

Part 6: Winsome Wisdom

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October 18, 2020

I have some friends who recently found that their son has a very severe case of celiac disease. As loving parents they began to craft a diet and a pantry that reflected very strict gluten free guidelines. I asked him what that was like and he said, "Gluten is in so little, and yet gluten is in everything."

He said it's not just the token items like bread or wheat that has gluten, but it gets added to seasonings and sauces, it's in some medications and it's used to baste and preserve deli meats, it thickens soups, it's even found in many gluten free foods!

When his eyes were opened to the threat of gluten, he couldn't look anywhere and not see it. They had to build specific relationships with restaurants in their town who they trusted to run gluten free kitchens and use separate cookware. He couldn't look anywhere and have confidence.

What my friend experienced in the seemingly pervasive and omnipresent threat of gluten, Solomon today is going to show us the opposite of when it comes to God's wisdom.

In today's text we are going to see that true wisdom, God's wisdom, might seem to be in few places and yet it is everywhere. It's difficult to find, and yet it's found in everything. And when we learn to see God's wisdom through the lens of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we actually get a profound sense of confidence in a world that seems out of control and chaotic.

My friend had a knowledge of a threat which caused him to lack certainty when there was anything unknown. But here, in Proverbs 3 we see a profound knowledge that gives us confidence, the Lord's confidence in the face of uncertainty.

We are continuing to go through the prologue of Proverbs which is written as a father to his child. Soon we are going to hear the dangerous calls of lady folly but for the time being this dad wants us to understand first and foremost the surpassing beauty and utility of wisdom.

Our main point today is going to be this: **God's wisdom revealed in Jesus is everything you've been looking for.**

We are going to see this in three ways. First in verses 13-18 we are going to see that **Wisdom is Infinitely Precious**, then in verses 19-20 we see that **Wisdom is Foundationally Supreme**, and then by way of application we are going to see that **Wisdom** (when found, and held to) is **Consistently Comforting**.

Let's start by looking at our first portion of scripture today: **Proverbs 3:13-18.**

This passage has been called the beatitudes of the Old Testament. If you're familiar with the New Testament, in Matthew chapter 5 Jesus gives a list of qualities each of them beginning with the phrase, "Blessed are....(poor, peacemakers, righteous)"

We live in a world where most of our experience with the word blessed is either tied to some sort of Catholic shrine or saint, or else from social media use: #blessed.

In Hebrew there are two words that can be translated as blessing, one word gets at the reason or source of blessing, the other word describes the experience of blessing. This one is that experience word, and it most simply means: "Happy."

Happy is the person who gets wisdom like this. Happy is the person who holds fast to her. We live in a world where experience is king. And generally speaking we don't care about how noble or pure the means are so long as we get the desired experience. But here God's means produce the experience we want: happiness.

And this is where we see our first point today: **Wisdom is Infinitely Precious.**

If you noticed this section is sandwiched by blessing. Verse 13 says blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and verse 18 ends with the promise that those who hold her (that's lady wisdom) are blessed.

In between those two pieces of bread we see the anatomy of why you are made happy by this wisdom. We see in verses 14-15 her value. How valuable is this wisdom that God offers?

The gain from her is better than silver, the profit better than gold, she is more precious than jewels and then there is this profound statement that nothing you desire can compare with her.

We have seen the ridiculous things people do to get what they desire. On game shows people sign up to eat weird things and face public humiliation for the promise of a cash prize. We love a good adventure novel or movie which dramatize the pursuit of treasure. The allure is wired into us.

The metals described here in this text are metals that take effort to get. In Job 28, Job describes the great length people go through to get gold and silver. He says that the earth naturally offers bread to us in grain, but we descend into the fire of the earth to get these metals. In verses 1-3 he says, **Job 28:1-3.**

When you think of what you desire in life, what are the lengths you will go through to get it? What cost is worth it for you to get what you think will make you happy? For you might be willing to turn over whole mountains for the silver your heart desires, but here in God's grace is wisdom offered which is greater than all you desire.

If you are in here today and you consider yourself to be looking for something, that's because God has made us to look for something. Every adventure into the unknown that seeks the promise of happiness is meant to show us that we were made to find that here in God himself. That's the value of wisdom.

But why is it valuable? What is this wisdom? Well we see the effect of wisdom in **Proverbs 3:16-18.**

We saw much of this last week, wisdom offers long life, riches and honor. But I want to focus on two unique things which Solomon adds here. First he says that to hold fast to this wisdom is to find pleasantness on all of her ways, peace on all of her paths.

Isn't that astounding! Whatever God is offering to us in here, it meets us with pleasantness every step of the way. Not only does this make us happy-blessed, but here is the promise that this life, this life offered by God is a pleasant life. Everything you've ever desired is right here.

But did you catch the source of this pleasantness. Look back at verse 18, "She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her..."

Do you realize the theme of the tree of life is only mentioned three times in scripture? We see its first in Genesis chapter 2. In Genesis 2 we see that God made Adam and Eve in a garden and God caused all the good trees to spring up but in verse nine we see that in the middle of this garden were two trees: The Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

God gave Adam and Eve one command in this garden: **Genesis 2:16-17**. In other words God wanted Adam and Eve to spend the rest of their life eating from this tree of life, all they had to do was not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But what did they do? They thought that God was holding out on them. The serpent said, "Why do you want the tree of life, when you can have this other tree and have even more joy?"

So they sinned, and they were removed from the garden. This is where you and I come into the story, we too now are separated from God's glorious presence and that wonderful tree of life. And as the Bible's story goes on we see God working to restore a broken people to himself despite our best efforts to continually ruin things. But at the end of the Bible the tree shows up again. In revelation 22 we see that God has completed his plan to save people from their sin through the work of Jesus Christ.

Jesus came as the new Adam, and he obeyed God where Adam failed, he died the death that all men deserved so that they might experience the life that only Jesus could offer. And in Revelation 22, Jesus brings his people back to the garden, a new garden, a garden where there is no sin, no death, no tear in the eye and look at what stands in the middle of this garden: **Revelation 22:1-3**.

We see the tree of life at the beginning where everything went wrong, we see the tree of life in Revelation 22 where Jesus makes everything right, and we see the tree of life here in Proverbs.

Why is this important? Because here we see that it is in God's wisdom that he begins his work to win creation back to what sin broke. Wisdom, God's wisdom, is not book smarts or street smarts, it is realizing that God has worked in Jesus Christ to restore sinners through his cross.

Wisdom wins us back to God's original design for us through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. We need to be brought back to this tree, and in God's wisdom we can look to Jesus and experience that restoration.

This is what leads us to the next portion of our text: **Wisdom is Foundationally Supreme**. Read with me **Proverbs 3:19-20**.

Do you remember the old commercials for cotton? The slogan was: Cotton, the fabric of our lives.

Their point was the fabric was so ubiquitous in our world that our world was made up of cotton. Well here we see that wisdom is the fabric of the world.

This is Christian worldview 101. God created us to view the world through the lens of his wisdom. God created this world by his wisdom, established it by his understanding. And he also sustains the world with this wisdom, by his knowledge he sends the dew upon the earth.

Now remember Solomon equates wisdom and knowledge to the fear of the Lord, and the fear of the Lord is a reverent reliance upon God. So wisdom then is reading our world through the eyes of God. He becomes the lens through which we view everything. If you really want to understand how to live life in this world, you must come to realize the wisdom which God has woven into creation itself.

I heard one author say that this revealing work of wisdom is like the light which miners use when working underground. Without it they are lost, but with it they are able to see all that they are made to work on.

Everything about our world was meant to bring us back to this reliance upon God and his wisdom. This book isn't ultimately about how to be Christian, this book is about how to be human. The cross of Jesus wins us back to a right relationship with God which is what you and I were made for.

In grading theology papers, there's one exam question which asks students to defend the Bible to someone who asks how we can find such an old book to be authoritative today.

Most students talk about God's authority, and his sufficiency, and those are good answers. But there is a greater answer which Proverbs holds up to be true. That is that God's wisdom cannot become outdated because our problem and our solution remains the same.

As humans we have outgrown the earliest manuals on the internal combustion engine. We've outgrown the metrics and means of medieval medicine. We've outgrown dial-up internet. Those guides would be useless to us today because of the problems we have solved. But we have not outgrown the need for God's wisdom because we haven't solved the problem of sin and death.

If we could solve the problem of this world through any other way, you're right we don't need this wisdom. But we as a human race have not outgrown the problem of sin and death. No one has solved our broken hearts, no cure has fixed our inevitable death. But this wisdom, the wisdom which sustains creation is meant to do just that.

Here it is wisdom that upholds the world, but look at how Paul puts it in **Colossians 1:15-17, 19-20**.

Jesus is what holds the world together, and Jesus is the wisdom of God which redeems us back to see our world as God has designed it to be seen. Everything you see regarding the world's brokenness, every desire in your heart for satisfaction is meant to lead you to the fact that the world is broken but Jesus has come to bring you back to God's joy on the cross.

This wisdom, this reliance upon God and a right view on life through Jesus is greater than anything you desire, it is the end for which the world was created, it is life itself. So what do you do with this?

Proverbs 3:21.

You keep wisdom with discretion. Meaning you start to discern all of life in this way. And this is where we get into the heart of this text. The progression of the father goes like this: If wisdom is this good, if

wisdom is the foundation of the world, then my son, make wisdom the foundation of your life. Choose to know it and do not forsake it.

This is what we are going to see in our third point today: **Wisdom is Consistently Comforting.**

Let's read the remainder of this passage and we will circle back to see the way in which Solomon wants us to live in light of it: **Proverbs 3:21-35.**

Where are you most comfortable? Where is it that you feel the most secure, the most protected, the most confident?

Do you get the sense here that God is offering you something of a similar value in his wisdom? Look at all that has been said so far: it's way is pleasant and peaceful, you will walk your way securely, when you lie down your sleep will be sweet, the Lord will be your confidence, the upright will dwell in his confidence, God blesses the righteous, gives favor to the humble and honor to the wise.

Here is the full ecosystem of experiences when you learn to rely on God's wisdom in every area of life!

Yet despite how good these things sound this passage also assumes opposition?

This passage assumes that despite our efforts to follow God's wisdom, to trust in the future hope laid up for us in the tree of life, this world makes much noise to shake our confidence.

How many of us lie down and are afraid? Afraid of the state of politics? Afraid of the health of our family? Afraid of all of the things that seek to threaten us in this world?

But here, in walking in God's wisdom the things which cause us fear are not removed but our experience in our sleep is. The sleep of one who relies on God because they have seen the wisdom of God solve everything in Jesus Christ is a sweet sleep.

I am one who wrestles quite frequently with anxiety especially at night. How wonderful this text is for me. My default when I'm anxious is to plan how I'm going to fix things, to prepare how by my works I will prevent or solve all the problems in life. I can certainly tell you that the past 12 months of building funds, pandemics and temporary shelters have not made it easy to stop these nighttime plans.

But here this text reminds me of my actual comfort. That comfort is not passivity. That comfort is not blind hope. That comfort is that if I remember that in Jesus, God has worked for my good, then all I'm responsible for is to pursue that same goodness. I don't know what all it looks like in those moments, but the wisdom of the gospel shows me what it looks like to not sin.

If I'm not living in active sin, of which anxious planning is one, I can rest knowing that God is sovereign. I can know that even if hardship and disappointment come, God is not disappointed in me. I'm not outside of his plan.

You see the threat of brokenness in this world calls us to abandon God's wisdom, it says that all the experiences of blessing and pleasantness come just like Adam and Eve, from another tree. The world shakes our confidence, but those who cling to wisdom find something even better.

Look again at **Proverbs 3:25-26, 32**.

Brothers and sisters it is not unique to our political climate or global pandemic to live in a world where it seems that we too will be caught in the terror of the wicked. We see sinful people and deceitful schemes that cause us to think we too will be caught up in it, ruin for us is inevitable. And yet God is not asking you to have confidence in yourself, he's not asking you to have confidence in your political candidates, he's not asking you to have confidence in your health. Instead he offers you something far more profound, his own confidence!

If wisdom leads us to obedience, then wisdom here in this text also reminds us of the safety of those who reliantly obey. The world might shake, the tremors might move the mountains, the hostility might turn up, and the blood might even flow but for those who choose to continually cling to this God and his gospel you will not be caught up in the destruction.

Jesus has made a way out for us, eternal life. We can trust God and suffer no harm because even if terror strikes with deadly force, we will have resurrected bodies. When life gets hard your active hope is to continue to choose wisdom. Continue to please God in all things! And if you do this all of this seemingly unrealistic promises will be yours!

How simple this is to hear, but how we need God's grace to apply.

But if you want to know what it looks like to apply such an unshakable comfort in the brokenness of this world, Solomon gives us one here: **Proverbs 3:27-32**.

What does it look like to trust God in all things? It looks like honoring your neighbors. There is a unique witness Christians have in a broken world. Everyone around us is seeking for what is good in this world, and Christians have received all of God's goodness in the gospel.

Therefore we withhold nothing from those around us. It's only when you see the value of wisdom graciously given in verses 13-20 that you can begin to freely give what is good to those around you.

The word for "good" communicates a sense of "benefit." Don't withhold any benefit from those around you when you have the power to do good. What benefits might you be withholding from your neighbors or coworkers which the gospel frees you to generously give?

Could that benefit be grace for the co-worker who consistently struggles to pull their weight? Could it be a kind word and a winsome witness to the neighbor with a different political view? It's often in self-defense that we refuse these things to those around us, but the gospel has shown us that we don't need those defenses anymore.

And more than that, this Proverb shows that if we are not willing to give what is good to those who are around us, we are not a far step away from taking what is good from those around us. Look at **Proverbs 3:28-29**.

Now if you remember way back in Proverbs chapter one, Solomon showed us the violent lifestyle of those who are greedy for unjust gain. To want gain by worldly standards is to keep what we think is ours and to take from those who might have what we want.

But look back at **Proverbs 3:13-14**. We already have gain! We no longer need to contend with those around us in order to feel vindicated for God has vindicated us already.

Our world is always in conflict, and God knows that we are each prone to fight for our own security on our own terms. But those who trust in God pursue obedience knowing that God will not abandon them. Look at these wonderful promises in closing: **Proverbs 3:33-35**.

To choose to follow God's wisdom is to choose to lean into following Jesus as actively as we can even when the world offers alternative options. It is to trust the confidence of God and not the confidence of man.

And if you can do this you will find the ability to act with confidence not withholding good from those around you, and you will also be able to rest with confidence experiencing a comfort which can come only when you know the God who created the world has ransomed you eternally through Jesus Christ.