Proverbs: Wisdom for Living in the Kingdom of God

Last week’s main points

- The beautiful poetry of the Psalms highlights many aspects of God’s character – heart and head
- The book of Psalms is like an art gallery that invites us to encounter God through various images and forms
- Some praise psalms give praise for God’s various attributes and actions; others give thanksgiving for specific acts or circumstances
- The psalmists use a variety of literary techniques to artfully portray God’s glory

I. Introduction: About Proverbs

A. How do we interpret the following?
   Proverbs 26:4 Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself.
   Proverbs 26:5 Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes.

B. What is wisdom?

   1. Wisdom = ability to make Godly choices in life
   2. Proverbs: The ABCs of wisdom
   3. Elaborated on in Ecclesiastes, Job, wisdom teachings of NT (Sermon on Mount)
   4. Relation of ordinary life to God the creator
   5. A worldview that includes a Godly perspectives, character traits, and actions

II. Outline: a “collection of collections”

A. Lectures and speeches (Chs. 1-9)
   1. Intro (1:1-7)
   2. Prologue (Chs. 1-9)

B. Sayings and admonitions (Chs. 10-29)
   1) Elementary patterns of acts and consequences (Chs. 10-15)
   2) Exceptions to rules (Chs. 16-29)

C. Brief poems and prayer (Ch. 30)
D. Maternal instruction and “hymn to valiant woman” (Ch. 31)
III. Understanding Proverbs – Interpretation

A. Some things to keep in mind

1. Apparent contradictions
2. Not every word of the Lord is appropriate for every time and place, or for every situation in our lives
3. Not set in a specific narrative context within the Bible story
4. Provides a “spirituality of the ordinary”

B. Don’ts and Do’s

1. Don’t:
   a. Take bits out of context
   b. Misunderstanding wisdom terms (e.g. fool = one who lives life apart from God)
   c. Fail to consider lines of argument (e.g. Job)
   d. Use to support selfish behaviors
   e. Not guarantees from God, but guidelines for behavior
   f. Treat proverbs as an exhaustive coverage of life’s issues
   g. Use to justify crass, materialistic lifestyle

2. Do:
   a. Look at figurative language that points beyond a literal meaning
   b. Think of as practical sayings, not systematic theological claims
   c. Consider wording – meant to be memorable, not technically precise
   d. Consider the ancient culture
   e. Look at exaggeration and literary techniques used to make point

IV. Wisdom: A worldview that includes

A. A proper perspective – “the fear of the Lord”
B. A character focus – who we are before what we do
C. Godly action – proper perspective leads to proper action

V. Today’s Focus Passage: Proverbs 3

A. The relationship of wisdom to the character of God: Who God is and how he relates to his people provides the context of wise living. (3:11, 3:19, 3:26, 3:32, 10:3)
B. The relationship of wisdom to revelation: God gives knowledge of himself and wisdom to his people so that their lives and actions proclaim truths about the Kingdom of God. Apart from God, wisdom is something we labor for. In the Bible, wisdom calls out – it is right living in right relation with a God who gives himself to his people. (2:1-8, 3:6) (Romans 11:33)

C. The relationship of wisdom to the ethical life: The goal of wise living is to bring peace and rest among God’s people and the world. Our lives and choices are bound up in the kingdom of God. (8:35-36)

VI. Application:

Godly wisdom is living in right relation with God, his People and his World. What we do is a response of faith to God and witnesses to the world truths about the character of God and his people.

A. How does wise living remind us of who we are in Christ?
B. Reflecting on today’s focus passage, what can we infer about the character of God?
C. What specific ways can wisdom in our life today point to the kingdom of God?

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Sources


