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Proverbs 25:11-13 "A Willing Voice and an Open Heart"

December 2, 2018

All right. Let's open our Bibles this morning to Proverbs Chapter 25 verse 11.

Proverbs 25, 26, 27, 28, and 29, those chapters are filled with Proverbs that Solomon wrote, but that were collected by Hezekiah, the king's men. The best way to learn any skill, I guess, is to watch and learn from an expert. If you want to be a good potter, I guess you hang out with a potter and watch what they do and ask questions, maybe practice and emulate their example. We read in verse 1 of this chapter, "These are the proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah the king of Judah copied."

Because God gave to Solomon great wisdom, he also knew a lot about government and being a king. There was much that Hezekiah wanted to learn as a godly man. Solomon had learned from his father David. God had given him wisdom like no other. And so King Hezekiah had asked his men to go and to get and to write out for him these

favorites of his that Solomon had spoken. He copied them. He arranged them in order. In fact, these chapters are very orderly. It's not really like the rest of our Proverbs. They cover a lot of subjects, but they are primarily interested in government; kings and rulers and such. In fact, Chapter 25, verse 6 and verse 7 just speak about the king and his subjects. Chapter 28 and half of Chapter 29 talk about the king and his sin. And the rest of the chapter talks about the king and his heirs; those that would follow after him.

But this morning I wanted to zero in on a couple of verses beginning in verse 11 down through verse 13. One little lesson, but really I think a powerful one. It is introduced though verse 9 and 10 with these words: "Debate your case with your neighbor, and don't disclose the secret to another; lest he who hears it expose your shame, and your reputation is ruined." It is introduced by Solomon talking about the right ways, words to say, and the right words not to say, and how you can have a reputation for keeping confidence and helping folks, or you can be exposed as someone who does a lot of talking in what they've heard, and your shame becomes your reputation.

In our verses this morning, verses 11, 12, and 13, the opposite side of the coin is considered. And the subject is pretty clear: There should be a willingness on our part to speak when the Lord shows us things that we need to address, and there should be a willingness on our part to hear from others when we are put in our place. In other words, we have a responsibility both to help each other to do well, but that's going to require faithful speakers and obedient hearers, and from what Solomon says this morning, that's hard to find. In fact, that's a rarity, really clearly so. You don't find it very often. Paul would write to the Ephesians in Chapter 4, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, except what is necessary to edify, so that you might impart grace to the hearers." So a willing voice and open heart is our subject this morning.

The illustration is given in verse 11, the application in verse 12 and 13. But he begins with these words: "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver."

I read a story a while back of a budding painter whose aspirations far exceeded his talent. Poor paintings in different kind of themes, he was sneered at by the

critics. He didn't make any money, and this would-be Rembrandt was about ready to hang it up. He just wasn't cut out for it. The family had a rich friend who took sympathy on this artist, we'll call him, and he bought one of his paintings. It was a horrible thing. But he wanted to be an encouragement to him, and to kind of compensate for his limitations, he framed this ugly painting in a very expensive and ornate gold frame, and he hung it in the back room near the garage of his large house. The artist was ecstatic. "All right. Finally someone is noticing my genius." Eight weeks later, this mansion of this rich man was broken into. A robber came. The alarm went off. He only had a few minutes and he grabbed the painting. Told to the owner, he told the artist, who rejoiced at the fact of his good fortune. "Now I'm being stolen. I'm going to be instantly a success." Until the police report came out, and they realized that the robber had tore out the painting, left it on the floor. Just took the frame.

That's kind of what verse 11 says. The apples of gold are set in a fitting of silver. No doubt this isn't a painting, not in Solomon's day. It would probably have been gold and golden apples that were sculpted and they were set in relief against a silver tray, but the point

is the same. There is great rarity found when you take something extremely valuable like a solid gold apple and you set it into a setting that is far less valuable, that of silver. And how appropriate is that to do that? The gold stands out because it is rarely placed in that position. So that's the premise. This is a rare find. And whenever you read in verse 12 and 13, this is a rare find, something that we don't expect. So Solomon's intended lesson for us, that it is rare to find someone that will speak fitting words at the right time for the benefit of the hearer, and it is rare to find hearers who will actually be rebuked and take it to heart and make a difference or make a change.

I think most of us appreciate a properly-timed verbal response, whether it's complimentary or derogatory; quick wit. I've always thought -- or I thought for years that sarcasm was a gift of the Spirit, because I had that, a powerful gift of sarcasm, until my wife told me it was a gift of the spirit, just not the Holy Spirit. That's what she said. But I like that kind of -- you know, sarcasm to me, I enjoy it very much.

George Bernard Shaw who wrote Pygmalion -- I think it won best picture back in the late '30s or something -- but it

became the play on Broadway "My Fair Lady." He lived in England at a time when Churchill was around, one's the artist and the other one's a statesman. They hated each other. I mean, they hated each other publicly and in newspapers and all. So when "My Fair Lady" opened on what was Broadway, if you will, in London on the west end, George Bernard Shaw sent Churchill a couple of tickets and the little note says, "I'm sending you a couple of tickets; one for you and one for your friend, if you have one." Churchill, not to be outdone, wrote back, "Thank you for the tickets to opening night. I will be coming on the second night, if there is one." Now, that's perfect. That's the kind of stuff I like. Just quick -- I don't care if it's mean. It's fun. I like it.

One of the best at being the one who speaks the right thing at the right time that exemplifies verse 11 is the way Jesus dealt with His enemies. They were forever plotting to capture Him, to trap Him in His own words. In fact, if you go through the gospels on Tuesday and Wednesday of passion week, Jesus spent literally every -- all of those days, two days, in the temple being confronted by His enemies. There are three specific kind of confrontations where they sought to turn the people

against the Lord, to steal His popularity, to discredit Him, or somehow to bring Him in conflict with the Roman rulers that maybe would lead to His death. So they plotted and different groups came and they made different plots. The first ones -- and Matthew records all of them, but the first ones are in Matthew 21 where they came and questioned Jesus' authority. The second one was a bit even more sinister, because it brought together two people that hated each other: The Pharisees and the Herodians. The Pharisees were nationalistic, they were conservative, they were very religious. The Herodians were servants of Rome. They were liberal, humanist. They didn't believe in any kind of religious anything. And so these were guys that normally would not get along, but they both wanted Jesus out of the way for their own reasons. And so the confrontation is described by Matthew as a plot to come and entangle Jesus in His own talk or in His own speech. And they came to Jesus there in Matthew 22 and they said, "Look, Jesus, or teacher, we know that You tell the truth, that You speak the words of God in truth, that You don't care about anyone, that You don't regard people or what they think. And so we'd like You to tell us what You think should, and is it legal for to us pay taxes to Cesar or not?" They came with flattery, which set the trap.

Flattery is the opposite of gossip. Gossip is what you will say behind a person's back that you'll never say to their face. Flattery is what you say to their face that you'd never say behind their back.

And so they buttered Jesus up, that's how they started. And yet we are told that Jesus knew their hearts. I think Luke wrote, "He perceived their craftiness." God always does. But they wanted to set a trap in such a way that it would be next to impossible to answer without offending someone. If He said yes, we pay taxes, the common people who loved Him would probably take a step back, because they -- they were being taxed to death. It was horrible the way that they had to live. If He said no, well, then those Herodians would run to Cesar and their relationship with him, they would yell insurrection, and that's punishable under Roman law by death. They felt like they had Him over a barrel.

Jesus' answer began with a popular phrase that we sometimes hear today: Show me the money. It's a biblical phrase, Tom Cruise. If he has a Bible, he should read it. But He said to the people, "Whose picture is on the money?" And they said, "Well, that's

Cesar." And Jesus said, "Then you should give to Cesar what belongs to him. But make sure that you give to God what things belong to God." And they were so smart in -- they were such smart words that you read in Matthew that the people marveled. It blew their mind, and they just walked away kind of shaking their heads. It was just perfectly answered. It was as smart as could possibly be. And He asked them the question, "Whose inscription is on you? Pay your taxes to Cesar, but give your life to God." It sets the tone, that discussion, for everything else that you read in the Bible between your reaction -- or interaction as a Christian with secular government; right? Jesus paid His taxes, Jesus obeyed the laws, and yet, when it comes to rendering, He said to us, "You should pay what you owe the Lord." The word "render" means to be in debt or to owe. Give God what you owe Him. You owe Him your life. Beautiful answer. Left the people wondering, and they walked off.

Well, here's Solomon, has that proverb ring true. There is a perfect picture when a wise rebuke is heard by an obedient ear. Notice verse 12, it says, "Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold, very wealthy or valuable, so is a wise rebuker to an obedient heart." But verse 7 says that is hard to find, right? That is

hard to find.

When Paul greeted Peter in Galatia there in the book of Galatians, we are reading about it, Peter was a man who had come to know the grace of God himself. He ate with the Gentiles, he was happy in freedom that God gave him from the law in that regard, and yet when the less than free folks in grace from James' church in Jerusalem came there to the church, Peter freaked out. It scared him. He went to sit with the Jews and began to eat only the kosher foods. And it stumbled a lot of people who respected Peter. He had been around a long time. Even Barnabas, who was an old time believer, already was caught up in it. And Paul just figured because it's public, I should say something publicly, and he calls Peter out on the carpet in front of everyone else, tells him that he played the hypocrite in everyone's eyes, that you stumbled a lot of people. And he said to him, "Look, if you're a Jew and yet you live in the manner of gentiles and not like a Jew, why would you compel a gentile to be one?" In other words, where is that grace, Peter, that you -- that you understood? Now, Peter, being a guy who'd been around a lot longer than Paul, might have said, "Who do you think you are? Do you know who I am? I preached on Pentecost. The first service, I

did it. Shut up, man. You know nothing." Peter didn't do that. Peter received the correction. In fact, if you read II Peter Chapter 3, I think it is, Peter begins to talk about those who twist the scriptures and won't believe in it. He said, "Our friend Paul, our beloved brother Paul, God's given him such wisdom to be able to discern and to speak the scriptures. Listen to what he has to say." And rather than rejecting that wisdom, he embraced it. He was a living epitome of verse 12.

There was great value to be found in someone who will bring a wise rebuke, as long as it falls upon an obedient ear. I mean, they couldn't have been more different, Paul and Peter. Peter was a simple fisherman; Paul was a polished scholar. Peter came from Galilee, a place that everyone would think was the backwoods. Nobody is talked about from Galilee as being a scholar. Paul was a Roman citizen. He was Hellenistic Jew. He was as comfortable in the Roman senate as he was in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Peter was an impulsive guy; Paul was an impressive guy. Peter was scared off by James' disciples; nobody scared Paul. He would give his life to serve the Lord. And yet Peter, when it came down to it, respected the word that he received from Paul. He was wrong. Paul was a wise reproof; Peter was an obedient

ear. I think that Solomon would have been proud of them both.

So verse 11 says having a wise rebuker and an obedient hearer is something that happens far too infrequently. It needs to happen more often, but it doesn't. If you read in Revelation Chapter 2 and 3 the short letters that Jesus wrote to the various churches in Galatia at the time, he constantly uses the words, "He that has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the church." It was always this issue of a word that was good needing to be heard by a heart that needed to follow. When that man tried to applaud Mary's mothering of Jesus, or burying of Jesus -- or I think it was a lady -- she cried out there in Luke 11, "Blessed are the breasts that nursed you." And Jesus yelled back, "No, no, no. Rather this: Blessed are those that hear the Word of God and keep it."

So there's something to be said for both sides of this equation. There are times when we just need to speak up because we see things in peoples' lives that are definitely problematic, and so we are obligated to speak because we care about them, want them to do well, even though we risk friendship and censure and anger. That's

usually what you get when you try to correct anything. And then on the other side, if that happens to us, we should listen, because we're blind in spots and things -- you really want to know about yourself, ask your family. They're usually the most honest. There's times that we just need to hear from God that -- and we hear it through the lives of others who love us and want to address things with us. But notice, it is so rare. It's like apples of gold in settings of silver. It's a rare find, a faithful rebuker and an obedient hearer. We need both.

In verse 13 he continues that thought, and he says, "Like a cold snow in the midst of the harvest time," or in auld autumn, if you will, "is a faithful messenger to those who send -- to those who send him to the Lord, and he refreshes the soul of his masters, those he's serving." There's a refreshing effect, like a cold snow on a hot day, unexpected, to have someone faithfully speak the words God sent him to speak. Not only is he faithful to the Lord, but he's faithful to the person he's serving, or the person he's helping, or the one he's looking to correct.

There are very few, relatively, prophets in the Old Testament by name. Oh, there's -- you have some books

written by the prophets. You'll find several in the historical works as well. But by and large, according to the years and the population, there weren't all that many of them. And most of them spoke very faithfully God's Word to the people that they were sent to speak. It caused them great consternation. They suffered as a result. There was oftentimes-extreme danger. And yet most of them took God's Word even to the cost of their own life, and they faithfully represented God to the people, and to the people who would listen they brought refreshment and joy and direction to their lives.

Moses remained faithful to the Lord despite the cost, to the challenges that he received from Pharaoh, the anger that he suffered at the hands of the children of Israel. Samuel spoke faithfully God's Word. And he did so, though the responses were few. And if you read the story of Samson, his influence seemed negligible. Even worse than that, look at a guy named Jeremiah. He spends 50 years preaching to a nation bound and determined to go into captivity. He is known as the hated and persecuted prophet, because every time he spoke up, nobody listened. They just lashed out at him. His final job after 50 years was to sit on a rock outside of town and write what he saw as he watched his people, the ones he loved, the

ones he'd been preaching to, carried away into the stockade and dragged away to Babylon. That was the result of his ministry. But he was faithful, and he brought God's Word to bear.

John the Baptist stood for Jesus when everyone else disbelieved in Him, spoke to Herod about his illicit way of life. Cost him his life, but he stood the test. Solomon writes here that a faithful messenger can be likened to a cold day in a heat wave. Brings refreshment to the harvester, brings refreshment to those who hears him. Excellent.

So we need both; right? We need both. You and I should be willing to speak up when the Lord shows us things that we may not have otherwise known. It is impossible to do that generally. There are people in the church -- I hope there's none left here -- who believe that their ministry is the ministry of rebuke. They come to church to point out your faults. "Yeah, dude, don't do that." That's just all they can do. And I'm always thankful when they decide to go somewhere else. Blessed subtraction.

However, we have a responsibility amongst those that we live with and know, to be willing to take care of those and their walks with God and their -- you know, there are

people that you have influence with, and they respect you and they know you, and you should say something when things aren't going well. It doesn't always bring you applause. In fact, more often than not, it brings resistance. "Hey, bro. I've been watching you for a long time. We love you. And here's what I'm seeing." And they're -- "Man, who do you think you are? I've been here at this church twice as long as you. I'll tell you what I'm doing is right. You just get out of my face." That's usually what we get, so that's not very helpful. Any help you get in the body of Christ is now negated by your pride, which is why verse 11 says it's such a rare find. Such a rare find that we will be able to speak up.

I know plenty of folks that know the Lord whose friends embrace lives that are in defiance of God and His Word, but they will have fellowship with them. They'll never raise an objection. They won't give them a warning. They call that love and tolerance. That's a shame. It's better if the house is on fire that you just go, "Hey, the house is on fire," than you sit on the couch and go, "It's warm in here." Not quite the same thing. That we are afraid to stand for the righteousness of God. We are afraid to speak up. We would rather have many friends than to be faithful to the Lord, which is why it's such a

rare find.

Faithful is a wise rebuker. He brings refreshment. He blesses the Lord. He blesses those who hear him. And the other side is that obedient ear. We should all have teachable hearts. It's not so easy to take criticism. We're defensive from the word go. But look, we don't see everything clearly. Proverbs 15, there's a verse there that says, "A fool will despise his father's instruction, but he who receives correction is wise." In fact, in Chapter 17, again the book of Proverbs, "Rebuke is more effective for a wise man than 100 stripes for a fool." If you're wise, you'll listen. Sometimes you just have to listen.

It's horrible to hear someone say, "You're pretty short with people". You'd be better off just -- sometimes you just need to hear it. And if you're in a position of authority, it's even harder, because, you can walk away from it. "Aw, I don't need to hear this. Go talk to somebody who cares." I'd care what you thought, and I'd listen. But we should care, because built into the church life is the benefit of being helped along the road. Blind spots are dealt with. I'm used to encourage you, you're used to encourage me. It's the way the

church should work. But because of sin, it so often doesn't. It's a word, like a fitly spoken word, rare; apples of gold set in silver.

It is rare to actually see it actually working and bringing refreshment to the Lord. So we need a willing voice, we need an open heart. We need to be faithful to speak, not to everyone. That's not your job. But to those that you spend time with, that you know, that you love, you have an obligation to say, "Hey, look, bro, I'd love to see you in church more often. You're kind of slipping away." "Don't judge me." "I'm not judging you, I'm trying to help you." "Well, you got your own problems." "I know."

Rare indeed. Way too rare. We need boldness and humility. And if we have both of those things, then the church becomes a place of great benefit. Then when people say, well, I don't need to go to church to be a Christian, no, you probably don't, but you should probably be in church to stay strong. Because let's face it, we serve a God who's faithful, more faithful than a brother; right? So we need that from one another. That's why we need the accountability, that's why we need the involvement, that's why we should be plugged in.

Unfortunately, because of His wisdom and because of the anointing of God's Spirit, we are left to know that to find that actually working is a valuable and rare commodity. Because when it does, it stands out. God is good. He gets both of us through as we minister one to another. It gets rid of pride. It gets rid of you just keep thinking about yourself. It brings you to the point where risk for another's benefit is worth it to you. It's a place you grow up.

So as the Lord leads, be good to each other. Tell each other what you see when things are not well, and receive when someone seeks to help you. And let the Lord work. It'll be the best way that we can grow as a church and as a people. Because we don't want to get to the end of the road and have left some of you behind. We want to get there as a group; right?