

Schadenfreude

Proverbs 24:17-18 (PART 1)

Baxter T. Exum (#1725)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
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Good morning, and welcome to the Four Lakes congregation! If you are visiting this morning or joining us online or on the phone, we are glad to have you with us. We'd like to ask that you fill out a visitor card online if you can, or you can use one of the cards from the pew in front of you. Whatever works for you, we would love to hear from you, and we invite you to pass along any questions or prayer concerns.

We are here this morning to preach the gospel, and in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, Paul tells us what the gospel is, ***"Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."*** The gospel, then, or the good news, is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

And we obey the gospel by reenacting it in our own lives as we die to sin, as we are buried with Jesus in baptism, and as we are raised up to live the Christian life. And we do have several examples to share this morning, starting with an update from the Crosstown congregation in Tulsa, Oklahoma, as they say that, "The angels in heaven are rejoicing! Welcome to the Body of Christ Victoria!" It looks to me like Victoria might have a Subway bag over a broken arm or something, but we are glad that Victoria has obeyed the gospel this week.

This next one comes through a friend, JJ Hendrix, and an update from the church in Azle, Texas. They say that, "The angels rejoice as Zackary obeyed the gospel by putting on Christ in baptism (Galatians 3:27) to have his sins washed away (Acts 22:16)!" Good news from Texas this week!

We have an update from the Hialeah congregation down in Florida. They say, "Another great day today! Melissa Smith washed away her sins through baptism today! Praise God for our new sister in Christ!"

And then we have one more, this one coming to us from John Pigg, a retired preacher who coordinates some mission work down in Mexico. Mexico has been in the news this week, hasn't it? We've had the two leading presidential candidates down at the border. But I am especially thankful for the three souls who have become citizens of God's kingdom this week. John says, "Thank God Sunday three souls were added to the body of Christ. Welcome our new brothers Javier, Juana and Arely. We are blessed in Mission GTO Mexico to have Raul

and Janette as our missionary family in Jerécuaro sharing the gospel of Christ.” Amen to that! And if you are interested in crossing that border from death to life this week, and if there is anything we can do to help, we hope you will let us know. Pull me aside after worship today, use the contact information in our bulletin or on the website, or send me a text at 608-224-0274.

This morning, I’d like to return to our very sporadic and long term study of Proverbs by studying a request that has been turned in by one of our senior saints a number of times over the past ten years or so, and it’s tied to something that is truly a test of who we are as God’s people. And I say this, because it’s basically an attitude that we have concerning those who may be described as our enemies. The request was for a lesson on Proverbs 24:17-18 and “not gloating over our enemies’ defeat or misfortune.” And I’ve put this off for several years, because we’ve been working through the book of Proverbs very sporadically over a long term basis. Now, to put this in context, there is no context! As you might remember, the book of Proverbs is a collection of “proverbs,” short pithy statements that are generally true. And these proverbs come from King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, and he collected these sayings for the benefit of his sons. Up to this point, we have made it through the first nine chapters. I hope you can take a copy of the Bible and take a quick look at those first nine chapters, because in chapters 1-9, we DO have some context; we have some paragraphs here and there. In Chapters 1-9 Solomon is basically encouraging his sons to walk in wisdom. Wisdom is personified as a beautiful woman, but on the other hand, foolishness is personified as an off-limits or adulterous woman. So, as they grow up, Solomon’s sons will need to distinguish between the two, turning towards the one and avoiding the other. However, when we get to Proverbs 10, we get to the actual proverbs, and the context, for the most part, almost completely disappears. You’ll notice, in Proverbs 10:1, the text almost seems to have a heading built into the text as it says, “*The proverbs of Solomon,*” and then it continues from there with a long series of completely unrelated little statements.

My goal, before I either die or retire (whichever comes first) is to continue to cover the rest of this book in sermon form – not all in a row, but as I have said over the past several years, “sporadically” and over the long term. So, how do we cover such a large chunk of scripture that has almost no context? I haven’t seen this done, and there hasn’t been too much written on this, but my goal is to cover the rest of this book topically, dividing the remaining proverbs by subject. So, this is what I’ve done. Several months ago, I printed out Proverbs 10-31 one verse at a time, and I’ve been reading through this, making notes as to the topic of each verse. I am now in the process of physically cutting this up and sorting the rest of the book by subject matter. On the wall up here, I’m sharing a picture of my study in a cabin just outside Copper Harbor on the Keweenaw Peninsula. On my trip several weeks ago, there was an area where I couldn’t find a state park with plug-ins (and last year it got down to 21 below zero with nearly 200 inches of snow in this area), so I found a cabin – no cell service, no electricity, but it did have a little wood stove. As the wind whistled outside, I had the great privilege of making some huge progress studying the book of Proverbs. I’ll give some more updates as we work our way through it, but today and next Sunday (Lord willing) I’d like for us to start our study of the rest of this book by looking at this request that’s been coming in from one of our senior saints, “not gloating over our enemies’ defeat or misfortune,” from Proverbs 24:17-18.

And the request is tied to an interesting German word that’s made a comeback over the past few decades. I am referring to the concept of SCHADENFREUDE. Now, my grandfather had some great advice on preaching, and he used to say, “Never use a big word when a smaller word will get the point across.” And I agree with that. This has been a guiding principle over my past 30 years of preaching. Today, though, we are making an exception. The word SCHADENFREUDE comes from two German words meaning “harm” and “joy.” SCHADENFREUDE, then, refers to the idea of having pleasure (or joy) in the pain or misfortune of others. And this is a perfect summary of this request we’re studying.

Carried over into English, the word goes back to the mid-1800's, spiking just after WWII, but then it comes back due to an episode of the Simpsons back in 1991. Ned Flanders is the Simpsons' devoted Christian neighbor with a beautiful family; he's almost always in a good mood, so Homer is thrilled when he finds that his neighbor Ned Flanders' business is failing, and his daughter Lisa uses the word SCHADENFREUDE, and she explains that, "It's a German term for shameful joy, taking pleasure in the suffering of others." That episode is the point at which the word SCHADENFREUDE went viral, so to speak.

Maybe you can think back to 9-11, when we saw the people of Gaza celebrating in the streets that night. Or perhaps right here in the US a few years later at the death of Bin Laden. In terms of justice, I think back to a ride to church when I was a kid. We were on Highway 176 down in Crystal Lake, getting ready to turn right onto Oak Street (where the church is located), and there is a lane to the right of us, but it's marked off as a shoulder, not for driving. We were several cars back, waiting in line, and a car flies up beside us, and turns right from that forbidden lane. Right at that moment, the cop in front of us lights up and pulls the guy over almost instantaneously. There might have been some cheering in the car right at that moment. And there is a sense in which it's good and right to be thankful for justice or to recognize God's retribution, but the issue here is really the pleasure part of it. Perhaps we laugh at those online videos where someone is texting and walking and falls into the fountain at a mall. Or maybe we think of watching someone eat some insanely hot pepper, and they are clearly suffering, but we enjoy it, we find some satisfaction in it. Or we might think of the movie Home Alone. That film could have been called "SCHADENFREUDE." Or, more recently, we might think of what has happened during the pandemic. If some famous person refused the vaccine and then got sick and died, there was sometimes (unfortunately) this sense of satisfaction, a "served him right" attitude. And now that we have more data on the side effects and the sudden deaths, that "I told you so" feeling of satisfaction is making a comeback from the other side now. It's a mess out there, isn't it? Or maybe a political leader gets sidetracked by scandal, and the other side almost seems to enjoy it. We live in a world of SCHADENFREUDE.

This morning, then, let's look at the passage that's been requested – Proverbs 24:17-18. Today we'll note the WARNING, followed by the REASON for the warning, and then, next week, I'd like for us to look at some examples in the Bible, both positive and negative. This morning, though, we start with the wise words of Solomon to his sons in Proverbs 24:17-18,

***Do not rejoice when your enemy falls,
And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles;
Or the LORD will see it and be displeased,
And turn His anger away from him.***

I. Let's start this morning by focusing in on the WARNING (in verse 17).

***Do not rejoice when your enemy falls,
And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles.***

And Solomon defines the terms, doesn't he? To "**rejoice**" is to "**let your heart be glad,**" and to "**fall**" is to "**stumble.**" But what I hope we notice here is that this isn't a warning against actively harming an enemy, but this is more passive. The warning here is against rejoicing when our enemy falls. So, this isn't even about us tripping our enemy or causing him to stumble, but this is simply the danger of us rejoicing when it happens. This, in fact, may not even be public. This may just be a reaction in the heart. And Solomon says so, explicitly, in the second half of verse 17, "**...and do not let your heart be glad...**" This, then, is not an action, but an attitude. It may progress to actively rejoicing (out loud), something we do, but this is primarily something we may think. Our thoughts may get us in trouble here.

Beyond this, let's also notice that the person who *"falls"* is our *"enemy."* And it's not even the enemy of a nation, but the one who falls is described as *"your enemy."* And I don't know about you, but to me, this seems to be pretty personal. Solomon is warning, then, about our attitude toward somebody who really doesn't like us, perhaps somebody who is out to get us – an aggressive co-worker, an angry neighbor; or it may be somebody we don't like for some reason, maybe due to envy or jealousy. Unfortunately, it might even be a spouse, but for whatever reason, this person is our enemy, and then this person stumbles or falls. Perhaps we feel threatened by a young and aggressive co-worker who's been working his or her way up through the company, and this person makes some huge mistakes and gets taken down a notch or two, and we're over here thinking, "Ha! Now I am more secure in my own position." Or maybe there's a neighbor who's always bragging about having the absolute latest and greatest in hunting gear, but he gets nothing. Years and years ago, I was mistreated by somebody, and shortly afterwards I heard that he had some kind of an accident where he crushed either one or both of his kneecaps and had to have extensive surgery. I'll admit that I struggled with SCHADENFREUDE just a bit. And although there may be some perverse satisfaction in it, Solomon warns that we are not to rejoice when our enemy falls.

And while we're talking about enemies here, we should probably just note that there may be a difference between my enemy and God's enemy. I may have a problem with somebody, or somebody may have a problem with me, but me being enemies with somebody may or may not mean that they are also God's enemy. Ideally, these two categories would line up perfectly (I love what God loves, and I hate what God hates), but that is not always the case. Just because I don't like somebody doesn't necessarily mean that God doesn't like this person either.

Another thing I hope we notice here (going back to my reference to Bin Laden earlier) is that there may be a difference between feeling relief and feeling joy over something. When justice is carried out, we may feel a sense of satisfaction in that "this is really what needed to happen." But that, to me, seems different from *"rejoicing"* or our *"heart feeling glad"* over the fall of an enemy. We may think of God's message through the prophet Ezekiel in Ezekiel 33:11, *"Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord GOD, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?'"* So, here is a message from God. He's bringing death and destruction on those who deserve it, but he takes no pleasure in it. So also, when we see justice carried out, we may recognize it as being just and right, we might be thankful that a victim may have some sense of closure, but that doesn't mean that we need to be taking pleasure in it. A terrible thing has happened.

And perhaps tied to this, we should probably also realize: At one time, we were God's enemies! As Paul writes in Romans 5:10, *"For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."* And so, instead of rejoicing, we may need a dose of humility, "There, but for the grace of God, go I." We could very easily be the ones who stumble and fall. And, as Elijah read for us in today's reading from Luke 6, we are to do for others not as they have done for us, we are to *"treat others the same way you want them to treat you."* The Lord, in fact, says, *"But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."* And this way of thinking about our enemies goes all the way back to the Law of Moses. Several weeks ago, we looked at Exodus 23:4-5 in our Wednesday evening class, where God said, *"If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying helpless under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him, you shall surely release it with him."* Human nature says, "Ha! Look at that! My enemy's donkey is wandering away!" The love of God says, "I need to stop what I'm doing to return that donkey to my enemy, because that's what I would want someone

to do for me.” So, if God takes no pleasure in the fall of the wicked, then neither should we. This, then is the warning, ***“Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles.”***

II. Before we wrap it up this morning, let’s at least briefly think about THE REASON FOR THE WARNING.

And we see the explanation given in verse 18, ***“Or the LORD will see it and be displeased, and turn His anger away from him.”*** This clarifies a few things for us! Here, it seems that our enemy is truly being punished for something, doesn’t it? So, now we find that this isn’t some random person who doesn’t like us, but this enemy is also God’s enemy, and this person is getting a dose of justice here. But the second realization I think we have in verse 18 is that if we gloat, we have now put ourselves back in the category of being subject to God’s discipline ourselves! So, we originally had us (the innocent bystanders in this picture), and we have our enemy (who is also God’s enemy and on the receiving end of God’s discipline), and we find here that if we gloat at that punishment, if we laugh and point mockingly at what that person is going through, we are now just as guilty as they are! The text simply says that God may ***“turn his anger away”*** from this person, but it seems implied (as I understand it) that we are the reason for God turning his anger away, and that we may now be on the receiving end of God’s anger. This, then, is the REASON for the warning: Don’t gloat over your enemy getting punished, lest you end up getting punished yourself!

We actually have an interesting reference to this over in Job 31:29-30. Someone has asked for some lessons on the middle part of Job, by the way. We traditionally cover the beginning of Job and the ending of Job, but it’s easy to overlook those chapters in the middle. So, here it comes, I guess! In a nutshell, Satan stands before God and accuses Job of serving God for nothing; so, to prove that this isn’t the case, God allows Satan to test Job. Job has no idea what’s going on, but he loses almost everything – his children, his flocks, his possessions, even his wife turns against him – and then he’s “comforted” by some friends, who really aren’t too comforting. They basically accuse Job of sin. I’m oversimplifying here, but his friends basically say, “Job, this is terrible! You must have done something to deserve this!” That was a common way of thinking back then, and we still see it today. But toward the end of the book, Job approaches God, and he defends himself, “Dear God, I haven’t done this, this, and this.” And in this context, we come to Job 31:29-30, where Job says to God, ***“Have I rejoiced at the extinction of my enemy, or exulted when evil befell him? No, I have not allowed my mouth to sin by asking for his life in a curse.”*** I just think that’s interesting! Of all the terrible things Job could have been guilty of that might have brought on this apparent punishment from God, he says that he has definitely not been gloating over his enemies! The reason for not being happy about the fall of my enemy is that gloating may put me in danger of falling myself. In the gospel accounts, I think of the parable where the one slave who is forgiven much goes out and harasses another slave who owes him practically nothing. When the master hears of this, he is irate and orders the first slave to be tortured. So also when we (who have been forgiven much) gloat over God’s discipline of someone we don’t like.

Conclusion:

The real application of this proverb comes in those words from Jesus that Elijah read for us earlier from Luke 6: Our enemies might suffer, but our job as God’s people is to love, do good, bless, pray, and give – even when people may never love us back, and our reward, Jesus says, will be great, and we will be sons of the Most High; for he Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. We are to be merciful, just as our Father is merciful.

Before John leads us in a song, let's go to God in prayer.

Our Father in Heaven,

You alone are a God of mercy, and justice, and love, and we come to you this morning asking you to search our hearts. We pray that you would help us root out any sense of envy or pride, anything that would cause us to take pleasure in others' pain, even in our enemies, Father. Instead, we ask for your help as we react to the world around us with love, doing to others just as we would like to have done to us. Help us to be Jesus to the people we see every day, even when it's hard, especially when it's hard.

Thank you, Father, for loving us, especially when we were enemies. Thank you for Jesus. We come to you today through his name. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com