

6/30/24 Christ Fellowship

## The Vision of Solomon for Finances – Proverbs 22:1

Abraham Lincoln – When I say that name, what do you think?

Adolph Hitler? What do you think? Madonna? Billy Graham? What comes to mind when I say those names?

What about when I say the name Lance Armstrong? Maybe some of you don't know or don't remember Lance Armstrong but he won the Tour de France bicycle race an unprecedented seven consecutive times. His name was famous around the world from the late 90's and on. He was a hero to children and an inspiration to men for years and there was a time when everybody knew his name. He even had those little rubber bracelets with his name on them and kids all over the world wore them proudly in his support. And then he was accused of using performance enhancing drugs and he immediately denied it ever happened. He even sued a former teammate who accused him of such. He looked right into the camera, time after time, and denied ever using anything illegal.

Finally, after it was absolutely proven, Armstrong admitted that he had been doping while he was winning all those times and he had a bunch of his medals and awards stripped from him and he is rarely ever seen anymore. Now, nobody looks up to him. Nobody wears his wrist bands. Nobody wants to be like Lance. His name is ruined forever.

Now, what do you think comes to other people's minds when your name is spoken? Do they smile? Do they cringe? Do they want to be like you or is your name not spoken in respectable circles? What does it mean to have a good name? What does it take to get a good name? Is it enough to have a good name for a while? Is it enough to have a pretty good name? How long does it take to get a good name and how long does it take to lose one?

To answer some of those questions, I'd like you to turn to the Old Testament book of Proverbs as we continue our study of the different visions that God has given. We know that God wants us to know His will for our lives and so He has made it plain in scripture what His will is. And God does that by giving people a vision or a revelation of His will. And in **Proverbs 22**, we see the vision that God has given Solomon for finances. And if you are wondering what finances has to do with having a good name, let's read just **Proverbs 22, verse 1**.

*“A good name is more desirable than great riches. To be esteemed is better than silver or gold.”*

Now, when you realize who wrote this you may have one of two reactions. Solomon – the richest man in the world – who may have been in today’s money a trillionaire – wrote this and so you may think, *“Oh, sure, that’s easy for him to say!”* Or, you may think, *“Well, he ought to know.”* But remember this is the same Solomon who asked God for wisdom and God gave it as well as the great riches. So, I’m going with, *“Well, he ought to know.”*

In the original Hebrew, the word “good” is not in there. It is just assumed because in the Old Testament time a name was only as good as the person. Names were more important then than they are now. Think of Abraham, Paul and Peter who all got their names changed to better reflect who they really were.

Down through the years, the European people gave names to their military and political leaders; names like Charles the simple who was the son of Louis the stammerer. Louis the sluggard and Ethelred the unready. Ethelred is bad enough. Or how about the ever-popular Louis the fat and his son, Louis the fat, the second? The truth can be brutal, right? The little kid across the street from our building in Lake Bridgeport used to call me Passenger Todd. That doesn’t sound so bad now. At least it wasn’t Todd the fat.

*“A good name is more desirable than great riches...”* What is a good name? A good name is the very essence of who you are. It is not just your reputation. It is also your character. Your reputation is who people think you are. Your character is who God thinks you are. And when you have a good reputation and a good character, you have a good name. If your reputation is good but your character is bad, it just means you haven’t been caught yet. And sacrificing your riches is a good way to get a good name but sacrificing your name to get riches is a bad idea.

The Book of Proverbs is considered a book of poetry like the book of Psalms. Especially in the original Hebrew, Proverbs was beautiful to read and to hear and sometimes even to look at. We lose some of that with it translated to English but not all of it. They don’t rhyme and never really did but Solomon’s writings are still beautiful poetry. But if Todd were writing this, I would just have simply said, *“It’s better to be good than rich.”*

There are three reasons why a good name is better than riches. There is a practical reason, a cultural reason and a spiritual reason. The practical reason is that anybody can do it. Not everybody can have great riches but anybody can get a good name. Now, an important part of having a good name is obviously being a good person but you also need wisdom.

Wisdom helps you know how to be good. And how do you get wisdom? James tells us in his first chapter that if we need wisdom, we should ask God for it and He will give it. So, again, everybody can have a good name even if your name is not good now. You can start by asking for wisdom and God will help you with that.

So, the practical reason is that anybody can do it. Another reason is cultural. Think about Billy Graham. Did Billy have a good name? One of the best and he still does even several years after his death. And no serious person in our culture can say that Billy Graham didn't have a good name. He made friends with presidents, liberal and conservative. Atheists may not have agreed with him but even they had to have some respect for him. Non-religious people would say, "*Yea, I like that guy.*" And when people like you and respect you, they tend to listen to you and Billy Graham had that going for him in spades.

One of the things that allowed him to have such a good name was that he was never accused of any kind of moral failure. "Moral failure" is a nice phrase that we use for those people that had a good reputation but bad character and they got caught. **1**

**Thessalonians 5** tells us to stay away from every appearance of evil. That's why Billy Graham had what became known as the Billy Graham rule. Simply put, that rule says that no male should spend any time alone with a female he is not married to. And now more than ever, that is a wise rule. That means a man and a woman who are not married never get in the same car, the same room or office or house by themselves. I've heard that Dr. Graham wouldn't even get in the same elevator alone with a woman.

What that prevents is either one being tempted to do something inappropriate but also the appearance of something inappropriate. All it takes these days is for a man to go into a room with a woman and somebody sees it from a distance and says, "*Hmm, I wonder what they're doing.*" I've seen it ruin careers, marriages and a person's good name because they were accused of something, whether it was true or not. But if you have a good name, everybody can respect that.

So, there is a practical reason and a cultural reason to have a good name. There is also the spiritual reason. I don't care how much money you have. God has more. He has more resources than Bill Gates and Elon Musk and everybody else combined and when we have a good name – when we have not just a good reputation but also a good character – we have access to all of God's resources. That's not preaching a prosperity Gospel. That's just saying that when your good character matches your good reputation, God blesses that with His grace and mercy and wisdom and generosity and sometimes even money. But that's not the point.

The point is when you strive after money, sometimes you get money. Sometimes. But when you strive after a good name, you get God's blessings. And how many of you know that a successful career and lots of money can sometimes be the opposite of being blessed by God?

In the past couple of months there have been two very successful pastors to retire early because something came out in their past that has ruined their good names. Moral failures. And it has been devastating. I don't know the whole story of either one and I really don't want to. And I don't really want to discuss it later because none of us know the whole story. But what I do know is that Satan is having quite a party. He knows that taking down the leader of a huge church like both of those had not only brings down the leader but does huge damage to the members as well. And from now on, at least for many years, possibly forever, nobody will talk about all the lives led to Jesus by those men. Nobody will remember how many people were helped or encouraged or lifted up by the words and deeds of those men. All anybody, especially unbelievers will talk about is their moral failures. And it makes all of us look bad.

Those men spoke to and had influence over thousands of people every week. Their janitorial staffs had more people than our whole church. But make no mistake, Satan hates Christ Fellowship. He hates us because we have embraced God's vision for us to minister specifically to the poor, the addicted and the incarcerated. He hates us because we preach and teach and sing truth. He hates us because we love Jesus and love each other. And he hates every church that does that and that makes every pastor a target. And nothing scares me more than to think about letting God down and letting you down by giving in to temptation and ruining not just my name but the name of the church and of our Savior. So, when you think of me, please pray for my wisdom and my purity so we can all continue to make God look good.

See, that's the secret to having a good name. When you strive to make your name great, eh, sometimes you might do okay with that. But when you strive to make God look good and make His name great and His name known, then God blesses you with the wisdom and purity you need to make your name a good name; a name that is good to God and to man.

Think about our old buddy, Job. Did Job have a good name? His was a great name...and still is. Do you remember how God called Job? Over and over again, God called Job "my servant Job." In chapter one, God asks Satan, *"Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him. He fears God and shuns evil."* Then after the whole thing

was over, God said to Job's buddies in chapter 42, *"I am angry with you...because you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has. 8 Go to my servant Job and sacrifice a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your folly. You have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has."*

Oh, I propose to you today that to be called the servant of the most high God is the greatest name we could ever be called! When God calls you "my servant" that's when you have a good name. That's the name that is better than silver and gold. That's the name that all men can respect. That's the name that gets you the real blessings of God and when you have the blessings of God you won't care if you have gold and silver.

Paul, the Apostle Paul, the servant of God Paul said in **Philippians 4**, *"I know both how to have a little, and I know how to have a lot. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content — whether well fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need. I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me."*

Did Paul have a good name? Absolutely! And you can too. I know I know I know that you have a past. And there are consequences for what we have done in the past. But God is forgiving and so you can still have a good name with Him. And because of His grace, you can still have a good name with other people. It may take a while. It's hard to earn a good name and easy to destroy it. But by God's amazing grace it is possible.

Maybe you need to spend some time asking God to help repair your name. For your sake and for His sake and for the sake of His Kingdom, He wants to help you. But it starts with asking for forgiveness and with repentance. You have to turn away from that lifestyle. You may lose friends. You may lose family. But you have to get away from anything that might keep you from having the name God wants you to have, that name of servant.

Maybe you need to ask God to be your Savior and Lord. If you have never done that before then today is the day of salvation. God the Father said that where there is sin, something had to die. So, instead of us using animals to make sacrifices, Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice and gave His life to pay the price the Father said was due. And all you have to do is believe and allow God to change you and give you the ultimate good name: His child and His servant. Do it right now as the music plays.