

Woodland Baptist Church
 Wednesday, August 20, 2014
 Seeking Wisdom Together - Proverbs 21:1-16

1) READ PROVERBS 20:16-30

a) **The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.**

- i) Chapter 21 begins (vv. 1–3) and ends (vv. 30–31) with references to the Lord. Verses 2, 8, 26, 28 of chapter 20 referred to kings. Now again the king is mentioned. The heart of the king is in God's hand (cf. Ecc. 9:1) as are the plans of all people (cf. Prov. 16:1, 9). A farmer directs water by digging canals. Similarly the Lord directs the hearts of kings, as, for example, Pharaoh (Ex. 10:1–2), Tiglath-Pileser (Isa. 10:5–7), Cyrus (Isa. 45:1–6), and Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:21; Neh. 2:1–8). God is sovereign (cf. Prov. 21:30).¹
- ii) The most autocratic monarch was not free from God's jurisdiction. In the same way that an irrigator can cut a watercourse in any direction he desires, so God sways the heart of the despot. By hidden influences and providential arrangements God disposes the monarch to order his government so as to carry out the designs of the heaven's ultimate sovereign (21:1).²

b) **2 Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the heart.**

- i) Note, 1. We are all apt to be partial in judging of ourselves and our own actions, and to think too favorably of our own character, as if there was nothing amiss in it: Every way of a man, even his by-way, is right in his own eyes. The proud heart is very ingenious in putting a fair face upon a foul matter, and in making that appear right to itself which is far from being so, to stop the mouth of conscience.
- ii) 2. We are sure that the judgment of God concerning us is according to truth. Whatever our judgment is concerning ourselves, the Lord ponders the heart. God looks at the heart, and judges of men according to that, of their actions according to their principles and intentions; and his judgment of that is as

¹ Bible Knowledge

² Smith, Wisdom and Psalms

exact as ours is of that which we ponder most, and more so; he weighs it in an unerring balance, ch. 16:2.³

c) 3 To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.

- i) It was a common thing for men to forget that sacrifices and offerings were not pleasing to the Lord when uprightness was lacking. He ever placed righteousness and equity above ceremonial observances, as, we may rest assured, He does to-day. The Lord witheringly rebuked the Pharisees, when He was on earth, for their attention to ritualistic details while justice and integrity were lacking. "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice" was His word. Isaiah sets forth the same truth, of the supreme importance of the execution of righteousness, when contrasting the ceremonial fasts with what Jehovah really delighted in (Isa. 58:5–14). See Samuel's word to Saul (1 Sam. 15:22).⁴

d) 4 Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, are sin.

- i) The "lamp of the wicked" seems to be their life (cf. 13:9b) or, more particularly, their conscience (cf. 20:27). Here, in the light of the first line, it seems to refer to the presumptuous pride of the wicked, that is at the very root of their being. If this is so, the verse is saying that arrogance and pride are the sum and substance of the life of the wicked, and that these are sin. This hubris is evident in their "haughty eyes" and their "proud hearts," which the Lord detests (6:16-17; 8:13). The Pharaoh of the Exodus personified these traits (Exod. 7—10).⁵

e) 5 The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty. 6 The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a snare of death. 7 The violence of the wicked will sweep them away, because they refuse to do what is just.

- i) Riches accumulated by means of honest, wholesome toil give pleasure and a measure of satisfaction to their possessor. But the hasty gathering of wealth by lying and deceit, often coupled with downright robbery, will bring sorrow and shame in their wake. One may possess boundless stores of gold and silver, and yet be as needy as the Arab lost in the desert, who, when almost

³ Henry

⁴ Ironside, logos

⁵ Constable

dead for want of food, found in the track of a caravan a package, which he opened with trembling eagerness, hoping it might be dates. He dropped it in dire disappointment, as he groaned, "It's only pearls!" Those pearls were worth thousands of dollars, but they could not feed a starving man. So with wealth illegally gotten. It cannot satisfy. He who possesses it will be in deepest and most abject poverty after all. Life will be a weary round of vexation and disappointment, and he will be left to groan at last, "All is vanity, and pursuit of the wind." See Ecc. 5:10–17.⁶

f) 8 The way of the guilty is crooked, but the conduct of the pure is upright.

- i) A person who continually has to explain and excuse his actions tips his hand: he is probably trying to cover up something bad that he has done. But a person who habitually tells the truth, and does right, proceeds straight on through life. King Ahab's convoluted history illustrates the first line (1 Kings 16—22), and Daniel's upright integrity does the second (Dan. 6:4).⁷

g) 9 It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife.

- i) Happy must the family be where the lovely order of God's word is recognized as to the various relationships of each one. If the husband render unto the wife due benevolence, and the wife be adorned by the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, the children are likely to be in godly subjection, and the home a sweet foretaste of that eternal one for which we wait. But where a brawling woman seeks to rule, and will not be content unless she has things her own way, it is most unpleasant. A quiet corner on the housetop is better far than to dwell in a palatial residence with such company. Both Job and David found it so at times (Job 2:9, 10; 2 Sam. 6:20–23).⁸

h) 10 The soul of the wicked desires evil; his neighbor finds no mercy in his eyes.

- i) A wicked person cannot rest without planning for some new evil activity. He does not look with pity on friend or neighbor if they stand in the way of gratifying his desires. He will sacrifice anyone, however closely connected, so

⁶ Ironside

⁷ Constable

⁸ Ironside

that he may work his will. Such a person is totally self-centered. He cannot experience compassion, even for a neighbor who is destitute (21:10).⁹

i) 11 When a scoffer is punished, the simple becomes wise; when a wise man is instructed, he gains knowledge.

i) This we had before (ch. 19:25), and it shows that there are two ways by which the simple may be made wise: 1. By the punishments that are inflicted on those that are incorrigibly wicked. Let the law be executed upon a scorner, and even he that is simple will be awakened and alarmed by it, and will discern, more than he did, the evil of sin, and will take warning by it and take heed. 2. By the instructions that are given to those that are wise and willing to be taught: *When the wise is instructed by the preaching of the word he (not only the wise himself, but the simple that stands by) receives knowledge.* It is no injustice at all to take a good lesson to ourselves which was designed for another.¹⁰

j) 12 The Righteous One observes the house of the wicked; he throws the wicked down to ruin.

i) Solomon was referring to God here as "the Righteous One," who evaluates "the house[hold]" of every wicked person, and he observed that God in righteousness brings ("turning") all the wicked "to ruin" eventually. This should encourage the godly when they observe the wicked flourishing (temporarily). Sometimes God judges the wicked directly, but often He uses the just to do so. He even used Jehu, who got carried away with punishing the wicked and went too far, to do so (2 Kings 9—10).¹¹

k) 13 Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered.

i) Those who give no mercy receive none. Just as the cries of the poor go unanswered, this saying leaves it to the reader to conclude that Yahweh will shut his ears to those who did not listen to the poor. This proverb completes the picture of 21:11-12; Yahweh will bring to ruin those who cause the ruin of others, and he will not help those who do not help the poor. The threat is

⁹ Wisdom Literature and Psalms

¹⁰ Henry

¹¹ Constable

similar to wisdom's bitter promise: "Then they will call to me but I will not answer, they will look for me but will not find me."¹²

l) 14 A gift in secret averts anger, and a concealed bribe, strong wrath.

- i) A gift given in secret implies a perversion. Both parties are involved in the guilt. The giver acts as the tempter. The receiver happily breaks God's law (Exodus 23:8). The passions of men are easily charmed. A greedy man is not angry when he is pacified with gifts, especially when they are given in secret, for they will tell no tales. Thus wounded pride is overcome by another ruling passion - avarice (extreme greed)! How we need to keep a careful watch over our own hearts so that we keep walking closely with God.¹³

m) 15 When justice is done, it is a joy to the righteous but terror to evildoers.

- i) The righteous feel real pleasure in doing what is right. They have the answer of a good conscience, and the feeling that, as far as they can, they are making God's will their will. A stable society can exist only when justice is strictly administered.¹⁴
- ii) **Romans 13:3** - 3 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended.

n) 16 One who wanders from the way of good sense will rest in the assembly of the dead.

- i) This proverb warns against departing from "the way of understanding." It is not enough to pursue wisdom for a while; one must continue to do so (cf. Heb. 2:1). Death awaits those who cease doing good and pursue the way of folly (cf. 1 Tim. 5:6). "Rest" is the poetic equivalent of "dwell." All the time that he had spent with Jesus did not save Judas Iscariot, because he chose to leave the wise way and to pursue folly (Acts 1:18).¹⁵

2) CLOSE

¹² Koptak

¹³ Bridges, 192

¹⁴ Wisdom and Psalms

¹⁵ Constable