

SERIES: Win the Day! Wk. 5

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We have a tendency to kind of reduce life down to these simple discussions, which lead to kind of simplistic solutions, but the fact is, these areas of our life are not isolated. If I have an anger problem, I probably have a money problem; I probably have a wisdom problem. These are all interrelated, and one affects the other, so that's how Proverbs is written. It almost forces you to keep interacting with multiple subjects, to kind of understand how they all relate together.

Chapter 15, Verse 6 says,

**Great wealth is *in* the house of the righteous,
But trouble is in the income of the wicked.** (NASB, Proverbs 15:6)

Now, again, there are several things to understand. Maybe the best way to think of it is, God does not divide people up as Republicans and Democrats. He does not divide them up as conservatives and liberals. He does not divide them up by various labels or races. He divides people up in two categories. There are the *wicked*, and there are the *righteous*. The wicked devastate communities; the righteous cause communities to flourish. It's very helpful to step outside of the common discussions, and rethink some of these things according to God's categories.

So again, defining terms: the *righteous* in the Book of Proverbs is referred to as the *tzadik*. It's a Hebrew word that refers to someone who is all about the flourishing of the community. It's someone who understands God's vision for *shalom*—what God has always wanted for the world—and is committed to that vision. The *tzadik* will even disadvantage himself or herself in order to advantage the community. It's a high level of commitment to *shalom*.

The *wicked* are the contrast to that. It's very important to understand, when we use the term wicked in the Book of Proverbs, we are not talking about people that kill, steal, and destroy. When we define it that way, most people would say, "That's not me," but the wicked in the Book of Proverbs, is referring to those that are selfish, those that are self-centered, those that are greedy. They basically are in it for themselves, and will advantage themselves and, if necessary, disadvantage the community, in order to do that. They're in it to win; they're in it to prosper at the expense of the community. Many more people fit into that definition.

So, go back to Chapter 11, Verse 10:

**When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices,
And when the wicked perish, there is joyful shouting.**

Again, remembering our definition, when the righteous do well — when they flourish— everyone wins. Because the vision, the passion, of the righteous, is to want *shalom*, is to want flourishing, to take the resources and put them back into the community, in such a way that everyone *flourishes*.

When the wicked perish, there is rejoicing, because the wicked do great violence to *shalom*. The wicked are selfish and greedy, and they are in it for themselves, and when they prosper, everyone else loses.

That's kind of the idea in Chapter 11, which cycles back, then, to a discussion in Chapter 15. Verse 6 - **Great wealth** -the word for wealth there includes produce, (so food) as well as treasure: money, gold, silver, that sort of thing.

Great wealth is *in* the house. (Vs. 6a)

This is talking about when the righteous flourish—when they do well, when they succeed—they have produce and wealth in their warehouse, and that is a good thing. Why is it a good thing? Because their heart and their passion is to turn around and put it into the community, so everyone can flourish. The better they do, the better chance everyone will flourish. You say, “But what if the righteous are wildly successful and keep it?” Then they aren't righteous. The righteous, by definition, are the ones that turn around and pour into the community, in order for others to flourish. That's the best-case scenario.

But trouble is in the income of the wicked. (Vs. 6b)

Basically saying, when the wicked succeed and flourish, everyone else loses. They are selfish; they are greedy; they are in it to win. They are in it to stockpile more and more for themselves, so when the wicked succeed, it is to the disadvantage to the community.

This is a very different way of viewing the world, society, and a culture. God does not divide between Republican and Democrat, between right and left, or conservative and liberal. God divides the world between the *righteous* and the *wicked*, and in His system, both socially and economically, for there to be true *shalom*, there has to be the prospering of the righteous, and the diminishing of the wicked.

It's helpful to stop and think, whatever we can do to marginalize and minimize the success of the wicked, also creates an environment where others can flourish.

Look at what it says then in Verse 9:

**The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD,
But He loves one who pursues righteousness.**

If that's how God feels about the righteous and about the wicked, then that's how we should feel about the righteous and the wicked.

It [the chapter] moves then to another discussion that's related, in Verse 15:

**All the days of the afflicted are bad,
But a cheerful heart *has* a continual feast.**

**Better is a little with the fear of the LORD
Than great treasure and turmoil with it.
Better is a dish of vegetables where love is
Than a fattened ox *served* with hatred. (Vs. 15-17)**

Now that discussion starts with the idea that all the days of the afflicted are bad. The afflicted are those who are afflicted financially; they maybe are afflicted with a disease or some other circumstance. The Bible is realistic about the world in which we live. Jesus said, “*The poor will always be among us.*” Because there will always be wicked who disadvantage the community to advantage themselves, there will always be those who are disadvantaged and afflicted. The text is not saying that’s okay. The text is not saying that’s good. It’s actually bad. It grieves the heart of God; it should grieve us. The Bible does draw distinction about those who are poor and afflicted because of their own foolish decisions, versus those who are poor and afflicted through no fault of their own. This carries the idea of those who are afflicted, because they’ve been mistreated, they’ve been disadvantaged through no fault of their own. That is part of the world in which we live, but—and this is a really important *but*—it does not have to affect the joy and satisfaction we experience in life.

It’s what the second part of Verse 15 says:

But a cheerful heart *has* a continual feast. (Vs. 15b)

We make a serious mistake, when we think because we’ve been disadvantaged, because we’ve been victimized, that my life is going to be unhappy and miserable. The message of the Proverbs would be, your circumstances do not have to define your happiness, and your joy, and your satisfaction in life. When you understand God’s path, when you understand surrender to God, when you understand what Jesus has done for you, when you understand what you have in Christ, when you understand what matters, when you understand the hope of the Gospel to a glorious future - even when life is hard, and you’ve been disadvantaged - you have every reason to be joyful, to be cheerful, to be satisfied, to be at peace, to be at rest! You can choose that. The Proverb talks about:

**Better is a little with the fear of the LORD
Than great treasure and turmoil with it.
Better is a dish of vegetables where love is
Than a fattened ox *served* with hatred. (Vs. 16-17)**

I actually see this all the time. I see families in our church who have very little. Life has been very hard for them, but they’re happy; they’re satisfied; they love each other; they live in peaceful homes; they understand what matters; they serve and pour themselves into the lives of others, and for them life has deep meaning - compared to others who have so much, yet they’re so unhappy, so dissatisfied, so restless. Once you understand what it means to be deeply satisfied and at rest, your heart is in a position to affect what comes out of your mouth.

Notice the very next thing discussed in Verse 18, right after the fattened ox *served* with hatred is:

A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, (Vs. 18a)

If I am unhappy, if I am miserable, if I am dissatisfied, if I think I've been disadvantaged, I become defensive. I become reactive to that. I become incredulous that someone would actually question my path! But the problem is, I'm lost in the jungle; I can't find my way out. I'm deeply dissatisfied; my way's not working and that ticks me off. Therefore, I'm mad; I'm angry, and my anger comes out everywhere.

One of the obvious signs that a culture has drifted from God is, it's a culture defined by its anger. But how do I prevent myself from entering into that, and being part of the problem? The answer is: first deal with my own perspective. When I understand what it means to submit to God, when I understand His path, when I understand, regardless of my circumstances I can be content, then I can be at peace; I can be at rest. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul was the model for this. He was consistently beaten; he was thrown in prison. He was disadvantaged; he was mistreated. He had a very, very hard life, yet he consistently talked, "I've learned to be content in whatever circumstances I'm in." I've *learned* to be happy. I've *learned* to be joyful in the most difficult moments of life.

So that leads us to the discussion about our tongue—what comes out of our mouths.

Chapter 15, Verse 1:

**A gentle answer turns away wrath,
But a harsh word stirs up anger.**

Now, this is not talking about someone who goes into an otherwise peaceful environment and creates conflict. If that's you, you're living at a very high level of foolishness; I mean that's almost off-the-charts foolish. This is talking about someone living in an angry culture. The wrath is coming at you. The question is whether or not you have the skill to diffuse it—rather than being reactive to the anger that is coming at me, I turn away wrath; I defuse it. There's a tendency when someone comes at us with anger, we react in kind, and then we excuse it by saying, "I didn't start it." You can say to God, "I didn't start it," and God would say, "But you're a fool because a fool responds with like anger." Someone of wisdom, someone with a high level of skill, has the ability to turn the wrath, to defuse the situation.

The second part of Verse 1 - **But a harsh word** - that word *harsh* is the Hebrew for an inflammatory word. A fool throws gas on the fire, just adds to the conflict, and makes it worse. **A harsh word stirs up anger.**

Verse 2:

**The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable,
But the mouth of fools spout folly.**

Basically, the imagery of the fool is every time the faucet opens, out comes foolishness, and it just creates more conflict. The contrast is, **the tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable.** It's the Hebrew *makes it desirable*. So what the proverb is saying is, **The tongue of the wise makes knowledge *desirable*.** So when someone comes at you with anger, rather than reacting to that as a fool and making it worse, I have the skill to defuse the situation and to create a context, where someone is actually desiring to hear more of what I have to say, about another path that actually leads to life.

Sometimes, the most skillful thing you can do in a given situation is just shut your mouth. Standing for Jesus does not mean you have to fix and correct everyone who says something you disagree with. Realize angry people are miserable people. Nobody wants to live that way. They're lost in the jungle; they don't know how to get out. I don't help by reacting. I do help by responding skillfully, and I'll never do that, unless there's a quiet, peaceful spirit within me. If you have a mouth problem, you have a heart problem. You'll never get it corrected in your mouth, until you get it corrected in your heart.

There is a direct linkage, which takes us then to Verse 4:

**A soothing tongue is a tree of life,
But perversion in it crushes the spirit.**

The only book of the Bible that mentions **the tree of life** outside of Genesis and Revelation is the Book of Proverbs. It is very intentionally used to say this is a way that people can experience just a taste of the world as God intended it to be, which is identifying the great power of the tongue. Is it really possible, in a world filled with so much hate and anger, that God has given me a gift, if skillfully used, I can actually give people a little taste of the world as God intended it to be?

The contrast to that, is a gift that is so powerful for good, is equally powerful for devastation, when it is twisted and misused. Here's the sobering reality of it. Some of you this week opened up your mouth, and out came foolishness, and it shattered someone else to such a degree, that twenty years from now, that person will still hear those words, and still feel the pain it caused. It is equally true, that some of you this week skillfully offered words of healing, words of power, words of life, to someone who was struggling and hurting, and it was so powerful, that twenty years from now, that person will still remember those words, and still feel the life, and the encouragement, and the healing, that that brought to their soul. **There is great power in our words.**

The Proverb then offers verses such as Verse 23:

**A man has joy in an apt answer,
And how delightful is a timely word!**

Verse 28:

**The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer,
But the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.**

Finally, Verse 30 kind of brings the two concepts together:

**Bright eyes gladden the heart; (what's the result of that?)
Good news puts fat on the bones.**

Bright eyes in the Proverbs, carries the idea of someone who understands what it means to fear the Lord: who understands what it means to travel His path and submit to Him, someone who understands, regardless of my circumstances, I can still be joyful; I can still be happy; I can still be satisfied. I can still be at peace, and at rest, and that produces within my heart a spirit at rest, which then prepares me, to respond skillfully in an angry culture, so what comes out of my mouth is **good news that puts fat on the bones**. It's a way of saying that people prosper from the

good news that comes out of my mouth. My prayer is that we will demonstrate that we are skillful people.

Sometimes it's really hard to recognize how truly broken we've become as a culture, especially for those that are maybe age 40 and under. There's a tendency to think that's just the way it is. They're unaware that it hasn't always been like this. Sometimes I tell younger parents, there was a time, when I was a kid, all of us in the neighborhood were in elementary school. On a summer day, we would leave the house at nine o'clock in the morning and we would come home at dark, and nobody thought anything about it. Now, parents won't even let their kids play alone on the front yard of their home.

That's just a picture of how much has changed in our culture. **We need to again see the world through the lens of the righteous versus the wicked, through the lens that God views the world.** It's only through the righteous, that there will be flourishing and the wicked will create a culture that will consume them. We need to be diligent about speaking words of life. We need to choose to be joyful. The proverb tells us, **what comes out of our mouth is a reflection of what's in our hearts.** In every place where God has me, we need to do our part in helping the righteous to prosper. **God is for the righteous.** He is opposed to the wicked. The same should be true of us. *Let's pray that the righteous prosper, so we all flourish.*