

Part 17: How to Get Rich Quick (And Still Die)

Tyler Velin | Proverbs 11:16-28

March 7, 2021

We are back in the book of Proverbs this week. We've transitioned into a portion of the book where Solomon is showing us the effects of godly wisdom in the context of community. Godly wisdom, as we've seen, is not just street-smarts or savvy, it is worldview that places everything under one presupposition: that God's ways are trustworthy.

Last time we were together Solomon talked about the ways in which the mouths and our words can either bless or destroy a community. Today he focuses not on our words, but on our wallets. In the same way our words reveal something about the whole of our hope, so too does our view on money.

Proverbs is systematically establishing a Christian worldview on just about everything in our lives.

We already saw back in Proverbs 6 a biblical worldview of our work. We do not just work to make money, we work because just as the ant was designed to work, so were we. Our work not only provides for us and for our families, but our work is part of God's plan for creation. We work so that God might be glorified in all of our efforts whether we flip burgers or homes.

This is an important reminder when it comes to talking about our money because a biblical worldview of work shows us that money in itself is not the end of our work. Why is this important? It means that money is not king. God is after something more in your life which means just as we have to see how our work glorified God we must also see how our view of money glorifies God.

This is really central to what Solomon is going to do with us today. This passage is split into two sections both of which speak about riches, wealth, rewards and generosity. But sandwiched in the middle of these sections is a parable which wakes up to the reality in this text.

Proverbs 11:22.

Like a gold ring in a pig's snout, is a beautiful woman without discretion. What's Solomon's point here? Well a gold ring is a beautiful thing. Just as gold is now, so too was it when this was written. It conveyed value and beauty to the person who owned it. It was to be admired because it was beautiful.

But without discretion, that is without the ability to discern wisely between what is true and what is not true, you can adorn yourself in all the gold of the world, but it's nothing more than a gold ring in the snout of a pig.

Meaning that you might be able to suit up in all that wealth can afford you by worldly standards, but if you do not discern what God thinks about such riches, you are the fool who feeds on garbage, rolls in the mud, stinks to high heaven, and takes a false sense of assurance out of the small snot covered piece of gold you might possess.

Don't you love Proverbs? Because while we wrestle over this partly silly, and partly offensive picture it makes the desired application very clear. We ought to be one who has discernment about things of value.

This is what we are going to look at today. To help us have a biblical view on wealth, riches and generosity we are going to see **The Wealth of the Righteous** in verses 16-21 and then in verses 22-28 we are going to see **Principles for Gospel Generosity**.

Let's start by looking at our first point: **The Wealth of the Righteous**.

Read with me **Proverbs 11:16-21**.

So there are a couple things we want to point out to better understand what Solomon is doing with us here.

The first thing he is showing us is how easy it is to get rich quick! Be violent and wicked!

In his autobiography Solomon says this another way: **Ecclesiastes 7:15**.

Do you want to prosper? Do you want to prolong your life? Do you want to get riches and wages? You'll find it if you're willing to sin to get it. You'll find it if you're willing to violently take it from others. You'll find it if you are willing to lie and cheat your way into it.

But secondly we see the alternatives in this text.

Did you notice all the contrasts? A violent and cruel man who gets riches is contrasted with the woman who gives grace and gets honor, and the kind man who benefits himself and others.

The wicked earn a deceptive wage, but the righteous sows hoping for a sure reward.

I'm guessing that you probably don't need to be Christian to see that we ought to desire one of these options over the other.

We know that we ought to be gracious and kind and righteous rather than violent and cruel and wicked.

But why is it then that our world is so filled with offensive schemes aimed at deceitful riches?

Because the unfortunate thing you see in this text is that it doesn't pay to be righteous, at least by worldly standards.

Sure a gracious woman gets honor, but a violent man gets riches. Try paying your mortgage with honor.

Yeah, the one who sows righteousness gets a sure reward. But in this text there is a farming allegory contrasted with a sense of immediacy. The righteous person is sowing hoping for a reward, where the wicked are getting their wages right now.

And the reward, if it were to make it through the hard season, is left undefined. What is the reward and will it be better than the wages?

There was a social experiment done by researchers from The University of North Carolina and Harvard University which sought to examine the effects created by "pay it forward" moments in culture.

They went to a subway station and gave individuals six free dollars. They then told each individual that they could split those six free dollars up anyway they wanted between two envelopes. They would get to keep one envelope, and the other envelope would be "paid forward" to another individual. When that individual received it however much money was left, they too would receive six dollars and be asked to split it up however they wanted for the next person.

For people who received an evenly split amount of three dollars, they on average forwarded the simple equality of three dollars to those who came behind them. Equality, not generosity was forwarded.

But for the people who received less than three dollars in their envelope they forwarded only an average of \$1.32 to others. What researchers observed is that greed is more often paid forward than generosity. This went to prove the researcher's hypothesis that negative stimuli have more powerful effects on the thoughts and actions than positive stimuli.

In other words the fear of missing out on money caused average people like you and me to slowly act out of a desire for their own good at the expense of their neighbors good.

Isn't this easy to do? While we wouldn't necessarily qualify ourselves a violent person, do we often through anger, manipulation or intimidation try to talk our roommates into paying a little bit more than we are? While we don't consider ourselves to be liars, do we sell things online which we know are on the verge of breaking without letting the buyer know? Or are we all too quick to walk out of a store knowing that we were undercharged by the new lady at the checkout counter?

I experienced a profound example of this at a white elephant gift exchange with my family. We would always set a limit for \$10-\$20 presents and then we would play the game where you could steal presents from other people for a limited amount of time.

The game was familial and friendly, my heart was loose and free, but then someone opened a gift and inside of it was a \$100 bill. Now this social experiment was I'm sure just as interesting to watch as all of our family rolled the dice a little more quickly, grabbed the packages a bit more aggressively, and behind our grinning faces and laughter was the silent confession of "I'm going to destroy you and take that money."

Solomon knows our hearts. He knows that the reward of honor and kindness and righteousness doesn't seem to have the same appeal as riches and wages but I love what he does here.

Read again with me: **Proverbs 11:16-21**. There's almost a cascade of Solomon preaching to our desperate souls here isn't there? Honor is nice, but if I'm honest I'd prefer riches so maybe just a little bit of force isn't that bad of an option.

But Solomon says, "This cruelty will only hurt yourself!"

"Yeah," we might think to ourselves, "but with riches like this, I can afford therapy."

"But," says Solomon, "Deceptive are those wages."

"But no one really got hurt."

Solomon says, "Deceptive to yourself my friends! You seek those riches to provide something promised but the promise itself is deceptive. These riches cannot deliver you from death. They cannot win you favor with God. Those who pursue evil will die."

Remember what Solomon said in **Proverbs 11:7** or **10:2**.

You see the greatest and most powerful negative stimuli in our lives is the fear we feel in our core. A fear of not being satisfied, a fear of being forgotten, a fear of discomfort, and ultimately a fear of death. The only way we will be able to set aside violence for the sake of grace and wickedness for the sake of righteousness is to realize that riches deceitfully promise relief in these areas, but those who stand in the righteousness of Jesus actually have been delivered from all of it.

Now remember when Proverbs talks of righteousness it does imply that we are acting in obedience to God, but ultimately the righteousness in Proverbs is not something we earn, but something we are given by faithfully choosing to love God and trust him for his own provision.

When can we put aside sinful anxiety, deceitful schemes and violent hands when it comes to our view of money? Only when we realize that walking in gracious, kind and righteous obedience to God afford us God's very delight.

The Lord loathes those who seek out crooked ways, but the Lord delights in those who trust in him (he's almost comforting us here). The wicked and all their wages cannot avoid what they try to pay off. They will be punished for their sin. But the offspring of the righteous will be delivered.

Jesus Christ is the righteous offspring who delivers all who are found in him. Look at what Paul says: **Romans 8:14-17a**. When we stand in Christ's righteousness we know we have a sure reward for we are heirs with Christ. We know that we have no need to sin in order to find joy for we are the very delight of God himself.

We can only be comfortable in laying down the world's longing for riches when we realize that even if we die poor by worldly standards, we die with the riches of God's pleasure and the wealth of heaven ahead of us.

In this passage we see those who trust Jesus were not those who got wages by worldly standards but they were those who received the blessing and joy of God's delight.

This is what we need to see first to understand the gold ring in the pig's snout. We see that God offers us something better in the gospel. God clothes us in the imperishable riches of redemption and promises to deliver us from what ultimately destroys us: our own sin. You can always use more money, but the provision of righteousness in Jesus is so profound that you'll never need more of it.

Yet where the passage we just read looked at the righteous who didn't necessarily gain wealth, the following text shows how we are to act with whatever wealth God gives us to enjoy.

Read with me: **Proverbs 11:22-28.**

Here we see our second point this morning: **Principles for Godly Generosity.**

We are actually going to look at four of these, but all of these depend on what we just looked at. Look at what Peter says in **1 Peter 1:18-19.**

Because we have been ransomed apart from silver and gold by the blood of Jesus, it means that whatever silver and gold we do have doesn't need to be used to purchase what Jesus already has. Which means that we now get to use our wealth in ways that God says is of benefit to his glory, to our neighbors, and to our own joy.

This is what we see in our first principle: **Gospel Generosity Liberates our Conscience.**

Now I want to define what I mean when I say "gospel generosity." First, I really mean that none of the generosity we will discuss is possible without first seeing how our redemption in Jesus Christ frees up our finances from having to buy soul satisfaction.

If Jesus brings us back into the delight of God then we really can hold our money loosely.

But secondly, generosity is not foolishness. We have seen twice now in the book of Proverbs a warning against lending money to foolish people, or in making a rash vow. In other words generosity is part of stewardship. God knows that if we are unwise and give without considering gospel wisdom we might hurt the people to whom we give the money and we might hurt our family and or our community who might have needed that money for something else.

Gospel generosity assumes that you have a budget to help wisely steward what God is giving to you. Just as a good disciple considers the cost for his life, a good disciple considers how his finances can be used to glorify God. It's hard to be generous when you don't budget, and we want to be a church where we aren't afraid to help each other manage their finances in a way that serve them, bless the global church and glorify God. So if you don't have a budget, or if you struggle with that please talk to us and we want to help you.

This conversation is really important in light of our first principle because through wisdom and the Holy Spirit, generosity can actually liberate our consciences in regards to money. Look with me at **Proverbs 11:24.**

Now when we first read this we probably focus on what I first focused on: one gives freely and grows all the richer. We will talk about that more in verse 25.

But the more time I sat with this text the more I saw the relief of the second part of this verse which talks of the one who withholds what he should give and only suffers want.

How many of you have felt the prick of generosity in your heart but wrestled to faithfully give? I am a Smaug when it comes to my finances. I really don't feel a need to have all the nicest things, but I want to sit on my piles of gold and know that if I need to save myself with it, I can.

As a result I encounter times where I know I should give, and my conscience is burdened. I know I should, but I fear the result of my generosity.

But look at what was already said in **Proverbs 3:28**. When we understand that Jesus and Jesus alone is our satisfaction and security, and when we have done the wise work of budgeting to assure provision on a basic level, we are able to free our conscience.

If we know what we have, and we trust God with our joy, we can actually obey our calls to generosity and grow all the richer as we find what we don't ultimately need.

When we sat down to fill out our pledge cards for the building fund I would throw out a number, and Sarah would look at our budget and say: "We don't need this, we could cut this." She helped me give up things freely, and here's the joy of it: We've lived with this new budget since then and looking back now I couldn't even tell you what we cut. We didn't need it. And now we are richer for it, not because either of us are making more money but because in Jesus we realize we need less things.

What a joy it is to come to this realization that we can give freely to global missions, to the local church and your own community when the Holy Spirit woos us to do so.

This then leads us to our second principle: **Gospel Generosity Blesses the Most People**. Read with me **Proverbs 11:25**.

What I love about this text is that it's describing generosity as simply the bringing of a blessing. This is a great challenge and encouragement. If you are in a season where money is tight you can still be generous by providing blessings to your community in other ways. For example your skills and your time.

Our generosity is meant to bless people. Have you ever been the recipient of such a kind gift? Isn't that a blessing? Doesn't that just give you a glimpse of what it is like to receive the generous undeserved gift of Christ's blood in the gospel?

As a church we should all feel this right now. As we have been working on the building campaign we have received donations from people in nearly a dozen states, our building has received gifts and favor from vendors in town who have never even attended our church. When we see what God has done we get to stand in awe at the blessing God has given us through other people.

But more than our generosity being a blessing to others, our generosity enriches us. Look at how Paul puts this at length in **2 Corinthians 9:6-15**.

Generosity blesses us.

Now this is where we need to deal with the lie of what is called The Prosperity Gospel.

The Prosperity Gospel is this false idea that if you love God and are obeying God he will make you rich and healthy.

This is a dangerous idea because a portion of it is true. If you are a person who is constantly blessing God's kingdom with generous support of his church, his people and his mission, God might continually bless you so that you might continually bless others.

And yet, the prosperity which is promised in the gospel is not always physical prosperity. Remember what we saw in verses 16-21, the believer received no worldly riches, but received the pleasure of God and in that were rewarded abundantly.

The Prosperity Gospel isn't wrong when it says God will enrich his people, this very Proverb promises that God will enrich, water and care for those who bless others. The Prosperity Gospel is wrong where it tries to tell God what his blessing should look like. Christ is our blessing and just as Paul says it might be that the reward of our generosity is that we may abound in every good work.

As we follow Jesus' call to love others we draw nearer and nearer to Jesus through obedience and this is our greatest joy and dearest delight. Do you actually trust that being generous to those around you is a way where God might choose to increase your own intimacy and joy with him?

Our third principle is distinct in the context of what is above as it actually deals with business not pure generosity. Read with me **Proverbs 11:26**.

Here we see our third principle: **Gospel Generosity shapes our Business Practices**.

This is highlighted all the more given what has happened in the news recently. As Texas was hit by a huge ice storm the state came to a grinding stop and supply lines were disrupted. Some businesses began to charge astronomical prices on goods because they knew people were desperate for them.

If a Christian understands that his work is not only about making money but about providing for others and using his gifts to glorify God, and if a Christian understands that money doesn't ultimately satisfy, then a Christian business man or woman understands that their business is meant to care for their community not harm it.

We see in scripture that a laborer deserves his wages and this is true. But we also see that when it comes to biblical business ethics there's a difference between viewing your customers as community members and seeing your customers as commodities to be consumed.

Here in this text for whatever reason either through a famine or through people not wanting to pay the price he demands he is withholding his goods from those who need them.

In Missoula it is no secret that we are in housing crisis. What does it look like for Christian property managers, landlords, contractors, painters and realtors to be part of the solution instead of seeking only to profit off of the problem?

I know of one Christian couple who bought a property when prices were really low and are able to charge a rent covers their costs and cares for their investment while at the same time is hundreds of dollars less than market value so that the people renting from them can put the rest of that money aside to save up for a down payment on a house.

How might we be both entrepreneurial and generous in our business practices knowing that God cares about our compassion to those in our community as well as he cares about our success in our industry?

Our last principle is a reminder of why any of this is possible: **Gospel Generosity Reveals a Flourishing Trust.**

Read with me **Proverbs 11:27-28.**

It is easy to read these texts and see these principles and think, "I'm going to do these well because I actually want to see if I gain through these." We always gain by following Jesus but we must be reminded of what our gain is.

If we follow Jesus because we think he will help us financially, we are betraying our trust. Trusting in Jesus is not trusting in money. Trusting in Jesus looks like trusting in righteousness. It means that regardless of what the circumstances are on the outside we really believe that honoring Jesus and loving others is what is best for us.

Look how Solomon describes this in **Ecclesiastes 5:19-20.**

Isn't this an astounding statement? He says you might get riches, you might get wealth, and indeed those are given by the mercy of God himself. Yet because God is the giver in all things it is God, not riches, who will keep you occupied with joy in your heart.

Oh that we would be a church who views our money like this that we might be occupied at every moment with the gift of God in Jesus Christ and from that overflow we steward our finances in a way that honors him and loves others.