

PM Proverbs 24:1-12 Strength in the day of adversity

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[0 : 00] From the lengthy readings that we had this morning. and our one reading is from the book of Proverbs chapter 24! For their hearts devise violence, and their lips talk of trouble.

By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established. By knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.

A wise man is full of strength, and a man of knowledge enhances his might. For by wise guidance you can wage your war, and in abundance of counsellors there is victory.

Wisdom is too high for a fool. In the gate he does not open his mouth. Whoever plans to do evil will be called a schemer. The devising of folly is sin, and the scoffer is an abomination to mankind.

If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small. Rescue those who are being taken away to death.

[1 : 42] Hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, Behold, we did not know this. Does not he who weighs the heart perceive it?

Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it? And will he not repay man according to his work? Amen.

And may God add a blessing to this reading from his holy word. Well, if you have your Bibles, if you could open at page 657 again at Proverbs 24, we'll look in some depth at, in particular, verses 10 to 12, but we'll look at the earlier verses too.

We are very much living in a day of much adversity, aren't we? If I were to ask each of you this evening, what is the greatest adversity you are facing personally, I'm sure everyone would have a different answer.

It could be economic adversity. It could be health concerns, difficulties and uncertainties at work, or strained relationships, or a range of different discouragements.

[3 : 13] And if I were to ask you what is the greatest adversity that we are facing nationally, or indeed internationally, again, I think each of you would have a different answer to give.

The increasing civil unrest in the UK and concerns that everyone has about the economy. The constant threat of the war in Ukraine escalating to something that would involve NATO.

The unpredictability of American foreign policy and whether there might be military intervention in Iran or indeed elsewhere in the Middle East and what that might lead to globally.

We are living in days of great adversity on every level. And I've not even mentioned yet the spiritual dangers that we face.

The intolerance of secular humanism to the Gospel and to Biblical morality and indeed the very foundations that God has put in place of men and women and family.

[4 : 22] The impact of a multi-faith approach to both education and the wider culture legislation, in particular employment legislation, all these important matters.

And the growing abandonment of Biblical truth by the leadership of some of the largest historic denominations within the UK.

If we're honest with ourselves, in the midst of these days of adversity, we can be so tempted to faint and succumb to weakness, can't we?

So the question we have to ask ourselves is this. How do I face adversity in my life?

Because if you don't experience adversity now, I guarantee you will at some stage. It was, we read in the book of Job, that man is born for adversity as the sparks fly upward.

[5 : 30] Now whether at a personal level or when faced with what we see on the news, how do we respond?

How do we react? Well this message, this passage rather, has a message of hope within it. Because first of all we see in verse 10 the need for spiritual strength.

Solomon writes, If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small. Now this isn't just a truism. There's a hint of rebuke there, isn't there?

And it's also inferred that weakness and faltering fainting weren't inevitable. Because real strength was actually available all along.

Now of course we do need to acknowledge our weakness before God. We don't want to be rash like Peter, full of misguided self-confidence.

[6 : 39] But sometimes I feel that we can almost treat that weakness as an excuse for doing nothing at all. And not depending on God for strength.

But instead adopting what I call a kind of pious fatalism. Well, things, we cannot change things and the Lord clearly means things to happen in this way so who are we to question that?

Effectively wallowing in our weakness and seeing no responsibility to pray or to act to seek to address the great evils in our society.

what is being salt and light if not doing what we can to hold back the greatest darkness and the greatest corruption as we have opportunity in our society.

Now if we look back a few verses we see not only that strength is available but also secondly the source of that spiritual strength.

[7 : 53] Solomon mentions there in verses 3 and 4 he uses this lovely pictorial language of wisdom being like a beautiful house majestically appointed with rooms filled with all precious and pleasant riches.

And really that is what wisdom and knowledge are like. But in verses 5 and 6 we read a wise man is full of strength and a man of knowledge enhances his might for by wise guidance you can wage your war and an abundance of counsellors there is victory.

These are strength slang words he uses the theme of strength might waging war gaining victory in I believe a metaphorical spiritual sense because if we know our Old Testament we know that Solomon's reign was a great time of peace as God had promised it would be.

So almost certainly there would have been no knowledge of or experience rather that Solomon would have had of war with the surrounding nations so I think it must be a metaphorical waging war here and perhaps as the wisest man of his era Solomon did have that insight even under the old covenant of spiritual warfare and certainly we are right to consider that in applying it to our own context but we see here the secret to possessing true spiritual strength in days of adversity it's wisdom knowledge guidance and good advice from others now let's look at these under three headings put wisdom and knowledge together first of all and we know don't we that the greatest source of wisdom and knowledge is Christ himself the ultimate wise man full of strength indeed Paul says in

Colossians 2 verse 3 that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in him the Lord Jesus so to have spiritual strength and might so that we are able to wage spiritual warfare and achieve victory we need to be grounded in our knowledge of Christ that means put simply that we need to be Christians and if you're not a Christian tonight then that is the most important matter that you need to address in your life this is the great task of all who have the privilege and responsibility of preaching God's word is to point people to Christ the one who God sent into this world to save sinners and every one of us is in that category we are desperately weak we cannot save ourselves but the Lord Jesus Christ has come and has lived that perfect life for us he's died that death that we all deserved and he gives the blessings of what we call his active obedience that perfect track record that his life was and he gives us that in the gospel if we put our faith in him then

[11 : 24] God doesn't look at the record of our sin and failure he sees Christ's 100% pass we could call it and that is given to us as a free gift but also Christ's death on the cross dealt with the consequences of all of our sin the sin that deserved the punishment of God's righteous anger Christ bore that that's why he died on the cross to die in our place to take our sin and if we will simply look to him put our faith in him and say yes Jesus I believe that you died for me for my sin I want to have your record in place of my record of failure and I know that you offer me that and I want to take that free offer of forgiveness of sin and that wonderful perfect righteousness which the Bible describes as a robe that we can wear so that when God looks upon us if we put our faith in Jesus he doesn't see our sin it's all been paid for on the cross but we're not left naked so to speak we have the righteousness of Christ worn like a robe so when God looks on us he sees the righteousness of Jesus the wonderful message of the gospel that can be yours even tonight you dare not trust your own righteousness you have none none of us has any righteousness that we can offer to God but it is offered to us in the wonderful gospel of the Lord

Jesus but if we're Christians we need to be growing in our faith we need to make sure that we are making best use of that strength that spiritual strength that wisdom and knowledge which we find only in Christ but where practically speaking do we find that wisdom and knowledge where is that guidance that we need the guidance by which we can wage spiritual warfare well surely we must think of the Bible in 2 Timothy 3 verse 15 Paul says that the scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation and indeed there is all the wise guidance that we need from Genesis to Revelation God's revealed word which is holy sufficient so that we can be thoroughly equipped for every good work that God calls us to do as Paul says a couple of verses later in that chapter but sometimes indeed many times all of us know that it is difficult to understand

God's word and that is why God blesses the church with what we Ephesians chapter 4 calls pastor teachers those who are gifted and equipped to explain the Bible to us and in our modern day and generation we have more access than anyone has ever had in human history to some of the best resources frequently free of charge on the internet we can read articles we can read online books we can listen to sermons we can watch videos from some of the finest preachers in the world all free of charge and we really need this is one of the best ways in which we can use the internet to have these many advisors to help us and if we think back through church history collective wisdom has so often been the way of spiritual victory for the church when it was threatened with false teaching with heresy that would have taken the church completely away from the truth of Jesus and his message we can think of the council at Jerusalem in Acts 15 which addressed the great crisis of that day was did

Gentile Christians non-Jews have to go along with all the Jewish rituals in order to be real Christians that may seem a bit of an esoteric issue to us in the 21st century but it was a huge issue in the first century but the apostles and other church leaders gathered together in Jerusalem in Acts chapter 15 and the collective wisdom after they had all spoken they came to that unanimity which understood that there are not two churches a Jewish church and a Gentile church no all one in Christ as Paul explains in Ephesians chapter 2 and Galatians chapter 3 the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile had been abolished in Christ's death and so believing Jew and believing Gentile were one together within the church of the Lord Jesus and then a few centuries later there was the councils the early church councils last year we celebrated 1700 years of the council at Nicaea and then there was

Chalcedon a century or two later both of these councils dealt with the person of the Lord Jesus Christ who was truly God and truly man and that was settled by the church at that time fast forward many centuries to the time of the reformation where the reformed confessions and catechisms came out of that glorious rediscovery of the great truths of the Bible at that time that had been hidden for centuries and distorted beyond all recognition all of these occasions in church history have displayed the collective wisdom of godly church leaders which was helpful not only for the church in their day but indeed for centuries afterwards even to the present day now for our own day and generation getting to grips with the Bible's teaching on the key moral and ethical issues and the threats to the well-being of both church and nation is crucially important for all

[17 : 42] Christians this is a new thing that we've never really seen before in history where there's attempts within the parliaments to remove the Judeo-Christian foundations of our society and to bring in things that are going to be and we've already seen to be incredibly detrimental to the whole of society now as I said earlier Jesus says of his disciples and if you're a Christian this evening this applies to you that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world but Jesus warns us not to lose our saltiness and become lukewarm or to not mention our faith and so hide our light under a bushel and at the Christian Institute we believe that what we have to say and the briefings that we have outside there will help what we hope will be the many advisors that you will need to enable you to think through these important issues and wage your spiritual warfare on this topic because be under these topics rather because be under no illusion these are all deeply spiritual issues they are attempts to set up different beliefs what

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10 lofty opinions that are set up against the knowledge of God and what he means by that is that people take their own opinions their own world views their own philosophies and say this is why I'm not going to become a Christian because my beliefs make more sense than yours my world view that puts me at the centre of things rather than God is why I'm not going to become a Christian so all these things here are basically enshrining atheism into our nation's laws which is a horrific thing to do and is setting the nation itself increasingly against God and if you look at assisted suicide speaking as plainly as we can what those who are pushing for it are saying to the nation is there is no day of judgment coming death should hold no fear for anyone in fact it should be welcomed and embraced if you are suffering because it will bring an end to that suffering and if we know our

Bibles we know what a chilling lie that is the deceiving of those that say yes I want my suffering and pain to end I'll take that medicine that will end my life within a few seconds when they enter eternity unprepared to meet God they will realize too late what a lie they have been fed by their own government so this is how serious the matter is so if you look next at verse 11 we see the purpose for spiritual strength now I want to say something about the general purpose for spiritual strength and then something more specific from this verse itself now once we know where to find strength to find it in Christ in scripture and in the many advisors whether they're people that we can speak to that are mature

Christians or reading Christian literature as I've mentioned already to help us develop our thinking and develop a broad Christian world view and all these issues we need to put that wisdom and strength and knowledge to use and we see in verse 11 what that use is now it's so easy to think that the only reason that God gives us strength is so that we can simply endure our own trials and nothing more now while God does enable us to endure them verse 11 makes clear in a general sense that it mustn't stop there we must think in general of how we can help others too with that spiritual strength no man is an island we do not live only to ourselves as Paul says but we have an impact as we were thinking this morning and an influence for good or for ill upon those close to us those around us even to the whole of society as we have opportunity now let's remember that the Lord Jesus prayed that the

Father would not take us out of the world we are here to be salt and light in it if we are Christians that means doing what we can to address the world's evils Paul writes in Galatians 6 verse 10 as we have opportunity let us do good to all men we are not to withhold good from those to whom it is due when it is in our power to act that's Proverbs 3 verse 27 so that's speaking generally but more specifically as we see in verse 11 the specific example Solomon gives there is to rescue those who are being taken away to death hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter now in an ultimate sense we can apply this spiritually and we do need to make every effort to persuade people to trust Christ so they will be saved from eternal death but surely it is physical death and slaughter that Solomon has in mind here and we can't know what specific examples he had in mind but really what we need to do here is to ask ourselves how can we apply this timeless truth in our own day and generation well in the present context surely being taken away to death implies against one's will so coercion and stumbling toward the slaughter implies recklessness or at the very least carelessness and surely both of these apply to assisted suicide vulnerable elderly people will feel pressurized coerced into a premature death if assisted suicide is passed into law because the doctor keeps mentioning it and they may feel well I'm being a burden on the NHS

[24 : 44] I'm taking up a scarce bed wouldn't it be the honourable thing to give it up for someone else all that money being spent on me that's not good investment should be spent on some I think even Christians are going to think it's the noble thing to do absolutely shocking for people to be put under that kind of pressure to see their own lives as having no worth or value but we keep being told that the vast majority of the public are in favour of these proposals well if they are they are utterly careless about their eternal souls claiming I'm not afraid of death I'm just afraid of dying but actually our friends at Care Not Killing have done some excellent research and they've found that first of all people think that assisted dying is not assisted suicide using weasel words there they think it means either palliative care or withdrawal of treatment both of which are currently legal and available and when the consequences of assisted suicide are explained to them support drops below 20% only fewer than 1 in 5 of the population when it's explained to them what is going to happen with this legislation their support for it drops like snow off a dyke so we surely cannot be silent but must speak to our MSPs our elected representatives about this and that's what we're doing by making these pieces of literature available for you and this brings me to the fourth and final point lest we think that this is just some kind of fringe issue that doesn't affect us let me tell you that around 70% of us will need some kind of end of life care in hospital you've only got about 30% of people that will drop dead from a heart attack or brain hemorrhage or stroke or be killed in a car accident or something like 70% of us will need some kind of end of life care and if that's the case we will be offered assisted suicide again and again and again and if it's not you it's going to be someone very close to you in your family so really brings this home but fourthly and finally in verse 12 we see the folly of excusing spiritual weakness

Solomon gives a solemn warning here doesn't he he addresses the excuse that many try to make of not knowing what is happening when in fact they really do if you say behold we did not know this does not he who weighs the heart perceive it does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it and will he not repay man according to his work well as Solomon would later say in Ecclesiastes there's truly nothing new under the sun people have been saying this for centuries but the inference here is that God knows whether we really can plead ignorance and indeed it's implied that we can't and even if these people genuinely didn't know before well they know now don't they and we know now and Solomon reminds them that God is the one who watches over their souls or who guards their lives so as his redeemed image bearers the inference is surely that they ought to be watching over the souls and guarding the lives of others who are threatened for whatever reason with a premature death how can we say that we love our neighbour if we are not prepared to do whatever we can to prevent them being put under pressure to end their lives so that knowledge of the need to rescue people brings responsibility when the opportunity arises and ultimately there will be accountability won't there that last phrase will he not repay man according to his work is both a warning to us and an incentive and it reminds me of the three parables in Matthew chapter 25 remember there was the wise and the foolish virgins there was a parable of the talents with the faithful stewards and the lazy steward and the sheep and the goats and really each of these three parables shows two contrasting things first of all the utter folly of failing to make use of the knowledge and opportunities that we all have the foolish virgins failed to keep oil in their lamps the wicked steward buried his talent the goats were completely indifferent to the needs of those other Christians around them but there are glorious promises and eternal rewards for those who out of love for the

Lord Jesus and concern for his people in particular and humanity in general the wise virgins the faithful stewards the sheep that without realizing it were serving Christ when they served the least of his people those who make the most of every opportunity to do good with whatever knowledge and abilities and opportunities we have let's pray together heavenly father this is a solemn passage in your word and it reminds us of our accountability before you and we know that our primary accountability is to believe the gospel and so we do pray Lord that if any have yet to do that this evening that they would do so and if they need to speak to someone they know may they do so tonight and settle the matter for none of us is promised tomorrow but if we do know you as our loving heavenly father we know the Lord

Jesus as our savior and our Lord we are still accountable for how we live our lives and there will be an assessment on that last day of how we have lived that life that you've given us in Christ we pray Lord that we would make the most of every opportunity for the days are evil we pray Lord that we would acknowledge that you have gifted us in many ways with knowledge with access to information with access to those whom you have placed in authority over us and now we are called not only to pray for them but to do good to them and indeed to do good to all in our nation if it is within our gift to do so we are not to withhold that doing of good and so we do pray that in the coming days we will contact those whom you have placed in authority over us to urge them not to vote for this legislation which would bring such horrific damage horrific harm to our society

Lord we do pray that you would impress your word upon our hearts help us to understand how we should put it into practice in the coming days and may you be pleased to have mercy upon our nation in Jesus name we ask it Amen