

Proverbs 23

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 10 March 2013

Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 0 0] Happy Mother's Day. For those of you, for those of us, blessed to still have our mothers alive, I wonder what you have done to mark the occasion to make your mother happy, or perhaps for some of us to make the mother of our children happy. Maybe you've given her a card or a gift. Maybe for some it's a matter of a phone call or a letter. And even as I ask the question, I am conscious of the fact that many of us did not grow up with the habit of celebrating Mother's Day. It wasn't a big deal, not just perhaps in our own homes, but even in society. For those of us who are maybe a little bit older, it wasn't something generally celebrated. That didn't reflect in any way any appreciation of or respect for mothers. It simply wasn't an occasion that was marked. And so, if that is how we have been brought up, maybe the very idea of celebrating a particular day is not maybe something we do or high on our agenda. And as I say, that doesn't necessarily reflect any lack of love for or respect for our mothers. But I think we can. We are living in a society that is evolving in different ways and in particular directions. And maybe there are times, not maybe, there are times when we are less than comfortable with the direction in which our society is evolving. And we need to be counter-cultural in many ways. But equally, we can rescue those things that are good and positive about our culture. And though a day in and of itself can be only symbolic, there is a danger that it is only symbolic. Nonetheless, in as far as it goes, that is, I think, a good thing that we can rescue from our culture around us and that we are part of and where God has placed us. Now, as many of you will know, we as a family lived in Peru in South America for many years. And I think I may have mentioned this in the past, in Peru and indeed throughout Latin America, Mother's Day is a seriously big deal. It way overshadows even something like Christmas. It's huge. And children spend weeks in school preparing not only gifts and cards, but shows and songs and theatrical presentations around Mother's Day. It seems that a whole term is dedicated to the subject. I'm probably exaggerating, but that sometimes was the impression that we had. Almost to the point at times that there seems to be the temptation or the tendency to matriolatry, if that's even a word. I think I've probably made that up, but some kind of worship of motherhood. Now, while we would want to be careful not to go to those kind of extremes, we can surely agree that it is a good thing, as we were sharing with the children, it's a good thing to want to make our mother happy, to make her rejoice. And Solomon certainly thought so. We return to the chapter that we've read and to a verse that we read to the children there in chapter 23 of Proverbs. And in verse 25, we read,

May your father and mother be glad. May she who gave you birth rejoice. May she who gave you birth rejoice. May your mother know rejoicing. And clearly, in the context of the chapter, the implication is that the son or the daughter would be the cause of this rejoicing. They would be the ones, we would be the ones who, by our actions, would give our mother's cause to rejoice. Solomon realized in the teaching and the instruction that he brings, he realized that bringing joy to a mother involves more than a card or a gift, whatever that might be. And his advice to sons and daughters involves many intertwined exhortations, but they can be summarized under two headings. We're going to be thinking about instruction that we find from verse 19 through to verse 25. That's the section of the chapter we'll be thinking about, not exhaustively, not exhaustively, but drawing from that section, instruction in this matter of how we can cause to rejoice the one who gave us birth. And the instruction, as they say, can be presented under two general headings, and that is what we must do and what we must not do.

Solomon identifies those things that we must do, that we ought to do, that we can do as sons and daughters that would bring happiness and joy to our mothers, and indeed, of course, also to our fathers.

And he also identifies those things we ought not to do, for they will, far from bringing joy, will bring sadness and concern and despair even to our parents. What must we do?

We must, three verbs that we're going to notice that Solomon uses or that we find in the text, be it explicitly or implied. We must listen. We've already touched on that with the children.

[6 : 12] We must buy, and we must get. We'll see or develop these verbs and what it is we are to do with them in a moment. But then also what we must not do. And Solomon says we must not join with certain people, we must not despise, and we must not sell. Now, hopefully this will all make more sense as we think of each in turn. Now, one thing I would say before we embark on that is that while the council that we will consider this morning has, very obviously, a particular application to sons and daughters who are blessed with a surviving mother or father, it is also sound advice for all.

The instruction is helpful for all, regardless of what our particular circumstances might be in this matter of being sons or daughters or the place that we have in a particular family.

First of all, then, what must we do? What is it that we're told that we must do? And the first thing that I want to highlight is that we are to listen. Notice there in verse 19, from where we will begin our consideration. Listen, my son, and be wise. Listen. We are exhorted, we are encouraged to listen. It's important to listen. And listening can be such a difficult thing. For all of us, we are often very poor at listening. We think we know already that we know the answers. We don't need other people's advice or opinion or correction, and we are very poor at listening. We may give the impression of listening.

We may go through the motions of being present as somebody speaks to us, but so often, if we're honest with ourselves, we do very little in the way of listening. And this very simple instruction is one that we are given. Listen. Listen, my son, and be wise. Solomon there, in what we just read, identifies the consequences of careful listening. The first one that he mentions there is that listening carefully, very especially to our parents. And of course, this applies not only to those who are young and who are living in the parental home under the authority of their parents. It applies very particularly to such.

[8 : 53] But it also applies, as we would recall, the instruction of our parents. There may be those here this morning who can recall instruction that they received as children, as young people. And if you're honest, you have to say, well, yes, yes, I did listen. I heard, but I didn't obey. I didn't follow that instruction. And maybe for some of you, you can be honest in recognizing the consequences of that.

So, the first thing that we are to do is we are to listen. And as I say, the first consequence that Solomon identifies of that is that we will be or become wise. Listen, my son, and be wise. Those who listen to godly appearance will acquire wisdom. Now, what is wisdom? Well, the author of this book identifies or defines wisdom for us or certainly gives further light on this matter of wisdom in chapter 9 and verse 10 of the book of Proverbs, where we read these words, The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

Wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord, or the essence of wisdom is the fear of the Lord. He is a wise son. She is a wise daughter who listens to a mother's call to fear the Lord, to respect and submit to the Lord's authority. Have you listened in that way? Have you listened to that wise call? Even when maybe when you first heard it, it was an unwelcome call, a tedious call, a seemingly unattractive demand that was being made on you. Have you listened? Have you listened to those who have called you? Maybe insistently, maybe gently, maybe not so gently, that you would fear the Lord and follow in His ways. But Solomon identifies another consequence of careful, active, listening.

Listen, listen, my son, and be wise. And then he goes on to say, and keep your heart on the right path. Keep your heart on the right path. Now, there's a sense in which we might see the second part of verse 19 as a separate exhortation, connected but separate. But I think we can say that this keeping our heart on the right path is a wise person who is a wise person who is a wise person who is a wise person.

They call them to walk on the right path. What is the right path? What is this way along which we are to walk, that we are encouraged and exhorted to walk? What is that way for ourselves and for our children?

[12 : 04] Well, when we ask that question, what is the way upon which we are to walk? It is difficult to ask the question without our minds being taken to the words of Jesus regarding His own person. We know they are familiar words. What did Jesus say of Himself? I am the way. I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. I think it is reasonable and

legitimate to take this exhortation or this encouragement that our heart be on the right path in the light of the coming of the coming of Jesus Christ and the identity of Jesus Christ and to say, well, ultimately, this is the way that we are to walk in, following Jesus, following the One who came to save us, following our Lord and Master. He is the One that as parents we encourage our children to follow. He is the One along whose path we are seeking to walk, that they might walk with us. It's interesting to notice there in verse 19 that the language that is used is of keeping your heart on the right path. Now, we might have thought that a more appropriate word there that would fit with the picture that's being painted might have been the word feet, keep your feet on the right path. After all, it's feet that we use to walk along a path, and yet, for a reason, the word that is used is not feet, though it would be understood, but the word heart. I wonder why that is. Well, I wonder if we had imagined that the word there, or if it were the case that we were encouraged to keep our feet on the right path, is it not the case that feet can give the impression of going in the right direction while the heart is far from God?

That's especially true for those of us who have been brought up in a particular faith environment, in a church, in a Christian family, and we've been given instruction as to the way we should live, and those things that we should do and should not do, and it's not maybe that difficult for us to go with the flow, if you wish, for our feet to go seemingly in the direction that they should be going. Of course, we don't always do that. Often our feet go astray, but it is possible, and I think many of us would be honest enough to recognize that there have been times when we give every impression of walking in the right direction, of doing the right things, of saying the right things, of avoiding the wrong places, or the list could go on. But our heart is in a very different place, and so the writer here very carefully encourages us, exhorts us that our heart would be on the right path. And of course, ultimately, it is the heart that will determine the direction our feet will travel. You know, for a time, it's possible for us to have that contradiction in our lives of our feet going in the right direction to the view of those who look on, and yet our heart to be in the wrong place. And we can live that double life, as it were. We can live that contradiction, but we can't do that forever. And ultimately, the heart will determine where our feet go. And so, of utmost importance is that our heart be in the right place, because where our heart is, our feet will surely follow our conduct, our behavior, our ethics, how we live, how we relate to other people. Our heart will determine that in the most significant measure, and ultimately. And so, it's a good question for all of us this morning. How is your heart? Where is your heart? Listen, my son, and be wise. Keep your heart on the right path. Now, there is, of course, here, and we have to move on swiftly, but there is here an implication, a serious implication of this verse, of this call to listen. There's a serious implication for parents. Our sons and daughters are to listen to us, but what do they hear? What do they hear? I ask that question as a father, and those of you who are parents, I would encourage you to pose that question to yourselves. What do they hear? Imagine if your son or daughter is careful to take seriously what they were encouraged to do this morning, even in the brief time that we had with them, to listen to mom, to listen to dad. And it's good that they, if that is their response, yes, that's what I'm going to do. Okay, but what do they hear?

What do they hear? Do they hear us calling them to the Savior? Do they hear us urging and encouraging them to trust in Jesus? And, of course, not only what do they hear, but what do they see? Do our words and actions coincide? We're not really to point our children in the direction that we want them to go. We are to lead them on the right path. So, first of all, if we are to please and to bring joy to our mother, our father, we are to listen, but also we are to buy. In verse 23, we read, buy the truth, buy the truth, and do not sell it. Buy the truth. Now, the language of buying introduces the idea of values or priorities. It points to that which is of great worth and commands a great price. How are we to understand this call, this exhortation to buy the truth? I think we can legitimately apply this in two very connected ways. First of all, the value of the truth, as we'll explain in a moment what we mean by that, the value of the truth, but also, and it is very much connected, the value and the importance of living truthfully or living with integrity. That involves many things, but among other things, it involves telling the truth. It's not the only aspect of living truthfully, but it's one aspect that we be those who tell the truth. We are to buy the truth. Now, in regard to the truth, the question that we could pose is, what price are we prepared to pay for the truth?

[18 : 49] What price are we prepared to pay to follow the truth, to follow Jesus Christ, who, as we've reminded ourselves just a moment ago, is the one who said and claimed, I am the way, the truth, and the life? Will we buy the truth? Are we prepared to pay the price of following Jesus

Christ? What sacrifices will we make to walk on the right path? We've identified what it is in a particular circumstance, but walking down that path will bring difficult consequences for us. We will be looked on, perhaps, by others in a way that we wouldn't like to be looked on. We may be marginalized by colleagues or even pitied by others as we are buying the truth as we are doing what we know to be the right thing. We may be unpopular as we would stand up for the truth, truth that is not popular and often despised. Buying the truth will involve abandoning sin or dethroning that precious idol that is taking the place that belongs to the Lord. We must buy the truth, and the language of buying the truth does speak of a price that needs to be paid. Now, it's true that the truth cannot be bought with silver or gold, but it must be bought, and the price can be a high one.

As regard the connected aspect of living truthfully, this exhortation also serves as a challenge. If we do limit the application to the matter of telling the truth, it is much broader than that, but for the reasons of time, if we limit it to this one aspect, the importance of telling the truth, is that something that we do? Is that something that characterizes us as Christians? Or in this matter, are we just like the crowd? We tell the truth when it's convenient. We massage the truth when it suits us to do so. We are economical with the truth when our interests are served by doing that.

Or are we rather those who see the truth as something of such great value that we will tell the truth regardless of the consequences? Now, that doesn't mean being foolish or rude or offensive, unnecessarily, of course, but there are times when we simply have to tell the truth, whatever the price, whatever the unpleasant consequences for us. Maybe a promotion might be on the line if we tell the truth. Maybe telling the truth will place us in a bad light before others. Maybe it will mean, to take a topical example, maybe it will mean penalty points on your license, and we could multiply the examples. But are we those who value the truth in our living, in our behavior, in our lifestyle, that we place value on this simple matter of telling the truth? We are to buy the truth. We are to listen. We are also to get wisdom, discipline, and understanding. In that same verse, 23, buy the truth and do not sell it. Get wisdom, discipline, and understanding. Now, we could look at each of these words in turn, the things that we ought to do, the things that we must do to bring joy to our parents, to bring joy to the one who gave us birth. We are to get wisdom, discipline, and understanding. We're not going to look at each of these words in turn, but rather recognize that the three words together do recognize or point to the importance of growing or maturing in the Christian life in the matter of living. We have to grow in our ability to live well, to live in a manner that is pleasing to God. As Christians, we have the truth, but we often lack wisdom. We lack discipline.

We lack understanding. These are traits or virtues to be acquired. And so, we're told, get these things, get wisdom, get discipline, get understanding. We know with what verve and with what energy we seek to get so many things. Maybe we seek to get the toys that this world offers, and we'll sacrifice.

[23 : 14] We'll do overtime. We'll do everything that's required to get what we want. And here, God says, well, employ that energy, that verve, that enthusiasm, that passion to get wisdom, to get discipline, to get understanding that you might live well, that you might live in a way that brings joy and satisfaction to your family, to your parents, to your mother. How can we get these things? Well, we can learn from others who are more mature in the faith. We can listen to and read and meditate on God's Word as it instructs us. In the field of practical Christian service and obedience, we can get these things as we are out there seeking to serve God and obey God. And of those of us who are parents, of course, can testify to how satisfying and what a source of joy it is to see our children getting wisdom, getting discipline, getting understanding. As we rejoice in seeing that in our children, well, may it be true of us also. This is a lifelong challenge to get wisdom, to get discipline, to get understanding. This is what we must do. We must listen. We must buy. We must get.

But also, and more briefly, what must we not do? Because the chapter and the portion of this chapter that we're looking at also carefully identifies those things we ought not to do if our concern is to bring joy to the one who gave us birth. What ought we not to do? Before we notice what we find in the passage, it is worth just commenting that the order in which we look at these things is important.

We ought to begin with those things that we must do. It's never a sensible thing to begin with those things we ought not to do. If we begin in the matter of Christian living with those things that we ought not to do, that is a recipe for, or certainly carries the danger of really descending into legalism and ultimately failure. Because if the Christian life is simply a list of don'ts, then it becomes almost

unlivable. We begin with what we ought to do, what we must do. And as we take those things seriously, we then find that the prohibitions, if you wish, and there are, become prohibitions that aren't burdens for us. Well, having made that point, let's just notice what we're told we ought not to do if we are to be sons and daughters who bring joy and satisfaction to our families and to our parents, those who care for us and love us. First of all, do not join with. Do not join with whom? Well, verses 20 and 21. Do not join with those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags.

I don't know how you respond to that piece of advice. Maybe your response in your own mind is, well, that's good advice for other people, but, you know, I don't have many drunkards or gluttons in my circle of friends. This isn't a big danger for me. Or maybe we think, well, this is good advice for young people. They are more prone to drunkenness and to behavior of that kind. Well, if that is your reaction, maybe a couple of thoughts just to ponder on, it seems to me that this reference to drunkards and gluttons can legitimately be taken as representing all those who live for today, who have no eternal perspective, those who have bought into a materialistic worldview. Of course, it also refers to those who are literally drunkards and gluttons, but I think they do represent a much broader and wider group of people.

Perhaps there are more folk than we imagine in that camp. Those who live for today, maybe very respectably, maybe in a manner that isn't scandalous at all, and yet basically they live for today, for what they can earn, for what they can make, for what they can buy, for the things that they can procure. That's what life is all about. Are we to shun all such people? Well, we'd be doing an awful lot of shunning if we were to do that. I don't think we're being told at all to shun anybody.

[27 : 39] But what we are being advised, what we are being exhorted, is to not to join with them. Join with them in the sense of sharing their folly and flawed worldview, not join with them in that exclusively temporal perspective, in forgetting that there is an eternal perspective that is real and that needs to be taken as seriously. Maybe a second thought to ponder on in regard to this advice of not joining with drunkards and gluttons is to ask ourselves whether perhaps we ourselves might be guilty of drinking too much wine or gorging ourselves on meat. Are we free from guilt in the matter of excess, of buying into this consumeristic, materialistic view of reality? Are we innocent in this matter?

I simply pose the question, do not join with drunkards and gluttons. And how many mothers have shed bitter tears as a result of their son or daughter joining with drunkards and gluttons?

Don't do it. But also we're told, do not despise. What are we not to despise? Verse 22, listen to your father who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old. This is something we ought not to do. We ought not to despise our mother when she is old. Well, the language is shocking, and I think deliberately so. We maybe recoil at the very suggestion that we would despise our own mother. What monster would despise his own mother? But I wonder, are we free from guilt in this matter? You know, the language is careful. Do not despise your mother when she is old. And the picture seems to be of a son or daughter entering into adulthood and beginning to make their own way in life and take their own decisions as it should be. But the danger is that we become dismissive of the advice and opinion of our parents, be it past advice that they've given us in the past and we've chosen to ignore, or be it present advice that they continue to offer us because of the love that they bear for us.

We can despise our parents in different ways, even if the language is shocking and we recoil from. Do we seek out and value the thoughts and opinions of our mother, of our parents? Are we committed to their care and comfort? Is our mother's happiness something we take responsibility for? Do not despise your mother when she is old. And then finally, in those prohibitions, if you wish, those things we ought not to do if we are to bring rejoicing to the one who gave us birth. In verse 23, we're told, buy the truth and do not sell it. We've already thought very fleetingly of what is involved in buying the truth. But then the other side of the coin there in verse 23, do not sell it. Selling the truth is a very solemn matter. And we can sell the truth in so many ways. Sometimes we sell the truth when we endeavor to make our message more palatable. We can be guilty of that as churches. We know that perhaps aspects of the Bible's message is not very well received, and so we sell the truth by simply removing that from our discourse. We sell the truth in order to be admired or to be accepted in our own individual lives. We can sell the truth as we look for a peaceful life. We don't want trouble. We won't want any argument. And so, in seeking a peaceful life, which is a perfectly reasonable thing to desire, we can sell the truth. We sell the truth for the plaudits of others.

We sell the truth perhaps to earn a little more or pay a little less. We sell the truth when we listen to God's Word through filters, filters that would filter out inconvenient and compromising demands. And again, we could go on.

Why shouldn't we sell the truth? Well, it's a very foolish thing to do. It's very foolish to sell the truth. But perhaps even more importantly, more fundamentally, it's not ours to sell. It doesn't belong to us, the truth. It's not ours to sell. Well, let's return to where we began this morning.

[32 : 20] In verse 25, may your father and mother be glad. May she who gave you birth rejoice. Well, if that is to be so, well, we've noticed this morning, it's all to do with what you do and what you don't do. Well, may God help us to do that which we ought to do and to not do that which we are forbidden from doing.

Let us pray.