

Wisdom's Call

Summit Christian Fellowship

August 10th, 2014

Proverbs 1:20-33; 8:12-36

Proverbs 1:20-33

²⁰ Wisdom cries aloud in the street,
 in the markets she raises her voice;
²¹ at the head of the noisy streets she cries out;
 at the entrance of the city gates she speaks:
²² “How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple?
How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing
 and fools hate knowledge?
²³ If you turn at my reproof,
 behold, I will pour out my spirit to you;
 I will make my words known to you.
²⁴ Because I have called and you refused to listen,
 have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded,
²⁵ because you have ignored all my counsel
 and would have none of my reproof,
²⁶ I also will laugh at your calamity;
 I will mock when terror strikes you,
²⁷ when terror strikes you like a storm
 and your calamity comes like a whirlwind,
 when distress and anguish come upon you.
²⁸ Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer;
 they will seek me diligently but will not find me.
²⁹ Because they hated knowledge
 and did not choose the fear of the LORD,
³⁰ would have none of my counsel
 and despised all my reproof,
³¹ therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way,
 and have their fill of their own devices.
³² For the simple are killed by their turning away,
 and the complacency of fools destroys them;
³³ but whoever listens to me will dwell secure
 and will be at ease, without dread of disaster.”¹

Proverbs 8:12-36

¹*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001 (Pr 1:20–33). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

12 “I, wisdom, dwell with prudence,
and I find knowledge and discretion.
13 The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil.
Pride and arrogance and the way of evil
and perverted speech I hate.
14 I have counsel and sound wisdom;
I have insight; I have strength.
15 By me kings reign,
and rulers decree what is just;
16 by me princes rule,
and nobles, all who govern justly.
17 I love those who love me,
and those who seek me diligently find me.
18 Riches and honor are with me,
enduring wealth and righteousness.
19 My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold,
and my yield than choice silver.
20 I walk in the way of righteousness,
in the paths of justice,
21 granting an inheritance to those who love me,
and filling their treasuries.

22 “The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of old.
23 Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
24 When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.
25 Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth,
26 before he had made the earth with its fields,
or the first of the dust of the world.
27 When he established the heavens, I was there;
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
28 when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
29 when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
30 then I was beside him, like a master workman,
and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,
31 rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the children of man.

32 “And now, O sons, listen to me:

- blessed are those who keep my ways.
- 33 Hear instruction and be wise,
and do not neglect it.
- 34 Blessed is the one who listens to me,
watching daily at my gates,
waiting beside my doors.
- 35 For whoever finds me finds life
and obtains favor from the LORD,
- 36 but he who fails to find me injures himself;
all who hate me love death.”²
-

Introduction:

I think if we are all honest with ourselves this morning we are much less wise than we would like to be and than we would like to admit. I think, if we could speak frankly, our own foolishness of heart has caused us more pain than we let on to. And since we are being honest, isn't it amazing that our lives are not more wrecked by folly than they are? It's as though we are playing a basketball game just hacking people to pieces and the ref is just looking the other way, making one no-call after the other. I'm amazed that my life isn't in shambles!

I was trying to think of all the ways the world offers wisdom and then it dawned on me that what the world is offering isn't really wisdom—its not even framed as such. It is constantly offering something more like secrets to the happy, fulfilling life. These are tips like the importance of six-pack abs, sex appeal, healthy eating, financial saavy, relational happiness at any cost, etc. . . . These tips we see plastered on magazines and best-selling books are not answers to the question, what does the wise life look like?

Kyle Young made the observation to me yesterday that the world has a lot of knowledge, but it knows nothing of wisdom. I think he is right, though in Proverbs wisdom and knowledge are often used nearly synonymously. His point is that what the world considers wise is totally different than what God does. But we need wisdom, we've just confessed it together. So lets consider God's word together this morning and pay ever so close attention to it.

As an introduction to a 5-week series on Proverbs, we are going to consider the topic of wisdom from Proverbs 1-9. Daniel Estes says that, “Proverbs 1-9 is the prism through which the remainder of the book is read.”³ I think he's right. Kyle just read two passages where God's wisdom is personified and is calling out to each one of us to be sought and embraced. And that is exactly what I think God is calling us to this morning. In everything that is said there is going to be the banner over it all to embrace God's wisdom for your life right now. If you hear me say anything, here me say that. How will you respond? The way we are going to proceed is by asking and answering three questions about that banner call: why, what, and how? According to the book of Proverbs, why

²The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. 2001 (Pr 8:12–36). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

³Daniel J. Estes, *Hear, My Son: Teaching & Learning in Proverbs 1-9* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2000), 17.

should you embrace God's wisdom for your life? What is God's wisdom for your life? And, How do you embrace God's wisdom for your life? I'll give four answers to why, one answer to what, and three answers to how. Some answers will be shorter than others. Let's begin.

Proposition: Embrace God's wisdom for your life!

Why?

It's Urgent. In fact it's so urgent that wisdom is personified in these introductory sections we are looking at this morning. Wisdom is personified so that it can scream at you! Lady wisdom is crying out at the top of her lungs. Listen starting in v. 20,

“Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the markets she raises her voice; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; at the entrance of the city gate she speaks”

Do you feel the urgency? There seems to be a window of time for these people to respond to Lady Wisdom. Wisdom will be given to those who respond to her urgent call, but for those who don't respond, Lady Wisdom will become their judge. Listen to v. 24-26,

“Because I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded, ²⁵because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, ²⁶ also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when terror strikes you . . .”

So, embracing God's wisdom is ever so urgent. It's time sensitive. And related to this, it's also important.

It's Important. In fact, it's a matter of utmost importance. This was a new discovery for me this week. Wisdom seems to be a matter of life and death. Did you notice that? We tend to think of Proverbs as quiet devotional reading. If we could imagine someone reading Proverbs it would be a Morgan Freeman or the James Earl Jones kind of voice with the sounds of a bubbling brook in the background. The sound of serenity, profundity, etc. Far from this, the tone that is struck here is one more of a general's last words to his soldiers, it's a call to listen, it's a call to pay attention. It's an alarm! It's meant to wake you up from lethargy and slumber. Your decision to embrace God's wisdom for your life is a matter of life and death.

Listen to what Lady Wisdom says in 8:32ff,

“listen to me: blessed are those who keep my ways. Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD, but he who fails to find me injures himself; all who hate me love death.”

Listen to the seriousness with which the father-figure pleads with his son in 4:4ff,

“Let your heart hold fast to my words, keep my commandments, and live. Get wisdom; get insight; do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, and she will keep you; love her, and she will guard you.”

Embracing God’s wisdom, today, is not only urgent but it’s really important!

It restores order. Embracing God’s wisdom also restores order. The proverbs teach that God not only created the world with a wise intentioned order but he also sustains the world in wise providential care. Listen to what Lady Wisdom claims about herself in Proverbs 8: 22ff,

²² “The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. ²³ Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. ²⁴ When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. ²⁵ Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth, ²⁶ before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world. ²⁷ When he established the heavens, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, ²⁸ when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, ²⁹ when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, ³⁰ then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, ³¹ rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man.

There is an order, a coherences, a fittingness, and design to God’s world because God made the world with wisdom. When we live rejecting God and his wisdom, our lives spin out of control. They are characterized more by disorder and chaos than order. Our lives, like the world before God spoke creative order into existence, were formless and empty, filled with darkness and chaos. When God speaks, and everything he says is wise, he turns chaos into order and harmony.

The truth is, often our lives can look ordered on the outside, but on the inside we feel disordered and fractured. Embracing the wisdom of God can reverse this pattern. It’s possible to present ourselves as though we have it all together, but we leave behind us a path of broken and chaotic relationships. Is that you? Do you need to embrace God’s wisdom for your life today? I do.

We are asking the question why we should embrace God’s wisdom. We’ve seen that Proverbs says doing so is urgent, important, and that it restores order. It also brings dignity and beauty to your life.

It bring dignity and beauty. The goal of embracing God’s wisdom is not simply a pragmatic or utilitarian one. Since we are human we not only care about whether something is right and good but also that it is beautiful. And God, in wonderful kindness, is coming to us through the words of Lady Wisdom and is offering to bring a profound dignity and beauty to our lives as we embrace him. Listen to what the father-figure says to his son in Proverbs 1:8,

“Hear, my son, your father’s instruction and forsake not your mother’s teaching, for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck.”

And then in 3:21 he says again,

“they [wisdom and discretion] will be life for your soul and adornment for your neck.”

Then in 4:7 he says,

“Prize [wisdom] highly, and she will exalt you; she will honor you if you embrace her. She will place on your head a graceful garland; she will bestow on you a beautiful crown.”

In Proverbs 8:6 Lady Wisdom says that she only speaks “noble things.” Have you known someone that has so embraced God in all his wise and loving ways that you are taken with the beauty, dignity, and nobility that radiates from their life? They seem more human than you do, less shallow, more real. Have you met someone in whom Proverbs 4:18 is true?

“. . . the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day”

Embracing God’s wisdom for your life, right now, is urgent, life-and-death-important, it restores order and harmony, and adds beauty and dignity to your life.

What:

Well, we have seen why we need to embrace God’s wisdom, but if your brain is like mine, you have been asking the question, What exactly is this wisdom? I’ll take a stab at it and you can immerse yourself in Proverbs over the next four weeks and decide for yourself whether I’m right.

I think wisdom is the ability to discern good from evil in matters both great and small in such a way that the good is loved and embraced and the evil is forsaken and avoided. The opposite of wisdom is foolishness and folly. And folly is an inability to discern good from evil in matters both great and small in such a way that the evil is loved and embraced and the good is called evil. Folly looks at what is wicked and says, “If that’s wrong I don’t want to be right.” We want to embrace God’s wisdom and never stop growing in it.

How?

We've seen why to embrace God's wisdom and we have an idea of what this wisdom is. Now we want to consider how exactly we are to embrace it? I see three pointers that will help us understand the *how* question.

Recognize Our Great Dependence

The first thing to say at this point is that it is not all as formulaic as we might hope. God is not vending machine that gives us treats when we put in the right amount of change. There is a real sense in which God is in charge of this process. The Father-figure states in 2:6,

“For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;”

We are all much more dependent on God than I think we realize. We are not nearly as autonomous and independent as we would like to think. We need God. So, how do we embrace the wisdom of God for our life right now? I think the first move is by stopping and recognizing that wisdom comes from him. I think it is good to feel our absolute, objective dependence on God. We are creatures, he is our Creator.

That's what must be said first, but that is not all that can be said. We remember that the book of James in the NT teaches,

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault” (James 1:5).

Earnestly Seek Wisdom

This brings us to the second way to embrace wisdom. After recognizing our profound dependence on God for any wisdom whatsoever, Proverbs teaches that we are to earnestly seek it. This is not a passive action. Listen to the conditional relationship between our earnest pursuit of wisdom and our resulting embrace of it. The father-figure writes in 2:2ff,

“My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.”

This wisdom that is of life-and-death-importance, is (1) given by God alone and (2) is to be earnestly sought. Both/and, not either/or. But that's not all. There is still more direction we are given on *how* to embrace this wisdom: (3) fearing the LORD.

Fearing the LORD

The thesis for the entire book of Proverbs can be boiled down to 1:7,

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

In v. 28 Lady Wisdom condemns those who have not embraced her

“because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD.”

Our section is bookended with this fear of the LORD. Proverbs 9:10 reads,

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.”

In other words, we can't take wisdom from proverbs and leave God there. It is impossible to gain true wisdom and reject the only wise God as he has revealed himself in Israel's story. This is why one scholar writes that “the fundamental nature of wisdom was theological.”⁴

Now, the fear of the LORD is not simply a sensitive conscience or a terror at the thought of God's judgment. That might be what it means to fear God in general, but to fear the LORD is different.

To fear the LORD, Yahweh, is to revere and treasure God as he has specially revealed himself to Israel in saving power. I think that is why God's personal name is used so often in Proverbs.

To fear the LORD is to accept as true the account of God's dealing with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

To fear the LORD is to take God's covenant with Israel seriously.

To fear the LORD is to accept that God has revealed himself here and not there.

And as we honestly open ourselves up to this God who has revealed himself in covenant and in promise to Israel, we read in the NT that the story of God's covenant and promise to Israel find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The story of Abraham, Moses, and David doesn't end in exile but climaxes in the death and resurrection of God's true Son, Jesus. That means, fearing the LORD obliges us to first see that God in all his wisdom became a human and died for God-neglecting sinners like you and me.

Paul teaches that in Jesus “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3)—and this is precisely because just six verses later he writes that “in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col 2:9). So before we can embrace God's wisdom for us in Proverbs we must say yes to the only wise God who calls to us in saving grace

⁴C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books*, New Edition edition (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), 174.

through Jesus. Before we look to Solomon's proverbs, we must recognize that "something greater than Solomon is here" (Matt. 12:42). In fact, this is the only way we are going to understand rightly God's wisdom for us in Proverbs because embracing wisdom begins with a worshipful fear of *this* LORD.

In Proverbs we see the wisdom of God on paper, in the gospels we see God in all wisdom becoming a person. In Proverbs we see the wisdom of God personified, but in the gospels we see the all-wise God born a human person. In Proverbs Lady Wisdom stands on the street corner and cries out, in the gospels we see Jesus crying out, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not" (Matt. 23:37ff).

We fear the LORD when we look to Jesus and bow before "the God who is there"—to steal a phrase from Francis Schaeffer. Adam and all his descendants—we are all fools, but the second Adam, Jesus loved us and died for us so that we might be wise in him.

The world does not accept Jesus. Those who are headed toward destruction, because of their sin and indifference to God, consider it both offensive and foolish that Jesus needed to die to forgive your sins. But Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:23ff that "Christ crucified" is actually the very wisdom of God!

Nothing is more urgent than embracing this, God's wisdom. Nothing is more life-and-death-important. Nothing restores life and order more than Jesus. Nothing brings more dignity, nobility, and beauty to life. Embrace God's wisdom for your life today!

God created the world in wisdom, and when he re-creates your world in Christ he does it with no less wisdom. In fact, not only were we saved by God's wise working, but God is calling us to continue to grow, mature, and develop in wisdom. And that is exactly what we are going to try to do over the next four weeks. But its not going to happen without us all recognizing that wisdom comes from God, not from us, and not from the world. And its not going to happen unless we all earnestly seek it together, fearing the LORD who revealed himself in Jesus Christ—who died to make fools like us wise in him.