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Proverbs 22:1 ESV

*22 A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches,
and favor is better than silver or gold.*

A good name.

My website is buzzking.com. I'm going to start out today with our Bible quote – which I am confident sets a personal record for its short length – and then I will get back to my website domain name. *A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches.* We've talked about the Proverbs a number of times. They were created by a special class of people called Sages. They took the accumulated common sense of their people, collected over thousands of years, and put them into pithy, clever statements. Many people wonder why this material is considered Scripture. Yes, God appears in the Proverbs from time to time, but much of it seems very secular. Here's something to think about. The Israelites and then later the Jews assumed that God created the universe in an orderly fashion, with a preexisting moral code that all should follow. They attribute the wisdom that comes from living godly lives to God. They also assume that God wants people to use their minds when making decisions. To these people, it was

very much a Scriptural thing to take the will of God and boil it down to common sense ways of living your life. In other words, if you follow the wisdom of the Proverbs, you will find yourself living the way God wants the universe to work. Further, by collecting wisdom that is based on God's will, and by taking that collection and giving it the status of holy Scripture, you radically increase the likelihood of future generations – like us – paying attention to it. In fact, the Proverbs have had a tremendous impact on society from ancient times until now. A major reason for the creation of Scripture, both Jewish and Christian, is to take what we have learned from God and do our best to embed it permanently in our society. Much of what we have codified in our legal system can be found in these Proverbs. They talk of honesty, equity, piety, thoughtfulness, empathy, love, and justice. Indeed, the ancient writers of Hebrew Scripture have had an astonishing impact on our world today.

So, let's look at our Proverb for today. Basically, it says that having people hold you in high regard is more valuable than being wealthy. One thing I can say is that many reality TV stars could learn a lot from this Proverb. In fact, many people today will do anything for money, even if it means humiliating themselves or corrupting themselves. But I do believe that if you live in a way that makes people think of you as a decent, innocent, honest person, someone who lives in

what we would consider a godly fashion, you will in the end be happier. And I think that most people do believe that happiness at least has a significant commercial value. As it turns out, the chapter that begins with our Proverb is mostly about wealth and poverty. We should note, though, that the Book of Proverbs does not say that you cannot have both wealth and a good name.

I'd like to get back to my personal domain, BuzzKing.com. The point is that I haven't always been the owner of that domain. Anyone can buy any dotcom domain, and as it turns out, I'm not the only Buzz King on earth. Before I got the idea to try to buy that domain, someone else already had bought it. He bought it from one of the more popular domain name vendors, Godaddy. I coincidentally tried to buy it from Godaddy myself, but the other Buzz King had gotten to it first. When I found out on the Godaddy website that the domain name was already owned by someone, I went to the BuzzKing.com site on a browser. I discovered that the other Buzz King was a rather minimally talented rock'n'roller. To be blunt, his music is so harsh, it's painful to listen to; and his lyrics are extraordinarily crude, so crude that I can't quote any of them here. His lyrics are anti-women, abusive, and disgusting. So, there I was, looking for a domain name so that I could build myself a website – and it turned out that my name was associated with a pornographic rock'n'roller. There wasn't anything I could do

about it, so I used a different domain name. I put in a permanent order with Godaddy, saying that I would like to buy BuzzKing.com, if it ever became available. I checked for its availability frequently, and as the years went by, I suspected that I would never own it. But my name was unique enough for people to associate it with that crude musician.

Well, the other Buzz owned that domain for several years. Then, about six years ago, when I was a student at the Iliff School of Theology, I got an email from Godaddy telling me that the BuzzKing.com domain would be up for sale – but I would have to bid for it. It turned out that the other Buzz King had missed a few of his payments and now he was going to have to compete with me to get the domain name back. The auction, between the two Buzz Kings was going to happen at a specific time, which turned out to be in the middle of one of my classes at Iliff. Before the class, I told the teacher – who was older than me and had no idea what I was talking about – that I was going to have to take part in an online silent auction in the middle of her class so that I could get the domain name BuzzKing.com. I told her that because my name is kind of unique, I felt dirtied by the fact that some pornographic rock'n'roller had the domain name. She just shrugged and said it was okay, that I should do whatever I had to do. Then the day came, and the auction began in the middle of her class. I thought I

would just sit there on my computer silently typing away, bidding back and forth with this guy, until the price got too high and one of us dropped out. But the other students were captivated by this and so everyone stopped class and watched as I bid for the domain. It took about a half hour, with the two of us trading back and forth. I had told Wendy that I wouldn't go any higher than a thousand dollars – which she thought was a crazy amount of money to spend on a domain name – but as it turned out, the other Buzz King dropped out at about four hundred and fifty dollars. I suddenly owned BuzzKing.com. The class cheered.

But here's the bottom line. I was less motivated by having BuzzKing.com as my website than I was by trying to clean up my name. I come from the computing world. I was confident that many people who know me in that community, people from all around the world, would go to BuzzKing.com looking for me. That's what people in computing do; they buy their name as a domain, if they can get it. If you are looking for someone with a unique name, you try their name, with dotcom after it. That's what people would do when they wanted to find me on the Internet. What would they find? Some music and lyrics that were beyond disgusting. That's why I was willing to spend as much as a thousand dollars to get the domain name. You see, *A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches.*

But a good name goes beyond our individual names. As believers, we need to remember that we represent the Christian Church to the world around us. The church, the collection of believers, does have many names in the Bible, you know. Depending on the translation of the Bible you look at, Psalm 89:7 says that the people of God form the “assembly of the saints” or the “council of the holy ones”. Romans 12:5 says that we are “one body in Christ”, reminding us of the unity we have under God. Isaiah 60:21 calls us the “branch of God’s planting” and “the work of God’s hands”; indeed, we are made by God, and in fact, Genesis 1:27 comes right out and says that we have the honor of being “made in God’s image”. 1st Corinthians calls us “God’s fellow workers” and “God’s building”, reminding us that we are God’s hands on Earth and that God lives within each of us. 1st Timothy tells us that we, the church, are “the pillar of truth”. Many times in the New Testament, we are referred to as “saints”. This is a lot to live up to. We need to value our good name, not just for ourselves, but for the sake of the church.

You know, as a professor, I sometimes had student athletes and/or military ROTC students in my class. Almost always, the athletes and the military personnel I taught were the most polite, hard-working, and responsible students. They did not blame me when they got a bad grade. They did not treat me with disrespect.

One time, an Air Force ROTC student said something very disrespectful to me in class. Mind you, the ROTC students all wore their uniforms to class; they represented the military at all times. Well, after class, the other two ROTC students in my class told me that they were going to have to report him. Not only did I get a formal apology from him, but my understanding is that he ran a number of laps around the football field while wearing a full backpack.

One of my favorite Bible passages, when it comes to Christian behavior, is Colossians 4:5-6. It says: ⁵*Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.* ⁶*Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.* This tells us how to behave when we are around non-believers. We should walk in wisdom, not stumble in stupidity. We should make efficient use of the time we have with them. This is valuable time, an opportunity to touch the life of a non-believer. We can spread the faith by how we act. We represent the church. If people know that we are Christians and they see us act in a kind, empathetic way, this makes the church look like an inviting place. This passage also says that we should be gracious, seasoned with salt. Okay, we know what it means to be gracious. But seasoned with salt? What does that mean? In ancient times, they didn't have refrigerators. There was no ice in the Middle East. Salt was used to preserve food so that

people could survive when it wasn't farming season. Salt was so valuable that it was often used as a currency. It also added taste to something that might otherwise be bland. So, yes, what we say needs to be seasoned with salt – because we are the mouth of the church.

After that online bidding process won me the right to buy the domain name BuzzKing.com, I felt elated. I had wrested it away from someone who was an embarrassment to my name. But that was a selfish thing on my part. I didn't do it because I am a Christian and I was on the path to being a reverend and a pastor. I was only thinking of myself. But each of us has a big reason to walk out in that world and to be different. We have a reason to take that grace that God has given each of us and to hand it to every person whom we encounter. We have a reason to not just live with joy, but to make it clear what that joy does to our hearts. We live in vengeful times. I don't know if any of you ever read the things that are written in social media or in forums on news sites or in the comments on news articles. But people are vicious. If someone gets into the news for doing something politically incorrect, they get brutalized by random people who don't even know them. They are more than shamed. They are condemned in the most cruel, sarcastic words imaginable. There is no grace, no forgiveness. People don't stop and think hey, maybe that person is under a lot of pressure right now.

Maybe they are suffering. Americans do not behave like Christians. As believers today, it is incredibly important that we act with grace. Please pray with me.

God, you are with us. We are not alone and scared, filled with anxiety, like so many people in this nation, this world. We have the Holy Spirit within us. We have been enriched with your grace. You walk with us every second of every day. We thank you for the security and the joy you give us. Let us give your church a good name. Let us represent you and all the faithful in a way that reflects all that you have given us. Grace is infinite. There is no limit to how much grace you have given us. We can hand it out in vast amounts to everyone we meet and never use up even the tiniest portion of that grace. May we walk out of here today knowing that we will make it clear that unlike our society, our church is not corrupt. Let us show the world that this Sanctuary is the place to be, the place of calm and decency. Amen.