

Proverbs 25-02-05a

Good evening, this is Wednesday, the 5th of February, 2025. We're back in Proverbs chapter 16. We finished Proverbs chapter 15 last time and dipped our toe in the water of chapter 16.

We're going to see this is a beautifully arranged, carefully orchestrated presentation with many structural clues that help us get at what God wants us to know with this particular segment of wisdom. It is so helpful when we see the way God is not only communicating to us, but he does it in a way that helps us see the point, the emphasis, the way in which it is done. And as we have so often observed in these first 15 chapters of Proverbs, it is not a confetti, it's not a bingo ball full of random numbers that come out one at a time in terms of these Proverbs.

They're very carefully structured and very beautifully presented in a way that helps us understand and remember what it's saying. So we're going to see that again tonight in this portion. We're going to be looking for your notes at Proverbs chapter 16, verses one through nine.

Proverbs 16, one through nine. Let's ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and study and we'll begin. Father, it is such a wonderful encouragement and source of peace for us to know that we are held in your hands.

We are sustained by your grace. We are enfolded in your love. We are strengthened with your spirit and your word.

We are motivated by the fellowship and the prayers of fellow believers. And as a group, as a united spiritual family, we progress through the circumstances that you present in such a measured and calibrated way to enable us to express our faith, to remember what we have learned, to pray back to you our understanding of your will, and most of all, to appreciate and to worship the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, as our example, as the one who even now sits at your right hand, interceding on our behalf, pleading our case, refuting and fending off the attacks of the wicked one who is so ready to accuse us and to find fault with us. We are grateful for the privilege of coming before you personally with our requests, with our praises, with our thanksgivings, with our concerns, knowing that you as our heavenly Father support us and sustain us at every turn.

We pray tonight, as we look at this portion of your word, that the Holy Spirit will help us to see its pertinence, give us clarity in terms of how we can best implement it in our lives, strengthen us in the inner man, purge us, create in us a clean heart, renew a right spirit within us. It is only by your grace that we can stand and move forward and we claim that grace, we ask for it in Jesus' name, amen. Our passage, good to read since we've missed a week or two here, begins at chapter 16, verse one.

Bear in mind that this is the center of a very closely connected section. We saw this begin back in chapter 15, verse 28. And we labeled that the heart chiasm.

Every verse refers to the heart in some way, shape or form, even one that looks like it doesn't, it actually does. And so we've looked at that in great detail. And so the emphasis was on our heart.

What is our heart? What is our desire? What are our goals and priorities and values as we are faced with the opportunities as believers to avail ourselves of what God supplies? And if we disdain instruction in verse 32, we are despising, we're injuring our own soul. But if we heed rebuke, we get a heart. The word understanding there at the end of verse 32 is the word lev, L-E-V, it's heart.

Every verse in this section, 28 through chapter 16, verse one mentions the word heart. And the emphasis is on the same thing. There used to be a wonderful song from back in the 1940s.

Where is your heart? You know, your lips, this is a romantic song, of course, but this woman is singing, your lips may be near, but where is your heart? And it is easier to see the outside. Man looks on the outward appearance. The Lord looks on the heart.

So this presentation of the heart we've seen in these last seven verses is looking at the heart from God's standpoint. How will our hearts, thoughts, intents, and motivations hold up at the judgment? If we heed instruction, we have a clean heart created within us. We have the blessings of God.

We abide among the wise, and we find the benefits of wisdom that have been emphasized throughout this book. So we begin tonight at chapter 16, verse one, which was also the last verse of the preceding section. And it is a hinge, it is a turning point.

It completes the thought of the heart that we've seen in the previous six verses. And the seventh here is chapter 16, verse one. So the preparations of the heart, the love, the inner spirit belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.

And this begins what I would call the Lord chiasm. We had the heart emphasized in every verse. Now we are going to have the Lord emphasized in every verse but one.

It reminds me of Psalm 119, where the word of God is alluded to in terms of statutes, ordinances, law, in all but a couple of verses. It's a long chapter, the longest in the Psalm. Psalm 119, and in almost every verse.

And so your curiosity is drawn to the ones that don't. If you're going to go with that theme, how come every single one doesn't mention it? And in this section, which is going to be chapter 16, verses one through nine, there's one verse that doesn't mention the Lord. And then the next verse after it does once again, and that's verse eight, we'll get there.

But let's read this and just get an overview. Once again, the first impression is going to be, He's just collecting random thoughts like wool and sticking them down in the scrapbook in no particular order. As we look at it more closely, just as we've seen throughout these last five

chapters or so, there is no randomness here whatsoever.

So verse one, the preparations, you can also translate this as plans. This is the machinations by which we look to the future. We look at what we want to accomplish and we organize our thoughts.

We figure out how we're going to expend our efforts and our resources. So who among us doesn't have a plan? Even if we're not noted for our foresight, we all plan something. In the morning, we have a plan for getting ready for the day, that we know what's coming up on the schedule.

Most of us have a calendar of some kind, and there's some sort of plan for transportation, for use of time, for use of resources, for dependence upon others, interaction with others. All of us have a plan. So the plans of the heart are for man, two or four.

This is the Hebrew preposition Lamed, which is translated two or four. You notice belong is in italics there. These plans are two or four, man.

But the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. The answer is from the Lord, the answer of the tongue. Verse two, all the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirits.

So for the second time, you see the word Lord in small caps. This is the indicator of the Hebrew Tetragrammaton, Y-H-W-H is there. So the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirits.

Verse three, commit your works to the Lord and your thoughts will be established. Verse four, the Lord has made all for himself. Yes, even the wicked for the day of doom.

Powerful truth there that compliments our New Testament understanding from Romans 8, 28, that God works all things together for good, even the presence and influence of evil, the evil one, those who choose evil. God has created even those who are evil for the day of doom. God's judgment is designed to teach us, to inoculate us, to vaccinate us against the function of free will that would choose evil.

Verse five, everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord. Though they join forces, none will go unpunished. Verse six, in mercy and truth, this is the word we commonly translate as grace.

So you can see the name of our fellowship there, in grace and truth, atonement is provided for iniquity. What happens if wickedness or sinfulness begins to crop up in our own life or in our own periphery? God has made provision. It isn't going to be saved or stored up unto the day of doom for us.

God has a remedy now and it is atonement. And by fear of the Lord, one departs from evil.

There is remedy for the failure and there is provision for escaping it, leaving it behind, separating from it.

The day of doom is the ultimate judgment, the ultimate and final separation, but there is temporal provision. There's time-based, I can have it now, grace from God. That's verse six.

Verse seven, when a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. When a man's ways please the Lord, he, the Lord, makes even the man's enemies to be at peace with him. You say, well, is this always true? It seems like there's constant opposition.

You look at the Pharisees opposing the Lord. You look at the Judaizers opposing Paul, stoning him and leaving him for dead. And how is that the enemies at peace? We'll look at this when we get there.

Verse eight, this is the only one that doesn't explicitly mention the Lord. It is an implicit reference. Better is a little with righteousness than vast revenues without justice.

And you say, well, I've gotten used to seeing the Lord in every verse. I go to verse nine, a man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his step. So how did the Lord fall out of verse eight? Think about the definition of righteousness.

That is one of the primary emphases in this section. Whose righteousness do we pursue? And that goes all the way back to verse two. What is genuine purity? What is genuine righteousness? It isn't what we necessarily choose or decide.

It is what God chooses and decides. So it is implicit in the verse with the reference to righteousness. Well, let's go and look a little bit at the structure that's gonna help us weave this together and see its linkages and its united theme.

We've said that this is verses one through nine. So if you notice, there are a couple of things that link the beginning of this section to the end. I encouraged you to write in your Bible above the word preparations, the word plans.

And the reason is it is the same word as we find in verse nine. It says the preparations of the heart to man. So you have the word for heart and the word for man connected to plans there.

Notice in verse nine, you have man, heart and plans. Once again, this is our clue. This is our signpost.

All right, I've got my inclusio. I've got this repeated reference to these three things. And there is an inversion in Hebrew, just as you have it in English, the word heart precedes man in verse one.

And it is the opposite in verse nine. So it is helpful. We see that there is this reversal that tells us look between these.

Heart and man are in one order in verse one. They're in the opposite order in verse nine. So the answer of the tongue, this is going to be a bit of a word play.

It is the word ma-ar-ke. And without going into a lot of Hebrew, it links to verse three, commit your works. That is ma-aseh.

Remember asah is to make or to do. You have it used when God creates Eve, he manufactures Eve. Barah is to create.

They used to say something from nothing, but it is without reference to the materials. It is just the act of creation itself. Asah is to manufacture something.

And so ma-aseh, this is the word works in verse three, and it rhymes with the word for answer. And so the association of the answer of the tongue with the works tells us that God is sovereign. And we may make plans and preparations.

And even when we do this properly and prayerfully, the ultimate result, many times, we haven't done anything wrong, but the answer and the result is of the Lord. It will transcend what we thought would happen. It will be better than what we imagined.

The plan of God always far outstrips the plan of Sam. I have discovered this across my life and I will do things prayerfully and God will allow me to move forward with the guidance that I have. But the result that I anticipate in so many cases goes beyond what I could ask or think.

And the Lord works things together because he is sovereign and he enjoys blessing us in unexpected ways. And we would have been happy with the result that we expected, but God goes above and beyond and brings us to our knees with thanksgiving and gratitude for his watch care and his interest in the intimate details of our lives. So this is part of the theme of this section that you see in the first three verses is we make our plans in terms of what we will say, in terms of how we will approach communication with others, whether it is sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, whether it is broaching what we need to do, parents teaching their children, guiding their children, in some cases prohibiting their children from doing certain things.

So we accomplish this in our heart. So what does that tell you? If we are making these preparations and these plans in our heart, what kind of heart do we want to have? We want the Psalm 51 heart, create in me a clean heart, O God, renew a right spirit within me, try me and see if there be any wicked way in me, purge me with hyssop so I can be clean, wash me, make me whiter than snow. In my heart, wisdom comes to reside that the theme, the overarching theme of Proverbs is get wisdom and with all you're getting, get understanding.

That resides in the heart so that when we make plans and we make preparations and we pursue objectives and try to be faithful and diligent and reflect the glory of God in so doing, it originates in our heart. So when it says the preparations of heart belong to man, that tells us we're responsible for the condition and the effectiveness and the wisdom that resides in our

heart so that those preparations are pleasing in God's sight and he can bless them. And the answer, for example, in conversation, the answer in communication, in revealing a truth or a plan or a purpose or a guideline or a condition, whatever it may be, God can bless it because it originates in a prepared heart, in a yielded heart, in a cleansed heart.

And we can trust that if we do our best to bathe ourselves in the grace of God, as I said this past Sunday, the heart that is bathed in God's grace, we saw this in Hebrews and in 1 Thessalonians on Sunday. We want our heart to be conditioned, to be improved, to be divinely enabled and empowered. Then what emerges from the heart is something God can bless and bless in ways we didn't even foresee.

And our answer, our response to whatever situation will be from the Lord. And we now find that we are in cooperation. God is with us.

Remember when the children of Israel had failed in the wilderness and God said, Moses, I'm gonna make a new people out of you. These people, they're too far gone. I can't do anything with them.

And Moses said, Lord, if you will not go with us, there's no point in going. You must be with us. And so God affirmed and reaffirmed the promise.

I will go with you. I will send my angel before you. I will be with you.

What is our promise? Fear thou not, God says, for I am with you. Be not dismayed. I am your God.

I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with the right hand, the strong power of what? My righteousness.

We want the righteousness of God in our hearts so that God will bless the answer that comes from that heart, whether we are speaking, whether we are working. And that's why this word for answer and the word for works are harmonious. They rhyme in Hebrew.

It's ma'arkeh and ma'aseh. What I say and what I do is blessed by God. Wow, what more could you possibly want? Divine planning and purpose, divine provision and grace are undergirding what we say and what we do.

Now we can have confidence at the judgment that in nothing need I be ashamed because God was with me. God was in me to will and to do for his good purpose. It's an Old Testament truth.

It began to be revealed here in Proverbs. God will be with us. God will be for us.

And if God be for us, who can be against us? So what a powerful verse. The preparations, the plans of the heart, it's up to us. God is not going to come in and overrule our choice, our desire, our wishes, the direction that we choose.

So the preparation of the heart is up to us. He has made everything available. Here is the way, walk ye in it.

That's all you've got to do. Just don't depart to the right hand or to the left. Stay on the narrow road.

Keep the straight gate directly before you. So preparations of the heart, that's our responsibility. And if we fulfill that, if we recognize the opportunity, God will bless the answer of our tongue.

And we're going to see in verse three, we commit our works to the Lord and our thoughts will be established. The works are a result of our thoughts. Where do thoughts happen? What do you know about this? The word of God is alive and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even as the dividing asunder the soul and spirit of the joints of the marrow and is a critic of what? The thoughts and intents of the heart.

Isn't it handy that we just had seven verses about the heart because the thoughts that we have in our heart will be established. God can establish them. He can bring them about.

He can exponentially bless and expand and make them greater than anything of human contrivance. Commit your works, verse three, to the Lord. And you just have to draw a circle and say, answer and works, they're so closely related.

You change, basically you change one consonant and answer and works, they rhyme, change one letter and you've got the other word. So we prepare our heart and we commit our works and God will establish, the Lord will establish the thoughts which occur in the heart. In between that, you have verse two.

All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes. This word pure, again, this is Zach, Z-A-K. They're Zach and this is the word that is used for the purity of incense or olive oil that is used, for example, in Exodus 27, 20.

I won't give you all of these, but just enough to understand how highly we esteem ourselves. This word Zach was used in Exodus 27, 20. You shall command the children of Israel that they bring you pure oil, pressed olives for the light to cause the lamp to burn continually.

The lamp stand in the holy place was to be fueled by pure olive oil. The purest, they've got extra virgin olive oil that you can buy, extra, extra virgin. The best, most pure olive oil was to be used for worship.

You find the same thing in Leviticus 24, verse two. It was also used of incense that was a part of worship of God. Remember incense, the smoke of the altar of incense is used to represent prayers that come before God.

And so in Exodus chapter 30, verse three, you shall overlay the top and the sides all around and

the horns of that altar with pure gold and make for it a molding of gold all around. And in Leviticus 24, seven, once you had that altar of incense of pure gold, you shall put, this is Leviticus 24, seven, put pure frankincense on each row of the bread of the presence, the show bread. Pure frankincense, it's used four different times for the purity of these items that are used in worship.

It is used seven times in our wisdom literature, Psalms, Proverbs, the books of Solomon. It is used for purity in ethics, in morality. So it is often associated with the upright, the ways of the upright are pure.

So in Proverbs 20, verse 11, which we've not gotten to yet, but you can note it down here. Even a child is known by his deeds, whether what he does is pure and right. Even a child, Proverbs 21, verse two, mimics or echoes the verse we're looking at of 16 too.

Every way of a man is pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts. If it was up to us and we were doing a self-evaluation, we would score a hundred on the test and get extra credit, but it isn't our opinion that counts. So the ways of a man, you can put, if you don't have a cross-reference in your Bible there, you can put Proverbs 21, two beside this.

It says the same thing. The eighth verse of that same chapter, Proverbs 21, verse eight, the way of a guilty man is perverse. And we have the word way in our section as well.

What does it mean to have a way? This is the way, walk ye in it. It talks about lifestyle, it's habits, it's how we do our lives. So in 21, eight of Proverbs, the way of a guilty man, guilty meaning sinful, convictable of offense against God, the way of a guilty man is perverse.

But as for the pure, his work, his ma'aseh is right, righteous. So pure, ethically pure, morally pure. This is what we're looking at.

I could give you other references. I'll just give you one more. It's Job chapter eight, verse six.

And one of Job's friends is allowing that if you were pure and upright, surely now God would awake for you and prosper your rightful dwelling place. The friends are looking at Job saying, you must have messed up because if you were truly pure and righteous, God would be blessing you, not allowing all of these horrific calamities to descend upon you, to befall you. If you were pure and upright, morally, ethically, spiritually, God would awake for you and prosper your rightful dwelling place.

You look like you're under attack, you're suffering. You have experienced losses, hardships, cataclysms and catastrophes. So you must not be pure and upright, which is a human evaluation, man looking on the outward appearance.

We have to be assured in our hearts. We have to have prepared our hearts. We have to have loaded our hearts with wisdom so that God's evaluation, regardless of what people may think, regardless of how others may construe circumstances or whether or not we are in divine favor.

What do you think the enemies of the apostle Paul thought when they heard that he had been stoned and left for dead in Lystra, that he had been shipwrecked, that he had been imprisoned and accused of crimes, that he had received 40 lashes minus one, three different times? Well, you don't have to look far in current day. If you voted for one particular presidential candidate, you are lumped in with somebody who is compared to Hitler and is a convicted felon. And what can you be thinking? And heaping abuse and innuendo and outright prevarication and falsehood on someone who is the victim in many cases of falsehood and perverse use of the justice system.

And so scorn is heaped on him. And if you support him, scorn is heaped on you. And Jesus said, if they've hated me, they're going to hate you.

And think about this, even fellow believers. And these were Job's closest friends. They sat with him for a week without saying a word because they cared about him, but they misunderstand what God is doing in his life.

They don't know the book of Job is going to be written and their words are going to be recorded. They don't know that God is going to have Job offer sacrifice on their behalf for their faulty analysis. So if you were pure and upright, Job 8.6, this is the word here.

All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes. I find no fault with this man looking at myself. I think I'm right.

And we've spent many an hour in recent months looking at the problem of assuming that the sensor in our soul that says we are right, or we are correct, or we are justified, or we are vindicated, and what we say, think, and do is in fact accurate. The Bible tells us you can't trust what your heart tells you about your rightness, or your purity, or your guiltlessness, or that it is someone else's fault. I will lay the blame and the shame at someone else's door.

It isn't me. I am pure and upright in my own eyes. That evaluation cannot be trusted.

So the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes. It is the Lord who weighs the spirits. And that's the evaluation we have to look to.

I may think everything is fine, but what does God think? Well, how would I know what God thinks? How can I possibly understand what his evaluation will be? He is attempting to tell us in every verse of Proverbs, this is the way, this is wisdom, this is what is pure and right. These are the statutes and the ordinances. These are the guidelines.

These are the priorities, and the goals, and the values that should prevail in our hearts. And if we malfunction, what can we do? Well, the Lord has made everything for himself in verse four, even the wicked for the day of doom. And the fact that God puts up with vessels of wrath fitted for destruction is a part of his plan.

It's a part of his self-revelation. I have often told the story that I read in a children's book about

the life of Daniel Boone, that when he was courting his future wife, Rebecca, he went over and sat with her on the front step of her family cabin. And she was a wonderful, beautiful, peaceful, irenic young lady, good cook, sweet disposition, happy frame of mind.

And Daniel Boone took out his hunting knife and reached over and sliced her beautiful apron, handmade, from top to bottom, and put his knife back in the sheath and looked at her. He wanted to see, he had never seen her under anything other than ideal circumstances. What do you do with the unexpected? What do you do with something that seems to be an affront and a wrong? And evidently she passed the test because he married her and they had lots of kids.

But what are you like when you're alone? What are you like when you're taxed? What are you like when the chips are down, the lights go out, the power is off, adversity strikes, and to the extent that we have resources in our soul, to the extent that we understand the truth of God, the grace of God, the provision of God, the spirit and the word of God as the power source in our life, to that extent we will be tested. And rather than rail against the test and demand to be let out of the classroom, I often had this experience when I was in college, both bachelor's and master's level, I come into the classroom, I sit down, it's midterm or final exam test time, they hand me the piece of paper, I flip through the questions and I think, why, this is too hard, how can you ask this of me? But if you're prepared, it's almost a joy to demonstrate you know the answer, you've got the formula, you can pass this thing, and the course has been worthwhile, I learned what I was supposed to learn, I've developed the skills, but the more advanced the class, the harder the test, and the greater the preparation and the practice and the investment in preparing the heart so that when the test comes, we can endure, persevere, prevail, adapt and overcome by God's grace. And because it is in God's strength, by God's spirit and God's word, in the pattern of the example of the Lord Jesus, it is the glory of God that emerges, it's not the glory of me, it's not boy, he's one tough hombre, look at how he persevered and survived, especially those who are fellow believers and fellow travelers on the narrow road will recognize what a wonderful exhibit of the grace of God, the power of God to sustain, to provide the fruit of the spirit in harsh and difficult circumstances.

That's what this is talking about, that's why we had seven verses on the heart and preparation of the heart as the first verse in this section, as if we avail ourselves and it is a choice to have his words and keep them. Remember Jesus said, the one who has my words and keeps them, hews to them, fulfills them, he's the one who loves me, I and my father will come to him and make our home with him. Now you've got the divine presence to take us to and through whatever may come, the valley of the shadow, harsh times, Job's situation.

And if the book of Job ended halfway through, what would we think? It is the vindication and the justification that God had a purpose in Job's suffering and Job's testing and even the misunderstandings of his friends. And it's hard to be misunderstood, it is hard to be thought to have failed in some way and that's why God is allowing these harsh circumstances. It's hard, but that's the reason we have the book of Job and look at the vindication at the end of the book and the opportunity to do even greater things when God doubles what Job has and gives him

an even greater opportunity to reflect his glory.

So that's what we have here. So the ways of a man being pure in his own eyes, the Lord weighs the spirits. We have to remember this, this is why we have the heart section, then the Lord's section.

All of our self-analysis shouldn't be through our own eyes, we should endeavor to look at ourselves through God's eyes. And that comes with the presence and power of the spirit and the word. Well, we're partway through this section, we'll pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we'll move forward and we will see how the second half of this nine verse section reinforces and compliments the first half and creates this tightly woven message for our hearts. We'll see it when we come back.