

Part 24: How to Be A King

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We are continuing our series through the book of Proverbs, and we have slowed down a bit to deal with a chapter that is of great significance in the middle portion of the book.

The book of Proverbs is a book of wisdom. It wants to make us wise about how to act, how to think, how to live, love, raise kids, go to work, solve disputes, steward our finances and so much more. But the central principle of Proverbs actually isn't just that wisdom works.

In other words, while Proverbs is a deeply practical book, it is not merely a book on pragmatism. Proverbs does more than simply tell us, "wisdom works." Instead Solomon is showing us why wisdom works.

As we have already seen in the book, there are some applications of wisdom which promise to only pay out at the end of our lives. There are actions of conformity to God's wisdom which might in the moment, and even for a long season, cause you to feel silly, poor and pitied by the world's standards. But this is why Solomon wants you to know why wisdom works.

Wisdom works because God is sovereign. Wisdom works because God works his will to control and accomplish everything for his glory and for the good of his people even when it seems confusing of befuddled to us at the time. To strip God of his sovereignty is to strip him not only of his very essence, but it is to strip our world of the hope of wisdom.

This is why Proverbs 16 is such an important chapter. It marries our hearts to God's sovereign power. When we live in a season where it seems wisdom doesn't work, Solomon wants us to have eyes for the God who always does.

Last week we saw the attributes of the sovereign God, but this week we are going to see the character of the sovereign God. Solomon does this masterfully by discussing the nature of kings, and God as the king par excellence.

Solomon is going to touch briefly on the nature of human kings, but by the end we see his goal is to win us to both trust and desire God as King. This is our big point today: **God is the all-powerful king who defends what is good and makes a way for those who are not.**

We are going to see this from two perspectives today. First in verses 10-12 we are going to see **The King and His Rule**, in that passage we are going to look closely at the character of a good king. But then in verses 13-15 Solomon models our response and experience with a good king and it's here we see **The King and His Relationships**.

So what I'm going to do is read the whole text again for us today and then we will dive in. **Proverbs 16:10-15**

So the first thing we see is **The King and His Rule**.

We read about this in verses 10-12 and did you notice all Solomon says about the rule of a good king and the common denominator we are to take away about the nature of his kingdom?

Solomon first says that an oracle is on the lips of a king. What does that mean? Translators wrestle to express the full sense of what is being spoken here but an oracle is generally something from God himself.

Other translators express it as a "divine decision." In other words Solomon is putting all kings everywhere on notice that their words and their effective rule are subjected to the authority of God himself. There is in one sense an agreement between human rulers and the God who rules all things.

Paul makes this point in **Romans 13:1-3a**.

Paul's point is the same as Solomon's here and they both conclude in the same place. Paul, writing in the context of his own corrupt Roman government, reminds both Rome and his readers that the rulers are meant to support what is good and protect from what is bad.

Solomon brings this same weight to the king in Proverbs. He says because there is an agreement, an authority borrowed from God himself, you king, do not sin in your judgement. Do not be willing to twist the rules for your own ease and popularity.

As a king, you better make sure that your work is justice and equity in the public square and in the market place. It is your work to make sure all the transactions in your kingdom are righteous.

Because a king is so fixated on protecting what is right and good, he is also vigilant to protect his kingdom from the abomination of evil. Deceit, depravity, violence and oppression are a threat to the very nature of the kingdom itself. A good king ensures his throne is established by righteousness.

Here we see the humbling power and amazing wisdom of God. In a book that speaks often to the poor, the oppressed, the simple and the afflicted here in the same book God is counseling kings.

Our world is often segregated. In many communities there are restaurants rich people eat at and places middle class people eat at. There are neighborhoods poor people live in, and those that the wealthy live in. There are expensive, specialized counselors for the rich and emotionally burdened, and court appointed therapists for the poor and disturbed. But here is wisdom for us all.

If you have ever wondered if you have outgrown the need for God's wisdom, here kings are shown to be in need. Even Solomon himself, the king of all wisdom is subjected to God's goal for a king to protect what is good and remove what is not.

How sovereign is God? Sovereign enough not only to control kings, but bold, powerful, and righteous enough that he tells them how they are to rule.

Let us then, consider how a Christian ought to engage in politics as politicians. In a bit we will see how we ought to respond to politicians as constituents but here we see how those in authority are to act. They are to act not according to mere pragmatism, not according to approval polls, not according to

retweet affirmations or click bait headlines. Verse 12 says they are to act and to establish their rule and influence by righteousness.

That is righteousness rooted in the God who is righteous. Politics today is a messy place. But it is a place where Christians are called to practice righteousness as God would have it. There are many political views which the Bible outlines on core issues like the sanctity of life, the image of God common to all humanity, and God's creator authority over our gender and sexuality which can place leading believers against the swell of political consensus.

But this is where God calls you ruler, to trust not only that wisdom works, but that God works. That righteousness really is what is best for humanity and that it's ok to be wrong and but winsome in the world's eyes if we are right and faithful in God's eyes.

This is what led men like William Wilberforce to stand up to the slave trade in England. Even though abolitionist sentiment was gaining steam, Wilberforce stood up to a multi-million dollar industry which trafficked in human souls not because it was pragmatic, economic or even popular, but because it was righteous. He said that it was slavery which "industriously and preserving depraves and darkens the creation of God."

The rule of human governors is meant to be a witness to the wisdom principles which God has sewn into the fabric of our society in order to protect what is good and punish what is dangerous.

This is what Solomon himself was tasked to do. He was tasked to defend the kingdom from unrighteousness not only for his own sake, but for the sake of his people.

In fact what we see when we read through the Old Testament is that the hope of the people was in the character of their king! If the king was sensitive to the danger of evil, sin and idolatry, the people flourished. But if the king allowed evil and unrighteousness into the kingdom, it fell.

Political responses to COVID-19 illustrate this point. Nations began to shut down their borders because they knew that if the virus got into their nation, it would drastically disrupt either health or liberty. So nations were vigilant to keep those out who didn't belong and those who were a threat to the kingdom.

But on a spiritual level, even Solomon the wisest king to ever live, couldn't keep his borders safe. He actually fell away into sin and evil and it was in his downfall that the whole nation was infected. Post-Solomon the kingdom of Israel was split into two through civil war, unrighteousness increased even as the prophets called kings and citizens back to righteousness and ultimately the nation was judged by being sent into captivity.

Not even Solomon was good enough a King to satisfy the hope of the kingdom. But exile and judgment was not the end of God's people. God was going to bring them back. Why has politics always been a place of division and extreme hope? Because we were made with political longings. Longings to be cared for, for justice and peace to be upheld and danger to be dealt with. But if we are not careful we can place our hope in the shadows which God graciously gave us while neglecting that God himself is the true substance of our political hopes.

God alone is the true king. The King par-excellence. The King with no fault. Solomon makes this point in a sneaky way by discussing kings in verse 10 and 12, but sandwiched between the two is a verse where the Lord is the one who establishes and upholds justice.

We live in a society where criminal justice reform is a forefront issue because even in our wisely established justice system, corruption still exists. Deceit still is present. There are people who are wrongly imprisoned and guilty individuals who are unjustly free.

But this King, this King of Kings, will one day uphold justice in such away where no injustice is found. Where all who do what is abominable will be not only found out, but removed from the public health and his constituents are safe, secure and satisfied.

In fact look at what high and mighty King David says himself about his own hope: **Psalms 21:1,7.**

Kings, the best of earthly kings, the most righteous of human rulers, ultimately place their trust in the King who rules all things perfectly. The King who won't be bamboozled, the King who won't make a mistake that harms his people, but the King who establishes his throne enduringly through righteousness.

The narrative of the Old Testament is that we were made to live under that King's rule and in his kingdom. But sinful hearts rejected him. But it's through Jesus Christ that God is going to re-invite and re-establish this rule. And this idea moves to the forefront as we look at our next few verses in **Proverbs 16:13-15.**

So here we see our second point this morning: **The King and His Relationships.** Where the first few verses stressed the king's relationship to justice, here we see the king's relationships to his people and the people to their king.

If a King like this King does exist, how should you respond to him? You see we live in a democratic republic and because of that we can often misunderstand the basic principles of kingship. We get to look at our rulers and say with constitutional authority: "You work for us." But that's not how kingdoms work. If a King like this does exist then we have the immense privilege to say with biblical submission: "We work for you."

When you look back at ancient fairy tales and stories, the hope for a people was in the quality of their king, and here Solomon gives us three ways in which we might experience this beautiful King.

First we see the potential of ***Finding His Affection.*** Read with me again: **Proverbs 16:13.**

How is it that you can please the King? You can have righteous lips, and speak the truth.

God the true and just king, is not interested in lip service. He won't be bamboozled by it. How many of us talk to God and present to him a reality about our own heart and our own circumstances because we think this is what he would want to hear?

But we are not talking to a God who rules with an itchy ear, we are talking to the God who knows all things through the Holy Spirit, even our hearts.

We can really apply this text in two directions. First we can honestly ask ourselves how we present ourselves to God. For Solomon the mouth and the lips are really an expression of your heart and if you think that mouthed worship and empty confession wins you favor with God then what your heart displays is a belief that this King is able to be duped like the kings of our world.

But secondly, we can apply this to how we live as constituents in our own society.

We cannot exhaustively know what position on every issue is the perfect position. This prevents us from speaking up with a false sense of arrogance and hostility. But we can, by the help of the Holy Spirit and the aide of God's word get a sense of how God's righteousness (not our right-ness) should shape our voice in the public square. And in those places we might speak up in a way that is opposed by general consensus, yet in those moments we have the wonderful reward of trusting that God our King is pleased with us, and that he loves us.

The next relationship seems to be contrary to this, but even here there is hope. That is the possibility of ***Avoiding His Wrath***. Look at **Proverbs 16:14**.

Now this is where a certain amount of common wisdom might deliver us from common kings. How many of us have seen movies or read books where the king is a short-sighted, quick-tempered, dull-wit who is often riled up? In those instances of wrong wrath, the King is often met by wise counselors who offer a just appeasement to calm him down. That's unjust wrath met by wise appeasement.

But we've also seen times where a good king has just wrath about something sincerely wrong, but sometimes this just wrath is met by a twisted counselor who by deceit and lies appeases and misdirects the king's wrath. This is just wrath met by false appeasement.

In other words, our own wisdom might work to appease the wrath of human kings. But one day, when we stand before the King of Kings his wrath will not be foolish or shortsighted and his judgement will not be manipulated or deceived.

But here Solomon says that there is a way for a wise man to appease the wrath of the good King.

How? Well he doesn't outright tell us but we can assume two things from scripture.

First, if you want to avoid the King's wrath, turn away from wickedness and don't do something that rightly draws his justice. Look back at how Paul finishes his section on authorities in **Romans 13:3a-4**.

How do you avoid the wrath of the King? Don't break the laws of the kingdom.

A wise man realizes that to live innocently before a King is to avoid the wrath that will befall the evil doer.

As simple as this sounds it is difficult. Even with the help of the Holy Spirit turning away from sin is no easy task. Possible, by grace yes it is. But it is not easy.

But second, turning away from future sins is one thing. But turning away from future sins does not do anything to atone for past sins. Where we have broken the law of the King is to introduce wickedness into the kingdom of righteousness. If any father is a good father, he must take care to remove those

who would knowingly do harm to his family from his home. If any king is a good king, he must remove those who would violate his kingdom.

This is what God's wrath does. Our sin is not a threat to God, our sin is a threat to ourselves and to others. Any sin, the smallest of sins, makes you a dangerous carrier of a deadly disease and God will remove that from his good Kingdom.

But just as common wisdom can appease the wrath of common kings, divine wisdom is needed to care for the wrath of the divine King. We see this divine wisdom in **1 Thessalonians 1:9-10**.

Jesus is the wise man who appeases the wrath of the King not by deceiving God, not by telling the Father that sin is no big deal, but by willingly and joyfully in union with God the Father coming and dying for the sins of those who are unrighteous.

We need wisdom to get out of the mess our own sin placed us in. We can't be wise enough to fix it, but we can put our faith in the wise man who fixed it for us. Maybe your lips aren't righteous and true before God because you know if you were honest you don't belong in his kingdom. But to approach the Father through the work of the Son is to have his wrath appeased and to be brought into his loving delight. It is as simple and yet as exclusive as Paul puts it in **Romans 10:9-10**.

All of our hopes are political, and it's in the work of Christ the King that we are safely and finally brought into the Kingdom that we were made to enjoy.

The result of this wisdom is not only that God's wrath is satisfied, but that actually through the work of the Son, the Father's disposition towards us changes. And this is our last point where Solomon offers the possibility of ***Experiencing his Joy***. **Proverbs 16:15**.

This King who is the just king is justly angry with those who sin. But when the Wise Man, Jesus Christ, takes away that wrath God's face is not neutral towards us.

His face lights up, and in that light is life. If you've ever wondered how God feels about those who come to him in Jesus Christ, here Solomon tells you: He's beaming.

Why? Because Jesus has robed you in his righteousness and now he sees you not for the stain of your sin but for the beauty of his son.

More than this, God's smiling face is a cloud of provision. It brings the rains gives us food.

Life in this world is incredibly hard and difficult but one of the greatest provisions you have when life is hard is to look into the face of God and realize that his favor is for you. That God, the sovereign King who set forth to save you in Jesus Christ, is powerfully working even when it seems he is distant.

Now for many of us we can read of the description of the King and his kingdom and think that we know him adequately enough to make the decision as if whether or not we actually want to work for him, to live in his kingdom and to labor for his glory. Maybe at this point you find it to be lackluster still.

But to truly experience this King, you must experience his smile towards you in Jesus Christ, and when you do your whole world changes.

Many of us talk of God in the same way C.S. Lewis portrays the kingly line of Tisroc in *The Horse and His Boy*. Tisroc was an ancient ruler who demanded adoration yet his rule didn't inspire any adoration. So whenever anyone in his Kingdom was talking and mentioned his name they had to add, as if under duress and under their breath, "Tisroc, may he live forever."

It was feigned worship towards an unimpressive king.

But to experience this King is to experience something which draws out the desire we were made for.

Lewis paints this in contrast to Tisroc when the boy, Shasta, encounters Aslan for the first time. Unlike those who lived in Tisroc's rule, Shasta had never heard of Aslan before, he wasn't trained in how to respond to him, but when he encountered his beauty everything changed. Listen to this moment: **"He turned and saw, pacing beside him, taller than the horse, a Lion. It was from the Lion that the light came. No-one saw anything more terrible or beautiful...And of course [Shasta] knew none of the true stories about Aslan, the great Lion, the son of the Emperor-over-sea, the King above all High Kings in Narnia. But after one glance at the Lion's face he slipped out of the saddle and fell at its feet. He couldn't say anything but then he didn't want to say anything, and he knew he needn't say anything."**

You see when you encounter a King like Aslan, the King of all Kings, the true and living King, and when his face shines upon you in the light of Jesus Christ, you do not offer a forced confession of allegiance. You fall to your knees at the beauty which is yours.

Finding the light of this King's face is finding the life we need to free us from sin. Finding light in this King's face is finding the provision of rain we need to live in life's seasons of dryness. Learning to trust in this King and hope in his kingdom is the greatest comfort to the soul and the deepest truth of God's wisdom.

We trust in wisdom because we have seen and experienced the wise King who is able to save us, care for us, and deliver us into his kingdom which will one day be ours.