

Lessons from Proverbs (I)

Proverbs 21:25; 23:4-5, 19-21

- I. These are some basic points about dealing with the material. Although we are essentially and eternally spiritual beings, God created us with physical bodies for a reason. (Expand on the various principle reasons and purposes of the physical body. But finally end on the point of the spiritual value of true dominion over the physical worlds: restored, heavenly economy.)
- II. Relationship with the physical world teaches us spiritual, moral lessons. These are expressed in these verses from Proverbs. That is the purpose for our being created as physical beings which we will emphasize in this sermon. We are here to learn how to live righteous, principled lives, and the very creation itself teaches us that standard, through our dealing with the physical world.
- III. One lesson is that of give and take. We do not receive from the creation without first giving to it. That giving means, in part, work. We invest ourselves in the creation, through our labor. This means mental discipline, intelligent thought, organized activity, cooperation with others. (Each of these aspects can be expanded.) For example – cooperation with others. In the American West, when one family's barn burned down, or when a new family moved into the area, the whole neighborhood would join together to raise a barn or a house. No one family by themselves could do it in a year; but everyone working together could do it in a day or a weekend. But this could happen because of the Christian spirit of giving, of trust, of harmony. Thus, moral lessons are learned along with work. This is the origin of the nobility of labor. Labor is not meant by God to be demeaning or degrading. Labor, centered upon God and public service, is a noble aspect of life, which gives life much meaning. (Maybe some personal testimonies on this lesson in your own life.)
- IV. Another moral lesson is here in Proverbs: that focused work will result in prosperity, and that laziness, gluttony, sluggardliness, etc. will result in poverty. (See also Ecclesiastes 11:9.)

- V. And yet the purpose of work is not the personal acquisition of wealth. In fact, Solomon tells us that if one works simply to acquire wealth for oneself, one's prosperity will vanish "flying like an eagle toward heaven." This can be the basis for an extended criticism of selfish capitalism.
- VI. Then the overall message is that whether we like it or not we must invest our energy, our labor, in this world, for our own growth, spiritually and materially. Nothing is simply given us without our investment (principle of give and take action). We become like God when we invest our energy in creation. We become co-creators, we exercise our divine nature. Thus, investment and work are God-centered realities.
- VII. But the question is, how do we direct our energy and labor? Do we direct it for our own benefit? If we do, we will decline; God will withdraw his blessings. Or do we direct it for the benefit of the whole? If we do that, then God will bless us and the whole. Acquiring wealth, then, is not in itself evil. The question is what one does with the wealth. So, so out and work hard; but then give generously to help others less fortunate, less blessed than yourself.
- VIII. (One could bring in here points from the parable of the wise servant, who invested what his master (God) gave him, and was blessed one hundred times over by God.)