

The Logic of Grace in the School of Wisdom

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Preacher: Daniel Bair

[0:00] Well, the year was 1881.

The location was a remote canyon in Sierra County, New Mexico.! The man was a guy named John Leavitt.

He was a blacksmith by trade, but he was trying his hand at prospecting. So he had a goal to mine for something, something exciting.

And he comes to this place that's already been passed over by all these other prospectors. He gets his team out there. They're chipping away at limestone, trying to find some treasure.

Well, after much trying and much failing, one day they break through this wall in the side of this canyon.

[1:03] And they're all excited. There's this hole in the wall. They make it big enough to crawl through. They light their little lanterns and they go inside. And they get in and they stand up and they hold up their lanterns.

And their excitement transforms to awe. They'd been maybe hoping to find some silver, like a stream of silver running through it or gold or something.

Or probably expecting to find walls of rock and nothing. But what they found was an underground silver walls, silver ceiling, silver floor.

This was such a beautiful find that it got named the bridal chamber. You can look it up. It still exists today. You can go visit it. There's no silver left. So your chance of getting anything out of it are nil.

But this find was the greatest, the richest silver mine find in North America. Part of the treasure was this silver was pristine.

[2:06] It was perfect. It was refined already. It didn't have to be smelt to make it pure. You could just chip off silver and ship it and it's ready to go.

It was so soft you could carve your initials into it with a stick. What a treasure. What an exciting place that this, leave it in his crew, just happened to find digging into the earth.

Proverbs 2, Solomon's telling us that the knowledge of God is a bridal chamber of silver. It's a treasure greater than all the silver of New Mexico, all the silver and gold of the world.

He wants us to see that the knowledge of God is a priceless treasure. But you won't find it wandering around on the surface.

You'll find it by digging. And so we journey through this chapter 2 of Proverbs. We'll see there's really, I don't know how many points to make it.

[3:07] I have four, but maybe there's five. The first four verses is this if section. And it's an escalating if section. If you notice in these first four verses, you have if three times.

And each part, it builds on the previous one. And then in verses 5 through 8, we have our first then statement. And then in verses 9 through 15, we have a second then statement.

And then 16 through 19 is a so, a reason for it. And again, in verses 20 through 22, we have another so section. So we'll walk through this.

We'll see this. One risk when we come to an if-then in Scripture is we tend to hear that as a contract. Sort of like perhaps your parent will tell you, if you clean your room, then you can have a friend over.

Or a boss will say, if you work hard, then I will pay you what you deserve. Or a teacher, if you turn in all your assignments, then you will pass my class.

[4:11] But that's not what Solomon is telling us here. This isn't something we have to earn. He's saying this is a relationship. There's a path that we must walk in order to find the treasure God has already hidden there for us to find, for us to discover.

So as we begin digging into this chapter, let's begin with a word of prayer. Heavenly Father, as we dig into your word this morning, we pray you would give us ears to hear.

That you would give us a mouth that cries out to you for wisdom, for knowledge. That you would give us the desire to work diligently to find the treasure that you've hidden in your word.

We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Well, this chapter starts with the ear. Look how verse 1 begins. My son, if you receive my words and treasure out my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom.

The first stage of the if is simply reception. Receive this word. This implies a certain hospitality. If you're at home and there's a knock at your door, to be hospitable, you invite this person in and you take their coat, you give them the best seat in the living room, you give them a nice hot cup of coffee, unless they're Jason or Eric, then you give them a cup of tea.

[5:41] That's the hospitality of greeting a guest. The hospitality of inviting the word of God in is when God speaks, you don't open the window a crack.

You open wide the door and invite the word in. And Solomon deepens this idea. He says, treasure up my commandments within you.

This word treasure up, it means to hide something valuable in a safe place. I mean, I think about pirates.

If a pirate has a treasure chest, he doesn't leave it on the beach. He doesn't put it up on a hill where all the passerbys will see and come take it. No, he buries it and creates a map so he doesn't forget where it is.

This is what Solomon's saying. Take God's word and bury it deep in your heart because we're leaky. We leak. We forget. We hear a sermon on Sunday and by Tuesday lunch, we've forgotten the point.

[6:46] I've preached a sermon and forget a point by Tuesday lunch. Our brains are leaky, so we have to treasure it up. We have to treasure up the word. We have to memorize it. We have to repeat it. We have to keep it safe so that when crisis comes, the word is there waiting for us.

Clement of Alexandria said that these opening verses are like soil receiving seed. Does the soil work to make the seed grow?

No, the soil rests, but it must receive the seed deep into itself. If the seed sits on top, what happens? Well, we know that the birds will come snatch it away. So the first if is this reception.

Receive. Be soft soil that allows the word to come deep into you. Hear it. Listen. But listening isn't enough. If we stop at verse 2, we think, okay, I've got the Bible in my head.

I'm good. I can figure it out now. And we begin to rely on our own intelligence. So Solomon shatters self-reliance in verse 3. Yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding.

[7:56] You hear the language intensifying. Yes, if. Indeed, if you do this. He turns up the volume going from the quiet of reception to the noise of crying out, speaking.

Why? Because true wisdom is foreign to us. We're not born with it. We're born selfish. We're born short-sighted.

We're born thinking we're the center of the universe. So if we're going to be wise, this wisdom has to be imported from outside. It has to be. We need a supply drop from heaven.

And so it's like this deep prayer, this deep cry of desperation. It's like the blind man on the side of the road calling out, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me.

Recognition of our lack and our inability. It's where our theology becomes practical. We know that we're all dead in our trespasses and sins. A dead man cannot make himself alive.

[8:58] A dead man cannot conjure up wisdom. We need it imparted to us. And so we cry out to God to give it to us. If in your study of Scripture you haven't fallen to your knees, you haven't started studying.

And you can have a Ph.D. in theology and miss this. You can know about God without crying out to him. The wise man, though, knows he's empty.

And so he cries out, he yells to God to fill him. The second thing. First to hear, to receive. The second to cry out with a voice, to pray, God, give me wisdom.

And then we sit on the couch and it falls miraculously into our laps. Now, what's the next step in verse 4? For us, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures.

This is the climax of the ifs. From the ear to the mouth to the hands. We're no longer farmers receiving the word. We're not beggars crying out for bread.

[10:06] We're miners. To find silver, you have to dig. You have to drill a shaft into the hard earth. You have to break your back moving rocks. You have to work in the dark with a lamp.

Sweating and straining and digging for days and finding nothing. But you keep digging and digging because you know the treasure's there. Solomon is saying, do this diligent stripping search.

Turn the house upside down to find the lost coin. Because that's the searching it takes to find this wisdom. One thing this does for us is it corrects the error of confusing grace with ease.

Salvation is a free gift. So everything should just come. Understanding and wisdom and knowledge should just come to us. It should just be easy. Proverbs 2 says, no, the fear of the Lord is a gift.

But it's found by those who are willing to dig for it, to work for it. And this mining, I would say there's maybe three practical ways that we go about this.

[11:15] There's these labors of mining that we do. There's first the labor of attention. To find silver, you have to move the worthless dirt and dig for this vein of precious metal.

Dirt is the distraction. Dirt is what's around us that's distracting us from this. The debris of our lives. Our phones.

The noise around us. The entertainment. The hurry. The busyness. That distracts us from mining. To hear God's word.

To hear God speak. This labor of attention. The second is a labor of meditation. Mining isn't raking leaves. As hard as that can be. Mining is breaking rock.

It's hard work. Perhaps you come to a difficult text in Scripture and you have to grab hold of this and refuse to let go until you really understand it. Maybe that means you're boring into it for a week before you really understand what this means and have an application for your life.

[12:16] It's a refusal to be satisfied with a surface level interpretation of Scripture. This labor of meditation. Attention. Meditation.

And finally, a labor of self-excavation. When you mine, when you dig a mine, you're hollowing out the earth. You're changing the landscape. And so when we're truly studying the book, we're not just opening the book.

The book is opening us. When we read Scripture, the Scripture is reading us. And we have this painful work of hacking away at our pride, at our prejudices, and allowing the silver of Christ to be revealed in us as he transforms us into his likeness.

This labor of self-excavation. It's exhausting work, but it's the only way to find the treasure. Okay, so we're on this treasure hunt.

What is this treasure? We're not just digging for good advice on how to manage money or how to make marriage work. Sure, these are good byproducts of this.

[13:20] But in Colossians, the apostle Paul tells us that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ. When we dig in the Old Testament, we're digging for Jesus.

When we dig in the law, we're looking for the holiness of Christ. When we dig in the prophets, we're looking for the promises of the Christ. When we dig into the Proverbs, we're looking for the wisdom of Christ.

The Bible is the field. Christ is the treasure. And he's worth every drop of sweat it takes to find him much more than a treasure trove of silver or gold. Solomon's telling us, if you want the wisdom of Proverbs, you must want it more than leisure.

You must long for it more than entertainment. You must desire it more than you do pleasure. You must pursue it with the intensity of a miner digging for gold.

That's the if section. So we come to the then in verses 5 through 8. If I do all this hard work, if I study, if I pray, if I memorize, if I wrestle with the Scripture, what do I get out of it?

[14:31] If we ask the world this question, if I work hard, what do I get? What's the answer? Well, you get money, you get power, you get fame, a fancy car, a nice big house. I think Solomon would say, why are you satisfied with such small things?

We come to verse 5. We have the then, the payoff. This is what happens when the miner hits the bottom of the mine shaft. He breaks through in verse 5. This is a surprise.

We're digging for answers to our problems. We're digging for advice on how to handle our money or how to deal with a difficult boss. But when we break through the rock, we don't find a principle, we find a person.

Solomon says, the reward for seeking wisdom is the fear of the Lord. Now, we don't want to be afraid, do we? It's not that kind of fear. Fear in the Bible doesn't mean this horror of something.

It's more like if you're standing at the edge of the Grand Canyon, this fear, you're this small thing and this huge, amazing thing is in front of you.

[15:43] You're trembling, not because it's evil, but because it's awesome, because it's magnificent. Perhaps it's the feel you get when you're in your house at night in bed and the thunderstorm is shaking your house.

You realize, I'm small, I'm not in charge. Solomon says, if you study the Bible deeply, you will see God is huge and you are small. God is holy and you are not.

And if you look at the second half of the verse, you will find the knowledge of God. This is the greatest treasure of the universe. John Calvin said that true wisdom is always two parts, knowing God and knowing ourselves.

Know thyself. That's been a mantra of our world forever. From the walls of the Oracle of Delphi to the Oracle in the Matrix advising Neil, know thyself.

But Solomon says, it's a dead end. You can't know yourself if you don't know who God is. And the miner's digging through the dirt looking for this gold, but when the dust clears, he finds not gold, but the king himself.

[17:00] Okay? The if, the then. If I do the digging, then I get the reward of finding. So, so this might cause us to think, well, well, then I earned it. My, my hard work paid off.

This sounds transactional. I gave God my sweat and he paid me with wisdom. And so I, I should brag about my wisdom. I have more wisdom than you because I worked harder. Well, verse six destroys that, that pride.

For the Lord gives wisdom. From his mouth come knowledge and understanding. The leading, the digging leads to finding, not because we're clever, not because we forced God's hand, but because he gives.

We dig, we study, we pray, but, but we don't manufacture wisdom. We can't create it in a factory. We, we get it from the mouth of God.

It's revelation. It's God speaking. We, we dig the well, but he fills it with water. We open our Bibles, but God opens our eyes. And so there should be no such thing as an arrogant scholar.

[18:08] Because the more you know about the Bible, the more you know about God, the more you realize that every ounce of truth you possess is a charity gift from him. God gives wisdom.

In verse seven, that, that wisdom moves from the classroom to the battlefield, from, from our heads to our hearts. Verse seven, he stores up sound wisdom for the upright.

He's a shield to those who walk in integrity. Solomon uses this military word, the shield. Why? Well, because as we're about to see in the rest of the chapter, the arrows are flying.

There are lies. There are temptations. There are spiritual enemies trying to take you down. And if you walk in integrity, if, if you're a miner digging for truth, God, God himself straps a shield to your arm.

Actually, it says he is the shield. When the lies of the world come at you, they hit him instead of you. And this protection isn't momentary.

[19:12] It's for the whole journey. In verse eight, it says he, he's guarding the paths of the justice and watching over the ways of his saints. This is one of the most comforting doctrines of scripture, that the perseverance of the saints.

It's, it's not my perseverance. It's, it's not that I did anything to preserve myself. It's that he's watching over us. He's guarding our ways. He ensures those who truly seek him, those who have received the seed, who have dug for silver, make it to the end.

We're believers not because we're clever. We're believers because the God of the universe decided to guard our path. He, he chose us and decided to be our shield.

We dig, but he provides the silver. We walk, but he provides the shield. And, and then this next section, we're going to see we need this shield because starting in verse nine, we have, we have this, this then that the second then that moves into the, the scary stuff.

Verse nine, then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity and every good path. Okay, we're going to get to the scary stuff in a minute. This isn't quite scary yet. The verse, the then of verse five pointed up to God.

[20 : 25] The then of verse nine points us out to righteousness and justice. But the order here matters. We can't have the, the fruit of verse nine without the root of verse five, which is what our world wants.

We live in a world that's, that's so fascinated with justice and equity. We hear those terms every day, but this world has rejected the fear of the Lord.

Proverbs two tells us you can't have one without the other. You cannot know what's right for people until you know who God is. If you don't know the designer, you cannot understand the design.

If you know God, you will know justice. If, if you say there is no God, you will have no justice. For verse 10, wisdom will come to your heart and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.

The, the, the shield is, it moves from your head to your heart. I like this phrase, it becomes pleasant to your soul. Think about your favorite food. Maybe it's a, maybe it's a juicy, medium rare steak or, or a big bowl of creamy chocolate ice cream.

[21 : 36] Or, or maybe it's a, a plump peach. When, when you bite into that, you don't have to force yourself to enjoy that. It just, it just comes naturally.

You, you naturally enjoy it. Now, now think about eating a big spoonful of dirt. It doesn't have the same reaction. You, you reject it naturally.

We don't need a rule book to tell us dirt is gross. We know that. We know it's wrong. Our bodies know, our taste buds know it's wrong. Solomon's saying when you dig for wisdom, God changes your spiritual taste buds.

You start to love righteousness. It tastes sweet to you. And you start to hate sin. It tastes like dirt.

And once your tastes have changed, and once you actually love the good, then, and only then are you safe. Because this, this internal change creates a guardian. Verse 11 tells us this, discretion will watch over you.

[22 : 43] Understanding will guard you. It's like a spiritual immune system. When a, when a, when a virus enters the body, our, our white blood cells attack it. And this is what verse 11 is telling us.

When, when a lie comes at you and temptation tries to seduce you, you don't have to run to a library to look up what to do. Your heart, which has been changed by God, says, no, that, that, that tastes like death.

And we need this immune system because we're not walking through a playground. We're walking through a battlefield. Some have said that, that Proverbs is a contest of voices.

We have the voice of this father speaking, but we have these other voices calling out to, to us. And here we have, we have two voices screaming for our attention. This first voice that's, that comes out of the shadows in verse 12 is, is this voice.

The text is going to speak positively of, of how wisdom guards us from this. But this voice is the one that, that calls you to the way of evil. These are men of perverted speech.

[23 : 48] The first enemy is the man of crooked speech. In chapter one that we looked at last week, the, the enemy was a violent gang. In chapter two, he's an intellectual.

He doesn't use a gun, he uses wit. This, this Hebrew word for perverted means twisted or, or topsy-turvy, something that has been turned upside down.

It's the danger of false ideology. And these, these men, they, they look normal and friendly, but, but if you listen to their twisted speech, you realize where they come from.

Look at verse 13. These are the ones who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness. They've left the path of light. They've deconstructed the truth.

They take words and flip their meanings. They, they call good evil and evil good. They call darkness light and light darkness. And we see this everywhere today.

[24 : 49] Things they, things the Bible calls sin, they call identity. Things the Bible calls holy, they call hate. And their arguments sound smooth.

They sound smart. But to the person with the fear of the Lord who hears this, they, they say that sounds twisted. But what's worse is, is this man doing this isn't just confused.

He's malicious. He doesn't just do evil. He loves it. Look at verse 14. These are the ones who rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perverseness of evil.

The dirt tastes good to them. It's, it's actually terrifying. They don't just commit sin. They celebrate it. They hold parades for it.

They find a dark joy in breaking God's moral order and flaunting it. But it's not just a mistake. It's a worship service to another God.

[25 : 52] And because they love darkness, their, their entire life becomes a, a, a confusing maze. Verse 15 gives their final condition. These are, these are men whose paths are crooked, whose, whose ways are devious.

Solomon calls them the men of evil. They're the, they're the counter evangelists who want to disciple you. They want to teach you their worldview. And if you're a simple person, if you haven't dug for the silver of scripture, you will follow them.

You will think, well, they seem smart and they're very popular. They can't be that wrong. But if you have the shield of wisdom, you'll, you'll spot the, the twistedness.

You'll see their path leads nowhere. To you, it will taste like dirt. Wisdom protects your mind from bad ideas. But, but the devil has two hands.

If he can't trick your mind with his arguments, he will try to seduce your heart with pleasure. The text pivots from this twisted man to an even more dangerous figure in verse 16.

[26 : 56] So, you will be delivered. If you have this wisdom, you will be delivered from the forbidden woman. From the adulteress with her smooth words. The second enemy is the forbidden woman.

The first enemy attacks your logic. The second enemy attacks your loves. Now, to be clear, this is, this is absolutely a warning against sexual sin. Solomon is, is warning his son about the adulteress who destroys families.

Her smooth words of seduction have destroyed many an upright man. But, but in the book of Proverbs and in the history of this church, this woman represents that, yes, but also much more.

She, she represents idolatry and apostasy. The culture around us that's trying to seduce the church. Verse 17, she's the one who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God.

This is the language of covenant breaking. She was an insider. She was part of the community. She knew the truth, but she forgot the covenant. She drifted away.

[28 : 02] She represents the temptation to mix our faith with the world. She says, you can have God, but you can have this too. You don't, you don't have to be so strict. You don't have to be so holy.

Come over here. The water is sweet. It's the, the honey trap. The evil man used arguments. The forbidden woman uses flattery. You're, you're so special.

You deserve this. God's holding out on you. She looks beautiful. Her words are smooth. Her house looks like a palace, but the, the wisdom of, of Solomon, the wisdom of Proverbs gives us x-ray vision to see past the paint.

Past that to the foundation. Verse 18, her house sinks down to death and her paths to the departed. The Hebrew word for departed is, is Rephaim.

If you know anything in Hebrew, that's, that means the ghosts, the shades. She, she looks pretty, but it's all makeup. She is death incarnate.

[29 : 06] Solomon pulls back the curtain. You, you think you're walking into a party. You're walking into a graveyard. Adultery and idolatry promise life, but they always deliver death.

Once you go in, you can't get out. Solomon gives us this, this warning in verse 19. None who go to her come back, nor do they regain the paths of life. It's the point of no return.

This is what happens when you play with sin. Eventually your heart gets, heart gets so hard you can't come back. This is why we need the shield.

The shield protects us from both of these. You're not smart enough to outwit the twisted man. You're not strong enough to resist the forbidden woman. You need the wisdom of God, the shield of God to see that Jesus is, is truer than the man and more beautiful than the woman.

And we come to our second. So in, in verse 20, God doesn't deliver you to leave you in a vacuum. He delivers you so that you may walk in a different direction. Verse 20, so that you will walk in the way of the good and keep the paths of the righteous.

[30 : 21] Solomon's telling us that, that wisdom here is a team sport. These nouns are plural. It's, it's the way of the good people, the paths of the righteous ones.

You cannot be wise and isolated. Perhaps you've met a, a professing Christian who says, I don't need the church. I don't need other Christians. It's just me and my Jesus.

I'm all good. Proverbs tells us that's impossible. And you will see other people walking with you. This is the communion of the saints.

When you dig for the knowledge of God, you'll find yourself in the family of God. And you're on this, this group hike now. And what's our destination? Verse 21 tells us, the upright will inhabit the land.

Those with integrity will remain in it. The purpose here, the, the, the, what we get here is the oldest promise in the Bible. The promise of land.

[31 : 20] For the Old Testament, inhabiting the land was, was the ultimate sign of God's blessing. It was, it meant your home. It meant your safe. And as Christians, we read this through the lens of Jesus.

This eschatological pointer to the ultimate reward. Not, not a nice house in the suburbs now, but, but a secure place in the new creation. And this will be given to those who walk uprightly.

The flip side is, is the exile. In verse 22, the wicked will be cut off from the land and the treacherous will be rooted out. There are two paths. There's no middle ground.

You pick one or the other. For the heir, there's the path of inheritance. For the exile, there's, there's this language of rooted out. It's, it's, it's violence. It's a gardener pulling out a weed that doesn't belong.

It's an invasive species. And one day the king's going to clean the garden. Here's the problem. As we close, we, we have to face a hard truth that the logic of this passage is if you dig for wisdom, if you do this, you will find God.

[32 : 26] And you'll be protected from sin and, and you'll inherit the new kingdom, which sounds beautiful. But, but if we're honest, we've failed the if.

Look back at verse one. Have you always treasured his commandments? No, we, we forget them constantly. Look at verse four.

Have you always dug for wisdom like a miner? Sweating in the dark? No, we're, we're often lazy. We prefer Netflix to scripture.

Look at verse 17. Have we ever listened to the forbidden woman? Have we ever loved the world or the things of the world more than God? Yes. By the strict logic of this text, we don't deserve verse 21, the inhabiting of the land.

We deserve verse 22. We deserve to be cut off, to be rooted out. If salvation depends upon our digging, our crying out, our, our walking in the paths, then we're doomed.

[33 : 31] But this is where the gospel breaks in. We look to Jesus Christ. The apostle calls him the power of God and the wisdom of God. Jesus is the only one who perfectly fulfills the if of Proverbs 2.

As he fulfilled this condition, he earned the reward. He deserves to remain in the land forever. But then the great exchange happened.

Jesus Christ, the only one who deserved the land, allowed himself to be cut off, took the judgment, was rooted out by the justice of God, in order that we, the lazy, the foolish, the one that's prone to wander, could be given the inheritance of verse 21.

He was cut off so we could be grafted in. He took the exile so we could be heirs. So think about that. Think about this this week.

We do not dig for silver to earn our salvation. We don't dig because we think we'll gain something from it. We dig because we've been given the field.

[34 : 38] We don't cry out to God to convince him to love us. We cry out because he's already made us his children, and so we cry out, Abba, Father. And we have this shield of verse 7, this shield of Jesus to protect us in this world, to keep us from these dangers of the lies and the world's attempt to pull us in to sin.

So let's go from here. Let's dig into the word, not as slaves fearing the whip, but as sons, as daughters seeking the face of the Father, the greatest treasure who's already given us everything in Christ.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we hear the conditions here. We hear the ifs, and we acknowledge that we've failed.

We're lazy miners content to play in the dirt rather than digging into your word. We've often turned our ears to the twisted speech of the word, the smooth words of folly, rather than crying out for wisdom.

And so we know we deserve to be cut off, but we thank you for Christ, the greater Solomon, who sought you perfectly and was cut off in our place, that we might inherit the land.

[36 : 02] Lord, I pray you would change our taste buds, make the knowledge of you pleasant to our souls, that we may hate the taste of sin and love the taste of righteousness.

We pray in the name of Christ. Amen. Well, friends, in a moment, we'll come to the table to taste and see the Lord is good. But before we do that, let's greet one another in the name of Christ.

Thank you. Thank you.