



Sermon Transcription • Abbotsford

Wise Up - July 8/9, 2017 - Jeff Bucknam
Nobodies and Somebodies - (Proverbs 12:9)

[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]

I was playing golf with a friend just a couple weeks ago and realized that I don't play golf enough, so I've decided to change that. No, I was playing golf with him and we were walking down one of the holes and he was talking to me about his kids. He's an older guy and his kids are what you call Millennials. "Millennial" is the term we use to describe the generation that is largely kind of late teens to thirties now, okay? I did my doctoral dissertation writing quite a bit, actually, about Millennials (what were called "Emerging Adults" at the time). So, we were having a chat about this and he was saying, "You know, one of the things that I really appreciate about the Millennial generation is how outward focused they are. They want to change the world, they want to help the planet, and they are far more into community living than things having to do with themselves." I said, "That's really interesting that you say that because I hear that a lot too in the news media and that certainly seems to be the M.O. for them (or at least the popular M.O. for them), but actually, when you do a lot of the research, or you read the research that's being done in terms of their responses to questionnaires and things, it's actually the opposite." He was like, "No way!" So, to verify that, I actually went back and did some looking into some of the research that I did back when I was doing my doctoral work. A study in 2012 compared Baby Boomers - that's the generation of people who are born largely from 1946-1961. (By the way, these are rough generations, right? So you're born in 1962 and you say, "No, that's not me." No, it's probably you.) But roughly 1946-1961 is the Baby Boomers, Generation X (1962-1981) is my generation (we're dower and think the world is ending all the time), and Millennials are 1979-1999, right around there. Okay, so this 2012 study compared their views (the views of these three different generations) on community involvement and life goals. They were asked a bunch of questions regarding how involved in the community are you? How involved in politics are you? What are your dreams for the world? What do you want out of life? *Business Insider* (a publication that's largely online now) actually did a report on it. Here's what they wrote:

"35 percent of Millennials said it was important to keep up to date with political affairs, a decrease from 50 percent for Baby Boomers and 39 percent for Generation X"

So, Baby Boomers, half of them think that we should keep up to date with political affairs and it's important for us to be involved in politics. Gen-X (my generation) is like "Nah, not really" 39 percent. But Millennials are even worse in terms of that kind of involvement - 35 percent of them.



“A whopping 75 percent of Millennials said that being wealthy was very important to them (three out of four), compared to 45 percent of Baby Boomers and 70 percent of Generation X.”

That, by the way, is the highest number that has ever been. In any of the studies that have ever been done for any of the generations, the question, “What do you want out of life?” Wealth, among Millennials, is the highest reported in that generation and any other generation that precedes them.

“Becoming involved in programs to clean up the environment - perceived as a badge of honour for Millennials - decreased from 33 percent for Boomers to 20 percent for Millennials. In fact, three times as many Millennials as Baby Boomers said that they made no personal effort to help the environment...[Quote:] ‘Popular views of the Millennial generation, born in the 1980s and 1990s, as more caring, community-oriented and politically engaged than previous generations are largely incorrect, particularly when compared to Baby Boomers and Generation X at the same age,’ said the study’s lead author, Jean Twenge. [Here’s the important line] ‘These data show that recent generations are less likely to embrace community mindedness and are focusing more on money, image and fame.’”

Some people call the Millennials the “selfie generation.” Not just because the selfie came about during their time, but because they love to take selfies. Why? Because of image. *Forbes Magazine* added their two-cents:

“Younger generations are, on average, less interested in intrinsic goals and more interested in extrinsic ones - especially the Millennials. They see money, fame, and image as being more important than aspirations concerned with self-acceptance, affiliation, and community.”

This probably explains why it is that there is a huge desire among many these days to be YouTube famous. I have only recently, in the last few years, learned what that means. YouTube is great. I watch Hogan’s Heroes on it [laughter], but I’m not as involved with YouTube as others. When I was a kid, we used to sit and -- “At 8:00 on Thursday night you could watch the Cosby Show.” So you’ve got to be there at 8:00pm and if you’re not you’re like, “No!” and if you’re at a meeting somewhere, you’d say, “We need to wrap this up because I need to go see the Cosby’s.” You’d go home and you’d sit -- it was family entertainment, everything worked around the clock like that, you’d watch TV together and things. This day and age, of course, we all have our own screens and we watch whatever we want to watch, and what we’re watching is not really Network Television anymore, right? Like CTV, CBC, Global - we don’t watch that stuff, for the most part. What we watch (especially if you’re younger) is YouTube and on YouTube, largely what you watch is other people living lives. In fact, I tell me boys, “So you’re watching a guy live his life while you’re sitting on the couch not living yours? Fair enough, fair enough” [laughter]. But that’s what they do. Somebody follows them around with a camera, they put a GoPro on their head and you follow some guy around, you get to know him and his life. What are they doing? Nothing. They’re just driving down the road talking and you’re watching them do that. I asked my boys the other day, “What’s the draw here?” “Dad, they’re YouTube famous and that’s awesome. We could be YouTube famous. Awe man, if I put a camera on my friend and he followed me around I’d be famous.” Why would you want to be YouTube famous? Because you don’t want to be a



nobody. You want to be a somebody, right? When you walk down the street, what you want is people to see you and notice you and say, “Hey, aren’t you the guy on YouTube?” Make a name for yourself, have the acclaim of the culture, that’s what we want. “What do I want out of life? I want fame, man! That’s why I post so much.” We don’t want to be nobodies, we want to be somebodies. Listen, even in the church this is happening. We’re told over and over again, “Listen, it’s not okay for you just to be a normal Christian person - maybe an accountant who goes to work during the week and comes home and loves his family - you’ve got to change the world, man. You’re accountants, see? You’re not changing the world! So you’ve got to go out and do something radical, you know, Walter Mitty style.” Remember this movie? “Don’t be boring, go and be radical.” You’ve got to be radical. Normal stinks, average stinks, being a nobody, not recognized, stinks. We want to be somebodies, we want others to take note of us, doing whatever is necessary to gain their attention and praise. That’s what this proverb actually addresses. This tendency among us to actually be just average people doing average things, but having aspirations to be somebody. How do we deal with that? Those feelings that come inside of us and are told to us by our culture that we should be somebody. Proverbs 12:9 really does address this. Here’s what I want to do. I want to tell you the proverb, I want to explain what the proverb means, and then after that, I want to give you just one point. I promise it is only one. It may be drawn out, but it is one point, okay? [laughter].

[The Proverb]

Here’s the proverb:

“Better to be a nobody and yet have a servant than pretend to be somebody and have no food.”

“Better to be a nobody and yet have a servant than pretend to be somebody and have no food.”

Okay, so that phrase *to have a servant* actually means *slave*. Here’s a verse in the Bible, a proverb from the Bible, saying, “Hey, it’s better to have a slave.” Okay, wait a minute. Back up. There are a few things you need to know about slavery in this particular day. Number one: it is not race-based. It never was for them, so don’t think about American slavery where they enslaved a group of people based largely on their skin tone. Not race-based at all. Slavery, secondly, was really common in those days. In fact, about 90 percent of the people who lived during that time at one point or another were slaves to someone else because it was really easy to fall into. The way you became a slave (most of the time) was you were indebted to somebody else and you could not pay that debt and so, as a result, you pay it with your life. Go to the restaurant these days and you don’t --you eat this great meal and you’re like, “Oh no, I forgot my wallet,” and instead of dining and dashing you go to the back and you work it off in the dish-pit. Okay, so this is what slavery was, largely. It was working it off in the back in the dish-pit for people and eventually you would earn your manumission, you’d earn your freedom. It was very easy and lots and lots of people had slaves in this regard because (this is the last point) they were actually really cheap. Usually you could buy a slave for 30 shekels...Hmm? You say, “Well, how much is that?” You know, in those days, it was about four months of your yearly salary. So, most of the people in this room would think like, four months of your salary is what? What your car is worth? I



mean, my car is worth way more because it's a Corolla so, like, it's awesome [laughter]. But, somewhere in there and everyone had one. Most of us have a car, right? Most people could afford a slave. It meant that you were middle class and they were very useful to have. Somebody could make your dinner for you. I mean, you'd have to give them housing they are like better kids. I'm just kidding [laughter]. You provide their housing and they make your dinner and they do all sorts of things for you. They provide for you and that. So here's what this is saying: It's "better to be a nobody and yet have a servant..." is essentially saying, "Look, it's better to be an average, nondescript, middle-class person." It's a good thing to just be a normal person. You're not really that bad off, you're not destitute at all, you have a servant that takes care of all sorts of things. It's better to be in that situation than to pretend to be somebody, right? To want and to strive and seek after fame and fortune and importance and act and have no food and go poor doing it. You should be okay with where God has placed you in your life instead of trying to strive for, or pretend to be, something that you're actually not. It's going to cost you everything - your time, your resources, and all sorts of things. The normal, anonymous life is preferable to going poor in order to keep up with the Jones's.

So let me give you some images for how this works out practically and what this proverb is essentially trying to say. Let's imagine that in order for you to really fit into this society (and by fit in I mean that people will look at you and think, "Oh, you're kind of cool." You meet the standards of acceptable coolness by whatever community you're in) in order to do that you have to have a widget. I don't care what the widget is because in different sub-cultures it is a different thing, right? You have to have a widget and everyone will think it's cool. When I was a kid in elementary school, it was a Breezin' coat. The widget was a Breezin' coat. Do you remember the Breezin' coats? Some of you? No? Maybe in Canada that wasn't a thing. It had to be a Breezin' coat and it had a little rainbow square on it. That made you cool - was the Breezin' coat. My mom said, "We can't afford a Breezin' coat, so you're going to get one..." I think it was called a Brazin' coat or some dumb thing, right? [laughter]. And everyone knew. "You're a loser, Jeff, because you don't have the actual thing." Every culture and every subculture has got a thing. It's got a widget - you have to have it in order for you to fit in, in order for you to be cool. So, you have an opportunity, then, when you're faced with that culture, to make a decision. Your decision is, "Okay, I can't afford the widget, so either I'm going to buy it and go poor so that I can pretend I am with everybody else and cool like they are, or I can just be at peace with who I am and where God placed me. It's not like I've got a rotten life, I mean the Brazin' coat is okay and it's going to keep me dry." The proverb is not about the people who are setting the cultural trend, the proverb is about how you respond to the cultural trend. What happens when you see those things and what goes on in your heart and what you want. It's saying that it's better to be at peace with where you are and who you are because it's not that bad off, than to try to fake it and be someone you're not because it's going to cost you everything.

So we have instagram and facebook. I prefer instagram, I don't have facebook because I hate it, but instagram I like because it's pictures and I don't have to read your opinions on that. I just look at the pictures. I don't know if you've noticed on instagram or on a lot of the social media outlets as you zoom through, some people post --I mean, what do we post? Do we post when we wake up in the morning? "Good morning," and you've got slobber hanging out, no. You don't post when you get out of the lake and your hair is all sideways. You don't post that. What you post is when you look the right



way and usually from the beach in Maui. That's the time you post. "Hey look at us, [click] we're in Maui." Now, most of us who have social media, we look at these pictures and we're like, on the first hand, "Oh, that's so cool that they're in Maui." But also, what goes on in our hearts, is we say, "Man, they're in Maui and I'm in Abbotsford [laughter] and last week they were in Europe and I was still in Abbotsford and the week before that they were in Fiji and I was in Chilliwack!" [laughter]. Right? This is ridiculous. We don't say it to anybody, usually, we just feel it. Listen, what the proverb is saying is that in that moment the proverb is not addressing the person who is posting on the beach in Maui [post away], it's addressing the person who is sitting in Abbotsford thinking to themselves, "Man, I would love to have that - that life, that house, those kids' clothes. I would love to have that." So, you're faced with a choice that's either, "Man, I should aspire to that. I should spend my money to gain that. I mean, I can't really afford to go to the beach in Maui or Fiji or go to Europe, I can't afford that, but I sure would like to post like that so that everyone would look at it and think, "Wow, you're so cool! You're somebody." Or I can say, "You know what? Albert Dyck park is great." [Laughter] Right? "It's not awful, it's not Winnipeg, I mean it's Abbotsford and it's okay, right? [laughter]. "I'm a nobody. Yeah, it's like everybody else, but it's average and it's good."

"It's better to be a nobody and yet have a servant than to pretend to be somebody but have no food."

This happens to pastors too. I mean, I just want you to know that this is something that I face. In my community of professional expertise or whatever, I look on instagram and I've got friends in the states that are doing the preaching circuit, right? You can go to these different conferences and, "Hey, it's really great to be at the cool conference this week and there were 20,000 people there and it was awesome." "Wait a minute, weren't you just at the last conference and I just saw a poster of you for that other conference? I never get asked to do those conferences." Probably because I don't dress right or something, right? You don't get asked to do that and there is this feeling that goes on inside your heart. You're like, "Well maybe I should aspire to do that because people would take note more if I did that." Or maybe it's okay to just be a pastor of a local church and to be faithful there. It's not awful, right? [laughter].

"It's better to be a nobody and yet have a servant than pretend to be somebody and have no food."

There's a danger in chasing the approval of others. It's better to be at peace with where God's placed you. So look, I hope I've given you an idea as to what the proverb means.

[The Point]

Here's the point. Just application now, okay? The reason that you and I pretend to be somebody (or want to pretend to be somebody) and have that aspiration in our hearts, when we look at instagram and we aspire in our hearts and want that life, is because we are generally really uncomfortable and unhappy with the providence of God that has placed us where we are now. Like, we wouldn't be aspiring to be there if we loved here so much. And most of us don't love here. I don't mean just Abbotsford, I mean your nose size and the size of other things in your body or your hair or your



financial situation or your whatever. We don't love the providence of God in our lives. Now, I'm using that word particularly. It's a word that really should be resurrected around our area: providence. "Providence" is the belief that every moment of every day God is involved. That you're sitting here right now and the breath that you're breathing, you're breathing because God is actively willing you to be alive. We're not Deists, we don't believe that God started the world like a top and he just started spinning it and went off somewhere. We believe that God is sustaining the world willfully, actively. He is involved in all sorts of things and you have proverbs that actually talk about this. One of the best ones is Proverbs 16:33,

"The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord."

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See, in those days, casting lots looked --we might throw dice these days, but in those days, they didn't have dice but they had rocks. So you'd take two kind of flat rocks and on one side of the rocks you would paint black and the other side you'd paint white and then you'd ask the universe a question or your god a question. You'd say, "God, should I ask Carolyn out on a date?" Right? And then you'd [shaking dice in his hands] throw it in your lap and if black and black came up, the answer is no. "Okay, should I ask Judy..." [laughter] No. If white and white came up, the answer is yes. If black and white came up, the answer is shake again [laughter]. This is how they used to make many decisions. We look at that and we say, "Oh, that's just by chance. You're just trusting the fates or fortune or luck", but what the proverb is actually saying is, no:

"The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord."

God is actively involved even in something as petty and chance-ridden as the lot. You shoot your basketball at the buzzer and it goes up and it hits the front rim and bounces around and falls out and you think, "Oh, so unlucky." No, providential. Or you shoot the basket up and it bounces on the rim and hits the top of the backboard and goes in and you're a hero, "Oh, I'm so lucky." No, providential. "My station in life is so unlucky." No, providential. The money you have - providential. Your colour of skin - providential. Nose size - providential. I could do this all day. Providential, providential, providential.

I was buying my sweet Corolla in the High River, Alberta --I told this story a few weeks ago, that my car broke down while I was at a baseball tournament there and it just pooped out and the engine was basically fried. But, it happened to happen just outside of a Toyota dealership [laughter]. So, okay, I roll into the Toyota dealership, this car probably can't move very far from there, so I walk into the place and say to the guy, "Look, I'm going to be honest with you, my car is outside and it's basically dead, so you're going to sell a car today to me. I need a car." And they're fighting each other like, "Oh, hey." This one guy ended up taking me into his office and he said, "Well, let's talk for a little bit." He said, "So, tell me the story. Like, how did this happen?" and I told him, "Well, we travelled from BC and drove all over the place and then just down the street started hearing this noise in the car and by God's providence, it happened just outside of your dealership here." And he said, "By what?" I said,



“Providentially, this has happened.” He said, “You know what, most people, when they say that, they say things like ‘luckily’ or ‘fortunately’” and then he stopped and got up out of his seat, walked over to the door and kind of looked around and closed the door a little bit. He said, “Are you a Christian?” I said, “Actually, I’m a pastor” [laughter]. And he said, “I thought so. I am a Christian too. I’m not just telling you that so I can sell a car to you, but I just think it’s cool that like...” I said, “Brother, you’re already going to sell a car because the other one is dead, right? So it’s all good” [laughter]. That’s the way we should talk, though, that by God’s providence we’re here. The problem, of course, is that you and I struggle with God’s providence. When I give that list of things that God is providential over, like missing the basketball shot or the size of your nose or whatever, inside we go, “Ugh, I don’t like that.” The reason we don’t like it is because we don’t often like the way God has ordered our lives to turn out. We wish for something else. We’re nobodies, so many of us, and yet we wish we could be on the beach in Maui. We should have that house or those clothes for our kids, and so God is providential and yet we struggle with the providence of God. Part of what happens when we struggle with the providence of God is we end up comparing ourselves to other people and we say to God, “Oh man, God, you’ve made my life like this. Why is it like this when that guy or that girl, their life is like this. I’d much rather have their life.”

I am encouraged, actually, that in the Scriptures, at the end of John’s gospel, there’s this story basically about this. In John 21, Peter has denied Jesus three times and now he has been restored over a barrel of fire. Jesus cooked fish on a beach with him there and he keeps repeating to Peter, “I want you to feed my sheep, I want you to feed my sheep, I want you to feed my sheep, I want you to be a leader in my church.” The end of the story is how it goes. John 21:17, Jesus said,

“‘Feed my sheep. Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.’ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God [in fact, tradition says that Peter was crucified upside down, so his hands being stretched out and being dressed in a way he didn’t want, was him being stripped down and mocked and treated like refuse on the side of a road. Jesus is saying to him, “Hey! Your future, the providence of God in your future, is going to lead you to basically be crucified upside down. You’re going to serve my church and feed my sheep and at the end of it there is going to be a violent death”]. Then he said to him, ‘Follow me!’ [verse 20] Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This is the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, ‘Lord, who is going to betray you?’) [It’s John. It’s John who is writing these words is that disciple]. When Peter [verse 21] saw him, he asked, ‘Lord, what about him?’ [like, “Okay, fine, if that’s going to be your providence for my life, then fairness suggests that he should also be dressed in a way he doesn’t want to, right? Why do I get this and him something different?'] Jesus answered [verse 22], ‘If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.’”

“My providence in your life is my providence in your life. It’s been crafted particularly for you and your growth, but it’s different than that person.” Yes, it’s different. We don’t like that, man. I don’t like it.



I few years ago, my son was in the Provincial semi-final of the baseball league in our area - big game. We had a kid on our team who was the single best youth baseball player I have ever seen. Listen, I have the stats to prove that. He must have hit like 15-20 home runs in a two week period. It got to the point, in fact, where whoever was throwing a pitch to him, I would sort of stand up before the pitch got there and go, "It's gone" and then he'd hit it and it would be gone. It was like clock work. He was amazing and had such a rich vein of form, right? We get to the Provincial semi-finals --he had hit in that tournament I don't know how many home runs. I don't know how many. We're tied to go to the final game and the bases are loaded with two outs. He comes up to bat and I actually stood up and I said, "It's over." I said to my wife next to me, "It's over, honey. It's done." She's like, "Sit down." Hands are up, kid throws the first pitch - ball, ball, strike (wasn't a strike), strike, ball. Okay, full count, bases loaded. This is the kind of thing you dream about in your backyard and this kid is Babe Ruth. "It's over!" and my hands are in the air. Next ball comes, tip foul into the glove, we lose. "You know, I never liked this kid." No, I didn't. I love that kid, he's great. It was so sad, I was so sad, and we were heartbroken. We lost the game the next inning and that night I honestly had the hardest time with this because I was like, "God, come on! I know some of the parents on the other team. They go to another church, so you give them that gift but you don't give that gift to us? Come on! What are you doing?" So the reason that I am bringing this up is because it's baseball and it's dumb for me to get frustrated about that, but that's the way it works. We get frustrated about the dumbest things. Everything about God's providence sometimes just drives us crazy. So, the question that we face is how do we live in a world where, providentially, we're often nobodies and we're surrounded by providential somebodies? We're just normal. Our lives are just normal. They're not that bad, but to be somebody...should we seek to be like them? Should we give everything to have their fame? Proverbs 12:9 then,

"Better to be a nobody and yet have a servant than pretend to be somebody and have no food."

Look, it's okay for you to be you, to be where you are. It's good where you are, what you have. You don't need to be somebody else. Let me just say that I actually believe that one of the most important things for you to do in the future of your Christian life, is to learn how to accept the wisdom of God. I actually think that is the key for you going forward because there are going to be a lot of providences that you don't like, but the right posture for a true disciple of Jesus is the one who says, "Not my will, but yours be done" yeah?

One of my favourite characters in the scriptures, actually, is Mary (Joseph's wife, mother of Jesus). One of my favourite little stories and vignettes about her is in Luke 1:26 and following. Here's how that goes, it says,

"In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you. Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be [because you know, like 14 year old girls having angels visit them saying, 'You're highly favoured.' Um, what?]. But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary;



you have found favor with God. you will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.' 'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?' The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail.'

So here's this woman, who is being called to a providence that is going to cost her a lot. It's going to cost her the opinion of her peers, it's going to cost her her standing in the community, I mean people don't usually, in those days, enthrone and think highly of 14 year old girls who get pregnant and then claim it was an angel who did it. So here's a future for you that may not be what you thought it was going to be. You're favoured, though. So what say you, Mary, in response to the providence of God? It's one of the greatest words in the Bible, verse 38,

"'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May your word to me be fulfilled.'"

Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane, Matthew 26:39,

"Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.'"

That is the mark of a genuine lover of God. An openhandedness, a willingness, to accept the wisdom of God because it comes from an all wise, all loving God, who has committed himself to you and your good. Look, I know that many of us struggle with the station God has placed us in. We wish things were different, we wish we were thinner, better, faster, smarter, richer, 'er, 'er, 'er [laughter], but he is the only wise God. Wiser than you and wiser than me and real joy is found in trusting that wisdom instead of complaining or aspiring to be something we're just not. Or better said,

"Better to be a nobody and yet have a servant than pretend to be somebody and yet have no food."

Let me pray for us. Lord, I am thankful for this little text. I am thankful Father, for your providence and how it is revealed in our lives. Give us wisdom Father, on how to handle it. Sometimes the things you allow are so hard that it requires a lot to trust you, and I pray Father, that your spirit would be especially attentive to us who are in circumstances like that. We want to thank you for you you've made us to be, what you've made us to look like, even. Lord, and we pray Father, that we would see the world through your eyes and rejoice in all the blessings that you've given. We pray in Jesus name, amen.