

Sermon 91, The Wisdom of Keeping Friends, Proverbs 27:1-10

Proposition: The Wise Son preaches what He practices, turning away from the folly of boasting and embracing the wisdom of friendship.

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are hastening toward the end of Proverbs. This marks our 91st sermon on this text. I can't comment on how many more there will be, but I trust that in God's providence we will be done soon. What I can say is that this book contains incredibly powerful wisdom for us, wisdom that Jesus applied to every situation in His life as the Wise Son. Remember, once again, that you gain this wisdom in two ways: By listening with your ears, and by training your heart to fear God. So listen with your ears while your heart fears God this morning, and you will gain in knowledge of Jesus' wisdom. His particular lesson for us today is that to be like Him, we need to turn away from the folly of boasting and embrace the wisdom of friendship.

I. The Folly of Bragging, vv. 1-2

Our passage begins with a warning about two kinds of bragging: bragging about the future, and bragging about yourself. Some of us are more given to these sins than others. But all of us should

learn from the wisdom of Jesus the Wise Son to flee these sins. Not only do they offend God; they also make us ridiculous in the world's eyes.

A. About the Future, v. 1

Don't boast about tomorrow. You don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. The Covid pandemic has been a reminder to all of us that human plans are uncertain and providence can intervene at any time. You think we'll meet for church next Sunday. I think we'll meet for church next Sunday. But it may not happen. You think you'll get that promotion, or buy that dream car, or have another child, or have your child get married and give you grandchildren — but it may not happen. Don't boast about tomorrow!

Brothers and sisters, how might we be guilty of this? In general, of course, we can simply lack humility in planning for the future. We can come to imagine that we've got the future sewed up neatly and that everything is going to go according to our plan. That is a sin. But more specifically, we can always be talking about what's going to happen in the future, whether that's the future of sports, politics, movies, our family lives, our professional lives, or anything else. Proverbs has insisted on telling the truth and made truthfulness the preeminent sign of wisdom! But if you don't or won't tell the truth, including the truth that you don't know the future, you are lying to yourself and to the rest of the world.

Now, the text does not say "Don't plan for tomorrow." It doesn't say "Just let tomorrow happen." It says not to brag about tomorrow. It says not to inflate expectations, your own and others', for what tomorrow might hold. James puts it more specifically; he tells us to say "If the Lord wills, we will go here or there or do this and that."

So keep your mouth shut; don't brag up how wonderful tomorrow will be. But furthermore, hold your plans loosely. Practice entrusting yourself to providence even as you prepare and work and plan as hard as you can. The wise son takes the uncertainty of life into account, but he is never overwhelmed by it.

B. About Yourself, v. 2

But here's another kind of boasting in which Jesus never engaged: Bragging about Himself. He made it clear that He was the Son of God and should be treated as such. But He didn't tell stories about how heroic He had been in the distant past. He didn't describe His god-like exploits all the time to impress the disciples and the crowds. He never did miracles to show off or to benefit Himself; He acted only to heal and feed the people of God. Jesus was never flashy or showy. He didn't grandstand, brag, or talk about how wonderful He was.

Do you? Oh, I know that by and large this congregation is not so gauche as to openly brag to each other. You don't come up to someone who was struggling with a child in worship and say "I had ten kids and they were always good during worship." You and I know not to do that kind of thing. But how about telling story after story in which you're the hero, in which your bright idea saved the day, in which the others were totally lost and confused until you showed up and led them to the promised land? Brothers and sisters, you know that this kind of bragging is a major weakness of mine. It's not right. Telling people how wonderful your wonderful self is, no

matter how sneakily you think you're doing it, is a mark not of wisdom but of folly. Your character and work should speak for themselves. In fact, they will. And if you brag on yourself all the time — make that if you brag on yourself, ever — you will show people exactly what your character is like.

II. The Wisdom of Friendship, vv. 3-10

So bragging is folly, whether it's bragging about the future (“We’re going to win this game!”) or bragging about your own qualifications and skills (“I’m the best at teaching music/wrangling cattle/writing reviews/you name it”). The wise son rejects bragging. You know what bragging does? It kills friendships. Does anyone want to be around the braggart, especially when he consistently gets the future wrong?

A. Negatively: The Foolish Attitudes that Wreck Friendships, vv. 3-10

And so the rest of our passage recommends friendship. Instead of being a braggart, be a friend. That's what Jesus did. That's what you and I ought to do because we want to be like Him.

What does it take to be a friend? The passage focuses on the negative, on those actions and attitudes that destroy friendship.

1. The Weighty Folly of Provoking to Anger, v. 3

The first of these is the folly of provoking someone to anger. This is easy to do by bragging about yourself. You think big rocks and sandbags are heavy and hard to carry around? Then try dealing with a fool who wants to make you mad. For example: I hate watching television news. I don't care which channel; they all drive me nuts. Imagine something similar for yourself. What just completely sets you off? Now imagine a fool doing that activity right in your living room, and you being forced to watch. Being aggravated by a fool like that is absolutely maddening. You're probably getting your blood pressure up right now just thinking about the particular kinds of folly that you find completely offensive. Well, that's not what the chapter is urging you to. It's urging you to take that feeling and turn it the other direction. Think about this: You might be that provoking to someone else. You might inspire that inner rage in other people — maybe in your mother-in-law, maybe in your pastor, maybe in your kids, maybe in your coworkers, and on and on it goes. Brothers and sisters, if you indulge in the folly of provoking people to anger by your words, actions, demeanor, etc., then you are foolishly attacking friendship. The wise son cultivates friends; the fool wrecks friendship by being hopelessly provoking. He makes people mad. In the worst case scenario, he makes people mad and enjoys it.

2. The Cruel Folly of Expressing Anger, v. 4a

But the opposite is a problem that destroys friendship as well. I'm talking about the habit of getting angry rather than the habit of making angry. When is the last time you flew off the handle? When is the last time you said something snippy in the heat of passion? I hope it was a long time ago. I fear that for some of us, including myself, it was not so very long ago. Brothers and sisters, this act of expressing anger destroys friendship. It is antithetical to the approach of the wise son. Do you think Jesus is cruel? Do you think that He overwhelms His children with His rage against them? Yes, we know that He did pour out His wrath, as we saw in Lamentations

not long ago. And if you are as righteous as He is, then you are free to get angry for good reason and express your wrath righteously. The rest of us will readily admit that there is little righteous about our wrath, and that it resembles not the righteous outrage of Almighty God but rather the peevish spleen of a junior demon. Righteous anger will not harm a worthwhile friendship. Unrighteous anger can destroy it.

3. The Insupportable Folly of Jealousy, v. 4b

Perhaps the worst offender in this list of anti-friendship activities is jealousy. Who can stand before it? The text seems to imply that no friendship can stand up to jealousy. Now, one way to take this is by remembering what C.S. Lewis says, that friendship is the most inclusive of loves. A friendship is not harmed by including another friend; indeed, the more friends the stronger the friendship, in important ways. If you are jealous of the fact that your friends have other friends, you are not truly their friend. You have ulterior motives. The very desire for exclusivity is a sign that the relationship you're looking for is not one of friendship, but of something else. Let me put it this way: If you're my friend, and you get upset when I tell you about a good time with another friend, then our friendship is headed for the rocks. Jealousy is a good thing in our relationship with our spouse and with God. It is a great evil in friendship. Essentially, it is forcing a choice: Him or me? That choice is not an appropriate choice to force on your friends. Jesus was not upset that James and John were brothers. He was not worried about the fact that His mother was friends with her relative Elizabeth. He did not insist that John the Baptist make no disciples.

So don't be jealous of your friends' friends! Don't be jealous of their stuff, their yard, their car, their family. How? By recognizing that Jesus is enough!

4. The Folly of Concealing Your Affection, v. 5

So in jealousy you openly manifest your hostility. The next verse addresses the opposite problem — the problem of concealing your affection! Hidden love is a problem. If you think well of someone, if you like him or her, then strike up a friendship! Don't just lurk in the shadows like a stalker. That destroys friendship in the egg, before it ever has a chance to grow. Keeping your affection to yourself will harm your friendship.

5. The Folly of Lavishing Fake Affection, v. 6b

Now, I'm not saying (especially to you, my fellow guys) that you have to be all gushy and syrupy and make sure your guy friends know how much you love them. Don't be mushy. The kisses of an enemy are profuse. If there's too much affection, too much "I like you, I appreciate you, you're a wonderful person and I think the world of you," that person is likely an enemy.

6. The Folly of Privation & the Folly of Excess, v. 7

Verse seven looks unrelated at first. Actually, it's driving home the point made in the previous two verses. Friendship can go wrong by excess or by defect. If you are too affectionate, come on too strong, make too much out of the friendship and your friend, you're going to wreck it. The full soul tramples on a honeycomb. Someone who has had too many "likes," too much praise and fawning out of you, is not going to be interested any more. But of course, the same goes the other way: To the hungry soul, every bitter thing is sweet. A person with no parental love or

involvement will think that a violent gang is like a good family. A person with no friends will think that someone who initiates them into violent or perverted activities is a good friend.

So just tell me what to do, and I'll do it! We want to say that, don't we? When Proverbs warns about coming on too strong, and also about the folly of having no friends, we tend to want something more clear. Don't tell me to avoid both extremes; tell me positively what I should do! How do I make friends? Well, the overall advice of Proverbs is to fear God and listen. Brothers and sisters, if you can do that, I would say that friendship will take care of itself. If you fear God, you won't indulge in these eight aspects of folly in your friendships. You will show an appropriate amount of affection, but not overdo it. You will listen to your friend's heart rather than bragging about your own exploits.

7. The Folly of Running from Your Home, v. 8

Well, this folly, the folly of running from your home, doesn't just harm the good of friendship. It harms the good of family too. Don't wander from home! Now, of course, Solomon is not telling us to never move. He's telling us not to wander. There's a difference. Just getting out for the sake of getting out is wandering. You don't have somewhere in particular to be; you just don't like the home you're in. This is particularly true of the man and woman whose house it is. To wander away is disastrous. You can't run from your problems. And problems in your own household are problems where you are definitely part of the solution and likely part of the problem too. Don't run away from your home. Jesus left His home and came to earth. But He came for a particular time and a particular reason — a reason that ultimately fed back into life in His Father's house. He was gathering more people to live in the Father's house forever. If you're considering leaving home, is it for the sake of home — either your parents' home or the one you'll be building — or is it for some lesser purpose? Imitate the wisdom of Jesus, not the folly of those who torpedo their relationships.

8. The Folly of Neglecting Local Friends in Favor of Distant Family, v.

10

The final folly you can commit against friendship is to neglect local friends for the sake of distant family. A brother is the gold standard for reliability, of course. But the proverb is telling us that if you don't cultivate local friends and instead rely on brothers or parents who live five states away, you're in trouble. Obviously, of course, if you are attempting to make local friends and every time you invite a family over they demur because they're doing some family activity, then you know that this habit of privileging family destroys friendship. I can't go do that with you because I have such-and-such planned with my family. Brothers and sisters, this is folly. Solomon is not saying to neglect your family. He's saying to not neglect your friends. Perhaps the best example of this is Jesus committing His mother to the care of His friend John. Jesus had family. He had living siblings. They were even fairly local. But rather than approach them, He left His mother in the care of a friend.

Don't neglect friendships for the sake of family. Family is important. But wisdom cultivates friends too.

B. Positively: The Wise Actions that Sustain Friendships, vv. 1-10

Though our passage majors on what to avoid, on all the things that wreck friendships, it also has some very important points on what you ought to do to be a friend.

1. Quit Doing All the Bad Things, vv. 3-10

Aside from avoiding those 8 points we mentioned — don't be aggravating, don't neglect your friends, don't come on too strong, and so on, we also see three major positive things.

2. Give the Right Amount of Praise & Affection, vv. 2, 5

Give the right amount of praise. Do your friends know that you think well of them? Do you tell them so? If you're around, do your friends know that they won't have to brag on themselves because you will say good things about them? Don't hide your love. Show it. Not in a mushy, sloppy way, but in a genuine manly or womanly way.

3. Give Congenial Advice and Appropriately Rare Rebuke, vv. 6, 9

You also need to give advice when it's wanted and rebuke when it's needed. No one likes open rebuke. I certainly don't like it any more than the rest of you. And a true friend will not be calling you out all the time. But a true friend will call you out when you really need it. And all of us are going to really need it. Part of my job as your pastor is to call you out, particularly from the pulpit. Part of my job is to give you advice. The sweetness of a friend is way better than thinking about things on your own. Again, notice how in the gospels we see Jesus rebuking the disciples when they really needed it, but mostly focusing on building a positive relationship in which He instructed them with what they needed to know.

4. Invest in and Maintain Generational Relationships, v. 10

This is the final word on friendship: don't give up on your friends. Don't give up on family friends. Friendship should run in families and be passed down. That's how God works: He has made us His friends in Jesus Christ. Do you teach your children to be friends of God? You should. His help is even better than a neighbor's.

The grace and friendship of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.