

## Sermon 70, God's Counsel Stands, 19:21-20:5

**Proposition:** The wisdom of God will triumph in the lives of His people and over the folly of His enemies.

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- II. God's Enemies Lose, 19:24-20:2
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### Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we come this morning to a passage that assures us that God's wisdom will triumph over human folly. Along the way, it tells us a great deal about how a wise son lives. What we'll see is that God's counsel stands, His enemies lose, and His people act with wisdom.

#### I. God's Counsel Stands, v. 21

Many are the plans of a man's heart. We all have ideas about our future — what we're going to do after church, what will happen over the next five years and the next twenty years. We have plans, and we have some ability to guess at the probability that they will come to pass. But brothers and sisters, God's plan is certain. It's fixed. There is no chance that it will fail to happen.

We know this. We understand that whatever our plans are, God's plans will come to pass. Brothers and sisters, a wise Christian recognizes that God's plan is unstoppable. This is not a reason for us to stop making plans. But it is a reason to hold them lightly. It's not wisdom to treat your plans as though they're divine, as though they are infallible and definitely coming to pass. That is the height of folly, matched only by the folly of ceasing to make plans at all. This news

about God should be good news to you: His counsel stands. That means that ultimately, you have nothing to fear because everything is under control. It's under the control of the God you love and have given your life to. So Christian, don't live in fear and worry. Don't live in resigned passivity either. Make plans, and strive to carry them out, but do it in submission to the God whose counsel stands.

#### **A. God wants to see kindness, v. 22**

Well, we move from a statement about God's decretive will to a statement about His revealed will. God desires that you be kind and truthful! Of course, the question immediately arises: If God's plan is always done, why doesn't He plan for everyone to be kind and truthful all the time? I'll tell you: I don't know. Brothers and sisters, the bottom line is that God wants us to be good, to be kind and truthful, and yet He does not always plan on it. His plan includes you and me telling lies and being unkind from time to time. That does not mean that His plan will force us to do those things — but they are nonetheless part of the plan, the plan which always stands. Theologians solve the problem for our minds by talking about “two wills” in God, the will of what He plans on and the will of what He requires from us. They call them “decretive” and “revealed.” The point is that you need to follow God's revealed will and not blame His decretive will for your own sin! God wants to see you be kind. He doesn't think it's a sin for you to be poor, but He most emphatically objects to you being a liar. Be like Jesus, the wise Son, who was always kind and truthful even though He was dirt-poor.

#### **B. God blesses those who fear Him, v. 23**

Why should you be content with God's plan in your life? Why should you fear Him? Because to fear Him leads to life. Obviously, in order to fear you have to already be alive. But once you are alive, you must keep fearing in order to attain life. Life is both a gift and task, as we all already know. First thing we know, we're already alive — and our primary task is to maintain that life by eating, working, exercising, sleeping, and all the rest of it. How do you maintain life in the full sense? By fearing God. And what is the reward of fearing God? Life, satisfaction, rest, and deliverance from evil. Who wouldn't want this?

Brothers and sisters, train your hearts to fear God. If I can exhort you to one thing, let it be to this. Fix your thoughts prayerfully on His greatness and majesty. Love and delight in Him so that you fear Him too. Do you have this attitude toward Him in sufficient strength? I daresay none of us do. I don't. But to fail to fear God is to be a fool, one who gets death, dissatisfaction, restlessness, and is handed over to evil.

His counsel stands. His plan comes to pass. You have the strongest possible guarantee on this promise that the fear of the LORD leads to life. So imitate the wise Son, whose delight was in the fear of the LORD.

#### **II. God's Enemies Lose, 19:24-20:2**

After all, Solomon goes on to provide us with a large string of reasons to fear God. He names various enemies of God and shows how they all lose. Every one of them fails in various ways. They lack the fear of the Lord and so can't get no satisfaction.

### **A. The Sluggard, v. 24**

The first of these enemies is the sluggard. He's so lazy that he can't even perform the workout of lifting french fries to his mouth. Obviously, this is a worst-case-scenario portrait that highlights the principle. The sluggard has rejected the idea that human beings were created for work. That very phrase (*Created for Work*) is the title of a book by Bob Schultz, one that one of my younger brothers received for Christmas one year. I can still hear the howl as he ripped the paper off and saw the title staring up at him. Brothers and sisters, Schultz is right. We actually exist to work, and it is tremendous folly to think and do otherwise. If you fear God, you will work hard according to your place and calling. If you don't, if you give way to total laziness, you will starve to death.

### **B. The Scoffer, v. 25**

Another fool is the scoffer. He's cruising for a bruising. He refuses to take anything seriously, and so he will get hit hard. That punishment won't benefit him, but it will help the simple. The naive, unformed person will see what happened to the scoffer and learn a lesson. Even better is the man of understanding, who will gain knowledge from a mere word of rebuke.

Which of these three characters is the best one to be? The scoffer, smitten but unwilling to learn anything new? The naif, sitting there watching with open mouth while the scoffer gets beaten? Or the man of understanding, who gets pulled aside and told "Hey, cut out the references to politicians in your sermons, OK?" Brothers and sisters, to be a fool is to be an enemy of God, and the results won't be good. This is all the more reason to fear God and follow the path to life.

### **C. The Shameful Son, vv. 26-27**

We have twin proverbs on the opposite of the wise son. This is the shameful son.

#### **1. He Mistreats His Parents, v. 26**

He physically assaults his father and chases his mother off the property, essentially severing any relationship with her. This is not a son who makes his parents glad. He is one who brings shame and disgrace. Let's face it, brothers and sisters: If you have children, which most of us do, then you recognize that raising those children was by far your masterpiece, the most important thing you ever did. Oh, yes, there are few people in history who were lead engineers on the Golden Gate bridge, or who crafted the constitution of the United States, or who painted the *Mona Lisa*. Those people might well say that raising their children was not the most important thing they did. But for the rest of us, when the son into whom you poured your life, the most important thing you ever did, turns on you and starts to hate you, that is catastrophic. That is indeed shameful and disgraceful.

#### **2. He Stops Listening, v. 27**

How did he get that way? By ceasing to listen to the words of knowledge. He stopped listening to God and to his parents, and the result was that he strayed from the words of knowledge. He became the disgraceful son who attacks his parents instead of blessing them.

Is that what Jesus looks like? Is that what He did? Of course not! Brothers and sisters, our Lord Jesus blessed His Father, took care of His mother, and brought glory rather than disgrace to

the family name. The fear of the LORD drove Him, and that's why He was a blessing to His parents.

But to fail to fear God and to be the shameful son — that, my friends, is cause for true disgrace. That will produce disaster. God's enemies perish.

#### **D. A Rascally Witness, v. 28**

Another kind of fool who stands against God is the rascally witness. He makes a mockery out of the whole process of doing justice. One of my Walmart co-workers in Timnath, CO was a young man who had a criminal justice degree from Colorado State University. I asked him what the point of getting a degree in justice from a school that didn't believe in justice was, exactly, and he told me that he really didn't know. It was about techniques, about how to manage offenders and how to understand them, rather than about anything really having to do with justice. Well, a rascally witness is one who doesn't really believe that justice exists. In terms of the old joke, he doesn't know the difference between frozen water and justice. (One is just ice.) Because he doesn't believe in justice, the courtroom is just about power — and as a witness, he has the power to throw a monkey wrench into things by saying whatever his little heart desires. This rascally witness makes a mockery of justice. He laughs at the whole thing. In other words, he is just a subpoenaed scoffer. The fact that he's been summoned to appear and testify doesn't mean that his character has been changed! His mouth devours iniquity; he eats up evil with a big spoon, as we would say.

His fate will not be good.

#### **E. The Scoffer and Fool, v. 29**

The next verse emphasizes that truth by speaking of the scoffer and the fool as two sorts of individuals who are ripe for judgment. God's enemies don't fare well! To be a scoffer, one who doesn't take anything seriously and laughs at all of it, is a posture of total folly.

#### **F. The Drunkard, v. 1**

So is substance abuse and chemical dependence. You can ask the law enforcement officers in this congregation, and they will tell you that of all the fighting and brawling and domestic violence-related calls they were sent on across their careers, all but one or two of those fights (and we're talking two fights in twenty years) was substance-related. When people get drunk, they fight and the cops get called. Beer is a brawler. If you get drunk, you're a fool. You've been deceived by a brown liquid in a bottle.

Does the scoffer fare well? Of course not. But does the drunkard do any better? Not really. The scoffer doesn't take anything seriously. But a drunkard or a druggie can't take anything seriously. While he's under the influence, his mind is gone. And even when he's technically sober, the substances may have messed him up enough that he might as well be a scoffer for his ability to take anything seriously. Brothers and sisters, the wise son says no to drugs and alcohol.

### **G. The Provoker, v. 2**

Well, the final fool against whom God's face is set is the provoker — the one who makes the king angry. This man is provocative; he doesn't care to please the king, and so he forfeits his own life.

His fate is the fate of all the fools we've just talked about, all the people who provoke God to anger. They forfeit their lives, justly, because they don't want to listen and obey.

### **III. God's People Act with Wisdom, vv. 3-5**

God's people are different, though. They act with wisdom. They want to please their Father.

#### **A. They Make Peace, v. 3**

So what do they do? They make peace. Fools start quarrels and continue in them. Wise men see that it is much more honorable to accept "defeat" in a battle of wits. Any fool will be quarrelling, but the wise man is a peacemaker. He does not get his honor by belligerently throwing his weight around. And so it is in the international arena too. A wise nation doesn't start wars, but rather accepts humiliation on the international stage as infinitely preferable to the disaster of warfare.

This willingness to back down is seen in the life of Christ. At His trial, He didn't attempt to prove Himself in the right. He submitted to the death He came to die and waited for His Father to vindicate Him. That was the action of a man of honor. It would have been dishonorable for Him to start a verbal brawl with Pilate. Brothers and sisters, are tongues are not our primary weapon of self-defense!

#### **B. They Work and Grow Food, v. 4**

But the righteous who fear God not only sit quietly under duress; they also work hard when the time for work has come. The sluggard won't work because it's too cold — and the upshot is that he has nothing. The righteous, God-fearing, wise Son does otherwise. He works hard, and has plenty and to share.

#### **C. They Draw Out Others' Counsel, v. 5**

Well, finally, God's people care what's in others' hearts. Let's face it: It's work to dig down and ask the deeper questions that will really let you get to know others. It's easier to keep the relationship superficial. But brothers and sisters, a wise son is never content to let the relationship remain superficial. He knows the depths of his own heart and reckons with his own longing to be known — and so he refuses to let others' plans and thoughts go unregistered. He persistently asks, constantly seeking to take the relationship into deeper, more meaningful waters. In this he is like God Himself, who asks us to pour out our hearts before Him and not to keep our thoughts bottled up inside.

So brothers and sisters, will you fear God and behave like wise children, and reap the rewards of that behavior? Or will you decide the scoffing and slacking is better, and fall away into faithlessness? The choice, dear friends, is yours. Yes, God's plan will stand — but it is part of His plan for you make a decision, for you to embrace His fear and thus to find His favor and walk in His wisdom. Amen.