

Becoming Wise

Proverbs 2:1-15

John chapter 3 is likely one of the most well-known passages in the Bible.

About half the chapter focuses on Jesus meeting privately with a Pharisee named Nicodemus.

He came to Jesus, because he was convinced that Jesus had come from God and that he had the answers to life's questions.

The very first thing that John records Jesus saying to Nicodemus is this, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Why would Jesus say that?

It is because every single human being comes into the world with a heart that turns away from God and we need the Holy Spirit to change our hearts, to turn them towards the LORD.

That is what it means to be born again.

One of the most basic things that the Holy Spirit does in giving someone new life in Christ is that He gives us a love for Jesus.

That is we have an affection and delight in the Person and Work of Our Saviour and that changes how we think, feel, and act.

You see Jesus said that loving Him is about more than a having a warm feeling towards Him.

It is that, but it is more than that.

Jesus says in John 14:15, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

He says that knowing full well that we will fail at keeping His commands.

Jesus knows our need of grace. He knows that we need His perfection to cover over our sins, He knows we need His sacrifice on the cross to be forgiven, and His resurrection to conquer the grave.

If we could make ourselves right with God through works Jesus never would have taken on humanity and come into the world.

Keeping God's commands add nothing to the finished work of Jesus, what it does is it reveals that the finished work of Jesus has been applied to our lives.

It reveals that our hearts have been changed by the Spirit to love the One Who is most worthy of our affection and devotion.

That is what genuine salvation is, it is being born again.

[The book of Proverbs is extremely helpful to us in that regard. The whole purpose of the book of Proverbs is to help God's people properly apply God's Word to our lives. That is how the bible defines wisdom. It is more that information in our minds, it is truth properly applied to how we live. Last week we learned where wisdom begins, it begins with 'the fear of the LORD.' This week in **Proverbs 2:1-15** Solomon is going to take us from the beginning of wisdom and he is going to show us how to walk along in the journey of becoming wise. He shows us here what we need to become wise, where wisdom comes from, and lastly he tells us about a tremendous benefit of growing in wisdom. First, let's look at what we need to become wise. We can see in verses 1-5 that...]

Point #1 – Becoming wise requires humility. (Verses 1-5)

In order to gain the ability to properly apply truth to our lives we must first realize that what is good and right comes from outside of ourselves.

One of the things I often say about good bible reading is that it is important to pay attention to the tiny words.

There is an important tiny word that is repeated three times in the first four verses, it is the word "if".

The word means that there are things that need to happen in order to get a desired result, which means that if those things don't happen then neither will the desired result.

[I'm guessing the kids in service with us know these kinds of statements well. You've probably heard something from your parents like, "If you want dessert you need to finish your supper." Or "If you want to play a game you need to finish your homework."]

Let's listen together at Solomon's if statements in **verses 1-4**.

Notice the need to "receive" in verse 1.

God's word is offered to people, but it is often left on the shelf.

To receive it means understanding our need of it.

That is an act of humility. It is realizing that we don't have the answers and that the LORD does.

That gets worked out in how we value what the Bible says.

If we believe that God has the answers for life then we are going to 'treasure up' or 'store up' those instructions, because we know our need.

That deeply felt need is going to get worked out in the way we listen.

Solomon says the way to ‘receive’ and ‘treasure up’ these words is by ‘making your ear attentive.’

Franz Delitzsch points out that literally means to ‘stiffen your ear’, it is an act of purposefully focusing your attention on what is being said.

If you are like me you know how easy it is to get distracted. What I have noticed is that the more I perceive a need to listen carefully the more I work at paying attention.

That is why Solomon says here ‘...if you call out for insight...if you seek it like silver and search as for hidden treasures.’

We ‘call out’ for things that we desperately need, things that come from outside of ourselves.

We search for things that we see as valuable and the fact that we are looking for them means we are seeking beyond what we already have.

That is humility and we need that to become wise.

[It is like being stranded on a desert island with no food. What are you going to do if you see a boat going by the island? You are going to call for help, wave your arms, and do anything else you can think of to get their attention because you know your need of help. Only a great fool would stand on the island and say, “I’ve got this covered.”]

Spiritually speaking human being are on a dessert island when it comes to wisdom.

If we are going to become wise, that is learn how to apply the truth of God’s Word to our lives, then we must see our great need.

Now, look at the promise of **verse 5**.

The word ‘understand’ here means the ability to discern or see things properly.

If we are humble and look to God’s word we are going to have a proper perspective on ‘the fear of the LORD’.

That He is our Creator, that we belong to Him, that He has the right to tell us how to live, and that His ways are for our highest good.

It also says we will ‘find the knowledge of God.’

That is we will think rightly about the nature of character of the LORD according to how He has revealed Himself instead of making up our own ideas about Who He is and what He is like.

[Sadly, our world is filled with the foolishness of people believing and proclaiming things about God based on their own opinions or the influences of culture. People who stand on spiritual desert islands saying, “I know better!” Becoming wise means realizing that we need God to

speak to us. It means crying out, it means seeking and treasuring instruction from the LORD. When we do that we are on the way to becoming wise because we are humble enough to realize that is the only way to become wise. Solomon shows us why that is the only way in verses 6-10 by showing us where wisdom comes from. He shows us that...]

Point #2 – Becoming wise is a gift from the LORD. (Verses 6-10)

God delights in a humble heart and so the one who turns from himself towards his Creator will receive everything needed to increase in the ability to live rightly.

We see another important small word at the beginning of verse six. It is the word 'For'.

Why is the promise of verse 5 true for those that humble themselves, by receiving and treasuring God's word with purposeful attention? (**Verse 6**)

If you have a bible with you this morning you need to know that what you are holding in your hands is much more than ink and paper.

This is God's instruction manual for life, which He has produced and preserved in miraculous ways.

It is unimaginable to think that God would do all that He has to make His word available to us and then keep its wisdom hidden from us.

Every single person who comes to the scriptures with a desire to understand and live a life that is pleasing in God's sight will gain exactly that to one degree or another.

Remember wisdom is something different than a measurement of intellectual capacity by itself.

Wisdom is the ability or skill to apply the truth of God's Word to your life.

The biggest problem people have in gaining wisdom is pride rather than intelligence.

It is pride that ignores God's Word and it is pride that twists the Scriptures to suit evil desires and we have that in abundance in our world today which is why there is so much godlessness.

If, however, we humble ourselves and genuinely seek to know and live out what God says, God will give us wisdom.

I love what is says in **verse 7-8**.

Commentator Allen Ross points out that the words "stores up" implies the idea of future use.

[When I read that the picture that came to my mind is the picture of a 'piggy bank'. Any kids have a piggy bank? What is a piggy bank for? That's right you use it to save money so that you can buy something in the future.]

When a person humbly comes to God's word seeking wisdom, the LORD is working His Word into the heart of mind of such a person like a piggy bank so that when it is needed later it is there to be used.

What is so encouraging and amazing about that is that the LORD never runs out of the ability to put treasure in our wisdom piggy banks and that becomes a safeguard for us according to verse 8.

He expands on the promise in **verses 9-10**.

When we humbly give our attention to the Scriptures, God will give us wisdom and when we have wisdom we will know God's standards, apply them correctly, and apply them consistently.

We will be able to do that because it says in verse 10 "Wisdom will come into your heart".

That is an important reminder for us. Wisdom is much more than the application of a set of rules to our lives.

It is something that is woven into our lives, it is something that goes so deep into our hearts that it is as much who we are as it is what we do.

Keeping a rule for the sake of keeping a rule is better than breaking the rule, but falls far short of genuine wisdom.

Obeying God's word because we love God and can see the goodness of His ways, that is true wisdom and it is consistent and genuine and it is a gift that comes to us from the LORD according to His grace.

[Jesus said, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." Matthew 12:34. Here is a hard question, "When we speak is it wisdom or foolishness that is coming out of our mouths." If it is going to be wisdom then we need to humble ourselves, give our attention to God's word, plead with Him for understanding, and He will give it to us over the course of time. And if that happens we will receive a tremendous benefit from growing in wisdom. We are told about it in verses 11-15 where Solomon shows us that...]

Point #3 – Becoming wise will keep you safe. (Verses 11-15)

The more we grow in the ability to do what is right the less we are influenced by evil.

Listen to the picture that is given to us in verse 11.

When I think of watching over and guarding the picture that comes to my mind from the bible is the picture of a good shepherd.

In the ancient world that was a full time round the clock job.

A good shepherd would stay with the sheep looking after them and protecting from thieves and wild animals.

That was true rain or shine, warm or cold, light or dark.

That is the kind of watching over that is in view here.

When our hearts and minds are full of wisdom we are constantly being protected by that.

Protected from what is the question that **verses 12-15** answer for us.

The word 'way' in verse 12 can be translated as path or road and is often used to describe a pattern of life.

That is the case here. '...the way of evil' is to live a life that is contrary to what God wants.

More often than not people who are neck deep in ungodly things want to bring other people along with them.

That is something that an unwise person can be easily pulled into.

I'd be willing to guess that happens on the school yards several times a day.

Kids who on their own wouldn't break the rules, but in the crowd they follow along.

I can remember getting caught up in that more than once growing up.

Sadly, it happens to grownups too.

It is easy to get caught up in the, 'everyone else is doing it' mentality and follow along.

The problem with that is where 'the way of evil' leads.

It leads to destruction every single time. That is often true in this life and it is certainly true in eternity.

The way of evil is described here as 'perverse' which literally means to turn things upside down.

When societies start to call evil what God calls good and good what God calls evil, they are in big trouble.

Why? Because God's ways are right and they work and lead to life.

That means doing the opposite will not work and lead to pain, sorrow, and eventually death.

Wisdom guards us against that.

That doesn't mean that evil people can't do bad things to us.

That certainly can and does happen and that has been true throughout the history of the world.

Jesus tells us to expect to be hurt by the unbelieving world.

These verses are pointing us to the bigger picture.

The way of evil leads to eternal destruction and wisdom keeps us safe from that.

[Noah is a fantastic example of this. How often do you think people mocked and made fun of Noah for building a massive boat because God said He would flood the earth? Probably quite a bit. How often do you think evil people tried to get Noah and his family to join in their evil? Probably often. What kept him safe? His wisdom. He kept doing what was right and obeying the LORD and in the end Noah and his family are kept safe, while those who walked in evil were destroyed.]

What wisdom did for Noah and has done for all of God's people, it will do for you and me.

It will keep us safe, because if we humbly seek after wisdom in God's word He will give it to us.

And when God's word has worked its way into the deepest parts of our heart we will be able to stand firm in what is right regardless of how many people are encouraging us to live an upside down life.

Do you want that for your life?

I hope so, because that is what it means to be truly born again.

To have a heart that desires to grow in wisdom out of love for our glorious God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Let's pray together towards that end.