

Thirty Truths to Wisdom (Part 5)

Thirty Truths to Wisdom

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I invite you to open your Bibles to Proverbs 24. We are going to end our study today of Solomon's thirty truths or thirty sayings. My hope and prayer as a pastor, as a minister, is that in going through this that you have grown in Christian maturity, that you have grown in what's called sanctification. You see, when you become a Christian, you embark on this journey of maturation, of growth, where, Lord willing, you're no longer a baby Christian. Remember Paul said that you're drinking spiritual milk, that's what the Corinthians were, they were babies. He says you need to grow past that where you can eat solid food, and my hope and prayer is that we are a church filled with mature Christians and part of that is that you have wisdom. Part of being a mature Christian is that you are wise, that you possess wisdom. Wisdom is the skill to live out the knowledge of God. Wisdom is the skill of living out the knowledge of God so you have to have knowledge, you have to have the knowledge of God to have wisdom but it can't just end there, it has to be the skill of living that knowledge out in this world. And of course, if you think about it, that means that this is what Christ embodied. Christ lived out wisdom in this world. This is who Christ is. So as you're reading all the Proverbs, think about it Christocentrically, that Christ is who lived out the Proverbs to the fullest extent. This is what wisdom looks like.

Now as we close it out, we're going to be looking at verses 13 through 22, the last six sayings, and what these last six sayings, these are the final six of the thirty, what they focus on is endurance, finishing well, you could say resiliency. Look at verse 10, Solomon says, "If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small." The fool melts in adversity. The fool looks like he's going along well but then all of a sudden something happens, they face a trial and what happens is they fall away, they melt away.

They face broken relationships, extreme anxiety, drug addictions, alcohol addictions, all these things and the fool melts away but the wise person is able to face the day of adversity because they have a perspective on life that enables them to persevere through difficulties. They endure, that's one of the differences between the wise man and the fool.

Now Paul says, this is Ephesians 6:13, he says, "Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm." So as believers, as those growing in maturity, we need to be reminded that we have to stand, to stand firm, Paul says, because Satan is attacking. That's part of enduring, that you are able to stand and take the blows that Satan gives you. Paul says to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2, he says, "Timothy, suffer as a good soldier of Christ Jesus." And Paul knew what he was talking about. Paul faced just incredible suffering, just monumental suffering. I was reading in Acts 14, literally when Paul was speaking in Lystra, the Jews came in and they decided to stone Paul. They did. They dragged him outside of the city. They thought he was dead and then he gets up and goes back into the city.

So Paul knew what he was talking about when he says that you have to be able to stand and at the end, final letter he writes to Timothy, 2 Timothy 4, he says, "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith." And that's my prayer for each of you, that you can withstand the storms of life, everything that Satan is going to throw at you and that on the last day we can put on your tombstone, just like my father has, 2 Timothy 4:6-8, "Fought the good fight. Finished the race. I've kept the faith." Friends, we live in an evil age. Have you all noticed that? Have you all noticed that? There is a great need not for immature Christians and flaky Christians but strong Christians to stand. Are you ready to stand? Are you ready to go the distance? Are you ready to withstand all that Satan's going to throw at you? That's what Solomon's talking about here in these last sayings.

So let's listen to Solomon, what he says. This is so perceptive what Solomon gives us. This is the secret to being able to stand firm. This is what wisdom looks like over the long haul. So look at verse 13. This is the 26th saying and what Solomon says is this, is that wisdom brings joy. Wisdom brings joy. Verse 13, he says,

13 My son, eat honey, for it is good, and the drippings of the honeycomb are sweet to your taste. 14 Know that wisdom is such to your soul; if you find it, there will be a future, and your hope will not be cut off.

Listen, if you are going to stand until the end, what you will need is joy. You will need blessed happiness.

Now this Proverb, this saying, is not about food. I saw some commentators say that. It's not about food. It's not about honey. He mentions honey, right? He says "eat honey, for it is good, and the drippings of the honeycomb are sweet to your taste." The honey is a metaphor for what it's like to have wisdom in your soul.

Now honey in the ancient world was the sweetest thing that anybody had. You couldn't find something sweeter than honey. It was the icing on their cake. It was the only sweet that they possessed. Now we love honey. I love honey. Every morning I get up and I toast an English muffin, and to my family's bewilderment, I put peanut butter on it and honey, and that hot peanut butter just melts on the English muffin and that honey makes it sweet. I love it. And what Solomon is saying is he says when you taste that honey in your mouth, that sweetness is like what wisdom is to your soul. Isn't that awesome that wisdom is sweet, that wisdom is good for your soul. Psalm 119:103 says, "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" Is that how you feel about the Bible, you just can't wait to read it in the morning because it's sweet to your soul?

Turn over, just put your finger here but turn over to Proverbs 3. I want you to see how Solomon describes the finding of wisdom. Proverbs 3:13, he says, "Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold." It's better than wealth, he's saying. It's better than any wealth that you could imagine piling up. "She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her." Why is that, Solomon? He says, "Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." You see, what the world doesn't understand, the world says, "Okay, if I can go find wealth then I'll be happy," but they find wealth and what happens? They're not happy. Just go start doing interviews with people in Hollywood. They're not happy. Why? You don't find happiness with wealth. You find happiness and joy in God, with wisdom. You find God, you find wisdom, and then what he says is you get everything else. "Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." Now notice this imagery, this imagery is going all the way back to the garden of Eden. It's going all the way back to Psalm 1. "She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called blessed." Isn't that remarkable?

Turn back to Proverbs 24. So what Solomon is saying is that you need to understand that wisdom brings the true joy that you want, and why is that? It's because wisdom orients you to God. Wisdom orients you to God and God made you to know him. God put you on this planet so that you would know and delight in the living God. That's why you're here. So if you possess wisdom, now you're oriented to God and then there's joy because you're able to put everything that you encounter in life into perspective. That's the biblical worldview. That's what wisdom brings. You're able to see everything and understand where it fits. There's delight in seeing a sunset and reflecting on the glory of God. There's delight in understanding that your trials are within the scope of God's sovereignty. There's delight in knowing that your sins are forgiven in Christ. There's delight in knowing that we can go to God anytime, anytime in prayer. And there's delight in knowing that there is a future resurrection of the dead. You see, you're able to, everything you encounter you're able to put in its proper category.

So Solomon says there will be a future and your hope will not be cut off, so you understand the world, you understand where you are with God. And this is a quote from J. I. Packer, listen to what Packer says. He says, "Joy is a condition that is experienced

but it is more than a feeling, it is primarily a state of mind." Why? Because it comes from wisdom. You have wisdom, you understand the world, and it's a frame of mind that you now live in joy. Now joy, you could slightly define it differently from happiness. Happiness is more contingent on your situation that you're going through. Joy supersedes your situation. Joy stays with you no matter what you encounter. No matter what you encounter. Remember Paul and Barnabas in the Philippian jail? They were beaten, thrown in jail, and then did they sit down and say, "Oh man, woe is us"? What did they do? They started singing. They started singing hymns to God. Why? Because their joy couldn't be taken away.

When my grandfather, Charles Castleberry, we took him to the hospital and he was diagnosed with leukemia, untreatable, you're a goner is what this little Indian doctor came in and that's what she told him, and we drove straight from the hospital back to his office and we ordered fajitas and he ate those fajitas with joy. And I'm just looking at this man, he has a death sentence, how can he do that? Because he knows God. He knows where he's going. He has wisdom. Wisdom leads to joy which can't be taken away.

That's why C. S. Lewis, C. S. Lewis wrote a book called "Surprised by Joy," and his point was is that God gives joy as a gift oftentimes when you least expect it. You seek after joy and you won't find it, but then God gives it as a wonderful gift, a wonderful gift to us.

Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 2:26, "For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy." And therefore as believers, if you possess wisdom, then you have the capacity to live joyfully in this world. You can live with joy and my prayer is that that would mark us as a church, that when people come here, that they would say, "Wow, you know, those weren't just these self-righteous Christians." You know, I know a lot of Christians that have good theology, Reformation theology, but they're as dry and dour as a raisin. They're just no fun and they're wrinkly and all those things. But my hope and prayer is that we would be a people of joy, of great joy because we've internalized the things that we believe, and we've internalized wisdom and we've internalized these truths. David says in Psalm 32:11, "Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!"

So if you have joy, that's going to help sustain you over the long haul. Remember the joy of the Lord is your strength. The joy of the Lord is your strength. Keep that joy. Fight for joy. Don't let it out of your sight. So that's 26.

27. I summarize this saying: the righteous keep getting up. Look at verse 15, he says,

15 Lie not in wait as a wicked man against the dwelling of the righteous;
do no violence to his home;

So the prohibition, Solomon says, is you don't do evil, you don't do wicked against a righteous man. You don't hurt his home. You don't hurt his family. You don't hurt him. Why? Because God is on the side of the righteous. God is on the side of the righteous.

Proverbs 18:10 says, "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe." Proverbs 3:33, "The LORD's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the dwelling of the righteous." So when somebody oppose the righteous, they are actually also opposing God and that right there should be a great source of hope if you are a Christian, that God Almighty is on your side. That God Almighty is on your side.

Look at verse 16, he says,

16 for the righteous falls seven times and rises again,

That's hyperbole. He's saying the righteous falls an innumerable number of times and rises again,

but the wicked stumble in times of calamity.

He says the righteous seem to go down, the righteous seem to go down but they rise again and again and again. They're like a cat, they have nine lives. They just keep coming back.

The righteous seem to fall but they keep getting up. Remember Daniel. Remember Daniel. He's in Babylon. He was promoted to be the Prime Minister and the other satraps and governors were jealous and they tricked Darius. Remember what they did? They went to Darius and they said, "You need to make an edict that no one can pray to any other god beside you for 30 days." And so Darius makes this edict. Well, what does Daniel do? He fears God more than he fears man. He goes into his inner chamber and he prays three times a day just like he always does. He opens up the window to the west which looks out towards Jerusalem, and he gets down and he prays. Well, those jealous hucksters come and they find Daniel in the act of praying and they bring him to Darius. Darius realizes that he's been tricked but he's already made this edict. It's irrevocable. And so Daniel goes to the lions' den and Daniel goes in, he's praying and you remember what happens, God sends an angel to close the mouths of the lions. The next morning, Darius gets up, he wants to see what happened, and he comes to the den and this is what Daniel says. He said, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God whom you serve continually been able to deliver you from the lions?" And amazingly Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever. My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths and they have not harmed me because I was found blameless before him. And also before you, O king, I have done no harm." So they took Daniel out of that pit and do you remember who they threw in that pit? All those governors and all those satraps and their families, and Daniel says before they even hit the ground the lions had devoured them.

So the righteous, they seem to fall but they rise again. The wicked stumble in times of calamity. And what often happens is this, the wicked try to take the righteous out and what happens is what one commentator says is that God sends a judicial boomerang. Remember what a boomerang is? A boomerang is one of those deals you throw it, it goes around and it comes right back and you catch it. So the wicked, they throw what they're going to throw at the righteous and it loops back around and it gets them. It gets them.

That's exactly what happened with Daniel, you remember in Esther, Haman wanted to get Mordecai, built a hangman's gallows for Mordecai. What ends up happening at the end? It's Haman on the gallows and Mordecai on the ground without a rope around his neck. It's a judicial boomerang that God sends that comes back around for the wicked.

So the wicked are destroyed in the same manner in which they were trying to get the righteous but here's what it boils down to, and this is what I want you to see, it's a deep confidence as a righteous person, if you're on the side of God, that God has your back, that you are on God's team. I remember 2 Timothy where Paul's talking about just recounting the end of his life and he's saying, "Everybody deserted me. Nobody stood with me when I was on trial." But he says this, "The Lord stood by me and strengthened me. The Lord stood by me and strengthened me." Do you believe that, that whatever trial that you will face as a believer, that the Lord will stand by you and strengthen you? He will. He will. Jesus says, "I am with you always even to the end of the age." He will.

28th saying. This one's really important. This one's really important. Never gloat over another's failure. Never gloat over another's failure. Look at verse 17,

17 Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles,

Before the Lord, before the Lord endeavor to never gloat over another's failures. The wise person does not rejoice when their enemies go down and the reason for that is that the wise person is humble before God. The wise person says, "Yet for the grace of God there go I." The wise person understands that really what we deserve, what we deserve before God is judgment. What I deserve before God is wrath. The wise person sees the world through the lens of the gospel. What does the gospel say? The gospel says there's none righteous, no not one, that the wage of sin is death, that we all deserve the judgment of God. That's what the gospel says but God, while we were still sinners, demonstrated his love for us by sending his Son to die for our sin, and that all who believe on him in faith have forgiveness of sins. Praise be to God.

So the wise person says, "God, I understand what I deserve but I understand that I have received mercy and I have received grace." And so when you see an enemy go down, and by the way, if you stand for truth, which you should, you will have enemies. You will have enemies. That's just part of being a Christian in this world. But when you see your enemy go down, you don't say, "Yeah, I'm so glad! They had it coming!" You don't say that. You say, "But for the grace of God there goes me."

When I was a little boy, this is the first verse my mom taught me. The first verse my mom taught me, Proverbs 25:21, "If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink," and this is the part that I kind of clung onto, "for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you." And I just thought about that, "Man, you know, if I'm nice to the bullies in the neighborhood, I'm going to heap burning coals on their heads." So I was getting Popsicle's and giving them away to all the bullies that were in our cul-de-sac and down the street, and I was just

thinking, "Yeah." You know, wrong motive right there, right, that I'm pouring the burning coals on their head. But the idea is that the believer, the wise person treats their enemy differently than those in the world do.

I want you to keep your finger here but I want you to turn to the right to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:43. I just want to remind you what our Lord said about this. This is very profound and really at the heart of the Christian ethic. Matthew 5:43, Jesus says this, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'" Who said that? That's what the rabbis said. That's not in the Old Testament. That's what the Pharisees said. That was their oral tradition that you'd love your neighbor, you'd hate your enemy. Jesus said, "You've heard that, But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Now look at his rationale for doing this, "so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For," this is what God does, "he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." He says God shows kindness towards his enemies.

Turn back to Proverbs 24. God shows kindness towards his enemies, so you are never more like your heavenly Father than when you love your enemy. Everyone in the world hates their enemies, the Christian loves their enemies. The Christian prays for their enemies. You want them, like you have, to experience the mercy and the grace of God. So when your enemy does come to calamity, you don't rejoice. That's the mark of someone who's not a son of God. That's the mark of someone who is not wise. You grieve that they have come under possibly the judgment of God.

Look at the next verse in Proverbs 24, verse 18. He says if you're rejoicing at the calamity of your enemy, he says,

18 lest the LORD see it and be displeased, and turn away his anger from him.

In other words, he's saying let God deal with retribution so that when you see pain and calamity, let it be a warning for you not to sin, and for you not to continue in rebellion. It's a reminder to you of the grace that you have received. Proverbs 17:5 says, "he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished."

I'm not going to have you turn back to the Sermon on the Mount, but Jesus later said, Matthew 7:1, you know this verse, "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you." What Jesus means there is not that you don't exercise discernment in the world. It's not that you never come to someone and say, "Hey, that's a sin." You know, sometimes when you confront something as a Christian, if you call anything wrong, what does the world say? They quote this verse. They say, "Judge not lest you be judged," and they think that they've got you in some type of, you know, rhetorical trap. But what Jesus means is it's not that you don't speak the truth, it's not that you don't call sin sin, it's that you don't stand as God over a person and damn them to hell. You don't stand self-righteously over a person and condemn them. Why? Because that's not our

place. That's what God does. We warn them. We tell them the truth in love but we don't stand over them.

So here's the litmus for this. I want you to think in your mind, I want you to think in your mind right now about your worst enemy. Your worst enemy. Maybe it's somebody political. Maybe it's a dictator in another country. Or maybe it's more personable, maybe it's somebody in your office. I want you to think about your worst enemy and I want you to think about something tragic happening to them. Something tragic happening to them. What are your emotions? How do you respond? What are you feeling in your heart? We should feel mercy. We should feel compassion. We should feel that warning from God that if it weren't for his mercy that would be us. So that's the 28th saying.

29. In verse 19 and this one is so important. This one is so important especially in the day that we live in but it's don't become angry because of evil. Don't become angry because of evil. Now this is why wisdom is so helpful. Has there ever been a time since our Lord came 2,000 years ago that there wasn't evil in the world? Has there ever been a time where evil was eradicated this side of glory? No, there's not. There's never been a time where there hasn't been evil in the world since Adam. There's always been evil. There's always been sin. There's always been rebellion against God. So it's important in the midst of all of this, in the midst of this dark world that we live in, that we don't fret or become angry because of the evil and let that rob our joy.

Look at verse 19. He says,

19 Fret not yourself because of evildoers, and be not envious of the wicked,

The Hebrew word that is translated "fret" means literally "to burn; to become angry." Do you find yourself just listening to the radio when you're driving in your car and you start hearing stuff that's happening and your blood just starts to boil. You start to become angry at everything that's going on in the world and you become angry that our nation is becoming more socialistic or whatever it is. You become angry that we waited until the balloon was over the Atlantic to shoot it down. I'm just saying, you start to hear things on the radio and it's easy to get frustrated, and what Solomon says is that you shouldn't do that. You shouldn't do that because there's a sense where there's always going to be evil, there's always going to be things that cause you to be frustrated. So it's easy to become cynical. It's easy to become jaded. It's easy to become angry and bitter and even frustrated at God. Have you seen that with people, that they begin to blame God for everything that's going on?

So Solomon says don't do that, don't lose your faith, don't lose your perspective. Look at verse 20, he says,

20 for the evil man has no future; the lamp of the wicked will be put out.

What he's saying is this, remember the sovereignty of God. That's what he's saying. Remember. Remember. Remember the sovereignty of God. Friend, God is sovereign. Christ is reigning. The writer of Hebrews says, Hebrews 2:8, "putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him." He says remember this, that Christ is ruling at the right hand of the Father. You might not see it. It might not appear like that but he is. Paul says 1 Corinthians 15:25, "he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet." In other words, no one is getting away with anything. Christ is sovereign. Christ is sovereign. He's not shaking in heaven because of the events that are happening right now here on earth. He's not. The universe is going exactly according to his plan and ultimately God will bring the wicked to nothing. Their lamp will be put out. And that's why I think the sovereignty of God is one of the greatest doctrines that you can understand. You can go through life and you encounter the bad things that happen to you, the bad things that are happening in our culture, the bad things that are happening in the world, and you can trust in the hand of Almighty God and you can go home at night, like I do, and eat Bluebell ice cream and watch Columbo with my wife.

You can live. You can live and enjoy the little gifts that God gives you. That's what wisdom is. Jot down this verse, a really important verse, Ecclesiastes 3:12. Solomon says, "I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil--this is God's gift to man." So you enjoy the things that the Lord gives you and you go to sleep at night resting in the sovereignty of an almighty God. He's got it. He's got it. He's got everything that you're worried about. You can trust him. Your blood doesn't need to boil. You don't have to fret. You don't have to be anxious. You can go to the Lord. Isn't that remarkable? Isn't that joyous?

There was this period in Israel's history, my wife and I were talking about this the other day, but it looked like, it looked like David's line, the line of David had been extinguished. It looked like everything was lost. David's son Ahaziah was killed in combat by Jehu and when he was killed, Ahaziah's mother Athaliah went and killed all of his sons. All of his sons. So the grandmother, so the King of Judah, his mom Athaliah after he's killed in battle comes and kills all of his sons. Why? Because she wanted to be the queen. She wanted to be the queen. And it looked like that the line of David was done, was no more. That's what everybody thought. That's what everybody thought but Jehoida was the priest and his wife found a one-year boy, a one-year old boy and that boy was of the line of David and they went and hid him in the temple and they hid him for six years and that boy grew and then six years later Jehoida brings that boy out, his name is Joash, he brings that boy out and he announces, "This is the King," and all of Israel blows their trumpets, shouts for joy and comes and they declare him the king, and then they take that wicked witch Athaliah, they take her out of the temple and they stone her. They stone her and they say, "There is now joy again in Israel. There is a line of David that has been preserved and now he is the King." But here's the point, here's the point: for six years they didn't know. For six years they didn't know. For six years they thought that the line of David was done. For six years they had no idea and then all of a sudden God turns

their fortunes right-side up because God can do that. And so they blew their trumpets with joy.

So here's the point: enjoy life, enjoy the life that God gives you. Don't fret about the evil. Don't fret about the evil. Don't let your blood boil.

30th and finally, here it is, this is how they end: fear the right authorities. Fear the right authorities. Look at verse 21,

21 My son, fear the LORD and the king, and do not join with those who do otherwise,

Now our culture, our generation has a real problem with this word that Solomon uses, "fear." Fear. He's not using that word to mean trepidation. He's using that word, you could say, to trust the Lord, obey the Lord, honor the Lord. That's what it means to fear the Lord in a biblical sense, to trust, obey and honor, and it means, Proverbs 9:10 says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom," that that's where you start the life of wisdom. You start the life of wisdom by fearing the Lord and what Solomon is saying is that's how you continue. That's how you begin, you begin by honoring, trusting and obeying the Lord, and you continue in that and then, he says, you have

the knowledge of the Holy One [you have] insight.

He also says, this is interesting, he says that you honor, obey and trust the king. Now the king was supposed to be, not always, there were many bad kings in Judah's history and all the kings in Israel's history were bad, but the king was supposed to be the representative of God to the people. The king was to represent the rule of God to the people. And so Solomon says do not join with those who do otherwise. So you keep fearing the Lord, you keep trusting the Lord, and you don't partner with the person who doesn't fear the Lord. This is really important. You don't go into business with a person in terms of a close association with someone who doesn't fear the Lord. You don't date someone and get involved romantically with someone who doesn't fear the Lord. You want to be around people who fear the Lord, honor the Lord.

And then he also says fear and honor the king, do not join with those who do otherwise and this is just, I think, a word of wisdom regarding institutional life. Have you ever been in an institution, a business, a church, maybe when I was in the Marine Corps where people start to run their mouth against the leadership of the platoon or the company or the business or against the elders of the church and things start happening, things start going sideways quick. What Solomon is saying is be very very very careful about doing that.

Look at verse 22, he says,

22 for disaster will arise suddenly from them, and who knows the ruin that will come from them both?

He's saying if you don't fear the Lord, if you run with those who don't fear the Lord, then disaster will arise suddenly and if you're involved in a mutiny, so to speak, if you're involved in a situation that is really rebelling against authority and causing dissension, then disaster can come upon you. So what I tell people is, look, if you're in a business, let's say that you're working a job and you can no longer support that company, you can no longer support the company, don't undermine it from the inside. You leave. You leave. Don't be a part of a coup d'etat. That's not what you're to do because that is ultimately going to look poorly on you. Same with the church. If you're part of a church that you can no longer support the leadership, don't stay and cause dissension, you leave. That's what you do and in that way you'll honor the Lord. Big picture what Solomon is saying is, look, keep doing what you've been doing. Keep fearing the Lord and you will play the long game, you will last, you will endure, you will finish well. You will finish well.

I was thinking this week about someone who finished well, who played the long game, and the name came to my mind of W. A. Criswell. W. A. Criswell. Does anyone know who W. A. Criswell is? Okay, maybe a couple of you. I grew up in Dallas in the shadow of W. A. Criswell. W. A. Criswell was the pastor of First Baptist Dallas for over 50 years from 1944 to 1994. He was the pastor of First Baptist Dallas. When he came in 1944, it was a very small church. First Baptist Dallas had 5,000 members in 1944. When he left in 1994, they had 26,000 members. 26,000 members. And what Criswell did is he came to First Baptist Dallas and he said, "Do you know what, I'm gonna preach expositively through the entire Bible. I'm going to start with Genesis and finish in Revelation." And the deacons said, "If you do that, you'll kill the church, people will stop coming." And he said, "Watch and see. Watch and see." And, I mean, he was a firebrand of a preacher and he just preached, preached, preached and the Lord honored that.

Kenny and I, we like to quote Criswell all the time. He just had this booming voice. He was just a titanic figure. My father-in-law went to Dallas Theological Seminary and he said Criswell came to speak in chapel at Dallas Seminary and everybody showed up, "Man, this is gonna be good." And Criswell said, "Man, you Dallas boys, y'all are great in terms of head knowledge, in terms of studying the text. Y'all are really sharp but you know what you lack? Fire!" He said, "You lack fire!" My father-in-law is sitting there hearing this, Criswell was just remarkable. Let me give you one more quote, he said, "I've preached expository sermons for 75 years but I've yet to touch the hem of his garment." Isn't that just....? He was just filled with truth like that.

Now when I was going through when my grandma died, I was going through her stuff and I found a little file in her filing cabinet, and that file actually belonged to her mother, my great grandma Pearly Mae Pratt, who was about 4'10", and in that file, and I didn't even know this, were the sermon notes from W. A. Criswell when she was a member at First Baptist Dallas years ago from his sermons in Revelation. And so I'm just looking at this, seeing the fruit of this man's ministry. I didn't even know in my own heritage, in my own life.

But he finished well, finished to the end. This is what Billy Graham said when he died. He said, "It is almost impossible to evaluate the life and ministry of W. A. Criswell. He

had a multiplicity of gifts. He had one of the most loving hearts I've ever known. He was anointed by the Holy Spirit in an unusual way." In an unusual way. And that's how I want to finish. That's how I hope you want to finish, that you want to finish where people say he/she had the anointing of the Holy Spirit in an unusual way. They were faithful to the very end. But it only happens with wisdom, it only happens by playing the long game, it only happens by having that joy, it only happens by enduring, it happens by being a person of mercy not gloating over another's failures, it happens by not getting angry by your surroundings, and it happens by continually fearing the Lord. So that's what we must do. That's my prayer. That's my hope is that you continually fear the Lord and that you become this wise person.

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we do pray that we would be wise women and men of God, that we would be sanctified men and women of God, that we would love the Lord, that we would fear the Lord, that we would obey the Lord, honor the Lord, trust the Lord, that in everything that we do honor might be brought to your name. God, I pray that you would begin this reformation and revival here at our church in our lives, that the people that we encounter would see our wisdom, they would see our joy, they would see the way that we fear the Lord, they would see the way that we handle circumstances, that we're not rocked, that we don't gloat over other's failures, that we're people of mercy. May we be people of mercy, and most importantly, may we be people who last, who stand until the very end. For Christ's sake. Amen.

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