

Proverbs 22
April 10, 2011
Lynchburg, Virginia

Exhordium

Variations on a theme. In music, variation is a formal technique where material is repeated in an altered form. The changes may involve harmony, melody, counterpoint, rhythm, timbre, orchestration or any combination of these. Hopefully, if we are developing an ear, then we hear it a bit differently and more pleasantly each time.

This proverb has several famous sayings. We quote them often. Who has not heard, “A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches? Verse 1, or. “train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it?” That is verse 6. Or, verse 7, “The rich ruleth over the poor and the borrower is servant to the lender”? And again, verse 29, “Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings, he shall not stand before mean men.”

We tend to treat the Proverbs as a mass of unrelated wise sayings. And while it is true that it is sometimes difficult to find a coherent theme, often the chapters of Proverbs hold together as an ongoing thought. It may be that in the midst of a group of sayings, some proverb is difficult to understand or difficult to see how it fits with the whole. But we should be looking for the continuity. These verse are all in the same chapter so we should understand them to be variations on a theme.

Chapter 22 fits so well with what we have been hearing from God’s Word about Work, Calling, Riches, Debt and a godly heart in dealing with all of this.

For those of us who are committed to raising our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, this is a key chapter of the Bible. It is good that we spend some time studying it.

Exegesis

Prov 22:1-29 22 A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold. 2 The rich and poor meet together: the Lord is the maker of them all.

What does it profit a man if he gain the world and forfeit his soul? The rhetorical answer, of course, is that it does NOT profit him. He is an eternal loser. He loses everything. So, if you can gain the world of great riches it would be good to trade it all for a good name. Only a good name will stand in heaven. This is why we come to God, our Father in the name of Jesus. We pray, in Jesus's name. We have a good name in Jesus, if indeed, we are in Jesus.

But we can possess much and lose our good name. Throughout this chapter, there is an easy way to measure this. How do you treat the poor among you? Is justice being done in your midst? Since the Lord is the maker of the rich and the poor, do you rich see it this way? Do you understand that the Lord is maker of all and that your riches are a means to bless the poor and not a means to rise above them and lord it over them? Riches are not given for control and domination. Riches are given by the Lord to bless His people.

Starting out this way may make the American Capitalist a bit nervous. If we are to bless the poor, does that mean that we have to give them our money. And the easy answer is, "Why yes, of course we do." That is the entire point. And if the heart immediately says, "But the money is mine. I worked hard for it. You cannot make me give it away, then we see the temptations arising that the Lord is pointing out in this proverb.

Keep in mind some New Testament principles. Ananias and Saphira were killed by God in the midst of a distribution of wealth. They were greedy and lied to the apostles. But they were not killed because they did not give all of their wealth. It was their's before they sold their land and it was their's after they sold the land. They were killed because they possessed wicked greedy hearts and were trying to put themselves off as righteous and holy. A modern day counterpart might be someone who is in the church, known as righteous and holy, may even want others to see them as benevolent but refuses to tithe. They are lying to people about their financial state.

The Lord also tells us to give cheerfully. The Lord does not need your money, per se. Sure, He has ordained the Church of Jesus to work in a particular way. It is funded by His people to advance Christ's Kingdom and to save the Earth. So, in once sense the Lord does need the money of His

people to build the kingdom. It's just that He does not need your money, a given individual. He will build His Kingdom with or without you. This is what happened to the Jews. They were unfaithful in taking the Kingdom to the ends of the Earth, so the Lord cut them out and found other people worthy to carry on His work.

So, the Lord does not want anyone to grudgingly give of their time, service, leadership, work or money. He wants your heart right so that you can give abundantly with hilarity. Is this some form of redistribution of wealth? Yes, I think it is. But the fact of the matter is that if we figure this out, the Lord will bless us so mightily that the wealth pie will grow so enormous that we will forget that we keep giving it away.

Incidentally, long-term, it is my inclination that in communities, giving of wealth primarily looks like a transfer of property with accountability. The great mass of poor people are primarily poor because they are tenants and debtors. Ownership, with godly humility, changes everything.

3 A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished. 4 By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honour, and life. 5 Thorns and snares are in the way of the froward: he that doth keep his soul shall be far from them. 6 Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

The rich and poor meet together but a prudent man foresees the evil. A poor man can only see to the next meal. He is not thinking much about the future and therefore about prudence. But a rich young man can act like a poor man, remember the prodigal son. He squanders his riches on wine, women and song. It does not take long for him to become the poor man that he despises. Thus, a man of means can act like a poor man, not hiding himself from evil. He is punished with financial ruin.

But a godly prudent man accrues riches, honour and life. This is a key verse. We sometimes think that because of all of the warnings of riches, even in this great passage of Scripture, that we must shun the wealth of this world. But that is emphatically not the case. We must learn to think of

riches the way God does. They are a great blessing from Him for the humble man.

What if you are not humble? Then riches are potentially a great curse. If you are not prudent, then snares and thorns are laid out for you.

V.6- Now comes this great verse, Train up a child. This is all in the context of raising a prudent child with a wise and humble heart. We do our children ill if we give them whatever they want, if they do not know the work that goes into acquiring wealth, if they do not understand that the Lord gives increase, if they take all of their good things for granted. This is not some extra thing they have to learn, this is at the heart of their faith. If they are not humble before the Lord in these things, then they ought not to receive riches, honor or life. But if they do learn humility and prudence, then we can expect the Lord to bless them, safely, with riches. I am not sure how we are doing on this? Do our kids want to make a lot of money? If so, why? Be honest with that question. And you can answer that question poorly whether you are rich or poor. Most of us are comparatively rich, when we compare to the rest of the world. But are you comparing to your doctor neighbor? Are you envious of his home, car, bank account? Why? What is he doing with it? Now, how would your kids answer that question? Try asking them. You may find out that you are not training up your child in the right way.

Why do we lose so many of our kids to the way of worldliness? Because we train them up in that way and when they are old, they do not depart from it. But we can train them up a different way and they will not depart from that either.

Are you a giver? Or a taker? Pretty easy to answer that question. Don't lie to yourself or to your children. Be honest. What are you giving to God's people? In your tithe? In extra offerings? In your time? To the church? To women in need? To men who need a friend or counsel? It is fine to be in need from time to time but when you get blessed, then you need to start giving. Do you want to still receive? Or, have you learned prudence, that you get, you receive, in order to give?

7 The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender. 8 He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity: and the rod of his

anger shall fail. 9 He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor.

This is a fact. The rich rule, the poor are ruled. But what is in the heart of the rich. Is it a mindset of power and domination, or of service? This is one of the great divides of our time, is it not? The liberals claim they love the poor and want to give to them. The conservatives claim they love the poor by refusing to give to them. Which is correct? Wait a minute, the powerful government takes a great deal from us. Is it any wonder when we will not give to our neighbor, that the government takes from us and gives to him?

I would argue for a maximum tax rate of less than 10%. If we are to give 10% of our earnings to God, it makes sense and is supported biblically that the government should get 10% or less. But what is our tax rate? Federal income tax, state income tax, property tax, gas tax, sales tax, city licensing fees, small business tax, social security and medicare tax. We have a huge tax burden and this tends to make us stingy with what we have left. But how did this greedy government get so greedy in the first place? Was it not a judgment from God on His people for a failure to do that which the Lord requires of us?

The Lord promises to bless those who have a bountiful eye. That means that He promises to bless those who give their stuff away. Incidentally, this does not mean He blesses the government because they give other people's money away. Many surveys have shown that conservatives give far more money to charity than liberals. Liberals love to tax the rich and give that money to the poor, including the poor beneficiaries of their largesse, like labor unions and large corporations. Conservatives do not get a free pass, either. Influence is peddled on Capitol Hill and many hands are greased in order to keep the poor greasy. But many wealthy conservatives give vast sums directly to charities. This is far better.

10 Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out; yea, strife and reproach shall cease. 11 He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend.

A pure heart will find favor. Where is the uncorrupted man? Well, a good man really is hard to find.

12 The eyes of the Lord preserve knowledge, and he overthroweth the words of the transgressor. 13 The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets. 14 The mouth of strange women is a deep pit: he that is abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein. 15 Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.

Riches can be a snare to a lazy son or daughter. The Lord fights against such. How is your work ethic? Suffering from the lions in the street? Do your work today and let the Lord deal with the lions. A lazy son is sure prey for prostitutes and hangers on. Look at the entourages of the famous athletes and movie stars. They are friends bought with money. That is a deep pit and they that are hated by God will fall into it.

But discipline will chase it out. The rod of correction is to teach the child not to love ease, or money, or flattering friends. The rod of discipline is to be applied to produce godly humility, contentment, generosity. A foolish child will want more stuff, will want to be a hoarder, will be envious of others, will be covetous. But a faithful parent will look for these tell-tale signs of hell and drive them out of their child. This is so important because we often let these sorts of things grow up in our children and at times, actually encourage it. But this way is the way of death.

16 He that oppresseth the poor to increase his riches, and he that giveth to the rich, shall surely come to want. 17 Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge. 18 For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee; they shall withal be fitted in thy lips. 19 That thy trust may be in the Lord, I have made known to thee this day, even to thee. 20 Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge, 21 That I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee? 22 Rob not the poor, because he is poor: neither oppress the afflicted in the gate: 23 For the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.

Here we have a long passage on the main theme. Riches are given to God's people to teach the poor how to be rich towards God. The poor have

a hard time with this. Those who live in grinding poverty are often the very vehicles of the rich. There is a fortune among the poor. Think about how much the wealthy classes demand of the poor. They keep them down to run their machine. And the poor seem to like being oppressed. They keep right on voting for their masters. But they are no closer to ownership. In fact, they are more indebted to the man than ever. Government largesse will never free the poor.

The Lord Himself will plead the cause of the poor. Furthermore, God, Himself will spoil those who spoil the poor. That is, God will take from you what you have taken from the poor. It seems that our country is in the midst of being plundered by God.

What can we do about this? Probably cannot do much to help our politicians. Are they not the rich that oppress us, as James says? Why are we still seeking their favor and flattery?

What we can do, is start really taking care of the poor. That does not mean that we subsidize his poverty. It means that we teach him to be rich towards God and watch as God pours out his blessing upon him.

I am wading in at the shallow end with theology and theory. But there are others who have worked out various aspects of doing this in the real world.

24 Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: 25 Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul.

26 Be not thou one of them that strike hands, or of them that are sureties for debts. 27 If thou hast nothing to pay, why should he take away thy bed from under thee? 28 Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set.

Don't be foolish in supporting a fool, neither a foolish son nor a foolish neighbor. An equity position does not need a co-signer.

Exhortation

29 Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men.

A man who stands before Kings, has riches, honor and life. God wants us to have this, but only if we have a humble, godly, giving heart. Otherwise, God, Himself, will fight against us.

We start all of this by being obedient in our station, right now. Do not work for leisure and retirement which is often just more leisure. Learn to rest God's way, deep abiding rest in Jesus, on the Lord's Day, with God's people. And then work with His energy expecting Him to pour out mountains of blessing.

If God's people will learn this, the secret of contentment and thankfulness, then God will shower us with blessings that will change the world.