

Proverbs 10 - Wisdom From God

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[0 : 00] Today I would like us to turn back to the passage that we read in the book of Proverbs. We are going to have a bit of a general look at this passage but we will focus in more detail on verse 5 as we go through the sermon.

But we can read again just the first few verses. The Proverbs of Solomon. A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother.

The foolish gained by wickedness do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death. The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry, but he thwarts the craving of the wicked. A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.

He who gathers in summer is a prudent son, but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who brings shame. Now the book of Proverbs is a really, really interesting book.

It's quite different from all the other books in the Bible and it has so much to teach us. It's basically split into two parts.

[1 : 04] Chapters 1-9 are a collection of poems that highlight the importance of gaining wisdom and understanding. And then from chapter 10 onwards you get this vast collection of short, brief statements.

Just one verse at a time, each set in forth a small, memorable statement of wisdom. So we read chapter 10, which is really the very start of this second section, as indicated by the title, the Proverbs of Solomon.

And so this book has got a huge amount to teach us. And today I want us just to spend a wee bit of time thinking about the book in general and then focusing a wee bit more on one or two parts of chapter 10.

It's a really interesting thing to ask ourselves. Can a 3,000 year old collection of Proverbs have any relevance for us today?

Well, let's see. Let's see if it does. First of all I want us just to ask, how should we approach the book of Proverbs?

[2 : 19] Just when you come to read a book in the Bible, it's helpful to have a wee bit of background knowledge to navigate through it. And in terms of the book of Proverbs, the key word is the word wisdom.

And we have to remember the fact that the different books of the Old Testament are split, or can be split, into different categories. If you look at this screen, there's a list of all 39 books in the Old Testament.

They split. We can split them into different categories. First of all, we have the books of the Law. And these are there to direct us according to God's commandments.

Then you have the historical books running all the way from Joshua through to Esther. They are there to inform us about what happened at the key stages of redemptive history.

You also have the prophetic books. They are there to warn us in terms of God's judgment. And they're also there to give us hope in terms of salvation.

[3 : 25] So you've got all these categories, the Law, teaching us what God requires. The historical books, recording events that took place. The prophetic books, giving us a message of judgment and salvation.

The wisdom literature. What's it there for? The wisdom literature is there to make us think.

And there are six books, which are generally considered to fall into this category. You can see them there, the book of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Solomon of Solomon and Lamentations.

These books are mostly made up of poetry. And they are focused on giving understanding and instruction to the reader.

And so these books are there to challenge us to think. And sometimes, sometimes that is the most important thing that we can do.

[4 : 33] And I think that as we live today in our world, we need more than ever to stop and think.

Because life today is so full of distractions, isn't it? So full of things that consume our mind. So full of things that absorb our attention, that make us busy.

We go from one day to the next, one week to the next, one month to the next, one year to the next.

And when do we ever stop and think?

Often it's only when something awful happens, like what happened in Manchester. But God is well aware that we need to stop and think.

And that's why he's given us wisdom literature in the Old Testament to challenge us to focus our minds on what really matters.

[5 : 37] So the book of Proverbs is all about wisdom. And that word should be in our minds whenever we go to read it. I want us today just to tackle our sermon in two sections.

The first section is more general. The second section is more specific. So generally speaking, I want us to just ask, how should we approach wisdom literature?

How should we approach a book like Proverbs? Well there's three key things I want you to remember. First of all, wisdom literature is constantly presenting us with a choice between two options.

A choice between wisdom and folly. We see that in Proverbs chapter 10 and throughout the book of Proverbs, you'll see this choice being presented before you.

Verse 1, a wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother. Verse 14, the wise lay up knowledge, but the mouth of a fool brings ruin.

[6 : 45] Verse 23, doing wrong is like a joke to a fool, but wisdom is pleasure to a man of understanding. The heart of it is a choice between being wise or being foolish.

Sometimes different terminology is used to express that choice. Very often you will see it being conveyed in terms of righteousness and wickedness. As you can see, verse 2, treasure gained by wickedness do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death.

Verse 32, the lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked what is perverse. So you've got this contrast, wisdom, folly, righteousness, wickedness.

And at the heart of that choice is the decision as to whether we are going to follow God's way or whether we're going to go our own way, whether we are going to listen to God or whether we are going to turn from Him.

And I think it's important to note that this is not just referring to the one-off choice that we make at the time of our conversion. When we come to faith, it's a one-off action of faith and repentance, where we turn from sin and turn to God.

[8 : 02] It's something that we do once. For some people they can identify the moment they did that. For other people they don't know really when it happened, they just know that it did happen.

That was certainly the case for me, it was just a very gradual conversion that I had. And that conversion is a clear choice between light and darkness, between life and death.

But the choices that Proverbs, books like Proverbs are said in before, are not just to do that one-off choice at conversion, it's also referring to the details of everyday life as the people of God.

So in other words, when you become a Christian, you are choosing between wisdom and folly. But then as God's people, as Christians, we are confronted every day, even every hour, with a choice between doing what is wise and doing what is foolish.

And when you look at the Bible and when you see the accounts that it gives of God's people, you see how honest and realistic it is because we see people like Abraham, like David, like Solomon, like Peter, who although they were following the Lord, they got it wrong at times in their lives.

[9 : 23] So it's important that we remember that even as Christians, we are not exempt from the choices that have been set before us by the Book of Proverbs. We can be fools and choose to go our own way, or we can be wise and follow God.

That's what Paul told us in Galatians 5, we've spent many months in Galatians 5 looking at the fruit of the Spirit, and he said in verse 13 of that chapter, for you were called to freedom, brothers, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh.

So wisdom literature is all about a choice, wisdom or folly. Second key principle is this, wisdom in a biblical sense is not simply to do with your intellect, it is also to do with how you live your life.

Now this is really, really interesting because if you look back over the ages of history, you'll see that there has often been a distinction between how people think and how people live their lives. If you look back at the ancient Greeks, for example, they had this kind of separation between the spiritual realm and the physical realm. So what they thought and what they did weren't really connected.

[10:38] And for that reason you'd have some people who would say, it doesn't matter how you live your life, it doesn't matter what you do, you could do all sorts of things. As long as you have certain knowledge in your mind, you are fine.

And so there was a disconnect between what people knew, what people believed and how they lived their lives. And we still see the same thing today, a disconnect between what people believe and what people do.

For example, if you asked people in Britain today what they thought of low wages and what they thought of cutting jobs, so if you said to somebody, is it good to pay people really low wages and to cut the number of employees that you have, to make people redundant as often as possible?

I think virtually everybody you would speak to would say, that's wrong. Shouldn't do that. Most people would surely be against low wages and job cuts.

And yet, if you went to most people in Britain and you said to them, where do you do your weekly shop? Do you do it at the most expensive supermarket or at the cheapest supermarket?

[11:56] And most would say, I go to the cheapest place. And yet, a cheap shop, more often than not, will be cheap because of low wages and because of staff cuts.

And it's just interesting what people think and what they do don't always connect. This is where the Bible gives amazing teaching because the Bible says that how we think is inseparable from how we live.

Jesus himself emphasised that the good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil for out of the abundance of his heart his mouth speaks.

In those words, Jesus just echoing the principle that lies behind all of the Old Testament wisdom literature, what you think must affect what you do.

And so when God gives us wisdom literature like the book of Proverbs, he's not just doing it to stimulate our minds, he's doing it to shape how we live our lives. Biblical wisdom is about the whole of life.

[13:13] And that's why when you read through a passage like Proverbs chapter 10, it touches on so many practical things, our possessions, our speech, our attitude, our work, our conduct, all of these combine to contribute towards giving us a wise understanding that is going to shape the way we live our lives.

So first grade principle of wisdom literature, a choice between wisdom and folly. Second grade principle, wisdom is not just about what you know or what you think, it's about how you live your life. The third key principle about wisdom literature is that at the very heart of biblical wisdom is one thing, the fear of God.

We read that at the very beginning from the start of Proverbs. This is what you would call the prologue to the book of Proverbs, really sets out what the whole book is about. The Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel, to know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice and equity, to give prudence to the simple knowledge and discretion to the youth.

Let the wise hear and increase in learning and the one who understands obtain guidance, to understand the proverb and are saying the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, fools, despise, wisdom and instruction.

[14:48] So at the heart of being wise is the fear of the Lord. Now what does that mean? What does it mean when the Bible says to fear God?

Well it's important that we answer that because it's very, very easy to misunderstand what the fear of the Lord is conveying. And I think to understand it, it's helpful to distinguish between two different types of fear and they should be on the screen.

Servile fear and filial fear. Don't worry, I didn't know what either of those words meant until I read them in a book, but it's very, very helpful I think in order to understand.

Servile fear, what does that mean? So servile fear is like the fear that a servant has of a cruel master. So you imagine somebody who is a slave to an oppressive master, they're terrified of them and they are constantly, constantly under the threat of cruelty and of abuse from this master. So you don't have that fear of God that is kind of this harsh, cold, taskmaster. But servile fear is not what the Bible is looking for.

[16:05] What the Bible is looking for is filial fear. Now what does filial fear mean? Well the word filial comes from the Latin word filius which means son.

And so filial fear is referring to the relationship between a father and their child. And therefore it is based on love.

It is convenient to have a child who loves their father with the deepest reverence and respect and affection. Therefore their desire is to please their father and to never ever disobey or dishonour a father who is so good and so kind and so worthy of their loyalty and affection.

I read a good quote from Sinclair Ferguson who said, it's a love for God which is so great that we would be ashamed to do anything which would displease or grieve him and makes us happiest when we are doing his will.

That kind of fear, that filial fear of God, that is the foundation of true wisdom.

[17:20] And that's exactly what we see modelled in Jesus Christ. He longed to please his father, he never wanted to dishonour him. He served and obeyed and glorified and honoured his father every moment that he walked on this earth.

And so God grant that we, every one of us, would fear God in that way. So that's our three principles.

Whenever you read Proverbs or other wisdom literature, Job or Ecclesiastes, remember these things. You're being presented with a choice between wisdom and folly. That should affect every part of your lives, not just head knowledge, it's practical.

And at the heart of that is a holy, filial fear of God. So how then do we approach the book of Proverbs specifically?

Because it's a really interesting book and it's bursting with material. But in some ways that makes it hard to read. If you read Proverbs chapter 10, you come away there are 32 verses and you come away almost overloaded with instruction.

[18:32] And you think, how can I apply all of this? Proverbs is unusual because usually whenever you would come to a passage in the Bible, you wouldn't just dive in and pick that verse out on its own.

You'd read what came before and you'd read what came afterwards. But Proverbs is a wee bit different because it really is very much just one verse at a time. And even in this chapter, there is a huge amount to take in, a huge amount to learn.

And so how best do we approach it? Well I want to just very simply say that there are, I think as you come to read the book of Proverbs, it's good to ask yourself three questions.

And I want you to try and remember these questions and maybe try using them yourself, maybe in the week ahead, if you read some of the parts of Proverbs. So three questions, we'll go through them briefly, see if we can do five minutes each.

First question, what area of my life is this proverb referring to? That's a really important question to ask because this relates to what we're saying about wisdom applying to every part of your life.

[19:37] Therefore, each proverb is aimed at having a real life influence. So if we look at some examples, verse five, he who gathers in summer is a prudent son, but he who sleeps and harvests is a son who brings shame.

That's talking about work. Verse 17, he who heeds instruction is on the path to life, but he who rejects reproof leads others astray. That's talking about listening.

Verse 19, when words are many, transgression is not lacking. But whoever restrains his lips is prudent. That's talking about speech. And some problems refer to more than one thing.

The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, so that's referring to speech. The heart of the wicked is of little worth. That's referring to thoughts. And so it's good to ask ourselves what area of my life is being referred to in this proverb.

And highlights the fact that proverbs is incredibly relevant. If you want advice for tomorrow, for the week ahead, read proverbs.

[20 : 39] So that's the first question. What area of my life is being referred to? Second question is this. What detail in my life is being affected by this?

And that's an important point as well, because the proverbs are detailed. They're referring to very, very specific things. So we'll take as an example verse five.

He who gathers in summer is a prudent son, but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who brings shame. Now, we said a moment ago that in general terms, this is referring to work.

So those of us who are going to go to work tomorrow morning, this proverb is teaching us something. But what are the details? What specific things are being referred to?

Well, the best way to discover that is to ask what are the key words in this proverb? And if you look at it, you will see that this verse has what you call a parallelism, which is where the first half is paralleled by the second half.

[21 : 46] So you can see that. He who gathers in summer is a prudent son, but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who brings shame. That's something that you see very, very common in the Old Testament.

Every verse is a parallelism. First half and second half match each other in various ways. And in this verse, you can see that there's a correspondence between two verbs and two nouns, which are highlighting an activity and a time.

You can see it there. Two verbs, gather and sleeps. And two time references, summer and harvest. And so the proverb is telling us that the wise person in the first half recognizes that they need to think ahead, that they need to take the opportunities when they arise and they need to make provision for the future.

The foolish person in the second half takes the easy option. They avoid hard work, they sleep and they miss the opportunity. Summer passes by while they sleep.

And so from these details, we can gather various lessons for our lives. And I want us just to highlight four things. Number one, we all need to think ahead and to gather for the future.

[23 : 10] It applies in so many parts of life. It applies as families. It applies in work. Maybe if you have your own business. It applies in terms of education. If you're studying, you need to be thinking ahead, working towards a future goal.

But it of course applies to us as a church. We need to be constantly gathering, preparing and working for a future.

That applies in terms of our building. And as you know, we are looking towards doing some refurbishment work on our building. It applies to our discipleship.

We all want to grow in faith, to support each other as we seek to mature in faith and to invest in one another so that we come on in our walk with Jesus.

And it applies to our evangelism. We want to bring more people in and that requires going out again and again and again and again with the message of the gospel so that we can draw people in.

[24 : 15] So we need to think ahead and gather for the future. Number two, we need to avoid the temptation of taking the easy option.

Sleeping is a lot easier than gathering. And therefore it's tempting. Laziness is a lot easier than hard work.

And whether that's at school, at home, at work, even in our church, it's very easy to think someone else will do it. And we can often find things distract us because they're the easier option.

For example, I find it easier to pick up my phone and read the BBC Sport website than I do to pick up my phone and read a theological book.

But which one would be better for me? Which one would do me more good? Yet often we drift towards the easy option.

[25 : 27] And this proverb is reminding us to think before we do that. So we need to gather for the future. We need to avoid the temptation to take the easy option. We need to have the right attitude and approach to relaxation.

It's a really interesting one because this is one of the many versions of the Bible that talks about sleep. And sleep, of course, is not wrong. Sleep is not an evil thing to do, but it can be done in the wrong place.

And so one of the points of this proverb is that sleeping should come after gathering, not before it. And you can imagine the harvester here going out and working and then coming home and resting.

And life today is so busy and so tiring that spiritually speaking we can so easily push aside opportunities that are going to help us grow in faith. And it's a very, very easy trap to fall into. But we have to remember that every single day, every single day is an opportunity for us to grow spiritually.

[26 : 36] It's an opportunity for us to take the opportunities that God gives us, not to put the easy thing first. So you maybe find it easier to pick up a newspaper or to look at Facebook or to read a novel or something like that.

Maybe that's what you find easier to do than to read the Bible. But to just pick up the Bible and read a proverb and to think about it for 10 minutes before we go and pick up the newspaper is a far, far better use of time.

And so while relaxation is not wrong, it should be in its proper place. And the key point is that a proverb like this is making us think about the details in our lives.

And God is trying to make us wise because ultimately having relaxation in the right place in our lives makes for a far more content way of life.

Again, imagine these two people. Imagine them. This is a day where the harvest is ready. The wise man goes out, gathers his harvest, comes home.

[27 : 42] He's tired, but he rests. He sleeps well. He's satisfied. The foolish man has been asleep all day. And so he's going to be tossing and turning all night because he hasn't gathered a harvest.

He hasn't done what he should have. He hasn't put things in the right order. So we need to have the right approach to relaxation. Very practical, but very helpful.

Fourth lesson is that we need to take the opportunities that are given to us. That's another key thing highlighted in this verse. Summer and harvest are times that come, but they will also go.

Therefore they are an opportunity that must be grasped. Earlier this week my grass was badly needing cutting and I knew it was going to rain yesterday and I thought I must take the opportunity to get my grass cut.

And I'm sure I heard loads of mojo the past few days. I'm sure you are all the same. Time comes, time goes. God is reminding us that we must, must, must take opportunities.

[28 : 55] And so when God gives us opportunities, we must take them. And as we said, every day is a great opportunity to glorify God. So maybe tomorrow morning at work is a thought for you all.

But it's a real opportunity to glorify God by working for him diligently. It's a day where you can do something good for a family member or a neighbour. It's a day where you can show the fruit of the Spirit in the way you conduct yourselves towards everybody that you meet.

It's a day where you can do something wonderful for God. And above all else, in terms of our own salvation, in terms of being forgiven for our sins, you and I have got to take the opportunities that are given to us.

Never forget that you can sleep your way into a lost eternity.

That's just one proverb, and yet it's teaching us so many things that affect the details of our lives.

[30 : 09] So that's our first two questions. What areas of my life is this proverb referring to? What details in my life are being affected by this? And then the last question, very briefly, is this.

Why does God want me to know this? And this is maybe the most important question of all, because whenever you are reading the Bible, you are reading God's revelation to you.

We cannot know everything about God, yet we can learn some things according to what he has revealed in his word. And that's telling us that these are the things that God wants us to know.

God is teaching us in this verse and in every other proverb and in every other version of Scripture, things that he wants us to know and things which ultimately affect a relationship with him.

So what does God want us to know in this verse? But I think first of all, he wants us to know that time passes.

[31 : 16] Summer and harvest are a reminder that we live in the realm of time. One day passes to the next, one year passes to the next, and the direction is always forwards, and it is never, ever backwards.

But God wants us to remember that. We must, must, must think of the fact that time is passing.

We must remember that in terms of how we treat our families every day. We must remember that in terms of how we prioritise our activities. We must remember that in terms of what we do as a church.

And we must remember that in terms of how we stand before God. So God is reminding us about the passage of time. God is also reminding us about the responsibility of humanity.

And part of our nature as being the image of God is the fact that we are responsible. And so if you ask the question in that proverb, just in verse 5 there, whose fault is it that the fool slept?

[32 : 30] Whose fault is it? It's his own. And that's reminding us the choice that Proverbs is presenting before us.

Wisdom or folly. The path we choose is our own responsibility. So we're reminded of the responsibility of humanity in this verse.

And finally we are being reminded of the provision of God. Because look again at the verse and ask the question, who provides everything?

Who provides the seasons? Who provides the soil to plant in? Who provides the rain and the sun that bring growth?

Who provides the health and strength to go out and gather? Who provides the harvest that's taken home? It's all God.

[33 : 33] It's all God's provision. And that is something that we have to remember. Every day we wake up to so many examples of the abundant provision of God.

It affects every part of our lives and above all else God has made provision for you to be saved, for you to have eternal life.

And he has sent his own son to make that possible. He has provided absolutely everything that is needed and he is promising you more than you can ask or think.

And it's all been offered to you today. It's like a harvest ready to be gathered in, isn't it?

An amazing provision that will leave you secure and prepared for all of life and for all of eternity.

[34 : 42] And it's free, a free gift. All you have to do is ask Jesus to be your savior.

And ultimately that's where this proverb and where every other proverb is pointing us. To where we stand before God and please, please recognise how much God cares about you and how much God wants you to come to him and find perfect peace, to find total forgiveness and to find eternal hope.

There is nobody in here who is excluded. Nobody here who is not good enough or not allowed or not in a position to come and to know the amazing riches that God wants for you and for me in Christ Jesus.

It's like a harvest there for the taking. He who gathers in summer is a prudent son.

But he who sleeps in harvest is a son who brings shame. Let's pray.

[36 : 28] God our Father, we thank you for all that your word teaches. And we thank you that you give us this wisdom literature, both in the book of Proverbs and throughout the scripture.

And we pray Lord that we would indeed grow in our wisdom. That we would grow in our fear of you, in our love for you, so that we would walk in your ways.

Every day Lord the world is drawing us away with so many temptations and so many attractions.

But you've brought us here today Lord to show us a better way.

And so we pray O God that we would all have your eyes on you. That we would be wise. That we would follow you.

Help us Lord and please don't leave us to ourselves. In Jesus name. Amen.