

26-0920p - Detailed Summary

26-0920p - *The Way That Seems Right*, Scott Reynolds

Bible Reader: Mike Mathis

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The Way That Seems Right

Scripture Reading

Scripture Reader: (0:04 - 0:29) Mike Mathis,

Proverbs 14:12: Mike read Proverbs 14:12: "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."

Scripture continued

That completed the evening Scripture reading and set the text for the sermon that followed.

Summary of Transcript (0:04 - 18:29), Preacher: Scott Reynolds

Text: Proverbs 14:12 (with Proverbs 16:25; 21:2; Matthew 7:3-5; Luke 6; Mark 4:24-25; Romans 2)

(0:34-2:15) A Warning Written Twice

Scott opened under the title "The Way That Seems Right," noting that the Holy Spirit had this sentence written twice in Proverbs. It appears in Proverbs 14:12 and again, in the same words, in Proverbs 16:25. A companion line a few chapters later explains why the warning must be repeated: every man's way is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the heart. The problem is not that people cannot tell right from wrong when they look at someone else. They are often skilled at that. The problem is that a person's own way looks right, feels wise, feels justified, and may even feel spiritual. The Lord is not weighing the story people tell themselves. He is weighing the heart.

Scott said he wanted the congregation to stay with the warning long enough for it to reach those sitting in the room, not "those people" and not the culture outside. If Proverbs is telling the truth, the most dangerous path in Cleveland that week may not be the one that looks obviously wicked. It may be the one that seems right.

(2:16-4:22) Appearance and Reality

The proverb is carefully worded. It says there is a way that **seems** right. Appearance and reality are not the same. A path can feel moral, responsible, even biblical, and still end in death. That is hard to accept because people live by what seems right. They make decisions by how a thing sits on the conscience at the moment and defend themselves by the reasons that sound best in their own ears. Proverbs presents this habit not as a rare failure but as the ordinary condition of the human heart: every man's way is right in his own eyes.

That does not mean there is no right way. Scripture is full of a right way, and Jesus calls himself the way. The question is whether people will submit their way to the Lord who weighs hearts, or keep treating their own eyes as the final court. The Lord weighs hearts, not reputations and not the

version of a story that makes one person look careful and another look careless. For that reason the sermon could not begin with a list of other people's sins. To start there would already prove the proverb and already choose the way that seems right. The first work of the hour was simple and searching: each person is capable of building a life, a habit, an opinion, even a ministry that seems right to him or her and is not right before God. Until that sentence is allowed to stand, Jesus' next teaching will only be a saying used on other people.

(4:23-6:34) The Speck and the Log

Jesus puts a picture on the proverb that no one can forget. In Matthew 7:3-5 he asks why a person looks at the speck in a brother's eye but does not notice the log in his own, and how he can offer to take out the speck while the log remains. "You hypocrite," he says. First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

Scott slowed the saying down by noting what Jesus does **not** say. He does not say there is no speck. Brothers and sisters do sin, and congregations do need correction. He does not say that people must never help a brother; the last line assumes that helping is part of love. He does not say that all judgment is forbidden, as if Christians must pretend nothing is ever wrong. What he says is that the order is wrong and the would-be fixer is broken. The man with the log in his eye is not merely imperfect. He cannot see. A man who cannot see is the last person who should lean over someone else's face with a sharp instrument and say, "Hold still, I'll fix you." That is why Jesus uses the word hypocrite. The issue is not only that a person has a fault. The issue is that he appoints himself as a surgeon while he is still blind. The attempt to help becomes an act of blindness dressed up as concern.

(6:35-9:10) The Teacher, the Tree, and the Treasure

Luke records the same saying and will not let it be treated as a slogan. Just before the speck and the log, Luke notes that a pupil is not above his teacher, but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher. That changes the standard. The question is not who in the room has the sharper eye. The question is under whom they are sitting. People become like the one they listen to. If they sit under their own heart, they will reproduce their own log and call it discernment or standing for truth, but it will still be their own looking at things in their own eyes. If they sit under Christ, they begin to learn his way of seeing, and his way of seeing always starts with the log in the one who wants to help.

Luke then sets the saying next to the tree and the treasure. There is no good tree that produces bad fruit, nor a bad tree that produces good fruit. Each tree is known by its own fruit. The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good, and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil, for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart. Scott connected this to the Lord weighing the heart. The mouth reports the inventory. Judgmental speech is not first a technique problem, as if a gentler tone would suffice while the same treasure remains. What people notice, excuse, condemn, and cannot stop rehearsing is fruit, and fruit tells on the tree. When the first thing that rises in a conflict is the other person's speck, a log should already be assumed to be in place—not because the other person is innocent, but because the eyes have already chosen a way that seems right.

(9:11-11:30) The Measure You Use

Jesus applies the same principle to listening and measuring in Mark 4:24-25: take care what you listen to; by your standard of measure it will be measured to you, and more will be given besides. Whoever has, to him more shall be given, and whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away. Two warnings belong with the log and the speck. First, the standard applied to others is the standard that will be applied to you, and then some. People like a tight measure when looking at a brother and a generous measure when looking at themselves. Jesus will not let them keep two sets of rules or scales. The measure used is the measure received. Second, spiritual sight is not a fixed possession. It grows or it withers. The one who receives the word with a humble measure is given more light. The one who uses the word as a weapon against others begins to lose even the light he thought he had.

That is a fearful thing. A man can start with real truth in his hand and, by the way he measures other people, become less and less able to see. This is why the person with the log often feels so sure of himself. He thinks he is discerning. He thinks he is the one who still takes Scripture seriously. Jesus says he is using a measure that will come back on his own head, and if he keeps using it he will not only stay blind, he will grow blinder. So take care what you listen to. Take care how you measure. The Lord who weighs hearts is not impressed by how quickly someone can spot a speck.

(11:31-14:48) Judgment Without Excuse

Paul takes the proverb and the saying of Jesus into the courtroom of the gospel in Romans 2. “You therefore have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same thing.” Romans 2 is not a command to stop telling the difference between good and evil. Paul has just finished a long indictment of the unrighteous. He knows evil when he sees it. What he will not allow is a man who uses God’s law as a mirror for everyone else and a shield for himself. God’s judgment is according to truth, not according to comparisons. People are very good at comparisons: at least I am not like that; at least our congregation does not do what they do; at least my sin is not as loud as his. All the while the Lord is weighing the heart.

Paul then asks the question that should stop a religious person in his tracks. When you pass judgment and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance, and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance? Kindness is not God saying the law does not matter. Kindness is God giving time to take the log out. If that time is used to keep talking about someone else’s speck, the person is not merely being inconsistent. He is treating the kindness of God with contempt. A stubborn, unrepentant heart is not standing still. It is storing up wrath for the day when God’s righteous judgment is revealed. God will repay each person according to what they have done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor, and immortality, he will give eternal life. To those who reject the truth and follow evil there will be wrath and anger, trouble and distress. First for the Jew, then for the Gentile. Glory, honor, and peace for everyone who does good, first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. God does not show favoritism—not Jew or Gentile, not church member or outsider, not preacher or pew.

The log is not only a large sin that has not been noticed yet. The log is often the act of judging itself while the same pattern lives in the judge: pride, harshness, a selective memory, a way that seems right. That sounds too close. It is supposed to. Romans was written to people who already knew the

(14:49-16:54) First the Log, Then the Speck

Jesus does not leave people in the dark about what to do. He gives an order, and it is the only order that works. First, notice the log. That will not happen by staring more intently at a brother. It happens when a person submits his way to the Lord who weighs hearts, and when the word is allowed to read him before he uses the word on anyone else. Then take the log out. That is not a feeling. That is confession. That is repentance. That is the humility of a pupil who still needs the teacher. In the language of this congregation, it is the same honest turning they have always preached: the heart coming under the authority of Christ, the old way abandoned, the new way walked. Baptism and a faithful life are not badges that exempt anyone from Romans 2. They are the beginning of a life in which God keeps weighing the heart.

Then, and only then, a person will see clearly. Clarity is not a personality trait and not the prize for being the sharpest critic in the room. Clarity is a gift that follows repentance. Until the log is out, the hands are not safe near anyone else's eye. Then take the speck out. Love does that. Restoration becomes possible because the helper is no longer a hypocrite. He is a fellow sinner who has been shown mercy. He does not come with a beam still in place and a verse in hand. He comes having first sat under the same judgment, and he is now asking his brother to hear. That is the gospel order—not because there is nothing to say to one another, but because there is something true to say, and the only people who can say it without doing harm are the people who have already let the Lord deal with them.

(16:55-18:29) Application and Invitation

Scott brought the warning home without softening it. If the first impulse in a hard conversation is the other person's speck, assume a log is already in place. If God's kindness has not been leading to repentance, that kindness may be treated with contempt. If Scripture has been used mainly as a measure for others, take care: that measure is coming back. Do not trust the way that seems right simply because it is yours. The Lord weighs the heart. First the log, then and only then the speck, and even then with the humility of a pupil who is still becoming like his teacher.

If someone needed to name a log that evening, he should name it before God. If someone needed the kindness that leads to repentance, it was still being held out. If someone had been waiting for someone else to change before dealing with what the Lord had already shown him, the proverb had already described the end of that way. There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. There is also a teacher who still makes pupils able to see. Sit under him, let him weigh the heart, and then you will see clearly. Then, by his mercy, you may actually be of use to a brother.

Scott closed by saying that was what he had, and the invitation was extended to anyone subject to it.