

Welcome and regrouping from holidays

Prayers

Reading of Psalm 1 while imagining

- Before reading the psalm describe the image of a tree in the middle of a semi arid land
- Read the Psalm and then ask for responses

Video

- Need to remember that the Jews were deported into exile in 586BC and are now returning in 538BC and the Temple is being rebuilt along with their lives and religion
- The return from Babylon is similar in ways to the original Exodus in that God is once again the Deliverer and is not bringing God's covenant people back to the Holy Land
- They have been chastened and they now have a new vision - The destiny of the Jews was not related to politics, geography, or to taking over other countries but to witnessing.
- The Jews are not only rebuilding their city, temple, etc., they are also trying to rebuild their covenant community with all the former institutions.
- Vision of God leading people back is not one of being conquerors but to be witnesses
 - God wanted these people to show God's will and righteousness
 - They would be as impressive as a great tree on the horizon in a semi arid land
 - Living symbol that draws its powers from living water down deep
 - Our help comes from the Lord
- Under the Ezra Nehemiah covenant we will see many new rules emerging or a strengthening of some that were not really followed.
- One such case is the restriction of marriage to other races (not out of prejudice).
 - Intermarriage was seen as a distortion of the covenant because it was the mother's job to be the chief religious influence and if it was a mother outside the faith then Judaism would suffer.
- Godly life means putting God first and trusting in his providential care
 - The human side of this covenant life means obedience
 - Sometimes there are "Goodies" that come but they are peace and joy, and sometimes affluence and health but these latter are not expected or demanded
 - These gifts are to be used with good stewardship as God directs in the service of helping others
- Piety does NOT equal prosperity
- Micah has it right when he says that we should
 - Do justice – which is possible from God's power and grace
 - Love mercy – or to be merciful to others in a response to God's mercies
 - Walk humbly with God in faith and radical dependence
- This way we are not conquerors but witnesses – like trees planted by living water

Right living

- What would your definition of right living be? [Turn to your neighbor and come up with some ideas about right living.]
- Would the Golden rule be sufficient? Would the definition from Micah 6:8 be sufficient? Did you hear what Dr. Outler said in relationship to the text?
 - Love the part of **walking humbly in the infinite and radical dependence on the Lord**
- What is the difference between "right living to obtain a reward" and "right living as its own reward"?

- Right living is not about rewards, even though some of the Proverbs stress financial and economic prosperity, right living is all about “quality living”
- What are some of the ways that we believe in “prosperity theology” today?
 - Prosperity theology is commonly a part of televangelist, charismatic, and Pentecostal churches although it is not exclusive to these traditions
 - Prosperity theology proponents within these traditions propound the idea that God wants Christians to be "abundantly" successful in every way, including financially. In answering critics, proponents claim that prosperity's ultimate purpose is the funding of evangelism and Christian work throughout the World.
 - However, critics counter that it is the accumulation of wealth and material goods and not "Gospel work" that is the major hallmark of this movement
 - Scriptural support for the Prosperity Gospel is based largely on a verse from the Old Testament of the Bible (Deuteronomy 8:18) "But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day" (New American Standard Bible)^[1]
 - Critics, on the other hand, claim that the doctrine is used by its proponents to become wealthy at the expense of persons who give or that the doctrine's focus on material wealth is misguided.
 - Some of the evangelists supporting prosperity theology include Benny Hinn, T.D. Jakes, Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, Jesse Duplantis, and Internet evangelist Chris Mentillo.
 - Pat Robertson calls this theory the "Law of Reciprocity" on his show, *The 700 Club*^[2]. The theology was previously the basis of Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker's PTL Club but was renounced by them in the 1990s following Jim Bakker's prison term for fraud
- What do you think about prosperity theology?
 - Did you catch the difference here in the way Outler broke apart blessing and rights?
 - Godly life is not about getting rewards; it is about trusting in God’s providential care.
- Affluence, wealth, and health can be gifts granted by God, but are not rewards from God for doing things right. They are gifts to us to be used by us as good stewards.
- Piety does not equal prosperity; **piety equals a right relationship with God and with others**
- Take time to look at the list on the board, and at the items marked on pages 100-102 in Red Book. What do the Proverbs have to say about right living?

What is wisdom literature?

- What did some of your Bibles say in their descriptions of wisdom literature?
- There is a difference between knowledge and wisdom.
 - **Knowledge** is about the information and facts that we all accumulate throughout our lives.
 - **Wisdom** is how we apply it.
 - The key to understanding wisdom literature in the Bible is that we apply our knowledge through our understanding of God.
 - God is the center and key to our knowledge. God is the cornerstone of knowledge
 - What is the difference?
 - **Wisdom literature lifts up the profound, but always in the context of living in a proper relationship with God**

What are proverbs?

- "masal" to represent, to be like, a parable, a comparison, a simile, and as it evolved and the collections grew they included pithy sayings
- A saying, usually giving brief, but sometimes extended, and colorful expression to a commonly observed fact or bit of homely wisdom; a sentence or discourse such as those which are assembled in the biblical book of PROVERBS and appear otherwise in the Bible and the Apoc., but especially in the WISDOM literature there
- Proverbs presents life as essentially fair: Life is better for those who are wise, righteous, and diligent than for those who are foolish, wicked, and lazy. Proverbs is also a polarizing book: Especially in its early chapters, it assumes that the wise person will also be righteous and diligent, and the fool will also be wicked and lazy. Its expressions at times may approach caricature, but they do so for an educational purpose. The book is directed toward the molding of character, whether in the family/clan or the royal court, urging the adoption of all the characteristics the speakers deem positive
- Not one form but many
- These were compiled over many decades perhaps even a few hundred years
 - The evolution can be charted: Early proverbs the dominant tone was that of human and worldly wisdom. One out of seven were religious
 - Later proverbs dealt more with the relationship to God
 - These teachings were not speculative but very practical
 - They dealt with the rewards of truth, charity, purity of heart, humility, monogamy, generosity, and discipline
 - Formed a moral code of ethics on which Christ and others could work
 - Jesus quoted the proverbs often; in fact his parables closely paralleled the nature and rhythm of the proverbs
 - Peter used them
 - James, the brother of Christ, used them and built upon them and was noted as the wisdom writer of the New Testament
 - Paul used them
 - Proverbs expresses confidence that people are able (and some people are willing) to learn wisdom and righteousness and to act in accordance with them. At the same time, it indicates that there are limits to human wisdom; the only true wisdom belongs to God

What are Proverbs (the book)

- The educational purpose is most clear in Proverbs. Its instructions are parental in tone, as indicated by the frequent address "my child" and the urging to listen to (obey) the teaching of one's father and mother
 - The kind of education in Proverbs includes some practical advice, but its central concern is the shaping of character
 - Chaps. 1–9 function as the invitation to an educational enterprise, which is carried out in the body of the book
 - The central part of the book is made up of sentence wisdom, in which each verse is meaningful on its own
 - The instruction portion (early part) utilizes a first-person speaker addressing an audience identified as "my child" or, less frequently, "children."
 - The sentence wisdom uses primarily impersonal language, punctuated by an occasional speaking "I" or addressed "you." It is weighted toward descriptive sayings (grammatically structured as though the speaker were simply describing phenomena) rather than imperatives. Although groups of verses may be connected by theme or a key

word, one has the sense of reading independent verses rather than paragraphs, and it is difficult to mark off distinct sections

- Most of the sentence wisdom consists of two-line verses. Many of the sayings are antithetic, in which the two lines contrast, sometimes directly and sometimes obliquely. Some consist of simple juxtaposition, asserting some equality or correspondence between the two lines,
- The book began to take shape during the exile and came into its final form sometime during the post-exilic period. The fact that the Septuagint version of Proverbs is structurally different from the Hebrew text, especially in the closing chapters, suggests that the book's arrangement was still in flux perhaps as late as the 3rd century BCE
- UNDERSTANDING PROVERBS
 - "It is a book of discipline: it touches on every department of our life and shows God's direct interest in it. Wisdom does not consist in the contemplation of abstract principles governing the universe, but in a relationship with God of relevant knowledge issuing in conduct consonant with such a relationship in concrete situations. The man who refuses this is, frankly, a fool. And wisdom must dominate a man's whole life, his children, his work, his business methods, even his table manners."
 - "A number of small paintings crowded together on the wall of a gallery are not likely to receive much separate attention from the visitor, especially if he is paying a short visit in a hurry. Conversely it is important to remember that each saying is part of a whole body of teaching. To take a proverb quite apart from its relationship to the whole and to seek to apply it to any situation may be quite misleading."
- There are three (or five, if you include the Apocrypha [a collection of edifying books that were never made canon]) wisdom books ineptly linked in with Psalms.
 - However some Psalms are considered Wisdom works: 1, 19, 37, 49, 73, 112, 119, 128, 133
 - Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, (Ecclesiasticus and Wisdom)
 - Wisdom literature flourished in all nations but dealt mostly with the human condition—they dealt with the meaning of life and offered a recipe for success
 - Showed people how to conform to the order of the universe
 - Wisdom and knowledge was the key to eternal happiness and success
- With the exception of bits from Ecclesiasticus (or Sirach) and Wisdom, these writings do not deal with the major OT themes of Law, Covenant, Election and Salvation
 - Proverbs does not mention the great events and persons of Israelite history. Thus it does not discuss the exodus, the Sinai experience, the settlement in the land, the specifically Israelite or Judahite monarchy (although it does mention kings), Jerusalem, or exile.
- They were very similar to their neighbors -- basically having the same roots (humanism) but evolved to what might be called religious humanism
- Not until post-exilic times do the writers insert that God alone is wise, with a transcendent wisdom that human beings could observe at work in creation. God's wisdom was beyond our powers to understand
- Proverbs writes about wisdom as a person present with God from the beginning of time until eternity
 - Assumes a mystery, with divine attributes (see Proverbs 1:20-33)
 - Female
 - Watching the struggle of humankind

- Angry when not paid attention to,
- Wisdom became the revelation of God's orderly plan in the universe and in individual's lives, rather than just an accumulation of pithy quotes

EXERCISE: Ask the class to take a moment and go through and pick one or two of their favorite proverbs and meditate on it in light of the surrounding work, and share why they like the one they picked.

The Person of Wisdom

- Wisdom is described as a lot of things in the Bible but in Proverbs (first nine chapters) it is described in feminine personal terms
- Perhaps the most striking theological aspect to the book is the personification of Wisdom in feminine form. Wisdom is associated with God in the work of creation (8:22-31), calls people to account (1:20-33), has the power to offer salvation from death (8:35-36), and has the specific role of addressing humankind
- Three ways of accounting for this feminine imagery
 - To some she indicates an Israelite goddess, or at least Israelite flirtation with goddess worship—e.g., the Egyptian goddess of wisdom, Ma'at; the Canaanite goddesses Astarte and Asherah; and the Sumerian goddess Inanna.
 - At the other extreme, some see the personal language as simply a literary device, akin to the image of righteousness and truth kissing each other in Ps 85:10.
 - Between those extremes are interpreters who understand her as an essence of one of God's attributes—essentially an adjective that took on human attributes.
 - Whatever its origin, the presentation of Wisdom as a woman would have appealed to the audience of Proverbs. If the sages sought to describe wisdom as desirable and yet elusive to an audience of young men, then allusions to a woman would have been apt. The listeners are urged to seek Wisdom, find her, and make her their own as if she were a wife.
- In Christian tradition, beginning with the NT, the personifications of God or God's word/truth/wisdom have most often been referred to Jesus.
 - In John 1, "wisdom," which is feminine in both Hebrew (khokmah) and Greek (sophia), is transformed into "word" (Gr. logos), which is grammatically masculine.
 - Jesus is directly called the wisdom of God in 1 Cor 1:24. Prov 8:22-31
- Biblical interpreters and theologians have begun to use the personal descriptions of Wisdom as a model for talking about God in feminine terms.
 - Some have developed this language, while others reject it because of its function in the patriarchal system reflected by Proverbs. The extent to which the personification passages provide appropriate language for contemporary God-talk is still under discussion

Understanding "Fear of the Lord"

- Proverbs 1:7 "Fear of the Lord is the beginning of all knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction"
- Psalm 112:1 "Blessed is the man who fears the Lord-, who delights in His commandments."
- Psalm 111:10 "The root of wisdom is the fear of the Lord, Those who attain it are wise."
- Isaiah 8:13 "Yahweh is the one you will proclaim holy, Him will you dread, him win you fear."
- THERE ARE TWO WORDS IN HEBREW FOR FEAR -- Fear here is translated "yirah"

- Yirah means “reverence” especially when dealing with something that is awesome or terrible
- Equating fear of the Lord with the beginning of wisdom is an extraordinary theological claim, given the amount of biblical wisdom that is adapted from surrounding cultures.
- It implies that without proper piety wisdom is impossible
 - PIETY: a strong respectful belief in God and a strict observation of religious principles in everyday life
 - Faithfulness, godliness, holiness, goodness
- The other word for fear is “morah” which means to live in terror of
- Yirah is not a crippling or debilitating word or concept, but one that is empowering
- When something is held in reverence you want to worship it or serve it. That is the concept that initiates wisdom
- Why would fear of God be the first step in gaining wisdom?
 - Ultimate purpose is to put us in the proper relationship with God and if that is not a concern the battle is lost before it is begun
 - There is much self-sacrifice and denial associated with pursuit of wisdom, if it is not done for the Lord then the results that are desired are for self and self-glorification. The rules of living are not just for a good life on earth, but surely they add to it, but are for a spiritual relationship.
 - One cannot gain knowledge of spiritual things if he begins from the wrong point, refusing to fear the Lord (to recognize his character and thereby respond). He remains the fool = spiritually ignorant
 - Those who spurn wisdom and discipline are "fools." There are three kinds of fools
 - Those who are lazy and short-sighted
 - Those who lack spiritual perception
 - Those who are arrogant, flippant, and mentally dull

Consequences and prosperity

- Proverbs assumes some connection between people’s character or behavior and the outcomes they experience. This connection is expressed in a variety of ways. Sometimes the speaker claims that character and behavior will have material consequences, either sufficiency (10:3; 13:25; 28:19) or abundance (3:9-10; 8:20-21).
 - At other times, virtue and vice determine not whether one will have material goods but whether one’s possessions will endure (13:22).
 - Often the outcome is expressed as a matter of life and death (8:35-36; 9:11; 10:2, 27; 11:4, 19; 14:27). In some sayings, the promise is intangible (honor, peace, and security or shame, discord, and violence; 3:3, 24, 35; 18:3).
 - Thus the sages, while consistent in claiming that it will be better for the good (wise, righteous, diligent) than for the bad (foolish, wicked, lazy), vary in how that outcome will be experienced
- The attitude toward wealth is generally positive and that toward poverty generally negative.
 - There are exceptions to the positive valuation of wealth, however: wealth amassed quickly (13:11; 28:22); wealth gained or preserved through injustice (10:2; 15:27; 21:6); wealth perceived as an alternative to intangible goods (11:4; 28:6). “Better-than” sayings that value positive intangibles with lack over negative intangibles with abundance make it clear that wealth is a provisional good (15:16-17; 16:19; 17:1; 28:6)
- Proverbs is educational in purpose, intended to train young persons to become positive members of society.

- It uses the language of consequences to encourage the listener/reader to develop proper character and behavior.
- What is consistent throughout the book is not the consequences of wickedness or righteousness, folly or wisdom, but the evaluation of those consequences.
- Whatever the material situation of the wicked, it is accorded a negative judgment. Thus the connection between what you do and what you have functions motivationally, and not as an explanation
- In some popular theology and ideology, consequence language is used to suggest that the poor deserve their poverty and to excuse a lack of communal redress for economic needs. Texts from Proverbs have been misused to justify such claims. Such a use of this book ignores that Proverbs calls for generosity and redress of injustice and also misinterprets the language of motivation as explanation

More context if needed

- Need to understand when and where these sayings were compiled and why
- The Jews have experienced the ravages of war, captivity, exile, and are now going home to begin life again
 - They want to avoid the mistakes they made before and to obey God more perfectly
 - They believed:
 - That God punishes sin and rewards righteousness
 - That keeping the Law offered great reward
 - That the covenant people must be pure and not intermarry
 - That the Temple needs to be restored and used again in worship and in sacrifice
 - That the Law needed to be restored and renewed and obeyed
 - That sickness comes from sin and prosperity and health comes from right living, justice, and righteousness
 - God is just and right living has great rewards
- You can see this same sort of bunker theology or mentality with those who are recovering alcoholics or non-smokers who were once addicted.
 - Need to not go down that road again

Paraphrase of Psalm 112

- Would like you to put Psalm 112 in your own words. As you read the Psalm, focus on what it says or means to you and write it down in your own words. To a great degree we are already doing this when we convert what we read into a form that gives it meaning to us.
- One half the group does this and the other half would do a “reverse paraphrase”. Sometimes the opposite statement of something drives the point home even more.

Marks of Discipleship

- Is it realistic to expect Christian disciples to be living some of the guidelines established in proverbs?
- With a society built on profit motives and personal initiative, how can Christians avoid greed, overspending, under-giving, and tight-fisted living?

- What about all the concern in the “right living” texts with orphans, widows, the poor, and greater righteousness? How do we live out some of the mandates of Micah text and others? How are we to be trees of righteousness in our community?

Assignment for next week:

- Need actors – Job _____; Eliphaz _____;
- Bildad _____; Zophar _____
- Elihu _____; The Lord _____