

Drink Responsibly

(by Pastor Trent Boedicker)

Text: Proverbs 23:29-35

2/28/16

Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaining?

Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes?

Those who linger long over wine, Those who go to taste mixed wine.

Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it goes down smoothly;

At the last it bites like a serpent And stings like a viper.

Your eyes will see strange things And your mind will utter perverse things. And you will be like one who lies down in the middle of the sea, Or like one who lies down on the top of a mast.

“They struck me, but I did not become ill; They beat me, but I did not know it.

When shall I awake? I will seek another drink.”

“I don’t have a problem!” Those were the defiant words of a man named Lou, who sat in a room with a dozen or so other guys. The chairs were arranged in a circle, in a church basement for the monthly Celebrate Recovery ministry. Lou’s arms were folded, head down, trying his best to avoid eye contact. He chose the seat closest to the door, so that he could bolt out of there at the first opportunity. After a few moments of awkward silence, he repeated himself, almost as if trying to convince himself. “I don’t have a problem. My drinking isn’t hurting anyone, and I could quit if I wanted. The only reason I am here is because my wife told me she would leave if I didn’t find one of these meetings.” The other men listened with compassion. They had all been there themselves.

The leader of the group responded, “We understand. You don’t have to participate this evening. If you want to listen in while the others share we’re okay with that. Who wants go first?”

There was a slight pause, before one of the guys stood up and spoke: “Hi, most of you already know me, my name is Bob. I am an alcoholic. It wasn’t long ago when I was telling myself the same thing: that I didn’t have a problem. I thought I had my drinking under control, that it wasn’t a big deal. I wouldn’t listen to anyone, when they confronted me. Then one night, after stopping at my favorite bar for a couple of drinks, I wrapped my car around a telephone pole on the way home. They said I was lucky to walk away. That’s when I realized that if I didn’t stop, and get help, I was going end up killing someone. It wasn’t easy, and I’ve had setbacks along the way, but I’ve been sober now for almost a year.” Everyone in the room clapped, and some of the men patted him on the back as he sat down.

The other men took turns, one at a time, telling a little bit of their story. Some had gone through broken marriages, others had lost their jobs. Some hadn’t had a drink for years, others were still struggling. But all of these men had something that caught Lou’s attention: hope. They had hope that things could change, their lives could be different, and that Christ could set them free. Lou still wasn’t convinced that he had a problem, but he decided to go back the next month. He wanted the hope that those other men had found.

Our passage this morning addresses an issue that people have wrestled with from the beginning of time: excessive drinking, the abuse of alcohol. In Solomon’s day, there were vineyards all over the kingdom. It was an age of prosperity, and so wine flowed in abundance. Wine was a part of

everyday life, and would have been consumed with nearly every meal. In most homes, it wouldn't have been an issue, because young people learned from early age to drink in moderation. There were others, however, who fell into the habit of drinking too much.

If we're wondering whether or not this is an issue in our culture today, all we have to do is take a drive down Main Street, in a small town like Ada and count the number of bars. Or we can go to the grocery store, and take an inventory of how many varieties of beer, wine coolers, and hard liquor are available.

A lot of young people live for the weekend; they can't wait to party with their friends. The fact that they are underage doesn't stop them. They can always seem to find someone willing to buy it for them. There is the belief that in order to have a good time loud music and an endless supply of alcohol is required. I guess throwing up, and suffering from a hangover the next morning, is part of the fun.

There was an article in the Lima News, just before New Year's, about the number of local business that got into trouble for selling alcohol to minors. Out of the 50 establishments that were checked, 14 failed the test, and broke the law. What was even more troubling to me (as I read the story on their website) was seeing the comments that were posted, and how many people didn't think it was a big deal. "Why are the police harassing local businesses?" People wondered. "So what if teenagers are drinking? They're just trying to have a good time."

Other people reach for the bottle in an effort to drown their troubles. They're looking for an escape. But even after the bottle is empty, their sorrows remain.

Scripture doesn't prohibit the use of alcohol. There is nothing wrong with having a glass of wine with dinner, provided that we know our limits. But the trouble is in drinking too much. Abusing alcohol is both dangerous and foolish. It's not just the life of the alcoholic that is affected, but the people around him are impacted by his drinking as well (his family, his friends, his loved ones).

God's people must exercise self-control, because drinking too much creates all kinds of problems.

The proverb begins with a riddle. Verse 29 asks, "*Who has woe? Who has contentions? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes?*" The answer is pretty obvious: a drunk, the one "who lingers long over wine." We can picture a man stumbling out of a bar, looking like a mess. He leans over a garbage can, for a few moments, to empty the contents of his stomach, and then keeps on going. As strangers pass by, he yells obscenities at them for no apparent reason. When gets to his house, he fumbles with his keys, trying to open the front door. He doesn't realize that it is actually the neighbor's house, that's why his keys don't seem to work. Finally he gives up, and lays down right where he is, on the front porch, and falls sleep.

People think it's funny. They laugh at each other and the silly things they do when they're intoxicated: like singing karaoke horribly off key, or sharing their life story with a complete stranger, or talking loudly so that everyone in the restaurant can hear, or laying down in the middle of the road. But it really isn't funny, because sooner or later that person is going to get hurt.

1. When people drink too much, they make really poor decisions.

We see that in verses 33-34. *“Your eyes will see strange things, and your mind will utter perverse things. And you will be like one who lies down in the middle of the sea, or like one who lies down on the top of a mast.”*

A person’s judgment is impaired, when they have had too many drinks. They are not thinking clearly, and are no longer in complete control of their actions. They say and do things that they would have never done, had they been sober. That’s no excuse; they are still going to be held responsible for their actions, even if they don’t realize what they’re doing.

The person, in these verses doesn’t know where he is going, and walks the edge of the water, onto a ship. What possess him to do that, no one knows. It’s the booze. Somehow, he manages to climb his way up the ropes, and then plops down on the mast to take a nap. He is completely unaware of the perilous situation he has created. He’s up there snoring, while the sailors below are shouting at him to get down, warning him that he’s going to fall. One wrong move and he will wind up in the middle of the sea. But he can’t hear or comprehend what they are trying to tell him. Ordinarily, this man would never dream of doing something so crazy, but the liquor makes him brave, and dumb.

If he had been in his right mind, he would have seen the danger, and stayed far away. But common sense flies out the window when a person is wasted. That part of our brain that sounds an alarm and says “You shouldn’t do this” temporarily shuts down. It is sort of like pulling the battery out of a smoke detector, in your home. There could be a fire in the next room and you wouldn’t know it, you’ve disabled the alarm. In a similar way, getting drunk disables a person’s capacity for rational thought; it hinders their ability to make good decisions. The result is that he does all kinds of foolish things, and doesn’t see the threat that’s coming.

The prime example of that in our day is drunk driving. When a person has had too many drinks, they lack the discernment they need to realize how dangerous it is for them to get behind the wheel. Response time is delayed, vision is blurred, they can’t see the center line, but in their mind they think they have it under control. But too often, that isn’t the case.

I came across some startling statistics this week: Every 2 minutes a person is injured by a drunk driver 1 in 3 people will be involved in an alcohol related accident at some point in their life. 300,000 people will drive while under the influence every single day, but fewer than 4,000 will get pulled over. The average drunk driver has been behind the wheel 80 times while intoxicated before their first arrest. 50 -75 percent continue to get behind the wheel even after having their licenses revoked. Almost 30 people die in the United States every day in a motor vehicle crash that involves an alcohol impaired driver. Over 10,000 people die every year in alcohol related crashes. The annual cost of alcohol-related crashes totals more than \$59 billion. (http://www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/impaired_driving/impaired-driv_factsheet.html, <http://www.lifesafet.com/blog/10-sobering-dui-statistics>, <http://www.madd.org/drunke-driving/about/drunke-driving-statistics.html>)

That’s frightening. I have to imagine that most of the drivers in those statistics didn’t want to hurt anyone. They thought they were fine, that they would make it home without incident, that no one would get hurt. But they were wrong. Alcohol clouds a person’s judgment, resulting in poor decisions.

God wants His people to be in control of our faculties at all times. ***Ephesians 5:18*** reads, “*And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.*” Don’t allow yourself be controlled by drugs or alcohol, but let the Holy Spirit influence every thought and decision. How else can we be ready to serve Him?

Alcohol not only influences a person’s mind, but also their emotions.

2. When people drink too much, they become belligerent.

Again, verse 29 asks, “*Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause?*”

It’s been said that there are two kinds of drunks: those who become silly, and those who become angry. A person who has become intoxicated is often loud, aggressive, and contentious. It doesn’t take much to set him off. He’s like a stick of dynamite with a short fuse. If he is at the bar, he may get into a fight with the guy sitting at the next table, just because the guy happens to cheer for the wrong football team. “Hey, were you looking at my girlfriend? I saw you looking at my girlfriend. Why do you step outside? I’ll show you!” Or he may get into an altercation when someone accidentally bumps into the able, and spills his beer. He comes home with bruises, bloody knuckles and a black eye and wonders what happened. “Why are you bleeding?” his wife asks, and he honestly doesn’t know. “I can’t remember.”

Verse 35 gives us the words of the drunk: “*They hit me...but I’m not hurt! They beat me, but I don’t feel it!*” He won’t quit, and doesn’t back down, no matter how tough the other guys are, or how many friends they have. Even after he gets pummeled, he keeps shooting off his mouth. “I’ll take you all on, I’m not afraid.”

Turn back a page or two to ***Proverbs 20:1***. The verse warns us that “*Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, And whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise.*” I don’t know how many times the police get called down to the local bar to break up a fight, but I would guess it is not uncommon. And I would imagine that alcohol is often involved when they are called to respond to domestic disturbance.

The drunk will fight with anyone, not just strangers. He may argue with his wife, or yells at his children. He may often become verbally abusive. He may punch holes in the wall, or throw things. He may even become physically abusive. He could be a completely different person when sober, but he loses control of his temper when he’s had a few beers.

There have been husbands who have woken up the next day, and their wife was angry. “What’s going on?” She answers “I can’t believe the hurtful things you said to me last night.” “I don’t remember saying it, it wasn’t me...” It was your mouth, your lips, your voice; it doesn’t matter whether you remember saying those things or not, you did. Saying “I was drunk” doesn’t take the pain go away that’s already been inflicted.

3. When people drink too much, they become addicted.

In Proverbs 23:35, the second half of the verse captures the thought process of an alcoholic. *“When will I wake up so I can find another drink?”*

Even after all the troubles he’s been through: the fights, the broken relationships, the bruises, and the hangovers...he keeps going back for more. He just can’t seem to quit. There is a physical dependency that develops. His body actually yearns for another taste of his beverage of choice. If he goes without a drink, for an extended period of time, he becomes irritable and sick. While he is working, he keeps looking up at the clock, anxious to get home and crack open a six pack. He may not even make it all the way home, but knows a few places where he can stop along the way to grab a drink or two to tide him over.

It has become a habit, a pattern, part of his regular routine. It is a way of life, and he can’t seem to stop. There may have been a few times when he has tried. His wife has been after him to ease up, and he realizes that it is quite an expensive habit. For awhile he seemed to be making some progress, but it doesn’t last, and before long he slips back into his old routine. The harder he tries, the more he fails.

E. Whether it is alcohol, or drugs, or anything else, addiction can seem impossible to overcome. A person must first admit that he has a problem, before he can begin on the path to recovery. If you’re not sure whether or not you have a problem, you might ask yourself a few questions:

- Do you drink heavily when you are disappointed, under pressure or have had a quarrel with someone?
- Can you handle more alcohol now than when you first started to drink?
- Have you ever been unable to remember part of the previous evening, even though your friends say you didn't pass out?
- Do you try to avoid family or close friends while you are drinking?
- Do you sometimes feel uncomfortable if alcohol is not available?
- Are you more in a hurry to get your first drink of the day than you used to be?
- Do you sometimes feel a little guilty about your drinking?
- Has a family member or close friend expressed concern or complained about your drinking?
- Do you often want to continue drinking after your friends say they've had enough?
- When you're sober, do you sometimes regret things you did or said while drinking?
- Have you sometimes failed to keep promises you made to yourself about controlling or cutting down on your drinking?
- Have you ever had a legal problem related to your drinking?
- Do you sometimes have the shakes in the morning and find that it helps to have a little drink?
- Are you having more problems at work or school, or with finances as a result of your drinking?

A person may feel trapped, completely helpless, incapable of making the necessary changes. But there is hope. Christ can break the chains of addiction if we let Him.

- ***John 8:36*** *“So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.*

- **2 Corinthians 3:17** “...wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”

In order to let go of a desire for something that is harmful and destructive, you need to replace it with a desire for that which is good and satisfying. We can't do it on our own, we can't free ourselves from that prison. We need help. We need the Lord, and you will need to surround yourself with people who care about you, who will hold you accountable. It is easy to push those people away, but you need to let them into your life. And you need to distance yourself from people who keep pulling you down, your old drinking buddies, the old crowd. I was talking to someone recently who is involved in prison ministry, and he was telling me that the worst thing a person can do when they get out is to go back to their old friends. They need to surround themselves with positive influences. The best influence you can have in your life, the best person you could spend time with, is the Lord. You may be nervous about letting those old friendships go, but He is the best friend you will ever know.

Conclusion –

Our passage this morning urges us to aware of the dangers of alcohol. As one commentator puts it, “All sins [are] agreeable and taste well in the mouth; but afterward are as bitter as gall, and fatal as the poison of vipers.” (*Lange, J. P., A commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Proverbs (p. 205). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software*)

Exercise self-control when it comes to alcohol or anything that can become an addiction. Take steps to make sure that it doesn't become a problem. You may need to stop hanging around with certain people, because that's what they do. They go to the bar and drink too much. If you go with them, you know it is likely you will do the same. So don't go. There is a slogan, one of the beer company uses in their commercials that says “drink responsibly.” If you are drunk, it is too late, your decisions are already impaired. Know your limit, and stop before you get there.

Set a good example for our children, and grandchildren. Teach moderation. Show them that you can have a good time without getting drunk. Talk to them about the dangers of alcohol. Let them know that there are serious consequences for their decisions.

If you have friends or family members with a problem, talk to them. They probably won't want to hear it. They might get angry. But if you love them, you need to tell them the truth.

If it has become a problem, get help. There is no shame in admitting that you have problem. There is shame in lying to yourself and others. The person willing to seek help is courageous, and is to be commended.