

God Pours Contempt on Princes

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[0 : 00] Back to the passage that we read, the last two verses of Proverbs chapter 21, page 544.

We read, no wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the Lord. The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord.

We live in dark times. We live in times that, you know, we wouldn't even have imagined even a decade ago. But as we see, as we know, the forces of darkness are on the mark, whether we think of our own land or indeed of so much of the world today.

We have a media that's so intent on obliterating the gospel message and the message of the good news, seeking to replace that with an agenda that flies in the face of gospel truth.

We have governments and, we have to say, every mainstream political party seeking to undermine scripture on so many issues. And not least the account of creation, where we read that God made man male and female.

[1 : 22] He created them. Then there's all that political uncertainty at Westminster, which, again, we have to say is a sure sign of a nation that's turned its back on God.

Even in our own Scottish Parliament, a Parliament that's engaged in possible legislation that would make it a hate crime, simply to state the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus Christ as the one and only way to the Father.

And Christians, quite rightly, are concerned about the general spiritual and moral malaise of the land, in a land where good is considered evil and evil considered good.

But we don't despair. We don't threat unnecessarily. God is on the throne. God is sovereign. God rules and God reigns.

And man cannot gain the victory over our Lord God Almighty. And that's what we see affirmed right through scripture. And even in this particular section of Proverbs, these last two verses we read there, and of course throughout that chapter, but we see the truth clearly stated.

[2 : 37] This pivotal, central truth that God is sovereign. And no one but no one and nothing but nothing can prevail against God. And so that means that you have to fix that truth in your heart when you're maybe tempted to cry out, where are you, Lord?

Well, he's there. He is there and he is not silent. After all, what do we sing even in Psalm 19? What do we read in Psalm 19? The heavens declare the glory of God.

And of course, we affirm that God has spoken to us and is speaking to us through his word. What did the writer to the Hebrews say? Right, he wrote this, the start of Hebrews.

Long ago and many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days, he's spoken to us by his son. So, when we think of God, he is not silent.

He speaks, has spoken and speaks to you through his word. And speaks, of course, through creation itself. And surely that has to give to you and to me comfort.

[3 : 46] He is our shelter in the storm. He is our fortress. He is our strong power. He's that name, the name of God that we run to, even as we were thinking last Sunday evening.

You run to the strong tower that's God. You have your safety, your security, because you know who God is. You know that he's there. You know that he's sovereign.

You know that he protects his church. You know that he is faithful, even when we so often are faithless. But he's the God who saves.

He's the God who guards. He guards his people. He's with his people. Even these times, when man seeks to do all in his power to undertake, to do the will of Satan and harm God's people.

And so that's why we want to come to these two verses, the last two verses of Proverbs 21. They're words of comfort. These are words given by inspiration of God, as we said, written down some 3,000 years ago, but they're just as applicable as when they were first written.

[4 : 53] Why? Well, man's sinful nature hasn't changed. Yes, three millennia, but man is still a sinner, still in rebellion against God. There's still sin within the heart of mankind.

There's that rebellion against God and will be until Jesus returns. So these words of Scripture, I believe, have so much to teach us, so much to give comfort to God's people in the times that we're living.

Three things then to study together that these two verses give us. The feebleness of man against the power of God. The full security of man without God and then the victory of God over his enemies.

So what do we find first in verse 30? There are three things I want to look at under that first heading, the powerlessness of man versus the power of God.

Three things to look at. It's quite straightforward because you see there's three negatives. No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against God. I want to look at these one at a time.

[5 : 58] So no wisdom, no wisdom can avail against the Lord. Those of you who were at our most recent midweek meeting on Wednesday, remember we were looking at that section in the epistle of James, James 3, where true godly wisdom was contrasted with earthly, unspiritual, demonic wisdom, the so-called wisdom of graceless, Christless people.

That false wisdom that seeks power and prestige and positions of authority. that the lover of those who love that kind of false wisdom, you know, will do all in their power to achieve the selfish ambition and at the same time have a bitter spirit and a jealousy of others.

It's that attitude of heart that doesn't desire to glorify God but to glorify self. It's that mindset that prevails in all who would direct hatred against God and His church.

And, you know, we see it, we see it all around, the false wisdom that's so increasing in society, you know, to the extent that, you know, those who love the Lord Jesus truly do shudder.

You know, when we see the arrogance of man and that depth of hatred against God and His church, the man who proclaims a so-called wisdom-based and human-centered reason, the man that proclaims and claims to have a wisdom, a superior intellect and a superior intelligence to the wisdom of God.

[7 : 42] And so that vocal expression of mocking of true faith, of mocking true wisdom, of mocking the authority of God's Word.

But what does our text tell us? No wisdom can avail against the Lord. No earthly and spiritual demonic wisdom can succeed against God. And so that surely has to tell you this.

It's for you and for me to direct our thoughts towards God and to think high thoughts of God. You know, to know God as he's made himself known, as he's made himself known in his Word.

It was the American preacher, A.W. Tozer, who wrote a remarkable little book. If you can get a hold of it, it's called *The Knowledge of the Holy*. And Tozer wrote this.

I think these are the first words of his book. He said, what comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.

[8 : 52] Well, think of what he's saying, what scripture's saying to that effect. I mean, if you think low thoughts of God, in other words, if you start to dispute his sovereign power, if you reduce God to being in man's image, you know, with all the weakness of man, all the limitations of man, all the limitations associated with finding man, then you're going to fail to grasp the reality of who God is in his power, in his might, in his majesty, in God, as infinite, changeable, in his being, in his wisdom, in his holiness, in his faithfulness, in all that he is, as true God, as one true God.

And you see, when you fail to grasp the reality of who God is, as God has made himself known, then you will start to doubt. You will doubt his all-surpassing power and might when you see those who seek to usurp God.

But when you have a high view of God, in other words, when you have a view of God that we see in God's Word, when that high view of God is in your heart, then you'll recognize that, yes, God truly is our strong tower and our strong fortress.

and having that knowledge of the Holy, having that knowledge of God, that high view of God, it's going to strengthen your heart. And you'll know then, and you'll have that assurance that no earthly and spiritual demonic wisdom can prevail against God.

Well, it was tried against Jesus, wasn't it? That worldly wisdom of those who hated the Lord Jesus, that worldly wisdom that argued that a silent Jesus, you know, silence by death, that would bring

stability to a rotten and corrupt church.

[10 : 53] Because, of course, the source of that wisdom was demonic. It was the devil. Remember, the devil who tried to manipulate Jesus and divert Jesus from the path of suffering.

Remember, the temptation of Jesus, trying to get Jesus to fall down and worship the devil. earthly and spiritual demonic wisdom that still is there in the world today.

Even when, you know, when you hear claims that the voice of Jesus has to be silenced in order for society to progress, for human potential to be realigned without, you know, all the shackles of a Christ-centered faith.

But no man-centered wisdom is going to succeed against God, who is sovereign, who rules God, whose purposes cannot be thwarted.

And so, you know, latch onto that truth. Latch onto it. No wisdom can avail against God. No wisdom can succeed against God.

[11 : 55] But what's the second of the three negatives? No understanding can avail. No understanding can succeed against God. No human-centered, unspiritual, demonic understanding can succeed against God.

But, of course, we have to probe this a wee bit, don't we? What do we mean by understanding? And what does that say about man's weakness against God's power?

And then, of course, we have to say, well, in that case, what's true understanding? What do we need to know? What do we, you know, need to know about God? And knowing God, you know, have that true wisdom to serve him?

Well, let's think, first of all, what do we mean here by understanding? This context, your man-centered understanding? Well, let's look at the biblical sense, of course, of the word.

Understanding means knowing God. It means insight from knowing God, I should say. Insight from knowing God. That's true understanding. You know, that discernment, how do you honour God?

[13 : 01] You honour him through knowing him, through having known God. And it means having that insight to know how you're to live before God. And again, that's based on your knowledge of who God is.

And so understanding then, directly connected with your knowledge of God, knowing who God is. And therefore, knowing God, knowing who God is, knowing what God seeks from you, in you, well, you have that discernment, to know what's true, what's right, what glorifies God, as opposed to a lack of understanding that's got no sure knowledge of God.

There's no ability to know how to honour God. So, man-centred understanding is empty of that true knowledge of God.

There's no discerning of God in his existence. There's no discerning of God as creator. There's no discerning of God and God's great plan of salvation.

There's no insight in man-centred understanding as to what pleases God. But there's still understanding but a false understanding. There's that self-perceived understanding that, well, that seeks a world without God.

[14 : 21] Saying that there hasn't to be any trace of God in any aspect of man's existence. That false understanding that seeks to remove God from our universe, from our lives, from the very basis of our justice and morality.

Well, that may be a wee bit vague, but let's give some examples. Let's take science. Let's take science. Because isn't it the case that the dominant theme of so much scientific teaching is the removal of God.

The removal of God as creator. explaining the origins of life without God. That rejection of any scientific mind that even would dare to suggest that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Or, you know, take the views of famous atheists like Richard Dawkins. He claims that he has understanding. You know, he claims he understands the universe, he understands society, he understands mankind, because, you know, he claims a superior understanding to the Christian who affirms God and declares that God is and that God has rescued mankind from the consequences of sin, that God has sent his one and only son to die for sinners.

And Dawkins and others, of course, they come back with their own self-perceived understanding, saying, how can a loving God send his son to be sacrificed? What does the passage tell us here?

[15 : 52] It says, no understanding can succeed against God. You see, the man-centered reasoning, you know, those who claim insight according to their knowledge, according to their knowledge of the universe, that man-centered understanding will never explain away the reality of God.

That man-centered understanding will never explain away the reality of the Lord Jesus, our Savior. And that man-centered understanding will never explain away the love of God the Father in sending his Son to die for sinners.

But know this, the arrogance of man-centered understanding, it will be seen in all its emptiness when Jesus returns, when every knee will bow before the Savior.

fear. And those who have doubted will doubt no more. And those who by their earthly and spiritual, demonic understanding in life, who in life didn't acknowledge God, one day will acknowledge him. I will remember some years ago, my minister in Sky, he reacted to a well-known atheist poet and author who just died.

[17 : 15] It was a man who by his own so-called understanding had denied God. But when that man died, I remember my minister saying, well, he won't be denying God now.

that, as the passage says, no understanding, no human-centered understanding can succeed against the Lord. But you who have that sure understanding of God, you who know God, who know God through knowing the Lord Jesus as Savior, you have been given that discernment, that understanding as to what's right in God's sight, knowing what honors him, what glorifies him in your words, in your thoughts, in your actions, because you have the enabling of the Holy Spirit within you, the Spirit who guides your thoughts, who guides your actions, who guides your understanding, who gives you that wisdom to glorify God and know what glorifies God and what is sin against God. You've been given that understanding to know that Jesus is true, that he alone is the way, the truth, and the life, and that apart from him, there's no salvation, no access to God, no life, apart from the Lord Jesus.

So you who know God, well praise him, praise him that you've been given this depth of understanding as you as you grow in knowledge of who God is, as you read God's word, as you meditate upon God, as you think God's thoughts, so that you're unable to live for him and glorify him through an understanding that's from heaven, from heaven above and not from earth below. So no understanding, no human understanding can succeed against the Lord. But then thirdly, no council can avail, no council can succeed against the Lord.

[19 : 15] What does that mean, no council? It really means no rebellion. There was no gang together of different groups who are hostile against God and none of that amalgam of groups who are opposed to God's rule.

They will not succeed against God. That's why we've sung Psalm 2 because we sang there of that council, that rebellion. The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take council together. Council together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying let us burst their bonds apart, cast away their cords from us. But as Proverbs tells us here, and Psalm 2 echoes, such council will not succeed.

Again, Psalm 2, he who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord holds them in derision, then he'll speak to them in his wrath and terrify them in his fury. Every empire that's raged against God has crumbled.

You see it in the pages of history. Every earthly council designed to wipe away the word of God from the land, that council itself will be wiped away and destroyed.

[20 : 32] And so surely that has to be at the forefront of your heart, to be right there in your heart and your mind. Because yes, we do see what seems to be an overwhelming array of groups that are impacting every level of society, forcing a particular agenda, a secular humanist agenda on everything, whether it's education, whether it's law, whether it's literature, whether it's gender issues, even the very language that we use.

And so what appears to be an irresistible force, God's word assures us, will not succeed. Now yes, for a time there are such false practices, yes, they do to an extent permeate society, but that doesn't mean they have that victory.

God has the victory as we're told there in the last verse. And even as Job himself commented on that reality, Job 12, 21, which is why we have that particular sermon title, he pours contempt on princes and loosens the belt of the strong.

But then what else do we find in these two verses? Well, the last verse now, we see the false security of man without God.

We've looked at the feebleness of man against the power of God, but secondly, we see the false security of man without God. The horse is made ready for the day of battle.

[22 : 12] Well, you know, whether it's 3,000 years ago or even fairly recent history, the horse, the horse was actually the greatest military weapon that was used in battle. Why?

Because of its power, it had speed, it had strength, even a cavalryman and a horse had advantage against a foot soldier, or even the horse that pulled the chariots.

You know, to speak of a horse in this context spoke of power and strength and resilience and success. These were the supreme beings, as it were, on the battlefield.

battlefield. So when we're told here that the horse, a horse is made ready for the day of battle, it's really another way of saying that, you know, speaking of trust in human, in what's human in our understanding as to the key to victory.

What's human, you know, human source, you know, in other words, power, power without God, strength apart from God, resilience based on human wisdom, you know, success dependent on self and not on God.

[23 : 24] And so if that's the case, then actually verse 31 connects with verse 30. Every commentator you write gives us this very sentence. If verse 30 warns us not to fight against God, verse 31 warns us not to fight without him.

So verse 30, don't fight against God, verse 31, don't fight without him. So the Christian soldier, don't fight without God, don't fight the battle that God gives you without God.

Because if you're a Christian, you're involved in spiritual warfare. So we're singing Psalm 144, you're fighting against the world, the flesh, and the devil. Now, you've been given the resources to fight in that battle, you've been given the weapons of righteousness, the sword of the spirit, the word of God, you've got the shield of faith to defend against the devil's arrows, you've been given the helmet of salvation, you are a Christian soldier.

So exercise that faith and that dependence on God for him to give you the increase, for him to give the victory, for you to be that overcomer in his strength and that spiritual warfare.

Because you see, whenever we think we can just, you know, dispense, get rid of all that God's blessed you with, you know, when we think somehow we're a superior in ourselves, you know, just like the war horse of times past, we're going to fail.

[25 : 00] Because whenever you trust wholly in yourself and not on God, you're going to fail, I'm going to fail, you're going to fall. But, you know, whenever you rely purely on what's in yourself, whether it's your intelligence, whether it's your gifts, whether it's your own resources, whether it's anything that omits God from your thinking, from your actions, we're going to fail in our duty to honour God.

Because when we trust in self, you forget God and you forget this power that's within you. We cannot fight without him. That was the problem in the history of Israel.

That was the problem with the Israelites. Because you see, there was that constant failure to depend on God and their battles. God had repeatedly warned them to rely on him and not on what seemed to be superior forces outside of God.

To give you an example, you know, when God speaks to the prophet Isaiah, he warns Israel against false trust in others. you go to Isaiah 31 verse 1, Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they're many, and in horsemen because they're very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the Lord.

And you know, that's such a timely reminder in the fight that you're involved in, in that spiritual warfare that you're engaged in. It might be that warfare in your heart, you know, when the forces of evil continually bombard you with temptation upon temptation.

[26 : 44] You can't fight that in your own strength. You're engaged in spiritual warfare even within your heart. Or it might be the spiritual warfare that you're engaged in when you're conversing with an unbeliever, that maybe you're doing it face to face or maybe through particular media channels.

You engage in that spiritual warfare, in his strength and in his enabling. You've been given weapons of righteousness and these weapons never fail.

The word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword and you go in his name. You go into that battle because the battle is ultimately the Lord. His is the victory because God is the God of victory

and you see that, we see that mentioned the very last line of verse 31, but the victory belongs to God, the victory of God over the enemies of God.

It's exactly the same truth that Zechariah the prophet uttered. You read in Zechariah 4, 6, not by might power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts, says the Lord of armies.

And that surely has to be your encouragement. It has to be our encouragement, you know, in the battles that you face within your heart or the battles that you face, you know, when the name of the Lord is mocked, when the gospel is attacked, when the things of God are just dismissed as utter rubbish.

[28 : 18] No, we have that high view of God. He's the Lord of battles. He's the mighty warrior. He's giving you all that you need in that fight. It's a good fight.

It's a fight of faith. And we're told victory belongs to God. And you're on the front line. You're in that conflict against sin and against Satan.

And yes, there is a last battle, that battle with death. And even death is not the overcomer. Because the one, the person who knows the Lord Jesus as Lord and Saviour, he can declare with Paul, he can declare with Paul, as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15, death is swallowed up in victory.

Oh, death wears your victory. Death wears your sting. The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

But you know, it's not only that last battle that you're given, you put your trust in Lord Jesus when you have that high view of God who promises his presence with you always.

[29 : 26] Not just that last battle, but you're given that enabling to know the victory that God gives you through Jesus. It's in every area of your life. It has to be.

It's where you've been placed in the heat of battle. God. Put your faith in him. Put your faith in the God who gives you victory. You know, again, the Bible tells us so clearly and the Bible speaks to us so forcibly of that truth.

You know, we're told there the victory belongs to the Lord. The victory, the victory, that word there in the original is the same word that contains the word for salvation, the Hebrew word for salvation. And it's a word that has that direct link with the name of the Lord Jesus. And it surely points us to this. It's in Jesus that the victory is yours.

In him, because he has won that victory on the cross against sin, against Satan, and in his resurrection, that victory over death itself. So if you're a Christian, rejoice.

[30 : 37] You are victorious in Christ. He's won that victory for you. That victory because of his great purpose in saving you and saving you for all eternity.

But if you've yet to come to the Lord Jesus, and have yet to yield your life to him, well don't hold back. Come to him in faith, and trust him wholly and completely for your salvation, and you will know victory in your life.

surely on that winning side, that side that can never be defeated by the world that's so opposed to the Lord Jesus and the gospel. Remember, Jesus is Lord, Jesus is King.

You give your life to him, he's your Lord, he's your King. Submit to him, come to him, know him as Lord, as Saviour, as Christ, the victor, and know that victory now and always.

Amen. Let us pray. Lord, we thank you for the assurance of your word. We thank you, Lord, that you give us that comfort through your word. We thank you, Lord, that no wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against you, the Lord God Almighty.

[31 : 59] And we pray then, Lord, that we will know the uselessness, true of fighting without you. Because we know that when we rely on self and don't rely on you, then that failure will happen.

But Lord, we ask, Lord, your power, your presence, you're going before us to enable your people, even here this night, to know that victory in the Lord.

We commit, Lord, all that we have been thinking of, proclaiming this evening. And we pray, Lord, that you will have the glory in what we have considered this night.

And may we take these words of truth with us this week, that we will know that victory in you, in all that you give us, even in the battles that lie ahead.

So hear us, Lord, as we continue in faith before you and pardon all our many sins we ask. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, let's close in Psalm 33 on page 246.

[33 : 07] Page 246. We're going to sing from verse 12 down to verse 18. That nation blessed is whose God Jehovah is, and those are blessed people are, whom for his heritage that he chose.

Verse 12 to verse 18 to God's praise. that are great.