

Proverbs 25-03-05b

We're ready now to continue our study in this wonderful section of Proverbs, and we're looking at the importance of wisdom and understanding that is underscored in Proverbs 16, 16. And it goes on to say, the highway of the upright is to depart from evil. He who keeps his way preserves his soul.

And what does it mean to preserve your soul? We could say, well, am I preserving it from evil because I'm putting distance by traveling the highway of the upright? That is certainly there, but to guard, to keep, to preserve intact, if you will, is not only for time, but also for eternity. There is an alumni magazine that you can, if you're a life member of the Alumni Association, it comes every other month. And a recent January, February issue of 2025 has the midshipman picture of President Carter when he was a midshipman at Navy, as you know, he was a graduate.

And there was a review of his long and productive life. But there is a section, and I'm sure this pertains in many alumni magazines, of obituaries for Naval Academy graduates who have passed away. And it reminds me, my dad used to subscribe to the Tulsa World, and he would turn to the obituaries and see if he knew anybody or if he was listed, as he would often.

Joke, but it is a sobering thing to consider and to take the time to consider that one day, you know, your name here will be in some form on a page where your life is summarized. I'm going to pick one of these just at random and not give you the name. But this individual was born on 5 December in 1945, Lakewood, New Jersey.

His parents, his father was in the Navy. His father was a blimp pilot stationed at Lakehurst Naval Air Station. He grew up in Northfield, New Jersey, graduated from Mainland High School, enrolled at the Naval Academy, active in athletics, participated in football and rugby.

After graduating, he was initially stationed at Pensacola. His memorable time was playing for the football team there, which notably included Roger Staubach. He married a lady in 1967 with whom he had two children.

Their names are given. He served as a surface warfare officer, and it gives the different ships that he served on. He got a master's degree in computer science, completed his career in the Navy in 1975 at Sinkpank Fleet in Hawaii, where he managed command and control systems, enjoyed the ocean, surfing, scuba diving.

Left the Navy as a lieutenant commander, worked for Honeywell Information Systems. He was a manager of operations for them at Newport News Shipbuilding. Later, he returned to the federal government, worked for the FDIC and the Environmental Protection Agency, retired in 2009.

Following retirement, he and his second wife lived in Florida for six years. He taught at college,

did computer courses, moved to Chapel Hill, North Carolina to be close to his wife's daughter and her family. He is survived by, and it gives a list of all the people, services were held at the Naval Academy, and so on.

I belabor that for this reason. That is the last we hear and know about this fellow. And if our life is that only, if it is a summary of where we lived, what jobs we held, who we were associated with, what we enjoyed.

You read these, you read description after description, obituary after obituary, and it is the highlights, it is a summary. The people who know the departed well could fill in many more details, but the grass withers and the flower fades. We are born, we have this time on earth, we come to the end of that time, and we are gone.

And as we were looking at on Sunday, we can think of our life as vintage wine from fine old kegs, from the brim to the dregs. But the things that are achieved in this life are ephemeral and transient. You serve on a ship, but by now that ship is decommissioned.

You serve in a unit, but the people in that unit were only collected as that group for a short time, even while you were there. Some came and others left, and that unit has completely reformed with different people that may not even exist anymore. And the experiences and the accomplishments of life are so fleeting.

You work in a company, and you sweat the bottom line, and reports that need to be given, and projects that have to be accomplished. And we invest time and sweat and labor, and we're concerned, are we going to do well? Will we keep our job? Will we be promoted? Will we be let go? And these strutting and fretting hour on the stage is very meaningful and important and immediate to us at the moment. But try to remember where you were on this date a year ago.

If you think hard, you can remember some of the circumstances. Did I still have my same job? Did I still live in the same place? Was I driving something different back then? Were there different people in my periphery? Was I looking forward to something that then happened in the month of March of 2024? It was before the election. Politics were different.

Government was different. International relations were different. Now it's changed.

But there is such a distracting amount of circumstance and change in circumstance that demands something from us in the moment. But when the moment passes, so does the importance and the effect of the accomplishment, in many cases, diminishes and is gone. And it is, in the end, our memories of our life that we carry with us.

Because much of the material accomplishment and the people that we knew, some of them are already gone, even though we're not that old. The older you get, the more people have departed this life. And all of the dynamics of the relationships have become a part of memory instead of part of current life and practice.

This is the gift that God has given us. Eternal life. Wisdom and understanding of that wisdom gives us access to eternal life.

And we preserve our soul. When we do what we do heartily as unto the Lord, that accomplishment still counts. It still matters.

It is recorded in heaven. It is a part of the treasure in heaven. It becomes a part of what is written in God's record and has an effect on the eternal future.

Future opportunities. Future blessings. If we are overcomers in the mundane tasks and requirements of life, sometimes if we've reached a place where most of our heavy lifting is behind us, and we spend a lot of time in semi-retirement or retirement as we get older, we're not doing what people in their 20s and 30s do in terms of just going hell-bent for leather 18 hours a day, things slow down.

And we think, well, I'm not doing as much. My life doesn't mean as much. I'm not having as much of an effect.

And that's actually true. This is why companies want to hire young people and not older people, because we can't get as much done. Our brains don't work as quickly.

Our memories are not as sharp. We have a lot of experience. And in many cases, we can make up with experience and caginess what we lack in energy and pure adrenaline.

But the point is this. Read an obituary page and imagine our name at the top. And it says, born here, grew up here, went to this school, got this degree or learned this skill.

Married this person, lived in this town, worked at this company, retired here. If we get old enough, loved these pursuits, had these hobbies, remembered fondly by these people. Poof.

That's pretty much the last time you're going to read about that individual anywhere. And after the memorial service and after the remains are stored in whatever location, life moves on. And necessarily so.

But to have your accomplishments fade and become just historical footnotes, any unbeliever's life is of that nature, has that characteristic. We as believers, because God has granted us access to his wisdom and understanding and application of that wisdom. When it says in verse 17, he who keeps his way preserves his soul.

We preserve our life. The meaning of our life isn't just circumstantial. It is spiritual.

And spiritual accomplishments, spiritual advance, spiritual growth, spiritual laying hold of is forever with a condition. But if we are faithful and if we continue to be faithful, the accomplishments that we attain, that we perpetrate, take on a spiritual weight of glory that transcends the temporal and the failing, the passing away, the vapor nature that you see at the beginning of Ecclesiastes. That's preserving our soul.

What you did today, think over this past day and whatever routine tasks, whatever special things you had to do today, this day a year ago, you had similar requirements, similar challenges, similar tasks, similar assignments. What were they? Did they get done? It kind of doesn't matter at this point from a human perspective. But from a divine and spiritual perspective, it totally matters.

What you did on March the 5th of 2024 is recorded in heaven. And to the extent that it was done in wisdom with understanding, hardly as under the Lord and not unto men, it counts. You may not see it.

We may not see it in the temporal ephemeral realms down here on Earth. It looks like what unbelievers did and what faithless and indifferent believers did. But for faithful believers who are guarding the way of the upright and not departing from it, every day of your life, the spiritual laying hold of righteousness by faith is stored.

It is preserved. It still counts and it will always count. It is like putting gold on a beautiful dome.

The Naval Academy has a chapel with a dome. And sometimes they cover these things in copper and they turn green. Other times you see like the Dome of the Rock or others.

And when they put gold on one of these domes, you put the gold there, it's reflecting light from now on. Gold is durable. It doesn't corrode.

It doesn't chip and peel and fade. It's valued for that reason. Our understanding of wisdom is gold and silver.

It is valuable and it is durable. Gold, silver, and precious stones are what survives the fire of God's judgment where wood, hay, and stubble does not. So, how important are these two verses? You can be blown through Proverbs and read them and say, well, yeah, of course.

I mean, I kind of get that. You know, God would always say that understanding His words is real important. And, you know, the way of wisdom is to be desired.

I get that. Think about the implications. Think about the application that you and I can avail ourselves of on an hourly basis every day.

I can take any assignment and I can convert it into an eternal weight of glory, even if it's affliction, even if it's hardship. If I'm working through difficulty, if I am enduring an oppressive, unhappy situation or circumstance or relationship, the way I handle it matters. If I do it with my spiritual resources, if I do it by the grace of God, in the strength and power of the Word and the Spirit, I have converted this momentary light affliction into an eternal weight of glory.

When Paul says that in Romans, he is not kidding. And think about the number of days that maybe we've still got left to us. Whatever has happened in the past, and I think a lot of us have been aware of this and have been trying to remember it and to apply it and practice it across

our lives.

But even if we start right now, every day from now until our death or the return of the Lord, we can redeem the time. The days are going to be evil by default, but we can convert difficulties. We can convert mundane tasks, routine chores, the daily grind, the assignment that we're given.

It's another day in the neighborhood. It's another day at work. It's another day in the house.

It's another day where I've got boxes I have to check and places I have to be and things I have to do. Just checking the boxes and doing things, think about the obituary. They don't even come up.

You couldn't write an obituary long enough to include, well, this guy had a really hard day and look how well he did. It doesn't show up. It vanishes.

Its memory is forgotten with the passing of time. Not spiritual advance, not spiritual accomplishment, not spiritual attainment. We preserve our soul.

We preserve our soul with this highway of the upright departing from evil. The days are evil. We depart from evil days.

We turn our evil days into days of righteousness, days of spiritual accomplishment. I did what I did and I manifested the fruit of the spirit as I did it. The fruit of the spirit is eternal.

When you have a day where you are patient by God's grace through God's strength, that patience is stored in heaven for that day. Think about the heavenly obituary. That's a long one.

Every day where we have a spiritual victory, a spiritual laying hold, a spiritual storing up, it is not forgotten. It is all a part of the record. And every day that God gives us is a day that we can add to that record.

It's such a cool thing that we can convert the usual and the ordinary into the extraordinary and the unusual through wisdom and understanding that wisdom. And this is at its core. Preserve your soul.

Preserve your life. Preserve the pushing through and the effort and the work of faith and labor of love. Isn't it interesting that Paul says that? God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith, your labor of love.

When our work and labor are characterized by faith and love, it gets stored. It's gold. It's silver.

It counts. What a terrific thing. That's eternal life.

That is the way in which we possess our eternal life now. We will fully enter into it and we're going to rejoin these wonderful things that we have put in the bank, so to speak. And we'll

enjoy the fruit of it and the benefits of it and the privileges that thereunto pertain when the Lord returns.

When we are moved into that new realm, that great kingdom and the kingdom of the Father that follows it. So this makes a difference. This is the first quatrain in this set of quatrains about our mind, our thinking.

So the first one is, what are our priorities? Do we understand what's important? It's important to view the day as an opportunity to redeem the time. That's its primary purpose. Tomorrow is Thursday, March the 6th.

God is giving us tomorrow, March the 6th or whatever day you're listening to this, God is giving us that day as capital, as something that we can invest. Think of the parable of the talents. What are you going to do with it? Can you invest it and not only accomplish the tasks, but double that talent and put another talent in the eternal bank? In the treasure in heaven.

I not only did what I was supposed to do, heartily as unto the Lord, and it was a blessing for me and those around me. It was a blessing to whoever I did it for or whatever interest I did it in. It's a blessing now, but I've taken that and I've doubled it.

It's got a permanent counterpart in the future. What a privilege and we're so easily distracted and it's so easy to forget that this is what we are here to do. Take this time and double it.

The Lord Jesus is the firstborn of God and we enter into the privilege of the firstborn, which is the double portion. So that's the first quatrain, verses 16 and 17. What is important? You think about the heart.

You think about the Lord and His evaluation. That was where we started back in chapter 15 and into chapter 16. And then the King.

There is authority that the King has over a kingdom. We have authority over our time, over our efforts, over our thinking. We are the King in the sense that there are things over which we have sovereignty.

We have control. We decide. We choose how this is going to be done.

Kings are constrained. You look at the King of England. He's got Parliament and all kinds of other things.

There are limitations. Any authority structure can't just do anything they please because there are constraints and realities. We have those as well.

But this King set of quatrains tells us the importance of how we use the authority and the control that we have. Now we're looking at the thinking that is behind that. So first of all, I would say that this first quatrain is when it comes to thinking of the importance of things, what is the long view? Think in eternal terms.

Every minute, every hour, every choice, every thought. When Paul says take every thought captive for Christ, it's another angle on this same truth. So then you come to verse 18 and 19.

Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. It is better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud. We move here from what is your assignment of importance to what is your attitude? It is one thing to evaluate factors, situations, variables, and assign them importance.

Is it more important for me to get my car fixed or to get to work on the bus? Is it more important for me to open a line of communication or to cultivate and nurture a relationship? Or is it more important for me to get something done around the house? This is mind machinations. These are evaluations and assignments of priority that we make in our mind. Now we move into what is your attitude behind all of this? Am I self-interested? Am I assigning myself and my comfort and my pleasure and my plan the highest priority? Am I here to make sure that I am gratified by what goes on? That would be pride.

I will raise my throne above the stars of God, Satan said. I will be like the Most High. I, me, myself.

The unholy trinity. Pride goes before destruction. Self-interestedness.

Thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, as Paul puts it. Do not think of yourselves more highly than you ought to think. And the reason we have that imperative is we are very capable of doing that.

We prioritize ourselves in ways that we shouldn't. Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. It is better to be of a humble spirit.

Notice in verse 18 and 19, this is in the spirit. The spirit here is a reflection of attitude. In the previous section, wisdom and understanding reside in the mind.

This is content. This is propositional truth. This is evaluating and assigning priorities.

The spirit, this is your gut. This is your sort of emotional view of things. And if our emotion says, I need this, I want that.

Someone is dissing me, disrespecting me. Someone is, I'm not getting my due. I need something different.

Well, I am thinking of myself in subjective terms. I am proud. I am haughty.

How dare you? This is what they call, I think it's kind of a funny metaphor, when people see what's happening in the shift of governmental priorities, and they call it pearl clutching. Oh, my world is being toppled, and my position at the top of it in high society is being threatened. And so they call that pearl clutching.

But it is an expression of this haughty idea of how dare you. I shouldn't be treated this way. This shouldn't be my situation.

Pride and a haughty spirit go before destruction. And this idea of destruction has the idea of being shattered. This has been translated this way, and this is by the inestimably great Bruce K. Waltke.

This is Waltke's translation of these two verses. Before a shattering, pride. Pride comes before a shattering.

Before shattering comes pride, and before humiliation comes a haughty spirit. Pride inevitably precedes shattering. Where there is pride, that pride will be shattered.

Where there is a haughty spirit, inevitably there will come humiliation. The Bible says one inevitably leads to the other. So verse 19, Dr. Waltke says, Better to be one lowly in spirit with the oppressed than to divide plunder with the proud.

And why is that? What kind of plunder do you think it would be, looking at this quatrain and its predecessor? Gold and silver? What's better than gold and silver? It is better to have a humble heart, a lowly spirit, than to divide the spoil, you think of gold and silver, with the proud. And notice, the proud have grouped together to despoil others. When proud people get together, others suffer and they aggrandize themselves.

They are greedy and they take to themselves spoil. If you stop and think about the situation, what does it mean to divide spoil with the proud? If you are a proud person, you will associate with other proud people, and you will join with them in despoiling others, being unfair and criminally culpable for taking to you what does not belong to you. Pride not only leads to shattering, haughty spirit not only leads to this humiliation, but it leads to harm to others.

You take their stuff to yourself and divide it with others who are similarly proud. You're going to be associated with people who are defined by pride, instead of associating with the lowly. Remember when Jesus said, come unto me, you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

My yoke is easy, my burden is light. I am lowly and humble of heart. And the Lord Jesus associated with the Galileans and with those who were socially ostracized because they were poor or because they were diseased or because they were cast out.

He did not associate with the proud. He wasn't regularly found with the Pharisees. He would talk to them.

He would even respond to the occasional dinner invitation, but he was not dividing the spoil with them. He condemned them and pronounced woes on them, which of course infuriated them. There's always a choice when rebuke comes.

You can get angry or you can get right. So, better to be of humble spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud. This is also a choice we make.

What kind of attitude are we going to nurture? Are we going to cultivate humility or are we going to tolerate pride? The original sin of Satan was pride. Pride caused Eve to bite the fruit and to get out from under the structure that God had created. Well, this brings us to the third quatrain here in verses 20 and 21.

And this has to do with our input-output, if you will. If you think in computer terms. If you think in terms of interaction with what is around us.

What is it that we listen to? And what is it that we trust? So in verse 20, he who heeds the word wisely will find good. And whoever trusts in the Lord, happy is he. You notice when I said these quatrains are sort of chiasmic.

Remember the subject of the first section up there in verse 16, how much better to get wisdom. He who heeds the word wisely. That's your wisdom and understanding from verse 16.

Wisdom and understanding. So once you have those, you get the wisdom and you understand it. Is it going to be a part of your way? Is it going to affect your attitude? Because he who heeds the word wisely will find good.

You're going to travel away and you're going to encounter good. God's goodness. Whoever trusts in the Lord, which is an inevitable result of wisdom and understanding.

That's why we started out with the heart chiasm and then the Lord chiasm. You get your heart right. Your heart is going to be full of love and appreciation for the Lord.

We love the Lord with all our heart. With all our soul, with all our strength and with all our mind. And so you see these coming out in Proverbs.

The heart is oriented toward the Lord. Our faith is directed toward the Lord. Whoever trusts in the Lord, there is happiness and goodness.

Who doesn't want happiness and goodness? How do we get there? Pay attention to the word, get wisdom, get understanding and then heed it. I have researched this particular chemical that is listed on the label of my food. And so it is harmful.

It can do bad things. It can create inflammation in my body. It can cause me to be obese.

It can contribute to diabetes. It can give me headaches. It is basically formaldehyde for food and it's not good for me.

I can understand that. That is the wisdom. That is what has been determined in the secular world by science.

I can understand that if it is a poison, then the more I consume, the worse it is going to be for me. But will I heed it? Will I say, even though that is my favorite snack, my favorite food, one of my staples, I am going to heed the warning that comes from wisdom about its ingredients and understanding the effect of those ingredients on me personally. So I am going to heed it.

And I will instead trust that God has provided me something better in the physical realm and that's what I'm going to look for. I will encounter good and I will be happy. That is the promise of the Lord.

Notice the conditions. If we trust, we will be happy. If we heed the word, we will encounter good.

If then, conditional promise. If I find that my life isn't really characterized by good and if I'm not particularly happy, here's one place to check. What could be the problem? Maybe I am not really trusting the Lord.

Maybe I am not really heeding the word. In one or more areas of my life, we like to focus on the places we're doing well and we don't want to talk about the skeleton in the closet where there's an area where I'm really failing, failing regularly. And I am not trusting the Lord and I'm not heeding his word.

And therefore, I encounter ungood, I encounter evil, and I encounter unhappiness. And if I pridefully continue down that path and if I have a haughty spirit that says, I'm doing fine. I have no need of change.

I have no need. I've got this. I've got it covered.

It is going to precede a fall and a shattering in our life. So then verse 21, which is the final two line section of this, the wise in heart will be called prudent and sweetness of the lips increases learning. The wise in heart will be called prudent.

This is the closing line of this section on the mind. And notice this wisdom that it has been talking about all the way through getting wisdom. It's better than gold.

Understanding it is better than silver. If you are wise in heart, if you heed what precedes this and you cultivate humility rather than pride, you have an attitude of submissiveness. If you heed the word and trust the Lord, you become wise in heart and the wise in heart will be called prudent.

Called by whom? Remember when it says the Lord Jesus as a youth grew in favor with God and man? Why do you think that was? Do you think the young Lord Jesus as he was moving through the stages from childhood to youth to adulthood was wise in heart? He grew in favor with God and man and the wise in heart will be called prudent. The Lord is going to look down and say, there's one of my children that gets it. That's a smart one.

That's one that is following the guidance and people who are blessed by us because we are humble, because we are prudent, because we have the attitude of submission and cultivation of wisdom and understanding, it is going to be a blessing to those around us and they will also view us and appreciate us as prudent people. Sweetness of the lips increases learning. This is a beautiful transition because the next set of quatrains here is going to talk about speech.

Once we have our heart right, our mind right, our attitudes right, once we are walking in the way of wisdom, once we are trusting the Lord and we are encountering goodness and happiness, we will be qualified to speak. This is one of the reasons it's so important to not send new believers out on an evangelistic mission. We must learn and become so that our lips will be sweet.

Our words will be persuasive. When it says increases learning, the word learning there means persuasion, convincing, bringing a point home to someone in a meaningful and helpful way. The wise in heart will speak in a way that is conducive to the message being accepted.

Now, you can't always judge whether the lips were sweet by the reaction. There are people, it doesn't matter how sweetly you speak, they're going to act like a wounded bobcat that's been cornered. The Lord Jesus had sweetness of lips.

He was wise in heart. He was prudent. And his presentation was met with ultimately violent resistance.

But that was not the Lord's fault. But if there is any chance of persuading, if there is any chance of other people learning and coming to an understanding, coming to an appreciation of God's truth, it will be spoken by those who are wise in heart and people will recognize them as prudent and will listen to their speech, which is a soft answer that turns away wrath. It is apples of gold and pictures of silver, gold and silver in the presentation.

And this second line in verse 21 leads us into verses 22 and following, 22 through 26, which is going to be all about how we communicate with each other. So practical, so helpful. I can't wait to get into this section.

I'd do it tonight if we had time because it's such a beautiful movement from what is going on in our mind and in our heart, what is going on between us and the Lord with our trust and our faith to the effect that we have on others through our speech. As we, first of all, concentrate on our wisdom and our understanding, resulting in faith and a wonderful relationship with the Lord, now God can use us to be a blessing to others through our conversation, through our speech. And what a great opportunity.

Another way that we can convert time into eternal value, convert our understanding and our wisdom into that eternal treasure in heaven that God wants us to accrue and has promised to give us through faith and patience. We inherit the promises. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the tremendous depth of truth and the opportunity that we have to understand it and to apply it. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will shine a light on our path through these words, help us to see clearly where our decision points are, where we can implement good priorities, we can redeem our time, we can convert each and every part of the day into that which has an eternal weight of glory attached. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.