

Where Wisdom Is Found

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[0 : 00] Reflect upon it. We ask that you will do such a work of grace in all our hearts that we may not simply be hearers but doers of your work.

We've even said that prayer a lot of times. We especially want that you should so move among us that we will indeed be enabled by you to do the things we hear from you.

In Christ's name, amen. The gentleman who took the children's focus this morning is the Reverend Tom Cooper, who's a very senior Presbyterian minister from the United States studying now at Regent College.

And so it's a fairly formidable task, even for one of such seniority and such wisdom, to take on that micro-congregation at the front of the church.

I once was in a church where three, at least, of the Sunday school teachers were fellows of the Royal College of something or other.

[1 : 13] Very impressive people. And the reason I'm telling you this is because later you're going to hear an appeal for church school teachers.

And I would say to all of you that you are supremely unqualified, but that the opportunity is one which will be richly rewarding if you can take on the challenge of seeking to communicate the reality of the gospel to the children of our congregation.

So I hope you will think about that. That's by way of giving you some advice. Now you will see that that leads nicely into the text for today, which is from Proverbs chapter 2, which is also advice.

Proverbs chapter 2 is a father speaking to his son. And he has ambitions for his son. And those ambitions he communicates to him.

And he said, this is where it's at. Look at the passage. If you receive my word, treasure my command, make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding, cry out for insight, raise your voice for understanding, seek it like silver, search for it like gold.

[2 : 41] As for a hidden treasure, well, that's good. The result of following that advice, the promise is that then you will understand the fear of the Lord.

Verse 5, see that? Then you will find the knowledge of God and then you will be able to live your life because in verse 6, the Lord will give you wisdom.

And as you are attentive to him, from his mouth will come knowledge and understanding. And he has a vast storehouse of sound wisdom for those who walk uprightly.

And he's a shield to those who walk in integrity. He makes it his business to guard the paths of justice and to preserve the way of the saints.

So it's a good passage, isn't it? Well, I have three major objections to it, which I'd like to share with you. The first is that it is advice. And in our society, nobody takes advice.

[3 : 50] It's a lost art. The people who think they can give it can't find anybody to take it. Advice is cheap. Advice is not asked for. Advice is not taken.

Advice is not taken. And especially if you were to do as this man has done and think that you can address your son and tell him what he should do and how he should live his life.

Quite impossible. Quite impractical. And not the way our world works at all. And some of you who have sons could bear eloquent testimony to the futility of attempting to do what this man sets out boldly to do.

You see, the difficulty is that we, our children, know more than we do. They live in the modern age.

They are progressive. Evolution, which produced Neanderthal types like you and me hundreds of years ago, now produces smart, elite, wise young men and women who know far more than we could ever tell them.

[4 : 54] The truth is in the future, not in the past. And because you know something of the past, doesn't give you any right to speak with advice to those who have to live in the future.

So, shall we go further? I have rewritten this little passage of Scripture to try and bring it up to date. And this is what it says. You know, this is, this is close to blasphemy, I guess, but I want you to just listen to it.

The passage should be written to say, My son, it is most unlikely you will receive my words. Wisdom is not something you value.

Your heart is inclined to a quick fix, not long-term understanding. You fill your world with noise so that you can't hear the cry of your own heart.

There is no time to seek and search for anything. Just cut your losses and move on. Well, that would be perhaps more practical advice to the young moderns of our day and age.

[6 : 07] The fear of the Lord, you can't compare with the glamour and potential of technology.

Of the wonder of our emerging world, the young man or woman would say, Man, that's awesome. That's to be feared.

And as for the knowledge of God, personal fulfillment is my goal. Not the knowledge of God. Well, for people who are caught in that dilemma, there is some comfort, you know, I mean, the caught in the dilemma of trying to pass on this advice.

There is some rather stern comfort in Deuteronomy chapter 21 and verse 21. Where it says how you are to handle a son who behaves in that way.

And it says this. It begins at verse 18. If a man, now you can, this is the law, heavy, so listen to it.

[7 : 15] If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and though they chastise him, will not give heed to them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gate of the place where he lives.

And they shall say to the elders of his city, this our son is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey our voice. He is a glutton and a drunkard.

Then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones. So you shall purge the evil from your midst, that evil which is a stubborn son or daughter.

And all Israel shall hear and fear. Now you can see that if you were to take that little text and embroider it and hang it on the wall, that it might have quite a therapeutic effect.

Even if it never was carried out, it would still serve a purpose. But we don't have that kind of sobering activity going on in our society.

[8 : 39] Well, those are the first two things that I find difficult about the passage. One, that it's advice. And two, that it seems irrelevant to our society.

And then there's another part of it that I find difficult. And that is where it says, it uses ifs, you know, like Rudyard Kipling's ifs. And it starts off in verse one of chapter two of Proverbs.

My son, if you receive my word. Verse three, if you cry out for insight. Verse four, if you seek it like silver. And of course, that's, everybody knows that problem.

That the essential problem is that our hearts, we know that if we were to behave in such and such a way, we would derive great benefit from it.

But that doesn't enable us or inspire us or create in us a longing and desire to do it. If you were to do this. And most of us live with all sorts of ifs.

[9 : 47] That is, we know that if we behaved in this way and if we looked after our health and if we looked after our money and if we managed our home and if we improved our relationships and if we did a million different things, things would be better.

But we don't do any of them. So it doesn't help very much, very often. In fact, it in a sense lays open the heart of the human dilemma.

And that is the great religious trap. And that is because we know better than we do. And this is particularly for us people who are at church.

We pretend to be better than we are. And people see that in our religion and think it's shallow, superfluous, and meaningless.

And so it is. Simply to know better than we are is fine. That's the dilemma. But to pretend to be better than we are is fatal.

[10 : 53] So we come back to the passage and we need to look at it again. And I want you to look at it with this text in mind. If you take a text from this passage, let it be the text in verse 4.

Seek it like silver. That is, and then I want you in order to understand what seeking it like silver is, to turn to Job chapter 28.

And he tells you what it's like to be a miner. You know how much of the wealth of this province has come from mining. Gold mines and all sorts of mines.

And there's a wonderful description of mining for the treasures of this earth, silver and gold. And look at it in verse 28, chapter 28 of Job on page 459 in the Pew Bible.

Where Job says, Surely there is a mine for silver. I'm going to read the whole thing, so just settle in and listen. And you'll find it easier, I think, if you follow it.

[11 : 59] Surely there is a mine for silver and a place for gold which they refine. Iron is taken out of the earth. Copper is smelted from the ore.

Men put an end to darkness and search out to the farthest bound, the ore and the gloom and deep darkness. This is hard rock mining going down deep into the earth.

They open shafts in valleys away from where men live. They are forgotten by travelers. They hang afar from men.

They swing to and fro. That's a picture of some early elevators. As for the earth, out of it comes bread, but underneath it is turned up as by fire, and its stones are the place of sapphires, and it has dust of gold.

That path into the secret places of the earth, verse 7 says, no bird of prey knows. The falcon's eye has not seen it. The proud beasts have not trodden it.

[13 : 08] The lion has not passed over it. Here's a picture of open pit mining, I think. Man puts his hand to the flinty rock and overturns mountains by the roots.

He cuts out channels in the rocks, and his eyes seize every precious thing. He binds up the streams so that they do not trickle, and the thing that is hid he brings forth to light.

And so he describes in that very eloquent way how we search the darkest places of the earth in order to bring forth the treasure of gold and silver and sapphires, the thing we count as to be of supreme worth.

But then, in a wonderful parallel, he then talks about another kind of mining, a mining in which we are all engaged, each one of us, seeking silver, to seek it like silver.

This is what it says, verse 12. Where shall wisdom be found? Where is the place of understanding? Man does not know the way to it.

[14 : 22] It is not found in the land of the living. The deep says, it's not in me. The sea says, it's not with me.

It cannot be gotten for gold, and silver cannot be weighed as its price. There's not enough. It cannot be valued in the gold of ophir, in precious onyx or sapphire.

Gold and glass cannot equal it, nor can it be exchanged for jewels of fine gold. No mention shall be made of coral or of crystal.

The price of wisdom is above pearls. The topaz of Ethiopia cannot compare with it, nor can it be valued in pure gold.

Whence then comes wisdom? Where is the place of understanding? It is hid from the eyes of all living and concealed from the birds of the air.

[15 : 24] Abaddon and death say. We've heard a rumor of it with our ears. God understands the way to it, and he knows its place. He looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens.

When he gave to the wind its weight and meted out the waters by measure, when he made a decree for the rain and a way for the lightning and the thunder, then he saw it and declared it.

He established it and searched it out, and he said to man, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.

Wonderful chapter. Well, what I want to say about it quite briefly is all of us are engaged in this.

The lawyer, the ambassador, the premier, the alderman, the physician, the surgeon, the stockbroker, the student, the mechanic, the garbage collector, all of us are seeking to put it together.

[16 : 31] And you can find all sorts of people who have never been to university and never been to school and never had the advantages of education who come a lot closer to finding it than many people who are heavy with academic honors and intellectual attainments because of the hidden quality of this thing which is called wisdom.

It's not knowledge. If it was knowledge, the whole of the world would be a computer which can store infinite amounts of it. But this is wisdom, and wisdom belongs to the individual.

It cannot be shared. It's something you must find. You must seek for it. You must lay your whole hands on it. And if you were a mother raising children, infinite possibilities for discovering wisdom.

And if you were a politician trying to rule men, infinite possibilities. And if you were a lawyer contemplating the meaning and application of the law, or if you were a surgeon cutting into the human body, all sorts of opportunities.

But the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord. That's where it starts. And I think you could take the verse from here where when it says that when it says in Proverbs 2, right in the middle there, sorry while I find it, where it says, you search for it, you seek it like silver, then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and then you will find the knowledge of God.

[18 : 13] And I would pray like Tom Cooper who was talking to those children and trying to inculcate into them some sense of the fear of the Lord. That's the beginning. And when that fear of the Lord takes hold of you so that you recognize that you are accountable to Him and responsible before Him, then that fear of the Lord is the beginning, and through the exercise of that fear in all the circumstances of your life, you come to the knowledge of God.

What a great thing it is, what a great moment it is, when your heart quakes with fear of the living God. And every second and every heartbeat and every breath you breathe is part of moving from the fear of the Lord towards the knowledge of God in all the circumstances of your life.

And it belongs to you. You can't get it prepackaged. You can't get anybody else to find it for you. It belongs to you and the circumstances of your life to find this knowledge of God beginning with the fear of the Lord.

That's where it's got to lead to. Well, what happens to somebody, like when I was 18, I committed my life to Jesus Christ.

And that was a very important decision for me. And one of the things I thought happened at that moment was that I then knew and understood everything. But I think in retrospect that I then maybe came to something which has been very valuable to me and that is the fear of the Lord.

[20 : 08] And that in that fear, to live your life in that fear, that awesome fear of God, will ultimately bring you to the knowledge of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

There's a lovely story which I'd like to be able to tell you, but I haven't any time left. It's a story about the Queen of Sheba coming to Solomon because she had heard of his wisdom.

And she came and she said, she was, she was breathless. She was overwhelmed. The half of it, she said. I have not heard.

And that story is quoted in the New Testament. And do you know why it's quoted in the New Testament? Because it goes on to say, a greater than Solomon is here.

A greater source of wisdom. and that greater source is the person of Jesus Christ. He is the one in whom the wisdom of God is revealed.

[21 : 16] And you see, that's why we can't waste our lives with meaningless things, with wasting time, with doing frivolous things all the time. We cannot waste one second of our life that is not part of beginning with the fear of the Lord and moving towards the knowledge of God.

And you're able to do that in all sorts of circumstances. But so often all we're doing is in a sense anesthetizing our minds so that we don't see from the perspective of the fear of the Lord the evidence for the knowledge of God in every person we meet, in every circumstance we find ourselves in.

We don't see the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. in all our circumstances. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 130 of Jesus and says he is the source of God that is God he is the source of your life in Christ Jesus whom God made our wisdom.

And so you take this whole search for wisdom which is Proverbs chapter 2. my son receive my words treasure up my commandments and this is Jesus speaking not like the scribes but with authority.

Make your ear attentive to wisdom incline your heart to understanding cry out for insight raise your voice for understanding seek it like silver treasure for it as for hidden treasure search for it as for hidden treasure and then you will understand the fear of the Lord and you will find the knowledge of God.

[23 : 10] well there it is I I hope I haven't given you any good advice this morning I hope that God the Holy Spirit has taken these words to stir in your heart the desire to seek for it like silver this understanding I hope that God has gripped your heart with the fear of the Lord I hope he's given you a desire for the knowledge of God which will never leave you and I invite you in Christ's name to partake of this Holy Communion in which God in his infinite wisdom imparts himself to us in a way which the world calls foolishness when bread is broken and wine is poured and in Christ's name we say this is my body which is given for you and this is my blood which is shed for you and he who is made our wisdom imparts himself to us in this sacrament of bread and wine

Amen to the situate and to the Secondly