

Sermon 95, When the Righteous Increase, Proverbs 29:1-16

Proposition: When the righteous increase, their righteousness gladdens the community; they will triumph because of the one who creates and judges.

Topic	Verse A	Verse B
Increase and triumph of the righteous	When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, But when a wicked man rules, people groan. (2)	When the wicked increase, transgression increases; But the righteous will see their fall. (16)
Making your mother and father glad by exercising the discipline of wisdom which brings wealth	A man who loves wisdom makes his father glad, But he who keeps company with harlots wastes his wealth. (3)	The rod and reproof give wisdom, But a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother. (15)
Establishing one's land and nation by judging the poor justly, not greedily	The king establishes the land by justice, But a man who takes bribes overthrows it. (4)	If a king judges the poor with truth, His throne will be established forever. (14)

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we looked together last Sunday evening at what happens when the wicked rise. Tonight we turn to the corresponding theme: What will take place when the righteous increase? When the righteous are multiplying in the land, what should we expect to see? Well, the text before us focuses on three things: Individual character, family joy, and state power. The individual, the family, and the state will all see changes when the righteous increase. Put another way, the multiplying righteous will indeed live their individual lives in a righteous way; the multiplying righteous will bring joy and peace to their families; and the multiplying righteous will give the state a focus on the poor. Finally, our text begins and ends with a promise that the righteous will triumph by default because the wicked will most certainly perish. When the righteous increase, they make the community better — and ultimately, they will triumph. All of this, of course, comes from the power of the wise Son who built the moral order of the universe and maintains it to this day.

I. When the Righteous Increase, vv. 2-15

So, brothers and sisters, look with me at what happens when the righteous increase. The short answer is that they bring joy. Our text breaks that joy down into some of its constituent parts in the remaining verses.

A. They Gladden Their Parents, vv. 3, 15

The first thing I want you to see in these verses is the frame created by wrenching the phrase “father and mother” apart and placing one parent in each of two verses. Notice that a man who loves wisdom makes his father glad, according to v. 3, while a child who hates wisdom brings shame to his mother according to v. 15. The text is not trying to say that fathers are better able to feel joy, and mothers shame. Rather, it is commenting, both positively and negatively, about what wisdom does in the family. When you show wisdom it makes your parents glad, and when you walk in folly it makes them ashamed. This goes for both your father and your mother.

We already know that to walk in wisdom is to walk in the fear of the Lord. But what does that look like? Our text provides 8 points.

1. They Love Wisdom, v. 3a

The righteous who make their parents glad love wisdom. They don't just think it's good for other people. They don't feel that wisdom is appropriate for others, but not for them. Rather, they love wisdom. Is this how you feel about wisdom, and especially about personified Wisdom, the Lord Jesus Christ? Loving Him is the prerequisite for real wisdom. If you don't love wisdom, then you aren't wise. Even if you act wise somehow, you are not really a lover of wisdom unless your heart desires it. And when your heart desires it, you make your earthly father glad — and your Heavenly Father too. God wants you to be wise! That's why wisdom is worth it. That's why we should learn to fear God. We want to please Him. We want Him to delight in us.

2. They Live Chastely, v. 3b

But what else do the wise do? They live chastely. If you are truly following God, then you will live chastely. To live any other way is the epitome of folly. What does it mean to live chastely? It means to reserve all sexual thoughts and actions for one person: Your lawful wedded wife, and her alone. To look with lust at any other woman, to touch or talk to any other woman in a sexual titillating way, is totally wrong and evil. And it is most definitely not wise. Living with or sleeping with your girlfriend is categorically evil. Making out with her, or with strangers at the nightclub, is categorically evil. Watching porn or scantily clad women or even looking with lust at fully clothed women — all of this is foolish in the extreme. In other words, it will only be done by someone who doesn't fear God. The lust monkey is driven by his penis, not by his desire to make his Heavenly Father glad. The wise son doesn't indulge in any kind of sexual folly. He has never heard of the sexual revolution, doesn't believe in it, and doesn't endorse it. Quite the opposite, in fact.

One commentator commented on this text that prostitution was tolerated and not condemned very severely in the the wisdom literature. I don't know how he got that out of this verse, which is itself a very harsh condemnation of the foolish son who visits prostitutes. Brothers and sisters, there is more than one way to sin sexually. The wise son doesn't pursue any of those paths. He doesn't look at the lingerie ads. Nor does he try to seduce the housewife next door, or anything in between. That's part of being wise. That's part of fearing God. And if you have lived in a sexually corrupt way, maybe for years? Then bring it to Jesus for forgiveness, as we saw last week. Confess and forsake, and you will find mercy.

3. They Live Frugally, v. 3c

One of the key points in the condemnation of sexual immorality is that it is a tremendous waste of wealth. To spend your father's money on a sex worker is to waste it. The only good kind of sex is gratuitous sex. The kind you can pay for with something less than your total self and total life is not worth having. It is a knockoff, a cheap version that doesn't have the kick of the real thing. That's why, when you watch porn, all you want to see is the next part, the next scene, the next pose, the next woman. The one you're seeing is not satisfying, but you hope that the next one will be. None of the pictures or scenes are satisfying, of course, but you keep looking because you hope to find one eventually. I have never slept with a prostitute, but I imagine that it is much the same. You are wasting your father's money if you spend it on a whore, just like you're wasting your seed if you dump it in her and wasting your life if you spend it seeking the embrace of a hooker. The righteous don't squander the inheritance from their parents, whether in financial or moral terms.

The righteous instead care about frugality. They are motivated by the idea of waste; they hate it. The thought of taking their father's wealth and wasting it is sickening to them.

The righteous are both chaste and frugal. Don't doubt the connection between these two things.

4. They Speak the Truth, v. 5

Furthermore, the righteous speak the truth. They don't believe in trapping, harming, and killing their neighbors through flattery. Instead, they tell the truth. Do you flatter? Do you like flattery? Then you are not walking in the fear of God. Once again, as with sexual sin, confess and forsake it. Get used to a more accurate self-conception and learn how refreshing the truth actually is!

5. They Walk in Joy, v. 6

The truth is so refreshing that the righteous who have it and live by it always walk in joy. Transgression of all kinds ensnares the wicked. They are doing all kinds of things that they hate but don't know how to stop. They are caught — maybe caught in paying high prices for call girls, or caught by their need for flattery, or caught by their need for alcohol and drugs, or caught by their taste in expensive cars/homes/properties, or any number of other things. The righteous, though, live a life free from those things. They know that no trap set by Satan can overcome them, and so they throw their heads back and sing. They are not miserable in their porn-free, prostitute-free, flattery-free lives. Quite the opposite, for they are also guilt-free and happy as clams in the sunshine of God's favor.

6. They Protect Life, v. 10

Well, the righteous also protect life. The bloodthirsty attempt to kill the upright. We know that much already. But the upright care for life and protect it. How? Well, by how they act in their home and workplace and everywhere where they are in authority. They also vote for pro-life policies across the board. They don't go out as vigilantes to attempt to stop everyone who might commit a homicide. Rather, they act according to their place and calling.

7. They Keep Their Spirits in Check, v. 11

One way in which the righteous protect life is by keeping their spirits in check. They don't vent their whole spirit all the time. The fool lets it all hang out. He blows up, he rages and laughs, he dramatizes everything, he throws his whole soul into it. The righteous doesn't act so outrageously. He keeps his cool.

8. They Are Well-Disciplined, v. 15

Why do the righteous act this way? Because they are well-disciplined. They have been given appropriate rebukes and appropriate treatment with the rod. That's why they are disciplined, cool heads who protect life, walk in joy, and live chastely.

Parents, do you rebuke your children? Do you use the rod when it's needed to help them remember the rebuke and put it into practice? If not, if you leave them alone and undisciplined, they will shame you all the time. Now, again, Proverbs is presenting the most extreme scenario on both ends here. It's highly unlikely that your child will be disciplined so well that he will always love wisdom and always make you glad. But it is also highly unlikely that you will leave you child to himself so much that he will run completely loose and undisciplined and thus always bring shame on his mother. Most children are somewhere in the middle. Wise parents, of course, will nudge the needle toward "more disciplined."

So this is what happens in the family when the righteous increase: More joy, more discipline, more fidelity, more frugality. But what happens in the state?

B. They Rule With a Focus on the Poor, vv. 4, 7-9, 12, 14

Well, it is indisputable in our text: When the righteous increase, they put the focus of government squarely on the poor.

1. They Know What the Poor Need, v. 7

The first thing to note is that the righteous who fear God understand what the poor need. The fool who does not fear God does not know knowledge. That is, he has no such knowledge. He doesn't know what the poor need — and that is true even if he is poor himself! Brothers and sisters, if you are not concerned for justice for the poor, then you do not meet the Bible's description of a righteous person. The word of God says that the righteous know the judgments/rights/justice belonging to the poor. This does not mean that they know how far they can squeeze the poor and still be legal. Rather, it means that they know what the poor need. They know their own responsibilities toward the poor. They know what a just outcome in any dispute involving the poor would be.

Do you know this? It's not hard to know. The just result is the one that gives to each what they deserve. Before you say "Well, then, obviously the poor deserve government money/my neighbor's money," think for a moment. The righteous want to make sure the poor get justice *regardless of whether the poor can pay for it* or pressure those in power to provide it. The one who doesn't care about this is the wicked man.

Proverbs, like the rest of the Bible, is lean on policy prescriptions. It does not give us sample texts of bills that will solve everything if we could just get the legislature to pass them and the executive to enforce them. But it does tell us about policy *priorities*. If your voting is not concerned with justice for the poor, it is unrighteous. If your business model is not concerned with justice for the poor, it is unrighteous.

2. Their Concern for the Poor Stabilizes and Secures the Land, vv. 4, 14

When the righteous rise, they not only care for the poor. They recognize that caring for the poor by administering genuine justice is what establishes the land and establishes the government over it. Justice establishes the land. Justice establishes the king's throne. And of course, a king who remains longer on the throne is, all other things being equal, much better for the land than starting over with a new king every six months.

How do you judge the poor with truth? Well, start by being honest with yourself and with them. And then, secondly, don't be a "man of gifts," the kind of person who is always soliciting contributions and trying to get something for nothing. That does not work. Indeed, when those in power continually squeeze the poor for more and more, when they solicit more and more "campaign contributions" or whatever you want to call them, they overthrow the land.

3. Creating Civic Strife Is the Opposite of Wise Rule that Considers the Poor, vv. 8-9

Well, our text goes on to imply that civic strife is the result not of wise rule but of rule by scoffers. Scoffers set the city aflame, as some versions paraphrase it. The word seems to mean something along the lines of “huff and puff.” Scoffers exert tremendous effort to get the city all riled up. You can call it mostly peaceful protests if you want, but one thing is clear: It is not the wise who create civic divisions in the name of helping the poor. Far from it, brothers and sisters. The one who is constantly agitating and storming and making a scene is the fool, not the wise man. The wise consider the poor, but the foolish don’t care to know how to do that.

4. Listening to Lies Will Crush the Poor Every Time, vv. 12, 7

So Proverbs unequivocally condemns rioters and anyone else who would force an us-vs.-them choice onto the city. The righteous rule by turning anger away and by creating rest and peace within the city. But notice this. This is so interesting. “If a ruler pays attention to falsehood, All his ministers become wicked” (v. 12). And what do the wicked do? They don’t understand the knowledge of being concerned about justice for the poor. That’s knowledge they don’t know.

So notice the sequence. The king rises to the throne. He likes being flattered and hearing lies, so soon he is surrounded only by those who will massage his ego and lie to him. All of those people are scummy. They are wicked. And if they’re wicked, it means that they don’t have a clue how to help the poor. That kind of knowledge is beyond them. Of course it is! Scummy liars aren’t concerned about the poor, or indeed about anyone but themselves. How could they be? If they don’t fear God, then they will sooner or later work out the implications of that folly.

So how do you ensure that your government sets policies that provide justice for the poor? You have to vote for politicians who tell the truth and demand the truth, *even when no one wants to hear it!* Otherwise, you will be governed by corrupt people who are incapable of caring for the poor.

So that’s what happens when the righteous increase. Things get better in the home. Things get better in society.

II. Why The Righteous Triumph, vv. 13, 16

But why do the righteous triumph? We know that they are decreasing right now. Some demographers even predicted once that Christianity would simply die out. (Of course, it’s doing no such thing.) But how do we know not only what the righteous do when they increase, but know for certain that righteous will triumph?

A. Because It’s Rooted in Creation, v. 13

Because that triumph is rooted in creation. God made the human race. He made both the poor man and the one who oppresses him. They are both God’s creatures, and therefore God decides their ultimate fate. He controls their beginnings; He also, therefore, controls their destinies. And He has solemnly announced that the destiny of the wicked will be to fall. This verse doesn’t mean that God approves of the oppressor’s oppressive ways. Rather, it means that even the

oppressor is a creature of God, accountable to God for how he treats his fellow-men and under God's restraining hand at all times.

B. It Can't Be Stopped by Moral Decay, v. 16a

And therefore, just as important, it is imperative that we remember that the eventual triumph of the righteous cannot be prevented by widespread moral decay. Remember, when the wicked rise sin goes up too. Transgression increases. The amount of wickedness rises right along with the ascent of evil people into socio-political prominence. *But the righteous are going to triumph anyway!* That is the uniform message of Proverbs — not that the righteous will never suffer or lose (they will do plenty of both), but that their sufferings and losses are always temporary. No matter how bad things look, we know that the righteous will live to see the fall of the wicked.

C. It Is Certain, vv. 1, 16b

That much is certain. The very first verse of our chapter trumpets it aloud. The one who has bucked reproof through a lifetime will be cut off suddenly, and the king's horses and men will be unable to repair him. We can look at Herod, eaten by worms, and Nebuchadnezzar, who lost his mind and went out and lived like an animal. We can see Nietzsche succumbing to mental illness, Hitler shooting himself, and two American atom bombs pulverizing two Japanese cities and forcing an unconditional surrender after four solid years of all-out war. It doesn't say that every fall of the wicked is directly self-inflicted. Sometimes God sends other agents to cut off the wicked. But regardless, the result is the same: Those who won't listen to rebuke will fall, whether at the hands of a foreign power, an infectious disease, a vengeful moral order, or something even bigger. God is not mocked. The righteous will see the wicked go down. We may not see it until the next life, but we will see it. God will set it all right in the end.

So when you pray "Thy Kingdom come," remember this passage of Proverbs. When you pray for Christ's Kingdom, you are praying for what we see described here. You are praying for the downfall of the wicked and the rise of the righteous. You are praying for joy in the home and justice for the poor. Do you want those things? Then pray for Jesus to increase. Pray for more people to follow Him. Follow Him yourself. And I'll see you in Heaven. Amen.