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Eastminster Worship Services

Sunday, June 27, 2010

Never the Same: When the Word Changes You

A Treasure Chest of Wisdom

Proverbs 16:1-4; 17:4; 18:1-8

Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh, Senior Pastor

“An apple a day keeps the doctor away.”¹ “This too will pass.”² There is wisdom in these sayings. It is healthy for us to eat fruit. And particular difficulties do not last forever.

What is the significance of the book of Proverbs for followers of Jesus? It contains the voice of God our Father. In the proverbs there is wisdom.

The purpose of teaching wisdom is that the learner projects a reality of justice and order in society and human character rooted in the virtues of and faith in God who created and sustains the world in and by righteousness. God is both the source and goal of wisdom.

Throughout Proverbs, wisdom (or the wise person) is compared and contrasted with foolishness (or the fool). ‘Fool’ in Proverbs indicates one who is lacking in morality and uninterested in correction, not one who is merely silly or playful. Wisdom is held up as something worth effort to attain and the reader is told that it starts with God.

Take this statement of wisdom in Proverbs 16:4a, “The LORD works out everything for his own ends.”³ The word “everything” in Hebrew, literally means “nothing escapes God’s domination”. Even the wicked will not escape God’s domination. God does what is only good, acting from love of goodness for its own sake and not moved by fear or hope of reward.

Everything means everything and ends means ends. Behind everything that has been created on this earth there is an end; a purpose, specifically God’s purpose. Now keep that thought in mind and think about this.

The most important seat in a car is the driver’s seat. The most important seat in a plane is the pilot’s seat. The most important seat in a ship is the captain’s seat. Why? Because the driver, the pilot and the captain all determine the direction their vessel will take.

¹A Pembrokeshire proverb as noted in the February 1866 edition of *Notes and Queries* magazine.

²Attributed to Ben Franklin.

Whether it is your individual life or our church, we must ask the question, “Who or what is in the driver’s seat?”

If you were to look up the word “drive” in a dictionary, you would find this definition: “To guide, control or direct.” When you drive a car it means you guide, control and direct that car down the street. When you drive a nail, you guide, control and direct that nail into the wood. When you drive a golf ball you hope to guide, control and direct that golf ball down the fairway.

Every life is driven by something.

Some people are driven by guilt, because of past failures in their life or because of mistakes they have made. Their lives are driven to perform to do everything they can to make up for those failures and those mistakes.

Some people are driven by grief, because of some loss in their life or the way they were mistreated in the past or because of a parent that never gave them approval. Their lives are driven by grief and resentment and bitterness.

Some people are driven by greed, because they never have enough. They want the corner office, the fancy car and the big house. They never understand that self-worth and net-worth are two different things.

Every church is driven by something.

Some churches are driven by tradition. The two sentences you hear most often are these, “We’ve always done it this way” or “We’ve never done it that way”. Many congregants in churches driven by tradition disdain the thought of change and have lost a vision for the lost and the least.

Some churches are driven by finances. The number one question is, “How much will it cost?” Money management is very important and God’s money should be given generously and spent wisely, but the church must always be driven by faith and not just by finances.

Some churches are driven by programs. There are those who think that the way you measure the success of a church is by how many “programs” it has on-going. You have some people who want this program and some people that want that program.

I have said all of this to make one point today in the message. Everything is under God’s domination. God’s end or purpose in dominating everything is to drive our lives and his Church.

Strong lives and strong churches are literally built on clear “ends” or purposes. We don’t have to wonder

³Proverbs 16:4

what those ends are, because they are the same for both your life and God's Church. I want you to write down this statement: "I am created by God to be and make disciples." That statement is true for both you and the Church.

What are God's ends for Eastminster and your life? God's ends are evangelism, spiritual growth, connection, service and worship.⁴ Churches grow larger through evangelism. Churches grow deeper through spiritual growth. Churches grow warmer through connection with others. Churches grow broader through service. Churches grow stronger through worship.

In a similar way the same thing is true in your own life. When you fulfill these five ends or purposes for your life, you please God. You were planned for witnessing that is evangelism. You were created to become like Jesus Christ that is spiritual growth. You were formed for God's family that is connection with others. You were planned for God's pleasure that is Worship.

Most every garage has a roll of duct tape, because it can be used to repair almost anything. In fact, the purposes of duct tape seem almost endless, but a study was recently done which showed that duct tape doesn't succeed very well at the purpose for which it was created.

Scientists at the Lawrence-Livermore Laboratory in California found that duct tape is not a good product for sealing duct-work. Experiments were conducted to monitor the effectiveness of different air-conditioning and heating sealants. It was found that duct-tape almost always failed. When using duct tape, approximately 30% of the heat or cool air generated in an average home was lost in the attic or wall space. Although you can tape up a bicycle seat, seal off a leaky radiator hose, secure a broken window or keep an alligator's mouth shut with it, you can't depend upon duct tape to fulfill its primary purpose.

Duct tape isn't alone in its ability to accomplish some great things, while simultaneously failing at the purpose for which it was created. Churches are doing this every day and so are individual people. We must get out of the duct tape syndrome and make sure that we are fulfilling the purpose for which we were created.

We are here to be and make disciples. That is our end; our purpose. Our purpose and our end will not be realized until God sits in the driver's seat of our lives.

Often, however, what sits in the driver's seat of our lives is words; words which reflect our true motives and thoughts. Words are powerful. They bless and they curse. Listen to Proverbs 17: 4, "A wicked man listens to

⁴Genesis 12:1-3; Acts 2:41-47

evil lips.”⁵ Words are powerful. They can change things. According to this proverb, evil words come out of the mouths of evil people and wicked people listen to the evil words that come out of the mouths of evil people. Words are powerful ends. How are you affected by the evil words of others? Notice Proverbs 18:7-8, “A fool’s mouth is his undoing, and his lips are a snare to his soul. The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man’s inmost parts.”

I know many church folk who are afraid to declare with their mouths what the Word of God says about them; their true end and purpose. But they will gladly and boldly talk about everything that doesn’t concern them. Watch what you say. Death or life is in the power of the tongue. Your words either confirm or deny that you are a disciple of Jesus Christ! Your words should agree with what God has already spoken in his Word.

Do you understand that we have the same power that Jesus exercised? That’s what God’s Word states in John 14:12: “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.” It’s the same power that healed the lame man at the gate called Beautiful. It’s the same power that forgives as Jesus has forgiven. It’s the same power that raised Lazarus from the dead. It’s the same power that turned water into wine. It’s the same power that caused the blind to see.

Words matter. They are the undoing of the fool and a snare to his soul. The words of a gossip reveal his true nature.

Everything, even words, is under God’s domination. Everything works for God’s ends; God’s purposes. With God in the driver’s seat of our lives, our ends and the ends of the Church are the same. You and the Church were planned for witnessing that is evangelism. You and the Church were created to become like Jesus Christ that is spiritual growth. You and the Church were formed for God’s family that is connection with others. You and the Church were planned for God’s pleasure that is Worship.

Words matter. The Bible is filled with words. And all of the words in the Word are for our benefit. God’s words change things. The words in the Bible are hope for the hopeless and friend to the friendless. The words in the Bible are wisdom. Peter reminds us that God has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Jesus Christ.⁶ Matthew exhorts us to keep seeking first the kingdom of God.⁷ God’s words in God’s Word matter.

⁵Proverbs 17:4

⁶2 Peter 1:3

Everything is under God's domination; our ends as disciples; our ends as the Church; the wicked; even gossips. Let us pray!

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1958 N. Webb Road • Wichita, Kansas 67206-3404 • p 316.634.0337 f 316.634.1496 • www.eastminster.org