

We ended last time with verse 23:

“The fear of the LORD leads to life,
and whoever has it rests satisfied;
he will not be visited by harm.”

Even as that proverb concluded our discussion last time –
so also it launches our text tonight.

If you do not have the fear of the LORD,
then you are heading down the path to trouble!

1. Sluggards, Scoffers, and Fools – Our Need for a Just King (19:24-20:11)
a. A Catalogue of Fools and Their Punishments (19:24-20:1)

The first seven verses give us a catalogue of fools – reminding us of where folly ends.

There are four types of fools given –
the sluggard in verse 24,
the shameful son in verse 26,
the worthless witness in verse 28,
and the brawling drunkard in verse 1 of chapter 20.

The connecting verses show the importance of discipline:
the scoffer gets beaten (verses 25 and 29),
while the son gets warned (v27).

The result is a chiasm that pivots around verse 27:

“Cease to hear instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge.”

The first step down the path of folly is sloth:

²⁴*The sluggard buries his hand in the dish
and will not even bring it back to his mouth.*

Remember that the previous verse has said that the fear of the LORD leads to life.
Whoever has the fear of the LORD rests satisfied.

This sluggard is so lazy – “how lazy is he?” –
he’s so lazy, he puts his hand in the dish –
and doesn’t even bring it back to his mouth!!

He’s surrounded by food – but he starves to death because he’s too lazy to eat!

Ha ha! Isn't that... funny....

But aren't we that way?

We are surrounded by the thing that we desire –
but something gets in the way...
and we don't actually get the thing that we want!

Why not?

Because we have not learned prudence...

²⁵ *Strike a scoffer, and the simple will learn prudence;
reprove a man of understanding, and he will gain knowledge.*

Notice how it says it:

“strike a scoffer *and the simple* will learn prudence.”

The scoffer is struck – so that someone else will become wise.
Yes, the purpose of your life may well be to become an object lesson for someone else!

Do you want that to be the purpose of your life?

No?

Then learn from the mistakes of others!

You don't *have* to learn the hard way!

You *can* learn prudence from watching what happens to others!

But this is also an important point for society.

Often we focus on the importance of “rehabilitation” for criminals.

And yes – we *want* to see the reform of criminals –

we want to see repentance and forgiveness and restoration!

But that is not the only purpose of punishment.

We also want punishment to serve as a deterrent –

to show others (the simple) that the path of folly is a bad path,
and it leads to bad end!

But then also notice the second line:

“reprove a man of understanding, and he will gain knowledge.”

You shouldn't have to strike a man of understanding.

If you reprove him, he will get it – and will turn away from the path of folly.

²⁶ *He who does violence to his father and chases away his mother*

is a son who brings shame and reproach.

Waltke suggests that a better translation of verse 26 would be,
“The one who ruins his father, driving out his mother,
is a shameful and disgraceful son.”

The image is of a son who has made a mess of his father’s estate,
thereby evicting his mother through creditors seizing the family property.

It is particularly interesting to hear this proverb in the collection of *Solomon’s wisdom*,
since Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, made a mess of his father’s estate!

And ten tribes abandoned the house of David to follow Jeroboam.

That’s what makes the connection between verses 26-27 so interesting:

²⁷ *Cease to hear instruction, my son,
and you will stray from the words of knowledge.*

Cease to hear instruction, Rehoboam, and you will stray from the words of knowledge.

Then again, when you consider Solomon’s own life,
the wisest man who ever lived – *ceased to hear instruction*.
You are never so wise as to be able to stop listening!

You are never so smart that you can ignore instruction.
Because as soon as you cease to hear instruction,
you will stray from the words of knowledge.

Verses 28-29 then turn from *hearing* to *speaking*:

²⁸ *A worthless witness mocks at justice,
and the mouth of the wicked devours iniquity.*

²⁹ *Condemnation is ready for scoffers,
and beating for the backs of fools.*

The same mouth that couldn’t be bothered to eat in verse 24,
is now devouring iniquity in verse 28.

And in verse 29, the scoffer and the fool is condemned and beaten –
(remember that the beating of a scoffer in verse 25
prompted the simple to learn prudence.

Will *you* learn prudence?

Will you learn from the fate of others *not to walk* down their path?

Or will you laugh, and lift your glass, and say,

“Here’s hoping that won’t happen to me?!”

Because

20 *Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler,
and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.* ^[d]

Wine and beer are good gifts from God.

(There were no distilled spirits in ancient Israel – only fermented beverages –
so I would suggest that “beer” is a better translation for “strong drink” –
since otherwise people may think that it’s referring to distilled spirits)

But wine was given for man to *enjoy* – not to be subdued by it!

We’ve seen this word translated “led astray” before!

In chapter 5:19-20, we were told,

“Let your wife’s breasts fill you at all times with delight;
be intoxicated [be led astray] always in her love.

Why should you be intoxicated [led astray], my son, with a forbidden woman?

We saw last week that he who finds a wife finds a good thing.

Sexual relations are *good* – when they are carried out properly – *in marriage*.

When you are making love with your wife, you kinda lose control –
and that can be a beautiful thing!

But outside of marriage, that leads to death and destruction.

Chapter 20 begins with a warning that wine is a mocker.

Wine has no pity.

Beer is a brawler.

When you’ve had one too many, you can pick a fight that no one wanted.

To be led astray by beer and wine is not wise.

It’s very much like the one who ceases to hear instruction –

he *strays* from the words of knowledge –

and yes, that’s the same word!

Whether straying from the words of knowledge, or straying after wine and beer,
the effect is the same.

Alcohol has a tendency to lower your inhibitions.

(that’s why wine is a mocker – it loosens your lips, and removes your filter –
and beer is a brawler – you wind up getting into fights....)

And this is why we need a righteous king to cleanse the land!

b. A Righteous King Cleanses the Land (20:2-11)

² *The terror of a king is like the growling of a lion;
whoever provokes him to anger forfeits his life.*

Verses 2-11 deal largely with public ethics.

The king plays a central role (verses 2 and 8).

Certainly these verses speak directly to political life.

Do not provoke the King!

Humble yourself before him!

We may not have “kings” in the same sense today –
but there are still really powerful people
that you don’t want to mess with!

But in light of the fact that these are the proverbs of *Solomon*
and the plain failure of his son Rehoboam,
it is clear that these proverbs point us forward as well
to our need for a righteous king!
The Son of David – the Lion of Judah.

Do not provoke the King!

Humble yourself before him!

Jesus is a good king.

But that doesn’t mean that he lets people get away with murder.

We’ve seen some odd statements lately in our political discourse
that certainly sound like they think that if we were just *nicer*
then everything would be wonderful!

The terror of a king should be a *good thing*!

If you have a righteous king, then he will exercise justice in his judgments –
and therefore only the wicked will experience his wrath!

Verses 3-7 then describe the characteristics of a wise man –
and thus, of a wise king as well.

Just watch these characteristics –

because they are the same as what we have already seen!

³ *It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife,
but every fool will be quarreling.*

I used to be pretty quick to jump into a debate.

I can still fall into the old habit...

but I don’t find it nearly as attractive as I once did.

In language that we will hear in a few more weeks,
“Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself.
Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.” (26:4-5)

The wise man does not go looking for a fight!
He knows that they will come looking for him...

What is more important?
To be right?
Or to have peace?

Of course, peace has to do with *well-being* (not just the absence of conflict).

As if to remind us of this,
verse 4 returns to the sluggard:

*⁴ The sluggard does not plow in the autumn;
he will seek at harvest and have nothing.*

He couldn't get his hand out of the dish in 19:24,
now he can't get around to plowing in the autumn...

so not surprisingly he will seek at harvest and have nothing.

In Palestine, the ground is softened by the autumn rains.
October-April is the “wet season.”

If you don't prepare the ground during the early months,
then the ground won't be ready for planting –
which means that there will be no harvest!

You have to do the hard work up front.
I could say it this way –
The sluggard does not scrape the paint off his house;
he will watch in horror a couple years later
as the new paint peels off with the old!

Verse 5 then moves to the contrast between the ‘ordinary’ person and the man of understanding.

*^{v5} The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water,
but a man of understanding will draw it out.*

We heard the language of “deep water” in 18:4 – “the words of a man's mouth are deep waters.”

We saw then – and we see here – that “deep water” is *not* a good thing!

Deep waters are mysterious, unfathomable, inaccessible.

And the purpose in a man’s heart –

you could also translate this “counsel” in a man’s heart –

it’s referring to the idea that what’s on the surface is often superficial.

Words often times seem easy to understand.

But the reason behind those words – the purpose – the meaning – the counsel –
what did she mean by that?!

Notice that Proverbs does not call this person a foolish person.

This is just an ordinary person.

The ordinary person does not really understand himself or herself.

Why do I do what I do?

Why did I just say that?

What’s really driving me?

It’s not just the fool – it’s anyone who does not have *understanding*
(though if you think about it, a person without understanding
is well on their way to becoming a fool!).

But a person of understanding will draw it out.

The deep, unfathomable heart requires a person who understands.

You know – that person who really “gets” you?

They understand you – they care about you –

they listen well – and speak well into your life!

That’s what Proverbs is talking about.

Over the last several years, we’ve been doing more and more counseling training,
with several folks participating in CCEF conferences and classes.

Our goal is to develop more and more into people of understanding –
people who understand the heart.

If you understand the word of God and the human heart
then you are a person of understanding.

It’s not about *quantity* of information.

Some information is necessary.

If you cannot distinguish a human being from a turtle

then you are not yet a person of understanding!

But wisdom and understanding are not academic subjects!

We want to improve our counseling and discipleship ministry.

The things that Dave has been doing in mentoring and discipling

are things that we want to see develop further in our congregation –
and in the broader community.

And it's not just in the formal "ministry" of the church –
it's also in our friendships (as verse 6 says):

⁶ *Many a man proclaims his own steadfast love,
but a faithful man who can find?*

We talked last time about friendship –
what is the chief characteristic of friendship?
Hesed – "steadfast love" – faithfulness – lovingkindness – covenant loyalty.

There are lots of people who will *say* "hey man, I got your back!"
But one who will *really* be there?
That's not so common...

The way the end of verse 6 puts it,
the answer is "No one."

Listen to me, children – teenagers!
I know that this one stings!
And you are in the years where you learn this the most painfully!
How often have you heard someone say, "You're my best friend!"

How long did that last?

How often have your friends failed you?!

A faithful man who can find?!

Everyone is going to fail you!
Those who are supposed to be there for you –
who have *promised* that they will be there for you! –
at the moment when you *really* need them –
they won't be there!

Sometimes it will be their fault.
They are just being selfish.
Other times, it may not be their *fault* –
they just didn't actually realize that you needed them!
Most commonly it is some mixed up, unfathomable, murky blend of both.

After all, when they needed you – where were you?

“Oh, I was there! I’m always there for my friends!”

But do you remember the time that you forgot?

Oh, right, no, of course not – because you forgot!

They didn’t forget.

They thought that you just blew them off –

and since you forgot, you have no memory of blowing them off...

or that time that you said that thing that *really hurt*...

Oh, you didn’t know?

Maybe they should have said something –

but they thought that you said it on purpose...

It turns out that very, very few people are characterized by *understanding* –

and without understanding the murky depths of the human heart –

and especially without understanding the murky depths of *your* heart –

it’s really, really hard to be *faithful*.

Faithful to what?

To “my idea” of who you are?

But if I’m just faithful to my idea of who you are –

then I’m not really being faithful to *you*.

At this point, I kind of want to just curl up in a corner and hide.

And verse 7 doesn’t make it any easier!!

⁷ *The righteous who walks in his integrity—
blessed are his children after him!*

Sorry, kids!

The implication is pretty obvious:

The unrighteous who lacks integrity –

cursed are his children after him!

We saw last time that *integrity* has to do with *wholeness*.

A life that is lived in right relationship to God, to self, to others, and to all creation

The one who lives *that* sort of life – who walks in that sort of integrity –

bestows a blessing upon his children!

And verse 8 says:

⁸ *A king who sits on the throne of judgment
winnows all evil with his eyes.*

The Son of David – sitting at the right hand of the Father –
he looks out on all the hearts of mankind –
and he *sees*.

Am I making this sound too much like the New Testament?
Too much like Paul?

But then comes verse 9:

⁹ *Who can say, “I have made my heart pure;
I am clean from my sin”?*

Proverbs does not spend much time dealing with sacrifice and atonement and all that –
but *clearly* Proverbs is embedded in that world –
and so that language trickles out here and there.

We’ve all sinned.

And none of us can say that we have cleansed ourselves from our sin.
We are all a mess!

¹⁰ *Unequal^[e] weights and unequal measures
are both alike an abomination to the LORD.*

Remember that we are talking about how the king judges.
Even the king – especially the king! – must be characterized by *fairness!*

But not only the king:

¹¹ *Even a child makes himself known by his acts,
by whether his conduct is pure and upright.*

Now, the ESV is being awfully nice to children.

The word translated “acts” in verse 11 is used 40 times in the OT.
37 of those times it means “evil deeds.”

Likewise the verb translated “makes himself known” –
in the particular form (hithpael) it means “to act as alien” or “to disguise oneself.”

Verse 11 would then read,

“even a child disguises his evil deeds, so is it pure or is it upright?”

I have yet to meet a pure and upright child.

Children are really good at “hiding” – “disguising” their actions –
making it look like they are sweet and nice...

Children,
you are never too young to start!
Practice virtue.
Practice telling the truth.

I know – adults don't make it easy on you –
because we are just like you –
we also like to hide – and cover our failures.

But as verse 9 reminded us – “who can say,
“I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin?””

We *are* headed towards a solution for our dilemma – I promise! –
but verses 12-19 then expand the problem into the marketplace:

2. Hearing and Seeing – Discernment in the Marketplace (20:12-19)

¹² *The hearing ear and the seeing eye,
the LORD has made them both.*

Remember that the LORD is the one who made the ear and the eye!
You learn through hearing and seeing.

Therefore

¹³ *Love not sleep, lest you come to poverty;
open your eyes, and you will have plenty of bread.*

The antidote to sloth is to wake up, open your eyes, and get to work.

Verses 14-15 deal with hagglers:

¹⁴ *“Bad, bad,” says the buyer,
but when he goes away, then he boasts.*

When you are talking down the price, it can be easy to say,
“this isn't worth it!”
But then when you talked him down,
you go home and brag about it.

In contrast, v15:

¹⁵ *There is gold and abundance of costly stones,
but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel.*

Verses 16-17 then use a play on words:

¹⁶ *Take a man's garment when he has put up security for a stranger,
and hold it in pledge when he puts up security for foreigners.*^[g]

¹⁷ *Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man,
but afterward his mouth will be full of gravel.*

The word for “security” in verse 16 looks and sounds identical to the word “sweet” in v17.

Putting up security for foreigners/strangers is really dangerous –

because if you don’t know them, then they might be out to swindle you.

They persuade you because they offer a sweet deal –

you could make a lot of money if it works out well –

And sure, “bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man –

but afterward his mouth will be full of gravel.”

What a great image.

You were expecting a delicious loaf of bread –

but instead you get a mouth full of gravel!

¹⁸ *Plans are established by counsel;*

by wise guidance wage war.

¹⁹ *Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets;*

therefore do not associate with a simple babbler.

Verses 18-19 then emphasize the importance of *counsel* and *wise guidance* –

but don’t get your counsel from a simple babbler!

Oh, and the final word of verse 19 is a third word that looks and sounds the same

as “security” and “sweet” in verses 16-17.

This one is the word “associate.”

So verses 12-19 lay out the beginnings of a path –

here is the way that you should walk.

But verses 20-28 then bring us to the solution of our problem:

Wait on the LORD: His King will make things right.

3. Wait on the LORD: His King Will Make Things Right (20:20-28)

²⁰ *If one curses his father or his mother,
his lamp will be put out in utter darkness.*

²¹ *An inheritance gained hastily in the beginning
will not be blessed in the end.*

Verses 20-21 return us to the theme of the foolish son.

The son has ceased to hear instruction.
He has cursed his father or his mother – and his lamp will be put out in utter darkness.

But notice how cursing and blessing are juxtaposed here:

Verse 20 starts with a curse and ends with the result.

Verse 21 starts with the beginning and ends with a lack of blessing
(in other words, a curse!).

Our parents messed up!

It's not cursing them to say that!

But how do you respond to their sin?

Notice how often verses 21-28 speak of the LORD (four times).

²² *Do not say, "I will repay evil";*

wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you.

²³ *Unequal weights are an abomination to the LORD,
and false scales are not good.*

Verses 22-23 reflect on this.

Do not say, I will repay evil!

You are not trapped in your parents' sins.

You do not have to repeat them.

In fact, *please* do not repeat them!

Wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you!

We've already established that we *cannot* save ourselves.

We cannot make ourselves pure!

It's too late for that!

We are those dissembling children who hid our evil deeds from others.

We need the LORD to save us!

But while you are waiting for the LORD –

knock it off with those false scales and unequal weights!

Yes, wait for the LORD – he will deliver you!

But don't think for a moment that "waiting" means "be passive"!

Verses 24-28 then conclude the whole section.

Here is where we learn what it means to wait for the LORD:

because it means to trust his king!

It means to trust Jesus.

- ²⁴ A man's steps are from the LORD;
how then can man understand his way?*
- ²⁵ It is a snare to say rashly, "It is holy,"
and to reflect only after making vows.*
- ²⁶ A wise king winnows the wicked
and drives the wheel over them.*
- ²⁷ The spirit^[i] of man is the lamp of the LORD,
searching all his innermost parts.*
- ²⁸ Steadfast love and faithfulness preserve the king,
and by steadfast love his throne is upheld.*

Steadfast love and faithfulness – those two things signally lacking in ordinary humanity –
are preeminently found in the King.

By steadfast love his throne is upheld.

Jesus is the faithful One.

He is the Wise King who winnows the wicked.

He is the Son who honored his Father –

even enduring the cursed death of the cross,

so that he might obtain the eternal inheritance

for those who are called into fellowship with him.

We need steadfast love – we need a faithful friend.

Wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you!