

Dr. Knut Heim, Proverbs, Session 8, "Prosperity Gospel" Part 1

Podcast, Audio Overview

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Welcome back, everybody, to another deep dive with us. Yeah. Great to be here.

Today, we're diving into something really fascinating and honestly a bit controversial. It's the whole concept of prosperity, but we're looking at it specifically through the lens of the Book of Proverbs. The Book of Proverbs.

Yeah, exactly. You know that ancient collection of wisdom sayings? Right. So often quoted when people are talking about wealth and success.

Yeah. But is that really the whole story? That's the question, isn't it? Is there more to it? That's what we're going to find out. We are going to find out.

Yeah. So, you know, one thing that comes up a lot these days is this phrase, prosperity gospel. And it's this idea that God wants his followers to be wealthy, that material blessings are a direct result of your faith.

A sign of God's favor. Yeah. You've got it.

Yeah. Just so we're all starting from the same place. Yeah.

Good idea. Let's go with the definition from the Collins Dictionary. It says, and I quote, a modern version, or, according to some, a perversion of the gospel, according to which the full blessings of God available to those who approach him in faith and obedience include wealth, health, and power.

Wow. That's pretty comprehensive. It is.

It covers all the bases. Yeah. Well, health, power.

That's a lot. It is a lot to unpack. It is a lot to unpack.

And it's interesting because this idea of the prosperity gospel pulls from a lot of different parts of the Bible. Right. But today, we're really zeroing in on what Proverbs has to say.

Specifically about wealth. Yeah. About wealth and prosperity and what that looks like in that book.

Yeah. Does it actually promise riches to people who are following its wisdom? Right. Is it just like a formula? Is it that simple? If you do these things, then you will get rich.

Yeah. Right. Or is there something deeper going on? That's what I'm so curious about because when you really dig into Proverbs, you start to see it's not just about becoming wealthy, like you said.

It's about living this life of integrity, making good choices, and really contributing to a just society. It's very holistic; it seems to take in all of life. It really does.

Not just your bank account. Yeah. And I think one of the things that's really important about Proverbs is that it emphasizes how wealth is made.

How? Yeah. And how it's used. Not just the fact that you have it.

It's about aligning your actions with these principles that lead to a flourishing life. So it's not about winning the lottery. Right.

Or inheriting a bunch of money from a rich uncle. Exactly. It's about- it's about how you live.

Cultivating a certain way of being in the world. That leads to a kind of prosperity. That leads to prosperity.

Yeah. Scholar Klaus Koch actually called this the deed-consequence connection. Deed-consequence connection.

Yeah. The idea that what we do directly determines the consequences we experience. Okay.

So almost like cause and effect. Yeah. You could say that.

And you see this all over Proverbs. Like, look at Proverbs 11.28. It says, "Those who trust in their riches will wither, but the righteous will flourish like green leaves. Oh.

So it's suggesting a pretty clear link there between righteousness and flourishing. Flourishing even if it doesn't look like riches and wealth. Yeah.

Exactly. That's a really good point. There's a moral dimension to this.

Yeah. It's not just about luck or circumstance. Yeah.

There's something deeper. It's about aligning yourself with God's ways. Yeah.

And that kind of leads me to another thing that's really interesting about Proverbs. This focus on being honest. Professional honesty.

In your work. Yeah. Marketplace ethics.

You wouldn't think an ancient book would have so much to say about that. Right. You'd think it would be more about, you know- sacrifices or something? Yeah.

Rituals. Yeah. What does it say about marketplace ethics? Well, it emphasizes God's view of dishonest business practices.

Okay. Proverbs 11.1 says, A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but an accurate weight is his delight. Okay.

It doesn't just say honesty is good. It's a good idea. It talks about how God feels about it.

He's delighted by honesty. He's delighted. And he finds dishonesty repulsive.

It's like he's personally invested. He's involved. In how we do business.

And it goes even further. Proverbs 20.10 says, Differing weights and differing measures. The Lord detests them both.

It's pretty serious. It is serious. God is the one who sets up a just economic system.

So it's not just about following the rule. It's bigger than that. It's about recognizing that our actions have spiritual implications.

Okay. So Proverbs definitely stresses honesty and integrity. Big time.

But does it actually say that if you're righteous, you're going to get rich? Right. Is it really that simple? Is that the formula? Well, it does seem to link righteousness with prosperity. It does.

But like most things in Proverbs, it's more nuanced than that. Okay. It's not just a simple equation.

It's more complicated. There are verses that suggest a much more complex relationship between the two. Okay.

So it's not always a straight line. Not a straight line. I mean, you know, it's interesting because sometimes it really does seem like the people who are cutting corners are the ones getting ahead.

Yeah. You see that a lot, don't you? You do. How does Proverbs address that? That's a really important question.

And it doesn't shy away from that reality that sometimes the wicked do prosper. They do. But it also acknowledges the tension that comes with that.

The tension. Yeah. And the potential suffering that comes along with it.

Okay. As Proverbs 13.23 says, the field of the poor may yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice. Wow.

So even if you're doing everything right, working hard, you can still be robbed of your prosperity. Proverbs acknowledges that injustice exists and that sometimes things happen that are outside of your control. That's tough.

It is tough. It's a hard truth. It is.

Are there other verses that kind of speak to that tension? There are. There are a bunch, actually. Like Proverbs 14.11. Okay.

It says, the house of the wicked will be destroyed, but the tent of the upright will flourish. So you have these two contrasting images. Okay.

You've got the house, this permanent structure that's going to be destroyed. Right. It seems so strong and solid.

Right. And then you've got this tent, which is temporary. Like flimsy.

Flimsy. Yeah. Yeah.

And yet it flourishes. So it's almost like it's saying outward appearances can be deceiving. Absolutely.

And that material wealth, even if it's gained dishonestly, can be really fleeting. Yeah. It can disappear so quickly.

It can. And I think that goes back to that deed-consequence connection that we were talking about earlier. Right.

There is this moral order at work. Even if we don't always see the immediate results. Yeah.

You might not see it right away. But eventually. But the consequences will come.

It's like, don't get too caught up in outward success. Yeah. The outward appearance.

There's something much deeper. True prosperity has deeper roots. Deeper roots.

And even when it looks like the wicked are winning. Which happens sometimes. It does happen.

Oh. Proverbs hints at this bigger picture. Okay.

This divine order that will ultimately prevail. So it's kind of acknowledging that human systems are limited? Yeah. They have their limits.

But there's something bigger going on. There's a bigger story. And this actually connects to another really important theme in Proverbs.

Which is God's concern for the vulnerable. The vulnerable. Yeah.

You see this emphasis throughout the book. You see it everywhere. On God's protection of widows and orphans.

Foreigners. Foreigners. Those who are most susceptible to being taken advantage of.

Yeah. The ones who can't protect themselves. Let's take in Proverbs 23.11. One of my favorites.

It says, Do not move an ancient boundary stone, or encroach on the fields of the fatherless, for there it is: Defender is strong; he will take up their case against you. Wow. God is like stepping in.

It is actively involved. Defending the powerless. That's powerful.

It is powerful. And it makes me think that, you know, true righteousness, according to Proverbs, isn't just about me getting ahead. Right.

It's not about you winning. It's about making sure that everyone. Everyone has a fair shot.

That justice is done. Especially for those who can't fight for themselves. That is so good.

So true prosperity, then, isn't just about my bank account. It's not about your stuff. It's about aligning myself with God's heart.

With his character. For justice and compassion for others. Beautifully said.

And you know, I think it's interesting because we were talking earlier about how God delights in honesty. Right. And it seems like that same principle applies here.

Absolutely. He's not just watching this injustice happen. He's not passive.

He's actively working. To set things right. To protect those being wronged.

To bring justice. So even when it seems like the bad guys are winning. Which can be discouraging.

It can't. Proverbs is saying there's more to the story. There's a deeper reality.

This is divine justice. That might not be obvious right now. But it's there.

It's work. And that brings us back to prosperity. Full circle.

If we define it only in terms of money. Yeah. Just dollars and cents.

Yeah. It's going to seem like an unfair system. It's going to seem random.

But if we see it as connected to this divine justice. To God's character. It takes on a whole new meaning.

It does. It really does. It's like Proverbs is inviting us to see success and prosperity differently.

To look beyond the material. To look beyond the material. The moral and spiritual.

But how do we actually live this out? Right. How do we apply this? In our modern world, that's what I'm wrestling with. It's been quite a journey through Proverbs.

It has. And I feel like I'm seeing this whole idea of prosperity so differently now. Me too.

But how do we actually put this into practice? Yeah. How do we live this out? What does it mean to really have, like, a Proverbs-based prosperity? That's a great question. And I don't think Proverbs gives us a step-by-step plan.

Right. But I think what it does is offer a totally new perspective. Okay.

So what's at the heart of that perspective shift? I think the key takeaway is that Proverbs sees prosperity as being completely connected to righteousness. So it's not just about having a lot of money. No.

It's not about the stuff you have. It's about living a life that really reflects who God is. Living out his character.

Exactly. And I think that's where the challenge is, but also where the real reward is. Okay.

How so? Well, because, you know, let's be real. For most of us. Yeah.

We've kind of bought into this idea that success equals prosperity. Oh, yeah. That's everywhere you look.

It's everywhere. Yeah. And Proverbs is basically saying, wait a minute, let's rethink that.

Let's redefine success. Yes. Yeah.

And I think that starts by understanding that God isn't just this far off, being someone who only cares about our religious stuff. Right. He's involved in every part of our lives.

He cares about the choices we make. The big ones and the small ones. Even in our work.

Yeah. Even in the marketplace. And we've seen how Proverbs really stresses God's heart for the vulnerable.

The people who are often overlooked and taken advantage of. Exactly. Remember those verses about protecting widows, orphans, foreigners? Yeah.

Those are powerful. They are. It's like Proverbs is saying, if you want to understand God, look at how you're treating those who are most vulnerable.

I love that. And it goes back to this idea of God's delight. Yeah.

Remember how he delights in honesty? Yeah. Well, he also delights in justice and fairness. So when we fight for those who can't fight for themselves.

When we stand up for what's right. It's not just a good deed. It's something that actually brings God joy.

It reflects his character. Exactly. So true prosperity.

Yeah. According to Proverbs.

Isn't about having a fancy car or a big house. It's not about the stuff. It's about living a life.

That lines up with God's heart. A life of justice, generosity, and compassion. That's it.

That's the heart of it. And maybe that kind of prosperity. It leads to a whole different kind of abundance.

An abundance that's not about money. Right. An abundance of purpose and meaning and a connection to something much bigger than yourself.

That's what's so powerful about Proverbs. Yeah. It's not just giving us financial tips.

Yeah. It's inviting us to change how we see our whole lives. To redefine success.

To redefine success. And it leaves us with these really interesting questions. Yeah.

Like, if God delights in honesty, even in the marketplace, does that change how we see our work? Yeah. And our economic choices. Do our everyday interactions.

Become opportunities. Not just to make money. But to actually reflect God's character.

Those are great questions to think about. They are. And it reminds us that Proverbs isn't just meant to be read.

Right. It's meant to be lived out. Well said.

So to everyone listening. Keep exploring. Keep digging into this amazing book.

Yeah. Wrestle with these ideas. And see how its wisdom might transform your life.

Your pursuit of a truly prosperous life. Thanks for joining us on this deep dive.