

Proverbs 23-12-13b

We are here in Proverbs chapter 13, and we have come down to this interesting section here, verses 7 and 8. There is one who makes himself rich, yet has nothing. One who makes himself poor, yet has great riches. And then in verse 8 it says, the ransom of a man's life is his riches, but the poor does not hear rebuke.

And it seems fairly inscrutable at first glance what has hearing rebuke got to do with ransoming your life. And most commentators kind of wrestle with this as well, assuming that the individual in verse 8, in the first line, the ransom of a man's life is his riches. So a rich man is able to ransom his life.

Someone comes and says, pay up or I'll kill you. And so he ransoms his life with his riches. But the poor, and they say, well, you can't threaten him with anything because he's not worth extorting.

He doesn't have anything worth pressuring him for. And so he's not going to hear rebuke. Nobody's going to rebuke him in the sense of, you know, give me your stuff.

But it's a real odd equation to try to take it in that way. And once again, I think you have to go back to verse 7 to make sense of verse 8. So the one who makes himself rich and has nothing, makes himself rich. Is he pretending to be rich? Does he make himself rich in an illicit way? I think if you look at this in the context of the whole chapter, go back to, are you heeding your father's instruction or are you not listening to or heeding rebuke? And this idea of rebuke comes up again in verse 8. This invites us to review everything up to this point.

So what and that's what we did at the end of the first session is review this. It starts with listening to instruction, taking it in and having a change of heart that reflects itself in speech, in diligence, in action, and in the use of our resources. So if someone makes himself rich and doesn't use his wealth as he should, as you see in verse 7, the idea being if this process doesn't work itself all the way out from the word of God, change of heart, change of speech, change of diligence, change of stewardship of resources, that you can be rich and act as though you have nothing.

I think in the positive sense, rather than these other ways of looking at it, pretending to be rich when you're not and so on, there's no notion here of pretense. I think someone who makes himself rich yet has nothing, you can view yourself as a steward of what God has given. If you follow through this process and understand what the passage is saying from the beginning, if you're heeding instruction, you don't walk around like Nebuchadnezzar admiring the kingdom that you have built and the city and the image and all the rest of the stuff that you've accumulated.

You can make yourself rich and yet you view it as having nothing. And because it's not

yours to keep and yours to be proud of and yours to exploit and indulge yourself in, you know, shameless, vicarious pleasures and so on, you view it as having nothing. Then you are going to be kind to the poor.

You're not going to be the rich man faring sumptuously with Lazarus at your gate being licked by the dogs. You're going to say, you know, what do you have that you did not receive? This is a stewardship from God. So I've made myself rich because I was diligent.

I have heeded instruction. I have put myself in a position to be blessed by God and you're like Job. Job didn't become the wealthiest man in his region by being a bad guy and being nefarious.

He made himself rich by diligent stewardship. You can make yourself rich and yet you don't act rich. You don't exploit it.

You don't live extravagantly. You don't put on airs like we saw in First Sympathy Chapter 2. And so you can make yourself rich and have nothing. There's another who makes himself poor and yet has great riches.

This is about the difference between the extent of your material possessions and your attitude. Do you view yourself as rich or do you view yourself as poor? And we're back to Revelation Chapter 3. You do not recognize that you're poor. Blessed are the poor in spirit.

When you go to the Beatitudes, doesn't matter how much you have. What kind of riches do you have? And these cut both ways. You can have great riches and be poor spiritually or you can have great riches and view yourself as poor.

It's got multiple. The parallel does not listen to rebuke. So in this case, you think, well, this person is guilty and can ransom his life.

Ransom his nefesh. So people try to say, well, a rich guy, can he or can he not use his riches to pay a ransom and redeem his life? What circumstances does that apply? Here's cutting to the chase for you and for me. Sometimes we are like the Apostle Paul.

We both know how to be abased and how to abound. At different times, we're prosperous or we're up against it. And we can work hard.

We can accumulate. We can make ourselves rich. Well, do we view ourselves as entitled? Do we act entitled? Do we act like, you know, people ought to really be impressed and treat us differently because we're well off? Or would someone not know you're well off? There's any number of examples of guys that have accumulated a lot of wealth, but they drive the same car they've always driven.

They live in the same house they've always lived in. They don't put on airs. They don't

buy a mansion.

They don't move to Beverly Hills. You know, what if Jed Clampett had just stayed where he was instead of moving to Beverly? Well, they wouldn't have had a TV series of the same kind, would they? So we can make ourselves rich, yet have nothing in the sense that it does not change us. The accumulation of material goods or any other kind of affluence does not change us.

Whereas we treat ourselves as poor. We need to know that we are poor and miserable and blind and naked and be looking to the Lord who provides this wise instruction that gets in our hearts, can be the fruit of our lips, can affect the way we are motivated to be diligent and not lazy, and to be careful with righteousness versus wickedness. Do we walk with a blameless way, as in verse 6? Or are we overthrown by wickedness? That's the defining feature.

This is in spiritual terms. What does this presence of wisdom do? Do we take advantage of it or not? If we do, then we can make ourselves rich, and yet we're like those who have nothing. What do you have that you did not receive? It's a stewardship.

It has been entrusted to our care. It is required of a steward that a man be found faithful. God has put this under my care for the time being, but I'm as poor as I ever was.

This is God's stuff. What would he have me do with it? And there's one who makes himself poor, yet has great riches. And you can take these things that God has placed in stewardship and disperse them and make yourself poor, but you have great riches.

Jesus talked about this. The wise, you know, the crafty steward that before he left his master's employ, he brought in the creditors and cut all of their bills in half, and he said, make for yourselves friends so that they may invite you into the eternal realms later. You know, use your mammon for good and use it for benefit if you're looking ahead.

The steward was wise in that he was looking ahead after his stewardship for the current master ends. And it's looking past the end of this life. You know, look to the benefit of others with whatever you have, what power and what influence you have, what resources you have.

Look to the good of others so that you will be well thought of. And the master commended his steward for his forethought. And they say, well, but wasn't this cheating to cut these bills in half? And we talked about that when we covered that parable.

You know, there are ways to understand that. But the idea is look ahead. And even if you've accumulated stuff, you can make yourself poor, and yet you have great riches.

Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, not treasure on earth, where moth and rust corrupt, thieves break in and steal. And this is the Old Testament equivalent of those

New Testament expressions of this truth. And we should never be blinded by material goods.

Treat ourselves as poor, make ourselves poor in the material sense, in the interest of others, we will have great riches. And then when you get to verse 8, the ransom of a man's life is his riches. And I don't think this is talking about, well, a rich guy can pay people off and survive, but a poor guy, you know, nobody even bothers because, and the rebuke is basically a request for some kind of blackmail.

Me personally, I don't think that catches it. I think this ties to the previous verse. The ransom of a man's life is his riches.

In other words, what is the value of your life? Whatever you have, whatever you accumulate, the way you treat that, that's the ransom of your life. You're vindicating your life. You are justifying your life.

You are building worth into your life because you're sending this riches out. You send the riches away and it is as though you redeemed your life for blood guiltiness or for a sin or for some other thing. Look at it as though my life is more than material goods.

I can send these out like I was paying a ransom and I'm redeeming my life. My life is worthwhile because I'm outward looking. I'm looking on how I can benefit others with whatever it is I accumulate.

I treat it as a stewardship from God. How many exhortations do we have in the Old Testament Scriptures to look out for the poor and the widow and the orphan and to be sure that you leave the corners of the fields ungleaned and so on? Use what you have to benefit others. You are redeeming your life when you so do.

So the ransom of a man's life, that's his riches. Whatever you have, great or small, do you use it for the benefit of others or do you use it for self-gratification? The poor does not hear rebuke. How does this tie in? Well, cross-pollinate these lines to recognize that I'm being selfish and self-gratifying with what I have instead of looking around to see if there's someone that I can benefit.

If a rebuke comes, such as this passage from the wisdom of God, take in his instruction, be changed by it, speak differently, act differently, be motivated differently, use your resources differently. If you have something, you're going to be outward looking. This is the love one another idea because you recognize and appreciate God and love Him.

So the ransom of a man's life is his riches. I'm going to look for ways to be beneficial with whatever I have. It could be my time, my abilities, my resources, my attention, my whatever I've got.

I am ready always to be of service and to try to be a blessing with whatever quote-

unquote riches I have, whatever I've got a super abundance of, that I've met my immediate responsibilities to my family, and I've got a surplus. Who can I help with this? Whatever it may be. And when I expend that, when I send it out beyond myself, I'm ransoming my life.

The poor does not hear rebuke. I don't have anything for you. It's Corban.

I need what I have for myself. I don't have enough to share with you. I'm poor.

However rich someone may be, I don't have any for you. And they do not hear rebuke that it ought to be different. The correction and the instruction that would come from God's wisdom doesn't get any traction.

And rebuke would cause you to look at whatever you have and not say I'm poor, but say I'm rich and I can share. And all of this, by the way, to counter some misapplication of this by many in the progressive and deconstruct movement is this is within the realm of believers. We have no obligation outside of Israel or outside of the realm of believers to dispense charity, to those who are outside the fold.

All of these exhortations were within Israel. There was no charity that God ever commanded the Israelites to express toward the Moabites, the Edomites, or any of the other ites that surrounded them. All of these were widows, orphans, and even strangers in the land.

And the one and others in the New Testament are in the fellowship. Why? Because it is the giving and the receiving that both can be blessed by the Holy Spirit. If you target an unbeliever for random acts of charity, they can't understand it.

They can't figure it out because they're outside the fold. God deals with them through his Holy Spirit. And the truth is out there.

The Spirit is out there. But when it comes to one another's, and this is why the current emphasis in mainstream Christianity is you should be kind to everybody. You should be sending as much as you can to anybody that's oppressed anywhere in the world.

Their victimhood is virtue. Their oppression automatically qualifies them for every form of Christian charity. And it's wrong.

And they will quote Jesus saying, if you've done it for the least of these, you have done it to me, and that the image of God is in everyone, and they specifically pull that quote out of context because the other two times Jesus says that, he says, if you have done it to the least of these, my brethren, you have done it to me. The least of these, my brethren. The one another's are in the brethren context, not any old unbeliever.

And unless and until we see signs of seeking and of questioning and of looking for God,

now we are free to try to open those gates and let God's love and grace shine through us to people. But people that aren't asking, people that aren't interested, you are misusing. It is bad stewardship.

It is a deceit and a falsehood to take what God has given us, whatever we've got, and to expend it on those who spit on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, who care nothing for God, nothing for Christ, nothing for you as a believer, and will turn like swine and tear you to pieces despite the fact that you are throwing them pearls. Whether it is material pearls or the pearls of God's word, they will turn and tear you to pieces and the command is not for them. This idea of ransom is in Israel.

And the idea of charity and the one another's is these, my brethren. These little ones, suffer the little ones to come unto me. Those were not Canaanite children.

Those were not Roman children. They were Israel. Suffer these little ones to come unto me.

Of such is the kingdom. The kingdom is those who are seeking, those who are accepting, those who are making progress as this passage exhorts. So we have to be aware of what God is and is not saying when it comes to charity, when it comes to expressions of love through resources of whatever kind.

We have to be wise about this. So, and the poor does not hear rebuke and we need to hear rebuke. It is the scoffer that does not listen to rebuke.

So this person that's poor is in the same category as the scoffer of verse one. And it helps understand the verse. Poverty is never viewed in the Bible as somebody that's poor just because they have poor ways.

Let me read you something from an article. None of the occurrences of Rosh, which is the word for the poor, none of these occurrences in Proverbs speaks of a poverty that is deserved. Several speak in quite different and positive terms of Rosh.

His poverty may be accompanied by moral integrity superior to that of the rich. And you see this in chapter 19, verse one, better is the poor who walks in his integrity than one who is perverse in his lips and is a fool. That is harmonious with our passage.

Verse 22, Proverbs 19, 22. What is desired in a man is kindness and a poor man is better than a liar. Proverbs 28, verse six, better is the poor who walks in his integrity than one perverse in his ways, even though he be rich.

And so poverty in and of itself is neither a commendation or a condemnation. We neither condemn nor commend based on poverty. But there are people today who look at the poor and automatically they must be loved, they must be helped.

Poverty is not a condition in and of itself for anything. You have to look beyond that to the heart. Are they walking in integrity or are they perverse and wicked? That is the criterion.

The Lord himself created both the poor and the rich. Proverbs 22, two. The rich and the poor have this in common.

The Lord is the maker of them all. And verse 13 of chapter 29, Proverbs 29, 13. The poor man and the oppressor have this in common.

The Lord gives light to the eyes of both. The rain falls on the just and the unjust, on the rich and on the poor. These conditions are not automatic qualifications or disqualifications.

And you can't just say, oh, he's poor, I will help him. We have to do the same thing the Lord does. And that is to discern.

So listening to rebuke goes right back to verse one. A scoffer does not listen to rebuke. The poor does not hear rebuke.

And so what kind of poverty is this? There are all kinds of materially poor people who will or will not listen. This has to be spiritual poverty. Thus the riches in verse eight are also spiritual.

And so the ransom of a man's life is his riches. And so the great riches of verse seven are treasure in heaven and wealth in God's eyes and by God's assignment. So these all have to be read in context.

And this is why we understand that Proverbs is not just a pastiche. So again, what is the bottom line? We need to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves. And that pertains to the wisdom that introduces this chapter.

The instruction of God rebukes us and we need to listen to it. That will change our heart. It will change our speech.

It will change our motivations of diligent or lazy. It will change our stewardship of whether we have great riches in the material world or whether we have great riches on God's scorecard or whether we are poor in this world or poor in God's eyes. Poor, miserable, blind and naked, a la Revelation chapter three.

So in other words, by the time you get to verse nine here, the light of the righteous rejoices, but the lamp of the wicked will be put out. And so now we have this transferred into ethical and spiritual terms. What kind of riches and poverty is in view here? It's not just the material situation or the bank account.

Is there light from righteousness or is there an extinguished lamp from wickedness? And

the poverty and the scoffing all tie together. So these Proverbs condition and inform and provide context for each other. And when they seem inscrutable, excising them, that's a good clue that we should not excise them and we shouldn't separate them and we shouldn't look at them in isolation.

We look at them in context and then they begin to make sense. Ah, this is a particular kind of poor. This is a particular kind of rich.

This is a particular kind of diligence and a particular kind of laziness. This is a particular kind of lying and a particular kind of indignity and shame. They're all of a piece.

They're in the same fabric and these are facets and aspects. And you come to verse 10 in the same section. Now, by pride comes nothing but strife, but with the well-advised is wisdom.

With the well-advised is wisdom. And we'll look at this more next time. But once again, you have an attitude of wisdom.

So in verse nine, your spiritual wealth or your spiritual poverty are described and it's an elaboration of the preceding verse in verse eight. Verse 10 is going to talk about whether or not we heed this rebuke that's introduced in verse one and is mentioned again in verse eight. So if you're proud, when negative feedback comes, all you get is strife.

You get pushback. You get animosity and division and hateful speech and so on, strife. But with the well-advised, who is someone who is well-advised? Someone who heeds rebuke and doesn't push it away, who takes a breath and says, could this be true? Maybe I ought to not immediately assume that as my dad used to say, imagining a formation of Marines, they're all out of step but me.

I'm the only one hearing the proper drum. Everybody else is out of step. There are times when you say, maybe it's me.

There is an abbreviation, which I will let you look up on your own time if you don't already know what it means. But people will introduce a question by saying A-I-T-A if I do this or I don't do that, A-I-T-A. And to modify it a bit, am I the bad guy if I do this or I don't do that, A-I-T-A.

And we need to ask ourselves from time to time, you know, I need to consider the possibility that I'm the bad guy here. My knee-jerk assumption, and most of us as humans is, no, no, no, it's not me. It's that person.

If this situation has gone pear-shaped, well, there's blame I can spread in any number of directions instead of looking to see if maybe I've got a board in my eye. A-I-T-A, I need to consider that honestly and humbly. If I am proud, I will dismiss that out of hand.

I am never the A. It's somebody else. Pride, you don't heed rebuke. You scoff at rebuke.

And there's nothing but strife. With the well-advised, wisdom can penetrate. Humility allows it through the door to do its redemptive, cleansing, transforming work on the inside that will affect my speech, my motivations, my actions, and my stewardship.

That progress through this chapter, the more you think about it, the clearer it gets. And this is an exhortation. Okay, if I say, sure, I'm gonna be a wise son.

I'm gonna heed instruction. Well, how does that work out in practical terms? It spells it out here. Listen to the fruit of your lips.

Is it edifying? Is it nourishing? Do you get fed first and other people benefit as well? Is it a cornucopia? Is it a horn of plenty that this wisdom has come in and anybody that gets around me, what comes out of my mouth, everybody's benefited. Everybody is edified. Everybody is built up or not.

If we guard the mouth, we're preserving our life. And by extension, this is why people that are trained in rescue swimming are trained. You have got to ensure your own flotation and your own breathing first.

If you dive in to save somebody as a lifeguard or a rescue swimmer, your top priority is you don't drown. Don't let the person tackle you and take you both down. Your life has to come first so that you can help others.

You've got to preserve your life so that you can be a blessing and a benefit and a life preserver for others. So he who guards his mouth preserves his life. He who opens wide his lips, this is kind of like drowning.

This is I've got to open wide because I'm opening my lips not to be a benefit to others, but I want ultimately to be gratified from within. I want something to come into my mouth when I open it. And you can think about that parallel I mentioned in the first session.

Is this opening taking place for intake or for productive exhale, productive benefit and life to yourself and others? Or are you opening because you want something to come in? And that affects then motivation. Are you lazy or are you diligent? You can say, oh, I wish it was a different way, but you never get beyond the wishing phase. Or are you going to become rich? And these riches occur over and over again.

The soul of the diligent becomes rich. It is these riches that you can share. It's these riches you can use to ransom life.

You see the continuity. If we don't get anything else out of these evenings, looking at Proverbs, when you come to these and recognize as we've said so many times, it's not a

random patchwork. They cohere.

They are intentionally aligned. There are so many word connections here. Look at soul.

Look at riches. Look at righteous and wicked. Look at words related to speech, the mouth, the lips, and all of it ties back to the effect of wisdom or scoffing at what that wisdom does because wisdom always rebukes us.

We only progress by correction because we start out inherently corrupt and sinful. In me dwells no good thing, Paul says in Romans vicinity of chapter seven, right? I know that in me dwelleth no good thing. So any step of progress we make comes by way of rebuke from wisdom, rebuke from instruction, rebuke from the word of God.

And at the point that we start mocking and scoffing and pushing away and not listening to rebuke and assuming it can't be me, you know, I, whatever, I am not the A in this situation. That's trouble. That's trouble.

We have to have the humility. Pride breeds nothing but strife with the well-advised. If you're well-advised, what happened? Somebody said that's not the way, do it this way.

Here's a correction to the way you're doing it. I could tell you a funny story about tying shoes. I'm so grateful.

My dad taught me to tie my shoes and he taught me so that you tie a knot and it stays. If you don't learn that and you tie a granny knot, your shoes never stay tied. The knot doesn't bind against itself.

And so, you know, people that grow up that way always end up taking the loops and tying them in a second granny knot, hoping that the two grannies will somehow bind enough so that your shoes don't come untied. And, you know, if you don't recognize that there is a right way and a wrong way to tie a shoe, you're going to live with this unhappy outcome and try to band-aid it forever. There is a right and a wrong and, you know, it has consequences.

So this is what the Word of God does for us. It doesn't matter how you tie your shoes. But it does matter whether or not we heed spiritual rebuke and detect in ourselves the arrogance that mocks it and that substitutes strife for repentance.

I'll shoot the messenger. I'll dismiss the content of the rebuke. That doesn't apply to me.

I'm not the problem here. I'll find some other way to scapegoat it. And that brings us to verse 11, which we'll do next time.

But I hope in some inadequate but understandable way, I've been able to impress on all of us that Proverbs is a fabric. It's not a collection of shiny marbles. It's a fabric.

And to understand them and to get the benefit of them and to be rebuked and corrected and instructed by them, we have to take them as a whole. We have to let them inform each other and recognize that this is not material riches or material poverty. We know that because we're in the realm of instruction and wisdom and motivation and righteousness and wickedness and light of righteousness and the dim lamp of the wicked.

They've only got a lamp. The light of righteousness is a light sourced in God. You don't need a lamp for that.

That light comes from God. The wicked are trying to keep their lamp going. And lamps inevitably run out of oil.

You run out of wick, they break. The wind blows it out. There's a reason why the light of the righteous isn't just a mere lamp in this context.

It's a lamp that's going to be put out. Well, then what are you going to do? So they cohere. And in your own personal reading of the Proverbs, look for these connections.

Even in English, you will see riches, riches, riches. You will see truth and deceit. You will see these connections, the soul, the soul, the soul.

And when you see those, let those Proverbs illuminate and enlighten and define and limit the meaning of these others so that they don't end up being inscrutable and random and fairly useless for application. Weaving them together. And it's such a wonderful and fruitful study.

And when you do it prayerfully, God blesses the investigation and you'll see it. And then let it get through the doors. Be humble enough to say, okay, how should I then live? This is some of the most valuable scripture in the entire Bible and it's Old Testament.

Who would have thought? But there's a reason that Proverbs 2 says what it says. We've memorized it. My son, if you will receive my words and hide my commandments with thee, and you remember the rest of it, then you will understand the fear of the Lord.

Then you will find the knowledge of God. The Lord will give wisdom. Out of his mouth comes this knowledge and understanding.

That's what this is. The rest of this book is introduced by chapter one and chapter two. And it's an open-handed plea to listen and to not let pride trip us up and cause us to misunderstand and underestimate what the true riches are, what true poverty ought to be and the benefit that we can be in this world if we're properly aligned in God's plans and purposes.

Well, we'll pick up here. It's really interesting to conclude this chapter and we'll try to do

it next time. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you that we are not left to figure out our faith and our life on our own. You have provided advice. You have provided wisdom and instruction.

You have given us copious precepts and commands and exhortations and your word that is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. And we pray that as we reflect on what we see in this particular chapter that God the Holy Spirit will help us to see its pertinence and application in our own circumstances. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.