

## Sermon 94, When the Wicked Rise, Proverbs 28:12-28

**Proposition:** When the wicked rise, the wise son hides and practices righteousness in secret — and in hope.

- I. Frame: Handling the Rise of the Wicked
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  - B. Fear God, Confess Sins, vv. 13-14
  - C. Accept that Having Wicked Rulers will be Bad, vv. 15-16a, 24
  - D. Cultivate Righteous Habits, vv. 21-27
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### Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, our text this evening talks about what to do when the wicked rise. Notice that both vv. 12 and 28 say that when the wicked rise, people hide. In between, I believe, lies great wisdom for those providentially born into a time when the wicked are rising. Everyone hides at such a time — but the righteous do far more than hide. They put into practice the demands of wisdom, forming them into habits. And, I think the text fairly implies, when the righteous habitually perform these deeds of wisdom, they will overthrow the wicked. It may not be immediate, but it will be certain. When the wicked rise, people hide. But when the righteous hide, they practice righteousness more aggressively than ever, knowing that wickedness can't last.

#### I. Frame: Handling the Rise of the Wicked

Again, notice the frame around our text. Based on this frame, then, for purposes of this sermon we will take the verses in between as wisdom for the righteous to practice when the wicked rise.

##### A. Hide, vv. 12, 28

The righteous flourish when the wicked perish, and when the righteous flourish then everybody flourishes. But when the wicked rise, the righteous and the population at large need to keep their heads down. They do their best to remain unnoticed because to be noticed is to be in trouble, is to be hurt by the forces of state security. There is nothing unrighteous about hiding. Our Lord

Himself said “When they persecute you in one city, flee to another.” And He hid Himself from those who wanted to kill Him on more than one occasion. So if you can hide from the wicked who want to hurt you, do so. If you are doing something that God commands but that the state calls illegal, you don’t need to send a copy of the footage to the governor.

Are the wicked rising enough for us to hide? Definitely. We do not want to advertise to the ACLU that our denomination will not ordain homosexuals. We do not take the trouble to inform everyone we meet that our theological views are downright reactionary. And let’s just say that there’s a reason we all live out here in Wyoming, far from the surveilling eye of the Federal Government.

When the wicked rise, everyone hides.

### **B. Fear God, Confess Sins, vv. 13-14**

But not everyone does this next part. Not everyone confesses their sins. In fact, though it is fine to hide from the wicked, what’s not acceptable is to hide from God. Now, that’s not our default. In fact, our default is to hide from the wicked and to hide from the Lord. The wicked won’t like the righteous thing I’m doing, so I’ll make sure they don’t have to see it or know about it. The righteous God won’t like this evil thing that I’m doing, so I’ll do my best to hide it from him. Admit it. You’ve thought that way. I’ve thought that way. We think that if we need to hide from the wicked, then we also need to hide from the righteous God!

But brothers and sisters, it’s not true. I just confessed a hidden sin last night. It was not pleasant, but I found mercy. I’ve had people confess hidden sins to me — and my heart has wanted to extend them mercy. I’ve also found out about hidden sins that the perp most emphatically did not want to confess — and my heart wanted to rip that guy into pieces. Well, our moral intuitions on this point reflect our Father’s face and attitude. He extends mercy to those who confess their iniquity. He hates it when we attempt to cover our sin. Only the blood of Jesus can cover sin.

One of the roads here in Gillette has a lot of sand on the side. The road striping crew came along and painted the white stripe right on top of  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch of sand a few months ago. Now that the stripe is completely gone. You can cover the sand over with white paint, but it won’t last. The sand will show through in no time. And so it is with covering your sin with anything but Jesus’ blood. You can layer as much whitewash as you want on top of that sand. Soon it will be completely gone, and the sin underneath will show through just as black as ever.

When the wicked are rising, that is not a reason to hide your sin. That is a reason to confess your sin. You know, this is one of the few times that Proverbs hints that the distinction between “wicked” and “righteous” is not so impermeable as the book seems to suppose. The righteous sin! The difference between the righteous and wicked, the wise and the foolish, is not whether they sin but what they do with their sin. The wicked don’t confess and don’t forsake — but the righteous do both. Yes, both. Whoever confesses but does not forsake is just as wicked as ever. You can say all day long that you’re sorry, but when you go and do the same thing again it proves that you are not sorry. I know, because I have done it. You have too. We all have besetting

sins that we have an awfully hard time forsaking. But do you want to forsake those sins? Are you taking steps to limit them, to stop doing them? Or are you simply doing the same things repeatedly and expecting different results? Brothers and sisters, how do you forsake sin? By learning to fear God. You have to change your attitude about Him. And when you do, you will not want to sin because you have a conception of who your heavenly Father is and don't want to offend Him! That conception will lead you to take specific, measurable action against your sin. I guarantee it.

That's what the next verse says: The one who fears always, who is in the fear of the LORD all day long, that one is the blessed one. If you harden your heart and choose to keep embracing sin, you will fall into calamity. And it will be a calamity worse than the calamity of having evil temporal rulers. It will be a calamity of having a bad eternal destiny.

Learn what God is like, and practice fearing Him. Think high thoughts of Him. Believe that He is actually disgusted by sin, that He hates it, and that He doesn't want you to do it. Be with Him and learn to adopt His attitude about sin. And when you do, you will find mercy. You will also find the strength to forsake, because you will have something better to go toward. You don't need sin when you have Jesus. The Christian life is simply the process of learning that truth.

### **C. Accept that Having Wicked Rulers will be Bad, vv. 15-16a, 24**

Well, as you practice confessing and forsaking in the fear of God, you need to also accept the reality that having wicked rulers is going to be a bad time. It's going to be awful. It's going to be like getting mauled by a lion. It's like getting chased by a bear. It's the kind of experience you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy. Brothers and sisters, I think we can all see that the wicked are rising. Based on your political views, you may have different ideas about which politicians and elites are more wicked and which less. But we all agree that in general, the wicked are rising. Prepare yourself now for that to be bad. It's not unendurable, but it's close. A ruler without understanding is a great oppressor. He's not a moderate oppressor. He's not a middle-of-the-pack oppressor. He achieves true greatness in his ability to squash people under his thumb. He is going to crush the weak like a 4-inch thick steel plate crushes a peanut. And yes, we are the weak, and the people we love are the weak. These wicked rulers have no sense of respect for parents and authority figures, either. They rob parents without a qualm. They are great oppressors, and their companions are great destroyers.

It's going to be tough to live under the ascendant wicked. It will be no fun at all. That's why we have got to get ready, why we need to be prepared by confessing and forsaking our sins and looking for mercy. Whatever you suffer from wicked rulers, you don't want to make it worse by suffering from your own sins too!

### **D. Cultivate Righteous Habits, vv. 21-27**

Effectively, then, what this means is that when the wicked rise, you need to cultivate righteous habits. You had better be practiced at doing the things that you'll need to do when the wicked are in charge.

### **1. Fight Bias & Favoritism, v. 21**

The first of these righteous habits, and an interesting one in light of recent developments around racism in our country, is that the righteous need to fight bias and favoritism. Partiality, in which some people are treated unfairly (either positively, where some get favors and rewards that others don't, or negatively, where some get discriminated against and harmed while others don't), is a great evil because it makes sin almost impossible to avoid. You can push someone into such a corner through your partiality, favoritism, and general unfairness that he will sin for a piece of bread. You make it almost impossible for the victim of your bias not to sin. How much is a slice of bread worth? Fifteen cents? I hope none of us would be tempted to steal for the sake of gaining fifteen cents. And yet, if you show bias, particularly when the wicked rise, you are creating a group of people who will sin for a piece of bread — likely because they can't get it any other way!

Brothers and sisters, I have told you before that the moral crazes of the world are not likely to bring about the righteousness that God requires. But the moral crazes of the world often have a truly moral core somewhere in there. The world's goals and methods are probably not up to the challenge of realizing that core. But just because the world has glommed onto part of God's law doesn't mean that we should reject that part. When the wicked rise, you must not show partiality and favoritism, whether to white or black, rich or poor. On the contrary.

### **2. Shun Get-Rich-Quick Schemes, v. 22**

But you also have to shun get-rich-quick schemes. You know what kind of person wants to get rich quick? A man with an evil eye. Jesus says that such a person is entirely full of darkness. That's who lives to get rich. That's who will pursue any option to get more money. If that describes you, repent! What will get you through the period when the wicked rise? It's not going to be money. Treasures of wickedness profit nothing. It's righteousness (not money) that delivers from death!

### **3. Openly Rebuke, v. 23**

Furthermore, when the wicked rise, that is not the time to keep your rebukes to yourself. Rather, that is the time to call someone out. Rebuke strikes dread into the heart of most of us. We don't like hearing them, and we don't like giving them. And, of course, the people who like giving them absolutely hate to receive them. But though all that is true, you can tell who your true friends are by whether they are willing to rebuke you when it matters. Some people are just mean-spirited or high-strung, and dish out rebukes right and left. Those people are not going to find more favor afterwards. They are the opposite of the flatterers. The flatterer tries to manipulate you by telling you what you want to hear, while the prolific rebuker tries to force you into compliance by criticizing you to the point where you'll do anything to make it stop. Neither of those people is your friend, and neither of them is going to find more favor afterward when you realize what just happened.

But the person who is really your friend? When you're out of line, he'll call you on it. He will say "No. Stop it. Don't do that." And when you've cooled off, you will come and thank him. You will say, "You're right. I was totally out of line." On the other hand, the flatterer will feel better in the moment. Only when you wake up afterwards and realize "That person was completely lying to me to try to manipulate me to do what he wanted" will you regret having listened to the flatterer.

When the wicked are rising, you need a true friend who will rebuke you. And you need to be a true friend who will rebuke, not criticize or flatter. There is a difference.

#### **4. Honor Father and Mother, v. 24**

You also need to honor your father and mother — indeed, all superiors in place, age, or gifts. To steal from your parents is the opposite of honoring them. To take their stuff and act like it's your stuff is a sin against God.

This is telling us that when the wicked rise, a general disregard for authority will be in the air. How can you listen to authority when clowns and villains like that have it? Brothers and sisters, again the answer is to walk in the fear of God. Don't look at the evil politicians and say "I can't respect that, therefore I will throw off authority altogether." Rather, look to the Lord and say "I do respect that. In fact, I want to be like Him. I desire to honor my Heavenly Father and so I will honor these wretched earthly rulers too."

#### **5. Trust Yahweh, Not Your Own Heart, vv. 25-26**

That's what the next two verses say. When the wicked rise, you will stop trusting authority figures, with some pretty good justification. But don't move from that to trusting your own heart. The one who trusts his own heart is a fool. He's also a troublemaker. I get the temptation to disregard authority. That temptation is all around us, swamping our society right and left (and yes, I'm referring to both sides of the political spectrum there). We see thugs and violent actors on all sides, some in the pay of the state, some volunteers, wantonly disregarding authority, stirring up strife, and sure that what they are doing is correct because they trust their own hearts and their own moral centers.

What do we do about this sort of thing — riots and anti-riots, state-sponsored violence and mob-enacted violence? We trust in the Lord and we walk wisely. Remember, to walk wisely means to walk in the fear of God. That means that you will not join in burning and looting, no matter how sorely you are provoked. You will not endorse state violence, no matter how much you are threatened by it, or how much it threatens groups you dislike anyway. You will walk as wisely as you can, refusing to sin in any way as you will give account to God. And at the same time, you will trust God. When you do these two things, you will be delivered. You will be prospered. That may not happen immediately. In the worst cases, it may not happen even in this life. But it will certainly happen, either here or in the world to come. Maybe your house will be burned down. Maybe your business will be looted. Maybe your husband will be shot in the back by agents of the state. But the one who walks wisely will be delivered, and the one who fears God will be blessed. Bank on it.

## 6. Give to the Poor, v. 27

Well, the final practice that's absolutely imperative when the wicked are rising is this: Give to the poor. If you give to the poor, you will not lack. That is a promise from God Almighty, and it appears other times in this book — including in the statement that the one who gives to the poor lends to Yahweh, and Yahweh will repay Him.

We've talked about this before. The suggested donation in OT times was 3.4 % of your annual income going straight to the poor. Let me just say that we do this in my household, and we don't lack. In fact, the last few years the Lord has provided for us about a 35% bonus over and above my nominal salary. Those results are not guaranteed, of course. I can only explain them as the blessing of God. And I am absolutely positive, on the authority of His word, that at least part of that blessing is due to God's honoring mine and Alexa's attempts to give to the poor regularly. This is not the same thing as giving to your local church. That is a tithe, and that is due to God. But God calls you to give to the poor too, above and beyond the tithe. When the wicked rise, such gifts to the poor are even more imperative. Whatever else you know about the wicked, you know that they do not wish to care for the poor. You and I will need to do it instead.

### II. Center: Hope

Well, we've talked about the frame and its statement that when the wicked rise, people hide. But what is at the center of that frame? Hope. Yes, the wicked are rising — but that is not the end of the world or the end of the story. The central point here is stated in v. 20, the middle verse between vv. 12 and 28. What is that central point? A faithful man will abound with blessings. Yes, the rise of the wicked is bad and is going to be bad. But even when the wicked rise, God's blessing is not over. This is for two reasons, both of which give us cause to hope.

#### A. Wickedness Can't Last, vv. 16b-18

First off, wickedness can't last. We talked about this last week. Evil is weak; evil will collapse on its own, even without being pushed by the righteous. These verses make the same point. The person who loves covetousness will fall. If your goal is to get rich quick, you will fail. Only by hating covetousness can you prolong your days. Similarly, someone who has the guilt of murder on his conscience will hasten himself right into the grave. No one needs to help him get there. The murderer will find it all by himself. You don't need to hinder him, either. He will run to hell by himself. As the great Christian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky shows at book length in *Crime and Punishment*, the criminal demands his own punishment. He wants the pit, and he will find it one way or another.

The man perverse in his ways will fall suddenly. He will come to his end — maybe not speedily, but suddenly. Evil cannot endure, while goodness cannot fail! This is a hard truth to believe, but it is certainly true. The more wisdom in your heart, the more you will know that God will indeed save the one who walks blamelessly.

## **B. Hard Work Prospers, vv. 19-20**

Finally, brothers and sisters, when the wicked rise, know this: Hard work will still pay off. When the wicked are in charge, it's easy to doubt that. It's easy to find cases where the wicked have stolen and destroyed everything you worked so hard to build. But the one who continues to work faithfully will have plenty of bread. If you are a faithful man, you will abound with blessings. How do you walk faithfully? By walking in the fear of God. Again, the righteous do fall. The righteous are persecuted and abused by the wicked. But the righteous don't stop trusting God and working hard — even when the incentives clearly tell them to stop trusting and stop working because the wicked are going to dominate anyway. Brothers and sisters, that's not true. The wicked have risen in the past and they are rising now. But don't give up. You know why? Because the Wise Son of God didn't give up, that's why. He kept working even with the wicked in charge. He did His task faithfully even when it got Him killed. Hard work prospers: He sees the travail of His soul now, and He is satisfied.

We can stand against the wicked, and we will win, because evil is weak and our Father is mighty in wisdom. He will triumph. Until then, do what pleases Him, not what appears to be convenient in bad times like these. He will win; stay on His side. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.