

### Wisdom in Treasures

#### Proverbs 21:16-31

**Proverbs 21:16-31** - *“A man who wanders from the way of understanding will rest in the assembly of the dead.*

*He who loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich.*

*The wicked shall be a ransom for the righteous, and the unfaithful for the upright.*

*Better to dwell in the wilderness than with a contentious and angry woman.*

*There is desirable treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise, but a foolish man squanders it.*

*He who follows righteousness and mercy finds life, righteousness, and honor.*

*A wise man scales the city of the mighty, and brings down the trusted stronghold.*

*Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles.*

*A proud and haughty man - “Scoffer” is his name. He acts with arrogant pride.*

*The desire of the lazy man kills him, for his hands refuse to labor. He covets greedily all day long, but the righteous gives and does not spare.*

*The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination. How much more when he brings it with wicked intent!*

*A false witness shall perish, but the man who hears him will speak endlessly.*

*A wicked man hardens his face, but the upright establishes his way.*

*There is no wisdom or understanding or counsel against the LORD.*

*The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but deliverance is of the LORD.”*

#### Background Notes

For background, let's consider verse 18 and a biblical example to help us understand this proverb. *“The wicked shall be a ransom for the righteous, and the unfaithful for the upright.”* What does this proverb mean? A ransom is the price paid to free a prisoner or redeem a slave. How are the wicked and unfaithful a ransom for the righteous and upright? The point of the proverb is not that the wicked ransom the righteous, but rather that the wicked themselves may be the ransom, or means by which God redeems and frees His people.

Isaiah 43:3 says, *“I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place.”* The Lord tells His people Israel that He gave Egypt, Ethiopia, and Seba as a ransom to redeem them. To whom did God pay the ransom? To the Persians, because Cyrus, the Persian king, issued an edict permitting God's people to return to Jerusalem from their captivity in Babylon. God gave pagan lands to Cyrus to become part of the Persian Empire. God has His ways of making enemy strategy backfire, and He delivers the righteous by punishing the wicked that oppress them.

#### Doctrinal Point

**The proverbs are wise advice for everyday living.**

Verse 16: *“A man who wanders from the way of understanding will rest in the assembly of the dead.”* This proverb reminds us of what the Lord taught in Matthew 7:13-14: *“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”* If people do not enter the gate of salvation through Christ, they are in the company of those on the way to eternal death.

Verse 17: *“He who loves pleasure will be a poor man. He who loves wine and oil will not be rich.”* The point of this proverb is not that all pleasure is wrong, or that consumption of oil and wine is wrong. The word **“love”** is the key. Loving self-indulgent pleasure is wrong, and loving excessively luxurious living can lead to poverty. I’ve seen it happen.

Verse 19: *“Better to dwell in the wilderness than with a contentious and angry woman.”* We could draw two good applications from this proverb.

1. Instead of arguing and quarreling all the time, it would be wise for husbands and wives to put some distance between them for a short time - until emotions quiet down.
2. Don’t rush into marriage. Make sure you know how your future husband or wife handles stress and deals with anger before you marry that “perfect person”!

Verse 20: *“There is desirable treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise, but a foolish man squanders it.”* Does this proverb contradict Matthew 6:19-21, where the Lord said, *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

So is verse 20 a contradiction to the Lord’s words? No! It is the balance in Scripture. The point is that wise folks don’t waste and squander all they have, but foolish people do. Wise people don’t hoard – but they wisely save for “a rainy day.” They have supplies on hand to help when a time of need arises, such as an earthquake or a hurricane.

Verse 21: *“He who follows righteousness and mercy finds life, righteousness, and honor.”* Do you see the divine “law of multiplication” here? This is more than just “you reap what you sow.” If you truly follow righteousness and mercy as a believer, you will find the abundant life now, as well as eternal life forever. You will be clothed with the righteousness of Christ, and you will receive honor and reward from the Lord Himself!

Verse 22: *“A wise man scales the city of the mighty, and brings down the trusted stronghold.”* In battle, would you rather have wisdom - or strength - to triumph over the enemy? Wisdom is better than strength! Strategy and tactics can overcome great odds and powerful forces. Think of Gideon’s victory over the Midianites.

This true in spiritual warfare. *“The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).*

Verse 23: *“Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles.”* How often we get ourselves into trouble by opening our big mouths? We need to pray as David prayed: *“Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth. Keep watch over the door of my lips” (Psalm 141:3).*

Verse 24: *“A proud and haughty man - “Scoffer” is his name. He acts with arrogant pride.”* What’s the point of this proverb? Don’t be a snob! That’s the kind of person who is described here. They think they know it all, and everyone else is stupid. And they tell you so! They are too proud and arrogant to ever admit that they’re wrong.

Verses 25-26: *“The desire of the lazy man kills him, for his hands refuse to labor. He covets greedily all day long, but the righteous gives and does not spare.”* In these two proverbs, the righteous person is contrasted with the lazy person. The sluggard does a lot of wishful thinking, and daydreams about what he wants, but he’s unwilling to work for it. As a result he comes to ruin. Lazy people die with unfulfilled dreams. In contrast, the righteous person is willing to work to provide for his own needs, and is also willing to share with others who cannot work. The lazy “desire,” but the righteous “do.”

Verse 28: *“A false witness shall perish, but the man who hears him will speak endlessly.”* There are different translations of this verse but the contrast here seems to be between the person who listens to lies and spreads the lies, and the person who listens to the truth and faithfully passes it on. This person’s testimony will endure because it is true, and the truth endures forever. False witnesses and all untruths will ultimately come to an end.

Verse 29: *“A wicked man hardens his face, but the upright establishes his way.”* Wicked people have to put up a bold and harsh front when trying to cover up their wrong behavior and actions. However, upright people don’t have to put up a false front. Their behavior and actions and lifestyle speak for them.

Verse 30: *“There is no wisdom or understanding or counsel against the LORD.”* What’s the point of this proverb? You cannot outwit, outsmart, outdo, or out-manuever the Lord. He knows everything. He is totally sovereign and in complete control of everything. *“He works all things after the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11).* The right course of action is to line up your life with **God’s** program – and not try to get the Lord to join **your** program!

Verse 31: *“The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but deliverance is of the LORD.”* The point of this proverb is not to denounce making preparations for battle. That is a human responsibility. But to make preparations, but it’s proud and ignorant to then depend only on your tanks and missiles and Marines. Victory is in the hands of the Lord! He can change the course of a war just by controlling the weather for example. He’s done it many times throughout human history. For one example, read about the victory of Deborah and Barak in Judges 5.

Can God do the same today? Of course He can. Remember when all commercial and military flights in Europe were stopped for many days by the eruption of a volcano in Iceland?

The proverbs are wise advice for everyday living.

## **Practical Application**

### **Don't worship the Lord with mixed motives.**

*Verse 27: "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination, and how much more when he brings it with wicked intent!"*

God hates hypocrisy, especially when it comes to worship. God says it's an abomination, or exceptionally wicked, if you have an unbelieving heart but you go through the motions of worship just for show, or if your lifestyle is ungodly but you're unwilling to repent of secret sin. It's even worse if you use an outward show of worship to cover up some evil intent, while making people think you're a worshiping saint. God loathes hypocrisy.

Some people think that they can "make points with God" or buy Him off" with a show of worship. Or they may think they can justify a certain amount of sin in their life during the week as long as they go to church on Sunday. Nothing could be further from the truth!

Don't try to worship the Lord with mixed motives.