

Proverbs for our Time: Money

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 00] Our gracious Father, we do thank you again for your word, through which you continue to speak, and to give us wisdom to live well in this world, and particularly wisdom in your Son, that we may live well in this world in relationship with you. And so Father, we pray that you would give us ears to hear and minds to understand your word this evening, for we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, over the last two weeks, we've begun to look at God's wisdom in Proverbs, as Jeff said, which helps us to live well in this world as God's people. But some have asked me, as I've chatted with them after the sessions, is there any worth in worldly wisdom? As one person put it, do I just follow Proverbs to be wise and nothing else? Or as another person said, when we have to make decisions, is there any value in listening to others, even if they're non-Christians?

I take, for example, the old proverb that says, if at first you don't succeed, try and try again. Or as Ryan, age 10, suggested on the next slide, he amended it and said, when at first you don't succeed, just sit down and eat cake. Then try again. Is there any wisdom in that? It could help having a break and coming back fresh to it, unless you eat too much cake, of course.

Or I take doctors and financial consultants, which I mentioned a couple of weeks ago. Do they have any worthwhile wisdom for us? In fact, there's a group of financial consultants on the next slide who are called Financial Wisdom. That's their name. They have offices in Mitcham and Ringwood, actually. Is it possible for them to have worthwhile wisdom for us?

Or take Steve Covey's book on the next slide. It has sold over 25 million copies. That's more than the population of Australia. That's big, isn't it? And one of the things he says to help live well is to find out our centre and mission in life, because everything else is shaped by it, including our priorities. And he's right, isn't he? Why do we do that? Yet for some Christians, we are to ignore all wisdom from the world. After all, James said in our second reading, and I think I've got on the next slide, he said that if you have a bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such wisdom, these readers were claiming to be wise, does not come down from heaven, but is earthly, unspiritual and demonic.

[2 : 52] And so some Christians say if wisdom is not from above, then by default it is from below. It's earthly. Or as James, in his characteristic pull-no-punches style, says it's unspiritual and even demonic. And again, that's true, is it not? If it's not from God, then by default it's from the devil. So can we take wisdom from the world or not? And if so, why and how do we rightly apply it? And I ask these questions tonight to begin, not only because some people have asked me over the last couple of weeks, but also because tonight we leave the introductory chapters of Proverbs and come to a collection of Proverbs themselves that has actually taken wisdom from the world. But the way it has used it will help us know how we can do the same.

But first, let me just remind you of where we'll be in Proverbs and the broad structure. I've given you the structure in a briefer form on the back of your outlines. You might remember that chapters 1 to 9 are the introductory chapters aimed at motivating us to listen to wisdom with a few Proverbs thrown in. Then chapters 10 to 31 are mainly Proverbs giving us wisdom with a few verses telling us to listen thrown in. It's kind of reverse.

And so if you've got your Bibles there, just flick back for a moment to chapter 10 verse 1. And we see the marking of the first collection there. Chapter 10 verse 1, you'll see a heading there.

In fact, you'll see two headings. The first one in italics is what the Bible translators have added to help us. But chapter 10 verse 1 is in the original Hebrew and it says the Proverbs of Solomon.

Do you see that? So that's the beginning of the first collection of Proverbs proper. And that goes on for some 12 chapters. And so if you flick forward now back to our reading, chapter 22 verse 17, we come to the second collection of Proverbs.

[5 : 05] And we can see it being marked out not just by the NIV heading in italics, but also by verse 17, which says, pay attention to the sayings of the wise.

And so this is the collection we're going to be looking at tonight, which means we're at point one in your outlines and verse 17 in your Bibles. So chapter 22 verse 17 says, pay attention and turn your ear to the sayings of the wise.

Apply your heart to what I teach, for it is pleasing when you keep them in your heart and have all of them ready on your lips. So that your trust may be in the Lord, I teach you today, even you. Have I not written 30 sayings for you, sayings of counsel and knowledge, teaching you to be honest and to speak the truth so that you bring back truthful reports to those you serve?

Now, back in verse 17 here, the word for the wise is plural. And so our writer, perhaps Solomon himself, has written down some sayings, some from himself, but some from other wise men.

[6 : 13] In other words, it's a collection of 30, we're told, 30 sayings. Now, the NIV has helpfully even put headings and broken these sayings up. But you can see that in italics, saying one, two and three and so on.

But this writer has collected them from others and not just himself. And he's written them down to teach his son, verse 21, to be honest and speak the truth to those he serves.

He mentions his son later on in chapter 23, verse 15, which is just over the page. But it's a common way of writing proverbial wisdom, you know, talking to a son. And the reference to serving is because these proverbs were often used to train young men in royal court as well as at home.

But the point here is that this writer has included wisdom from the world, it seems, from other wise men. Now, it could be that he got these sayings from wise men amongst God's people, fellow Israelites.

But we know that's not actually the case. Because on the next slide, we have a papyrus from ancient Egypt, currently in the British Museum. And on it are the instructions of Aminamope, who was an Egyptian wise man.

[7 : 28] He was around before Solomon. And there are striking similarities between his proverbs and the ones we have in our Bible. So, for example, on the next slide, we have from Aminamope, give your ears, hear the sayings, give your heart to understand them.

It profits to put them in your heart. Now, does that not sound like verse 17 and 18 that we just read? It does, doesn't it? Or on the next slide, Aminamope states in his wisdom, for conduct toward magistrates, knowing how to answer one who speaks, to reply to one who sends a message. Does that not sound like verse 21 that we just read? Teaching to speak truth and bring back truthful reports to those who serve? Or take, on the next slide, I put this up and I'm not sure how easy it is to see, so it's on the back of our outline as well.

I've listed just three examples between Aminamope's proverbs, which became before Solomon, and Solomon's collection here. And there's, you know, quite a number of similarities, and these are just three.

There are many more. The list goes on. Now, for many scholars, this is a real problem. How can this inspired Bible writer take wisdom from the non-Christian world, to use our language?

[8 : 53] Isn't that using wisdom that is earthly and unspiritual, demonic, as James says? And some scholars, to get around this, would claim that, well, actually, Aminamope came after Solomon and copied Solomon's wisdom.

But the evidence is against them. So can an inspired Bible writer use wisdom that is from the world? How can they do that?

Well, we need to remember two things. First, we need to remember from last week that God has stitched order into creation, both physical and moral order. And although the fall is like that earthquake, you might remember that illustration from last week, which has fractured this order, it's still sufficiently intact, such that even the non-Christian world can make observations about life and draw conclusions from experience, in short, get wisdom.

And because God has stitched this order into creation, then it is still from God above. In fact, as many of you will know, this is what theologians call general revelation.

God reveals general truths to the general public, if you like, from which we can get or glean wisdom. So, for example, we have all got a sense of justice, have we not?

[10 : 18] And if you ever doubt that, just cut someone off on the road and see what happens. And in fact, we feel this sense of justice when it's us who are cut off or ripped off.

That's a moral order stitched into our nature. And we can get wisdom from this. We can learn that if we want to be someone's friend, then don't rip them off or don't cut them off on the road.

But the second thing to notice is that the Bible writer doesn't just copy this wisdom from Egypt. He actually shapes it and directs it by the wisdom from God's word, what we call his special revelation. Have a look at verse 19 again. Verse 19 says, So that your trust may be in the Lord, I teach you today, even today.

Or verse 22. He talks about not robbing. And then he adds in verse 23, For the Lord will take up their case and will exact life for life.

[11 : 22] Here the writer wants the reader to trust in the Lord. And the word Lord is in capital letters, which is God's personal name, Yahweh. But how does this writer know God's personal name?

How does this writer know that God will judge people who exploit the poor? How does the writer even know that God wants us to trust him? Well, because God told him by his word, his special revelation through Moses and the like.

The point is, even Proverbs is happy to use wisdom from the non-Christian world based on general revelation, not based on sinful nature, which is really what James was talking about.

But it will direct it and shape it with God's special revelation, God's word. And that's why we heard in our first week that the fear of the Lord, which we learn from God's word, is the beginning of wisdom. It's first and foundational for wisdom. That's why verse 19 and verse 23 are not in Aminimope's Proverbs in Egypt. They're not there.

[12 : 32] Because God's special revelation in his word is shaping and directing this collection of wisdom that he's gleaned from other wise men.

So that we might use the wisdom from the world rightly. It reminds me of the video I saw when iPads, most of you will know what an iPad is, when iPads first came out.

It was done by a comedy group in Germany, which means the language is in German. But the first line of the clip, and I'll play it in a moment, the first line of the clip is the daughter talking to her father and it says, so dad, how do you like the iPad I got for your birthday?

Take a look. Say, Papa, have I not even asked you how did you get to the new iPad that we gave you to the birthday? How do you like the iPad I got for your birthday? Good. With all the apps, are you ready?

What's that for apps? Go ahead and get to the side. That's the iPad. Ready then, ring to it.

[13 : 33] What's it? What's the problem?

Now, he had some general revelation, right? He could tell that the iPad had a flat surface that was to be used and that he knew it was a gift to be used rather than sat on the mantelpiece.

But without first receiving the special revelation from his daughter or the instruction manual to shape his general revelation, he misused the surface, didn't he? Used it as a chopping board instead.

And so, you see, we can use wisdom from the world just as the Bible writer of Proverbs does here, but we must begin with God's wisdom and his word and use it to shape and direct this wisdom from the world that we might use it rightly.

Now, my guess is that we all do this intuitively without realising it. We test things against scripture, don't we? Normally. Or we ask, what does the Bible say?

[14 : 41] But we don't always understand the mechanics behind it nor why we can take wisdom from the world and exactly how we are to use it and apply it. But there is wisdom in the world that is from God based on general revelation from the created order.

And even the Bible is happy to use it provided we start with God's special revelation and shape it by it. And that's what we see Proverbs doing particularly in this collection. Of course, for us, God's special revelation ultimately comes through his son.

The word become flesh. On the next slide, we read in Hebrews that God has spoke in many ways in the past, but in the last days he's spoken definitively through his son. And while Proverbs told us last week that it was by wisdom that the Lord laid the earth's foundations just above that we're told in the New Testament that God used the Son, that he created the world through Jesus.

And that means that Jesus is God's wisdom through which he created the world. Or on the next slide as Paul writes in Colossians 2 and 1 Corinthians 1 that in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom or that Christ is our wisdom from God.

And so without Christ, this ultimate special revelation, if you like, the world will not make complete sense even for the Old Testament Jew which was part of the answer to the question we had last week.

[16:10] Here's the ultimate special revelation which helps us to shape and direct all other revelation including God's wisdom here in Proverbs. And so we need to amend our third principle for reading Proverbs which I've done on the back of your outlines again so it's a bit at the bottom.

And that is if Christ is God's ultimate wisdom and special revelation then he is the one who's to direct and shape all other wisdom. And so we need to ask how might Christ or the New Testament help us to understand and apply this proverb.

We just did that in regard to the promises last week. But we can do it for all Proverbs this week. And so with those principles in mind let's have a go at getting some wisdom from these sayings.

We're at point 2 and verse 22. Here we write the proverb is do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court for the Lord will take up their case and will exact life for life.

Well the first principle tells us that we're in chapters 10 to 31 which are usually shorter sections and so we're to look for some proverbs that are related together by topic.

[17:26] Now luckily for us the NIV has already done that and it's put a heading saying number 2. So that's the first principle done tick. The second principle of Proverbs is that their nature is to use analogy and to make us reflect.

And so we need to slow down and pause ponder what is being said here. And now what is being said about this topic of exploiting or robbing the poor?

Well it could simply be a case of not stealing. The word for exploit here is the word for rob but it's more than that isn't it? It's robbing from the poor because they are poor.

In other words it's taking advantage of them which is why the NIV uses the word exploit. It's showing no compassion to the needy in court and taking them for everything they've got or that it is. And the warning is that if we do this then the Lord himself will take our life for theirs which tells us that God really cares about how we treat those in need doesn't it? Now before we apply this to ourselves the third principle was to look to Christ or the New Testament to help us understand and apply it.

[18:38] And as we do we certainly see Christ himself practice this proverb don't we? He did not crush the needy because of some Sabbath rule about doing no healing instead he healed the man with the shriveled hand if you remember.

And on the next slide we have from James chapter 1 verse 29 the New Testament saying religion that God our father accepts as pure and faultless is this to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

And so when we see people in need or distress we are not to exploit them but show compassion towards them.

And this is wisdom for us today is it not? For there are poor and needy amongst us whom God cares about. Some time ago I shared with the morning congregations about my older brother he's not a widow or orphan as James says but he does have learning difficulties such that reading and writing even now is a struggle and so in that sense he is needy and people in the past have taken advantage of him time and time again.

But I remember one Christian guy who owned a dairy farm near where we used to live and he gave my brother a job on the farm when he was 16. It was just a labouring job rounding up the cows and getting them into the sheds for milking and so on.

[20:03] And this Christian guy could have got my brother to sign a contract that paid him five dollars an hour and my brother would have happily signed it knowing no better. He wouldn't have been able to read the contract.

But this Christian man didn't. He paid him a full adult wage and my brother started earning so much that my parents thought they should start charging him board.

Now my brother worked hard for it but you see this Christian guy refused to exploit the poor if you like. Take advantage of my needy brother. Here is a man who truly practiced this proverb you see and so lived wisely in God's eyes.

And I'm encouraged by others at our own church who have done that. Some have even taken in someone who needed a place to live and food to eat and he's now living with them at the moment.

This is what it means to live wisely in God's eyes. Let's have a look at another proverb. We'll go with the even sayings just because there's 30 of them and we're not going to go through 30 of them. [21 : 11] Go to saying number 4 and verse number 26. It says do not be one who shakes hands in pledge or puts up security for debts.

If you lack the means to pay your very bed will be snatched from under you. Now again the first principle of proverbs tells us to look for shorter sections in this part of the book that are grouped by a related topic.

But again the NIV has done this for us. The second principle is to understand what a proverb is which means we have to pause and ponder what it's saying. And at first glance it seems to contradict the one we just looked at about not exploiting people but showing compassion and the like.

I mean aren't we supposed to give to those in need? In fact Proverbs 22 verse 9 just on the left hand side of the page encourages us to be generous.

Chapter 22 verse 9 says that generous will themselves be blessed for they share their food with the poor. But here in verse 26 it sounds like we're not to be generous by putting up security for debts and not pledging money towards others.

[22 : 23] So we need to keep looking and find out what's going on here. And as we do we notice that there is actually no poor involved are there? There's no poor involved here.

And notice verse 27 assumes you will have to pay. And if you've gotten no money to pay then you can lose your bed. And so the picture we get here is someone asking you for money for a shady or shaky deal.

One that is not going to be pulled off. And so the problem is not about being generous it's about being shrewd with money and how we use it.

And again this is wisdom for our time is it not? Because there are all sorts of schemes out there especially aimed at those amongst us who are retired and they ask you to go into on some deal or have some sort of timeshare or the like.

And you have to be very shrewd because your very bed could be snatched from under you. 18 months ago a man from Western Australia lost \$3 million from his super fund to a West African investment scam.

[23 : 32] On the next slide but the thing was he started even encouraging others to give towards this scam and the kicker in all this is that he was told that it wasn't real, that it was a scam but he didn't believe people.

He needed wisdom from this proverb didn't he? Or people I know no longer at our church were also warned about a scam and didn't listen and they lost their savings.

In fact on the next slide ASIC which is the Australian Security of Investment Commission they've listed on their website which is on the next slide the 10 most recent dodgy companies that of yesterday are seeking people to invest in them when they're a fraud.

This is wisdom for our time is it not? Of course when we look at our third principle Jesus teaches us that using our money shrewdly not only involves avoiding dodgy deals but it means using it well for the kingdom.

For example the parable of the shrewd manager in Luke 16 and at the end of the parable Jesus says this on the next slide he says the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.

[24 : 52] So the dishonest manager is we're not to follow his dishonesty but his shrewdness and Jesus says I tell you use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves so that when it is gone that is when you die that's when it's gone you'll be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

See what Jesus is saying? use our money shrewdly we can use it well but on God's terms not on the world's terms we can use it to see others come into the kingdom we can invest in other people's eternity such that we'll be welcomed when we go to heaven we'll hear those words well done good and faithful servant that's what it means to truly practice this proverb and live wisely in God's eyes eyes but can you see how these principles help us to read these proverbs which seem so random and to live wisely in God's eyes let's look at one more and then I'd like to try something a little bit different so hold on to your socks but we'll look at one more first number six we'll keep following the even schema so saying number six verse number 29 here we read do you see someone skilled in their work they will serve before kings they will not serve before officials of low rank now again

principle one is done for us the

NIV has already broken it up into a topic the second principle is we need to slow down and think about what's being said here and as we do it seems to be saying that the one who is a good worker the one job will be noticed and promoted they will serve the upper management if you like the kings or CEOs now this is an observation from life based on God's order that he stitched into creation and the implication might be to work hard and be good at your job in fact there are a number of proverbs that talk about working hard and not being sluggard like verse 13 just on the left hand to verse 13 at the sluggard says there's a line outside I'll be killed in the public square in other words they just make up excuses to stay inside and be lazy in fact with school holidays at the moment my children have been enjoying sleep ins but at 11 o'clock this morning

I thought it was getting a bit ridiculous so I told this particular child to get up to which reminded me of that sluggard proverb so with all the biblical justification I needed I said you sluggard get out of bed now these proverbs about hard work are balanced though by proverbs about chasing after wealth being a workaholic if you like and we see that in chapter 23 verse 4 but before we simply say that God's wisdom to us is to work hard so we'll be promoted we need to keep applying that third principle and ask how does Christ or the New Testament help us to apply this and as we look at the New Testament Christ teaching through his apostles we see on the next side things like Titus chapter 2 which gives us another motivation to work well it says to teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything to try and please them not to talk back to them and not to steal from them but to show that they can be fully trusted why so that in every way they will make the teaching about

God our saviour attractive and now employees are a little bit different to slaves in the New Testament but it's a pretty close parallel in some circumstances but here we're given another reason isn't it aren't we and that reason is evangelistic not for promotion sake but for other people's sake that they might be attracted to our saviour christ or take colossians chapter 3 on the next slide here we read to that slaves are to obey their masters in everything slaves obey in everything those who are your earthly masters not by way of eye service as people pleases that is when they're watching you just to please them but with sincerity of heart fearing the lord whatever you do work heartily as for the lord and not for men knowing that from the lord you receive the inheritance as your reward you are serving the lord christ here we are again to work hard you know with sincerity of heart do a good job but we're given another reason for it aren't we it may lead to promotion to serve the king or the ce ceo christ what's more this proverb is generally true that those who work hard and do a good job are promoted and rewarded but it's not always true is it and yet in christ as we saw last week these promises will be completely true for by serving him faithfully we will be rewarded with a heavenly inheritance it says and that beats any earthly promotion as i mentioned last week my father used to work at a local high school as a teacher all his life he was a math teacher and in his day there were not as many restrictions and checks and balances in place for teachers in fact one of his colleagues would regularly skip teaching classes he couldn't be bothered dealing with a bunch of brats and he would actually leave the school go out and buy some fish and chips come back to the staff room and chew away at them over the course of the afternoon and he got away with it he was never pulled up for it what's more many of the kids who went to that high school were quite frankly brats and it was a tough school and you'd rarely get a child or a teenager saying thanks to you

[31 : 26] I can't even get my teenager to say thanks to me but it would be very easy for my father not to work hard his colleagues weren't the kids were ungrateful no one appreciated his work but I remember growing up that he would be in his study most nights of the week and usually he was either preparing for church but very often doing marking or preparing for maths lessons why well he told me once because he's serving Christ he said now he was never promoted but he was happy to do it because he knows trusting Christ not only means serving him it also means receiving an inheritance that far outweighs any promotion here is someone who practiced this proverb I think to its full extent and so live wisely in God's eyes I hope that you can start to see how these principles that we've been working on and building up over the last few weeks help you to read proverbs and apply it rightly to your life and

I hope that you can see that because my aim has been not just to teach you from proverbs but also to teach you about proverbs so that you can read them for yourself and on that note hold on to your socks I'm going to give you a go to to go to go to stop for discussion when Jeff asked that question

at the beginning of the service to break into pairs I saw a couple people go oh no anyway bear with me have a go at saying number eight which is verses 23 4 and 5 and use the principles on the back of your sheet the first one's done for you already to see if you can get some application for life and if you're really adventurous you can try saying number nine so I'm going to give you a few minutes to do that and then we'll come back and I'll see how you go all right I won't some people have finished some people are still going but hopefully you've started to get your teeth into

Proverbs for yourself because you want to be able to read the Bible for yourself at home right and so I'm hoping these principles will help you to do that I won't ask people to call out what they've found I'll be the guinea pig and tell you what I've found and you can mark yourself so saying number eight do not wear yourself out to get rich to wear yourself out to get rich means you're really chasing after it don't lean on your own understanding or your own wealth that kind of thing and why well verse five cast but a glance at the riches and they are gone for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle or plummet on the stock exchange at the GFC or apparently Neville just told me Bitcoin took a dive and the like so in other words we're not to chase after being rich because riches are fleeting aren't they they don't last forever and when you look to the New Testament can anyone think of any places that kind of help us apply it even further like do not store up riches in heaven where what happens to them moth and rust eat and destroy they fly away or even the rich fool do you remember the rich fool he he built bigger barns and said I'll sit back eat drink and be merry and remember what happens God said to him you fool this very night your life will be demanded from you then who will get what you have prepared for yourself this is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich towards God I remember when I lived in Sydney we were renting a place and we went to a real estate agent and she was very excited this was the last property that she was showing before she retired she said that she and her husband had worked very hard for a long time and saved up everything being very frugal and they were looking forward to spending it all on themselves and she said that and sadly a week later we went back into the real estate agent and she died of a heart attack true story and that's this parable isn't it what about saying number nine

I don't know if anyone had a go at saying number nine was anyone adventurous enough to have a crack at it it's a bit of an odd one it says do not crave his delicacies for he is the kind of person who always is thinking about the cost he says eat and drink but in his heart he is not with you and if you've ever had gone to someone's place and felt that kind of reservation then often you don't quite vomit up the little you have eaten verse eight but you do feel awkward don't you I remember Michelle's grandmother who was a lovely lady she brought out a block of chocolate and said would you like a piece of chocolate that was it you get one piece and one only and she grew up in the war where they had food coupons and the like so you understood what was going on but you kind of felt bad for even taking that one piece and that's what the proverb is saying here but as we come to the [37 : 06] New Testament the focus actually reverses which is what makes it tricky to apply to encourage us to be willing hosts 1 Peter chapter 4 says offer hospitality to one another without grumbling so there's an application if you like of saying number nine well there's more we could do but for now let me close with a proverb that the writer received from God's special revelation it's over the page chapter 23 verse 17 saying number 15 and I think this sums up a lot of the things that we've been looking at do not let your heart envy sinners but always be zealous for the fear of the Lord for there is surely a future hope for you and your hope will not be cut off you see left to just general revelation it might be easy to envy sinners when their life goes well and ours does not but special revelation especially in

Christ reminds us that we are to direct our envy our zealousness not for the things of other people but the fear of the Lord because verse 18 there is a future hope that in Christ will certainly never be cut off let's pray our gracious father we do thank you for your word to us and particularly your word in your son to us which helps us to understand the wisdom from the world and even the wisdom from the old testament book like proverbs father we do pray that you would help us to meditate upon your word to see how it might be fulfilled in Christ or to see what his teaching through his apostles might say about it so that we can rightly apply your wisdom and live well in this world in your eyes for we ask it in Jesus name amen hear