

READING
SERMON

Proverbs 2:1-22

The Image Of Wisdom (Proverbs 2:1-22)

The local girl's school to where I went to school had as its motto

Get Wisdom, Forget it not.

Wisdom – something that we all love to have, but not all people seem to have it. The book of proverbs has a lot to say about wisdom, and this evening we look at the image of wisdom, or what wisdom or what wisdom can do.

But what is wisdom? Wisdom is mentioned some fifty times in the book of Proverbs. So it is a good place to begin and the series will be mostly in Proverbs. But what is wisdom? In chapter 1, verse 7 we read

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.” (Proverbs 1:7 NIV)

So wisdom has something to do with knowledge – you cannot have wisdom with out knowledge, but equally, you cannot have wisdom it seems without discipline – without work. Later in Proverbs we read

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” (Proverbs 9:10 NIV)

So wisdom begins with God and us following God. Remember in this context fear is not to be afraid of, to be terrified of. The Message puts its quite nicely when it says

Start with GOD--the first step in learning is bowing down to GOD; only fools thumb their noses at such wisdom and learning. (Proverbs 1:7 MSG)

The first step to wisdom is to acknowledge that God is greater than me, greater than us, knows more and that I know so little. It begins with dependence not on us, but on God. In the chapter we read we read in verse 6

“For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.” (Proverbs 2:6 NIV)

All wisdom comes from God – it is knowledge, it is understanding. It is a bit like a girl I once taught who had a difficult learning problem. She could read something from a book or any writing perfectly. So on reading tests she scored well above her age. However if you asked her questions on what she had read – there was no comprehension. None at all. It was the same when she watched the TV, so her parents told me. She would watch a programme totally absorbed, but at the end could not relay anything that had happened. There was knowledge of words and how to say them, but no understanding of their meaning and of sentences, etc.

But the strange thing is in Proverbs that Wisdom is personified – made into a person, made into a lady. Verse 20 of chapter 1 says

“Wisdom calls aloud in the street, she raises her voice in the public squares;”
(Proverbs 1:20 NIV)

She is there calling out for us to follow her, but then we read in chapter 2, verse 4

“and if you look for it (wisdom) as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure,” (Proverbs 2:4 NIV)

Wisdom calls to us, but it also needs to be searched for, like hidden treasure. We need to work at it, it is not handed to us on a plate – we need to build that relationship with the one where wisdom comes from – from God as we read in verse 6

“For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.” (Proverbs 2:6 NIV)

Wisdom comes from God and him alone, but the portrayal of wisdom as a lady and not God in Proverbs can be confusing. But it is there and so must be looked into and followed.

But why do we need wisdom? Verse 12

“Wisdom will save you from the ways of the wicked...” (Proverbs 2:12 NIV)

What wicked ways. Let us look at them

- Perverse :14

“who delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil,” (Proverbs 2:14 NIV)

Sadly we seem to live more and more in a world where this goes on. People seem to enjoy being evil, or at least doing wrong things to get their own way. Like this low level example.

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- Devious :15

“whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways.” (Proverbs 2:15 NIV)

Sadly we know that there are so many conmen and women around that call on people to gain money from them. In the Neighbourhood Watch meetings I go to we are told of bogus callers, of those who want access to your home or details from you. So many people these days seem to want your bank details and password, or so it seems from the number of emails I get requesting the information!

- Dark Ways :13

“who leave the straight paths to walk in dark ways,” (Proverbs 2:13 NIV)

Today we have so many different sects purporting to be Christian, but they are not. This last week I received from Evangelical Alliance this email

THE BRITISH NATIONAL PARTY DOES NOT SPEAK FOR BRITISH CHRISTIANS, SAYS EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

The British National Party are not the defenders of genuine Christianity, the Evangelical Alliance has said ahead of Nick Griffin’s appearance on BBC Question Time.

The appearance of the British National Party's leader, Nick Griffin on BBC Question Time offers a further opportunity to emphatically reject any claims that they are the defenders of Christianity.

The BBC invited Nick Griffin to participate following the election of two BNP candidates to the European Parliament in June 2009. To maintain its political neutrality, the BBC decided that it could not ignore the BNP's presence in the British political sphere.

Speaking ahead of Nick Griffin's appearance on BBC's Question Time, Steve Clifford, General Director of the Evangelical Alliance said: "We unequivocally condemn any attempt to use the Christian faith to promote racist nationalist policies and expect the BNP's policies to be exposed for what they are on Thursday's Question Time."

The British National Party have regularly attempted to promote themselves as the only party standing up for Christian values. The Evangelical Alliance totally rejects any such claim.

And I agree with EA about the BNP – they do not speak for Christians as they are an exclusive group and not inclusive as Jesus taught.

- Adultery :15

"whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways. It will save you also from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words, who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God. For her house leads down to death and her paths to the spirits of the dead. None who go to her return or attain the paths of life." (Proverbs 2:15-19 NIV)

Adultery is unfaithfulness and so wisdom keeps us faithful. We do not just go after this or that fad, but keep God central at all times. Unfaithfulness is a sign of our times – this is why contract legal people get so much.

These are negative things – it is nice to think that Wisdom would also bring positive things. There are

- Shields :7

"He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless," (Proverbs 2:7 NIV)

Wisdom is a shield. We have our shield in our faith, our faith in God. Remember that Paul speaks of a shield when he writes about the armour of God and he says

"...take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one." (Ephesians 6:16 NIV)

The shield of faith – to combat doubt. Wisdom too will combat doubt like a shield.

- Protect :11

“Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you.” (Proverbs 2:11 NIV)

Wisdom already gives us a shield but we will be protected from the evil ones when we have wisdom.

Wisdom will show us the ways to walk – the way to life. Verse 20

“Thus you will walk in the ways of the good and keep to the paths of the righteous. For the upright will live in the land, and the blameless will remain in it;”
(Proverbs 2:20-21 NIV)

Wisdom will show us the way. Jesus said to his disciples

“...”I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6 NIV)

We are to walk in the Spirit, walk in the way of Christ and to do that we need wisdom – this woman who calls out, but who also needs to be sought out as if she is hidden treasure.

And where is this wisdom to end up? In the head, the brain? No because that would just make it facts and figures and knowledge. The answer is found in verse 10

“For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.”
(Proverbs 2:10 NIV)

It is the heart, but notice that it is pleasant. Wisdom comes from the heart, it involves not just our IQ, but what is also called our EQ – our emotional intelligence. Some people are very, very clever, but when it comes to emotional and relationships, because relationships involve emotions, then they are very, very low.

However wisdom resides in the heart, the centre of our emotions. It does require knowledge, but also for us to know ourselves and our emotions.

How to look at this? The best way for me is with Star Trek. In the original series there was Spock. He was half human and half Vulcan and had the funny shaped ears. He was always trying to become emotionless – only logic ruled the day. The series was made in the nineteen sixties when logic was master and rules and knowledge was all important.

Then in the second series, The Next Generation – there was an Android – a human looking robot called Data who was without emotions but who was desperately trying to gain emotions – to become human.

Wisdom is part knowledge and part emotions in what to do with that knowledge – and it begins and ends in God and our relationship with God

PRAYER