

Wise in Adversity

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: 04 July 2021

Preacher: Bo Wong

[0 : 00] Morning, church family. As Dave said, we're going to be hearing from Proverbs chapter 24, and we're going to be starting at the start of the chapter and reading through to verse 12.

That's Proverbs 24. Be not envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them, 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. Hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter.

[1 : 08] If you say, behold, we do 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?

Good morning everyone. It's school lady time, so we are back to the book of Proverbs. The book of Proverbs is a bit difficult in a sense, talking about it because it sounds like a lot of how to do things, or how to live a good life.

However, we need to see that it's not only teaching us that the wise way to live.

However, more so is to tell us that we don't have that wisdom, and we can't live out to what he's teaching us.

But God does provide us a way for us to do so. Last week, if you remember, we were talking about wise with money or in money, in Proverbs 11, verse 3 says that, it would say that, riches does not profit in the day of wrath.

[2 : 30] Today, in Proverbs 24, verse 10, if you faint in the day of adversity. So both of them have got this day of wrath, or the day of adversity.

So today, we would think about how we would stand in that day, or in day-to-day as well. Let's pray first before we start.

Almighty God, we thank you for the privilege of reading your word, and knowing something that is greater, and knowing that we could have a life that is different, that we have always lived, and also knowing that in adversity, we are not alone.

May you help us in understanding this, and may you help us to live a life that is worthy of your calling. Thank you, Lord. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. I'm going to share the screen while I'm talking.

[3 : 52] So today, the topic is, Why is in adversity? From Proverbs 24, verses 1 to 12. First of all, I'd like to share with you about this man called Rick Ritzkohler.

Rick Ritzkohler was born on 27th of May, 1939, and he died on 11th of September, 2001. So about 20 years ago.

He was the head of security for Morgan Stanley in the South Tower of World Trade Center, when both the North and the South Towers were hit by plans.

Before the towers collapsed, Rick called the authority, and he was told to stay put, and not to evacuate. But Rick did not agree.

He called his old army mate, and that's why we know what he was thinking, and told him what happened. And he said he was going to disregard the order to stay, and he evacuated the building.

[5 : 06] So because of Rick's quick and decisive action, 2,687 people were saved. Only six persons from the South Tower died on that day, including Rick himself.

Why did Rick disregard the order? Because he had been expecting such an attack for some time. In fact, he had conducted many evacuation drills for the employees in the South Tower.

So in that day of adversity, Rick was the first to act, and the last to leave the building. Don't you wish that we would have such strength to stand on our ground and act in the face of adversity?

I do. However, we know that this is rare. In real life, in our life, we are usually unprepared for adversity, and we try to avoid it or not know how to cope with it.

So we go to Proverbs 24.10 as our words for our day.

[6 : 25] It is to faint in the day of adversity. Your strength is small. Faint, in the Hebrew word, has the meaning of dropping down or letting go.

And in the Old Testament, when God reassured His servants that He would not forsake them or fail them, this word was used.

So Proverbs 24.10 can be translated as, if you give up easily in the day of adversity, your strength is small. However, verse 5 tells us that a wise man is full of strength.

So that means, verse 10, we can also understand it as, if you have little wisdom, you will not have sufficient strength to stand in the day of adversity.

So an adverse event is one that challenges our presuppositions, disrupts our plans, and dashes our hopes, as David shared just now.

[7 : 38] Adversity happens all the time. It is an double-double, and it will come for each of us. So adversity is common. I see people facing adversities every workday.

For example, one day last month, I had three different patients coming in one after another with sadness. The first one was sad because all her adult children did not want to talk to her.

She said everyone was rude to her. The second patient was sad because his driving license had been changed to a conditional one. He's about 80 years old.

He used to drive army trucks in ANZAC. He wanted to be able to continue to do so. He asked me to remove his sleep apnea from the list of his medical conditions so that he can get his full license back.

The third patient had been sad for more than a year since the death of her partner. She did not know what else to live for. Sometimes I think, if these patients had been given wise counsel during their younger days, they may not have ended up where they are now.

[8 : 55] But then I think again, most of us will only listen to counsels which agree with our desires. These patients are suffering now because they are stuck in their own presuppositions of what life should be and they just could not get out of it.

So, we're talking about the nature of adversities that is common and then we'll talk about unavoidable and that is coming for each of us.

Alright. We're still in the common part of it. I wonder how the first patient built her family until all her children did not want to talk to her.

Her presupposition was that she had done all her best for her children. She had built her house well and filled the rooms with good things for her children. She could not understand why all her children dislike her now.

The second patient has nothing else to live for except his being able to drive an army vehicle during the ANZE parade. He does not cope with the adversity of not having a full driving license.

[10 : 10] The third patient lost her partner to cancer. She could not get herself out of her grief. As a result, her teenage daughter has now also become depressed and she actually tried to commit suicide.

This patient's identity was dependent on her partner while her daughter's identity was based on these two adults. They were not able to face the adversity they found themselves in.

All these three patients had been building their lives expecting favorable outcomes like many of us. They put their trust and hope on weak and transient things or persons.

Some of us may be able to identify with one or more of these patients. Some of us may go through similar adversities in time to come. Some of us are preparing ourselves for the future.

So we try to avoid having such adversity. We will try to get the best qualification for ourselves to get the best job or get the best spouse.

[11 : 18] However, we cannot predict the future. What we think is best now may turn out to be the source of our adversity in years to come. Adversity is unavoidable not only because we cannot predict the future but because we are building our life on false presuppositions.

The first patient thought that she could always derive her security and significance from her children. Eventually, her children would become tired of being their mother's emotional support. They would resent their mother's constant dependence on them. The second patient derives his security and significance from his achievement in the defense force.

He cannot accept the fact that he has become too frail to drive an army vehicle. The third patient builds her security and significance on her partner.

When her partner dies before her, she does not know how to cope with life. We live in a world of decay and disruptions. In the past 50 years, we have lived through the Cold War, the Terrorist War, Global Financial Crisis, Multiple Natural Disasters, and now the Pandemic.

[12 : 38] And if we are honest in finding the causes of adversities, we shall find that many of the adversities are the results of our own foolishness. Our ill health is caused by our lifestyle choices and habits.

So, things that we like to eat now many a times as we get older they will be the source of our illness. Our pollution, the pollution of the environment is caused by our desire for comfort and enjoyment.

So, we are using a lot of technologies and things and we don't know how to dispose of them. the relationship breakdowns are caused by our own self-centeredness.

So, we all are so busy to achieve our own goals and the cost of doing it we neglected relating to people or even neglected on health to do exercise.

all these things that we do we are just so focused on our goal that not knowing that in the end they would bring adversity to us.

[13 : 56] In the past few weeks almost every day in my general practice I'm seeing patients who are struggling with whether to have the AstraZeneca COVID vaccine. they fear getting the rare side effects of the vaccine they also fear getting the real disease.

We are not only foolish in the way we live that lead to future adverse events but we are also too weak to face any adverse events. I feel for their anxiety and their pain we all want to avoid adversity but it is unavoidable because the future does not usually turn up as we hoped we would and also because the choices we make now usually predispose us to encounter adversity in time to come. So adversity will come for all of us and Proverbs 24 does not actually say we are too weak to face adversity but it says we are too weak to face the day of adversity.

The day of adversity seems to be pointing to more than just any day that we may find ourselves in some encounters of adversity. In verse 11 and 12 it is saying that there is a day when we will need to give an account of our life.

The account emphasizes on how we have or have not helped others who are facing adversity.

During the accounting time it says that we would mostly have no excuse for our behaviors.

[15 : 24] at this point we might want to pause and ask why God requires us to help others. Is it not enough if we just do no harm to others just keep to ourselves?

The role that God has in mind is a role that shows love and kindness. All of us like to be welcome when we meet up with people even as we meet online. Even though we may not be able to love others we like to be loved by others.

Most of the adversities we encounter are caused by our lack of ability and desire to love others. If there is love among people there will be less conflicts and oppressions.

Even we ourselves demand love and kindness among the people. Would God not require us to live such a life when we are created in His image?

Proverbs 24 implies that we are not strong enough to help others and that we are not even strong enough to help ourselves to face adversities. To have strength we need to have wisdom.

[16 : 31] Wisdom means the ability to see a bigger picture and the ability to suffer loss. Rick Raskola understood the bigger picture of the threat of terrorism and therefore he was prepared for the attack.

We need to understand the bigger picture of our life and the universe to know what to expect in life. However, we cannot understand the bigger picture of life because we are too self-focused.

We can only see things from our own points of view. We are the center of our own universe. The aim of our living is to keep ourselves comfortable and happy. When things do not turn out as we want them to we can only respond with anger and despair.

So how do we face adversity? I would suggest two things. One is knowing the bigger picture. Second is to know the one who was born for adversity. Before Rick Raskola went down with the South Tower he called his wife and told her that he loved her and that she should know that he was doing what he lived for.

[17 : 46] Rick was not suffering in the face of adversity. He was prepared for this and the threat of death did not frighten him or weaken him. The threat of death made him more resolved to save as many people as he could in the short time he had.

Because Rick was prepared, he knew the bigger picture. He knew what was coming and he was prepared to die for it. What is the bigger picture for your life and my life?

We cannot see this bigger picture unless it is revealed to us. This bigger picture we are talking about is not even to do with our world in terms of our day-to-day life.

It is more than that. It is for the eternity. We need to know where we are heading to, where we are coming from. In the reading of Proverbs today, there is some truth that has been revealed to us. That is, there will be a day for us to give an account of our life. In that day, we will not have any excuse about why we do not do what is right. So, that has been revealed and so what are we going to do about it?

[18 : 57] So, compared to this day of adversity, when we face the judgment of God, our day-to-day encounters are small things. Unless we can stand before God's judgment throne without fainting, there is not much point for us to learn how to cope with our day-to-day adversities.

On the other hand, if we can face the day of judgment, then we will know how to face our day-to-day adverse encounters. So, God reveals to us about the bigger picture of life through His written word, and also through the word becoming flesh, as He sent His Son into this world of adversity to live among us.

So, while we try to avoid adversity, Jesus was born for adversity. In Luke chapter 2, verse 34 to 35, we read, We all expect ourselves and our children to live a life of comfort.

Jesus' parents were told not to expect such a life for Him, for Jesus. Jesus Himself did not care if He had a life of comfort. He came for a mission. He came to live by the word and the will of God. So, we can look at Jesus' life and how it fits into Proverbs 24. Jesus did not envy the ways of the world.

[20 : 41] He actually criticized those who were in power. He was therefore hated by those who were in power. Those who could not tolerate the godly way Jesus lived His life devised violence.

They wanted to kill Jesus. So, that is the reader from Proverbs 24, 1-2. Jesus was not intimidated by all the oppositions and threats.

He was not tempted by the offer of the devil. Proverbs 24, 5. He listened to the counsel of God. Proverbs 24, 6. He was building God's kingdom, calling people to follow Him.

So, Jesus is building something that is eternal. and He filled all the room with all the precious things, spiritual things. At last, Jesus was arrested by the religious leaders, those leaders who thought they were wise but had no idea what Jesus had been teaching.

Real wisdom was too high for them to grasp. They falsely accused Jesus of blasphemy and treason. Jesus just kept quiet. When a wise person is being judged by fools, he keeps quiet.

[22 : 03] Proverbs 24, 7. Now, in Proverbs 24, 7, when it says that wisdom is too high for a fool, in the gate, he does not open his mouth.

We can read, he does not open his mouth, the he as the fool, or it can be the wise. I suppose can be read in either way, but in applying to Jesus Christ, he will be the wisdom that will not open his mouth while judged by the fools.

In general, when we are foolish, we will talk a lot. The wise person knows when to talk and when not to talk. that's why I would apply the he as the wisdom who will keep quiet in the midst of foolishness.

The religious leaders scheme to have Jesus crucified by the Romans. People scoffed at him when they saw him hanging on the cross.

They teased Jesus, if you are here to save others, why don't you save yourself now? Proverbs 24, 8-9 Jesus did not faint on the cross.

[23 : 26] He was in control of his emotions and thoughts. He prayed for those who killed him. And he committed his soul to God as he died. Proverbs 24, 10 Why did Jesus not save himself on the cross?

Because he came to die to take away the curse of God. No one stood up for Jesus when he was innocent.

But Jesus was dying for those who were guilty, those who were stumbling to the judgment of God. Proverbs 24, 11 Jesus knew that day of adversity will come for each of us.

He knew that the God who keeps watch over our souls knows what we have done and that he will repay us according to our work. Proverbs 24, 12 When God repays us according to our own works, we will all be condemned.

However, in Christ, God can now repay us according to the works of Jesus and therefore we can stand in the day of adversity.

[24 : 43] What effect did adversity have on Jesus? John 1 14 says, And the word became flesh, and dwell among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only son from the father, full of grace and truth.

All the adversities the world throw at Jesus only help to bring out his grace and truth. We see his beauty in the midst of adversity, we see his kindness in the midst of hatred.

In going through the ultimate adversity of being crucified, Jesus became the perfect sacrifice or redeem us from the wrath of God. In Jesus Christ, we no longer need to worry about the day of adversity.

In Jesus, we are also given the wisdom to live in this world of adversity. Why could Jesus become more glorious in the midst of adversity? Because Jesus did not live for himself, he lived for God and God's people.

When we do not see the bigger picture but only focus on our own small pictures, we cannot cope with any adversity that interferes with our plans and hopes. When we can see the bigger picture and learn to live for God and his kingdom, we can serve on the way for adversity for God's glory.

[26 : 04] I will give you another example. Ernest Gordon was a soldier in World War II. He fought in Malaya and was captured by the Japanese and sent to the prison camp in Thailand during World War II.

I think some of us when I watched a movie about the river Kai KWI. So that is a story that he recounted. When he went into the camp he was an atheist and he described how hopeless and despair prisoners were under the cruelty of Japanese soldiers.

They were just waiting to die. They were just waiting passively. They were just doing what they were told to do. And each just care for themselves. Ernest became very sick.

I suppose he was injured as well, beaten up, starved, and he was very close to death. A Christian prisoner cared for him and gave him his own portion of food and led him to recovery.

Ernest came to know the Lord Jesus in the camp and began to care for others. Soon there was a transformation in the camp.

[27 : 30] People started to put other people first. They rose above their own self-pity and started to care for one another. Instead of cursing their enemies at God, the prisoners started to pray to God and for their enemies.

The adversity under the cruelty of Japanese captors change, but the prisoners were changed. They were still enslaved in the camp, but they were no longer enslaved by suffering and death.

They had someone and something bigger than themselves to live for. What is a wise thing to do in adversity? We know that we cannot avoid adversity in this life.

The stoics advise us to face adversity like a man just suffer it quietly. The Ippicurius advised us to enjoy ourselves as much as possible to lessen the effect of adversity.

What did Jesus do with adversity? Jesus, for the joy that was set before him, enjoyed the cross despising shame and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

[28 : 37] Jesus had a far bigger picture in mind. He served on the wave of adversity to display God's glory. Proverbs 24 11 said, Rescue those who are being taken away to death.

Hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. This is not just another task for us to do. This is life. When we can see the bigger picture, when we can see the kingdom of God coming, our own comfort and safety will become trivial.

Adversity can no longer enslave us. In Christ, we are not only free from facing the day of adversity when God will judge the living and the dead. We are also free to be like him, rescuing those who are stumbling to the slaughter.

Maybe display the mind of Christ in the midst of adversity. Maybe be willing to suffer loss because we have something greater and we have everything in Jesus Christ.

Let us pray. Father, we know that so often when we meet with adversity, we will tend to think about ourselves, poor me, why me?

[30 : 04] Father, we thank you for changing us, that we can think about the Lord Jesus Christ and think about others in the midst of adversity.

Father, may you help us to rise above ourselves and to enjoy your presence with us as we live our life.

and do something that has eternal value and that will show your glory.

Thank you, Lord. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.