

Proverbs 2

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 January 2014

Preacher: Paul Levy

[0:00] I'm sure like me, from time to time you've had the experience of a nightmare. Whether you're being chased by something or someone, they're after you.! The actual memory of it might be very short. Or perhaps it's a long, vivid ordeal from which you can't seem to escape.

But we know the feeling, don't we? That feeling, the sheer terror at gripping our hearts. And then the moment comes over you when you realise that you're awake. You're awake and relief floods over you. Isn't that a beautiful feeling? There's nobody standing at the bottom of your bed. Nobody's chasing you.

No animal in the forest. No elder with an axe. No threat. No danger. Where you live is secure and you're safe.

And I think that feeling of safety is something that we all deeply, deeply want. All of us. And some of us in life, we feel vulnerable and we want to be protected and we want to be made to feel safe.

We fear being unloved and left alone. We fear that our job is not protected. Or the economy is not protected. We don't know what the future holds. Even our country is not protected.

[1:19] Other of us, others of us who are in the eyes, may fear absolutely nothing and no one. Do you know people like that? The problems of the world always happen to somebody else and not to us.

And our life simply stretches in front of us in a carefree kind of way. And I wonder if it is too simplistic. I think it probably is. But those two feelings of vulnerability and wanting protection from the world on the one hand, and the other feeling of feeling immortal and not really needing to be protected by anyone or anything, is it too simplistic to say that those two feelings, vulnerability and wanting protection from the world, and on the other hand feeling immortal and not really needing to be protected from anyone, is it too simplistic to say that they tend to describe the feelings of the old and the young?

I don't know. The older you are, the more fearful you are. You've been around the block. You've been your confidence locked. You've been hurt and let down.

You know how fragile you are. But the younger you are, the more you think the world is your oyster. You can do whatever you want in life. I'm generalising online, very much so. But I think it's a pretty decent generalisation.

Well, do you remember what the book of Proverbs is? It is a father preaching to his son. That is what it is. It's a father pastoring his son. It's a father caring to his son, to a young man, to a youth.

[2:46] To someone on the threshold of maturity. And the wise father says to his son, Son, you're not immortal. You are not invincible. And you need divine protection as you go through life.

Now, if you think that you don't need protection this evening, if you don't think you need it, well, these words are for you too. But most of us here tonight, we know we need protection, don't we? We know that. We feel that we need it. And so here's the father's words are for us. Here's how to be perfectly protected.

Perfectly protected in life. Here's how to make yourself ambush proof. From some of the traps of life. Here's how the chapter works. Here's what the father is saying to his son.

And so he's saying to us. And the message is, get God's words of wisdom. Get God's words of wisdom. Because if you do, then secondly, you'll protect your character.

[3:47] And thirdly, you'll protect your character. First point, get God's words of wisdom. Because second point, it'll protect your character. Third point, it'll protect your conduct. Firstly, get God's words of wisdom.

Now just take a minute to notice how this sermon from father to son works. The sermon is a very simple, if, then, shape. If you do A, then B will follow.

Okay? Look at verse 1. Look at it with me. My son, if you receive my words, or if you accept my words. Look at verse 3.

If you call for insight. Look at verse 4. If you seek, or if you look. Verse 5, then, then you will understand.

Verse 9, then you will understand. If you do this, then this will follow. And here is what the father is saying. My son, if you get God's words of wisdom, then that wisdom will protect you.

[4 : 50] Look at verse 7. He stores up some wisdom from the upright. He is a shield to those who walk in integrity. guarding the paths of justice and watching over the way of the saints.

Verse 11, discretion will watch over you. Understanding will guard you. And notice, in verse 12, it will deliver you from the way of evil, from men of perverted speech.

So there's two things, in verse 12 and in verse 16. It will save you from wicked men, in verse 12, and in verse 16, it will save you from wicked women.

So you'll be delivered from the forbidden woman. Wisdom saves. Wisdom guards. Wisdom protects. So the wise father says to his impressionable son, get God's words of wisdom so that you will be perfectly protected.

And I don't think there's a stronger impulse of a parent than to protect their child. Isn't that? Even those of you who have children who are adults. You want to protect your child.

[6 : 04] Isn't that what parents most want? For their children to be protected? But what kind of protection does he need? What kind of protection do you most need?

Financial protection? What is the greatest threat that faces you? And what does God offer you to protect you from it? Well, here's the surprising answer in Proverbs.

What God offers you to protect you is words. Words. God offers you words to protect you.

Now, words never feature, do they, in the top ten lists of defences known to man, do they? They don't. What do we say in the playground?

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me. What good are words for protection? What we need are insurance plans, pension policies, armies, submarines, fences, doors, locks, borders, real tangible objects if we're going to be protected.

[7 : 11] And the Father says to his son, No, that's not what you need. Here's the living God of heaven and earth on your side. At your right hand.

And he will protect you with words. And it is clear that the words of the Father that he's asking his son to listen to are God's words, isn't it? So look at verse 6.

For the Lord gives wisdom. From his mouth, from God's mouth, come knowledge and understanding. God is speaking here through Solomon, isn't he? In all these Proverbs that he's collected and put together in this book.

And the Father is passing them on to his son. And just look at the text. As you work through it, it escalates what the son has to do. So, the verbs have increasing strength.

Let me show you that. First one. First of all, if you receive my words or accept them. And treasure up my commandments with you. Or store up.

[8 : 09] It's a picture of getting grain into a barn. Or a picture of hoarding your money in a bank. Hoard up my commands in your heart. And then make your ear attentive.

And incline your heart. The meaning there is the son is to bend himself to the words. Incline his heart towards them.

Face them head on. Immerse yourself in them, son. Completely. And then verse 3. It's very strong. It's even stronger. Yes, if you call out for insight. You call out for wisdom.

Verbally asking God. Speaking. Verbally asking God. Praying to God for wisdom. And then stronger again in verse 4. If you seek it like silver. And you search for it. Like silver and hidden treasure.

Searching for it. Searching for words. God's words. Do you see the attributes? What does the person who is going to be protected in life, what do they look like? Well, first of all, they're a humble person.

[9 : 14] They bend themselves to the words of someone else. They are a listener before they're a speaker. And this protected person is relentless, single-minded in their pursuit of God's word.

Like a miner digging, I'm digging down deep to find precious metal, to find silver. But the Bible uses many, many different images, doesn't it? To describe God's word that we're familiar with.

So we read at the start of our series, what is God's word like? It is like honey. Honey that is sweet to the taste. God's word is like bread.

God's word is like water to a parched tongue and a tortured body. God's word is like a hammer. God's word is like a fire. God's word is like a soul that casts. God's word is like a light. God's word is like a lamp. God's words are a scepter by which he rules his people. God's words are like a mirror. God's words are like seal.

[10:12] Like seed. God's words are like an anchor for the soul. And Proverbs says, in chapter one, do you remember that last week? God's words are like a beautiful woman.

Like a beautiful woman you should want to go home with and eat with. And then chapter two, God's words are like gold and silver. And you would search for them all of your life.

People live their lives, don't they, some people looking for hidden treasure. So there's film after film, isn't there? Pirates of the Caribbean. Following the map.

Feeding the danger. Breathing the elements is to find the thing that they believe will bring them happiness. Life that they couldn't have without it.

And many people, everybody wants life to work. Everybody wants protection as they go through life. But they do not want God's word to do it for them.

[11:12] Many people want to be wise, don't they? But they don't seek for God's wisdom. The father puts his son across the table from him and says, when your Bible is closed and gathers dust, and when your mouth is never open to God, praying and asking for more and more of God, when there is no desire to get God's word into your heart, mind and soul, then you will never get God himself.

And you will never get wise. And you will go through life unprotected and exposed. Get God's words of wisdom.

So why? Why do we need them? Why should we want God's words of wisdom? Because, says that, first of all, they'll protect your character, point two, and then they'll protect your conduct later on, point three.

God's word will protect your character. This is a wonderful, wonderful truth. How about the God of the Bible? God wants to change you. He doesn't save you so you can stay as you are.

God wants to change us. That's painful, isn't it, for many of us. God wants to remake us. God wants to shape us, and mould us, and protect us.

[12:27] And he wants to do all those things, not by putting his shield up outwardly around us. God wants to do all those things, just from the inside out. Now, what your friends, and what your family members are interested in, most of the time, and your colleagues, is reputation before character.

Reputation before character. And we see that extreme view, don't we, in the line that we shouldn't care less what our politicians, or prime ministers, do in their private life.

Because it doesn't affect what they do in public. Who cares? If the president sleeps with an intern, it doesn't affect his ability to run the economy. Or to decide on foreign policy.

It is the externals that matter. It is the reputation, the record of achievements, that is what matters. Proverbs' view is the exact opposite. So I wonder if you've heard the saying, build character, and your reputation will take care of itself.

Build character, and your reputation will take care of itself. Don't worry about what other people think of you. Don't worry about that.

[13:40] Let God change you from the inside out. Worry about what he thinks of you. And as he enters your life, and his word enters your heart, you will become a certain sort of person on the inside. And your reputation will take care of itself.

So what sort of person will you actually become? If you accept, if you receive, if you get, if you store up, if you cry out for God's word, well look at verse 5, then you will understand the fear of the Lord.

And find the knowledge of God. And these things will mean that you begin to look at verse 7. You begin to score up some wisdom to the upright. He is a shield to those who walk in integrity.

Verse 8, you will become just, and faithful. He guards the path of justice, and watches over the way of his saints. Verse 9, you will become the kind of person who understands what is right, and what is just, and what is fair.

And you will become that kind of person, not because you followed some 10 point plan to happiness, a guide to being a better you, but because verse 10, wisdom has come into your heart.

[15:02] Knowledge has become pleasant to your soul. And so discretion and understanding protect you. You are protected from the inside out. And God's words can do that.

God's words can change you. I wonder if you have ever stopped to notice, and that about words. We don't often think about it, don't we?

We don't often take the time to notice that words are capable of changing you. Words do things to people. Words that we speak can make someone weep, can't they?

Or blush. Words that you speak can make somebody rage. Or rock with laughter. Words give birth to emotions, don't they?

Words change things. Who uses words the most powerfully in the UK? Well, turn left, the driving instructor says, to the learner.

[16:09] And with his words, he influences, doesn't he, the person who turns the steering wheel. The driving instructor says, a little more gas, a little more gas.

And with those words, he influences the person learning to drive. What about these words? I will. I will.

When a man or a woman say those words to each other, and before God, they're not simply describing marriage, they're actually creating it, aren't they? They are bringing together something into existence through their words.

Those words, I will, something exists after those words are spoken, which did not exist beforehand. Does it? I love you.

I hate you. I never want to see you again. You are my best friend. I am sorry.

[17:13] God gave us words because he loves creating things. He loves changing things. He loves seeing something come into existence which didn't actually exist before he spoke.

God said, let there be light. There was light. He spoke and the universe sprang into being. He opened his mouth and the angels shouted for joy that a world was born.

With the words he created everything. And just as he spoke like that, he speaks here, now in these words. So that something will happen to us as we hear them.

And what will happen is this. God will change your view of the protection you most need. And so change your heart. And that is what God is doing in the Proverbs chapter 2. He's changing our mind of what do we need most to be protected from.

The protection you most need always is from yourself. And from your own heart. From your own way of seeing the world.

[18:22] Your own desires. Your own priorities. And perspective. None of us are born wise. None of us. And yet, how often do we live like we're wise?

And can decide by ourselves and go alone by ourselves without God and without his word. Have you seen the film The Iron Lady? It tells the story of Margaret Thatcher's cruise.

Right, good film. And she's sitting as an elderly lady on a GP's couch. And she cites these words. Watch your thoughts for they become words.

Watch your words for they become actions. Watch your actions for they become habits. Watch your habits for they become character.

Watch your character for it becomes what we think we become. Watch your thoughts for they become words.

[19:23] Watch your words for they become actions. Watch your actions for they become habits. Watch your habits for they become character. Watch your character for it becomes your destiny. So what is there to protect our thinking and guard our hearts?

Do you want that kind of self-protection? protection? Your heart is desperately wicked. So is mine. It's deceitful. Who can know it? Protection from yourself by God's word.

Protected from the inside out. One preacher said this and I think he's exactly right. You do not need to hate Jesus to waste your life. You only need to be okay with how you are.

You do not need to hate Jesus to waste your life. You only need to be okay with how you are. I'm fine thanks. Yeah, the Bible is for someone else really.

I don't really need to get into it. I'm okay. For people who are far away. For people who have made a mess of their lives and need a hand.

[20:25] That's who the words are for. I'm okay. I don't need to change. I don't need to grow. Or repent. Or develop. Or mature. I don't need that.

No. We are not born wise. No one is born upright and blameless and just and faithful. Nobody is a walking storehouse of discretion and understanding.

And just like a loving father says to his listening son. Son, I love you so much. I love you so much that I'm prepared to say to you that I am not okay with how you are.

You are young and you need to grow and you need to develop godly character. So God says the same thing to us tonight. Wherever you are with me and in your walk with me, I love you so much. God says, I love you so much I am prepared to move you on further. Changing and transforming you even more by my words.

[21 : 26] And if you think those words are precious enough to seek for and wise enough to listen to and strong enough to protect your character, well, they are. God's words will protect your character.

Thirdly and lastly, God's word will protect your conduct. God's word will protect who you spend your time with and who you associate with and who you give your time to.

Drinking deep from the well of God's wisdom will mean that you run from certain people. And it will mean that you run from certain people and you run towards other people.

You will stop doing certain things and you will start doing other things. And notice it is this way round. It is always this way round in the Bible. God changes us from the inside out first.

Character comes first. Who we are comes before what we do. Character first, conduct next.

[22 : 37] And the protection God offers is not a reward for the person who listens to his word. Don't think that. No, the protection God gives is a consequence of listening to the word. So if you accept verse 1 and if you store verse 1 and if you listen verse 2 and if you learn verse 2 and if wisdom enters your heart then you will be protected.

I've really, I tried to get an illustration of this. This is not a great illustration but it's the best I can do. There's a difference isn't there between entering a mosquito infested jungle and with a can of insect repellent in your hand.

There's a difference between that and entering a mosquito infested jungle having taken anti-malaria tablets for the last four months or whatever it is. One of those protections is offering you a whole body protection isn't it from the inside out the malaria tablets if you didn't know.

It's protecting your bloodstream protecting you where you're most vulnerable and when God's word and God's wisdom and God's knowledge and the Bible get into our bloodstream and become our own way of thinking and become your own acquired taste then I think this father says to his son that effect on you will make the conduct of people who do not love God's word simply alien to you. alien to you. Wisdom will save you because it will make you understand why what is being said to you is wrong. And I just want you to notice just how cleverly the father lays out two categories of people whom God's word saves us from.

[24 : 20] So just look with me if you're asleep come back to me alright. Look with me God's word will save us from verses 12 to 15 wicked men. God's word will save us from 12 to 15 wicked men.

God's word will save us from verses 16 to 19 the wayward wife. And when you read about the problems those are the kind of two big opposition.

The two main threats to the son's protection. Easy money on the other hand easy sex on the other hand. And look at the focus on words. God's word.

His wisdom will save you from verse 12 men of perverted speech. And verse 16 from the adulteress with her smooth words.

Do you notice a parallel emphasis in these two groups? The evil men and the quicksilver lady both of them have left something.

[25 : 23] So the men in verse 13 they've left they've forsaken the paths of uprightness. And in verse 17 well she's left her husband.

And that word here for leave or abandon is a covenant word. It's a word that's used again and again in the Old Testament. In the law and the prophets. This is the word to use when Israel decided to forsake God and his covenant.

They say you have left the Lord. That is what the prophets say to the people. And the men have forsaken God's covenant with him. They've abandoned the straight paths for crooked paths of their own which breed only darkness.

Now do you notice what that means about these men here? It means that these men they're not your average pagan. They are faithless men. They are men that grew up in covenant homes but who have no true heart knowledge of God.

They are backslidden believers if I can call them that. They are people who have once known God and yet they've turned their backs on him. They are apostate Christians and they can be the most

dangerous people on earth for believers.

[26 : 40] People who once said I used to walk where you used to walk but come over here it's much better over here. This is the path of acceptance. Notice the end for men like this.

Verse 22 just notice it. They will be cut off from the land and the treacherous will be rooted out of it. But it's not those men that are the strongest temptation and this is very very helpful.

It is the unfaithful wife who the father presents to his son with the strongest of warnings. And I want you to notice how the father does it. The smooth words of the adulteress they have got disastrous consequences.

Smooth words are deceitful words in the Bible they are like words of oil slipping. Probably because they are full of flattery and lies. Do you notice that this woman has left behind the words she once spoke to her husband in covenant promise.

She made vows for her husband but she has broken. She has left those words behind and she is now speaking smooth words to a new man. And the father says to his son if the first man, if her first husband couldn't trust her why should you trust her?

[27 : 53] She lied to him what on earth makes you think she's not going to be lying to you? And just look at the strength of the language verses 18 and 19 from her house sinks down to death and her past to the departed none who go to her come back nor do they regain the paths of life.

If you go to chapter 22 verse 14 it says this the mouth of the forbidden or the adulteress is a deep pit the mouth of the forbidden or the adulteress is a deep pit here is a woman who is dressed to kill but she is literally a gateway to the grave she is in fact deadly and our English translations are much more coy and prudish they're much more prudish about this than God himself actually is so look at verse 19 it says literally all who enter her all who enter her that's exactly the same phrase that is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to describe two people sleeping together and the phrase matters because here is the writer's point listen to this from a commentary on the book of Proverbs to this phrase imagine verse 19 all who enter her makes the woman herself the orifice of death this woman is an orifice of death now one of the most shocking images that we see in the news today I'm sure you'll agree it is the phenomenon of mass graves so you've seen those pictures on the TV of genocide terrible war crime comes to light and the cameras discover one of the most grotesque and offensive sites that human beings are able to create in this world is an open pit of bodies they're piled on top of one another they're decomposing it is an act of total desecration and complete horror and here is what the book of Proverbs says to us it says this it is never wrong to tell your son or your daughter or to tell yourself it is never wrong to tell your son do not have illicit sex but the problem in the human heart the problem in the unprotected undeveloped human heart the problem is that the very fact of illicit sex makes it so appealing to our culture it is and so this wise father ties a very different tack he says my son when you are tempted to sleep with a married woman outside of marriage that I want you to see and I want you to smell and taste the very stench of death on her lips you are poised on the edge of a mass grave an open pit where none who went to ever return where the bodies of countless men lay strewn and decaying already sleep with her my son and you kiss the grieve you embrace the pit you sell your soul to death now I don't know about you but that is effective parenting isn't it these are words from

God which shape me from the inside out and they protect my heart and they begin to change what I'm attracted to and why I'm attracted to it and they change what I love and why I love it and who I love my son there is no such thing as the one that stands for what you do will follow you will live with you and eat at you and take you to a place of despair listen again the realm of the dead that is this woman's house leads to where does it lead to it leads to the land of no return the dark house the house who none leave will enter it none who go to her come back nor do they regain the paths of life verse 19 the house where the inhabitants are bereft of light where dust is their fare and clay is their food where they see no light and reside in darkness this is what God's word can protect us from it can protect our character and it can protect our conduct so can I say to us brothers and sisters as I say to myself nothing nothing matters more than getting

God's word change your life if you have to give something up start something new but whatever you do get God's words of wisdom Amen God