

# Lust and Liquor

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Preacher: Paul Brennan

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Good. Well, we're going to read together this evening, and we're studying the book of Proverbs. And Paul is going to be looking at part of the last chapter of Proverbs this evening, Proverbs chapter 31.

And we're going to read together Proverbs 31 and the first nine verses. So we were in Ecclesiastes this morning. Just turn back a page or two, and you'll find yourself at the end of Proverbs.

So right at the end of this book, we have words of a king taught to him by his mother.

The words of King Lemuel, an oracle that his mother taught him. What are you doing, my son?

What are you doing, son, of my womb?

What are you doing, son, of my vows? Do not give your strength to women and your ways to those who destroy kings.

[ 1 : 1 1 ] It's not for kings, O Lemuel. It's not for kings to drink wine or for rulers to take strong drink, lest they drink and forget what has been decreed and pervert the rights of the afflicted.

Give strong drink to the one who's perishing and wine to those in bitter distress. Let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more.

You, open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth. Judge righteously.

Defend the rights of the poor and needy. Amen. And may God bless us. His word that we shall be studying together in a little time.

Well, please do have Proverbs chapter 31 open in front of you. Do have your Bible there. And we'll look at these first nine verses together this evening.

[ 2 : 2 1 ] Now, I wonder how you might feel if your lasting legacy, if your contribution to the world was a ticking off from your mother. That is Lemuel's legacy.

We know almost nothing about him, apart from these words here in Proverbs 31. This is Lemuel's contribution. A telling off from his mum, contained in the best-selling book in the history of the world. I imagine that was on his bucket list of things he wanted to achieve in life. Of all the things to be remembered, a telling off from his mum. But it's a very good thing that it's here. Because these are wise words.

From a wise woman to a young man who is clearly failing in his duties and his responsibilities. And given that Lemuel went down to the effort of writing these words down, it would indicate, it would suggest, that he perhaps paid heed to his mother's warnings.

The fact he wrote it down, it's here, would suggest he took note of his mother's warnings. And these words are especially pertinent for a young man here this evening.

[ 3 : 3 6 ] Although there's much for all of us to learn and respond to, as we'll see, it's particularly aimed at young men. So don't think that because these words are addressed to an ancient king, that we're off the hook.

These words are especially relevant for a king. But these are the words of wisdom of the true king. This is Christ's wisdom.

And these are Christ's ways. And as Christ's people, these words are for us. And especially for young men. And by young men, we're really talking about those under 40.

So I'm in that category. And there's many here who are. But it's not just young men. The implications of what we read here are not limited to men in that category. Parents need to hear these words so they can instruct their young sons.

Young women need to hear these words so they are better discern a godly young man from a fool. And older men in the church have a duty to instruct and rebuke younger men if they go astray.

[ 4 : 44 ] Now we'll think about the implications as we go along. But we'll think first about the message from the queen mother to her son the king, to Lemuel. And the tone of these words is really very striking, isn't it?

This was not a cozy chat. But rather this was a fierce conversation. This was a sharp telling off. Look at verse 2. What are you doing, my son?

What are you doing, son of my womb? What are you doing, son of my vow? This is not a genuine inquiry into what he's up to.

This is a what are you playing at rhetorical question. She's not expecting a response, is she? She can clearly see what Lemuel's up to.

And she knows that her son is on the path to ruin. And what follows is a vehement exhortation. This is a forceful rebuke.

[ 5 : 46 ] This isn't a cozy chat by the fireside with mum. No. It's far sharper than that. And there are two key areas where Lemuel needs instruction, where he needs correction.

And the two areas are lust and liquor. Lemuel is pursuing the wrong women, and he's abusing drink. And the obsession with women has the same effect as the obsession with drink.

Both render him useless as king. Both strip him of his ability to exercise his responsibilities, his duties, as he ought to exercise them.

He's failing to be a king. He needs to be because he's failing in these two areas. And the queen mother, she has identified a very serious problem. And without correction, Lemuel's rule will end only in disaster.

So let's look at both of these temptations that Lemuel is warned against. First, look at verse 3. And here, the queen mother is tackling lust.

[ 6 : 52 ] We see here a strong warning against lust and pursuing the wrong women. Because doing so, she says, will destroy you. Verse 3 reads, Do not give your strength to women, your ways to those who destroy kings.

Now, this is not a call to chastity. This is not a prohibition on marriage. But it is a sharp warning against a specific type of woman.

It's a warning against a specific type of sexual encounter. The warning in the first half of the verse is given more specificity.

It's a tricky word. It's given more specificity in the second half. He's warned about giving his strength, his ways, to women who will destroy.

In other words, he's being warned against unfaithfulness and of sex outside of the covenant of marriage. And this is a very specific application of much of what is said in the very early chapters of Proverbs.

[ 8 : 02 ] It's maybe worth just turning back with me to chapter 5. And we'll notice a few things there in chapters 5 and 6. So flick back in Proverbs. And these early chapters deal a lot with the young man and the temptations of sex.

So look at chapter 5, verse 1. My son, be attentive to my wisdom. Incline your ear to my understanding that you may keep discretion.

And your lips may guard knowledge. For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey. And her speech is smoother than oil. But in the end, she is bitter as wormwood.

Sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death. Her steps follow the path to shale. She does not ponder the path of life.

Her ways wander. And she does not know it. Look on to chapter 6. And from verse 20. My son, keep your father's commandments.

[ 9 : 07 ] And forsake not your mother's teaching. Bind them on your heart always. Tie them around your neck. When you walk, they will lead you. When you lie down, they will watch over you.

When you awake, they will talk with you. For the commandment is a lamp. And the teaching a light. And the reproofs of discipline are the way of life. To preserve you from the evil woman.

From the smooth tongue of the adulteress. Do not desire her beauty in your heart. Do not let her capture you with her eyelashes. For the price of a prostitute is only a loaf of bread.

But a married woman hunts down a precious life. Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes and not be burned? Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched?

So is he who goes in to his neighbor's wife. None who touches her will go unpunished. People do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his appetite when he's hungry.

[10:08] But if he's caught, he will pay sevenfold. He will give all the goods of his house. He who commits adultery lacks sense. He who does it destroys himself.

He will get wounds and dishonor. And his disgrace will not be wiped away. Now we could read on. We could flick on chapter 7 and read further. But Proverbs knows well the temptations that are especially enticing for a young man. Proverbs is particularly aimed at a father and a mother speaking to their son.

And Proverbs knows well the temptations that young men face. Proverbs knows the powerful reality that needs to be curbed and restrained.

Proverbs knows the lure of forbidden sex. Proverbs knows the power of sex in the wrong context and its power to destroy.

[11:06] The Bible is full of examples of men behaving badly and of men behaving badly sexually. And it never ends well. The temptation of illicit sex will promise you the world.

That's why it's one of the biggest industries out there. It will promise you untold satisfaction and pleasure. But it will demand of you a higher price than you'd ever thought you'd have to pay.

It promises the world and delivers death. Take one of the great kings of Israel, David, and his lowest point. Spotting Bathsheba as she bathed, not his wife.

He uses his kingly power to take her. He used his kingly power to have her husband move to the front line of battle and thereby guaranteeing his death. Disastrous consequences for Bathsheba, for David, and for Uriah.

As one writer put it, And this is certainly true of kings and rulers.

[12:31] And the line that what we do in private has no impact on public office. That's quite a common line you'll hear today, isn't it? But that line is utterly at odds with the Bible.

That does not wash with what the Bible teaches. The Bible says the opposite. It absolutely matters what you do in private. Because who you are in private, what you do in private, when the cameras aren't on you, that is who you are.

And that is a warning for secular kings and leaders, but also leaders in the church. We've seen in recent months, haven't we? The devastating revelations surrounding Ravi Zacharias.

His sexual unfaithfulness, his abuse of women is devastating. And for those women, for his family, for the many employees of his foundation, for his whole ministry, for the reputation of the Lord Jesus Christ, devastating.

And countless other church leaders, many I'm sure you can think of in your own minds, who have been brought down and destroyed the witness of a church because of sexual failings.

[13:42] What we do in private, it matters. And for all of us men, we all have realms of responsibility and our actions have consequences.

We may not be kings, but we do all exercise authority to one degree or the other. And these warnings to Lemuel are warnings that we need to heed too.

The Bible is clear. Proverbs is clear. The only place that God commends sexual enjoyment, the only place where it commends fulfillment is the covenant of marriage.

The marriage relationship between a man and a woman. That's the only place where God commands and commends sexual activity. So, if you're a young man here, a teenager, a student, a young worker, if you're a young man, if you are not married, then you should not be engaging in sexual activity.

Whether in person or online. Consider where it leads. Read over chapters 5 and 6. It leads to death. It does not lead to good places.

[14:58] If you're dating a girl and you're engaging in sexual activity, then you as the man must curb your appetites and stop. It's on you. You are causing your sister in Christ to stumble and sin.

Stop it. If you have a mate who's fooling around with his girlfriend, he professes to be a Christian, then have that fierce conversation with him.

Tell him straight. Ask him, what are you doing? What are you doing? And heeding the wisdom of Proverbs here, it will save you much heartache, much regret down the line.

But if this has been or is an area of struggle for you, and it will be for many, then there is real hope and comfort for you in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

turn to him, repent, and he will delight to welcome you, to forgive you, and to equip you to live his ways.

[16:08] He gives you his Holy Spirit to enable you to fight these temptations, and if you ask, he will not let you down. There is no sin that is beyond the pale.

turn, and he will forgive. But it's not only foolish, lustful behavior with regards to women that the queen tackles.

It's not the only thing she has in her sights. Look on to verses 4 to 7. We've thought about lust. Secondly, it's liquor. We see here a strong warning against drunkenness because it will destroy your ability to discharge your responsibility.

drink will render you useless. Look at verse 4. It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine or for rulers to take strong drink.

Now this isn't a straightforward call to abstinence. She's not banning alcohol. Look on to the next line, verse 5. Lest they drink and forget what has been decreed and pervert the rights of all the afflicted.

[17:24] You see, the absolute prohibition on drinking is qualified by verse 5 to mean drinking to the point of drunkenness. The problem here is drinking to such an extent that the king is unable to fulfill his duties.

She is condemning drinking that leads to drunkenness which means the king forgets the laws. He can't remember what he's passed. He's unable, therefore, to defend the poor, the weak, those who need defending.

He cannot do it because he can't remember. He's so drunk he's forgotten his roles, his responsibilities, his laws. Drinking in this way renders a king unable to be a king.

It renders him unable to discharge his duties. But further, the king, she says, has no reason to pursue intoxication.

That is what I think is being made, the point being made in verses 6 and 7. These verses could be read horribly out of context, couldn't they? Give strong drink to the one who is perishing and wine to those in bitter distress.

[18:31] Let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more. Now, these verses, they're laden with sarcasm and irony and clearly the queen mother is not advocating giving wine and drink to the poor.

Such a policy would fly in the face, not just in the very next verse, but of what all of Proverbs and the Bible teach us. Now, these verses are serving as a contrast.

She is saying that there is some sort of logic, there's a perverted logic in someone in bitter distress or dire poverty seeking out drink in order to forget their circumstances.

You can understand why someone might do that. It's certainly something we do not commend that will only make things worse. And this is something that for some, perhaps many of you will know from bitter personal experience.

The fallout from this sort of thing, the fallout from drunkenness. Most families will bear the scar due to the fallout from addictions.

[19:44] The fallout from my own grandfather's addictions, his own drink problems, still reverberate today in my family 20 years after his death. Perhaps this is a live issue for you and your family even today.

Drowning one's sorrows in drink only makes things worse. We know, don't we, the shame in Scotland of having the highest drug deaths in Europe.

We know that through our connections with Hope for Glasgow and Terry. The desperate needs of many in the city who are caught up in addictions. And the point being made here in Proverbs 31 is that you can begin to understand why someone in dire straits would turn to drink but it makes no sense whatsoever for a king to do that.

The only reason the king might do this is for selfish desire for pleasure. He's king. He's not in poverty.

He doesn't need to drown his sorrows. It's a selfish desire that if left unchecked will begin to impact those around him. It will impact those around you.

[20:55] Those for whom you have responsibility. If you are drinking to that extent it's going to have an impact. Now none of us are kings but this warning against drinking to the point of inebriation comes to us with the same weight and power.

Nothing good will come from drunkenness so only render us useless in the discharging of our duties to which we've been called. If you are a husband and father then drunkenness will have a

devastating effect on your family.

If you're a business leader with responsibilities for some maybe you have employees then their livelihoods are in your hands and drunkenness could have an impact on them.

If you're a young man perhaps a student from the early days of your working life then drunkenness will have a devastating impact on your future. It will take you places you never wanted to go and require payments far beyond what you're ever willing to give.

So heed the warning with regards to alcohol. It's a sober passage isn't it? Lemuel's mother was not one for holding back and we need to feel the weight of it too don't we?

[ 22 : 21 ] Heed the warning with regards to lust and liquor. But it's not just warning that we have here there is also a positive command.

Lemuel's mother is saying to him look rather than using your mouth for selfish pleasure rather than attempting to sate your own desires here is what you ought to be using your mouth for and what I've said of the king here is valid for all all of us in each of our spheres of activity.

Look at verses eight and nine. Open your mouth for the mute for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth judge righteously defend the rights of the poor and needy.

See the queen mother urges Lemuel to use his mouth constructively to speak on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves and to judge righteously defending the rights of the poor.

And clearly this has implications for those in king positions. but as we said already each of us has authority and influence to varying degrees as individuals and also as a church.

[ 23 : 41 ] Think about your own circumstances. Think about your spheres of influence. The sort of man that Proverbs 31 commends will be the one who does speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves.

That is the right way to use your mouth not chasing women not drinking yourself to the point of drunkenness rather speaking up. Now where might you have influence like that?

Who are we talking about here? Well Bruce Walkley says this. These these people he's talking about these are the socially and economically too weak to defend themselves against the rich and the powerful.

those have no voice. And there is one category of people who fall squarely within the mute poor and needy category.

There is a category of persons who are unable to defend themselves and they are in fact the most at risk people group in the United Kingdom and more were killed last year in England Wales and Scotland than in any previous year.

[ 24 : 57 ] more were killed in Scotland last year than died from COVID. Official statistics tell us that 6,834 people died with COVID mentioned somewhere on the death certificate in 2020 and the majority of those were well on in life in their fifth, sixth, seventh decades.

13,815 people from this at risk group were killed last year not by disease but at the hands of medical professionals.

Well over double the number of COVID deaths and yet how many column inches were given over to the deaths of these 13,815.

how many millions of government pounds were spent on advertising to protect these 13,815. This is a people group that the Bible deems worthy of protection and precious in his sight.

this people group had all of their lives ahead of them. This at risk people group I speak of is the unborn child in the womb.

[ 26 : 16 ] My brother David who runs the organization Brephos, it's well worth checking out the website, he says that the womb is the most dangerous place to be on the earth.

Certainly twice as deadly as COVID, at least in Scotland. Worldwide, it is estimated that 73 million abortions took place last year, according to the World Health Organization.

Our passage says, open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. The New Living Translation translates it this way, ensure justice for those being crushed.

And that is what is literally happening to babies in the womb. I'll not go into it, but there is a reason why they've yet to show an abortion procedure on mainstream television channels.

It's considered too harrowing. Now, there will be folk, I'm sure, in this room, or watching online, for whom this is a deeply personal, a deeply painful issue.

[ 27 : 27 ] statistically, one in three women in the UK have had an abortion. Perhaps this issue is a source of great pain and sorrow and regret.

And if that is you, then can I point you very tenderly to the Lord Jesus Christ. He knows, more than anyone else, the circumstances, the pressures on your life.

And although the things that all of us do grieve him, he will not turn any away who come to him in repentance and faith. Those who seek forgiveness for sins, he will not turn away.

And if you would find it helpful to speak to someone, an older, wise Christian, then don't hesitate to do that. Please do not keep it to yourself, concerned about what others will think.

Please do speak. None of us is perfect. All of us do things we deeply regret. But can I address the men for a moment?

[ 28 : 31 ] This is a passage addressed to a king and to men. And men are generally excluded from discussion on abortion because of the fact they are men.

Nancy Peercy, in her excellent book *Love Thy Body*, says that many men duck the issue for this very reason. And she quotes a well-known columnist in the U.S.

who says this, I lined up on the pro-choice side for a simple reason, because I'm a man. Lacking the ability to get pregnant, and thus spared what has been for women friends of mine the anguishing decision of whether to stay pregnant, I've remained on the sidelines and deferred to the other half of the population.

He goes on to say that his attempt to be neutral was another name for wimping out, and his wife challenged him. And he writes, my wife is pro-life, and she's not buying my argument that as a man I have to defer to women to make their own choices about what to do with their bodies.

To her, that's cowardly. It's time to man up, she said to me. There are babies being killed, millions of them, and you need to use your voice to protect them. That is what a man does.

[ 29 : 49 ] He protects children, his own and others. That is what it means to be a man. Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute.

Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy. Men, that is how you are to use your mouths.

That is how you are to use your strength and your time, not on selfish indulgences like lust and liquor, but rather defending the weak, protecting and speaking for those with no voice.

So can you find ways to express the Bible's high view of life, its inclusive view of life, a view which extends the rights we enjoy to the most vulnerable, to those babies in the womb.

Now, there are many other implications for us from verses 8 and 9, but that seems to me to be one that our culture, which is all for justice and equality and inclusion, is failing disastrously at.

[ 31 : 12 ] Christianity has an inclusive view of human life. So will we speak on behalf of our most vulnerable?

Men, this is a sobering passage for us this evening, and I'd urge you to heed this mother's warning. Beware lust and liquor.

become ensnared in those, and they will at first distract you, but left unchecked, they will destroy you. And it will mean that you've neglected the key instruction in this passage, which is a key part of what it is to be a man.

Christ calls you to protect the weak and to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Father, give us the courage to respond to your word this evening.

Help us to be those who put to death our sinful desires by your help and by your spirit at work in us, and so use our energies and our mouths for what you have asked us to do.

[ 32 : 41 ] Help us in Jesus' name. Amen.