

Proverbs 3:13-35

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[0 : 00] It is good to be with you again tonight. Thank you for coming back. If you've been here for all three weeks.! In whose name we pray. Amen.

Okay, well, apparently in Moldova, one of the punishments for drink driving, if you're caught drink driving, you can be sent to work in the morgue for a day or for longer.

And no doubt, given all the pleasant jobs that there would be in a morgue, washing the bodies, cleaning up after the mortician. I don't know how effective that sort of punishment is, but the logic of it is quite clear, isn't it?

It's saying that the way you're living leads to death. This is how you live. This is where you will end up. And there's lots in Proverbs about which path you're on.

Are you on the right path or are you on the wrong path? Because one path is leading to death, but the other path is leading to life, to true life.

[1 : 29] I'll just read a couple of verses from chapter 4, if you've got Proverbs open. Chapter 4, verse 18. But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.

The way of the wicked is like deep darkness. They do not know over what they stumble. Are you walking in the light or are you walking in darkness, tripping up over things?

In lots of other places in Proverbs you can find that theme. Chapter 2, 18 and 20. Chapter 5, 5 and 6. You can easily find those yourselves. But to be on the right path that's heading in the right direction is to be following God.

We saw, didn't we, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. It's about having God in his rightful place. That's really what we've been looking at all the last three weeks.

So we saw that wisdom is worth pursuing because we live in God's world. And then we found that true wisdom is therefore found in him.

[2 : 37] Plenty of people will call to you and say, this is wise, this is the way to live. But because it's God's world, God is the one who you listen to. True wisdom is found in him.

And so then last week we focused on that idea that you therefore need to lean on him and his resources rather than on yourself and your own resources.

Tonight we're thinking then a little bit more about how wisdom helps us along this path. We get on the right path, the path towards life, the path that is following God.

And then we think, well, how does wisdom help us along this path, ultimately to the destination, true life? Three things and then a fourth, which I've kind of crowbarred in.

So I'm not crowbarred. The fourth is a summary. Let's call it a summary. Firstly then, God-given wisdom lets us hold material things lightly.

[3 : 38] God-given wisdom lets us hold material things lightly. And so back in chapter 3, picking up in verse 13. Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, the one who gets understanding.

For the gain from her, that is from wisdom, is better than gain from silver. Her profit is better than gold. She's more precious than jewels and nothing you desire can compare with her.

See, other people, he says, other people might be driven by the dazzling allure of gold and jewels and making money, but not you. Don't be fooled by those trinkets of the world.

You've got something better. You've got something that's worth more wisdom. God-given wisdom is worth more. And we say, well, really? How can that be?

Well, this little section, verse 13 to 18, begins and ends with the same word, doesn't it? Which is always a good thing to look out for in the Bible.

[4 : 40] Blessed is the one who finds wisdom. And then at the end, those who hold her fast are called blessed, blessed. You see, to find God's wisdom means to be blessed by him, to be living life

as he intended.

Experiencing life optimally as the creator intended. Wisdom is, in verse 18, a tree of life to those who find it.

A tree of life. And you know what that's bringing to mind for us? It's making us look two directions, isn't it? The tree of life. So you look back to the Garden of Eden. Do you remember in the garden where there was the tree of life that they could eat from?

And, of course, they're barred from it when they turn away from God. But then in Revelation, we see again that that tree of life is there. Where the promises that the one who overcomes will have the right to eat from the tree of life will be eternally blessed.

And it's hard for us to get our heads around this because you can measure gold. And you can measure how much you've got in your bank account. And you can measure your possessions. But it is very difficult to keep hold of and measure and think rightly of just how valuable it is to be blessed by the Lord.

[6 : 04] That's what we're heading for. But it helps us now. It lets us hold, as I say, it lets us hold material things lightly.

So I remember one time we got a new carpet in the lounge. And so the day before, it was anything goes. Okay. Painting in there, fine.

Traipsing through in your wellies, no problem. Snacks in there, yeah, fine. The next day, no shoes, no mess, no children.

You know what it's like? We get so obsessed with things and stuff. And of course, this is not to say that material things don't matter. Of course, we need homes and clothes and money and careers. These are good gifts from God. But we hold them lightly because this God-given wisdom, this way of living with him at the center, tells us that it is just stuff.

[7 : 08] And it's just stuff, so don't let it grip your heart. Don't let it direct your steps. Our attitude to possession should be noticeably different from non-Christians around us.

Not dictating details for you tonight, but basically we have less and we give more. And this is not about how clean you keep your house.

But metaphorically, live as if all the carpet was old. Live as if it was all about to be changed. You see, why are you spending so much of your toil and time chasing the gold of this world when there is a city of gold that has been promised to you?

Is there something that you need to loosen your grip on? Is there something that you are holding too tightly? God-given wisdom lets us hold material things lightly.

Secondly, God-given wisdom lets us be good neighbors. It lets us be good neighbors. And so in verses 27 to 30, we're really to the end of the chapter, we're told how to act in our relationships.

[8 : 29] And he says different things. So positively, you've got to be ready and willing to help others at your own expense. Verse 27.

Do not withhold good from those to whom it's due when it's in your power to do it. Do not say to your neighbor, go and come again. Tomorrow I will give it when you have it with you. You know, on pocket money day, as in our house, can I have my pocket money?

Come back tomorrow. Come back tomorrow. No, no. You give what's due. And sometimes the hardest thing for us to give is of our time, isn't it?

Sometimes it's very easy to make the bank transfer to church. Sometimes it's a lot harder to be the person giving time to the vulnerable member of the congregation in need or seeking to help somebody that you know you'll not get the credit for and it will be a right pain for you.

But positively, we're willing to help others. Negatively, we refrain from attacking others. Verse 29.

Do not plan evil against your neighbor who dwells trustingly beside you.

[9 : 36] Do not contend with a man for no reason when he's done you no harm. Don't go after other people in any way. And you see, we can think of all sorts of ways that we might do that.

But perhaps one that might convict us is to think of all the ways that we put other people down. Because it's so easy to do. And it can make us feel good. It can make us look good in front of others.

When we put other people down, when we make jokes at their expense, when we gossip, when we take advantage of other people, Don't do any of that, he says. Be prepared to help them and don't attack them.

And then we say, well, that sounds like just being nice, doesn't it? Who could argue with that? Just be nice. But a thought might arise in the back of your mind.

Well, hang on a minute. If that's how I act, what if they act like this? What if they actually take advantage of me?

[10:40] So if I lend something to someone, are they going to take good care of it? Will they return it? If I put myself out for them, will they repay the favor? Other people are speaking against me.

Other people are quite happy to trample over me. I need to stand up for myself. I need to fight fire with fire. And this is not calling us to be naive in our relationships.

It's not calling us to let ourselves be walked all over. Of course not. But it's calling us to be good neighbors.

And we're good neighbors, not because of who our neighbors are, but because of who our God is. Do you remember what Jesus' picture of what it means to be a good neighbor is?

It's a good Samaritan, isn't it? The one who goes out of his way to help his enemy. And so because my drive, because my reward comes from God, I have a wonderful freedom in my relationships with other people.

[11:56] You see, I don't have to be overly concerned about how this horizontal relationship will go, because my priority is my vertical relationship. The priority is having this fear of the Lord.

You remember having God in his right place? Because God is the one who sees. God is the one who vindicates. We've seen it in our psalms that we've had in the service tonight. God is the one who is watching over.

And so verse 33, the Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the dwelling of the righteous. Actually, God will see that everything comes out in the wash. He will shake it all out, rightly.

That's not your concern. But Christians should be the most reliable, the most generous, the most kind people.

And just like with our attitude to possessions, people will notice. People will notice that we put ourselves out for others. Now, sadly, we don't always do this brilliantly.

[12:57] And you see, I think sometimes as Christians, because we know we're right, and we are right, because we know we're right, that can produce an arrogance in us, can't it?

A smugness, a superiority, that actually we start looking down on those who don't think the same way as us, who don't follow this right path, because we know we're right. But no, we're only on the right path, because he's opened our eyes, so there's no reason for smugness.

Be a good neighbor. You know, people might dislike what you believe, but they should find it very hard to dislike you. Might dislike what you believe, they should find it hard to dislike you.

So God-given wisdom lets us be good neighbors. Thirdly, God-given wisdom lets us live fearlessly. Have a look from verse 21.

My son, do not lose sight of these. Keep sound wisdom and discretion, and they will be life for your soul and adornment for your neck. Then you will walk on your way securely, and your foot will not stumble.

[14:14] If you lie down, you will not be afraid. When you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. Do not be afraid of sudden terror or of the ruin of the wicked when it comes, for the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught.

Some children are afraid of the dark, aren't they? Some grown-ups are afraid of the dark.

Because as we grow up, we find actually, although we tell the children not to worry and we put our light on, as we grow up, we find that actually the world is a very dark place, and there's plenty of darkness to be afraid of.

Coronavirus, racism, violence, redundancy, loneliness, rejection, death, all of this darkness that crowds in on us, and yet, the proverb says, verse 24, if you lie down, you will not be afraid.

When you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. How can you sleep soundly when there is so much darkness?

[15:22] And I don't know the darkness that is chasing you at the moment, what it is that's oppressing you. But here, God's word says to you, you can lie down and not be afraid.

You can sleep, sweet sleep. Because we know the Lord is standing guard over our life. That's what it means to have this God-given wisdom, to have God in his rightful place, that he is the one who is watching over you.

Again, we've had it in our Psalms, God being a shield to us. Do you remember in the story of the lion's den? Remember, children, Daniel goes into the lion's den, he's thrown in there, and the king goes home.

And what are we told? The king couldn't sleep that night. He was the one lying in the palace with all the riches of the world, with all of the entertainment that he could wish for, all the luxuries that could be afforded to him, and he couldn't sleep.

We don't really know what Daniel was doing that night. But if you've seen a picture book of it, if you've got a children's Bible, it looks like he's cuddling up to the lions, doesn't it? Well, who knows whether he was having a cuddle, but we know their mouths were shut.

[16:37] You see, you have a better night's sleep in the lion's den with the Lord by your side than you do in the palace without him.

So think about this. Whatever I encounter, I'm not at the mercy anymore of what other people think of me. I am not at the mercy of financial pressures or ill health because I'm in the hands of a merciful God.

And this means that I need not fear. If I am living for anything else other than God, then I will be afraid. And I'm afraid because I'm afraid it will be taken from me.

The language that it uses here about sudden terror, the ruin of the wicked when it comes. You see, if I'm living for other things other than God, I'll be plagued with anxiety.

What is it that fills your mind in the idle moments? When you do lie down to sleep, what is it that crowds into your mind? All the things that worry you and make you afraid. Well, Christian, listen to this, that your security is in your God.

[17:46] The one thing that cannot be taken from you so that you need not fear. You might lose your friends. You might get ill. You might not make ends meet, but you will be blessed.

Christians aren't exempted from the pain of this world, but we should view it differently. The Lord will be your confidence, verse 26.

The Lord will be your confidence. Or you could say, sometimes that's translated at your side. See, as I live his way, he protects me.

He will, again, verse 26, keep your foot from being caught. It was grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fear relieved.

See, the only thing truly to fear is God's judgment against our sin, God's rightful judgment, isn't it? That's the only thing that we should truly fear. And when our eyes are opened and we see that at the cross that has been dealt with, all our other fears can fade away.

[19:05] There's a story that came out last year, last January, a Nigerian pastor, Lawan Adimi, he was kidnapped by Boko Haran on the 2nd of January.

And a video came out of him, and he said this, I have never been discouraged. Because all the conditions that one finds himself in is in the hands of God.

By the grace of God, I will be released. But, if the opportunity has not been granted, maybe it's the will of God. How do you think he was sleeping?

I don't know. I imagine all sorts of fears and anxieties were crowding into his mind, but he speaks as one who lives fearlessly because he knows his God is with him.

And very sadly, he was killed by his captors just a few weeks later on the 20th of January. And we say, well, what's gone wrong? Had the Lord looked away at the crucial moment?

[20:28] You said my foot wouldn't be caught, and yet here I am ensnared. Or was it that the Lord had chosen that moment to guide his child on the last few steps of his path to his wonderful inheritance?

We don't live in the dramatic, or very often we don't live in the dramatic, do we? We live in the mundane.

We live in the everyday. But we live with the fears of everyday. We live with the pressures to rely on our own resources, to follow the paths of our own wisdom.

When we're called to put God in his rightful place and to have that same confidence, in all of the challenges that you face. Remember what it says in Philippians, do not be anxious about anything. Why not? Well, in everything. By prayer and petition, bring your requests to God. And what will happen? Well, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

[21 : 34] Because you've got him at your side, you know your foot will not be caught when you lie down. You can sleep. So God-given wisdom lets us live fearlessly in a fearsome world.

And so, drawing it all together, and really I suppose this is a bit of a conclusion to the mini-series, these three weeks.

What is it that I think I want to leave you with and leave with us? It's just that encouragement to pursue, to chase after God-given wisdom.

Pursue God-given wisdom. Because God's ways really are best. And he really can be trusted. Think of all the best achievements of mankind.

What are the most impressive things, do you think, that humanity have managed to do? Unlocking the mysteries of the cells and the stars, constructing breathtaking bridges and skyscrapers, transplanting organs, and worldwide communication in a second.

[22 : 40] Well, just like at Babel, what does God have to do? God has to stoop down to look at our achievements. And then he says, look at what I've made.

Verse 19, chapter 3, verse 19. The Lord by wisdom founded the earth. By understanding, he established the heavens. By his knowledge, the deeps broke open and the clouds dropped down the dew.

You see, that's why true wisdom is God-given wisdom. Because this is his world that he has made. And that is why wise lives are those God-driven and God-guided lives.

I heard an interview with Ava Max, you know, the pop star. If you've not heard of her, ask Paul. He'll tell you all about her later on. Ava Max. And she said that every day in her routine, when she gets up, she picks an oracle card.

She's got a pack of these oracle cards and she picks one a day to give her motivation, confidence for that day. And it speaks into her life. It's so pitiful to hear that.

[23 : 51] So sorry for her. That that is what is guiding her. We don't come to Proverbs.

We don't come to the book of Proverbs looking for a quick fix or a magic formula. You know, just something that's going to get me through the day. No, rather, we're those who come to Proverbs knowing that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

And so we have our trust in him. We have him in his rightful place. And when you read the Proverbs, and do read them, and when you get into all the pithy sayings, really, from chapter 10 onwards, they are so good just to read and turn one over in your mind all day.

But it's not an oracle card because you're humbly asking God to guide every step that you take. Let's just finish with this there.

Queen of Sheba. Remember the Queen of Sheba, what she did? This is what Jesus says in Matthew chapter 12 and verse 42.

[24 : 59] You don't need to turn to it. Matthew 12, 42. Jesus says, The Queen of the South, the Queen of Sheba, will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it. For she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon and behold something greater than Solomon is here.

Let's see, here she is. She's traveling countless hot, dusty miles just to get to Solomon and seek his God-given wisdom. And Jesus says, now something greater is here. Now you have me.

Now you have Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, the one in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden, the one that we abandon everything in order to seek and find that we gain so much more.

And it's that that enables us to hold this world lightly, that enables us to love our neighbors and enables us to live fearlessly. Because friends, we are on the right path.

Let's pray. Let's pray.