

THE WISE AND THE FOOL

Grab your Bibles and open them up to **Proverbs 1**. It is nice to be back here preaching after three weeks off. It is wonderful to be part of a church with leadership that cares about me and my family and makes sacrifices so that I could spend some time with Esther and Gemma and the rest of the kids. That said, I missed aspects of preparing and preaching and **I have three weeks worth of conviction and rebuke to pour out on you**, so strap yourselves in.

Today we are continuing our series on the Book of Proverbs and Marc and Aaron did a great job of laying a foundation for us to go through the rest of the book. The Wisdom Literature of the Bible (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon) are difficult books to preach through verse by verse, because of the way that they are organized. They tend to be collections of Songs, prayers, conversations, or in this case wise sayings. If you have ever read through the book, you know that especially from chapter 10 on, it almost feels like fortune cookies stacked on top of one another: one two line comment after another that don't seem to relate. But they do relate. They relate because they are all connecting us to the wisdom of God. They are all giving us bits of a larger picture, which when put together give us of who it is that God wants us to be. Proverbs is a book that needs to be read, and reread, and then read again to truly capture the complexity of what is being laid out here. To take the picture analogy on step further, it is like oil painting. The first pass is your underlying sketch. The second pass is laying down your background colors. **Each and every layer is adding more and more and more detail. You can't just grab stuff out of it, plug and play, it will not have any depth.** You have to sit on it, live life, and go back to it. Then trip over yourself, and read it again, and return ready to be corrected.

As we begin today, I am going to review what Marc and Aaron covered, because the ideas that they covered give us a good overview of the book.

Aaron began our study of Proverbs by looking at the relationship between Wisdom and the Fear of the Lord. Specifically, he defined for us what Wisdom is: it is the love of the things of God and the hatred of evil. So the Book of Proverbs exists to help us understand what God loves and what God hates.

Marc then followed up two weeks ago by introducing us to the Righteous and the Wicked. Marc made it clear that Christians are both the wicked and the righteous. We are people who have pursued wickedness, but who God, in His loving grace, has blessed with Righteousness. So the Book of Proverbs exists to help us understand the grace of God: both what God saves us from (Wickedness) and what He saves us to (Righteousness).

With that foundation we can begin to talk about how to live out the new life we have in Christ. We can start to add some color to the canvas. So **Proverbs 1**, starting in verse **20**:

THE OFFER OF WISDOM

Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the markets she raises her voice; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks: "How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?"

So Wisdom is presented to us here not as an abstract idea, but as a character. Solomon has decided to reveal the nature of God's wisdom to us by personifying it. Wisdom here is a woman who is walking through the city shouting. Before imagining what your response to such a woman would be, remember that the main way for transferring information in the ancient world was to gather at the gates and call it from the streets. So this is a little less crazy bag lady and more of a way to describe her as a herald. In other words, she was calling to everyone. This was not a message that was exclusive to a specific group.

Lady wisdom calls out to anyone who will listen. She says, why are you so content in your ignorance? Why are you so comfortable not knowing anything? Why do you continue to think that you are okay even though all parts of your life continue to prove otherwise? Why won't you listen?

There are numerous ways to avoid the call of wisdom. Lady wisdom reveals three of them in the characters that she calls out to: the simple, the scoffer, and the fool.

The Simple.

The first character that lady wisdom addresses is the simple, and she asks a question of him: *how long will you love being simple?* The idea of being simple here is different than being a simpleton. Lady wisdom is not insulting those of lower intellect. Instead, the word simple here means open. She is not calling out then to people who don't know anything, but instead to those who are open to everything.

It is a badge of honor in our society to be open-minded and tolerant. What is most often meant by these things is that we are to play nice and accept anything that anyone says. The fact that someone believes in something is supposed to be enough for us to respect it. If they believe it, we should honor it. The problem is, the only way to do this is to not actually believe in anything yourself. This is the irony of being a freethinker; it means you aren't allowed to believe in anything. There are a great number of people who take pride in how open they are, without realizing that this is a trap. To maintain this openness you are in bondage to the beliefs of others. If you buy into the lie of tolerance, what you have done is prevented yourself from being able to embrace wisdom.

Lady Wisdom is not attacking tolerance, in order to offer intolerance and bigotry as the alternative. She is offering freedom. A freedom that says you are no longer bound by truth as others define it. This Freedom is exclusive. In order to believe that what God says is true, you have to be willing to accept that fact that a lot of people are wrong. Smart people. 'good' people. People close to you. Even your own natural inclinations. If God is right, a lot of other things are wrong.

The Scoffer.

The second character that she addresses is the scoffer. To scoff is to make fun of or ridicule. The question that she poses to the scoffer is: *How long will you delight in your scoffing?* Her question is, when will pointing out the problems of others become a poor excuse for not knowing anything yourself?

Much of what passes for wisdom today is knowing how someone else is wrong (this should be extremely evident to us in the middle of a political season). This is true outside of the church, watch the Daily Show, and in the church, read blogs. **A scoffer is someone who takes special delight in this conflict.** To be clear, are there times to take on issues, as we have already said, if you believe in something, you will be forced to interact for the sake of truth. **But a scoffer is not looking for truth; a scoffer is looking for blood.** So when wisdom presents itself to a scoffer, the scoffer tries to find the loopholes, the problems, then delights in the fact that he has found them. God's wisdom is truth, it can certainly hold up to attack, but it is not a truth that feels the need to defend itself against scoffers. If you choose to find your delight in being righter than God, if that is your hearts desire, He will allow you to do it.

The fool.

The third character that wisdom calls out by name is the fool. She asks him: *how long will you hate knowledge?* So the simple avoid knowledge, the scoffer mocks it, but the fool hates it. It is an offense. The fool is someone who finds the truth of God insulting.

Now you might think that this is not you. You might say to yourself, I'm a pretty smart guy, I love a little bit of knowledge. Let me be clear, a fool is not someone who hates the appearance of

knowledge, just someone who hates the knowledge that comes from God. The word fool here means coarse or thick. In other words, a person we may refer to as a thick-minded person. In being thick-minded, this is a person who has cast off the ability to hear anything beyond what they already know. They don't seek knowledge because they think they already have it. They are a fool, in that, they are always going to be right, no matter how wrong they get.

One of the most painful things to me as a pastor, is people who refuse to listen. There are times when I have sat across the table from someone whose life is falling apart. Someone who has continued on a path, even as that path has led them far from where they intended to go. A person who has left a trail of destruction everywhere they have gone. A person who has been told by friends, by family that things need to change. And yet, they sit across from me with a stony gaze and list of reasons why they have been and will continue to be right. A fool, ultimately, is a person who refuses to believe that they don't have wisdom in themselves.

We all struggle to trust in God; if we didn't we would not sin. But being reminded of our failure is not the motivation that we need to trust God more completely. What we need is to continually be reminded of the promises of God. Which is where Lady Wisdom goes. She says, **v.23**:

If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you.

This is a beautiful promise. She says here, if you turn away from yourself, if you stop placing your trust, value, and let's be honest here, your hope for a good life, in yourself, then you are given something in return. **The gospel is not that you give everything up with the hope that God will somehow make it up to you.** It isn't that you set aside your good hoping that God's good will be better. The gospel is that you recognize your good as nothing more than foolishness. You have no good. You look at what God offers you in Christ Jesus and see wisdom, goodness. You recognize that what you have is worthless, and what He is offering you is of ultimate value. We have nothing but temporary solutions, but God gives us an eternal gift, that affects our past, present and future. This is what Lady Wisdom offers:

New Past. We are rescued from the destruction of our foolishness. When the Spirit is poured out on us, all that we have ever done is washed clean. We no longer have to live under the shame and guilt of our foolish decisions. We see the mess that we are, that is why we turn from it. In that turn, God gives us grace. The death of Jesus becomes our righteousness. Because of that, as we see how messed up we are it is accompanied by the fact that this depravity has been paid for. As our sin becomes more recognizable to us, it also loses its power.

New Future. We are rescued from the destination of our foolishness. In the gift of the Spirit we are given an eternal outlook. No longer is life simply about the here and now, but we are here as a precursor to future glory. Our hope no longer lies in our lifetime or our goodness. Our hope is rooted what Jesus has done and in the fact that because of His work in the past we are secured a future in Him. And our future hope informs our present living.

New Present. We are given a new truth to replace our foolishness. She says: *I will make my words known to you.* In other words, we are not to go on living like we did before. God's wisdom trumps our own. Not just because it is more true, but also because it will bring more joy. In turning away from foolishness we are given the opportunity to experience this world in the way that it was meant to function. In His wisdom, God presents to us a way of life that is peace: all relationships in proper balance. But in order to receive these things we need to see the reality that we are the simple, the scoffer, and the fool. If we continue to deny this, there are consequences. Lady wisdom goes on to present this warning, v.25:

THE RESULTS OF FOOLISHNESS

Because I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded, because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when terror strikes you, when terror strikes you like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you.

Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof, therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way, and have their fill of their own devices.

This is harsh. As we read this we need to be reminded that this is the character Lady Wisdom speaking, not God directly. So we laughing at calamity and mocking at terror, we are not to imagine God taking joy in the destruction of the wicked. **Ezekiel 18.23** states:

Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?

God, like Lady Wisdom here, desires people to turn away from foolishness to Him. But the idea here is that wisdom will, in the end, be right, and the justice of God will delight in revealing the glory of God in His wisdom. Fools will get their due. God will receive glory. We don't have to wait until judgment day for that to be seen. Foolishness has consequences in this life or, as it is stated here: *they shall eat the fruit of their way, and have their fill of their own devices.*

Living in opposition to God and the way that He set the earth up to function has negative consequences on the individual and on society. When God gives us His law, He is not only giving us commands, He is guiding us away from harm. So when we read the proverbs of the wise and the fool, many of them listed in your bulletin, we SHOULD read them as the guidance of a loving God, directing His people away from the results of their own foolishness. I'll give you an example, **Proverbs 12.5**:

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

If we read this simply as a law, we hear: listen to advice. But that brings a few questions to mind: whose advice do I HAVE to listen to? On what issues? The Bible doesn't answer these questions (though there are other verses that help to clarify some of these ideas further). As a law, this is very frustrating. But if we read this as wisdom from God, we hear: you are flawed to the point that you deceive even yourself, so surround yourself with people who will speak truth into your life. You need others. See the difference. One is a difficult to define, impossible to live out law, the second is a helpful glimpse into how we were created which helps us to better live in harmony with one another. Let's look at another one, **Proverbs 29.11**:

A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back.

Does this mean that God doesn't want us to speak? But doesn't he say to *always be prepared to make a defense (1 Peter 3.15)?* Aren't we told to *preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort (2 Timothy 4.2)?* Both of those verses are followed by with patience, gentleness, respect, and love. Sometimes gentleness requires silence. There are times when not venting your spirit, even when you are right, is the appropriate response. As a law, we ask, what are the parameters of these situations so that I can be sure that I don't make a mistake. As wisdom, we hear: your passion is not always as righteous as you might think; there may be times when you destroy a person with words, when the better response would be to shut your mouth.

This might seem highly subjective. You might think, if God wants us to act a certain way, than why doesn't He just make it more clear? Because God doesn't want you live a specific way. He isn't interested in you becoming a specific kind of person. God did not give us the Bible so that we would all become alike. **What God desires is for you to be transformed.** To be made new. This newness is not about all of us handling situations in some flawless and precise way. If that's what God wanted than He would not have created us differently and given us different circumstances to live in and struggle with. The Proverbs are not here as a practical cheat sheet for life (God's Wikihow); they are given to us to sanctify us. To shape our hearts so that we can take on this life with confidence instead of despair.

It is this despair that God's wisdom protects us from. As Lady Wisdom warns us of the consequences of foolishness, she is reminding us that a heart that is anchored in anything but Christ will not withstand the storms of life. She says:

I will mock when terror strikes you, when terror strikes you like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you.

In this life we will face storms. Some people seem to always be in the midst of calamities, while others have a knack for avoiding them, but eventually, even the most careful avoider will face distress and anguish. At that point you discover how strong your foundation really is. The foolish will find that their worldview offers no support.

It is easy to be THE SIMPLE as long as the people around you are not negatively affecting you. You can have a 'live and let live' perspective as long as you keep yourself protected from other people. But as soon as the things that you really care about are threatened, you are going to have to believe strongly in something. When the breeze is light the anchor doesn't have to be that strong, but when the fight comes to your door, you are going to have to take a side. Having a simple theology will not sustain you.

It is also easy to be a scoffer in good times. If you can maintain your superiority, putting other things down is easy. But when things go bad, knowing how others beliefs are flawed does not provide hope. In the dark moments of the soul, a scoffer will no longer find delight in scoffing. It isn't enjoyable to dwell on the failures and celebrate the downfall of your enemies when you are in a worse position than they are.

Finally, it is easy to be a fool when your way seems right. The judgment of wisdom is not always instantaneous. Sometimes God allows foolishness to prosper, but this is not his stamp of approval on it. The fool WILL eventually face difficulty, and no amount of human wisdom can overcome human suffering.

The only hope in that moment is the grace of God. The ONLY confidence that we can have is that Jesus Christ fully paid the price for our sin upon the cross, when He said IT IS FINISHED, it was...He died so that we could live. This is freedom and it is the final promise of Wisdom, v.32:

THE RESULTS OF WISDOM

For the simple are killed by their turning away, and the complacency of fools destroys them; but whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster.

The gospel is freedom. It is not a freedom that says that life will not be hard. It is not a freedom that you will know exactly how to handle every situation. It is not a freedom that says do whatever you want. It is a freedom from the fear of our own depravity. We no longer have to be overcome by the weight of our own patheticness. We can make mistakes and not have to worry about being

found out and made to look like a fool, because no amount of human shame can change the fact of who we are: the family of God.

Listen to the great promise that accompanies the wisdom of God:

1. You will dwell secure: knowing that your hope lies not in your own goodness, but in the goodness of God.

2. You will be at ease: if you have died to yourself than you no longer have to protect yourself from being exposed as a fool. Your own foolishness is a reminder of how great the grace of God really is.

3. You will not dread disaster: there is nothing that this life can throw at us that is greater than the promises we have already received. If God is for us who can be against us?

Remind yourself continually of the promises of God and His wisdom, that when the storms come you may be strengthened by the promises that are just as real when we can't see them as when life is going well. I got to witness this firsthand this week as I visited a friend who is dying. A woman who, when she found out she had a severe form of cancer responded, I just hope we can glorify God through this. And I sat with her husband, who was as you could guess, in a state of shock, he grabbed his Bible, and sitting next to his bride of many years, reminded us all from **2 Corinthians 4.16-18**:

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

That response is not natural. That response is the result of a heart that has been changed by God from foolishness to wisdom over time. That is a response that comes from reading the Bible over and over and letting God's reality shape ours. May we all be willing to put the time and effort into trusting God, that we may receive the overwhelming blessings that He offers us.

