**Good Health**

Proverbs 3:1-8, 16-25

Rev. David Waldron

**Scriptures:** Revelation 22:1-5; Proverbs 3:1-8, 16-25, 11:17; 12:18; 14:30; 17:22

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL]30, 32, 487, BPH[[1]](#footnote-1)379, 525

**Series:** **Proverbs.** Sermon 3

**Theme:** The health/healing benefits of God’s wisdom for body and soul

**Proposition:** Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for health and healing of body and soul

**Introduction**

Good health is something we all desire for others and for ourselves. We know that being sick and unwell saps strength and often involves pain. Health is a huge ‘industry’ employing many professionals worldwide. We have a number of health workers in this congregation. Our New Zealand government will spend almost $17bn on the physical and mental well-being of our population this year (9.5% of GDP). Good health is influenced by many factors include diet, exercise, sleep, genetics.

This sermon is does not explore these topics. The Bible is not a medical textbook as such…However, there is a **connection between wisdom and health.** The Scriptures do speak to this subject as we see from the book of Proverbs.

In chapter 1 of the book of Proverbs we saw that a living relationship with God is the foundation for all true wisdom. **The wise person is someone who fears the Lord, who willingly, trustingly and, in hope, submits to the loving will and purpose of the God with whom that wise person has a living relationship**.

In chapter 2, we understood that the wisdom of God **protects** those who walk in it and that because Christ Himself is that wisdom, following Him shields his disciples, delivering them from death to life eternal.

Here in chapter 3 we find two intertwined themes, **health** and **wealth**, which we’ll address over two sermons. Good health today, and by God’s grace, ‘wisdom with wealth’ next week.

**Health** is a topic addressed by a number of proverbs in this book and we’ll draw these in as we work through our text from Proverbs 3 verses 1-8 and 16-25 together with Proverbs 11:17, 12:18, 14:30 and 17:22.

1. **Heart Disease**

Some medical treatment addresses only the symptoms of ill health, not the cause(s) – e.g. pain relief, cold remedies, antihistamines. We know that this is less than satisfactory, because in a very real sense the problem has merely been masked, or managed, not actually dealt with or resolved. The root cause of ill-health must be addressed for lasting change.

In the book of Proverbs and in Scripture in general we find a consistent focus on the heart: e.g. **Prov 4:23** “*Keep your* ***heart*** *with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life*”. **Deut 6:5** “*You shall love the LORD your God with all your* ***heart****...*”. **Matt 15:19** “*For out of the* ***heart*** *come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander*”. Here Physician Jesus accurately diagnosed the source of all human evil – as not a being a result of a poor environment, nor a lack of education nor ultimately learned behaviour patterns - but coming from the heart.

It is critical that we understand here that the ‘heart’ is **not** the cardiovascular, four-chambered blood pumping organ, but rather **the centre** of the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual life of all human beings, made in the image of God. Biblically (not medically!) speaking we could rightly say that the ultimate cause of all ill health whether it be physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual is ‘heart-disease’.

It is not surprising then, that the wisdom of God in the book of Proverbs with respect to good health puts the focus on the heart: **3:1** *My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your* ***heart*** *keep my commandments.* **3:3** *Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your* ***heart****.* **3:5** *Trust in the LORD with all your* ***heart****, and do not lean on your own understanding.*

If I forget the good teaching, the wise commands of God **then I will not have good health of heart.** If you let go of the lovingkindness(Hesed) and faithfulness of the Lord, no longer being informed, impacted and impelled by His love, **then you will not have good health of heart.** If we decide to live life our own way, **then we will not have good health of heart.**

Imagine going to visit a hospital and asking the manager to take you to the ward with the greatest number of very sick patients. Imagine someone asking you to take you to one book of the Bible in which there is great sickness of heart, where would you go?

You might choose the book of Judges, full of failure, ignorance and sin. 21 chapters of progressive decline in the spiritual health of Israel. Why so much ‘heart-disease’? **The last verse in the book (Judges 21:25) explains it all: “**In *those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes*”.

Putting this into the language of Proverbs 3…The people leaned on their own understanding, they were ‘wise in their own eyes’. How foolish! They were the Lord’s own people! They had His wise Words, they knew of his wise works. Theirs was the God, the only true God, the wise God who had created the world, who had judged this world in a global flood and who daily gave life-giving water to nourish the ground so that they could eat.

In the words of Proverbs 3:19-20 “*The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens; by his knowledge the deeps broke open, and the clouds drop down the dew*”. In following their own understanding, the people in the time of the judges had, in the words of Prov 3:21 ‘lost sight’ of God’s sound wisdom. They no longer saw God at work.

This was true, not just of the Israelites in the time of the judges. We can go to other ‘hospital wards’ in Scripture and find patients there also sick with ‘heart disease’, for example:

**Solomon**, whose foreign wives “*turned away his* ***heart*** *after other gods and his* ***heart*** *was not wholly true to the Lord his God*” (1 Kings 11:4). Solomon had ‘heart-disease’. The **Pharisees and Scribes** who could not bear to have Jesus alive – of whom the Wise Physician diagnosed with the word ‘hypocrite’. Quoting from Isaiah 29:13 **Matthew 15:8** "'*This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me*”. The unbelieving Jewish religious leaders had ‘heart-disease’. **Judas Iscariot**, whose heart the Devil had infected so that he desired to betray Jesus, with whom he had lived in close proximity for a number of years (John 13:2). Judas had ‘heart-disease’.

If the OT people of God, including wise Solomon could be so sick, If the religious leaders who knew the OT Scripture so well could be so sick, If Judas Iscariot, who walked on this earth so close to Jesus in-the-flesh, could be so sick, then could you and I also be sick with the same ailment? Perhaps not realizing our true condition.

Wise people go to the doctor if they suspect they might be unwell. When was the last time you went for a comprehensive health-check-up? When was the last time you got an accurate diagnosis of your heart condition – not the health of your cardiovascular pumping organ but the true state of the centre of your being?

Let’s go the Lord, the Great Physician, now for a quick check-up as we move to our 2nd point ‘health symptoms.

1. **Heart Symptoms**

We’ve identified the underlying cause of ill-health - the heart. The symptoms of poor cardiovascular health are well known and can include: chest pain, shortness of breath, erratic heartbeat, and dizziness. What **evidences** are helpful in diagnosing the condition of the centre of our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual being?

The book of proverbs provides a number of such symptoms, both of a healthy heart and an unhealthy one. This is by no means an exhaustive list, but here are four manifestations of an unhealthy heart: **Cruelty, thoughtless words, envy and a crushed spirit.** In contrast to four symptoms of good health: **Kindness, wise words, contentment and joy.**

Here are some proverbs which contrast these symptoms: **11:17** *A man who is kind benefits himself, but a cruel man hurts himself.* **12:18** *There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.* **14:30** *A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot.* **17:22** *A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.*

Here’s an opportunity to self-diagnose the state of your heart using God’s wisdom. Not to lean on your own understanding, but to Trust in the Lord. If you have a pen and paper to hand, taking some notes could help.

**Firstly**, write down, or think about, the word ‘cruelty’. Cruelty may be defined as ‘*indifference to the suffering of others or pleasure in inflicting suffering on others*’. We could say that cruelty here is a lack of love for others. Put down for yourself against cruelty, either ‘never’, ‘sometimes’ ‘often’, or ‘always’.

In contrast, write down, or think about, the word ‘kindness’. Our English translation in Prov 11:17 ‘kind’ is the highly significant Hebrew word ‘Hesed’ – the covenant love of God for His people. We know that this love is faithful, unconditional and seeks the very best for those upon whom that love is bestowed…It’s the lovingkindness of God about which Jeremiah declared: **Lam 3:22** “*The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end*”. Put down for yourself against ‘kindness’ either – ‘never’, ‘sometimes’, ‘often’ or ‘always’.

**Secondly**, ‘thoughtless words’, rash speaking, ‘shooting from the lip’. Often closely associated with anger, sadly often inflicted upon those closest to us – our husband/wife, children, parents, grandparents. Against ‘thoughtless words’ for yourself write down either ‘never’, ‘sometimes’, ‘often’ or ‘always’.

In contrast, write down, or think about, ‘wise words which bring healing’. The wise person speaks wise words which bring healing to hearers. The healing, building, restoring tongue loves the truth. The healing tongue does all it can to “guard and advances my neighbour’s good name” (HCLD43). When there is grace in the heart, there will be healing in the tongue. Eph 4:29 *“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear”.* Put down for yourself against ‘wise words which bring healing”, either ‘never’, ‘sometimes’, ‘often’ or ‘always’.

**Thirdly** envy is self-destructive – making the ‘bones rot’. Envy may be defined as the desire to have a quality, possession, or anything which belongs to someone else e.g. your neighbour’s house, his wife, her husband, their car, or even their donkey if they have one – you how it goes in the 10th commandment ‘or anything that belongs to your neighbour’ (Ex 20:17). Envy, jealousy, covetousness and greed feed discontentment and unhappiness. Some common circumstances which can lead to envy are:

1. An unfulfilling or low-paying job, or no paid work
2. Singleness well into the middle years of life or beyond.
3. Being widowed
4. Inability to have children
5. An unhappy marriage
6. Physical disabilities or continual poor health

These are just a few of a myriad of circumstances in life which can provide fertile soil for the growth of envy, jealousy and discontent. Put down for yourself against ‘envy’, either ‘never’, ‘sometimes’, ‘often’ or ‘always’.

In contrast, write down, or think about, the word ‘tranquil heart’ – the Hebrew words here are actually ‘healing heart cf. ‘healing tongue in 15:4. A tranquil heart is content, calm and composed whatever the circumstances of life. The tranquil heart knows well the ‘peace of God which surpasses all understanding’ (Phil 4:7). Put down for yourself against ‘tranquil heart’, either ‘never’, ‘sometimes’, ‘often’ or ‘always’.

**Fourthly**, a ‘crushed spirit’ is very damaging to health. This condition may be a deep despair or depression. A person with a ‘crushed spirit’ struggles with severe sadness, e.g.

1. **Moses** was overburdened by the responsibility for God’s people and asked God to take his life (Num 11:15)
2. **Job** cursed the day of his birth (Job 3:1-26)
3. **Jonah** was angry with God and wanted to die (Jonah 4:3-9)
4. **Hannah** was deeply distressed when she could not become pregnant (1 Sam 1:1-16)
5. **Tamar** lived a desolate life of great sadness after her brother Amnon sexually abused her (2 Sam 13:20)
6. **Naomi** was filled with bitterness after the loss of her husband and two sons in Moab (Ruth 1:1-20)
7. **David** testified personally that hidden, unrepentant sin had crushed his spirit: “*For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer*” (Ps 32:3).

19th century Biblical scholar Charles Bridges described a crushed spirit as being ‘*a brooding sense of despondency*’. Put down for yourself against ‘crushed spirit’, either ‘never’, ‘sometimes’, ‘often’ or ‘always’.

In contrast to a ‘crushed spirit’ is a ‘joyful heart’. John Calvin: *Joy is a quiet gladness of heart as one contemplates the goodness of God's saving grace in Christ Jesus.* C.S. Lewis wrote that *joy is not a satisfied desire but an unsatisfied desire ─ a deep longing for God, a hungry pursuit of God’s heart that never ends and is more satisfying than any earthly happiness.* John Piper has defined joy this way: Christian joy is a good feeling in the soul, produced by the Holy Spirit, as he causes us to see the beauty of Christ in the word and in the world. Put down for yourself against ‘joyful heart’, either ‘never’, ‘sometimes’, ‘often’ or ‘always’.

If you’ve completed this set of self-checks, then you’ve conducted an examination of your own **core health** in Biblical terms. Self-examination is worthwhile, but presenting yourself for a check up to someone else can be even more helpful. Consider asking someone who knows you well (husband, wife, parent, older child, mature brother or sister in the Lord) to do a health check for you.

Here are the symptoms again: Of poor health: cruelty, thoughtless words, envy and a crushed spirit; of good health: kindness, wise words, contentment and joy.

Whatever your ‘health scores’ – to a greater or lesser degree you, like me, are in need of healing. An accurate diagnosis of your own heart will show that to a greater or lesser degree you have ‘heart-disease’. For if you look at your own heart with the ‘spectacles of Scripture’ you will find that it is diseased.

Which brings us to our 3rd point:

1. **Heart Healing**

Let me begin with a question you will not be expecting. Do you have a belly/tummy button? I don’t intend to be offensive by asking this rather a personal question. It is a rhetorical one - so you don’t need to call out and tell me and everyone else here about this part of your anatomy! Now you may have what is affectionately termed an ‘innie’ or an ‘outie’ but either way, you’ll have a navel – the site where an umbilical cord once attached you to your mother.

Do you know how many times the word ‘navel’ occurs in Scripture? Three times!

1. Once in Song of Solomon (7:2) – when the bridegroom declares ‘*Your* ***nave****l is a rounded bowl*’ – sounds like the bride had an outie!
2. Once by Ezekiel - when describing the helpless state of Israel pictured as an abandoned baby left to perish in the open field – “*on the day you were born your* ***cord*** *was not cut*” (Eze 16:4).
3. Once here in the book of Proverbs in verse 8: “*It will be healing to your* ***flesh*** *and refreshment to your bones*”

The word translated ‘flesh’ here is the Hebrew term for ‘navel’. Verse 8 is a ‘merism’ - a figure of speech in which ‘the combination of two contrasting words to refer to an entirety’. We could accurately paraphrase the meaning of verse 8 with these words: “*It will be healing and refreshment from the outermost to the innermost part of you – from your tummy button to your skeleton*”. In other words, it will be complete **healing** and strengthening. Here then is the promise to all who fear the Lord and turn away from evil…you will be completely healed and wonderfully strengthened…you will flourish.

Here are some of the health benefits flowing from the wisdom which God offers which are identified in our text:

1. Longevity –length of days and years of life – v2 ‘long life’ v16.
2. Peace (shalom) – a complete wholeness, harmony and completeness.
3. Delight in life – ‘her ways are ways of pleasantness’ –v17.
4. Untroubled sleep without fear or anxiety –v23 and 24.

The wisdom of God is a ‘***tree of life*** *to those who lay hold of her, those who hold her fast are called blessed*’ – v18 (also note ‘tree of life in Prov 11:30; 13:12; 15:4). Recall that the tree of life was planted in the midst of the garden of Eden (Gen 2:9). After Adam and Eve sinned, and thereby knew evil, God expelled our first parents from Paradise so that they could not. “*take also of the tree of life and eat and live forever*" (Gen 3:22). God knew that Adam and Eve would desire good health forever, so he had cherubim guard the way to the tree of life (Gen 3:24).

However, this tree is to be replanted in the midst of the ‘Paradise of God’ yet to come (Rev 2:7). This tree continuously yields fruit symbolizing God’s ongoing provision for eternal life. The leaves of this tree are for the ‘healing of the nations’ (Rev 22:2). In the New Jerusalem there will be no need for healing because all there will enjoy perfectly good health.

Here in Revelation, the leaves of the tree symbolize God’s provision of completely healthy hearts. A gathered people living in harmony with God, each other and themselves…This tree will be readily accessible to all who dwell in the New Heavens and New Earth. Symbolising the continuing good health of God’s people forever and ever.

That’s incredibly encouraging for the future you might say, **but what about my health now?** Is there any hope for healing before I die? Can I experience some of the health benefits of God’s wisdom now? If so how?

You cannot go to the pharmacy and ask for some of the fruit or any of the leaves of the tree of life. But you can come to Christ Jesus. You can come to the Son of God who is the ‘*power of God, and the wisdom of God*’ (1 Cor 1:24). You can take him into yourself and be healed.

He said: (John 6:51) **“***I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh*.".

Being united to Christ by faith **does not mean** that our ‘heart-disease’ is completely cured in this life. The quick health check we conducted earlier should have demonstrated this to you. However, being a wise person – not wise in your own eyes, but a person who fears the Lord, who willingly, trustingly and, in hope, submits to the loving will and purpose of the God does bring healing to your soul and will most likely be of significant benefit to your body.

A healthy soul is strengthened by the certainty that however long you live on this earth, you will enjoy ‘length of days and years of life’ for eternity with Christ who loves you. A healthy soul delights in the pathways down which the Lord leads in life, be they easy or hard. A healthy soul is at rest in the peace of God, experiencing wholeness, harmony and completeness. A healthy soul has no reason to fear or be anxious. Now a healthy soul does not necessarily mean a healthy body, however a refreshed and flourishing soul, enables your particular body to be as healthy as it can be in this fallen world.

**How is all this possible?** Because of Christ. Because of the wisdom of the cross who to all who are being saved is the power of God (1 Cor 1:18) – the power of God to heal.

Christ, who suffered ill-health soul and body: In Gethsemane ‘*my soul is very sorrowful, even to death*’ (Matt 26:38); At Calvary “*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*” (Matt 27:46). His heart was pure, without blemish, perfectly loving and kind, A heart from which came only wise words. His heart was content to do His Father’s will. For the joy set before Him he endured the cross. **“***Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief*” (Isaiah 53:10). **“***He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed*” (Isaiah 53:5). I think that it would not be inaccurate to say that the heart of Christ was broken – so that the ‘heart disease’ of people like you and me could be completely healed.

Will you be wise today and take your own lack of kindness, your own thoughtless words, your own discontent, your deep sorrow, despair and/or depression to Christ? Will you wisely Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and not lean on your own understanding?Will you wiselyin all your ways acknowledge him, so that he will make straight your paths? Will you not be wise in your own eyes but rather fear the LORD and turn away from evil.

It will be healing and refreshment– from your tummy button to your skeleton - from the outermost to the innermost part of you.

AMEN

1. Blue Psalter Hymnal [↑](#footnote-ref-1)