

Four Roadblocks to Reform

(Proverbs 26:1-12)

7/11/18; Wed PM Pine Grove

Introduction

Last week, I watching a documentary on a professional bass angler...

Now professional bass angler may sound like a funny phrase, but there are men who make a really good living fishing for bass..

One of those men was named Robert Hamilton Jr., and in 1992, he won the most prestigious bass tournament in the world known as the Bassmasters Classic.

Even in 1992, he earned over 1 million dollars for that win and the sponsorships that go along with it.

Yet, Robert Hamilton would see that win as a curse.

In two short years, Robert Hamilton Jr. would be hooked on pain killers and he would eventually end up broke, divorced, and living in a rented room in someone else's home.

Now nearly 25 after his incredible win, a sports writer caught up to him and did an interview.

It was fascinating to me because it was related to bass fishing, but it would interest anyone who has ever fallen into a pattern of sin..

Today, Robert Hamilton has been sober for 1 year, and he is telling his story in hopes of getting back into fishing but also sounding a warning to anyone living like he lived for over a decade.

What is interesting in Hamilton's story is this..

During the interview, he never once blamed anyone for his sin but himself...

He spoke of bad breaks and bad luck and missed chances, but over and over, he never shifted the blame from his own shoulders...

That was such a breath of fresh air in our current culture that tries to name everyone else for their problems...

You see the Bible is crystal clear...

We are fully responsible for our choices.

This has been true throughout human history...

When Adam and Eve sinned, Adam and Eve were cursed...

Someone once said that there is no shortcut to revival in a nation or church..

Revival only occurs one person at a time...

And that is clearly true.

Well, Israel in 715 BC was in need of revival..

We have talked about their history a little bit, but let me remind you that 715 BC was a tense time in Israel...

The northern portion of the nation had been carried off 7 years earlier by the Assyrians in 722 BC.

The remaining portion of the nation in the south was not in much better shape.

Sin, rebellion, and disobedience was common among the people, and the possibility of the southern part falling to another nation was a reality.

However, in 715 BC, Hezekiah came into power over the southern part of Israel, and his work was clear.

Lead the southern part of Israel known as Judah back to the Lord..

So what is the first step needed for national revival?

Well, Hezekiah knew exactly what was needed, so he turned to the place where all revivals and great awakenings originate..

He took the people back to the word of God.

WE saw that in verse 1 of Proverbs 25, where Hezekiah sent some of his men to recover the wisdom of Solomon from 200 years earlier..

You see, Solomon was the last king over a united Israel, but his wisdom that God had given him had been lost...

And when Godly wisdom leaves a nation, foolishness replaces it, and that is exactly what was happening in Israel..

So over the past few weeks, we have begun to examine the wisdom that Hezekiah's and his men brought back to people of Israel, which runs from Proverbs 25 to Proverbs 29..

We began in chapter 25 which is broken describes what a nations as a whole must do to return to the place of the Lord's blessings..

Then we saw in chapter 25 how people must do on an individual level as they interact with one another in social settings to revive a nation..

But now we come to chapter 26 and what we are going to begin to get here in terms of returning to a place of blessing as a nation is what individuals must do...

In other words, the nation must have a certain mind-set as a whole, social interaction also must follow a godly pattern, but it is also clear that no revival or reform occurs unless the individual people that make up a nation are committed as well..

So what do personal revival look like?

Well, interestingly enough..

The Lord doesn't begin this section with a picture of what you should do...

Instead, he led Hezekiah to paint 4 portraits of people that a nation can't be made of if the nation hopes to return to a place a place of blessing...

So what we get in chapter 26 are what we can call 4 kinds of people who serve as roadblocks to revival in a society, in a nation, in a church...

Therefore, let's take some time tonight learning about who we should avoid being if we hope to bless our nations, our churches, and even our families...

And if we see ourselves in these 4 pictures, may God grant us the ability to repent of these things and fully obey Him.

The first roadblock to revival is the FOOL, which we see in verses 1-12..

I. Fools Block Blessing (1-12)

Now before we begin to work through verses 1-12, we must understand who the fool is in the book of Proverbs and really in the Bible...

The fool is not necessarily the man with the lower IQ or the man with no money...

The fool is not necessarily the outward sinner..

People often call fools, “really good people.”

You see the fool is simply the person who rejects the Lord.

The fool says in his heart there is no God.

The fool is the one who rejects the wisdom of God.

Stephen Hawking was an expert in astrophysics, yet for all his brilliance, Hawking was fool because he was an outspoken atheist..

The fool is really a big category in the Scriptures...

Judas Iscariot was a fool, but so was Cain..

The Pharisees, and Saducees were fools but so was the Pilate, the Roman governor..

Well the fool is a stumbling block in society, so let's look at him and avoid being him and teaming up with him...

Verse 1..

***1 Like snow in summer and like rain in harvest,
So honor is not fitting for a fool.***

There was a recent hailstorm outside Denver where the hail literally covered the ground like snow...

The air temperature was so hot that the incredible amount of steam rising from the cold hail on the hot streets made driving almost impossible...

The cold of ice snow or hail doesn't mix with the heat of summer...

Just like the rain doesn't mix with the normal dryness of harvest season..

In the same way, giving honor to a fool is also out of place.

Yet, we live in a culture that honors foolish people all the time...

WE honor fools who don't work..

We honor fools who abort babies..

We honor fools who endorse the sin of homosexuality.

We honor fools who worship false gods..

We honor fools who don't show love for their neighbor.

And we honor fools that don't show a love for God..

Well, God's wisdom says that honoring a fool is unwise..

First, it encourages the fool to continue in his foolishness..

But second, it encourages others to join him in his foolishness.

Sadly, we live in a culture that honors the fool, and brings shame upon those who are living by the wisdom of God..

Verse 2..

2

***Like a sparrow in its [a]flitting, like a swallow in its flying,
So a curse without cause does not [b]alight.***

The ancient world was consumed with blessings and curses...

They felt that that blessings and curses were all equal...

The mere speaking of either one of them was a guarantee of their coming to pass..

But that kind of superstition was not of God..

God alone has the power to pronounce blessings and curses..

At times in OT, he used people to either bless or curse on his behalf...

However, at no time can a fool pronounce a blessing or a curse on anyone..

To illustrate that, verse 2 says that a fool who tries to curse someone is seen in the picture of a bird that hovers over something but never comes to rest on it..

WE have a couple sparrow that built a nest in our ferns..

They can literally fly up to that fern and hover over it, check out their nest, and fly off without ever lighting on it..

Fools make fly over and pass out their curses but they will never come to rest because they lack the power to curse anyone..

Now, where does that hit us in 2018?

I can't help but think of all the false preachers out there who promise a blessing for giving to their ministries or threatens a curse to anyone who doesn't give to them..

How silly is that!

They have no power to call down God's financial blessings on anyone and no power to withhold God's financial blessings on anyone..

God alone blesses and God alone curses, so the fool is better off keeping his mouth shut especially since he clearly doesn't speak for the Lord..

Now verses 1 and 2 are important for the revival that Hezekiah is seeking in Israel..

First, the nation must stop its practice of honoring foolish people if it hopes to be blessed by God...

And second, the nation must stop listening to fools if it hopes to be blessed by God...

But third, and this is also very important in terms of dealing with fools, the nations needs to learn how to speak to fools...

So, let's look at verses 3-5..

3

***A whip is for the horse, a bridle for the donkey,
And a rod for the back of fools.***

4

***Do not answer a fool according to his folly,
Or you will also be like him.***

5

***Answer a fool as his folly deserves,
That he not be wise in his own eyes.***

The first principle of speaking to fools is this...

It is impossible to speak with a fool..

And the illustration is clear..

If you are riding a horse or using a donkey for labor, you don't tell them to turn right or speed up or pull hard, you use force to get what you need..

The bridle turns and the whips starts or speeds up..

The wisdom is clear.

Animals only understand brute force..

The same is true of the fool.

He only understands brute force..

Now let me give two examples of this in the world...

First, you cannot negotiate with the evil leader in the world..

Fools do not respond to negotiations very often..

You can talk to you are blue in the face, and in the end, he will shoot you, overthrow you or conquer you no matter how sweet he talked..

Foolish leaders and governments only reposed to brute force...

The second example seems like the total opposite but it is not..

You cannot negotiate with a foolish child..

You can talk and teach and beg and plead, but the child will only respond to brute force..

This is why God endorses corporal punishment of children...

Even though they are sweet and young, they are fools that need instruction, and sometime that instruction is not a negotiation but the rod across their backside...

I always warn parents...

If you don't want to raise a foolish child, don't act like a fool and ignore the clear instruction in Scripture of how to raise your child..

So, the first principle of speaking to fools is realize that it is generally ineffective...

The second rule on speaking to fools is found in verse 4-5...

There are cases when you are faced with speaking to the fool...

In verse 4, the warning is clear..

Don't speak long with a fool or else you may end up sounding like him..

In verse 5, the instruction is clear..

There are times you must speak to a fool in order to cut off his ignorance being spouted..

How are we take this as a whole in speaking with foolish people...

I would simply say this..

When speaking with someone who is clearly foolish, here are a couple things to keep in mind...

#1 - Don't think that your interaction will bear much fruit in their lives..

I gave up hope long ago of talking people into being saved..

First of all, God doesn't need me but even if he did, any apparent success would quickly go to my head..

#2 - In most cases, it is best to let the fool spout off and say little or nothing in response...

Arguing with unbelieving people is usually a loss for the believer..

WE get drawn into their world and we usually display our old nature more than our new nature in disagreements.

#3 - If the foolishness needs a response from you, be biblical, be direct, be kind, be gracious and then be gone.

There was a lot of foolishness in Israel in 715 BC, and if Hezekiah had made it his missions to interact with every fool, he would not have had time for anything else.

I see so many Christians today interacting with so much foolishness on social media these days..

I have seen days and hours wasted by wise Christians trying to answer foolish people...

IT is not my missions to shut up every fool...

IT is my mission and your missions to preach the wisdom of God found in the gospel of Christ..

IF the fool finds Christ, he will stop speaking and acting like a fool..

The picture of the fool continues in verses 6-10...

We now turn to how to deal with fools in our lives...

Let me read this whole section..

6

***He cuts off his own feet and drinks violence
Who sends a message by the hand of a fool.***

7

Like the legs which [c]are useless to the lame,

So is a proverb in the mouth of fools.

8

Like [d]one who binds a stone in a sling,

So is he who gives honor to a fool.

9

Like a thorn which [e]falls into the hand of a drunkard,

So is a proverb in the mouth of fools.

10

[f]Like an archer who wounds everyone,

So is he who hires a fool or who hires those who pass by.

In verse 6 and verse 10, we see the unwise decision of using a foolish person for important jobs...

In verse 6, God's wisdom tells us that sending a message by a fool is like trying to walk without legs..

In other words, messages sent by fools will at best go where or at worst, messages sent by fools will be delivered incorrectly and lead to violence rather than peace..

In verse 10, the translation is little more difficult but the picture seems to be of an archer randomly firing arrows..

So is the wise man who randomly grabs a fool to do an important job for him..

Wise employers choose wise employees and any nation that ignores that principle is setting itself up for failure...

Verses 7 and 9 of this section offer wisdom on how to deal with what fools say..

There are plenty of fools in the world who offer their own wisdom to people...

I can't but think of all the books in the world about how to parent, how to be successful, how to win friends, how to be a leader..

Yet, God's wisdom right here would say that the fool's wisdom are like the legs of a lame man in verse 7...

In other words, an unbeliever's wisdom is useless to the wise man of God..

Verse 9 furthers that idea by picture a drunk man with a hand full of thorns...

He plans to use it as a weapon but that is also useless since he is too drunk to wield it properly..

The same can be said of the uselessness of the world's wisdom..

Now, let me make a point here..

The world, the fool, and the unbeliever all have access to God's wisdom..

And there are times that unbelievers write book that pull from biblical wisdom...

There are times that unbelievers even speak the wisdom of God..

So it isn't like it is impossible for the fool to speak godly wisdom or for the unbeliever to apply godly wisdom..

It is possible, but we must always realize this..

There is always truth mixed with error, and if a person isn't filled with enough biblical wisdom, they won't know the difference when they hear it...

Let's move to the final 2 verses in this portrait of a fool in verses 11-12...

11

***Like a dog that returns to its vomit
Is a fool who repeats [g]his folly.***

12

***Do you see a man wise in his own eyes?
There is more hope for a fool than for him.***

So far, Hezekiah is hoping to encourage revival and reform in Israel by teaching his people about fools...

First, don't honor foolish people...

Second, don't listen to foolish people..

Third, don't waste time speaking too long to foolish people...

Fourth, don't be unwise in dealing with foolish people..

And now lastly in verses 11-12, we get God's wisdom on spotting foolish people..

In verse 11, the fool is the one who continue to return to his foolish behavior over and over..

Now, I don't think a dog eating its own vomit requires much explanation, but we do need to think about folks who return to and repeat the same destructive behavior over and over..

Look, a dog gets sick because whatever he ate was bad...

And people experience the consequences of sin to remind them that sin is bad...

So people who return to the same sin over and over even though it is bad for them are like the dog who eats the same thing that made him sick...

Look, I ate a chicken leg as a kid and got sick, and I still ain't crazy about chicken legs to this day..

My stomach has long memory..

Yet it is sad that our bodies and lives don't have long memories to the ugly consequences of sin..

I have counseled people and give them biblical counsel on a specific issue in their life..

I have shown them where God's word said don't do this or this will happen...

I have shown them what they should do instead and the blessing that come with that behavior...

Yet, I have watched people choose the sin over the obedience over and over and then wonder why their life continues to be miserable...

Now, I also want to be careful here...

It is good to be patient...

It is good to extend grace when people fall into a pattern of sin...

It is good to forgive over and over and over again..

But it is also good to simply let the dog experience the unpleasantness of getting sick in hopes that they learn...

If you want to identify a fool, take note of people who continue to make bad choices despite the fact that they know and have been told better...

And additional way to spot a fool is the pride he displays....

Verse 12 speaks of a man who is wise in his own eyes..

In other words, fools often feel that they have the world figured out...

They know how life works, how family works, how God works, and they are filled with confidence because of it..

The second half of verse 12 says that a person like this is worse off than a fool..

Now, if a fool is the worst possible option in the world, how can someone be worse than him...

Well, there are fools who think they are wise...

Let me give you an example..

I have shared the gospel with people, and when I talk to people about Christ and the truthfulness of Christianity, I would much rather talk to an atheist than a false Christian..

In other words, at least atheists are honest with themselves..

They embrace their unbelief..

They embrace their foolishness...

However, the false convert to Christianity thinks he has been found by God but he is actually still lost...

This kind of person is actually impossible to talk to..

In his mind, he has it all together...

When the reality is that nothing in his life is together..

But that is the fool who is good prideful to even recognize his foolishness..

For him, there is sadly very little hope for anything good.

My heart grieves for people like this, and I assure you there are plenty of them in the world..

May God give us love and patience to continue to preach the truth to them..

And may God also help them see their own foolishness..

Conclusion

Let us stop right there for tonight..

But remember...

The main point in the context of Proverbs is that fools prevent any sort of reform or revival in any social group, whether that is a nation, a state, a church, a workplace, even a family...

So if Hezekiah desires to prevent the fall of what remains of Israel, the nation needs reform...

But no reform occurs without personal revival..

If you try to reform a nation with laws that make them act right, you end up with a nation that is outwardly obedient but inwardly rebellious to God..

And in fact, that is what Israel eventually becomes..

The Pharisees were people who had outward obedience but inward disobedience to God..

So all revival, all reform simply begins in individual hearts..

Israel needed to believe God and love God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength...

The same is true today...

People pray for national revival in our own country...

I pray that individual hearts are changed and people come to see their need of salvation by repenting of sin and trusting in Christ alone for salvation..

When that happens on a personal level, everything that person touches is changed...

Whether that be his family, his community, his workplace or his nation..

If you want the world to change, you change first...

If you want anything to change, make sure to remove yourself as a roadblock first...

Let us pray.

II. Sluggards Block Blessing (13-16)

III. Busybodies Block Blessing (17-22)

IV. Liars Block Blessing (23-28)