

# The Mission and the Future (Evening Service)

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Date: 05 November 2017

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Let's pray. Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening. In Christ's name, Amen. Amen. Please grab a seat. Oh yeah, welcome again. If you're new to St. John's, my name's Aaron. I'm the pastor for this service. I'd love to meet you. Come and say hi to me after the service. So we are doing, if you are new, what we're doing is we're doing a series in Proverbs, and the major concern of Proverbs is wisdom, and wisdom is all about this. It's all about, you know, how do you make a decision about the right job, right person to work with? How do you make a decision about who to marry or who to date? How do you respond to people and treat people in different sort of situations? It's kind of about how to make the right decisions in most of the situations you'll find yourself in life, in everyday life, which sounds like a good thing to have, isn't it? Wisdom. And how do you get it? Well, we've learned that from the fear of the Lord, and we see that again in this chapter here, verse 21, reminds us again, the fear of the Lord. And where do we get the fear of the Lord, though, from? You know, we can't just, we don't just sort of sit down in a room and listen to moody music and trying to sort of drum it up, right? It's, it's, no, we're in the Word. We're in the Word reading about a gracious God, but a holy

God, a God of justice. Here's the thing, though. You really only know if you fear the Lord. You really only know if that fear is real, that reverence is real in, in your sort of daily life as you live out your life. In other words, each day in just the ordinary sort of experiences of life, you make decisions demonstrating your reverence for God or not. And these decisions move you along the path of wisdom or they move you along the path of foolishness. And Proverbs gives us no other option.

There are two paths. Okay, that's the introduction. How does it all relate to Proverbs 24?

Well, Proverbs 24 says this. It says to us, okay, okay then, Christian, I'm going to give you a very real situation to think about. I'm going to give you a test, Proverbs 24 says, a test. And if you pass this test, you become wiser or you become more of a fool if you fail it, more out of touch. And the test is this. How do you respond to the wicked? How do you respond to the fool? And Proverbs 24 says there are three responses we can have. First, we can be envious towards the wicked. Second, we can gloat when their life comes crashing down because of poor decisions. Third, we can speak to them and help them get on the right path. So those are the three options Proverbs 24 gives us. In response to the wicked, in response to the fool, we can be envious of them. We can gloat when their life goes sideways, or we can speak to them about their life. Help put them on the right path. Okay, let's get into the passage. The first response, and it's not the right response, obviously, is envy.

Verse 19, fret not yourself because of evildoers, and be not envious of the wicked. You guys know how this works, don't you? You're trying to live this really good life, and you've got these friends, and they're just doing whatever they want. No regard to God, sleeping with whoever they want, spending all their money just on themselves, just doing whatever they feel like doing, and you look at them and you go, they seem to be really happy. They seem to be doing actually pretty good. And I'm here, and I'm trying to do the right thing, and my non-churchy friends just seem to be having a much better time than me. And you kind of want their life.

There's a guy called Asaph wrote a psalm. He wrote quite a few psalms, and Psalm 73 is one of his, and it's a very relevant one to us this evening. So it's a psalm that he wrote about this very situation. So he's kind of fleshing out this proverb here. So it's, you know, it's, he's basically sort of expressing his struggle with how everyone else seems to be doing pretty good, especially these people that just don't follow God, and they're having a great time, and he questions God. He's like, where, where, how is, this doesn't seem right to me. Where are you, God, in all this? And here's what he says. Psalm 73. I'll just pick a few verses from him. For I was envious of the arrogance when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. Their bodies were fat and sleek. They were not in trouble.

[ 5 : 27 ] They were not stricken. They scoffed. Loftily, they threatened oppression. And here's what he says. It's all in vain. I've kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. And all day long, I've been stricken and rebuked every morning. But when I thought about how to understand this, it seemed to be a wearisome task. Like he just, he just can't get his head around this, and he doesn't want to even think about it. Do you see what he's saying here? It's like, I'm trying hard to live this really good life. Is it worth it? These folks out there who are just ignoring God are having, they're in much better shape than me. Can't get my head around this. What's the point in being good?

What's the point in even trying? And how does Asaph get over this? How does he get over this envy of the wicked or the fool? Well, first thing is this. He takes the eternal perspective.

Takes the eternal perspective in moving past his envy. And again, I'll read from Psalm 73. He says this, Truly you have set the wicked in slippery places. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors like a dream when one awakes. O Lord, when you rose yourself, you despise them as phantoms. So it's saying the same thing as Proverbs says. So Proverbs 24 says exactly the same things. So it says, don't envy those who seem to be doing really well because God will right all wrongs.

And we see this in verse 19. So we see it in verse 19. Here's the problem, right? Don't freak yourself. Don't be invisible. Then it says this in verse 20. For the evil man has no future. The lamp of the wicked will be put out. My son, fear the Lord and do not join those who will do otherwise for disaster will arise suddenly from them. And who knows the ruin that will come from them both.

Okay, what's it saying?

Yes, the wicked, the fool, they will enjoy some temporary pleasure. Life will look pretty good. So we shouldn't be surprised when we look at other people that are doing whatever they want.

[ 7 : 34 ] It's not always miserable, you know. Sometimes it looks really good. But you, while they enjoy temporary pleasure, you have eternity with God.

Verse 14 of Proverbs 24. You know that wisdom is such for your soul. If you find it, there will be a future and your hope will not be cut off. So first, you take the eternal perspective when tempted with envy.

Temporary pleasure, eternity with God. Secondly, you find satisfaction in God. Now back to Psalm 73 here. This is what Asaph does. He goes, he says this, Nevertheless, I'm continually with you. So he's going, I don't understand this, but I'm continually with you. You hold my right hand.

You guide me with your counsel. And afterwards, you receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is my strength of my heart and my portion forever. So the question Asaph has to deal with, his great temptation is this, is I want something more than I want God.

[ 8 : 44 ] I want what they have. I want what those folks have. And the solution to that, the second solution to that, is being satisfied with God.

Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire but you. And why does this make sense? Why is this a good thing?

Because if you live, you think about this, the things we live for, right? You live for beauty. You're jealous of other people with a, we know, right? Beauty fades. You live for money. Money fades. Success fades. Popularity fades. If you don't have God, you've got nothing because everything is fading. Everything is basically slowly slipping away.

But God. From the psalm again. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is my strength. God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

[ 9 : 42 ] So even if your faith is really shaky, you put that shaky faith in a non-shaky God. God. And you've got all you need. Okay, so what are we doing?

What are we doing here? We're talking about our response to the wicked. The first response Psalm, Proverbs 24 mentions, is envy. It's not a good response. The only good thing about it is that it sort of exposes stuff that might be in our heart.

But it's not a good response. And neither is gloating. That's the second bad response. Gloating. Proverbs 24, 17 and 18. Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles, lest the Lord see it and be displeased, and turn away his anger from him.

Okay, so a response to the fool or to the wicked. It's not fretting. It's not envy. And it's not gloating. So when the wicked fail, what do we do? We have compassion. Why is that? Because we believe in a God who wants to redeem the fool. We believe in a God who wants to redeem the wicked. And Christ is our greatest evidence of that, our greatest proof. This is what God is about.

[10:52] God let his enemies nail him to the cross so that he could save those very same people. And let me give you a bit of an example of this, when we might gloat over people.

An example I've seen recently. So Mark Driscoll, right? So he's been on my newsfeed recently on Facebook. Look, and people are unhappy. So because he has a job in...

So he started another church in Arizona, and he's been hired by... What's the name of the publication? Pathius? Pathius, I think.

People are really unhappy about this. Some people are anyway. So Mark Driscoll. So he was a pastor in Seattle of a mega church. And it all went sideways. He was exposed as being quite a terrible bully, as it turns out.

And three years on from that... So he sort of resigned and... Resigned slash pushed. We don't quite know what short happened. But three years on, he started another church, and people are really upset about it.

[11:54] But I remember this. I remember when he first resigned, and because there was just this vitriolic stuff on Facebook, on my newsfeed all about it. And factually all probably true, that, you know, he shouldn't be a pastor.

He needs some serious healing before he does this kind of thing. But the thing was this. The spirit of the articles, the spirit of the updates, the spirit of the things people were writing about him, what struck me is this, is people were just rejoicing.

People were just... They seemed overjoyed at his failure. Listen to the passage again. Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles, lest the Lord see it and be displeased and turn away his anger from him.

See what it's saying here? It's not messing around. Listen to that second part again. Lest the Lord see it and be displeased and turn away his anger from him. So it's saying here, if we rejoice when the wicked fail, God will see it, and he'll be more angry with you than with the wicked.

When you gloat, you put yourself in a dangerous place spiritually. Now this doesn't mean we don't speak about failure, and we don't call out Christian leaders when they do terrible things.

[13:16] But if we have to speak about it, we should only ever do so with grief. Our tone should be grief and mercy.

All right, let's keep going here. How do we respond to the wicked? How do we respond to the foolish? Okay. We don't be envious or jealous. We don't gloat over their failure when their life comes crashing down.

What do we do? So we try and rescue them. And that's actually the big point of Proverbs 24, verse 11. Rescue those who are being taken away to death.

Hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. See, Proverbs says these two paths. And if you're on the wrong one, we try and rescue these people.

The last time we heard this word slaughter was back in chapter 7. A young man was being led astray by an adulterous woman. And Proverbs describes the situation as this young man being led away to slaughter.

[14:20] So fools on the foolish path, spiritually dying, and it always talks about death. You know, they're going to death, right? So we're not envious of this young man.

We're not gloating over his slaughter. We're trying to save him. We're going, what are you doing, man? That's what we want to say. We say, what are you doing? You're on the wrong path. This is what we're doing when we're sharing our faith, isn't it?

As we're trying to rescue people from a path that will eventually lead to death. So Proverbs 24 is telling us that this.

It's saying that part of being wise is telling people they're on the wrong path. Part of being wise is telling people they're on the wrong path.

And that's tough, isn't it? That's not what Vancouverites do. When I drop my kids off at school in the morning, a number of times I've had opportunities to talk with parents about faith.

[15:31] So you drop your kids off, mum and dad's there, and have a quick little chat. And a couple of times I've had these faith conversations. and half them terrible, like really awkward.

I think I'd probably damaged them. You know, like it just was bad, you know, like trying to awkwardly, I don't know, you know, it just was bad. Other times, other times it was good. This week I had this, chat to this lovely woman and she asked me what I was wearing for Halloween. And I said, I said, I could probably wear my work outfit, I guess. And she goes, so you're going to dress as a working man?

And I said, oh no, no, I'm a priest. And I said, but I don't, I mean I won't because it's probably a bit disrespectful, you know. And so I said that and then she goes, she goes, my grandmother was just a, just a hardcore Catholic, lovely woman, but carried so much guilt.

And my grandmother had two children, you know, my mother and a sister and they're both atheists. And so that was the follow-up to me talking about potentially my Halloween costume thing, right?

[16:50] And it was, it was a point in the conversation where I thought, okay, what do I do here? I could nod and go, oh, you know.

I think if you've been in these situations, you kind of know that there is this, there's a pain barrier you kind of have to push through. Am I going to say something?

I have an opportunity to. Am I going to push through this pain barrier and am I going to take this opportunity? And I don't always have the courage to do that. In this case, I did.

And I said, that's very interesting that your mother didn't follow in the faith of her mother. And I said, sometimes churches, you know, sometimes churches can obscure all the good stuff about Jesus.

All the really good Jesus stuff like that Jesus is God who came to be with us. That Jesus said these amazing things, wonderful things that should give us great hope.

[17:55] That Jesus died on a cross for us so that we could have peace with God. And I said, there's a lot more to say about that. And then she says, I'd love to have that conversation.

And so, anyway, that's a conversation that we're planning on having and God opened that opportunity for me and I'm just delighted for that. And Proverbs here reminds us not to shrink back from these situations, right?

The task of rescue. Immediately before verse 11, it says this, it says, if you faint on the day of adversity, your strength is small. That's the thing immediately before given the task of rescuing, right?

And what is that? It's a call to fortitude. It's a call to resilience. It's saying, don't shrink back because the stakes are high. Now, we have reasons why we want to shrink back, though, and look at verse 12.

It's very interesting. See, it anticipates you saying, yeah, but I don't really know them. And maybe they're on a really great path.

[19:03] Maybe somebody else is talking to them about Jesus. I don't want to mess with that. Maybe they're already Christians, so I'm not going to say anything. So look at what verse says. It's like playing the ignorant card.

It's like, no, none of my business. Look at it, verse 12. If you say, behold, we did not know this. Does he who not weighs the heart perceive it?

It's God. Does not he, God, who keeps watch over your soul, know it? And will he not repay man according to his work? It's not messing around, is it?

A guy called Ray Van Leeuwen wrote a commentary on Proverbs, and he gives this very extreme example of this situation here, playing the ignorant card. So he was a son of Dutch immigrant parents, and his parents lived through the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands, and he sort of relates the story of Dutch people.

Now, this is a few Dutch people. This is not, you know, Dutch people across the board, but he gives the illustration of a few Dutch people who had Jewish neighbors, and of course, these Jewish neighbors during the occupation were just collected, you know, in the middle of the night, people would just turn up and just collect them and take them away.

[20:19] And those Dutch neighbors would not say anything. And after the war, those folks would say, oh, look, we just, you know, we had no idea. We had no idea what was happening.

That's why we didn't say anything. We had no idea what was going on there. But of course they did. Verse 12, if you say, behold, we did not know this, does not he who weighs the heart perceive him?

Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it? And it's a very extreme example, isn't it? But let's bring it back to everyday life. We have these opportunities to share a very precious part of our life, our faith.

And it's not easy, and it can be awkward and we can not be very good at it sometimes. We don't want to risk a friendship. We don't want to risk an awkward situation. We don't want to risk ridicule. We don't want to risk being misunderstood. We don't want to risk being lumped into those wacky Christians. But we can't use the excuse of saying, well, I didn't know what path they were on.

[ 21 : 21 ] I didn't know what they believed. That's not an excuse we can use. So let me close here. Two paths. You're on one or the other. Friends, your family, neighbours, people at school, one or the other.

We can be jealous of them. That doesn't make sense, doesn't it? We have eternity with God. We can gloat over them when they fail.

And that makes no sense either, really does it? Because why are we gloating over them? We're sort of saying, ha! They got what they deserved, Mark Driscoll.

He got what was coming to him. You know. But isn't this, this is not the position, this is not a position Christians can take.

We can't say that. We can't say, I'm so happy that guy got what he deserved. Because none of us, none of us are getting what we deserve as Christians, are we?

[ 22 : 25 ] we all deserve separation from God. We all deserve God's anger. But all of us don't get what we deserve.

Thank God for Jesus. We all get grace. So it makes no sense to be jealous. It makes no sense to gloat.

Those responses move us backwards. They put us on the path of foolishness. We can't be jealous. We can't be gloat. What can we do? We can be part of the process by which God rescues that person.

And that's a hard thing. But it's a thing we're called to do. This is what followers of Jesus do. That's it. Proverbs 24, folks. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.