

BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: Win the Day!

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Message Title: A Guiding Light Pt. 2

Release Date: Thursday, 1/23/20

**Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil,
But counselors of peace have joy. (*NASB, Prov. 12:20)**

Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil and that is contrasted with the *shalom* in the second part of the verse. Basically, what that is saying, is that I may present myself as being a person of compassion, a person who cares, a person who is concerned about injustice and unfairness and things that are right, but at the end of the day, what I am really about, is advancing my cause. I'm about an agenda. I'm about myself and my career and my notoriety. This is my chance to get in the spotlight and make a name for myself. Ultimately, what I'm doing is, I am disadvantaging those in need, in order to advantage myself and my cause. It isn't *true compassion or justice*.

The atheist German philosopher, Nietzsche, had some good things to say, and he had some really bad things to say. One of the things I think that Nietzsche had right is, "By and large people are about power and control. Religion is about power and control. Government is about power and control. A lot of the marketplace is about power and control." I think he was right about that. You think about, then, people who present themselves as being all about justice, but really, they want to advance their cause. It's about using others for power and control to ultimately get my way. That's what the proverb is talking about. What's contrasted are the **counselors of peace have joy**. The word **peace** is our Hebrew word *shalom* that we have been talking about—this idea of mutual flourishing, "Hey, we are all in this together. We all either flourish together or we all go down together," but you ultimately live in the culture you create. The *counselors of shalom* is basically saying, the righteous are those who are not pushing any agenda other than they just genuinely want flourishing, and when they create a context where people can flourish, there is joy; there is satisfaction; there's this glimpse that satisfies something deep within our souls, that says, "This is the way it is supposed to be."

So the fourth and last: We've talked about the *need to be teachable*, about a *Biblical view of work*, about *true compassion and justice*, and the last is a topic that we have talked about quite a bit, because it comes up quite a bit in Proverbs, and that is *what comes out of my mouth*. You say, "You know, Bryan, you've really talked about that quite a bit already." I agree, but it's talked about more than any other subject in the book of Proverbs, under the umbrella of *skillful living*. If you can't control your mouth, you have virtually no chance at *skillful living*. So, what this proverb talks about, is the power of words to destroy, and the power of words to heal—*powerful* both ways.

Verse 6:

**The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood,
But the mouth of the upright will deliver them.**

Very similar, Verse 13:

**An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips,
But the righteous will escape from trouble.**

Both of those verses use a trap metaphor—like going out and setting a trap and baiting the trap. It's basically this idea that the wicked bait the trap; they are just waiting for someone to step in it, in order for them to pounce. The fool falls for it. The fool gets drawn into this toxic war of words that destroys the *shalom* in a community. The second proverb [verse 13] was saying, but ultimately when the fool does that, they end of stepping in their own trap, because you ultimately live in the culture you create. We either all go down, or we all flourish together. There are certain people that it feels like they are always right on the edge of going off, and you just know that. Think with me aren't there certain people that you know, if you take them into any social context, there's a pretty good chance someone is going to say something, and they are going to go off, and create uncomfortable conflict. And you always know they are just right on the edge of that. These are people that just seem to thrive on this. It's almost like they draw energy from this conflict. What the proverb says is, that the righteous aren't like that. "I'm not stepping in that trap. I'm not taking the bait; I'm not going to do that." We need to be more skilled than to fall for that, in whatever environment we are in. Wouldn't it be equally true, that we all know people that we could take into any social environment, and you have a high level of confidence, that no matter what is said there, they're not going to go off at the mouth? They are just too skilled to fall for that. There are certain people where there is conflict everywhere, they go—conflict at home, at work, in the neighborhood, in their small group. There's just conflict everywhere. That's what the proverb is talking about.

Verse 14:

**A man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of his words,
And the deeds of a man's hand will return to him.**

Basically, the reminder is that we all live in the culture that we create. If what comes out of my mouth is *shalom*, that's typically what is returned to me. I live in the culture that I create.

Verse 16:

**A fool's anger is known at once,
But a prudent man conceals (or covers) dishonor.**

Basically, we are talking about a **fool** who has a quick fuse, is always this close to going off. The fool has a problem with his or her temper—the reason he or she is a fool is because you ultimately create a culture that will destroy you. Now I thought about it this week, and I think my statement is accurate. I don't believe over my lifetime, I have ever known anyone with a temper problem, who was happy. I don't think I have. The reason is, because someone who can't control his or her temper, ultimately lives in the culture they've created, and it's a miserable way to live. There is conflict at home, in the marriage, with your kids, in the neighborhood. There's conflict at church, in your small group, at work—there's conflict everywhere. It's a miserable way to live, and I don't think I've ever met anyone with a temper problem, who is happy. So, it's the way of the fool. The **prudent man** conceals or covers dishonor. Dishonor means something that is offensive. It means something that is not only offensive, but might be a put-down, an attack, or something like that. The prudent person—the righteous, the person who lives skillfully, even if there's something that's offensive, even if there's some sort of attack or an insult—they're too skillful to get sucked into that and contribute to the breakdown of *shalom*.

So think of it this way: all of us as Christians are called to be a light out into the darkness, which means we are called to be among people, who don't believe what we believe, that don't think what we think, that don't share our values. They are often going to say things that are offensive. They are often going to say things that are insulting. They are often going to attack, and oftentimes attack you personally. If you can't be in that environment without going off at the mouth, you stand virtually no chance of doing your part to fulfill the *Great Commission*. You have to have more skill than that. Whether it's face-to-face, or whether it's on social media, you have to have enough skill not to get sucked into that. What if I choose not to respond to somebody's insult today, and a week from now, I am able to enter into a meaningful conversation with that same person, to begin a journey to talk about Jesus? That is what the proverb is talking about.

Verse 17:

**He who speaks truth tells what is right,
But a false witness, deceit.**

Verse 17 is courtroom language. It's simply talking about a righteous witness tells the truth, simply because it's right, but the false witness lies, in order to somehow advantage himself, herself, or a cause. We've talked about this already. It is the reminder that truth has to matter. We live in a culture that has said there is no absolute truth. Therefore, we've devalued truth; therefore, we are no longer offended by the lie, and everybody shrugs their shoulders, and, "That's just the way it is." But at the end of the day, without truth, there is virtually no possibility for flourishing...no possibility for justice...no possibility for compassion. Just like in a marriage, there is just no possibility for flourishing, when the two partners won't speak truth. I don't know that the culture at large gets this, but we are the people of God. The one who dwells within us defines Himself as the *Way, the Truth, and the Life*. We have to be people of truth. We have to demand it from ourselves, from our spouses, from our kids, from our pastors, from our churches, from our leaders, from our politicians. We cannot accept anything less; people need to tell the truth!

A couple years ago, I was at a conference, and there was a well-known pastor, who was talking about being on a television show—I think it was ABC's Good Morning America—talking about traditional marriage and was on there with someone basically talking against traditional marriage. And he said as soon as the interview started, the other person just went off, and cited all kinds of studies and statistics of the damage traditional marriage does to communities, people and children, and basically consumed the whole time, and they went to a commercial. And that was it! They were ushered off, and in the Green Room, the pastor said he tried to politely say to this other person, "You know I want to keep learning; I want to keep growing. I'm not familiar with those studies and statistics. I would like to learn more about that. Could you help me find those studies?" The person didn't bat an eye. He just simply said, "Oh, none of that is true; I just made it all up. I will do whatever is necessary to win." I would suggest to you that happens all the time—and everybody goes with it, and nobody really thinks that person is lying. We must be people of truth!

Verse 18:

There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword,

But the tongue of the wise brings healing.

It's a very vivid imagery, that those who speak rashly, recklessly, hurtfully, is like taking a sword and piercing someone again, again, and again, and leaving them bleeding. Now we're all familiar with the saying "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." I don't know who made that up, but they were way off, and they need to talk to The Proverbs, because The Proverbs would say: sticks and stones may break my bones, but words pierce to my heart and leave me bleeding. Isn't it true, we can all think of words that were said to us a year ago, five years ago, ten years ago, thirty years ago, that were hurtful and unkind, and there is still some bleeding that comes out of that scar when you think about it? Words are so powerful. But they are also powerful for healing, which is the second part of that proverb, **But the tongue of the wise brings healing.** If we don't get baited into those destructive conversations, but rather we are skillful enough to offer words of healing, it is equally powerful. Probably most of us, if not all of us, remember things said a year ago, five years ago, ten years ago, thirty years ago, that were words that brought healing and encouragement and life to our souls, and here we are thirty years later, and we still remember those words. There is tremendous power in words.

Several years ago, there was a little encounter in the hallway. To be honest, I don't even remember it. But the person I encountered told me this several months later. Apparently, he came up to me and said, "I am new today and I'm sorry about the way I am dressed." And I said, "I think you look great, and I'm glad you are here this morning." That was the whole exchange right there. I did not know this person was homeless, wandered in our doors, and when I said, "I think you look great; I'm glad you're here," something triggered in his brain that said, "I don't have to live this way. I can live a different life," and it turned him. He got a job, got a house, and about a year later, I had the privilege of baptizing him on this stage. That was less than a thirty-second exchange, which reminds us there is so much power in our words.

Verse 19:

**Truthful lips will be established forever,
But a lying tongue is only for a moment.**

Verse 22:

**Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD,
But those who deal faithfully are His delight.**

Verse 25:

**Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down,
But a good word makes it glad.**

I think there is no shortage of anxiety in our culture today, which means when we offer good, encouraging, healing words, it is a powerful language in our culture. Why does all this matter so much?

Verse 26:

**The righteous is a guide to his neighbor,
But the way of the wicked leads them astray.**

Verse 28:

**In the way of righteousness is life,
And in *its* pathway, there is no death.**

The life that our souls long for is found in righteousness; it's found in flourishing; it's found in *shalom*, which is ultimately then found in a relationship with Christ. But the wicked are determined to lead people astray, and the wicked are winning the culture. Why this matter, is because we, as the people of God, have been called to represent the righteous, to at least create glimpses—pockets of flourishing - in our cities. What a vision or a dream, that one day we could actually win the city! Not a hostile takeover - we win the city and the city rejoices, because people say, "I think this is what my soul is longing for," and it creates an opportunity to exalt Christ the Savior!

So, we're talking about just practical ways we can help create *shalom*. Yesterday, we talked about *being teachable*, talked about *our work*. Today, we want to talk about justice, *true justice*, which is our Hebrew word, *mishpat*. There's a lot of talk in our culture about justice and social justice, but if you really listen to it, most of it is justice for people that agree with me, but *true justice* is different than that.

A couple of years ago, I was in Israel and had built a relationship with our guide. And the night before, he had shared with our group his belief, that there is no absolute truth or morality, and that everything's relative, and all truth is equally true. And so, the next day, we went through the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem, and we happened to go through first, and we're waiting for the rest of our group. And I asked him the question, based on what he shared the night before with the group, what would be the basis by which he would say, what Hitler did to the Jews was evil? And he kind of looked at me and he said, "Well, of course it was evil." And I said, "Well, in my worldview it is evil. But if there is no absolute truth or morality, if Hitler thought that it was the right thing to do, then what gives you the right to say it was wrong?" And he just stared at me, and he said, "I'd never really thought about that."

I think that's a huge problem in our culture. People want justice. I think they're very sincere in that, but you can't get there without absolute truth and morality. So, there has to be a value for truth and morality, for justice to win the day. So, think about it for you. You can't change the world, but as a boss, as an employer, as a teacher, as a coach, as a parent, as a neighbor, what would true justice look like for you? A lot of people today are involved in causes, but they're only involved in causes enough to make them feel better. But if you're going to be serious about justice and making a difference, you really have to roll up your sleeves, get in the mess and work hard. It's not easy, but that is all part of justice in the world.

The last one was one we've talked about before, and that's *the importance of our mouth*, considering the words that are coming out of our mouth. And do they bring encouragement and healing, or do they bring brokenness and destruction? So, we have a chance every day, just based on the words that come out of our mouths, to do damage, or to bring about great healing and compassion. So, in the midst of a culture full of so much anger, I would suggest, I think that provides a tremendous opportunity, to provide something different, something better, that I would suggest is what people are longing for. So, I leave you with this thought: *I'm sure there's*

someone around you today, who needs some words of encouragement and kindness. Maybe start there, and just see what happens.