

Sermon Notes 2022

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Foreword

Herein contains my summary of the sermons for 2022. These sermons notes are mostly typed out during the sermon as the pastor preaches. Sometimes I will add in some of my own clarifications/notes/thoughts to the points given by the pastors, hence one can safely assume that any theological errors found herein are to be attributed to me, not the pastors.

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23rd January 2022: A Father's invitation to wisdom

Text: Proverbs 1

[1] The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel:

[2] To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, [3] to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; [4] to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth— [5] Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance, [6] to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles.

[7] The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

[8] Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, [9] for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck. [10] My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. [11] If they say, "Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us ambush the innocent without reason; [12] like Sheol let us swallow them alive, and whole, like those who go down to the pit; [13] we shall find all precious goods, we shall fill our houses with plunder; [14] throw in your lot among us; we will all have one purse"— [15] my son, do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their paths, [16] for their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood. [17] For in vain is a net spread in the sight of any bird, [18] but these men lie in wait for their own blood; they set an ambush for their own lives. [19] Such are the ways of everyone who is greedy for unjust gain; it takes away the life of its possessors.

[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."

Notes

- Authorship of Proverbs: Mainly Solomon (see chapter 1:1, chapter 10:1, chapter 25:1) but also others like Agur, Lemuel, "the wise", etc. Though Solomon's wisdom is greater than all of the others' wisdom (1 Kings 4:29-34).
- Apparently, Solomon was also a man of science; his study of nature helped him to see wisdom in the created order, like when he provides an analogy to the ant to explain the value of hard work and diligence. As will be seen in the later sermons, God's wisdom is baked into the whole

created order (Proverbs 8, Proverbs 3) and hence one can get wisdom by studying the created order.

- That being said, books of Wisdom like Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job are revealing divine truths about the world, more than just information about the world.
- Proverbs teaches divine truth, teaching God's people what godly living in day to day life looks like. Though on this note, Proverbs teaches us general principles instead of going into specifics; for example, in Proverbs 13 when the child and the rod are mentioned, the text does not tell us how many times we should use the rod, how much force to use with the rod, etc.
- Again, we must emphasize that that wisdom is from God above (2 Chronicles 1:8-10), though it is available to all by God's common grace.
- Proverbs invites us to reflect upon God's truths rather than to promise us immediate rewards for our choices.
- Wisdom literature in its entirety (Job and Ecclesiastes also) teach God's people the entire complexity of life.
 - Proverbs gives us general principles for us to ponder and consider as we think about living righteously.
 - Job and Ecclesiastes handle the edge cases (i.e, exceptions to the general principles in Proverbs) that now occur because of sin. E.g, Proverbs say that generally the wicked will suffer for their wickedness, but Job and Ecclesiastes show the exceptions to the above general rule.
- Wisdom is more about knowledge, it is also about skillfulness (Exodus 31:1-3). More than being knowledgeable, being wise is to be skillful in applying God's truth in our life.
- True wisdom is inseparable from righteousness. Wisdom teaches us how to do righteousness, and teaches us how to see beneath the surface to make sound judgements.
 - The Law teaches us what is right and wrong, but the emphasis of the Law is not on the "how".
 - Wisdom emphasises that right living leads to life, wrong living leads to death (Proverbs 1:29-32), then goes on to give us general principles on what right living looks like.
- "Wisdom cries out in the street" God's wisdom is available to all, not hidden. It is just whether people want to hear or not.
- Wisdom is received on bended knees (Proverbs 1:7)
 - To fear God is to reverence God and to humbly submit to God's power and moral authority over all things.
 - Fools disregard God and ignore God's moral authority, e.g Adam and Eve and the Fall.
 - God's moral authority is baked into God's creation, hence people who go against God's moral authority go against God's created order and hence generally hurt themselves. E.g, addiction to drugs, addiction to pornography, sex outside of marriage etc all are scientifically proven to cause harm to a person.
 - * Though we must emphasize again that the devastating effect of going against God's wisdom in the created order is obscured because of sin, i.e sin throws the balance of the creation abit off (e.g thorns and thistles), and sin darkens our mind such that we don't really see the devastating, natural consequences of sin until it is too late.

- Wisdom from God is best exemplified in Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:30). Fear of God will lead us to be transformed through Jesus. Not our own wisdom that transforms us, but Jesus makes us wise.
- Wisdom is learnt not alone, but in the context of community and discipleship

30th January 2022: Living wisely before God

Text: Proverbs 3:1-12

[1] My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, [2] for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you.

[3] Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. [4] So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man.

[5] 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 straight your paths. [7] Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. [8] It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.

[9] Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; [10] then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.

[11] My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, [12] for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.

Notes

- Story of the lazy grasshopper and the hardworking ant: idleness leads to hunger. This was a very famous fable in ancient Greece to teach diligence. In Proverbs, there is a similar story in Proverbs 6:6-8.
- Every culture has a wisdom tradition. This makes sense, because wisdom helps us to live a good life.
- Peace in verse 1 is "shalom" in Hebrew, i.e there is a connotation of wholeness and abundant welfare.
- God makes wisdom available to all, God created the earth by wisdom (Proverbs 3:19-20). I.e, God's wisdom is baked into His creation. The created world reflects God's wisdom, and hence it makes sense that we can learn wisdom by looking at God's created order (e.g by looking at the ant). This is regardless of whether one believes in God or not. This is nothing but the generosity of God, who freely gives his creatures common grace.
- However, the wisdom as described above is incomplete. I would add that because of sin, the wisdom as described above is fallen; now we have wicked people prospering for example. Sin has affected God's creation such that the wisdom baked into God's creation is abit disrupted, and also sin has affected us such that we are partially blind to all the wisdom in God's creation too. Hence, all human wisdom must be completed and reframed by God's revelation. To truly live the good life, we are to be like God, and we are to submit to God.
 - To be like God, we are to acquire the character of God. From v3-4, we must possess steadfast love and faithfulness, in order to find success before the eyes of God and Man. But steadfast love and faithfulness are qualities of God (Exodus 34:6). This makes sense, because we are made in the image of God, and hence reflecting God's character is what we are supposed to do anyway. Hence just as how God shows steadfast love and faithfulness to us, we should show steadfast love and faithfulness to others. Of course, showing steadfast love and faithfulness to others might lead to us sacrificing something

on our end. However, living the good life is not about maximising our self pleasure, but it is about the collective shalom of all, which is God's original plan for humanity anyway.

- To submit our lives to God, we need to submit our thinking, our possessions, and our negative life experiences.
 1. To submit our thinking, we must first note that we are finite creatures with a finite understanding. The worst thing for us is to be wise in our own eyes, because if that is the case, we can't grow intellectually. E.g Proverbs 26:12. Now, if we note that God is infinitely wise than us, then we ought not to be wise in our own sight, we must trust that God's commandments are far wiser than our own understanding of the world. As Paul said, God's "foolishness" is infinitely wiser than human wisdom. An example is the flawed human "wisdom" of "can do whatever, just don't get caught". But God's wisdom is Romans 13, submitting to lawful authority. We are to "trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding..."
 2. To submit our possessions, we see that in verses 9 and 10 of our text. This is not prosperity gospel, it is not about how when we give more, we will receive more. This wisdom has the context of Israel's old covenant, where giving is part of the Law, and obeying the Law is about love for God and faithfulness for God. And as per the OT promises, when Israel is faithful to God, God will bless Israel with material possessions in this world. For us in the NT, even though the old sacrificial system is not for us, this principle is for us too, just that it is transformed; see Luke 12:33. We should not expect God to bless us with material wealth when we submit our possessions to God, because God gives us things far better than material wealth; God gives us treasure in heaven.
 3. To submit our negative life experiences to God, we first look at Proverbs 13:24 too. Just like how parents discipline their children, God disciplines us too. However, not all suffering we experience is God's discipline/punishment of us. See Ecclesiastes 8:14 and Job. Some of the suffering we experience is a result/consequence of sin. It is wiser to regard suffering not necessarily as God's punishment for us (unless God has clearly revealed this to us), but as something that will draw us to God. Suffering itself is not good, but God can bring good out of our suffering when we bring it to God. This is what it means to submit our negative life experiences (our suffering) to God. In fact, suffering sometimes can lead to greater holiness and deeper communion with God, which is part of living the good life, and hence paradoxically, we might find greater shalom with God in our suffering.
- The ultimate portrait of wisdom for us is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was completely like God, and fully submitted Himself to God. What Jesus did seemed foolish by worldly standards, but it is infinitely wise by God's standard, and hence God has highly exalted Jesus Christ. And now we can have the mind of Christ through the Holy Spirit. Let us seek this, and hence get the ultimate shalom.