

Meaning of Life from the Wisdom Books

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Preacher: Matthew Garrett

[0:01] Well, let's begin with prayer. Actually, I think before I go to prayer, I'll just say you see the PowerPoint sign there that today we're going to be taking a short break, a one week break from the book of John.

And we're going to look into the wisdom books in the Old Testament and see what we might learn there. And that's partly because I've been studying through the wisdom books lately, the books of Job and Psalms and Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

And I'm going to try to preach through all four books in one sermon. So buckle your seatbelt.

Nothing to it. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we know that you are here. You said you would inhabit the praises of your people. We have praised you. You are here.

You've also said that you are the eyes of the Lord are everywhere in the earth, that there's no place we can hide from you. So you are here. And now, Lord, we are here also.

So we're asking you, great God of the universe, do what only you can do. You're here and we're here. Work in our hearts. Heal us. Mend us.

[1:16] Help us to be like Jesus. It's in the name of Jesus we pray. Amen. Amen. So, what I'd like to do first then, is instead of jumping straight into the wisdom books, I want to look at this great scripture in Joshua 24, verse 15.

Joshua said, toward the end of his ministry and mission, he's an old man, he's about to quit his job, I guess, as the leader of Israel.

And he says to the people, he gathers them all together and he says, if it doesn't please you to worship the Lord, choose for yourselves today.

Which will you worship? The idols in whose land you are now living or the Lord? But as for me and my household, we will worship the Lord.

Well then, the wisdom books. And how is that going to relate to this verse? Let's just jump into the first one I want to talk about. God's wisdom in the book of Proverbs.

[2:24] This is probably considered the primary book of wisdom. I remember reading many years ago that the great evangelist Billy Graham, for all of his adult life, read five, or I'm sorry, read one chapter of Proverbs and five chapters of Psalms every day.

And then that way, every month, he would finish the Proverbs and the Psalms and start over again. So every year he read the book of Proverbs 12 times and the book of Psalms 12 times.

So this is a great book to give us wisdom. Basically, in a nutshell, here's what Proverbs says. It says, if you'll do what's right, and if you'll work hard, and if you trust in God, then God's going to bless you.

And then the book of Proverbs also says the vice versa. It says, if you won't work, if you'll be a lazy bum, if you won't do what's right, if you won't trust in God, then you're going to be in a heap of trouble and everything's going to go wrong.

That's basically what the book of Proverbs is about. Now, let me just pick a few scriptures out of that for you to consider. For example, chapter 9, verse 11, if you are wise, your wisdom will reward you.

[3:49] Chapter 10, verse 3, Proverbs 10, verse 6, blessings crown the head of the righteous.

So that's all about if you live righteously, work hard, trust God, he's going to bless you. But then there's all these other verses that have the opposite end of that. Chapter 10, verse 24, what the wicked dread will overtake them.

Chapter 11, 17, a cruel man brings trouble on himself. 16, verse 5, the Lord hates proud people. They will not go unpunished. And then I thought it's interesting in chapter 10, verse 27, you kind of in one verse have both ends of it.

The fear of the Lord will add length to your life and the years of the wicked are cut short. So you see this through the entire 30, 31 chapters of Proverbs, this kind of back and forth between live right, God will bless you, don't, and you'll be in a heap of trouble.

[5:04] And I think if I was to pick a key verse, it probably comes back to this very well-known verse that we all, I'm sure, have pretty much memorized. We're so familiar with it.

Proverbs 3, 5, and 6, trust in the Lord with all of your heart. Lean not on your own understanding. Don't trust yourself, just your own wisdom and things.

In all of your ways, submit to Him, and He will make your path straight. He will direct your path. God will take care of you. That's sort of the whole message of Proverbs in a verse or two.

But then we come to the book of Ecclesiastes, and it turns the book of Proverbs upside down on its head. Written by the same guy.

King Solomon wrote most of Proverbs and claims in the first verse that he also wrote all of Ecclesiastes. Now, in Ecclesiastes, it basically says it doesn't matter what you do in life.

[6:07] If there's no God, then life is meaningless. I remember the first time I read this book. I'd only been a believer for about a year. I was maybe, I don't know how old I was, 26 or so, and I finally got to Ecclesiastes.

I had decided, I'm going to read the whole Bible. And so I had started back there in Genesis 1, and I was buzzing along. I got to Ecclesiastes, and I thought, what is this doing in the Bible?

If you've never read it, I mean, it's a crazy book. It says things like, eat, drink, and be merry. Have a big party. Nothing matters anyway. I mean, you're like, what is this doing in the Bible?

And I think what this book is saying, it's like it's a thought experiment. That here's Solomon saying, if there is not a God, here's the meaning of life.

And so he really goes at it from, it's not going to matter what you do. Let's look at some verses on that that are amazing. Right at the get-go. Verse 1, he says, I'm writing this.

[7:16] And then verse 2, meaningless. Meaningless. Utterly meaningless. Everything is meaningless.

What do people gain from all of their labors under the sun? He goes on chapter after chapter saying, why bother to work hard?

You're wasting your time. If you make a lot of money, you're just going to die and somebody else is going to have it. No matter what you accomplish, give it two or three generations.

Nobody's even going to remember who you were or that you lived. Nobody's going to care. He didn't say this anywhere, but he probably, they must not have had tombstones much.

He would probably say, don't buy an expensive tombstone after your children and grandchildren are dead. Nobody's ever going to go look at that grave again. I mean, he's really saying, if there's not a God at all, what's the purpose?

[8:14] Chapter two, verse two is a very strange verse. Laughter is insanity. Even pleasures accomplish nothing.

And I remember when I read that, I thought, wait a minute. The Bible says laughter is a good medicine. That's in the book of Proverbs. This is Ecclesiastes. If there's no God, why bother to laugh?

You got nothing to laugh about. You're going to live this long. And then it's over. What are you laughing for? That's what this book is about.

Look at verse 11 of chapter two. Everything is meaningless. A chasing after the wind. I'm going to ask Elias the question.

Elias, if you were to chase the wind, do you think you could catch him? Not really. They'll waste the time, wouldn't they? Yeah. So, that's what he's saying.

[9:13] He says, look, no matter what you're trying to do, what are you going to accomplish? And then he says, there's no difference in verse 16. Just like the fool, the wise person will also die.

Oh my goodness. What a discouraging book. But then, after 12 chapters of this, he gets to the last two verses. And he says, but hold it.

There is a God. And so, here's what he says at the very end of the book. Ecclesiastes 12, 13, 14.

Now, after considering everything, and that's what that book reads like.

It's like he considers everything in the whole world. Here's the conclusion. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. God will bring every deed into judgment.

Whoa. So there is a God. Life's not meaningless after all. But then we come to Job. Job kind of says this.

[10:26] Y'all know the story. I'm going to briefly repeat it. But, in the summary, real quick, Job kind of says, most of the time, righteous people, God's people, will prosper.

and evil people, will suffer. Most of the time. But not always. And God is ultimately in control.

And Job really hammers away at this. And, it's, this is another time when it's interesting to me, the songs that the Lord led Steve to pick, and even the prayer he opened with of Romans 8, 28, we know that all things are working together for good to those that love the Lord and are called according to his purpose.

Bad things will happen to good people, but it's all working together for good. And Job is a guy who would sing, it is well with my soul. And yet, he is the ultimate suffering saint in the whole Bible.

He is the guy that has the worst life of anybody in the whole Bible. Hardly anybody in history has had it worse than Job. Just a real quick reminder of it.

[11:44] Job, the Bible starts off in his story and says he was a really, really good man, always tried to do what was right, gave to those who were in need, shared when he needed to.

In one place, he even says, I have not even looked at a young woman in an improper way. And I'm thinking, what kind of man are you?

And so, I mean, this guy was an incredible guy. And then what happens? God permits Satan to have at him. He tells Satan, okay, don't kill him, but anything else.

Because Satan, you might remember, challenged God, said, he only loves you because look what you've done. He's rich. He's got everything. Take away some of that.

He'll curse you. And God says, I'll take the challenge. I know this guy. Go ahead. You say, God, that's not like the book of Proverbs. He's doing right.

[12:49] Don't let these bad things come on you. But what happens? Well, first he loses all of his wealth, all of his cattle, all of his sheep, all of his everything, his donkeys, his goats, all of his properties.

It all is taken away from him. And then, all of his children die in tragic natural disasters and such. I forgot he had a slew of kids.

They all died in the same day. And then, even his health fell apart. He got covered with sores, terrible boils, top of his head, bottom of his feet.

He was miserable. And what did the devil leave him with? A nagging wife. I'm sure Joe wanted to say, devil, why don't you take her with you?

And then the devil let three so-called friends come to see him who had nothing but bad advice and kind of like, this is all your fault.

[13:51] Go ahead. Confess your sins. This wouldn't be happening to you if you were a good man. And, you know, we Christians need to be careful when we start judging people too harshly. We don't know what they've been through.

And so, anyway, that's all happening to him. Now, in the end of the story, Job is saying, but God, why did you let this happen to me?

And God doesn't give him any easy, simple answer that we can go. Now we understand suffering. I've got it. He kind of says, I'm sovereign.

trust me. And in our suffering, when the young mother gets killed in a car wreck, when the doctor says it's cancer, when we lose the job we wanted and it's gone, and when a house fire takes whatever it is, God says, I'm not going to explain to you right now exactly why this happened.

I might show you one day. But for right now, trust me. I'm sovereign. And then in Romans 8, 28, I'm working all things together for good. So now, let's look at just a few verses in Job to see how he was

reacting.

[15:06] After everything had been taken away from him, his next comment is astonishing. He simply says, the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away.

May the name of the Lord be praised. Whew. Could you do that? I'm not sure that I could. Take away everything and I'm going to say, praise the Lord.

And then, halfway through the book, third way through, he says another amazing thing, Job 13, verse 15. Even if he kills me, he's talking about God.

Even if God kills me, I will still trust in him. He says, I don't care how bad it gets. I'm going to trust him.

And then, I think that the key verse in Job is 19, 25. This is a verse where he had some sort of great revelation from God when he says, for I know that my Redeemer lives and in the end he will stand upon the earth.

[16:19] It's like he has a vision that there's a Messiah, that God has a plan and that one day that Redeemer will come and stand on earth and it will make everything right forever.

He says, I know that. I don't know how many knew that. The scholars believe that this is the oldest book in the Bible. He didn't have any other scripture to look at. So, it's amazing that he's able to say that.

And so, I think it comes down to that a faith that is not tested is a faith that can't be trusted. If you're going to really trust your faith, there's times when God will permit it to be tested.

And it can be a hard test. Sometimes it's not that hard. And only God really understands and knows why he's permitted these things to happen in your life.

The things that hurt you, the things that didn't go right. Truly, as a believer, only God really understands. And so, the question is, will you trust him that he's at work in this?

[17:27] Will you trust him? And that is the wisdom that Job offers us. Then we come to the Psalms.

The book of David. David, the warrior, the king, the giant killer, the poet, the songwriter, the handsome guy, the, I mean, just one of the most charismatic, wonderful leaders that ever lived, David.

And in his book of Psalms, you've got this poetry. It was a hymn book. He put these things to music. He wrote about half of the Psalms, not all of them, about 80-some. And these were songs he would sing.

And so, it's full of, like, poetry of wisdom and then poetic joy, happy times, poetic despair, poetic faith. And why is that? Because David lived through all of it.

Can you imagine how scared he must have been when the lion attacked the sheep or when he had to go face the giant? but can you imagine how good he felt after he had killed the lion and after he had killed the giant and was the hero of Israel?

[18:39] His life is nothing but one huge roller coaster. Sometimes he's the king and sometimes he's running for his life as his own son is trying to kill him.

Sometimes he's praising the Lord and then he's in terrible sin. You know anybody like that that can praise the Lord one day and be sinning the next?

You probably don't know anybody like that. You know, David has a life like us. Even probably more ups and downs. I hope your life isn't that much of a roller coaster.

That's a rough way to live. But let's just skip through some of his scriptures which are poetry. poetry. Especially, I don't know Hebrew, but they say if you read the Psalms in Hebrew it's marvelous.

There's lots of rhyme and it has a rhythm to it. You know, true poetry. They did the best they could translating it into English. So anyway, here we go. Just a few clips, sound bites if you will.

[19:44] Psalm 1-1, very first chapter as it begins. Blessed is the man who delights in the law of the Lord. Psalm 3-3, you are a shield around me, O Lord.

You lift up my head. You hear old happy David rejoicing and then we come to Psalm 4. Answer me when I call to you, O my God.

Give me relief from my distress. In 6-3, my soul is in anguish. How long, O Lord? How long? You ever felt that way? But he doesn't stay there. Chapter 8, verse 1. O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

Remember, these are all songs. All of these were things that they would sing. And then you get to the next. Let's look at chapter 10, verse 1.

[20:52] Why, O Lord, do you hide yourself in times of trouble? God, today is when I need you. Today is when everything's gone wrong.

And where are you? How can I believe in you? How did you let it happen? That's how David's feeling. And then here's suddenly Psalm 23-1. The Lord is my shepherd.

I shall not want. Hallelujah. We don't have a hallelujah time. This is the same David. Then we come to 38, several verses in there.

O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger. I confess my sins. Do not be far from me, O my God. And then toward the end of the book, Psalm 103, 1.

David wrote that one. I looked it up to verify it. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless his holy name. So, there's probably a lot of what could be called key verses in David.

[21:58] But this up and down roller coaster of emotion and the wisdom that comes from it, I think this is a good key verse. Psalm 46-1. God is our refuge and our strength of very present help in a time of trouble.

David lived that. He lived it. He had a broken heart. He had a huge disappointment. He had the days of loneliness and fear when everything went wrong.

He dealt with it. He lived through it. Well, let's hit some conclusions out of these four books of the Bible. It's back to what I was saying at the beginning.

We have a choice. There's either a life that we decide there's not a God and then we're living in Ecclesiastes or there's life where we believe there is a God who is sovereign even when he's hidden and we don't understand him.

And then we're living in the books of Psalms and Job and Proverbs. And if the Ecclesiastes view is right because there's no God, then Ecclesiastes chapter 8 verse 15 is correct.

[23:12] There's nothing better than to eat and drink and be merry because you're going to die soon. I was meditating on this this week and an old song popped in my mind.

I thought about Plague this morning and I thought it's too complicated sometimes. But this is a weird one. It's not a Christian song. It was like in the 60s or something. There was this lady named Peggy Lee.

She wrote the saddest, she must have just finished reading Ecclesiastes and she wrote this song, is that all there is?

Is that all there is to life? Then let's keep dancing and break out the booze and have a ball.

And then she talks a little bit about something else goes wrong. The first time the house burned down and she says, so what? It was a fire. Is that all there is?

[24:16] And then she said, I went to the circus. I was supposed to be thrilled. And at the end I thought, is that all there is to a circus?

Then break out the booze. And then she says, I fell in love. I loved this boy so much. And we spent hours gazing in each other's eyes and then one day he just left.

is that all there is to love? Then let's keep dancing. I mean, it's just the strangest song, but it's exactly what Ecclesiastes says.

Ecclesiastes says, if there's not a God, then nothing in your life has any meaning. And you have to decide, is there a God or not? Well, by the way, I'll go back up because that's the last verse.

Once you decide to eat, drink, and be merry, just realize that you probably are not going to die the next day and you're going to have to live with it. Okay? The stupid things you did when you said, there's no God, I'll do whatever I want to do.

[25:28] You're the one who's going to have to pay the bill when it comes to do. You better hope to die after you live that way. You're going to have to deal with it. That's what Proverbs would say. Well, then, let's consider the evidence.

You're going to have to make a choice. A godless world, because it's faith either way. An atheist has faith that there is no God and no meaning and it's all random.

That's a faith thing. Or a believer has a faith. Yes, there is a God. And the question would be, yeah, but is that God still alive or did he take a lunch break?

Is that God personal and involved? Does he actually hear my prayer and care about me? And can he do something about it or not? And did he create all things?

So for me, in answering that kind of question, there's two best places to go. Either the beach or the mountains. things.

[26:28] That's the best place for me to answer that question, to begin to answer it. If I walk on the beach by myself, especially at night, and I see those stars, and I feel that wind blowing in my face, and I see those ocean waves forever, endlessly, how many thousands, who knows how many years, that they keep crashing on that beach.

I just know, somebody had to have done that. It didn't happen by itself. And then there's another thing I have to look at.

Even on my worst days, and we've all had some, even on the worst days, I have to remember some things like, wait a minute, was I born into a family?

You say, yeah, you don't know how bad my family was. Did they feed you? Did they change your diaper occasionally? Did you have some food to eat?

Did you have some clothes to put on your back? Did you have a shelter you could sleep in, even if it was a man down by the river? Did you have a shelter to sleep in?

[27:53] Did you get to be born in America where the poorest people are richer than most of the people of the world? Did you deserve it? Did you get to go to school?

Did you get an education? Did you get a job? Did you ever love? Were you ever loved? Did you have that experience? Did you see where I'm going with this, don't you?

Did you have medicines when you were sick? put all that together and let me ask you, does it seem like maybe something or somebody's kind of been taking care of you from the very get go?

One day we're going to also see how many times God rescued us and we didn't know it. Amen. My eyes just fell on Glenn and Renee.

something just popped in my mind. You know where I'm going, Glenn. You don't know yet. Now there's Glenn. He must be an evil man. This week he was sitting at his desk on Thursday when that big storm blew up and he's sitting there and suddenly he hears a loud crash and a tree branch falls through the ceiling right above his head and stops.

[29:18] He must be an evil. man. No, I think that God caught the tree.

A lot of people died in storms when the tree crushed them. I have a friend that happened to his mama talk about strange. This is an Ecclesiastes moment.

Hurricane was coming to South Carolina ocean front. She went to Charlotte, North Carolina to stay with a child. The storm changed its course.

I think it was Hugo. Went right through the middle of Charlotte and a tree blew over onto the bed she was sleeping in and killed her. and it totally missed her home in Charlotte.

Now, I don't know if she was a believer or not. Happened to the mama of a friend of mine. So, I don't know what to make of that, but God is sovereign and there's a plan in it.

[30:22] or it's all nothing. But I think when we get to heaven, oh by the way, I don't know if this is true or not, but I heard that when Renee, Renee wasn't there when the tree fell, is that right?

So, I heard when she got home, she comes in, there's a tree on the house, she pushes the door open, she runs in, how's the little doggy? How's the little doggy? How's the little doggy?

little doggy? little doggy? How's the How's the That's probably Glenn's twisted version. Anyway, we're going to find out one day, maybe.

And if the Lord decides to show us these things in heaven or wherever, I think we're going to all be amazed at the number of times he rescued us from the danger we didn't even know was there.

The poison we almost ate, the snake we almost stepped on, the traffic jam that made us late for work or an appointment and if he hadn't have permitted it, there was a guy that ran a stoplight and we would have been killed.

[31:36] And the Lord said, no, traffic jam, I'm not through this guy or this girl yet. I think when we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing

that will be, we will see all the ways that God watched over us.

But then you have to make a decision. And if you conclude that there's really not a God and life is meaningless, then live any way you want to and then deal with the consequences.

consequences. And I went through a period as a young man when that was my philosophy and all I can say to you, I feel sorry for you if you choose that path or anyone who does.

And you're also going to have one problem if you choose that path. Here's your problem. We were all created to be worshippers. God put that in us. And so, I don't know if you can figure out this slide here, but there's four, the black and white is four people on their knees worshipping something. And the idol is in front of them. So the person on the far left with a weird head dress, I don't know what that's all about. Worshipping, you know, there's a cell phone.

[32:50] Just, there's so many folks who are just how many hours a day do they spend on screens and social media and all that stuff. And it's all they think about. Video games, whatever.

Then you've got some folks like the second one there, he's obviously worshipping money, possessions. You know a lot of people like that. Then here's one that we don't think about much. Here's a woman worshipping family.

Did you know your family can become an idol? It can come between you and God and it's like all you ever think about is being with your family taking care of them and getting gifts for them and calling them on the phone. It's all you ever think about and you can become an idol.

And then the last one is kind of, I mean it shows a bunch of athletic equipment but I think it's the idea of hobbies, sports, whatever, professional, whatever.

Maybe it's movies, maybe it's celebrities, maybe it's your favorite music, whatever. There's a lot of stuff out in our culture that we can worship. worship. And by worship I mean it's all we ever think about.

[33:54] When we're not busy at work or busy doing what we have to do, washing dishes, cutting the grass, all that kind of stuff. Who was it that said when they get to heaven the first thing they're going to do is go and punch Adam in the nose?

I'm thinking you have, because you sinned, you're going to have to work and labor against the thorns by the sweat of your brow.

And I get so tired of pulling weeds and mowing grass and you wash the dishes. Becky says, when did you ever wash a dish? Well, once or twice.

You were known. Anyway, I'm just saying that, what was I saying? I'm saying that the things that when you're not busy and distracted, where's your heart?

When you're not having to do things to survive, where's your heart? That may be your idol because you were created to worship. So now I'm going to end right where I started.

[34:59] If it doesn't please you to worship the Lord, then you have to choose today. Which one will you worship? The idols of America?

It's interesting they called that show American Idol. Kind of, you know, America's full of idols. Is that who we're going to worship? Or are we going to worship the living, personal, involved, creative God?

Each person has to make that decision. But I can say with Joshua, as for me and my sweet wife, our household, we will worship and serve the Lord.

We're going to sing a song. Maybe the Lord has spoken to someone and you feel like, you know, I need to get this right with God. I've had some idolatry slipping in my life.

I haven't been putting God first. Lord, I see that ultimately you are what I need and you're all I need. You can only sing, it is well with my soul.

[36:05] whatever happens, whether the sea billows roll, whether the clouds be rolled back like a scroll, come what may, my sins, I bear them no more.

It is well with my soul. You can only say that if you've made God the Lord of your life. So we're going to sing a hymn. I'll be down front to pray with you.

You can make a come and have prayer or right where you are. You can recommit your life to following Jesus Christ. Let's stand.