June 22/23, 2019

Be Quiet and Listen

Skillful Living Series

Proverbs 30:1-33

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There's probably lots of words we could use to describe 21st century American culture. One word I would use is arrogance. We just think we know everything, and if we don't know it, we will google it up and we just have everything we need to know. There's widespread agreement that we as a nation are becoming more and more secular. So, stop and think about this. Why are we becoming more and more secular? Answer: because we know it all. We don't need God. God is archaic, kind of passé. We have it all figured out. If we don't, we will figure it out, so we don't really need God. So I would agree—there's no question—we as 21st century Americans have more information at our fingertips then anyone has ever had in the history of the world. But that doesn't mean we're more skillful at living. I would suggest to you we are becoming less and less skillful at life. That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Proverbs, Chapter 30.

The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the oracle.

This is a proverb written by Agur. Now, nobody knows who Agur is, and there's no point trying to figure it out—nobody really knows. In verse 1 he tells us he is writing an **oracle**. An oracle is like a sermon but it's a really intense sermon. Typically, it's the prophets delivering the oracles. So, it's a pretty intense message and he continues:

The man declares to Ithiel, to Ithiel and Ucal: (*NASB, Proverbs 30:1)

Now those could be two children; some people take that position, but if you read through this proverb, he's very creative in how he takes these words and kind of personifies them as children. The actual two Hebrew words, translated into those two names, one means, "I've wearied myself," and the other one means, "I've come to the end." So, it's more likely it's just a poetic saying he's wearied himself. "I've wearied myself and come to the end." The basic idea of the proverb is this idea that there's God's way, and there's our way. We arrogantly think our way is the better way. What's he saying—now that he's lived life—is he's worn out by this, and he's come to the end of himself and he believes God's way is the better way. So, verse 2:

Surely I am more stupid than any man,
And I do not have the understanding of a man.
Neither have I learned wisdom,
Nor do I have the knowledge of the Holy One. (Vs. 2-3)

This is very sarcastic, but he's looking at what the Proverbs call the know-it-all fool—the people who don't need God—they know it all. They have all the answers, and he's looking at them and saying, "Apparently I'm stupid because I don't know everything and I don't have all the answers and there must be something wrong with me," but all of it kind of has a tone of sarcasm. Verse 4:

Who has ascended into heaven and descended?
Who has gathered the wind in His fists?
Who has wrapped the waters in His garment?
Who has established all the ends of the earth?

What is His name or His son's name?
Surely you know!

This has a little bit of the flavor of a couple of chapters in the book of Job, when Job is kind of talking back to God a little bit and God says, " Wait a minute, Job, where were you when I hung the stars in space? Where were you when I created the universe?" This has kind of that same flavor. He's asking the arrogant, the know-it-alls, "*Wait a minute, were you the ones who ascended and descended from heaven? Were you the ones that hold the wind in your fists? Were you the ones that created everything that exists?*" He ends that by saying, *"Surely you know it's not you!"* So again, you kind of get the flavor that, "You know, maybe you don't know everything, and maybe your way is not best, and maybe we should listen to what God has to say," which is verse 5:

Every word of God is tested; [maybe we would say tried and true]
He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.

Now think about this in a postmodern culture. We've gone from the Enlightenment period—the 17th and 18th centuries—thinking human reasoning could solve every problem—we know everything—but now, in a postmodern culture, we've concluded that nothing can be known. There is no absolute truth. There's no absolute morality. No one can know, so feel free to function as your own god. You decide what is true; you decide what is right and wrong. And what that has created in our culture is so much despair…so much fear…so much anxiety…so much hopelessness. People feel that deeply. "You mean to tell me we can't know what's true? We can't know really what's right and wrong? We are just kind of making it up every day?" Every study you look at out there has the earmarks of people who are so confused and full of despair because of the uncertainty of all of this. But the writer of the proverb comes back and says, "Wait a minute! We don't know everything, but God knows everything, and God's put it in a book and that becomes our refuge. That becomes our place of safety." Where do I go when I want to have some confidence in knowing this is true? In knowing this is right? In knowing this is what I want to build my life on? He says, "Your place of refuge is you turn to the Word of God. God knows what's true and that gives us the foundation upon which we build our lives." Verse 6:

Do not add to His words
Or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar.

Verse 6 is interesting in the way it's worded. Within ancient Israel there really wasn't this concern that the Word of God was going to be outrightly rejected. The concern was more it was going to be embellished—added to what God has said. "This is what God has said, but I have a lot more to offer because I know everything." This is a huge problem in the American church. Our churches are filled with preachers who read a verse, and then it's thirty minutes of psychology; it's thirty minutes of philosophy; it's thirty minutes of opinion, and people think that's what the Bible says. But the reality is that isn't what the Bible says. We have to make sure that our understanding of truth is driven by the biblical text—what God has actually said— because that's what is authoritative. That's what has power. That's our refuge. Verse 7:

Two things I asked of You,
Do not refuse me before I die:
Keep deception and lies far from me, (Vs. 7-8a)

So there are two things he is going to mention, and he doesn't want to be deceived or confused about them.

> **Give me neither poverty nor riches;**
> **Feed me with the food that is my portion,** (Vs. 8b)

So basically he doesn't want to be deceived by **riches** or by **poverty**—by the two extremes. In the middle of that, he just wants to trust God. Last week Mark reminded us of the Lord's Prayer and wonderfully reminded us of that part, *"Give us this day, our daily bread*." This is very difficult for us to understand as Americans. We are just consumers. We want more and more and more. What the writer of the proverb is saying is there is a danger with riches; there is a danger with poverty. This is a consistent theme from Genesis to Revelation. As a matter of fact, there's a rather scholarly book on money written by Craig Blomberg. The title of the book is *Neither Riches Nor Poverty* because that's the consistent message all the way through.

Now, it's not that there is a problem with wealth. We talked about this in Proverbs 29: *"When the righteous prosper, the people rejoice*." Everybody wins. But in terms of my desire in life, "I don't need to be rich; I don't want to be poor. I just want to trust God every day to supply what I need, and that will be enough." The words of Paul in the New Testament, *"I want to learn to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself."* Then he talks about the concern of both extremes. Verse 9:

> **That I not be full and deny *You* and say, "Who is the Lord?"** (Vs. 9a)

Again, this is a consistent message all the way through the Bible. If God's blessed me, then there's always a risk that I become self-sufficient—that I put my truest in my riches. "I don't need God; I can take care of myself." He doesn't want that. Again, the wrestling match is between God's way and our way, and he wants to stay dialed in on God's way. The other extreme:

> **Or that I not be in want and steal,**
> **And profane the name of my God.** (Vs. 9b)

Those who are in poverty blame God. They consider themselves the victim so they justify behaviors that are offensive to God. So he says, "I don't want to be on one extreme or the other. I just want to trust God, and I want to walk in His ways." So, starting in verse 11, he identifies four categories of people that, when we go our own way, this is what happens:

> **There is a kind of *man*** [meaning a group of people] **who curses his father**
> **And does not bless his mother.**

So, what happens when we are arrogant? The family begins to break down. "I don't want to hear it." "Don't tell me what to do!" "I don't need my father and mother telling me what to do. I have it all figured out." So essentially it's talking about the breakdown of the family. Now, all of the research out there affirms that when the family starts to break down, society starts to break down. As the family goes, so goes the society. So what happens when we go our way is it begins to break down the family. Verse 12:

> **There is a kind who is pure** [so another group of people] **in his own eyes,**
> **Yet is not washed from his filthiness.**

This is a very accurate description of our culture. People have worked very hard to convince themselves, "I'm fine." We've dismissed the concept of sin. Sin goes with God, and God is archaic. We're free to make up our own rules. Therefore I've convinced myself, "I'm okay." Yet, when God looks at us, we're filthy and full of sin. There was a time in our culture where there was an agreed-upon standard of morality, and as people measured themselves against that morality, if they were outside the boundary, then they understood that. There was some level of conviction, and they modified their behavior to operate back within the boundary. Then we moved to this idea that when I measure myself against the standard, if I'm outside the boundary, I just move the boundary; I change the standard. "Now, I'm okay." But today we've moved this to the point where there is no standard; there is no absolute morality. There are no real rules, so I'm free to decide for myself what's good and bad, what's right and wrong. Therefore, there are millions of people that look at themselves in the mirror and they've convinced themselves, "I'm pure; I'm fine. Who says I'm a sinner?" And yet God, who ultimately will be the judge, says, "Actually you're filthy," and if something doesn't change, those people are in real trouble. The third category of people, verse 13:

> **There is a kind—oh how lofty are his eyes!**
> **And his eyelids are raised *in arrogance.***

This is the arrogant; this is the secularist. "I don't need God." "Why do I not need God?" "Cause I already know everything. I don't need any help." The fourth one then, verse 14:

> **There is a kind of man whose teeth are *like* swords**
> **And his jaw teeth *like* knives,**
> **To devour the afflicted from the earth**
> **And the needy from among men.**

This fourth category is kind of created as a metaphor of a wild animal basically destroying some prey. So it's the idea of taking advantage of the afflicted and the weak and the needy—those that really can't fight back. We've talked about this a lot in the book of Proverbs. It's the wicked who are determined to disadvantage others to advantage themselves, so there's kind of a flow to this. What happens to a culture, to a society, when we do it our way? There's a breakdown in the family. There's a dismissal of morality. There's an arrogance that produces this secularism that creates the law of the jungle, and those who are weak or needy or afflicted are those who are used and abused the most—a pretty accurate description of the culture in which we live.

Starting in Verses 15 and 16, then, he moves to a discussion that when we do it our way, it creates this insatiable appetite. We are never satisfied; we always have to have more. It's driven by the fact that we just can't find anything that makes us happy, that ultimately satisfies us. So, in verse 15:

> **The leech has two daughters,**
> **"Give," "Give."** (Vs. 15a)

So, he's talking about what was referred to as the horse leech. It was fairly common in the ancient Near East. The horse leech had two suckers, one on each end. One was used to attach to the host. The other one was used to drain the blood, so it's a very graphic image. So he's looking at the horse leech, and he says, "The horse leech has two daughters. Their names are "Give," and "Give," in other words more, more, more—never satisfied.

There are three things that will not be satisfied,
Four that will not say, "Enough": [So, four metaphors, images, to illustrate this]: (Vs. 15b)

The first is **Sheol**. Sheol is a reference to the grave. The grave is never satisfied. The grave is never happy; the grave always wants more people to die. The reality is people just keep dying because the grave wants more and more of them. It's just a clever metaphor.

The second one is somewhat sensitive, **the barren womb**. The idea is a woman who wants a child, and how painful that can be when there's this longing day after day, month after month, year after year. It's just this painful longing and desire for a child, but the child never comes. It's a metaphor of an image. There's nothing wrong with a woman feeling that. It's just used to picture people that have this longing that is never satisfied. It never really happens.

Earth that is never satisfied with water, (Vs. 16b)

It's a more difficult case to make today. As Mike said, "We're in the monsoon season." *(laughter)* But again, think about the ancient world. Think about the desert, arid climates of the ancient Near East. There's never enough water. No matter how much it rains there's never enough. They always needed more. It's just an insatiable appetite for more. And the fourth one is

And fire that never says, "Enough." (Vs. 16c)

Imagine a wildfire out of control. It doesn't just stop and say, "Oh, that's enough." It just keeps burning until it has burned everything in its path. So, there're just four images to say when we do it our way, we have an appetite that's never satisfied. We can't find what we are looking for. We are never quite happy. We always have to have the next thing…the newest thing. We always have to have more. It's a very accurate description of our culture. We just seem to lack the ability to be satisfied, to understand, "This is what I have today. This is my life today, such as it is, and in that I can be satisfied. In that I can be happy."

One of the big concerns with this insatiable appetite is it causes us to miss the moments that matter. We are going to rush all the way to the finish line, having never been satisfied, and we're going to look back and realize, actually that caused us to miss the moments—the moments you'll have today that you will never get back again because you are busy thinking that I need something different; I need something more. That's the concern. When we do it *our* way, we have this appetite that is never satisfied. Think how that's contrasted with, "G*ive us this day our daily bread."* When we do it God's way, God will give me what I need today, and with that I can be content. Verse 18:

There are three things which are too wonderful for me,
Four which I do not understand:

So he's going to paint a picture of four things that he just thinks are wonderous. Verse 19, first:

The way of an eagle in the sky,

You can just imagine the writer looking up and watching this eagle soar in the sky for long periods of time, and he just marvels at, "How does he do that?" and what a wonderful creation of God! The second one:

The way of a serpent on a rock,

Now you may look at a snake on a rock and not think, "Oh, that is so wonderful," *(laughter)* but just stop and think that he's marveling at the fact that this long skinny reptile, with no legs, just moves so silently and gracefully through the rocks. He's just marveling at, "How does he do that?" and what a wonder that God has created! The third one is:

The way of a ship in the middle of the sea,

This may not be an imagery that impresses us, but think in the ancient world about just marveling at this huge thing that floats on the sea and just glides through the water—perhaps how people felt when they first saw planes flying and there's just this wonder of, "How is that possible?" I mean, honestly, even today you look at these gigantic jets and it's like, "How is that possible that that thing just floats through the sky?" There's just kind of a wonder to all of that so he's wondering at what God has made possible. Fourth one:

And the way of a man with a maid.

It really should be translated ***with a maiden***. The language is filled with sexual overtones. It carries this idea that God has made people in such an amazing way that a young man and a young woman fall in love and have this beautiful, wonderous longing to express themselves to one another in a beautiful, sexual experience. It's just kind of the wonder of how God has made us, and what a beautiful thing that is. All of that then leads to the corruption of that because we're determined to do it our way. Verse 20:

This is the way of an adulterous woman:
She eats and wipes her mouth,
And says, "I have done no wrong."

So, the idea of **an adulterous woman** would be any sexual immorality, any sex outside of marriage, any sex outside of God's intended plan or purpose. So he goes through these wonders and then he moves to the way of the **adulterous**, and how she has taken something that was so wondrous, so beautiful, so magical, and now turned it into something so cheap…something so dirty…something so ordinary. To her it has no more moral overtones than eating a sandwich. That's the imagery; that's the metaphor. It's the idea that she sees or views what she does as having no more moral responsibility than just eating a sandwich. She eats a sandwich; **she wipes her mouth, and says, "I've done nothing wrong."**

Now just stop and think about that. You go home; you eat lunch. There are no real moral overtones to that. She has reduced her behavior to a level where she sees her sexual immorality in that same light. This is such an apt description of our culture. We have taken something that is so wondrous, so magical, so special—this something that's within me as God has created me—that I'm only willing to share with one person on planet earth. There's something about that that's magical, and we've reduced it to something so cheap, so dirty, so ordinary, that it's just becomes something that's meaningless.

When secular writers are becoming so concerned about our sexual behavior as a culture—with book titles like "Cheap Sex," like "The End of Sex," —certainly we as a culture should perhaps wake up and ask ourselves, "What are we doing to God's wonderous gift?" My heart goes out to so many

young people who have been deceived by the liar, that will never know the wonder, the magic of taking this special gift and only sharing it with one person for a lifetime.

There's a lot of talk these days about social injustice. Different people define these terms differently, but I have been suggesting for years that the greatest social injustice of our time is our sexual immorality. There is not a topic that does more devastation and damage to people's lives—that has the financial costs, that has the psychological costs, that has the social costs, as our sexual immorality. It's not even close. If I'm hearing someone talk about their concerns over social injustice, the first question I want to ask them is, "Tell me your view on sexual immortality," because if they are not willing to admit that God's way is the right way, then everything else is so filled with hypocrisy it's hard to hear it. Let's deal with the big one that's destroying people's lives first.

There is a commercial currently running on television that advertises a website, and the first thing you hear is a gentleman saying, "Plastic is our most dangerous addiction." The first time I heard that commercial I just stared at the television in disbelief and thought, "I can't believe what I just heard!" Now I understand the importance of the environment; I understand the problem of plastic and all these things. We need to be stewards of the environment. You don't need to send me an email with all the problems with plastics, okay? *(laughter)* I'm on board with that, but at some point we need to regain some perspective. Plastic is not our most dangerous addiction. We are talking about something that has been devasting people's lives around the world for thousands of years. The statistics on this are overwhelming.

Are you aware of the fact that it's estimated this year 40 to 60 million babies will be aborted around the world? Forty to 60 million innocent babies killed! That's roughly 136,000 per day. Are you aware of the fact that it is estimated that every single day over 1,000,000 people contract a sexually transmitted disease? Did you hear what I just said? One million per day! It's estimated that the financial cost, just in dealing with sexually transmitted diseases, is over $8,000,000 a year! Then you start to talk about sex trafficking. Then you start to talk about prostitution. Then you start to talk about pornography and all the issues related to that. Then you start to talk about pregnant teen moms. Then you start to talk about single parents. Then you start to talk about the breakdown of the family…about the devastation in these families and societies! You talk about all the ramifications and costs to that. There is no issue that has as much financial cost, psychologically cost, emotional cost, or social cost as this topic.

Think of it this way. If we would be willing to move from our know-it-all position to just believing God's way is the better way, in this one area of life around the world, it would utterly change the world…utterly change the world! As a matter of fact, it would free up so many resources, that we could easily have resources to address every other topic of interest, including the plastic. The devastation of choosing to go our way instead of God's way has been devastating to the world! Verse 32:

> **If you have been foolish in exalting yourself**
> **Or if you have plotted *evil,* put your hand on your mouth.**

Imagine a parent having a conversation with a know-it-all teenager. Now, we were going to have to really stretch our imagination to think of a know-it-all teenager, *(laughter)* but let's just say it happened. But hat parent deeply cares; he is just wanting to help. Imagine the parent saying, "I just need you to be quiet and listen for a moment." That's verse 32. If you've been a know-it-all, if you

think you have all the answers, if you've been living life your way, on your terms, I just need you need to put your hand over your mouth, be quiet, and listen for a moment—and at least consider the possibility that maybe God's way is the better way. It's always helpful to assess how it is working. How *is* it working? Maybe it's possible your way isn't working, and maybe be open to considering God's may be the better way. Verse 33:

> **For the churning of milk produces butter,**
> **And pressing the nose brings forth blood;** [So a couple of metaphors, images]
> **So the churning of anger produces strife.**

When we go our way, we create this individualistic law of the jungle— "May the strongest survive" culture. So, what happens is we are *churning up anger* and the anger turns to conflict. Ultimately, we will consume ourselves; we will destroy ourselves. As long as we keep going our own way, we eventually are going to destroy ourselves. Our society will collapse from within. It seems like a pretty good description of the path it feels like we're traveling.

You have to decide. Do you think you know it all? Therefore, you will go your way, or is it possible maybe God knows better and maybe God has a better way and a better plan to live? One question would be, "Well, if I'm going to go God's way, what exactly does that mean?" Here's what I would tell you. We've gone through twenty-nine proverbs, thirty counting this one. The messages, the transcripts, the information, it's all there. Proverbs is filled with the most practical advice on how to live life skillfully. It's all there for you. You just have to decide if that's the voice you want to listen to or not. There's no question you can google up endless information, but you cannot find wisdom for life on Google. To do that, you have to open the pages of Scripture—the ancient Book—and listen to what God has to say.

Our Father, we're thankful You've not left us to grope in the darkness and try to figure this all out. We have a place of refuge. We have a place we can go to with great assurance, that we can know the truth and the truth sets us free. God, my prayer for all of us this morning would be that we would listen to what You have to say. We would not be the know-it-all fool, but rather we would be surrendered and submissive to Your Word because it's there we find the life that our souls are searching for. Lord, this I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

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