

Part 34: How To Have Hope

Tyler Velin | Proverbs 24:15-22

August 21, 2021

For those of you who were with us last week, we began looking at Proverbs chapter 24 which is a whole chapter that assumes a trial in the life of those who are trying to follow Jesus. What is that trial? Other people.

Last week we saw that it is difficult and dangerous to love people as the Bible calls us to if we ourselves are not filled with God's wisdom which satisfies us and makes us strong to care for people in difficult and sometimes dangerous ways.

Last week we saw a hope that moves us towards others, and this week we are going to examine the second half of the chapter and see a hope in midst of others. That is a hope for those who are simultaneously sinners and sufferers.

Proverbs 24 acknowledges something that theologians call: "the already and the not yet." For those who are in Jesus Christ we are already freed from the judgement our sin deserved, but we are not yet free from sinning. We still wrestle, even with the Holy Spirit, to obey. For those who have faith in a resurrected Lord we have hope of a new world where all the broken pieces are put back in place, but we are not yet in that world even though we see glimpses of it in the church.

To forget that even inside of faith in Jesus Christ we are still sinners is to become quickly legalistic, hypocritical, or often frustrated. To forget that we still suffer makes us disheartened, doubtful and caught off guard.

But today Solomon speaks to us as sinners and as sufferers so that we might have hope. Hope that we might not want to sin against others, and hope when others sin against us. The big picture we are going to see today is that **The fear of the Lord keeps us and comforts us in the face of wickedness**. To put it another way, the fear of the Lord keeps us from pursuing wickedness towards others, and it comforts us when other people acted wickedly towards us.

Solomon's text today is first and foremost a plea that we would not participate in the same activities as wicked men, but secondarily that the righteous might see hope when we faced with wickedness. So we are going to look at this passage from both sides of that coin. First we are going to see a warning: **Don't pursue wickedness for you will lose hope**, and secondly we are going to see a comfort: **Don't lose hope because of those who pursue wickedness**.

With that said I'm going to read the whole of our passage today and then we are going to dive in. **Proverbs 24:15-22.**

What's really clear, especially in the last verse of Proverbs 24, and if you remember back to the first verse of Proverbs 24, is that Solomon is warning us as his children to not desire wickedness and evil. Now it's important to note that while all sin has a Godward effect, all sin is first and foremost offensive to God. But when Proverbs talks about wickedness and evil it is generally that sin which is both offensive to God and harmful to others.

In Proverbs we see these two people are the violent people, the deceptive people, the lying people, the arrogant people, the manipulative, oppressive and abusive people.

In this way God wants to actually give you a glimpse into parts of our heart that we might not be fully aware of. You see most of us, even your non-Christian neighbors and co-workers, are probably quick to admit that they have some sort of fault in their heart if it comes to an objective, moral or spiritual ideal.

Nobody is perfect. If God were to see our hearts we would probably say: Yeah, I suppose I could be better.

But while we'd be quick to say we have perhaps been wicked towards God, we aren't generally wicked towards others. We don't meet those qualifications of wicked and evil people. We are generally kind, not oppressive, we want to extend love, be good neighbors and faithful employees. Which means that when we encounter passages which warn us so clearly like this we assume that we have already passed this test.

But God wants you to soberly examine your own heart to see that each of us might be more prone to these issues than we think. Twice in this chapter alone it warns us against envying, or desiring the life of the wicked person. In other words, there will be times in your life where your heart desires to treat other people in wicked and evil ways. In those moments, what will you think and how will you act?

This is our first point today: **Don't pursue wickedness for you will lose hope.**

Knowing there will be times where our hearts justify our wicked desires, Solomon wants to show us that taking up sin against others for your own joy will never work out. He warns us of acting wickedly in three ways, he warns us of our wicked actions, our wicked affections, and our wicked envy.

Look at the ***warning against wicked action*** in **Proverbs 24:15-16.**

There's a TV show on CBS called *Criminal Minds*, while I've never watched it, what I can gather from the commercials is that there is a group of agents who specialize in knowing how criminals think so that they might use that skill to capture or prevent evil. Well here, God does in reality what primetime TV tries to do in fantasy: he brings us into the mind of the wicked man.

The wicked man lies in wait, or literally "lurks," at the dwelling of the righteous why? Because he wants to do violence to his home. He wants to rob it. He wants to take all of the good things the righteous person has and he doesn't care if the righteous live or die.

Again, we might say, "Who thinks like this?" But look at the news! How many times have we seen pre-meditated assaults and robberies? How many times have we seen people who are victims or witnesses of a crime bullied and threatened by the perpetrator so as to keep them off of the witness stand? How many times do we read of women assaulted in the workplace only to be forced to sign a non-disclosure agreement or lose their jobs? How many times do we see an interview where a person accused of wicked acts says something like: "I don't know what came over me?"

We would love it if no one thought this way, but don't we see that many do? And who's to say that many couldn't be you? Solomon wants to! God wants to prepare you for this by showing you two things, first the resilience of the righteous and second the certain demise of the wicked.

He says the righteous will be picked on, they will be struck, they will fall seven times, but they will always rise again. We will talk more about why in a bit, but here we see in contrast to the righteous who are promised a resurrection, the wicked will stumble once and will not recover. The righteous, will be fine, God will defend the oppressed and the faithful, but the perpetrator will not survive.

Don't be this man. If this is you, and you look into your heart and say: "Wow, I've got a major problem here" don't miss the good news. Solomon isn't writing this about those out in the world, he's writing this about you. Which means that if you see these abusive, manipulative, wicked tendencies in your heart this is a safe place to address them. The church is where these people can safely come because Jesus became that man for you.

Solomon warns against wicked action, but secondly he warns about something far more common: **a warning against wicked affections**. Read with me **Proverbs 24:17-18**.

What's really interesting here is that God shows that even when he rises up to judge those who genuinely do wicked, he is equally concerned about your heart's reaction to that judgement.

When we think about and talk about God's judgement we are generally prone to two errors, each of which are rooted in arrogance. That is to cringe and to gloat. Both fail to have an adequate view of God and his holiness, and sin and its consequence.

Those who cringe hear about God rising up in judgement and they say: "Well if that were me, I'd probably of handled it differently," or "that seems a bit aggressive." But if we are really passionate about justice in our world, to downplay and cringe at God's righteous and perfect judgement belittles the actual harm done and the wounds of those who have been wronged.

But Solomon here isn't warning those who cringe at justice. He's warning against those who gloat.

If you've ever been around a family with young siblings you've probably seen a scene like this: one sibling does something harmful to another sibling and mom and dad see it. So they take away the offender, but as soon as dad turns his back to carry away the child that needs punishment what does the victim child do? Sticks out his tongue, makes a face of sheer delight.

In our modern, western world we love to watch others fall. We delight in it. From Fail Blogs, to Tell-All Podcasts, to Cancel-Culture we delight in seeing those who oppose us come crashing down in a flaming ball of justice. We are quick to enjoy and savor the falling of those who are opposite us.

But to be flippant about the judgement of the evil doer is to be flippant about your own salvation. God himself does not delight in the judgement of the wicked though it be perfectly just, how much more should we who stand in the borrowed perfection of Jesus stand in a somber but humble posture.

This rejoicing is rooted in arrogance as well, because instead of a humble and sober joy in justice being done, it gloatingly says, "Serves you right sucker." This sort of flippant celebration fails to understand

that apart from the grace of Jesus in your own life that person could have been you. That is precisely what the cross goes to show!

There is a big difference between rejoicing in the downfall of the wicked with God, and rejoicing in the downfall of the wicked as God. But that's often how our own hearts respond.

Here's how much God cares about your heart towards those who do you evil: So much so that if God sees in you an arrogant, flippant, gloating heart, he will put his justice on the wicked on pause so that he might address your own wicked heart. That's what Proverbs 24:18 says. God will turn away from the evil doer for a moment, and he will address you.

It might be easy to check your actions, but here we see the painful work of checking our affections. Consider the warning given earlier in **Proverbs 16:18**.

Don't arrogantly delight in the destruction of the wicked, for God will become displeased with you.

Lastly, we see *a warning against wicked envy*. Read with me **Proverbs 24:19-20**.

When we see the word "fret" not here, we often equate this emotion to anxiety. While there is some anxiety at play here, it's a certain kind of anxiety. It's not an anxiety driven by fear but by want. In fact there is a phrase we use a lot which better communicates the force of that Hebrew word and it is the phrase "hot and bothered."

In other words it can read: "Do not be hot and bothered for the evildoer, nor be envious of the wicked."

Solomon assumes that seeing the prospering of the wicked in our world will make us anxiously uncomfortable to want what they have. He says don't become agitated for the wrong things, don't burn with desire for the gain of the wicked, don't want what they have.

Again, Solomon knows that no one wants to be wicked. They want what wickedness produces. To keep us from this desire Solomon points out their end: they have no future, and their light which seems so radiant right now will be put out.

To invest your envy in the rewards of wickedness is to have something that is here today and promised to be gone in the future.

We see how serious these warnings are in the end of this passage as we can almost hear the pleading posture of Solomon for his son in our closing verses: **Proverbs 24:21-22**.

How does one keep his heart from desiring and envying the wicked? They fear the Lord. That is to see an affection displaced by something greater. The Lord and his King, that is the Lord and his chosen arm of justice, will bring about destruction on those who do evil.

Why do we not pursue evil? Because the Lord will judge. The Lord will avenge. The Lord will bring to ruin. The Lord will cause justice to flow like a river over all who do what is evil.

This is good news for anyone who is not a sinner. But aren't we all sinners? Haven't we all delighted in destruction, haven't we envied the wicked, haven't even some of us caused harm to others?

If so, if that is you, then look to the King who came to suffer for you. This is what Jesus does for us on the cross. Jesus doesn't erase our wickedness as if it never happened, he dies for it as if it he did it.

Look at how Paul puts this in **2 Corinthians 5:21**.

In Jesus those who are sinners are made righteous. This is the good news of the gospel. This is the free gift of grace to all who believe!

But now we have another problem. We might have just moved ourselves from the category of the wicked into the category of the righteous, but now if we look back at this Proverb we see that we have simply moved from being the oppressor to the oppressed. Being the victimizer to being the victim. We have moved from being sinner to being sufferer.

But this is where we see our last point today. Where we first saw the warning to avoid wickedness because they will lose hope, what we also see in this Proverbs is the comfort: **Don't lose hope because of those who pursue wickedness.**

You see Proverbs assumes that the wicked will not prosper but it also assumes that the righteous will be afflicted by the wicked until the Lord brings final judgment. This is where we need hope not only as sinners but as sufferers.

Look at how Jesus spoke to his followers in **John 15:18**. Or again in **Mark 13:12-13**. Consider also his words in **Matthew 5:10-12**.

To be in Jesus Christ is to be declared righteous like Christ and to be righteous like Christ is to be mistreated by those who are wicked.

But this is why we are encouraged to fear the Lord. We've discussed so much in the book of Proverbs. The definition we've been using for the fear of the Lord is a reverent reliance upon the Lord.

When we begin to feel the weight of wickedness around us we are often faced with two choices, cave into the wickedness of the world, or wait in reverent reliance on the Lord and his King.

This Proverb warns of the dangers of wickedness but it also promises the relief of the righteous. The evil man has no future, but those who fear the Lord do! Look back at **Proverbs 24:13-14**.

Those who pursue wickedness cannot please the God who comes to judge, but those who rely on God are pleasing to him.

Solomon said earlier that the righteous are struck and fall seven times. The number seven was a number which indicated a sense of perfection in Solomon's day. In other words the life of the righteous might be completely filled with the process of being struck but despite how complete their affliction, more complete is the hope that they will rise again.

Look at how Solomon's father, King David encourages us in a similar way: **Psalms 37:1-11**.

You see to fear to Lord is to place our trust in the Lord and his King that in his perfect timing wickedness will be judged, and the righteous will rise. But right now, as sufferers in this world don't we cry out: "How long?" Look at this picture into heaven in **Revelation 6:9-11**.

This week don't we see this in global headlines? As Afghanistan fell to the Taliban we have seen wickedness first hand. Don't we long for the Lord to come in judgement?

Taliban officials have instructed girls as young as fifteen to be captured and married against their wills to Taliban fighters. One journalist tweeted out: "Ground reports all over say Taliban is hunting unmarried women, tracking down Shiite Hazras, jailing and torturing Christians to give up info on others. 'It is a reign of terror,' I was told yesterday."

One report from ministry workers says that the Taliban let church leaders know that they knew who they were and where they were. Another said that most Christians he knows are preparing to meet Jesus within the next few weeks. Still another speaks of believers being openly executed in the streets.

I spoke to our own ministry contacts in the Middle East, one said that many people are unable to communicate what is happening to the church because their emails and phone calls are being monitored. Additionally there is localized fear in the whole area that ISIS and the Taliban may be joining forces to jointly stamp out the church of Jesus Christ in the area.

This is one area of our globe. It fails to mention the state of Christians in China, Somalia, North Korea, Libya, Nigeria, India, Columbia and so many more places.

Be careful what you sing dear church if you are not prepared to suffer dear church. To sing of the stronghold is to acknowledge the threat, to boast in the shield is to feel the blow of the sword, and to love the light is to know the chill of darkness.

But that is also to know there is hope, hope which will not be crushed. Christ the King, the King who suffered for the wicked who are in him will one day return and judge the wicked who are apart from him.

What God says to the church in suffering, to the church who feels wickedness at their door is: fear the Lord. Wait. For the time is coming.

The book of Revelation continues: **Revelation 7:9-17**.

What is the hope we have in the face of wickedness? Why can we choose to continue to fear the Lord, continue to put on humility, to continue to refuse to respond to a wicked world with wicked anger and arrogance? Because we know the future which is ours by grace.

My son saw Sarah and I watching the news and heard us talking about this stuff earlier this week and that night he couldn't sleep. He was fearful, and tearful.

He asked if the persecution happening over there could happen here. I said, hopefully not. But I also told him that there are little boys his age in parts of the world where it is happening and the hope we have in Jesus is big enough for them in their own suffering.

We might die, we might fall seven times. But the hope of those who have been buried in Christ Jesus is that we will always rise one more time than we fall. That is the hope which will not be cut off. That is the light which will never fade.

This is the fear of the Lord! A fear which relies on Jesus work to come back and punish the wicked and remove every tear from our eye. This is a fear that rejoices not in our petty vindication, but in the vindication of the whole world at the judgement seat of the lamb. This is an envy and a desire which will not fade though the world wages war against it.

Brothers and sisters the only way we will not join and partner with those who will inevitably fall to judgement is to have joined the one who has already been judged for us and risen in our place.