

Wisdom is the Principle Thing

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[0 : 00] Well let's turn then to the book of Proverbs and we'll return to chapter 4 which we read from and our text is found in Proverbs 4 verses 5 to 9 and the teaching in this passage can be summarized as wisdom is the principal thing.

And we want just to notice to begin with that the Bible tells us quite clearly that there is a distinction to be made when we think about wisdom.

There is worldly wisdom and there is heavenly wisdom. It distinguishes between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God. And in this passage we are told to get wisdom, verse 5, get understanding.

And verse 7, wisdom is, which is the title, wisdom is the principal thing. Paul in writing to the Corinthians tells us that the world by its own wisdom knew not God.

That is to say, it could not discover God so as to have a real living experience of God. It was incapable by its own wisdom, by its own understanding, to connect, if you like, with the living and true God.

[1 : 45] And no matter what religious system, that of course is true of Judaism too, no matter what religious system, it cannot simply connect us with the living and true God in a meaningful relational way.

Because it employs human wisdom, it employs an enlightened understanding. And you see, he says here, get wisdom, get understanding.

Something we haven't got and need to get. That's the point he's making, as we shall see. So that's why it's called the supreme thing, the principal thing.

And it is not the wisdom of the world, but it is heavenly wisdom. And that wisdom we are to seek to obtain. And I think it's worth saying, even as an introduction, even those here tonight who, by the grace of God, have come to experience that heavenly wisdom, we constantly need to be given more wisdom and therefore constantly need to seek it.

James tells us in his little letter, If any man lack wisdom, if any man lack wisdom, and it is implicit that he does lack wisdom, let him ask of the giving God.

[3 : 10] It's something we're constantly in need of. We need wisdom from him. We need wisdom from the Lord. And we find it in him in limitless measure.

Get wisdom, therefore. Wisdom is the principal thing. And the more you think about how lacking in wisdom, in true wisdom, the world is, both the secular world and the religious world, the more it presses upon you the need of that heavenly wisdom, of the wisdom of God revealed in Christ. I want us to think about four things that are there in the passage. First of all, the obvious, get wisdom. Yes, seek it.

But he is telling us to get it. To get it. To make sure we get it. To be diligent about seeking it in order to find it.

We must put forth the best desires of our hearts, as it were. We must be serious about getting this wisdom. We must recognize, therefore, our need of it.

[4 : 30] And we must make sure we put it first on our agenda. Wisdom is the principal thing. Therefore, get wisdom.

Now, I know that it is customary, both in Christian circles and in the world, too, for people to say, the most important thing is your health.

The most important thing is happiness. In fact, at my daughter's wedding, recently, a consultant surgeon said to me, when he was leaving, and said some fine things.

But he also said this, the main thing, I told your son-in-law, the main thing is health and happiness. Now, he says a highly intelligent person, and he was betraying himself.

But it's easy for us to do the same thing. If I had a pound for every time I heard, the most important thing is education. And that's not to decry education, by the way.

[5 : 40] Not at all. Not a bit of it. And, in fact, the truth is, we ought ever to be learning. We ought to see, by the more we learn, how much we need to go on learning.

And that the people who have the most real knowledge, confess how little they know. So we're not decrying it, but what we're saying is, when the focus is on it, as the principal thing, the same as when the focus is on happiness, or on health, we've shifted the focus, from God's recommendation to our worldly assessment.

Wisdom is a principal thing. And therefore, we must take care about the advice we give. Of course, it's good to do your best, your very best.

It's good to aim, hi, and seek to achieve. But in all that we would achieve, wisdom, heavenly wisdom, is the principal thing.

In fact, Paul said to the Corinthians, who seemed to excel, in those days, in philosophy, he said to them, that he came to them, not with the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit, and of power, for he determined, though he could handle himself in philosophy, he determined not to know anything among them, except Jesus Christ, and him crucified, who was, said Paul, to the Corinthians, made unto us, firstly, wisdom from God.

[7 : 38] 1 Corinthians 1, 24, wisdom is a principal thing, and therefore, it's important for us, when we read about wisdom, in the book of Proverbs, to connect that wisdom, with the person, of Christ, with the Son of God.

Now, I want to say a word, just a, more a technical matter, but I know there's a lot, behind it, that, could be said.

Some people have objected, to us, using wisdom, with reference to Christ, from the book of Proverbs, I could ask you, why?

And I would make you, want to tell me, why? The object. Well, the answer is, because, if you read it, listen to it, get wisdom, get understanding, do not forget, nor turn away, from the words of my mouth, listen to this, do not forsake, her.

Who's the her? The her is wisdom. How can you refer that, to Christ? He's a him, not a her. And this is a sort of, silly thing to do.

[8 : 58] Notwithstanding, there's a simple explanation. In all languages, there are, there are different genders, you have, masculine, feminine, and neuter.

And the word, wisdom, is in the classification, it's a feminine noun. And therefore, the obvious way, to translate it, is simply, her, and not him.

When, you're talking about wisdom, if you're using a pronoun, to describe her, then, you're referring back, to the wisdom, that's referred to.

And so, because it's feminine, and therefore, you get her. Wisdom, is personified as her. But that is simply, a grammatical matter, it's a technical point.

They're using, the feminine noun, and therefore, feminine pronouns, get her, keep her, exhort her. And, to get into, some sort of, esoteric, some mystical, thinking, about Christ, with, in relation to this feminine, is a bit of nonsense, frankly.

[10 : 17] It's a bit of, arid, speculation. Better by far, to simply, recognize, the reference, is, to wisdom, personified, setting, just keeping, the grammatical rule, but not to miss, the real point.

That's why, we mentioned, what Paul said, to the Corinthians, Christ is made, unto us, firstly, wisdom, from God. If you go, over into, chapter 8, you see, wisdom, personified, there, as the great, master builder, of the universe, who was there, ever before, the Father, and it's clearly, a reference, to the Son of God, wisdom, personified.

And, what is being told, to us here, that, he is the principal thing, therefore, we are to get him. He is worth getting.

He is worth worlds, to us. And, if you remember, borrowing from Paul, again, here, Paul stands, before us, in the Bible, as, as the, as the, eminent apostle, although he himself, says he was, the least of all the apostles.

But, in terms of her edition, in terms of learning, in terms of his, his status, in Judaism, he was a, he was top flight. and he says this to us, writing to the Philippians, verse 7 of chapter 3, he says, he says, the things that I counted profit, I came to see as rubbish, for the excellence, of the knowledge, of Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I, I suffer the loss, of all things, that I may gain him.

[12:17] Wisdom, is the principal thing, he, Christ, is the principal one, in all our getting, therefore, we are to get a firm hold, of him, who is made to us, if we will have him, wisdom, from God.

And, that said, we are to keep him, verse 6, it's put like this, do not forsake her, and she will, preserve you, or keep you.

This is put negatively, do not forsake her, but it means, keep, keep wisdom. And, there is a necessary, caution, you know, in this word, keep wisdom.

Life, unfolds many, a twist. Christian life, unfolds many, a twist, that we never thought, to see.

And, the people, who were on the road, are no longer, on the road, who were full of promise, who were full of, enthusiasm, and, and apparent zeal, and faith.

[13:35] And, history is writ large, with that. Our own lifetime, is writ large, with it. People, who seem to have gotten, heavenly wisdom, and who went on, for a season.

And, they were full of promise. And then, somewhere along the line, they, they lost, a hold, of that wisdom.

And that's why, you see, the proverb, by the spirit, says, keep wisdom, keep a firm hold. Jesus, in talking, to the people, gave the parable, you remember, of the sower.

And, in that parable, he tells us, that, that, there were those, who rejoiced, at, at, at, embracing, the word.

And then, things got difficult, and, they forsook him. They went back, from following. And, there's where we're told, keep, wisdom.

[14:41] Get a firm hold. He, talks to us, about those, whose roots, didn't go down, very far. And, when, the, the, the, the, the bitterness, of life, affected them, they lost, that, wisdom.

Still others, when temptations, came in the form, of worldly, cares, and money, and possessions, they simply, lost interest.

Keep, he says, keep, wisdom, forsake her not, and she shall preserve you. And, that's a reminder to ourselves, in that, that we are to, we are to take seriously, our own responsibility.

And, if you're, sharp, and theology, you may be saying, well, it's God that keeps us. But, my dear friends, let me tell you, what Peter says, kept, by the power of God, through, faith.

we are, kept, by the power of God, but we act, by faith. In other words, the kept, keep, themselves.

[15:56] Jude says, keep yourselves, in the love, of God. So, what we're reminding ourselves, of here, is, of our responsibility, toward God, to keep, wisdom.

To keep, close, to the one, who is incarnate wisdom, Jesus. To trust him, to rely upon him, in all things. In order, that we do not, go back, from following him.

I've often, pondered, and I know many, a preacher, and, a expositor, has too. I've often, pondered, the question, whether Demas, was, one of those, who went back, really back, was never, converted at all, seemed, to be.

So, he was, a preacher, we're told, by Paul, he has forsaken me, having loved, this, present, world.

And, there are other, cases too, aren't they?

You wonder, where they were, really. But, they're there, to tell us, keep, wisdom. Get that, good hold of him. Rely upon him.

[17:08] Trust him. Don't, go back, from following him. Don't, go back. Forsake him not.

And, you see, if you think about it, as surely, as Christ, who is wisdom, from God to us, makes us wise, in the ways of salvation, he also makes us wise, in coping, with the wiles, of the devil, the whole, reality, of spiritual warfare.

When, when, when, Peter, was told, that he would, deny the Lord, he didn't believe it.

He simply thought, this is not going to happen. He didn't know himself. He didn't think, that he could lose, a hold, on Christ. But, he did.

And, and, and the Lord said to him, Peter, when you're converted, when you're brought back, from the wilderness, of sin, go on, strengthen, your brethren.

[18:19] He, he slackened his hold, you see. The kept are to keep themselves, and when they don't keep, wisdom, then they discover, how weak, and frail, and, and, how, potentially, they could ruin themselves.

They are, in, serious, danger. Keep, wisdom, therefore. He, will, preserve you.

Get wisdom, keep wisdom, love wisdom. You see it there, in the passage. Love her, and she will keep you.

Wisdom, is the principle, thing. And, I hope, that you're coming along, with me here. I hope, that you realize, that this is not, information, on the virtue, of wisdom.

But, something, far more profound. It's about, the person, who is wisdom, from God, to us. Love, wisdom.

[19 : 33] Philosophy, is, the love, of wisdom. Two Greek words, philos, and sophos.

The love, of wisdom. wisdom. There's a play here, on the difference, between the wisdom, of the world, and the wisdom, from God.

And, the emphasis, here is on, love him, who is made over, to us wisdom, who is incarnate, wisdom. You see? Because, his, way, and his, understanding, and what he, imparts to us, will contradict, the wisdom, of this world, the philosophies, of this world.

Their starting points, are always wrong, they're always speculative, they always begin, with the human situation, and the work, upward.

It was, Gerhardus Vos, so I can't, commend him, as easy reading. He was, a profound, thinker, Christian apologist, and Gerhardus Vos, had a, very useful, model, for thinking, about the difference, between, the world's wisdom, and, God's wisdom.

[20 : 56] And, he just simply, took, two lines, and, the line, of philosophy, was the line, going from earth, that way, not getting, very far.

Whereas, wisdom from God, is coming down, and the line, is a continuum, it's straight down. And, scripture gives us, all we need to know, about that wisdom, how to get, that wisdom, how to keep, that wisdom, how to love, that wisdom.

And, this is important, it's practical. True wisdom, flows from him, who is the very, embodiment of it, himself.

Love wisdom, love true wisdom. I think, there's a little, something in this, of a caution, again. We can tire, we can tire, in the way.

We can lose heart, in the way. It's possible, for us, to lose, a feeling, of warmth, towards Christ, who has made over, to us wisdom.

[22 : 17] And to grow cold, and even indifferent, to, to, to, allow our spiritual life, to grow cold. And we lack, that enthusiasm, for Christ.

There's so many, other things going on. We just see to this, see to that, plan for this, plan for that. Oh, and there's this, and there's that, there's that appointment. And on and on, it goes. And life, just becomes, one pile, of commitments.

And it's easy, to let these things, make us, grow cold, in our love for him.

But the Bible, is saying to us, love wisdom, keep on living. It's interesting, see, I mentioned Peter, earlier on, we return to him now, at the Sea of Galilee, breakfast by the seashore.

Peter, do you love me, more, than these? And whether it's, these, with reference, to the fishing tackle, as I, inclined to think, or these other disciples, the question, implied, that he didn't, really love the Lord, more, than these.

[23 : 33] And he was quite hurt, by it, wasn't he? And he was even more hurt, when the Savior, said it three times, do you really love me?

The Lord touched that, point of weakness in him. Where was the evidence, that he really loved, the Lord? Where was the evidence, after all, he had denied him, with oath and curse.

And he went out, bitterly, weeping. And if we ask the question, to ourselves tonight, as from Jesus, the wisdom from God, do you really love me?

He says. Do you really? Do you really? Do you really love me? What is, what is our answer to that, in our own hearts, before him?

Love, wisdom. We must love him. Otherwise, service to him, will be a pain. It will be a burden.

[24 : 51] It will be something, we'll be figuring out, how to avoid, leave it to somebody else. love us, thou me, more than these. Am I principle, in your life?

It was said, by Jerome, who was no mean, Hebrew scholar, commenting on this, very verse. He says, beg for me, he was talking to a, Christian friend, beg for me, who am grey-headed, beg of the Lord, that I may have wisdom, for my companion, and there's a capital letter, at W, he's thinking about Jesus, that I may have wisdom, for my companion, of which it is written, love her, for it is in, flesh, embodied.

In other words, he's thinking, about Jesus, beg of the Lord, that I may have wisdom, for my companion, get wisdom, keep wisdom, love wisdom, and lastly, exalt wisdom.

It's there, yes, it's there, verse 8, exalt her, and she will promote you, she will bring you honour, when you embrace her, she will place, on your head, an ornament of grace, a crown of glory, she will deliver, to you.

Well, you only need to read those words, to think of it, there's more here, than a virtue, called wisdom. Wisdom, there's, there's this person, who will, will place a crown of grace, upon you, a crown of glory, upon you, exalt wisdom, this is where we finish, we are to esteem, him very highly, and this obviously, to exalt him, we have to do that, in our hearts, we have to exalt him, first and foremostly, in our hearts, he is to be enthroned there, and we are to be conscious, of, of him being enthroned, in our hearts, of having the, chief place, in our hearts, above all else, he is to reign, supreme.

[27 : 29] The problem, for the sinner, of course, is he doesn't like, that thought, because it demands, too much of him, but I am afraid, that nowadays, it is true in the church, people don't want, the commitment, this is one of the great, strains, that is placed, upon congregations, and, and churches, is that, too much is left, to too few, and, it seems to me, that part of the problem, is this very, final point, we are looking at, exalt them, exalt wisdom, exalt, her, and she will, promote you, she will bring, honour to you, you see, if we, really, enthrone them, in our hearts, if we exalt them, there first, then, we'll be willing, servants, we'll do, whatever we can, to promote, his glory, and to support, his cause, if, you know,

I'm going to digress, for a moment, I've always said, I have a bone in my throat, about this, I'm just going to, sound off, tonight, if there's one thing, there's more than one thing, I know, but if there's one thing, I look back on, with regret, is that we lost, from, somebody smiling, he knows what it is, there's one thing, that's a bone in my throat, about our monthly record, is that we took off, the front page, that in all things, he, may have, the preeminence, what happened there, well, I'll leave you to think about that, but I'll tell you this, for free, he should have the preeminence, in our heart, exalt him, and he will promote you, and not to be ashamed, to say, let him have the preeminence, not reverend so and so, or so and so, or so and so, but Jesus Christ, the Lord, exalt him, and he will promote you, and whenever we try to find, something else, or maybe we have something else, or someone else, who is in that principled place, that we exalt above him, we are challenged, to listen, to the spirit in the word, exalt wisdom, and it will promote you, and it will crown you, with an ornament of grace, and a crown of glory, will be delivered to you, get wisdom, keep wisdom, love wisdom, exalt wisdom, it's all about Jesus, and so it should be, he should be, enthroned in our hearts, and we should know it, and feel it, every day we rise,

I remember, a few years back, I used to have a meeting, with one of the rabbis, in the, up in Gifnok, and we had a discussion, across the table, and he was always, in a lather of sweat, to get there on time, and I remember once, he said to me, he said, you have it easy, besides me, he said, you don't have to do, all the things I do, and of course, he was talking about, his religious ritual, every morning, on with the tefillin, round the arm, the left arm, on with the phylacteries, on with the tzitzit, the vest, on with the talus, on with the kippah, the whole show, out of the prayer book, davening away, he was sweating, by the time he got, to the, to the, to the meeting place, he said, you don't have it, like that, you have a TC, but we only have a TC, because Jesus, is made to us, wisdom, we have got him, we keep him, we love him, and we exalt him, and when he is exalted, all these other things, have little to say, in comparison, with him, and it's important, therefore,

I think, as we leave this, to recognize, the wonderful privilege, of being his, and of exalting him, in our hearts, if he is exalted, in our hearts, we can let other things go, other things, won't matter, to us to say, if he is exalted, in our hearts, we, will be promoted, by him, and the believer, is encouraged, to see that, I'm sure, that's what Paul, had in mind, when he said, we are raised up, to the heavenly places, in Christ, James says it too, in another way, let the lowly believer, rejoice, and he means the poor, let them rejoice, in their exaltation, and let the rich, believer, as implied, in his, humiliation, because why, well he may have all the riches, in the world, but it will not keep him, in this world, one second, longer, let the poor believer, who has next to nothing, rejoice, in his exaltation, he has exalted,

Christ, by faith, and is exalted, in Christ, and wherever we are, whatever our means, or otherwise, if Christ, is exalted, in our hearts, then, we are exalted, in him, and surely, we want, to serve him, wholeheartedly, it should be, what can I do, more, rather than, what can I get out of, because in him, we are exalted, and ultimately, we will receive, a crown of glory, that will never, ever, fade, well, I've said probably, too much, but may it be, that under his blessing, we will get wisdom, and

keep wisdom, and love wisdom, and exalt wisdom, that is Christ,
[34 : 22] Amen.