



**Sunday School Lesson for May 7, 2006
Released on May 3, 2006**

"A Treasure Worth Seeking"

**Printed Text: Proverbs 2:1-5; 3:1-6, 13-18.
Background Scripture: Proverbs 2, 3.
Devotional Reading: Proverbs 2:6-15.**

Proverbs 2:1-5

1 My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee;

2 So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding;

3 Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding;

4 If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures;

5 Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.

Proverbs 3:1-6, 13-18

1 My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments:

2 For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee.

3 Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart:

4 So shalt thou find favor and good understanding in the sight of God and man.

5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

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13 Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding:

14 For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.

15 She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.

16 Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honor.

17 Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

18 She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her.

Today's Aim

Facts: to show the value Solomon attached to true wisdom.

Principle: to develop the concept that divine wisdom should be considered life's greatest treasure.

Application: to help students devote themselves to knowing God and His thoughts and then strive to make these their guidelines for living.

Introduction

Christian bookstores are full of titles about how to act in the various situations of life. They offer wisdom on child rearing, personal growth, and a host of other subjects. Of course, there is nothing wrong with sound advice, as long as it is rooted in Scriptural truth. But are we paying enough attention to the Bible's own divinely inspired book of practical wisdom--the book of Proverbs?

The world loves to pursue treasure. The problem is that people do not really know where to look. Christians, however, have clear guidance on where to seek their treasure. Proverbs tells us that wisdom is the great prize we should value most. And the only way to obtain such wisdom is from God. As Solomon declared near the beginning of the book, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (or wisdom)" (1:7).

In a fallen world it is not easy to pursue wisdom in the way it deserves. The world offers substitutes that pass for wisdom but leave us bankrupt in the end. This is why the first part of Proverbs centers on the importance of wisdom and on encouraging God's people to pursue it. Wisdom means living life according to what matters most. When we live wisely, we receive great riches because we are in fellowship with the source of all blessings.

Lesson Background

What is the difference between a wise person and a foolish person? In the book of Proverbs, this usually has nothing to do with education. Many of us can name someone with a college degree who acts the fool on a regular basis. We may be able also to point to a person who never graduated from high school, yet stands as a source of quiet, reliable wisdom.

In Proverbs wisdom is a matter of how one responds to the will of God. The wise person is the one who knows what is right and wrong from God's perspective and chooses to do the right thing. The foolish person is the one who knows what is right or wrong from God's perspective and chooses to do the wrong thing. Foolishness, then, is not a matter of ignorance. Conversely, wisdom is not a matter of education. Both the wise and the foolish are assumed to be educated in the ways of God, knowing what is right from wrong. The fools consistently disregard God's standards and freely do the wrong thing (sin).

Central to the message of Proverbs, however, is that foolish behavior is more than just displeasing to God. The life of the fool is also self-destructive. When we shun God's standards to follow our own desires, we will be frustrated, unhappy, and without hope. "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise" (Proverbs 12:15).

The book of Proverbs in general is attributed to King Solomon (see Proverbs 1:1). Solomon's wisdom was given to him by God (1 Kings 4:29). This wisdom was legendary even during Solomon's own lifetime (1 Kings 10:24). We know that some of the proverbs of Solomon were compiled several hundred years later by the advisers of King Hezekiah (Proverbs 25:1). Apparently, this compilation process included a few authors beyond Solomon. The book also contains proverbs that are attributed to Agur (Proverbs 30:1) and Lemuel (Proverbs 31:1), although we know nothing about these men.

Desiring Wisdom (Prov. 2:1-5)

1. What does a student need to do once he has heard the truth? (v. 1)

In today's world, the word "wisdom" is used rather loosely. Many people claim to be wise. Some people make wisdom synonymous with knowledge. Some use the word "wisdom" to attribute to worldly success. The bottom line, however, is that wisdom comes from God. A person cannot be wise outside of a relationship with God. We must understand this in order to understand today's lesson.

A godly father desires nothing more than that his children learn how to live as God intended them to. Solomon was eager to have his son live rightly. Wisdom is not something that comes automatically. We must seek to attain it.

The first step to wisdom is to receive the teaching of the wise. A person must be receptive to the truth if it is to take root. Once the student has heard the truth he needs to hide, or store up, this wisdom so that it is available to him when he needs it. This assumes that the student values wisdom. A wise student recognizes the

usefulness of what he is learning even if it is not immediately apparent to him. He recognizes that all wisdom will be useful someday.

2. Why should we pursue wisdom with great passion?

The author in Proverbs makes the case for the importance of wisdom by multiplying the "if" clauses. By this repetitiveness, he also pointed out to the fact that the pursuit of wisdom should dominate our lives and involve much effort.

Great urgency is conveyed by the verbs used in verse 3. We are not to soullessly pursue the truth. We are to cry after knowledge and call longingly for it.

As a former college student, I realize the importance of learning vast amounts of information for exams. Often, it took days of studying to firmly grasp what I needed to know. Some of the textbooks were interesting to read while others were very dry reading. Often, I had to spend late nights studying for tests so that I can recall the information when I needed it. Studying was not an option. I had to do it in order to survive.

When it comes to getting the wisdom of God, we should put forth the same effort in learning and understanding His wisdom. The Bible is not the easiest book to read, but we must be diligent in trying to learn wisdom. Some wisdom will not come easy, but we must always seek the Holy Spirit so that we can understand the wisdom God is trying to give us and apply it to our lives. God's wisdom is most important, and we should put most of our energy in getting it. Giving up on getting wisdom is not an option for Christians.

3, What kind of fear of God is a healthy thing?

Verse 5 tells us that wisdom leads us to an understanding of the fear of God. Proverbs 9:10 tells us that wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord. This fear is not abject terror but a healthy sense of awe and respect as we acknowledge Him for who He is. Fear of the Lord and knowledge of Him are nearly synonymous, for one cannot properly know Him without having a profound sense of reverence. He is all-powerful and perfectly just. We can come nowhere near His level of greatness.

Holding on to Wisdom (Prov. 3:1-6)

4. Why is it important to remember that the blessings spoken of in Proverbs involve principles, not prophecies?

In our fallen world and with our wayward hearts, it is not enough for us to just receive wisdom; we must work to retain wisdom's hold in our lives. A person who goes to school to learn a profession should not forget the information that was taught after he/she graduates. Likewise, we should not forget the wisdom that we learned because we will need it for the rest of our lives. Solomon emphasized that our obedience to the truth should not be just a matter of outward conformity or intellectual agreement. We are to store wisdom in our hearts. Our desire should be to live according to wisdom.

Living by wisdom has great benefits. We must remember, of course, that Proverbs is presenting principles, not prophecies. Good people can suffer setbacks and even die young. Last month, we studied Job and the setbacks he suffered. We know that Job was a very upright man, yet he suffered more drawbacks than most of us will in our lifetimes. Of course, Job was rewarded in the end. As a general rule, people who live by God's principles will experience a greater measure of peace and prosperity.

5. In what sense do the material blessings spoken of in Scripture have a typological significance?

In the Old Testament, material blessings have a typological dimension. Old Testament material blessings point toward the spiritual blessings we receive in Christ, as described in the New Testament. By trusting in the righteousness of Christ, who fulfilled the law for us, we enjoy rich spiritual blessings, including eternal life.

6. In what way does the wise person gain the world's favor? (v. 4)

Once again, Solomon referred to the benefits that come to those who walk in wisdom (Prov. 3:4). Living rightly pleases God, which is the most important thing. It also gives us a good reputation and the goodwill of other people.

Of course, the Bible also teaches that those who live godly lives for Christ will suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). In the daily interactions of life, though, a kind and upright person will earn the respect of those around him. Christ is the best example of this. Scripture says that as He lived on earth, He "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52)--language that almost echoes that of Proverbs 3:4.

7. What lies at the heart of every godly life? (v. 5-6)

Proverbs 3:5-6 is one of the most quoted Scriptures in the Bible today. It is hard to conceive of better advice as one seeks to navigate this treacherous world.

At the heart of every godly life is faith. There is no way we can make it through our own intellect or strength. Through faith, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live the godly life. We cannot see God through our eyes, but if we are his children, then we have experienced his grace and goodness. We know that He made all things and knows what is best for us (cf. Heb. 11:6). We must trust the Lord as a child trust his loving father. We cannot trust God halfheartedly (cf. Jas. 1:6-8), but we must trust Him with all our being.

8. What is the corollary to wholehearted trust in God?

The corollary to wholehearted trust in God is that we must not depend on ourselves. This can be difficult since we are independent creatures by nature. Often, we try to figure things out ourselves instead of giving them to God. Sometimes, we take God's gifts of the mind and use that same mind to exclude Him. God desires us to have a mind of our own, but we must allow the Holy Spirit to guide all of our reasonings. God's ways are not our ways (Isa. 55:9). He sees all that will happen and is committed to our welfare. How feeble our minds are by comparison!

Benefiting from Wisdom (Prov. 3:13-18)

9. What does the analogy between wisdom and rubies teach us? (v. 15)

The world insists that happiness comes from acquiring lots of material wealth. Commercials air daily to entice people to spend some money to acquire wealth. A lot of people fall into scams trying to get rich quick. Others work multiple jobs and try to invest in the right stocks so that they can maximize their income.

Solomon tells us that wisdom is better than all the riches of this world. Now if people invest the same amount of time and energy in getting wisdom as they do in trying to acquire wealth, then they would have happiness and peace beyond measure. The benefits of wisdom far exceed the benefits of material wealth. The greatest benefit of wisdom is a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Wisdom is something worth working for.

When Solomon gives an analogy between wisdom and rubies, he is not only talking about the value of wisdom, but the beauty of it as well.

In the final analysis, no analogy or comparison can fully express the value of wisdom. So the writer concludes that wisdom is more valuable than anything of the imagination that can satisfy our desires. As Paul said, God will do more for us than we can ask or think (cf. Eph. 3:20). Wisdom is knowing God.

10. Why is a life of wisdom linked to peace? (v. 17)

Life is not a bed of roses. Everyone will experience hard times; nevertheless, the wise person will find the path of life he has chosen to be a way of "pleasantness" (v. 17). As Matthew Henry said, "All the enjoyments of sense are not comparable to the pleasure which gracious souls have in communion with God and doing good" (*Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Hendrickson).

Pleasantness is paired with peace in this verse. A wise person lives harmoniously with the way God has made the world and thus experiences less of the strife and discord that accompany a sinful life.

The blessings of wisdom, both in this life and in the world to come, are not to be taken for granted. A person needs to seek wisdom with all his being. As he lays hold of it and clings to it, he will find life in its fullest expression and have abundant cause for gratitude.

Conclusion

Proverbs seems to be giving a blanket promise that the wise, godly life will be a long happy life. Why, then, do some of God's finest people tragically die early? Why would God allow a faithful, young Christian mother to die and leave her small children behind?

As I write this lesson, I am in prayer for one of my college's graduates who suddenly fell into a coma last week while alone at his church's office. Without a powerful miracle, he will soon die and leave behind his ministry and his young family. He is a fine, godly man who rejected worldly success for the call of God to preach. Why does it seem that he will die so young?

It is impossible to answer that question because we can never totally understand it from God's perspective. But I know that this young man recently had won a great victory. After many years of prayer and discussion, he finally had led his brother-in-law to the Lord. Maybe that was the most important thing he could ever do. Perhaps in God's eyes his faithful life already has been long and pleasant and successful. And maybe part of wisdom is not fighting or resenting God when He calls a faithful servant home, but trusting that He knows best in everything.

Prayer

Our great Lord, we know that all wisdom comes from you. Give us the desire to learn the wisdom that you are offering us in our lives. Help us to keep on receiving your wisdom, even when it is difficult for us to grasp. We know that you want only the best for our lives, and we need your wisdom to live the life you have laid out for us. Give us the appetite for more wisdom, so we can continually please you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Thought to Remember

A wise person trusts God and His Word to show the best way to live.

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

Proverbs 8:1-15 portrays an anonymous woman calling on people to seek divine wisdom. Verses 22-31 present a personification of wisdom speaking using personal pronouns, and claiming to be eternal. An attempt will be made to discover the identity of that which is personified by Solomon in these verses.

Lesson Summarized By

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