

A Taste of Proverbs

Proverbs 1

I want to let you know, this band is amazing to work with- can we show them some love and appreciation for tirelessly leading us in worship Sunday after Sunday? We're so blessed to have such amazing people here at One Church. Sometimes when we're rehearsing early on Sunday mornings, I'll tell us to rehearse the bridge of a song again, but I'll do it in a playful James Brown voice, I'll say "take it to da bridge!" You know, give it some James Brown musical energy, you know what I'm saying? You guys had no idea I'd be talking about James Brown this morning at church, right? Sorry I just had too, because I... I feel good. James Brown had another groovin' song in which he says "Taste... the piano," and then he plays a funky little piano solo riff. My wife and I always thought that was so funny how he says it- "Taste... the piano," it's forever etched into our minds, and this morning I want you guys to be able to "Taste... the Proverbs."

Proverbs 24:13-14 states "...eat honey, for it is good; Yes, the honey from the comb is sweet to your taste; 14 Know *that* wisdom is the same for your soul; If you find *it*, then there will be a future, And your hope will not be cut off." This morning I want to give us a taste of Proverbs, a taste of godly wisdom, so that all of us might have our hunger renewed for the Lord and for living in His wisdom. Anyone like sweets? Name me some of your favorite desserts... Basically what this passage I read is stating, is that in the way we crave these type of sweet things and are satisfied when we eat them, so we should crave God's wisdom and we will be satisfied in similar fashion when we consume His wisdom.

A proverb is a short, clever, wise saying that conveys a general truth. The book of Proverbs is a collection of these type wise sayings that King Solomon collected from others- from generations past- as well

as wise sayings that he himself wrote. The Bible tells us that Solomon asked God for wisdom, and because he asked for wisdom above any other thing, God gave him wisdom beyond any others before him, and there is language seeming to indicate that there would be none like him afterwards. So Solomon was the cap- there's been a lot of smart people throughout history, but none have been able to outsmart him. Now, King Solomon towards the end of his life stopped living according to the wisdom God gave him, and made some really bad, stupid, *unwise* decisions- so I guess perhaps we could debate on his true wisdom *in practice*- but I guess the idea is that no one received or would receive the level of godly wisdom that was given to Solomon, and being the smartest guy in the world, he was free to do with that wisdom as he saw fit. He had freewill to use it, or ignore it. There is however one Biblical exception mentioned- Jesus confirms Solomon's wisdom in **Matthew 12:42**, but then states in poetic fashion that He (Jesus) is *greater* than Solomon. But of course Jesus and Jesus' wisdom is greater than Solomon's because Jesus is God, and it is God who gave Solomon wisdom in the first place.

Now, when we read the Bible, it is super important to recognize the genre of what we are reading. The genre helps us in how to interpret and apply what is written. The distinct literary genres of the Bible include: *historical narrative* (books like Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings); *books of the law* (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy); *books of wisdom and poetry* (Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Job, Ecclesiastes); *books of prophecy* (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel); *Gospel books* (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John); and the *letter books* (or *Epistles* using the Greek word) (Romans, Corinthians, Ephesians, etc). And there is some genre overlap with some of these books mentioned, but knowing the genre helps us understand the context, and the reason and intent behind what was written, and understanding the genre can help us in correctly interpreting and applying what we read. Specifically the principles presented in the

wisdom and poetry books of the Bible are intended to be treated as general rules and probabilities, and they are *not* intended to be formulated, guaranteed promises.

For example, **Proverbs 10:27** states “The fear of the Lord prolongs life, But the years of the wicked will be shortened.” The general principle is that when you fear, honor, revere the Lord- you will be blessed with longer life- but this is not a hard fast rule- there have been plenty of people who lived their life completely dedicated to the Lord, walking with Him in righteousness, and they died young. Yes, there are exceptions to the general wisdom contained in Proverbs- and actually some of the other books belonging to the wisdom genre that I mentioned, prove this very point. Job and Ecclesiastes both give us another viewpoint, that should be paired with the wisdom from Proverbs. The book of Job *especially* points out that there are exceptions and unique circumstances where living wisely and life circumstances don’t always line up as they typically should in the life of one who is closely following God.

So this morning we’re going to look at Proverbs chapter 1, that gives us a good overview of a lot of the type of material that is contained in the rest of the book. And again, it’s my hope an appetite for learning and wisdom would be stirred up in each of us this morning as we read through and study this chapter. I hope that this passage will be encouraging to us this morning, and that it will serve as a re-centering, a re-calibrating, a reminder, a re-focus on the Lord and on our aiming to live by His principles. Look with me at **Proverbs 1:1-9**, this section serves as an introduction, it sets up and states the purpose of the rest of the book. Verse 1...

The intent of this book, as it says, is that the reader would know wisdom, would be instructed, would be able to discern what is written concerning wise behavior, righteousness, justice, integrity. As it says,

may youth increase in knowledge and wisdom as a result; if we heed these words we will learn; if we understand we will have gained good counsel- and verse 7 really sets the tone for all that will follow- if we wish to embark on a lifelong journey of wisdom and learning- forming good habits, setting good boundaries, consistent good decision making- the very first step, the very foundation of it all- is the recognition of the LORD- and that word there is Yahweh- the creator God. We also now know His name to be Jesus.

Verse 8 gives us some of the immediate context to consider, Solomon seems to have collected this book in order that the next generation, specifically his son- would benefit from his parents' wisdom gained through life experiences and observations. The idea is that counsel is written here, so that the younger generation would learn, and not make the same mistakes that the previous generation made. There are lots of metaphors contained in this book, and here is our first in verse 9- the instruction here is compared to a graceful wreath worn on the head and necklaces for the neck- the idea is that these words will enhance one's life with attractiveness.

Ok, so after this introduction, verse 10 is where our first real life application instruction begins, let's read **verses 10-19...**

Ok, so let's break this down... Verses 10-16 paint a scenario for us. There's this group of friends, and they come up to you and say, "Hey, we got a plan. We're going to make some money, and since you're our friend we're going to let you in on it." And the basic idea is that they're going over to the rich guy's house, and they're going to hide in the bushes, and when he gets home, they're going to kill him and everyone gets to split up all the rich guy's stuff equally. That's the illustration provided. Now hopefully most of you are like "that doesn't apply to me, I've never had that kind of thought cross my mind..." I hope that's the case! I hope you've never considered joining a gang and murdering your neighbor. I assume that's probably not on your "to-do list." Hold on

though, there's a larger application that's presented I'll talk about in a moment. But first, verse 17 gives us the applicable, specific proverb. Check it out, let's read it again... **Verse 17**

Ok, what does that mean? What the author is attempting to say is that if you are attempting to trap a bird, you would typically go out at night time, when the birds aren't out, and set up the trap then- with them not around. He's saying it doesn't make sense to set up the trap during the morning day light, when all the birds are out and active, and they see you setting up the trap- that would spook them, they'd be wise to your tricks, they'd fly away and not come back for a while. When I lived in the jungles of South America, in one village I worked with, the chief of the tribe took me out deep into the jungle one evening, and we built a small hide- a blind- with a bunch of trees and leaves. We made a little entry door, and then opened up some small holes on the other side that we could look out from. I didn't quite understand exactly all we were doing at the time, but I went along with it, and the next morning we got up really early and hiked back to the hide we had made, got inside it, and waited. Through the little holes we had made, we could see the side of a cliff about 30 feet away. And when the sun started coming up, that cliff began to get covered up with the activity of tons of Macaw parrots. They came to the cliff each day to find food in the dirt of the cliffside. Now, we weren't trying to trap any of the parrots, but the principle is the same- we set up our hide at a time the birds *weren't* there- if we had built that hide in the morning, had we shown up in the morning without having any camouflage, then we would have obviously scared all the birds off and they would not have come.

Ok, so how does this proverb, this illustration, connect to what the author is teaching? Well, **verse 18** makes the connection, let's read it again...

What God's word is saying, is that it's obviously silly and doesn't make any sense to set up a trap in the view of what you are intending to

trap. Even a bird with a tiny brain, is smart enough to not walk into a trap that it sees being set up. And the implication is that someone who agrees to this type of plan, who hooks up with their friends in order to kill and rob the rich guy, is basically seeing a trap set up before them, and then choosing to walk into it. That type of person has a brain smaller than a bird. We have chickens and Guinea fowl at our house, and man- there sure is some stupid behavior observed. What comes to mind quickly, is when the gate fencing to the chicken coop is wide open, and we're giving them food inside the fenced area, there is always one who can't figure out how to walk through the opening. Instead it goes back and forth along the fence line at the closed section, trying to go through the closed fence portion over and over and over again, instead of walking another 2 feet and going through the opening. Without fail, it happens all the time. That's just plain dumb. The Bible here is saying don't be dumb like this, don't be dumber than a bird brain! These verses here are part of Biblical Mockery 101- this here is a classic example of a Godly Biblical insult. It basically says you if make this type of life decision, then you're stupider than a bird. Listen, God doesn't mind insulting us if the insult has the potential to bring us into wisdom and right relationship with Him. He loves us too much to *not* mock us at times.

Ok, so as I mentioned, most of us- hopefully *all* of us, have never entertained the idea of teaming up with our buddies to kill and rob our neighbor- and so we're all feeling smarter than birds this morning, right, the insult doesn't apply to us, we're good- but then Solomon expands the application a bit in **verse 19**, let's read *it* again...

Alright, so here we are told this isn't just talking about murder and robbing your neighbor- but rather the same exact principle applies to anyone who makes "unjust gain." This type of wording opens up the application and meaning of this proverb now to all kinds of other different situations and scenarios- the idea being if someone *gains* in

life- financially, maybe even gains in power, and/or influence- in a way that is unjust, not upright, not honoring the Lord, bending the rules, taking from others, putting others down so that they themselves can be elevated, etc- then this person too is dumber than a bird. They are setting a trap for themselves and they are stupidly walking into it. In due time, their life, their soul, will be taken away by that which they “gained.” The intent of these words to us as the reader, is that we would recognize the wisdom being presented, and check ourselves so that we won’t engage in unjust schemes in order to “get ahead in life.” The warning is clear, getting ahead in life through the wrong means, prospering at the expense of others, underhanded cutthroat business dealings- God is not pleased with, and these will end up eating away at your soul.

The intent is that we as the reader would become wiser, and would be warned, so that we would be sharpened and will make sure to work ethically and to seek gain through God’s hand and blessing- to live honorably and with integrity.

And then the last section of this chapter presents something that happens throughout the rest of the book- wisdom is personified as a woman, calling us to her. This element in the book of Proverbs is repeated and it seems to be contrasted with the idea of *not* listening to the calling of other women, like the calling of adulteresses and prostitutes. A common theme throughout this book is to be wise and not tempted into sexual sin by attractive provocative ladies, but rather heed the voice of “lady wisdom.” And this doesn’t mean that the words of wisdom are for men only, no- that’s just an illustration- the wisdom of God presented in this book and throughout the Bible is for *all*- for both genders, and for all ages. Look at **verses 20-23** with me...

Here is the invitation to all- wisdom is calling out, shouting in the street: “don’t live unwise anymore, don’t be dumb, don’t be resistant to

learning, don't be a know-it-all, don't be a fool." This is origins of Mr. T right here- "I pity da foo'!" Don't be a pitied fool, but rather seek the wisdom, counsel, guidance from God in His word- and it will be given to you. Verse 23 says turn to wisdom's rebuke, turn away from your own understanding to the correction of wisdom; and the result is that the spirit of wisdom will be poured out on you. **James 1:5** says it like this: "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him." That sounds like a promise to me- ask God for wisdom and He will give it you! Now, in the verses that follow, James goes on to say that wisdom will only be given to those who ask in faith and don't doubt- so there's some fine print there to read- but the general idea is for us to humbly in good faith ask God to give us His wisdom- and He will!

Sometimes I think we as Christians find ourselves at crossroads in life, decisions have to be made, and we want to honor the Lord, and we really want Him to show us exactly which decision is the one we should make. Anyone been there before? Anyone there right now? And sometimes God intervenes and *does* show us exactly which decision to make, but I've also experienced times in which He *didn't* do that and I had to really wrestle with which way to go. We really don't have any Biblical promises that tell us God will appear like a Genie in a bottle showing us every decision to make, but rather we are promised His *wisdom* if we humbly, in faith, ask for it and submit to His wisdom already revealed in scripture.

I've often thought of it like this- our relationship with God is described in the Bible as being a Father/child relationship. If you think about an earthly father/child relationship in regards to fatherly guidance, wisdom, and intervention with that child- you could probably say that early in the child's life, the father is teaching the child wisdom, intervening a lot, and hands-on guiding most of the child's decisions. "Here's what you should eat... brush your teeth after meals... here's

what time you should go to bed... etc.” But as that child grows, what the father *wants* to see is that the son or daughter has grown in to father-like wisdom, and is now making decisions rooted in what they have learned from their father. The father doesn’t want their 20 year old calling them and asking, “hey dad, should I eat baked fish or a Twinkie for lunch?” No, the father is pleased with their child moving into adult maturity and making wise decisions based on the wisdom the father has given them.

Now, that’s just a personal, generally analogy I’ve processed on my own- it doesn’t mean that I think God no longer speaks or intervenes at a certain point in our walk with Him, that’s not what I’m saying at all. Nor am I saying that we shouldn’t present little decisions to God- no, we are to pray without ceasing as the Bible says, and remember that Jesus said “without [Him] we can do nothing.” (John 15:5) Rather the idea I’m attempting to present is that in the moments when sometimes it seems like we’re not hearing an answer from God on a specific matter, perhaps those are moments in which God wants us to seek His general wisdom contained in His word, and to then move in the direction that lines up most with His type of wisdom, integrity, honor, patience, grace, character- presented in scripture. Ok, Verse 24 to the end, finishes out this chapter with a warning of *not* heeding wisdom. Again this is lady wisdom, God’s wisdom personified speaking, verse 24... **(v 24-33)**

The sobering truth presented here is that there is some *timing* attached to wisdom. The basic idea is that wisdom helps us *before* we make a mess of things. Once we make a mess of things, once we already act unwisely, often we have to just push through the natural consequences of the unwise mistakes we made. And sure, there is still God’s grace and forgiveness even in those situations- but the idea here is to use wisdom so that you can avoid negative natural consequences. And once again, Biblical mockery is employed- wisdom says she will laugh at and mock those who don’t listen to her. When the

consequences of not heeding God's wisdom come about, when the verse 29 results of not "fearing the LORD" occur- God's word is basically saying here- you made the bed, now you have to lay in it. And I don't think it's that God enjoys mocking us, or enjoys telling us "I told you so," but the reality is that there are natural real world consequences for us not aligning our lives with God's word. And so the push here, to us as readers of this passage, is for us to *not* wind up in this type of situation in which wisdom laughs at us and we are having to reap what we sowed. The push is for us to receive Godly wisdom and counsel, to humbly submit ourselves to God's wisdom and ways, to live in integrity, to be above reproach, to seek the wisdom from God's word, to humbly in faith ask for God's wisdom- so that we don't go our own way and make a mess of things. The push is for what will later be said, a verse you might recognize from **Proverbs 3:5-6**, it says "Trust in the Lord with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight."

And then I love this last verse, verse 33... "Whoever listens to [wisdom] will live securely And will be at ease from the dread of evil." When we live with integrity, with honesty, when we're not hiding any little secrets- there is peace, security, rest. Living in Godly wisdom, integrity, obedience allows us not to have to worry about what will happen if someone finds out, we don't have to worry about keeping track of which lies we told to who, we don't have to lie awake at night thinking about when all the threads will come unraveled. When we do what's right for the right reasons, even if the circumstances around us become difficult, frustrating, and stressful- there is peace available knowing that God is pleased with us and with our actions, there is peace available knowing that we did the right thing, there is peace available knowing that one day God is going to honor our decisions that were made in a desire to honor Him. So be encouraged church, God wants to give you His wisdom!