

“Buy Truth”

PROVERBS 23:23

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I would assume that most of us here this morning probably really enjoy getting a good deal on something. Some of you enjoy clipping coupons like we do in our family. Just over a week ago, we took some coupons over to Target and saved nearly \$8 on a \$40 purchase. That was a good deal! We look in the sale sheets, we scour the Internet, we get the Bucky Book and the Entertainment book, we go to garage sales, we buy in bulk, we use little tricks that we learn from friends and family. Years ago, a good friend told me to go to COMP USA for technology advice, because their employees really know their stuff, but my friend said that after doing the research at COMP USA that I should just drive over to Best Buy to make the purchase. Well, that's what I did for several years...until COMP USA went out of business for some strange reason! But my friend was right: They gave the good advice, but they almost never had the best deal.

As we think about buying and saving and making good investments, I would like for us to consider one verse from a very unusual book in the Old Testament—the passage is found in Proverbs 23 (p. 1035). The book of Proverbs is rather unusual, because (with the exception of a few passages) there is no context in this book. Context is the idea that we look at the surrounding verses to help us figure out what the passage means. However, in the book of Proverbs, just about every verse is completely separate and distinct from every other verse, and that is the case with our verse for this morning. The verse stands alone, and in this morning's passage, King Solomon (the author) makes a statement about the value of purchasing the truth. Now, normally we do not think of truth as something that can be purchased. Nevertheless, King Solomon makes a very interesting statement. The passage is Proverbs 23:23. By the way, I should tell you that I was aided in preparing this morning's lesson by some notes I took during a lesson delivered by Randy Illg at the church in Crystal Lake back on January 1, 1992! That was more than a year before Keola and I got married, nearly 20 years ago, so "Thank you" to brother Illg. But if you will, please notice the inspired word of God through King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived. As Solomon said in Proverbs 23:23, ***“Buy truth, and do not sell it, get wisdom and instruction and understanding.”*** As we keep our thoughts on this one verse this morning, I would like for us to look very carefully at what Solomon said as we apply it to our situation today, nearly 3,000 years after it was first written.

I. **And obviously the first admonition here is that we are to BUY TRUTH, we are to purchase the truth.**

But right here at the beginning, we run into a serious problem, and the problem is: Surveys show that roughly 70% of the American people believe that there is no such thing as absolute truth! Among those who are

between 18-25 years old, the figure is even higher. And so we find that a vast majority of the people around us are not only not interested in buying the truth, but they don't even think that there is such a thing as truth! Of course, many people would like for us to believe that we are a "Christian nation," that we are a Bible-believing people; however, the statistics do not paint such a cheerful picture. As a nation, we are eager to deny the truth that there is truth!

And really, it is easy to understand why. Some time ago, I saw an ad in Newsweek for a certain brand of air filters. The ad has a number of pictures. There is a picture of dust at 1200 times its normal size. There are pictures of pollen, and mold, and viruses, and bacteria. Probably the most disgusting of all is the picture of the dung of a dust mite. And the advertisement says, "If you could see your air, you'd be more tempted to squash it with a newspaper than breathe it." That is the truth! After looking at these pictures, I would agree. And yet there are some things that I would rather not know! In a similar way, it is much easier to simply deny the existence of truth altogether than it is to believe it and change the way we live. In my opinion, that explains why 70% of those around us do not even believe in the concept of absolute truth. By the way, when those around us say that there is no such thing as truth, maybe we should ask them, "How do you know that that is a true statement? There is no such thing as absolute truth? Are you absolutely sure about that?"

Nevertheless, King Solomon tells us that we are to **"buy truth."** And at first, this seems like a ridiculous statement. In one sense, we know that truth is free. But in another sense, we also know that obtaining the truth requires some kind of sacrifice. Buying truth requires searching for it. Buying truth means that we will examine it before making the purchase. Truth is not something that just comes to us. God will not just zap it to us in some kind of a vision, but we must eagerly search for it. We must give up our prejudice. We must sacrifice to find it.

Think for a moment about what it means to buy something. When we make a purchase, we are making an exchange. We take something that may be valuable to us, and we trade it for something that we consider to be more valuable. For example, I take my money to the grocery store, and I trade it in for food. I value money, but I cannot eat money, and so I trade one thing for another. In a similar way, when we buy the truth, we invest our time and effort (that is, we give up something that is valuable to us), and we do it in order to obtain something else that is even more valuable. Solomon, then, is encouraging us to make that trade. And the trade is not necessarily financial. As the prophet Isaiah said in Isaiah 55,

¹ "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. ² Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. ³ Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live... (NIV)

The truth, therefore, is free, but we must search for it, we must sacrifice to obtain it. We remember that short parable Jesus told in Matthew 13:45-46, where He said, ***"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it."*** We see this kind of sacrifice in the life of Paul, who said in Philippians 3 that he counted ***"...all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ."*** In other words, Paul looked at his previous life of relative ease and financial security, and he basically said, "I have gladly traded it all in for the benefit of knowing Jesus Christ." Sometimes we look at this passage and say, "Look! Paul was setting aside all of those sins from his past," but no, that is not what the context is saying. Instead, Paul was saying that he gave up

everything—his status, his education, his family, his heritage, his finances, his health, and eventually even his life, in order to obtain and preach the gospel. In a similar way, Solomon did not put a price on the truth, because no price is too high.

And please remember: This passage was written by a man who had tested out nearly every form of pleasure. He had tried to find happiness through money, women, land, food, and alcohol, but none of these things brought the return on his investment that they had originally promised. Instead of happiness and joy, these things only brought sorrow, shame and heartache [Patrick Morrison]. Solomon, then, is sharing this advice from his own personal experience: Buy the truth.

II. We now come to the next part of this verse as Solomon says, **“DO NOT SELL IT.”**

In other words, truth is to be bought at any price, but it is to be sold for no price. Some may sell the truth in order to get along with family and friends. Some may sell the truth for the passing pleasures of sin. Some may sell the truth for power. Some may sell the truth for money. We remember Judas who sold the truth for 30 pieces of silver. We remember Esau who sold the truth for a bowl of soup. We remember Demas who sold the truth for his love of this world. And in the same way, every temptation we face is a temptation to sell the truth. The devil says, “If you will give up the truth, I will give you this,” but it is always a bad deal. We remember how Paul spoke of those who were overcome by various lusts and impurity, those who (according to Romans 1:25), ***“...exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator....”*** You see, people can exchange the truth of God for a lie, but it is always a bad deal.

Sometimes we can sell the truth simply by letting it slip away. Over time, we lose our zeal, we lose any sense of value for God’s word, and as time goes on we eventually just let go. Sometimes a church will strive for popularity, they will go all out for a tweak in the attendance figures, and in doing so, they will sell the truth. We look back over the past 2000 years of church history, and we see it over and over again. We see it all around us even today as denominations come together to vote on what they will teach so that no one gets offended, “Oh, most people don’t believe that God created the universe and everything in it in only 6 days, well let’s just whack that!” whatever it takes to appeal to more people, to keep those contributions coming in. Solomon, however, tells us that the truth is not to be sold. ***“Buy the truth and do not sell it.”***

III. As we close our thoughts on this verse, we notice here at the end an alternative as Solomon tells us that we are to **GET WISDOM AND INSTRUCTION AND UNDERSTANDING.**

“Wisdom” is the ability to see things from God’s point of view, it is the ability to properly apply knowledge. ***“Instruction”*** refers to getting the information that God wants us to have. And ***“understanding”*** refers to our comprehension of what God wants us to know. As we think about these three basic ideas, we see that Solomon is talking about something very personal. Wisdom is something that we gain through years of experience. We try and we fail, and we gain wisdom. We go through a tough time in life, and we gain wisdom. We make a mistake, and we gain wisdom. We might say that wisdom is purchased with wrinkles and grey hair. Sometimes I wish that I had known 20 years ago what I know now, but that is not possible, because wisdom comes with experience.

When Solomon says that we are to get ***“instruction,”*** he is telling us that we must go looking for it. Instruction does not happen by accident, but we must study and search for God’s will. Instruction might also include correction or discipline from someone who has been where we are now. In terms of our Christian faith, instruction comes by having an appetite for God’s word. Right around the time when I was baptized in the

early 80's, I remember a missionary coming to our congregation and raising money to send Bibles into what was then the Soviet Union. I remember at that age being so interested in the stories this man was telling, stories about smuggling Bibles into Russia. This man regularly hid Bibles in his luggage and then gave them away in various communist countries. He was willing to risk his life to make sure that as many people as possible had access to God's word. He valued the word of God and sacrificed much of his own life to make sure that others could also read it on their own. Unfortunately, there may be a time coming when Christians in those former Soviet states will need to smuggle some of those Bibles back into the United States. I told you several months ago about spending some time in the library of our daughter's elementary school—hundreds of books, but not a single Bible; because again, as a nation, we no longer believe in absolute truth. The truth might offend people, and so the best-selling book of all time is excluded from a public school. As a nation, we no longer value the Bible as we should. Solomon, though, tells us to get wisdom, instruction and understanding.

Conclusion:

We may clip coupons, we may shop at Goodwill, we may use Craigslist, but the greatest deal of all is when we buy the truth. And the most important truth of all truths is the truth that tells us what we must do to be saved. We refer to this truth as the gospel, the good news concerning the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. In response to that truth, the Bible teaches that we must repent of our sins, we must be buried with Christ in baptism, and we must then live the Christian life.

If we do these things, if we put this truth into action, we will be making the best investment that we could ever make. We buy in by believing and accepting God's word through faith and obedience. If we fall away from the faith, we sell the truth, and we step away from the best investment we could ever make. As we start a new week, let's think very carefully about ways that we might have sold out the truth, and let us recommit to making changes. If there are things we need to do to accept the truth, God invites us to get back in. Are we seeking the truth, or are we making excuses for not seeking the truth?

If you are facing some kind of struggle in your life right now and would like for us to pray about it as a congregation, we would invite you let us know. Write it down and bring it to the front, and we will be glad to go to God in prayer on your behalf. And if you are ready to obey the gospel, please let us know, and we would be glad to help with that as well. If there is some way we can help, please let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

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