

The wisdom books take all the same pictures and images from the rest of the OT and uses them to talk about the everyday life of the people of God.

Tonight we’ll be talking about building houses  
(think of the house of God – the temple of Solomon!)  
planting vineyards – the righteous rising again.

All of it points to Jesus – certainly! –  
but it also reminds us that all scripture connects to us as well – through him.

### **1. A Wise Man Is Full of Strength to Rescue the Helpless (v3-12)**

#### **a. Saying 21 – By Wisdom a House Is Built (v3-4)**

<sup>3</sup> *By wisdom a house is built,  
and by understanding it is established;*

<sup>4</sup> *by knowledge the rooms are filled  
with all precious and pleasant riches.*

Perhaps Saying 21 means a lot more to me after spending the last year on a rehab project!  
Just this week we were preparing to embark on a project when I invited a friend over.  
This friend has a lot of experience and wisdom in historic rehabilitation.  
He heard our plan and said, “I can save you time and money – and it will look better!”

By wisdom a house is built – and by understanding it is established!

But verses 3-4 are talking about more than construction projects.  
We talk about “building a friendship” – or “building trust” –  
Paul will talk about pastoral ministry as “building” –  
because the church is a holy temple,  
being built up in faith, hope, and love.

What is true of construction  
is equally true of everything else in the Christian life:

“by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.”

Many of you are students:  
you are engaged in building your life.  
Much of what you are doing now is foundation-building.

You may not know what you will be doing 10 or 20 years from now –  
but what you do now is essential for that!  
You are learning the tools – gaining the skills – that will equip you for the future.

Without knowledge, you will never be able to fill a room with anything!

The same principle applies to saying 22 as well:

**b. Saying 22 – By Wise Counsel a War Is Won (v5-6)**

<sup>5</sup> *A wise man is full of strength,  
and a man of knowledge enhances his might,  
<sup>6</sup> for by wise guidance you can wage your war,  
and in abundance of counselors there is victory.*

Whether building a house or fighting a war – the same principles apply.

A wise man is full of strength.

A strong man can lift a heavy object.

A wise man can lift a far heavier object –

because the wise man understands the principle of the lever!

A strong man can crush his enemies.

A wise man can defeat a strong man – because the wise man understands tactics.

And particularly, a wise man understands the importance of good counsel!

“By wise guidance you can wage your war,  
and in abundance of counselors there is victory.”

**c. Saying 23 – Don’t Let a Fool Guide Public Opinion (v7)**

<sup>7</sup> *Wisdom is too high for a fool;  
in the gate he does not open his mouth.*

It is possible that the ESV has translated this correctly –  
and if so, it is describing the ideal scenario.

The only problem is that fools rarely recognize that they are fools...

So the more likely translation is “in the gate he must not open his mouth” –  
or maybe, “let him not open his mouth”!

In other words, Don’t let a fool guide public opinion.

The wise man seeks out an abundance of counselors –  
but the wise man also knows which counselors to listen to!

Think of Solomon’s own son – Rehoboam –  
who sought out a multitude of counselors!

His father’s counselors – the older men – urged him to lighten the load on the people.  
They pointed out that if he began his reign with gentleness and mercy,

he would win over the people immediately.  
But then the younger men – his buddies – scoffed at the people.  
They urged him to threaten the people with his power and might,  
to show off his toughness.

Even if you don't know the story, you can guess the outcome!  
He followed his buddies' advice – he listened to the fools –  
and people rebelled –  
and the kingdom was divided.

All the advice in the world will not help –  
if all your advisors are fools!

And that really sets up Saying 24 (verses 8-9):

**d. Saying 24 – Foolish Counsel Is an Abomination to Mankind (v8-9)**

<sup>8</sup> *Whoever plans to do evil  
will be called a schemer.*

<sup>9</sup> *The devising<sup>[1]</sup> of folly is sin,  
and the scoffer is an abomination to mankind.*

Think about Rehoboam and his friends for a minute.  
Did they think of themselves as “planning to do evil”?  
Of course not!  
They were just giving the king advice about how to govern his kingdom!

The fool rarely thinks of himself as a schemer!  
Notice how the Father says it –  
“will be *called* a schemer.”  
Schemers rarely recognize that what they are doing is scheming!

But the devising of folly is sin.  
The word here is connected to the word “schemer” –  
so it might be better to say, “the schemes of folly are sin.”  
The schemes of folly are not just bad for others –  
they are bad before God – they are sin.

And so the scoffer is an abomination to mankind.

Bruce Waltke points out that the schemer – the villain –  
overvalues his own self-importance,  
and thus devalues others.

The schemer – the villain – designs to further his own interests

at the expense of the community.  
(Exactly like Rehoboam and his buddies!)

Scheming is a sin – because it is  
“a transgression against society as ordered by God,  
and the mocker [the scoffer] with his perpetual sneer  
and his incapability for loyalty to the society that supports him  
is repugnant to people.” (Waltke, 274)

Having seen the danger of scheming and folly,  
we return in Saying 25 (verses 10-12) to the theme of how the strength of wisdom  
should be used:

**e. Saying 25 – Rescue the Captives – Don’t Play Dumb! (v10-12)**

<sup>10</sup> *If you faint in the day of adversity,  
your strength is small.*

Notice that the Father turns his address directly to his Son –  
to the disciple – to the learner.

And if – as we saw in verse 5, “A wise man is full of strength” –  
the implication is that the wise man does not faint in the day of adversity!

The strength that comes from wisdom is a strength that prepares you for the day of adversity.  
Because wisdom understands how you fit into the world.  
Wisdom recognizes who I am in relationship to God –  
and therefore who I am in relation to others –  
to myself – and to all creation.

And so if you faint in the day of adversity –  
your strength is small – and your wisdom is small.

Instead:

<sup>11</sup> *Rescue those who are being taken away to death;  
hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter.*

The wise man sees those who are helpless –  
and does something about it!  
This is what strength and wisdom is for!

It’s not for you!  
The fool says “I am smart – I am strong –  
I can do whatever I want!”

But when we live for ourselves – we follow the path of folly.

Your wisdom and strength was given to you so that you could help others.

When we use our wisdom and strength selfishly,  
then we turning away from the path of wisdom!

“Oh, but I don’t anyone who needs help...”:

<sup>12</sup> *If you say, “Behold, we did not know this,”  
does not he who weighs the heart perceive it?  
Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it,  
and will he not repay man according to his work?*

Are you deliberately avoiding that knowledge?

Are you hiding from those in need, so that you can pretend they don’t exist?

The example in our text puts it rather starkly:

“those who are being taken away to death” –  
which could be the innocent victims of a murderer –  
or, for that matter, the sick – those who are stumbling to the slaughter  
in a more figurative sense.

The father is saying to his son that

“God will not excuse him for his lack of gritty determination, mental toughness,  
and moral courage to do the right thing.” (Waltke, 276)

In a very real way this proverb is at the heart of Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan.

The priest and the Levite see the poor fellow in the ditch –  
but they do nothing.

The Samaritan, on the other hand, exemplifies wisdom:  
he cares for the Jew in the ditch, and provides what he needs to recover.

And the father reminds you that God knows all things.

God weighs the heart – so he perceives what you are thinking.

He keeps watch over your soul – so he knows why you do what you do.

You cannot hide from God.

You cannot lie to him.

And he will repay you according to your work.

How do you hear that?

Does it sound ominous?

That’s not how it is intended!

It is intended as an encouragement to walk the path of wisdom!

Because if you walk in the way of wisdom, God will reward you!

And yes, there is a warning!

If you insist on becoming a scoffer and you are dismissive of your fellow men,  
then when you are in trouble – God won't show up for you either!

But that also means that if you *do* show up for others –

if you are there for them – then God will be there for you!

## 2. Do Not Fret – But Fear the LORD and the King (v13-22)

The final section of the 30 Sayings of the Wise consists of five sayings,  
each of which begins with a double admonition in the odd-numbered verse,  
with the reason for the admonitions in the even-numbered verse.

The whole sequence begins with the promise of eternal life –  
and ends with the disaster of eternal death.

All of which is a reason not to fret – but to fear the LORD (and the king).

### a. Saying 26 – Wisdom Is the Honey of the Soul – And Leads to a Future (v13-14)

Saying 26 points to the future.

<sup>13</sup> *My son, eat honey, for it is good,  
and the drippings of the honeycomb are sweet to your taste.*

<sup>14</sup> *Know that wisdom is such to your soul;  
if you find it, there will be a future,  
and your hope will not be cut off.*

Wisdom is the honey of the soul!

Think about how the metaphor works:

“Physically eating is an apt metaphor for spiritually ‘knowing’ (i.e., internalizing).

[when you eat something, it becomes part of you –

and when you know something it – also – becomes part of you].

And the palate – the sense of taste – is like the soul – which “tastes” ideas.

Honey is good for you – and it also tastes really good!

Both wisdom and honey invigorate while they give pleasure.

So if you are unhappy, may I suggest that you pursue wisdom!

Devote yourself to gaining understanding.

It is both useful and delightful!

And if you find wisdom – there will be a future.

As we have so often seen in Proverbs,

the future – your hope – is more than just living a little longer.

We just heard that God will reward us according to our work.

There is a judgment day coming when God will reward us all according to our work.

And this is why Saying 27 is so important:

**b. Saying 27 – Both the Righteous and the Wicked Fall – But Only the Righteous Will Rise Again (v15-16)**

<sup>15</sup> *Lie not in wait as a wicked man against the dwelling of the righteous;  
do no violence to his home;*

<sup>16</sup> *for the righteous falls seven times and rises again,  
but the wicked stumble in times of calamity.*

The righteous are just as likely to fall as the wicked.

Actually, the righteous are *more* likely to fall!

Why?

Because the righteous may fall *seven times* – and rise every time!

Whereas the wicked tend not to rise!

The righteous will endure unjust suffering.

The whole of the Old Testament points to the innocent suffering servant  
who will fall – only to rise again.

**c. Saying 28 – So Don't Rejoice When Your Enemy Falls... (v17-18)**

Saying 28 then warns:

<sup>17</sup> *Do not rejoice when your enemy falls,  
and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles,*

<sup>18</sup> *lest the LORD see it and be displeased,  
and turn away his anger from him.*

We just heard that the wicked stumble and do not rise.

But do not rejoice when your enemy stumbles.

Don't gloat!

The point here is *not* that you should wish for the recovery of the wicked.

After all, verse 18 suggests that if you are faithful,

then the LORD's anger will continue against them.

The point is that when the LORD sees *you* gloating over the trouble of your enemy,  
then he may need to teach you a lesson –  
and so he may allow your enemy to recover!

We should rejoice when God's righteousness is vindicated.  
But we should *not* rejoice at the trouble of others.  
It's an important distinction,  
If I have a vengeful spirit – that is not good.  
But if I delight in God's righteousness – that is good!

And that distinction is important to Saying 29 as well:

**d. Saying 29 – And Fret Not Because of Evildoers – They Have No Future (v19-20)**

<sup>19</sup> *Fret not yourself because of evildoers,  
and be not envious of the wicked,*  
<sup>20</sup> *for the evil man has no future;  
the lamp of the wicked will be put out.*

If my focus is on *them* – then I will be vengeful and fretful.  
I will fret – I will worry – I will be anxious –  
because the evildoers prosper...

What does it mean to “fret” because of evildoers.  
It means to be upset at God  
because obviously God doesn't know what he's doing!  
Fretting is a form of anger.

We *should* be angry because of evildoers.  
But that anger should prompt us to *do something* about it.  
Fretting is an anxious anger that just stewes in anxiety and frustration.

But the wise man will recognize that the evil man has no future.  
The lamp of the wicked will be put out.

Sure, right now, things are not the way they should be.  
But God is still God – and I am still not!  
He knows what he is doing – and he will make things right.

Therefore (Saying 30):

**e. Saying 30 – So Fear the LORD and the King (v21-22)**



<sup>21</sup> *My son, fear the LORD and the king,  
and do not join with those who do otherwise,*  
<sup>22</sup> *for disaster will arise suddenly from them,  
and who knows the ruin that will come from them both?*

Fear the LORD – and fear the king –  
the king, after all, is the Son of David – the LORD’s anointed – the Messiah.

Believe in God – believe also in me – Jesus said!  
And do not join with those who do otherwise.  
Do not join with those who would overthrow authority – either human or divine.  
Jesus is King – therefore submit to those in authority,  
since the governing authorities are given by God.

God will judge the wicked – and rulers are one of his chief means of bringing judgment!

### **3. P.S., Here’s Four More Bonus Sayings! (v23-34)**

Then you have this added comment in verse 23 -

<sup>23</sup> *These also are sayings of the wise.*

This introduction connects these sayings to the 30 Sayings of the Wise.  
In a sense you can see these as applications of the Thirty Sayings.

First:

#### **a. Whoever Gives an Honest Answer Kisses the Lips (v23-26)**

*Partiality in judging is not good.*

<sup>24</sup> *Whoever says to the wicked, “You are in the right,”  
will be cursed by peoples, abhorred by nations,*

<sup>25</sup> *but those who rebuke the wicked will have delight,  
and a good blessing will come upon them.*

<sup>26</sup> *Whoever gives an honest answer  
kisses the lips.*

This is dealing with legal and financial matters.

How will you deal with people at work – or in your community?

What about when there is social pressure to call evil good –  
to say to the wicked “you are in the right!”

Remember what we’ve just heard:

God is going to judge the wicked.

So it would highly imprudent for you to endorse what God condemns!

But whoever gives an honest answer kisses the lips.

It was common in the ancient world for equals to kiss each other on the lips.

If there was a slight difference, the lesser would kiss the greater on the cheek.

So the image of kissing on the lips is one of equality and friendship.

The second bonus saying then says:

**b. Make Sure You Have Food Before You Build Shelter (v27)**

<sup>27</sup> *Prepare your work outside;  
get everything ready for yourself in the field,  
and after that build your house.*

This is common sense:

Don't build a house until you have the means to support a household!  
Work hard at your career – get established in your business –  
*then* build your house.

The third saying then talks about how to live in community:

**c. Don't Bear Witness Against Your Neighbor Without Cause (v28-29)**

<sup>28</sup> *Be not a witness against your neighbor without cause,  
and do not deceive with your lips.*  
<sup>29</sup> *Do not say, "I will do to him as he has done to me;  
I will pay the man back for what he has done."*

Remember how we saw that God will repay us according to our deeds?

Well, you are not God!  
You should not repay others according to their deeds!

The fact that others are deceptive and vindictive  
does not mean that you should be!

Our final saying then shows what happens when you ignore the wisdom of the wise:

**d. The Field of a Sluggard Provides Instruction (v30-34)**

<sup>30</sup> *I passed by the field of a sluggard,  
by the vineyard of a man lacking sense,*  
<sup>31</sup> *and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns;  
the ground was covered with nettles,  
and its stone wall was broken down.*  
<sup>32</sup> *Then I saw and considered it;  
I looked and received instruction.*  
<sup>33</sup> *A little sleep, a little slumber,  
a little folding of the hands to rest,*  
<sup>34</sup> *and poverty will come upon you like a robber,  
and want like an armed man.*

There are lots of echoes here of Isaiah 5 – the Song of the Vineyard,  
where Israel is God’s vineyard,  
but the vineyard failed to produce.

In a very real way, this is Israel.

When Israel became a sluggard – when Israel lacked sense –  
its stone wall was broken down,  
and it was all overgrown with thorns.

What Proverbs does is say that what was true of Israel as a whole  
can also become true of individuals.

If you ignore the words of the Father – if you abandon the wisdom of God –  
then poverty will come upon you.