

TALKING POINTS 8

Monday (Proverbs 25:12)

G is for Gold: *A wise person's warning ... is like a gold earring or jewelry made of fine gold.*

Perhaps your Mum or your Gran has a pair of gold earrings? Perhaps one of them has a gold chain or bracelet or even a gold ring? Would they let you borrow this item so you could pretend you had a gold mine? I doubt it! Even though we live in South Africa where we have gold mines, gold is too expensive to be used for a toy.

When the Israelites left Egypt after being slaves there, God organised that they were to ask the Egyptians for gifts. The Egyptians gave them a great deal of gold jewellery (Exod 12:35-36). Later, when they were building the tent of worship as they travelled through the wilderness, the people brought these gold items as offerings to God (Exod 35:21-22). The gold was melted down and used to beautify the furnishings of God's house.

The wise writer knew that when people thought of 'gold', they would think of the beautiful things they had seen in the temple. Perhaps they would also remember some beautiful piece of jewellery that they had seen one of Solomon's wives wearing.

But the writer wanted them to realise that wise advice was just as precious as gold. It was so precious, in fact, that another wise man put it this way: It is much better to get wisdom than gold (Proverbs 16:16).

Do you agree?

Tuesday (Proverbs 24:13-14)

H is for Honey: *Eat honey, my child. It is good. ... I want you to know that wisdom is sweet to you. If you find it there is hope for you tomorrow.*

Honey and wisdom are sweet? This sounds like a very strange comparison.

When, many years later, the Persians discovered that certain people groups grew sugar cane, their king is said to have described sugar cane as “the reed which gives honey without bees”. Up till then honey was the only sweetener people had discovered.

But honey was not just a sweetener. In Bible times there were no pharmacy medicines so people used natural things to heal them. One of the ‘medicines’ was honey! That sounds a lot better than some of our medications, doesn’t it?

So when the people thought of ‘honey’, they thought both of something sweet and of something which would keep them healthy.

Now can you see why the wise writer suggests that wisdom is like honey?

The people who first heard this proverb knew that King David had described God’s ways as “sweeter than honey that is taken from the honeycomb” (Ps 19:10). Perhaps they also remembered how long ago God had provided honey-tasting bread for his people. After their ancestors had left Egypt and when they were wandering in the wilderness, they forgot that life in Egypt had been hard and longed for the good things they had enjoyed there. To satisfy them, God had made it rain ‘manna’ each night. This was a kind of bread which tasted like wafers made with honey (Exod 16:31).

God had looked after them then and, if they trusted God, he would continue to provide good things for them. Not just honey, but wisdom so they could make good decisions.

(Do you like riddles? There is a riddle about honey in Judges ch 14.)

Wednesday (Proverbs 18:11)

I is for imagination: *The wealth of rich people is like a city that makes them feel safe. They think of [imagine] it as a city with walls that can't be climbed.*

Long ago people who lived in cities with strong, unclimbable walls thought that they could relax because no enemy could ever get at them. They were wrong, of course. There are lots of stories in the Bible and in history books which tell us how cities which seemed incredibly safe were destroyed by their enemies. Maybe you know the story of Troy where we are told that, when the enemies couldn't break down the walls, they got inside by hiding inside a huge wooden statue of a horse. Maybe you know the story of the strong city of Jericho where the walls fell down after God's people marched round and round the city for a week (Joshua 6:1-5). No city has ever been completely attack-proof.

However, the writer of today's verse isn't really talking about being attacked in a city. He wants us to think about the problems of having lots of money.

Why? Because people who are rich imagine that they are totally safe. They think that they can be what they like, do what they like, go where they like. They believe that their money will always be there for them and, if they have a problem, they can just throw money at the problem and it will disappear. Money can make people "feel safe", just as the people of long ago felt safe in a city with strong, unclimbable walls.

But money can't be trusted. Things like earthquakes, wars, or even viruses, can make people poor very quickly.

An even sadder truth is that money can cause people to forget to trust God. Often people with money feel that they can sort out their own problems, and they don't ask God for help.

Jesus was thinking of this when he said, "It is hard for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. But it is even harder for the rich to enter God's kingdom (Matt 19:23-24). This does not mean that, because camels can't be threaded through a needle, rich people can't follow God's ways. Jesus used exaggeration to make people hear a very important message: Don't trust wealth more than God.

Thursday (Proverbs 26:18-19)

J is for just joking: *Suppose a crazy person shoots flaming arrows that can kill. A man who lies to his neighbour and then says, "I was only joking" is just like that person.*

We have all heard those words, "I was just joking!" (Maybe we have even said them?) If we think about when these words are used, we will realise they are usually said when something went wrong with the joke – when someone got hurt or began to cry or complain!

Probably what happened wasn't even really a joke. The 'joker' wasn't joking! The action – perhaps pushing, shoving or tripping – was meant to topple the person or the words that were said were meant to hurt.

This means there are two warnings in these verses:

First we should not be like this "crazy person". God gave us a sense of humour and wants us to enjoy fun and laughter so joking is fine. But we have to be careful that we are not mean. Meanness, just like the "flaming arrows", can cause a lot of harm.

The second warning is that we must face up to what we did and not make silly excuses like, "I was only joking." Excuses like this just don't work. Nobody believes us anyway. When we do wrong things, we need to ask God to forgive us and to help us to apologise.

Friday (Proverbs 30:14)

K is for Knives: Some people have teeth like swords. The teeth in their jaws are as sharp as knives. They are ready to eat up the poor people of the earth.

Covid 19 has caused a great deal of sadness: loved family members have been very ill and some have died; people have been unable to celebrate important days (like birthdays) together; many have lost their jobs and others have lost their businesses and their money.

But there have been some good things during these covid 19 days. One of these is the huge effort by lots of people to look after those who are poor and who have no money and no jobs. Each Wednesday, for example, our church members take soup which they have made to the church so that it can provide a meal for the poorest of the poor. Last week the church collected 200 litres of soup! And there are lots of people showing that kind of caring.

The people that the wise man is describing in today's verse are not like that. These people are mean and greedy. Instead of helping the poor, they want to grab as much as they can for themselves. Perhaps we can picture them as sabre tooth tigers or as sharks with long teeth ready to tear up their victims! Such people are not obeying God even though there are lots of verses in the Bible telling them how they should be acting.

Way back in the time of Moses, God had already told people not to be hard-hearted or "tight-fisted". God expected his people to give generously to the poor and needy (Deut 15:7-11). If you read those verses you will see that God did not even want people to think mean thoughts or to hesitate about giving to the poor.

We can't earn a place in heaven; God gives us that as a gift because Jesus died. But, if we give cheerfully to others, we will become aware that we are loved by God and that he will care for us (1 Cor 9:7-8).

Saturday (Proverbs 28:1)

L is for Lion: *Those who do what is right are as bold as lions.*

Do you remember the lion in *The Wizard of Oz*? He was terribly embarrassed because he was so scared. That's why he travelled to ask the wizard to make him brave. Well, that makes a good story, but no-one needs to travel to become brave!

Perhaps you can remember a time when you also felt scared. I am thinking of times when we felt scared because we had done something which we didn't want anyone to find out about. Perhaps we had broken something? Perhaps we had scratched Dad's car or something else which was precious? When we do something we are ashamed of, sometimes we try to keep the matter hidden.

Those who have a guilty conscience like that will usually feel as though they have to sneak away, even though no-one has noticed what they have done. However, today's verse reminds us that, if those who do what is right, will have a clear conscience and won't have to be embarrassed or shy. They can be as bold or brave as a lion.

Sometimes, though, it isn't easy to decide what is right and what is wrong! That is why, just before he went back to heaven, Jesus promised that those who love him will receive the Spirit of truth who will guide them into all truth (John 16:13). One of the ways the Holy Spirit acts is through our conscience.

The more we get to know God, the more our conscience will be polished up and switched on. It will become a **lamp** that can shine into our lives and guide us so that we will know what God wants of us (Prov 20:27).