

Proverbs 22-07-20a

Greetings, welcome to the Wednesday night Bible study here at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We're in our second iteration in the book of Proverbs. We pick up tonight in chapter one at verse three, and we're hoping to make it through verse 19 tonight.

Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and study, and we'll begin. Father, what a comfort it is to remember that it is not by might nor by power, but by your spirit that we live the life to which you have called us. We're grateful for that gift from the Lord Jesus Christ.

In his absence, we have the Comforter who encourages us and brings to our mind the truths such as these that we see in your word this evening. We pray that as we study this portion together, that the Holy Spirit will give us insight and understanding and see the pertinence of these observations from your word in our daily lives so that we can not only have theological wisdom and moral wisdom, but also practical wisdom that will guide us and enable us to live a life that reflects your glory and is the means by which others may be drawn to you through the Lord Jesus. We pray it in his name.

Amen. Let's read how far we have gotten in the book of Proverbs. The Proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel, to know 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. To understand a proverb and an enigma, the words of the wise and their riddles. Well, this book wastes no time formally stating its authorship, its premise, and its purpose.

In the authorship, we have as well a statement of authority. And this is helpful in a number of ways. Because the wisdom literature in general, and Proverbs in particular, differs from the main categories of biblical literature into which previous books we study generally fall.

So in the law, you have a great deal to say about ritual and sacrificial worship. There is no mention of sacrificial worship in the Proverbs. In the historical books, you have allusions to figures that were prominent in Israel's history and in its development as a nation going all the way back to the dawn of time.

None of those individuals are mentioned in Proverbs. Nothing of the law, nothing that such as you would find in the historical books don't have allusions to those heroes of the past, so to speak. And differing from the prophetic books, we've recently finished studying Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, Proverbs doesn't talk about the national fate in terms of Israel being blessed by God for faithfulness and obedience or disciplined and

judged by God for apathy, indifference, and rebellion.

That's not a theme in Proverbs. So it is quite different from the books of the law. It is quite different from the books of history.

It is quite different from the prophets. It focuses on prudent and moral behavior as individuals, what to do and what not to do. How can you live your life according to principles of good sense, common sense, and in doing so, live a life that is pleasing to God.

Very much a rubber hitting the road practical guide. So that is what we're going to be watching for as we go through. We already talked about the structure of the book.

We're going to have the introduction in the first nine chapters. Once we have this statement of purpose, there is going to be some exhortatory material exhorting a young man to pay attention to this wisdom and what the benefits of it will be. The canonicity of this book has been recognized in Israel as part of the Old Testament since ancient times.

Although it does say that according to tradition, there was some debate about whether it should be included or not because it contains an apparent contradiction, a boldface, adjacent statements with opposite meaning and effect. And they said, well, it can't be inspired by God if it's got a big fat contradiction right in the middle of it. And this held them up for a while, but they finally decided that by interpreting it properly, there wasn't a contradiction after all, which of course is a good sound way to resolve such questions.

So certainly by the time of Christ, Proverbs was recognized as inspired and canonical. Josephus, when he's counting the books, includes the five books of the law, 13 books of the four prophets and four books of hymns to God and precepts for the conduct of human life. And when you resolve the different methods of counting, because Samuel, Kings and Chronicles are one book each in the Hebrew, those numbers indicate that he is including Proverbs as one of those four of wisdom and hymns.

So that establishes that by Josephus time, there was no question that Proverbs belonged in the Hebrew Bible. Jesus alludes a couple of times to proverbial wisdom. When he's talking to Nicodemus in John chapter three, and he says, no one has ascended to heaven, but he who came down from heaven, that is the son of man who is in heaven.

This seems to be a clear allusion to something that we will see some months hence in Proverbs chapter 30, verse four. And this is the section that is assigned to Agur, the son of Jaqay. We've discussed what that might or might not mean in terms of, is it a pseudonym or synonym for Solomon or someone else, but in the 30th chapter, which is ascribed to Agur, the son of Jaqay, he says in verse four, who has ascended into heaven or descended? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name? And what is

his son's name, if you know? And Jesus alluding as he does a couple of times to Nicodemus's supposed alleged and proper knowledge of the Old Testament, you would expect Nicodemus to pick up on that allusion from the Proverbs when Jesus says that he has come down from heaven and that he is the son of man who is in heaven.

So there are other allusions. We saw one in chapter 11 of Matthew in our Sunday morning study where Jesus in verse 19 of Matthew 11 says, the son of man came eating and drinking, and they said, look, he's a glutton and a winebibber. By the way, it appears as though Jesus consumed wine with his meals as was customary in those days.

He didn't set it aside and demand Welch's grape juice. Otherwise, it would be difficult to accuse him of being a winebibber if he never bibbed any wine. This is not an encouragement.

It is just an observation. A glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners, but wisdom is justified by her children. Wisdom is justified by her children.

And this seems to be an allusion to the portion of this first chapter that we're about to see in verse 20. Wisdom calls aloud outside and raises her voice in the open square. And there are many personifications of wisdom in the book of Proverbs.

And those who heed that wisdom are in that sense, wisdom's children. There has been a comparison made to Proverbs chapter eight, where wisdom is once again personified, crying out at the gate, taking her stand on the top of a high hill and crying out. And John's first 14 verses in the gospel of John, the Logos, because both of them are said to exist from the beginning.

Proverbs 8.22 says, the Lord possessed me at the beginning of his way before his works of old. And of course, John 1.1, in the beginning was the word. Both are said to be active in creation.

Proverbs chapter eight, verse 30 says, wisdom is speaking, says, I was beside him as a master craftsman and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him. And John 1.3, of course, says that all things were made through him without him, not anything was made that was made. And wisdom is said to be a source of life.

And Proverbs 8.35, whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord. And John 1.4, in him was life and that life was the light of men. So there are certainly thematic connections that indicate that John, the author of the gospel of John, was acquainted with the Proverbs as well.

They found about 20 quotations or allusions throughout the New Testament to Proverbs. Some of them are a bit more fuzzy like those that we've just seen. Others are more direct.

For a couple of direct ones, Proverbs chapter three, verse seven, which begins, do not be wise in your own eyes is quoted by Paul in Romans 12.16. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.

Proverbs 3.11, my son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest his correction. Whom the Lord loves, he chastens as a father, the son in whom he delights. This, of course, you will remember in Hebrews chapter 12, verse five and following, quoted pretty directly there.

Proverbs 3.34, surely he scorns the scornful, but gives grace to the humble. That's quoted twice in the New Testament by James and Peter. 3.34 of Proverbs, again, is quoted in James 4.6 and first Peter 5.5. God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

And if you read the church fathers, they're replete with allusions to Proverbs. So it's been a useful and important book since earliest times. The Proverbs, and this is, I'm just finishing up my introduction here.

As you know, the Proverbs are a distillation. We talked about this last time, about how terse they are. Many of them are only eight or nine words in Hebrew, and we have to use 15 or 20 in English to bring out the meaning.

But it is fun to do like Robert Alter and others have done, and try to make as economical and compact an English translation as you have in Hebrew, so that it strikes us more fully as it was intended in the original. These are poetry. They are the shortest poems in the Bible.

And each of them is a treasure. They've been compared to highly polished gems. They may be small, but they're valuable.

So they are economical. Secondly, they are profound. There is a lot of experience and a lot of wisdom that is compressed into these Proverbs.

And that's why it requires taking time over them. We just had a discussion a few minutes ago about the difference between a throat lozenge and a spoonful of cough medicine. You get that cough medicine, it tastes nasty generally.

I don't know where they get the cherry flavoring for that, but there's no cherry that ever tasted like that. But you want to get that over the lips and through the gums and out of your taste buds as soon as possible, where if you get a lozenge, you work on that. You savor it.

And it works over time because it is persistent and slow. You get the value of it over a much longer time. So these should be savored because even though they are short, they

are profound.

Thirdly, they are timeless. They are time tested. These were recognized by wise men.

And beyond that, not only were they collected and in some cases, authored by the likes of Solomon and Agur and Lemuel, and in some cases, King David and others. But the wisdom has been galvanized. It has been inspired by God through its inclusion in God's inspired word.

So this wisdom is not the same as you might find in a, there were some ancient collections of wisdom literature in Egypt and Babylon and elsewhere. But the imprimatur of God's inspiration takes these to another level and adds to their depth. So it's funny, there are some scholars and commentators, they write a commentary on Proverbs, but they just hate the Proverbs.

They've been described as, there's a man named Gottwald, G-O-T-T-W-A-L-D, Gottwald. Coming to the Proverbs, he said, they are mediocre as literature, tedious as ethics, and banal as religion. Not a fan of the book.

But you have to be careful about saying things like that when you come to the truth that they are a part of God's word. If you want to go tell God that his word is tedious, mediocre, and banal, just let me get well away first and you go ahead and try that out. We'll talk about the classifications of the Proverbs.

You know, they are generally two lines, not always, but generally, especially when you get to the aphorism sections that begin in chapter 10. One through nine, again, is more of an extended exhortation, but the Proverbs proper that begin in chapter 10, generally two lines. And these two lines do various things, and I don't want to give a list because we're not going to remember it now anyway.

But as an example, one line will state a thing, and the second line will be a comparison. So, like cold water to a weary soul, so is good news from a distant land. This compares to this.

Others contrast something. I like the proverb in chapter 29, verse 5, that says, and you know this to be true. When you hear this, it has the authentic reflection of experience.

A sated man loathes honey. If you're full, somebody bringing you another sweet dessert plate, he can't even look at it. But, by way of contrast, second line, to a famished man, any bitter thing is sweet.

Sated man, sweet stuff, you don't want it. So, we're going to see that some of them will show points of congruity, some of them will be contrast, some of them will be comparison, some of them will state a thing and then talk about how incongruous it is that the fool doesn't pay attention or people don't take it to heart, and it points out, this

doesn't make sense. Why would somebody think or act this way? Sometimes they just give consequences.

You do this in A and this is what happens in B. So, you can broadly categorize many of the proverbs in that way. I militate against starting out by saying, well, this is a comparison proverb or this, because we saw in the Psalms that it's not really helpful. It's something to do to say that this is a Psalm of individual lament or this is a Psalm of this or that.

That doesn't help me take it to the bank and cash it. If I'm going to get the truth out of it, I don't really care how a scholar would classify it and say, well, there are other Psalms or other proverbs that do the same thing. If you find it helpful, you can figure out, oh, well, there are other Psalms or proverbs that do this, but I don't find it particularly helpful.

I'm not going to spend a lot of time on structure for these proverbs, but there is a structure to the book of Proverbs. I introduced that last time. The first nine chapters serve as an introduction that state the value and exhort a son to pay attention to it.

And the wisdom ends up being personified and speaking for herself. And that's going to come to bear when we start talking about the rest of this first chapter here in just a few minutes. So then you have the content of the book going all the way up through chapter 30, and then the concluding chapter is a mother, the queen mother, as it were, talking to her son.

So you have the exhortation to a young man at the beginning, and you have the exhortation at the end. It's a lady wisdom here at the beginning, and it is a lady who is wise enough to be queen at the end. In order to interpret the Proverbs, that's why we have this section we're about to address, which begins in verse 8 here in chapter 1 and extends through the end of chapter 9. That is the guide on how to interpret the rest of the book.

The thing about a proverb, people love aphorisms. You cannot look at Facebook or almost anything online, any social media, without seeing people that are posting little sayings, little refrigerator magnet pithy observations. Proverbs are that, but unlike many of these that you see, they are divinely inspired.

They are divinely commissioned. They are divinely approved, and they have that quality as divine truth that enables the Holy Spirit to take it and do something with it in our soul. The word of man is not alive and powerful.

It is not sharper than any two-edged sword. It does not pierce to the dividing and center of the soul or the spirit, the joints or the marrow. It does not serve as a useful or qualified judge of the thoughts and intents of our hearts.

The word of man will not do that. I don't care how pithy, I don't care how clever, I don't

care how popular the aphorism is, it lacks an invisible supernatural quality. It is the difference between the dog that is laying here in my floor and the people who are here sitting in chairs.

There is an invisible quality that makes us human, that makes us sentient. It is called the soul. It is called the spirit.

It is what distinguishes us from animal life. The same is true of the Proverbs. Don't think of them as just a biblical collection of the same kind of aphorisms you can read on the back of the car in front of you.

They're not the same. The Holy Spirit doesn't do with humanly derived wisdom what He does with divinely inspired wisdom. So it is important to remember that these Proverbs compress that divine truth into a very short, striking statement.

They're designed to be memorable. They're designed to be catchy, to stick in our mind, and it makes it easier to remember. Secondly, these Proverbs, unlike much of biblical text, don't argue.

They don't exposit. They don't explain. They just assume their truth.

They just state it flat out. They don't say, here's an observation, and you know why this is true? This is not the Apostle Paul in Romans. This is not even Solomon in Ecclesiastes working through logical observation, interpretation, and application.

Proverbs just say, this is how it is. This is it. I'm done.

They're not designed to explain. They are designed to give pointed expression to a truth. They just codify it.

They distill it and present it. It doesn't try to explain. So, say, the difference between Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, both associated with Solomon, is Ecclesiastes is reflective wisdom, where the reflection is in the text.

I observed this to happen, and these are the thoughts that came to my mind. Proverbs, if you want the reflection portion, you've got to work on that piece of hard candy over time and extract it for yourself. It's not going to tell you.

So, this is more didactic. It just states the truth and leaves you to figure it out. So, because of that, we need a special understanding as we interpret these things, because there are exceptions to Proverbs, and it is important to understand that these are general statements that are useful because they are generally true, but they may not always be true.

You think about the righteous prospering. Well, have you ever seen righteous people that weren't currently prosperous? It is generally true, but it's not always true. Train up a

way that he should go.

When he's old, he will not depart from it. Have they been well trained, well brought up, inculcated by faithful, obedient, and knowledgeable parents, and when they are old, they departed from it? There are exceptions. These are not a piece of extended explanation.

They encapsulate what is generally true, and because it is generally true, this is what you follow with the hope and expectation that the apodictic will follow the paradiatic. You train up your children in the way that they should go with the hope that when they are old, they will not depart from it. If they do, it's not on you, and you can't go back and say, well, did I not train them up in the way that they should go because they're old and departed? No.

There is a general statement of truth, but in any statement, there are exceptions. The epistles of John say that believers don't sin. Well, actually, we do sin.

So, because it is terse and because it is condensed, it can't say except when A, B, and C. It's going to give us the general rule of thumb that you should start with. It's the foundation. You can examine and deal with the exceptions later, and for a lot of the Proverbs that seem to have exceptions, you'll find them in the earlier part of the proverbial section that begins in chapter 10, and then in the later Proverbs, it will talk about some of those exceptions.

So, for example, the first five chapters of the proverbial section, it's actually six chapters, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15, 10 through 15, these focus on the way things ought to be. This is how it ought to be. If you train up a child on the way they should go, they ought to stick with it when they get old, right? In an ideal world, this is what would happen.

And these are usually true, but because they're short, you can't build all of this explanation in. So, in the Proverbs after chapter 15, you have many of them that recognize that things don't always work according to the ideal. And that's why you have many of the, well, this, better this than that.

Those occur after chapter 15, because they recognize that the world's not always black and white. And so you can go, for example, to chapter 16, verse 8, I've never seen the righteous go hungry or his seed begging bread. That's the ideal.

But in 16.8, better is a little with righteousness than vast revenues without justice. So, there are times when the righteous only have a little, but it's better to be righteous and have that little than to have an abundance and not have justice. 28.6 of Proverbs, better is the poor who walks in his integrity.

I thought the just weren't supposed to ever be poor, but it recognizes that sometimes there are the poor who walk in integrity. Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than one who is perverse in his ways and is rich. So, shades of gray sometimes exist, and

Proverbs is not designed to turn the world completely black and white, but to provide solid foundational general guidance.

The purpose of this book, as we began last time, and now we're getting into our verse two, is to know wisdom, chokmah. I think I spelled this for you last time. It's C-H-A-K-M-A-H.

This is an understanding of what God requires, to know wisdom. We have done a study on what God requires. Godbold's turned that into a little booklet that's very succinct in distilling that study out.

What does the Lord require of you? We went to the passages that talk about it, and most of those are very simple statements. What does the Lord require of you, O man, but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? Of course, there's quite a bit more to our life than that, but that is a good general rule to follow. So that is chokmah.

This is understanding what God requires, to walk wisely before God, what God requires of us. Instruction, musar, we looked at this last time, M-U-S-A-R. This is rebuke, correction, instruction, education, moral training.

And that moral training, this is why we train up children in the way they should go, because this gives them every opportunity. It opens up the door. It encourages them in the direction of not departing from it when they're old, to possess godly wisdom as a of being instructed.

And with this chokmah, and with the exhortative instruction in it, we are enabled to perceive the words of understanding. And this is very interesting, because what it really means is, when you hear words that purport to be words of understanding, these are thoughts, these are ideas. This is enabling us to comprehend the utterances of wise men.

So if you do get an aphorism in your Facebook stream, or whatever they call that long list of what everybody is saying, how valuable is it? How true is it? I saw one earlier today talking about the Emmaus hermeneutic. You know, we've had the Jesus hermeneutic. The whole Bible should only be understood through the lens of what Jesus specifically said in the red ink sections of the Gospels.

This is similar in that the Emmaus hermeneutic takes the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, those verses in John where Jesus talked about the Old Testament scriptures that refer to himself and how they were fulfilled. And their hearts burned within them. And when you read those verses in John, they said, well, if you follow this closely, the entire Bible should only be understood by us in this day as it pertains to the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you can't relate it to Jesus, you're not getting the picture. And it is a misunderstanding of what Jesus did. Jesus did not go Genesis 1-1 through Malachi 4-6 on the road to Emmaus.

He took those scriptures, those quotations, those prophecies, those statements, those ritual pictures, sampled them, and explained them in the time of a short walk to remind those disciples that these things were ordained by God and were the fulfillment of his salvific plan and purpose. But you can't take that word of understanding. Well, here's a word by which you can understand your whole Bible.

Every verse that you look at, especially in the Old Testament, it's got to be related to Jesus or it doesn't count. Sorry, no. How do I know that's not valid? This is what the purpose of Proverbs is, to impart the kind of wisdom that enables us to discern amongst words that purport to come from the wise.

So to perceive words of understanding, does somebody really understand the Bible, the Old Testament, if they're going to use the Emmaus hermeneutic or the Jesus hermeneutic in isolation? It's a wonderful thing to see the Lord Jesus in the types, in the symbols, in Joseph, in Joseph's dreams, in the sacrifices, in Leviticus and the rest of it. It's a wonderful thing. We've done it to a radical extent, but that's not the whole thing.

So if we are going to perceive what is and is not a word of understanding, we need this wisdom from God. And we talked about understanding the word binah, B-I-N-A-H. This is discerning between good and evil, to know your right hand from your left.

Good angel talking, bad angel talking. This is guidance from God. This is the Holy Spirit giving me insight.

This is my own heart deceiving me. This is Satan giving me a twisted truth. Binah is discernment.

Paul talks about that at the beginning of one of his letters, that I pray that you will come to know, to discern the better things. He talks about it in 12.2 of Romans, that you will understand what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God, to distinguish and discern between good, better, and best. Binah.

So the purpose of this book, the purpose of all biblical wisdom, is to give us a basis for instruction. As Paul tells Timothy, that's what the word of God is for. Doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness.

To perceive, to be able to sort out. Somebody says, here's medical wisdom, here's political wisdom, here's social wisdom, here's work-related wisdom, here's relationship wisdom. How can you weigh that and decide if that is good or bad advice, a proper or improper observation, good or bad analysis, excellent or faulty scholarship? How can you know? The wisdom of God is the wisdom in this book is designed to give us that ability to

perceive words of understanding and to receive the instruction of wisdom, which results in justice, judgment, and equity.

This justice here is actually righteousness. It is tzedek. This is what is in accord with the will of God.

What is just is what accords with the will of God. If I follow this advice, if I support this cause, if I adopt this way, does it comport with the will of God, God's ordinances? The judgment there is mishpat. Remember, shafat is the verb to judge, and shofet is judging.

And mishpat, you put an M in front of a verb and you turn it into a noun. It's that which comes from judging. It is judgment.

This is correctly judging human actions. Justice, this shouldn't really be justice. It should be righteousness.

My abbreviation for that goes back decades to plus R. It's short, easy, I know exactly what it means. But that's plus R, divine righteousness. So the instruction in wisdom, now we will know what is pleasing in God's sight.

Secondly, we will know what is proper and improper in terms of judging human actions, things that are going on around us. And thirdly, equity is uprightness. This is another M word, it's mashareem.

And this means to stand up straight, to be vertical, to be plumb, to be upright. This is rectitude. What is right in our thoughts and in our actions? This is integrity, personal integrity.

What pleases God? What's proper in human action? What reflects integrity? That's what this will do. Justice, judgment, and equity in your New King James. Well, time to take our break.

We'll pick up in verse four. What does it mean to give prudence to the simple? Can you give prudence to the simple? If I am simple, can you please hand me some prudence? I would love to be elevated out of my simplicity. We'll see what that means when we come back.