

The Value of Proverbs

Three wise women...

- You know what would have happened if there had been three wise **WOMEN** instead of three wise **MEN**, don't you?
 - (image: three African women)
 - they would have asked for directions... arrived on time... helped deliver the baby... cleaned the stable... made a casserole... and given practical gifts!!
- The book of Proverbs is very much about that kind of practical wisdom!
- Wisdom that makes a difference when there's **work to be done, relationships to be worked at, life to be lived!**
 - how should I live my life? What does my faith have to say about daily living?
- Proverbs is a collection of pithy sayings, collected and edited over years; finally put into this form, collated to be as helpful as possible for their purpose:
 - and the final editor summarises that purpose in the first 6 verses
 - (this is poetry, and should be read as such!)
 - (re-read vs. 1-6)
- Constant blend of head knowledge and practical out-working:
 - wisdom and discipline (v.2)
 - understanding words (v.2) & acquiring disciplined life (v.3)
 - knowledge and discretion (v.4)
- That's what Proverbs is all about!
 - don't know what your acquaintance with Proverbs is like!
 - (image: GNB Proverbs illustrations!)
 - as a youngster I used to take great delight in whiling away boring sermons by looking at the little pictures along the top of the page in the GNB version of Proverbs!
- This evening is, in part at least, an introduction to the book and its teaching:
 - we will be pursuing it in more detail in subsequent evening services, picking up each week on one theme that is addressed in the book of Proverbs (though perhaps in verses scattered throughout the book!)

The Essence of Wisdom

- But even though this is "only an introduction", and even though we will be going on to work all of this through in much more detail, the core of the whole thing is contained in one of the verses we read.
 - variously described as motto for book, key to understanding, foundation on which rest is built;
 - one of those verses you've heard/know, but if asked might be hard pushed to tell someone where it comes from!

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline." (Proverbs 1:7) (image: boy, sky, text)

- All wise living starts and ends with the fear of the Lord.
 - not fear as in scared, but reverence, awe, obedience.
 - (David Atkinson) *"All true knowledge of God, his world and his ways, derives from and is controlled by reverent obedience to God himself as he makes himself known."*
- Not the kind of knowledge that we often think about - intellectual knowledge, head knowledge, go to college or university and study knowledge.
- But an approach to life, involving commitment to and relationship with God.
 - says: this is an awesome God; one not to be trifled with; one who demands our all;
 - says: this is God's world, and in God's world God's ways are best - makers

- instructions; (divorce statistics and living together before marriage)
- says: I trust that God knows best; I trust Him (relationship);
- says: I believe, therefore I will commit myself to living in that way, even when it isn't easy, because I trust him;
- In other words, the essence of wise living, balanced, wholesome living, is living in-step with God.
 - get our perspective right - whose earth? God's earth!
 - so, as Prov 3:9 says, "**Honour the LORD with your wealth, with the first-fruits of all your crops**" - doesn't make sense unless we have a God first perspective!
 - likewise, the pressure in our society is immense to be careless about sexual standards, to sleep together before and outside marriage, and so.... its tough to stick to advice such as Prov 6:32 "**a man who commits adultery lacks judgment; whoever does so destroys himself.**" (unless what God thinks is more important than what others think!)
- Real wisdom is rooted in relationship with God.

Beginning:

- This fear is the foundation on which all the other advice, pithy statements, etc are built.
 - this beginning is not, though, something that is left behind;
 - **more like reading, a basic skill learnt in first few years at school, but one of the foundations on which all future learning is built... essays, books, etc, etc!**
 - The prevailing attitude which says, with David Hubbard:
 - "*Although [fear] includes worship, it does not end there. It radiates out from our adoration and devotion to our everyday conduct that sees each moment as the Lord's time, each relationship as the Lord's opportunity, each duty as the Lord's command, and each blessing as the Lord's gift. It is a new way of looking at life and seeing what it is meant to be when viewed from God's perspective.*"
- "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline." (Proverbs 1:7)**

Wisdom's Call

- As always in matters of faith, we are left with a choice - a choice to respond or to reject.
- That's what the second chunk of the first chapter that we read together earlier on is all about:
 - **the picture is of Wisdom as a person, a town crier going into the streets, calling on people to respond;**
 - calling them to follow her, to live lives marked by Godly wisdom, the wisdom whose essence is in fearing the Lord;
 - **picture then is of her warning of danger coming, a storm brewing;**
 - **people are faced with a choice:** to respond, act on what they hear, and be ready for the effects of the storm, **or ignore the advice, go on with their daily business as if nothing had happened, and be responsible for whatever calamity strikes them!**
- Hurricane warnings in the States - pictures on the TV - always some fools who ignore the warnings and get themselves or their families killed or injured.
- v.32-33: "*For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them; but whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm.*"
- And so we need to respond:
 - **first and foremost we need to learn again the "fear of the Lord";**
 - second, and the true result of that fear, need to learn the working out in our daily lives of the Maker's instructions (**not know about; actually do** - I'm bad at that!)
- **May God grant us a vision of his majesty, that we may rightly fear him, and a measure of his boundless strength, that we may rightly serve him with godly wisdom.**