

Proverbs 25-02-26b

We pick up now in Proverbs chapter 16, we have seen this threefold set of quatrains, two verse sections, four lines each and how tightly interwoven they are. You just can't help it. It's more difficult to see in English, but in Hebrew, when you repeat Mishpat, last word here, first word here, you almost say, was there a scribal error? Did they accidentally repeat a word? But then it happens again in verses 12 and 13 with righteousness.

But think about this. What are the doubled words? They not only serve to link the two verses together, but what do they mean? Righteousness and justice. Righteousness, this is the rightness of the standards, the principles, the policies, the verdict that is rendered is right.

It reflects truth. It reflects honesty. It reflects fairness.

Ultimately, it reflects the glory of God because he is the originator of righteousness. One of his titles is the King of Righteousness. And so righteousness is the quality of rightness.

It's not wrong. It isn't. It's the farthest thing from its opposites, wickedness and evil, and that which is destructive.

It is constructive. It is a blessing. And then justice.

This is the result of what a judge does. It is one thing to have right views, right opinions, a right analysis. You come to a passage of scripture, you know, our generally threefold approach is to observe and to interpret.

So let's say our observation is spot on. We got it right. We saw what God put in that passage for us to learn.

And we interpret it. We say, well, this is narrative or this is poetry or this is prophetic, but this is what it means. And we get that right.

And we fully understand God's desires, God's policy, God's plan, God's purpose, God's provision, God's character, God's grace, God's son, the Lord Jesus, God's plan for history, his dealing with the angels, his dealing with humanity. We got it all down. What is the third step? Application.

And if we only understand it, but we don't live it, we don't respond to it, we don't implement it, we don't plow it into our words and our thoughts and our actions, this is something that puffs up where love builds up. These righteous and proper true understandings should produce fruit. The fruit of righteousness is justice.

This is equitable and fair treatment of others, acting in righteousness, blessing others with being right. You can be right and be an insufferable boor about it. You can take your rightness and use it like a ham hock to beat people over the head with.

You can be right in a wrong way. You can be right in an obnoxious, uncaring and ineffective way. You can display righteousness in a way that is offensive.

And technically you're right, but did you have to act that way, deliver it with that attitude of arrogance and insensitivity and indifference to the effect that your right words might have? Justice is taking righteousness and putting it into practice in a way that promotes the fruit of the spirit. Not only reflects the fruit of the spirit in our own lives, but encourages it and cultivates it in those around us. A fair verdict.

Many times when we actually fail, we fall short, we commit an error. It is a relief to have it brought into the open and dealt with in an appropriate way. Seeing that a penalty has been inflicted, we can move on.

There's not lingering guilt. There's not lingering shame or shouldn't be. We behaved badly.

We chose wrongly. There was a consequence and it is resolved. I paid the penalty.

In our case, we look to the Lord Jesus and he, as our representative, has paid the penalty. The penalty is paid. I am free from guilt.

I am free from shame. I am free from ongoing repercussions of my bad action. If there are consequences, if there are outcomes and circumstances that have changed because of my failure, I look to the Lord who has promised to work all things together for good in my life because I love him and I recognize that he has called me according to his purpose.

God owns the weights in the bag. God has set up the scales and the measures to display righteousness in the earth. It is our job to be reflections of that.

The king is an idealized example in the same way that the pastor or the elder in the church is an idealized example in the pastoral epistles. So we see that these first two quatrains are linked by these essential qualities that define this section, righteousness and justice. Interestingly, the third quatrain is not so linked.

You think, aha, I have found the key. There's going to be another doubled word. So is the section over because that doesn't happen in verses 14 and 15? Not at all because we still have the king and we're back to the singular king.

He was singular in the first quatrain because the Lord appeared owning the weights in verse 11, but the king is in verse 10 and he is singular even in the sense that he only appears in one line of the quatrain. But when you come to verses 14 and 15, we are back to the singular king, messengers of death, the king's wrath. As messengers of death is the king's wrath, but a wise man will appease it.

A wise man. So what do we know about wrath and turning it away? Can you think of a memory verse perhaps, such as a soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger.

Now this by the way is legitimate wrath.

You can be righteously indignant. For example, look at the first chapter of second Samuel, Saul and Jonathan have been slain on Mount Gilboa. A man who was at the battlefield comes to David and brings him proof that he was there and is sort of celebratory and delivering the news.

And David becomes angry and that man dies. Think of the story that Nathan tells that same King David years later after the murder of Uriah the Hittite and his adultery and taking of Uriah's wife Bathsheba. Nathan comes and tells the story of the rich man who entertains guests and decides he wants a lamb for supper.

And he goes and takes a lamb belonging to a poor man next door and slays that and feeds the appetite of this stranger. Such a wonderful metaphorical story. And when David hears this as an actual circumstance, what is his judgment? He is wrath.

He is full of wrath. And he says, this rich individual should be slain for doing that. And Nathan says, you are the man.

That was a righteous indignation and a life is indeed going to be taken for David's murder. Life for a life. Shed man's blood by man shall his blood be shed.

What form did that retribution take in David's case? The son that he had with Bathsheba is going to die. David's son is going to die for his sin. And God uses that.

That was an awful period in David's life of heartache. David is on the floor sobbing. He won't eat.

But God worked it together for good because David loved God and God loves David. He's a man after his own heart. And even these tragic failures and consequences are woven together by God to foreshadow David's greater son, who will die not only for his sin, but also for the sins of the whole world.

And that substitutionary death is just. It is justice. It satisfies the righteousness of God, but it does it in a unique way that reflects God's grace and God's love.

It is sacrificial to God and it is beneficial to us. So there is a righteous wrath on the part of the king. And in many cases, when he reaches that level of wrath, it is because a heinous wrong has been committed that is a death penalty offense.

It is an abomination. It is worthy of death under the law. And this same righteous king that has been, this is not a foolish king.

This is not an out of control king who is jealous. It's not. You see this in Proverbs 6, 34, the wrong kind of wrath.

Jealousy is a husband's fury and he will not spare in the day of vengeance or Proverbs 15, 18. A wrathful man stirs up strife, division, contention, but he who is slow to anger allays contention. But there is a time to be rightfully angry.

But how is that anger going to be expressed? Is sending forth messengers of death the only option? If God simply sent messengers of death to the human race for our sins, it's over. But there is a way for God to display his righteousness and his justice, but also his love and his grace. And God's wrath is appeased.

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against ungodliness. Romans chapter one, there is a righteous wrath against ungodliness, against wickedness and evil, suppressing the truth. But God is slow to anger.

There is a time, there will be a place when these things will be righteously punished and eliminated for the benefit of all. But God is actually working even the wicked for the day of doom. Remember verse four of the same chapter, the Lord has made all for himself, even the wicked for the day of doom.

But the day of doom is future. And God is patient, not willing that any should perish, but that all have the opportunity to come to repentance. So messengers of death accompany the King's wrath, but a wise man will appease it.

Let's take a beat. Let's think. We can decide about severity, about scope, about timing.

Death may indeed be warranted, but let's appease it for the moment so that it doesn't go off the rails. It doesn't cease to reflect righteousness and justice. Notice righteousness and justice.

Now we have the necessity to preserve those in the face of situations that just anger a righteous person. And wisdom keeps our wrath in its place. The wrath may not be intrinsically wrong, but acting on it in a wrong way, acting on it perversely and impulsively and without thought, wisdom needs to step in and pour some water on that hot fire, unless it's a grease fire.

Wise man will appease it. In the light of the King's face is life. Here, instead of the link we have of justice in the first quatrain, righteousness in the second quatrain, here, this is a contrast.

You have wrath and death in verse 14. You have light and life in verse 15. So these are not linked together as a unit.

They are separated on purpose because they are a contrast. That's why we don't have a repeated word between them. And this highlights the choice that we have.

It is important for us to respect the righteousness of God. It is important for us to implement the justice of God in the light of that righteousness as believers in general, much more so when we're in authority, because the choice is life and death. Wisdom needs to be in place to prevent us being impulsive and letting anger run away with us.

In the light of the King's face is life and his favor is like a cloud of the latter rain. It's not the full latter rain. It's not the whole season of rain.

It's a wonderful cooling spring shower. Instead of the heat of wrath, wisdom comes in. And when the King sees that the better part of his reaction to what is genuinely wrong is to bide his time, to look to the Lord for timing, for extent, for scope, for direction, for targets, who is actually in the wrong.

You don't want to shoot the messenger if it's the King who sent the message from afar that needs to be dealt with. And the light of the King's face is life. Where does this light come from? It comes from the same Lord who owns the weights and measures, who has dictated the nature of the scales and measures.

So this is what we want to look for ourselves. The King is a wonderful example, but he is to be an inspiration for the people. Our King in the earthly realm takes the name of a president or a executive of some kind.

It can be the boss of a company. It can be someone who is in authority over us at almost any level. But our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is the ultimate authority, and we want the light of his life.

Remember in John chapter 1, in him was life, and that life was the light of men? It's the Lord Jesus. He is the Word who was with God and who is God. And we come to grace and truth through him.

And so in the light of the King's face is life. Notice the contrast with messengers of death. Do you want to be defined by wrath? There are people who have to be mad at something, or they don't have a purpose.

The most famous line from one of Marlon Brando's movies, Rebel Without a Cause. Somebody comes up to him and says, what are you rebelling against? And he says, well, what have you got? He is a rebel by nature, and he just needs to find something to be against, something to criticize, something to find fault with, something to be angry about. It may not even affect the person.

They'll take up the cause of people in another country, or people in a completely different category, or people who are far away, and they take second and third hand reports and form an opinion. And then they want to go rabble rouse and militate and make angry opinion statements about something. And they need something to be against.

In many cases, they're not even for anything. They're defined by what they're against. So light is life, not darkness.

Men love darkness rather than light when their deeds are evil. We want light to characterize our face, because it is not only stemming from the inner life we have in Christ, but it shines the light

of life to others, and it becomes blessing by association. We hope to be remembered as people who were a positive experience for those around us, to bring the blessings of life to others and to be blessed by similar people, and for that to characterize a fellowship.

And the leadership of the fellowship, the pastor and the elders, should reflect those things. It shouldn't be a constant stirring and draying and pounding of pulpits and shaking of fists about everything that's wrong in the world. We have so many wonderful provisions and blessings from the Lord.

We have such great opportunities and potentials because of what God has provided. It's that glass half full, whatsoever things are true and honest, noble, good report, think on these things. The peace of God that passes understanding will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus when we focus on the positive.

We need to cultivate the light of life in our face, in what people see. But finally tonight, I want you to notice the progression here from verse 10 through verse 15. The first quatrain focuses on the King's effect on others.

He is using his lips and his mouth to speak something that is going to affect other people. What is the basis for his effect on others? The verdict is on his lips, and his mouth needs to be reflecting justice. When he speaks, this is like they used to say when somebody talks, people listen.

It was an investment company. I keep thinking Merrill Lynch was bullish on America. But when somebody talks, people listen.

I forget who it was. I'm no kind of investment person. But when the King speaks, people listen.

They may agree or disagree, but everybody listens. And so this talks about what kind of a King is it? What kind of effect is he going to have on justice? Well, the second quatrain gives the basis. What the King decides and what the King speaks in terms of verdicts needs to be based on the Lord's honest and true weights and scales.

He is reflecting delegated responsibility from God. You can find very interesting parallels between this section and the Lord chiasm that preceded this. Many things that are said of the Lord in the first section are said of the King in the second section, because he is a representative of the Lord himself.

The King was put there by God, anointed by God in Israel to be God's representative, his immediate agent for righteous and just government. That's what we are now. We are here at God's appointment to be reflections of his righteousness and his justice, not to how can I get ahead? How can I maximize my assets and minimize my losses? How can I get over? How can I get ahead? How can I cut in line? How can I get to the front? That's not our goal.

Any unbeliever could do that. We are here to do what the King in Israel was to do, and that is to

be a reflection. So the King has an effect on others.

That's the first quatrain. That effect should be based on what God has decided and what God has provided in terms of righteousness and justice. That's the second quatrain.

And the third quatrain is what is the effect on others when the King speaks? We don't have the effect. It needs to be right, and it needs to be just at the beginning. But what is the outcome for others? That's what you have in verses 14 and 15.

Is it going to be wrath and death for others? Well, you get around that King. Remember, they used to talk about the hanging judge, Judge Roy Bean. And boy, you don't want to get in front of him because he's as likely to hang you as he is to take a sip of his beer.

And people had a reputation for harshness and for impulsive decisions. In the light of the King's face is life. Righteousness and justice ought to be beneficial for those who qualify for that benefit.

We benefit when God blesses us, and He is righteous and just to do so because the Lord Jesus Christ has made it possible. And we have been forgiven a great debt. The parable of the unjust servant who is forgiven a great debt, but will not forgive a small debt on the part of an underling of his.

And one of the scariest things in the Bible is that the master unforgives that servant's debt. Is that theology? Can we lose the forgiveness of our sins and be held to account because we are refusing to forgive others? Forgive us our trespasses, Jesus said in the model prayer, as we forgive those who trespass against us. So if I've got an unforgiving spirit and a grudge bearing heart, is God going to be unforgiving and bear a grudge against me? That's what scripture seems to say.

So when it comes to the choice between wrath or light emanating from my face, I'm going to go with light anytime I possibly can. Why? Wrath is messengers of death. Light is life for us and for those around us.

In the light of the King's face is life. His favor is like a cloud of the latter rain. This is the rain that comes right before the spring harvest.

It's what finishes the crops, gives them that last push so that the heads of grain are fulsome and bountiful. And there is an immediate result at the end. You need the former rains.

That's what gets the crops started. But a cloud of the latter rain is a subset. It's a part of the rain that God brings.

We become a part of the way that He blesses others. And we are in His hands, a transference of His blessing in the same way that the King is transferring God's righteousness and justice. He is also translating life and blessing.

And rain from the spring is always a picture of blessing. The former and the latter rains, especially the latter rains. Well, this is going to set us up now for another set of quatrains that are going to come together to tell us the path to follow.

What is going to be the larger pattern of life? So we're going to see references to the highway of the upright in verse 17 and keeping our way to preserve our soul. This is going to begin with a reference to wisdom better than gold, understanding better than silver. Why? Because it shines a light on our path.

What is our way? What highway are we going to travel? This starts a whole new theme. So we've completed our King quatrains. We've had three very definite sections.

The next one is going to be something about our way. And these flow logically. Got to start with the heart.

The heart has to be oriented toward looking to the Lord. Then you see an application of that where the King himself has to be a man dedicated to righteousness and justice because he knows the Lord's weights and measures and is implementing that. And then there is an effect on others.

We're going to see this pattern continue through chapter 16 when we continue our study next time. But we'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, we are so grateful that your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

It reminds us of our purpose. It separates us from those who live in darkness and walk without a plan with nothing other than self-interest to guide them. Ways that seem right, but in the end are ways of death.

It preserves us from our fallen nature, gives us self-control and the ability to manifest the fruit that comes from your spirit, which is holy rather than ours, which is fallen. We pray that as we reflect on these things that the Holy Spirit will help us to see their pertinence and their application in our conversations, in our interactions with those around us. And like this King, we can be those who are righteous and just and fair to others as well as fair to ourselves as a reflection of your righteousness and justice so that that light will shine.

Others will see our good works and glorify you. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.