30 Sayings for Wisdom - Part 1

10/09/16

Proverbs 22:17-21

*Listen to the sayings by opening our hearts. Learn these 30 wise words so that we can recall and speak them when conflict arises. Lean on God, not ourselves or the sayings. If we listen, learn, and lean on God, then we will have knowledge, good advice, truth, and answers for our challenges, moving us through life’s conflict toward community.*

Some of the most practical and profound wisdom is found in the Proverbs. The Book of Proverbs is not merely an anthology but a "collection of collections" relating to questions of values, moral behavior, the meaning of human life, and right conduct. It presents life lessons that if we followed would lead to a happy life. The wisdom is deep because it is attributed to the consciousness of Solomon. He prayed for Wisdom, and God granted it. Solomon shares some of that wisdom in the Proverbs.

Over Chapters 22, 23, and 24, Solomon shares 30 sayings that are intended for our instruction and knowledge. Over the course of three Sundays, I want to share this ancient wisdom with you. Much of it will be familiar because it has become a part of our universal consciousness. Some of these sayings will make us feel uncomfortable because it will strike very close to home and reveal challenges we are currently engaging. Some of this wisdom will be readily received by our souls as reminders and will illuminate where our feet should be walking.

Today, we will look at what would chronologically be sayings 11-20, or Proverbs 23:12- Proverbs 24:4.

30 Sayings for Wisdom

*11: Commit yourself to instruction; listen carefully to words of knowledge.*

*12: Don’t fail to discipline your children. The rod of punishment won’t kill them. Physical discipline may well save them from death.*

*13: My child, if your heart is wise, my own heart will rejoice! Everything in me will celebrate when you speak what is right.*

*14: Don’t envy sinners, but always continue to fear the LORD. You will be rewarded for this; your hope will not be disappointed.*

*15: My child, listen and be wise: Keep your heart on the right course. Do not carouse with drunkards or feast with gluttons, for they are on their way to poverty, and too much sleep clothes them in rags.*

*16: Listen to your father, who gave you life, and don’t despise your mother when she is old. Get the truth and never sell it; also get wisdom, discipline, and good judgment. The father of godly children has cause for joy. What a pleasure to have children who are wise. So give your father and mother joy! May she who gave you birth be happy.*

*17: O my son, give me your heart. May your eyes take delight in following my ways. A prostitute is a dangerous trap; a promiscuous woman is as dangerous as falling into a narrow well. 28 She hides and waits like a robber, eager to make more men unfaithful.*

*18:**Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes?  Those who linger long at the wine; those who go in search of mixed wine.  Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it swirls around smoothly;  At the last it bites like a serpent, And stings like a viper.  Your eyes will see strange things, And your heart will utter perverse things. Yes, you will be like one who lies down in the midst of the sea, Or like one who lies at the top of the mast, saying: And you will say, “They hit me, but I didn’t feel it. I didn’t even know it when they beat me up. When will I wake up so I can look for another drink?”*

*19: Don’t envy evil people or desire their company. For their hearts plot violence, and their words always stir up trouble*.

*20: By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches.*

I would like to briefly highlight a few of the ideas in these verses.

Solomon speaks of several tendencies that apparently were as rampant in his time as they are today. People are people: we each struggle with the human condition, and have been for millennia. We are spiritual beings, living in a spiritual universe, guided by spiritual principles, having a human experience. Our experience today is similar to that of people a thousand years before Christ walked the earth.

Solomon places an emphasis on listening, learning, paying attention to our actions and words, respecting our selves and others. While we are engaged in our human journey we cannot underestimate the snares the world contains. We are being asked to dare to learn.

As in his day, if we “spare the rod, we spoil the child”. We can either teach our children through corrective measures that there are consequences for their actions, or life will teach them. Either way, they will learn.

I’ve heard it said that there are two ways to develop wisdom, through mentors or mistakes. We can serve as mentors, teachers and coaches for our children so they can avoid the mistakes that lead to even worse consequences than our gentle rod.

Some of the verses address who we are allowing to influence us. Are we spending time with drunkards, gluttons, lazy or evil folks? Are we spending mental time envying those that do wrong, maybe by taking advantage of others for their own gain? Who are we hanging around? Who are we giving permission to invade our minds and hearts? Who is it that we are allowing to influence us – whether in person, on the television or internet, or through books?

This proverb speaks directly to lust and avoiding the temptations of the world. Although it specifically speaks to vulnerable men and the dangers of a tempting woman, the same admonition goes out to women in their times on vulnerability. The world can be an alluring place. We are to be wise in our choices of companionship.

I think we can safely assume that what Solomon addressed in his advice were issues that he recognized for the people of his time. Several verses spoke to drunkenness. Think that was a concern in his day? Today we just need to throw in drugs and gambling, and a few other addictions, and not much has changed since the time of Solomon.

He uses the metaphor of a house as our own spiritual being. By wisdom we are built; we come into distinct and complete awareness with our Creator. By understanding we are established and realize our own potential as a Child of God. By knowledge, we become discerning and capable of following the guidance of the Christ so that all parts of our lives are filled with ‘precious and pleasant riches’.

In conclusion, our wisdom will come from one of two sources: mentors or mistakes. We can plug into the Divine Mentor, through prayer, meditation and the inspired writings of the Bible and other great authors. We can listen to tapes, podcasts, and other recordings of powerful spoken ideas. We can associate with people who think and believe as we do; who can help shore up our attitudes, thoughts and behaviors, and hone our moral compass.

Or we can disregard all that, and just do it on our own. We can bump into walls, fall off cliffs, and stumble in the darkness. We can make the mistakes that will inexorably lead us to a change of behaviors, thoughts and attitudes anyway.

We are God’s, and God will embrace us, whether we are kicking and screaming or we have our arms lovingly held out. God’s plans for us are good, and will make all of our failed efforts work for our good. God is ever encouraging us and drawing us to the path of Spirit and awareness, and we will get there one way or another. Why not listen to the words of wisdom, learn them, and lean on God and not our own feeble attempts?

My prayer is that we open our hearts to the wisdom of the Christ and allow that Wisdom to raise us above all of our challenges.

Let us pray…