

Lesson 12: Christ the King and the Way of Righteousness

The book of Proverbs is often treated as a collection of good advice: tips for work, money, parenting, conflict, and speech. But if we stop there, we miss the deepest reality Proverbs is pressing upon us. This is not a random grab-bag of wise sayings; it is royal instruction. It comes to us in the voice of a king, shaping a son for the throne, inviting us into a way of life that is profoundly Christ-shaped. In this lesson, we want to see how Proverbs holds together the themes of kingship and the “way of righteousness”, and how those themes ultimately drive us to Christ as both our King and our path.



The Royal Setting of Proverbs: A Father, a Son, and a Throne

Proverbs opens by anchoring us in history: *“The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel”* (1:1). From the very first verse, this is royal literature. We are listening in on the instruction of a Davidic king, in a kingdom God has established, to a son who is being prepared to rule. Throughout the early chapters we hear the repeated refrain, *“My son...”* (e.g., 1:8; 2:1; 3:1), which is not just generic parental talk. It is the language of a royal father grooming a prince to sit on the throne, to judge the people in righteousness, and to walk in the fear of the LORD.

This royal framing matters for how we read the entire book. Proverbs is not just about “how to be a better you”; it is about how a king, and by extension, a people, should live under God’s righteous rule. We see explicit king-focused proverbs later in the book:

- *“It is an abomination to kings to do evil, for the throne is established by righteousness.”* (16:12)
- *“Steadfast love and faithfulness preserve the king, and by steadfast love his throne is upheld.”* (20:28)
- *“The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.”* (21:1)

Notice the assumptions baked into these sayings. The king is not autonomous; his heart is in the hand of the LORD. His throne is not built on charisma or military might but on righteousness, steadfast love, and faithfulness. In other words, the king’s rule is supposed to reflect God’s character.

This helps us see how Proverbs fits within the broader story of Scripture. God had already promised David that his throne would be established forever and that he would have a son who would reign in righteousness (2 Samuel 7). Proverbs picks up that line and depicts what such a king ought to look like. The wise king fears the LORD, hates evil, loves justice, guards his speech, and rules for the good of the weak.

Proverbs 31 reinforces this royal frame when it gives us the words of King Lemuel’s mother: *“What are you doing, my son? ... What are you doing, son of my womb? What are you doing, son of my vows?”* (31:2). A royal mother instructs a royal son, warning him against sexual immorality and drunkenness, and urging him to *“open [his] mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute.”* (31:8) A king’s calling is to be a voice for the voiceless and a defender of the oppressed.

Why emphasize all this? Because if we miss the royal context, we will shrink Proverbs down into private, individual self-improvement. But the book is much bigger. It is training for royal sonship, first for the Davidic king, then for all who belong to him. And once we see that, we are already being led toward Christ, the Son of David Who truly embodies the kingly wisdom Proverbs describes.

The Way of Righteousness and the Way of Death

Alongside this royal theme, Proverbs gives us another dominant motif: the two ways. Again and again the book sets before us two paths, two roads, two trajectories of life. One is called wisdom, fear

of the LORD, and the “*way of righteousness*”; the other is folly, wickedness, and the “*way that leads to death*.”

In **Proverbs 2**, the father promises that the LORD Himself will provide the wisdom that will guard the son: “*For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity*” (2:6-7). Wisdom will keep him “*from the way of evil*,” from men “*who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness*” (2:13). The righteous path is depicted as a straight road that leads to life; the wicked path is twisting and unstable.

Proverbs 4 makes the contrast explicit:

*But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.
The way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know over what they stumble. (4:18-19)*

Two ways, two destinations, two kinds of people. The book will keep coming back to these themes: the righteous vs. the wicked, the wise vs. the fool, the straight path vs. the crooked road. This is not just psychological description; it is moral and spiritual. The way you walk reveals whom you worship.

The “*way of righteousness*” is not a vague ethical niceness. It is bound up with fear of the LORD (1:7), with trusting in the LORD with all your heart and not leaning on your own understanding (3:5-6). It is a path marked by integrity, generosity, sexual purity, self-controlled speech, and humility before God. It flows from a heart that has been taught to love what God loves and hate what God hates.

On the other hand, the way of the wicked is not merely “people who occasionally mess up”. It is a life ordered around self, appetite, and pride. The wicked man is quick to shed innocent blood (1:11), greedy for unjust gain (1:19), arrogant (21:4), violent (4:17), and resistant to correction (12:1). The adulteress is portrayed as one whose house sinks down to death, whose paths lead to death (2:18). The fool despises instruction, mocks at sin, and rushes toward ruin.

Now here is where we need to be honest and let Proverbs challenge us. It is easy to read these chapters as if “the righteous” are people like us on our good days and “the wicked” are everyone else. But the book is sharper than that. If we measure our own lives against the standard of the “way of righteousness”, how consistently do we fear the LORD (1:7; 9:10), control our tongues (13:3; 21:23), resist sexual temptation (5:8; 6:25), love correction (12:1; 15:31-32), defend the poor (14:31; 31:8-9), and refuse unjust gain (10:2; 15:27)? How often do we instead follow the reflex of folly: defending ourselves (12:15; 21:2), hiding our sin (28:13), envying the wicked (3:31; 23:17; 24:1), or quietly cutting corners (11:1; 20:23)?

If you start thinking you scored well on this test, go read 1 John 1.

In that sense, Proverbs is doing something similar to what Jesus does in the Sermon on the Mount. It holds up a vision of righteousness that exposes our lack of it. It says, in effect, “the way of righteousness leads to life; the way of sin leads to death”, and then it confronts us with how often our hearts stubbornly walk the wrong path. That tension is intentional. Proverbs is not just telling us how to behave; it is showing us that we need a wise and righteous King. Who can both walk this path perfectly and bring us into it.

Christ the Wise and Righteous King

If Proverbs gives us a royal setting and a “two ways” framework, the question becomes: Who truly fulfills this? Who is the King whose throne is established by righteousness? Who walks the way of righteousness without ever turning aside into folly? And how does that connect to us?

The New Testament answers by consistently presenting Christ as both the wisdom of God and the righteous Son of David. Paul says that Christ “*became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption*” (1 Corinthians 1:30). He tells the Colossians that in Christ “*are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*.” (Colossians 2:3) Jesus Himself says that “*something greater than Solomon is here*.” (Matthew 12:42) In other words, the true and greater wise King, the One to Whom Proverbs has been pointing, has arrived.

Consider how Jesus embodies the royal wisdom which Proverbs describes:

- He is the perfectly obedient Son. Where Proverbs urges, *“My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments,”* (3:1) Jesus can say, *“I always do the things that are pleasing to him.”* (John 8:29) He never once despised wisdom or rejected His Father’s instruction.
- He is the just and compassionate King. Proverbs calls kings to hate evil, love truth, and defend the poor (16:10-13; 31:8-9). Jesus fulfills this as the King Who proclaims good news to the poor, exposes hypocrisy, and lays down His life for His people.
- He is the truly righteous Man. **Proverbs 10-11** paint a portrait of the righteous person: truthful in speech (10:11,31-32; 11:13), generous in giving (11:24-25), slow to anger (10:12,19; 11:12), diligent in work (10:4-5), secure in the fear of the LORD (10:27-30). When we lay those chapters over the Gospels, we see Jesus living out that righteousness in every arena: His speech is pure, His compassion is genuine, His dependence on the Father is unbroken.

He is also the one Who fully walks the *“path of the righteous”* described in **Proverbs 4:18**, *“shining brighter and brighter until the full day.”* His life moves toward the cross and resurrection, then beyond, to His exaltation at the right hand of God. *“The full day”* is the glory of the risen and reigning Christ.

But Christ is not only an example of wisdom; He is our representative and substitute. Left to ourselves, we belong on the path of the wicked. Our hearts are bent toward folly. We fall under many of the warnings of Proverbs, particularly when it exposes our pride, greed, or lust. Yet the wise King *steps into* our story, *takes* the consequences of our foolish wickedness upon Himself, and *credits* to us His perfect righteousness.

Think of it this way: every time Proverbs says, *“the righteous will be delivered”*, Jesus is the reason that can be true for us. Every time Proverbs says, *“the wicked will not go unpunished”*, the cross shows how seriously God takes that divine requirement. Christ, the righteous King, bears the penalty due to *fools and rebels*, so that they may be forgiven and transformed into *wise sons and daughters*.

This is why the New Testament can speak not only of Christ as wisdom, but of our being *“in Christ”*. If we are united to Him by faith, our wicked, foolish sinfulness is counted as His, His righteous, wise life is counted as ours, and His Spirit sanctifies us to walk in His way, which is the path of righteousness. The King in Proverbs is not just a model to imitate from a distance; He is the living LORD Who has taken us as His people and is writing His wisdom into our hearts.

Following the King on the Way of Righteousness

If Christ is the wise King and the way of righteousness, what does it look like for us to follow Him practically in light of Proverbs? We could say it simply: we learn to walk *in the King’s path, by the King’s power, according to the King’s words*.

1. **We walk in the King’s path:** The *“way of righteousness”* is no longer an abstract ideal; it is the path Christ Himself walked. When Proverbs calls us to trust in the LORD with all our heart (3:5-6), we now see that most clearly in the life of Jesus, trusting the Father in the wilderness, in Gethsemane, and even on the cross. To follow Christ is to be drawn into that same posture: *“not my will, but yours, be done.”* (Luke 22:42) The path He walked becomes the path we are summoned into: a life of obedience, humility, self-giving love, and joyful fear of God.
2. **We walk by the King’s power:** Proverbs regularly calls us to guard our hearts, to pursue wisdom, to turn away from evil. *Those commands remain. We are called to obey God’s Law.* But we no longer hear them as bare moralism, nor does the Law condemn us. The risen Christ has poured out the Holy Spirit, Who renews our hearts and enables us to begin living the wise life Proverbs describes. When Proverbs warns against raging anger, lazy hands, or deceitful speech, we don’t simply grit our teeth; we cry out to the One Who is *“wisdom from God”* to change us from the inside out. The same Spirit Who rested on Christ (Isaiah 11:2) now dwells in those who belong to Him.

3. **We live by the King's words:** The voice of the father in Proverbs (*"My son, do not forget my teaching"* in **3:1**) echoes for us in the words of Christ. He is the King Who teaches us how to interpret the Law, how to understand holiness, how to relate to money and possessions, enemies and neighbors. When we read Proverbs now, we are listening as disciples of Jesus, asking: How does this proverb take on new depth in light of Christ's life, death, and resurrection? How does this call to wisdom align with the character of my King?
4. **We embrace the King's discipline:** Proverbs insists that *"the LORD reproveth him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights."* (**3:12**) The New Testament picks this up in **Hebrews 12**, reminding believers that our sufferings and corrections are part of God's fatherly training, shaping us into holiness. If Christ is our King and we are His royal children by grace, then we should expect Him to correct us when we stray into folly. That correction may come through the Word confronting us, through a friend's rebuke, through consequences of sin, or through providential hardships. The wise response is not to resent it, but to see it as the King's love, drawing us back onto the way of righteousness.
5. **We hope in the King's final judgment:** Proverbs tells us that the righteous will be delivered and the wicked will not stand in the day of calamity (**11:4-8**). In Christ, we know there is a coming day when the wise King will judge the world in righteousness. That sober us: foolishness and wickedness will not have the last word. It also comforts us: every act of quiet faithfulness, every costly step of obedience on the way of righteousness, is seen by the King and will not be forgotten. We are not merely "trying to be good"; we are living as subjects of a righteous King Whose kingdom cannot be shaken.

Practically, this means we read Proverbs not just for "life hacks", but as a training manual for discipleship under Christ. We bring all areas of life under its searchlight—speech, work, money, sexuality, friendships, anger—and we ask: What does the King's wisdom look like here? Where do I see in myself the marks of the fool, the sluggard, the scoffer? Where do I see the beginnings of wise, righteous patterns that reflect my King? And then we bring all of that to Christ in prayer, asking for repentance where needed, encouragement where we are weary, and deeper love for the path He has set before us.

Conclusion: Learning to Love the King's Path

Proverbs, when read in its royal setting and in light of Christ, becomes far more than a collection of clever sayings. It is the voice of a King preparing a Son for the throne, and through Christ it becomes the voice of our King preparing us to live as His royal people. The book lays before us two ways: the way of righteousness and the way of death. It then introduces us to the One true righteous King Who has walked the path perfectly, borne the penalty of our sin, Who now invites us to follow Him.

If we belong to Christ, we are not spectators of His wisdom; we are participants in it. His righteousness is counted as ours. His Spirit dwells within us. His words train us to walk in the light. That means Proverbs should both humble us and encourage us.

It humbles us by revealing where we still cling to foolishness, pride, or secret sin.

It encourages us by reminding us that our King is not asking us to do anything He has not already done, and that He promises to complete the good work He began in us.

And never forget that our doing is the fruit, not the root, of our salvation.

So as you continue to read and meditate on Proverbs, do so with a Christ-centered gaze. Listen for the royal voice. Notice the shape of the way of righteousness. Let the warnings against folly and wickedness drive you to repentance. Let the portraits of the wise stir up longing to be more like Jesus. And then, day by day, step onto the King's path again, trusting that the One Who is wisdom from God will lead you safely home.