

The Mission and the Future

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 November 2017

Preacher: Rev. James Wagner

[0 : 00] We come to the end of a section in Proverbs, chapter 24 ending, though it does with a 34th verse, we're stopping at verse 22 because it ends a section that starts back in chapter 10, after that first section of chapters 1 to 9. And the text today, verses 1 to 22, is a subsection in that section of 10 through 24. And the subsection begins back, hope you're tracking with me, and you can turn there to chapter 22, verse 17, and there's a heading above that. It isn't the unoriginal, but it says, words of the wise. I want to read the beginning of this section to you, verses 17 to 21 of chapter 22. They read like this, Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, and apply your heart to my knowledge.

For it will be pleasant to you, keep them within you, if all of them are read on your lips, or ready on your lips, that your trust may be in the Lord. I have made them known to you today, even to you. Have I not written for you 30 sayings of counsel and knowledge?

To make you know what is right and true, that you may give a true answer to those who sent you. The section that we're looking at today is a part of the subsection, as I said, that has 30 sayings. That's right, 30 more sayings. How many of these sayings that you've heard already from chapter 1, now up to 24, do you remember? At this stage, I'm not sure I can remember, let alone practice them all.

And Solomon wants to give his sons and subjects 30 more. It reminds me of the time I read a classic book called Spiritual Leadership by J. Oswald Sanders. I was recruited by a campus staff team at a parachurch organization to come on campus with their team. And after I read the book by J. Oswald Sanders called Spiritual Leadership, I declined the invitation. The author filled the book with sayings and practices of the greatest Christian leaders. And I came away from that, not inspired, thinking, how could I possibly do that? When you read all of these Proverbs, do you ever think, I'm just not up to this? How am I really going to pull this off? How can I remember all these Proverbs?

[2 : 36] Not 30 more sayings. I have a hard enough time remembering the Ten Commandments. I'm not minimizing scripture here. Let's be honest, there is a lot here to ingest, digest, and live out.

But this beginning of this section is really instructive and helpful. And there are three key words in the introduction of this section to help us live out these Proverbs.

And the word is trust, right, and true. The sayings precede from the Lord the one who we can trust, who is right and always true.

In other words, the Lord is utterly reliable. And so too are his words and sayings like nothing else. And that's the key to living these Proverbs.

All the Proverbs that came before these 30, all of which we're not going to take a look at, but also these 30 that come in this section. And we're not going to cover all 30 of them.

[3 : 40] You might be happy to know. I'm just going to look at three of them with you today. But let me share with you what I also remember, or maybe the only thing that I remember, from J. Oswald Sanders' book and classic called Spiritual Leadership.

And I'll just preface this by saying I actually gave the book away. So this actually left a big impression on me. I remember this from his book. He said that a vision without a task is just a dream.

Let me say that again.

A vision without a task is just a dream. But a task without a vision is drudgery. But a vision with a task is a mission.

This passage today, as the title says actually in your order of service, is about mission and future. I want to frame this talk, actually, this sermon in those terms about a mission and a future.

[4 : 48] And here are the three tasks we'll look at today. The first one is to build. The second one is to rescue. And the third one is to eat. More specifically, build a house, rescue the dying, and eat honey.

It's right in the text. So let's actually take a look at this. First, build a house. We're starting with a saying in verse 3. You can look down at it where it says, By wisdom, a house is built.

And by understanding, it is established. Now, we all build something and would love to build our own house. Few of us are fortunate to build our own, though.

Solomon's father built his own house, but he was kept from building a temple. But Solomon built what the Lord prohibited David from constructing. That is, a temple or a house of the Lord.

So Solomon knows something about building. But even if we don't build our own house, let alone a temple, we all build something. If not a house, then reputations and resumes are built by us.

[5 : 52] Marriages and families. Our professions and maybe even departments we build. Neighborhoods and nations are built as well.

And some even build walls or want to in between nations. But, as we laugh about that, most of us build walls ourselves.

Emotionally, socially, financially, even intellectually, we build walls. Well, a house is a good thing to build, but not in and of itself.

A house isn't neutral. It's a good thing when it is built, as it says in verse 3, by wisdom. Continuing on. Established by understanding.

And furthermore, in verse 4, filled with knowledge. You must admit, this is kind of curious and unnatural. I thought in order to build a house, she needed things like land and materials.

[6 : 52] And, oh yeah, a lot of money. And what about tools and trades? But, most importantly, the agent of building a house, and I think a household is in mind here.

That's what Solomon's talking about, is wisdom. In other words, the Lord is the most important agent in house construction. And why is that?

Well, in another saying of wisdom literature, King David wrote this. Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. You see, the danger in building your own house or your own household is the motivation.

For some, it's beauty. In others, it's function. But, still some in verse 1 tells us that it's done out of envy. And so, I wonder, do you, do we ever envy someone else's house or household?

We like the building, or we like the family. Maybe we wish they had a spouse like that, or our children were like someone else's. And envy finds its way in our life. And motivation and effort, if it's about envy, then just becomes vain glory.

[8 : 07] Well, more important than beauty or function of a household, though, is the foundation of it. I can't help but think that Jesus had verse 3 in mind when he shared the parable about the wise and the foolish builders.

One built his house on a rock, the other on sand. The one that was on rock, actually that equaled the word of the Lord. The one on sand, it was just anything else.

By his own design and making. So, it's by wisdom that a household is built. Establish. Filled. This is the first task in this mission.

And like the Lord who established and filled the earth on a macro level, in Genesis, where we read about creation, so we get to establish, fill our households with the Lord and his wisdom at more of a micro level.

So, that's the first task. Build a house. The second one, then, is rescue the dying. Rescue the dying comes after building a house.

[9 : 15] This seems so obvious. Or even more so than building a house is actually rescuing the dying when it comes to wisdom. But I need to impress on us that it is vitally important.

Building a house may be important, but when someone is dying, you drop everything and run to the rescue of that person. This summer, we were on our way to Malawi and we were in a plane for 11 hours.

If you've been in a plane that long, you know that there's only so much you can do. A lot of what you do is watch movies. And I don't get to watch a lot of them, but I watched one that was called Hacksaw Ridge.

Great story about Desmond Doss. It's based on a dream called The Conscientious Objector. And he was a seventh-day Adventist Christian, an American pacifist combat.

And he was in combat as a medic in World War II. He refused to carry firearms of any description. And Doss went to great lengths to rescue the dying.

[10:20] He rescued 75 men in one battle before he himself suffered an injury. He put himself at risk, not just physically, but in other ways as well. And his strength, though, came from his biblical convictions and courage.

And he was the first conscientious objector to be awarded a Medal of Honor. And Doss kept repeating to himself, kind of going back up on that ridge, often when he was by himself, when the soldiers had completely withdrawn, saying, help me get one more, Lord.

One more, Lord. He was rescuing the dying. But who? Who are we to rescue? We're charged in verse 11. Look with me down at that.

Rescue those who are being taken away to death. Stumbling, as it were, to the slaughter. We are to rescue or hold back or deliver, as Solomon has just spoken about before.

Who? Surprisingly, those who are doing evil. The schemer. Scoffers. Sinners. It says, like you and me. And that's pretty shocking, isn't it?

[11:28] I mean, why not just let them go astray, each of them to their own way? But it seems that Solomon is saying, with wisdom we see that rescuing is a matter of life and death.

Verse 10 suggests that we are strengthened by the rescue. We might actually think, actually, what we should do is, when we're strong, then go rescue. But no. We are strengthened through this rescue operation.

And furthermore, in verse 12, it states that we actually have no excuse. In fact, we are our brother's and our sister's keeper. And that applies not just to temporally here, but actually eternally.

That's the significance that Solomon's bringing to bear on our lives. And we can't plead ignorance, which is what he says. So it's quite impactful, as you heard earlier, that for the next 10 years, the bishop of our diocese has charged us with a decade of evangelism.

But really, who can rescue the dying? We are like Desmond Doss, kind of going into danger zones. But the rescuer actually is our Lord.

[12:47] There are barely instruments in the hand of that rescuer. Here's the way the order works. We have to be rescued first. We're infected and affected by sin.

We're in desperate need of being rescued. We need rescuing because we're not just the battle wounded, like soldier Doss' soldiers that he was rescuing.

But we're rebellious, rejecting the wisdom and the word of the Lord. It makes us lawbreakers. It not only breaks us, but it breaks the heart of the Lord as well.

So then Jesus rescues us, enlists us, that is the whole church, in his rescue operation, once we know the great lengths that he's gone to, to rescue us.

So we rescue the dying. That's the second task. There's a third task in our mission, though, and it's in verse 13, and it's to eat honey.

[13:50] After we build a house, rescue the dying, we go from the home to the battlefield, and now it looks like the table, or your pantry, I don't know what. But eat honey seems like a little bit of a welcome relief.

It's a time to relax. In fact, it's beautiful. Look with me at verse 14. Know that wisdom is such to your soul.

If you find it, there will be a future, and your hope will not be cut off. That's after verse 13, when he says, My son, eat honey, for it is good.

It's beautiful, isn't it? How he's drawing us in and showing us this parallel, that what honey is to the taste of wisdom, what wisdom actually is to the soul.

I don't know what your week was this last week, but maybe you had quite a bit of sugar in your household, guessing that you did. What do you do with that sugar and that candy afterwards?

[14:52] I don't know about you, but I put it in places that it's actually hard to get away from other members of the household, and well, I can pretend myself, but it's just hard not to keep going back to that sugar, isn't it?

It's kind of like what wisdom is like. It's just to know to go back to wisdom. It is as sweet as honey is. It is drawing us, alluring us into the ways of the Lord.

But what really is Solomon doing here in this proverb? He's not just prescribing a new diet. He's not just giving us a substitute for white sugar. And he's not taking up the subject of physical health.

He's taking up and making a statement about our spiritual health. We all know that sweet food is irresistible. And so too, he wants us to know that the wisdom of the Lord is irresistible as well. And so he makes this general statement about wisdom. And he begins the section with a prescription, then followed by this string of prohibitions. And look down with me just really quickly at all the prohibitions that he makes after this, which I won't delve into.

[16:02] But he says, Lie not and wait. Do no violence. Do not rejoice when your enemy fails. Lest the Lord see it and be displeased and turn away from anger with him.

Fret not. Be not envious. Just a number of prohibitions follow this general statement of prescription, which is to eat honey. But what I find fascinating about that prescription to eat honey is just the short word that he actually says back in which is only two.

My son, eat honey for it is good. Why do we seek? Why do we pursue? Why do we want wisdom? Not just because it's practical, which makes our life easier, or powerful, which makes us beautiful, or even, sorry, powerful, which makes us influential, and not even beautiful, which makes a life pleasing.

But wisdom is good and right and just. It's for living life well, living life right. But it's not only that. He also says that wisdom is for the future. Again, verse 13. And dripping from the honeycomb are sweet to your taste. And then he says this. Know that wisdom is such to your soul.

[17:21] If you find it, there will be a future. It's easy to get bound down, actually, in these proverbs, in these sayings.

How can I practice them? How can I live them out? Well, one of the ways that we do that is to know that it actually is about the future. It's not only about the here and now, making right choices, affirming the right things, resisting temptation, but it's about a future.

And as he says, and your hope will not be cut off. What does Solomon mean when he says, if you find it? Well, we have to seek.

We have to find it. We have to long for this wisdom. We have to ask for God to stir our wills. That we might receive that which he actually has for us, and which he has no intention of withholding from us.

And when we seek and search and long for the wisdom of God, then we actually see this future that's before us. And our mission then is linked with this future that the Lord has provided for us in advance.

[18:30] And so wisdom then becomes about our character. Character that is for the future, that gives us hope, and is enduring. So much so that he dwells on this in verses 20 and 22.

Look down with me then again at verse 20. He says, Notice that he uses the word will in both of those.

He's got the long range, the future in mind. So let me bring this to a close then.

As we see mission and future, what are we doing in terms of building a house, rescuing the dying, eating honey? We have a mission. But it only comes to us through the grace of God, which depends on the knowledge of him.

There are three questions in these 22 verses. In verses 12 and 22. I wonder if you notice this.

[19:46] Look at what Solomon says. If you say, Behold, we did not know this. Does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Verse 22.

For disaster will arise suddenly from them who know the ruin that will come from them both. I think the way that we live out these proverbs, the way that's described here in terms of tasks and all the other ones that comprise the church, is to actually know that the Lord is the one who actually knows.

He's the one who knows best. He's revealing that to us. We are trusting him with all of our heart. We live in a culture that actually says, Just trust your heart.

Or just follow your dreams. The proverbs say, Trust the Lord with all your heart. The one who actually knows way beyond what it means to live a life of wisdom.

And wants that for us too. Do you know that? I speak to you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

[20:57] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. You are the one who regard to you in the name of Jesús. Amen.

Amen. Yes.