

Sermon Notes for July 15th, 2012. Life with the King. Prov. 16:10-15 + Selected

Intro: I will break two societal rules this morning – I intend to talk about religion (that happens regularly) and politics (that doesn't). I won't be telling anyone how to vote. Rather, my focus will be how are we to think about authority, leadership, and our response to the governing authorities. I think you'll discover that the Bible has a perspective that will surprise you. It did me as I have prepared this sermon this week.

Meditation Verse: "Fear the Lord and the king, my son, and do not join with the rebellious, for those two will send sudden destruction upon them, and who knows what calamities they can bring?" (Prov. 24:21-22)

Key Idea: God mediates his justice on earth through rulers. The degree to which earthly rulers approximate God's character and action will influence the degree of blessing under their authority. We are called to begin to learn to "reign" during the present age, in anticipation of reigning with Christ in the age to come.

Underlying Principle that we easily forget.

"Righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a disgrace to any people." (Prov. 14:34)

Intro: Last week, Prov. 16:1-9. God's superintending of events while man is responsible to plan, purify motives, pray, turn away from pride, demonstrate love and faithfulness – especially in light of past failures. This will lead to reconciled relationships. We should cultivate contentment, never compromising on righteous standards, aware that ultimately God is directing our steps (even as we continue to make and carry out plans).

Do you want to make God laugh? Tell HIM your plans. Do you want to make God smile? Tell HIM you joyfully accept and willingly submit to HIS plans for your life. God extends his sovereign orchestration of life through earthly rulers. All fall short of the heavenly ideal. The issue is not how well those leaders approximate God's ideal, but how we respond to the leadership that has been ordained for us by God.

Prov. 16:10-15 is another subunit – this time linked by the word "king". He is mentioned in every verse with the exception of vs. 11 where "the Lord" is cited as the source of honest scales & balances – just standards for carrying out business.

It would be easy to read these verses – think about current rulers instead of "kings" and quickly dismiss these passages as having little relevance for us today. It will require some interpretive work to build the bridge from the ancient world of Israel to our modern day, but the effort will pay rich dividends. God will hold every earthly ruler accountable for his / her actions. But on a deeper level, these passages are a challenge to us to exercise godly leadership over whatever realm of responsibility God has entrusted to us.

I. The IDEAL King. (you could easily substitute “the Lord” for “king” and these verses would make perfect sense. Ideally, the king perfectly reflects God’s standards and actions in a society. He would be the human representative of divine authority).

A. The King’s Pronouncements (vs. 10 – 11)

The lips of a king speak as an oracle, and his mouth should not betray justice – 10

Honest scales and balances are from the Lord; all the weights in the bag are of his making - 11

Words are equivalent to “oracle” (divine statement). His mouth does not betray justice (kings functioned like judges deciding disputes – to be in line with justice. Commerce, overseen by the king, should likewise be governed by a fair standard.

B. The King’s Purity (vs. 12-13)

Kings detest wrongdoing, for a throne is established through righteousness – 12

Kings take pleasure in honest lips; they value a man who speaks the truth. – 13

All wrongdoing is despised; b/c righteousness is the operative principle
Those who, like the ideal king, speak with honesty and truth give pleasure to this ideal king who is characterized by these qualities.

C. The King’s Power (vs. 14-15)

A king’s wrath is a messenger of death, but a wise man will appease it. – 14

When a king’s face brightens, it means life; his favor is like a rain cloud in spring - 15

Neg. King gets angry at wrongdoing – he has responsibility and authority to punish the wicked. If you’re wise you will “fear the King – just like you should God.”
Pos. If the king is pleased b/c of truth, honesty, righteousness; you will be blessed.
Ps. 72 as a prayer for the Davidic King who embodies these ideals (judges with righteousness, liberates the oppressed, protects the helpless). Righteousness will flourish and so will the land. Others will recognize his wisdom, abundance and come and bow down to worship. No human king ever fulfilled this prayer – but we believe it points to KING Jesus who reigns now in heaven and will one day reign on the earth. Until that day – we long for approximations of the ideal.

See Ps. 72:15-17: “Long may he live! May gold from Sheba be given him. May people ever pray for him and bless him all day long. Let grain abound throughout the land; on the tops of the hills may it sway. Let its fruit flourish like Lebanon; let it thrive like the grass of the field. May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun.”

II. The Foolish (wicked) King. (all too often this is what we see our world.)

- A. Rulers who oppress the people under their jurisdiction and are driven by greed.
“Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a wicked man ruling over a helpless people.” (Prov. 28:15) “A tyrannical ruler lacks judgment but he who hates ill-gotten gain will enjoy a long life.” (Prov. 28:16). Too many examples of rulers who live for ill-gotten gain – generally – they will not live a “long life” – someone will be fed up by the injustice and remove them. Also, “one who is greedy for bribes tears it (the country) down.” (Prov. 29:4b)
- B. Rulers who embrace lies instead of the truth.
“If a ruler listens to lies all his officials become wicked.” (Prov. 29:12) – the ruler sets the tone for those who work with him / her. He influences for good or ill
- C. Rulers who indulge in sensual pleasure. (unable to fulfill judicial responsibilities).
“do not spend your strength on women, your vigor on those who ruin kings. It is not for kings, O Lemuel – not for kings to drink wine, not for rulers to crave beer, lest they drink and forget what the law decrees, and deprive all the oppressed of their rights.” (Prov. 31:3-5)

This and more characterizes many who rule today – not just in America – but throughout the world and throughout history. But all rulers will have to give an account of their work to the ultimate judge. The fact that they fall short of the ideal does not change the standard by which they will be judged.

This also characterizes “foolish” believers – who are squandering their opportunities in this life to develop the godly skill that will be required of to reign in the age to come.

So what area “good” kings (rulers) like? What characteristics (albeit imperfectly) do they seek to develop and demonstrate as they exercise authority?

III. The Wise (righteous) King (ruler) (all too rarely seen in our world).

- A. Discriminates based on God’s standard. Sees character and judge appropriately.
A king delights in a wise servant, but a shameful servant incurs his wrath. (Prov. 14:35)
When a king sits on his throne to judge, he winnows out all evil with his eyes. (Pr.20:8)
A wise king winnows out the wicked; he drives the threshing wheel over them. (Pr.20:26)
- B. Promotes compassion and kindness (Pr. 22:11)
He who loves a pure heart and whose speech is gracious will have the king for his friend
By justice a king gives a country stability (Pr. 29:4)

IV. The King of Kings: God is sovereign over all earthly rulers – he appoints and dismisses as HE pleases for HIS purposes.

The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases. (Prov. 21:1) – God as the ultimate source of blessing (water being necessary for irrigation / life).

See also Den. 4:32-37, Rom. 13:1-7 “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted. (vs. 1-2)

So how should we live – especially in light of the upcoming campaigns (and elections). Perspective: Learn / develop now for life in the age to come. Jesus told the twelve they would sit on thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28). Future judgeships are not limited to the twelve.

Luke 19:11-27 – Parable of the ten Minas – the faithful are given a charge to reign over / take charge of cities. – two were faithful and their responsibility doubles – one was unfaithful and he loses what had earlier been entrusted to him.

I Cor. 4:8: Already you have become rich! w/o us you have become kings. More than a little sarcasm on the part of the apostle, but also a grain of truth. Exercise “judgment” lovingly for the body (expel the immoral brother for his long-term spiritual health). I Cor. 6 don't go to unbelievers for judgment – b/c you're destined to judge angels – certainly there must be someone who can handle simple cases that arise now.

Eph. 2:6 We are seated with Christ in the heavenly places to reign / exercise authority as he sits on his heavenly throne. Rev. 2:26, 3:21, 20:6.

So we are becoming kings – how are you doing in “grade school” for reigning? Are you beginning to approximate the standard of the ideal king? Or are you much more like the foolish kings (rulers) that inhabit this world. All will be held accountable.

1. PRAY: We are explicitly commanded to pray for leaders – I Tim. 2:1-2. Not out of desperation or fear, but confident that God works when we pray.
2. Respect – those in authority whether you agree or disagree with their policies.
3. Work for greater approximation to God's standards (aware that in this fallen world we will always fall short)
4. Be kind toward those with whom you disagree.
5. Don't make an idol out of a party, a policy, or a person. God is, and always has been, sovereign.

Too often believers act like functional atheists when it comes to politics. God is in control and nothing will change that. We are, as I emphasized last week, responsible to plan, pray, follow through – always with the awareness that ultimately God directs our words and steps.