

Sunday, June 10, 2018—Ecclesiastes 1-3

The Old Testament has three main sections—the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. Because of his great wisdom, Solomon thought deeply about life and relationships, and his works constitute a significant portion of the Writings called Wisdom Literature. His thoughts in Ecclesiastes may well be from the latter years of his life when he had experienced so much and took time to evaluate it all.

Solomon was king of Israel and had more wealth than anyone could imagine. He had wives and concubines in the hundreds. He was wise beyond his years. He said this, “So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem; my wisdom also remained with me. All that my eyes desired, I did not deny them. I did not refuse myself any pleasure . . . When I considered all that I had accomplished and what I had labored to achieve, I found everything to be futile and a pursuit of the wind. There was nothing to be gained under the sun” (2:9-11). His conclusion was that everything was futile, like chasing the wind.

To think one could know all things or find satisfaction was vanity. He saw the advantage of wisdom versus folly in life, but both wise and fool had the same fate—death. The more he considered all of this stirred deeper dissatisfaction in him. He hated life because of it (2:17).

Solomon gives a glimmer of hope in 2:24-26. Rather than trying to find all the answers, one is blessed more by seeking to be pleasing in God’s sight and finding joy in each day (see also 3:12). Praise God for putting a desire in your heart that only He can satisfy (3:10). Seek Him more daily.

Saturday, June 9, 2018—Proverbs 29-31

In the age of social media, people often comment about the need “to vent” or “rant” about a situation they believe is unfair or unjust. Proverbs says, “A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise person holds it in check” (29:11). To be sure, being able to express frustration or anger verbally can provide a bit of relief that prevents unwise choices or actions. This is one of the blessings of community. James, however, told his audience the wise were quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger. The self-control which comes from the indwelling Holy Spirit is the only hope for living with such character. “Do you see someone who speaks too soon? There is more hope for a fool than for him” (29:20).

Knowing Jesus provides a new life and new strength. He protects His own (29:25, 30:5) and provides what is necessary—not too much so they become self-sufficient and not too little so they become desperate and act foolishly to provide for themselves (30:9). Just as churning milk produces butter and twisting a nose draws blood, so stirring up anger produces strife (30:23). The Holy Spirit guides His people into peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control.

When a man finds a woman under this control, her noble character is worth more than jewels (31:10). He trusts her, and she lives as a blessing to him, their family, and the community. “Charm is deceitful, and beauty is fleeting, but a woman who fears the LORD will be praised” (31:30).

Praise God for the self-empowering control of the Spirit.

Friday, June 8, 2018—Proverbs 25-28

Jesus taught in parables. He was a master storyteller, but he told His disciples the stories were a tool to weed out the surface fans from the committed followers. Those who were truly interested in Him and His Kingdom would take the time to question, investigate, and grow.

Solomon concurs. “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter and the glory of kings to investigate the matter” (25:2). True wisdom is the result of consistent investigation combined with

faithful application. Wisdom is not something one can simply boast about or profess to possess. “The one who boasts about a gift that does not exist is like clouds and wind without rain” (25:14). Wisdom proves itself in action and effect.

Because wisdom is evident, one should surround himself with the wise and avoid or be careful around the foolish. “The one who hires a fool or who hires those passing by is like an archer who wounds everyone” (26:10). Actions have consequences, and poor choices have victims.

God has made people to flourish in community. “Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens another” (27:17). The people one surrounds himself with help shape his direction, but foolishness is hard to overcome (27:22). The wise take time to know well the people around them.

Becoming righteous is the work of God and the goal of man. That righteousness will lead others to rejoice when the righteous succeed (28:12). The joy and approval of others is something money cannot buy. Pray for a life which pursues Jesus, learns truth, and blesses others.

Thursday, June 7, 2018—Proverbs 22-24

The young live in a world of change. Every day, someone changes the diaper of the infant and toddler multiple times. Every day, the preschooler learns new words. Every day, the child lives with changes in knowledge, physical growth, increased skill, and broadened vocabulary. Change is constant.

Change for the sake of change, however, is not always a good thing. “Don’t move an ancient boundary marker that your fathers set up” (22:28). The wisdom of the fathers led to their establishment of a rule, a tradition, or an expectation. Changing or removing it simply because it is inconvenient or seemingly outdated is not wise. Discover the reason.

This discovery can take time and often requires humility. Repeatedly, the author of Proverbs encourages the reader to seek the truth by denying self or making effort. Avoiding sin requires remaining alert and affirming the value of truth and righteousness. Taking care of the poor, widow, an orphan requires self-denial and patience.

The call to wisdom is a call to discipline. “Don’t let your heart envy sinners; instead, always fear the Lord. For then you will have a future, and your hope will not be dashed” (23:17-18). The alternative is to pursue the things of the world which cannot last and never satisfy.

The writer of Proverbs was observant. He looked at the slacker and saw the disorder his foolishness was causing (24:30-34). Wisdom is available, but gaining wisdom requires work. The results are worth the effort. Pray for a heart that seeks wisdom and a life which lives it out.

Wednesday, June 6, 2018—Proverbs 19-21

Our lives are not lived in a vacuum. What we do affects those around us, including God Himself. Proverbs 19:17-18 discuss the vertical and horizontal dimensions. “Kindness to the poor is a loan to the Lord, and he will give a reward to the lender. Discipline your son while there is his hope; don’t set your heart on being the cause of his death.”

The two dimensions affect one another. Treating the poor with kindness is an act of worship to God Himself, giving Him what the writer describes as a loan. He is blessed by the tender hearts and sacrificial actions of His people, and He will pay them back. Furthermore, when parents see children as a precious soul and responsibility from God, they will discipline them—something that will bless the children, God, and ultimately them.

Proverbs 20 speaks on a variety of topics, but the ideas of consistency, faithfulness, and self-discipline are repeated. “Food gained by fraud is sweet to a person, but afterward his mouth is full of

gravel” (20:17). Both young and old alike need the reminder that abundance does not come from quick fixes and easy answers. Abundance comes when patience and obedience consistently tend the field of life. This produces bounty.

“The one who pursues righteousness and faithful love will find life, righteousness, and honor” (21:21). On the other hand, the slacker and the wicked will eventually come to ruin. Thank God for the victory available in Him. Pray for a life of worship and sacrifice which experiences His best.

Tuesday, June 5, 2018—Proverbs 15-18

James is full of one-line nuggets of truth, encouraging the reader to put faith into action. In James 3, he writes of the power of the tongue to do both good and evil. This section of Proverbs shares a similar message.

“The lips of the wise broadcast knowledge, but not so the heart of fools. The sacrifice of the wicked is detestable to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is his delight” (15:7-8). God is more concerned with the attitude of the heart and the words coming from such a heart than the outward actions of worship. The writer knew death and life are in the power of the tongue (18:21), and a fool’s lips are a trap for his life (18:7). A fool was more dangerous than a bear robbed of her cubs (17:12). One who was humble before God would speak wisely and one day find honor because of his attitude (15:33, 18:12; see also 16:18-19).

Actions were important as they came from the same source as words. “Commit your activities to the LORD, and your plans will be established” (16:3). “A person’s heart plans his way, but the LORD determines his steps” (16:9). “Patience is better than power, and controlling one’s emotions, than capturing a city” (16:32). Better to have little in peace and righteousness than plenty in chaos and strife (17:1).

“A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones” (17:22). Thank God for the joy and life which come from wisdom.

Monday, June 4, 2018—Proverbs 12-14

Because He is out of sight and supernatural, people often forget (or may never have realized) God is capable of experiencing pleasure. After all, He declared His creation to be “good,” and He speaks often about the things in which He takes delight. The writer of Proverbs gives further insight into the ways which bless people and delight the Lord.

“One who is good obtains favor from the LORD, but he condemns a person who schemes” (12:2). “Lying lips are detestable to the LORD, but faithful people are his delight” (12:22). God knows what is good, and He hates when people stray from that and give their hearts to things that are evil. When people willingly choose Him and His ways—the things which He has designed them to enjoy—He finds joy and blesses those choices.

As difficult as discipline and instruction can sometimes be, they are necessary for learning, growing, and abundance. “Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but one who hates correction is stupid” (12:1). “The one who has contempt for instruction will pay the penalty, but the one who respects a command will be rewarded” (13:13). “Poverty and disgrace come to those who ignore discipline, but the one who accepts correction will be honored” (13:18). God continues to shape His people throughout their lives, and He rewards those who seek Him and continue to grow in Him.

God’s people continually pursue Him because there are ways that seem right but in the end lead to destruction (14:12). Thank God for His delight in wisdom. Pray for a fresh infusion.

