

Ancient Wisdom for the Modern World

Proverbs 1.1-7

This is a book I have treasured from early in my life as a Christian. I had been struggling to navigate this new terrain of the Christian life. The topography of the Kingdom of God is different to that of this world. I was desperate for practical, down in the dirt guidance. And that wisdom was available in this book. Are you wondering at the moment what does life look like in these surreal circumstances we find ourselves in? How do you love and serve your neighbour when you must distance yourself from them? How do you love your family when you are on top of each other all the time? My hope is that the Book of Proverbs will prove to be a beneficial map and compass for you.

Verse 1 sets the context for us. This is God given wisdom for God's people for godly living. You'll see that Solomon is the author of these Proverbs, with the help of a few others (see 24.23; 30.1; 31.1). Solomon was the king of Israel and was internationally renowned as the wisest person on the earth. This was a wisdom given to him by God (1 Kings 3-4). The wisdom in this book then is for those who are part of God's Kingdom.

And the aim of Proverbs is establishing right principles and priorities, patterns and paths for life. It can be distilled down to, 'Will you choose wisdom or folly?' It seeks to help God's people to make wise decisions rather than walk down paths of foolishness.

Proverbs are precise and pithy, generally utilising rich and vivid imagery to create memorable sayings which function as guides for living as God's people under God's rule in God's place. Roger Crooks sounds an important caution about how we read Proverbs:

"Solomon observes life, and writes down his reflections in the form of proverbs, rather than promises. These are not the same thing because a promise implies an obligation: if A is done, then B will follow; while a proverb has to do with a general principle of life that is usually true but to which there may be some exceptions: if A is done, then B will generally follow. Proverbs must be read as a book of proverbs and not promises, and we avoid big problems if we do this."

NB

The passage we are looking at this week functions as a prologue to the book. As one commentator succinctly summarises, "The first section consists of three units stating the book's title (1.1), purpose (1.2-6), and foundational principle (1.7)."

The purpose of the book is to gain, be governed by and grow in wisdom. Wisdom, instruction, words of insight, prudence, wise dealing, knowledge and discretion are different shades of the same colour. They each have particular emphases and targets but abide under the same umbrella of purpose. This book is to help the church of Christ to always choose the wise option.

And what is the foundational principle of wisdom and knowledge? According to Solomon, it is fear of the LORD (1.7). This is a key phrase throughout the book (see 9.10; 14.27; 29.25; 31.30). To fear the LORD is a reorienting of our priorities and recalibrating

of the way we view the world. We are to remove ourselves from the centre of the story and step down from the throne of our hearts. To fear God is to acknowledge that he alone is God. He is pre-eminent and supreme over everything. Jesus told the disciples that they were to fear the one who was the ultimate judge and the truly sovereign one (Luke 12.4-7).

This is given further clarity in the other half of this verse. Fools are those who refuse to fear the LORD. When I was in St Andrews, I remember talking about this passage with an older minister. And what he said struck me. He noted that all the professors and PhD students who refuse to fear God are fools. Folly in Proverbs is not to do with mental acuity but it is a spiritual condition. "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Psalm 14.1).

Wisdom is not acquired in schools and universities, it is not downloaded from Wikipedia, and it is not even won by old age but it is divinely given by God. It is given to those who humbly submit to his sovereign rule, to all those who deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Jesus "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (Colossians 2.3).

The apostle James says that "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him" (1.5).

Prayer: O Lord God Almighty, we exalt your holy and blessed name. We are confronted at the moment with circumstances that disorient and dismay us. We are unsure and nervous about the best route and options to take. Please would you give us your divine wisdom, as we see to be ambassadors for your Kingdom here on earth. Help us we pray to know how we can best serve and love our family, friends, neighbours and colleagues. We know you are gracious and bounteous in your love and provision, so please hear and answer our prayers. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Suggestions for Prayer:

1. For our health service workers and all who support them
2. Wisdom for our political leaders
3. The elderly and unwell in our congregation
4. Eagle's Wings: that food and funds would be available
5. The people of India under lockdown, many have no access to homes and food