

## Daily Bible Reading Schedule The Golden Thread

### September 25 – Proverbs 11: 10 – 11; 14: 31; 19: 17

Look at Proverbs 11:10-11. Why would a city rejoice when someone prospers? Because they are righteous—doing what's right in God's eyes—using their prosperity to bring shalom to the city they live in.

When someone prospers it means they have risen to the top. A lot of times when that happens people get jealous and resentful—the city doesn't rejoice it becomes envious. But when the righteous prosper the city rejoices because their prosperity will bring prosperity to the city.

It is a victory for everyone when righteous people succeed. A lot of times when we hear the Bible talk about someone being righteous we think of people who are morally upright. But the righteousness talked about in these verses is more than just moral goodness, it is a willingness to disadvantage yourself to advantage the community.

On the other hand, the wicked put their own needs ahead of the community's needs. We see so many examples of this in our society today. So many business people, so many politicians put their own needs ahead of the community they live in. So many see the community they live in as a place to be plundered and pillaged. It is easy for us to fall into that trap ourselves to look for ways we can advantage ourselves even if it means we disadvantage the community, but if we do that we are not one of the righteous.

What would it take for us to be called one of the righteous? What would it take for people to rejoice at our success? It would take us being willing to disadvantage ourselves—just like Jesus did—and pour ourselves into the lives of those who live around us to advantage them. What are you doing with the prosperity that God has blessed you with? Is your family the kind of family that your neighbors would look at and think what on earth would this neighborhood be like without them here?

How about our church? Does our church exist for itself or the community we live in? What are we doing with all of the blessings God has poured out on us? Do people look at our church and think “wow we sure would miss them if they were gone?” What kind of church would we have to have for people to rejoice that we are here and part of the community? Its not just buildings, or even programs—it is being involved in the lives of those who live around us.

Righteous people and righteous churches go out and look for the places and the people where things are coming unraveled and they pour themselves into weaving people back into the fabric of shalom. The righteous want to succeed not for themselves but for their community.

### September 26 – Proverbs 11: 10 – 11; 14: 31; 19: 17

How do we become a people, a church, where people rejoice in our blessings? Look at Proverbs 19:17. Even just on the surface isn't this a

marvelous promise? If you are kind to the poor you are lending to the Lord. Let that sink in for just a minute. Do you understand what that really means?

It means you no longer have to look at anyone and think that your money or your help might be going into a black hole, because a gift to poor is a gift to Lord. God will make the loan good no matter what.

But there is a deeper principal even than that, and it is this—God identifies with the poor. Look at Proverbs 14: 31. When we walk by people and ignore their needs it is as if we are ignoring God. Every one of us is made in the image of God, so when we show contempt for other people and ignore their needs it is as if we are showing contempt for God and ignoring God.

You don't get relationship with God by helping the poor, but it sure is a way you can tell if you have relationship with God. The only way you can come to God in a way that is pleasing to him is if you recognize your spiritual bankruptcy—what the Bible calls poor in spirit—to realize you come to God in absolute spiritual poverty, and realize that even in that state God did not see you as a black hole, a waste of time, a hopeless case. But instead, sent His Son to die for you.

The minute you understand this about yourself it removes any air of superiority you may have toward other people, and when that superiority is removed you will be more than willing to get down there in the dirt with them to help them up. You will be more than willing to pour yourself and your resources into the lives of others.

But on the other hand, if you think God owes me because I am so good, then you look at the poor and say why don't they do something to fix themselves. Why don't they just pull themselves up by their own bootstraps? People should try to do that, but sometimes their poverty and brokenness is so great that they can't, and they don't need a lecture, and they may not even need your money—but they need your grace and mercy.

Jesus knew what it was to be poor and suffer injustice. Did you know that Christianity is the only religion that claims that its God was subject to injustice? Think about this when God came to earth he came as poor man—born in a manger, in a stable. His parents were so poor that when Jesus was circumcised they could only afford the smallest sacrifice possible—two pigeons. When Jesus rode into town on Palm Sunday it was on a borrowed colt. When he had his last supper with his disciples it was in a borrowed room, and ultimately Jesus was buried in a borrowed tomb. Talk about being poor. How easy it would have been to look down on Jesus the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

As Jesus hung on the cross he was naked, thirsty—a prisoner condemned to die. Why was he there on the cross? To take your place, to take my place, to take the place of the poor and the victims of injustice. The more you understand that Jesus did that for you and the more you take that into the

very center of your life the more you will become one of the righteous people that everyone in the community rejoices over.

The gospel isn't just about doing the right things or getting right with God. The Gospel is about Jesus disadvantaging himself to come to earth and be one of us—becoming poor so that we could become rich. Jesus did that just for you so that the thread of your life could become part of the fabric of shalom. If Jesus was willing to disadvantage himself to advantage you—If he was willing to become poor so that you could become rich—shouldn't we be willing to do the same for those who live around us?

## **September 27 – Ecclesiastes 1 and 2**

Tradition holds that Ecclesiastes was written by King Solomon during the latter part of his life. This would make complete sense, because as you read this book you see a man who has experienced all that life has to offer and yet still feels empty. Look how the second verse starts out. "Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless! This is a person who has tasted all of life, and found that life lived purely for oneself is utterly meaningless. Chapter 1 starts by focusing on how life is just one repetitious day after another; nothing new under the sun. In verses 14 – 18 of chapter 1, Solomon even says that the great wisdom he had accumulated was also meaningless. In fact, as you look at verses, you get the strong impression that Solomon believes that all wisdom does is make you more aware of the futility and pain of life. In verses 15 and 16 of chapter 2, Solomon goes on to say that wisdom brings no real benefit, because in the end both the wise man and the fool die anyway. In chapter 2, Solomon also looks at trying to find meaning in pleasure and in work. Solomon realizes that in the end all you seek to gain in life, either through work or through pleasure, means nothing once your life ends and you are gone.

It is really a very bleak picture of life. How could Solomon have such a bleak outlook on life? First off, as you think about what Solomon says, it is basically all true. Life is bleak, pleasure fades quickly, work brings wealth that one way or another disappears one day, so when a person looks at their life, only in terms of what is happening in their material/physical world, life is meaningless. If our earthly existence is all there is, then our lives truly do mean nothing. If Solomon truly did write this in the later part of his life, he had very much experienced what it was like to live only in the material/physical realm. For most of the later part of his adult life, Solomon had abandoned God.

**1 Kings 11:1-6** King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter-- Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. <sup>2</sup> They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. <sup>3</sup> He had seven hundred

wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. <sup>4</sup> As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. <sup>5</sup> He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. <sup>6</sup> So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done.

So it is no wonder Solomon experienced these feelings in his life. We were created to love and glorify God with our lives, but our sinful natures convince us that we can find meaning and purpose in life apart from God. There are times in our lives that wisdom, wealth and pleasure all look more beautiful to us than God does, and so like Solomon we go off chasing after these things, and turn away from God.

But the good news of the Gospel is that God did not give up on us. God sent us something new under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:9). God sent his son to die on the cross, so that our hearts could be turned away from the meaningless things we pursue in life.

**John 3:16** "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

If we look at the cross, we see real beauty, the beauty of a sacrifice that was willingly made so that our lives can have meaning and purpose. Because of the cross our lives are not just about things that will fade away when we die, but things that will last into eternity.

## **September 28 – Ecclesiastes 5 and 6**

In chapters 5 and 6, Solomon spends a lot of time talking about the meaningless of wealth. Look at verses 10 – 12 of chapter 5. Do they remind you of Jesus' words in:

**Luke 12:15-21** *Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." <sup>16</sup> And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. <sup>17</sup> He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' <sup>18</sup> "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. <sup>19</sup> And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." <sup>20</sup> "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' <sup>21</sup> "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."*

You can spend your whole life accumulating wealth only to see it disappear in a moment. What good does wealth do you in eternity? Wealth only does a person good if it is used to accumulate eternal wealth by using the blessing God has bestowed on us to bless others.

**Luke 12:22-34** *Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear.*

<sup>23</sup> Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. <sup>24</sup> Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! <sup>25</sup> Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? <sup>26</sup> Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? <sup>27</sup> "Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. <sup>28</sup> If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! <sup>29</sup> And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. <sup>30</sup> For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. <sup>31</sup> But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. <sup>32</sup> "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. <sup>33</sup> Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. <sup>34</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

After living his whole life accumulating vast sums of wealth, Solomon realized the folly of it all. It is easy to get deceived by wealth, because certainly wealth makes this life much more comfortable, but sometimes a comfortable life can keep us from eternal life, because a comfortable life can divert our attention away from God. But as we look at the cross and see Jesus, we see something that is far more valuable than wealth and possessions. Jesus could have had anything he wanted during his life. He could have had wealth, power, comfort, and pleasures, but he traded all of that for the cross, so that God's will could be done, and eternity secured both for him and for us.

**Matthew 13:44** *"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.*

Jesus' call is for us to follow his example and go and do likewise.

## September 29 – Ecclesiastes 12

This chapter marks the conclusion of Ecclesiastes. For 11 chapters Solomon has detailed the meaninglessness and folly of a self-indulgent lifestyle—a life style that focuses only on oneself, and only on this life. In chapter 12, Solomon comes to the conclusion of the matter, and it is found in verse 13.

**Ecclesiastes 12:13** *Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.*

That is a pretty succinct summary of what life is really all about. It took Solomon a long time to get there, but in the end he seems to have found what is really important. You can almost picture Solomon as an old man looking back on his life and as his life is coming to a close, realizing that he has wasted so much of it on things that really didn't matter.

Unfortunately, at this same time he also would have realized how badly

he had failed in the things that he realizes are most important. Because of his addiction to women (How else can you describe the need for 700 wives and over 1,000 concubines?), Solomon's attention was diverted away from the one thing that matters more than anything else: "fearing God and keeping His commandments."

As we studied the Book of Proverbs we came to an understanding of what it really means to fear the Lord. The fear of the Lord is not just quaking in your boots (although that is exactly what we would do if we really saw God as He truly is), and it is not just being afraid of what God will do to us if we disobey Him. The fear of the Lord is a realization that a relationship with the Lord is the most important thing in our lives, and we lose that we are utterly lost. It is the one thing we should fear losing more than anything else. To understand what Solomon meant as he wrote these words, all we need to do is to think about these words that Jesus said as he summarized the Law of God.

**Matthew 22:36-40** *"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"*  
<sup>37</sup> *Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'* <sup>38</sup> *This is the first and greatest commandment.* <sup>39</sup> *And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'* <sup>40</sup> *All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

Jesus and Solomon both reach the exact same conclusion concerning what is really important in life—to love God more than anything else and to love others as you love yourself—to fear the Lord and keep His commandments.

## **September 30 – Song of Songs (Solomon) 2: 8 – 15** **Ephesians 5: 21 – 33**

Song of Songs was written by Solomon, and in this book, Solomon paints a picture of the passionate love and desire that a husband and wife share with each other. In today's reading you can see a glimpse of this love. It is a picture of the marital love that Paul says Christ and his church have for each other. In Ephesians 5 Paul uses marriage to explain the relationship between Christ and his church. Today, as people read this passage they struggle with what Paul writes, because it has become unfashionable in our society to suggest that a wife should submit to her husband, but that is only because people get the wrong idea about what Paul is trying to say. Read these verses from Ephesians very carefully and notice that Paul starts out by saying in verse 21 that all Christians are to submit to one another. Next, Paul uses marriage to illustrate what this means. It is true that in verses 22 – 24, Paul tells wives that they are to submit to their husbands, but don't stop reading there. Go on and read the following verses where Paul talks about how husbands are to submit to their wives. What? You don't see Paul saying that? He sure is. What is it that he tells husbands they are to do? Love their wives to the point

where they are willing to give up their life for the sake of their wife's life, just as Jesus gave up his life for the sake of ours. I would submit to you that this is a far greater form of submission than the wife is called to give.

The reason why the relationship between a husband and a wife is so important is because marriage illustrates the relation of Christ to his followers. The love and intimacy that is expressed in very graphic terms in Song of Songs and in Ephesians 5 is exactly the kind of relationship that God desires to have with each of us. The passion and desire for intimacy that a wife feels for her husband, in a properly functioning marriage, is exactly the kind of passion and desire that we should feel toward God. Now stop and think, what is it that should fuel that passion and desire for God? First, it is His sheer beauty. That alone should be enough to make us desire God, but alas it isn't is it? So what did God do when we refused to desire him simply for what He is? He gave His life up for us. God's desire for us was so strong that He willingly came to die so that we could live. How can we be cold and indifferent to love like that?

### **October 1 – Isaiah 4: 2 – 6**

The Book of Isaiah is the first of the prophetic books of the Bible. These prophetic books were all written after the reigns of David and Solomon (around 950 BC), but they were all written at least 400 years before Jesus was born. In these prophetic books we will see some very clear references that are unmistakably references to Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection. Some of these prophetic books were written as Israel was on the decline, and the prophets spoke the word of God to warn the Israelites of the judgment that was about to come upon them, but also to tell them that all would not be lost, because of their covenant God who would be faithful to them in spite of their unfaithfulness to Him.

Isaiah lived and prophesied during a time of great upheaval in Israel. God had allowed the nation to be split in two—the 10 northern tribes would become known as Israel, and the two remaining tribes would be known as Judah. Once the one great nation became two nations, Israel completely forsook the Lord. All of their kings were evil, and led these 10 northern tribes into the idol worship of the nations that lived around them. The two southern tribes that became known as Judah also struggled with idolatry from time to time; however they also had some good kings who loved the Lord. Judah was King David's family line, and God had promised that someone from David's family would become a great king who would rule forever (2 Samuel 7), so in spite of their wickedness God made a way for this family to continue. Because of their unfaithfulness to God both Israel and Judah were headed for exile and judgment. Israel's demise would come first in 722 BC at the hands of the Assyrian Empire. After Israel's exile these 10 northern tribes would never be heard from

again. Judah's exile would not happen until 586 BC when the Babylonian Empire would defeat and take them into exile. But Judah would rise from the ashes and return from exile, and from this family line Jesus, the great king who would reign forever, would be born.

Isaiah's prophecies concern all of these events, including events in Jesus' life and ministry. Isaiah's prophecies concerning Jesus will be the focus of our study.

In chapters 2 and 3, Isaiah warns the Israelites that the Day of Lord (the day of judgment) was fast approaching, and Israel is about to be judged and punished by being sent into exile. In today's reading, Isaiah tells the Israelites that even though God is about to judge them and send them into exile, He is not done with them yet. Even though they will be cut down to a stump, God will cause a beautiful and glorious branch to grow out of that stump. These verses are a clear reference to Jesus and what Jesus would do. Look at how Isaiah describes what this glorious branch will do for the people of Israel. First, in verses 3 and 4, Isaiah tells us that he will make them holy and that he will take away the filth of their sin and cleanse them. Isn't that exactly what Jesus has done for us?

**Hebrews 9:14** *How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!*

Isaiah goes on to say in verses 5 and 6 that through this righteous branch the presence of God will come to dwell once again among His people. To do this Isaiah looks back at how the presence of God was first made known among the people of Israel. As the Israelites left Egypt, God appeared in their presence as cloud of smoke by day and a flaming fire by night. When Jesus came, the presence of God walked among us.

**John 1:14** *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

And because of what Jesus accomplished for us on the cross, we can live eternally in God's presence.

**Revelation 7:13-17** *"These in white robes-- who are they, and where did they come from?" <sup>14</sup> I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. <sup>15</sup> Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. <sup>16</sup> Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. <sup>17</sup> For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."*