

Wisdom Delivers - Kevin Miller, 30 minutes, **Proverbs 2:1-22** (#544)

Introduction: What good is the book of Proverbs? Sure, it is very quotable, but is there any pattern or structure to it? Is there an overarching theme that will lead us to seeing why wisdom matters, or even what wisdom actually is? One of my aims in this series is to help us grow to love Christ better by living intentionally according to His wisdom. Said another way: we need to make a faithful connection between what we know about Jesus and what we do – or don't do – in our everyday lives. The name for that connection is wisdom. Or, to paraphrase professor Bruce Waltke, there is a difference between knowing the parts of a bike and actually learning to ride that bike. We might know a whole lot about our Lord or about the Scriptures, but we need to translate that knowledge into action. The wisdom of Proverbs helps us to make that connection.

Admittedly, I've not set an easy task for myself or for you. While I've narrowed our study to **chapters 1-9** because those are the easiest ones to see connections between, this still isn't much like what we're used to, is it? Before we dig in to **chapter 2**, let me offer two guideposts that will help us to make sense of all this. First, the main theme, the immovable foundation of this book is found in **1:7**: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction." That phrase, and variations on it, will come up several more times during our studies. So, from these early sermons, don't miss the point: wisdom – true wisdom – only comes from the Lord and it points back to the Lord. You can't be wise without trusting Christ. You won't have real understanding and knowledge apart from serving and enjoying Him.

Second: though there will be some repetitive sections in these first nine chapters, there is an overall pattern. If the first half of **chapter 1** is about the need for wisdom, and the latter half of the chapter is about the availability of wisdom, then we'll see that this **second chapter** continues the theme by teaching us about the blessings and protection offered by wisdom. In **chapter 3**, we'll learn of how the Lord is the provider of wisdom. And so on. In short, though some of the themes will be similar, I want you to see how each reveals something vital about our God and how we are to respond to Him. Think of it like a magnificent painting or a beautiful photograph: depending on how you look at it, things might appear one way. Then you go away and come back and you notice something different. That is a major part of how Proverbs works. This isn't a book that you can rush through and get much out of; instead, the way that this book was written is meant to force us to think, to ponder, and to chew on the truths found here. Patiently give yourself to that and you'll come away from these weeks having learned something more about following and enjoying Jesus.

I said that this chapter would be about the blessings and protection of wisdom, so let's test that theory by delving in: **Proverbs chapter 2**, beginning with **verse 1...**

2:1-5 *The call: seek wisdom.* Notice the "if" in **verse 1**. *If you do these things: if you receive, if you treasure, if you open your ears to what the Scriptures are saying and if you will think not only with your head but also with your heart...* In short, if you adopt a posture of humility before God's Word, an attitude of wanting to learn – of thirsting to learn – then you will stand to benefit.

The pictures in **verses 3-4** follow right along, don't they? If you call out to the Lord for wisdom on how to go through life, if you ask Him for understanding, if

you seek the wisdom of the Lord not just as a way to have a better life for yourself in the here and now, but because you are seeking the Lord's righteousness and glory – if this is what you want, what drives and motivates you: if it marks your attitude and your actions, *then (verse 5)* you'll begin to understand what it is to fear the Lord and to know something about Him. About who He is, and who you and I are in comparison. About our predicament of sin. About the Lord's plan to deal with our sin in Jesus. And about His eternal purposes that every Christian will get to enjoy.

So, step one in gaining the protection and blessing of wisdom? It's to seek wisdom. Simply to say, but hard to do, because it doesn't just happen. Nobody drifts toward being wise. Simply gaining years or experience won't do it. Wisdom is available, but you have to want it and to be willing to seek it. Do you? Will you?

2:6-8 *The Lord who gives wisdom.* Here's the next step: trust the Lord who made wisdom, who stores wisdom, to give *you* wisdom. Understand this: you won't find wisdom – true, lasting, eternal insight – anywhere but from the Lord. No shop sells it. No provider offers it. And, oh how amazing this is: the Lord is happy to give it to those who are “upright” and who “walk in integrity.” What do those mean? Both are used throughout the Old Testament as descriptions of how God's people are to follow Him: they aren't descriptions that boil down to “do more, try harder,” though we are called to think and live differently, to be changed by Christ. But more fundamentally, these are calls to live in a different pattern of life from people around us. In Old Testament speak, here is a call to live “not like all the other nations.” If you are a Christian, the call is to live as a citizen of Christ's kingdom even more than whatever country issues your passport. Are you? Will you?

So, if we are to seek after wisdom (**verses 1-5**), and now we learn of the Lord who has all wisdom, what is the proper response? It's actually fairly obvious: ask the Lord for wisdom! That is what **James** writes in **1:5** of his letter: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." Ask the Lord, trusting in His goodness, believing that what the Scriptures say are true: He has wisdom, and He wants to give it to His people.

Now, let's not be naïve about this: I've already said in this series that wisdom doesn't come automatically. It doesn't cost money, but it will cost your life, your dreams, your pride. **James** says something similar: the words he gives about wisdom are written in the context of suffering – it is under trial when wisdom is so often needed, isn't it? If that's the case, then why do the hard work of seeking wisdom? Why put forth effort and attention *now* rather than just hoping that God will help when the trials come? Why not rely on the "foxhole" prayer in the difficult moment instead of the long, obedient life that is called for here?

The answer comes in the remainder of this chapter: seeking wisdom *now*, living wisely *today*, has a benefit attached to it. First, it delivers; second, it blesses. Let's see both of those in the following verses...

2:9-15 *First, wisdom delivers.* When you call out to the Lord, when you ask Him to help you know and obey what He has taught and preserved for you in His Word, then – as we read in these verses – wisdom will change you. In **verses 9-15**, it protects. You will understand what is good, you will recognize what is evil. We Christians call that ability "discernment," and it's important. We need to know what we should be doing, and we also need to know what we should be avoiding. Putting that knowledge into practice is what is described here. When you seek

wisdom, you will be spared from falling in with all sorts of wicked people and evil plans that might look really good on the surface, yet would end up leading to heartache, ruin, or worse.

Brothers and sisters, there's an underlying truth here, one that isn't popular to our Western and American way of thinking: you and I really don't know best. That sort of individual impulse isn't found in the Scriptures. What's more, the crowds don't know what's best, either. This is why wisdom gives you insight and knowledge about how to live that you'll find nowhere else. Rather than taking an online poll or phoning a friend, this is the God of the Universe telling you what is good. The call is to rely on His vision rather than your own, His knowledge and insight as opposed to whatever seems good to you. That's faith, quite literally: we walk with this kind of trust rather than by our own sight. And when we do, when we trust God in this way, we'll be spared from many situations that we would have otherwise blundered in to. So, this morning: what's your plan to walk by faith? In this New Year, how are you being intentional about seeking the Lord's wisdom more than relying on yourself? What needs to change for this to become the pattern, the habit, of your life? Ask Him to help you make that your reality.

2:16-19 The deliverance of wisdom turns into the *protection of wisdom*. That's what we read of here, isn't it? And these verses work on two levels. One is the obvious, the temptation that is alive and well in hotels and on screens and in neighborhoods today: the temptation of adultery itself. But, on a spiritual level, there is also the danger of adultery: what the Bible calls "turning from your first love," which is to say, turning from the Lord and loving, giving yourself to, anyone or anything else. Money. Status. Beauty. Worldly significance. False gods and wicked philosophies of life. These, too, are adultery just the same.

The promise of wisdom in these very real situations is deliverance and protection. Wisdom will show you how the false promises of this world won't add up, how they are liars, icebergs that don't look so big or bad because they seem small on the surface, though devastating in reality. The imagery in **verses 18-19** tells it like it is: adultery isn't "fun," it's not "exciting," unless you consider dying fun. The false promises of lust and pleasure won't add up, no matter how glossy the magazine or how slickly produced the video. And it's the same when it comes to the things that tempt away from the Lord: giving in to whatever the culture hates about Christianity won't actually bring acceptance – you'll still be shunned. Looking to money for your security won't work out – even the rich have their problems. Thinking that popularity, beauty, or status will make life easy will cost you far more than you might ever have imagined. And none of that will lead you safely to your eternal home. Dear church: get wisdom! It will be protection for your soul every bit as much as it will lead you into the best way to navigate this life!

2:20-22 Finally, *the blessing of wisdom*. To those who set themselves on this path through the help of the Holy Spirit; to you, if you'll follow Christ this wholeheartedly, we read that there is a blessing. The way of the good and the paths of the righteous lead to inhabiting the land and remaining in it. This recalls the Old Testament covenant made by the Lord to His people if they would be faithful. Here's the good news: Jesus has already been faithful. He has already undergone the trial and has finished the race well. If you trust Him, then your call is to faithfulness also, but it's a faithfulness that has been secured for you by your Savior. Do you want this? Do you want to rest in your Savior whose yoke is easy and burden is light? Then cry out for wisdom. Trust the Lord to provide. And ask the Spirit to help you hunger and thirst for righteousness. Let's pray...