

Unexpected Results
Proverbs 25:20
Sunday, July 25, 2021
First Baptist Church Lethbridge
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We've been exploring the book of Proverbs. As a book of practical wisdom a lot of the Proverbs come across as clear and concise gems. Some Proverbs, on the other hand, come across as cloudy and confusing puzzles with a few pieces missing.

Take Proverbs 25:20 "Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar poured on soda, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart."

What does that mean?

That's a very Yoda way of saying something; it's all backwards. That's not how we would phrase it today. We'd say it "One who sings songs to a heavy heart IS LIKE one who takes away a garment." or "One who sings songs IS LIKE vinegar poured on soda".

OK, so we're looking at an analogy here. If we want to understand what it's like to sing songs to a heavy heart, we need to think about what it's like to take away a garment on a cold day.

So who would do that? Who would take away a garment on a cold day? That's a pretty cruel thing to do, taking someone's coat. I suppose if you didn't have a coat, and you were desperate enough you might be motivated to steal someone's coat. Other translations say one who takes off a garment, taking the other person out of the equation. But if it's cold, why would you take off your own coat. I mean this month, when we've been maxing out at a high of 37.9 taking off a garment on a cold day sounds like an exercise in imagination try to make yourself feel cool.

In fact, as we sit here in this un-air-conditioned sanctuary, let's see if it works. Imagine cold day. Instead of +37 degrees, it's -37 degrees and you're taking off your coat. Again, why would anyone do that? Unless you moved inside where it's warm then you'd need to take off your coat to cool down or maybe if you saw someone without a coat out of kindness, you might give your coat to them, but then you'd be left cold and if it was -37 you could get really cold, hypothermic even.

Did you know there are three stages of hypothermia? The first stage is when a person's core temperature drops below 35.0 °C. You begin to shiver and feel confused. Your breathing and heart rate speed up, blood pressure increases, and your blood vessels contract drawing blood away from your hands and feet toward your heart and internal organs. These are all physiological responses to preserve heat. Now the third stage starts when the body hits 28 °C and here something very strange can occur. It's called paradoxical undressing. People have been known to take off all of their clothes at this point. Scientists are not entirely sure why. It might be due to a malfunction in the part of the brain that regulates temperature. It might be an instinct to remove anything tight around body that could restrict blood flow. It might be a result of the contracting muscles and blood vessels reaching a point of exhaustion. They can't contract any more and blood rushes back into the arms and legs, making a person feel suddenly hot. When blood and oxygen have been reduced in the brain, you are no longer able to think straight, and this unexpected result occurs: people take off their clothes on the coldest of days only to become even colder and finally die.

So one who takes off a garment on a cold day is cold.

Like one who takes off a garment on a cold day or like vinegar on soda is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.

Let's think about what it's like to pour vinegar on soda. Have you ever done this? I want to especially ask the kids right now have you ever poured vinegar on soda? Raise your hand if you have never poured vinegar on soda? Oh, you're missing out. This is awesome and so much fun to do, I wish I could show you how cool this is. I wish I would have thought about bringing some!

Jamie: Uh, Carol; I happen to have brought vinegar and soda to church today.

Carol: Really?

Jamie: Ya, it's just behind the organ. I could bring it out and we could show people what it's like to pour vinegar on soda.

Carol: Oh, that would be excellent. Please, come up. (Jamie and Carol set up)

Kids, if you would like to have an up close view of this I invite you to come up to the front.

For those of you who don't know, this is Jamie. Jamie teaches science, and specifically chemistry at Winston Churchill High School which is unsurprisingly why she regularly carries with her to church things like vinegar and soda.

Jamie: OK, so here we go. The soda is in here. This is the vinegar. Go ahead and pour the vinegar on the soda. (Vinegar is poured on soda)

Carol: (to the kids) So what happened here? Describe to me what happened?
(repeat back what the kids' descriptions)

Jamie: Carol, something else happened here that's we couldn't see.

Carol: Please tell us.

Jamie: There is a change in temperature that happens when vinegar is poured on soda.

Carol: Really!

Jamie: Yes, what do you think happens to the temperature when we pour vinegar on soda?

Carol: I don't know. I would assume it gets hotter. There's a lot of activity happening in this reaction, and I know when I'm really active, when I'm moving around a lot, I get hot. Where energy is expended, heat is often the bi-product. So my guess would be the temperature gets hotter?

Jamie: What do you guys think? What do you think happens to the temperature when vinegar is poured on soda? (kids answer)

OK, let's measure it. (invite another kid to help) I have a thermometer here that

measures temperature. Let's measure the temperature. What does it say? (repeat temperature)

OK, let's pour the vinegar on the soda and measure the temperature. (pour vinegar on soda)

What does the temperature read? (repeat)

Carol: The temperature when down! That is an unexpected result. Why does the temperature go down?

Jamie: (answers)

Carol: Well, that is not what I expected. Thank you Jamie, for bringing vinegar and soda to church today and sharing with us this wonderful insight. Kids, you can head back to your seats now.

So what is it like to pour vinegar on soda? It's kind of violent, and it results in cold.

What's it like to take off a garment on a cold day? It hurts you, and leaves you feeling cold.

So what is the proverb saying about singing songs to a heavy heart? That the results may not be what you expect.

By now we are all quite familiar with what can cause a heavy heart:

A positive COVID test in your class

a frozen zoom screen

A new grandchild you can't visit

you get laid off of work

you're told it's cancer

you hear I don't think I love you anymore

pile on top of that

crops that just stop growing for lack of rain

1665+ unmarked graves

one side of the world on fire and the other side flooded over

food, medicine, & electricity shortages in Cuba

and of course the looming Delta variant

Under all that weight we're sure to find not only heavy hearts but broken ones.

It is not easy space to be in. It's difficult to see people grieving, and hurt. The desire is to want to relieve our friends of grief and pain. We want so desperately to lift the heaviness, so we drag our friend who just got dumped to karaoke, or insistently invite the widower to Christmas dinner, refusing to take no for an answer, but rather than a lightened heart the attempt to cheer creates the unexpected result of an even heavier heart.

Why? I wonder if sometimes these attempts to make others feel better end up being more about our own discomfort with grief and a wish to move people closer to our emotional state rather than to genuinely care for people and **meet** them in their grief.

Is there another way we could care for heavy hearts?

Consider Ruth and Naomi. Naomi had two married sons. Tragically her husband and both sons died leaving her and her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth widowed and destitute. So Naomi encouraged the young widows to return to their families and marry again. The daughters said, no we'll stay with you and they proceeded to argue about it. Eventually, and not without tears, Orpah agreed to return to her family, but Ruth refused, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay." They moved to Naomi's home town of Bethlehem and old friends came out to greet them, saying, "Can this be Naomi?" to which she replied, "Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara, (which means 'bitter') because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me."

Ruth and Naomi: a picture of a young women staying by the side of an old woman; a bitter old woman.

Consider Jesus and Lazarus. Jesus was good friends with Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha. Lazarus became very ill and his sisters sent word to Jesus that he was dying. But rather than come immediately, Jesus delayed his return. His plan was to reveal the Glory of God by raising Lazarus from the dead. But that, of course meant that Lazarus was going to have to die and his family would feel all the grief that went along with that.

When Jesus finally arrived, Lazarus had already been buried for 4 days and the house was filled with friends and family there to comfort the sisters. Martha eagerly goes out to greet Jesus before he even gets into town, but not Mary. A lot sad and maybe a little mad, Mary stays at home and doesn't come out to see Jesus until he asks for her. She says, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ "Where have you laid him?" he asked.

"Come and see, Lord," they replied.

³⁵ Jesus wept.

In Ruth's words "Where you go I will go" and in Jesus' tears we see God entering into pain and grief. There is a presence, an incarnation taking place a willingness to sit and be with people in their sorrow. There is no attempt to sing songs, just a willingness to be.

There is always a lost or broken relationship behind sorrow, hurt or anger. A death, a conflict a wound and so a loneliness and isolation. To sing songs to a heavy heart, to make light of pain, points out the divide that separates us from that person we're missing or angry with. It's cold comfort to sing songs to a heavy heart.

But to enter into that uncomfortable space and sit with a person in their grief, meeting them where they are at, there is something incarnational and Christ like there. Within the whole of the Bible, we see a picture of God's plan to bring restoration to a broken and hurting world. Largely written to an ancient Jewish audience who was anticipating God to send someone to rescue them from slavery, and oppression. They saw Jesus Christ as their rescuer, but hopes were dashed when they saw Jesus arrested and crucified. This was not what they expected at all from their saviour? Why did God's plan for restoration include the Cross? God could have rescued his creation by pulling everyone out and whisking

everyone away to heaven, but rather than move everyone to his position, God chose to meet us in ours. And the Cross is where he enters into our sorrow and anger, our suffering and death, where he enters into our lost and broken relationships with God and with one another and he says come, follow me out of this, to restoration, reconciliation, and resurrection. This is the unexpected result of the Cross. Death was not the end of the story for Jesus, nor Lazarus, nor bitterness for Naomi. Notice, her new name never stuck.

Proverbs are not commands nor are they truths to be imposed on every situation, but there is wisdom in them. Romans 12:15 presents its own version of this proverb “rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”

As restrictions lift and we are allowed to gather again, some of us are ready to sing songs and celebrate, yet others of us are mourning and lamenting. Can we sit together in this space where our emotional responses may be different and we have different needs? In going with hearts where they need to go and staying where they need to stay, we just might find the unexpected result of God’s presence with us all.