

Sermon 81, Life with Father, Proverbs 23:19-25

Read the Magnificat

Proposition: Who you're with and how you act determine what you love and what your destination is.

Wisdom demands that your friendships and practices be oriented around life with Father, not bodily pleasures!

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, our passage contrasts the two ways. It shows the way of honoring your father and mother, of listening to their counsel, of hanging on to the truths they imparted to you. And, sandwiched in between two glowing descriptions of that way, it presents the other way — the way of spending time with people who worship their belly, who live for food, drink, and altered consciousness. Which way will you go? The wise talk about these things in their thirty sayings because these are the main things wisdom is interested in. These are the distinctives of wisdom. Will you pay attention to them, walking in the wisdom your parents bequeathed you? Or will you devote your life to getting meat and drink? Wisdom demands that your friendships and practices be oriented around life with Father, not bodily pleasures!

I. The Way of the Father, v. 19

Once again, the address to the son reappears, after having been absent from section II (except for 19:27 — “Cease to listen to instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge”). Once again, the Father has something to say to his son. This is your earthly father speaking to you, saying something incredibly important that few of us earthly fathers are able to put so clearly. This is your heavenly Father speaking to you, telling you exactly what it is that He expects you to do now that you have been born again as His son. There are three components here.

A. Listen

The first of them is the one that we have heard a million times, and that we need to hear again. This is the foundation of everything, the action that begins the journey to wisdom. Remember what Genesis 1 says? As soon as God created Adam, He spoke to him. There has never been a moment when the human race existed without divine revelation. God has never left us without something to listen to, without instructions from Him on what He wants to see. He tells us who He is and what He wants us to do. The Father speaks! Your task is to listen to that. That means reading the Bible, listening to sermons, paying attention to your fellow saints and to nature and history — “He speaks to me everywhere,” because this is His world. Do you listen?

B. Be Wise

The second command the Father gives is “Be wise.” Don’t just be a son; be a wise son! Now, what does this mean? It means to show wisdom. It means to be righteous and smart and prudent and disciplined and all of the other things that we’ve seen about wisdom in the last 80 weeks. But fundamentally, it means “Fear God.” God speaks, and He tells us to have a respect that borders on awe, indeed, that is best termed “fear,” for His dynamic power and rushing energy. Be wise, my son — that is, fear God, my son. You show that you fear by listening.

C. Cause Your Heart to Stride in the Way

And the other way you show that you fear is by causing your heart to take strides in the way. Now, what does this mean? It is the transitive form of the verb “to walk.” We don’t have this exact form in English, so we paraphrase with “cause your heart to take strides.” Yes, it’s important that your body walk in the way. It’s imperative that your hands, your lips, your eyes, and your feet all do things that please God. But more important than external obedience is the obedience of the heart. Do you *want* to walk in God’s way? And does that desire manifest itself in performance? That is, do you walk in God’s way? Listen. Fear God. Walk in His way. That is the Christian life.

It’s not complicated. It’s just difficult. But this is the way of the Father. This is the way your earthly parents want to see you in, especially if they are Christians. This is the way your Heavenly Father wants to see you walking in. Does this way attract you? Do you want to walk in your Father’s way and please Him? Or does something else attract you more? I’m speaking particularly of the alternative path that we can call “the way of the greedy.”

II. The Way of the Greedy, v. 20

What is this way?

A. It Involves Companionship, v. 20a

It is a way that begins with companionship. It is all about being with certain people. Do not *be with* these folks, the Lord says. In other words, though our eyes instantly skip to the drinking and gluttony part, that's not where it starts. Of course we know that it's a sin to be drunk and to be gluttonous. But it is also wrong and wicked to be with those people! Now, what does this mean? Does it mean that you can't go to the buffet, because someone there might be eating too much? Does it mean that you can't go to the bar, because someone there might be drinking too much? I don't think that's the point. It's not talking about being in the same room with someone who has a problem with these sins. It's talking about sitting at their table, about interacting with them socially, about developing relationships with them. Don't do that.

Now, what about Jesus eating with sinners? First of all, we don't know that the particular sinners he was eating with were guilty of these exact sins. Proverbs has elsewhere warned us against going with angry people. But even leaving aside the question of whether the sinners Jesus ate with were drunkards and gluttons, secondly, we can affirm that what Jesus could do without moral danger is far beyond what you and I can do without moral danger. Jesus was far more spiritually mature than we are. As I say all the time when people challenge me on my abstention from alcohol with the (valid) point that Jesus drank, "He also ate with prostitutes. Do you think that's a good idea for me?"

Thirdly, the point here is rather obvious. What is the number one social activity? Eating and drinking. That should be indisputable. Most invitations are invitations to get together for a meal, or at least a drink. Almost all establishments that encourage social interaction also serve food and drink. And so on. Well, do you see it, brothers and sisters? If you are visiting socially with gluttons and drunkards, then what are you probably doing with them? Eating with them! That is, you are participating with them in the very thing that is their downfall. It doesn't have to be sinful to eat and drink, of course, and that's why Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners. Nor is it sinful to balance accounts — but would you think it was a good idea to spend a long evening over Quickbooks with a white-collar criminal? How about doing a little firearm shopping with a man who had been convicted of domestic violence? And so on. Just as you shouldn't join people who have a record of problems with particular things in otherwise harmless activities, so you shouldn't befriend people who have problems with food and drink because, inevitably, your friendship is going to revolve around eating and drinking.

So don't go with those people! If you know that someone likes a few too many, don't go out wine tasting with him. If you know that someone eats more than he should, don't go eat with him. Take a walk instead, perhaps, if it is a relative or someone whose friendship you can't lose. But don't keep company around the table with people who are abusing what's on the table.

Of course, the most obvious culprit that most of us would point to is ourselves. I have a problem with eating too much. I'd say at least twice a month a wake up in the night with the

feeling in my esophagus. You know the one, I think. It's a burning feeling. It feels like stomach acid trying to flow back up and out because your stomach is too full. It's not a good feeling. It's a sure sign of overindulgence. And I get it because I overindulge.

Can I not be with myself? In one sense, no, I can't. Sin does that. It makes you unfit for yourself to be around. In another sense, I need to embrace my new identity in Christ and live it out practically. I'm not an overeater; I'm a Christian. I'm not a belly-worshipper; I'm a Christ-follower. And so rather than saying, "Food is just too good," I need to say "Jesus is so good that food isn't as good as He is. I can forego that second piece of desert, I can leave the peanuts and Craisins in the cupboard, because Jesus is better than they are!"

So is Solomon saying "Never eat with anyone who eats too much?" I don't think we should take this as that kind of absolute prohibition. Rather, the idea is "Don't make gluttons and drunkards your main social group." Don't get together with people for the purpose of drinking and eating too much. That is a sin. Befriending the kind of people who do that so that you can do it with them is a sin.

B. It Abuses God's Gifts

Why is it a sin? Because it abuses God's gifts — of course, His gift of health and your own body, but also, the things you're consuming. The verse names two different delicacies.

1. Wine, v. 20a

The first is wine. Then as now, wine was a classy drink. It is famous for being exceptionally good. Many people believe that fine wine is about the nicest gastronomic experience out there. But the way of the father, expounded in the verses surrounding vv. 20-21, is totally opposite to this. The father doesn't want you to live a life that's all about bodily pleasures!

2. Meat, v. 20b

Even if you are a teetotaler, you probably like meat. In Gillette, few of us are vegetarians! Certainly as Americans we believe a good steak to be about the best meat that the world has to offer. But these things are to provide for our needs, not our greeds! They are God's gifts to fill our bellies and give us the energy we need to live. They are not God's gifts to give us endless gastronomic delights. We are not made to live for food; food is made for us!

So to be a glutton and drunkard is to abuse your body and the food and drink you're putting into it. And it's also frankly disgusting.

How do we combat the urge to keep eating and drinking? Some advice is common sense: use smaller plates. Take smaller portions. Don't keep ready-to-eat food around. Don't ever let yourself eat out of the package. Take a reasonable serving and then when it's gone, go do something else so that you aren't just mindlessly eating way too much food.

But the only ultimate way to control this sin is the same as for any sin: You have to love Christ more than you love gastronomic pleasure. You have to love and desire the Father's way more than you love and desire the greedy way.

C. It results in poverty so extreme you can't afford clothing, v. 21

One consideration that can assist you with that is to think about the consequences of following the greedy way. When you live for the pleasure of eating and drinking, it will bankrupt you. You will become so poor that you can't afford clothing. Now, I just read today in the *New York Times* that the average American family spends very little on food and clothing. "Today, food eaten outside the home and in it accounts for 10 percent of spending and clothing just 2.4 percent."¹ Our fellow Americans spend less than 3 cents on the dollar to buy clothes — and yet being addicted to food and drink will make you so poor that you dress in rags because you can't afford, or don't care about, proper clothes. That, my friends, is real poverty. Of course, in Solomon's day clothing was probably far more expensive. In our grandparents' day, it certainly was: in 1920, Americans spent 17% of their income on clothing, says that article just cited. That's a share comparable to healthcare spending today. Can you imagine a world where clothing costs as much as medical bills? In that world, it would certainly be easy to get poor enough to not afford clothing. Anyway, the point is that if you live for greed then you'll have nothing.

III. The Way of the Family, vv. 22-25

Instead, listen to your father and mother and bring them joy by hanging on to the truth they taught you. So say the wise, and in that, they agree with the rest of Scripture.

A. Honor Your Father and Mother by Listening to Them, v. 22

So instead of living for what you can put into your mouth, how about you live for what you can put into your ear? This verse tells you that honoring your parents by listening to them doesn't come to an end when you graduate high school. Whether your parents are old or young, listen and don't despise them. Did you catch the parallelism there? To blow off Mom and Dad is to despise them. You may think you're just gently asserting your independence and asking for some room. In reality, you are looking down on the two people to whom you owe your life.

What kind of person despises parents? Yes, some parents are evil and even despicable. But the vast majority of parents did a pretty good job. And whether your parents are really good or really evil, the commandment of God still says to honor them.

B. Pay Any Price to Keep the Truth Your Parents Gave You, v. 23

How do you do that? By paying any price to keep the truth your parents gave you. Yes, the verse doesn't say that the truth came from your parents. But sandwiched as this statement is between statements about parental wisdom and joy, I think it's only too clear that you and I need to pay any price for the truth. Don't let anyone deceive you! That's one of the Bible's major themes. Ultimately, the person most likely to lie to you is yourself. To buy the truth does not refer to paying spies to gather information. Rather, it means being willing to put up with pain, discomfort, hard work, the scorn of the cool kids, and anything else rather than to drop your

¹ [Never Mind the Internet. Here's What's Killing Malls.](#) *The New York Times*. Feb 16, 2020, Section BU, Page 5 of the New York edition with the headline: Never Mind the Internet. This Is Killing Malls.

belief in what's really true. Sometimes, of course, our forefathers in the faith and our co-religionists in other countries have been physically attacked in attempts to get them to "sell" or deny the truth. In our own cultural moment, will are likely to be laughed to scorn when we hang onto the truth that God gave each person a biological sex and that part of submitting to and loving God is embracing the sex He gave us. But we must not sell that truth, or any other, from the truth of creation to the truth of consummation and everything in between. We buy the truth. That means we will pay, with our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor, to retain the truth we know.

Is this not a totally different paradigm then the one that says "Life is all about what I put in my mouth"? I daresay it is. In fact, I know it is. A life that's all about living for the truth at any cost is totally different than a life that's about living for pleasure at any cost. One way of life will grieve your parents every single day. The other will make them glad for a lifetime.

C. Make Your Parents Glad, vv. 24-25

These two verses expand on a theme we have seen many times: The point of wisdom is please your Father! And look with me, if you would, at the tremendous joy that comes to parents who have wise and righteous children, children who buy the truth and who, though they enjoy a good meal and a good drink as much as anyone, don't live for those things but instead live for God. What sort of joy do those parents experience? Remember, the ultimate wise son, the hero of Proverbs, is the Lord Jesus Christ. And the joy that the Father had over Him is the joy that you will feel over your own wise children, parents.

1. With the Joy of God the Father, v. 24

The man who fathers a wise son rejoices. In his heart is a steady undercurrent of joy, for he knows that his son is a good man who will do well. Beyond that, though, think of the joy of God the Father in His Son! "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." That's what the Almighty said, more than once. How much joy did Jesus bring to His Father's heart? More than we can dare to imagine.

2. With the Joy of Mary the God-Bearer, v. 25

This next verse, though, is unprecedented in Proverbs for its focus on the mother, who is mentioned in both halves. What was the first word Mary used to sum up her thoughts on becoming the mother of God, as reported by Luke? Joy. "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit *rejoices* in God my Savior." How did Mary feel about Jesus? She rejoiced in Him. Moms, do you want to feel about your children like Mary felt about Jesus? If they are believers, born-again children of God, then you can — and will.

Do you care about pleasing your earthly father and mother, along with your Heavenly Father? Then you need to stop living for food, and stop getting together with greedy people to eat and drink. Instead, you need to listen to your Father and live for His truth.

Which way will it be? I urge you tonight to pursue the way that leads to Heaven, not the path that leads first to rags and ultimately to Hell. You are a son of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Embrace the family culture. Make your parents glad. Amen.