

Pastor T.C. Arnold
14th Sunday after Trinity
Proverbs 4:10-23
September 2nd, 2018

God's Word is clear and practical. That being said, I understand when people may not think so. Sometimes the Bible seems more impractical and confusing than the other way around. If you have ever thought so yourself, you are not alone. In the Old Testament there are long lists of ceremonial laws that don't translate well into our modern culture. In the New Testament there is the book of Revelation and sometimes we aren't even sure what is going on with that. The question is: how can the Bible be clear and practical in some parts and yet seem so antiquated... out of touch with what is happening in the world today... in other parts?

But the Word of God IS clear and practical. Take a look at the law of God for instance. The law of His Word is not confusing and perplexing. His law shows us directly what we are not to do. But not only that – and this is what makes God's Word so clear and practical – it also shows us what we are “to” do. For that reason, we have this reading from Proverbs. Look how practical this particular book of the Bible is. People say that the book of Proverbs – sometimes called the book of Wisdom – is more practical in content than theological. In other words, it tells us what to do or not to do more than it tells us about how to understand God. That's really not wrong and this may be a good way to look at it. Clear and practical is good. That means it's useful. We can get something out of it. We can apply it to our lives.

And that's what Proverbs 4:10-23 shows us. It shows us how to live. Remember, the law of God not only tells us what “not” to do. It also tells us what we are “to” do. It puts us into action. That's what Proverbs does – it shares the law that puts us into action. “*Hear, my son, and accept my words*” (action). “*Keep hold of instruction; do not let go; guard her, for she is your life*” (action). “*Do not enter the path of the wicked*” (action). “*Do not walk in the way of the evil. Avoid it; do not go on it; turn away from it and pass on*” (action). “*Be attentive to my words* (action). *Let them not escape from your sight*” (action). “*Keep your heart with all vigilance*” (action).

These are “easy to follow” instructions. These directives we can understand. These words are clear and to the point. These words are “clear” and “practical.” That means we can readily understand them and apply them to our lives. That means we can go from this place and do these things and understand that there is a tangible, concrete way to get this done. There is nothing abstract about it. All we have to do is go out and do it.

And yet...what do we do? We end up not doing those things we are told to do. Sure, we work hard to do those things we are NOT supposed to do. But even so we don't keep the law perfectly. We don't keep the law to the standards God would expect from us. But this is compounded by the fact that we aren't doing what God would expect from us. In other words, we aren't listening to the Book of Wisdom. This is God's wisdom given to us. This is law. This is practical living for ourselves and for our neighbor. Last week we asked the question, “*who's my neighbor?*” and Jesus answered that by giving us the parable of the Good Samaritan. That was a very “clear” and “practical” story that shows us that the people we least expect... are our neighbors. Today the Lord shows what to do and how to act in this wise instruction we call Proverbs. Again, this is nothing less than practical instruction. This is God's law.

But we have been told we are not saved by the law. As a matter of fact we have heard about the law the last couple of Sundays in the Epistle reading. Last Sunday we heard a reading from Galatians chapter three. It says in verse eighteen and nineteen, “*For if the inheritance (heaven) comes*

by the law, it no longer comes by promise (the Gospel); but God gave it to Abraham by a promise. Why then the law? It was added because of our transgressions.” And then two weeks ago the Epistle reading 2 Corinthians 3:4-11 said, *“To that we are sufficient in ourselves but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter (the law) but of the Spirit (the Gospel). For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”*

There is something that this “clear” and “practical” that the law cannot do. It cannot give us eternal life. The clear and practical Word of God is clear and practical for us today – but if it is the law, then it is not practical for getting us to heaven. So, what do we need?

We need the practical Gospel. The practical life God expects us to live is outlined for us in Proverbs. Live that life. But for the life everlasting in heaven – live in the life that Christ has lived for you. This is the practical Gospel.

We go back to the Word of God and how it is clear and practical. Instead of making this path and journey from today going forward until we reach our heavenly home a complete and utter mystery, our Lord has “revealed” Himself to us in ways we can understand. What could possibly be more clear and practical than our Lord who is above and beyond all things – who is both eternal and infinite (beyond time and space) – choosing to come to be like us in every way except without sin? What could be more clear and practical for you and me so that we can see, touch and feel than for our Lord to be made into a man? What could be more practical than the way He chose to teach His people (we already talked about the parables), the way He revealed His mighty power in miracles, and the way He was able to boggle their minds with His transcendent wisdom?

I ask you, beloved in the Lord, what could be more practical than the Gospel you have in your possession today? What could be more comforting in your time of need than knowing our God is the kind of God that makes Himself to be like you, suffer for you, die for you and live so that you might live forever – for you? The Gospel is this precious, practical gift that we possess – given to us in our faith. It didn’t come by means of the easiest way. Our Lord suffered and died for this gift. Our Lord was nailed to a tree for this gift given to you. Our Lord had so much more happen to Him than we could ever imagine for what we have in life today.

The way it all came about might not seem “clear” and “practical” – but it was God’s way. It was His way to tell you how much He loves you. It was His way to tell you right now that He was willing to give up everything so that you might live. It was His way to tell you that Jesus has made the way to life – He has lightened the way to life – He is *“the way the truth and the life.”* There is nothing more practical than a gift given to us that has already done everything for us.

God’s Word is clear and practical. Both the Law and Gospel are clear and practical. When we look at Proverbs, we are shown how to live – what God expects from us. That’s God’s Word and His Law. Nothing is more practical for us. Nothing is more practical for us than the Gospel. This is a deed already done and a life already won. There is nothing clearer than this: Jesus loves you and He loves you to death – both His and yours. You are never alone. He will see you through, all the way to heaven. Amen

The peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.