

This morning I would like us to turn our attention to the book of Proverbs. I have never preached out of this book. Forgive me if I don't do it justice. It is a book which no two theologians I have read have agreed upon the exact structure of the book. It is a collection of proverbs from King Solomon, various collection of sayings from the wise, a philosopher oracle, & a Bedouin King recalling the advice of his mother a Queen. Solomon wrote the section we will be studying this morning. That makes me a bit nervous since scripture says of natural men he was the wisest man ever. I doubt that is an epitaph that will accurately be put on my tombstone.

If you would like to turn to Proverbs 16 on page 539 that is where we will be studying what God would have for us today. This is a Proverb of Solomon which is arguably the center section of his advice to his son and to us. The text was originally written for his son Rheaboaam the fourth king of the united Israel. Rheaboaam as we have studied in our small group on Wednesday foolishly did not heed his father's advice and split his kingdom asunder. May we not make that mistake! Later this work was passed through the kings of Judah and made available as the collective sayings of Solomon. Proverbs was collected, edited, and collated during the reign of King Solomon and his successors. Some believe that it was finally finished sometime during the reign of Hezekiah (see Prov. 25:1) some 248 years after it was begun. Others believe it was finished just two centuries before Christ. This text continues a theme of introspection began in chapter 15. In chapter 15 it focused on the mouth, here in chapter 16 it focuses on the heart. There is purposeful overlap between the two chapters.

When Ronald Reagan was still known nationally for little more than being an actor he gave a stump speech for Barry Goldwater's 1964 Presidential campaign. Goldwater lost but Reagan's speech, known to many as "The Speech" was successful for launching him into first the governorship of California and later the Presidency of the United States. His son Michael Reagan relates that before his run for President of the United States that Reagan believed that the great evil of his day was the Communist country of Russia which he would later deem appropriately as the Evil Empire. Reagan lost his parties nomination in 1968 and in 1976. Reagan according to his son Michael once while watching television with the news of the Carter administrations dealing with the Russians that he knew what he wanted to say. Reagan believed that America capitulated too much to the Communist and if he got the chance he was going to sit in a room with them and listen to their demands at the end he was going to say but one word in Russian, nyet. Nyet means no. During a policy speech to the national association of Evangelicals on March 8, 1983 Reagan slipped in a line about the Soviet Union which he called "an evil empire." The line had been set in the sand by a single phrase and the American people began to rally behind Reagan. In September of that year the Russians shot down a Korean plain further giving Reagan the moral ground he needed to start stronger actions against the Russians. America began a renewed interest in defense against its then deadliest foe. This led to the Star Wars project, a massive military spending campaign, which advanced America's military and eventually bankrupted Communist Russia who couldn't afford to keep up with the American advances.

Our passage this morning comes from Proverbs 16, beginning at verse 1. This verse has arrested my thoughts for the past few weeks. It has literally popped up all over the place. Has that ever happened to you? I believe that God would have us learn something important from him for us this morning. So if you would please read along carefully with me starting at verse 1.

The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.

Reagan never knew that his desire to see the fall of Communist Russia would occur not only in his own lifetime but also in large part due to his simple phrase "the evil empire" which he inserted at the last minute into his speech before the NAE. It wasn't his nyet exactly as he envisioned but it certainly was what God had planned. It came about from a last minute phrase delivered to a group of Christian that changed the course of Reagan's life, administration, and world. It was Providence.

In our own lives we too have the desires of our heart. Some of them come to pass. Others do not. The person that we are romantically interested in becomes interested in us too. The dream job we wanted comes to pass. The house we had hoped for opens up. The children we long for are born to us.

Yet sometimes our plans do not come to pass as we expect. Sometimes our good dreams are not meant to be. A young John Calvin who would become one of the leading theologians of Geneva during the Reformation consoled a pastoral friend who had lost his wife. Of all the verses of Scripture the young Calvin could have turned to, he turned to this very verse to remind his fellow minister that God's ways are not our ways. That phrase is so often used it becomes cliché to us. That is not a cliché statement. That is the reality in which we find ourselves more often than we can understand. Calvin believed that we have our ideas for how life should go but this was not necessarily what God in his providence had so planned.

It is very true that the plans of the heart belong to us. The reality of human freewill is we are limited only by our imagination in our minds, hopes, and aspirations. We truly are the kings of our own thoughts. This is the freedom that God has granted all humanity. This is usually not the case in the real world. In the history of this world more than one man has had their desires crushed by the circumstances of their lot in life. Though there may be bonds that keep us from accomplishing what we desire in the physical world in the mental we are free from any physical restraints. William Wallace the Irish freedom fighter is attributed saying at the time of his death to his captors that "You may take my life but you can never take my freedom." Wallace was biblically correct in that statement. This is a blessing that can easily lead to a curse. Just because we are free doesn't mean we always use that freedom correctly. We may be using that freedom to imagine things that are not part of God's providence. Sometimes our aspirations, dreams, and plans are not nearly as grand as what God has planned for us. When this occurs God changes our course.

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Calvin had looked to this verse to give solace to his grieving widowed friend yet in the irony that so often happens in life Calvin found out this his own desires were not to come to pass. He like many of us had desired for his life an ideal scenario. He desired to have a long life with his wife and for them to have children to come and add to their family. Calvin desired sons and daughters that would last long after he did. Sadly neither of these desires of the heart were able to take place under the providence of God. He and his wife were unable to have multiple children. Their one son that survived delivery died in early infancy. To add bitterness to this disappointment the love of his life also died un-expectantly. Calvin was left a childless widower. The pastor whom had years before been comforted by Calvin now comforted him with the very same words in his grief. **The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.** Calvin later wrote, "We unjustly defraud God of his right, unless each of us lives and dies dependent on the sovereign pleasure [of God].... Our principal motive of consolation consists in this, that by the admirable providence of God, the things we consider adverse, contribute to our salvation, and that we are separated in the world only that we may be once more reunited in his celestial kingdom." Calvin was later restored to be with his wife in heaven. Their friendship and love has now gone on for over 400 years. Their spiritual children are still with us today. The works that Calvin left behind is still with us producing new adherents to the Sovereign God of Calvin's gospel of free but not cheap grace.

We often ask ourselves why does God allow for things that wrench at our souls to occur. Often it is not because our desires are impure, unworthy, or necessarily sinful but because it is not the plan or path by which God had intended for us to travel. The second half of that first verse tells us that God is the one gives us the answer of the tongue. What does this mean? It simply means God gives us the answer to the question, "What on Earth am I here for?" It is very true that the Puritans were right when they asked and said, "What is the chief end of man? To enjoy God and enjoy him forever." In a very real sense that gives us the big picture rightly. We are here for the purpose of God. Yet what we want to know must often is what are the smaller purposes. There is the cliché "don't miss the forest for the trees." Yet we sometimes don't care about the forest because all we are interested in are those trees! If you think you are meant for apples or oranges and end up with avocados or lemons you feel cheated.

In Genesis 1:26, We are given the awesome revelation that we are made in the image of God. You may have read in the news that they have discovered a new species that predates the presupposed ancestors of humanity. This now dead species has caused science to rethink the origins of humanity. Adrian Rogers the great Baptist pastor from Texas said that he is glad that the bible does not correspond to modern science. He said this because science is ever changing as new information and evidence is discovered once changing commonly held scientific views. Rogers once quipped, "perhaps one day science will catch up with the Bible," that is the revelation of God. In that verse in the creation narrative we are given the beautiful secret of not only humanity's origin but why we are like we are. We, you

and me, are little reflections of God the Great Creator. Have you ever wondered why the Bible begins with a Creation poetic narrative? It does so because God wanted you and me to know that he is a creator and we are made in his image. Our culture that is ever changing is proof that God's offspring likes to mimic however imperfectly to create. God the master artist has created our lives to be canvas. Often we are given the brush and told to go at it. Yet we so often mess up our canvases and God like the great master restorer he patiently steps in and fixes the painting.

Solomon tells us in verse 2 "**All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes,**" which is to say we often think the decision that we are making at any given time are the very best or the only decision that can be made. Sometimes we act in desperation and we assure ourselves that our decision was the wisest one. Gratefully, Solomon finishes that second version with the declaration "**but the Lord weighs the spirit.**" God is the ultimate judge of how well we have made the decisions that we have made. That should give us great comfort because it tells us that God is really sovereign. He isn't letting us alone with the brushes and the paint and expecting us to churn out Rembrants but only end up with refrigerator art. The Lord weighs, that is he judges what we do. The imagery Solomon paints here is that of a King that insures that the weighs used for selling merchandise and wages is accurate. A example is our own American system of feet based off measurements authorized by the English kings such as Edward and James. It was based off their authority. A king is supposed to do justice for those under his authority. Their destiny or fate is in the king's hand for he weighs out their work. Jesus tells us in the Scriptures that he is the Great King and that he is even now as we speak establishing his kingdom. He is weighing out our spirits. He is showing us where we have yielded to God's directions and where we have yet to yield.

Solomon charges his son, and God charges us in vs 3 to "**Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established.**" This is not a promise that what ever we ask of God he will give us. God is not a cosmic bellhop. He is not the Genie in Aladdin. A lot of times when we pray we come to Jesus and God like that. We throw Jesus name in like it seals the deal or is the secret code word to get us on the inside track. No this verse is about yielding. It is the challenge of this text. It is the challenge of the Christian faith. It is saying I need to surrender to Jesus.

There is a story of a Japanese soldier who refused to believe the war was over. For over 4 decades he did raids and attacks on the island he was on. Several groups tried to convince him that the war was over. Yet he refused to believe it. Finally his former commander who had retired was contacted and flew to the island where the lone soldier was fighting a war that had ended decades before. The commander looked him in the eye and told him to stop fighting, that the war was over. The soldier weepingly obeyed. He yielded to his superior. This verse is telling us to do that. God is saying to you and me, surrender. The War is over surrender.

The charge is to commit. When you commit something you give it up. You are giving it over. In effect you are saying God, I trust you with this to do with it better than I

can do. Really whatever you do it is yours. It is God who does the establishing of our plans. God is the greatest artist who has ever existed. He is in the masterpiece business. Yet he wants us to willfully, joyfully, and obediently give ourselves to Him.

Solomon promises in **vs 4** "**The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.**" Have you ever been troubled with why good guys get left in the dust and bad guys get ahead? The answer is here. God has made them for the day judgment and he has put them where he has for his sovereign purposes. This is a tough one for us to trust in. We have this inane belief that because we are made in God's image that we are in effect little gods. That is not hupzbah that is stupidity. Solomon the wisest man till Jesus says in **vs 5**, "**Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord; be assured, he will not go unpunished.**" I said earlier sometimes we aren't blessed not because of sin but because it simply isn't God's plan for us. Sometimes we aren't blessed because we are willfully sinning. We are acting like asses and think we are acting like stallions. Both have four legs but they are very different animals. Trust me God knows the difference. Sometimes, we are bucking at God and making fools of ourselves in the process. There is a reason donkeys aren't a flattering symbol. They are foolish and like majesty. They are beast of burden. In a very real sense this fifth verse is the passionate head of the passage trying to get us to think about the consequences of foolish pride. It tells us we must not be foolish enough to think we are Frank Sinatra and can say we always "did it my way" and be right with God. God is not a fan of the Burger King mentality. Our way often leads to destruction. Solomon said previously in 14:12 "there is a way that seems right to a man but in the end it leads to destruction." Jesus echoed this idea when he said "broad is the path to destruction but narrow is the way to life." We must yield or be willing to pay the consequences for not doing so. Hell in the next life, and hell in this one are paved with people that have had good intentions but have done it there way instead of yielding to the Lord. If Satan can't get you to suffer for eternity, he takes misery in this life as a consolation prize.

What if we were to yield with our lives to Jesus? If on Monday when you went back into the office you said, "God this job is yours, work through me." What if in your marriage you said "God this marriage is yours, work through me, work through my spouse, work through this whole relationship to do your will." I believe our lives would change. When we admit we don't have the answers and start looking to God then we have yielded and God will begin to take over. If we don't we sit in our smug arrogance and screw up our lives. Hopefully we don't want that. Hopefully we want to have a life that is as good as it can be according to God's desire for us. Remember he's the God that promises us with lines like "every good and perfect gift comes from up above." That is ours when we take it in the way he offered it. To be candid I long for the day that I can say my job, my relationships, and my way of living could ever be called perfect and that I have all the good gifts from above right now. My life is good, but it is far from perfect. I have a lot of yielding to do. How about you?

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So how then are we suppose to live in this life? Vs 6 Solomon says "**By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the Lord one turns away from evil.**" Solomon throws the curb ball here. Up until now the text has been primarily about us. Now we are told it isn't really about us primarily. It is in our nature to go the wrong way and to do the wrong thing. This is just the way it is. Yet God in his steadfast love and faithfulness takes care of all our iniquity.

Steadfast means that which stands in the same place unmoving. William Cowper once right said "God moves in mysterious ways his wonders to perform, he plants his feet on the wave and rides upon the storm." Cowper paints the picture of a God who plants himself on the turbulent ocean but who himself is unmoved. God is steadfast and he is steadfast in his love. He is faithful even when we are sinful. Iniquity is when we have done something wrong by choice. We do this all the time. If you are at work and don't do what your job or boss requires. In your marriage where you choose willfully to do the wrong thing because that is what makes it easier for you. With our kids when it is easier to do our own thing then invest in their desires and needs. We are a people of iniquity. We like to sin. It makes us feel good, before it makes us feel bad. We are a people desperately in need of atonement.

Atonement is God's way of making things right by sacrifice and that is by His sacrifice and not our own. In Ted Kennedy's recent autobiography there is a very interesting line about the Chappaquiddick affair. In case you aren't familiar a young Ted Kennedy was driving home with an intern and drove off into the water of the Chappaquiddick River. He escaped from the car but his passenger did not. He went home, showered, and called the police. Ted Kennedy was a potential nominee for the Presidency up until this time but because of this tragic event and his response to the incident much of the public was polarized against him. This ended his Presidential aspirations. Instead Ted ran for a Senate seat in Connecticut where over the decades in that office he came to be known as the liberal lion of the Senate. In his autobiography he accepted blame for the death of his passenger but he said regarding his action that night that "Atonement is a process that never ends." The liberal lion of the Senate had it partially right. He needed atonement. Who knew it was something that was eating at him even years later especially as he was getting ready to meet his Maker. Yet the Liberal Lion of the Senate failed to see that The Lion of the Tribe of Judah provided the Atonement once and for all. Jesus as the Lamb of God came to take away sins by atoning for every one of them. John the Baptist said, "Behold! The LAMB OF GOD! Who takes away the sins of the world!"

We like Ted want to be the ones to atone for our sins. We desire to be our own saviors but we can't do it. It is a worthy goal but impossible for us to do. The Apostle Paul once said "I would gladly be cut off from Israel if it would save them." Yet he couldn't do it. It was outside of his ability to atone for even one of his kinsman. It is outside of our ability to atone for our sins or anyone else. We must cling to Christ who in his steadfast love and faithfulness is wanting to redeem us and atone for our sins. Christ the Lion of Judah is the great King of Kings.

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How do we know if we are delighting our king? How do we know if we are being established by our king? Solomon says in **vs 7 "When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him."** One way is that we are at peace with those around us. This is a general proverb and there are times that this will not be the case. Yet as a rule when we are right with God, God makes even our enemies be at peace with us. Now they may not like us. They may still view us as enemies but God keeps them at bay. Solomon learned this from his father. David wrote in the 23 Psalm "The Lord makes a tabernacle for me before my enemies." God makes a place of rest for us. He protects in midst of the storm and keeps our enemy at bay. At times he even brings peaces between us and our enemy. We see real peace in our lives. Solomon also tells us in **verse 8, " Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice."** When we live right with God, no matter what we have we appreciate it more and enjoy it because we have gotten it the right way and having the right perspective about it. Some of the happiest moments in life are when we realize to live with what we have. We so often struggle to get stuff that we play with for a few moments but eventually it ends up on the yard sale or in the trash. I actually listened to a guy fuss about not having a new XBOX. Really? Really? That's what you have to fuss about? Seriously?

The key to understanding this set of proverbs comes again and is repeated in a slightly different way in the **9 verse, The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.** Paralleling verse 1 we see the internal and external at work. Both relate the place for the human heart where our will and desires plan their path. We have our plans, yet this verse affirms God moves those who are his where he wants us. The beauty of the Sovereignty of God is when we are right with him, we go where he wants us to go. Our duty in following him becomes our delight. Our words and our steps are left into his hands.

Solomon reminds his own son a lesser king that he is to be wise with the authority and place God has given him. WE MUST BE WISE WERE GOD PUT US. Since this is in Scripture it is also truth for us! In verse 10-15 we see a pattern of how to live. We won't go through these in any detail but note them add study them on your own. Solomon lays out five things. (1) God establishes his words "**an oracle is on the lips of a king**", (2) God sets the standards "**it is an abomination to kings to do evil, for the throne is established by righteousness**", (3) those who would be Kings are to love the spoken truth "**Righteous lips are the delight of a king, and he loves him who speaks what is right**", (4) wrath comes from angering our king by not speaking the truth "**A king's wrath is a messenger of death, and a wise man will appease it.**" (5) refreshment comes from delighting in our King "**In the light of a king's face there is life, and his favor is like the clouds that bring the spring rain.**"

God tells us in this work that ultimately for those that are his (1) God establishes his words/ways. (2) God sets the standards. (3) We are to love speaking truth. (4) Wrath comes from angering our king by not speaking/living the truth. (5) Refreshment comes from delighting in our King.

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The rest of this book is a further outworking of the verses here. We see in the last verse Solomon again says in **33** that **“The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.”** In the Old Testament when a decision had to be made often they would use lots as an impartial method of solving a dispute. It was used to break up tie-breaker decisions. Think of drawing straws and the odd size one wins or loses. In our time we pull a deck of cards and say whoever gets the high or the low wins or loses. This verse affirms that even what we call dumb blind chance is in the very providence of God. The inanimate card, piece of straw, or the lot is in God's control. With a God this great and the charge to yield to him. What do you need to give over to him? If you don't know ask him.

In conclusion let me remind you of what happened to the first son whom this was written to originally. Rehoboam when he came to power inherited a united kingdom yet his subjects were not all committed to him. His father Solomon for a period during his idolatry had abused the people and there was a distrust of the house of David by those outside the City of Jerusalem and the area of Judah. Solomon's advisors told the young king to be patient with the people. Yet Rehoboam listened to his young advisors and told the people he would even be harsher than his father had been. Rehoboam tried to be bold. He tried to be intimidating. He tried to have it his way. All he did was alienate his followers. They abandoned him as their king and followed another false king, destroying the plan God had for this nation till this day. The nation has not had a Jewish king over all of Israel since the time of Rehoboam. May we remember that God judges the proud. May we be humble before our King. May His Sovereign Joy sustain and guide not only our words and way but also teach our heart to dream for nothing more or less than Him.

Let us pray.