

Proverbs 25-03-05a

Good Wednesday evening. This is the 5th of March, 2025. We're continuing our study in Proverbs 16.

We're entering a new section here. We have seen the heart chiasm. We have seen the Lord chiasm.

We have seen the king quatrains. And tonight we're going to see the mind quatrains, quatrains related to our way of thinking. This is going to begin in verse 16.

Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and study. And we'll begin. Father, thank you for another opportunity to be enriched and informed and equipped by the truth that is in your word through the power of your spirit.

We pray that as we look at these things together, we will see how they are meaningful in our forward progress, that they will have traction in our souls, and that the Holy Spirit can use these truths to conform us more closely to the example of the Lord Jesus and be better representatives of him as we redeem the time and fulfill our opportunities in the days that remain to us in this life. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let's begin by reading our passage. The heart chiasm, of course, began back in chapter 15, verse 28, and then continued through chapter 16, verse 1. And then in 16, verse 1, we had the Lord chiasm that extended down to verse 9. More recently, we've looked at verses 10 through 15, which comprises three quatrains dealing with the king. And there is also something of a chiastic structure in these quatrains, but we don't have to exhaust the structural clues to understand the pertinence of these truths in the attitudes that pertain for a king, pertain to us as well in our areas of responsibility and authority.

So we looked at that last time, and we pick up now in what I would call the mind quatrains that begin here in verse 16. So 10 through 15 was last time. This is going to be verses 16 through 21.

So 16 and 17 will be a four-line section, 18 and 19, a four-line section, 20 and 21, a four-line section. So I've helpfully marked these off with my number two pencil, just for ease of review when I go back and look at these. And so these six verses read as follows, Proverbs 16, 16, how much better to get wisdom than gold and to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.

The highway of the upright is to depart from evil. He who keeps his way preserves his soul. Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.

Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud. He who heeds the word wisely will find good. And whoever trusts in the Lord, happy is he.

The wise in heart will be called prudent and sweetness of the lips increases learning. That's our

section. And there's a bit of a caveat when we come to verse 17, and we will cross that bridge when we come to it.

But it does affect our understanding of the structure a little bit because there is evidently some material that has dropped out of the Masoretic text, but it is included in the Septuagint. This is always an interesting question for me because God superintends not only the inspiration of his word, but also its preservation and its communication down through the years. And there seems to be a bit of material that has dropped out in this part of Proverbs.

And so then you ask the question, did God intend for that to drop out because it wasn't inspired or wasn't helpful? If it is inspired and helpful, then why wasn't it somehow preserved? Or since it has been preserved, how much attention should we pay? Things that we find in other sources we have to kind of treat in a special category. This happened in the Gospel of John with the pericope of the woman caught in adultery. Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.

It is so typical of the Lord Jesus that we seem to take it as inspired and yet it has fallen out of its, of its, actually it has been added in. It wasn't in the earliest manuscript. So things like this always are a bit of a head-scratcher.

But we'll look at the missing material and I will give you my thoughts on it. But what I will say is in marking my Bible and finding the chiasms and the quatrains and the symmetries, I was having difficulty with this section. And when I discovered through a footnote somewhere that there was more material in the Septuagint, this solves the problem.

And I thought, well, should I just stick with what's in the text because it's easier for us to make notes in our Bible as it stands? Or should I print this particular section, the mind quatrains, in a separate page that we can stick in our Bible? And I may do that and have it posted for next week, but we'll take it as it comes for now. So with that caveat, let's begin. Our first quatrain here is addressing the priorities that should characterize our thinking, our mind.

We always summarize, I always summarize thinking under goals, values, and priorities. It seems to me that almost everything we undertake can be addressed in those terms. Where does this fit as far as the goals that should pertain in my life? How does it reflect biblical values, scriptural truth, God's righteousness, and God's definition of what is evil versus what the world may say, and our priorities? As we look at goals and as we look at what is important and what is right and what is wrong, how do we then order our efforts and list things in order of priority so that we do the big things and the important things first, the minor things and the little things or less important things come later? And so priorities generally get sorted in terms of our understanding of their relative importance.

So here, when it says that the getting of wisdom is better than gold and getting understanding should be chosen rather than silver, a couple of things immediately come to mind. This is a reflection of priorities. Should I pursue material benefit, material good? Should I also pursue spiritual understanding? And in what proportion? If I work eight hours a day and I spend 20

minutes in reflection and Bible study and prayer and so on, have I got wrong priorities? Should I be spending eight hours in Bible study and 20 minutes working? Well, we would probably soon starve.

So it isn't so much a matter of what time do we dedicate, but to what extent do we honor what we have learned, what we carry around in our souls versus thinking that would characterize anybody, even an unbeliever, in terms of how should this job be done, with what attitude, under what conditions, with what motivation, with what outcome, how concerned should I be about outcomes? Am I more concerned about material outcomes? Here is a good circumstance that resulted or did it reflect the glory of God? Did it cause someone to see my good works and glorify my Father who is in heaven, as Jesus said? So these are issues that pertain to our thinking, what goes on in our mind, our values, our understanding of truth we think of as residing in our heart, our motivations we think are, biblically speaking, spring from the heart. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, which is why it needs cleansing. It needs a pure heart to be created by God, when you read Psalm 51.

So here's the thing, how much better to get wisdom than gold? So we know that if we had to choose between compromising our spiritual identity, moving away from our identity as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and our function in terms of our biblical charge, our biblical responsibility, those opportunities and potentials that God gives us, if that is going to take a back seat to pursuing prosperity, our job, if our job makes us so tired that we really can't think, we can't pray, we fall asleep in Bible class, we find ourselves constantly thinking in earthly terms, human perspectives, with human goals, human values, human priorities, something is wrong because wisdom is better than gold. Our spiritual life is more important and more central than the material world and getting on and advancing and succeeding in the material world. And there have been cases where people have to withdraw from a particular kind of employment because it requires compromise, it requires being a participant in evil practices and you become complicit, you become an accessory or even someone who has to implement an evil policy.

And this becomes a choice. Do you want to live under wisdom or do you want to continue to receive the gold? So this isn't just a sort of happy metaphor that isn't wisdom great, oh, it's worth its weight in gold. No, this is an actual biblical truth.

Wisdom is more important than the material remuneration or acquisition that would characterize most human lives. And when it comes to a choice, we should be choosing that which underwrites and undergirds and supports and motivates spiritual advance, not that which advances us materially at our spiritual life's expense. So how much better to get wisdom than gold and to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.

Now we see that the issue here isn't just one is better than the other, one is greater in God's eyes and is going to stand up at the judgment better, but this is a choice. And the wisdom that is available, we can listen to it, we can accede to it, we can agree with it, we can assent that it is

true. We have no argument with it.

That certainly seems right to me. That reflects everything I've ever learned from the scriptures. But to understand it with the outcome of application, you can agree that smoking causes cancer, but you don't act on that agreement by cutting out nicotine, cutting out cigarettes.

There are things that we know, but they don't produce change. We can know something and it doesn't divert us into a different path. We don't do something about it.

This is why scripture can say, you believe, well, that's great. Even the demons believe and they tremble at the knowledge. What do the demons not do? They don't repent.

They don't change. They don't avail themselves of whatever form of grace was offered to them by God. And based on everything we know in scripture, there was some sort of reunification that was possible for the angels who rebelled.

And it was evidently rejected. We don't have those details. We'll probably get those in the future ages.

But at present, it isn't something we need to know. We have our hands full understanding our own salvation and our own requirement for repenting, to change our minds when we understand the content of wisdom. Do differently.

God will enable us and empower us to change if we avail ourselves of that promise. I will strengthen thee. Yea, I will help thee.

Yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. And when we choose righteousness, because we understand that wisdom leads us in paths of righteousness, then God will give us the enablement that is necessary to fulfill it. So far from being sort of a shallow aphorism, this is important for us to reflect on.

It is genuinely better to get wisdom than to pursue gold. And we can typically balance our lives in a way that we can do both. We can earn a living.

We can pay our bills. We can owe no man anything, which is another biblical value. Doesn't mean never take out a loan.

It means don't be late on your payments. Don't default. Don't fail to make good on whatever promise you made when you got into that situation.

And to be reliable, to reflect integrity and character in our dealings with others, whether it's individuals or institutions. Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. That means pay your taxes.

We're coming up on tax season. And don't cheat. Don't bend the truth.

Don't use the magic pencil to make things come out better. Because the way of wisdom is to trust God. And if the taxes seem high and confiscatory, and it's going to leave me short, well, that's an opportunity to trust God to make up the difference.

That's the way of wisdom. It's better than whatever material gain we think we might preserve or acquire. And with that wisdom, remember earlier in Proverbs, get wisdom and with all you're getting, get understanding.

This is like acquiring fuel and then be sure you have something that you can use that fuel efficiently. Cold weather is coming, get kerosene. And with all you're getting, get a stove.

Get a kerosene stove. Wisdom without understanding is an abstraction. It is knowledge that puffs up.

It doesn't result in love that builds up. So there's a lot you can say just about verse 16. Then in verse 17, this is where we see this emphasis on application.

Once you have wisdom, once you get understanding, now you're going to walk down the way with it. And what way does wisdom with understanding take us? Well, the highway of the upright is to depart from evil. Now we say, well, departing from evil is a highway.

That's not what this is saying. It says the departure point for the highway of the upright is evil. Whenever you're going to your Google maps and it says, what's your starting point? And then what's your destination? Usually starting point is your location.

And then the destination is the place you want to go. But in the your location box, it's evil. And the highway of the upright departs from railroad station evil and heads toward righteousness, heads toward acceptability and pleasing God.

So the highway of the upright, this is upright people's highway. It's starting point is evil. It is going to take us away from evil, distance us from evil, from its contemplation, from its practice, from its effects on us.

We are leaving that bad environment. Bad company corrupts good morals. So the place of evil, if we are upright, meaning we have recognized wisdom and we're getting understanding and we are moving away from evil as a result, this is going to put distance between us and evil.

And if we guard our way, we continue to stay on that highway without detour, without off ramp, without going back. I forgot something. I need to go back to evil.

Keeping the way, this preserves our soul, our life, our nefesh. And we begin to have a pattern of life that not only distances us from evil, but preserves us. And as we guard our way, the way guards us and distances us from evil.

So when we guard our way, we ensure that we are headed in the right direction by God's grace. God's grace is going to distance us and preserve us. So it's a win-win.

So that's the first quatrain. There's three of these quatrains here as it exists in our English translation. I will give you briefly the change that is evident when we look at the Septuagint.

You remember the Septuagint? Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures, done a couple of hundred years before Christ, called the Septuagint because 70 individuals allegedly worked on it. That's the legend. But in this verse, this is what the Septuagint reads.

And I find it hard to believe that some Greek Hebrew bilingual guy that was working on this passage just decided spontaneously to insert material. It is much easier for material to drop out of a manuscript by any number of ways. Homo eteluton and ellipsis and other things can happen where a scribe's eye will skip from one word to the same word or a similar word down below than it is to imagine the creation of material like this.

So let me read you this verse in the Septuagint. This is verse 17 about the highway of the upright in the Septuagint. The paths of life turn aside from evil.

And you can see that's very close. The highway of the upright departs from evil. So the paths of life turn aside from evil and the ways of righteousness are length of life.

So that's your first two lines. The paths of life turn aside from evil. The ways of righteousness are length of life.

And this is going to continue then. He that receives instruction shall be in prosperity. And he that guards reproofs, that values reproofs, shall be made wise.

He that keeps his ways preserves his own soul. This is the line that we have as the second line in verse 17. And then the second part of that is he that loves his life will spare his mouth.

That's a lot to write down. Don't worry about getting it right now. I will print this out.

I'll make a page so that you don't have to try to type it out. And I'll try to show what this does structurally. The structure is different in what we have in our Masoretic text based English, but it still works.

And we want to just get the point. I am not so concerned about structure as what structure helps us to understand. And God apparently thought it would be okay for generation after generation of English speaking people and even Hebrews who are using the Masoretic text to derive benefit and Holy Spirit guided strength and wisdom from what is here.

So we're not shooting ourselves in the with what we have here. And that 16 and 17, that's a quatrain as it stands now. And so you move if you notice from wisdom and understanding to its effect on your life.

Now, this is how we're going to walk. This is the way that we are going to travel and we're going to guard. We're going to ensure that nobody pushes us off the road.

No one draws us away, entices us away, seduces us by pleasing words. We're not going to be dazzled by the crafty harlot and the inducements that she pitches of, you know, come to my house, baby. And, you know, as they used to have in some of the old songs from the 30s, you know, this, why don't you come up and see me sometime? And the unspoken promise of momentary gratification is a distraction.

So we move from what should characterize our thinking to its effect on how we act. What does this do in practical terms? If we just pull up right now, if this was the only two verses that we looked at tonight, what would we do with this tomorrow and the next day? We are together in Bible class week after week. We learn things.

We see it in Scripture. We try to gain clarity of what it says and what it means. And there is suggested application, but we have to take this wisdom and understanding and work it for ourselves.

Most of us don't know the details of other people's road. You know, we say, you've got to hoe your own row. And there can be people on each side, and I can take a glance and see a little bit of what they're facing, their opportunities, their challenges, their blessings, their tests.

And I can pray for those that are in my near periphery as intelligently as I can. But if you think about it, we individually know the most about what is hard for us to overcome by way of distraction or temptation or sin that wants to infiltrate from our nature and get into our mind, get into our speech, get into our actions. We used to, in the old days, talk about the mental attitude sins and sins of the tongue and overt sins.

It's a convenient classification of the areas where we tend to fail. And getting wisdom and getting understanding, only we can take those things and leverage the power of God for change, for improvement. And in the areas where we're doing well, you know, it isn't always, we're starting from a point of failure and defeat.

Many of us, I think, by God's grace, have made some progress. We have mastered some of the things that used to cause us to worry or to fail or to fall into bad habits, sinful habits, sins of the tongue or attitude sins. And where we used to have a great deal of impatience or bitterness or implacability or want to hold a grudge or whatever, by God's grace, the Holy Spirit and the Word of God have re-engineered our heart.

And we're able to keep those things in check. We recognize them when they're coming and we shoot them down before they get in the door. And it's a wonderful thing.

But when you shoot, and it's a fun thing to keep track of this in movies, when people are shooting, how much ammunition do you have? It amazes me that somebody that's got a pistol in his waistband can fire off 25 or 30 shots. Is he reloading? Was he carrying a pocket full of magazines with extra bullets? If he's got a revolver, what happened after six shots? Why is he still shooting? And they've gotten better about that in more recent days. But in the old

Westerns, guys could fire for days and never reload.

We have to reload our defenses and our active opposition to the things that want to infiltrate our soul. We get a handle on it, but we can't take for granted that, well, that problem is solved. I'm not going to worry anymore.

I won't be bitter anymore. I won't be vindictive or be unhappy with others' behavior and have it throw me off stride. We have to continually renew our resources.

That's why even people who are wise continue to pursue wisdom and to value it more than gold. I've got three barrels of wisdom, so I'm all set. We expend it.

We use it like ammunition. And this is why we are continually resorting back to refreshment and restoration in the Word of God. It's important that we be reminded.

It's important that our fleshly heart and mind be renewed in the power of God, because it's like the green spot that a flashbulb makes in your eye. Initially, it's very bright and very distracting, and your eye can chase it around the room because it's more real than what you see in the room, but it fades. I used to have a great illustration in the old days of cathode ray tube televisions, the black and white TVs.

When you turned off the knob, there would be an image that would slowly fade. The phosphorescence would continue. And this was the way the old TVs worked.

The phosphorescent picture, you could scan it with the picture tube. The stuff in the back would spit a line of electrons out, and it would cause the phosphors to glow. And before they faded, it would start at the top and run all of these lines down, and then it would return to the top and scan another line.

But it scanned it before the first lines faded, and so you had a continuous picture. And we do the same thing. We are illuminated.

We are activated, and we are energized by the contact we have with God's Word and the Holy Spirit. But it requires constant renewal, because we are fallen. We are temporary and temporal.

And wouldn't it be great if you could hear a Bible class on a subject and never forget it. It's always fresh. It's always effective.

And I never have to revisit that again. I don't need a review. I don't need a reminder.

I've got it. I'm like a program in a computer. I've been written in a new way.

I've got a new routine, and it's rock solid. Every time I encounter that situation, I do exactly the same thing. We are mortal.

We are fallible. And so this constant search and prizing of wisdom to revisit it, to review it, to

think on it, think on these things, is so important. And to understand.

And we can learn a thing, and it has one application and one meaningful aspect for us when we come back to that very same truth in different circumstances. We're older. Times have changed.

Situations have changed. Relationships have changed. That same truth has fresh impetus and fresh power to enable us to walk worthy of our calling and to reflect the Lord Jesus in His glory.

And that same truth needs revisiting so that its power can be implemented in the present, not just the past. So that is what we want to focus on. Consistent daily exposure to the Word of God.

We have two meetings a week, two Bible classes each. Out of seven days, we have a little over two hours of Bible class in which we get together and look at the Word and think on it in fellowship and in worship. All the rest of the time, it is up to us.

It is our individual choice to choose understanding is better than choice silver. We choose it. And this has to be a daily choice.

We have to think about it when we are currently not thinking about it, and in the midst of work, in the midst of chores, in the midst of relaxation, in the midst of pleasures. If I have done nothing by way of prayer or a few minutes of reflection on Scripture, and I'm binge watching something on streaming television, where are my true priorities? I can tell myself I'm an active, healthy, enthusiastic, growing believer, but if I'm investing several hours in entertainment and I have paid no attention on this particular day whatsoever to anything related to the Scripture, what does the Holy Spirit have to work with? The Holy Spirit is not going to inspire a TV script to guide me in the paths of peace and the way of righteousness. It has to be the Word, and I have to choose to bring that understanding to mind so that the Holy Spirit can then lead and guide, enable, empower, and cause my faith to lay hold of righteousness, lay up treasure in heaven.

And the great thing is God's Word is so powerful that I don't have to have equal parts of pursuing gold and pursuing my spiritual life. God's Word is powerful enough, 15 or 20 minutes of thoughtful reflection will energize me for the day. Do you notice how you can take some of these new devices with lithium-ion batteries? You can charge them for an hour and they last a day.

That's the way the Word of God is. That's how powerful it is. That's what the Holy Spirit can do with it.

But we have to choose the choice silver. We have to choose the gold. And in so doing, and making that our highest priority, God will infuse His power and His grace and His guidance and His glory into all of the rest of the day.

And we're constantly aware. Let your moderation be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.

The Lord is nearby. And that brief reminder, that brief review, that little bit of reflection will let the Holy Spirit revisit and remind us of who we are and why we're here all through the day. But give us this day our daily bread.

Think about the spiritual bread, the manna, the wisdom, and the understanding of that wisdom that ought to define us. It is who we are and why we're here, but it's a choice. All of that in that first set of lines here in this section.

Let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to move forward in the mind quatrains.