

SERIES: Win the Day! Wk. 5
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(Proverbs 13) Verse 23 - it's a very interesting proverb:

**Abundant food is *in* the fallow ground of the poor,
But it is swept away by injustice.** (*NASB, Prov. 13:23)

The fallow ground was basically that ground that was left for the poor. It wasn't farmed; it wasn't plowed; it wasn't taken care of. But the poor could have at it, and they could plant their seeds, and they could grow more than enough, for the poor to have plenty to live on. So the question is: then why were there people starving to death? The answer is in the second part of the proverb: because **it is swept away by injustice**; because selfish people in it for themselves take what the poor need to survive, in order to keep it, or sell it to make a profit.

In essence, what this proverb is saying, is that God has created the Earth, in such a way that there is plenty of food for everyone. People look at starving children in the world, and they want to blame God, "If God is so good..." What the proverb is saying, is God has created the Earth in such a way there is more than enough food for everyone. Then why are there starving children? Because of injustice, because of wicked, greedy people around the world, who are determined to disadvantage the community to advantage themselves, and these people ultimately take it for themselves, and there is a consequence. The community doesn't flourish; the community suffers.

So, imagine a culture where people are by and large in that death spiral, where they're going their own way; they are traveling their own path; their hope is deferred. It's one disappointment after another. It becomes more desperate, which means they become more selfish; they become more greedy; they become more self-centered. It becomes more the law of the jungle, and everyone's in it for themselves. Now the very thing they desire, is the thing that's going to destroy us all, and it creates this death spiral, that drives the culture deeper and deeper and deeper into its misery. I would suggest to you that's where we're at.

One of the things that's very interesting, is to listen to the solutions that are proposed to the things that concern us all. What you find if you really listen, you find that nobody has a clue what to do. There is a level of desperation; there is a level of confusion. The solutions are simplistic; they're naïve, and they have no real sense of the depth of the problem, and what has to change, in order for real change and justice and flourishing to happen in our community. So what's the alternative?

Verse 12, second half of the verse:

But desire (there's our word) **fulfilled** (satisfied) **is a tree of life.** (Vs.12b)

But when you travel the path that God has called us to - so imagine the father is trying to teach his son - "This is the path of life. This is the path where you'll find what your soul is searching for. When you find that, that longing in your soul will be fulfilled. What is it like? It's like **a tree of life.**" No question, there is a poetic reference back to Genesis 2 to the Garden of Eden, to Paradise, to the world as God intended it to be. We at least get moments and pockets of that kind of flourishing in this life, with a promise of that in the New Heaven and the New Earth to come.

In the ancient Near East, a tree was a really big deal. We take trees for granted. We take lots of things for granted, but in the ancient Near East, it was such a dry, barren, thirsty climate that trees were rare, and they were valuable. We saw this in our Samuel study. It was the king that got the opportunity to sit under the shade of the tamarisk tree, because trees were so valuable and so rare. They also carried the idea, where there is a green and flourishing tree, there is some source of water. There is life there. Think about Psalm 1. Those who feed and meditate on the Word of God are "... *like trees, firmly planted by springs of water.*" It was a powerful imagery in that ancient climate. So those that travel that path, rather than have hope deferred, there's this satisfaction to their dry and thirsty soul that becomes like this **tree of life.**

You see it again in Verse [13].

But the one who fears the commandment (fear meaning respects it, believes it, obeys it) **will be rewarded.** (Vs. 13b)

There's a reward for listening and following what the proverb says and, of course, the whole of Scripture.

Verse 14:

The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, (Vs. 14a)

Those who listen, those who obey, those who listen to the voice as, "This is giving me directions, how to find the path that leads to that which will satisfy my soul," the idea is the **fountain of life** is like the springs of life. Again, in an ancient Near East culture, to find a spring full of cool, fresh water was the greatest picture of this water that satisfies my dry and thirsty soul.

Verse 15:

**Good understanding produces favor,
But the way of the treacherous is hard.**

We talked about this word **understanding**. It carries the idea of understanding how things work, how God intended them to be and how they work together. I likened it to a mechanic, who can see all the pieces of an engine lying on the shop floor, and the mechanic says, "I know how an engine works. I know how it runs. I know how all the pieces fit together. I can put it all together, and the engine will run." That's kind of the idea of this word—so for someone to understand, "This is God's vision. This is the world as God intended it to be. This is the pathway of mutual flourishing. I understand the vision; I understand the parts, and I have some sense of how to put it together. Even if I am only creating a pocket of flourishing here and there, it is at least a glimpse of the world as God intended it to be." The proverb says that's where you find favor; that's where you find what your soul is looking for.

But the way of the treacherous (which again is those that are unfaithful, those that don't want to travel that path) **is hard.** (Vs. 15b)

The word **hard** doesn't mean difficult. Life for the righteous can be very difficult. Hard is the idea that it will never satisfy. It's unsustainable. It's like going across a bridge that definitely won't hold you. It is going to crash. There's simply no doubt about that.

Verse 16:

Every prudent man acts with knowledge, (Vs. 16a)

Remember the word **prudent** is someone who's kind of street-smart. They're kind of wily. They're clever. They get it. The world is complicated, and they learn how to live with a high level of skill. **Knowledge** is the idea that I don't just understand it in my head, but I understand it to such a level I actually live it out. Again, the Hebrews believed if you don't live it, you don't know it, so knowledge always had the idea of, "I know it so well I actually live that way; I treat people that way. This is how I live my life." So the prudent, the street-smart, the wily person acts with that kind of knowledge.

But a fool displays folly. (Vs. 16b)

That word **displays** is a Hebrew word used to describe a salesman or saleswoman displaying their merchandise, in order that people would buy it. So imagine in the ancient world, somebody goes to a busy marketplace, lays all their wares out and displays them, in order for others to see their stuff and to purchase it. That's the word that is used, so it says the **fool displays**, lays out his or her foolishness for all to see.

Now think about it in our culture. Is it not true that we have become so confused? It starts with this heart that becomes sick. Now my thinking is sick. Now my emotions are sick. Now I don't understand; I actually crave the things that are going to destroy me, but I'm absolutely convinced that's the right way, to such a degree that now I actually display my foolishness as something to be celebrated. I am constantly shocked in our culture, how much we celebrate stupidity. We do! And we display it like it's some sort of badge of honor. People can make millions of dollars by displaying their stupidity, and that's just where we're at as a culture. That's exactly what the proverb is saying, and it's not good news. It's an indication we're in this death spiral, to where we actually call evil good and good evil. We're in real trouble.

Look at what it says then in Verse 19:

Desire (there's our word) **realized is sweet to the soul,** (Vs. 19a)

There are lots of people in this room that would say, "I know exactly what you're talking about. I made a decision to travel God's path, and I have found that which satisfies my thirsty soul, and it's sweetness to a desperate soul."

**Desire realized is sweet to the soul,
But it is an abomination to fools to turn away from evil.** (Vs. 19)

In other words, thinking has become so messed up, that when someone suggests to the fool who's on this death spiral, to possibly rethink the choices that are destroying him, they find that an **abomination**. They just find it offensive. "How dare you say that to me?" Any suggestion to turn from your evil ways and maybe try a different path is offensive. It's repugnant. That's what the proverb is saying. Is it not true, that we as a culture, by and large, celebrate that which will destroy us? And when anyone comes along and suggests we rethink that, "What if we were to actually think there is absolute truth, and there are moral laws, and there are social laws, and there are spiritual laws; and what if we really recaptured a sense of God as the absolute, and travelled a different path?" immediately people react. People don't say, "Well, that's something to think about." They don't say that at all. They're deeply offended. "How dare you suggest that?" Suddenly you're labeled as a hater and a racist and a homophobe, and out come the labels, and by and large what the culture says is, "You know, you Christians need to kind of go back to your church and shut the door; you can talk about whatever you want there, but please, don't share it outside the doors of your church."

It's exactly what the proverb is talking about. The death spiral has now become so pronounced, that the actual desire is toward the things that will destroy us. And when anyone suggests maybe there's a better way, people are so deeply offended, they don't want to hear it. It is a frightening thing, to be so convinced you're right, that you won't listen to anyone else, when in reality you are travelling a path that will destroy you. So look at how the proverb ends.

Verse 25:

The righteous has enough to satisfy his appetite, (Vs.25a)

This is kind of this biblical theme through the Proverbs, and through the whole of Scripture, that there is something that ultimately satisfies the soul, and it comes to those who choose to travel God's path.

But the stomach of the wicked is in need. (Vs. 25b)

But if you choose to travel a different path, there will be these cravings, these longings, these desires, but they'll never be satisfied. It's just hope deferred, which makes the heart sick, which leads to this death spiral that can get out of control really fast. You say, "Why would anyone do that?"

We learned in Proverbs Chapter 12, Verse 15:

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, (Prov.12:15a)

Their heart has become so sick, they're convinced they're right. Proverbs 14 says, "There is a way that seems right to a person, but in the end it is destruction". Do you hear how frightening that is, to actually get to such a point in this death spiral, where you're absolutely convinced you're right on the right path, yet you're actually on the path that will ultimately destroy you?

There is a lot of confusion around the concept of Heaven and Hell, but one of the best ways to understand it, is simply as these two paths into eternity. If you read the Scriptures with that in mind, it's a very consistent message. This idea that somebody's going to be thrown in Hell, to pay forever for their kind of temporal sins on this Earth, is not correct. It is that they have now reached the point where they don't want to hear God; they don't want to see God; they don't want

to listen to God; they don't want anything to do with God. They're determined to travel their own path, and they're deeply offended by any suggestion they change. So God, at the end of the story, turns them over and gives them what they want. "If that's what you want, I'll let you have what you want." And that's what defines their story forever.

The essence of Hell, is this desire in their soul for something that will satisfy, that will virtually never be realized. It's just a desperate empty search. There will not be people in Hell, desperately crying out to God for grace and mercy, and God just turns His back and won't listen. That's not it at all. As people, that's the last thing they would do. They are so opposed to God and anything God has to say, they are fiercely determined to travel their path, and they have reached a point where nothing will ever change their mind.

Contrary to that, are the people that at some point have said, "This isn't working. My soul longs for something more and something different, and I believe the only place I can find it is on God's path of life." There is a surrender to God, and God's truth, and God's laws, and God's teaching, with a belief that this is ultimately where I'm going to find meaning to life. This is where I'm going to find what my soul is longing for. God is so absolutely committed to you experiencing the fulfillment of that vision, that when we were lost with no hope whatsoever, God gave up His own Son, sent to Earth to die a cruel death on a cross, to shed His blood in payment for your sin. There was simply nothing you could do to make yourself right with God, so God did it for you, so that God could offer you Salvation freely, as a gift of His grace. Whether you're rich, or poor, or black, or white, or male, or female, no matter what you've done, no matter what's been done to you, God offers you this salvation freely as a gift. You were made for relationship with God, and your soul will be restless until it rests in God. There is no possibility for you to have a relationship with God, without accepting God's gift of Salvation. Your sins must be covered and paid for to have a relationship with a holy God, but because God has done it for you, it's free. It's a gift!

And on the basis of that, we enter into a relationship with God, and we start to get a sense of, "This is what my soul is longing for. This is what my soul wants," and we have these moments and glimpses of something that is wonderful, and deeply satisfying, that gives us just a sense of what is to come in the New Heaven and the New Earth, when my soul will be perfectly and deeply satisfied in the presence of God, forever.

The Bible is not a book of rules and judgements and restrictions and condemnation. It is a road map that God lays out, in order that we might find the path that leads to life.

So we're talking about this idea of traveling God's path. And it's a good reminder, that from Genesis to the end of Revelation, there's a consistent message of two paths that people travel. In Genesis Three, it's all about whether you determine to be your own God and travel your own path, or whether you surrender to God and travel His path. That then plays out in the story of Cain and Abel, with Noah and the world, with Abraham and the rest of the world, with Israel and the rest of the world. We get to the poetic literature -Psalms and Proverbs - the righteous and the wicked. Jesus talks about the wide and the narrow path. And the story ends with Heaven and Hell. So that's the decision that people make, "Which path am I going to travel?" this whole idea of ultimately Heaven or Hell. I know the concept of Hell disturbs a lot of people, which it should. But at the end of the day, those are the two paths. And those are the two endings.

The way of the fool is right in his own eyes. That's what the proverb says. That's a frightening thought. You think you're right. You actually think your path is going to deliver the goods, but it's the path of a fool. You have to decide. You can believe God's truth or not, His roadmap or your roadmap. It's a choice by faith, to either believe God tells the truth, or to travel your own path. But *if you choose to trust God and travel His path, it leads to the **tree of life**.* I pray that's the path you choose.