

# SUMMER 2 - Healthy, Wealthy and Wise

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[ 0 : 00 ] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 5th of January 2003. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled Healthy, Wealthy and Wise. It is based on Proverbs chapter 3 verses 1 to 35. Well let's pray. O God our Father, we pray that as we come to your word you'll make us wise. Wise for living, wise for salvation. And we thank you that wisdom is your gift, though our pursuit. And we thank you for the promise that those who pursue it will receive it. In Christ, Amen. What is the secret to long life? A little gin each day.

[ 1 : 06 ] I think that's what people thought the Queen Mother's secret to long life was. A little, maybe a bit more than a little, gin each day. Whenever people turn 105, invariably a current affair or those sorts of so-called current affair type programs interview them.

What is the secret for long life? They ask every 105 year old that you ever meet. There aren't many of them. Is it exercise? Hard work? Cigarette a day if not gin?

Cigarette a day if not gin? Cigarette a day if not gin? Some might say it's a good diet, meat and free veg. I've yet to hear 105 year old say McDonald's. Or some would say it's just good luck.

There's no secret to long life. It's just that some live longer than others. There's no consistent answer to the question, what is the secret of long life? What's the secret to becoming rich?

Well, there are any number of books that will try and tell you what the secret to becoming rich are. They're quite popular books and you find them in most of the bookshops. There are quiz shows that try to at least help you become rich, if not give you the secret for becoming rich.

[ 2 : 14 ] Who wants to be a millionaire? The lottery, of course, tries to give some people the answer, even if it doesn't have a formula for becoming rich. Like the US man who just won over 500 million US dollars in a lottery in the United States.

And so very generously gave his church 10%. I'll sort of drop that in just in case it happens to you. The Business Review Weekly, periodically, every year, will list the richest Australians.

What's their secret for being rich? For some it's hard work. For some it's probably a bit of a fluke. For some it's inherited money.

For some they play sport. There's no real secret to becoming rich, I suspect. Or at least there's no consistent answer from those who are rich. What about the secret of wisdom?

Where do you find the secret for wisdom? Private school education? Some parents might think that. Or a long beard? I shaved mine off.

[ 3 : 23 ] It didn't work. For some it's just simply age and experience. The older you get, you must be wiser. Although there are a lot of very foolish old people I've met.

Present company excluded. There's no real secret to wisdom, is there? At least there's no consistent answer if you ask the people who, at least in their own eyes, think they're wise.

Healthy, wealthy and wise. What are the secrets to each of those? What's the secret to all three? Is it really as simple as early to bed, early to rise?

Makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise? Nice proverb, but it's not in this book. Let me tell you the secret. My child, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments.

For length of days and years of life and abundant welfare they will give you. There's a secret, a claim at least, to be the secret for health and wealth and wisdom.

[ 4 : 32 ] Words from the writer of the book of Proverbs at the beginning of chapter 3. Appealing to his audience to follow not so much his teaching because it's his, but in the light of this book, his teaching because it's God's teaching.

Not to follow this wise person's commandments, but ultimately to follow God's commandments. For that's where health, wealth and wisdom truly are found.

And the promise that comes, notice how verse 2 is related to verse 1. Verse 1 says, That's if you like the promise that goes with the commandment, or the condition that goes to the commandment, or the result or consequence of keeping the commandment in verse 1.

Length of days and years of life and abundant welfare they will give you. Not meaning social welfare, the Hebrew word is shalom, which is often translated peace, P-E-A-C-E, but it means more than just sort of a detente, a standoff between enemies.

It's a very strong, rich word. It's about harmony in relationships, harmony in life, peace in its richest and best sense. Notice that in order to receive those things, the obedience to the commandments, in verse 1, comes from the heart.

[ 5 : 57 ] Let your heart keep my commandments. That is, these things that are promised in verse 2, or the result in verse 2 of keeping verse 1, is not from a begrudging obedience, but from a heartfelt obedience to the commandments that this wise teacher is teaching, that is God's commandments.

And notice how in verse 1 you get two commands, a negative and a positive. Don't forget, keep. They're the same thing in a sense. It's saying the same thing firstly negatively, and then positively to reinforce the commandment.

Don't forget my teaching. Not just a memory lapse. Some people who are old will have memory lapses and forget that sort of teaching. But rather forgetfulness is about disobedience in the scriptures.

When we forget God's commandments, and when we forget God, we disobey God. When we remember, we do, and we obey. Remembering and forgetting in the scriptures are very practical sorts of things.

And later in the Lord's Supper, one of the ideas about it is, as Jesus said, do this in remembrance of me. Not because we're going to forget his name or something, but do this in remembrance of me is so that we will keep on being faithful and obedient to Jesus and his commands.

[ 7 : 12 ] Well, verses 1 and 2 set the pattern for the next 10 verses afterwards. Verses 1 to 12 come in six lots of brackets of two. In the first bit of each bracket, commands, mostly negatives and positives together, followed by the result or the promise that is associated with keeping the commands in the odd-numbered verses.

So see how the pattern continues in verse 3. Don't let loyalty and faithfulness forsake you. That's the negative command. The positive command is bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.

So, verse 4 says, result or consequence or promise, you will find favour and good repute in the sight of God and of people. Loyalty and faithfulness are the two things that are key in the odd-numbered verse, verse 3.

That's what we've got to do. And both of those words are relational words. They're words to do with our relationship with God. fundamental in the Old Testament to the people of God relating properly to God is keeping covenant, loyalty and faithfulness with God who himself is faithful and loyal to his covenant promises.

It reminds us that these words are written for the people of God who know God. It's not just written for anybody. And so the commandments that are referred to in verse 1 are alluded to by using the terms loyalty and faithfulness in verse 3.

[ 8 : 38 ] That is the covenant relationship that God has established with his people which have embedded within it obligations to keep God's law. So loyalty and faithfulness here is not just a personal commitment to God, though it's part of that, but it also, like verse 1, suggests obedience to the commandments of God.

And the promise that comes with it in verse 4, you'll find favour and good repute in the sight of God and of people. That's a striking promise.

It's one thing to say you'll find favour in the sight of God and that makes sense when we're obedient to God's covenant laws and we're faithful and loyal to him. But all too often the scriptures tell us that those who are faithful to God will actually incur the wrath or anger or persecution of people.

I suspect, though, behind the idea here is in the sight of God's people you will actually be looked up to and find favour if you are obedient in covenant faithfulness and loyalty.

The next two verses continue the pattern. Verse 5, the commands and also, in this case, the beginning of verse 6 and then the second half of verse 6 comes the associated promise or result or consequence.

[ 9 : 50 ] The command, positive expressed first this time, trust in the Lord with all your heart. Then the negative that goes with it, do not rely on your own insight. But then comes another positive, in all your ways acknowledge him and then comes the result or promise and he will make straight your paths.

Clearly here it's still relational with God. We are to trust in God and acknowledge him in all our ways. What that means negatively is not relying on our own insight, our own wisdom, our own understanding, our own ingenuity, our own cleverness, our own experience or anything like that. See, all too often our own cleverness or experience or reason or thought might lead us to think this is the right path to do. But all too often such a conclusion runs counter to God's clear instruction. Rely on God, trust in God, not in our own reason or ability. It's extraordinary to me how often over the centuries people have tried to dismiss God with all sorts of logic and reasoning only for later down the track to be clearly shown to be fools and rebuffed by latest discoveries or new ideas or new understandings about the scriptures or the words or what they mean or whatever. Beware of relying on your own mind. Many of us are very clever, very well educated, very well trained people. It becomes a temptation to think that we know the answers.

[ 11 : 21 ] But trust in the Lord, not in our own cleverness, ability or whatever. And this time the promise is along the lines of guidance and God will make straight your paths.

The destination in our relationship with God is always clear. It's to be with Him in the Lord's house forever. However, we understand that ultimately, of course, in heaven as the New Testament makes clearer than the old.

But this is not promising just the destination. It's the journey to the destination. It's like as if trusting in the Lord and acknowledging His ways are right is like the Melways that helps us on a clear or straight path towards the destination.

It doesn't take away the difficulties along the way but it does rather straighten the paths that as we trust in the Lord with all our heart as we don't rely on our own understanding as we acknowledge God in all our ways then our path towards our destination of our heavenly inheritance with God will indeed become straighter.

Not easy but nonetheless straighter. Or the fourth pair verses 7 and 8 again a negative followed in this case by two positives and then the promise do not be wise in your own eyes then the two in effect positive commands to balance it fear the Lord and turn away from evil and then the promise it will be healing for your flesh and a refreshment for your body.

[ 12 : 57 ] In some ways this is still building on the previous set verses 5 and 6. Now it's made even clearer from what the second bit of verse 5 said do not rely on your own insight now the command is don't be wise in your own eyes.

That's perhaps a little bit stronger than what verse 5 was saying for it's very easy to think ourselves wise wise about all sorts of aspects of our life but our goal is not to be wise in our own eyes we're not to think of ourselves as wise in our own eyes but rather the counter to that the corrective to being wise in our own eyes is fearing the Lord that means knowing that God is God and that there may be things that we do not understand and not only fearing the Lord but turning away from evil. Sometimes when I read theology and commentaries it seems to me that the commentators seem to be almost boastful about having all the answers being able to be paraded out before us.

One of my favourite theologians was from the time of the Reformation in the 1500s John Calvin and he was a Frenchman who ministered mainly in Geneva and also in Strasbourg in what was then Germany now in France and Calvin I think had a very healthy ignorance about some things that is he was one of the most brilliant Bible commentators and theologians but he was always quick to say this is beyond my knowledge and my wisdom and so on that is there is more about God that I do not know and that I think is a very healthy position.

It's not that we're completely ignorant about God or that he's unknowable that we've got no clue about what God is on about at all we actually ought to pursue the truths of God to the full but we will always come short of full understanding about everything to do with God because God's God and we're not.

[ 14 : 53 ] So fearing the Lord here is the corrective to being wise in our own eyes. When you read the people in the mediator who pontificate about all sorts of issues in society who seem to be wise in their own eyes there's usually very little if any fear of the Lord.

Fear of the Lord is the way in which we'll ensure that we are no longer wise in our own eyes but notice too fear of the Lord as we saw last week was the beginning of wisdom. Indeed in some respects in this book it's also the goal of wisdom the starting point and the end point of our pursuit for wisdom.

So if when we move out of fearing the Lord then we move out of being wise. We probably move into being wise in our own eyes but becoming then a fool in God's eyes.

Notice too how fear of the Lord which is about acknowledging God is God a reverence and awe it's a positive term it doesn't mean terror fear of the dark sort of stuff. It's actually about trusting God in the end.

Notice how it's coupled in this verse with turning from evil. evil. That is it's got a moral component about it as well. Those who are wise in their own eyes rarely turn from evil because they no longer realise that evil is evil.

[16:06] So the corrective fear and turn is what the New Testament would say repent and believe. To turn is simply to repent turn away from evil be done with it.

to fear the Lord in New Testament terms would be to trust God or have faith in Jesus Christ. So in effect the corrective to being wise in our own eyes is the gospel imperative that Jesus' first words recorded in Mark's gospel were repent and believe the good news.

And here we find it as the beginning of wisdom in effect. If we are to be wise we have to be people who have repented of our sin and are trusting in God fearing the Lord.

And the promise this time in verse 8 it will be healing for your flesh and a refreshment for your body. There's the good health that maybe some of us pursue.

Indeed it's a strange expression healing for your flesh it's technically to do with your navel and probably it's to do with your innermost being. Probably just sort of an idiomatic sort of expression.

[17:15] But there's certainly no mention here of having a good diet or exercise or three veg a day or seven veg if you go to Coles as healing for your flesh. It's purely about fearing the Lord turning from evil.

That's where true health is found. And for one who's not all that keen on vegetables or exercise I take comfort from verse 8. Well the fifth pair in this opening part of chapter 3 is verses 9 and 10. Now we just get a positive command. Honour the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce. And then in verse 10 the result or promise your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will be bursting with wine.

Now some could say well here is clearly a statement of a doctrine of prosperity or a prosperity gospel. Here is if we are to honour the Lord with our substance that is with our money our possessions our income the produce of our hands remember this was a fairly much agrarian society so for them there would be little cash but in a good year animals and crops and so on usually. Honouring God with the substance of your income giving the first fruits to Him not what's left over in your wallet at the end of the day sort of thing. This is a generous giving back to God acknowledging that all comes from Him then the result will be filled barns and bursting vats of wine.

[18:40] Now take care here because this is not promising that you will be rich. It is not promising that you'll have you know hundreds of holiday houses and a private jet and your own little golf course in the backyard sort of stuff.

This is really promising that you will have sufficient if not plenty of your daily needs because a way of describing daily needs in those days would be barns that is for grain for bread and vats for wine for drink.

We must remember of course that in those days there was no coke there was no cordial people basically drank wine or water. So this is saying yes you'll be comfortably off you'll be well off in some respects but it's not sort of filthy rich in a sense.

It's that your daily needs will be abundantly provided. That's the promise that comes here for those who honour the Lord with their substance. The fifth sorry the sixth and final of these pairs verses 11 and 12 my child do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his repentance. of fall of that allows daddy to sai put her then go