing wrong with drawing that from this. But if you look at this closely, it says a righteous, and this is just our word from tzedakah or tzedek, which is a righteous one. You can see that again, man here is in italics.

And so a righteous one, and it says regards. You can get regard out of this verb, but you remember me belaboring at some length a verb in the first session, at the beginning of the first session that occurs as a cognate noun in verse one, and it is yada, knowledge, to know. And this is to know.

There are many different facets and expressions and aspects of knowing and knowledge. But if you translate this right at the center of the locus of meaning of these words, it is a righteous one knows the soul. This is the nefesh of the animal.

And nefesh is the seat of desire and thinking and function. It is often translated bowels or intestines. The mercy that is going to be mentioned here.

I'm a little bit ahead of myself, but the animal here is behema, and it's singular. This is one animal, one cow, one ox. And who is in view here? This is the man working for himself.

He doesn't have a flock. He doesn't have a herd. He is tilling the soil, and he's got one ox.

And he is righteous. This is of a set, and we're going to see how we know this as we keep going. But the righteous, and it is the man of the preceding verse working for himself, and he knows the soul of his animal.

This is the nefesh, and it is what the animal needs, what it desires, what's going on in whatever limited consciousness it has. Is he thirsty? Is he tired? Is he got something stuck in his hoof? Is he being pestered by flies? Is he in need of something? Are you working him too hard? Are you not balancing the work with rest and recuperation? Are you feeding him adequately? And so on. So the righteous man knows the soul.

Now, this is not the eternal soul idea. Psuche in the Old Testament, and the reason they translate it life is it just has to do with the conscious awareness that we share with many of the higher animals. But the righteous man cares about this animal, and it's not just a selfish interest.

Well, I don't want to wear him out because I need him to work. He has a genuine concern and care for the wellbeing of this animal. He'll brush down a horse if he has one.

He'll tend to the needs, minister to the wounds, check the feet, make sure there are not harness sores and such on the animal. And it's out of a genuine care and concern. And this puts the righteous man in the context of recognizing that he himself is serving God.

And you want God to look out for us as we serve. We can look out for those who are undressed. Jesus catches this idea in his parable of the unjust servant who is forgiven a great debt, but then won't forgive his underservant a very small amount, that we have a contextual view of the world, a perspective on the world that recognizes that, like the Roman centurion, I am a man under authority, and I have those who are under my authority.

I say to one come and he comes, to another go and he goes. Would you imagine that that Roman centurion was sensitive to the needs of his soldiers. And he recognizes that the God in whom he believes is also sensitive to his needs.

And it is on that basis that he can make appeal to the Lord Jesus, not only to have the need met, but that this authority goes with that responsibility, that accountability and that sensitivity. And in a balanced world where one is endeavoring to pursue righteousness as a goal and as a part of one's values and reflecting one's priorities, righteousness should permeate all three of these. And the value that looks at an animal

that is completely under one's control and care and knows its soul, knows its needs, knows what it's feeling and thinking.

That is the idea behind psuche here. So the righteous one knows the soul of his behemoth, his four-footed animal. And this is typically the domesticated animal that works in your field.

But the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. The word for tender mercies here is what I started to describe earlier. This is the, what in Greek is *splachna*, what comes out of the bowels or the internal, the word, *rechem*, that this comes from is the word for womb.

And the idea of tender mercies is a mother's love for her baby. That the act of giving birth and having this child, your womb calls to you to nurture and protect and defend and love and have every possible level of interest for the wellbeing of this baby. And so this word, *rechemim*, tender mercies is, hooks into the idea of a mother's love for her newborn infant, coming from her womb and having this internal attachment to the very center of your being.

So the tender mercies, what the wicked considers to be pity, charity, looking out for somebody else ends up being cruel. Now, this is something to think about. If our concern is not grounded in and stemming from righteousness, the righteousness of God, the sense of justice and the perspective that we have of our place in the order.

If we are wicked, if we are one who promotes ourself, lifts ourself up, can you think of people in the abstract world of unbelief who still engage in charity, but what is the motivation for their tender mercies? Well, I want to be well thought of. This is a way that I can boost my standing in the community and the esteem with which people look at me and so on. And by not being based on intimate personal knowledge, notice the righteous knows the nefesh of his animal.

He works with this animal all day long. He and this animal are a team and he has a bond and he has a genuine care and concern because he's righteous. But you take this person that is shallow, isn't working for himself, is trying to promote himself in the preceding verses, verse eight, he's of a perverse heart.

He honors himself. He's not actually accomplishing anything. He's not actually providing for himself.

He's trying to get what he gets by ill-gotten gains, by perverse means, by wicked designs, all the way back to the beginning, the wicked intentions. There are two worlds and we don't last for long trying to straddle them. We are either righteous or we are wicked.

We are either those who have genuine concerns, genuine love, a genuine heart cleansed by God, conditioned by God, powered and fueled by the spirit and the word of God, or we

shift. And there's a little bit of gray, but not a lot. It's not completely black and white, but there is a way that seems right to a man and the ends thereof are the ways of death, not the ways of, well, it's just not so hot or it's not quite as righteous or well, it's better than nothing or you occasionally do the right thing.

The Bible tends to paint things in very polar terms, doesn't it? And this is what you see throughout Proverbs. Proverbs doesn't say, well, there's a great wide middle way. Jesus talks about this.

There's a narrow road through the straight gate and there is a broad road and a wide gate. And he doesn't talk about a great field in between where people are just kind of wandering around, bumping into things. You're on one or the other.

And if we cannot assure ourselves and have confidence that we are on the narrow road, heading for the straight gate, that we are the righteous, that we are those who are diligent to show themselves approved unto God, who do not need to be ashamed because we are rightly dividing the word of truth. If we are not those who cultivate the presence and power of God's Holy Spirit to lead us and guide us in that word and to create in us and establish an environment where the Father and the Son will come and make their home with us, there's not a kind of or a sort of, or well, occasionally the polar expressions in the Bible are you are either this or be assured you are that. When the blessings and the curses were read on Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, was there a third address in the valley? Well, if you're neither hot nor cold, you're in this wonderful lukewarm valley here, let me tell you what life is going to be here.

You'll occasionally get wrapped on the knuckles by God, but there will also be occasional blessings and you'll just kind of ping pong and yo-yo between this and between that. Do you notice there's one mountain and there's the other mountain? Nothing is said in the valley in between. And if you're not on the mountain of blessing, guess where you are.

If you are not the righteous, guess who you are. And we fool ourselves, we extol ourselves, we honor ourselves as in verse nine and we lack bread. We're not actually partaking of the manna.

We are not being fruitful. Think about Psalm 1, the one who does not stand in the way of sinners, sit in the seat of the scornful, walk in the counsel of the ungodly, not in that order. His delight is in the law of the Lord and in that law he meditates day and night.

The truth, what is he like? He's like a tree planted by the rivers of water, bringing forth his fruit in his season. The ungodly are not so, but blow away in the wind. They can't stand in the fellowship of the righteous, can they? And there's not, oh, but by the way, there are these kind of half dead trees.

There's the fringes of the fellowship of the righteous. You've still got a root, you're not

totally blowing away. The contrast in scripture is always, if you are not this, you are that.

The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff, dead husks that the wind blows away. If you're godly, you're the tree planted by the river. If you're ungodly, you're chaff.

Think about the New Testament, talking about chaff. Burn the chaff with unquenchable fire, gather the wheat into my barn. Well, but what if I'm sort of unhusked wheat? What if there's some wheat in there, but I've still got my chaff husk on me? Doesn't talk about that.

You're one or the other. And it ought to sober us and it ought to drive us to judge ourselves lest we be judged, because it is a great temptation and a great deception sourced in Satan himself to think, yeah, you're okay, eat the fruit, make you a little wiser. You are either in the garden or you are out.

You are either clothed in light or you are naked. They didn't kind of slowly drift as they ate the fruit day by day. Did you notice that when the serpent conned Eve into eating the fruit and she conned Adam into eating the fruit, the consequence in the day you eat thereof, it isn't, well, you know, their status changed immediately and permanently at the point that they bit into the fruit.

And they are driven from the garden that same day. And that's how they quote unquote died to, and that death of Adam and Eve is in my view, much like the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ that is a process. It began on the day they ate and it ended with their physical death.

Doesn't matter how many years intervened, there was an inevitable course of death that began when they ate the fruit and was inevitable, unstoppable, according to the decree of God and the righteousness and justice of God, no coming back from that. Physical death will occur. In the same way, the return of the Lord Jesus is gonna begin at the rapture and it is gonna culminate at the second coming.

And there's no stopping that thing. But it is all one return. It's got phases, it's a process, but it begins at the rapture and it ends at the second coming.

Begins with us meeting him in the air and it ends with him meeting Israel on the ground. But it's one coming. And those who don't understand the distinction between the rapture and the second coming can't parse that, can't figure that out.

And I would encourage them to go back and look at the death of Adam and Eve. If you need to see something that happens all at once and yet is a process, there you go. And there are many other parallels.

But looking at this, a righteous man knows a righteous one and righteousness knows and understands the needs, the opportunities, the strength, the fatigue, the ups, the downs

of an animal, even an animal. And there's an a fortiori idea here. If the righteous is sensitive to the soul of his animal, if he knows the soul of that animal that he works with, how much more so is he going to be sensitive to the people in his periphery and know them and understand them and be ready when he is able and the opportunity arises to meet those needs.

If he takes care of his animal, how much more so? But the tender mercies, what you would think would be the interior connection like the womb to a newborn of the wicked, it always disappoints. It always falls short. It always ends up hurting instead of helping at some point.

It may seem good at the inception, but it ends up being cruel. The end result, the product of these attempts at tender mercies, these expressions of the wicked heart, because it's coming from the womb, the *splachna*, the *rachmim*, the interior, the interior of a wicked man, Jesus says, you know, can a bad spring produce fresh water? Can a poison spring do that? A fresh well is going to produce fresh water. A good tree is going to produce good fruit.

A bad tree is going to produce bad fruit. And you don't get beneficial, up-building, helpful, long-lasting, God-honoring help to others from the wicked. It always ends up as a cruel hoax, a cruel attempt.

That's what this says. Now we come to almost literally the punchline. In verse 11, he who tills his land.

You see the word tills there? It doesn't mean to till. It doesn't mean to plow. It doesn't mean to cultivate.

This is our friend, Ebed. This is to work in the sense of serve. This ties directly back to verse nine.

He who is a servant worker to his land. There is a word play here of the one working. And this is, remember the O-E-N fix, and it's a participle.

The one serving, the one working his own land. This is the verse nine guy. And notice what happens.

What is he satisfied with? Lechem. The guy that was honoring himself, no lechem. The guy working for himself, serving himself, serving and working on his land is satisfied with lechem.

Goes right back to verse nine. But he who follows frivolity. I was tempted to talk about social media here, but pretend I didn't say that.

If you follow somebody who's vapid, that's your own fault. Listening to all these words

that are sound and fury signifying nothing. But to follow after frivolity, this acts like this is a noun or an abstraction or a concept of frivolity.

This is people. This is a plural. And these are vain people, empty headed, empty purpose.

These are a population of those who honor themselves and have no bread. This is the whole group. You want to join the group of the frivolous.

You want to join the group of the vapid and the ephemeral and the shallow, the purposeless, the led by the nose people. And wherever they go, you're tracking them. You're trying to join.

You're trying to catch up and be in that group. He who follows the frivolous ones, the vain ones, the shallow and empty headed ones. And it says is devoid of understanding.

Remember up in verse nine, it said, he lacks bread. This is the identical verb, lacks. And I would put it here.

I wish they had done it in the English translation because it's supposed to be parallel. The one who, the guy who is working his land, what is he doing? He's lightly esteemed because he's poor and he's got one animal. So what is the picture? This is so poetic.

It's just genius scripture. The righteous who knows the soul of his animal. What are those guys doing? He's working for himself.

So if you picture him in the field, what is he following? He's got, Don Henley's got a Waiting in the Weed song. And one line of it says, I've been following the plow. I've been following the plow.

It's just me out there. And the only thing I'm following is the plow that is being pulled by my animal that I care about. I'm following the plow.

This guy is following the crowd that thinks like he does. This is what the pastor I listened to long ago called being herd bound. You're, you gotta be one of the crowd.

You wanna be in the in crowd, the in group. There are cultural references I could make here to the people that would go to Studio 57 and things back in the 60s. And they all wanted to be a part of Haight-Ashbury or they wanted to be in a community in New York where all the poets and the hippies hang out.

And I wanna be in that group. Well, they're all old baggy eyed has-beens now and the community has fallen apart and they've got nothing to show for it. They were hip and in and esteemed by those who don't know what they ought to esteem.

And now they're nowhere. Nothing, certainly nothing for eternity. But the guy that was

following the plow, nobody thought he was somebody worth knowing or paying attention to.

His best friend is his ox. And he knows that ox like he knows nobody else. All the people in the community around him don't really care about him, but he's working for himself.

He's got bread. And what else does he have? He will be satisfied with bread. He's working for himself, but he is satisfied.

He's got fulfillment. And bread of course here is a metaphor for all of his heart needs versus the guy who follows the frivolous ones and lacks heart. Understanding is a three letter word in Hebrew, lev, L-E-V.

How did verse nine start out? Tov. How does verse 11 end? Lev, tov, lev. It's on purpose.

It's a point. The word lack is in verse nine. The word lack is in verse 11.

These three verses are a unit. They should never be looked at separately. Well, God will bless the man who regards his animal.

Oh, you're missing the point. It's not about animals. Remember, Paul makes this point in Corinthians.

Remember Deuteronomy 25, verse four says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." 25, four of Deuteronomy. "Do not muzzle the ox." Does it ring a bell that Paul quotes this when he's talking about elders in the church in first Corinthians nine, verses nine and 10? "It is written in the law of Moses," Paul says. "First Corinthians nine, nine. "It is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Paul goes on to say, "Is it oxen God is concerned about?" The implied answer is no.

"Or does he say it altogether for our sakes?" For our sakes, no doubt. "This is written, "So that he who plows should plow in hope, "and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope." The guy who's plowing. Reminds you of TR.

The guy who's in the arena. "The air isn't come short, "His face is marred with dust and sweat and blood. "The critic is up there in the stands, "Lightly esteeming him." But that guy is going to know the satisfaction, even in secular terms, which is what TR is talking about, Teddy Roosevelt.

It's not the critic who counts. It's not where the strong man didn't do it right every single time. The credit belongs to the guy who is plowing.

And in God's economy, that's exactly how it works. You plow for yourself. Don't worry about public opinion.

Don't worry about the criticism of those who are thinking you're doing it wrong. This is a set. And the animal in the middle is just a metaphor for what the righteous man cares about.

He knows what his animal needs. He knows his soul. And he knows that God knows his soul.

Compared to God, we are the behemoth. And yet God cares for us as we care for that animal. And if we follow God's guidance, if we are faithful to pull the plow, these that follow after the accolades and the emoluments of the world are inevitably lack, they lack heart.

The heart that is the seat of wisdom, that is the seat of knowledge and understanding, they haven't even got one. They don't even have a shelf to put the truth of God on. That is not the way to go.

And this wonderful central piece of information here in chapter 12 is so practical and so convicting. And it hangs together. It is structured and designed to be thought of as a unit.

And when you see it in Hebrew, it just smacks you in the head. You can't, well, actually you can miss it. I looked at many, many commentaries and not very many people noticed the beautiful structure and the symmetry and the repetition that are in this.

But I really appreciate the ones who did and put me onto it because there's a lot of Hebrew here. But it's there. And once you see it, you can't unsee it.

And the behemoth right in the middle is not an accident. And this good man, he's not well thought of, but he's working. He's doing his job, doing for himself.

And you have the repetition of that in the word tilling in verse 11. It's oved, eved, oved, they're cognates. It's the same root, has the same meaning.

He will be satisfied with bread. Now, is it by his own efforts that he is going to have this lechem, this bread? Is it? Don't forget there is structure in this proverb. Who is it that guarantees the outcome for the righteous? Who is it that judges who is righteous and who is wicked? The very concepts of righteousness and wickedness are tied back to the Lord in verse two.

The good, notice the tov back in verse two. And then you have tov again at the beginning of verse eight. It's not an accident.

God favors, God will ensure that the dedication and the single-mindedness and the not worrying about what the world says or what people on the outside think, doing what you do as unto the Lord and not unto men, God will favor. The guarantee of divine

omnipotence is behind this promise. Can we take it to the bank? Does that provide us the power from the word of God and the spirit of God to live as we should live, objectively and not subjectively, doing what we do heartily because God has given us the perspective and the enablement to do it? Yes, it absolutely does.

This, back to my point at the beginning of the night, this is the way Proverbs works. It's not a pastiche and a crazy quilt. There are things that empower us in the hands of the Holy Spirit, change us in our heart and change us in our soul.

And we've got to look for the context. Anytime you see a verse that doesn't seem to make sense by itself, A, we need to be sure that the translators understood it properly and it does help, but you can do this with a Strongs. Find the word, find the range of meanings and just try out other meanings of this word that are common in the Old Testament.

And maybe one of those others is better. Try it out. But even in the English, by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, you can see these connections.

Just as an example, I had you circle verse three, the stability and the permanence of the root of the righteous. And you see that echoed again in verse seven, the house of the righteous will stand, will be established, is permanent. Just take a look down at verse 19.

The truthful lip shall be established forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment. This passage keeps cycling back to, are you thinking about that which is momentary and light? Momentary light affliction, working for us an eternal wait. Is it momentary and light or is it eternal and waiting? What is it? The passage keeps coming back.

In case you forgot what I said in verses one through three, Solomon says, let me just give you a quick reminder. We're talking about time versus eternity. We're talking about the opinion of men versus the opinion of the Lord.

We're talking about what you can do in your own strength versus what you can do with the favor of the Lord. And it cycles back and back and back over and over again. The issue is, are you righteous or are you wicked? Are you patient? Are you looking to the Lord or are you impatient and looking to those around you that you think can give you a boost up? It is consistent, it is thematic, it is structured, and it is a thing of beauty.

Well, we'll continue this study next time. We're going to pick up, we're going to finish this section of 14 verses and notice the interconnections of which this is just one example. I could spend a year on Proverbs chapter 12, honestly, but we're just going to, we're going to take samples from these sections and just give quick notice and suggestion on the other connections that are in the passage.

But I really think Solomon constructed this section of Proverbs as he didn't know the major and minor prophets were coming. There was no Isaiah. There was no Ezekiel.

There was no Malachi. There was the five books of Moses and the Psalms that were being assembled sort of as we speak in David and Solomon's day into the Psalms. But what did they use for scripture? This is the practical epistles of Paul, Peter, and John of the New Testament for the Old Testament.

Five books of the law and you've got the gospels in the New Testament. But what do you do to build on that foundation? I think Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, given knowledge and instruction from God himself before he fell off of his own wagon, put this together. This is the practical epistles for the people of Israel.

And so instructive for us. Well, we'll continue to look at it next time. We'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the gift of your word, the presence and power of your Holy Spirit. We are so privileged in Christ. We thank you for the Lord Jesus, for the sacrifice that he made and the work that he accomplished to make these things possible for us.

In him, we have so many wonderful privileges and opportunities. And we pray that as we reflect on these passages of scripture, that the Holy Spirit will help us to see their pertinence, their application of what they mean to us as we move forward, parsing and exploiting our opportunities and fulfilling our duties and our tasks in the time that remains to us in this life. We want to redeem the time.

We know the days are evil and to represent the Lord Jesus as his body and to exploit this opportunity to push against the resistance thrown up by our own flesh as well as the world and the devil is such a privilege and of relatively short duration. We pray that we can make the most of it in the light of these words from your scriptures. And we ask it in Jesus' name, amen.