

Proverbs: Life and Death

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[0 : 00] Good morning, church. It's good to see you all this morning. Well, would you turn with me once more to the Old Testament book of Proverbs?

This morning we'll begin in chapter 4, verse 10. That's page 529 in the Pew Bible. While you're turning there, let me say welcome to you.

If you're new, welcome to New Haven. Welcome to Trinity. We're glad you're here. If this is your first time at Trinity, let me just say our aim as a church is to be a people who are so steeped in the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ, so soaked in that, so saturated in that, so transformed by that, that we go out and we give all of our lives in praise and in glory to God.

So if you want to be a part of that great endeavor, we're glad you're here. Join us. Stick around. Let me also say welcome back to the students. There are some students here, right?

You're here. Yes, you're here. Great. It's good to have you back. We're excited about the start of another school year here at Trinity. We've actually, Matt kind of alluded to this, we've actually got some great stuff planned for the upcoming year.

[1 : 23] Uh, we're launching a whole new set of Sunday school classes for middle schoolers and high schoolers. Uh, if you're in high school, uh, I'm going to be teaching through the book of Romans.

Just you and me and Romans and maybe one or two other leaders. Uh, but we are going to do a deep dive into one of the most culturally explosive, life-changing books ever written.

Uh, so if you're in high school, September 10th in the Fellowship Hall classroom, nine o'clock, come join me for that. Uh, this fall is also the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Anybody know that? Has that been on your radar? Um, yeah. Uh, so we have some good stuff on the deck, on deck to delve into our Reformation heritage. Uh, rumor has it some of our resident historians and theologians will be teaching a class, uh, about the Reformation.

So stay tuned for that. Um, in a couple of weeks, we're going to be joining with other congregations through Bridges of Hope for a joint prayer and worship night at the College Street Music Hall. Uh, there's some information in the bulletin about that.

[2 : 25] Later in the fall, we're going to have Keith King, the pastor of Christian Tabernacle Baptist Church here in New Haven, come preach for us. Uh, and we're kicking off this semester with a month-long emphasis on prayer. Uh, seeking God together, growing in our intimacy with Christ that will culminate at the end of the month on September 24th in a church-wide prayer gathering.

Um, oh, and did I mention that we're preaching through Romans 8 this fall? Uh, you're thinking, what's so big about that? Who cares? Uh, no, Romans 8.

Romans chapter 8. Some people have called Romans chapter 8 the greatest letter, the greatest chapter and the greatest letter and the greatest book that's ever been written. And we're going to spend the whole semester just soaking in the great message of God's gospel in Romans chapter 8. Um, it's going to be great. We're going to have a great fall together. Uh, so we hope you'll stick around and be a part of what God's doing here. Um, now today, okay, back to today. Now today what we're doing is we're wrapping up our series on Proverbs.

Uh, this summer we've been working our way through this book that's all about wisdom, and today we're going to bring it home. We're going to bring it to a close. Uh, we're going to do that by looking at two passages, actually. We're going to look at one passage from the, kind of near the beginning of the book, and then we're going to look at another passage from sort of near the end of the book.

[3 : 37] One in chapter 4, one in chapter 24. Um, and then we're going to celebrate baptism, and that's going to be awesome. Uh, so let's start, though, in Proverbs chapter 4, verses 10 through 19, page 529.

And as we come there, let me pray for God's help as we come to His Word. Oh, Lord, so often in this book of Proverbs, you have commended, commanded, held out for us the picture of humility. So, Lord, we pray for our hearts to be humble before Your Word this morning, and God, we ask that You would speak powerfully to us through this book once more as we draw near to Your written Word. And as we do so, we pray that You, Lord Jesus, the incarnate Word, would be speaking to us by Your Spirit, that You would allow our cold hearts to be warmed, our stopped-up ears to be opened, and our lives to be changed. God, do it for Your name's sake, we pray. Amen.

Amen. Proverbs chapter 4, verses 10 through 19. Hear, my son, and accept my words, that the years of Your life may be many. I have taught You the way of wisdom. I have led You in the paths of uprightness. When You walk, Your step will not be hampered, and if You run, You will not stumble. Keep hold of instruction. Do not let it go. Guard her, for she is Your life. Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil. Avoid it. Do not go on it. Turn away from it and pass on. For they cannot sleep unless they have done wrong. They are robbed of sleep unless they have made someone stumble. For they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day. The way of the wicked is like deep darkness. They do not know over what they stumble. Just a couple weeks ago, I was on vacation with my family at the beach in Delaware. We often go to a little beach town called Bethany Beach.

The tourism slogan for Bethany Beach is a quiet resort. I'm not sure that gets them a lot of business at Bethany Beach, a quiet resort. But there you go. We love going to Bethany every summer.

[6:22] My wife grew up going there as a kid, and it's fun now to take our kids and kind of continue that tradition. And for the most of the week that we were there in the middle of this month, in the middle of August, we just had perfect beach weather. It was great. It was like high 70s, low 80s, gentle breeze off the water, nice rolling waves. It was great. But then our last day there, there were some storms that had come through, and the water had become much more active, and the waves were higher, and the pool of the water was stronger. But, you know, after a week of sort of playing in the water and taking our kids out into the waves and splashing around, our kids, of course, even though the water was much more active, much more powerful, they still wanted to jump in, have us, you know, take them out, go out into the waves, and do what we'd been doing for the last few days. And at first, I was willing to try it.

Sure, why not? I mean, you know, maybe we could hang tough for a few minutes, have a little fun, and then come back in. But then my father-in-law, actually, Beth's dad, basically said, he said, hey, let me try it out first. Let me see what the water's like. Now, here's what you need to know about my father-in-law.

He's not here, so I can talk about him. He has spent his whole life every summer, he had spent his whole life every summer growing up on that very beach, lifeguarding, surfing, swimming, probably trying to pick up girls when he was in his teenage years. You know, but he had been going to this beach year after year for 20 years.

He had basically grown up there, and he had been back summer after summer as an adult. He had taken his kids to that beach, and now here he was as a grandfather on that same beach. In other words, he is someone who knows the water. He knows how the ocean works. He knows its power. He knows its danger. So he got in, and he swam for a few minutes, and he came back and said, it's not safe. Don't take the kids in. It's too much. So trusting his wisdom, we stayed out. We didn't go in. Instead, we just sort of stayed in the shallow surf where the waves kind of ran up on the beach, and you know what? We had a great time. It was a lot of fun, but we didn't go in. Now, Proverbs, as we said again and again, this book is about wisdom. It's a book about chokmah, which is the Hebrew word, which means something like skill or expertise, like a swimmer who knows the ocean through years of experience and can read it and can know when it's dangerous and when it's safe. Biblical wisdom, in other words, is the skill of living life well. But what we need to see as we draw things to a close this morning, and what Proverbs actually has been telling us again and again and again, although we haven't sort of highlighted it, is that wisdom, getting it, keeping it, living it, it's not just about having good ideas, and it's not just about living a successful life here on earth. Wisdom is actually a matter of life and death. Like children standing before the power of the ocean, wisdom is a matter of life and death, telling us when to swim and when to stay on the shore. In other words, I put it this way, wisdom is the path, not just to good ideas, not just to being successful, not just to how to figure your way out of a tricky situation. More than that, biblical wisdom is the path of life.

Wisdom is the path of life. This is the big idea that Proverbs 4, 10 through 19 wants to drive home, and that I want us to end on this summer. Look again at verses 10 through 13 in that text we just read.

Hear, my son, accept my words, that the years of your life may be many. And here the father says, I've taught you the way of wisdom. I've led you in the paths of uprightness.

[10:20] When you walk, your step will not be hampered, and if you run, you will not stumble. Keep hold of instruction. Do not let it go. Guard her. Why? For she is your life. Life.

And life here isn't just a sort of long life free from danger or discomfort. It's not just the negative idea of avoiding hazard or avoiding risk. More than that, it's a positive picture.

Look again at that image in verse 12 of walking, running without stumbling, like a runner in full stride. Did you hear this summer that Usain Bolt supposedly ran the last race of his career, the great sprinter? And if you ever saw Usain Bolt run a race, you know that that man running was a thing of beauty. He was amazing. It's like he was designed to run really fast, and it was awesome to watch him go. Is it possible for a whole life to be like the stride of an Olympic runner?

And not just when times are good and things are easy, but even in the midst of trouble and pain, is it possible to run without stumbling, to walk and not be hampered?

Yes, Proverbs says. Wisdom is the path of life. It's where life, true life, flourishing life is found.

[11:53] Now, what does wisdom look like? We've tried to view it from so many angles this summer, taking this whole life of wisdom and pulling the different threads and turning the diamond to see all its angles. We've looked at diligence in our work. We've looked at truthfulness and discretion in our words.

We've looked at generosity with our money, purity with our sex, justice for the poor, faithfulness among friends, and above all, humility before others, and humility supremely before God.

It's a bit of what wisdom is like. Wisdom, we've said, is living with the grain of God's universe. The living God has created this world with a shape, with a curve, with a grain, and wisdom is living in line with that created order. But you know, so far this summer, I still don't think we've touched on the deepest implications of that truth.

How deep down that really goes. So, turn with me to Proverbs 24, verses 13 and 14. That's page 546, if you're following along in the Pew Bible. This is the second passage we'll look at. Proverbs 24, verses 13 and 14. Verse 13, my son, eat honey, for it is good, and the drippings of the honeycomb are sweet to your taste. 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.

Take honey, the Father in Proverbs says, and don't just look at it. Don't just study it. Don't just hear what other people have said about it. Don't just theorize about it. He says, take it and eat it.

[14:11] Put it in your mouth. Feel its goodness and its sweetness on your tongue. Put that honey in your mouth and experience the pleasure, the delight of it.

And now, know that that is what wisdom is like to your soul. The pleasure, the satisfaction that your soul is longing for, like tasting the sweetness of honey. That's wisdom to your soul. But this sweetness won't be fleeting. It won't wear away. Did you see what the rest of the verse says? If you find it, there will be a future, and your hope will not be cut off.

Could it be that there is a honey, a satisfaction, a delight for our souls that we can taste now, and that will never grow old, but that will continue into the future, into a hope that will never be cut off? Could such a thing be?

We've said that wisdom is the path of life, and yes, wisdom is living with the grain of our creator's universe now. But even more than that, you see, wisdom is stepping into the joy of an indestructible future. It's stepping into the joy of God's future that's breaking down into the present and blazing a path of hope that can never be cut off. If you find it. If you find it, verse 14 says.

We're all looking for a path of life, aren't we? We're all looking for a path of life, some way to be fully alive, some way to get some modicum, some bit of joy that won't go away. Some of us are seeking it in education and prestige. Some of us are seeking it in the approval of a parent or a friend.

[16:28] Some of us are seeking it in a political party, whether right or left. Some of us are seeking it in our own moral efforts, a cause, a work of justice. And to be sure, none of these things are necessarily bad things. In their right place, they can all be very good things, but are they the path of life? Will it be like honey to your soul? Will it stretch out into a future? Will it go out into a hope that cannot be cut off? If you find it, verse 14 says. If.

If. It's a frightening word, if, isn't it? Inside that word, if, is the very real possibility that we might not find it, that we might live our whole lives running down a path only to miss the true path of life. So, if wisdom is the path of life, who will open the path of wisdom, the path of life to us?

Who will show it to us? Who will put us onto it? Who will keep us on it? Who will open to us this path of wisdom, this path of life, so that we might find it?

The Bible's answer to that question is this, that God has done it for us. But, you know, it's not in the way that we would expect.

We would expect, I think, God to come to us and give us some principles and give us some rules and maybe give us some character qualities, some virtues to emulate. And then we would expect God to say, okay, there it is, go ahead, get to work, follow these rules, implement these principles, emulate these virtues. But friends, while the Bible definitely does have principles and rules for how we ought to live, that's not ultimately where wisdom is found. That's not what opens the path of life to us. After all, who could really put all that into practice? I mean, honestly, think about it.

[18 : 59] Take what the book of Proverbs says about our words, for instance, a huge part of biblical wisdom. Now, maybe you're not given to spreading salacious rumors and gossip. You're not sort of actively tearing down your neighbor with your razor-sharp words.

But how about telling a friend the truth, even when it hurts, even when it's going to cost you? How do we do on that front?

Friends, could we not go through every aspect of wisdom that Proverbs lays out for us that we've looked at all summer? Self-control, generosity, humility above all. And if we took honest stock, would we not say that each of us woefully falls short?

And then, seeing how we aren't wise so much of the time, then we start to hear Proverbs like this.

10.16, the wage of the righteous leads to life, the gain of the wicked to sin.

10.24, what the wicked dreads will come upon him, but the desire of the righteous will be granted.

10.25, when the tempest passes, the wicked is no more, but the righteous is established forever.

[20 : 24] 10.27, the fear of the Lord prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be cut short.

11.19, whoever is steadfast in righteousness will live, but he who pursues evil will die.

19.16, whoever keeps the commandments keeps life, but he who despises his ways will die.

Proverbs is very clear. There's a way of life, and there is a way of death.

So, it's not just that we fall short of wisdom's demands and miss out on some good things in this life, but it's that we are running on a path that leads to ruin and leads to death.

And so, we need more than God to just show us what wisdom is. We need God to rescue us from our folly of sin and death.

And here's where the Bible gets really good. The good news is that this is exactly what God has done. Rather than leave us in our folly and in our sin and in the path that leads to death, Jesus comes.

[21 : 45] God shows up in the person of his son and says, There's a thief out there who's come to steal and to kill and destroy, but I've come that you might have life and have it to the full.

And that sounds familiar, doesn't it? It sounds a lot like Proverbs. But how has Jesus done that? How would he come and give us life?

How would he come and give us fools, life abundantly? And the answer that the earliest Christians gave, and that the apostles gave, and that even Jesus himself gave, is that he would rescue us from death and bring us into life through the cross.

At first, it seemed like utter folly, didn't it? God's own son, crucified, killed. What good is that?

A crucified Messiah. And yet, friends, think of the wisdom. Think of the wisdom of the cross.

[23 : 03] How else could God, in his perfect justice, judge sin, and yet, in his perfect mercy, justify sinners?

How else but through the cross, where Christ took our humanity and took our sin and then took our place, receiving the judgment for our sin, and in exchange, giving us the record of his righteousness so that God would be just in judging sin and the justifier of all who believe?

And so God, in his perfect wisdom, devises a plan where his justice and his mercy are perfectly expressed and perfectly displayed and perfectly satisfied. Christ, the wisdom of God, Paul will say.

And so Christ opens the way of wisdom, the path of life, for all who admit that they're fools and trust in him as their only wisdom and righteousness. And once we see what God has done for us in Christ, once we put our trust in him alone to make us wise, to rescue us from the path of death and

to set us on the path of life, what are we to do?

If wisdom is the path of life, if Christ has opened that way of life for us, removing our record of sin, well, Proverbs chapter 4 has already told us.

[24 : 40] Run. Start running in the way of wisdom. Run in this path of life. You've been set free from folly. You've been set free from the path of death.

Now run in the way of wisdom. Why are you holding back? Of course, the way of Christ, the way of wisdom will seem like foolishness at first.

Just like the cross seemed like foolishness at first. Why tell the truth, something that Proverbs seems so keen on, when you know a simple little lie would be much more profitable and not really hurt anybody?

Is truth speaking really all that important? Why tell the truth when it would be so costly and so easy to just do something so easy, like tell a little lie?

Well, friends, because the cross shows us that Christ was willing to be truthful for us even when it cost Him everything. Why be generous to the poor when it would substantially need to change my standard of living even when I've worked so hard to earn it?

[25 : 54] Friends, because the cross shows us that Christ was radically generous to us when we were spiritually poor. He became poor for us that we might become rich when we did nothing to deserve it at the cross.

Why strive to be humble when everyone around me is seeking their own glory and it seems like they're doing just fine? because the cross shows us that humility is true greatness, that when Christ, the living Lord, humbled Himself, then He was exalted, then His true glory was made known. Friends, don't you see there's no true wisdom, there's no skill in godly living apart from the cross, apart from Christ, but with Christ. Ah, now we can run in it.

We can take up our cross and we can follow Him in the paths of wisdom and as upside down as they might seem to be to the world, they are the paths of life. Listen again to how chapter 4 describes it.

Go back there. Verse 14. First, a warning. Do not enter the path of the wicked. Don't walk in the way of the evil. Avoid it. Don't go on it.

[27 : 13] Turn away from it and pass on for they can't sleep unless they've done wrong. They're robbed of sleep unless they've made someone stumble. They eat the bread of wickedness. They drink the wine of violence. There's the warning and then the promise.

But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn which shines brighter and brighter until full day. the way of wisdom in other words.

The way of the cross is the ever brightening path. Can't you see it? Here you stand, church, on the path that Christ has blazed before you.

And perhaps right now at this point on the path as you look ahead it seems very counterintuitive. especially when everyone around you seems to be living a life so differently whether it's in regard to their money or their sex or their influence and power.

The way of wisdom, the way of the cross looks like foolishness to the world. But with each step that you take the brighter and brighter it becomes.

[28 : 29] The sun is rising Proverbs says. The shadows are fleeing. And as we run this ever brightening path we realize that it is the path of the indestructible future joy of God.

for it is the path of the risen Jesus who has conquered death and brought life and immortality to light.

You see the path of wisdom is not only the path of the cross but because it's the path of the cross it's the path of God's new creation. It's the way to live in God's future now.

Now, awake oh sleeper Paul says in Ephesians 5 and arise from the dead and Christ will shine on you.

Do you hear him calling you this morning friend? Wake up. Arise from the dead oh sleeper and I will shine on you in this path that you run.

[29 : 42] it will be the ever brightening path and it will end Proverbs 4 says in the full day of dawn and in the new heavens and in the new earth we read in Revelation there will be no need for sun or moon to shine for the glory of God will be our light and Jesus the Lamb will be our lamp and that path will go further up and further in and the glory of the nations will stream in and the sweetness that we had only tasted here will there as we've run this path be our whole food and drink because

on that day God will be all in all the one the one who is behind and in and through every created pleasure that you had tasted there will be unveiled in his fullness and we will see his face we're told and we will reign with him forever what is wisdom it's the path of life friends

Christ has blazed this path with his own cross and down it flows the glory of the new creation so church run in this path even when it is inconvenient even when it is unpopular even when it seems so strange run in the path of wisdom because God has promised that even if sorrow and even if trouble lie ahead it will grow brighter and brighter with Christ's own presence until it opens up into the full day of dawn would you pray with me our father we pray that you would take this message of proverbs that the way of wisdom is the ever brightening path and you would Lord fuel our faith God we struggle so hard in the living of your ways but we thank you that you've redeemed us in Christ you filled us with your spirit and you've given us a certain indestructible hope help us as a church to run in the path of wisdom and in the path of life we pray amen so you you