

## Part 4: Jesus in the Wisdom – The Good Life Under God's Rule

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Today we are resuming a short series where we are walking through the story of the entire Bible. We are doing this not only because we want you to be able to understand the story of scripture, but because we want you to be able to read the story of scripture for yourself.

If you've wrestled to read the Bible, this series is designed to help you wrestle a bit more optimistically. We've already walked through most of the Old Testament, but today we are beginning a portion of books that the Jews called "the Writings" or what is often called, "wisdom literature" or "poetry."

My guess is that, for many of us, this style of writing is what we have the most familiarity with. It is in the wisdom literature we read of proverbs that still shape our morality today: "Pride comes before the fall," "A cheerful heart is good medicine," or "a friend loves at all times." This morning, one of our residents is filling the pulpit of another church preaching on Psalm 23, also found in our subject material today: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." British rock bands paid homage to the book of Ecclesiastes when they sang: "To everything turn, turn, turn...there is a season turn, turn, turn."

However, even though we may be familiar with aspects of the wisdom literature we cannot rightly understand or apply it to our own lives if we fail to see that these too are part of God's story to redeem his people through the work of Jesus Christ. What we see today is not just poetry and wisdom, but Christian poetry and wisdom. Therefore to fail to see the significance of God and his redemption is to remain a fool despite our reading of wisdom.

As we have done so far, our goal for each sermon is threefold. First we are going to **Survey the Story**, second we are going to **Study the Story** and lastly we are going to **Savor the Savior of the Story**.

Let's begin by getting a **Survey of the Story**.

The books we are going to be looking at today are listed in the Hebrew Old Testament order as: Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. Sometimes included here is the book of Lamentations, but I addressed that briefly with the prophets last week.

While not all of the books meet the narrow qualifications of "poetry" or "wisdom literature," these books are often referred to in those broad terms.

As I mentioned before when we read in the wisdom literature we often read them as episodic: a psalm a day, a proverbs a day, or something like that. And while they do stand on their own in many ways—they too are dependent upon the narrative of the whole Bible.

To help us understand where we are in the story of scripture we've been tracking three themes that typified God's perfect creation, that were lost in the fall, and that God himself covenanted to redeem through Jesus. Those three themes are God's presence, God's people and God's place.

The writing of the poetry and the wisdom books don't necessarily describe the narrative events of how God is recreating his presence, his people and his place, but what it does is describe what life is like when God's people are in God's place and in God's presence.

The majority of these books are written under the influence of King David and King Solomon, two kings whom God specifically blessed and caused his promise to flourish under their rule. In this way, you can almost think of the wisdom books as snapshots. But these are snapshots not necessarily of a thing, but of a time.

When I proposed to Sarah, I gave her a picture I took. It was a pretty picture, it included a rural road with flowers and green grass on it, beautiful mountains and clouds dotting the sky. But the truth is, it wasn't that unique, there are lots of places with roads like that. You can probably find a better picture in your own camera roll. You could go today to that very spot and recreate that picture yourself, but you it won't be the same for you.

Why? Because the significance of this picture is that it was the very spot where I first told her that I loved her. The picture was beautiful, but what made it most beautiful, most vibrant and most important was the relational reality behind it.

This is what most of the wisdom literature is. You can mouth the prayers of the Psalms, use Solomon's pick-up lines from Song of Solomon, practice the mechanics of Proverbs and utter the vanity of Ecclesiastes. You can recreate the picture, but these pictures are dependent upon the reality behind them.

Their beauty is not merely what they say, but the reality of relationship behind it. Wisdom not only shows us what human flourishing looks like, but it shows us why we flourish—because when God is on the throne, we can make sense of our life.

This is our main point today as we see **Jesus in the Wisdom**. What we see in these pages is **The Good Life under God's Rule**, that is to say we see life in light of the King.

These book shows us the beauty of living in the pinnacle of God's covenant kingdom and call us to seek to live our lives in line with the king's wisdom as well. That's the big theological progression we see today: ***Seeing God's rule give us something to see in all of life.***

When we can understand the relationship we have with the King of Kings, the whole of our life is influenced by his wisdom. Consider this passage in Psalm 89 and notice the connection between the King and our wise living: **Psalm 89:11-18**.

The shield, the protection for living, is what? The king of God's people. When the King of God rules, wisdom, peace and favor rule. When we see God on the throne we see hope even if we also see difficulty.

With that said let's begin our second point this morning: **Study the Story**.

What I want to do in this portion is to give us two keys to reading the wisdom, and then I'm going to walk through each of the six books in brief highlighting the connection they make to our experience and the rule of God.

First, when it comes to reading wisdom we must **Read with our minds:**

To read these books as God intended we must all become like Winnie the Pooh and, “Think, think, think.” Consider **Psalm 1:3-4**.

To read this well, we need to understand the contrasts that are being made. How does a tree contrast with chaff? What does this say about the righteous and the wicked?

Moreover, it invites us to think deeply about the allegories and illustrations themselves. It drives its roots deep into the ground, pulling nourishment from something outside of itself, it reaches to the heavens and provides shade, blessing and fruit to those around us. If we delight in God's word, we will grow deeper roots and the winds of life will shake us, but not fall us. We will provide benefit to those who draw near to us. The beauty of allegory is that we can draw out so many of these things with our minds!

But the richness of these texts also demand us to **Read with our emotions.**

Part of why God has chosen to use such vivid language is because it speaks to us at an emotional level. What we have in these pages is the songbook of the human soul and affirmation of the human emotion.

In many ways these books are to our emotional life what the bumpers at a bowling alley are to bowlers. It keeps us out of the gutters. There are Psalms where the Psalmist is so upset with the violence he has witnessed that he cries out to God do destroy the children of his enemy. What are we to do with that? We are not to create a theology of murder, but instead we are to realize that in the midst of a wicked world we can take our anger to God who is just and we can trust him with it.

In the book of Job, an exacerbad Job brings his frustration to God but in the end is comforted by God. In the book of Song of Solomon we read of individuals burning with lust and they have to wrestle with how to handle that in a way that submits to God's rule over our sexuality—and this is for their own joy!

In this way, one the greatest apologetics for the Christian experience is wrapped up in these pages. They balance **Proverbs 29:11** with **Psalm 5:1-3**. What do we do with God's wisdom? We throw our experiences not out into the world, but down the lane of God's word and we let the wisdom of his mercy absorb the reality of our emotions. Here is the self-care of the Christian soul, to yourself hurl your experiences at the foot of God with the help of his word.

In the story of scripture the wisdom books show us how profound God's rule is. It is so profound that he has come to rule over even our emotions as we seek to subject both the good and the difficult to the God who has promised to care for us in his mercy.

With that being said let's quickly progress through these books and see how they fit in the story.

First, we begin with the book of **Ruth**. This might seem odd, and apart from understanding the story of scripture, it is odd for it to be here.

The book of Ruth is a short historical account about a non-Israelite woman, who has been left to die without a husband, but miraculously God found a "kinsman redeemer" for her and they fall in love and are married.

It's the only book in this section that is written in story form instead of poetry. But its implications are profound for how we understand the rest of the wisdom. Because, after the whole story passed look at how it closed: **Ruth 4:13-17**.

Why is this important? Because behind this seemingly random love story is the lineage of King David, the man after God's own heart. The King to whom God was going to covenant his kingdom forever.

The story of the book of Ruth is that God produced order out of chaos, and meaning out of sorrow. In places where it seemed everything was going wrong, God worked. God's wisdom worked. And the result was that David and Solomon and all their wisdom was made possible for us.

You see Ruth illustrates what all of the rest assumes: wisdom doesn't work because it is smart and effective in and on its own. Wisdom works because God works. If God wasn't faithful to his word, if God had no ability to direct the course of history, if God was a weak, dependent God, then wisdom would have no merit. But because God works, there is hope for our praise and power in our wisdom.

This now sets up the stage for the book of **Psalms** which begins with a collection of Psalms from David, Ruth's great grandson.

What we see in the Psalms is a prayer book and a hymnal for all of God's people. But what we see more importantly is a king who cares about worship. David, Solomon and the other Psalmists recorded these prayers and songs and wrote them down so that we might worship as they did!

The Psalms model the leadership of worship. David as the people's good king, wanted to draw others into the joy of his worship. David walks with us in our anger, in our joy, in our frustration and in our feasting and says: "This is what it looks like to worship God in the midst of it!"

God cared too much for his people to not teach them how to worship, and the Psalms teach us too. But there is a principle that sits throughout the whole Psalm book and it's one that we see right off the bat in **Psalms 2:1-12**. The pinnacle of Israel's worship is the welfare of God's son, the king.

If God's people take refuge in God's anointed king, they will find refuge and worship forever. They will find safety amidst a world which wages war against them. Why would we worship God? Because God's king will endure. What hope do we have for worship even when things look bleak? The hope that the Lord has set his King on his holy hill forever. No matter what is going on in your life, if the king is on the throne, worship is possible.

The book of **Job** is one where scholars don't really have an idea where it fits in the Biblical story. Some think it could have been one of the earliest books written, but the Jews had no problem placing Job here in the wisdom literature because its central theme is the rule of God that orients the realities of life.

Job is afflicted in many ways by the Devil, but we see that even the Devil is under the authority of God. The remainder of the book tracks Job and three of his friends trying to make sense of why life is so hard, and why good things happen to bad people, and why bad things happen to good people.

What you'll notice about Job's three friends is that they have truth! What they say is not flat out wrong. But it's truth without tension. We can't fully answer the questions of judgement, evil, blessing and joy if we fail to wrestle with the rule of a holy and perfect God.

In other words Job's main point is that the greatest gift we have is not God's wisdom, but wisdom of God. A fourth friend shows up right before God speaks. His name is Elihu and he reminds Job and the other three of this fact: **Job 36:22-29**.

Elihu reminds us that unless we know God, we can't make sense of life, there is no peace because there is no tension. But in God's mercy, the unsearchable, transcendent God who cannot be known, makes himself known. The beginning of wisdom is a God who makes himself known, and after Elihu says this, God speaks.

God calls us to trust in his wisdom, his character, even if it doesn't make sense to us at the time. Consider Job's own reflection in Job 13:15 when he says, "Though he slay me, I will hope in him."

Job's life was bleak, and he couldn't make sense of it. Maybe you've been in a position like that too and you have wondered, as Job did, where is wisdom? In that moment, Job didn't have an answer but because of what he knew about God he did have hope. Do you know how he spoke of that hope? Look at **Job 19:25-26**.

Job knew that somehow, someday, he would be redeemed. The Lord would give Job relief from the trials of life by sending a redeemer and because of that, when all was said and done, he would stand before God and all will be right. Wisdom believes that God is wise even if we can't see it.

The book of **Proverbs** screams onto the scene after Job as if to say to us: "If this God is your God, if you submit to him, if you trust him, then fear him and live."

The main principle of Proverbs is given in **Proverbs 1:7**. Proverbs shows us that God not only cares about our worship, but he cares about the whole of our lives—our business goals, our parenting, our finances—all of it!

God's rule is the gravity of the Christian experience. When engineers go to test a new plane or rocket you can bet that before they did anything they considered the law of gravity. Everything depends on that. When we pursue godly wisdom we must first consider the ruling influence of God in our lives if we ever hope to get off the ground.

Proverbs 16 is often called "the spine" of Proverbs and notice what it says: **Proverbs 16:9-10**.

What's the point? How might you get to where you want to be in life? How might you be wise? You consider the words of the wise king, and you realize that he establishes your steps. Wisdom is when we learn to line up our plans with the steps God has established—in this there is no sin but instead joy.

The book of **Ecclesiastes** is one of my favorite books in all of the Bible. Here's why: I'm young, and one of pains of youth is constantly thinking that all things considered, you'd do it better than the last guy.

But Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon who God blessed with the most wisdom and the most power, and in a drastic scandal of grace, Solomon used all that wisdom and power in a season of his life to run away from God. His goal in this experiment? **Ecclesiastes 2:9-11**.

He wanted to find all the pleasure in life and in the end he found there was none. Now it's not that Solomon didn't find life, pleasure and joy. In fact quite the opposite. He just didn't find it in the life he thought he would.

You might think that with enough sex, enough money, enough good fortune you really can be satisfied. Anyone else who said your goals won't work simply didn't do it as well as you would. But Solomon did. You can never throw a house party as good as Solomon. You will never sleep with more people than Solomon did. Solomon made the most hedonistic of our day look like a choir boy.

But at the end of his whole experiment look at what he says: **Ecclesiastes 5:19**. How will man find joy in his days? When God occupies his heart. God is at the bottom of our joy.

How then should we live? Look at what Solomon says to all of us who think joy exists outside of God's rule: **Ecclesiastes 12:13**.

Fear God and keep his commandments. Ecclesiastes shows us that those who want to be wise about joy, turn their lives into joyful obedience.

We must understand this if we are to understand the final book this morning ***Song of Solomon***.

Did you know that there is an entire book in the Bible dedicated to sex? Have you read it? If you would, you would find that most of what the world tells you about God and his view of sex falls remarkably short of what is true.

In vivid, steamy analogies, Song of Solomon describes the joy of intimacy between a husband and his wife and here we learn of a couple things.

First, when God rules over our lives he rules over our sex as well. This too, is for your joy.

Secondly, we see God's design for our sex lives. Solomon in his Ecclesiastes days enjoyed amounts of sex that are unprecedented. But at the end of all things what does Solomon rejoice in? What causes him to pen the world's most sensual love poem? What did God so desire to inspire by his Holy Spirit and preserve for our good? The exclusive love of a husband and wife who live out the sexual intimacy in submission to the God who made them.

Here is sexual joy, here is the romance and passion our world longs for in the sphere of sexuality. To be wise with it we place this too in submission to God. God's king shows us what sexual intimacy truly looks like.

This might seem like an odd place to turn to our final point this morning, but it's quite fitting. This is our final point this morning **Savor the Savior of the Story**.

You see the need for wisdom implies the tension of life. We need wisdom because life sometimes isn't clear. We need wisdom because often it seems that good is failing and evil is soaring. Often times it looks like God isn't working.

But Jesus shows this tension. The author of Hebrews quotes Psalm 2, speaking of the Lord's anointed King who holds together our worship and applies that to Jesus. Right before he does this, look at what he says **Hebrews 1:1-3**. None of this works without the King. Wisdom only works if there is a King on the throne! And when Jesus takes the throne of our hearts through faith, we joyfully know that wise living is not only possible, but profitable.

Jesus is the Psalm 2 greater king of David and in him the whole of the universe is upheld. On the cross of Jesus we find the tension of wisdom that what seems devastating to human eyes, death on a cross, is life giving by the Spirit. It was when things seemed darkest, light shone brightest. It's when it seemed most counterintuitive to the flesh, that we got the substitute savior we always needed.

Jesus is Job's redeemer who lives forever calling out to us that as we encounter the trials of life, that we can trust on the character and nature of God on account of Jesus. If we stand in Christ, then we stand in the righteous provision of God.

Jesus is Elihu in the flesh who entered into our senseless babel and revealed to us the God we missed in the middle of it. When you need wisdom, listen first to Jesus who is God in the flesh.

Jesus is the greater Solomon who didn't need to taste sin for himself in order to make us wise, but who tasted the punishment of our sin in our place so that we can be filled with him who fills all in all.

Jesus is the King whose rule produce the flourishing we've always wanted. Look at **Colossians 3:15-17**.

When Jesus rules in our hearts what do we become? The Psalm 1 tree! When our lives are ruled by God's wisdom, the heart of peace and thanksgiving we have flows outward to all who are around us!

Jesus is the greater husband who loved his wife in ways Solomon couldn't. From this perspective the book of Song of Solomon isn't simply about human sexuality, it is about divine intimacy. Yes, sex is beautiful according to God's plan and we must submit all of our longings to God's design.

But intimacy, love and affection is not limited to those who are married. For those who are single, for those who are young, for those who are divorced, widowed, same-sex attracted, Song of Solomon is for you in Jesus. It graciously shows that even you, in God's wisdom, have no lack.

For consider **Ephesians 5:25-27**.

Here is the love that satisfies us forever! Here is intimacy not only with Jesus through faith, but with the body—that is the church! The wise man realizes this not according to the eyes of the flesh, but only with eyes of the King—eyes that see the world in light of a savior who brings salvation out of our sin, order out of our disorder, and one day a kingdom out of our chaos. Kiss the Son, and blessed are all who take refuge in him.