

## Proverbs 23-11-08a

God seems to direct our attention outward to circumstances and events and then directs us to the spiritual resources necessary for coping and application and redeeming the time. And that certainly seems to be the case with our recent looks at world events and circumstances around us, social upheavals and movements and opinions and so on. How should we then live? Interestingly enough, the answer to that question is right here in our passage.

Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study and we'll begin. Father, how grateful we are for another time of fellowship, an opportunity to learn and grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus, to avail ourselves of the supernatural power that you have granted to us as a privilege, being members of the body of Christ, representing him on this earth and granting to us the same means of focus and accomplishment of your plan that you gave to the Lord Jesus himself. We pray that as we look at this portion of scripture together that the Holy Spirit will minister it to our hearts, help us to understand it and see how it pertains and applies as we navigate each day until the time the Lord Jesus comes to take us to himself.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's read our passage.

We actually got to start on this, but I think we kind of lost our momentum over the intervening weeks. There was some traveling and some blast from the past in there. So let's begin at verse 15 and read down through verse 23.

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise. A fool's wrath is known at once, but a prudent man covers shame. He who speaks truth declares righteousness, but a false witness deceit.

There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, but the tongue of the wise promotes health. The truthful lip shall be established forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment. Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, but the counselors of peace have joy.

No grave trouble will overtake the righteous, but the wicked shall be filled with evil. Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal truthfully are his delight. A prudent man conceals knowledge, but the heart of fools proclaims foolishness.

As you look at these and listen to them and think about them, these are very typical proverbs, aren't they? Some of them seem, you know, you always kind of hesitate to say something that might sound blasphemous, but they sound a little bit like trite observations or shallow truths or obviousities of some kind that, well, sure, somebody who's speaking truth is going to declare righteousness. Righteousness and truth are kind of hand in hand. A false witness speaks deceit.

Isn't that a tautology? If you're a false witness, of course you're speaking deceit. So if this was the only verse I had, I'm on a desert island, a scrap of somebody's Bible page floats up on the beach, I pick it up and it says, he who speaks truth declares righteousness, but a false witness, deceit. What am I going to do with that? How am I going to apply it? Of course, there'd have to be at least one other person on the island, or I wouldn't have anybody to talk to, nobody to potentially deceive or speak righteousness to.

But where is the inspired, powerful, living, and active Word of God in these sayings? And to a greater or lesser extent, you can look at all of these in this section and say, well, these are not revelations. There's not a deep and profound discovery here that inspires and motivates and opens a new door for me in terms of perception and application. So why is it in the Word of God? Well, believe me, when you're working your way verse by verse through a book and you come to passages, really great sections of Proverbs are like this.

It's a little scary because you think, well, what if it really is just trite and shallow and tautologous and there's not really going to be anything profound there? But I long ago disabused myself of any such possibility, because any time we slow down and look at context, look at structure, and look at what is sometimes not immediately obvious from our English translation, but the beauty in the Hebrew that is virtually impossible to capture, you realize the need for at least a working understanding of the original language. God didn't write this in English for a reason. He put it into Hebrew.

And He said, if you're going to get this in a translation, you're going to have to dig a little bit to get back to the freight. You could take a picture of a train car and see that it's got coal in it, or you can go visit the train car and get coal out that you can make a fire with. And that's kind of the difference between reading some of these verses in English and getting back to the Hebrew and realizing there is substance here.

There is powerful truth and it is alive. It is life-changing. It is motivating, encouraging, and enabling and empowering for us.

And we're going to see that this evening. Let's begin by looking at this. I read this as a section for a reason.

This is a section dedicated to wise and foolish speech. And we speak out of our hearts. Our mouths don't have a little miniature repository of information and that it just comes out and we didn't think about it.

We didn't learn it or consider it ahead of time. And so what is in our hearts will generally reflect in our speech as well as in our actions. So when we talk about wise and foolish speech, we're really talking about the outcome of wise and foolish thought.

It's too late to fix what's in our soul. By the time we start speaking, one has to precede the other. There is causation in our speech that begins in our heart.

So there is the profitable use and the unprofitable use of our ability to converse, our ability to communicate. If you look at any kind of recent news, people are communicating all over the place, aren't they? I think this about what's going on in the Middle East. I think this about what's going on in Eastern Europe.

I think this about what's happening on college campuses. I think this about what's happening with violence in various forms and contexts. I've got opinions and I'm going to use the avenues of communication.

Our speech now goes beyond our tongue and our lips and our mouth to social media, to text and email, to signage that people carry and things they'll put in their yard or on their bumper. We have many ways of expressing our views, our opinions, our desire to influence others is reflected in this speech. People speak because they're hoping to get somebody else to think or to react or to agree.

It typically isn't just, I just want to go out to a wall that nobody can see but me and I'm going to paint a slogan and an aphorism on it. We put it out there because we want someone else to read it and to be affected by it. So take a look and if you don't mind marking in your Bibles, you will see that there are markers here that aren't immediately apparent, but they really help us clarify and see the point of this section.

First of all, look at verse 16. What we're going to see here is that 16 and 23 are the outer edges of a symmetry, of a chiastic structure. Verse 16 and verse 23.

So you can take a marker or pencil or something and just go from 16, go out in your margin, go down and turn back in at verse 23. Put your fingers on those two verses so that you can jump back and forth kind of easily. Keeping in mind the ancient Hebrews didn't have a text, they did this mentally.

They were so much more erudite, had so much more mental power and could visualize and revisit these things in their minds. We're playing catch up. This notion of goat herds and dusty old nomads, you know, pinning random thoughts and that became the Old Testament is so nonsensical.

These people had acute mental powers, great memories. They memorized whole sections of this and then could picture it in their minds. It's like having a photographic memory.

It's like having the word on the page. Dr. Criswell had this ability. He could write his page of notes and then not refer to them in the pulpit because he could just pull it up before his mental eyes and follow his points and read the scriptures that he had written down.

What a faculty, what a gift. But put your fingers at 16 and 23 and notice that you have, first of all, there are words that help us see this chiasm. There is the word fool in verse 16, a fool's wrath.

And in verse 23, in the second part, it's in the first part of 16 and the last part of 23, you see the fool. This is a Hebrew word, awil, awil, and it's the foolish one. You have conceal, which is kose.

A prudent man covers or conceals shame. And in 23, a prudent man conceals knowledge. So there is a different object, but the same verb, kose.

And when I say kose, what do you know from your rules of Hebrew? Hebrew verbs are always ah-ah, aren't they? Kasa is the verb, but this is kose, which makes it what? It's an I-N-G word. It's a participle. It's an ongoing action.

He is, this is a pattern. This isn't just, oh, I know a thing, but I'm not going to tell somebody. This is prudence in constantly monitoring the difference between what I know and what I say.

And this is kose, conceals. You see the word for prudent in verse 16. This is arum.

This is the word that means shrewd, crafty in some cases. There are just some great examples of that even in Genesis. And then in 23, the prudent man, the prudent man in verse 16, the prudent man in verse 23.

Look at the next two verses, move up one to 22 and down one to 17. And this pattern continues. You have the word conscientious in verse 17.

The one who speaks truth declares righteousness. We have imunah in there. Imunah is the word that is translated truth.

And in verse 22, those who deal truthfully are his delight. This is imunah in both of those verses, those bracket verses. You have false shikar in verse 17, a false witness and false lips in verse 22.

So we are invited to see this as a package, as something between bookends. And 16 and 17, 22 and 23 are the outer covers. Within that, we have two equally balanced units.

And they are tied together with body parts pertaining to speech. So we have lips in verse 19 and in verse 22. We have the mouth in verse 14.

We have the tongue in verses 18 and 19. So is this unit going to be about our speech, our communication? It is woven all the way through. You can't get away from the idea that we're talking here in terms of divine wisdom and guidance when it comes to our communications.

Where do these come from? We said that our speech comes from the heart. You see this in verse 19. You see it in verse 23.

The heart of fools proclaims foolishness. And there is making known as opposed to concealing. We have these words for, are you communicating or are you withholding? Making known or concealing.

Do you provide a witness? Someone provides counsel. There is advice. There is consultation.

Speaking the truth hopefully in love from others. There is proclamation in verse 23. Proclaiming foolishness.

So this is a very tightly woven section. It's not a pastiche of random sayings or aphorisms. You will also notice that in this section, as we have seen in the past, there is a pattern that alternates.

So the odd numbered verses give the positive verse first and then the negative. So look at verse 17. He who speaks truth, this is a positive.

And in the second part, a false witness, that's the negative. So positive, negative. Verse 18 is going to be the opposite.

Now it's going to be negative first and then positive. All of the even numbered verses lead with the negative and follow with the positive. And this is not an accident.

So positive, negative in verse 17. Look at verse 19. Positive, the truthful lip.

Negative, the lying tongue. 20 is an even verse, so it's going to lead with the negative. Deceit in the heart of those who devise evil.

Positive, counselors of peace. 21 is an odd verse, so positive first. No grave trouble will overtake the righteous, followed by the negative.

The wicked shall be filled with evil. Verse 22 is a positive, is an even verse, so it's going to lead with the negative. Lying lips are an abomination, but those who deal truthfully are His delight.

Verse 23 is an odd verse, so it's going to lead with the positive. Prudent man conceals knowledge, followed by the negative. The heart of fools, proclaiming foolishness.

So notice that there is intentionality. And whereas you might just read by this and say, well, there's a collection of aphorisms, seeing this symmetry and seeing this intentional structure is a flag saying you need to slow down and pay attention to the content. It's easy to say, oh look, these outside verses form a bracket, so I want to move to the middle and see what's at the center of the chiasm and forget that there's content in

those covers.

And this tells you what He's going to tell you in the midst of the chiasm, and then He's going to tell you what He told you at the beginning, middle, and end. So how important is something that is given in the mouth of two or three witnesses, so to speak, structurally? It's really, really important. So we see that there is truth and there is deceit in communication.

And this deceit is a really interesting word. This isn't just misinformation. All of this bandying about of accusation, well, you're spreading misinformation or disinformation.

That's not what the word translated deceit means here. And when we find out what it does mean, it invests these sayings in this carefully constructed section with great value and great meaning for us. And you'll notice that within that frame, verse 16 and 17 on the outside, 22 and 23, you have a break between verse 19 and verse 20.

And you'll notice that these two sections are each marked with deceit. Now, is verse 17 even or odd? It's odd. So in the odd ones, we have the positive first and the negative second.

What is the key word in the negative section of verse 17? Deceit. The negative section here is deceit in verse 17. Verse 20 is the first verse of the second section.

It's an even verse. So the negative is going to come first. What is the key word in the negative section of verse 20? Deceit.

The very same word. These two sections lead with the contrast between deceit and truth. As I said, this word deceit is very interesting.

There are lots of words for untruth, and I could go do a survey of those, but we don't need to because this word in and of itself helps us understand what's going on in this section. Another one of the Hebrew truths that we have talked about many times in the past is, if I have a verb, let's say I have a verb, Rama. There is a town called Rama.

Now, if I want to turn a verb into a noun in Hebrew, what's the easiest way to do it? Do you remember? You put an M in front of it. So now, because M is the preposition that means from. So from the action of the verb, ma-ra-ma, or mir-ma.

The first A kind of collapses when you stick this prefix on. So you've got mir-ma. That is the word for deceit.

I'm not going to give you a whole lot of Hebrew, but we need this one. Mir-ma, mir-rama, from Rama. Well, what does Rama mean? This is a word that originally meant to throw, to cast.

It is a word that came to have a metaphorical meaning, but remember the song of

Miriam, you know, blessed be the Lord, the horse and rider he has cast into the sea. That's Rama. He has hurled them into the sea.

He has, this is to hurl with violence, to hurl with intent to harm or intent to destroy. It's not, oh, I tossed a pebble into the brook and watched the ripples and a happy duck floated by. No, this is a violent sort of throwing.

This means to shoot arrows. So this is mal-intent in hurling something, directing something against someone for their harm. That's what Rama means.

But what it comes to mean is the, it is often translated to deceive or to beguile. The one I just gave you is Exodus 15.1, the horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea. That's Exodus 15.1. If you remember in Genesis 29, when Jacob has served seven years for Rachel, but on his wedding night and then the subsequent morning, he discovers that he has actually married Leah and he goes to Laban and he says, why then have you Rama'd me? Why have you, it's translated deceived, but this is not a simple deception.

You know, people that are really literalistic about applying the Bible will say, is it wrong if I'm playing basketball to execute a feint, F-E-I-N-T, where I act like I'm going to go one way, but then I go another because isn't that a deception? And are we as Christians not to ever deceive someone? So I should never make someone believe I'm going to go one direction when I'm really going to go the other. That's a lie. I have lied with my body language.

And there are people that have actually, you know, agonized over this. I shouldn't act like I'm going to do one thing when I'm really going to do something else. Of course, they don't seem to have read the story of the Lord Jesus when his brothers said, well, we're going down for the assembly feast.

And Jesus said, I'm not going. But then after they left, he went. That was something of a feint.

It was a misdirection. It was an act of misdirection. But why have you deceived me? You have done me harm.

You have beguiled me. You have executed treachery against me. This was treacherous.

It worked in your favor and my harm. It is the opposite of love that is sacrificial to self and beneficial to someone else. Rama is sacrificial to the other guy and beneficial to me, usually and often violently harmful.

So as you see, it's a subsequent use. You can find it in Joshua chapter nine with the Gibeonites. Why then have you beguiled us? Why have you deceived us? And then we have this covenant that was based on false representations and a misperception at a minimum.

And now we are in trouble for not fulfilling a divine command. It's in first Samuel 28, when the witch of Endor finds out that Saul is the king. And she says, why have you, why have you Rama'd me? You are Saul.

And now I'm going to be executed for being a witch in the land. Rama. Well, why is this important? You get back to our passage and it is introduced here with deceit.

That's in verse 17. He who speaks truth declares righteousness, but a false witness, deceit. Well, what was our defining bracket that began in verse 16? A fool's wrath is known at once.

A fool's wrath is known at once. This is frustration. This is contention.

It is translated as sorrow, provocation, vexation. It's often translated vexation and you see it in Proverbs often translated vexation. So a fool's vexation is known and it says at once.

Some translations say immediately. This is but Yom. You remember Yom is the word for day, but means in by or with.

So a fool's vexation is known in the day. This is the very same phrase that's translated in other places, you know, in the day of God's wrath or in the day of judgment. When the first thing is an issue, you know it that day.

So the day of judgment, there is an issue that needs judging and in the day of judgment, God is going to resolve that issue. He is going to deal divine discipline, punishment. He's going to dispense divine wrath in the day that that is dealt with.

Well, when vexation becomes an issue for the fool, for the AWEEL, it is known at that time. When vexation appears, it becomes evident. It's in that day.

So it's known at once. It's known, you know, pretty quickly. He can't conceal it.

He can't contain it. He can't control it. It's like a cat in a box without a lid.

He's not going to stay in there. It's going to jump out. It can't be like the lady in the basket in the plain of Shinar.

You put a lead lid on it and she can't get out. The fool cannot contain this vexation. He is provoked.

Now, do you see provocation all around the world today? Do people feel provoked? Do they look at various developments and say, I'm going to march. I'm going to shout. I'm going to post.

I'm going to make my opinion known. I am vexed. I am deeply unhappy about this

situation.

Well, why would this be a bad thing to have a vexation? Was Jesus vexed? Did he not drive out the money changers? Was he not vexed when he pronounced the woes on the Pharisees? Was he not provoked in his heart when he looked out over Jerusalem and was weeping all day long? I've held out my hands. I wanted to gather you as a hen gathers her chicks. You vexation always wrong for us.

Here is the contrast. A fool's vexation is known in the day. It's known immediately.

Vexation appears knowledge of it by others. It's apparent. It's, it's a look on the face.

It's a tone of voice. It's actions. It's slamming doors.

It's shattering crockery or whatever it may be. What is the contrast? The prudent covers shame. The Arum, the Arum is, it's often translated as shrewd or crafty.

And why this? Why isn't this someone that has, has, uh, is kacham, has kachma, has doctrine, has, or, or, uh, imuna, truth, or, or some other word for, uh, inner wisdom. Why is it Arum? Well, look at in the day, this goes to self-control. You save yourself a lot of grief.

You can avoid a lot of sin. You can avoid a lot of harm and injury to others by taking a beat, exercising self-control when vexation occurs. And those of us that have had a problem with controlling vexation, knowing that you shouldn't express your vexation, knowing that you shouldn't have a flash of temper or a flash of anger or impatience that you shouldn't let your mouth loose in that moment, in that yom, in that day, in that time.

It's one thing to know it, but it's like knowing smoking's hazardous to your health or, you know, don't slam on the brakes on ice. It's an instinctive reaction and we don't have the power to control it. Uh, especially those of us for whom this is an area of weakness.

You can't just resolve. You can't, uh, commit. You can't write it on a piece of paper and stick it on the mirror.

I will be patient today. I will have self-control today. You know, the answer to this question, where does self-control come from? The fruit of the spirit is, starts with love and ends with self-control.

There's a bit of an interesting chiastic structure in that fruit list as well. Love, self-control, meekness, joy. To be humble is to keep your joy.

To be arrogant, you will immediately lose it. And, and we're actually going to see that coming up in the, in the Proverbs, but it's a fruit of the spirit. What does that mean? It is not a fruit of the unregenerate, unenabled human soul.

We are not by nature able to control ourselves. Our passions can reign, our emotions, our reactions, our sense of, of harm and injury and injustice done to us or done to those close to us will, this is the phrase, you know, I, we lose it. Lose what? Peace, self-control, good judgment, and so on.

So that's what this is talking about. A fool's vexation just spills right out. It's right there in the moment, but the Arum, why is it this word shrewd, crafty? What is the primary characteristic of a shrewd and crafty person? Remember, this is the word that is used of Satan as the serpent in the garden.

He was, he was crafty. The guiding, defining principle of this is looking ahead. If you're crafty, and if you're shrewd, you're not just playing the immediate next move on the chessboard.

You're looking two or three moves down the road. The shrewd man takes factors into consideration, cause and effect. If you're shrewd, when you're playing billiards, you not only make your shot, but if you know that's the last shot you're going to be able to make, you try to leave the cue ball somewhere that makes your opponent's next shot very difficult.

It's, it's one thing to, to sink the six ball because it's one of yours. It's something else to sink it and then let the cue ball roll behind where the next guy doesn't have a shot without banking off of three bumpers. That's shrewd.

That's crafty. That's thinking ahead. What's going to happen next? Let me not just react to the immediate, but let me think a few ply, as they say in chess, a few back and forth moves.

Oh, look, I can take his queen with my rook. But if I do his next move is checkmate. So maybe I had to think one move ahead of just, wow, I captured his queen.

And then I lost the game. He's daring me to take the queen. He's hoping I will lose my self-control and delight in taking the most valuable piece on the board right before I lose the entire game.

A room shrewd, someone who thinks ahead. Well, we don't do this by nature. And the detail here as people would endeavor in old Testament days to follow these divine exhortations, these descriptions, these, these predictions of what happens and what will happen descriptions of being a wise son, as opposed to a foolish son, a joy to his father or the heartache of his mother.

And someone said, well, I want to do all of those things. The same Solomon that wrote all of these down and collected them wrote Ecclesiastes. It's so difficult to endeavor and be under the glass ceiling of, of lack of the Holy Spirit and lack of the ability to build into eternal things.

You can assemble things on the earthly plane and they all fall apart and go to others. As soon as you check out, how can I break through? How can I tie into and begin living for eternity and not just trying to resolve immediate circumstances? What do you see around us today? People waving signs and demonstrating and congregating in front of places of government and saying, cease fire, free Palestine, wave Israeli flags and let them defend themselves. And they, you know, the you're anti-Semitic great confusion.

There are three concepts and you can do this on your own time. We're not going to do it tonight. You've probably already done it, but there are distinctions between anti-Semitism, which is hostility, hatred, and vindictive, implacable action against the Jews as a religio-ethnic group.

That's anti-Semitism. There is anti-Zionism. Now many times these will overlap, but they are distinct and different.

Anti-Zionism is saying there shouldn't have been created a state of Israel and it shouldn't continue to exist. Zionism is Israeli nationalism, a nation with a capital and with sovereignty over it, separate and distinct and free of oppression and persecution from its neighbors. That's Zionism.

And then there is the overall dislike of conflict, that you shouldn't do an eye for an eye and a tooth for tooth. And just because you were attacked, it gives you no right to retaliate or to act in kind. They killed your babies.

You're going to kill theirs. This goes back to people who brook at the psalm that says, blessed is he who dashes your children's heads on a rock, and so on. And there is an anti-violence that is often one-sided.

And they say, well, it doesn't really matter what the Palestinians in general or Hamas in particular believe, embrace, have as a slogan, from the river to the sea, they can think what they want. But if they turn it into action and into violence, I am against, of course, that action. But I'm primarily against the action that seems to be an overreaction.

So there are anti-violence people. I want to be a peacemaker. I want there to be peace.

Look, release the hostages and stop shooting rockets. And can't we just all get along? There is anti-Semitism, which will use anti-Zionism as an excuse to attack the Jews that they've always hated. And then there is anti-Zionism, which says the whole creation of the Israeli state was a mistake.

It's the reason for all of the unrest in the Middle East. And if they were gone, if you could somehow disappear them or wipe them out, there would be peace in the Middle East. So peace at the cost of annihilating an ethnic group.

And people are generally against genocide. But many of those who decry genocide with

the Bosnians and the Serbs or the Croats or the Ukrainians or the different ones in Europe, they've got a whole different opinion when it comes to the Middle East. So it's important to distinguish these terms.

Well, the power to accomplish this has been given to us. And we have to remember where that power is. It is one thing to say, I should not be foolish.

I should be silent when I am vexed. I should hold my tongue. I should wait and think.

It's something else to be able to do it. That ability comes to us through the Holy Spirit. And we'll have much more to say about that when we come back from the break.