

SUMMER 9 - Wealth and Poverty

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 0 0] the theme of riches and poverty whether or not it's coming from the book of proverbs is one that's found all over the place in the bible and is one that is highly pertinent i think for christian living today but probably to be truthful in every day and age since jesus came and also in the life of god's people in the years before he came you may have seen the article in the uh what is it called good weekend in the saturday age just gone an article about the hillsong church in sydney in castle hill one of australia's largest if not largest churches i would assume i think its annual collections in the plate is something like 10 million if i remember rightly the trouble is i threw out the article so i couldn't check the figures again today um and in top of that of course there's this huge music industry so many of the songs that churches around australia and the world are singing today are hillsong songs and so on the uh pastor was interviewed by the uh journalist uh brian houston who i think is the chairman of the whatever it is the body that is the sort of combined assemblies of god churches and pentecostal churches in australia he refused to declare his income the pastor the journalist noted a couple of times that he wore a brightling watch that would cost thousands of dollars mine's a little seiko that cost 200 a few years ago duty free and was and was a present i think um and uh and as well as that he was a property developer and he had his property in the country somewhere or by the coast as well as living in a you know sort of salubrious area of castle hill and uh and he was quizzed about those sorts of issues of wealth and argued that the gospel of jesus christ is about prosperity and that as we live lives seeking to honor god then he will shower his riches upon us and uh they being uh it seems focused on at least uh on uh material wealth and so there were some stories in the article if you haven't read it of people who were praying for a job and didn't have a job and they've got a job and now their income's going well and all those sorts of things uh etc i must say i was fairly disturbed by the article um disturbed on a number of accounts i guess i think uh disturbed at the lack of accountability i think uh christian ministers and churches must be openly accountable um and it's right that at least in the anglican church which is all i can speak for christian ministers get set um a stipend in effect to pay and it's public uh knowledge what that is uh and those sorts of things um but uh disturbed i think that uh there seemed to be uh an excitement about becoming wealthy uh and uh i couldn't help but be cynical a bit that uh it borders over into the greed uh in a way but excuses it under a cloak of god's blessing and it's not the only church that does i don't mean to be picking on it simply that it was reported like that in the age article and of course if the age article was uh incorrect then uh i i apologize but it's based on what was reported in that article but i know that there are other churches around that have a gospel that is fairly much what has been labeled a prosperity gospel that is it's about accumulation of wealth and i know that that's the case not only in the western church but elsewhere in the world as well and one of our local pentecostal churches from what i understand from its literature and teaching uh teaches along that lines that it's promising people through the gospel uh riches and wealth here and now uh on this on this in this earth on this in this life now there are certainly some passages in the scriptures that indicate uh that a part of the blessing of god uh towards his people when they are obedient will include blessings and especially one finds that in the old testament but i think we need to read all

scriptures in the light of the new and we find there i think a transformed idea of riches and wealth uh where the inheritance that is reserved for us is clearly a heavenly inheritance which is uh if you like fabulously wealthy but nonetheless heavenly and uh and uh and so on not just on the in this life now but not only in the light of the new testament the old testament itself it seems to me qualifies that sort of prosperity view and so some of those are the issues that perhaps are in our minds when we come to the theme of poverty and wealth uh tonight restricting ourselves to the book of proverbs and in particular looking at chapters 10 to 22 um though occasional references in proverbs elsewhere it's a common theme let me say um uh roughly uh one in five verses uh thereabouts refers to something to do with wealth and poverty may not use the word rich or poor but it may use the word words to do with food or your vats being full or your desires being satisfied and those sorts of things and so it's a common theme and we're not therefore trying to extricate out of proverbs something that's trivial and inconsequential let me uh remind you too that it's right to see in the book of proverbs what are often generalizations that is proverbs doesn't leave a lot of room for the exceptions uh to the rule so uh when it says pride comes before a fall it's not saying that every single person who's proud will fall but as a generalization that's true and the same in the issues of wealth and poverty as well so keep that in mind we're not talking here about laws of god or usually or promises of god but what is generally the case and generally true we also need to remember that this is not just sort of somebody's observations about life either there is throughout the book as we've seen the last three weeks a clear moral exhortation this book like every other book in scripture is here to correct and reprove us so feel prepared tonight or be prepared tonight to be corrected or reprov'd but also to encourage us and train us in righteousness so that's what this book is here for simply put there are slightly differing views within the book about wealth and poverty and that's because its observations uh will observe one thing and then a slightly different thing and we have to hold them together to get a rounded view in effect of what's being said certainly there is no blanket condemnation of wealth nor is there a blanket if you like approval or commendation of poverty each is qualified in the things that are described about it in this book well what i want to do is uh work through the themes and it will mean that we jump around a bit so some of you may choose to follow the verses with me others may just note them down others may just listen that's up to you but uh other unlike other weeks uh there is a sort of bit of jumping around from chapter to chapter verse to verse what i want to do firstly is see what does proverbs say about how wealth is to be obtained because whilst i said that wealth is not blanketly condemned how a person becomes wealthy is actually quite important and i've got four points it seems to me as we as i've tried to think this through and see what this book says the first is that wealth ought to be obtained that is it is good when it is obtained by hard honest work so let me give some examples of this and as i say you may or may not want to look them up but they're individual verses so they're fairly brief 10 verse 4 a slack hand causes poverty but the hand of the diligent makes rich now one level that's just an observation but at another level it's actually commending to us to be diligent a slack hand causes poverty a lazy person but the hand of the diligent makes rich it's

actually a proverb we saw in the first of these uh studies a couple of weeks ago in verse 16 of chapter 10 the wage of the righteous leads to life the gain of the wicked to sin uh they're uh picking up i probably should have put that later on actually to do with uh honesty by way of work uh it seems a bit later on chapter 13 verse 11 wealth hastily gotten will dwindle but those who gather little by little will increase it 13 verse 11 now what i think that is saying is that the best wealth to have is wealth that is gained little by little and i think the implication of that is that is worked for rather than some get rich quick mechanism that's hastily gained there's a sense in which the haste of of acquiring that wealth uh is um suggests it could be a little bit underhand so it's about honesty and hard work being commended here um chapter oh jumping back a bit uh chapter 12 verse 11 those who till their land will have plenty of food but those who follow worthless pursuits have no sense again the commendation of hard work tilling the land to get plenty of food but in contrast it doesn't actually say a lazy person but somebody who just follows worthless pursuits that suggests perhaps idle but certainly foolish our way somebody who's not working hard at all another way in which proverbs puts this is in chapter 13 verse 4 the appetite of the lazy craves and gets nothing while the appetite of the diligent is richly supplied now that's a very evocative way to say it somebody who's hungry but also lazy they will crave food to satisfy their appetite but get nothing because they're lazy the appetite of the diligent is richly supplied that is by working hard they gain enough food by which to eat and satisfy their appetite and as we've seen over the last three weeks proverbs often says something in a very uh creative imaginative certainly evocative sort of way that makes us think and sometimes smile sometimes ponder what it's saying and and of course in a subsistence sort of culture like ancient israel was you wouldn't have your money automatically transferred into a bank and wander down to coals to spend it uh you may well be paid in in food items or if you're of course like most people just a farmer then your actual work directly brought the food to your table and maybe some bartering to change uh you know a bit of grain into something else um etc the um so there um some of the verses that uh suggest uh honest and hard work and it says that even if you get wealthy through quick gain or hasty means or maybe slightly underhanded ways whilst wealth itself is not bad clearly here it's a good thing the means to the end is important and that's one of the key things here that is wealth itself is not bad hard work honest work is the right way to obtain it but other sorts of dishonest ways or hasty ways get rich quick schemes is not good and the me the end does not justify the means that's actually a very important christian ethical principle i think throughout the scriptures the end never justifies the means that is we can work towards a good end but in order to achieve a good end we have to have a good means to get there we're not justified by doing bad things in order for good purposes so don't tell lies thinking that somehow a good end will come out of it we're not justified to do that sort of thing uh etc there are plenty of other examples we could find another way the second sort of way in which wealth is rightly obtained is by divine gift that is god is the giver of the of the wealth

so wealth is a blessing from the lord chapter 10 verse 22 is an example of that the blessing of the lord makes rich and he adds no sorrow with it that is that wealth given by god has no undercurrents of sorrow is pure gift and pure blessing very fine indeed and that's a common theme through the scriptures it doesn't in any way take away the need for hard work it's not for us to sort of lounge back in our chairs thinking well i want the blessing of the lord to come down and fill my bank account a hard and honest work has got to be accompanied by god is the one who actually provides the wealth after all especially in an ancient society much more than we ever think about they were dependent on god's gift of rain in order to produce the crops and and the blessing of animals and so on so clearly the hard work's important but the blessing of god is necessary as well the same sort of idea comes elsewhere in the scriptures when the people of god were commanded to go into the promised land in deuteronomy 8 and they would reap the benefits of a very rich land god warned them that while you're in the land and all these blessings came to you you are not to say my wealth and my wealth has been gotten for me by my hand that is god is the one who provides it a third category a bit bit like the first but slightly different is that wealth is rightly obtained by righteous behavior that is not just honest hard work but by a moral character that is upright that's fairly important let me give a few examples of this chapter 13 verse 21 misfortune pursues sinners but prosperity rewards the righteous well there we are righteous character and righteous behavior will receive prosperity as it's called in that verse now clearly the implication is god is the one who brings that prosperity so in one sense um it's the same point as point two that it comes by divine gift but the righteous character that is required which is i think a broader category than honest hard work is crucial here if prosperity is to come in other places we see the similar sort of thing chapter 10 verse 3 the lord does not let the righteous go hungry but he thwarts the craving of the wicked again the lord is active but it's the righteous here who will receive prosperity or in that case not go hungry chapter 15 verse 6 talks about in the house of the righteous there is much treasure but trouble befalls the income of the wicked again this in here the exhortation is to be righteous that's the point of the verses it's not just sort of an observation oh yes you know those people are wealthy they're righteous and so on there is a there is a sting in the tail here are we the readers righteous people or not we also find um uh one more example under this category 13 verse 19 uh which i think is a is a and a slightly odd contrast but a beautifully written statement a desire realized is sweet to the soul but to turn away from evil is an abomination to fools that's an odd contrast the first half of the verse doesn't obviously contrast with the second but as we've seen the last three weeks these odd contrasts help explain each half of the verse a bit yes it is in a sense a person who's got a desire that's realized that is sweet and the implication is that that is for the person who turns away from evil turning away from evil is an abomination to fools they don't turn away from evil but the implication is if you want your desire satisfied then turn away from evil be righteous now it doesn't necessarily say wealthy there but it's along the same lines about satisfaction uh uh sating your appetite and uh prosperity and so on there's a fourth category though that also applies

uh here uh about uh rightly becoming wealthy and that is we become wealthy through generosity or prosperity becomes ours through giving away generously some examples of this chapter 11 verse 24 some give freely yet grow all the richer others withhold what is due and only suffer want now we might well think that the logic would be that the person who doesn't pay and what's due and doesn't give generously they'll accumulate their money and therefore grow wealthy but no indeed the writer here observes that that is not always the case maybe it is sometimes but the person who gives generously or freely yet grows all the richer we see also in the very next verse 11 verse 25 a generous person will be enriched and one who gives water will get water water being a basic thing to give people people as they traveled would normally often need to come somewhere to get water like we see in the book of genesis a couple of times people go to a well for water give away water very precious commodity in that in that land which was fairly dry and inhospitable at times give away water water comes back to you in a sense a couple of others to illustrate this point because i think it's quite an important one 19 verse 17 whoever is kind to the poor lends to the lord and will be repaid in full now often of course when you lend to the poor you don't get repaid because they can't repay you but this is saying whoever is kind to the poor in effect lends to the lord point i'll make a more comment about later but they will be repaid in full giving away generously comes back at you in blessing is in effect what this is saying and that even and even in later on in proverbs there's a commendation of giving generously to your enemies and not just your friends so that's that's about the right ways to become rich if you like or wealthy to use the term that's used here terms that are used here of course we know exceptions there are righteous people who are poor in old testament times new testament times and in our times and and indeed the scriptures make it clear that there's a big sense in which jesus himself became poor for our sakes and yet was thoroughly righteous what we've got to remember here is these are not promises that is it's not a sharp promise that if you tithe your income or give generously to the church building fund or to the church collection plate or to this charity or that then god will shower you with gold bullion or something like that there's no clear promise that's not what's being said here but what it is saying is that real wealth and prosperity comes to you as a result of righteous living generous giving and god's own blessing as well as honest and hard work now i'll make more comment a bit later on about about qualifying the importance of wealth because so far what i've said could justify us in thinking well i'm going to pursue wealth and so therefore i'm going to make sure that i give really generously and i do all these things so that i can be wealthy that's not the motivation really that in the end this book is commending to us and indeed there are more important things than wealth which we'll see later as well a couple of things about what proverbs comments on about how wealth is used it's used to provide inheritance not only to children but children's children in chapter 13 verse 22 the good leave an inheritance to their children's children but the sinner's wealth is laid up for the righteous that is the sinner's children and children's children never benefit now again it's not a blanket promise

[20 : 19] again there'll be exceptions to the rule but what it's saying is that the person who's good or upright or righteous to use the other categories to describe that person in the book they will be they will be blessed of god so that there is wealth that will be passed on to their children and children's children that's in effect what it's saying but they will become wealthy and an evidence of that will be the legacy or inheritance that if you like cascades down the generations to children and children's children another benefit if you like of wealth is personal security we saw this three weeks ago in chapter 10 chapter 10 verse 15 the wealth of the rich is their fortress the poverty of the poor is their ruin and I made a comment then that we could easily take that verse out of context it's hard to know what its context is in some ways here but divorce it from other comments in Proverbs about that sort of idea that is it could be saying to us trust your wealth that's your fortress but in the wider scale of what Proverbs and certainly the scriptures are saying that's not the case and a place in Proverbs where that's shown to be is chapter 18 verse 11 the wealth of the rich is their strong city in their imagination it is like a high wall but the context of that verse is the verse preceding the name of the Lord is a strong tower the righteous run into it and are safe that is God ultimately is our strong tower our refuge but wealth that is part of his blessing will therefore be part of the refuge strong tower security that he provides that's rightly how we understand it that is it's not for us to accumulate wealth so that we can sit back and say I'm secure now I'm safe that's not fearing the Lord that's trusting in our riches the context is that right wealth is a blessing from God through our hard work and righteousness

God is our strong tower and one of the ways in which he provides security for us is by the blessing of wealth that comes to us so it's underneath the sovereignty and the sovereign power of God that we should understand those verses and also if in chapter 18 reading verse 11 the wealth of the rich is their strong city read on the next verse before destruction one's heart is haughty and humility goes before honour that is another corrective if you think you're proud and trusting in the wealth that you've accumulated read on to verse 12 pride comes before a fall is in effect what it's saying now sometimes wealth is viewed positively and sometimes negatively in the book of Proverbs positively wealth brings friends now that's an observation rich people often have people wanting to sort of hang on to their shirttails or coattails or whatever the expression is and be their friend much less so the poor people in our society so there's a sense in which perhaps positively and as an observation in society that is the case chapter 14 verse 20 the poor are disliked even by their neighbours but the rich have many friends now at one level that might be saying that's a good thing about wealth at another level it's probably actually chastising us about our treatment of the poor more of which

I'll say later but the same sort of idea comes in other verses in chapter 19 verse 4 wealth brings many friends but the poor are left friendless move on a few verses to 19 verse 7 if the poor are hated even by their kin how much more are they shunned by their friends when they call after them they're not there that's a fairly bleak statement about being poor and friendless I think it's probably there to chastise us for our treatment of the poor and our turning away from them because we won't get much out of them there's also comment about the use of wealth or its effect on power again this might be read positively or negatively or maybe a bit ambivalently chapter 18 verse 23 the poor use entreaties but the rich answer roughly that is

I think it's conjuring up a situation where the poor is asking for something or are asking for something but the rich because they're rich are powerful and they answer back sharply they don't heed to the request at that point I think that's a bad use of power power that's now dominating the poor and unloving and so on but certainly that's one of the if you like dangers or benefits depending on which way you look at it of wealth that is it creates power and in today's society that's still the case people who are wealthy have a great deal of power I guess you see that in all sorts of ways in which they make donations to political parties and have the ear of various important and strategic and influential people and get on boards and committees and you name it whatever sometimes that's good sometimes not so chapter 22 verse 7 picks up on the same sort of theme the rich rules over the poor and the borrower is the slave of the lender at one level an observation poor people are in the end not quite at the mercy but maybe that's a way of putting it at the mercy of rich people they will the power because they're rich that could be good could be just an observation

I suspect there's a moral value though in the proverb that is saying wealth can lead to an abuse of power and a greed and a selfishness and so on there are certainly picking up on that verse 7 the rich rules over the poor and the borrower is the slave of the lender there are certainly plenty of laws in the Old Testament in the book of Exodus and Deuteronomy and Leviticus that prohibit the rich getting too rich they all assume the poor are there but they prohibit exorbitant interest rates or no interest at all within the family of Israel land to be returned after so many years slaves to be remitted after so many years different laws for every seventh year and every fiftieth year the Jubilee year and so on so there are all sorts of mechanisms built in to restrict the wealth of the rich and also to protect the poor for example if a poor person needed to borrow something from you could take as a pledge their cloak which doubled as a blanket at night and a coat by day but you must return it before nightfall because it is what they need to sleep and keep warm at night so there's a sense in which yes there was some to-ing and fro-ing and borrowing but highly restricted so the poor people were not going to be oppressed or abused in that system now in the light of that context these comments about wealth and power for the rich over the poor

[27 : 33] I think have that sting in the tail that the people of Israel were not actually living as they ought to have lived and certainly not with the generosity of heart that the Deuteronomic laws in Deuteronomy 15 commend we'll come more to the care of the poor a bit later but let's move on to the topic of the relationship or the relative importance maybe is the better way of putting it of wealth and righteousness because thus far you could be excused for thinking that the book of Proverbs wants us to be wealthy and to go all guns blazing to be so and there are a few verses that qualify the significance of wealth firstly wealth is unable to rescue you from death fairly obvious I suppose although there are fabulously wealthy people in the world who freeze their bodies and do all those sorts of things to try and escape death but basically the book of Proverbs has got it right wealth is unable to rescue you from death a few verses that relate to that sort of idea chapter 10 verse 2 treasures gained by wickedness do not profit but righteousness delivers from death now when you put the two lines together we realise what do not profit means that is treasures gained by wickedness well they might actually profit you in this life they might give you some power or some influence or some luxury or security but the real profit that it's talking about is a profit in the face of death and the second line of that verse says righteousness delivers from death that is treasures riches wealth will not rescue you from death the only thing that delivers you from death is righteousness a right relationship with the

God of the living and if you look over to chapter 11 verse 4 riches do not profit in the day of wrath that is the day of the Lord to come that the Old Testament looks forward to and we look forward to when Jesus returns that's the day of wrath the day of judgment if you like so on that day when Jesus comes to judge I could well imagine to be honest some people walking up saying somewhere here I've got fabulous wealth can't I buy my own ticket into heaven and the answer is no no way at all riches do not profit in the day of wrath but it's the same ending from chapter 10 righteousness delivers from death that's the ticket to heaven and of course in the New Testament we know it's a righteousness from Christ for us so we cannot use wealth to bribe our way into heaven God won't stand for it it won't take us past death

I remember one of my favourite authors is F. Scott Fitzgerald who wrote *The Great Gatsby* and a few other books it was a fairly sad case himself back in the jazz age in the 30s but he wrote some brilliant short stories one of which was called *The Diamond as Big as Big as a Ritz* and it was a slightly surreal story but a magnificent short story about two boys from boarding school in America who went back to one of the boys' homes for the holidays and the boys' home or the boys' family to the home he was going that boy was fabulously wealthy so wealthy that his father owned quite a vast part of wherever it was in America and it was full of gold so it was gold mines there and he was so wealthy that he was able to change the magnetic field so that all the people the cartographers of America didn't even know it existed so no one could get it and of course there were all sorts of underhanded things going on and in the end somebody came over to bomb it if I remember rightly and the little story almost ends with the boy's father standing on top of the mountain watched by the two boys and holding up if I remember a nugget of gold trying to bribe

God to leave him alone in his wealth now it's an extreme story but it's the sort of thing that people are like people think that somehow their wealth or their achievement or something about them merits God's attention and it doesn't at all completely inconsequential in a sense even if the wealth that we have is the blessing of God it is our righteousness that counts before God not our wealth another thing about the limitation on the value of wealth is that trust in wealth leads to fall so chapter 1128 those who trust in their riches will wither but the righteous will flourish like green leaves so don't trust in your riches there's nothing inherently wrong about them though they may be if they were achieved through dishonest means but don't trust in them because you'll fall you'll wither to use the word in that verse the contrast again the righteous the righteous will flourish like green leaves the withering and the flourish is the contrast the righteous and those who trust in riches is the other contrast there's an odd verse about pretense about wealth some people who pretend to be wealthy and maybe some wealthy who pretend not to be 13 verse 7 some pretend to be rich yet have nothing others pretend to be poor yet have great wealth and we're not told why that would be the case though maybe we can even think of people who fit those categories maybe to hide it may be that a poor person pretends to be wealthy in order to gain friends or gain influence it may be that a rich person pretends to be poor to try and get rid of the people who are trying to hang on to his coattails we're not sure but I think the proverb suggests deceit by way of pretense it may also suggest dissatisfaction on both parts and maybe a corrective to that is to think in terms of Paul's words at the end of *Philippians* towards the end or middle of

Philippians 4 about whatever my situation in life be satisfied or content whether rich or poor there's also a danger for the wealthy of maybe blackmail chapter 13 verse 8 wealth is a ransom for a person's life but the poor get no threats and I guess usually that's true isn't it you think of what was her name *Patty Hurst* who was kidnapped in about 1974 the heiress of that fabulously wealthy *Randolph Hurst* I think the newspaper man in America and was it a *John Paul Getty* the three fourth fifth or something he got kidnapped and an ear chopped off or something I guess if you're born into a poor family you don't have to worry too much about that is what it's saying there's a danger about being wealthy and of course you hear the sort of expression I'll sue you for all your worth no one's ever said that to me now at this point it's worth just a brief comment about what is wealth

[35 : 03] I don't think whenever we talk about riches and wealth or read riches and wealth in Proverbs we should be thinking along the lines of John Paul Getty's and Bill Gates and Rupert Murdoch's of this world I don't think that's what quite is in mind I think wealthy here is somebody who has plenty sufficient and probably most of us would fall into that category to be honest of course in ancient Israel's days there was much greater insecurity about life much more dependent upon the weather I mean we're worried about the weather because of bushfires and droughts but we still have our showers every day and we still drink the same amount of water probably and we're not running short of those basic necessities to stay alive much more was that the case in ancient Israel and probably anyone of us today in that sort of society we're very wealthy we're probably the wealthiest generation that's ever lived in the world those of us gathered here tonight in general of course our standard of life is high

I think we kid ourselves if we think we're poor is what I'm trying to say I think we're wealthy all of us and probably the vast majority of Australia even those below the so-called poverty line are in many senses still wealthy in biblical ways what I'm trying to do is say what I think the words wealth and riches and treasures and so on mean here it does include the sort of extremes but I think it includes those who are pretty comfortably off thank you very much I'm not worried about where my breakfast cereal is coming from tomorrow morning and therefore I think we should see ourselves as wealthy people in the Bible's eyes I'm sure of that and that I think relates to what some of the other verses talk about I think it's back in chapter three that it talks about your vats being full and your barns full and as a sign of wealth and I don't think that that means that you've got a monopoly on the grain market and you own all the grain in

Israel or something like that I think it means that you've got sufficient and you can see into the future you're not worried about your food for tomorrow or the next day you're comfortable and reasonably well off that I think is the standard of wealth that this book is looking at and addressing well we better turn to poverty I've said a few things on the way about it but a few direct things about poverty certainly poverty is not condemned in itself that is if you're a poor person it doesn't mean that you must be a fool or a wicked person to use the language of this book many will be but not all so in itself poverty is not condemned certainly poverty is not an easy life poverty is ruined chapter 10 verse 15 said as we looked up a bit before in contrast to the wealthy poverty poor people lack in friends as we've already seen the poor person has a hard life chapter 15 verse 15 there is condemnation for laziness that brings about poverty but not poverty per se so there's no blame for being poor and indeed the book of proverbs even expects that there will be poor people and that of course is also the expectation elsewhere in the old testament in deuteronomy chapter 15 and Jesus as well had the same expectation which all goes to show how foolish Bob Hawk was a few years ago when he promised to get rid of poverty but there are a few things that we should say there is a close association in the book between poverty and laziness the sluggard or the slothful person depending on the translations that we use and often they go together the slack hand causes poverty we saw earlier on in chapter 10 verse 4 another way of putting that which is quite neat I think which we saw two weeks ago chapter 14 verse 23 in all toil there is profit but mere talk leads only to poverty that's not saying talk's bad but it's only mere talk and no plans no work or action well that only leads to poverty stupid words chapter 12 condemns worthless plans that have no toil or labor to produce income and food and so on chapter 21 verse 5 a similar sort of thing the plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance that everyone who is hasty comes only to want there's a sense there in which we do need to plan but we need to plan diligently that is execute the plans as well but the person who spontaneously thinks oh I better do something it's a bit late you know the person who thinks well I'm running out of food I better go and plant my crop so I can get some harvest tomorrow now even I who's not much of a green thumb know that it takes at least a few days I think to grow a tomato or something like that and coles is open 24 hours so who needs to bother anyway but you know what I mean that you've got a plan to grow things or to cultivate things or to feed animals or whatever in order to gain the food that's what it's commending so laziness leads to poverty chapter 19 verse 15 the same sort of thing laziness brings on deep sleep an idle person will suffer hunger well I guess the lazy person or the idle person is going to sleep so long but they'll wake up hungry and they won't have anything to eat sort of wanting us to mock that person in a way laugh at them in a way but of course the sting in the tail is if it's describing us that's that's the sting and love of sleep do not love sleep chapter 20 verse 13 or else you will come to poverty open your eyes and you will have plenty of bread that's not a simple matter of just getting up and finding the bakers arrived but it's saying that we've got to work and we can't just spend all our day lounging around in bed that'll

bring on poverty and even if it doesn't bring on poverty this book is condemning such behaviour the wise person is the person who works hard diligently even if they don't become really rich or wealthy diligence is a character trait that is commended in this book regardless of its outcome now what this is actually saying then is that it seems to me is that in the end diligence is more important than work than wealth that is if you were this is not saying wealth is the thing to be valued above all that's where the prosperity gospel but one of the points at least it goes astray I think diligence and hard work is being commended here more than wealth that's actually the thrust of it when it says be diligent in order to gain riches it's trying to motivate you to be diligent diligence is the key thing and we must keep that in perspective another thing so that's a brief comment about poverty I want to the last the third and final area we've talked about wealth we've talked about poverty the third and final sort of general area is to do with giving because this book commends generosity in giving that was urged way back in chapter 3 and in verse 27 of chapter 3 do not withhold good from those to whom it's due when it's in your power to do it and then it goes on in verse 28 don't say to your neighbour go and come again tomorrow I'll give it when you've already got it with you that's repaying a loan or when you promise them something of loans that are that is done promptly moving back into the centre chapters of the book 14 verse 21 those who despise their neighbours are sinners but happy are those who are kind to the poor now the word happy there doesn't mean sort of the person at the end of a birthday sort of chuckling away it means blessed it does have a joy about it it's not a sort of sanctimonious you know

I'm blessed but there is a cheerfulness and a joy about it as well but it's not just a sort of you know happy-go-lucky sort of thing it is a person who's blessed and so on and the person who's blessed is the person who's kind to the poor who shows mercy to the poor who shows them compassion and that means not just saying oh there there isn't a tough life you've got it means giving them things giving them what they need in their poverty and so on now we should also bear in mind here that this giving to the poor is not it's not talking about the sort of the beggars and the drifters it's talking about neighbours people you know people whose who's you know crop has failed or because of some catastrophe somehow they've ended up in real poverty and you know them they're your neighbours not necessarily next door neighbours but people you know in your town or village or neighbourhood or or wherever that is it's not it's not the sort of unknown type people that are being addressed I'm not meaning to dismiss them but this is what it's talking about those at Holy Trinity know that I've just moved house from here which is remarkably close to over the road which is still just walking distance from the church about 50 metres away and one of the reasons was to try and get a little bit of sense of space from the site and but within the first week 1.30 in the morning there was a banging at the window and so I poked my head out the upstairs window and looked down and it was a chap wanting money 1.30 in the morning I thought gosh he's keen and he probably thinks I'm half asleep and therefore I'll be vulnerable and just sort of empty my wallet out the window they give you fancy

[45 : 05] I want to write a book of the stories they tell you he buys some of you've heard this he buys this is aggression he buys fruit for three restaurants he said and so he goes early to the markets and his ATM card was not working he tried it three different ATM machines not working he said and I've got to go to the market at 1.30 in the morning to buy fruit and vegetables for the restaurateurs and of course all the thoughts flash through your mind why don't you ring the restaurateurs why don't you have an account surely the people know you they'll give you credit you must go there every day if you're buying for three restaurants well and he wanted me to go down the street with my credit card and get money out of a machine well there's no way I was going out the door let alone down to an ATM machine in the middle of the night with someone I'd ever met before and I wasn't going to give him a cent and of course then you go back to Ben you lie there and there's pangs of guilt gosh and then when you read this you think oh no have I been have I not been generous to the poor and so on well I'm sure it was a con I'm 99% certain of that and so 99% of me doesn't have guilt the poor in proverbs are not the people who ask for money they're the people who are really poor and they need it and they may ask but it's not just asking that makes them poor chapter 22 verse 19 says so that your trust may be in the law oh I've written the wrong verse oh chapter 22 verse 9 sorry those who are generous are blessed for they share their bread with the poor now there is a sense in which by giving prosperity comes back to you in some form or other and there is blessing in giving even if you don't immediately and directly become fabulously wealthy as a result there is blessing in giving and indeed that verse I think those who are generous are blessed I think technically it talks about the person with a generous eye and that suggests it's not it's the person who's actually alert to other person's needs that is not just the person who sort of sits behind their their door and they'll only just sort of begrudgingly hand over a lot of money when somebody knocks and knocks and knocks but rather they're alert to people in need and they may even take the initiative in giving rather than waiting to be asked and and so they've got a good eye generous eye often the parts of the body are used in this book in another place there's the shut ear to the cries of people in another chapter now this care for the poor is actually a big theme in proverbs and one of the bases for it is that poor and rich alike have a common maker a common creator a common God so chapter 22 verse 2 the rich and the poor have this in common the Lord is the maker of them all so that is there is a sense in which we do belong together in a way we're made by the same God so yes at one level we might say well the rich receive blessing from

God but all of us are made by God we all belong under him and so that then spills over into these some proverbs about giving to the poor looking back to chapter 14 verse 31 we saw this last week two weeks ago those who oppress the poor insult their maker but those who are kind to the needy honour him now like the Bible everywhere the the the structure if you like of relationships is not just a horizontal two-way thing that is my treatment of Stephen here is not just about me treating Steve or how I treat him or whatever our relationships are always triangular that is in every human relationship there is a third dimension or third person namely God so how I treat Steve is actually in a sense how I'm treating God if I treat him well then I'm honouring God and vice and and if I'm not then I'm not and that's the pattern all the way through the scriptures our love for our neighbour is always a reflection of our love for God in as much as you did this to one of the little ones Jesus says you did it for me and that's what Proverbs is saying if you show contempt for the poor then you're in fact despising or showing contempt for

God so that's a strong motivation there for how we care for and treat the poor and the same idea not only in chapter 14 comes in other places so the way we treat the poor is we've got to think in terms of treating God that way that is if you like as some sort of spiritualities might say see God in the face of the people that you look look after or care for or respond to see God in the face of the poor and so on and and one verse we did look at oh the verse goes on to say but those who are kind to the needy honour him that is kind is merciful compassionate because that's a key part of the character of God so how God treats us is how we're to treat others and how we treat others is a reflection of how we treat God it's all bound up together so try and think of your relationships triangularly and and that will be good motivation for treating people well especially of course the people that we find it hard to treat well because they come from the same maker we find in chapter 15 verse 25 the Lord tears down the house of the proud but maintains the widow's boundaries now on the face of it it doesn't tell us how to treat widows who are poor because widows were landless and it was very much a land land was the sort of source of your your crops and animals and so on but the verse of course is in effect telling us to respect our neighbours or our widows in particular boundaries that's not talking about social stuff you know personal space don't come up here and say hello how are you today it's not talking about those sort of you know spatial boundaries like that if you own land you would have a boundary marker at the corners of your land and there were laws earlier on in the Old

Testament do not move them in fact that law is repeated in several places little law but very important in effect this is saying the same thing God will look after them and so there's a sense in which if you move a widow's boundaries trying to oppress her because she's poor woe betide you because God will look after her and the sort of hidden implication is if you've offended his law you stand under his judgment and wrong the chapter 18 verse 23 we saw before the poor use entreaties but the rich answer roughly there is a the way that is written is to make sure that we do not in fact answer roughly even if we're rich we're to be compassionate so there's a sting in the tail of that proverb in effect against us warning us not so much against being rich but against using our richness to treat others harshly or abruptly we've seen already how the poor were shunned by friends and family and neighbours and that's not supposed to be the case but usually is so it's an implicit rebuke for those of us who do that there's certainly an encouragement to give to the poor in chapter 22 verse 16 oppressing the poor in order to enrich oneself and giving to the rich will lead only to loss and by implication we're to give to the poor not the rich and that will bring gain it's unsaid but probably in a sense in that proverb doesn't need to be said and we've already seen in a couple of places how giving generously and to the poor in particular will bring about blessing in response there's a curse later on in chapter 28 on those who close their eye to the poor so in some this what we've seen there's no blanket condemnation or commendation of wealth nor of poverty the means by which a person becomes poor or rich are significant and those means where they're wrong laziness and dishonest gain and so on that's condemned there are dangers in being rich dangers about abuse of power dangers about false security in your wealth dangers about thinking that your wealth might somehow redeem you from death there are dangers with poverty as well dangers to do with losing friends and being oppressed and so on the book is not just making observations about that it is about urging israelite society that is rich to care for the poor for the poor to work hard be cheerful in their lot for about not equality but but fairness in relationships and in systems and so on throughout it you see we're dealing with a book that is not just about observing life it's a book that is actually telling us how to live because it's a book written to make us wise and therefore we aren't not to be fools and that means not being wicked not being lazy and so on if we were to compare poverty and wealth which one would be better to be well riches are often a blessing of the Lord and so perhaps if our riches were a blessing of the Lord then it would be better to be rich and thus blessed and wealth certainly leads to some security and some friends though whether they're just there for your money rather than you and perhaps some power but the book actually makes it clear that life is not quite so simple and maybe not quite so fair chapter 16 verse 8 says better is a little with righteousness than large income with injustice and there I think comes the real value system in the book of proverbs what we are to pursue is righteousness not

wealth because it is better to have righteousness but be in effect poor than to be wealthy without righteousness and that's what really matters and it's saying here in effect I think that that does happen in life it's not simply the case that if you're righteous you're rich and that if you're poor then somehow you're lazy or something it's not quite so simple life is not quite so fair we might say but what is best is to ensure that we have righteousness even if that is with a little because if we have no righteousness but have all the money in the world then we're worse off in effect chapter 22 says it this way verse 1 a good name is to be chosen rather than great riches and favour is better than silver or gold now it may just be speaking about a good reputation and favour of other people I think it's more than that what it's saying is to be prized above anything or certainly prized above wealth and riches is a good reputation a good name a favour from the Lord that is bestowed on those who are righteous and the New Testament makes it clear that that is the righteousness of Christ through his death for us and the other thing that is perhaps to be prized above all another way of saying the same thing again is in the end wisdom itself the benefits of wisdom are better than riches and silver and gold it's real wealth but it's not worldly wealth and it's a wealth that lasts forever well both wealth and poverty have within them some inherent dangers but in the end they're not the be all and end all our pursuit is to be wise and thus part of that is to clearly be righteous near the end of the book of proverbs is a little prayer and it's a prayer that picks up on what we've seen already in chapter 30 chapter 30 verse 7 two things I ask of you do not deny them to me before I die remove far from me falsehood and lying give me neither poverty nor riches feed me with the food that I need or I shall be full and deny you and say who is the Lord or I shall be poor and steal and profane the name of my God you see the dangers the rich who become complacent and smug and satisfied and don't fear the Lord or the poor who start to steal and therefore also don't fear the Lord and indeed profane his name give me neither poverty nor riches feed me with the food that I need or may that be our prayer amen you