

Provers 1:10-19

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Preacher: Matthew Capone

[0 : 00] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church.

And it's my joy to bring God's word to you today. Special welcome if you're new with us. We're glad that you're here, and we'd love to have you go to our website at www.cmpca.net.

And as soon as you go there, there will be a pop-up for our visitor connect form. And that's a chance for us to get to know you better and help you connect with us in our community. Whether you're new or you've been with us for a long time, I'll remind you again that while you can see me, I can't see you.

And that while we can often see numbers, we can't see names. And so I encourage you at this time to use the comment box in the Facebook video to let everyone else know that you're here. You can say something as simple as good morning. Great to be here.

Share who you're watching with and where you're watching from. And even as we are separated, that gives us a small sense of being together. Finally, I'm very excited to announce to you all that we are going to resume in-person worship next Sunday, June the 14th.

[1 : 04] And so this is our last Sunday of only having a live stream. We will continue the live stream because we understand that some of you will choose to still remain at home during this time. And there are many details surrounding that, which are on our website that came out in our Friday email.

And also on Friday, a letter went out to the mailing list of the church with details about reopening. I'll highlight just a few things. First, we're going to, at least for the 14th of June, have two services, one at 9 a.m. and one at 11 a.m.

And it's very important for us that you let us know in advance which service you're coming to and how many folks are coming with you. And that's just very helpful for us as we plan for those.

As that form was linked to in the Friday email, it's also going to be on our website on that same pop-up that comes up immediately when you go to that page. And so I just urge you as soon as possible to let us know if you're coming and which service you'll be attending because that's incredibly helpful to us.

And, of course, the details surrounding that, including things like we really encourage you to bring and wear your own mask. We're going to continue social distancing. We're going to have a slightly shorter service than we would normally.

[2 : 09] And we will not have adult community or Sunday school. And our nursery also will not be open. However, our nursery workers will be there for emergency needs and help with diaper changes.

Again, I encourage you to go to our website, read that letter if you're on our list, and to go through all those details. And we're just excited that we're going to be returning to worship together very soon.

With that, we're in the book of Proverbs. And you'll remember that the book of Proverbs is a book in the Old Testament, and it's a book about wisdom. Wisdom is skill in the art of living.

It's knowing how to navigate the space between what's right and wrong, operating within those. It's operating well in God's world, knowing how to thrive in the gray areas.

It's knowing how to navigate the path that God's given us. And it's also knowing how to stay on the path. The last couple weeks, we've been talking about how we get wisdom. Remember, it begins with the fear of the Lord.

[3 : 09] And the fear of the Lord is this attitude of submission, respect, dependence, and worship, as one man describes it. And then last week, we talked about that the prerequisite for wisdom is this humility, this teachability.

If we think that we know everything, it's proof that we're not wise. In fact, the book of Proverbs says that. It says in Proverbs 12, verse 15, The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

With that introduction, we're going to begin to get into the meat of the book of Proverbs. And our first topic is going to be violence. Now, that might surprise you. Might not. If you live in this world, if you've lived for long enough, you actually know in some ways that shouldn't surprise us.

It's a common element in a world affected by sin. And, of course, we're reminded of it even these last few weeks as people living in the United States of America. And I'll just simply say we don't need to get pulled in to the tribalism that's so common in our nation right now.

We can condemn brutality when it comes from police, and we can condemn it when it comes from protesters. We don't have to pick. We can say the image of God matters in various circumstances.

[4 : 19] We can stand with people who are victims of violence. And we don't have to get pulled into sort of a political way of looking at it, but we can have a Christian way of looking at it. As we're coming to this topic, of course, it just so happens that that's going on in our world, and also that this is the passage of Proverbs that we're up against.

As I say when we talk about things that tend to be more controversial, I'll say something, but not everything. And I'll remind you that Proverbs is a master class in the human heart.

And so it's going to answer some questions for us. Why is violence so attractive? What are the strategies and the tactics that people use to pull us into violence?

And how do we stand strong against it? That's the instruction we're going to see here in the book of Proverbs, and we're going to be starting at verse 10 of chapter 1.

And so I invite you to turn there with me now. You can turn in a web browser. You can turn on your phone, or, of course, you can turn as I am in your Bible. But remember, wherever you're turning, that this is God's word. And Proverbs chapter 30, verse 5, tells us that every word of God proves true.

[5 : 29] He is a shield to those who take refuge in him. And so it's for that reason that we read now, starting at verse 10. Verse 14.

Verse 15. Verse 15.

For unjust gain. It takes away the life of its possessors. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

Our Father in heaven, we praise you as we do every week that you don't shy away from talking about hard things with us.

You don't shy away from speaking clearly. But instead, you come with your word. And you give us the instruction that we need. And so we simply ask now that you would send your Holy Spirit to do that.

[7 : 14] That you would soften our hearts. Father, you'd open our ears and our eyes. That you would ask that we would be able to see and know and understand everything that you've written in your word.

And that you'd help us to see Jesus as more glorious and beautiful than ever before. That we would follow him in his paths of peace. We ask these things.

I'm grateful that we don't have to earn them because we ask them in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. This passage at verse 10 starts here with a question.

Do you want to belong? Do you want to belong? Do you want to be part of a group? Do you want to feel the sense of community that comes from working forward with others in a common mission?

That's the tempting voice that we're presented with at the beginning of this. We're told in verse 10 that there are sinners who are enticing. They're alluring. They're trying to invite someone into something that's wrong.

[8 : 15] And their tactic here, their first tactic, is one of community. They're saying, we are going to be the community and the mission that you want to join. If you're longing to be a part of something bigger than yourself, you need look no further.

We have it for you. That's what we see here in verses 11 through 14, but especially in 11 and 14. They say, come with us, verse 11. You're going to be a part of us.

Let us lie and wait for blood. Let us ambush the innocent without reason. Verse 14, throw in your lot among us. We will all have one purse. We're going to have this beautiful community where we share everything.

And so that's the first voice of violence here. You are going to have a group and a crew. You're going to have friendship and community. You will finally have a place and a people that you belong to.

This shouldn't surprise us. This is true of many elements of violence in our world. For example, there's a recruitment process that often happens before someone joins the community of white supremacy.

[9 : 25] And in this recruitment process, this is part of the offer that they make to people. There are sociologists who look into, psychologists who look into the reasons why people join these groups.

And one psychologist gave three reasons. And two of these top three reasons were this. The desire to feel significant and a sense of belonging. A desire to feel significant and a sense of belonging.

And so we see that the call of violence that were presented here in this ancient book of wisdom is the same as the call of violence that happens today. People without community, without relationships, are especially vulnerable to this invitation.

In fact, in those communities, recruitment has been on the rise in recent years. And this is part of their process. They want to come to people who are lonely, looking for purpose, and looking for people, and offer them what they think will be the solution to the longing of their hearts.

There's also another invitation, though. It's not just community, but there's an offer of wealth. We see that especially in verse 13. We shall find all precious goods.

[10 : 36] We shall fill our houses with plunder. You're not just going to have friends. You're going to get to live the good life. You'll have access to experiences and amenities that other people won't.

You won't have to worry in the way that other people will have to worry about financial things. You're going to have success in every way. You're going to have success in your relationships. You're going to have people, a tribe that you get to be a part of.

And you're going to have success financially. You're going to be secure. Of course, we know this in our world as well. It's not just the allure of community, but it's the allure of wealth.

And there's all sorts of ways to be dishonest and to make money. And so the temptation to violence is presented here for us. And we learn a few things from the fact that it's the very beginning of the book of Proverbs.

First, we are foolish if we assume this temptation is something that we're immune to. We're foolish if we assume this temptation is something that we are immune to.

[11 : 44] There is more than one way to lie in wait for someone's blood. We're incredibly creative about our sin. We might read this passage right and think, man, of course I'm not going to get involved in a gang that would murder.

And yet it's talking about a bigger concept here. Verse 19, such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain. This greediness for wealth and gain will inevitably involve people being trampled on, whether it literally murders someone or not.

So think, for example, in the early 2000s, there were plenty of stories about piracy when it came to music and movies. And, of course, that's a way of devouring the product of musicians and artists.

It's a way of taking away their wealth. And as this passage warns us, there were many stories about people who did that, and it haunted them. There were teenagers who participated in music piracy and had to go through years of court battles, had to face fines for what they'd done.

And so it's similar to the temptation here that's given to this young man. Beware of these get-rich-quick schemes. Beware of opportunities where it seems too easy to make money.

[13 : 00] Of course, there's also plenty of jobs that prey on the innocent. Part of the reason that we've had some of the financial crises that we've had have been because of unscrupulous people who are looking to take advantage of the innocent and the poor and the foolish.

And so there's plenty of schemes that involve fraud and deception. There's businesses that might not be technically illegal but are wildly unethical. It might not be technically illegal but wildly unethical, taking advantage of the poor and people with few options.

There are lucrative industries that thrive on exploiting women, often legally. If you're a kid, you might, and even as an adult, you might find a group of bullies who tell you, hey, you can belong with us.

You can be a part of our group. We'll devour other people with our words. It's going to be a small price for us to let you in. All you have to do is agree with us and then go after others.

It's easy to put this on to another group, but this passage is saying look out for your tendency to violence.

[14 : 09] Maybe it's not physical violence, but look out for your tendency to put profits and gain over people. And so we're foolish to assume that we're immune from these things.

We're also foolish to assume that our children are immune from these things. Remember, this is a father speaking to his son about the temptations he's going to face in this world.

And one of the great lies of the Christian community is this. If we're Christian parents and we have Christian kids, yeah, they're going to struggle with sin in some ways, but they're not going to get pulled into anything really bad.

Yet this book of Proverbs tells us something different. This is actually something we're warning our children about. There will be people who are going to come and tempt you to these sorts of behaviors.

There's going to be constant recruitment to live the good life devoid of love for others. It could be a recruitment to join radical, violent groups.

[15 : 09] It was just last April that there was a shooting in California at a synagogue, and it came out that the shooter was a young man who was a member in good standing of a Reformed Presbyterian church.

By the way, we are Reformed Presbyterian church. So there was a lot of head shaking and seeking and questioning from folks in our community generally about what happened.

Well, part of what happened is that no one is immune to the temptation to violence. We don't assume that just because we're Christians in a church that we're not going to be tempted by these calls, these calls for community, these calls for belonging.

There's also a recruitment, not just for violence, but to separate our vocation from our faith. There will be voices that tell our children, hey, you can go to church on Sunday, and what you do in your work Monday through Friday doesn't matter.

It doesn't matter what industry you're a part of. You don't need to think carefully about whether you're involved in a career that actually tramples on the poor and those with fewer options.

[16 : 21] I knew a man at one point in my life who was successful in the financial industry, and he was contacted at one point by a headhunter, and that headhunter told him, hey, we've got a great job for you at another firm.

And he said to them, I don't want to work for that firm because what they do is actually not ethical. And this headhunter was speechless, right? He didn't know what to say.

Wasn't used to someone who was careful and cautious about the invitation to violence. And so the temptation is there. It's there for our children.

We're foolish to think that we're immune. We're foolish to think that our kids and our community are immune. And so the wise parent here, this is a master class, not just on the human heart, but there's some dynamics of discipleship and parenting that we see here, talks about these things with their children in advance.

The father here is telling his son, look, this is the way the world works. There are going to be times when you have people who come to tempt you for these sorts of things. Be prepared for that.

[17 : 26] Know that it's coming. Know what you're going to say when it happens. Know how you're going to respond and be prepared. Know the consequences.

And so that's the same thing we can see modeled in the Proverbs that we do in our church and our family as well. We can tell our kids, look, we here believe in God and follow after Jesus, but that doesn't mean there aren't going to be very real temptations in this life.

There's going to be temptations to do things with our bodies that don't honor God. There's going to be temptations to do things in our work that stomp and trample on other people. And so let's talk about it now.

Remember last week we talked about the fact that it's better to sweat in training than to bleed on the battlefield. Sweating in training involves this kind of instruction. The instruction that we saw in verse 8, the father's instruction and the mother's teaching.

Part of it is talking about the situations that are going to come up in the future and making sure we're ready for them. And so this father here speaks plainly. He helps his son understand what's really going on.

[18 : 32] In verse 11 and 12, of course, no one would actually use these words, right? You're tempting someone to violence. You would not say to them, let us lie in wait for blood. Let us ambush the innocent without reason. This is the father's way of telling his son the reality behind what's going on.

Then he also tells him about the consequences. In verses 15 through 18, he lets them know what's really going on.

Their feet run to evil, verse 16, and they make haste to shed blood. For in vain is a net spread in the sight of any bird. But these men lie in wait for their own blood.

They set an ambush for their own lives. In other words, even birds are smarter than this. Birds know a trap when they see it.

And yet these violent people can't. They are stupider than birds. And they're stupider than birds because the end of what they're doing is their own destruction.

[19 : 30] And so know now, my son, that this is a matter of life and death. That's the voice of the father.

In fact, that's part of the voice of Proverbs is that the difference between wisdom and foolishness can be the difference between life and death.

And so the father's warning the son. He knows that there's real temptations that need to be discussed. He knows that his son's heart may be caught up by these things. And he's not afraid to talk openly and honestly about the challenges and the evil in this world.

There's also a concept that's introduced in this passage that's going to become a theme in this book of Proverbs. And it's that of the path. It's not enough just to put away violence.

Proverbs actually tells us there has to be an embrace of another path. And so we see in verse 15, My son, do not walk in the way with them. Hold back your foot from their paths.

[20 : 38] This is going to be continued to... The author of Proverbs is going to continue to develop this idea of the way. That there's two ways. The way of wisdom and the way of folly. And so it's not enough to avoid one path or walk away from one path.

We also have to go on to the other path and embrace another path. Fearing the Lord is not just hating what's evil. It's also loving what's good.

Fear of the Lord is not just hating what's evil. It's also loving what's good. Of course, our Lord Jesus also tells us about two paths. In Matthew chapter 7, he says this, Enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction.

And those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life. And those who find it are few. Violence is one path.

Jesus teaches us about the other. Remember, we've been talking about the fact that Matthew chapter 12, verse 42, tells us that Jesus is greater than Solomon.

[21 : 49] He is the great wisdom teacher who teaches us even more than Solomon did or could. And so he helps us understand it's not enough to not be violent.

It's actually something even more that he calls us to, which is to preserve and promote life, to promote and love justice. These evil men present a path and they make promises of a reward.

Jesus also presents a path and he promises a reward. It's just a very different path and a very different reward.

They promise a reward to people who pursue violence. And Jesus promises a reward to those who pursue peace.

We also see this in the Gospel of Matthew. He tells us in Matthew chapter 5, Blessed are the people who have blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

- [22 : 52] Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
- So those who pursue peace are going to be sons of God. They are going to have the rich community, the real community that's worth being a part of. Those who are meek are going to inherit the earth.
- They are going to have the true riches and treasure. Jesus makes better promises. These men who are inviting the Son promise riches to those who take.
- Jesus promises rewards to those who give. Tells us in Luke chapter 6, Love your enemies and do good and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great.
- And you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. So they promise a reward to violence.
- [23 : 57] And they promise a reward to those who take. Jesus promises a reward for peace. And he promises a reward for those who give.
- They promise a community. And we see in John chapter 17, Jesus prays for his community. For us, the church, that we would have true and rich community.
- That we would be one. And so simply, Jesus just offers better promises. One presents a way to death. Jesus presents the way and the path to life.
- Jesus offers a better deal. He offers better motivations. We're told in verse 10, My son, if sinners entice you, don't consent.
- Jesus is also enticing and calling out and alluring and inviting. He's also offering rewards. He's just offering rewards for a very different way.
- [24 : 56] Very different destination. So Jesus promises us a great blessing that motivates us, not just away from violence, but towards peace.
- And so it's not just that we don't walk in this way. It's not just that we're not greedy for unjust gain. It's the fact that we're going after the opposite. We can listen carefully when people tell us about their experiences of injustice.
- We don't need to be defensive, but we can be peacemakers. We can be willing to have less money for the sake of others and for the sake of the community, rather than trying to gain more money at the expense of others and at the expense of the community.
- We can stand up for the lives of others when they're threatened, rather than devouring them. We can seek reconciliation even when it's inconvenient and it's costly.
- And we can walk in that way because Jesus offers us something much greater and much richer than anyone in this passage can.
- [26 : 13] I mentioned before that violence offers us something and Jesus offers us something. But one of those has a much better track record than the other.
- We can have confidence and trust and faith in what Jesus offers us because his track record is strong and secure. He has made it clear to us that we can trust and rely on him.
- And he's made it most clear to us when he died for us on the cross. It's the cross that shows us Jesus' seriousness and his commitment to the way of peace and his seriousness and commitment to us.
- Jesus received violence when he didn't deserve it so that we would receive peace when we don't deserve it. And so we can follow after Jesus having faith in him because of looking at him on the cross.
- We know that he makes good on his promises. His investments, investments we make with him, have a sure and clear return and reward.

[27 : 25] In late 2008, there's a man whose name, many of you probably know, Bernie Madoff, who was arrested. And he was arrested for running a Ponzi scheme, which is a deceitful scheme.

It's a way of taking away the lives of the innocent. It offers great rewards if you give your money to it, but it turns out there's no real investment there. It's all built on a lie.

And just as this passage presents, Bernie Madoff suffered the consequences of his way. It's verse 18. He set an ambush for his own life.

Verse 19. Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain. It takes away the life of its possessors. He ended up not with great riches, but instead he ended up in jail.

He ended up not with community, but he ended up isolated and alone. And so he illustrates a couple things for us. First, he shows us that the way of violence ends in death.

[28 : 30] But he also reminds us that the way of violence is a Ponzi scheme. It offers a return and a reward that it can't make good on.

It leads not to wealth. This passage reminds us it leads to bankruptcy. Makes great promises, but in the end, we're left with nothing.

On the other hand, Jesus offers to us the greatest returns. He offers real returns. And he's guaranteed them for us by his death and his resurrection.

And so we can pursue peace, not violence, but because we know, blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. And blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.

Please pray with me. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Our Father in heaven, we thank you that you're a good and a faithful father. And that you come and you warn us of the things that would cause us death.

[29 : 40] We ask that you'd send your spirit now to drive those warnings deep into our heart, but even more, that you'd show us the glory of Jesus and his way of peace. And you'd remind us that Jesus, unlike the other offers, provides a real return on investment.

And we ask that you'd use that to give us faith and trust and hope in him. We ask that you would do that now, not because of what we've done, but because of what Jesus has done for us.

And so we ask it in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. I look forward to soon being able to give you all a benediction in person.

But while we wait for that, we'll have to make do with a benediction over video. I'll remind you that a benediction is a good word from God.

It's a word that is true in the midst of a world filled with words that are not true. It's tradition for the minister to hold up his hand to send out God's blessing on God's people and for God's people to hold out their hands to receive God's blessing.

[30 : 48] And so hear now God's good word over you from 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He who calls you is faithful. He will surely do it. Amen. Thanks for being with us today. And I look forward to seeing many of you in person a week from now.

Thanks so much.