

GOD'S PLEASANT WAYS

Proverbs 3:11-18

Intro: Proverbs 3:11, 12 is obviously a very important passage of Scripture because it not only appears in the OT, but it is quoted in the NT. Cf. Heb. 12:5, 6.

So, while there are differences in the ways of the Lord in the OT, as compared with the NT, this is a truth that is timeless in its application. God chastened His people in OT times; He still does the same in NT times.

But, as Bridges has remarked, it is not the chastening of the teacher in school, much less is it that of the jailor toward the prisoner, but this is the discipline of the loving father for his child.

It may come in different forms.

Sometimes it comes in the form of persecution for the Gospel's sake. This is what the Lord told His disciples in Matthew 10. It can result in humiliation, physical suffering, and often in the past it has led to death. This was especially true in the case of our Lord, but there have been countless numbers who have laid down their lives for the Gospel.

Sometimes it takes the form of illness. In some cases the Lord delivers from death; in other cases it results in death--often after a prolonged illness, or perhaps a short most severe time of suffering.

In other instances the suffering can come about through estrangement of family and friends. Sometimes a family suffers a great deal because of the sufferings of a particular member of a family.

But as the people of God, whatever form it may take, we can be sure that it is "of the Lord." He is the One Who does the chastening and the correcting.

I mention this tonight because I feel that this is an opportune time to speak of things which will benefit all of us. We as a family, and Lucille in particular, have been through a time of testing because of the prolonged illness of her Mother, which ended in death for her this last Thursday night. The sufferings connected with that have taken many forms. We do not know what Mother's comprehension has been during that time because she has not been able to communicate with us. But things like this affect everyone concerned. I am sure that it has affected some of you who have known what a trial it has been.

— I do not mention it because our sufferings have been any more difficult than yours. What I do know is that we all have our trials, and perhaps we can help each other to deal with these trials as they come along. All of us who know the Lord Jesus are children who have the same heavenly Father. And it is a great comfort to know that our trials are under His control and that they serve His purposes for us.

We were with the deSmets for a little while this week, and Al said to us as we were talking about Lucille's mother that all of this has a purpose for someone. I said that it must be for us, i.e., Lucille and me, because we did not know how much Lucille's mother knew about what was going on. And Al's response was that, when I said it was for us, I was probably right.

It is doubtful if we can know all of the reasons, but, as we need to do whenever we are looking for answers and help, let us turn to the Scriptures--and for now let it be this passage in Proverbs 3.

The first thing that we learn it, as I have pointed out, this is . . .

I. THE LORD'S CHASTENING.

— Sometimes chastening means punishment, but that is not the main idea in this word. Chastening means teaching. It means that we have other things that we need to learn, things which the Lord wants to teach us. And all of this is with a view to changing us, reforming us, improving us. The object of chastening is to see us progress in the things of the Lord. Chastening is one way the Lord teaches us to fear Him, which mean, not to dread what He will do, but to love Him, to put Him first in our lives, and to realize the importance of obeying Him in every circumstance of our lives.

The Lord chastens us, not because He hates us. He loves us--far more than we can comprehend. He delights in us. He approves of us. He takes pleasure in us. We are already acceptable to Him.

— And so we are not to despise what he does. This means we are not to reject it as something to be despised and worthless. We are not to reject it, but to accept it from Him. At the same time we are not to be weary with it--we are not to be disgusted by it, but we are to accept it and to submit to it.

These truths are all in those first two verses of our text: Prov. 3:11, 12.

But that is not all that we have here. We also see that we need to seek for something. Solomon described it as . . .

II. THE SEARCH FOR WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING.

The book of Proverbs has much to say about wisdom. And the book contains much wisdom. But I want you to see tonight that there is something more here than just simply the gathering of a lot of facts together, even though we are surely talking about the wisdom of God. We do that, to be sure, but there is deeper truth here.

In my text for the morning service we read in 1 Cor. 1:24b that "Christ" is "the power of God and the wisdom of God." Many who have studied the book of Proverbs have come to the conclusion that to seek after wisdom and understanding is to seek after CHRIST!

Therefore, when we are under the chastening hand of the Father we learn that we cannot do without Christ--and so we begin to seek Him more earnestly than ever before. Paul told the Colossian church (2:3) that in Christ are hidden "all of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Those treasures are not to be discovered by a casual reading of the Word, but by a diligent search. Sometimes the search may be long, but the promise we trust in is recorded for us in Prov. 8:17,

I love them that love me;

and those that seek me early shall find me.

And, if you will notice the context of that verse in Proverbs 8, you will see that wisdom is again the subject.

Under the chastening of the Lord we learn how inadequate we are, and how much we need the Lord. So our Bible reading becomes a search for Christ, and by patient searching we find Him, and drink deeply of the riches of wisdom which are to be found only in Him.

How and where do we seek Him? We seek Him by prayer, and we seek Him in the Word.

But not notice . . .

III. THE REWARDS (Prov. 3:13-18).

First of all, there is . . .

A. Happiness, joy (vv. 13, 18).

The "tree of life" shows an eternal supply of joy.

B. Heavenly riches (vv. 14, 15).

Money cannot buy what we have in Christ. And we would not give up the riches that we find in Christ for the greatest fortune in the world.

C. Length of days, riches, and honor (v. 16).

Obviously God deals with us in different ways, but there is no question but that temporal blessings often follow for those who seek the Lord. And note that wisdom is pictured here as handing out blessings with both hands!

D. Pleasantness and peace (v. 17).

This verse has come to me in a special way since Mother's death.

This trial is over. This episode in our lives is closed. Lucille especially has taken the brunt of it more than anyone in our family, or in her family. She has had to do what so many of you have had to do with your loved ones--live with the trials twenty-four hours of every day. It has been in her thoughts constantly, as it has been in many of yours.

But when it is all over, how are we to look at it? What will we say? We may not feel this the first day, or the first week, or even the first month, but eventually we will say,

Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
and all her paths are peace.

We all know the calmness of peace--peace in the midst of the trial, and peace afterwards. The load of that burden has been lifted. Others will come, but the lessons learned in one trial help us with the next.

But what about "pleasantness"? I felt that the Lord underlined that word for me, and I haven't even shared the meaning of this word with Lucille until this very moment.

"Pleasantness" means that this trial, which has been so hard (whatever it might be in your case--perhaps you still are in the midst of it)--this trial will be seen through Christ, the wisdom of God, to be a beloved friend. It like a thing sweet to our taste. This is what David experienced when after his deliverance he wrote these words,

O taste and see that the Lord is good:
blessed is the man that trutheth in him
(Psa. 34:8).

"Pleasantness" is what Paul expressed in Romans 8:28.

That which seemed to be so hard, so long, even at times cruel, was a dear friend in God's hand, bringing us to taste of the joys that can only be found in the Lord.

Concl: The Lord measures out our trials. He never forsakes us while we are in them--or afterwards. And we learn from them how wonderful, how loving, how kind, He is, and the rewards for us, now and eternally, are a treasure which is priceless in value.

Therefore, let us submit to Him, and trust Him, even when it seems that there is no purpose in doing so. The end will show, as David said, "Blessed is the man that trusteth in him."