

Proverbs 23-12-20b

Our study continues in Proverbs chapter 13, where we've looked at this wonderful set of encouragements in verses seven and eight, viewing both the material and immaterial world in the proper perspective, keeping our priorities straight, keeping our goals aligned with God's plans and purposes, so that we work to accumulate treasure in heaven and not treasure on earth. We pick up now in verse nine, the light of the righteous rejoices, but the lamp of the wicked will be put out. By pride comes nothing but strife, but with the well-advised is wisdom.

Wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished, but he who gathers by labor will increase. We're just gonna look at these three verses for now, because this will take all of our time, I think. We've already seen this idea of the light of the righteous and the lamp of the wicked.

It is, first thing to note here is, there is a difference in a lamp and a light. The first thing that comes to my mind is our memory verse, Psalm 119, 105. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.

And a lamp isn't actually a light by itself. Lamp hosts the fuel and the wick, but the lamp doesn't itself glow. It's not like a light bulb.

In the ancient world, you think of the clay lamps. And you can say, well, this is a monotony of the adjunct. If you have a lamp and it's lit, it is a light.

And that is true. But the Bible is always very careful with its language and specific. And so let's just think about 105 of Psalm 119.

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. A lamp is a vessel that enables you to have light. It's pretty difficult to carry light around if you don't have a lamp, but it is local.

It's near. It is something that you can touch and hold in your hand. And God's word is a lamp for our feet, which are also attached to us.

And so you get the picture in your mind of someone who is carrying, probably slightly aloft, a lamp, and that helps to know in the dark where to place your feet. And you're concerned about not stumbling, not stepping on something, not departing from a path, but it has to do with the mechanics of your walk, of your travel, of your traverse. And so the lamp speaks of the physical means.

So what is the physical means by which we obtain God's word? Well, where does it come? God has ordained that there be apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers. There are elders in a church. There are overseers.

And the purpose of the assembly is, they used to tell us in seminary that the acronym for what should happen in a church is WIFE, thinking of the bride of Christ idea, and that it's W-I-F-E, worship, instruction, fellowship, and evangelism. And you can take each of those in place, but worship and instruction, this is where fresh insight into the word of God can be had because there are those who labor in preaching and teaching. You go back to Acts chapter six and the mechanics of feeding the widows and such were getting in the way of the apostles laboring in the word and preparing the spiritual meals.

And so they said, we need to have deacons. And you have Stephen and Philip and Nicanor and these other guys who were detailed to do the deacon work, the physical handling of the assembly. And that's kind of the lamp.

And so when it is time for us to assemble, or if we set aside time for devotions and we have a book, you've got any number of devotionals that you can access, whether they are podcast type of things. Dr. Criswell has a daily devotional. You've got streams in the desert.

You have our daily bread. There's just any number of things that will offer a spiritual thought. The Bible, you version, I think, that I have on my phone sends a verse of the day that you can think about and find helpful comments from.

And this is a mechanical way to get our mind on our spiritual identity and recover and emphasize our spiritual priorities. And that's a lamp. But if we substitute the lamp for the light, and I think many of us have been exposed in the past to churches that people would just go, and well, I attended Bible class, or I heard a tape, or I listened to something.

And therefore I'm spiritual. And you can get so enamored with the lamp and so sure that you're doing the right thing because the lamp is in your hand that you can lose sight of the light. And these things are to be the means of delivering the word of God into our soul.

That's what has to flame. That's what imparts the power. A lamp by itself is nothing.

If it doesn't have the oil, if it doesn't have the Holy Spirit, so to speak, and the life-giving, light-bearing power of God has to be there. So you can do church attendance. You can go through the motions of all kinds of things.

We can go through the motions of prayer. We can go through the motions of all kinds of Christian activities. But where is the light? Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

And those things have to go together. We need the lamp, can't carry flame in your hand, but that lamp has to be lit. And it has to be providing light that enables us to place our feet on that good path, the path to light, not be in the darkness.

If we dwell in darkness spiritually in this life, we are gonna be in the outer darkness in the life to come. Goes along with the idea of where is your treasure? So the light of the righteous rejoices. And there's a slight emendation here that you just revocalize this word, and it means gives joy.

The light of the righteous gives joy. You have to kind of personify light and say that the light itself is rejoicing. And we don't really have many examples of personification in this section of Proverbs.

And I think the revocalization is probably correct. There are several little wrinkles in this section of Proverbs text-wise. And I think this is one of them.

I have a note that this is the light of the righteous causes rejoicing or gives joy. It's just a slightly different way of reading the Hebrew word. And this is where genuine peace, genuine happiness, the fruit of the spirit, what comes right after love? Joy.

I'm having a good time. I may be enduring hardship. We all have people in our periphery that we know are suffering under various afflictions, but you can't quench that joy.

They're just unsinkable in that regard. They're indefatigable when it comes to recognizing what the positive elements are in their life. And we should all be this way.

And those of us that aren't that way by nature really struggle, but this is where the power of God comes in. That comes from God's word and God's spirit and the fruit of the spirit, not the fruit of trying real hard or the fruit of sincerity or the fruit of wishing or the fruit of hoping or the fruit of self-analysis. It's a fruit of the spirit.

And so rather than trying to cultivate joy directly, we cultivate the presence of the spirit. Spirit speaks to us and energizes us, cleanses our soul and orients us attitude-wise, purpose-wise, perspective-wise through the word of God. And we have to set aside time to give him an audience and let him speak to us the wisdom that comes from scripture.

There's no substitute for quiet time. It's only quiet in the sense that we've shut the world off and shut our worries and fears and concerns off and give space. You know, if you had a wonderful financial advisor, I've been thinking about financial things, you know, what do you do if you've got a little bit of retirement set aside from days gone by and you know, should you invest it here, invest it there? Many of the organizations with whom I have an association, whether it's the Navy Federal Credit Union or USAA or three or four other entities, they've got advisors on standby that you can talk with and they'll tell you, well, given your age and your resources such as they are and your situation, you know, here's what you ought to do.

But I've not given them any time. I haven't talked to any of them. I haven't talked to NFCU.

I haven't talked to USAA. I haven't called them up. I haven't said, hey, here's my situation.

Give me some advice. Well, for all of their wisdom and all of their experience and all of their availability, if I don't give them space to talk to me, it is of no avail. It is as though they don't exist.

And the same is true of the wisdom that comes from God through His Holy Spirit. If we say, where's the wisdom? I don't see the traction that the Word of God has in my life. Well, we're never going to see it on our own.

We have to stop. We have to set aside quality time to ruminate, to meditate, to reflect, to think about what we've learned from the Word of God and prayerfully, humbly, and giving time, let that soak in. You remember the seed of the Word in the parable of the soils that we talked about in the first session, where the cares of this world choked the seed and rendered unfruitful? How fast does wheat grow? It doesn't spring up in a night.

You plant the seed and it takes time. It takes watering. It takes cultivation.

It takes weeding. And keeping varmints out. Anybody that lives in the country who wants to grow a garden knows that you've got deer, you've got raccoons, you've got squirrels, you've got possums, you've got, what are these, armadillos? I keep wanting to call them aardvarks.

They're armadillos. And no end of other little stray animals and bugs and birds that want to come in and eat the produce. And you've got, if you're going to cultivate something good, you've got to take time to protect it from attack.

You've got to harvest it when it is ready. You have to prepare it and present it and consume it properly. That's when food that is grown from the soil creates benefit.

And it's in our context. These ideas are coming up here in the next couple of verses. So the light of the righteous, that light, the lamp and the light of God's word, this wisdom, creates joy.

If we want genuine contentment, genuine peace, genuine appreciation, as I quoted an old pastor from days gone by, capacity for life, capacity for love, capacity for happiness. Second to the top floor of the edification complex, for those of you that remember, capacity, a bigger cup that God can pour into that will run over like Psalm 23. That's something we have to consciously set the table for, something we have to consciously pursue.

The lamp of the wicked will be put out. The light, the great thing is a lamp is made out of clay. It's earthly, it's temporal.

And the lamp for my feet and my earthly walk, that's time-bound, that's for now. But the light, God's light is eternal. God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

Jesus is the light of the world, John one. And that light transcends this earthly life. We have to use lamps now, but the lamb is the light in the kingdom age to come.

The kingdom of the father. So light is our goal. We want to make use of the lamp now, and we've got a small flame going of light.

We see through a glass darkly. We see, we have vision darkly, not a whole lot of light, not as much light as there's going to be in the future ages. So we want to build into that with our conscious purposefulness when it comes to gaining and applying wisdom.

That's verse nine. Verse 10, by pride comes nothing but strife, but with the well-advised is wisdom. By pride comes nothing but strife.

And this, the combination, and I'm not going to go into the Hebrew, but the word pride and the word nothing comes nothing but strife is probably a textual wrinkle again. This is another letter R and it's been vocalized with one vowel and without changing the consonants of the text at all, but understanding that this has a different vowel under it. It's an E instead of an A basically.

You end up with a word in, long story short, I like the way Robert Alter has translated this in his version of verse 10. The empty man in arrogance foments strife. I think this is right.

Everett Fox, Robert Alter, other really erudite Hebrew scholars feel like this is the better way to understand the text. So the empty man in arrogance foments strife. The word for strife here is really interesting because you have heard this word.

This is matzah. Remember all of the emphasis on Passover and atonement and redemption? Yom Kippur, Gula, redemption. Well, what kind of bread do they eat at Passover? What do Jews call it? It's matzah bread, matzah bread.

And it comes from this same root. And it is called in the word of God. I think it's in Deuteronomy 16.

It's called the matzah, the bread of affliction. It is the Lecham Oni, Oni. You recognize that word? Ben-Yamin, that was Jacob's name for his youngest son.

What was his mother Rachel's name for him? Ben-Oni, son of pain, son of my pain. Well, this is matzah. Matzah is the bread of Oni, the bread of pain, the bread of affliction.

And it is a reminder of the hardship in Egypt from which they were being delivered. And if you see that bread, you get a picture of it. It's all perforated.

It's full of holes. It's been punctured. You know how crackers have those little punctures in? Well, look at a piece of matzah bread.

It's that on steroids. It's got dozens and dozens of holes in it. It's unleavened bread and it's bread of affliction.

It's perforated. It's been pierced through many, many times. Pierced through with sorrows, pierced through with losses, pierced through with pain, matzah.

So what is this verse telling us? Not just by pride, although pride is involved, but the empty man in arrogance. This is one who is poor. He's made himself rich perhaps, but he actually has nothing.

He is empty of wisdom. He is empty of divine treasure, of spiritual wisdom. He's empty.

And what does he do? He creates, he foments, he brings about matzah. Pierces himself through, pierces others through with sorrow, with pain, with hardship, with strife. And without this wisdom, we're not only going to lack the joy of the Lord in the previous verse, the light of the Lord, the lamp for our feet and the light for our path.

We're going to have that guttering lamp. I can read you Alter's translation of the preceding verse. The light of the righteous shines, but the lamp of the wicked gutters.

That's a word you don't use much anymore, but candles and small flames, when they're just almost going out, they're sputtering and you get dark smoke and carbon going down your beautiful white candle, that's a guttering flame. The lamp of the wicked gutters. It just, it's an ugly, inconsistent light if there's light at all.

So the empty man in arrogance, matzah. That's what you get. But with those who take counsel is wisdom with the well-advised.

Once again, this is heeding counsel. You can read any number of accounts of recent presidents. I got a book by a guy who was an opponent of, he was up in the realms of government and had an audio book.

And I thought, oh, this might be interesting. And I got it to listen to during the George W. Bush administration from 2000 to 2008. And he had nothing but bad things to say about President Bush and his contention, true or otherwise, his constant railing, harping, consistent criticism in situation after situation after situation is that they would bring advice to Mr. Bush and he disregarded it.

I have heard similar things from people who left the Trump administration, that Mr. Trump was not one to consider advice and that the missteps in his administration were largely due to failing to heed wise political counsel or economic counsel or whatever else. Whether or not that's true, it is an example. And you can think about Mr. Obama's

administration.

And I am sure there are people that feel like he didn't heed good counsel during his eight years. And the current administration. I am sure that there is no end of counsel being given about various crises at home and abroad that is being disregarded because there is an agenda.

There is a view of what ought to happen. And we get a hold of that. We get that particular bit in our teeth and we don't wanna hear other sides.

We don't wanna hear other views. Why is that? Well, it is a manifestation of arrogance to not listen, to not be a good listener. One of the things that wisdom teaches is just listen.

Don't reject out of hand. When somebody is trying to tell you something, maybe they've got something to tell you. And I speak from experience.

I have no end of problem with this. There is a way that seemeth right to a man. The ends thereof are the ways of death.

All kinds of death. Professional death, relationship death, social death, economic death. As I've told you before, an early evaluation of mine when I was still a midshipman was, Mr. Hall seems too sure of too many things.

Will that certainty become a limitation? And when that certainty gets in the way of humility and listening, it absolutely is a limitation. And your lamp gutters. And in arrogance, all you do is pierce yourself and others through with a lot of holes.

It is hard to imagine a case where humility sends you wrong. God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. And even if I'm wrong in my humility, my humility is going to make me easily correctable.

Where if I'm arrogant and if I'm proud, no, no, no, no, that's not right. We proceed down that path to our own sorrow, I can attest. So with the well-advised is wisdom.

The wisdom doesn't do you any good unless you listen to it, unless you heed the counsel. So this, we're back to the lamp. I'm going to Bible class all the time, but I'm not really listening and I'm not taking on board what I heard.

I got a lamp, but I'm not getting a light. I'm handing the lamp to somebody else and saying, boy, you could really use this. You know, this will help you.

Because I can see that you're walking down a bad path and we're not using it for our own feet and our own path. And all of us fall victim to this at some time or another, and to some extent or another. So that brings us now to verse 11.

Wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished, but he who gathers by labor will

increase. You're going to be amazed at what this verse actually says, because this isn't it. And maybe this is one of the reasons we really have to come to Bible class for somebody who can spend the time to straighten out.

You know, in some cases, we're two and three levels removed from what was originally written. It's been translated or transliterated from the old Hebrew text into Aramaic letters. That Aramaic has then been translated into English.

And sometimes things just go awry. The word translated dishonesty here, you know what this word is? You know this word. If you were with us for the Ecclesiastes study, what is the word that's repeated over and over again in chapter one? Translated vanity, hevel, H-E-B-E-L.

That's the word here. And it's got an M in front of it. So you say from, M means of or from.

So from vanity, from hevel is how this starts. Wealth from hevel. The word for wealth is perfectly good, but wealth from hevel.

Well, here's what happened. I sound like Mr. Monk. Here's what happened.

The H and the B got reversed. And again, there's widespread assent by Hebrew scholars that these two letters got switched. So instead of M-H-B-L, this should be M-B-H-L, M-B-H-L.

And what this ends up being is, and long story short, just cross out dishonesty and put haste, haste. Hastiness, from hastiness. And this comports very well with the second line.

He who gathers, it says by labor. This is literally by hand. You're assembling it by hand.

I tell people when they're asking me questions about their pianos, that one of the reasons, you know, it's such a tragedy to me that you can buy a piano for 150 or \$200. And the entire thing was assembled by hand. The action parts were assembled and adjusted all by hand.

You think about the hundreds of man hours that go into assembling a fine piano, the felt, the strings, everything done by hand, the adjustments of it, the refinements of it, the regulation of the action, so that the aftertouch and the dip and the drop and all of these measurements of really fine piano, it's all done by hand and it takes time. Remember what we were talking about earlier? If you're going to benefit from God's wisdom, if the Holy Spirit is going to speak and turn it from a flame on the lamp into a light on the path, it takes time. What is wealth in this context? It's not, oh, if you assemble dishonest gain, it's going to diminish.

That's what the first line says. Wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished. Oh, if you cheat, you're not going to keep those dollars very long.

You're not going to keep that mansion and that car. And you can look at all of these guys that have famously made themselves fabulously wealthy, but they were dishonest in how they did it. And there's people who went to prison and this guy recently that fabricated wealth out of nothing and now he's in jail.

That's not what this is talking about. What is wealth in this context? All the way through, what is this? What is real wealth? And this is a two-edged sword because it is true that if you accumulate your wealth hastily and you're not careful and you don't build it on a solid foundation, your material wealth, it can quickly diminish. If you go out and invest in a bunch of stocks and for the moment they're up, but then some of those companies crash or go bankrupt or lose their market or whatever, it can overnight your wealth on paper can fluctuate by tens of thousands of dollars.

That is true, but the real truth of this is not investment wisdom. The real truth of this is spiritual wealth. If you say, okay, I understand I need this spiritual wisdom.

I need to listen to counsel, but you do it in haste, it's kind of slapdash. Oh, okay, so what kind of a rule can I make myself out of this? I'll just, I'll schedule myself for five minutes of devotions every morning and I'll pray because evening and morning and at noon I should pray and I want that lamp shining. So I'm just gonna, and you don't put your heart in it.

How should it be done? He who gathers by hand, remember line upon line, line upon line, precept upon precept, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little. You can't rush to the finish line. You can't take God's wisdom and can it and bottle it and set it on the shelf and just crack it open like a Pepsi and guzzle it down when you think you need it.

This verse is saying it takes time. You've got to invest the time. If you do it in haste, you'll have it momentarily, but it quickly diminishes.

It doesn't stick with us. It doesn't become habitual. It doesn't become pattern living.

I do it and it's a flash in the pan. I've got light for the moment. Remember how they used to put the black powder in a tray and when they were gonna take a picture and they'd light it and take a flash picture.

Everybody holds still now, that's momentary light, but it quickly diminishes and that's what this word means. Wealth gained in haste, hasty wealth, hasty spiritual insight. I see it today, it makes sense to me now, but it doesn't stick with me.

I don't go back and review it. I don't incorporate it into the fabric and the foundation of

my thinking, my perspective. I don't really adjust my goals and values and priorities.

It's wonderful in the moment. It's a great flash of light and it leaves a little green spot in the middle of my vision for a few hours or a few days, but I was hasty. I didn't value it.

I didn't make that an enduring flame in my soul. If you gather by hand, I'm gonna take this like a brick and I'm gonna build a straight course of bricks with my hands in the word of truth. The workman that needs not to be ashamed, that's how he does it, brick by brick, by hand.

I'm gonna take this and I'm gonna build something with it. I'm gonna make something lasting. It's gonna count.

It's gonna matter. It's going to persist. That's what verse 11 means.

So be sure you correct dishonesty. It's wealth of any kind, but for our purposes, the spiritual wealth that has been talked about earlier in the passage, the wise counsel, it's gonna last. It will diminish.

And these are things, there's a great verse in Jeremiah on this for diminishing. And it's Jeremiah 10, 24. Correct me, oh Lord, but with justice, not in your anger.

And when we ask the Lord to do this, this is something we should follow also. Offer correction, but not in anger. Boy, for those of us with anger issues, this is a brick in the face, but needful.

And something I don't want to have as a flash in the pan that I think about today and I forget about tomorrow and every day after. Jeremiah 10, 24, write it down. Correct me, oh Lord, but with justice, mishpat, but with justice, not in your anger.

Otherwise, it's the word pen, lest. Remember that? Seeing they see and do not perceive, hearing they hear and do not understand. The heart of this people has grown callous.

Turn you at my reproof otherwise, but it's the word pen, lest, in that context. Same word here, pen, lest, and then there's one word, and it's the very same root as we have in our passage. Lest you bring me to nothing, I diminish to insignificance.

This is our word, and it's to be or become small, to be few, to be diminished. It's maat, M-A-A-T, if you want to write it down in Hebrew. But it's God's correction when he does it in justice builds us up, improves us.

Instruction, rebuke, correction in righteousness. Whom the Lord loves, he chastens, scourges every son whom he receives. No discipline is great at the time, but it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

Correct me, O Lord, but with justice, not in your anger. And even the personification

there, in your anger, anger can so quickly become subjective. He doesn't say, correct me in your justice.

Justice is objective. You know, the blindfold across lady justice with the scales. Correct me in justice, objectively, impartially, fairly.

Correct me where I justly and rightly need it, not in your anger. And in praying this prayer, Jeremiah is also reminding us that God's model of correction should be our model of correction. We should do it fairly and justly, not in our anger, personalizing, becoming subjective.

Otherwise, the object of that correction is diminished, is shrunk to nothing. You bring me to nothing is the gloss, is the translation there, Jeremiah 10, 24. This is our word.

Wealth, insight, and spiritual wisdom is quickly diminished and comes to nothing if we assemble it in haste. It just won't last. The Holy Spirit can't bring it back to our mind because we didn't really internalize it.

But if we assemble it, if we gather it by hand, what happens? The opposite, edification, building up, laying up in heaven, treasure. The old phrase of the edification complex. However you want to understand that which is built in us that lasts and fadeth not away, reserved in heaven, this is it.

Isn't it amazing how the Old Testament scriptures like this one are so replete with the wisdom that informs not just time, but also eternity, prepares us not just for service and function now, but in the ages to come. Well, that's verses seven through 11 in our first and second sessions. We'll pick up here at this very interesting verse 12 next time we'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the light and the truth of your word. Thank you for the wisdom that imparts the permanence and the value that it can build in our souls and in our eternal future if we will but heed. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit will impress these on our hearts, help us to remember it and apply it in the days to come.

We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.