

Upper Path Valley Presbyterian Church
2020: The Global Year of the Bible
The Seventh Sunday of Easter
The Eleventh Sunday of Quarantine from COVID19

May 24, 2020

A Lamp and A Light, Part 19
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Good morning Church! It is a privilege to be leading you today in this capacity as we continue worshipping our Lord together online. I have been so encouraged by your commitment to the Lord and “virtually” gathering each week to praise, learn, and pray as the Body of Christ. The building may be closed, but the ministry of the Church continues through you, through us, as we pray, serve, encourage, and love one another. Let’s keep it up and let’s keep spurring one another on.

If you have been able to continue your Bible reading from the Daily Chronological Bible you know we have been in the book of Proverbs this past week. If during the past days or weeks you have fallen behind in your daily reading, it is okay. Each day is a great day to jump back in. It’s hard some days, but that doesn’t mean that it is not worth it. The Devil does not want us in God’s Word. He wants to distract us from it and do whatever he can to prevent it from speaking to us. So we need to power through, persevere, and dig deep into God’s Word because it has something to say to us. So before we dig into the book of Proverbs, let’s pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you for gathering us together on this platform. Thank you for your Spirit and love that connects us to one another. As we seek your truth today, guard our hearts and our minds from the constant hum of distraction that is all around us. Quiet our minds and our souls. Help us be still for this moment to learn and dig deep into your wisdom and truth. We thank you for the preservation of your Word that is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path. Help us to bind your word to our hearts so that we can be your ambassadors to this world. In this moment, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to you O Lord. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

It’s interesting how God works things out each week. When I looked ahead and saw I would be preaching on the Book of Proverbs, I chuckled to myself as Proverbs is my Dad’s favorite book of the Bible. He loves to quote some of his favorite proverbs around the dinner table and he always asks me if I’m studying Proverbs in my seminary courses. I also chuckled because some of my favorite Proverbs were within this week’s reading. My excuse for not running, Proverbs 28:1, “Only fools run when no one is chasing them...,” I don’t want to look foolish. For all of you who are missing the hair salon and are in need of a touch up for those roots there is a Proverb for you, Proverbs 16:31, “Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained by living a godly life.” and Proverbs 20:29, “The glory of the young is their strength; the gray hair of experience is the splendor of the old.” So, don’t view them as gray hairs, but just as your wisdom and experience shining through (that’s what my family does anyway.)

Now Proverbs is the first of three wisdom books in the Scriptures, followed by Ecclesiastes and Job. How do you describe wisdom? What does it mean to be wise? I’ve always viewed wisdom as “experiential” knowledge that leads to better decisions in the future, or knowing the right and just thing to do and doing it. If you know dinner has to be done at a certain time, it is wise to starting thawing out your ingredients early. If

your final paper is due at 11:59 pm on Monday, then it is wise to start it before Monday. In Hebrew, wisdom is called *chokemah* and not only is it a characteristic of God but is something we also can use and this practical wisdom can be found in the book of Proverbs. The Daily Chronological Bible describes Proverbs as composed of "short poems, usually in the form of couplets, which set high ethical standards and give practical advice for daily living through the use of comparative, or perhaps antithetical, imagery." There are more than 600 proverbs recorded in this book and are arranged in no particular order because as we all know life is in no particular order. Each moment brings new information and new circumstances, so Proverbs seeks to help provide general guidance for God's people to live wisely.

At this point, let's take a step back and look at how Solomon received this wisdom in 1 Kings 3:5-14, *"That night the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream, and God said, 'What do you want? Ask, and I will give it to you!' Solomon replied, 'You showed great and faithful love to your servant my father, David, because he was honest and true and faithful to you. And you have continued to show this great and faithful love to him today by giving him a son to sit on his throne. Now, O Lord my God, you have made me king instead of my father, David, but I am like a little child who doesn't know his way around. And here I am in the midst of your own chosen people, a nation so great and numerous that it cannot be counted! Give me an understanding heart so that I can govern your people well and know the difference between right and wrong. For who by himself is able to govern this great people of yours?'"*

The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for wisdom. So God replied, 'Because you have asked for wisdom in governing my people with justice and have not asked for a long life or wealth or the death of your enemies - I will give you what you asked for! I will give you a wise and understanding heart such as no one else has had or ever will have! And I will also give you what you did not ask for - riches and fame! No other king in all the world will be compared to you for the rest of your life! And if you follow me and obey my decrees and my commands as your father, David, I will give you a long life.'

Solomon could have asked for anything from God. He could have asked for the defeat of his enemies, for unlimited wealth and power for himself, for prosperity for the Kingdom. However, he chooses to ask for wisdom. Why? I think because Solomon understood that on his own he could not lead the people. Listen to verses 7-9 from the Message: *"I'm too young for this, a mere child! I don't know the ropes, hardly know the 'ins' and 'outs' of this job. And here I am, set down in the middle of the people you've chosen, a great people - far too many to ever count. Here's what I want: Give me a God-listening heart so I can lead your people well, discerning the difference between good and evil. For who on their own is capable of leading your glorious people.?"* Now whatever shortfalls Solomon had later in his life, in this moment, from the outside, you can see his humility...God without you I cannot lead this people. Give me a heart that listens to you and obeys your counsel. Oh, if only more people would pray this prayer. Oh, that I would pray this prayer more often!

And what Solomon illustrates for us today is one of the key Proverbs many of us probably know by heart, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge..." (Proverbs 1:7) or Proverbs 9:10, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." The New Living Translation records it as "Fear of the Lord is the foundation of wisdom." If the fear of the Lord is the foundation of wisdom and we all could use some wisdom in our lives, then we need to understand what it means to fear the Lord.

Warren Wiersbe describes it this way, "Biblical wisdom begins with a right relationship with the Lord. The wise person believes that there is a God, that He is the

creator, and Ruler of all things, and that He has put within creation a divine order that, if obeyed, leads ultimately to success...Biblical wisdom has little if any relationship to a person's IQ or education, because it is a matter of moral and spiritual understanding. It has to do with character and values; it means looking at the world through the grid of God's truth." That's what Solomon wished to do...to look at the world through the grid of God's truth. The beginning of wisdom, the Fear of the Lord, is to understand that we are not God and to seek to live our lives according to his design and not our own.

This is what it means to be a Christian, a Christ-follower. Remember at the beginning when I said it's always interesting how God lines things up. On Monday, I started my summer courses, Christian Ethics (umm Proverbs anyone), and Theology Survey 1. In one of my theology text books the author starts by explaining what is involved in being a Christian. He writes, "For accepting Jesus as Lord means making him the authority by which we conduct our lives. What, then, is involved in being a Christian? James Orr put it well: 'He who with his whole heart believes in Jesus as the Son of God is thereby committed to much else besides. He is committed to a view of God, to a view of man, to a view of sin, to a view of redemption, to a view of the purpose of God in creation and history, to a view of human destiny found only in Christ.'" We need to live our lives and view the world around us with a Biblical worldview and think Christianly about life.

Let's jump ahead to another often quoted Proverb, Proverbs 3:5-6, "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.*" Again, this is telling us to seek God's truth and not rely on our own understanding. Yet this section of Proverbs continues, "*Don't be impressed with your own wisdom. Instead, fear the Lord and turn away from evil. Then you will have healing for your body and strength for your bones.*" In our lives, we can either choose wisdom that comes from God by humbling ourselves to his will and design OR we can think we are wise in our own eyes, we can be impressed with our own knowledge, be prideful and miss out on the life God calls us to live. Pastor Meagan gave us a great acronym for pride several years ago, Please Remember I's Drive Everything. If we are allowing "I's" to drive everything, then we are following folly and not wisdom or God.

I believe that every day of our lives we are at a crossroads...do we choose to live in submission to God with wisdom or do we choose to live right in our own eyes or in the eyes of the world around us? Are we drawing others to live in wisdom or are we leading others down the road of folly? Solomon understood this, he knew the history of his people. He probably learned about the period of Judges and how the people did right in their own eyes, which is why he urged people to listen to God's instruction. Follow wisdom and not folly. Wisdom will lead to life, folly only leads to destruction. And can all agree that we need more wisdom, but not man's wisdom. We need the wisdom that only comes from God.

As Christ followers, we need to start each day with humility and ask God for understanding (wisdom) for each moment. Many of us have heard of the "Serenity Prayer," some of you may even have it as decor in your houses. How many of us have actually heard the entire prayer? Well here it is, "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time, accepting hardships as the pathway to peace, taking, as he did (meaning Christ), this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it. Trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender

to HIS will that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever in the next. Amen.”

As we think about wisdom and submitting to God’s will as the foundation of wisdom on this Memorial Day, I cannot help but think about the example those who have gone before us left behind when they made the ultimate sacrifice. Those men and women who lost their lives defending ours submitted their will or aligned their will to something that was greater than themselves. Ultimately following the example of Jesus who aligned his will to the Father’s and sacrificed himself to save us. The religious leaders may have thought Jesus a fool for staying on the cross if he could save himself. And some may think those who volunteer to be put in harm’s way as foolish as well. However, those brave men and women, knew that it wasn’t about them it was about something greater. In humility, they chose to serve.

In the same way, in humility let us seek God’s wisdom. Let us live our lives in a way that is honoring to God and to one another. Let us live each day choosing the fear of the Lord, submitting to his authority in our lives who will give us the wisdom we need for each day. And by doing so God will enable us to draw others in His Kingdom so they too can have freedom and life in abundance. Let’s pray: *Heavenly Father, we thank you for allowing us to have wisdom, wisdom that only comes from you. As we seek your will and to build your kingdom, remind us each day that you are Creator and Ruler. May we humble ourselves before you and in doing so conduct our lives that are honoring to you. We thank you for the example of all those who have gone before us. May we too model what it looks like to fear the Lord and to seek your will. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*