

Proverbs 24-11-13a

Greetings, fellow members of Grace & Truth Bible Church. It is Wednesday, the 13th of November, 2024. We're in a very fascinating, very helpful, very applicable section of Proverbs.

Although I could probably say that about every section of Proverbs, but I'm particularly intrigued by this one. We're going to see the better-thans. What is better than something else? Proverbs has a collection of better-thans.

We're going to look at them this evening. Hopefully, our application, our Christian faith, walk, life, testimony, witness, preparation, hope, faith, and love will be better than they were before as a result of looking at these passages. Let's ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and study, and we'll begin.

Father, how grateful we are for this time of nourishment and comfort and encouragement from Your Word. We thank You for the presence and power of Your Holy Spirit to enable us to take advantage of those wonderful attributes, those potentials that You have granted to us through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We thank You for Him.

We thank You for His ongoing representative role at Your right hand, interceding on our behalf, awaiting the day when the command is given to come and take us to Himself and present us before Your throne. We pray that our study tonight, our fellowship, our prayer, our efforts at application will prepare us for that day and for that future time of service and function in the kingdom of Your Son and in Your own kingdom to follow. We pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Let's take a look at our passage. This is Proverbs chapter 15, and we pick up tonight at verse 16.

We saw the heart triplet last time, and I feel like we gave that a pretty detailed coverage, so we're going to start fresh tonight at verse 16. Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure with trouble. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fatted calf with hatred.

These two verses are tied together quite closely. It is self-evident that they are to be studied together as a unit. They inform each other.

They use similar language. And for only the second time in our entire study of Proverbs, they use this better is this than that pattern. This is a very simple combination in Hebrew.

The word better comes from the word tov, T-O-V, or V. It's a soft B. Many times it's easier to just use a V when we transliterate it because that's how it's pronounced, tov. In Israel, if you want to say good morning to someone, you say bokr tov. It's very similar to broke

your toe, but that would have the opposite meaning.

But bokr tov, if you want to say good evening, it's laila tov, and so on. So it means simply good, beneficial, blessed, better, something positive. And then the second part of this pattern is the word min, M-I-N.

And this is the Hebrew word from. If you translate this brutally, literally, it is better this from that. The reason I point this out is I think there is something in the Hebrew that we've lost when we say better is this than that.

In English, when you say, well, it's better to have a little with peace than a lot with strife, you're comparing two realities that you may or may not have experienced. You can look at it in the abstract or in the hypothetical or theoretical realm. In Hebrew, when you say this is good from the alternative, there is the suggestion, there's the implication that we're coming from that.

We've already experienced it. It's a part of our circumstance in the past. And coming from that, I appreciate this new thing.

This is good coming from that. You see the difference? From means I'm coming out of a situation that wasn't so good, and here's a new one that counterintuitively is preferred, is better. And so there's an experiential lived factor in the Hebrew that is helpful to catch.

As I said, we have seen this one previous time, only once in our entire journey through Proverbs up to this 15th chapter. We've done 14 1/2 chapters of Proverbs, and we've only seen this Tov Men pattern once previously. And that was back in chapter 12.

Flip back a page or two to Proverbs 12, verse 9. Hopefully this is familiar if you don't remember it outright. But we were looking at these sections, and this was the first verse in a three-verse section, which was verse 9, 10, and 11 of chapter 12. And all three of these verses start with something positive and then lead on with something negative in each verse.

So in verse 9, better is the one who is slighted but has a servant than he who honors himself but lacks bread. A righteous man regards the life of his animal. Tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.

He who tills his land will be satisfied with bread. He who follows frivolity lacks understanding or heart. He who follows frivolity has an empty heart.

So each of these, it's a plus, minus, plus, minus, plus, minus in the two lines of each verse. But we're looking at verse 9. Better is the one who is slighted but has a servant than he who honors himself but lacks bread. If you remember, this Hebrew can be just pointed slightly differently.

And instead of saying better is the one who is slighted but has a servant, the word there is eved, which is either to work or a worker. Eved is the word for servant because the servants do the work. And so it is the one who is slighted, but there is eved to him.

It's lo in Hebrew. Lo means to or for, and the o with a dot over it, that's a wow with a dot over it, is a long o, and it's to him. So there's either work or a worker to him.

So it could either mean there is a servant to him, he has a servant, or he works to or for himself. And it all depends on if you point eved as more of a noun or more of a verbal idea. So, and I think our preference here based on the context is better the one who is despised or disrespected but works for himself.

Maybe he's despised or disrespected because he works for himself. Then the one who honors himself but lacks bread. So the contrast is, do you want the fruit of work, which is bread? What did God say when sending Adam out of the garden? You will earn your bread by the sweat of your brow.

You will cultivate the ground and you're going to have difficulty getting it to yield its fruit. You're going to have to work. You're going to have to work for your bread.

Paul says in the New Testament in the church, he who does not work should not eat. If he's capable of work but doesn't do it, then he shouldn't eat. So here, better one who is lightly esteemed.

This is one of the translations. This is a, for those of you that love Hebrew, this is a nifal participle. Kal is the active voice, nifal is passive.

And so a nifal participle means this is something that happens to him. He isn't despising other people. He is receiving the slights.

He's treated with contempt by others. And this is the word Qalah, Q-A-L-A-H. But it's a nifal participle.

And so this is an ongoing lack of respect from others. Think of the elites in our country who sort of look down on the poor yokels in flyover country who don't know any better but to vote and think differently than they do. It's ongoing.

It isn't sporadic. It's not over one specific issue. It's a general opinion of the garbage, the worthless, the basket of deplorables, if you will.

That's the idea here. I'm not really trying to be political, but it's a good illustration of this attitude because you can't change it. No matter what happens, people have this inability to unite.

They will call for unity, but they want you to unite with them. They don't want to unite with you because you're deplorable. There's something wrong with you.

You are lightly esteemed. You are treated with contempt. And it's not fixable on their part.

So what do you do? When you are the object, you are the nifal participle target of Qalah, what do you do? Take your satisfaction in your work, in the fruit of your labors, the work of your hands, and tov. You come from being despised. There's none of us that haven't been treated with contempt by somebody or looked at as a category or as a member of a class or a group as contemptible.

You're not up here in our \$900 suit Gucci shoe circles. You don't go to the Dallas Country Club and have another piece of barbecued brisket or a pecan pie. You're... Some of you will know where that comes from.

You're just below and beneath. And there's nothing you can do to change that perception because that's a problem in their heart. That's a problem of lack of relationship with God, lack of humility, lack of correctability, lack of perception, distance from the truth.

They have been deceived and they practice deceit. They live in deceit. They don't know the truth when they see it.

These were your Pharisees in Jesus' day. These were those who thought it was a mistake to leave Egypt when Moses led them into the wilderness. There have, in every generation, been these who consider themselves elite, the intelligentsia, the brights, and so on.

So what do you do when you are the nifal participle kalah people? You come from that. What is the good? The tov is ability to work. Just give me the freedom to work.

Paul says, pray for the kings and all of these people that are up there fighting political battles because the target, the goal of that prayer is that we can lead a peaceable and quiet life. We can work with our hands. We can make our own way.

We can create our own life. Just leave me alone. Think what you want, say what you want, but give me the freedom to work.

He who does not work as a Christian does not eat. We work. This is the mandate from the garden.

Till the soil. Pull a living out of the opportunities that are granted. Don't live on charity.

Don't sponge. Don't mooch. Don't wait for handouts.

We work. If we're limited, then we work within our limits. You can't dig ditches, but you can run a computer.

You can't run a computer, but you can answer the phone. You can find something so that

you can support yourself. We work.

And it is Tove. Don't worry about being slighted. Don't worry if it's, well, you're wearing an apron at Home Depot or you're stacking carts at some big box store somewhere.

So I'm working and that is better than covering myself with status or expecting others to treat me with status and I've got no bread. What's the use of being well thought of when you can't eat? So this is a very pithy Tove Min statement that we had in Proverbs chapter 12, verse 9. And when it says he who honors himself, when you honor yourself, the reason you do so, you're doing it in front of others because you want them to share in the operation. I'm raising myself up.

I'm honoring myself. I'm wearing finer clothes. I'm driving a better car because I want you to look at me with esteem and not kala contempt.

And so my efforts are to change your mind instead of change the inventory in my pantry. And those are screwed up priorities. And looking to God, what is it that God says? What does the word of God say? I have never seen the righteous go hungry or his seed begging bread.

Begging bread. If you've got bread, that's Tove. And you get it through work.

Even the manna didn't show up. It wasn't the widow's cruise. God could have just as easily provided for the Israelites by saying, let every man have a pot in his tent.

And in the morning, six days out of seven, there will be manna in the pot. How did they get the manna? Same way the poor people got food from the corners of fields. It was left there for them to go and gather for themselves.

The poor would go to the ungleaned corners of the fields of the well off. They would gather. They would take to the mill.

They would grind it into flour. They would take that flour and make their own food. All they were given is the opportunity to have something to start with, but it wasn't handed to them as a finished product.

So that is Proverbs 12, nine. The next time in Proverbs, we have this pattern is in our passage, Proverbs 15, 16 and 15, 17. So having seen the archetype back in chapter 12, what we see is that counterintuitively, what a human mind might think is good, well, it's so wonderful to be well thought of.

It's better to have substance, regardless of human opinions. To work and have bread, we come from the empty value of the high opinion of worthless people. So now in 15, 16, better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure with trouble.

Better is a little. These are indefinite words. Both little and treasure can mean a variety

of things.

So when you look at the word for little, this can be a little of almost anything. It can be a little food, a little treasure, a little of almost anything. Same thing with treasure.

The treasure can be a treasury. It can be a storehouse. It can be a room in the king's palace where treasure is stored.

But the idea here is that a little of anything is good from a lot with trouble. And the word for trouble is mahuma, M-A-H-U-M-A-H. It's interesting because one of the individuals in Xerxes' palace, he had a collection of eunuchs.

There were seven or eight of them as I recall. And he's going to gather them together in the course of dealing with Vashti and getting women and eventually ending up with Hadassah or Esther. But these are functionaries in the palace and when they list out their names, there's Bigtha and Bagthi and all these other guys.

But the very first one, his name is Mahuma. And it means trouble. It's identical.

It's the same form and everything here in our passage. So you find this in Esther 1.10. The heart of the king was married with wine. And he commanded Mahuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, Carcas, seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus.

But Mahuman, that's our word. So trouble, trouble leads off the list. But this has the idea of turmoil, of being confused, stirred up, discomfited.

You find this in 1 Samuel 5.9.11. The hand of the Lord is against a city with very great destruction. He struck the men of the city, both small and great. Tumors broke out on them.

These are the Philistines who took the Ark of the Covenant. You remember 1 Samuel 5. And so they sent and gathered together in verse 11 of 1 Samuel 5. All the lords of the Philistines and said, Send away the Ark of God of Israel. Let it go back to its own place, so that it does not kill us and our people.

For there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city. The hand of God was very heavy there. The deadly destruction is the Mahuman.

It's the turmoil, the confusion, that people were killing each other accidentally. There are other accounts of battles where there is turmoil on the inhabitants of the land and they mistakenly kill each other. This is like dying from friendly fire and that sort of thing.

You can look this up in Strong's. It's 4539 in Strong's and get the list of passages. But you get the idea.

There is turmoil and confusion in view. So we look at our verse here. And better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure with calamity, with turmoil, with a complete opposite of peace, safety, calm, confident expectation.

And the human mind, given an abstract choice, shall I give you a little or shall I give you a lot? We generally think, well, more is better. And I don't want to be impenury. I don't want to be poor.

I don't want to have a lack or a need. If I have a choice between \$10 and \$10,000, I think I'll take the 10,000. That's human wisdom.

Divine wisdom says you need context. If the context is turmoil, if it is a lack of peace and confidence, if it is confusion, if it is misdirection, if there is deceit, if there is calamity and destruction, what's the point of having a lot? Now you've just got one additional worry because how can you protect a lot when the gloves are off and the structure is degrading and disintegrating? How do you protect your wealth when there are angry armed mobs going from place to place? Even if you try to defend yourself, you remember back during the BLM riots and there was a couple that was standing on their front porch with their weapons, trying to guard their stuff, and they got arrested and tried in court. Their next door neighbors probably didn't have as much, didn't stand on the porch, and the turmoil passed them by.

So these first two examples call to us in Proverbs 12 and in Proverbs 15, call to us to step back and try to take a divine perspective, a divine viewpoint, and have our spiritual life and our spiritual knowledge be the context for deciding whether we are content with a little rather than grasping for a lot. I would rather have my job and be able to work and people think I'm low class or I'm working beneath myself or why don't I have a job that's got an upward path and better pay and better benefits and stock options and whatnot. I'm just content because this job pays my bills.

I've got food on the table than to reach for something that has status and might impress people but you've gone in debt to try to honor yourself. You can't pay for your car or your mortgage or your other accouterments. You've done it all on credit trying to honor yourself in front of others and you're ending up bankrupt.

The common sense here, you would think, well, anybody could understand that without it being the inspired word of God. Here's the thing. How do you get to that perspective? You can understand it and approve it and agree with it in the abstract but in the moment of our lives, how do we get there? How do we understand that this is the situation and place our faith in God? Look for guidance from God because this is easy to say but it's hard to do.

It's hard to know that you are disrespected and live with it. It is sometimes hard to do a menial job and have the perspective and have the heart and have the thankfulness and

appreciation that doesn't make us feel oppressed or deciding that we need to look for something better. This takes divine power.

So when we look at these situations, this isn't just a saying. It isn't just an observation that, well, you know, a little with peace is better than a lot with strife. It is getting to the place where we can live that, where we can make that happen and actually be content with a little rather than looking over the fence and wanting a lot and deciding that we'll stretch and we'll strain and we'll go overboard trying to gain the approval of others and get out from under this kala, poor attitude toward us.

We want to earn someone's respect and we have to fight that. That's a human instinct. That's, any unbeliever in the world can do that.

To look at our situation and take it before the Lord and be thankful for such things as we have. To recognize that God is ensuring that we have bread by this means and an old pastor from years gone by used to say, wait until God promotes you. You're not promoted by self-promotion.

You're not promoted until God promotes you. Do the assigned work, be content with what we have, work quietly with our hands as far as it is up to us, live peaceably with all men. If our task is menial, do it to the very best of our ability.

Be good servants. Do what we do heartily as unto the Lord and recognize that this is tov. This is good to complete our given assignment to function at the level where God has placed us.

If he wants us to be honored, we will be. This is coming up in one of our future passages by the way. So we see this one and the next one in Proverbs chapter 15, which is verse 17.

Better is a dinner of herbs or vegetables where love is than a fatted calf with hatred. This is a specific case of the preceding one. They go together and love is contrasted with being despised.

This is an advance. If you're able to work, even when the outsiders have a poor opinion of you and you've got bread, now you've got that little. You've got maybe bread and vegetables.

You've got soup and crackers. You've got, as Jerry Reed used to say, soda crackers and pork and beans, but it's sufficient. And there's love.

Outside, there may be contempt, but inside, even a small meal, what you're looking for is love. We've seen the importance of love. We saw it in the triplet that precedes this in Proverbs 15.

We have seen it in 2 Timothy 3, where that list of perilous times characteristics is bracketed by what people love and what they don't love. And right in the middle, there's another mention of love, unloving, unholy, unthankful. Our highest achievement in this life is love, God's love, love for Him, love for one another, love for our neighbors, love for those who are on the outside, and leave in love for our enemies.

These have different conditions. They have different qualities. Our love for enemies is not the same as our love for God.

Our love for one another is not the same as our love for neighbors. There are different expressions, different capacities, different qualities, different conditions and limits, and we need to understand that. So when we come to our dinner table, even if there is a limited menu, where there is love, that is good.

Coming from a situation where you had a lot more food at a sumptuous banquet, but there's hatred. You're going to get indigestion, eventually, from that environment, so to speak. So that's a better than.

But we have more of these coming up in Proverbs, in the next chapter, Proverbs 16, verse 8. Better is a little with righteousness than vast revenues without justice. We're starting to see a theme here, if you notice. Having a little of something or a lot of something isn't the blessing that the human mind would think it is, unless there are spiritually valuable conditions, spiritually conducive circumstances.

Love, righteousness, justice turn a little into a blessing, where without those things, even a lot isn't good. Our immaterial lives determine the extent to which that which is material is a blessing or a curse, is something to enjoy or something that inflicts pain and calamity. And it directs our eyes upward, off of the dust, above the horizon to our relationship with God.

Love is sourced in God. Righteousness is sourced in God. Justice is sourced in God.

Better is a little with righteousness than vast revenues without justice. Whether it's tax time and people have to make a decision about whether they're going to be honest and pay taxes on things that they are tempted to fudge. It's better to pay and not have as much in your bank account, but there's righteousness.

You can go to bed content before the eyes of the Lord. We just saw earlier in chapter 15, the eyes of the Lord are everywhere. He can even see Sheol and Abaddon.

Do you not think He can see into the heart? If He can see that far, it's the furthest distance from His throne in heaven. If He can see the depths of Sheol and Abaddon, do you not think He can see what's going on in our hearts? And we want righteousness. Purge me with hyssop.

Make me clean. Wash me so that I am whiter than snow. And if doing the right thing leaves me with a little, that is good.

Coming from a world where vast revenues exist, but there's not justice. It's not right. It is not just.

It is not fair. You think about the difference there would be in American history in the days of slavery if believers in the Lord Jesus had understood these truths instead of glossing over them? Well, I need this many slaves so that I can harvest my cotton and my tobacco and my other crops. And we'll barely be scraping along if I don't have extra labor.

And this is the only way to make a profit is to have people working that I don't pay. I simply feed and house them and press them for work. And this gives me a profit.

That's not fair. It can be done fairly. And I think there were some who were slaveholders that were very fair.

And their slaves were treated with kindness and affection. And they were cared for and they were not abused. And this is where you get terms of affection used like aunt this and uncle that.

These have become pejoratives in the modern day. But the reason they used to name a Serb Aunt Jemima is this was viewed with affection. You put this on a label because you look at it as a good thing.

Here is someone that was beloved and was renowned for their cooking skills and was appreciated and enfolded into the family. You don't call somebody aunt and uncle that you hate. You're entering them into family.

But that system was open to abuse and Christians, God-fearing, church-going people who didn't learn the word of God abused that and were part of the problem and not part of the solution. It's a vexed question but it is an illustration. Better is a little with righteousness.

You don't have to cheat. You don't have to oppress. You don't have to get the better of someone.

You don't have to leave somebody hanging. Then vast revenues and it's not fair and it's not right. You got these vast revenues by leaving someone else short.

You beat them out. You basically robbed them. Then verse 19 of chapter 16.

Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud. You see the thread running through these. There are things that are humanly considered to be good.

Let's divide the spoil. There's largesse. There's treasure.

There's vast revenues. All of that has to be good, right? Not if it is in an environment without justice. Not if it is unrighteous.

You would be better off having a humble spirit and dwell with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud. Where do you see Jesus? Is he dividing the spoil with the scribes and Pharisees and the chief priests and elders of the people? Or is he spending time with those that were looked down upon and despised? He didn't do it simply because they were looked down on and despised. That wasn't the qualification they were seeking.

And that was the condition. And the proud and the well-off, Jesus didn't revile or distance himself from Nicodemus or from Joseph of Arimathea or from the wealthy ladies who helped to finance his public ministry. These were well-off people.

What was the defining characteristic? Poverty is not a virtue. And wealth is not a crime or a sin. What is the attitude that accompanies it? And if people are well-off and proud, you've got to come from that.

You've got to distance yourself from that. And the Tove, the good, is a humble spirit and associating with those who are lowly. There are wealthy people who are very humble and lowly.

And they recognize that they are simply stewards of what belongs to God. So that gets us partway through our list of the better-thans. Again, we have seen Proverbs 12, verse 9, our passage, Proverbs 15, 16, and 17, and now Proverbs 16, verses 8 and 19.

We're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to see the final one in Proverbs 17 and then move forward in our passage of Proverbs chapter 15.