

Permanence of the Righteous vs. Transience of the Wicked

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[0 : 00] Please turn with me to Proverbs chapter 10, starting in verse 23, and we're going all the way to chapter 11, verse 31.

Proverbs chapter 10, verse 23 to chapter 11, verse 31. Doing wrong is like a joke to a fool, but wisdom is pleasure to a man of understanding.

What the wicked dreads will come upon him, but the desire of the righteous will be granted. When the tempest passes, the wicked is no more, but the righteous is established forever.

Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the slugger to those who send him. The fear of the Lord prolongs life, but the ears of the wicked will be short.

The hope of the righteous brings joy, but the expectation of the wicked will perish. The way of the Lord is a stronghold to the blameless, but destruction to evildoers.

[1 : 24] The righteous will never be removed, but the wicked will not dwell in the land. The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but the perverse tongue will be cut off. The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked what is perverse.

A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is his delight. When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with a humble is wisdom.

The integrity of the upright guides them, but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them.

Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.

The righteousness of the blameless keeps his way straight, but the wicked falls by his own wickedness. The righteousness of the upright delivers them, but the treacherous are taken captive by their lust.

When the wicked dies, his hope will perish, and the expectation of wealth perishes too. The righteous is delivered from trouble, and the wicked walks into it instead.

[2 : 28] With his mouth the godless man would destroy his neighbor, but by knowledge the righteous are delivered. When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices, and when the wicked perish, there are shouts of gladness.

By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but by the mouth of the wicked it is overthrown.

Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent.

Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps the thing covered. Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.

Whoever puts up security for a stranger will surely suffer harm, but he who hates striking hands and pledge is secure. A gracious woman gets honor, and violent men get riches.

A man who is kind benefits himself, but a cruel man hurts himself. The wicked earns deceptive wages, but one who sows righteousness gets a sure reward.

[3 : 36] Whoever is steadfast in righteousness will live, but he who pursues evil will die. Those of crooked heart are an abomination to the Lord, but those of blameless ways are his delight.

Be assured, an evil person will not go unpunished, but the offspring of the righteous will be delivered. Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion.

The desire of the righteous ends only in good, the expectation of the wicked in wrath. One gives freely yet grows all the richer. Another withholds what he should give and only suffers want.

Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered. The people curse him who holds back grain, but a blessing is on the head of him who sells it.

Whoever diligently seeks good seeks favor, but evil comes to him who searches for it. Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf.

[4 : 38] Whoever troubles his own household will inherit the wind, and the fool will be servant to the wise of heart. The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and whoever captures souls is wise.

If the righteous is repaid on earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner. This is God's holy and authoritative word.

In this world, there is much sin and injustice, and sometimes the innocent are condemned and the guilty are acquitted. Sometimes bribes blind the eyes of the judge.

Sometimes false witnesses rise up to imperil the falsely accused. And if you have been the victim of such injustice, you've grown. And if you've been an observer of such injustice, you've grown with the rest of creation under the weight of it all, as Romans 8 speaks of.

But Proverbs 10, 23 to 11, 31 reminds us that this is not the way it's supposed to be. It gives us a picture of God's perfect order of justice, and teaches us that we should live righteously, trusting that God's justice will ultimately prevail.

[5 : 56] That's the main point of this passage. First, we're going to look at the permanence of the righteous versus the transience of the wicked. Chapter 10, 23 to chapter 11, verse 8.

And then we'll look at the advantage of the selfless versus the disadvantage of the selfish in chapter 11, verses 9 to 31. The whole section, this whole first collection of Solomon's Proverbs is divided into two subsections I mentioned last week.

And this first subsection goes to 1529, and is a series of contrasts between the righteous and the wicked, as we saw today as we were reading the passage. And so he's emphasizing here the permanence of the righteous versus the transience of the wicked.

And that's trying to motivate us to live righteously, trusting in God's justice. It says in verse 23, Doing wrong is like a joke to a fool, but wisdom is pleasure to a man of understanding.

A joke, a laughing matter, a mockery. To the fool, wrongdoing is like a joke. It brings pleasure and amusement. It's not only sociopaths who laugh at the expense of others' suffering.

[7 : 08] People who advance themselves at the expense of others. People who hate others. They smirk and laugh at the downfall of others. And their ghastly smiles reflect their foolish heart.

But in contrast, for a man of understanding, it's not wrongdoing, but wisdom. That is the object of his pleasure and enjoyment. And the parallel between doing wrong and wisdom shows that wisdom is not merely theoretical, but concrete and practical.

The wisdom that Proverbs offers is a skill of right doing or right living. The wise person finds joy and delight in the wisdom of God, in obedience to God.

Though the fool finds pleasure in wrongdoing, this doesn't mean that a sinner lives a life of pleasure without a care in the world.

Verse 24 tells us that there is a deep-seated insecurity in the fool and the sinner. It says, So God has given every human being a conscience, a sense of right and wrong, as well as a sense of divine justice.

[8 : 22] And wrongdoers, even if they get away with wrongdoing, live with the sense of foreboding and dread that they will eventually get what is coming to them. Notice the contrast in the language that is used to describe how these things come.

What the wicked dreads will come upon him. It will overtake him. It will catch up to him. The phrase communicates this inevitability.

It will come upon him. In contrast, the desire of the righteous will be granted. It's like a gift from our God. The graciousness of God rewards those who follow him.

And as verse 25 confirms, verse 25 confirms his contrast. This is, When the tempest passes, the wicked is no more, but the righteous is established forever.

However, the tempests of life, the troubles of life, inevitably come, and when they do, the wicked is no more. They are like a house built on sand, or a tree with a shallow root that is uprooted by the tempest.

[9 : 37] However, the righteous is established forever, like a house built on a rock, like an oak tree with deep roots that fears not the tempests that come. In God's ultimate justice, the wicked sprout up for only a moment, but the righteous flourish forever.

And because the wicked take pleasure in wrongdoing, and their doom is sure, because the wicked are transient, they are unreliable, and should not be trusted or employed.

That's what verse 26 is speaking of. It says, Like vinegar to the teeth, and smoke to the eyes, so is the slugger to those who send him.

In the ancient Near East, the messengers who conveyed the words of the sender, and represented the sender in negotiations, had a very important role in society. However, the wicked sluggard should never be employed in such a role, because they will surely bring trouble to their sender. The vinegar in view here is the undiluted acidic form of vinegar that's corrosive to your teeth. It weakens the enamel on your teeth. And without the benefit of the advanced dental care we now enjoy, and people still have teeth trouble nowadays, but imagine people back then, what kind of teeth they would have had.

[10:55] If you're drinking some acidic vinegar, that would be a very unpleasant sensation. That's what's in view in this imagery. Be very sensitive to that. Similarly, smoke is an irritant to the eyes.

When you're camping out, or you're barbecuing, and you get smoke in your eyes, it causes a burning, itchy sensation, and it can make you tear up. And so in those ways, like vinegar to the teeth, and smoke to the eyes, the sluggard cannot be tolerated for long.

He will corrode the reputation of his sender, he will frustrate the interests of the sender, and he will irritate the sensibilities of the sender. And that's the warning. And after that brief aside, Solomon returns again to the theme of the permanence of the righteous versus the transience of the wicked in verses 27 to 30.

The fear of the Lord prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be short. The hope of the righteous brings joy, but the expectation of the wicked will perish.

The way of the Lord is a stronghold to the blameless, but destruction to evildoers. The righteous will never be removed, but the wicked will not dwell in the land.

[12:07] So the hope of the righteous endure and it's fulfilled, and for that reason it brings joy. But the expectation of the wicked perish, so they do not experience the joyful fulfillment of the righteous, that the righteous do.

Even though at times it seems the wicked linger longer than we would want. In truth, they are short-lived. And this theme is continued with an emphasis on speech in verses 31 to 32.

The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but the perverse tongue will be cut off. The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked what is perverse.

The righteous speak what is appropriate or acceptable, while the wicked speak what is inappropriate and perverse. And for that reason, the mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom. That word literally means to bear fruit. The mouth of the righteous are like trees that bear fruit, good fruit. And they're like vines that grow sweet clusters of wisdom grapes.

[13:09] But the mouth of the wicked, in contrast, is like a vine that grows sour grapes and will therefore be cut off. It is useless. And an acceptable speech of the righteous is connected to the acceptable deeds of the righteous.

And that's the transition to chapter 11, verse 1. It says, A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight. The word delight is the same Hebrew word that's translated in chapter 10, verse 32 as acceptable.

So a just weight is acceptable to God. The righteous say what is acceptable in their conversations. And the righteous use an acceptable way in their commercial activities.

Scales and weights were widely used in the ancient world. And deceitful sellers and buyers used tampered scales or forged weights in order to take advantage of others, to exploit others for unjust gain.

So for example, some merchants used a false balance, a tampered scale that they would manipulate to their advantage when they're negotiating. And traders also used forged weights.

[14:21] So people back then carried these stones that weighed a certain amount. It would be written on the stone that it weighs this much. And that was used for commercial activities.

However, a deceitful trader, when purchasing grain, he would use a false weight that is, for example, marked 15 pounds, when in reality it was only 10 pounds.

So that he would receive payment for 15 pounds of grain while giving only 10 pounds of grain. And of course, they would do the opposite when they're buying grain.

And in doing these things, they exploited others and gained unjust wealth. And the use of these false weights is condemned repeatedly throughout Scripture. And this is contrasted with using the just weight, the full weight, which is the Lord's delight.

It's acceptable to him. And we might deceive our neighbor through these practices. And there's a number of ways we might do that, whether it's the way we do taxes or the way we present things in ads or the way we talk to people in negotiating on Craigslist or whatever it might be.

[15 : 35] We might defraud our neighbor, but we can never fool God. We can never deceive God. And the Lord who hates a false balance will surely punish the wicked.

And these exploitative practices, it stems ultimately from pride. And that's why it says in verse 2, when pride comes, then comes disgrace.

But with the humble is wisdom. Why do these things come from pride? Psalm chapter 94 verses 4 to 7 capture what this looks like. It says, They pour out their arrogant words, all the evildoers boast. They crush your people, O Lord, and afflict your heritage. They kill the widow and the sojourner and murder the fatherless. And they say, The Lord does not see. The God of Jacob does not perceive. That's at the heart of all wickedness, isn't it? People believe that they could get away with it. People believe that God does not see. They believe that justice will not catch up to them.

[16 : 41] And that's the essence of their pride. And so they use false balances and weights, pridefully thinking that they could escape God's judgment. But when pride comes, then comes disgrace.

This is the inevitable, inescapable law of divine justice. If you invite pride into your heart against God, disgrace will soon come against you in your life.

The two are joined together at the hip. They always come together. In contrast with the humble is wisdom. The humble recognize that they are under the authority and governance of God.

They live under His watchful eyes. They live in submission to His rule. They know their place and accept their limits. The wicked may pride themselves in being shrewd or being imagined that they're wiser than the righteous.

But in truth, it's the humble who possess wisdom. Submitting under the bounds of God's law. And verses 3 to 8 tell us that this humility toward God is what produces integrity toward men.

[17 : 45] It says, The integrity of the upright guides them, but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them. Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.

The righteousness of the blameless keeps his way straight, but the wicked falls by his own wickedness. The righteousness of the upright delivers them, but the treacherous are taken captive by their lust.

When the wicked dies, his hope will perish, and the expectation of wealth perishes too. The righteous is delivered from trouble, and the wicked walks into it instead.

There's a recurring contrast between what is straight and upright versus what is crooked and treacherous. The straight or upright people, they are guileless.

There's no deception in their ways, unlike the crooked who are devious in their ways. And this is the principle that this section of Proverbs hammers home again and again, that in the end, there will be justice.

[18 : 53] Even unjustly gained wealth do not profit in the day of wrath. Only righteousness delivers from death. And this is what Martin Luther King Jr. had in mind when he said, the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.

In the end, cheats never prosper. It's honest work that pays. The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.

We should live righteously, trusting that God's justice will ultimately prevail. In one sense, then living righteously, righteously is one of the most self-serving things that a person can do.

Because it ultimately is what is most beneficial to oneself. And in verses 9 to 31, Solomon then elaborates on that paradox by contrasting the advantage of the selfless versus the disadvantage of the selfish.

The righteous person, according to Proverbs, is someone who disadvantages himself in order to serve the community. But the wicked person is someone who disadvantages the community in order to serve himself.

[20 : 03] However, in the end, it's the selfless, not the selfish, who gain the edge. It says in verses 9 to 11, This is pretty straightforward, right?

The wicked seek to destroy their neighbors. And for that reason, the neighbors don't applaud them, are not happy about their prospering and their success. But the righteous, however, bless the people, bless their city, and they deliver their neighbors.

And for that reason, when it goes well with them, the city rejoices. Because they serve others, the righteous are celebrated by others. And the wise not only benefit others by what they say, but they also benefit others by what they don't say.

It says in verses 12 to 13, Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent. Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps the thing covered.

We should never yield to the temptation of belittling a neighbor. Even the neighbor that is closest to you in your own family, your household.

[21 : 29] Every human being is created in the image of God. And because of that, has intrinsic worth and dignity, no matter how debased they are by their sins and by their environment.

So when we belittle other people, it's a way of kind of exalting ourselves, isn't it? We aggrandize ourselves. We make ourselves seem bigger by making others seem smaller.

We lift up ourselves by putting down others. And that's such a subtle sin sometimes, such an insidious sin. And it can pass with a lot of, it masquerades a lot of different things, but it destroys community.

Instead of belittling a neighbor, a man of understanding, it says, remains silent. It reminds me of James chapter 3, verses 8 to 10, which says, no human being can tame the tongue.

It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it, we bless our Lord and Father, and with it, we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing, my brother, these things are not to be so.

[22 : 38] If we have a proper respect for God, we wouldn't dare to hold in contempt people who are created in the image of God. Every single one of our neighbors, regardless of their educational attainment, regardless of their socioeconomic status, regardless of the complexion of their skin, regardless of their history or background, regardless of their political affiliation, they bear the image of God Almighty, and he who belittles his neighbor can only be described as someone who lacks sense.

But we have to do this even when it's hard. It's especially hard to be silent when we are ourselves insulted or reviled by our neighbor. But even then, out of respect and reverence for God, we are to hold our tongue rather than respond in kind.

So the wise person does not go about slandering and revealing secrets. He says, What has been confided to you in secret should not be broadcasted in public.

This too is a way that the wicked disadvantage others in order to advantage themselves. By speaking ill of others, they seek to speak well of themselves, to present themselves in a better light by comparison.

They seek to elevate their own standing in their community and improve the way others perceive them by speaking ill of others. In contrast, he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps the thing covered.

[24 : 11] The trustworthy person restrains rather than loosens his tongue, rather than divulging a secret to damage one's neighbor. The trustworthy person covers it in order to protect his neighbor.

Like we saw last week in chapter 10, verse 12, hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.

And continuing this line of thought, verses 14 to 15 contrast the way the wise provide counsel and guidance to their community and benefit their community.

And the fool, however, bring themselves under the authority of a stranger by putting up security for him. It says, Where there is no guidance, the people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.

Whoever puts up security for a stranger will surely suffer harm, but he who hates striking hands in pledge is secure. The wise speak words of wisdom to guide their community.

The foolish speak words of folly and get entangled in the affairs of strangers by becoming a surety for them. And this talks about how there's strength in numbers.

[25 : 16] There's strength in numbers in warfare, of course, but there's also strength in numbers in wisdom. It says, Where there is no guidance, a people falls. A people refers to a people group, a nation.

Even nations fall for the lack of guidance. But in an abundance of counselors, there is safety. We have a similar proverb in English, two heads are better than one.

It's saying, Don't make important decisions in your life by yourself. If you're in the habit of being the master of your own faith, you only make decisions yourself and don't listen to others, then don't get

out of that habit.

Consult with others. Seek out many people's advice because there's strength in numbers and getting an abundance of counselors. And the reason for that is because it's in the interplay between arguments and counter arguments in the weighing of competing ideas.

That's where truth is discovered and winning strategies are formed. This is why it's so important to listen to people who don't think exactly the way you do. So let's not get used to enjoying the sound of our own voices and the logic of our own opinions and listen to competing ideas.

[26 : 31] Read conservative and liberal newspapers. Talk to old people and young people. Find fair-minded people of all stripes who disagree with you. And don't be consumed only with being heard.

Seek to listen. And if we never leave our own echo chambers and dig our heels into our own confirmation biases, we will falter. That's inevitable. It's in the abundance of counselors.

There's safety. And verse 15 functions as a transition from the topic of right speaking to right living again. And then verses 16 to 22 form a new subunit bracketed by verses 16 and 22.

Very colorful proverbs which speak of the woman who gets honor. These verses continue to contrast between the advantage of the selfless and the disadvantage of the selfish.

But it says in verses 16 and 17, A gracious woman gets honor and violent men get riches. A man who is kind benefits himself but a cruel man hurts himself.

[27 : 35] So look at the gender, the number, and the reward of these two verses, how they all vary. And I think intentionally. First notice the contrast in gender and number in verse 16.

Woman singular and men plural. This shows the interplay between individual responsibility and collective responsibility that we saw last week also.

Chapter 10 verses 45 taught us that a slack hand causes poverty but the hand of the diligent makes rich. He who gathers in the summer is a prudent son but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who brings shame.

So that's the message of personal individual responsibility that conservatives would embrace. If you're poor, they say, that's because you didn't work hard enough. Now but that's qualified by chapter 13 verse 23 which we also looked at last week.

The fallow ground of the poor would yield much food but it is swept away through injustice. That's the message about systemic injustice and societal responsibility that liberals would rally behind.

[28 : 40] If you're poor, that's because of a system that is rigged against you. According to Proverbs, both aspects are true and must not be neglected.

And we see a similar interplay here. A gracious woman because of her own virtue gets honor.

That's the way it should be. Unfortunately, it's also true that violent men get riches.

Do they deserve it? No, they don't. But men who are generally stronger and hold more systemic power seize the riches by their violence. through injustice. But make no mistake that honor is the far better reward.

Proverbs chapter 22 verse 1 says, A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches. And favor is better than silver or gold. So the relatively powerless woman that is in view here, by her righteousness, by her virtue of graciousness, gets the greater reward.

And this is in stark contrast to the woman at the end of this subunit. It forms a bracket, these two proverbs. Look at verse 22. Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion.

[29 : 49] This is the worldly way. I can't help but laugh when I read that proverb. It's such a colorful proverb. This is the worldly way of gaining honor and power for women.

It's physical beauty and external adornment. Despite all the progress touted by feminists, women have become more sexually objectified now perhaps than ever before.

In the name of sexual revolution and feminine liberation, women have been told to wield their sexuality as a weapon to their liking without the fear of getting pregnant, without the fear of being condemned by prudish crusaders.

But this is nothing new. Women used beauty and outward adornments as instruments for seducing and subduing men in the ancient world as well. And there's plenty of ancient literature that testify to that.

So they say, do you want to be noticed? Do you want to gain power? Do you want to matter? That's what the TV ads, magazine covers, and the movies tell the women of our generation.

[30 : 56] Well then, you have to wear tight pants, short skirts, low-cut shirts, adorn yourself with makeup, hairdo, and shiny jewels. But unfortunately, and perhaps unsurprisingly, this lack of chastity and modesty plays right into the sinful desires of lustful, immature, selfish, and manipulative men.

That's because these are the principles and values of a sinful world. That's because, and that's why the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments consistently resists the sexual objectification of women.

Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion. What good is a gold ring that adorns a pig's snout?

The pigs rolling around in the mud, and in the ancient world, they were usually fed swill. That's kitchen compost, waste. That's what they grew up and that's what they ate.

For these reasons, they had a reputation for being dirty. What good is outward adornment, outward beauty for a woman who for her lack of inward graciousness and judiciousness rolls around in the mud of sin and eats the swill of sin?

[32 : 12] What good is that? Her outer beauty forms a grotesque contrast with her inner ugliness. And while the gracious woman of verse 16 forms a contrast with the violent men, she forms a complementary pair with the man who is kind in verse 17.

It says, a gracious woman gets honor and violent men get riches. A man who is kind benefits himself, but a cruel man hurts himself. So then this parallel between verse 16 and 17 invite a comparison between the second halves of these verses that qualify one another.

Because verse 16 does concede that violent men get riches, but then verse 17 qualifies that by telling us that in the end a cruel man hurts himself. Those who do violence to others in the ultimate calculation of things are doing violence to themselves.

If you want any lasting benefit, if you want true honor, then you must be gracious and kind. because there will be divine justice for those who cause the loss of others for their selfish gain.

Verses 18 to 21 continue to reassure us of this truth. It says, the wicked the wicked the wicked earns deceptive wages, but one who sows righteousness gets a sure reward. Whoever is steadfast in righteousness will live, but he who pursues evil will die.

[33 : 40] Those of crooked heart are an abomination to the Lord, but those of blameless ways are his delight. Be assured, an evil person will not go unpunished, but the offspring of the righteous will be delivered.

This illustrates the principle taught in many places in scripture and especially Galatians chapter 6 verse 7 which says, do not be deceived. God is not mocked for whatever one sows that will he also reap.

You will reap what you sow. If you sow sin, you will reap trouble. If you sow righteousness, you will reap a sure reward from the Lord. So don't be deceived by the appearances of things.

Yes, for a little while the wicked might appear to prosper, but there is injustice in this world, but none of it escapes God's notice and none of it will escape God's final judgment.

So be assured, an evil person will not go unpunished. And if you sow righteousness, that's to scatter the seeds of righteousness, it says in verse 21, the offspring of the righteous, that's literally the seed of the righteous, will be delivered.

[34 : 47] You will bear much fruit and plant, I mean, and reap or reach a rich harvest. And this principle of divine retribution should govern the way we live and also, more specifically, what we do with our money.

It says in verses 24 to 26, one gives freely, yet grows all the richer. Another withholds what he should give and only suffers want.

Whoever brings blessing will be enriched and one who waters will himself be watered. The people curse him who holds back rain, but a blessing is on the head of him who sells it.

This is paradoxical, isn't it? It's because from a worldly, just financial perspective, the more money you give away, of course, the poorer you become. But because of God's justice, one gives freely, yet grows all the richer, while another withholds what he should give and only suffers want.

I can witness this fact that every Christian that I've known who has given generously can corroborate this reality. You cannot outgive God.

[35 : 57] 2 Corinthians 9, verse 68 says, Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. Whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

Each one must give as he has decided in his heart and not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things, at all times, you may abound in every good work.

To those who give generously for the needs of others, God makes all grace abound, so that you have all sufficiency in all things, at all times. Sometimes people illustrate this principle with the example of the nursing mother.

The more the mother nurses her child, the more her milk supply grows. It's counterintuitive. But the more she withholds her milk from the child, the sooner her milk supply runs dry.

Wealth is like that. God gives it so you might steward it and give much of it away. In his wisdom and justice, God has embedded a general principle of reciprocity to the order of the universe, so that the generous enjoy prosperity while the stingy are beset with scarcity.

[37 : 19] Scarcity. Verse 28 further develops this idea. It says, Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf.

Whoever trusts in his riches relies on his riches, sets his hope on his riches, and for that reason is tight-fisted because money is not a tool for him but is God.

And that leads to his downfall. But those who are open-handed with his riches, the righteous, they flourish like a green leaf. Verses 29 to 31 keep driving this point home and then verse 31 concludes, If the righteous is repaid on earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner?

This can be misunderstood, this verse. It's an argument from the lesser to the greater. So he's saying, Even the relatively righteous are repaid for their misdeeds on earth.

Do you think then God will spare the wicked and the sinner? Of course not. That's the logic of this last verse. Even the righteous will get what's coming to them, then how much more the wicked and the sinner who have done much more wickedness, committed many more sins.

[38 : 39] And so this is what we're trying to motivate. We should live righteously, trusting that God's justice will ultimately prevail. Let me ask you, how does that make you feel about your future prospects in light of God's justice?

If you're like most people, hopefully not in our church, but if you're like most people, including unbelievers, you probably feel pretty good about your future prospects. There's an article entitled The Illusion of Moral Superiority published in Social, Psychological, and Personality Science a few years ago.

It documents the phenomenon called the self-enhancement effect, which is people's tendency to overestimate their own qualities and abilities in relation to the same qualities and abilities in others. We naturally think more highly of ourselves than we ought to. And this study shows, it demonstrates that actually that self-enhancement effect is most pronounced when it comes to assessments of our own morality.

We all tend to think that we're especially, when it comes to morality, that we are better than others, that we're more righteous than others. In other words, this is something the Bible has been saying for thousands of years, we're all self-righteous.

[39 : 59] Now, but the Bible presents us with a more sobering and accurate assessment than our own personal assessment. Romans 3 verse 10 tells us, none is righteous.

No, not one. And this is a problem because Proverbs 11 chapter, 11:31 told us that if the righteous is repaid on earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner?

Even the righteous get what's coming to them for this little sense here and there perhaps, but we are not in the righteous category as much as we would like. In the ultimate sense, in light of God's perfect standard, we are all in the wicked and sinner category.

And how then can we be saved? As the psalmist says in Psalm 130, if you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? No one could stand before God.

No one could stand and be acquitted at the court of God's justice. And this is how the book of Proverbs points to and finds this fulfillment in Jesus Christ because that same chapter in Romans, Romans 3, which told us that no one is righteous continues in verses 21 and 24, but now the righteousness of God has been made and has been manifested apart from the law, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe, for there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by His grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

[41 : 40] Jesus, the righteous one, died on the cross to pay the penalty of sin that we should have paid, that we should have died for. And through His death and resurrection, we are justified.

That means we are counted righteous. Not as a wage that we ourselves must earn by our hard work, but by His grace as a gift freely given.

We were not righteous, but nonetheless, God counts us as righteous on account of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And that's how we come to inherit the eternal life that this passage speaks of.

Return with me one last time to Proverbs chapter 11. Look at verse 30. He says, The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life and whoever captures souls is wise.

The outcome of a righteous life is a tree of life, a symbol of healing and eternal life that goes all the way back to the beginning of creation in Genesis 2.

[42 : 45] And it's the righteous person, the wise person in a biblical sense that captures souls and shares with them this eternal life.

The phrase capture souls, it's a startling image because that phrase occurs six other times in the Old Testament and every single one of those other occurrences it is translated to take away life. It refers to killing someone, to capture souls. But here, it's used in an ironic, subversive sense to mean precisely the opposite.

To capture souls in order to rescue them, to save them. It's very similar to the way Jesus told His disciples who are fishermen in Luke 5, verse 10.

He told them, from now on, you will be catching men. Think about it. Fishermen usually catch fish in order to kill them. It's not an encouraging image if you think about that.

[43 : 49] They're trying to go around and catch men. And the imagery of catching is normally used in the Old Testament to refer to divine judgment, catching someone in one's net. But Jesus transforms that image as this proverb does.

Jesus transformed the imagery in a surprising way that He said, those who would follow Him, those who would be wise, those who are called to find those who deserve to be, our calling is to find those who are deserving of being captured and killed.

That's our calling. We were all of those who deserve to be captured and killed, but instead, Jesus says, you capture now to save. At the hands of Jesus, the instrument of death, the cross, becomes the instrument of life and salvation.

We should have been captured and killed. That's every single one of us. But instead, God turns that around and says, capture those souls, not for death, but for eternal life so that they might be saved. And that's what Jesus did for He is the righteous one, the wise one who captures souls. That's in view in this verse. He did it on the cross for us and now that is our calling to receive it, to follow Him and likewise become catchers of men and women sharing this wisdom with the world.

[45 : 20] Please take a moment to think about that, of the reality of what Christ has done for us in spite of our lack of righteousness.