

Wisdom and Beauty

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Date: 21 July 2019

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[0 : 00] a couple of thousand years ago, on how they can live wisely. It's a manual for wisdom. And it's meant to train you in how you can be wise and have the good life.

And I trust the good life is something that we all want. And you would have noticed in that reading that Proverbs is slightly different to a regular Bible book. So it's not like a story. You can't follow the story slightly.

And it's not making an argument. It's not saying point one, point two conclusion. It gives us this hot pot. And you've got to try and figure out what's going on. And so what it does is it talks circular in a big circle and then makes a punch.

And that's what it's going for. And so it's got these topics and themes in it. And we've covered some of the topics on Sundays. So we'll be looking at sluggardliness. I think Robin will be preaching on that in the evening in a couple of weeks.

So being lazy, if you're lazy, that's probably going to stop you from living the good life. And then last week, kids talk, we thought about words. How if you're someone who is always combative with your words, if you're slightly hot-headed, then that's going to create problems for you in living the good life.

[1 : 13] That's going to ruin your life. And then we thought about faithfulness. Faithfulness is another topic that comes up. If you're unfaithful, if you're always blowing hot and cold, one day you want to do this, one day you want to do that, following the latest fad, then that's probably going to stop you living the best life that you possibly can.

But there are three really big topics that come out in Proverbs and indeed throughout the Bible, kind of hot topics that the Bible always talks about that is going to stop you living the good life and that are going to, if you fall into these traps, they are going to destroy your life, really wreck your life in every way imaginable.

Socially, emotionally, health-wise, spiritually, money-wise, they're going to wreck your life and make life incredibly hard. Three topics. I wonder if you can think what they are.

Can you guess? So the first one is violence. If you're a violent man, the Bible's really strong on that. Life's not going to go well for you. Then wealth. If you're someone who's unwise with your money, if you're not generous to people, if you don't care for others, then life's not going to go well for you. And then finally, the one that we're going to be thinking about this morning is sex. If you use sex in the wrong way, then life is not going to go well for you. So sex, money, and violence.

[2 : 37] And Proverbs, because it's, well, it's proverbial, it's proverbial wisdom, and it seems life more connected, and it's more nuanced. It talks about sex in the language of beauty and allure.

So we're considering beauty and sex this morning. And we're going to think about this topic in three ways, from three angles. So we're going to consider, firstly, the joy of beauty, and then we're going to look at the danger of beauty.

And then finally, we're going to consider the myth of beauty. So the joy of beauty. And I wonder if you notice there, Proverbs 5, verse 18 and 19, what a wonderful picture it paints of the joy of beauty and sex and intimacy.

Let me read it for us there. May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doer, a graceful dear, may her breast satisfy you always.

May you ever be intoxicated with her love. And firstly, I wonder what you notice, where it says joy and beauty is to be found.

[3 : 49] Well, in verse 18, is to be found in your wife. That is, if you want to have the good life in sex, in beauty, then you've got to keep sex within marriage.

It's always within the context of marriage. And then look what it goes on to say. It says, in the wife of your youth. And what's it saying here? It's simply saying, well, don't trade your partner and your spouse in for a new model.

Stick with the one you have. Pick one and stick one. Pick one and stick with one. And then you'll be all right. So, don't trade them in thinking that the sex will be better, because it won't, is what it's saying.

And then secondly, what does Proverbs say about joy and beauty and sex? Well, it says, enjoy it. It says, enjoy being together. I'll paraphrase what it says there. It says, be drunk and crazy in love with your spouse always.

What a beautiful picture that is of what it is like to be married. Look at the words, how it uses there. Be blessed, rejoice, loving, a graceful dear, satisfaction, intoxication, love.

[4 : 58] It's a beautiful picture of what the good life looks like in the context of marriage, of keeping sex, in the context of marriage and beauty. And it's astounding, isn't it?

It says, rejoice in them. Have lots of kids with them. Have a delight in them. Be intoxicated in them, always. And everything about them. So, I wonder what, maybe if you're married here, maybe you're going out to someone, what's the little quirk that your partner has?

Maybe they don't put the cap on the toothpaste. Maybe they set the table in an awkward way.

Maybe when you got together, that was slightly annoying, but it turned into something that you really, really loved about them and that you really thought was great about them.

And that's the thing. You've got to love them in all that they do, in all their little quirks and nuances and weirdnesses. And so, I was listening to the story this week about this nurse who was working on A&E.;

And this old chap came in, old chap, A&E.; He'd cut his thumb and he said, quickly, I need to get this done. I need to go and see my wife. I'm having breakfast with her at nine o'clock.

[6 : 10] And the nurse very diligently started treating her and sent him on his way. And she asked, well, where's your wife? And she says, well, she's in the old age home. And every week I have breakfast with her.

Every day I have breakfast with her at nine a.m. And then it turned out that his wife had had dementia. And she hadn't recognized him for three years. But he still loved her and he still kept with her every day having breakfast with her, even though she had no idea who he was.

So be in love with him. Be intoxicated with him. Cherish and care for them in everything they do, all their nuances. And it's very challenging to us today in Glasgow, isn't it?

So we think, if you want to have the good life, well, what's the temptation? Well, then trade your spouse in for a new one. That's going to make you happy. But what does Proverbs say? It says, if you want to have the good life, then love your spouse like mad always.

But because Proverbs paints such a great picture of how intoxicating sex and beauty is, Proverbs also warns us against the dangers of what it looks like when we get this wrong.

[7 : 24] So the danger of beauty. So we looked at the joy of beauty. Now we're going to look at the danger of beauty. And I wonder if you can empathize with the situation. It's been a hard day at work. Hubby's gone and grabbed the kids.

He's looking after them. You've lit your candles. You've poured out your bath water. You've poured in the bath salts. You've climbed into the bath and you've whipped out your book.

And of course, it's one of those books that you only read on Kindle because you won't want your friends to know you're reading it. And it's something like, Poor Little Rich Boy, A Millionaire's Romance. And you read it and you start thinking, well, what's going on here?

I wonder, I wish my partner could be more like this. I wish I could get more romance like this in my life there. So what's going on?

What's going on there? Well, you're imagining that your partner could be like someone else. And you know what happens. You've been married for a couple of years.

[8 : 23] Your partner picks up a couple of pounds. They start letting themselves go a bit. And you start thinking, maybe you start daydreaming.

What if I could trade this one? And what if I could move on slightly? Maybe I could upgrade or something. Maybe I could do something. But look at what Proverbs says in chapter 6, verse 25. I'll just read it for us. What does it say there, 625? Do not lust in your heart after her beauty, or let her captivate with your eyes.

So what is it saying? It's saying don't even entertain the thought of trading your partner in for someone else, of adultery in chapters 5 and 6.

And then in chapter 7 of going and looking for sex outside of marriage. So where does adultery, where does sexual sin start? Well, it starts in the heart, in the daydreaming, and in the mind.

[9 : 25] And if we allow and tolerate and indulge in our hearts and our minds, then we're going to find ourselves doing it. So what does Proverbs say about the heart? Proverbs 4, 23.

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. Whatever you set your heart on, whatever you find yourself daydreaming about, that's the direction that your life is going to take. So if you want to be wise, steer clear on that. And the first thing to note about the danger of beauty is just how well attractive it looks, of how attractive adultery and sex outside of marriage looks.

Just scan down in chapter 7, verse 16 onwards. Just scan maybe quickly and look at how it describes there what someone might say when they're trying to trick you into it.

It looks very attractive, doesn't it? Very inviting. I've covered my bed. I've perfumed my bed. Let's drink deeply. It looks attractive. Very inviting.

[10 : 32] And then verse 21. What do we read? It's very subtle.

It's incredibly deceptive. Alistair Campbell has got nothing on... Alistair Darling, is that right? It was either spin doctor. He's got nothing on the adulterer. Adulterous woman leading people astray.

And it looks like the real thing. Verse 18. Come, let's drink deeply of love till morning. Let's enjoy ourselves with love. It looks like the real thing.

That looks like something that could be in the Song of Songs. It looks like something that could have been in our earlier quotes in chapter 5. But it plainly isn't. And that's so often the mistake that we make in life when we get to issues like this.

Is that we think if something is bad, then it will look bad. What do I mean by that? It means we think that life is like watching a horror movie.

[11 : 37] You know something as bad is about to happen because the music changes. And the scary music comes on. And so we think, well, there's no bad music here.

It looks very inviting. It looks very tempting. This must be a good thing. Well, there is no soundtrack to your life. There's no music in your life.

And that's the point of Proverbs. That life is more complicated and more tricky and more nuanced than we realize. And therefore, we need wisdom to be discerning in life.

But instead, what do we find ourselves doing? We say stuff like, well, everyone's doing it. It's obviously got to be okay. It's okay. It's only in the moment. It's once. It feels so good.

How can it be wrong? I've never felt like this before. I'm a smart person. I know what's good for me. And we use those arguments to justify things that we know are otherwise foolish to do.

[12 : 42] And we do them anyway. So we know that adultery and sex outside of marriage destroys our lives and those around us. You and I both know this.

I don't have to illustrate this for you. And if you've been affected by this, then I really pray for you. I really care for you and empathize with your pain in this.

But we still find ourselves daydreaming about this sort of thing and indulging it. And what does Proverbs say? Chapter 7, verse 14. I have food.

Well, we all want a nice meal. The adulterous person in this chapter who's trying to lure you away looks very inviting. I look for you. We all want to be looked for.

We all want to be wanted. I covered my bed with colored linens. Verse 16, chapter 7. Verse 17. I've perfumed my bed. We all want to be treated and pampered.

[13 : 40] And it sounds very comfortable, very luxurious, very attractive. And it all seems incredibly tempting next to the reality in our lives.

So I wonder where you are this morning, today. Marriage might be tough at the moment. You might want to give up. You might want to think, well, perhaps I'll just move on.

It's really tough. This sounds very inviting. It might be that you're simply sick of being single. You might think, well, maybe I will indulge that fling.

Maybe I will indulge that romance. Just to break the monotony somewhat. And we all want to be acknowledged and cared for. And we're simply desperate for any kind of attention in our lives.

For good reasons in some root case. But there is some attention that we don't want under any circumstances. And that's what Proverbs is talking about here.

[14 : 38] It's the kind of attention. It's the kind of behavior that will wreck our lives. And the lives of those around us. And it looks incredibly attractive.

All our friends are telling us, just go with the flow. But look at the end of it. Look what Proverbs says it results in. Just turn back and look towards the end of chapter 7 there.

All at once he followed her like an ox going to slaughter. Like a deer stepping into a noose. Till arrow pierces his liver. Like a bird darting into a snare.

Little knowing it will cost him his life. Verse 23 in chapter 7. And then look at how the chapter ends. In chapter 7. I'll just read it for us.

Do not let your heart turn to her ways. Or stray to her paths. Many of the victims she has brought down. Her slain are mighty throng.

[15 : 38] Her house is a highway to the grave. Leading down to the chambers of death. If you want to ruin your life. If you want to wreck your life. Then indulge those fantasies.

So I went to a preaching workshop on Proverbs recently. And the speaker there was a very mild-mannered English gentleman. Very measured in his tone.

Doesn't really express himself massively. Not like the Scots. The Scots are a bit more expressive. And speaking on this section. He made one comment. I'll read it for us.

He goes, beware of adultery. It's stupid. Beware of sex outside of marriage. It's stupid.

And that's the point. That this section in Proverbs is making. It's a one-line point. It's very easy for me to make. I'm just fleshing it out a bit. Right.

[16 : 35] And why is it stupid? Well, that's the myth of beauty. The myth of sex and beauty. That our world says to us. Is that if we want to be wise. If we want to have the good life.

Then you should throw off all inhibitions. And be allowed to express yourself sexually. In whatever way you want to. That's the way to be wise. To be contemporary. To be progressive.

Our world says to us. That if we suppress. We'll put boundaries. On our expression. Of our sexuality. Then that's unhealthy.

And not only is it unhealthy. But it's a morally bad thing to do. The world says. Expressing yourself sexually. That's the thing. That's going to give me meaning.

In my life. And make me. And don't you dare tell me otherwise. And everything should be sacrificed. On the altar of this. That if you don't do this.

[17 : 33] Then you're living a sub-human life. But what does Proverbs say? What have we understood. About life from Proverbs. Well firstly.

That God made you. And everything. You see. He made the world. He made everything. And he made it good. And secondly. That you have a future.

Beyond this world. So remember. We're reading Proverbs backwards. We're looking. To the very end. Beyond the grave. And we're thinking about them. And so it might be. That you're here this morning.

And you're saying. Well James. None of this. Is relevant to me. I mean. Look at me. I'm not beautiful. I'm sitting here. Thinking. Well let's face it. I would like a bit of temptation.

In my life. I haven't had a bit of temptation. Come my way. In quite some time actually. You might be feeling. I'm getting left on the shelf. All my friends.

[18 : 27] Have gone off. And got married. Or maybe here. That you're here this morning. And you're thinking. You're just overwhelmed. With a sense of guilt. Over something you've done.

Over something that's been done. To you. And you feel crushed. And rightly or wrongly. You feel ugly. You don't feel beautiful. And you long for someone.

A savior. Who knows what it feels like. To not be beautiful. And yet still loves you. Warts and all. And who can empathize.

With your heartache. Heartache. Well. Well. Last year. We looked at Isaiah. And Isaiah 53. Verse 3. Says. I'll just read it for us.

It's describing Jesus. Isaiah is a prophet. In the Old Testament. And he writes about this coming savior. That's going to come. And this is how he describes. Jesus. He says.

[19 : 23] He had no beauty. Or majesty. To attract us to him. Nothing in his appearance. That we should desire him. He was despised. And rejected.

By mankind. A man of suffering. And familiar with pain. Like one whom people. Hit their faces. He was despised. And we held him. In low esteem.

You see. Jesus had no outward beauty about him. He never married. He knew what it was like. To be left. On the shelf. He knew what it was like. To feel ugly.

And unwanted. And ultimately. He was rejected. By almost everyone he knew. And put to death. On a cross. Crucified. But here's the trick.

Jesus died. That hideous death. On a cross. So that you and I. Could be made. Into the most beautiful. Glorious beings.

[20 : 19] In the universe. Radiantly glorious. Washed of all our sins. Washed of all that ugliness. That we feel bad about. All those things that we might have done. That have been done to us.

Have been washed away. At the cross. By Jesus. In his death there. To make us dazzlingly clean. So Martin. At the start of the service.

He talked about some marriages. That we're having. Over the summer. Marriages are fantastic. Aren't they? They're great. Celebration. Aren't they? And. You go to a wedding.

And the bride. Always looks. Dazzlingly beautiful. Glorious. And I hate to break this to you girls. Ladies. That the day. The way you look. On your wedding day.

Is probably the best. You're ever going to look. In your life. I hope that's not too much. Of a shock. But that's exactly. How the Bible. Describes Christians.

[21 : 13] As a beautiful. Glorious. Radiant bride. That Jesus has cleaned. Of her. And it's not just. A fading beauty. It's not a temporary beauty. It's a. Unfading.

Never ending beauty. You see. The beauty that we see. As beautiful and glorious. As we look on that day. A couple of years go by. And. Everything starts. Sagging.

And. You're. A lot less beautiful. Everything fades. And it's gone. But the beauty that Jesus gives. Lasts forever. It doesn't matter. So it doesn't matter.

What you've done. Or how badly. You've messed things up. Or how unbeautiful. You may feel now. When you trust. Jesus. When you trust him. He makes you glorious.

And beautiful. With an everlasting. Unfading beauty. There's no Botox. In heaven. And if you're married.

[22 : 07] The best. Most exquisite sex. That you're ever going to be here. Is not going to be. The smallest patch. On how ravishing. And awesome. It's going to be.

With Jesus in heaven. You'll be in such. Rapture there. That the thought. Of unfaithfulness now. Will seem. Like the ravings. Of a lunatic. Let me pray.

For us. So father. We thank you. That you've given us. Good gifts. We thank you. For the good gift. Of marriage. We thank you. For the good gift. Of sex. We thank you.

For the good gift. Of beauty. And that you delight. In all these things. Father. And we pray. That we'd use them wisely. As people. Who realize. That we're living in your world. And that we need to live under.

Our king. In that world. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen.