

# Sermon 56, Radiant Wisdom/Gospel Light, Gospel Life, Proverbs 15:30-33

**Proposition:** The gospel gives bright-eyed joy, creates the church, shapes the individual, and makes the future bright.

- I. The Gospel, v. 30
  - A. Joy in the Face
  - B. Joy in the Heart
  - C. Fatness for the Bones
- II. The Church, v. 31
  - A. Ear-Based
  - B. Life-Giving
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## **Introduction**

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, our passage this morning is about good news. While it may apply in some ways to good news in general, I'm going to look at it with you today under the heading of good news in particular — that is, the particularly good news we call the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel, after all, is the best news ever given. It is the news best calculated to brighten the eyes and make the bones fat. It is the news that allows the wise son to be at home in the congregation of the wise. And it is the news that motivates you to undergo the discipline of wisdom and endure the humility that comes before honor. The bottom line, of course, is that it's the gospel that makes you a wise son in the first place — and therefore the gospel, when believed, is the foundation for any and all real wisdom that you possess. So let's focus this morning on the good news about Jesus, and its role in the life of the church and the individual Christian. We'll see that when you know the good news, your eyes are bright — and your future is too.

### **I. The Gospel, v. 30**

We start this morning by looking at the gospel. Paul defined the gospel strictly as news, the news that Jesus came, lived, died, was buried, and rose again. It is not advice; it is news, a report about

what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. And the result of this good news for you and I today is joy. That's not the only result, but that's a major one. Indeed, it's the second fruit of the Spirit — and thus, those with no joy are those without the Spirit of Christ.

### **A. Joy in the Face**

The good news makes the face joyful. It makes the eyes bright. Are we a bunch of bright-eyed Christians? We have every reason to be. God has given us everything we need for life and godliness. He has made us wise sons through faith in Jesus. He has promised us an eternal life in Heaven with Him, delighting in every delight and in the fullness of joy that we will have in seeing and enjoying Him with our loved ones. Does that joy show in your face? Are your eyes bright?

The proverb can also be taken to mean that seeing other people's bright eyes makes you joyful. The light of gospel in your fellow church members' eyes can and should light up your life too as you look around and see the joy that's here. You're one of us. You're welcomed by us if you've been welcomed by Jesus — and that joy in your face makes the rest of us equally glad.

### **B. Joy in the Heart**

But Christians who have heard the good news don't just have joy in the face; that surface-level joy reaches all the way down to the heart. The brightness of your eyes as you hear once again about Jesus and what He did should thrill your heart and fill it with joy too. Brothers and sisters, where is our joy? The greatest enemy of joy is our sin. Our sin promises happiness, pleasure, and fulfillment — but leaves behind only misery, pain, and regret. Sin is the biggest roadblock between us and gospel joy. If you want joy in the heart, the path to it leads through repentance and reaffirming your belief in the gospel.

Joy is the steady, solid assurance that things are going to be good. It's closely allied to hope and faith. Indeed, it is the feeling you get from having faith in a sure and certain hope. If you truly have hope to be blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity, then you will also have joy. Joy is a byproduct — a byproduct of the gospel.

### **C. Fatness for the Bones**

Well, remember how Proverbs has promised not only prosperity but also physical health? That promise is repeated here. The health benefits of a merry heart are well known; conversely, too, we all know that it's quite possible to die of a broken heart, to just be so broken down and sorrowful about life that you stop caring to live. But the good news of the gospel is emphatically not merely good news for the soul, or for the spirit. It is good news for the whole person, bones and all. Remember how that phrase is often used to indicate how an owl will eat an entire animal, bones and all? Well, the phrase means the same thing here: God's salvation in Christ means health for the whole body. The gospel strengthens you and nourishes you, bones and all.

How does it do that? Well, for one thing, we are whole people. Though you can perhaps break humans down into body, soul, and spirit, or animal part and rational part, or some other schematic, the fact is that God doesn't deal with just our spirits or just our souls. He saves us, men and women, as whole embodied people — and He promises to raise our bodies to new life

at the end of time. Even if your Christian life thus far has been painful and hard and sad, and even if your physical health has declined since you first heard the good news, know for certain that the good news will ultimately make your bones fat. It will ultimately nourish your whole body, even beyond the good effects of cheering you up. The gospel saves — or rather, the gospel is the good news that Christ saves.

So do you want to listen to the good news? Do you want to see it reflected in the eyes of your fellow saints? Do you want the cheerful heart and fat bones that come from the good news of Jesus? Then come to church!

## **II. The Church, v. 31**

And that's exactly where Solomon takes us. How do I know that this verse is talking about the church? Because everything it describes corresponds exactly with what the church is supposed to be.

### **A. Ear-Based**

Notice first of all that it's ear-based. The church is about listening. If you were deaf, the service here wouldn't mean a whole lot to you. There's not a lot of visual, especially if you don't read along with the words that are being read from the pulpit. Any of you who have had the privilege of worshipping in a foreign language with brothers and sisters abroad will know what I'm talking about. Church just is not the same when you can't hear what's going on — even if you can read a translation of the lyrics and follow along in a printed translation of the sermon. And so, if you want to put it this way, you can say that the most important body part for participation in the church is the ear. The most important faculty you have for gaining wisdom is your hearing. If you can't listen, you will be a fool! And by the same token, a church that does not primarily appeal to and address itself to the ear is a church that has departed from inculcating wisdom. Wisdom can be manifested by the light of the eyes, of course. And you can learn by watching. But from the beginning, from ch. 1:8, Proverbs has majored on the exhortation to listen. That continues to be the case here. It is particularly the ear that takes in wisdom.

So if you find a church that has a beautiful building but no proclamation of the words of wisdom, run. If you find a church that majors on spectacle with light shows, fog machines, and music rather than the word at the center of things, then you are not finding a church full of wisdom. And that means, of course, that you are not finding a church full of Christ. Christ is the word, and you take Him in by the ear. Yes, He is the image of the invisible God — but He is not seen with the exterior eye, not now, at this time in redemptive history. How does He image the invisible God? At this point, He does it primarily as the Word of the Father. And that means that if we want to grow in the gospel, we need to work on our ears. We must work on our ability to listen.

### **B. Life-Giving**

But the church is not only primarily the listening church, the church of the ear. It's also the church of life. When you go to church and listen to the good news proclaimed there, you get

another benefit: life. Already we saw that the gospel makes the bones fat. Here that promise is generalized into the promise of life for the one who listens.

This is ultimately because Jesus has life in Himself, life which was given to Him by the Father. That self-life, that status of being *autotheos* as the Greeks call it, is what empowers His words and makes them life-giving too. Yes, you heard that right. When you use your ears in church to listen to the gospel, you are taking in the very life of Jesus Christ. Here's how Christ Himself put it: "Truly, truly I say to you, that an hour is coming—and now is here—when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and the ones who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in himself, thus also he has granted to the Son to have life in himself" (John 5:25-26). The hour is here when the voice of Christ that calls out to those in the graves "Lazarus, come forth!" The hour when He raises the dead and spiritually gives life to sinners dead in their trespasses and sins is here. Where is the authentic, living, life-giving voice of Christ found? In the words of wisdom, yes. In the words of Scripture, yes. But preeminently in the congregation of the wise, where the wise son lives. It is there that his ear hears the reproofs of life. They give life, these reproofs do, because they come from Jesus the living one.

### **C. Corrective**

Now, they are corrective words. These life-giving words of Jesus don't meet you where you are and then leave you there. They confront you with the error of your ways. They tell you where you're wrong. They insist that you leave your folly and live, and go in the ways of understanding. Thus, already in Proverbs we have seen six chapters where every proverb profiles both the wise and the foolish. The statements about the wise are positive, for our imitation; the statements about the foolish are rebukes, for our warning. The truly wise man will understand statements like "The fool rages, but is confident" and "The scoffer does not like to hear rebuke; he will not go to the wise" as rebukes, corrections directed toward him and toward anyone else who leans that direction. If the shoe fits, wear it. If the description of the fool — say, that he despises his mother — fits you, then you are hearing corrective words.

Now, these days you hear frequently "I don't want to know what you're against; I want to know what you're for" and "The problem with the church is that it knows what it's against but not what it's for" and other similar sentiments. But brothers and sisters, as I trust you've noticed, these sentiments themselves highlight the thing they're against just as much as the thing they're for. They are against purely negative positions. That's probably wise — and indeed, perhaps one could have a purely negative platform. But one cannot have a purely positive platform. If you're for something, then you're against its opposite. In the fiscal realm, if you're for a balanced budget then you're against deficit spending. If you're for responsible use of government money then you're against pork-barrel projects. If you are for godly sexual ethics then you are against same-sex mirage. And so on. Brothers and sisters, if you are for wisdom then you are against folly. If you are pro-life then you are against death. If you are pro-Christ, then you must be anti-Satan. This why the words of life are and must be corrective. They tell you what Jesus is like, and therefore what you ought not to be like. You ought not to be angry, resentful,

proud-hearted, and all the rest of it. Instead, you ought to be joyful, kind, patient, giving, and wise — just like Jesus.

So here at church, you will hear about how you ought to manage your finances. You will hear about how you ought to behave as a husband or wife, a parent or child. You will hear that you ought to admire your mother and the church, and that you ought to spend large amounts of time in prayer because God loves to hear prayer. You're going to hear it, because it's the truth. It is the corrective aspect of the church. A church that never corrects is a church that is never going to prosper — at least not for eternity.

#### **D. Congregation of the Wise**

Here at last we come to the reason that I take this verse as being about the church. It describes a place in the midst of the wise. The sage envisions a group of wise people, a company or congregation of the wise. The wise and the righteous are used interchangeably throughout this book, because wisdom makes righteous and righteousness makes wise. Thus, the congregation of the wise and the congregation of the righteous are interchangeable names for the same reality that we call the church. Brothers and sisters, the gospel creates the church, and the church is just another name for the assembly of the wise.

Is that what our church is? An ear-based, life-giving, corrective assembly of people who have been given the gift of wisdom because they walk in the fear of God? It is so by definition. That is our call. That is what we ought to be. A church full of hypocrites? No. Rather, we are called to be a congregation of wise people, a group of God-fearers. Only then, when we are made up of a critical mass of people who really are in their heart what they claim to be with their mouth, will we see our church become a truly life-giving ear-based assembly of the wise.

#### **E. Home for the Wise Son**

And when it does become that, its grandest purpose is to be a home for the wise son. We talk about the church as our mother. We talk about our fellow church members as our brothers and sisters. But how often do we take this language in a slightly different direction and think about the church as our home? Because brothers and sisters, that's what it is. The church is our home. And if you incline your ear to hear the gospel, then you will really and truly feel at home here.

I remember reading a book by a pastor's daughter in which she described bringing the children of a Muslim refugee family with her to a church event. They were traumatized, and couldn't stand it — and she realized that she had never even considered that someone might find it hard to take, because it was her home and always had been.

Is that how you feel about the church? Is this your home? Do you know that this is where you belong, and that you wouldn't fit in anywhere else even if you wanted to? More importantly, do you know this, our own little local congregation with all its flaws, as the home of Jesus Christ? This is where the ultimate wise Son lives. He dwells among us, in the midst of His people. We are His temple. We are the home of Personified Wisdom.

Do you believe that? Do you actually expect to meet with Jesus here in the gathering of His people? Do you know that He is here? Do you commune with Him in corporate worship? Do

you see His glory and glorify Him for it here in the church? And do you listen to Him, becoming like Him? Brothers and sisters, this is the church. That means that it's Jesus' bride, the household of God, the temple of the Holy Spirit.

If you aren't at home in the church, then you aren't like Jesus. If you want to be more at home here, try assimilating. Learn the language. Invite the people over. Get to know your brothers and sisters, at church and outside of church. Make this your social world in some important ways.

Again, all of this is the product of the gospel. All of it comes from listening to the good news which is the word of life. To hear the gospel is to become joyful, and to be at home in the congregation of the wise.

The scoffer won't go to the wise. He won't come into church. There's nothing here for him. In fact, Psalm 1 tells us that sinners will not stand in the congregation of the righteous. But Psalm 22 tells us that Jesus loves to stand and praise His Father in the great congregation.

So how do you rightly respond to the gospel? Join the congregation of the wise and listen to the life-giving words of reproof with them.

### **III. The Individual, vv. 32-33**

Why are these words delivered in the context of the congregation of the wise so important? Because of what you as an individual need. You can't be a lone ranger Christian or a lone ranger sage. You can't be wise without the help of the body of Christ.

#### **A. Needs Discipline**

Even after hearing — indeed, especially after hearing — the gospel, you need discipline. If you ignore discipline, you're despising yourself.

What does this mean? There are two sides to it. The first is that refusing discipline is tantamount to despising yourself, because if you are undisciplined you will die. But the other side of it is the reality that when you're in sin, living an undisciplined lifestyle, you feel guilty about it. You hate yourself for your sin, even while you do nothing to avoid that sin or to repent of it. This is part of the fallen human condition — you and I are still moral creatures made in God's image, and we still desire what's good. But we also are totally depraved, unable to will what is morally good in a morally good way for morally good motives. Sin enters somewhere into every action and every motive. It may be the tiniest of entries; its stain may be nearly microscopic. But it's there. Every human deed would be rejected as "slightly imperfect" by the sharp-eyed inspection of the Lord of Hosts. Well, those who have heard the good news about Jesus know that our sins can be forgiven, and that because Jesus bore the punishment for all of our sins even our imperfect works are now accepted in God's sight. We know that. And so we don't have to live a double life, sinning and secretly despising ourselves for it. Instead, we can live with appropriate self-respect, grateful to God for creating us and psychologically whole.

Without discipline, though, you will and must despise yourself. We all look down on lazy sloths and couch potatoes, even when we ourselves are lazy couch potatoes. The solution to self-loathing, though, is not self-esteem but rather the words of gospel life. These words, as they

proclaimed in the church, come and correct your self-loathing by teaching you the discipline of the fear of the LORD.

### **B. Needs Correction**

To correct something is not merely to point out that it is wrong, but to set it right. If I perform a course correction, I don't just say "This boat is going the wrong direction." I actually take the wheel and set it going in the right direction. That's a necessity, brothers and sisters, for all of us. We need to heed correction. We need to listen when God's word says "Stop doing that and start doing this. Stop stealing and start working and sharing. Stop lusting and start giving your wife a good time in the bedroom. Stop yelling in anger and start thanking God for His faithfulness in the midst of even the most distressing situations."

We need correction. We need to be set right. And the good news proclaimed in the congregation of the righteous and spoken one-on-one does just that.

When you are disciplined and corrected, you gain understanding. The person who just believes that his way is the right way and never stops to consider it more deeply doesn't ever advance in understanding. He sticks to his default ideas and that's that. But if you let yourself be disciplined, if you listen to correction, then you will understand better — much better.

So the gospel is good news, but it comes with moral demands. It comes with correction and discipline. If you don't live a disciplined lifestyle open to correction, then you have not truly understood or believed the good news about Jesus.

### **C. Needs the Fear of the LORD, v. 33**

Finally, the gospel-shaped individual needs the fear of the Lord. Yes, we need discipline. What is the discipline of wisdom, though? It is the fear of Yahweh. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, Proverbs assures us. It is the beginning of knowledge. And it is ultimately the content of wisdom too. Wisdom is a discipline; we saw that already in the book's opening. What discipline is it? It is the discipline of fearing the LORD.

How does the gospel relate to the fear of God? The gospel is the good news about what Jesus did. The proper response to the good news is faith — that is, believing that this news is true. But the proper activity of faith is to produce love and fear. After all, if you believe that God really is who He said He is, you can't help but love Him — and you can't help but fear Him.

Thus, the discipline of wisdom is to fear the LORD. If you are fearing God in a particular moment, then you are well on your way to acting wisely. You cannot do anything ultimately foolish in the fear of God. Yes, you can be mistaken about what God wants and so on. But if you are fearing Him, then your orientation is basically right. And if you fear Him, you will learn about Him. You will learn the good news, and you will go dwell among the wise, who will help you pursue the right path.

So I urge you to fear the LORD and to pay attention to discipline and correction. Don't blow those things off!

#### **IV. The Future, v. 33b**

If you are the wise son who accepts and believes the gospel, you will submit to correction and discipline. Our passage has already made that clear. Submitting to that correction and discipline is going to require humility. And any position of honor is going to require humility up front. Before anyone will look up to you, before anyone will think well of you, you have to show that you have the humility to endure discipline and correction. Notice that it doesn't say "Before pride is humility." You will never prove yourself enough that you will get a license to be proud. The gospel destroys pride, every time. But though it destroys pride and teaches humility, it doesn't destroy honor. Far from it. If you humbly listen to the life-giving words of the gospel, which so often come as words of rebuke and correction, you will be honored. Maybe you're already experiencing that honor; maybe you're still only experiencing the humiliation of correction and discipline. But brothers and sisters, make no mistake: the gospel ends in honor — honor for Christ, and honor for those united to Him by faith.

So fear God. Listen to the good news. Make yourself at home in the church. And someday, I and everyone you know will honor you because you look so much like Jesus. Amen.