

When a Nation Needs Wisdom

(Proverbs 25)

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Introduction

How do you change the direction of a nation?

Some would say that you pick up a weapon and make everyone fall in line..

Which will work until someone gets a bigger weapon?

Some say that better laws will do it...

Which will work until someone comes along and changes those laws...

The Bible would say that the direction of a nation will change as the individual people in a nation change.

That is why the gospel of Christ is to be preached today.

You see the gospel is the only thing in the world will lasting effect...

Weapons come and go..

Laws work for a while, but the gospel transforms the heart and when the heart is changed, the course of a person's life is changed forever...

This is why I put little trust in government to change the course of nation...

Sure, we want good government and God - honoring laws, but governments can never have lasting influence since they are always changing as well.

That is why the gospel is the only way to change society...

That being said, not everyone in a nation is going to believe the gospel...

Not everyone is going to repent of their sin and put their faith in Christ...

As a result, no society, no nation will ever go in the right direction forever.

But what can a people do?

What can a nation do?

What can a church do to change direction?

Well, a king in Israel in 700 BC had the same question.

The nation that he was leading was in trouble...

It has already split into two parts...

And the northern half had already been conquered and carried off by another evil nation..

And that king knew that the southern half of Israel was headed that same direction if they continued on their course..

So what did he do?

Well, he did what needs to be done in our nation today...

HE took the nation back to the word of God..

That king was named Hezekiah..

You see, Hezekiah came to power as a critical point in Israel's history...

The northern kingdom of Israel was gone, and the southern kingdom was nervous...

What can we do to avoid the same fate must have been on their minds..

And I am sure that Hezekiah felt the pressure of the people to protect them and turn their nation into the right direction...

Yet, Hezekiah didn't set his heart on a strong military or better laws...

He led his people back to the word of God, to the proper worship of God..

And a major part of the word of God that took center stage in his reforms was the wisdom of Solomon..

Hezekiah came to power about 200 years after Solomon had ruled Israel..

The people of Hezekiah's day knew of David and Solomon but they had forgotten the wisdom that God gave to these men...

So Hezekiah set out to bring God's wisdom back to the people..

And anytime the word of God is put from and center in a person's life, in a church's life, in a nation's life, blessing comes.

In fact, Hezekiah's reforms prevented the overthrow of the southern kingdom for another 100 years..

That is what happens when God is returned to his proper place in a nation...

Well, for the next 5 chapters in the book of Proverbs, we are going to see some of the wisdom that Hezekiah brought to Israel because God determined that this wisdom would be part of the Bible..

So, chapters 25, 26, 27, 28, and 29 are a collection of Solomon's wisdom that was given to him by God that was meant to bless the people of God.

Therefore, let's begin our own reform by listening to the word of God that came from what Hezekiah collected and gave to Israel almost 3000 years ago..

Yet it is wisdom that can still change the direction of a life or a nation today.

Let's begin in verses 1-7 which deal with the wisdom of kings and rulers...

I. The Glory of God and Kings (1-7)

25 These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, transcribed.

2

*It is the glory of God to conceal a matter,
But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.*

3

*As the heavens for height and the earth for depth,
So the heart of kings is unsearchable.*

4

*Take away the dross from the silver,
And there comes out a vessel for the smith;*

5

*Take away the wicked before the king,
And his throne will be established in righteousness.*

6

*Do not claim honor in the presence of the king,
And do not stand in the place of great men;*

7

*For it is better that it be said to you, "Come up here,"
Than for you to be placed lower in the presence of the prince,
Whom your eyes have seen.*

In verse 2, we see a comparison of God to the kings of earth...

2

***It is the glory of God to conceal a matter,
But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.***

The earthly king is praised for his ability to uncover truth..

In fact, Solomon and to a lesser extent Hezekiah were praised by people because they helped people see the truth.

I appreciate people like that in my own life who lead me to truth and help me understand..

And so the glory of man is to uncover truth...

Yet as great as that is, no king, no ruler, no one will never uncover all the truth about God..

God has revealed much about Himself, but for everything we know, there are countless other things that we will never know...

The simple wisdom is this..

Earthly kings are good, but there is no king like the King of kings..

In verse 3, we see more glory of the earthly king though as Solomon calls the heart of the earthly king unsearchable...

3

***As the heavens for height and the earth for depth,
So the heart of kings is unsearchable.***

Unsearchability is simply a good trait of the rulers..

Predictability often leads to defeat for a king, so it is important for earthly leaders to be distant and vague at times..

Another good quality of earthly kings is found in verses 4 and 5 where rulers are encouraged to rid their kingdoms of evil...

4

***Take away the dross from the silver,
And there comes out a vessel for the smith;***

5

***Take away the wicked before the king,
And his throne will be established in righteousness.***

Just like a silver smith takes all the impurities out of rock of silver, kings are called to rid their nations of evil...

This was clearly the case for Hezekiah as he removed places of false worship in Israel..

Kings are not called to commit evil acts but to fight against them and the people who commit them..

Only when kings actively fight against evil will their reign be blessed by God.

In verses 6-7, the wisdom shifts from proper behavior of a king to proper behavior in the presence of a king..

6

***Do not claim honor in the presence of the king,
And do not stand in the place of great men;***

7

***For it is better that it be said to you, "Come up here,"
Than for you to be placed lower in the presence of the prince,
Whom your eyes have seen.***

Wisdom always calls people to humility...

Don't rush up to the king like he knows you because he may not know you..

And if he tells you that in front of other people, it will be quite humiliating..

Instead, it is better to be humble in the presence of the king and let him call upon you..

Jesus told a parable that must have been based upon this proverb in the book of Luke..

Let me read it to you..

Luke 14:7-11

7 And He began speaking a parable to the invited guests when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor at the table, saying to them, 8 “When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not [e]take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, 9 and he who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give your place to this man,’ and then in disgrace you [f]proceed to occupy the last place. 10 But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will have honor in the sight of all who [g]are at the table with you. 11 For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

The simple wisdom for us is this...

Don't be excited to be recognized..

For some people, social media is simply an opportunity for their pride to be displayed for the world..

People take selfies with all sorts of celebrities...

People use social media to boost in their possessions..

People use social media to brag about their fame..

However, the wisdom of this verse is not to make your own fame, but to let your actions speak for themselves...

Some people would rather rub shoulders with famous people...

Yet wisdom tells us that our greatest desire is to be known to God.

As Hezekiah sought to turn his nation back in the right direction, he knew that pride and arrogance were not the ways to do that...

Pride leads to a fall, but humility leads to security...

And the southern kingdom of Israel needs more humility if they hoped to remain in the land...

In verses 8-10, the subject changes to disputes among people..

II. The Sensibility of Arguments (8-10)

As long as the earth is fallen, there will be arguments between people..

Our flesh is selfish.

Our flesh is quick to anger.

Our flesh lacks patience.

And as a result, people argue and dispute over all sorts of things..

So how is the Christian supposed to argue?

Is he called to always give in and avoid the argument?

And the answer is clearly no.

There are things worth arguing for..

But should the Christian be known as an argumentative person?

And the answer is also clearly no.

So we can also say that are certain things, probably most things, that aren't worth arguing about...

But if the Christian finds himself in a dispute, how should he handle it?

Verse 8...

8
*Do not go out hastily to [a]argue your case;
 [b]Otherwise, what will you do in [c]the end,
 When your neighbor humiliates you?*

9
*[d]Argue your case with your neighbor,
 And do not reveal the secret of another,*

10
*Or he who hears it will reproach you,
 And the evil report about you will not [e]pass
 away.*

Couple principles to draw from here when strife comes between you and a neighbor..

Principle #1 - Don't be looking for an argument.

Verse 8 says don't be hasty to argue your case.

In other words, make your case after much patience..

Make your case after hearing the other side.

It may be that there isn't an argument after all..

Some people are looking to fight.

Sometimes I have seen in my own life that I am on the defensive before I even hear what the other person has to say..

Wisdom tells us to argue and dispute and contend as last resort not first resort ..

Principle #2 - Be discreet in your arguments.

Verse 9 says that we are not to reveal the secret of another..

What does this mean?

Couple possibilities...

This could mean that we aren't to call others into our argument if at all possible..

This could mean that we are to avoid arguments so that we aren't tempted to make people takes in the debate..

Those could mean that we should keep our disputes as private as possible..

I tend to see it as more of the last possibility..

Often arguments spill out into the community and a matter that should have been handled 1 on 1 now becomes a bigger problem..

I think the wisdom principle is clear here..

Go to the person and keep it between you two and that will keep you both free from sins of slander and gossip..

Principle #3 - Arguments stain your character and the church's character.

Verse 10 lets the reader know that arguments often have long lasting consequences..

In this case, the loser of the argument also loses in the eyes of those around him..

Because the evil report about him never leaves people's views of him...

I think the wisdom of verses 8-10 is to avoid arguments if at all possible, but if you do have to make your case, make it to the person with whom you are arguing and keep your mouth closed about it...

In the case of Hezekiah and his leadership of Israel, it was important to keep disputes among the Jews to a minimum.

Disobedience to this verse had let the nation to split in half, and now that the northern kingdom was gone, another split in the country would be deadly.

Our nation needs to take heed of this verse as well.

So many people are looking for a fight today...

So many people fight on TV, on the internet, on social media today.

So many people are only known today for how argumentative they are..

And all of this has even infected the church..

May we all be slow to argue with our neighbor, and if an argument can't be avoided, may we do so discreetly and with love on our lips..

Let me end with something that Jesus also said with Proverbs 25:8-10 in mind...

57 “And why do you not even on your own initiative judge what is right? 58 For while you are going with your opponent to appear before the magistrate, on your way there make an effort to [ac]settle with him, so that he may not drag you before the judge, and the judge turn you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison.

59 I say to you, you will not get out of there until you have paid the very last [ad]cent.”

Let's now move to verses 11-12 as we shift gears once to a different topic..

This time, we get wisdom on..

III. The Gold of Godly Advice (11-12)

Verse 11..

11

*Like apples of gold in settings of silver
Is a word spoken in [f]right circumstances.*

12

*Like [g]an earring of gold and an ornament of
fine gold
Is a wise reprover to a listening ear.*

A person in in trouble...

A church is on trouble..

A nation is in trouble...

When any of them become unteachable...

People must remain teachable or else the individual
or group suffers...

Many a sports team has been defeated when they
feel like they don't have anything to learn...

Many a person has also fallen when they their pride
tells them that they have it all under control..

Verses 11 and 12 were gentle reminders to the people of Israel and to us tonight that receiving godly counsel and advice are more precious than fine jewelry..

We must be willing to listen and obey and we must also be willing to give good biblical advice when necessary...

Israel needed godly wisdom as their nation was in trouble...

But they also needed to listen to the counsel they received..

May we be just as humble in our own lives as well..

The fourth area of wisdom is found in verses 13-14...

We can call this..

IV. The Gift of Trustworthiness (13-14)

Let's begin with verse 13..

13

***Like the cold of snow in the [h]time of harvest
Is a faithful messenger to those who send him,
For he refreshes the soul of his masters.***

Now, the harvest time is not a time for snow.

In fact, the freezing temps of a snow would damage the harvest..

But the cold of snow would certainly benefit the workers of the harvest..

It would cool them down and refresh them..

So Solomon uses that picture of refreshment to compare the refreshment that comes from the lips of a trustworthy messenger..

In other words, trustworthy people are a refreshment to the soul...

On the other hadn't, we have the opposite in verse 14...

14

Like clouds and wind without rain

Is a man who boasts [i]of his gifts falsely.

Solomon again turns to the weather to make an illustration...

This time he doesn't take about harvest snow, but rainless clouds..

We all know these clouds that make it look like rain but never deliver it..

They frustrate those who need rain..

The same frustration can be felt when a man makes claims but cannot deliver on those claims..

In the book of Jude, Jude compares false teachers to clouds without water because they are always making promises that they can't keep...

The same could be said of the person who talks but never delivers..

He is untrustworthy and unfaithful.

He is the opposite of the faithful and trustworthy messenger of verse 13...

People, churches, nations need a population of trustworthy people..

No society will last where lies and deceit and unfaithfulness grows..

We are seeing that in our own country as people prove their unfaithfulness every day.

Not only people but politicians...

In fact, when government and leaders show themselves untrustworthy, the people often follow...

And that is certainly the case in our nation today..

Israel needed a trustworthy and faithful people if they hoped to see their nation return to a place of blessing...

So Hezekiah reminds them that reliability is a breath of fresh air or snow for a nation...

May God make us just as faithful, reliable, and trustworthy in our day as well..

A final bit of wisdom for tonight is found in verse 15..

We will call this...

V. The Good Outcome of Gentleness (15)

Verse 15...

15

***By [j]lforbearance a ruler may be persuaded,
And a soft tongue breaks the bone.***

We live in a steamroller society...

By that, I mean that so many people feel that the way to get what they want is to steamroll over everyone else..

This generation pulls out a weapon if someone insults them and begins firing..

Yet, God's wisdom calls for patience and forbearance and gentleness and kindness..

The first part of verse 15 even says that rulers can be won over by those who show patience to them..

If you want to influence those in government, you will accomplish more with honey than vinegar...

The second half of verse 15 takes it a step further by speaking about the need to offer gentleness in speech..

The picture is simple...

Soft words break bones....

In other words, gentleness accomplishes much in the way of change..

Broken bones are the picture of violence so much as conviction...

The best way to generate change is not through a loud mouth but a gentle spirit...

Israel needed more patience and gentle tongues if it hoped to survive as nation...

The same could be said for our nation today..

May be all be known for our gentleness and patience.

Let's stop there for tonight...

Conclusion

Hezekiah has much more of Solomon's wisdom for the people of Israel, but that is certainly a good place to start..

If any people will...

#1 - Honor the Lord and their king...

#2 - Argue less and better..

#3 - Accept Godly advice...

#4 - Be trustworthy..

#5 - Be patient and gentle...

That group of people whether it be a family, a church, a state, or a nation..

If any group of people will listen to and practice those 5 pieces of wisdom, that family, that church, that nation will be blessed and stable...

May God make us those people and may our obedience to that wisdom be contagious to those around us...

Let us pray.

