

Kings and Prophets 13-03-08a

This is Friday, the 8th of March, 2013. We continue our study in the Kings and Prophets tonight. And as we do so, we will begin, as is our custom, by going to the Lord in prayer.

Shall we pray? Father, we're grateful for this time of fellowship and learning in your word. We thank you for the spiritual gifts that you have ordained and distributed in our midst. We thank you for the encouragement that comes from spending time together, centered on the truth of your word and recognizing the tremendous privileges that you have given us in this age and in this time as members of the body and bride of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray that tonight, as we continue our study in the Old Testament, that your Holy Spirit will be our teacher, that we'll find us ready pupils and diligent students, that we can take these things to heart and have them influence our thinking and motivate us and encourage us in the days ahead. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen. We left off last time in 1 Kings looking at the reign of Solomon and seeing that he has a conversation with God, the result of which is a request for wisdom, which is granted, and many other things that he did not ask for, long life, great power, wealth, and being in the very center of God's realm of provision and blessing.

One of the notes that is made in chapter 4 of 1 Kings is that Solomon's wisdom exceeded the wisdom of all the men of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt. He was wiser than all men. Ethan the Ezraite, Heman, Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol, or sons of wisdom.

His fame was in all the surrounding nations. He spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005. He spoke of the trees.

He spoke of animals, birds, creeping things, and fish. Men of all nations, from all the kings of the earth, who had heard of his wisdom, came to hear the wisdom of Solomon. Well, has any of this wisdom survived in the pages of inspired scripture? We recognize that the books of Ecclesiastes, or Kohelet, Song of Solomon, are attributed to Solomon, and also the book of Proverbs.

It says that he spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005. So I thought what we might do tonight is take a quick look. We're going to cover the book of Proverbs in one night.

I would venture that if I were to give what I fondly recall, I use these illustrations, then I realize that our kids know nothing about this. I doubt that any of them have taken a blue book test. A few of them have.

Most of them have an online quiz where the computer dishes the thing out, and in some cases it's adaptive and it gets scored immediately. We would take a test and not know for a week what we got on it, because there's a great stack of blue books where you'd written essay responses. But if I were to give a blue book quiz and say, tell me everything you know about the book of Proverbs, I suspect, I could be wrong, I could be pleasantly surprised, but I suspect that

most of us would have difficulty filling one page.

Well, it comes after Psalms and before Ecclesiastes. It's a wisdom book. It was written by Solomon.

There's a lot of Proverbs in there. Old Proverbs chapter 2, let me quote Proverbs. I know the first part of Proverbs chapter 2. You'd be getting down to the bottom of that first page and be running out of gas, running out of steam.

That's what else do I know about Proverbs? So since our subject here in Kings is King Solomon, and since he is purportedly responsible for these Proverbs, and this is a rather large book of our Bible, and the wisdom of Solomon was a gift of God, it seems that it would behoove us to know something about this book. Obviously, it's not something we're going to take up and begin a verse-by-verse study of, but as a part of God's revelation, inspired truth, inerrant, infallible, profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction, we should at least have a glancing knowledge of this book, more than a half a page. You can make the book seem more full if you write your name really big.

Write your name big at the top, and then you only have half of that page to fill. So what can we find out about the book of Proverbs? And much of this I'm going to give you is a condensation and a distillation of information that's commonly available. I haven't gone in and done a pioneering study of the book of Proverbs.

This is an overview, but these are things that amazingly, even though they're not difficult to observe or to discover, are not commonly known. In fact, it's getting more and more surprising that major Bible stories are getting to where they're not commonly known, much less something like this book. Well, you think of the book of Proverbs, and you think, well, it's a mishmash of aphorisms and two-line sayings and some exhortations to watch out for the crafty woman with the anklet and trying to seduce you off the street, young man, and my son, you know, wisdom is crying out in the street.

You need to follow her and not the seductive woman that's going to lead you astray, and her ways are the ways of death. But then pretty much it gets down to, you know, better a crumb in the corner of the rooftop than a big banquet where there's strife and this sort of thing. And it's just, you say, well, where's the rhyme and reason to it? And if you try to, if you do Bible reading where you say, I'm going to read through a book and you've read through Proverbs, there's not a very obvious or discernible structure.

However, there is a structure, and we're going to see that this book divides neatly into five parts. Think the Pentateuch. Now it actually divides a number of different ways.

It's sort of like a faceted diamond. You turn it one way and you see a certain number of facets. You turn it another way and you see more.

This is one of many ways. There's a beautiful nine part division of Proverbs. But the point is

when people look at the book of Proverbs, they can tell that it falls into sections and it just remains how finely do you want to subdivide those sections.

But if you turn to the book of Proverbs and we're doing this because, remember of all of the wonderful things that you can say about the kingdom and our study of the kings, David has just handed the kingdom to his son Solomon. God emphasizes what man does not. If you were going to read a secular history book or if there were a historian on the scene, he would be trying to write down the state visits and the diplomats and document the different ongoing things much as we read in the paper today.

This isn't God's view. God says, you know the greatest thing about Solomon's kingdom? It was his relationship with God and the concomitant, the accompanying wisdom that he had. Wisdom to invest the time that comprised his life effectively.

Isn't this what we want to do? God has allocated time to us. It's like the parable of the talents. What do you do with what God hands you? And he says, do something with this.

When I return, I expect there to be a multiple. Lord, you gave me five, I made five more. Lord, you gave me three, here's three more.

Lord, you gave me one and I made two out of it. But the guy that gets one doesn't do anything with it. And even what he has is taken away.

Well, this is the time of our life. The way, and this is your first observation looking at the book of Proverbs before we read a word of it, the way to convert time into treasure, time into reflected glory of God, the way to convert time into laying hold of eternity and eternal life is the wisdom of God. It is the truth of God.

This is what we aim our faith at. Faith lays hold of divine truth. And in so doing, when we put that into application, it's not sitting on a flowery bed of ease, gazing out a window on a beatific pastoral vision and saying, I believe God.

I believe there are angels floating above. I believe there's a crystal river flowing from under the throne. That's not what we're talking about.

We convert, God gives us time. We convert that time into eternal life, eternal inheritance by faith. We look at a situation, we have two or three different options, and we choose an option based on what we know of the word of God.

God's word says that it's not earthly security that counts. It's eternal security. It's not earthly fame.

It's not earthly factors that always determine the best thing to do. Sometimes there is a spiritual truth. Is there a spiritual truth? Can I find it? Can I apply it? When I do so, I've taken that time and just like a talent, I've invested it and it yields a return.

So wisdom is the principal thing. This is what we find in the introduction of Proverbs. If you turn to Proverbs chapter one, this is the theme.

This is what he's going to get at in the first section here, which is the introduction. The first part of the book gives the title of the book, and there's a prologue that states the book's purpose. This is kind of handy.

You don't want to just launch off. It was a dark and stormy night, and you don't know, well, what kind of book is this? Is it a mystery? Is it a horror show? Is it a parody? Is it a satire? Is it a prologue? Tells you this is what's coming. The prologue follows the title.

The title is in verse one, the Proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel. Now here's the prologue. Here's the purpose statement.

What is this collection designed to do? To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, to receive the instruction of wisdom. Now you notice these verbs of perception and of reception vary and they are different facets. We think, well, I go to Bible class.

I hear the radio. I read a book. I do devotions.

And now I know the word of God. Look at the subtlety. Look at the variation.

Look at the different parts of comprehending God's truth. To know wisdom and instruction. Sometimes they ask you to write your resume and your resume is supposed to be a compilation of what you are good at, what somebody might hire you for because you've got skills or experience.

But people say, I want to be competitive. I really, really want to get any job that anybody will give me. So they inflate their resume and something that they may have just seen becomes something that they single-handedly accomplished.

They were at the company when they earned the company of the year award. And they say, you know, led the effort to enhance productivity, earned company of the year award. And they take a part of something that's not really theirs.

To know wisdom and instruction doesn't mean to have heard wisdom and instruction. It doesn't mean you were just present when wisdom and instruction was floating around, right? You understand what yada means, right? To know. This means to know the way you know your daily routine.

You know where your stuff is. You know where you're supposed to be and what you're supposed to do. You know how to drive a car.

You know how to start the dishwasher. You know how to unlock your front door. You know, you look at your keys and you know which one goes to what.

These are things you know, that it's practical knowledge. It works itself out in daily experience. So the purpose of this collection is that people will know, will have a working, practical, meaningful, productive, fruitful grasp of what? Crop rotation, agricultural techniques, goat herding, sheep shearing.

No. Wisdom and instruction to perceive the words of understanding. To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity.

To give prudence to the simple, to the young man, knowledge and discretion. A wise man will hear and increase learning and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel. There's the receiving end and there's the applying end.

Do you see it? Justice and judgment and so on. This is the practical side. You've got to receive it before you can apply it.

But you cannot stop at receiving. You cannot stop at hearing. Coming to class, listening attentively is a very essential thing.

And you all do this very faithfully. We want to carry through and ensure that we do the other just as faithfully, which is to develop judgment and justice and practical wisdom in the spiritual realm, that it fulfills its purpose. You don't want to train an artillery battery to precision and perfection in loading weapons.

Wow, they really know how to cut that powder. They can get those rounds in and they seek that rotating band against the lands and grooves inside the howitzer's tube and they slam shut that breach and they set off the quadrant elevation and the deflection and they're standing there everybody's in his place. Nobody hurt themselves.

Nobody cut themselves. Nobody blew themselves up or anything else. That's great.

They all loaded the weapons perfectly. Let's do that again. Well, you can't do it again because all the weapons are loaded.

What do you have to do once they're loaded? You've got to fire. You want steel on the target. Loading is not an end in itself.

We are the greatest artillery loaders in the world. Nobody can touch us. Nobody can match our times or our precision in loading our weapons.

Well, listen, this is coming to Bible class and not getting any further. This is listening and being a hearer of the word and not being a doer. Solomon says at the outset of this book, you've got to close the loop.

You've got to finish the process. You load and then on command, you yank the lanyard and you fire and steel leaves the tube and impacts and wreaks all kinds of havoc and destruction right where it's supposed to. To know, to perceive, to receive, to give prudence to the simple, to the

young man.

The wise man will hear and increase learning and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel. Wise counsel is on the practical side. To understand a proverb and an enigma, the words of the wise and their riddles.

Now, if you have been following along in our parables study over the last few weeks, what does a parable do? Why did Jesus teach in parables? That is the ax that comes down and there's people on one side that do not understand. They hear, seeing they see, but they do not perceive. Hearing they hear, but they do not understand because when that ax falls, they hear that parable.

Their lack of understanding is an indictment. It is a charge of criminal negligence. You should understand this and you don't.

Why? Because you have not trained yourself to think about and analyze and pray over and meditate on the truth of God's word and the law that they meditate day and night. That's the tree planted by the river. So Solomon understands this same thing.

If these proverbs come down and you grasp them and you get what they mean on the spiritual plane, you're gonna be the wise man. And that wisdom is the talents that your time and your life have been invested in. Verse seven, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.

The word beginning there is Rosh. It is the first noun in the Bible. Does anybody know the first word or word combination? I know Matthew knows and I know.

The first word, Genesis 1.1 is Ba-Rashit. Ba is in and Rashit is the beginning. Rosh, Rosh, Rosh, Rosh means head.

So the head can be the beginning, but really it's the, what does your head do? It's in charge. It's more than a beginning. The head is over all and is ruler.

You know, he has made him head of all things to the church. Doesn't mean the beginning of all things. He's the sovereign.

He's the Lord of all things to the church. The fear of the Lord is the head of knowledge. Now think about this.

This is a double entendre and the Proverbs are full of these. It doesn't just mean, well, if you're gonna get anywhere with wisdom, you gotta start by fearing the Lord. Your wisdom isn't gonna do you any good if the head, meaning your fear of the Lord, isn't in control.

If the head is oriented toward God and reverences him and honors him, your wisdom is going to be activated. It's plugged in. It's got power.

The batteries are fresh. The fear of the Lord is the activating, ruling principle over wisdom.

That's what makes wisdom really work.

I was reading some documentation this past week of what the United States Army did in France in World War I, setting up chains of supply, moving troops and chow and beans and bullets and everything around. But what was really interesting to me is that in the history of what they did, there was a whole chapter on leave, liberty, leave and liberty, and the idea that the troops can go do something. In my entire life, five and a half decades, I have never heard anybody say a peep about the Army developing leave policy in World War I. But if you think about it, the United States Army had never fought in any great numbers an off-continent war.

We had some skirmish battles, Cuban and Haiti and the boxers and stuff like that are little scattered things. But we had hundreds of thousands of troops in Europe and the Army had to figure out, well, what do we do by way of giving them time off? What can they do? Where can they go? And they just had not thought about it before. There weren't really any policies for it.

They had to go to the British and say, well, what do you guys do? And make some modifications. How long can we let them go? Can they take their weapons? Should they be in uniform? How far can they go from where they are stationed? Does transportation time count? And interestingly, your transport time to and from your destination didn't count against your leave. If you had a seven-day leave, getting to the place where you were gonna take leave and coming back wasn't in the seven days.

So you could actually have like a nine-day leave because, well, it takes a day. But there's a huge... I just was fascinated. I read page after page after page of the Army's leave procedures in World War I because they had to pretty much invent it ex nihilo.

They had to borrow and observe and, well, in our situation, and what about this? And what about that? And do they know the language? And what about money? And all kinds of things. And very quickly, they discovered that if they gave no guidance, trouble would ensue. What if you get tangled up with the civilian authorities? What if you break a French law and they lock you in the French jail? Now what? Well, it just hadn't been thought of before in these numbers and great quantities of just tens of thousands of troops in Bordeaux and Paris and all these other places.

Well, my point in bringing this up is the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Is your wisdom going to be of any practical value? Is it going to make a difference? Is it going to accomplish something? Well, only if it is guided by and under the umbrella of the fear of the Lord. That's what the beginning, that's what the roche, the head is.

The thinking that governs wisdom has to be oriented toward God in reverence and honor. Fools despise wisdom and instruction. And this isn't so much that they despise it as in the sense that, oh, that wisdom is just stupid.

Who wants wisdom anyway? I'd rather have the gun pointed backwards and when I pull the

trigger, I blow my head off. That's, who wants wisdom on how to operate a weapon? I don't want to know anything about boats. I want the anchor line to wrap around my ankle and yank me underwater and drown me because who wants wisdom about boats? This isn't really what it means.

It means, it kind of means they waste it. Fools, they devalue it. They, you know, in Hebrews where it says that you do despot to the spirit of grace, despot is related to despise, but you, it isn't so much your attitude as that you waste, it's wasted on you.

Fools, they denigrate it. They ruin it. They make it of no effect.

That's why they're fools. It's, this is the cause and effect. The reason they are fools is that wisdom and knowledge isn't governed by the fear of the Lord.

Another way of saying this, if your knowledge, if your wisdom is not conditioned by and defined by and in service of your fear of the Lord, you're a fool. And that wisdom and knowledge is wasted. It may seem smart, but it's not.

Back to my, back to my leave analogy, guys didn't know what to do when they went on leave, that nobody had any experience. Guys in our generation, in recent generations, there's always been somebody ahead of you that says, oh yeah, you know, we had leave in Subic Bay or we took leave in Italy or we took leave in London or this is what we did. And you know, this is the way you can really get in trouble.

And you know, there's MPs, there's sharp draw. These guys, it was unbroken snow. It's like, wow, free ticket to France.

I, let's go see the Eiffel Tower. Let's go to the, you know, the, no, I don't think very many of them said, let's go see the Louvre. You know, let's get some culture.

They wanted to see the can-can getting danced and you know, let's live it up. And they very quickly, it became a very serious problem right away because they had all kinds of bad behavior because guys were just cut loose. These guys, understandably perhaps, didn't think about, we are the guests of this country.

We're here fighting a common enemy. We ought to be nice to these ladies whose husbands and brothers and sons are at the front, you know, fighting the Germans and have been longer than we've been here. A lot of us are here to provide support.

General Pershing was really anxious to not put American troops into combat until they were fully trained. And that's why we were relatively late in World War I in actually engaging in just those final battles in 1918 because of this. And so there's a lot of them in the rear with the gear.

There's a lot of American troops, tens of thousands of them behind the lines in transport depots and supply depots and medical facilities. And when you start reading about it, it's

enormous. There's just hundreds and hundreds of thousands of guys over there and they're doing office jobs, mechanical work, supply work, trades.

They needed roofers. They needed motor mechanics. They would rehabilitate motorcycles and trucks and things.

They used their skills. Some of them were recruited. Our mutual grandfather served in the Motor Transportation Corps and he and many others were recruited because they knew about mechanical things.

And there was a big campaign to get mechanics and take them over there. So the point is if their knowledge and their skills had been subordinate, if they could really understand the war the way General Pershing did, the way the senior staff did, this is something that had to be promulgated. It had to be communicated.

It had to be set down in regulations because these guys did not have that wisdom to govern them. And they very quickly made themselves odious to the host country because they went out and got drunk and broke things and just raised all kinds of cane and havoc because their experience, they were just so happy to be in France and do French things and see French stuff. And it wasn't governed by the larger picture that was so important.

And because of that, that had to be instilled. It had to be promulgated. That's what these Proverbs are supposed to do.

Structure of the Book of Proverbs. That's the prologue. That's the purpose.

How does the structure of the book serve this purpose? Well, interestingly, this is the prologue for Solomon's part of the book. Not all of the Proverbs are the Proverbs of Solomon. This part is.

And what we discover is that after the title in 1.1, after the prologue in verses two through six and the statement of the theme, the theme of the book is in verse seven. The fear of the Lord is the head, the beginning. This is what makes wisdom work.

This is going to define Solomon's book, which goes from here to chapter 31. Actually, his part's going to go to verse 22. Chapter 22, verse 16.

So Solomon's portion starts in chapter one and goes through chapter 22. His section is composed of two parts. Solomon's section.

This is why I said, depending on how you divide it. But the biggest division here is Solomon's part. The actual original part that Solomon did is chapter one through 22.

In the Mashal part, Mashal is a teaching poem or poetic language that is designed to teach, a teaching poem, if you will. This is going to be starting in chapter one, verse eight and going through chapter nine, verse 18. So basically, last half of chapter one through chapter nine, this

is where you have, my son, if you will receive my words, wisdom cries in the streets.

Don't be hoodwinked, don't be seduced. These are, it's poetic, but it's didactic. It's like an epistle.

It's a writing. My son, let me share this wisdom with you in an extended set of discourses. They hang together, verse after verse makes sense.

All right, that's Solomon's, that's the first half of Solomon's section. The second part starts in chapter 10 and goes through chapter 22. And these are the aphorisms.

These are the pithy two line sayings collected by Solomon. Okay, so he's got two parts. He's got actually three parts.

There's the introduction, title, prologue, and theme. That's part one in chapter one. Rest of chapter one through nine, that's your wisdom didactic poems, your teaching poetry.

Then 10 through 22 is Solomon's collection of, we would say, you know, he's got some great one-liners. Well, these are mostly two-liners, sometimes four, but these are the aphorisms, the little quick memorable distillations of wisdom. And that's where Solomon's part ends.

Solomon's book, there's a clue in verse four. And the verse divisions aren't quite the way I would do it, but it gives prudence to the simple, to the young man, knowledge and discretion. A wise man will hear and increase learning and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel.

You've got four guys listed there, sort of. You've got the simple, you've got the young man, you've got the wise man, and you've got the man of understanding. This is one guy going through four stages of maturity.

You start out simple, you become a young man, you become a wise man, and if you live long enough, and if the fear of the Lord governs your wisdom, you become a man of understanding. This book of Solomon's is designed, it is aimed at the young man, the simple, the young man. It is designed to take the simple young man and turn him into a wise and understanding man.

It's a gift probably to Solomon's sons. That's why he says, my son, my son, my son. It is designed to take the simple and the young and move them in the direction of wisdom and understanding.

You can't help but think of John in his epistles when he says, I write to you young men, I write to you, these are recognizable categories. Well, we're gonna pause here and take our break, but step back and the emphasis, the focus, the theme of the Proverbs is really the theme and the focus of this first lesson tonight. God gave Solomon wisdom, but, and he keeps that wisdom all of his life.

When is that wisdom effective? When does it yield lasting fruit? It's in the early part of Solomon's life, because in his early life, he was governed by the fear of the Lord. That's when he

built the temple. That's when he compiled these books.

That's when he did all of his greatest work and it's lasting work. These are things that redound and reflect the glory of God. Later on, when he's got 700 wives, 300 concubines, later on, when his kingdom begins to fragment and it's not something that's sustainable beyond his own reign, he still got the wisdom.

God never removed his wisdom. What's the missing element? He lost his love for the Lord. He lost his first love.

He let that fear of the Lord go soft and get weak and anemic. And it doesn't matter how wise you are. Without that head, without that fear of the Lord, your wisdom is of no use.

You do despot to it and you become a fool. You can be the wisest man in the earth and be a fool in the same way that can be the richest man in the earth and be the poorest at the same time. So you and I being given access to the treasures of God's word and the wisdom and knowledge that comes from our studies in these passages, that's great, but what the catalyst that activates it and makes it effective and causes it to bear fruit and reflect the glory of God and secure for us an inheritance in the eternal future is not just the wisdom.

It's not, wow, look at that neat thing I learned. It is the fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord is what activates it and makes it go.

And without it, all the wisdom in the world is, what did it do for the Pharisees? Puffed them up. Why? Keep loading and loading and loading and never firing. Keep hearing and hearing and hearing and never applying.

Never advancing, never building line upon line and precept upon precept. So if you had to leave at the break and you couldn't come back for the second part of the study of the book of Proverbs, this is the theme. You and I want to move out of simple and young into wise and understanding.

And you don't get there by simple accumulation of wisdom. It's the fear of the Lord. It's the head that makes all the difference.

Let's pause here and take a break.