

Pastor Ben Libby
 Sermon
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To Jesus Christ, who suffered once for sins in our place, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God. Amen.

The Word of the Lord which forms a portion for our sermon text this morning comes to us from Proverbs, chapter 4, starting at verse 14:

Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil. ¹⁵ Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on. ¹⁶ For they cannot sleep unless they have done wrong; they are robbed of sleep unless they have made someone stumble. ¹⁷ For they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence. ¹⁸ But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day. ¹⁹ The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble. ²⁰ My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. ²¹ Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. ²² For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh. ²³ Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

This is the Word of God. Congregation may be seated.

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and from your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear fellow Redeemed...

Looks can be deceiving. This is something that we learn to be true over time. Take advertising for example. Specifically, take fast food commercials! These commercials make the product look so good. They will show you this perfect picture of a Big Mac. The burger patties are glowing. They have just the right amount of lettuce, pickles, and onions stacked in the perfect place. The bun has every sesame seed in its correct place. Next to this picturesque burger, you have a package of French fries that are so hot and fresh that you can practically smell them through your TV. Then, there is a dripping ice-cold Coke, that is bubbly and fizzy. They can make this look so good on the commercials that it makes our mouths water!

But what happens when you actually get off the couch, pull your car through the drive-thru, and fork over the 6 bucks for this meal? What do you get? You get a burger with half the ingredients fallen out, sesame seeds everywhere, and they forgot to hold the onions. You also get a half-filled carton of fries, over-salted and Luke-warm. And the Coke? It is filled mostly with ice, perhaps it's flat, or even worse, the syrup isn't mixed correctly, and it doesn't taste like it should.

And yet, we know this might be the case going in. We kind of understand that what we see on the commercial is not what we are going to get. Even though what is shown looks good to us, we know that we will not get that, but we order it anyway. We still

eat it. And, while it may fill us up, it is not healthy for us.

It is not only in matters of advertising where looks may be deceiving. This principle holds true to all facets of life. The thing that looks the best may not actually be as good as it looks or the best for us. Yet, somehow, we buy in anyways.

This is a principle that Solomon touches on here in this Proverb. But what he is referring to has much wider implications than just some meal we may eat. He is talking about real, important spiritual matters. He is talking about the two different roads that people walk in this world. There are only two: you are either on the way of the wicked or the path of righteousness. One of these roads looks really easy and the other looks really hard. But looks can be deceiving. What looks easy and profitable is really darkness. But what looks hard and foolish is really the way of light! And so we pray, **MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH AND THE MEDIATIONS OF OUR HEARTS BE ACCEPTABLE IN YOUR SIGHT O LORD, OUR MAKER AND REDEEMER, AMEN.**

Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of the evil. ¹⁵ Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on.

Solomon does not go into how the way of the wicked looks enticing, but he knew it well. Solomon is known for a few things. He is known for building the Temple, a grand structure for Jehovah's glory. He is also known for being the wisest king, or even man, ever. But he was also known for his infidelity. He was married to many different women, and these foreign wives brought him to their foreign gods. In his time, he was the most powerful man in the world. But they say that absolute power corrupts absolutely. He

had many resources as his disposal. He had many things in this world, and these things were a distraction for his faith. At the end of his life, when looking back at all the things he had experienced, his conclusion to all these things and experiences was "all is vanity".

He doesn't need to go into what make these things appealing. He certainly does in other parts of proverbs, but it really goes without saying. Many things look good to us, when in fact many of these things are harmful to us.

What Solomon reminds us here of something that is not so obvious. The way of these things, even though they may look good and profitable, are the opposite of that. In fact, they are so dangerous that we shouldn't even look!

That is a common rational that people often tell themselves about tempting things. People say, "Well, I can look and not touch. Just a little look isn't going to hurt me." But of course, we can see that thought is the work of the devil. He knows that if he can get us sinners to look at something tempting, he can build up desire in our hearts. Isn't that how he got Adam and Eve in the first place? He simply asked an innocent question and showed them that the fruit **LOOKED GOOD**. If he can get us looking, he can get us to desire. **James 1:14-15 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.**

That is why Solomon uses the strongest of warnings here. **Do not enter the path of the wicked** (he first states his points and repeats it to emphasis how serious he is) **Avoid it! Do not go on it! Turn away from it and pass on!**

Truly, the way of the wicked is not worth focusing on. But it is important to know how to identify it. There is a difference in being on the look out and looking out of curiosity. But, we need to be careful. Why? Because the way of the wicked looks good. They look really fun! They look like everything we have been missing out on! They are like that Big Mac commercial, we see examples of them and they look really good to us!

In our New Testament reading for this morning, Paul spells out the way of wickedness plain! **Galatians 5:19-21 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.** That basically covers it!

While that is an exhausted list, there are harder to see wickedness as well. Yes, sometimes they are obvious. Wickedness is anything that goes against God's Word, or against the love of God or our neighbor. Sometimes, your conscience's alarm will go off, but other times it will not. But be careful! Wickedness comes in all kinds of shapes and sizes. As Paul reminds us in Corinthians, even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

Throughout this Proverb, there is no mention of Jesus or of God. But that does not mean they are not being talked about. What did Jesus say about these two different paths to which Solomon was referring to? **Matthew 7:13-14 "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the**

way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

What is the difference between the two roads? Well, the difference is about as glaring as I-5 compared to a dirt road out in the country. One is well traveled and allows for many different people to travel on it at rapid speeds simultaneously. The other is none of these things. It is sparsely traveled, it does not have many visitors, it is plain.

¹⁹ The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble.

The way of wickedness is wide and open for a reason. It is inviting. It looks good. Above all, it looks easy! But looks can be deceiving. This weekend I was on a highway, I-5 itself in fact and I was coming back home. I had Google maps open on my phone, and it went off and told me that that there was a stoppage due to a crash up a head. I looked ahead, and I saw no stoppage. Traffic was moving just as it was supposed to, people were going and exceeding the speed limit. Next, I saw an overhead sign that said the same thing, STOPPAGE AHEAD. Still, no signs of slowing down. Could both my phone and the traffic sign be out of date? Sure enough, about 8 seconds later, the red brake lights all glowed. It looked like the warning were out of date and wrong. But, looks can be deceiving!

We too, might think that Solomon's warnings do not apply to us. It is really those terrible sinners that jump to mind that need to hear these warnings! You might not think that these warnings are all that relevant to you. But make no mistake, these roads go through your town!

If you think that these warnings do not apply to you, then you are the just the kind of person who needs to hear them! **1 Cor 10:12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.**

There are many tempting things about the way of wickedness. It looks good and inviting. But it also looks like those who give in are having a good time and are not suffering any kind of ramifications. But Solomon really tells it like it is. **they do not know over what they stumble.** Truly, they walk in darkness. They do not know when they will stumble, but they most certainly will. They may look happy and they might look free but looks can be deceiving! Freedom to sin is slavery to death. We need to steer clear of these ways!

What about that other path? That narrow gate that is hard which Jesus was talking about? What about the path of the righteous?

Well this path looks hard, doesn't it? "Follow God and all his strict commands? I'll pass!" "Your going to live your life by a book that was written thousands of years ago? Get with the times!"

These over-voiced opinions and others that we hear make this path hard to find. But it is certainly there! Jesus said, **"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."** The path of righteousness starts and ends right there. To go on the path of light and of righteousness is hard! Jesus said that it is difficult and there are few who find it. Those are the two paths, the way of wickedness and the path of righteousness.

So, which one do you travel on? Are you on the superhighway or on the dirt road? Are you stumbling around in the darkness or are you living in the light? We know which

road we should be on, but which one are we truly on?

When we look at our lives and when we look at what God's Law tells us, we know the sad truth. We are well familiar with the ways of wickedness, we in fact spend a lot of time there. Solomon tells us here to absolutely avoid it. To pass it by! But we and our sinful tendencies like to dabble. When we look at our lives, we see evidence of this, we can see the scars of our sin everywhere. We see all the sin and the shame that gets compiled in our lives. Then we see God's zero tolerance policy in the Bible. We see that we are on the way of the wicked and we can see where that goes, namely to hell!

But, thanks be to God, looks can be deceiving! Even though it looks like we destined to doom and destruction, that is not where we are going!

¹⁸ But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.

What is the difference between the two different words of roads that Solomon uses here? What is the difference between a "PATH" and a "WAY"? Well, they are similar. "Which way is it?" This is a question we might ask when looking for directions. Which way do we go? A "WAY" is a direction, it is one of many options. There are many different ways we can go. And that's what the way of wickedness are. They are many ways, and yet they all end up at the same place.

But a "PATH" is different. A Path is not a direction, it is trail that someone already went down. That is the reason we are on the path of righteous, because of the person who already went down that path, **JESUS CHRIST THE RIGHETOUS!**

Hebrews 12:2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who

for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus is the reason that we can be on the road of righteousness. We can walk down that path because He first blazed the trail! He lived a perfect life and suffered an innocent death for us. Because of His perfect life, He fulfilled all of the God's Law for us. Because of His innocent death, we have His righteousness accounted to us, and now we are righteous! When we look at ourselves through what the Word says, we see all our sins and mistakes, and these things haunt us and make our consciences guilty. But looks can be deceiving, because we are innocent! Yes, we were sinners, bound for hell, but now no longer! We have been washed in the water and the blood, and now God removes our sin, guilt, and stains forever!

How can we make sure that we stay on this path? Solomon says, **20 My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. 21 Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. 22 For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh. 23 Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.**

Solomon's fatherly advice is to be attentive to his words, and to protect your heart. He says keep his words in your heart, and thus you will be protecting your heart. While Solomon is referring to these words, he is also speaking under inspiration. This advice applies to all of scripture. When we keep God's Word in our heart, we are protected from the temptations of the wicked. When we keep God's Word in our heart, we have the light of Jesus!

That thought that he says about the path of the righteous is an interesting one. ¹⁸

But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.

They say that night is darkest just before the dawn. Truly, the dawn is coming. Jesus has promised us that He is coming quickly. We are currently toiling in darkness. How are we supposed to function here? There is so much darkness around us, how can we see where we are going?

We see where we are going because of Jesus! He blazed a trail of light, and we can now follow in His wake. We can see because we have His light inside of us, and it is the light of life. This path is going to get brighter and brighter until the light of Christ dawns upon all mankind. Why would we ever want to be a part of darkness?

Looks can be deceiving. Sin and wickedness can look fun, easy, and like freedom. But they are none of these things, at least they do not last. But the condemnation and death that they bring about will truly last forever. The Path of righteousness looks hard, following God doesn't look easy. But with Jesus, it is! He did everything to earn for us our salvation, and now we follow Him unto eternity! Going down the path of righteousness gives us lasting light and life, and they are yours through Jesus Christ! AMEN!!!