**WASTED BEAUTY**

*Like a gold ring in a pig’s snout, is a beautiful woman without discretion. -*-Proverbs 11:22

Poetry packs a punch because of its vivid imagery. If a picture is worth a thousand words, then a word picture must be worth thousands. Proverbs 11:22 contains just such a figure of speech. In this edition of Textual Tuesday, we will break this proverb down phrase by phrase and then draw some applications.

**“Like a gold ring.”** We typically think of rings as jewelry for the finger or the ear, but in the ancient world, rings were also used to adorn the nose (as in Gen. 24:47). Certain cultures around the world still use nose rings, often as part of a bride’s wedding attire. So, in the time of the writing of Proverbs, the mention of gold rings would bring to mind a beautiful woman perhaps arrayed for marriage. But in a reversal of expectations, the gold ring in this proverb is…

**“In a pig’s snout.”** Swine were unclean animals under the Law of Moses and eventually came to be the epitome of the category of unclean animals. Even in our culture, anyone who has ever raised hogs knows how filthy they can be, rooting around with their snout in the mud and muck of the pigpen. It would be a colossal waste to put a gold ring, which belongs in the nose of a beautiful bride, in the snout of such a filthy animal. And yet, according to this proverb, there is something comparable to the absurdity of a precious jewel in the snout of a hog. And that is…

**“A beautiful woman without discretion.”** Our culture waffles between worshiping beauty and denying beauty. As we will see, physical beauty alone is not what makes a godly person, but beauty is a universal value, and it is deeply interwoven with other universal values like goodness and truth. A beautiful pass by a quarterback is true to its target and is a good play. Scripture frequently acknowledges the beauty of key characters in the biblical storyline, like Sarah (Gen. 12:22), Rebekah (Gen. 24:16), Rachel (Gen. 29:17), David (1 Sam. 16:12), and Esther (Esther 2:7).

If we see beauty in this light, then when someone’s appearance is beautiful, but their actions are ugly, it should create a jarring sense of disconnect. And that’s the point of this proverb. A beautiful gold ring is out of place on the filthy snout of a pig. And in the same way, you know what is out of place for a beautiful woman? To be without discretion, or to be one who (as the Christian Standard Bible translates it) “rejects good sense.” A pig is filthy by nature, but a beautiful woman has been blessed with a measure of dignity. For such a woman to reject spiritual discernment is to degrade herself. Her beauty is wasted beauty.

Solomon isn’t suggesting that this lack of good moral sense is only a problem for beautiful women. It’s a problem for everyone. Think about the prodigal. Jesus didn’t merely compare him to a pig. Jesus said that he wanted to be treated like one (Luke 15:15-16)! And that’s because the prodigal wasn’t where he was supposed to be – at home with the father, and it was degrading to him.  It wasn’t until, as Jesus says, “he came to himself,” came to his senses, got his discretion back, that he went home where he belonged. Solomon is saying that when a beautiful woman lacks discretion, that situation is as out of whack as when the prodigal was in the pigpen rather than at home.

On the other hand, a beautiful woman with discernment is a formidable force for good, as the story of Abigail illustrates. Abigail was “discerning and beautiful,” but she was married to a man who was “harsh and badly behaved,” Nabal (1 Sam. 25:3). Nabal lived up to the meaning of his name (“fool,” see 1 Sam. 25:25) by rudely rebuffing David’s request for hospitality, and only Abigail’s intervention spared Nabal from death and David from murder. No wonder David praised her for her discretion (1 Sam. 25:33)!

It is easy for men to become so enamored by a woman’s physical appeal that they forget their own commitment to holiness. Proverbs 11:22 calls upon men to have the sense to see that a gorgeous woman with no virtue should have the appeal of a gold ring encrusted with crud. And it also calls upon women to cultivate the imperishable beauty of a heart gleaming with Christ. That is the sort of beauty that will never go to waste.

--Shane Scott, via Focus Magazine