

## Drowning Sorrows

### Proverbs 23:29-33

Last night Ellen read a public Facebook posting to me from a pastor she knows: “Movie, pizza and a Heineken = Night in.” Sounds like heaven, doesn’t it?

It reminded me of a wedding reception I was at a few years ago in Leura. The bride and groom seated Sue and me with three other pastors and their wives (they were not from our fellowship – we had not met them before the wedding and have not seen them since). It was the pastors’ table.

The barmaids brought the drinks out early. Everyone at our table indulged . . . except for Sue and me. While we drank water, they drank beer after beer after beer plus wine and champagne. Before long they were well and truly drunk and talking like no pastor ever should. I wondered how they could possibly preach at their churches the next morning. In truth, I hoped they would be too hung over to even go to church – by God’s standards recorded in 1 Timothy 3, they had disqualified themselves from pastoring.

Do you see the mixed messages in these illustrations? We’re told that alcohol is dangerous and something to be wary of, yet there are even some pastors who are so public about their indulgence that their example gives the opposite message: it’s cool. It’s fun. Have all you want.

What is a young person supposed to think? What is a person who has been scarred by alcohol supposed to think? What is the person who wrestles with addiction supposed to think?

William Law, in *Leadership Magazine*, makes a poignant observation. “Our souls may receive infinite hurt, and be rendered incapable of all virtue, merely by the use of innocent and lawful things. What is more innocent than rest and retirement? And yet what more dangerous than sloth and idleness? What is more lawful than eating and drinking? And yet what more destructive of all virtue ... than [gluttony] and [drunkenness]? ... It is the right and prudent management of ourselves, as to these things, that all the art of holy living chiefly consists.”<sup>1</sup>

Alcohol is legal in our society. So is food. So is romance. Yet thousands of lives are destroyed every year by the inappropriate or excessive use of each.

Sermon in a Sentence: **Indulgence makes for regrets that are only resolved by repentance and redemption.**

[Pray]

This is the sixth practical topic that we are taking from the book of Proverbs. Previously we’ve learned about parenting and money and decision-making among other things. Today we are learning about drunkenness and its cousin, gluttony. We could also apply this lesson to all things people are prone to indulge in – legal, like energy drinks, and illegal like marijuana, cocaine, ice and the like. In every case, indulgence makes for regrets.

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<sup>1</sup> William Law, *Leadership*, Vol. 7, no. 1.

Dr George Crabb notes that there are four reasons people indulge: to feel good (euphoria), to feel better (dull senses), to do better (performance enhancement), and curiosity/peer pressure. “Underlying all of the above reasons is a single factor - a bad, ungodly choice to turn to something else rather than to the Lord Jesus Christ. We find all answers to life in Jesus Christ not in some chemical.”<sup>2</sup>

In Proverbs 23, we have clear messages about the perils of indulging in food (gluttony) and drink (drunkenness).

We begin with gluttony.

Proverbs 23:1-3 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup>When you sit down to eat with a ruler, observe carefully what is before you,<sup>2</sup> and put a knife to your throat **if you are given to appetite.** <sup>3</sup>Do not desire his delicacies, for they are deceptive food.

We must be careful about selling out for food.

This is exactly what happened with Edmund in the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. When he was approached by the White Witch – posing as the Queen of Narnia – he was at first suspicious and afraid. How did she win him over and turn him into a traitor against his own brother and sisters? Turkish delight. Edmund sold himself for a bowl of Turkish delight.

In this he was not unlike Esau in the Old Testament. For a bowl of porridge, he sold his birthright.

Hebrews 12:15-17 (ESV)

<sup>15</sup>See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; <sup>16</sup>that no one is sexually immoral or **unholy like Esau**, who sold his birthright for a single meal. <sup>17</sup>For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears. (see also Genesis 25.30-34)

Indulging with food makes for regrets. Cravings for sweets or fat or salt, if unchecked, can become as strong as any other addiction – and can destroy.

Perhaps you noticed the headline this last week out of Las Vegas, NV, about the Heart Attack Grill. This restaurant caters to gluttons. It sells single, double, triple and quadruple bypass burgers. The quadruple boasts nearly a kilo of beef fried in pork fat and served with “flatliner” fries, which are also cooked in pure lard. The burger alone adds up to over 8000 calories. By comparison, a Big Mac is about 500 calories.

Some people thought the Heart Attack Grill was funny until a man suffered a real heart attack there this last week while gnawing on a triple bypass. Thankfully the man survived. What is not known is whether or not he learned a lesson about gluttony.

Now I want to make two disclaimers very clear.

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<sup>2</sup>[http://campaign.r20.constantcontact.com/render?llr=zvrde5bab&v=001XqiOmN3J1DDKM6SRKyDZybOO85GEjyTcKQbT7BMChOogrC8EfoBWAq8IXXidYKxoNt\\_4Sg75i758opiSbxbQh1fJ2FO59CxV6fE0p\\_ievKo%3D](http://campaign.r20.constantcontact.com/render?llr=zvrde5bab&v=001XqiOmN3J1DDKM6SRKyDZybOO85GEjyTcKQbT7BMChOogrC8EfoBWAq8IXXidYKxoNt_4Sg75i758opiSbxbQh1fJ2FO59CxV6fE0p_ievKo%3D)

Firstly, gluttony and being overweight are not the same thing. A glutton is anyone who attempts to find their happiness in food. They live to eat rather than eating to live. Some of the most obvious gluttons I've ever met were skinny as a rail. So don't judge anyone – including yourself – on the basis of body image. Gluttony is an internal, not an external, disorder.

Secondly, there is a time for feasting. Today is one of those days. So don't feel self-conscious about having a second helping at the luncheon that follows this service. If God prescribed regular feast days for Israel – and He did, then He is pleased when we celebrate His goodness today with a good feed.

In this instance, abundant food is a means used to praise God. With gluttony, food is not a means – it is the end – and it happens day after day after day.

**Indulgence makes for regrets that are only resolved by repentance and redemption.**

In verses 20-21, drunkenness and gluttony are shown to be temptations made harder to resist by the company we keep.

Proverbs 23:20-21 (ESV)

<sup>20</sup> Be not among **drunkards** or among **gluttonous** eaters of meat, <sup>21</sup> for the **drunkard** and the **glutton** will come to poverty, and slumber will clothe them with rags.

Recent research has borne out the truth of this proverb. Young people who are around alcohol are almost certain to begin drinking themselves – from an early age. This is despite expensive advertising campaigns and zero blood alcohol regulations for P platers.

In Australia, 90% of young people have had their first drink by 14. By 16, most have finished off a full serve of alcohol. By 24, 80% have experienced binge drinking.

I'm not making these statistics up. This comes from a study published by the Australian Medical Association in 2009. But I doubt you have trouble believing what I've quoted. You know as well as I do that alcohol runs deep in our society. The pressure on young people to go clubbing is intense . . . and the grog keeps pouring as people age. You're not much of a mate if you don't share a beer from time to time, are you?

The average Australian consumes 10 litres of alcohol a year – placing us near the head of the class in world rankings.

Yet, the messages are mixed. At the same time that alcohol is advertised as being so much fun, RBTs are lining our streets. More than one standard drink for a woman or two for a man and you are probably over the legal limit for operating a motor vehicle. In other words, you are drunk. When you think about it, it doesn't take much.

And what do we get for this indulgence? Proverbs says it leads to poverty and slumber.

**Indulgence makes for regrets that are only resolved by repentance and redemption.**

The perils of alcohol are described vividly in the closing verses of this chapter. At this point, you may want to reference the outline on the back of your bulletin. Here are three ills that come from alcohol.

Proverbs 23:29-35 (ESV)

<sup>29</sup>Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? <sup>30</sup>Those who tarry long over wine; those who go to try mixed wine. <sup>31</sup>Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. <sup>32</sup>In the end it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder. <sup>33</sup>Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart utter perverse things. <sup>34</sup>You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies on the top of a mast. <sup>35</sup>“They struck me,” you will say, “but I was not hurt; they beat me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake? I must have another drink.”

Notice three ills in the passage we just read:

## 1. Alcohol destroys (Proverbs 23.29-30) – a riddle

Verse 29 presents a riddle that is answered by verse 30. Six questions are asked to describe a single evil. Think about this description. Is this a good life? Is this the kind of life you would want for your kids? Woe. Sorrow. Strife (fights). Complaining. Victimises friends and relatives. Red eyes.

Verse 30 answers the riddle. What is it that causes all of these problems? Tarrying long over wine and sampling mixed wine.

Indulgence.

John Macarthur helps us to understand the mixed wine part at the end of the verse:

Not wine diluted and lowered with water, but made stronger and more inebriating, by the addition of more powerful ingredients, as honey, spices, myrrh, defrutum, opiates, etc.<sup>3</sup>

In essence, the proverb is stating the fact that alcohol destroys. This is a well established fact. Alcohol is a drug and a poison.

According to the Australian Medical Association, “Alcohol has been causally linked to more than 60 different medical conditions including cirrhosis of the liver, inflammation of the gut and pancreas, heart and circulatory problems, sleep disorders, male impotency, eye diseases and conditions, and alcohol dependence. Alcohol consumption also raises the overall risk of cancer, including cancer of the mouth, throat and oesophagus, breast cancer and bowel cancer.”

“In 2003, alcohol was the risk factor responsible for the greatest burden of disease and injury in Australian males under the age of 45,”

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<sup>3</sup>Smith, J. H. (1992; Published in electronic form, 1996). *The new treasury of scripture knowledge : The most complete listing of cross references available anywhere- every verse, every theme, every important word* (718). Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson.

“An estimated 450 000 Australian children live in a household with at least one adult who regularly binge drinks.”

“There is a strong association between alcohol use and crime, particularly violent crime. In 2001, two-thirds of teenagers (and more than 80% of binge drinkers) reported they had witnessed violence by someone who was drunk and aggressive and had had to look after a friend who had drunk too much.”<sup>4</sup>

Alcohol destroys. That is the first ill. The second is in verses 31-32.

## 2. Alcohol deceives (Proverbs 23.31-32) – a rule

Proverbs 23:31-32 (ESV)

<sup>31</sup>Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. <sup>32</sup>In the end it **bites like a serpent** and **stings like an adder**.

This is talking about the appeal of alcohol. It looks good. It feels good. In a few cases, it even tastes good . . . but therein is the deception because it is not good. It bites like a snake.

Proverbs 20:1 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup>Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.

Referencing the Australian Medical Association again, we are told about the appeal of alcohol in our society. They list four factors:

- A. **Social acceptability of hazardous alcohol use.** “Most of the detrimental effects of alcohol consumption arise from harmful or hazardous drinking by 'social' drinkers who are not alcohol-dependent. Hazardous, but socially acceptable patterns of consumption have become part of popular Australian culture.”
- B. **Marketing and glamorisation of alcohol.** “Alcohol advertising and promotion is increasingly sophisticated, and is aimed at attracting, influencing, and recruiting new generations of potential drinkers. Teenagers and young people are particular targets of alcohol advertising at sporting and music events, and the marketing of sweet-tasting alcopops where the taste of alcohol is disguised by sugar and other flavours. Education about the significant potential negative effects of alcohol consumption competes with powerful and constant impact of positive media and advertising messages about alcohol.”
- C. **The availability of alcohol** (in terms of locality and time of day). “Alcohol can be obtained from a wide range of venues in Australia, including supermarkets, internet sites, and licensed clubs, bars and restaurants.”
- D. **The low price** of some forms of alcohol, especially alcopops, which appeal to young people.<sup>5</sup>

A recent study ranked alcohol as the "most harmful" drug among a list of 20 other drugs. The study, released in a British medical journal, claimed that alcohol was even more dangerous than

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<sup>4</sup> <http://ama.com.au/node/4762>

<sup>5</sup> IBID.

crack and heroin—when assessed for its potential harm to the "drug-taker" and those harmed by his drug-taking. Hardcore drugs like heroin, crack cocaine, and crystal meth are the deadliest drugs. But when researchers analysed other important categories—the addictive nature of the drug, how it harms the body, the drug's role on society (such as tearing families apart)—alcohol far exceeded all the other drugs in terms of overall harm.

In the United States, alcohol claims more than 80,000 lives every year, and is responsible for or involved in about one-third of all fatal car crashes, half of all homicides, one-third of all suicides and one-third of all hospital admissions.<sup>6</sup>

Alcohol deceives. It makes big promises, but only delivers grief.

**Indulgence makes for regrets that are only resolved by repentance and redemption.**

### 3. Alcohol deludes (Proverbs 23.33-35) – a ruse

When we say alcohol deludes, we are talking about the self-deception that often sets in. Many alcoholics refuse to admit that they have a problem. In fact, they may even boast about their ability to 'hold their liquor'.

Notice the delusion in verses 33-35.

Proverbs 23:33-35 (ESV)

<sup>33</sup>Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart utter perverse things. <sup>34</sup>You will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, like one who lies on the top of a mast. <sup>35</sup>"They struck me," you will say, "but I was not hurt; they beat me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake? I must have another drink."

A painting by Hieronymus Bosch that is displayed in the famous Louvre museum in Paris illustrates this proverb well. In the painting, there are ten people in a boat and two in the water beside the boat, all of whom are indulging in food and alcohol. They look so happy partying on the water, yet danger is all around them. The sea is perilous . . . and lurking above at the top of the boat's mast is a thirteenth face – the ominous image of a deathly skull.

Delusion.

Drinking actually deludes in more than one way. It not only tricks people into thinking they have no problem with alcohol, it also tricks people into thinking there is no problem with other evil behaviours.

A study in the US found that people often do things while drunk that they would never do if they were sober. Yet they delude themselves into thinking that their drunkenness somehow absolves them of responsibility:

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<sup>6</sup>Maria Cheng, "Study finds alcohol most dangerous drug," *Post and Courier* (11-1-2010); "The Party's Over," *Nature* (11-25-2010)

"If you have sex, you're a slut, and if you don't, you're a prude—but drinking allows you to do both," she says. "You can go out, get drunk, have sex and the next day say, 'I'm still a good girl.'"

"'I was drunk so I hooked up with that guy.' 'I was drunk so I missed my class this morning.' 'I was drunk so I got in a fight.' If it's something they're not proud of, it gives them an excuse."<sup>7</sup>

The proverb says, "They struck me," you will say, "but I was not hurt; they beat me, but I did not feel it. When shall I awake? I must have another drink."

**Indulgence makes for regrets that are only resolved by repentance and redemption.**

We have seen, then, that gluttony and drunkenness are forbidden by God – not because God is a killjoy, but because He wants to protect us. The damage that gluttony and drunkenness does to people is well proved.

As it relates to alcohol, the Scripture clearly teaches that it destroys, it deceives and it deludes.

Someone might ask, "But what about just having a social drink?" We don't have time to deal with that topic this morning, so we'll save that for our Bible study groups this week. But let me briefly say this:

- A. The Bible clearly forbids what it calls strong drink and drunkenness is always a sin. Remember our society defines drunkenness as only one or two drinks, so it doesn't take much to cross the line.
- B. The Bible does not clearly forbid a social drink. Even so, I think it is wise in our alcohol-immersed society to abstain altogether. I also think principles that we can derive from the Bible together with a consideration of the historical and cultural background of the Bible bear out the wisdom of abstaining. I cannot in clear conscience say with biblical authority that a social drink is a sin because I don't find that stated explicitly in the Bible. I'm telling you what I think.

For our young people, I want to say I pray for you that you never start. I know the peer pressure on this and many other things is intense. I urge you to stand for Christ and to stand for the principles that are in the Bible. I promise you that you will never regret doing that.

I close with a real life story about the regrets that come from indulgence . . . and the resolution that comes when we repent and embrace the redemption that is found only in Jesus Christ.

Josh Hamilton was only a teenager when a Major League Baseball team noticed him. He was lauded as the next Babe Ruth – a pure power hitter. Hamilton was so good that the Tampa Bay Rays paid him \$4 million just to sign a contract with them. Think of it. He was only a kid.

His career took off in the minor leagues. He was on the fast track to the big time . . . until one fateful day when he and his parents were involved in a motor vehicle accident. They all survived, but Josh's injuries affected his career. He turned to alcohol and cocaine.

After much rehab, Josh made a comeback in baseball. He was nowhere near as good as he once was, but he was still better than most. The drinking and drug abuse, however, continued. He failed

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<sup>7</sup> Sharon Jayson, "College Drinking is Liberating and a Good Excuse", USA Today (8-22-2011).

a drug test . . . and then another . . . and then another. Ultimately, Josh refused to even take the tests, and for that he was expelled from baseball permanently.

That was when Josh hit rock bottom . . . and that is where Josh was found by Jesus Christ. In broken hearted repentance, he put his faith in Christ for salvation, and he was changed. He became a powerful witness – speaking to groups of young people all over the country about Christ.

Three years passed in which Josh was sober. He applied to be reinstated in baseball, and they took him back. He signed with the Cincinnati Reds for the lowest salary allowable. It was 2006 – seven full years after he was proclaimed the greatest baseball player, he finally made his Major League debut.

The next year, he was traded to the Texas Rangers and his career took off. In 2010, he was voted the Most Valuable Player in all of baseball, and he led his team to the World Series. In 2011, he again had a great year, and the Rangers once again went to the World Series.

Josh Hamilton was a hero – a rags to riches story . . . but not without help. Knowing that once a person is an addict, they are always an addict, the Texas Rangers hired a coach named Johnny Narron to hold Hamilton accountable. Wherever Josh went, Narron went with him. His full time job was to babysit one baseball player and to make sure he never took a drink. Major League Baseball also held Hamilton to strict account. He was drug tested three times every week.

After the Rangers narrowly lost the World Series last October, Narron took a coaching job with another team. Hamilton had been dry for years. Perhaps he could be trusted.

Actually, he couldn't. Two weeks ago, on 2 February, this was the headline across the United States:

Josh Hamilton Relapses.

He was videoed at Sherlock's Pub and Grill in Dallas, TX, drinking four beers while his teammate Ian Kinsler tried to get him out of the bar.

The next day, at a nationally televised news conference, Hamilton publicly and humbly asked forgiveness from his wife, his team, and his fans . . . and from God.<sup>8</sup>

Now you may wonder why I told you this story – a story that doesn't have a clean ending. It is because this is the nature of indulgence. We cannot break it on will power alone. We need God – not once, but every day – to release us from it.

**Indulgence makes for regrets that are only resolved by repentance and redemption.**

Have you indulged? Do you have a problem with gluttony? With alcohol? With some other form of addiction?

Please take the good news. Repent – admit your sinfulness. And turn to Jesus Christ who redeemed you at the cross.

If the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed. (John 8.36)

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<sup>8</sup> [http://espn.go.com/dallas/mlb/story/\\_/id/7535200/texas-rangers-outfielder-josh-hamilton-relapse-alcohol](http://espn.go.com/dallas/mlb/story/_/id/7535200/texas-rangers-outfielder-josh-hamilton-relapse-alcohol)



And just a closing word of wisdom . . . make yourself accountable to someone – as Josh Hamilton started doing again right after his news conference on 3 February.