

Sermon 93, Evil’s Bane, Proverbs 28:1-11

Proposition: Wisdom destroys evil, but evil had incurable flaws from the beginning.

- I. Evil Self-Destructs, vv. 1-11
 - A. The Wicked Lack Staying Power, vv. 1, 2, 5, 10
 - 1. No Guts, v. 1
 - 2. No Endurance, v. 2
 - 3. No Savvy, v. 5
 - 4. No Paternal Pride, v. 7
 - 5. No Safety, v. 10
 - B. Financial Oppression Hurts, But It Can’t Last , vv. 3, 8
 - C. Financial Poverty Beats Poor Character Every Time, vv. 6, 11
- II. Evil Is Destroyed by Listening to Instruction, vv. 4, 9
 - A. Law-Keepers Oppose Wickedness, v. 4
 - B. Law-Hearers Offer Welcome Prayers, v. 9

The wicked flee when no one is pursuing, But the righteous are bold as a lion.

First Occurrence	Counterpart
2 By the transgression of a land many are its princes, But by a man of understanding and knowledge, so it endures.	7 He who keeps the law is a discerning son, But he who is a companion of gluttons humiliates his father.
3 A poor man who oppresses the lowly Is like a driving rain which leaves no food.	8 He who increases his wealth by interest and usury, Gathers it for him who is gracious to the poor.
4 Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, But those who keep the law strive with them.	9 He who turns away his ear from listening to the law, Even his prayer is an abomination.
5 Evil men do not understand justice, But those who seek the LORD understand all things.	10 He who leads the upright astray in an evil way Will himself fall into his own pit, But the blameless will inherit good.

6 Better is the poor who walks in his integrity, Than he who is crooked though he be rich.	11 The rich man is wise in his own eyes, But the poor who has understanding sees through him.
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Chiastic Breakdown -- doesn't quite work

Heading: The actions of the righteous vs. the wicked

Chiastic summary:

Land sins, politics unstable; understanding man gives longevity & understanding son keeps instruction; fool humiliates father

Oppressing the poor

Center: Failure to listen to instruction

Evil's ignorance, God-seekers' understanding & Evil self-destructs, the blameless inherit

Poverty better than wealth b/c it gives integrity and understanding

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we all know that evil is bad. But our text highlights that it is also unstable, flawed, lacking in longevity. Evil cannot endure. One commentator on this passage says that this message is one of faith rather than one of experience, and so it is. Evil can last longer than a human lifetime. Look at the Soviet Union, or the abortion laws in the United States. But evil cannot outlast good. Evil cannot overcome holiness. And our text this evening highlights that reality. Evil allures, but good endures, as Tolstoy titled one of his short stories.

I. Evil Self-Destructs, vv. 1-11

The major point of our text is that evil self-destructs because of its own inherent weakness. The wise son doesn't think of evil as overwhelmingly powerful, as something that will endure. He thinks of evil as something with no preservatives in it, something that will rot like a fish on the docks in Singapore. The first reason this is so is that the wicked lack staying power.

A. The Wicked Lack Staying Power, vv. 1, 2, 5, 10

They just don't have what it takes to tenaciously pursue evil forever. Now, all of you are thinking "Why do moral libertines seem so disciplined and organized in their pursuit of an ungodly society? Why do theological liberals seem to have so much tenacity in overthrowing the teaching of God's truth?" Part of that is simply an illusion. Evil seems stronger in this world because it

controls the propaganda machines. It resonates with the hearts of all fallen human beings. And the devil is a liar who loves you to think he's powerful and important. In those important respects, then, the power of evil is illusory. But in another respect, yes, evil is indeed powerful, disciplined, and organized. It is powerful not in the sense that it will or even can rule the cosmos, but rather in the sense that it can easily rule your heart. You are predisposed to fall to evil. And so it seems powerful because it can so easily sway you and me and everything that humans build. But it is not powerful in itself; it is only powerful over us.

Let's look, then, at the reality that casts such a vast shadow. What are wicked human beings like when looked at from the point of view of wisdom?

1. No Guts, v. 1

First of all, they lack guts. Their conscience is screaming, and so they are constantly trying to hide, trying to run, trying to avoid anyone knowing what they are doing or conversely, trying to force everyone to noisily approve of what they're doing. When you're guilty, there are certain topics you won't talk about, certain places you won't go, certain people you won't see. Brothers and sisters, how do you know whether you're wicked? The test presented in this verse is a pretty good one. Do you live in fear of certain concepts, certain questions, certain people, certain places? The righteous have nothing to fear from their enemies — nothing permanently damaging, anyway. The wicked know that they deserve condemnation, and so they lash out to prevent it from falling on them.

This explains pride parades. This explains apparently neutral topics that suddenly turn explosive with your spouse, child, or pastor. This explains why the wicked are so tenacious in seizing control of the institutional machinery. They are afraid of what will happen to them if they don't. They run as if the very whips of their masters were at their heels, as Legolas observes about the Uruk-hai.

Are you bold as a lion? I'm not talking about an aggressive vs. a timid personality. I'm talking about whether you believe that you have something major to lose. Are you afraid of what might happen to you? Or do you have confidence in the protection and provision of the living God? The answer to that question is a big clue as to whether you are righteous or wicked.

2. No Endurance, v. 2

Secondly, though, the wicked have endurance. When a whole land is full of wicked people, it can't sustain a political regime for very long. As one commentator pointed out, Northern Israel had 9 dynasties in 200 years, while Judah had 1 dynasty in 350. That's a massive difference.

Some of you, like me, are probably wondering whether the USA will make it to the semiquincentennial in 2026. At this point, of course, we simply don't know. But we do know that a nation as wicked as this one deserves many rulers writing many rules. We deserve an unstable and transitory government. And the further we press into rebellion, and the longer we press into rebellion, the more rulers and the more rules we're going to get. Massive volumes of regulations are not a symptom of growing righteousness.

By contrast, the discerning and knowledgeable person causes the land to endure. Again, think of George Washington. With hotheads like Aaron Burr running the country, the nascent republic might have been stillborn. With Washington's sober, knowledgeable, and discerning actions, the foundations were laid for the republic to endure, which it has now done for almost 250 years. The land lasts when someone with some wisdom is in charge. By the fear of God, the state is secured. And without it, the government falls.

3. No Savvy, v. 5

Part of the reason for evil's short shelf life is that the wicked have no savvy. In particular, they don't understand justice. A state built on injustice cannot endure; the consciences of those under its evil rule viscerally reject its legitimacy. Those who seek Yahweh, on the contrary, understand everything. That is not to say that they know all there is to know about every topic, but that they "get it." They understand what reality is like, and they have the humility to learn more about it. The wicked, though, genuinely believe at some level that the injustice they are wreaking is perfectly just because it favors them, or seems to favor them. Those who cannot live without God, and are constantly trying to connect with Him, understand what justice is, and they understand where the world came from and who is in charge of it. They don't understand everything in practice, but in principle they get it. They have the framework in which every fact can fit and thus be understood correctly.

4. No Paternal Pride, v. 7

The wicked can't last because their behavior is, to use the buzzword, "unsustainable." One way we know that is how they humiliate their parents. The wicked don't believe in honoring father and mother. The wicked act in a way that makes their parents regret having given life to them. Of course, if you regret having children, and tell them so, it makes them think they maybe shouldn't have children either. When you see that you are a grief to your parents, it makes you think twice about having children who will be a grief to you. On the other hand, clearly, a discerning son both avoids the gluttons (people who live for their fleshly appetites) and makes his father glad. If your parents are glad they had you, you might be willing to put in the work of raising children, knowing that they will likely make you glad.

But here's the thing: If evil can't produce children, then that already stamps it with a big expiration date. A foolish son grieves his father, and may not reproduce more fools like himself.

5. No Safety, v. 10

The last character deficiency we see in the wicked is that they mislead the upright. They try to corrupt those more righteous than themselves. This may be intentional or unintentional, but it is certainly a reality. There is no safety for the wicked, because when they try to capture the righteous they harm they intended falls on them instead. This is not necessarily going to happen right away. But it is going to happen. How do you know when you can't see? You trust. You have faith that God's world will be right in the end, even if it's not right now. The machinations of the wicked will bring them down at last. The wicked will inherit evil, but the blameless will get good. If you don't believe it, just wait. God will come through yet.

B. Financial Oppression Hurts, But It Can't Last , vv. 3, 8

Financial oppression, too, can't last forever. The poor man who oppresses the poor is a horrible thing. He is like a rain that crushes the grain before it can be harvested. Don't oppress the poor. How can you do that? Overcharging, voting for candidates and policies that do harm, ignoring poor people, failing to give to the poor — all of these are ways you and I can oppress the poor. Another way you can harm the poor is by charging interest, conceived of as a continuously increasing charge for the use of money. Usury is bad at all times, but interest exacted from the poor is downright evil. The one who makes money by usury is simply gathering a fortune that will be spent by someone who is kind to the poor.

How is that possible, you ask? Only by the power of God. Nothing less can protect the poor from the depredations of financiers.

Do you want to be rich? Give to the poor. Do you want to be poor? Then take from the poor. Oh, for a short time these strategies may seem foolish. But in the long run, they pay. That is the message and wisdom of Proverbs; that is the message and wisdom of the word of God.

But before we get to the end, when things are set right, let's remind ourselves of the first part of the statement again: Financial oppression hurts. We can talk about how much misery poverty causes, how many lives it blights, how enlightened self-interest tells us to help the poor, and so on. I know that you know all of that stuff to some degree. Solomon assumes that you know it when he talks about the poor. He doesn't major on the social science aspects of it. He targets the moral aspects, which are these: Be kind to the poor. That goes whether you're rich, poor, or something else that's not quite either one. Those who harm the poor are in for a world of hurt.

C. Financial Poverty Beats Poor Character Every Time, vv. 6, 11

But the poor do have one major advantage. This advantage is the advantage of character. Now, v. 3 has already pointed out that the poor can be wicked too. It's not only the rich who can take advantage and defraud. But when the poor have strong character, they are better than the rich. They can see right through the rich.

Would you rather have financial poverty or poor character? You may think that you can trade character for money, but in the end, wickedness will destroy you. That is the message of Proverbs. That is a message that we all need to hear. You can't trade character for anything — pleasure, profit, fun, etc. If you try, the thing you receive will turn out to be worthless, for only those with character can enjoy life over the long haul.

Evil self-destructs because of its inherent weaknesses. You may not be able to see it self-destructing. You may think that it is too powerful to be overthrown. But the moral order is stronger than the evildoer who would attempt to violate it, and the moral order will crush that evildoer.

II. Evil Is Destroyed by Listening to Instruction, vv. 4, 9

But evil is not only subject to internal rot, as powerful as that is. Evil is also subject to external enemies. As you would guess, the enemy of evil is good. People who listen to instruction and

keep it are the people who destroy evil. This is not the same thing as destroying evil people. Oh no. If you keep the law, you don't have to attack the wicked. Their own consciences and God's superintending providence will take care of all that. You need only take care of your own righteousness and you will inevitably end up opposing wickedness in the power of God.

A. Law-Keepers Oppose Wickedness, v. 4

First, then, notice that law-keepers oppose wickedness. The word translated "instruction" here is "Torah." However, it is not *the* Torah, but simply "Torah" that is in view here. Likely, then, Solomon is not simply thinking of God's instruction in the Torah, but also of his own instruction here in this book of Proverbs and indeed, of instruction more generally. If you have the humility to listen to instruction, then you are well on your way to hearing God's instruction and being saved. The one who listens to instruction will struggle against the wicked.

Have you ever opposed wickedness? In your home? Workplace? Church? If not, then Solomon would suggest that you are not really listening to God's instructions on how to live. To oppose the wicked is to say "No, we are not doing it that way." It's the whole "Over my dead body!" approach. Not every hill is a hill to die on. But those who listen to instruction, and particularly to God's instruction, have standards that they will not violate. They have certain things they will not do, thoughts they will not think, and behaviors they will not tolerate. They will die on certain hills. Jesus died on one.

Law-keepers oppose wickedness.

B. Law-Hearers Offer Welcome Prayers, v. 9

More than that, those who hear the law offer prayers that God wants to hear. Those who won't listen? Even their prayers are an abomination. God listens to those who listen to Him. The verse encourages prayer, but only prayer from those who care enough to listen and put into action what they hear.

So what will it be? Will you stand up to evil by your commitment and by your prayers? Or will you give way before it? Are you bold, or fearful? Trust God and keep striving against sin, remembering that wisdom destroys evil. Amen.