

BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: Win the Day!

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Message Title: Less Talk, More Action! Pt. 2

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(Proverbs) Verse 5:

**The righteousness of the blameless will smooth his way,
But the wicked will fall by his own wickedness.
The righteousness of the upright will deliver them,
But the treacherous will be caught by *their own greed*. (*NASB, Proverbs 11: 5-6)**

All of that then goes down to Verse 10. Verse 10, I think, gives us the strategy, gives us the language that we can speak in order to be heard.

What Verse 10 says is,

When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices. (Vs. 10a)

In other words, when the *tzadik*, when the righteous prevail—when they have their way, when they are thriving in the culture, when they begin to restore the fabric of *shalom*—there’s something about that that appeals to the soul of others. What if the righteous introduced a concept of *shalom*? There *is* a way that we can do this together, that we can create these pockets, where we flourish together and everyone wins, whether you’re black or white, whether you’re rich or poor, whether you’re Republican or Democrat. Isn’t there some way we can come together, and have this sense that we all can flourish together? That’s the vision that God intended, in Proverbs 10, that it’s a vision that is filled with hope. The vision of the wicked is ultimately destruction. There’s no hope and there’s no future and people feel that. It’s all coming unraveled. But the vision of *shalom* is filled with hope. There is another way! We can do this together, and we can create a culture where we all flourish. What the text says is: **when the righteous have their way, the city rejoices** because people feel that. “That’s what my soul wants, what my soul longs for.” There’s a sense in which this is a better way.

The idea of *rejoicing* is a Hebrew word that was primarily used to describe military victory. As a matter of fact, this is the only time in the Old Testament this word is used outside of the framework of a military victory. In the ancient world, when your armies went out to battle, everything was at stake. If they lose the battle, this isn’t like a football game where they come back and you say, “You know, we’ll get them next time.” This is for keeps. If the army loses, life as you know it has come to an end. You’re either going to be slaughtered or you’re going to be sold into slavery. But your chance at life is over. That’s the word that’s used to describe when the army wins. There is this sense of victory, this rejoicing, because we’re all in this together. Live or die, we’re in it together.

The vision of Chapter Ten carries the idea, that even though people feel the culture unraveling and have all these concerns and worries, and wonder what is the solution, when they start to experience pockets of flourishing, something speaks to their soul and says, “This seems like a better way; this seems like a better path.” Then you begin to create a context where The Gospel makes sense, where there’s a sense in which we can have meaningful discussions about God, and Gospel, and what Jesus has done to save us. Ultimately, the only way that there will be true and lasting change, is if people have a meaningful encounter with the resurrected Christ; they experience genuine true conversion. And that requires meaningful conversations around The Gospel, which means there has to be some sort of a language—a common language to speak. *When the righteous cause the city to flourish, the city will rejoice!*

Some of you businessmen, some of you businesswomen, when you’re out there in the marketplace, that world just makes sense to you. You’re wired for that; you thrive out there. It makes sense. But when you step into the church, you’re sometimes struggling to figure out, “I just don’t know where I fit in the Kingdom. I don’t know what I’m supposed to be doing.” I have a suggestion for you: go out there and flourish. Go out there and prosper. Go out there and succeed! Flourishing businesses are honoring to God but do it with a heart toward *shalom*. Don’t do it with a heart toward greed, a heart toward selfishness, or significance, or ego, or stockpiling—where you see how much you can accumulate and buy. We have enough of that. That’s what’s causing the culture to collapse! But when the righteous flourish, they have a vision for *shalom* and understand: this is my stewardship; God’s given me these talents; God’s given me these opportunities; God’s given me these resources, and this is my stewardship; this is my part of the garden to help the garden flourish, to restore *shalom* in a community. Every single one of us intersects in hundreds of ways out into the community.

If we did so with a vision for *shalom*, for flourishing - “How can I serve you? What would it mean for you to flourish? How can we do this together?” - it creates pockets of flourishing that then create platforms for presenting the message of The Gospel.

So, that’s basically what Verse 10 is saying. This would be a very practical goal for us—that we would have a goal that people in our city would say, “This city is better because they are here.” That should be the goal that creates a platform, by which we can express: this is why we do what we do. This is the heartbeat of The Gospel.

The proverb then goes on to talk about that in different ways. I just want to highlight a couple of verses.

Verse 17:

**The merciful man does himself good,
But the cruel man does himself harm.**

Basically, what that is saying, is you ultimately live in the culture you create. So, if you create a culture of mercy and grace, you will receive mercy and grace in your hour of need. But if you create a culture of cruelty, that’s what you will receive in your hour of need. Ultimately, you have to live in the culture you create. That’s the whole idea of this strategy, that everybody has to live in this culture, and if the wicked are slowly destroying the culture, it makes opportunity for an alternative that feeds and speaks to people’s starving souls.

Verse 19:

**He who is steadfast in righteousness *will attain to life*, (and life is the life of flourishing)
And He who pursues evil *will bring about his own death*.**

So that kind of a message is repeated again and again.

Verse 24:

There is one who scatters, and yet increases all the more, (Vs. 24a)

That's the righteous; scattering is generosity; it's sowing seed. And it seems like the more you sow, the more you get back. That creates a flourishing within the community.

And there is one who withholds what is justly due, *and yet it results only in want*. (Vs. 24b)

This is again the person who is cheating someone else. They are not willing to pay them or give them what they have coming, and ultimately you destroy the culture. You go down with it. We cannibalize ourselves.

Verse 25:

**The generous man will be prosperous,
And he who waters will himself be watered.
He who withholds grain, the people will curse him,
But the blessing will be on the head of him who sells *it*. (Vs. 25-26)**

Basically, it's the idea people would store—the rich would store grain typically under their house - and when people were in desperate need, some of them wouldn't sell because as long as they held out, the price would go higher and higher and higher. In the meantime, people were literally starving to death, and eventually when it gets desperate enough, they would sell at a high rate. It would be the idea of those whom God has blessed, those whom God has called to be stewards of what you have received—how you've prospered, what you've gained—to just continually spend it on yourself, and stockpile it year after year after year, while there is such a desperate need for *shalom* within the city. This is a reflection of the greedy, "I'm going to advantage myself and, in the process, it will disadvantage others." But the righteous are generous.

Verse 27:

**He who diligently seeks good seeks favor,
But he who seeks evil, evil will come to him.
He who trusts in riches will fall,
But the righteous will flourish like the green leaf. (vs. 27, 28)**

Verse 30:

**The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life,
And he who is wise wins souls.**

It basically converts people to the way of righteousness, affirming again the strategy is to create pockets of flourishing, that are going to speak to people's souls that are dry and thirsty and looking for something different, looking for something more. And as they begin to get a taste of this new way, they will rethink their belief system, their world view, and possibly even open their hearts to a meaningful discussion, about the Jesus that has so radically changed you.

What is the primary weapon of the wicked to tear down *shalom*?

The answer is in Verse 11:

By the blessing of the upright (or the righteous) **a city is exalted,**
(So, when the righteous prosper, the city benefits.)
But by the mouth of the wicked it is torn down.

Just like Chapter Ten, there is a high emphasis on the damage done by **the mouth** to tear down *shalom*. This is such a big deal in the book of Proverbs, that it is the most discussed topic under the umbrella of wisdom in the entire book of Proverbs. It would be fair to say, you have no possibility of *skillful living*, unless your mouth is under control. It is with the mouth that *shalom* is destroyed. Think about that, as it relates to our culture, as it relates to our politics, as it relates to celebrities, as it relates to so much in our culture, to social media. Why do we talk that way?

Verse 12:

He who despises his neighbor lacks sense,
But a man of understanding keeps silent.

We, as a culture, talk that way because we *despise our neighbor*. Now the word *despise* carries the idea of superiority—this idea that I'm superior. There's this condescending tone. "I'm right; you're wrong. I'm good; you're evil. I'm on the right side; you're on the wrong side." So, there's this sense of superiority that causes us to talk that way, which unravels *shalom*.

Notice what it says up above in Verse 9:

With his mouth the godless man destroys his neighbor,
But through knowledge the righteous will be delivered.

One of the challenges in living in a culture where people despise their neighbor, where people are convinced that their position, their idea, their belief system, is smarter - it's more intelligent, it's more informed - there is this condescending tone to anyone that disagrees with them. I don't think any of us would disagree with that; we experience it every day. The challenge is, it's easy for us as Christians to get drawn into the same behavior. Listen to a group of Christians talk about the people they disagree with politically. There is a condescending tone, "We're good; they're bad. We're right; they're wrong. We're good; they're evil." One of the things that we have to recapture, is the reality, that the only thing that makes us different, is the grace of God. It says in the second half of Verse 12 **...but a man of understanding keeps silent**. It says in the second half of Verse 9 **...through knowledge the righteous will be delivered** from this behavior.

Basically, it looks like this: I was nothing more than a sinner, a misfit and a loser. I had nothing to offer God. But on the basis of God's goodness and His grace and His mercy, through the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, God has offered me forgiveness of sin and a relationship with Him. That is, according to the New Testament, a radical conversion. Now I see the world differently. I have the Holy Spirit dwelling within me, to see the world as God intended it to be, to get a glimpse of *shalom*, to actually be counted among the righteous and to live that way. But the only reason I have that, is because Jesus has radically changed me on the basis of His grace. If I honestly believe that, I have no basis to be condescending. I have no basis to think I'm smarter, that I get it better than they get it, that somehow, I'm a level above the rest. That's not true, so the idea of knowledge and understanding is saying: if we really believe the truth, then we should not be drawn into that same toxic, destructive behavior. The text says in Verse [12]: *rather the man of understanding remains silent.*

The ancient Near East actually had what they referred to as the *Silent Man*, and it was pictured as a strong tree in the middle of a meadow, that wasn't really blown about by all the winds. It was strong and it was sturdy. They had a great value on those that could remain silent in the midst of chaotic and destructive times, understanding the importance of not getting sucked into the angry, toxic, destructive words of the culture. We need to separate ourselves out of that. We don't need to talk louder; it's not a hearing problem. We need to speak a different language. What is the language that the culture will listen to?

Because the wicked prevail, people are feeling *shalom* unravel. You hear people talking about it all the time. What we can offer them are these pockets of *shalom*, these places of mutual flourishing, these places that feel like they have what their soul is longing for, to begin to create platforms, where we can share the message of Jesus.

So, think of it this way: every person represents a thread, and you are a thread that is woven through the fabric of *shalom*. That thread intersects hundreds of other threads to make the fabric. So, think about your world—every place where your life intersects the lives of others. In every one of those intersections, you have the option to do destruction with your mouth, or to begin to create pockets of flourishing, by choosing to love, and to serve, and to care, and to create ways, in which people can flourish in such a way, that it appeals to their dry and thirsty soul. They may actually say, "I think this is what I'm looking for," which opens up the possibility for meaningful conversations.

If people are going to say, "I don't get what they believe, but I do know the city is better because they are here," what is needed is *Less Talk and More Action!*

It is interesting how much the Proverbs talks about how destructive our mouth can be. To say it another way, there is no chance for living skillfully, if you cannot control your mouth. It's not that it will be hard, it's that there is no chance. Some of the Proverbs actually say you just need to be quiet, and for some, that's maybe where it needs to start. So, to me, this includes email. It includes all social media, whether it's Instagram or a blog or whatever. We need to think about how we're using our voice, our words, and the impact that has. In James, Chapter One, Verse 20 - if you were with us, when we went through that study - James says, "The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God". I think we need to stop and think about that.

I know people like to look in the Gospels, and they see Jesus, and He had a righteous anger at The Temple. And for them, that's a justification for what they consider their righteous anger. But it's helpful to remember, we're not Jesus. Jesus was perfect, so He had perfect anger, and it's easy for us to get caught up in the anger of the day. One of the ways to think of *shalom* is to think of it like a fabric. And in a fabric, there's thousands of threads that all intersect one another in so many different ways. And that's the idea of *shalom*, is thinking about where your life intersects other people's lives in so many different places. Imagine, if everyone listening to today's study in Proverbs, took what the writer says seriously, we could make a significant impact on our culture. How do we do that more specifically? We'll talk about that tomorrow from Proverbs Chapter 12.