

Sermon 43, Talking Well and Eating Well, Proverbs 13:1-6

Proposition: Wise sons watch their mouth and receive abundance from their Father.

- I. The Foundation of Everything: Listening Well, v. 1
- II. How You Talk, What You Eat, and How You Handle Yourself are All Connected, vv. 2-3
- III. Wanting without Working is Meaningless, v. 4
- IV. Righteous Talking Protects, Evil Putrefies, vv. 5-6

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, many commentators have lamented the decline of family meals in America. Now, many or most of us are familiar with grabbing snacks on the go, sitting in front of the TV, and generally eating together as a family only a few times per week. A family like the one I grew up in, where all twelve of us gathered and sat down together for twenty-one hot meals a week, is a *rara avis* indeed these days.

Why are family meals important? Because of the connection between talking and eating, a connection that Solomon plays on in our text this morning. Talking well and eating well have something to do with each other, and it's connected with listening and working. Indeed, if I could put the point of our passage into a single sentence, it would be this: Be a wise son, watch your mouth, and God will give you abundance.

I. The Foundation of Everything: Listening Well, v. 1

As we have so many times in this book of Proverbs, we begin once again with the key concept of listening. How many times have we been over this? Well, this is our 42nd or 43rd sermon, and I think every last one of our sermons on this book has featured the theme of listening in it somewhere. Why does this come up over and over and over? Because we human beings are terrible listeners! Brothers and sisters, our lives are based on repetition. Every day, we do approximately the same things. Week to week and year to year, most of what we're doing looks pretty similar. We need to eat again every few hours. We need to sleep again every night. We need to worship again every week. Yet in the midst of this, we are forgetful. We turn away from what we know to be right, and we act as though we never heard God's instructions. Indeed, even things we heard once we tend to stop believing if we don't see or hear them again. My cousin worked with hotels for years, and he said that if you put up a single no smoking sign you might as well not even bother. You need multiple no smoking signs, in various places, before hotel guests start to pay attention to them.

So once again, we are reminded to heed our Father's discipline. Again, the point is that Solomon is saying, "You be a wise son. You make your Father glad by your wisdom." As we have seen, then, the sayings in the rest of this chapter are not moralism, telling you simply to be good and do good. Rather, they are statements made in the context of a pre-existing relationship.

You are a son of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Your destiny is to be conformed to the image of God's Son. And part of how the Spirit of Christ is making you look like Christ is by using the Word as a tool to shape you. Do you want to know Jesus better? Then read His profile here in Proverbs 13. And as you get to know Him, personified Wisdom, you should imitate Him, internalizing His wisdom.

So what do we see here? Jesus responds to His Father's discipline. He pays attention to what His Father says. Notice, too, that the lines are not quite matched. The scoffer does not listen to rebuke. Rebuke and discipline are put in parallel with each other. Now, when we hear "discipline" we think of the rod, and Solomon certainly thought of that too. No doubt discipline has a physical component, and some discipline is rightly applied to the body ("corporal punishment," as our culture terms it). But the major component of discipline, as Proverbs emphasizes over and over, is verbal. The most important way your father disciplines you is by how He speaks to you, both in corrective discipline (=rebuke) and preemptive discipline.

This chapter is not telling you how to be saved; it's telling you how a saved person lives, how a saved person comes to look like Jesus. And the foundation of everything in this regard is listening. Jesus is the Word of the Father. He is the verbal expression of all that the Father is. And so to listen to Jesus is to hear the Father's voice, to hear the Father's essence. Because the Father has expressed Himself perfectly in a Word, those who love the Father are characterized first and foremost as *listeners*.

That's why we read so much Scripture and devote so much of our service to a sermon in this congregation. We do it because we believe that wise sons listen to their Father's discipline.

I remember during my first internship at a church, back in 2013, I said "I'm not sure that I'm ready to exercise church discipline. I feel that I can preach, but I am not at all sure that I will be able to discipline!"

To which my pastor at the time responded: "Preaching is the highest exercise of discipline!" Indeed, brothers and sisters, discipline is primarily a verbal thing. How you talk to those under your care will make it clear to them whether you are disciplined or undisciplined, and correspondingly whether they are disciplined or undisciplined.

Now, notice for a second the negative side of this. Who is the foil of the wise son? Who is the "other" of whom we should beware? A scoffer. We have encountered this fellow before. What is his specialty? He takes none of it seriously! He laughs at the word of God. He mocks Christian doctrine. He says things that make it very clear that he thinks you and your precious Christ are unbearably stupid. Brothers and sisters, how do I say this? *A wise son is not a scoffer*. If you mock everything, including the great truths of the Christian faith, you are not a Christian. You are not a son of God through faith in Jesus Christ. You are a scoffer, and your destiny is to come to ruin, to be overthrown. So be a wise son; found your life on listening. Jesus woke up every morning to hear His Father's word. And so should you.

II. How You Talk, What You Eat, and How You Handle Yourself are All Connected, vv. 2-3

Well, though listening is the foundation, talking is very important for the Christian life too. All of us speak, thousands of words per day. And how you talk determines what you eat.

Now, we all know what eating is. It means consuming food. But Solomon is using it here in a metaphorical sense to refer more broadly to inputs to one's life. From the fruit of your mouth — that is, based on the results of your words — you will eat what is good. This proverb gaps the obvious: Only those whose words produce good fruit will get to eat good fruit. Only those whose words speak good into the world and into the lives of others will enjoy good inputs into their own lives.

What do I mean? Fathers, if you attack, belittle, criticize, and demean your family (the ABCD of abuse), you will not enjoy them. You will have a bad family and a terrible home life. You will be ashamed of the bastards you're raising. And they will be ashamed of you. The input into your life that a good family gives will be missing. Your mouth put out bad fruit, and it will ultimately bring evil into your life. "In the end, it's a failure of spiritual and social life that drives people to suicide," says Princeton Economist Angus Deaton. What do the treacherous — those who betray others, who hurt others with their words, and especially those who have torn down their own families — what do they really want? Violence, says the sage. They desire to destroy, and ultimately they desire to be destroyed. Brothers and sisters, how you talk to others is not neutral. It predicts whether you will get what is good, or whether you will get violent.

Thus, Solomon tells us that the one who guards his mouth preserves his life. What does he mean here? Simply that a wise son is careful how he talks. He remembers the WAIT principle: "Why Am I Talking?" He speaks words that edify and build up, as we saw in the previous verse. The words he speaks sink into other souls and into the world at large and grow up to bear good fruit.

Guarding your mouth means jailing it, keeping a close watch on it, not letting it get out and harm others. You see, your mouth declares what's in your heart, and if your heart is full of putridity and evil, it *will* come out of your mouth. Later on in the book, the sage will say, "My son, give me your heart." Well, this warning about righteous speech is ultimately a warning about a righteous heart. A filthy heart spewing filthy words will be ruined. There is no question about it.

III. Wanting without Working is Meaningless, v. 4

So be a wise son. Be like Jesus, who spoke only what was good and edifying during His time on earth. But not only does a wise son speak well; a wise son works hard and experiences the reward of prosperity.

We met in our text one opposite of the wise son. This was the scoffer, the man who laughs at everything serious and especially at all religious truth. Well, another opposite of the wise son is the slacker, the sluggard, the man who can't be bothered to work. His soul craves. He is full of desires — but they will be frustrated. A lazy man who likes to spend money is doomed

to continuous frustration, continuous rage at his circumstances. He won't do what it takes to acquire. The wise son, meanwhile, works diligently and is made fat. The Hebrew language, with its bent towards the vividly concrete, uses this image not only because it indicates a surplus, but also because it ties in with the theme of eating. We know that the way to eat is to work. Indeed, the way to get fat is to work enough to buy enough food that you can eat too much. Of course, the broader point is not merely what we all know, that lazy people are hungry but hard working people can afford food. The point is deeper than that; essentially, it is the point we've seen over and over in Proverbs: God rewards righteousness. The wise son will receive everything the Father has; a mansion in Heaven and all the riches of the Father await the one who perseveres through this earthly life and is welcomed into the eternal kingdom. That's the kind of being made fat which is ultimately in view here. Yes, hard work often has an earthly reward. But as our chapter will later point out (v. 23), the results of hard work can be destroyed or stolen in this life. But usually in this life, and always in the life to come, the diligent will be made fat.

IV. Righteous Talking Protects, Evil Putrefies, vv. 5-6

Well, once again we see that the righteous are the wise and vice versa. Both these verses can be taken as being about speech because they lead off with a reference to lying. The righteous hate lying. They are careful to always and only speak the truth. Yes, many righteous people have slipped into lying — think of Abraham, David, and Peter by his actions in not eating with the Gentiles. But all righteous people hate lying, even when they do it. If you enjoy lying, you are loathsome and shameful. In other words, the full version of this mismatched proverb would read, "The righteous hates falsehood, but the wicked love falsehood and therefore are loathsome and shameful."

Are you willing to lie? Don't be. Lying produces disgusting, disgraceful results. Your reputation will be destroyed, and so will your character. You will be an objectively shameful condition because you are not what you ought to be. Ultimately, the liar will be destroyed by his own wickedness. Again we hear this theme sounded. God usually punishes sinners simply by letting their own sins get the best of them. The more you give yourself over to sin, the greater the risk that that sin will destroy you. Conversely, righteousness is the best protection. It's how God takes care of His wise sons. And parents, be honest here — isn't it also how you take care of your children? The day is coming, or has come, for all of us — the day when we have to let our children go out into the world and make their own way. We will worry about them. But in addition to our trust in God, which is mandatory at all times, we will Lord-willing be able to think to ourselves, "Well, I raised them rightly. I have taught them to do the right thing. And if they do it, I don't think I have too much to worry about." We implicitly believe that righteousness will guard the way of the blameless, all other things being equal!

So brothers and sisters, embrace your identity. You are obedient children. You are wise sons. Walk like it, in the power of Jesus Christ and His Spirit. You're beginning to look like Him already. Keep pursuing wisdom, for wisdom's name is Jesus. Amen.