

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.
 - * 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..."
 - * 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.
 - * 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.

6th February 2022: A disciple's heart

Text: Proverbs 4:20-27

[20] My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. [21] Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. [22] For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh. [23] Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. [24] Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you. [25] Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you. [26] Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure. [27] Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil.

Notes

- The key point of today's text is verse 23. For the ancient Israelites, faith is not separated from knowledge and not separated from one's experience of the world. Two points today: guarding the heart, and acting in wisdom. Btw, the word "heart" here refers not to the physical heart, but to the entire inner life of the person.
- Wisdom starts with inclining our ears to our parent's saying. That's how we learnt things like "don't touch the hot stove" etc.
- Guarding our hearts means to watch our inner man with all vigilance. Whatever happens to the heart will affect everything a person does. I.e, if the heart is corrupt, then the affections, motives, pursuits of a person will be corrupt. The heart is the core of the person.
- As Augustine said: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you". The restlessness is because of sin; sin causes us to try to fill our heart with worldly things, which will only make us restless, but as we all know only God can fill our heart.
- The heart is what God transforms in the New Covenant, e.g Jeremiah 31:33. And once the heart is transformed, we will have abundant life in the sense of John 10:10b. Also, from John 7:37-38, we see that believing in Jesus is the way to have a transformed heart.
- We guard our hearts practically by Psalm 119:11. Guarding our hearts keeps us from sinning, and helps us to live the abundant life that God has for us. The more we hear God's word, the more we will recognise God's voice.
- In life we watch many worldly things carefully, like our weight, our children's grades, sales, etc. But the text today says, **above all else**, guard your hearts.
- If we are parents/teachers, we help our kids guard their hearts through sound instruction in the fear of God.
- If we give our hearts to Jesus, Jesus must control everything, not just certain portions of our lives. The heart is the core of the person, and if we truly give our heart to Jesus, the entire life will be transformed, not just selected portions.
- Walking in wisdom: first of all, we note that our actions follow our beliefs. Our behavior is a good indication of what is in our heart. Actions here refer to what we say (v24), what we see (v25), and how we walk (v26).
 - By the way, actions here include what we say (v24). As per what Jesus says, what comes from the mouth first comes from the heart. To walk wisely, we must be careful with what we say with our mouths; that is a practical application of guarding our hearts.

- Our actions here also include what we see (v25). So we should keep our eyes on heavenly things, and look at all things in the world through the lens of God's word. Keeping our eyes on heavenly things mean to keep heavenly things as our primary motivation, e.g Paul and running the race, keeping his eyes on the prize.
- Our actions here also include what we do with our feet (v26). There are two paths we can choose to walk; the straight and the narrow path, or the wide path that leads to destruction. As another application of guarding our hearts, we must daily constantly walk on the straight and narrow, and turn away from the wide path that leads to destruction.
- Our perfect role model for all of the above is our Lord Jesus Christ, who perfectly obeyed the voice of His Father and who perfectly did the will of His Father. Because He is the perfect Son, He brings many sons and daughters into glory through the cross. With Christ's help, it is possible for us to guard our hearts, through the Holy Spirit that Jesus sends us to help us walk in His example.
- In conclusion, let us guard our hearts and walk in wisdom (which is the result/expression of us guarding our hearts), and we can walk in wisdom by watching the things we say, the things we see, and the things we choose to do (our feet).

13th February 2022: Do you want to be blessed?

Text: Jeremiah 17:5-10

[5] Thus says the LORD: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD. [6] He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.

[7] "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. [8] He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit."

[9] The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

[10] "I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds."

Notes

- The bible has a different take on what it means to be blessed, as compared to the secular idea of blessings being in the form of health and wealth. Of course God can bless us with such health and wealth, but having health and wealth is not a necessary condition for one consider himself blessed by God (see Luke 6:17-26). Let's understand why the poor etc can consider himself blessed.
- In the Jeremiah text, there are two groups; those who trust in man vs those who trust in God. Those who trusted in man would be those, in Jeremiah's time, would be those who trust in military might, in false gods and false prophets. Those who trusted in God, in Jeremiah's time, would be those who rely on God for deliverance. There are also two analogies corresponding to these two groups: shrub in the desert vs the tree planted by the stream.
 - Those who trust in man are like the shrub who don't bear any fruit.
 - Those who trust in God are like the tree which always bears fruit, whose leaves are always green.

Both the shrub and the tree might both experience drought, but because the roots of the shrub are not deep, the shrub will wither. But for the tree, since the roots are deep, it can still bear fruit in times of drought.

- I.e, those who trust in man are cursed, and those who trust in God are blessed. What is depicted here in Jeremiah is a throwback to the Mosaic Law, in Deuteronomy 28. There will be blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. Faith and obedience go hand in hand; those who trust and have faith in God will obey God naturally. When we trust God, we will obey. And when we obey, we will be blessed. Hence we can say that those who trust in God will be blessed.
- In Jeremiah's time, Judah was a nation that didn't trust in God, hence they experienced the curses of the Law, experiencing things like famine etc and even eventually exile. But for those in Judah that were going through the same difficult times, they are still blessed as long as their trust is in the LORD.
- Hence in Luke, even in adverse circumstances (e.g poverty), we can still be blessed when we obey. Blessing does not necessarily remove suffering; in the Jeremiah text, we see that even

the tree experiences drought (Jeremiah 17:8). Hence we can say that the poor who trust in God are still blessed.

- What are some of these blessings? They are:
 - Peace that transcends all understanding.
 - Communion and friendship with God.
 - Treasures in heaven.
- So how is all of these relevant for us? The starting point of a blessed life is to put our trust in God for our salvation. We must trust in Jesus' finished work on the cross rather than in our own works; our hearts are deceitful above all things, and hence our own works are rubbish. Jesus has come to seek and save the lost, only Jesus can save us, because only He has died on the cross for our sins. For His suffering on our behalf, our sins are cleansed, but if and only if we put our trust in Jesus. If we reject Jesus and put our trust in ourselves (i.e in man) instead, we are cursed. The "good works" that we do will never be enough before a holy and just God. Apart from Jesus, we are under the wrath of God for our sins; and this will manifest itself especially on judgement day. Hence, the starting point of a blessed life is to trust in Jesus' completed work for our salvation.
- We can also put our trust in man when we trust in the physical blessings that God give us rather than recognising that God is behind all of those blessings. When those physical blessings distract us from God, then those physical blessings will lead us to be cursed. E.g, some parents' lives revolve around their children so much so that they have no time to spend with God, no time to participate in church life, etc. We should work hard and study hard and take care of our kids etc, this is our testimony before the world. But we should not let these things distract us from God, because if not we will be like the shrub in the desert. Hence let us repent and seek God and His kingdom first.
- When we are going through difficult times, are we turning our hearts away from God in anger and disappointment or do we cling on to God with confidence and hope? If we turn away from the source of blessings (i.e God), how can we be blessed? There are two examples which Pastor Kien Seng talked about:
 - Example 1: Very sian because of physical sickness, don't even want to come to church.
 - Example 2: Physical sickness has led to greater trust and dependence in God.

Here we see two people in the same circumstance but one is evidently more blessed than the other, because he is closer to God. The latter person is what it means to be blessed in God's eyes.

- So do you want to be blessed? If you do,
 - Believe in Jesus, cultivate your relationship with Jesus. Cling on to Him, put your trust in Him. Put our trust in who God is and what He has done for us, especially in the finished work of the cross. Putting our trust in God also means putting our trust in His Word, because His Word reveals who He is and what He has done. We also put our trust in God's promises. And when we trust in God's promises and His Word, we are like the wise man who builds his house on the rock.

20th February 2022: Turning from anger

Text: Proverbs 15:1,18;16:32;27:3,4

[1] A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. [18] A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.

[32] Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

[3] A stone is heavy, and sand is weighty, but a fool's provocation is heavier than both.

[4] Wrath is cruel, anger is overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?

Notes

- Anger is a common emotion; even animals can get angry. It is possible to get angry without sinning; see Ephesians (Be angry and do not sin). Anger is not sin in and of itself, but our response to our anger could be sin.
- Anger is part of our body's fight or flight response, more specifically our fight response; anger can help us to protect ourselves/others, stand up against injustices of the world.
- To see that anger can be non-sinful, consider that God can be angry; however, God's anger is wholly without sin. God is also not fundamentally angry, he is fundamentally righteous; his anger is directed at the sinfulness of Man.
- But anger can of course be sinful, when it controls us and makes us mean, full of hatred and bitterness. One simple example is road rage.
- For Man, anger is usually an emotional response to a threat against our **ego**. Human experience makes this abundantly clear.
- To help manage our anger, there are 3 main points:
 - First point: restraint, not react. Instinctively, when we hear something we don't like, sometimes we just react based on the emotions we are feeling. These feelings are often based on our first impressions of the things we have heard, and contain a lot of our biases. Most of the time, people are triggered when:
 - * They feel threatened.
 - * They feel frustrated or powerless, hence angry at ourselves. Or angry at the situation.
 - * They feel invalidated or unfairly treated.
 - * They or their possessions are not respected.

For us personally, it is helpful to find out what are our triggers. However, all of the above is not an excuse for sin; just because triggers exist doesn't mean we have to be triggered. Self-control is a Christian virtue, a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Practically, we can restrain when we deliberately interrupt our 'reactive' response, by walking away, slowly counting to 5, taking a break from the situation, etc. If we must respond, we are to give a 'soft answer'. If we can't give a 'soft answer', it is better to keep quiet. If we can't give a 'soft answer' and shout back because of our anger, then the other person will get angry also, and then there'll be a relationship breakdown. The above might seem hard to do, but remember that Jesus faced the biggest injustice in the world, yet he was like a lamb led to the slaughter; he opened not his mouth.

- Second point: re-evaluate, not relish. When we re-evaluate something, we do it more objectively as compared to our instinctive response, and we widen the possible explanations or interpretations of the actions or what was said. When we relish, we take delight in going through the situation over and over again to stir up our emotions. We become more angry and our burden becomes heavier. We should also re-evaluate the consequences of our possible angry actions, especially in light of James 1:19-20. We must remember that our human anger does not produce the righteousness of God. One such consequence is that our unrestrained anger is a poor testimony to our Christian faith.
- Third point: release, not retain. Keeping our anger within us is described as a burden, as in Proverbs 27:3-4. A stone is a heavy thing, and as for sand, a lot of it is a heavy thing. Sand is a particularly good analogy; if everytime we retain our anger we store up a grain of sand, then in half a lifetime, all that sand will accumulate to be something super heavy. And also, as per the proverbs verse, one possible thing that stirs up our anger is jealousy. To release our anger to God, we should:
 - * Be truthful with God about your feelings. Lament them to God, as per in the Psalms.
 - * Be ready to forgive those who said those things that made us angry. Just as God forgiven us, we should also forgive.
 - * Ask God to turn our problems into solutions.
 - * To combat jealousy, we thank God that we are made differently and given different gifts. We affirm the good in our lives and recognise the source of goodness which is from God.
- Our angry, sinful response is merely a symptom of a greater problem, which is sin. The Bible is not just an anger management manual; when Jesus died on the cross for our sins, He removed the root of our human anger, which is sin. The ultimate remedy for anger is to kill the sin in our lives, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit and of the Word. We are to emulate Jesus' example, as per Philippians 2:3-11, and when we do, anger will vanish. When we are slighted, we must remember that we forgive as God forgiven us.