

The Path of the Just a Shining Light

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Bible Text: Proverbs 4:18
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Our Scripture reading this afternoon is taken from Proverbs 4. We read the entire chapter. Our text is found in verse 18. Those who have made Confession of Faith a few weeks back each chose a different passage and Rebecca chose the text out of Proverbs 4:18. Proverbs 4 beginning at verse 1.

1 Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding. 2 For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law. 3 For I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. 4 He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live. 5 Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth. 6 Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she shall keep thee. 7 Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding. 8 Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. 9 She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee. 10 Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings; and the years of thy life shall be many. 11 I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths. 12 When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble. 13 Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life. 14 Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. 15 Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away. 16 For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall. 17 For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence. 18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. 19 The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble. 20 My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings. 21 Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart. 22 For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh. 23 Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. 24 Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee. 25 Let thine eyes look

right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. 26 Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. 27 Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil.

That far we read in God's holy inspired word. May God bless that word to our hearts.

The text that we consider this afternoon is Proverbs 4, the 18th verse.

18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

Beloved congregation, in our Lord Jesus Christ the 4th chapter of Proverbs contains a father's encouragement to his son to walk in wisdom's way. It's evident from a number of verses throughout the chapter, verse 5, for example, "Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth." Later on in the chapter, verse 11, "I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths. When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble." On the one hand, when we walk in wisdom's way, we will avoid the path of the wicked, that's the path that's described beginning at verse 14, "Enter not into the path of the wicked," but on the other hand, when we walk in wisdom's way, we will walk in the path of the just as described in the text.

When we confess our faith. This was a text chosen in connection with Confession of Faith, when we confess our faith, essentially we are confessing by that that we are resolved to walk in wisdom's way. According to the words of the Form in the back of the Psalter, "We resolve by the grace of God to adhere to this doctrine," that is, the doctrine of the wisdom presented in Scripture, "We resolve by the grace of God to adhere to this doctrine to reject all heresies repugnant thereto," to reject the way of foolishness, "and to lead a new godly life, that is, to walk in the path of the just."

The question, beloved, for each one of us, then, is: am I walking in the path of the just? We want to consider the text under the theme, "The Path of the Just a Shining Light." Let's note the path in the first place; secondly, the shining light, why is that pathway called a shining light; and lastly, the spiritual growth that is implied that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. The path of the just, a shining light.

Beloved, the text makes it abundantly clear that there are only two paths in life. There are only two courses of life. The one path is the path of disobedience that leads to death. Verse 14 warns us not to enter into that path, into the path of the wicked, not to go in the way of evildoers. That's one of the paths, the pathway of the wicked, those who entertain evil thoughts; those who speak evil words; those who commit evil deeds; those who have absolutely no love for God at all in their hearts. They are contrary to God's character and they hate God's people. They are walking on a path that leads to the eternal death of hell. The only other way, beloved, beside that path is the path presented in our text, the path of the just, and it behooves each and every one of us to know whether we are on the path of the just. I don't say that, beloved, to make any of God's children now to start doubting

whether we are on the path, but just the opposite. When we ask the question, when we examine ourselves, we ought to see that we are, indeed, on that pathway and we come, then, to a greater assurance that we are on the path of the just.

I can't think of a more practical question for each of us to ask: am I on the path of the just? How can I be sure I'm on the path of the just? Well, in order to answer that question, we need to know what is that path that Solomon speaks of. The path is not called, we ought to understand this, it's not called the path of the just because we have to travel down that path in order to become just, in order to become righteous we have to go down that path, but rather righteousness comes first. Being just comes first and then walking in the path follows. You and I don't become just, we don't become righteous by walking down the path of the just, but rather we walk in the path of the just, we walk in the path of righteous ones because we have been made righteous. The tree is not made into a good tree because it bears good fruit, but it bears good fruit because it's a good tree.

The question, then, is: how are you and I righteous? The path of the just literally is the path of the righteous ones. How are you and I made righteous? We are righteous, beloved, in the first place, by the righteousness that Jesus Christ imputes to us. We need in order to be on that pathway of the just, we need a perfect righteousness from outside of ourselves because by nature we are unrighteous; by nature we could only walk in the path of the wicked that leads to destruction; by nature the way we are born in Adam, we could only walk in the path of unrighteousness, we could only be intent on doing evil against God.

Indeed, by nature, we would keep ourselves. If that's all we were is the way we were by nature, we would keep ourselves from sleep in order to carry out our rebellion. That's how bad we are by nature. That's brought out in the context. Beginning at verse 16, it speaks of that way of the wicked. "For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall." That's how intent we are to do evil as we are by nature. By nature, we would only eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence, according to verse 17.

That's the way Solomon describes the wicked, as if eating the bread of wickedness, that was our nourishment, and drinking the wine of violence, that was our joy. But then, beloved, the wonder of the Gospel is that God commendeth his love towards us when we were yet sinners. We were still on the path of the wicked. We were yet in that path when Christ died for us. When, beloved, there was nothing good in us to make us worthy of God's mercy, when we only deserved his wrath, he still loved us. Our guilt was imputed to him so that especially on the cross Jesus Christ suffered the punishment that we deserved and now God no longer looks at you and me as guilty in his sight. He actively sets our guilt aside. He puts it as far from us as the East is from the West. He forgets. He actively chooses not to remember our guilt and so he doesn't seek to punish us anymore in his wrath.

At the same time, beloved, God also imputes to us, our guilt was imputed to Christ but he also imputes to us the righteousness of Christ so that God looks upon us as if we had kept

every single one of God's commandments perfectly. Jesus Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law and as we are now in Christ, God adopts us as his dear children. He gives us the Holy Spirit. He gives us the life of Christ, new spiritual life, and by that work of regeneration he sets us on the path of the just, the path of the righteous ones. Only when we are perfectly righteous with that imputed righteousness will we ever walk in the path of the just.

Others may pretend to walk in that path. Outwardly they may seem to have their lives in order. They might wear the nicest clothes and come to both services on Sunday. They might make a show of their humility. They might be longstanding members in the most faithful church in the world. They might have all the right doctrines tucked away in their heads. They might even have served as deacons and elders and ministers in the church of God, but if they don't have that perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to them, then they are not in the path of the righteous ones. It's impossible. They are on the path of the wicked.

The path of the just is the path of life only for those who are truly righteous in Jesus Christ. The path of the just is the path in the first place, then, of those who are justified. When we confess our faith, beloved, in Jesus Christ, we confess that God has justified us for the sake of Christ's satisfaction and for the sake of his righteousness. You and I must be justified in Jesus Christ otherwise we cannot possibly be on the path of the just.

When God imputes that righteousness of Christ to us, when he gives us spiritual life, then he also sets us on the path of the just. It's significant that Solomon calls it a path and you find that figure throughout Scripture. It's called a path. Well, a path implies the activity of walking. A path is something that people walk upon in order to get from one place to another place. You don't go onto a pathway simply to stand still or to sit on the path, you get on a path because you have a destination in your heart; you want to go somewhere.

So, too, the path of the just leads to a destination and everyone who by God's grace has been set on that pathway will arrive at that destination without fail because it's a path that leads to the holy city. It's a path that leads to the New Jerusalem wherein dwelleth righteousness. Beloved, if you and I are on that path, we will long for righteousness. We will long for the place of perfect righteousness. We will look forward to the glory of heaven because we long for that day when sin is no longer affecting us, when we don't have to struggle day after day against the sins in our lives. We want to put those sins away because we, by God's grace, delight in righteousness.

The path of the just is for those who are righteous in Jesus Christ who have been set on the path to that holy city and it implies, then, the activity of walking and looking for that holy city. Now you understand, beloved, that doesn't mean that our walking earns a place in that holy city. It's not that our walking is a condition that we have to meet in order to be saved in the end. It's not that our walking in the path even has to meet a certain standard. It has to be this righteous and if you're this righteous, then you will get to the destination. No, our walking on that pathway, beloved, is not the root that leads to our salvation, but rather our walking on that path is the fruit of our salvation. When God

makes us righteous in Jesus Christ with the righteousness of justification, he also works in us infallibly by his Spirit to make us walk in the path of the just. He works in us to give spiritual life and then he infuses into us new qualities into our wills. He works in us thankful hearts that begin to walk down the path of the righteous ones, desiring to give God the glory that is due by walking in his ways.

Beloved, the path of the just is, therefore, the fruit of God's work in us and it's the way of righteous living, living out of thankfulness for God for what he has done. The path of the righteous ones is the path that leads us in wisdom's way. Verse 11 again, "I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee." Notice how God is speaking about his work, "I have led thee in right paths."

And that means that the path of the just is not just having a head full of doctrinal knowledge but the path of the just involves the whole of our lives that begins with God's work in our hearts. That comes out beautifully in this same chapter. The whole chapter fits together. When God gives us spiritual life, he also enlightens our hearts so in verse 23, the inspired writer says, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." It starts with the heart and that means it doesn't matter how wonderful someone's actions might appear, how lovely their words might sound, if those actions do not come out of a heart that trusts in God and that loves God and that delights in that righteousness, if those actions do not come from a heart of faith, then they are but glittering sins. They are abominations to God. Other places in the Proverbs talk about that. The plowing of the wicked is an abomination to God. The prayer of the wicked, those who hate God and who utter words that they might call a prayer, that, too, is an abomination to God.

God must take away our hearts of stone and give us hearts of flesh otherwise those who speak nice sounding words and perform all those acts are still in the way of the wicked, but when God works in our hearts, when he works in the first place to justify us, and then when he works in our hearts to sanctify us, that work in our hearts affects the whole of our lives. The heart affects how I use my mouth and my lips. The heart affects how I use my eyes and my eyelids. The heart affects how I use my feet because out of the heart are the issues of life.

Solomon goes on to describe that. After he speaks of the heart being the fountainhead, then he says this in verse 24, "Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee." He's going to describe all these different parts of the body that now are affected by the heart. Verse 25, "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil."

When we walk, beloved, on the path of the just, that's not, then, something that simply remains in our hearts, walking on the path of the just will show itself. Does that? Does that show itself in your life and my life, beloved? Could somebody point at us and say, "There's someone, as far as I can see," especially family members who live close to us, "they are walking on the path of the just"? Would they say that about you and me? Does it show in the way, fathers, that we talk to our children? Does it show in the things that

we watch on television and on the internet? Does the fact that we are on the path of the just, does that show in the way that we love our spouses? Or how we react to adversity? Does that show that we are on the path of the just? Does it show in the way we confess our faults to one another? Does it show in the way we talk about our disagreements and seek to come to an understanding? Because if we are on the path of the just, that's not something that just remains in our hearts, it will show. That's why Solomon says about the path of the just, that it is as a shining light.

The path of the just will show itself. Now, it's described that way as the shining light, beloved, not because we are light in ourselves. We need to be careful when we talk about the path of the just, be careful of pride because the devil and our flesh conspire together to turn even the walking in the path of the just into a matter of pride. The devil would like nothing better than for us to compare ourselves to that one over there, "That one's not doing what they should do. That one's not doing what they should do." The devil wants to puff us up with pride. He would like us to boast in ourselves. He would like us to say, "My hard work and my faithfulness have accomplished this."

It's important, then, for us to know, beloved, that the path of the just is not as a shining light because of ourselves, but rather it's a shining light because of our gracious God who shines upon us in that pathway. By nature, we are not children of the light. By nature, we are pure darkness but God graciously comes and he lightens our darkness; he lights our candles, Psalm 18.

Scripture is full of references that point to God as the light. We must see that as the source. Psalm 27, "The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" Psalm 36, "For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light." Psalm 43:3, "O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me." You see, the psalmist understands he cannot go in his own, he doesn't have light of his own, he needs God to shine out that light from above.

So if we are going to travel on the path of the just, we need God to shine his light upon us. God himself, his pure light. Not, of course, to say God is made up of the substance of light but that's pointing to God's ethical and moral purity. In him is not darkness at all. There is not even a hint of sin in God. He is righteous and holy in all his ways. He is light and only when God brings us into fellowship with himself will our path be as the shining light. Only when he shines down upon us will our path be as the shining light and we walk in that shining path, beloved, because God, himself, has made us his people and made himself our God. Therefore he will save us to the uttermost. Something that he has begun, he will certainly accomplish. When the Father of lights shines upon us, then our pathway will be as the shining light.

The world, in contrast, can set themselves on supposed paths of self-improvement. They can grit their teeth. They can give up alcohol and drugs, perhaps. They can take anger management courses. They can make all sorts of outward changes but if they don't have fellowship with the God of light, they are every bit as much in the path of the wicked as before they made any change at all.

The shining path of the just flows out of our relationship with God and that's brought out beautifully in 1 John 1:5, "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

Do we have fellowship with God, beloved, with the God of light? That will show itself in our walk, walking in the path of the just; desiring and striving to walk in the path of obedience. Not, beloved, that we're going to walk in that path perfectly. We will stray often into byways. We will stray into darkness, but if God has set us on that path, he will always draw us back to himself. He will bring us to repentance and cause us to continue in that path.

Are we walking on that shining path of the just? Some might say that we shouldn't try to recognize ourselves walking in the path of the just. They might say, "Yes, we may recognize others, that they are walking in the path of the just, but it's dangerous to point at myself and say, 'Yes, I am walking in the path of the just.' It's dangerous," they say, "because then if I say I'm walking in the path of the righteous ones, that will inflate my pride." Instead, they encourage themselves only to see their wickedness and it's not surprising, then, that when they see themselves walking in certain wicked actions, they can't help but fall into doubt concerning the path of the just.

Maybe they think that way because they want to promote humility. "I can't see any good work of God in me because that's going to lead to pride. I must be humble. I'm not going to recognize God's work in me." Yes, we need to beware of pride, beloved, but the solution is not to ignore God's work, the solution is not to bury the signs of God's gracious work in us, the solution is to acknowledge that we walk in the shining path of the just only because God has graciously shined upon us. That's how we guard against pride. Like the Apostle Paul, he says about himself, "I am what I am because of the grace of God."

One of the striking features of the text is the fact that the text goes on to point to a life of spiritual growth. The path of the just is as a shining light and then this, "that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Literally, going on and shining until the perfect day, or until the day is established. And the picture is not difficult to see in our mind's eye. It begins with the dawning of the day in which there is hardly any light at all, barely visible, and then progressing to the light of the morning, and then eventually becoming the perfect day in which the sun has risen to its zenith. Our translators capture that in the words "more and more."

Those who make Confession of Faith and those who made Confession of Faith a couple of weeks ago, the truth as shown in our text indicates that we should expect spiritual growth in our life. We should expect that the light would become greater and greater. Now, I do recognize, beloved, that some don't necessarily perceive that growth in their

consciences. If you asked them, "Are you growing spiritually?" they might even say, "No, I'm becoming more sinful." Imagine that. God working a work of grace in their hearts and making them more sinful. The thought is almost blasphemous, beloved, but here's the experience: they might think that because they have not perceived the growth that is there.

We have to be careful not to measure the truth based on what we experience in our consciences. We ought, rather, to measure ourselves by the truth of God's word and what does God's word say about spiritual growth? Not that the children of God become weaker and weaker and more and more sinful, that's not what God's word says. Besides our own text, there are many passages of Scripture that point to just the opposite. Job 17:9, "The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger." Not stronger and weaker. Not forever vacillating. Not standing still. But stronger and stronger. Psalm 84:7, "They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God." From one strength to a greater strength, that's the idea. 2 Corinthians 3:18, "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

Beloved, when we behold the glory of the Lord revealed in his word, God is changing us. It says they are changed, the saints are changed; that is, we are being changed into the same image, that is, into the image of Christ. There is progress from one level of glory to another level of glory. From glory to glory. From one level of shining to another level of shining. From one level of Christ's image to another level of Christ's image.

We are being changed. That's what Scripture proclaims. The Apostle Paul speaking to the Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth." Then 1 Peter 2:2, one last verse, "As newborn babes, desire," that's a command, "desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." The sincere milk of God's word, God will use to make us grow thereby.

That's the clear truth of Scripture. Now, beloved, our own experience may be different than the truth of Scripture, that is, what we perceive about ourselves. We might look at ourselves and say, "I have not grown at all. I still struggle with the same sins that I struggled with when I was young. I still speak disparagingly to my wife and to my children. I'm still selfish. I still procrastinate. And I'm still not as zealous as I ought to be in my service of God."

So how, then, are we to apply the truth of Scripture concerning our spiritual growth? Do we say to ourselves, "Well, Scripture must be wrong. Obviously, the Holy Spirit doesn't know what he's talking about. That's not my experience." Obviously not. One solution to that, beloved, is to understand that our growth is often imperceptible. There is growth that we often don't see. If you stare at a plant for hours and hours and hours, you might never see it grow. I don't see it getting any bigger. Maybe then you add more water to it. But if

you look at that same plant after a week or after a month and you think back to what it was, then you can say, "Ah, now I can see. It has another little tiny shoot coming up."

Looking back at our own lives, maybe an idol that we had when we were young, we might see that that's not so much of an idol as it used to be. The desire for riches that I had when I was young is not as great anymore. Now those riches don't have such a luster as they used to have. Maybe the sports that were such a joy in boasting for me when I was younger, well, now they don't mean so much anymore. Now that kind of change doesn't happen overnight. Growth is often imperceptible, especially when we are staring at a particular area. And often when we are concerned about a particular area, we become more and more conscious that it's sinful but is not that growth, beloved? Growing in the knowledge of our sin? More grieved over the sin than we used to be? Is that not growth?

No, we shouldn't take a measuring stick to ourselves and say, "I do this 2% better than I did yesterday." But here's what we ought to be concerned about, beloved: not necessarily measuring the growth but that we are continuing in the battle, continuing the battle against sin. We might very well have grown in a particular area but we might also be more conscious of how far we fall short of that which God requires of us and then it seems to us that the finish line has grown even further away and we think we've gone backwards when, in fact, we've grown. Much of our growth comes in the way of a sensitivity to our sins and our sinfulness.

The text presents the case of the Christian as a case of growing that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. God's light shines more and more and, yes, we do see our sins more and more. That's growth. Are you and I on the path of the just? If we are not, we need to repent, beloved. Look to Jesus Christ. Call upon him to forgive you. On the basis of his shed blood, call upon him to give you grace to walk in the path of the just, to walk in the way of thankfulness. But if by God's grace we see that, yes, he has placed me on the path of the just, I do see that he has forgiven me and I do see a desire to walk in righteousness, and I do see a struggle against sin day by day, then give thanks to God that he has put you on that path of the just and continue on in the battle.

This is a text, beloved, not to discourage us, not to say, "Well, it says shining more and more and I don't do that so I'm just going to give up," but it's a text that causes us to look to God more and more because we can't do it in ourselves. The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. One day, that's not going to happen in this life, we will never reach perfection in this life, nothing close to it; but one day God will bring us to perfection. One day that light will be perfect when God takes us to glory and then the old man will be done away with. Then we won't have to struggle with sin anymore. Then we will have perfect fellowship with God, the God of light, and there will be no darkness at all. That day is coming for all who walk in the path of the just who have been placed on that path by God's grace. Amen.

Our Father which art in heaven, we thank thee for thy grace. We recognize that we, ourselves, never would be on the path of the just, on the path of the righteous ones, apart from thy grace. So we pray that thou continue to shine down upon us thy grace that we

may give thee the glory and the honor that is due; that we may show forth our thankfulness to thee for all that thou hast done for us. Bless us, we pray. Forgive the sins that we have committed and lead us by thy Spirit day by day. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.