

May 16

Proverbs 1-4, 8 & 9

Hi, I'm Reid Brown, the pastor of adult discipleship for the last 8 years at Christ Community. Welcome to the May 16<sup>th</sup> edition of Project 4:4. Today we begin reading in the book of Proverbs. The key contributing author is Solomon. God granted Solomon's request for wisdom, and the 'wisdom of Solomon' became known far and wide. In fact, if we want to describe a very wise person today, we say he has the 'wisdom of Solomon,' for Solomon was the wisest man in all of the world, and apart from Jesus Christ Himself, the wisest man who ever lived.

Solomon wrote 3,000 Proverbs expressing that wisdom, over a very wide range of topics. Only a small percentage of those Proverbs are actually included in the Book of Proverbs, in fact; only 800 bearing his name appear here. These presumably are the best of those proverbs. Simply put a proverb is a short sentence drawn from long experience. It is the wisdom of many and the wit of one; in essence, the ability to see ourselves and the world in the way God sees, and in a way that will be very memorable.

Perhaps Solomon was the headmaster of a real school. We don't know about that. He certainly took the opportunity God gave him to learn about many, many things and to share that knowledge with people who came to listen to him lecture and talk. The first days reading is devoted to one topic -- and that topic is wisdom.

The Book mentions the words knowledge and wisdom many times. In fact the word wisdom is used, I think, 61 different times in the Book of Proverbs. Knowledge is the ability to acquire facts; wisdom is the ability to rightly apply those facts to the business of living.

Proverbs presents a picture of a young man starting out in life, and there are two choices that are constantly confronting him -- two paths that he can walk, two schools of wisdom and "unwisdom" bidding for his favor and sending him their literature, as it were. One is the 'school of wisdom' and the other is the 'school of unwisdom,' the school of fools.

Let me give you just a little more general information about the Book of Proverbs. It is pretty well agreed that the contents of the Proverbs belong to the days of Israel's first kings and Solomon is the author of a good bit of the Book, but not all of it. King Hezekiah organized some of the editorial work according to chapter 25. He reigned about 250 years after Solomon. The Book, as we have it now, was finalized, at the latest, according to tradition, by a man named Ben-Seriah about 180 B.C. A great bit of the vast storehouse of knowledge that Solomon acquired comes through as we read the Book of Proverbs. He talks about plants and about animals and about birds and about insects. He spends some time studying ants, you will remember, and reptiles and fish. It is all here, little pithy epigrams drawn from his observations on nature, meant to teach us about spiritual truth. Men of all nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon. They were sent by all the kings of the earth who heard about his great wisdom.

We need to understand that the Book of Proverbs is dealing with precepts -- not promises. That is to say, that when we read the Proverbs, we need to keep in mind that they are

generalizations; they state what is generally, but not necessarily invariably, true. They do not deny there are exceptions, but exceptions are not within the scope of proverbial sayings. For instance, the Book of Proverbs says that those who live by God's standards will prosper in the world and live a long life. That is generally true. But it is not an unqualified promise. Job and Jesus show that we do not always prosper, at least not in all points in our life, and Jesus did not live a long life. The precept, however, remains totally accurate and totally true – precepts, not promises. Remembering that will save you from a good deal of confusion when things in your life don't seem to match the teaching of the Book of Proverbs.

Acquiring wisdom and knowing how to deal with the pitfalls of folly will lead to health and success. Throughout this Book of practical advice in the art of living, however, there is this constant undercurrent of teaching us to rely upon a fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; that is reverential fear, not the sort of terror that makes us quake in the corner of the room and shake. Reverence for God is the path to life and security. People have to trust the Lord, not trust themselves.

In today's reading there was a reference in chapter 3 to the 'tree of life.' It calls to mind the Garden of Eden, and basically says that the wisdom that is given here, if applied, will bring us to a place in which we are greatly blessed by God. Right after that allusion to the Garden of Eden, Solomon says, "By wisdom the Lord laid the earth's foundations. By understanding, He set the heavens in place. By His knowledge the deeps were divided and the clouds let drop the dew." Wisdom governed all the actions of the Lord in creating the world, in creating us, and in establishing the way in which we ought to live our lives. By paying attention to that same wisdom, we line ourselves up with the God who created us and with His purpose and plan for our lives.

I am going to leave you to gather your own pearls from the first days reading in the Book of Proverbs. I am going to ask you to discover two or three verses that are especially meaningful to you and if you are digging deeper to memorize those verses.

I simply want to make one more statement which is to recognize that according to the Book of Proverbs, the chief preoccupation of the life of a young person ought to be not the securing of financial resources that will make possible an easy and comfortable life here on earth, but the acquisition of wisdom. Get wisdom; get understanding. Don't forsake wisdom; she will protect you. Love her and she will watch over you. Wisdom is supreme. Therefore get wisdom though it costs all you have; get understanding. Esteem her and she will exalt you. Embrace her and she will honor you. Wisdom is understanding what God says about life and then obeying it. The getting of wisdom is the most important thing that we can do in our lives. According to the wisdom of the wisest man who ever lived on the face of the earth, the highest priority we can have is the getting of wisdom, and understanding and an obedience of what God says about our lives. Make that the priority and Solomon says you will never ever live to regret it.

This is Reid Brown encouraging you to take care and may the wisdom of God guide your life.