

## Sermon 42, Living Like an Immortal, Proverbs 12:15-28

**Proposition:** God wants His wise sons to walk on the path of righteousness, for that is the way to life.

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- V. Follow Righteousness, find Immortality, v. 28

### Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, our text this morning moves from yet another warning about when to speak and when to keep your mouth shut to the promise of immortality for the righteous. And so, I've arranged it under five imperatives. Our text tells us to listen and to speak, to speak the truth, that we will suffer pain if we plan evil, and what we need our characters to show in order to delight God. Again, this passage is telling us what a wise son with a hearing heart looks like. Yes, this is law, in the sense that it's telling us what we are morally obligated to do. But it's gospel, in that it reveals the perfections of Jesus to us and also shows us that in His power we can obey God and begin to look like this. Particularly in the last verse we will see that Jesus, the righteous one of the Father, is the one who leads us to immortality. So listen, and do. Follow your great Savior on the path to righteousness, for it is also the path to unending life.

#### **I. Listen, Speak, vv. 15-16**

Once again, we see a warning about being corrected. Solomon is stuck on this concept of rebuke because it is, perhaps, the single biggest factor in a life of wisdom. Nobody starts out wise; everybody has to acquire wisdom. But if you are wise in your own eyes — that is, if you already

are so convinced that you're right that you are unable and unwilling to entertain the idea that you might be wrong — then your chance of gaining wisdom is zero. The person wise in his own eyes is worse off than a fool. And so Solomon tells us that the wise man listens to counsel. He seeks out people who challenge his ideas. He is willing to be persuaded that he is incorrect.

#### **A. Listen when Corrected, v. 15**

So listen when corrected. That's when you should be ready to shut your mouth and listen.

#### **B. Ignore it when Insulted, v. 16**

Meanwhile, when insulted, keep your mouth shut as well — not by taking the insult to heart, but by keeping your annoyance bottled up and taking it to the Lord. Who gets all hinked up about an insult? A fool does, that's who. Wise people doesn't get bothered by insults. They overlook them. They prefer to let their character speak for itself.

Does this sound like you? It sounds like Jesus. Obviously He never needed to be corrected. But He did listen to advice, preeminently to His Father's advice in Scripture. And He overlooked the insults against Him, even asking His Father to forgive the people who were nailing Him to the cross.

### **II. Speak the Truth and**

Well, Jesus knew when to speak and when to listen. He also practiced speaking the truth.

#### **A. Reveal your Righteousness, v. 17**

This proverb seems rather obvious at first glance, but it is simply highlighting the connection between habits and acts, between character and individual actions. Are you an honest person or a dishonest person? The kind of person you are determines the kind of words you speak. Our Lord Jesus is the truth, and thus He spoke true words. What kind of words do you speak? They reveal the sort of human being you are. True words will reveal that you are a righteous man.

#### **B. Create Health, v. 18**

But not only does the truth reveal your character. It also creates health. Reckless people stab at random with their words, not really caring who they hurt. Those people are fools, and their words can destroy or badly hurt the people around them.

How do you speak? What do your words produce in the lives of those who hear them? If you are wise, your words will be producing health. They will be making people whole, giving them greater psychological and even physical integrity. The words of Jesus create health in us — spiritual health first and foremost, and then psychological and physical health to some degree too. Can you live without the words of Jesus, or do you have a deep hunger for the word of God? Brothers and sisters, the tongue of the wise is health. It brings healing. It makes whole.

#### **C. Live Forever, v. 19**

Finally, speak the truth and live forever. Jesus did this, and now He lives by the power of an indestructible life. Again, this is not teaching salvation by works but rather salvation with works. The lying tongue will quickly perish. Yes, there are people in public life who tell lies and yet seem to stick around for decades. But brothers and sisters, their time is coming quickly. The truthful lips will be established.

### **III. Plan Evil, Suffer Pain, vv. 20-21**

Well, if you plan evil, you will suffer pain. The mismatched proverb in v. 20 indicates that those who plot evil lack joy. They have no true delight in their wicked ideas. Even their plotting is painful to them. Meanwhile, those who promote peace have joy. They love seeing the reconciliation that their efforts bring. Indeed, the sage extends this from the specific good of peace to the good in general by telling us that no harm befalls the righteous. This is speaking ultimately, of course. The righteous suffer many things — but in all things God works for the good of those who love Him. Correspondingly, though, all things work together for the ultimate cursing and pain of those who hate God. Do you want your fill of trouble? Then plot evil. Plan to cheat on your taxes, belittle your kids, break your promises, dishonor your parents. You will get hurt, probably in this life and certainly in the future. Yes, the righteous suffer too — but ultimately, they will not be harmed. In Christ, we have joy, even as He had joy in pain by looking to the joy set before Him.

### **IV. Show these Qualities, Delight God, vv. 22-27**

Well, our text goes on to tell us half-a-dozen qualities that delight God.

#### **A. Faithfulness, v. 22**

The first of them is trustworthiness. He delights in people who are trustworthy, or faithful — people characterized by truth not only in words but in deeds. Meanwhile, He detests lying lips. That's why they won't be established. That's why people who plot deceit suffer. It's because God hates their wicked works.

#### **B. Prudence, v. 23**

Our Father loves prudence too. He delights in it when we control our tongues, when we are able to conceal our knowledge. This doesn't mean that we never tell people what we know and what they need to know. Instead, it means that the wise are able to hold back information until they know whether it ought to be divulged. Fools, though, simply let their folly out. They can't help themselves.

The Lord loves it when we control our speech. He delights in our ability to speak wisely.

#### **C. Diligence, v. 24**

He also thinks well of those who work hard. Are you lazy? I am. I don't work nearly as hard as I could, or should. But God loves diligence, and the diligent man will rule. Meanwhile, the one who hates to work will end up being forced to work.

Solomon knew all about forced labor. He used it to gather the raw materials for the Temple. Believe me, working under the lash is even more unpleasant than forcing yourself to work. So be the diligent hard worker that your Father loves to see!

#### **D. Encouraging Speech, v. 25**

A kind word is something that all of us can give. God loves them. His Son had this quality in full measure; see Isaiah 50. We can't cure anxiety *per se*, but we can certainly lift hearts by how we treat people.

Brothers and sisters, the full-orbed Christian life is not just in what you believe and what you know. It's also in how you behave. A single kind word will often do more to convince someone of the truth of our profession than a library full of irrefutable logic coupled with harsh and mean speech.

#### **E. Thoughtful Friendship, v. 26**

Well, the righteous investigate their friends. The word here is the one used of the twelve spies going up to search out the land. Yes, that's right: the righteous look into their friends carefully, probably because they know that bad company corrupts good morals. The way of the wicked leads the wicked astray. The righteous know that, and they don't want to be led down the path of the wicked by the ties of friendship.

Be careful to whom you give your heart in friendship! Yes, the Bible calls us to love everyone, good, bad, and indifferent. But it just as clearly calls us to be choosy about our friends. People to whom your heart is relationally knit must and will influence you.

My pastor breaks people down into the categories of friend, ministry, and swine. You don't associate at all with the swine. You reject them as the divisive person who has been warned twice. Cut them out of your life. But most people are going to go into the ministry category. They are people who can benefit from what you have to offer, and you should be as generous with them as you can. Recognize, though, that they will drag you down to their level if you aren't careful. This doesn't mean to patronize them or talk down to them. Not at all. But it does mean being aware that the way they live and what they consider acceptable is not acceptable to you. You don't want to become like them.

The top category, the category of friends, must include only people you want to be like. You will learn from and imitate your friends. You will participate in events and institutions with them. You will enjoy many of the same cultural products. Don't let just anyone into this inner circle. Even Jesus had an inner circle, as did King David. You should too. Otherwise, the way of the wicked will lead you astray.

#### **F. Industriousness, v. 27**

Finally, our passage tells us that the Lord loves industriousness. The lazy man will shoot the deer, but not cook it. But a hard-working man is a man who makes the most out of everything he has. He eats his game meat. Diligence is a precious thing — the Lord loves it.

Do you have it? Do you utilize everything you have for the sake of profiting from your work?

#### **V. Follow Righteousness, find Immortality, v. 28**

Well, our passage concludes with a promise to the person whose character is shaped by all these practices. Such a person will find immortality. On the way of righteousness is no-death. Now, we know that Jesus is not only the wisdom of God, but the righteousness of God too. This means that on the path of following Him we will find immortality. God is not saying that He saves righteous people; rather, the point is that those who have been saved are righteous. They follow Jesus right to Heaven.

Do you want to live? Then follow these practices of righteousness and holiness. They won't save you; instead, they will show that you are saved. They are the practices of internalized wisdom that demonstrate that you know, love, and are beginning to look like Personified Wisdom. He's the Savior; those who are like Him have been saved.

Righteousness is absolutely and utterly contrary to death. So listen to righteousness. Follow it. Self-righteousness is not righteousness. Only the genuine article, which is the gift of God in Jesus Christ, can save. Trust Him for it, and live. Amen.