

Sermon 75, Proverbs in a Nutshell, Proverbs 22:4

Proposition: This verse sums up the theology of Proverbs: A humble walk with God results in the sum of all blessedness.

- I. The Definition of Humility
 - A. The Knowledge that You Can't Save Yourself
 - B. The Faith that Trusts in the LORD with All Your Heart
 - C. The Fear of the LORD
 - D. Wisdom
- II. The Side Effects of Humility
 - A. Riches
 - B. Honor
 - C. Life

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have done relatively few sermons on single verses of Proverbs. But we're pausing this evening on this verse toward the end of collection II because it so beautifully encapsulates the theology of this book. If you can only learn one memory verse from this entire book, make it this one. It tells you in 7 Hebrew words the main thrust of everything that Proverbs has to teach. As you'll see, it's prosperity theology — but it's prosperity theology with the true Gospel built in. The prosperity gospel (not as if it is another gospel, but the false teaching that calls itself the prosperity gospel) asserts that if you believe you'll receive, that you merely need to name it and claim it. Part of the reason this false gospel has been so powerful and spread so far is that it is at least half true! What we'll see this evening is that a humble walk with God results in the sum of all blessedness. However, that's not why you walk with God. If you're walking with God to get blessed then you're not walking with God! Riches, honor, and life *are side effects*. That, essentially, is the point our prosperity friends miss. They think that riches, honor, and life are direct effects — but it ain't so. Humility, defined as the fear of the Lord, will give you riches, honor, and life — but only if you're fearing God for Himself, not for what He can give you.

I. The Definition of Humility

We start, then, by looking at what the first half of the verse says. It tells us that humility is the fear of the Lord. We could almost translate “By humility (the fear of the Lord)” because “the fear of the LORD” is in apposition to “humility.” What is humility? First and foremost, humility is an accurate self-estimate. It is knowing who you truly are. Humility does not mean thinking less of

yourself, but thinking of yourself less. The point is not that the humble person thinks he's a worthless piece of slime; rather, the point is that a humble person rates his own value accurately.

A. The Knowledge that You Can't Save Yourself

Is humility a good work that God then rewards with salvation? No. Humility is an attitude, yes. But it is an attitude driven by the knowledge that you can't save yourself. If you could save yourself, you would have reason to be proud, not humble! By humility, that is, by the knowledge that you can't do what you need to do to earn God's favor and cover your sins, comes riches, honor, and life.

Thus, if humility is an accurate estimate of oneself, another way of saying that is that humility is the knowledge of who you truly are. To be humble is to know that self-salvation is impossible for you. It is to know that you don't measure up and can't measure up to what God requires.

Do you have this humble knowledge? I honestly don't care how many times you've affirmed that you can't save yourself. I know a lot of jerkwads, nasty evil people who talk big about how humble they are and how they can't save themselves but then turn around and wreak havoc on their families and loved ones. Are you that kind of person? If you are, you have almost certainly spent years erecting walls around your heart, blinkering your eyes so that you don't know you're that kind of person. But true humility means far more than just saying "I know I can't save myself." It means actually believing that. It means living like a person who's been humbled by the knowledge that he cannot please God unto salvation.

If you are actually humble, how will you live? Number one, you'll listen. When someone tells you you're wrong, *you'll believe it*. At least, you will mostly believe it. You will be willing to say "Yes, I was wrong" and then change your mind and your life! Second, you'll not be a blabbermouth. You won't go on and on about yourself, your schemes, your thoughts, your projects. You will not think that your own sorry self is the greatest subject in the world and the most interesting thing anyone could possibly hear of. You won't be like the woman my father encountered who rattled on about herself for a long time and finally said to him, "Well, enough of me talking about me. What do you think of me?"

Third, a humble person is a good person to live with. If you're humble, the people around you will be glad that you share a home with them. Your landlord will be glad that you are his tenant. Your wife will be glad you're her husband. Your kids will be glad you're their father. Your church will be glad you're their pastor.

Brothers and sisters, are you this humble person? Do you listen? Do you talk about yourself relentlessly? Would your family, if given the chance to give an anonymous review of how you are as a family member and housemate, give you five stars or one star?

The knowledge that you can't save yourself, when it's actually absorbed and believed, will yield true humility and love.

B. The Faith that Trusts in the LORD with All Your Heart

It will also give birth to the virtue of faith. Humility means knowing that you can't save yourself. But it equally includes the flip side of that, which is a heartfelt trust in Yahweh as the one who will save you. Faith is a humble virtue. It is the habit and activity of someone who understands that he is not able to make it on his own, and that he has to entrust himself to someone else. In this sense, faith is an act of humility. Asking for directions is an act of humility; that's why most of us don't like to do it. It involves the admission that we don't know where we're going. But a far greater act of humility is the act of throwing yourself entirely upon God's mercy for salvation. Again, the person who trusts in the LORD with all his heart will be a pleasant person to be around. He will be a listener, not a talker — at least not in the bad sense. But more than any of those things, he will be one who looks to God for salvation.

That's the difference between Proverbs and the prosperity gospel. The prosperity gospel says "Give to get." The real gospel says "Give yourself to God in faith because you know that you have no other choice."

True humility thus produces faith as its necessary adjunct. If you are humble, then you know you can't save yourself. But if you're not humble, then you think that you can save yourself, and you have no need for faith.

C. The Fear of the LORD

Well, Solomon defines humility as being the fear of the LORD. We've talked about this before, because it appears throughout the book as the definition of wisdom. To fear the LORD means to make your decisions based on who He is. It means being driven by His character.

I heard something fascinating last night: Discipline needs to make the party disciplined afraid. Without fear, there is no discipline. If you aren't afraid to offend God, you don't know the discipline of wisdom — and you don't know the love of God.

The example I've used before is the hurtling semi-truck. You instinctively draw back as one blows past you at 80 MPH on the interstate. Why? Because you know how much energy is in that thing and how you would go splat if it hit you. In the same way, to know God is to know how much energy is in Him. It is to know Him as pure act, as the God who is overflowing with life and vitality in every direction, whose awesome majesty is a fire that would consume you in a heartbeat. If you don't fear God, then you don't know who He is. It really is that simple. And, of course, you really have no humility because humility is an accurate estimate of oneself. You can't know yourself without knowing your Creator, the one in whose image you were made.

Again, someone who fears God is a listener and good to live with. Do you have this respect for the Almighty? Do you know Him as the fearsome and terrifying God? If not, then you don't know Him.

How can one get to know Him better? By spending time with Him. By talking to Him. By obeying Him. As you do these things, the cobwebs of sin will clear out of your brain and you will come to realize far more clearly just how magnificent your heavenly Father really is.

D. Wisdom

Well, of course, we have seen throughout the book that wisdom and righteousness are two different perspectives on the same reality. Now we see the additional truth that wisdom and humility are two other names for the same thing. Let me sum it up this way: wisdom is the fear of the Lord. Righteousness is the fear of the Lord. Humility is the fear of the Lord. In other words, to be the humble person that's talked about here is the same thing as being the wise person talked about through Proverbs or the righteous person talked about through all of Scripture.

So the verse is telling us to walk in the fear of the Lord that is humility that is wisdom. This is a command, but a gospel command, addressed to the wise son who humbly realizes that his own virtue isn't enough and flees for salvation to the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. The Side Effects of Humility

And when you obey this command, what happens? What do you receive? The text highlights three things.

A. Riches

The first of them is riches. You get wealthy when you follow Christ! Now, all other things being equal, this wealth will come to you right here on earth. Barring accidents or things interposing, the natural course of development is for your pursuit of Christ to yield tremendous wealth. Of course, as we know, accidents happen and those interpose to stop natural development all the time. Still, when those things can be systemically isolated and killed, the natural result will be that most people follow the natural course. Thus, we all know that naturally a human being will grow ten fingers and ten toes. Lo and behold, everyone in the room has ten fingers and toes. Why? Because though things can and do interpose sometimes to stop that natural development, that doesn't really happen all that often. The vast majority of the people we know are correctly developed and have all their parts and faculties in some kind of working order. Similarly, then, in a society where most people fear God, we should expect tremendous gains in wealth. If something interposes to stop that, say disease or invasion or some other disaster, though, what happens to this verse? Well, God's promise has not been voided. It has just been postponed. The promise will be fulfilled in its fullness in the New Heavens and the New Earth. As you all know, and as I said last week, what we will enjoy there will put to shame the richest billionaires that Earth has ever seen. This is the ultimate fulfillment of this promise. If you humbly walk with God, you will get rich — maybe in this life, definitely in the next.

B. Honor

The same goes for honor. In this life, many servants of God will be honored. If you are the righteous, humble person who speaks the truth that Proverbs has talked about so often, you will be honored and blessed. You will be welcomed as part of the family of God, yes — but even in the secular world you will frequently meet with acclaim for your faithfulness and honesty. Of course, if your honesty gets in the way of someone else's dishonesty, then that person will probably try to dishonor you and besmirch your name. Jesus Himself was greatly honored in this

life by some people, and greatly dishonored by others. Sometimes the same people honored and dishonored Him (e.g., Peter — and by extension, us!). Brothers and sisters, Christ accused the Jews of dishonoring Him: “I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me” (Joh 8:49 NKJ). But now, as the recipient of the name above every name, He is highly exalted, indeed, worshipped by hundreds of millions of people around the world.

C. Life

But the greatest blessing of all is life. Again, this proverb is not saying that you earn life by being good. It’s saying that when you have the humility to recognize that you aren’t good and throw yourself on the mercy of God that He rewards you with life.

Of course, isn’t it still a good action to recognize that you need God’s salvation to throw yourself on His mercy? Of course it is. But as the rest of the Bible makes clear, those actions are the actions of someone who has already been redeemed. Life is a gift, but it’s also a task to those who already have it. You’re alive; maintain that life.

So how about it? Do you want these rewards? By humility, which is the fear of the LORD, are riches, honor, and life. I want to live. I want to be respected. I want to be wealthy. And if I follow Jesus, I will be — maybe not in this world, but certainly in that which is to come. The aim of life is fixed beyond life. So come, and welcome, to Jesus Christ. Finding Him, find life. Find wealth. Find honor. He has them all — and when you trust in Him, He gives them to you. Praise Him.

Amen.