

Alcoholism

VBC

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Series: Life 101

Proverbs 23:29-35

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INTRO

While Super Bowls and Soccer Cups were not a part of the landscape of ancient Israel

- They did have their riddle wars
- Where riddles were given – and contestants sought to figure them out

Riddles were a teaching advice – a mix of fun and seriousness – a sort of jigsaw puzzle designed to engage the hearer

- The sage, who was a master at teaching, engaged in riddles of his own
- In 23:29f – he posed six riddles --
 - What manner of man is this whose life is filled with trouble and sorrow, rage and self-pity, isolation and loss of intimacy
 - Who is it that has become undone?
 - Living with strife, needless bruises, and bloodshot eyes?
 - Eyes that more than shot – are dull, with a vacant stare that says – "Nobody's home"?
 - As you look out on life, who is the walking tragedy?
 - Who is it who lives in a world of chaos and conflict and emptiness?

Give up?

In vs.30 – he gives us the answer – these ills are the lot of those who have become enamored with alcohol

- Who tarry, delay over the wine – the first to enter – and the last to leave the bar
- Who are on the hunt – the connoisseur in search of mixed drinks – in pursuit of stronger stuff

All too often I've read this passage with minimal attention

- You see, I don't drink – but now I am a father of teenagers
 - and I realize that there is a culture out there that has its sights set on encouraging my kids to buy in to the allures of drinking – with no intention of exposing the consequences
- I also have seen what drinking has done to a host of my friends – some of whom have lost their lives

The reality – almost everyone has a friend/an uncle/a coworker/a spouse/a neighbor who drinks too much

- While illegal drugs get the attention, alcohol is America's most pervasive drug problem
- It is facilitated by cultural norms and social connections – and factors into most domestic violence and sexual assault cases
- And it costs every one of us – alcohol abuse costs the economy 167 billion a year

So I am drawn to this passage in Proverbs

- The most extended statement on drinking in Scripture
- So graphic, one wonders if the author has experienced this condition as well

It is a carefully developed statement designed to persuade anyone who would think about drinking – or any drugs for that matter – to think twice

- In this passage, there are three obvious reasons to say no --

1 - ALCOHOL IS DECEPTIVE – vs.31-32

- There is something both alluring and seductive about drinking – about being part of the circle of those who boast in their drinking
- Which is not surprising – for evil to do its worst, it must look its best
- So the writer warns about becoming captivated, hypnotized by its appearance
- Don't be enamored by its feel – don't let your senses be overwhelmed by its smoothness, your appetites mesmerized by its allure

- For the attraction can be fatal – vs.32
- Beyond the sparkle is the poison – which he likens to the bite of a snake
 - The venomous pierce of a viper
- These may stand as metaphors for the initial hangover – but they may include the larger pain – the consequences that come with poor choices

What is deceptive can be constrictive

2 - ALCOHOL IS CONSTRICTIVE – 33-35a – this is the heart of the text

A- ALCOHOL CONSTRICTS ONE'S ABILITY TO REASON – 33a

- Your eyes will see strange things – unfamiliar, foreign
- With each drink, a cascade of molecules surge through the bloodstream, into the brain, setting off a number of chemical events that rearrange the interior reality of the mind
- Like other drugs, alcohol works to confuse, lead to a nightmarish stupor in which one can neither see nor think straight
- The brain is befuddled, cross-grained – reasoning becomes wrong headed

B- ALCOHOL CONSTRICTS ONE'S SENSE OF ETHICS – 33b

- With each drink, the nervous system is depressed – one's world begins to turn upside down
- Your moral compass is altered – your heart will say perverse things
- Anyone around a person with a few drinks notes subtle changes that take hold
- What in sobriety is unacceptable becomes acceptable
- What inhibitions are in place begin to relax – discretion, reserve diminish – statements are made that better judgment would have kept to self
- Behavior becomes indiscreet, even belligerent and potentially violent – leading to abuse of people, sexual violence – reckless choices

- Go to any athletic event where alcohol flows freely – or ride in a cross Atlantic flight next to one who has had one too many drinks
- Happy-go-lucky fans, calm and polite passengers become obnoxious and abusive, belligerent, obscene

C- ALCOHOL CONSTRICTS ONE'S SENSATION OF STABILITY – 34

- Like one lying down in the heart of the sea, on the top of a mast
- Life is tossed about – wobbles on – the giddy head, heaving stomach, unsteady legs --
- Like a person with vertigo
- The picture is a life out of control – the staggering, reeling of a man possessed by drink

D- ALCOHOL CONSTRICTS ONE'S AWARENESS OF REALITY – 35a

- Alcohol clouds one's perceptions of what is going on around him
- Struck – but not weakened/ hammered – but not knowing it
- Those given to it are unconscious of the injuries suffered
- Even congratulating himself on no apparent ill effects
 - That's because he no longer feels pain
- Anaesthetized and beyond feeling – he has lost all sense of what is happening to him – and worse – what he is doing to others

Over and over – the sage is making one basic point – alcohol IMPAIRS

- It's aim is to injure and ruin – a point underscored in 20:1
- Where wine is personified – described as a mocker, strong drink a brawler
- A substance aimed to delude, scorn, ridicule your life

An overstatement? Consider how alcohol works to abuse – mock

1) It mocks your character

- Your credibility for one – successful addicts must learn to be good liars – to their folks, spouses, employers
- Over time your self-respect is lost

2) It mocks your health

- Over time – malnutrition (as one drinks instead of eating); organ, liver, pancreas, reasoning abilities, peripheral nerves – all are impaired by a drug that mocks your well being

3) It mocks your family

- Here's the scenario that happens in all too many homes where kids have become addicted
 - It starts with confusion – Where did we go wrong? Why were our values rejected?
 - It moves to frustration – How can I fix the problem? I can't
 - To weariness – listen to the mom of a son who started with alcohol in 9th grade – then went on to marijuana and cocaine – barely graduated from HS, then disappeared
 - "I would sit in a chair and just stare. I couldn't think, I couldn't pray. I would scream at God, feeling disillusioned and abandoned"
 - To utter sadness – feeling the unbearable pain of being a spectator to the chaos, of watching a life self-destruct
- And all the while – alcohol ridicules, mocks – the pain is as numbing as the sting of a viper

4) It mocks society

- In America today – alcohol, the number one drug of abuse – is the leading cause of domestic violence and highway deaths in the US
- The third largest health problem
- 1 out of 3 suicides is attributed to alcohol

5) It mocks the kingdom of God

- Keeps a life from living most fully for God

Why?

- 1) In part because we ignore vs.31 – we not only look on the wine – we allow ourselves to be enamored by the sparkle – the endless alcoholic commercials
- 2) And what do we see – our kids see?
 - A deceptive world where --
 - Those who drink are rugged, physical
 - And women are reduced to the role of admiring onlookers – the audience before whom men perform
 - And play – usually in outdoor settings – boat racing, fishing/ hanging out settings, where people are having a great time
 - Play that generally involves risk, challenge – and the reward is always a beer
 - And the commercial ends at vs.31
 - For drinking never has consequences – at least no causes for concern
 - There is no awareness of reality

- One is reminded of a parallel proverb – There is a way which may seem good to a man – but its end is the way of death – 14:12

Deceptive, Constrictive --

3 - ALCOHOL IS ADDICTIVE – 35b

- The final line is the saddest part of the story
- Like other drugs – there is a disabling attachment that takes place
 - Waking up, coming to some sense, facing the consequences of his choices – he turns to the self-defeating action of alcohol to escape the distress, relieve the despair
 - He hopes to cure the distress with the same thing that caused it, initiating a new round of addiction and cycling down one more level!
 - Which in the end devastates his work, self-respect, personal relationships, and bank account
- For it never fulfills – only drains
- Like blackmail – every time you meet a demand – it escalates

CONCLUSION

But enough of the consequences – what is the alternative?

- Here's where we must return to the message of the book – to fear God – which is the starting point of wisdom
- Yield and allow God to be God in your life
- Alcoholism – like any addiction – sexual, food, etc – reflects a person who has placed themselves at the center of their universe – the body becomes the source of gratification – and God is left out

The first thing every addict must do is get off our throne and quit playing God

- And present to God what belongs to Him – which is EVERYTHING
- Especially our body – is not ours to do with what we want – but God's to do with as He wills
- Our need is to yield it all – Rom 12:1
 - Which is our reasonable service of worship – reasonable, because sensuality can never be satisfied
 - All it ends up doing is deadening our feelings

How does God help us?

- In the only command in the whole text – it would seem to center around one response --

REDIRECT THE HEART

- Do not gaze
- Which suggests – set your sights elsewhere
- Find your pleasure in something, Someone else
- Confront your emptiness

- Going back to the text – the words of vs.30 picture a heart that is empty – has to be – to be captivated by the sparkle
- There is a longing that is seeking to be satisfied – an appetite seeking to be filled
 - Redirect it to God – let Him satisfy your heart
- Sin is, after all, what we do when our heart is not satisfied with God
- When He is not the center of our affection, the source and goal of our movement --
 - we become captivated with other things
 - become enamored with lesser things