

September 12, 2010
Pentecost 16

"The Fear of the Lord Is the Beginning of Wisdom"

PROVERBS 9:8-12

Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you. ⁹ Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning. ¹⁰ "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. ¹¹ For through me your days will be many, and years will be added to your life. ¹² If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you; if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer."

All through history people have passed down important lessons of life by using proverbs or meaningful and memorable sayings. Let me give you some examples to show you how someone has passed down proverbs to you. You can add the missing word to complete the proverb. "A penny saved is a penny...earned." "A bird in the hand is worth two in the...bush." "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of...cure." Some of these proverbs or sayings have been around for hundreds of years. They keep getting passed down from one generation to the next because they are useful teaching tools.

The Lord our God has seen fit to place into the Bible a book we call Proverbs. It was written primarily by King Solomon. The book begins with the words, "The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight." The proverbs were not just written by Solomon. They were placed down under inspiration of the Holy Spirit for 2 Peter 1 tells us, "Holy men of God spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

Today we want to focus our attention on this proverb from the Lord that is well known, but not always that well understood. The proverb is this: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Before we unpack the meaning of this proverb lets listen to what the Lord tells us about wisdom.

A word to the wise

The Lord tells us, "Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you. Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning." There are two groups of people living in the world today. There is the one group of people who are open to being instructed in the wisdom of God's Word and there are those who minds are shut to the true teachings of God's Word found here on the pages of the Bible.

If you speak God's Word to someone who does not believe in God's Word, they will mock you and ridicule you for what you are saying. They may even hate you for daring to tell them the truths the Lord has given to us in his Word because these truths conflict with what they believe in their heart of hearts.

Have you ever heard a child yell at his mom or dad when they were correcting them for

something they had done wrong? Have you ever had one of your children brush you off by saying "Whatever?" People react the same way to the instruction God gives in his Word unless the Holy Spirit opens their hearts to believe.

When I lived in Santa Barbara, I occasionally walked to the church where my office was located. As I walked down the street, I saw a boy about 12 years old leaving the house to go to school. His mother called out to him to come back and pick up something he had forgotten. He turned around and yelled at her, "Shut up you old hag." There was something seriously wrong in that young man's relationship with his mother. We are born into this world scorning and ridiculing what the Lord tells us in his Word. We refuse to accept it. We hate it. "Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you."

How different it is with someone who is led by God's grace to believe in what the Lord says to us in his Word. It says, "Rebuke a wise man and he will love you. Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still." These people who understand and believe what God tells us in his Word are always open to hearing more of what the Lord has to say to them. I think of what the Apostle Paul wrote to a young pastor named Timothy: "From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God breathed and is useful to teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." This young man named Timothy had learned God's Word when he was a little child, an infant. Earlier in this letter Paul wrote, "I have been reminded of your faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois, and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also." He was wise to salvation, and he longed to receive more instruction and help from the Apostle Paul.

God's Word seems like foolishness and nonsense to those who do not accept it and believe in it. In 1 Corinthians 2 the Apostle Paul describes the people who do not have the Holy Spirit in their lives in this way. "The man without the Spirit of God does not accept the things that come from God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." The Jehovah Witness comes to your door. You witness to them that Jesus is your Lord and God. You tell them that you believe three persons are one God. They will try to show that you are a fool for believing what you have come to see in the Bible with your eyes of faith. They cannot see what you see because they have not been born again. Their eyes do not see what you see. The Apostle Paul said that the preaching of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. He said, "We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles." The great Apostle Paul was once one of those people who ridiculed Jesus' death and resurrection, and even killed Christians for believing this, such was his scorn and disdain for the Christian faith.

My dear Christians, this morning, by God's grace you have been given a wisdom that allows you to see into the mind of God and know what he has planned for your life. In 1 Corinthians 2 the Apostle Paul tells us that we cannot see into the mind of another person. I cannot see what you are thinking, and you cannot see what I am thinking. But we receive the Holy Spirit so we can understand who God is and what God has planned for us. Paul writes, "We have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand what God has freely given us." We long to have more of this wisdom. We cannot hear enough about God's love for us and what he has in store for us.

In Ephesians 1 Paul prays that his beloved people in Ephesus might know the Lord even better. "I keep asking the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of the his glorious inheritance in the saints."

The fear of God and the beginning of wisdom

We always want more of this wisdom that God gives us. Proverbs tells us, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Fearing God means much more than being afraid of God. The ancient Aztecs were afraid of their god. That is why they built pyramids and offered daily human sacrifices to guarantee that their god would continue to bless them and love them. A missionary watched in horror as a woman from India let her first born child slip into the waters of the Genghis' river just to guarantee that she might remain fertile and have more children. The Chumash Indians who lived in Santa Barbara County believed in a great spirit that they needed to appease to get more blessings in this life.

The fear we have of our God is totally different. It is the fear that starts with believing a holy and perfect God demands perfection for eternal life. It involves also believing that God not only demands perfection but gives us the perfection we need to be accepted by him. He did this by having his Son sacrificed on the cross for our sin. There is no other religion in the world that teaches anything remotely like this. We stand in fear and awe of our God because of his love that provided the perfect payment in Jesus.

This past week I was having a devotion with an elderly lady and giving her communion. We read the words of Psalm 130 where David speaks of the fear that he had before his God because of sin so obvious in his life. He cries out in anguish, "Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord, O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy. If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord who could stand?" When we look at our sin, and we look at God's perfection, we cry out in fear, "O Lord, who could stand?" But then David rejoiced in his forgiveness. "But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared." David was filled with a holy fear and awe of God when he realized that the Lord did everything necessary to forgive his heinous sins of adultery and murder.

In our opening hymn we sang about the awesome wonder and fear we have of our God when we look at the glory of his creation. Then we sang of an even greater fear and awe we have when we think of how our God was willing to sacrifice his Son so we could be forgiven. "And when I think that God his Son not sparing, Sent him to die, I scarce can take it in. When on the cross, My burden gladly sharing, He died to take away my sin. Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee, How great Thou art, How great Thou art." When God's Old Testament people watched as the Lord drowned the army of Pharaoh in the Red Sea, it says that they feared God and trusted in him. "And when the Israelites saw the great power the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant." When Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac, it says that he feared God. He trusted that the Lord God would raise his Son to life again even after he took his life. To fear God must to trust in his awesome power and strength to deliver us.

Think of the wisdom and knowledge you have of your God this morning. You know what he did to create the world in which we are living. You know what God has done to rescue us from our sin. You know about the place he has prepared for us after we die. You know what he wants you to do with your life here on this earth. This fear or awe and respect for God that you have is the beginning of wisdom. Of all the things you know in life it is the beginning. It is the most important. This wisdom sustains and strengthens you every day. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Amen.