



Proverbs 1:1-7

We have been exploring the life and times of King Solomon and found that he was a man of renowned God-given wisdom. Kings and Queens sought his counsel, he wrote books on wisdom, he was a man of literature and science. A part of the word of God is attributed to some of his work - most of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs.

So what is wisdom? What is it that was so prized of Solomon? The first chapter of Proverbs gives us what I think is a pointer.

Prov 1:1 The proverbs of Solomon, son of David and king of Israel. 2 Here are proverbs that will help you recognize wisdom and good advice, and understand sayings with deep meaning. 3 They can teach you how to live intelligently and how to be honest, just, and fair. 4 They can make an inexperienced person clever and teach young people how to be resourceful. 5 These proverbs can even add to the knowledge of the wise and give guidance to the educated, 6 so that they can understand the hidden meanings of proverbs and the problems that the wise raise. 7 To have knowledge, you must first have reverence for the LORD. Stupid people have no respect for wisdom and refuse to learn.

The word used for wisdom in the OT is *hokmah*. It has a wide variety of meanings relating to wisdom: skill (in war), wisdom (in administration), shrewdness (wise dealings with others), wisdom prudence (in religious affairs), wisdom (ethical and religious). Mounce notes that even though the meaning of *hokmah* can mean skill in war, it usually means intellectual wisdom. Central to the wisdom books is the notion that true wisdom comes from God: *Job 28:20 Where, then, is the source of wisdom? Where can we learn to understand? 21 No living creature can see it, Not even a bird in flight. 22 Even death and destruction Admit they have heard only rumours. 23 God alone knows the way, Knows the place where wisdom is found, 24 Because he sees the ends of the earth, Sees everything under the sky.*

Solomon's request for wisdom reflected God as the source therefore we read in verse 7 *To have knowledge, you must first have reverence for the LORD. Stupid people have no respect for wisdom and refuse to learn.*

Because God knows everything, He alone can be the only true source of wisdom. Interestingly we looked at an issue in the Corinthian church this morning where a group of people thought they had knowledge and they acted on this accordingly. Their actions weren't wise and people were hurt as a result. Their knowledge we found was incomplete. They didn't have the full picture.

The only true possessor of the whole picture is God Himself because He's omniscient. Therefore, it's only as we lean on the Lord as Solomon did we start to see things as they really are, to discern things and make the right decisions in our own lives. Here are a few definitions of wisdom that commentators have made:

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wisdom—or the use of the best means for the best ends, is generally employed in this book for true piety.

J I Packer(Knowing God, p80)

- Wisdom is the power to see and the inclination to choose the best and highest goal, together with the surest means of attaining it.

John Piper: Wisdom must include a sensitive, mature judgment or discernment of how the fear of the Lord should work itself out in all the circumstances not specifically dealt with in the Bible.

One of the limitations of law is that it can't cover every eventuality and every moral dilemma that every culture throws up. What is a godly way of living in our modern society for example. Wisdom is all about knowing the right way, God's way in every situation.

Proverbs as you know is a practical book. Wisdom is a practical thing. We can only make wise decisions – things that have the best means and end if we know how to use knowledge. As I said this morning, I encourage people to study the Word of God, but knowledge is one thing but without wisdom, it can lead to the disastrous mess that occurred in Corinth.

So wisdom is the correct application of knowledge (assuming the knowledge is accurate). To function as the people of God we need the wisdom to use what we know effectively in our relationships with God's people and in the end this comes down to our relationship with God. Get that right and the rest follows on naturally as Solomon found out. And we have the advantage of the indwelling Holy Spirit to help us to wise living.

However Solomon has left us this compilation of wise sayings to help us understand how wisdom works. It's a collection of simple practical proverbs. Actually, the vast majority are what I would call common sense. They tell us what common sense looks like! And that's its strength – simplicity. The proverbs are sometimes funny, sometimes profound nuggets but all of them in a simple way give us the mindset of wisdom – what it looks like in real life and what its absence looks like.

Prov 14: 8 Gossip is so tasty--how we love to swallow it!

Prov 14: 12 No one is respected unless he is humble; arrogant people are on the way to ruin. 13 Listen before you answer. If you don't, you are being stupid and insulting. 14 Your will to live can sustain you when you are sick, but if you lose it, your last hope is gone. 15 Intelligent people are always eager and ready to learn. 16 Do you want to meet an important person? Take a gift and it will be easy.

The wise man is contrasted with the fool in many places. The Good News uses the words "simple people" but the more traditional fool gets to the Hebrew *k^esil* a bit better. A *k^esil* is not meant in Proverbs in terms of a simpleton or idiot, but someone who doesn't follow the ways of the Lord, so he isn't just stupid but shameless (Mounce) to go with it. There is a moral deficiency in a *k^esil* which ends in him making unwise and foolish decisions and keeps making them – Prov 26:11 *A fool doing some stupid thing a second time is like a dog going back to its vomit.*

Prov 14:16 A wise man fears the LORD and shuns evil, but a fool is hotheaded and reckless.

Prov 18:6 When some fool starts an argument, he is asking for a beating. 7 When a fool speaks, he is ruining himself; he gets caught in the trap of his own words.

Also on Solomon's radar are some other deficients too such as the sluggards, sinners, arrogant, mockers and the greedy rich.

Of course wisdom is exalted in Proverbs and because it is so revered, it's personified:

Proverbs 3:13 Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, 14 for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. 15 She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. 16 Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honour. 17 Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. 18 She is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed. 19 By wisdom the LORD laid the earth's foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place; 20 by his knowledge the deeps were divided, and the clouds let drop the dew.

8:22 "The LORD created me first of all, the first of his works, long ago. 23 I was made in the very beginning, at the first, before the world began. 24 I was born before the oceans, when there were no springs of water. 25 I was born before the mountains, before the hills were set in place, 26 before God made the earth and its fields or even the first handful of soil. 27 I was there when he set the sky in place, when he stretched the horizon across the ocean, 28 when he placed the clouds in the sky, when he opened the springs of the ocean 29 and ordered the waters of the sea to rise no further than he said. I was there when he laid the earth's foundations. 30 I was beside him like an architect, I was his daily source of joy, always happy in his presence-- 31 happy with the world and pleased with the human race.

One idea that has been around since the 2nd century is that the personification of wisdom is a reference to Christ and reflects Colossians 1 as well as verses like this:

1 Cor 1:23 As for us, we proclaim the crucified Christ, a message that is offensive to the Jews and

nonsense to the Gentiles; 24 but for those whom God has called, both Jews and Gentiles, this message is Christ, who is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Although some quite prominent early church Fathers went with this one, it is worthwhile pointing out that Jesus is reflective of everything to do with God, not just wisdom. *Col 2:9 KJV For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.* Unfortunately the JW's have latched on to use Proverbs 8 to suggest that Jesus is just a created being!

Most modern scholarship does not now see the personification of wisdom as being Christological or prophetic in any way. In fact the personification is female. Why? Because *hokmah* is a female word in Hebrew. Simple as that! The personification is a literary tool to emphasise something important – and this is a piece of literature. It's poetic and underlines the significance of wisdom. Don't forget that Proverbs is a book promoting wisdom.

So what does wisdom do for us? The opening words of Proverbs give us some idea about their usefulness for wise living.

3 They can teach you how to live intelligently and how to be honest, just, and fair. 4 They can make an inexperienced person clever and teach young people how to be resourceful. 5 These proverbs can even add to the knowledge of the wise and give guidance to the educated, 6 so that they can understand the hidden meanings of proverbs and the problems that the wise raise.

Wisdom is taking the knowledge of others and using it to build ourselves up – to have the right judgement, the right values, impart experience, add knowledge. Wisdom makes us into rounded human beings. They aren't law, just anecdotes that make us understand how we do apply knowledge, the moral law and the thugs of God into our lives.

Proverbs is not a fashionable book as indeed Ecclesiastes, Song and Job. What a pity! They are the Word of God. They are written as literature, mostly in poetic styles. How do we absorb them as they do seem like common sense? But surely that's the essence. They tell us that we need to be wise, why we need to be wise, where that wisdom comes from (God) and what shape wise living takes. So why don't we put more of a priority on these books? Is it because we are too busy looking for profound things that we can't be bothered with these sayings. Actually, many are very profound if we give them time to meditate on them.

I think that sometimes we can desire the profound so much that we forget the simple. But it's the simple common sense scriptures that ground us in a godly life, not the hidden depths of prophecy or the epistles. And it's these simple things which make a difference to others as we live in a world that desires to seek a wise way of living that can only be found in Christ.

That's the beauty of Solomon. He condensed his learning from literature, nature and science into something simple that inspires wise lives. Easy to read, easy to absorb. And if we ignore simple things like these – for example that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and start to look at other things, then where do we end up? Well, possible like Solomon who ended puffed up with his own wisdom rather than God's, that he forgot where it came from and what started well ended in disaster!

Let me finish with a bit from the beginning of Proverbs 2:1 *My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, 2 turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, 3 and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, 4 and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, 5 then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. 6 For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. 7 He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, 8 for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones. (NIV)*

So wisdom? Just do it!

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