

Ancient Wisdom for a Postmodern World

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Date: 19 July 2015

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- [0 : 00] Heavenly Father, we thank you for the power of the resurrection that you have brought into our lives through the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- We thank you that we stand on you, the solid rock. And Lord, as today we move into hearing a message from your word that in so many ways is a difficult and heavy, another heavy message from your word.
- Lord, we pray that you would truly help us to receive your words. That if there's anything in what I say this morning that is not of you, that you would help us to discern that and discard that.
- But Lord, what is from you? Help us embrace. Help us to treasure and to live according to your words. We thank you and we love you for who you are. In Jesus' name, amen.
- Would you please be seated? Amen. There's a true story documented for us of a young woman in first century Israel, Judea, who was a married woman.
- [1 : 17] And she was caught in the act of adultery. And she was brought in front of a crowd of people to a rabbi, one of the many rabbis in first century Israel.
- In front of all those people, they called for justice, for the law to be administered. And they looked to the rabbi for his response. As this young married woman who was caught in the act of cheating on her husband stood before the rabbi, so many things would have gone through her head as she awaited death.
- And it is fair to say that of all the things going through her head, one of the passages from the Bible that most likely was in her head as she awaited death was a passage we're looking at today.
- It is a graphic passage. It is a heavy passage. And it's from Proverbs. This summer, we're looking through various themes that the book of Proverbs addresses. The series is titled Ancient Wisdom for a Postmodern World.
- It's not simply that it's ancient wisdom or old wisdom, but it's wisdom from the ancient of days, from God himself. These are his words. This is his word. And this is one of the most graphic depictions or graphic passages speaking into the issue of adultery, which is what we're looking at this morning.
- [2 : 40] I read it a few minutes ago, and it's graphic even to us about 2,000, maybe 3,000 years after it was written. But it would have been even more graphic to those who were there when it was first written for some of the innuendo and some of the things it refers to are things that would have been seen as so vivid to the people for whom it was written.
- There's so much we can learn from these words. And the first thing we learn, the passage taken as a whole, speaks to us that adultery, that sexual impurity of any form leads to death.
- It is very clear as it speaks of this young man so vividly, this young man walking down a street, being careless, not going out to seek sexual impurity, but sexual impurity, finding him.

That as the passage wraps up, we see it says, All at once he follows her. As an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag is caught fast, till an arrow pierces its liver, as a bird rushes into a snare, as he does not know that it will cost him his life.

And it continues as it speaks of sexual impurity's many victims, that they're all, that they're a throng of many. It's a mighty throng, and that they are in Sheol, the place of death.

[4 : 01] But we see very clearly and vividly, graphically through this passage, that sexual impurity in any of its forms, whether it's adultery, or pornography, or just sexual fantasy, that it leads to death.

And yet, there's such hope in these words. As Solomon writes these words, he's writing them, not so that we'll simply be aware that all of us are doomed to death, but he's writing them to us saying, Avoid that way.

It's not inevitable that we'll commit sexual sin. It's not inevitable. When we're in the midst of feeling temptation, we often feel like, this is inevitable, this is what I need, this is what I'm made for, and there's no way out. But he writes these words, offering such hope, that if we take them seriously, there is a way to defeat and overcome sexual impurity.

So the first point we have today is that sexual impurity is not inevitable, but it inevitably leads to death. That sexual impurity is not inevitable. We can overcome it. But if we give in, it inevitably leads to death.

This is a heavy word, and it's a word from God himself. Now, if we're going to be able to overcome sexual impurity, we need to look at what is sexual impurity's game plan.

[5 : 10] And we see in verses 11 and the few following, she, sexual impurity, is loud and wayward. Her feet do not stay at home. Now in the street, now in the market, at every corner she lies in wait. She seizes him and kisses him.

And with bold face she says to him, and it continues on. What we see is that sexual impurity here is looking actively, proactively for a victim. She will not stay in her place of home.

Instead, she's on the street. She's in the corner. She's looking. She's looking. She's looking for a victim. And she has words to say and physical components and all of this stuff. What we see is that sexual impurity is proactive and strategic in its desire to consume us.

In 1 Peter 5, verse 8, in the New Testament, Peter writes and says that our enemy, our enemy is like a roaring lion looking for whom he can devour. He's actively looking for whom he can devour.

I work with an organization. I work mostly with the church, our church. But I work very part-time with an organization called Strength to Fight that works in universities and schools and churches.

[6 : 12] We go and give talks about pornography. And it's a ministry to help people get free of pornography. And one of the things that we found in our academic research is that 12%, 12% of websites are porn sites.

That's about 4.2 million websites today. And growing every day are websites dedicated to porn. Not only that, but there are a lot of pornographic videos.

People use Disney character names specifically so that when kids are Googling stuff and kids are looking up their favorite Disney stuff, they'll come across it.

The pornographic industry is a multi-billion dollar industry that is proactively and strategically targeting us and our children, the children in our lives.

It's a multi-billion dollar industry that is looking for people to enslave and to indict, to bring into sexual sin for their own profit and gain.

[7 : 14] And so our second point is that sexual temptation proactively and strategically seeks out its victims. And we therefore must proactively and strategically fight against it.

If they are looking strategically at how to enslave us, how to catch our attention and lure us in, then we need to be proactive and strategic in fighting against it.

And so this passage offers much hope and strategy about how we can be proactive in fighting against it.

So let's look at how sexual purity does its thing. Well, verse 15 it says, So now I come, we'll start in verse 14. I had to offer sacrifices and today I've paid my vows.

So now I have come out to meet you, to seek you eagerly, and I found you. The crescendo of sexual impurities temptation on this man and in all of our lives, whether guy or girl, is that it focuses us on ourselves.

[8 : 17] It appeals to our desire for significance, for our desire for validation, our desire to be someone. It appeals to us and it speaks to our ego. I want you.

You are awesome. You're an amazing romancer. You're what I long for. And yet as we turn toward the end of the passage, we see that she has so many victims. So many victims.

It's such a deception. It's such a lie. Sexual impurity will make us want to, whatever form it is, whether it's the prostitute, whether it is a friend who is seeking out an affair, or whether it is the online website.

Just a few weeks ago, I was on Skype because my sister lives in Haiti and it's one of the only ways we can be in touch. And all of a sudden, I was added by someone that was posing as a friend.

So they're like, hey, whatever. And so I'm like, oh, hey, how do I know you again? And just instantly, they started messaging me about just you, you, you. You are everything I need. You, this, and you. And I just deleted right away because I knew that it's a lie.

[9 : 19] It's a lie. It's not about us. It's not about us being awesome. It's not about us being there for them. No, they are speaking words as if they actually care about us. What our form sexual impurity is trying to get at us, it appeals to our ego.

And so the third point is that sexual impurity speaks to our desire for significance, for belonging, and validation. But in all of this, it is a deception. Indifferent to who we are.

She comes out to this man in this passage and is saying, I want you, but he is one of so many victims. The only thing it really desires of him is his death. Armed with that knowledge, when that temptation comes, we're able to say no.

I know you're making me feel like I'm a somebody. I know you're making me feel like you really desire me. But all you long for is to use me and destroy me. I will not give in.

So that is one component to defeating sexual sin. In verse 16, sexual impurity says, I've spread my couch with coverings called lrons from Egyptian linen.

[10 : 27] I've perfumed my bed with myrrh and aloes and cinnamon. Come, let us take our fill of love till morning. These words can also be translated. Other translations of the ancient Hebrew say, come, let us drink our fill of love till morning.

We see that part of the game plan, part of the strategy of sexual temptation in any of its forms is that it's a promise of fulfillment. It's this image of drinking this thing, of fulfillment.

And it's promising love, something that is more than lust, but something that is truly life-giving. One of the game plans of sexual temptation is that sexual impurity promises release, fulfillment, and love.

But it's a momentary pleasure that brings emptiness, anxiety, and anguish. As I speak these words, I know I'm not alone in having listened to the lie of sexual temptation.

I know that I'm not alone in this place of having given in in various forms to sexual temptation. You know what I'm saying is true, if this is also you.

[11 : 31] That though the promises of fulfillment, gratification, and all of that, that's a momentary pleasure that leads to anxiety. A fear of being found out.

It's like an anxiety seeps into your very bone marrow. And you're left not fulfilled. You're left not with pleasure. You're left with anxiety and emptiness. Truly, sexual impurity is like being stranded at sea, and you have a true need for water.

And sexual impurity is like salt water, which the uninformed, the foolish, will begin to drink the salt water, believing it's going to fulfill them. But all the water does is dehydrate them because it's salt water, and it makes them thirst for more.

And so they take more, and they take more, and they take more, and they continue to pursue it, never ever receiving the hydration they need. And it destroys them. Those who give in to the promise, the allure of salt water when they're stranded at sea are those who will not overcome it, and they will die.

And the same is true for sexual impurity. It offers a promise of fulfillment and love. It's no mistake that in the Gospel of John, chapter 4, Jesus famously is at a well in Samaria, and he speaks with a Samaritan woman.

[12 : 47] You and I, you know the story, probably. And she, this woman has had not one, not two, but many husbands. And the man she's with right now, she's cheating on her current husband with.

She's committing adultery, just as this passage describes. And it's no mistake that Jesus chooses to have similar words to this idea of drinking deeply of love. And he says, no, drink of me, the living water.

Jesus is saying, drink of me, the living water, and you'll thirst no more. He knows that this woman has had this reckless pursuit of fulfillment, of trying to drink deeply of satisfaction and of love.

And yet she's been going to all the wrong places. And she won't find that in adultery and excitement and the allure of this type of sin, or of any sin. She'll only find it as she turns to Jesus and drinks deeply of him.

That is what Jesus calls her to. Now, how do we defeat sexual impurity? Armed with the knowledge that it is a deception.

[13 : 48] That is part of it. But earlier on in the passage, we see such strategy. How we can be proactive. And this we need to take seriously. It defines this young man as being a simple man.

And it says that he doesn't go out seeking impurity. He doesn't go out seeking destruction and death. But he's just passing along the street near her corner, near the corner of sexual impurity.

Taking the road to her house in the twilight in the evening. It tells us that it's not that this is a man that desires his own destruction. He's probably a very nice chap. But he's walking close to where sexual impurity does her thing.

And it's at a time of day during the twilight when he'd be most susceptible to giving in. He's being reckless and simple-minded in his going near it. And so what we see is that this man could have avoided this entire situation.

This young man. Wisdom would have called for him to stay far from the street where sexual impurity is. And to be especially on his guard during that time of day.

[14 : 50] During the context. During the twilight. When he'd be most susceptible. How you and I can defeat sexual sin. Is by being aware. Understanding. Where we're weak.

Where we're most susceptible. What is the context. Whether it's geographic. Whether it is a time of day. Whether it's something in our lives. For me I know for every type of sin. You name it.

Being rude to people. Or inappropriate thoughts. Anything. Any type of sin. I know that I'm susceptible when I'm feeling super stressed. Super exhausted. And when I'm pretty alone.

And so as a result. When I find myself in a situation. If I'm one of the weeks where I'm doing a ton of extra speaking outside the church. At different locations. And church on Wednesday. And all this stuff. And so I'm alone a lot.

Because I'm doing a lot of study. And there's a lot of pressure. And I haven't gotten enough sleep. When I see myself in that situation. Warning sign. And so I'll call up accountability brother. And I'll call him up and say.

[15 : 46] Hey I'm in a situation right now. Where I know I'm more susceptible to sin. And we're able to be alert. Pray together. And then I focus on getting out of that context. We need to be alert.

And so I want to challenge you. To take this seriously. For life and death is on the line. The health and well-being of our souls.

Of our relationships. Of those we love is on the line. As we take seriously the need to stay far from sexual impurity. A lot of people. A lot of people think that to be mature in Christ.

Is to be able to look sin in the eye and say no. But the Bible is clear in the Old Testament. In the New Testament. Throughout the Bible. The Bible is clear. We defeat sexual sin.

Mature Christians defeat sexual sin. And all types of sin. Not by looking it in the eye and saying no. But rather by fleeing it. It's over and over and over in the New Testament letters.

[16 : 45] It's right here in Proverbs multiple times. Flee temptation. Stay far from it. Maturity is to stay far from it. And so some proactive strategic steps through which we can take.

Is that if you find that your smartphone is an avenue toward sexual sin. And you've promised yourself over and over that you won't look at porn on your smartphone.

What you may need to seriously consider. I want to challenge you to seriously consider getting rid of your smartphone. Get a flip phone. Many young men that I've walked with have had to do that.

They get rid of their phone. If you find yourself working a job. Where there is a guy or a girl. That is trouble for you regarding sexual sin.

You may need to consider. In fact I challenge you to consider quitting your job. And finding a new one. I have had friends who are housemates with someone. And the person has pornographic material in the house.

[17 : 43] And they've tried to get the person to get rid of it. And it hasn't happened. And because of that housemate they themselves are struggling with sexual sin. Taking these words seriously. That is serious stuff.

They have to find a new housemate. They have to leave. In my house I live with eight young men. And we have decided to get rid of Wi-Fi. We did that more than a year ago now. We don't have internet at my house. It's like we're living in a century past.

A time gone by. But we've made this decision. Because a number of people in the home just said. You know what? We want to do whatever it takes to be free of temptation.

So I want to encourage you. No matter how hard. No matter how difficult. No matter how radical your friends think you are. To do what it takes to stay far from it. I want to challenge you to take time to journal.

Write down. I've done this. Write down. Prayerfully write down the context. The situation. The things that it triggers for you. That are temptation for you. Take these words seriously.

[18 : 42] We defeat sin by staying far away from temptation. In terms of location, access, time, and opportunity. One of the things that we find that often allows us to.

That kind of brings us into sin. Is that where we're most susceptible. Isn't simply these very dark places. But it's actually when you can justify it because of something good. When I was working as a speech writer for an MP.

Whose whole reason for politics was fighting human trafficking. And sexual abuse and all this stuff. It would have been very easy for me to justify. In fact, it would have been helpful for my research. If I would have in my research to come across some inappropriate stuff.

Even some good academic research. It's just very graphic. And knowing the depravity of every single heart. Which includes my own. I don't know every heart. But the darkness in every heart.

I refuse to do certain types of research. Because I need to stay far from it. For even though my justification. It was good. If I had read that stuff.

[19 : 44] It would have put those images in my mind. I had to stay far from it. I have friends who were sharing the gospel with someone of the opposite gender. And this person seemed very eager to hear about the gospel.

And he had also wanted to be sexually immoral with them. And I challenged them. I pleaded with them. I got in their space. And I said, get out of this right now. Do not meet up with them to share the gospel.

How can you say that to someone? I said, you need to trust God. That God will be faithful to his word. And that God will bring someone else into their life to share the gospel. It is not for you. It is not for you to compromise your own purity for the sake of the gospel.

God doesn't call us to do that. So I want to challenge you, even if it's a situation that you think it would break your heart to get out of. If you need to get out of it. If it is tempting you for sexual sin, get out and flee.

For sexual impurity, sin itself leads to death. Now we defeat temptation, it shows us in Proverbs 7, by staying far from that way.

[20 : 50] But it's not simply running from something. Those who focus simply on running and fleeing from sin, which is part of what we need to do, will usually end up being caught by it if they're not running towards something greater. I've heard it said, what you run from catches you.

What you run toward, you will find. Running away from sexual sin, fleeing it, is biblical, but it's not the end of the story. At the start of the passage, it begins with, My son, keep my words.

Treasure. Treasure up my commandments with you. Keep my commandments and live. Keep my teaching as the apple of your eyes. Something so precious. Something so tender. Or bind them on your fingers. Keep them close to you. Write them on the tablet of your heart.

Say to wisdom, you are my sister. And call insight. Listen to this. Call insight your intimate friend to keep you from the forbidden woman. From sexual impurity. From temptation. The way that we defeat sexual temptation and sin of all kinds is both by staying far from it, but even more so, but even more so, by treasuring God's word, by being intimate with it.

The images of intimacy speaks to this idea of how there being two different types of knowing. Head knowledge and then experiential knowledge. The second form of knowing is the words that the ancient Hebrew uses to describe a husband and a wife sleeping together.

[22 : 03] Adam and Eve. It says Adam knew his wife Eve. They had a child. It's not that Adam had a lot of knowledge about his wife and that made a child. That's not how it works.

It's that intimacy. And so we're called to be intimate with truth, to treasure it, to value it. And that requires head knowledge. It requires that we know the Bible. Not just our favorite person, but we read the Bible, that we treasure the Bible, that we chew on it, that we think of it, that we store it up within our heart and our mind.

One of the things that I do, for I find often I can read the words of the Bible, even if I'm doing my morning devotions day after day, I can read it, and it's just going into my head, making me better at Bible quizzes, but it's not actually something that my heart is embracing, that my heart is experiencing, that it's really being written on my heart.

And so before I read the Bible in the morning, I pray, God, would you help me to love and understand and to truly know your word? I want to challenge you, if you're not praying that, pray that. We get to chew and treasure on God's word by reading it, by praying it, by looking to God for his help, that we love his word and his ways.

But what do we do when we find ourselves having broken this? What do we do when we find ourselves like this woman, who's standing before the rabbi in first century Israel?

[23 : 24] And it wasn't simply that the laws of the land called for her death, it's that the Bible itself called for her to be stoned. The story is found in John chapter 8, it's a true story, of this woman standing there before Jesus, and the throngs of God's people, and they've called for her death.

She'll be standing there with her head down, knowing that God's ways are death. People are holding stones in their hand, ready to kill her. And the words of the rabbi, of Jesus, the rabbi, was, He who is without sin, throw the first stone.

Imagine you're the woman, you hear the rabbi has just called for your death. You're standing there, waiting, waiting for the stone to hit you. That's a miserable, painful, excruciating way to go.

And it's the way that God has prescribed in His Word. You're standing there, waiting. Perhaps Proverbs 7 is in your mind, that this is the way that leads to death, to Sheol, the place of the dead.

Standing there, waiting, waiting. And then you hear, as one rock hits the ground. And then you hear that sound again. And then you hear it again.

[24 : 33] And you hear it again. Your eyes are closed, you look up, wondering what's happening. And you see that person after person is dropping their stones, as John 8 tells us, and walking away. And now it's just you and Jesus.

Now as a child, when I came across that passage, I thought Jesus was saying, Hey, I'm super kind. I'm letting you off the hook. Now don't do that again. But Jesus is able to say, Jesus is able to say, We're not going to have you murdered, or killed rather, because He takes the punishment.

You see, there's one person that could have thrown the first stone. Jesus only said, He who's without sin, throw the first stone. And Jesus is without sin. Jesus could have thrown the first stone.

And after that, all the other stones could have flown. But Jesus looks up, and with love in His eyes, He says, He's without sin, throw the first stone. And then He refuses to throw a stone.

And as not only the lady, but as Jesus, not as only the young woman who committed adultery, but as Jesus hears, then He hears it again, and then He hears it again. The woman is hearing, I'm going to live.

[25 : 39] But Jesus is hearing, I'm going to die. Because it wasn't that Jesus was just going to violate God's ways. No. God's ways, God's law, God's word called for her death. And Jesus, as you know, says, You can go free, because I'm going to take the death.

And just as being stoned with stones is a painful way to go. So crucifixion is excruciating, painful, horrific way to go.

And Jesus took it. Not only for this one woman, but for every single one of us. And so these words are true, and we take them seriously. That sexual impurity leads to our destruction, to harm.

It breaks relationships. It does not fulfill. It hurts us. And it's something to take seriously, and to proactively and strategically look to avoid. The words of God call us to be proactive in staying far from it.

It calls us to be aware of the deceptions. It's saying, I want you, but really what it wants is your destruction. The word of God is something for us to treasure in. And we find such life and freedom as we stay far from evil, as we go God's way.

[26 : 47] And we'll find such strength in it. But where we find ourselves breaking God's ways, if you yourself has found yourself, as many of God's followers have, having broken God's ways, and you know, you know it's caused harm in your life.

And you know it leads to death. This passage is not the end of the story. It's not all that the scriptures have to say. But John 8 shows us, as we see in every gospel, with the death and resurrection of Jesus, that sexual impurity leads to death.

But Jesus defeats death and brings restoration, purity, and life itself. That sexual impurity in every type of sin, whether it's a sophisticated, nice sin, or it's the most violent criminal act, it leads to our own destruction and the harm of others.

But through the death and resurrection of Jesus, knows that death never has the final word if we turn to Jesus, if we cry out to him for forgiveness and for salvation and for rescue and restoration.

We find life in him. He is a faithful God as we sung today. He is faithful. He is faithful to his word. He is faithful to us as people. Let's pray.

[27 : 59] Heavenly Father, as much as we wish it was not the case, for so many of us, including myself, we know that these words are true.

That when we break your ways, it harms us, or harms those around us. It brings death, emptiness, anxiety, and destruction. But we thank you that you bring restoration.

You restore what was lost, what was taken from us, what we have given away. Lord, you restore life. You restore health to these broken bones. Lord, you remove the anxiety as we come into the light.

You remove the anguish as we come to you and find life and peace and restoration. So, Father God, I pray that for anybody that's in a situation right now where it's ongoing sexual impurity, whether through porn or through adultery or just lustful stuff or whatever it is, that you would help them to flee from it, to repent and turn to you and find freedom and life and victory and purity in you.

For those who aren't in a situation right now, but they were, and the effects of that are still on in their life. We pray that you would help them to turn to you and come into the light through confession, finding light and life and hope in you.

[29 : 18] And we pray for each one of us that you would help us to learn from this simple man in Proverbs 7, that we would not go near and walk near temptation, that we would be able to eliminate that through taking your word seriously and treasuring it and knowing it and loving it and living according to it through the power, through the strength of your death and resurrection and for the life we receive in you.

In Jesus' name, Amen.