

## Dr. August Konkell, Proverbs, Session 15

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This is Dr. August Konkell in his teaching on the book of Proverbs. This is session number 15, Lessons from God's World. Proverbs 25:1-28.

Welcome to a talk on Proverbs. We have been talking about the collections of Proverbs that are given under Solomon's name, beginning with chapter 10. What we have said is that these various collections have been made at different points in time.

And we have also observed that the collections seem to be associated with the court of a king. They are all associated with Solomon, who of course is known as the most wise of kings. But when we come to the second major collection, after chapter 10, it is said to have taken place during the days of Hezekiah.

So, when we come to Proverbs chapter 25 verse 1, we read that these are the Proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah, the king of Judah, have transcribed. It's a little bit of a paraphrase to use the word transcribed, but in this case, it has to do with taking something that is traditional and passing it along. So these collections were made about 250 years after Solomon.

The time of Hezekiah is about 700 before Christ, whereas Solomon's kingdom ends at about 931 before Christ. So, the book of Proverbs has been long in its collection. The collection done under Hezekiah is not nearly as long as the 375 Proverbs that are under Solomon.

It also seems to break down somewhat into topics. And so, what we're going to do in this little talk is just look at Proverbs chapter 25 and the various topics that are addressed there. We'll begin with what I have called the order of a good society in verses 2 through 7. Some very profound things are really said here in these Proverbs.

The first thing is about the mystery of knowledge. I always have to smile when scientists, be they biologists, declare to us all of the knowledge that they have, even about the very origins of the universe itself that we live in, our galaxy, and probing ideas about the distances of the heavens and the age since our earth was formed and all of these sorts of things. Frankly, they're based on very limited observations that we have as humans on all sorts of things that we don't know.

I had the privilege of meeting Stephen Hawking a couple of times when I lived in Cambridge. I remember reading with some diligence one of his first popular publications, A Brief History of Time, in which at that time he had a particular theory about the age of the universe. And then even while I was in Cambridge, he was already revising his ideas.

What do we actually know about time and distance? Well, the fact is almost nothing. We don't know what time is. We know how we measure time.

But what would time be if I wasn't on planet Earth? And then, of course, we have physicists such as Einstein, who really was the predecessor of Stephen Hawking in many ways, who said to us that time is as elastic as a rubber band, that it isn't in any sense a fixed entity, nor is distance a fixed entity. Well, all those things could be true because they're all creations of God, and we only know them from a very relative perspective, a limited perspective. That's the point of this proverb.

What we know is very limited. I wish those who had such a profound trust in what they think is the vast knowledge of science could take these proverbs a little more seriously. What we should see in the heavens is what Psalm 19 tells us about and what this proverb says.

We should see God's mystery and God's glory in the heavens. This proverb puts it in an interesting way. It is the glory of God to hide things.

They're a mystery to us. We probe them. We're meant to probe them.

We're meant to see what they're all about. But our ability to actually know them is very limited. And contrasting to that is the king.

It's the king who can discern things, who can make decisions about people, and know things about people. And of course, there's another comparison that can be made with the king. It is the king's business of what he should know, relationships between people.

But the other thing about the king is the things that we don't know. His mind, what is he thinking and what may he do? So, this proverb reminds us of what knowledge we are to have as humans, and what knowledge we don't have as humans. That what we need to have for success is to be genuine.

What we need to have is true character. If you want to have silver, if you want to have gold, you have to smelt out what is called the dross, the residue of the various other minerals and rock that may be in the metal. And so, in the same way, society has got to root out those things that will corrupt it.

What we need to have, if we're going to have dignity, is humility. There's nothing else that I find so contradictory as very proud people who actually make themselves look very, very foolish because of their pride. Beware of trying to promote yourself.

It's better to start accepting the low place and be asked to move up. Because as this proverb says, if you sit at a dignified place at the table and someone else has to say, oh, I'm sorry, that's reserved for someone else, it's going to be a humiliating experience. Resolving disputes.

We will always have disputes. We will always differ from each other in terms of opinion. And this proverb warns us, now be careful about getting into an argument with your neighbor and be careful about going to court, because it may not turn out like you think.

I'm always reminded here of the words of Jesus. When you differ from a brother, this is someone who shares your worldview, your perspective, and your faith, and you have differences. The right thing to do is to make sure that you discuss between the two of you how this can be resolved.

And if you can't do it that way, then bring in a few others to mediate the situation. And if you can't do it that way, take it to the congregation. You know, I've seen this work.

We have this tendency, no, I'll just take you to court. But that isn't necessarily the best solution. And I remember one time when I was a pastor, there were two families in a village that were at terrible loggerheads with each other.

They were both good families. But they had disputes over many things. They asked me if I would mediate one of their meetings.

It was the most interesting thing. We got into this garage. It was a huge garage.

There were 15 or 20 of us all together around in this big circle. And frankly, all I did was sit there. I don't recall that I ever said anything.

And we all left and they were reconciled. It was just an amazing thing to watch it all happen. But they needed someone else there, just one other person, who kind of controlled a little bit about what they would say to each other because there was one other neutral person present.

Well, that's what this proverb is about. It's also about, you know, being careful of what you think about yourself. You think your case is so strong, it might not be that good.

And here I'm reminded of Psalm 139. Most interesting, begins with a declaration, an indicative sentence. You have searched me, O God, and you know me.

And then the Psalm goes on to describe the intimacy with which God knows every single one of us, every movement we have, every place where we are, and it doesn't matter where we might go, God knows. And then the Psalm ends with a prayer, an imperative. Search me, O God.

Now that's kind of interesting. If God has searched me and knows me, why does the Psalmist say, search me and know me and see if there be in me a way of pain. Etsev.

Here we have that word about pain again. See if I'm the one who's saying the wrong words, and so forth. Now what is the case in the Psalm? The case in the Psalm is very clear.

The Psalmist believes that he knows God's enemy. And he says I hate your enemies, O God, with a passion. But there's a little bit of a question in his mind.

What if it turns out that his enemy is not God's enemy? You know, that's a possibility. We think we know who God's enemies are, but maybe it's just our enemy and not God's enemies. So, the Psalmist has to pray.

God is the one who knows, and that's his comfort. I don't know. You have to search for me.

These proverbs are saying the same sort of thing. Confidentiality. When you've got a dispute, you make sure that you keep confidential that information, which is confidential.

The power of words. And we've already referred to this proverb in verse 11, like apples of gold in an engraving of silver. So as a word on its wheels is literally what the Hebrew says.

So, you have to kind of wonder, what does it mean for a word to be on its wheels? And what does it mean for a word to be an apple of gold in an engraving of silver? But the general gist of it, whatever the specific metaphor, is pretty clear. The essence of it is to depict the kind of thing that's on the pillar of the temple. It's a chain that works as a lattice, and on it are hanging the little pomegranates, and the whole thing beautifies this ornamental pillar that stands in front of the temple.

It's just perfect. It just does what it's supposed to do in its place there on the pillar. And so is the right word at just the right time.

It just makes the whole situation appear different. It's mobile. It moves.

It changes with the circumstances. It has its effect. Correction.

You know, it's a good thing to encourage. It's a good thing to speak words that affirm. And in fact, complimentary words are going to be a lot better than criticism all of the time.

Criticism has to be used carefully. However, if a correction is appropriate, and if that correction can be understood, then of course that's even better than a compliment. That's even better than an affirmation because now you've advanced the situation.

This is a whole tricky business. If you have a criticism that isn't going to be understood, there's no point in criticizing. And that's what we tend not to know.

We tend not to know that we shouldn't criticize when the criticism simply won't be understood. It doesn't mean it's not true. It just means it isn't going to be understood.

And if it isn't going to be understood, you're only going to arouse anger and resentment. So, messages need to be expressed so that it strengthens a relationship. Our Canadian Marshall McLuhan is famous for his declaration that the medium is the message.

In other words, the way in which the message is given is a whole part of the message itself. And of course, this is always true. Then a number of proverbs that we have here in this chapter about good relationships.

Be careful what you promise. Oh my, especially with children. They can hear a promise when you think you haven't made one.

They do it all of the time. But you promised. Well, now is that exactly what I said? But sometimes we do make promises that we're not too able to keep.

Make sure our reactions are corrective. Be moderate. This one I like.

As the proverb expresses it here, don't make your neighbor wish that you were leaving. That's what you don't want to have happen. You don't want to overstay your welcome.

Where someone is going to be asking, I wonder how soon they're going to go. Mercy is the best revenge. Paul quotes this, of course.

When you show mercy and favor to your enemy, you heap coals of fire on their head. That is actually true. Most of us don't manage to do it very often.

And sometimes even our attempts at trying to do it aren't very good. But I have to say that I have seen this work wondrously. Where someone does something that

really is intended to hurt, and where the person simply responds by doing the opposite to the offender.

Offenders just don't know what to do with that. How do they deal with this good favor that's been shown to them by someone who just intended to injure them? It's like burning fire under your feet. How do you handle this? But it sure can change the attitude in a hurry.

Slander. There is a difference between gossip and slander, though I think in our language they do tend to overlap. But slander is to say something that generally speaking has some kind of truth to it, but it's meant to give an inference that is very negative.

That's the thing about slander. Slander is usually not all wrong. It couldn't work if it were all wrong.

There's always something to it that's true, but of course, it's concealing part of the whole picture. A contented home is better than a rich home. Better to dwell in a small house than in a broad house with a lot of complaining.

Long-awaited news is like refreshing water. How true that is. The righteous can sometimes be wronged.

No question about that. Lack of self-control is like a city without defense. What a wonderful metaphor that is.

Cities had to be defended with big walls, but if you don't know how to control your own emotions, you really have removed from yourself all the kinds of protection and relationships that you need. These are some of the thoughts of the Proverbs that the men of Hezekiah collected.

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