

Proverbs 24-10-02a

Greetings, welcome to Wednesday night at Grace & Truth Bible Church. We have a fascinating passage to look at here tonight in Proverbs chapter 14. I'm very excited to present it to you.

It took me a while to figure it out, but as always, when you spend enough time, God will generally bless us with insight and understanding, and this has unfolded like a beautiful flower and has been very helpful to me, and I hope it will be equally so for you. Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and study, and we will pick up in Proverbs 14, verse 25. Father, what a privilege to spend this time together to nourish and nurture our souls in fellowship and looking together at your word and seeking to understand it more fully and to implement it more energetically in our lives.

We thank you for the ever-present Holy Spirit and ask that you will bless us through him with insight, understanding, a grasp that is practical and enables us to live the life to which we have been called that reflects the glory of the Lord Jesus and is pleasing in your sight. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen. We have studied our way verse by verse all the way up to Proverbs 14, verse 24, looking at the crown of the wise, is there riches? And we know in Proverbs, riches is often almost a code word for the true riches, which is wisdom, wisdom, which is divine truth, knowledge and understanding of God's plan and purpose.

This is wealth. This is what you can take with you when you leave. This is a great kind of riches because it transcends time, it transcends this earthly reality.

It is conveyed with us at the resurrection, at the rapture, at the conclusion of this life and entrance into the next that goes with us. What a great thing to redeem the time, to invest it and to have something to carry forward. And I learned something new about verse 24 and I'll just briefly review this, but it does seem a bit repetitious, the second line of that.

Remember, it says the crown of the wise is their riches, but the foolishness of fools is folly. And you think, well, that's an awful lot of foolishness there in the second line, but there was a great Hebrew scholar from several generations back. He was a contemporary of, and even a potential husband of Lottie Moon.

His name was Crawford H. Toy. He was a Baptist seminary professor and he did wonderful work in Hebrew up to a certain point. And then he got squirrely ideas and kind of augured himself into the ground.

And Lottie Moon ended up not sharing her life with him and vice versa. And she went off to Asia to complete her work there. But there was a time when they were considering getting married and making a life together.

But despite his falling off his theological perch, Crawford Toy was a great Hebrew scholar. When he came to this verse, he noticed that with a very slight emendation, the Hebrew word for folly here becomes the word garland, as in the victor's crown, the garland that graces the head. We've seen it in previous verses in Proverbs, where remember early on when talking about wisdom, the father is telling his son, it will be a beautiful necklace.

It will be a great chain around your neck and it will be a graceful ornament to your head. The word translated graceful ornament is almost this word. They are so close that whether you think this has been mis-copied and was originally the word or not, it's so close that someone who speaks Hebrew in hearing this verse or reading it would immediately think of the other word.

And so it makes a nice parallel and it's a pun. It's a memorable, close approximation of the word. So when you read it that way, the crown of the wise is their riches, but the garland, the graceful ornament of the head of a fool is folly.

So the idea here is, do you want a crown of wisdom? And you think about the crowns that Jesus spoke of in the resurrection, the crowns that John saw on the heads of the 24 elders that were cast before the throne, the crowns that Paul speaks of, the crown of life, the crown of glory, and so on. And the Old Testament concept is similar. This is something that is permanent.

Your royal family, especially in this age, and being in Christ and being a royal priesthood, a royal priesthood, there is both royalty and priesthood because we are in Christ. So this idea that the crown, this is when you reach the pinnacle, when you are finally judged, will you receive a crown, which is the riches of wisdom and knowledge that you accumulate by paying attention to God's word and endeavoring to apply it and to carry it forward, to have it in the treasury of the soul, to guard it, to keep it, and as we've seen in 2 Timothy, to entrust it to others, to share it with family. If we're parents, we try to impress it on our children.

We try to live it in a way that is meaningful and visible. We're not trying to be models or examples, but it inevitably becomes a gospel witness as we pursue it before the Lord. So do we want to be characterized, to have the crown, the glorious ornament of the head that is God's wisdom, God's truth, God's knowledge, or is it our foolishness that is going to mark us out and we wear the dunce cap? This is sort of the either or, but this brings us now to verse 25.

And we have seen this beautiful symmetry. It's like a string of pearls where you have lead-in verses, you have a central idea, you have exit verses, and they illuminate, inform, explain, enhance, compliment their symmetrical partners. But I stopped at verse 24 because starting at verse 25, I did not see that symmetry.

And it has become a right foot, left foot, wonderful way to progress through this section of the Psalms and then all of a sudden it seemed to be broken. And I was scratching my head and I thought, well, just when you think you have it figured out and you can coast, you have to get busy and do more work. What I want to suggest, what appears to me and what has made a beautiful symmetry out of this is to notice that beginning at verse 25, we have a section here that is a wonderful chiasm, a beautiful, perfect chiasm that extends from verse 25 all the way down to chapter 15, verse three.

And once again, without seeing these symmetries, it's hard to know how many verses are enough for a chapter and then just start a new chapter. We saw this in 14, that chapter 14 really should have begun at its first three. Well, chapter 15 should have begun at verse four in my humble opinion.

And it's worth every penny you paid for it, but this is what I think. I think they should have, and I will show you why. You remember a chiasm, things on the outside and then they correspond in ever increasing Russian doll fashion.

There's something inside of something inside of something and there's inner and outer brackets. You can go A, B, C, D, E, and then you come back out, E prime, D prime, C prime, B prime, A prime and the A and the A prime connect and relate to each other in a meaningful way. Well, this chiasm has a wrapper.

There is a two verse introduction and there is a two verse conclusion. So if you have your trusty red Marine Corps number two pencil or something equivalent, many of you aren't privileged to have this particular pencil. If you don't, you should get one.

But if you start and circle verse 25 and verse 26, this is the threshold. This is where you enter into this wonderful, rather extended chiasm. Its compliment is going to be verses two and three of chapter 15.

So because of the way I was working and labeling things, I have already used the letters A through D. And so I just labeled these P and Q because those were conveniently not in use. So we're going to read this section and watch for the symmetry. Pay attention to the content first and foremost, but remember people in the ancient day were smarter than us.

They had wonderfully retentive memories because they had to have. It was developed in childhood. It was developed through the early learning phases.

Both young women and young men exercised their minds. They memorized scripture. They could listen to someone speak and retain the points and recall it and review it and communicate it to others.

They had to because they didn't have phones. They didn't have pads of paper and pencils. They, most of them weren't equipped with the kind of things that scribes used.

So their scratch pad, their notepad, their notebook was their mind. And by reason of use, their senses were exercised to imprint and remember and recall and repeat and rehearse to their family members what they had seen and what they had heard. And this is one of the reasons that so much of scripture began in oral form before it was set down.

So you don't need a text if you have that kind of mind. We are much more dependent on storing our information and our memories externally. So it's great that we have a written page and something to write on.

So we're going to start at verse 25 of Proverbs 14 and extend down through chapter 15, verse three. When you notice a term, a concept that has occurred before, you can just put a little mark with your number two pencil and you will begin to see this symmetry emerge. You can do this on your own.

I'm going to save you a lot of the trouble. Let's begin at verse 25. A true witness delivers souls, preserves lives, but a deceitful witness speaks lies.

In the fear of the Lord, there is strong confidence and his children will have a place of refuge. The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life to turn one away from the snares of death. In a multitude of people is a king's honor, but in the lack of people is the downfall of a prince.

He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive exalts folly. A sound heart is life to the body, but envy is rottenness to the bones. He who oppresses the poor reproaches his maker, but he who honors him has mercy on the needy.

The wicked is banished in his wickedness, but the righteous has a refuge in his death. Wisdom rests in the heart of him who has understanding, but what is in the heart of fools is made known, is revealed. Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.

The king's favor is toward a wise servant, but his wrath is against him who causes shame. A soft answer turns away wrath, but harsh word stirs up anger. Here's our outro.

The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness. The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good. This is the difficulty with Proverbs.

If you don't have a sense of the form or the pattern of these sound words, it's just sort of a string of aphorisms, and you quickly kind of dull over. You can't really stop and feel the impact and the wisdom and the inspiration, the inspired truth of these. Some of them sound tautological.

They sound like they're sort of obvious, shallow, repetitive, not very interesting, not very

helpful in terms of application. This is why observing the structure is so key to digging out the treasure that is here. So my encouragement is, if you've got something to write with there, or you can note it on a piece of paper or whatever, verses 25 and 26 correspond with verses two and three.

We'll see that. We're going to save that wrapper for last. We're going to proceed to verse 27, and actually down to 27 and 28.

Do you notice that 26 and 27 are unusual in that we haven't seen many allusions to the Lord or to the fear of the Lord in the preceding context. Once in a while, there is an allusion, but here we have two strong references to the Lord in a row, and this kind of marks out something special that is going to occur. Also, when you get to verse 28, this is the first royal reference in Proverbs.

It's really quite fascinating that we have two king sayings here, and this is the first of many that are going to be observable in this section of Proverbs. So the juxtaposition here of the Lord and the fear of the Lord and the king is going to become something that we see over and over again over the next many chapters of Proverbs. When you start talking about the king, very nearby, you have references to the Lord because the people are under the authority of the king.

The king is under the authority of the Lord. And so when you see royal proverbial sayings, nearby, you're going to find a reference to the Lord. Now, why do we care about that? We're not the king per se, but we are, as I mentioned, royal family.

And because we are in Christ, because as goes the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, so goes the believer in this age, we pay particular attention when God is speaking to the king because we don't have an intermediate monarchy. We don't have a prophetic element. These things have been combined, condensed, and we've been promoted into an environment where we have the Holy Spirit to be our prophet, and we have the Lord Jesus to function in that royal role.

Now, we have not yet entered into the kingdom. This is not, we're not kingdom people. We're not doing kingdom things.

And the Lord Jesus is never identified to the church as king, but he is head of all things to the church. He is pictured as having the same kind of love for the church that a husband has for a wife. And so where Israel would look to their divinely appointed rulership, we look to our divinely appointed rulership, which is Jesus Christ himself.

And there's nobody in between. There's no popes. There's no pastors.

There's no cardinals or bishops or priests. We have some authority in our families, in our marriages, in our nation. But when it comes to spiritual identity, we go straight to the Lord.

We go to the Father through the Son in the power of the Spirit. And there are no human beings otherwise implicated. The Lord Jesus is the way to the Father.

Nobody comes to the Father but by him. And we don't enter into the fullness of Jesus Christ without the power of God in our lives via the Spirit and the Word. Simple.

But when you come to Old Testament scripture and we want to observe, interpret, and apply, their structure was symbolic for us. It was meaningful as an illustration and as an example, as a paradigm. So we pay special attention when it talks about the king and the fear of the Lord.

So we begin here in verse 25, and we have a true witness delivers souls, but a deceitful witness speaks lies. There is so much. It is estimated that 20% of this section of Proverbs talks about speech, communication of a verbal nature, the tongue, the lips, the mouth, testifying, telling the truth, speaking lies.

This is a large emphasis. That means two verses out of every 10 in this part of Proverbs 10 through 25, roughly, is what we say, what we hear, what we do with what others say, human communication. And we sometimes forget to pay attention to the truth of what we hear, the truth of what we say, and to be diligent and careful to be people of truth, both in what we accept and what we express.

The truth. Jesus is the truth. We are his representatives on this earth.

His physical body left. We are now his physical body on the earth. If he is the truth, we need to be the truth.

We should be transparent. The light of the body is the eye. And if we are truthful, then internally and externally, there is no hypocrisy.

There is no dissembling. There is no deceit. There is no misleading.

We are people of truth. And it is sometimes lost on us that truth has a kind of power that we underestimate. Small areas of truth.

There is power in the truth because the truth that we live is divine truth. And to be honest, to be forthright, to speak the truth in love, in things large and small, it reminds me of small exercises when I was young and single and a Marine and had a priority of being in shape and being able to go and endure for 48 hours without sleep or longer. Working out becomes a part of your routine.

And you do sets of exercises that focus on muscles or muscle groups. So you do leg presses, you do abdominal work, you do work for your lower back and your glutes, and then you work your upper body and biceps, triceps, deltoids, and so on. And any one of these exercises, you think, well, that's kind of a small thing.

That's just one little muscle group. But the combination of working on small things gives you an overall fitness that has unseen benefits. You don't turn your ankle as readily.

You don't put your back out because you've got muscle tone and your joints are held in proper alignment by toned muscles and tight ligaments. And regular working out gives you good posture. It gives you great strength, but it's an accumulation of small efforts.

You do pushups, you do dips, and so on. And the cumulative effect is similar when it comes to our spiritual life. And if we exercise ourselves in small and seemingly insignificant truths, and we don't allow compromise, the problem with compromising on seemingly minor white lies or, well, I'll just omit my blame in this and we'll attribute it to accident or misfortune.

Instead of that was me, I messed up, and that's why this happened. There is a, you say, well, in this circumstance, what difference does it make if I'm brutally honest or if I just kind of leave off my part in this or what I know about it? There is a separate effect of living in the truth, speaking the truth, being of the truth, reflecting it, and being brutally truthful. There is a power that comes into our life similar to when we study the scriptures.

This scripture that we're looking at may not be immediately applicable or pertinent in our current circumstance, but the act of looking at it, praying through it, understanding it, looking for ways where it can make a difference, just that process, even if we don't go tomorrow and, oh, look, Proverbs 14.26. I've got an immediate application of this. The fact that it is cycling through our soul confers and transmits and energizes with divine power in our soul. Contact with the truth energizes us, strengthens us, enables the Holy Spirit to speak more clearly.

By the same token, when we make small compromises, we obviate, we dissemble, we deflect, we omit, that lack of truthfulness drains divine power out of us because God is a God of truth, and our dedication to the truth in things large and small has a direct effect on our spiritual health and wellbeing. If you want a way to step up the divine power that is expressed in life, in thought, in speech, in actions, focus on truthfulness. Dwell in the truth, reject what is false.

Don't spend a lot of time agonizing when you hear something that is not true. Identify that it's not true and whatsoever things are true, noble, good, lovely, of good report, think on these things. Shove out the false, convey in the true.

I cannot emphasize enough, and nor can scripture. So watch the very first verse here. A true witness delivers souls.

You think, well, but what if he's just truly witnessing that someone was walking off with Ahab's ox? Did you see this ox wander away on its own? No, I saw Ahab let it out of its

stall and lead it away. This is not a life and death situation, but a true witness, the truth that you live and that you speak and that you think is delivering life. It has an outsized effect.

A deceitful witness speaks lies. So there is a link here and you think, well, isn't that sort of a tautology? If you're a deceitful witness, of course you're going to speak lies. It sort of goes without saying.

So why does it say it? Well, it doesn't go without saying because notice the link between character. This is a person who is by nature deceitful. Notice witnesses in italics.

This is a deceitful one. This is someone who is deceitful in things large and small. They're practiced in it.

It's habitual. They do it without thinking. They will lie for no reason.

They will misrepresent without a cause. There's nothing on the line, but this kind of habit, this sort of easy coasting downhill has an effect. Now, when you speak, you are going to have an effect on others.

You can either deliver lives, deliver souls, be an agent of salvation, a means whereby people tap into the power of God for deliverance. Remember Paul in Romans 1 16, I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. It is the power of God for salvation, for deliverance.

The gospel, the good news, the truth, it's not just a ticket out of the lake of fire. Everything connected with the gospel of Jesus Christ, all of the truth about him, his words, his works, the plan and purpose of God that he embodies, the message that he entrusted to the apostles to transfer to us and to faithful men who can teach others also, that truth is deliverance. It's daily deliverance.

Paul talks about being delivered out of this present evil age. Do you want to be lifted above the political fray and the social upheaval and the international concerns and stresses and threats and dangers? Truth. The truth of God delivers souls.

And when we're concentrating on it, that's what's going to come out of our mouths. And it's going to be reflected in our lives. We will be people of truth.

If we are deceitful, even in small ways, we are inevitably going to communicate. We are going to speak. We're going to reflect that which is not true.

And therefore that which is not God or godly. And we will not do what we are here to do, which is represent Jesus Christ, who is the truth, the way and the life. We are either with the Lord or we're against him.

We can't be a fountain that puts forth both sweet water and bitter. So this is not a tautology at all. It is the link between character and effect that we have on others.

We can either be an agent of life or we can be in cahoots with the father of lies. Jesus said he was a liar from the beginning. He is a liar and the father of it.

Do you really want to bat for the other team? Do you want to be a traitor and a negative effect? Be a person that isn't of the truth and you're on the other side. It's a very powerful verse. So then you come to verse 26.

In the fear of the Lord, there is strong confidence. If you are dedicated to the truth, whatever the cost, and sometimes we say, well, if I'm truthful about this, this may cost me, it could cost me a friendship. It could cost me goodwill.

It could cost me something even more central to my notions of what makes my life good. Well, are you pursuing circumstances or are you fearing the Lord? Well, it's a choice. So linked to this directly, in the fear of the Lord, there's strong confidence.

I know that whatever the apparent cost may be of being truthful and being a person of truth, I will be confident that God is going to bless me. God sees, God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith, your labor of love. The books are being kept.

God will not suffer the righteous to be moved, but to be righteous, we have to be truthful and we have to make it an issue. We have to watch ourselves, examine ourselves. Am I in the faith? Am I in the truth? Or am I sort of sloppy about the truth? I'm careless.

It isn't very important to me. It has to be vitally important. The Lord Jesus never deceived anyone, never told a falsehood and it cost him, cost him goodwill.

Remember when he said, unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you're out. Many turned away from following him. And you know that the Lord had to grieve.

If you would just stick around, you would learn, you would grow, it would come to make sense. Nah, nah, nah, this is like people saying, oh, bloodbath on day one, promise to be a dictator. Eat my flesh, drink my blood.

You don't bother to get the context. You don't figure out what is actually being said. It's a knee jerk response.

It's a convenient way to do what you wanted to do anyway, which is reject and depart. Just looking for an excuse. D'oh, eat flesh, drink blood, you cannibal.

What's the matter with you? That's grotesque, goodbye. Jesus was truthful. We have to partake of his work in the flesh, the upper room.

How many of these same people, if Jesus had said, would you like to come to the last supper with me? I'm going to break bread. I'm going to pass around a cup. And this cup is going to be the new covenant in my blood.

And when you drink it, you have part with me. He could have sort of softened the blow. He could have cajoled and been gentle.

Jesus said, eat my flesh, drink my blood, or you're out. Many turned away. It's a harsh truth.

There are harsh truths in scripture. There are lifestyles that are an abomination in God's sight and were death penalty offenses in Israel. People don't want to speak that truth today.

Well, that might cost me. I might be on the outs. Someone might cancel me.

I may be called out and vilified for speaking the truth of the word of God. Well, are you a person of the truth? This doesn't mean go, you know, throw pearls before swine and lob grenades into crowded theaters. But if an issue comes up, if you have a family member who demands that they be accepted when they are embracing and practicing perversity, you have to speak up.

Are you a person of the truth or not? If you're not a person of the truth, you're not with Christ. You're not in Christ. You're not useful to the master.

And you are going to be in the darkness, which is outside. You're of no use. You're not a good servant.

So these verses matter. This is not, oh, the Proverbs. I don't really know what he's talking about.

What's the next one say? In the fear of the Lord, there is strong confidence. Be confident that when you are in the truth, you are in the right. You don't have to be obnoxious.

You don't have to be supercilious or bitter or vindictive. We're going to see the balancing truth in this. Look at chapter 15, verse one.

A soft answer turns away wrath. It's grievous words that stir up anger. You can be truthful without being grievous.

It's like the commercial that says it's firm yet gentle. Don't think about that too long or you'll remember where it comes from. But we don't have to be obnoxious.

There should be no arrogance. There should be no carelessness involved in this, but we have to be people of truth. And speaking the truth is sometimes hugely unpopular.

Well, your popularity standing and statistics, how many people follow you on social media? I promise you, it's not going to come up at the judgment seat. And it isn't something that you carry forward into the eternal future. Friendships that are shallow and tenuous and based on not aggravating the other person, those relationships, they're

not going to persist and endure anyway, because those people won't be anywhere near the throne.

They won't be anywhere near the Lord. That are shallow and condition their acceptance and their love and their conversations and their contact with you on whether you do what is acceptable in their sight. Our fellowship as believers is the common ground of what is acceptable and pleasing in God's sight.

That should unite us and draw us together. And anybody that has not got that agenda, you don't want to be close to them anyway. Bad company corrupts good morals and a lot else.

And it's not worth it. This is part of the sacrifice of being a person of truth is you are only going to end up with other people who value the truth. And those who don't, however dear they may be, in some other sense, they must be left behind.

They must fall away. In the fear of the Lord, there is strong confidence. And notice, his children will have a place of refuge.

If you maintain your dedication to the Lord and to the truth, those in your periphery will be blessed by association. It doesn't say anything about the quality or character of these children, but because they are related to you and because you are related to God through the truth, they will be blessed. They will be protected.

They will be shielded. Don't try to shield them. Don't try to protect them.

Be a person who fears the Lord and is of the truth and God will shield them in ways you could never fathom or reproduce. Have confidence. God will bless when we prioritize what he prioritizes.

When we are people of faith and obedience. Powerful, powerful truths. And it concludes here in verse 27.

The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life. Explorers have searched for the fountain of youth, for all kinds of riches and treasures. Here is the fountain of life.

You don't have to explore. You don't have to expend a lot of energy. The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life for us and for others.

Remember what Jesus said on the last great day of the feast? Oh, let him who is thirsty come to the waters and drink and out of his belly will flow rivers of living water. You come and drink of the water of life and from you, it will flow like a river to others. The best way to benefit others is not to try to benefit them.

The best way to bless those with whom we are in contact, those that we love, those that we're associated with, is to be people of truth and to fear the Lord. First and foremost,

take up our cross daily and follow the Lord Jesus in truth. You can't confer a greater blessing on the people you love than to not worry about them and concentrate on the fear of the Lord.

God will take care of them in ways beyond our comprehension, beyond our abilities, beyond what we could ask or think. But you've got to have strong confidence. You've got to trust him that he will honor his promise to honor those who honor him.

Well, we'll pick up here in verse 27 when we come back from the break.