

The Value of Wisdom
Proverbs 3:13-35 (03/19/17)
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Proverbs 3:13-35 begins with that familiar phrase “How blessed is the man.” It is used fourteen times in the Old Testament, most famously in Psalm 1, “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly...” What is a blessed man or woman? One scholar says it refers to people who experience life the way God intended. Being blessed doesn’t mean all the lights were green on the Lloyd Expressway, or the medical report came back negative, or your investments have skyrocketed, or you got an A on that test, or you got accepted for that job. When these things happen we say, “God has really blessed me!” What about when every light turns red, the report shows an alarmingly high PSA level, your investments just bottomed out, you blew the test, or you didn’t get the job. Being blessed has nothing to do with what you have, but rather the kind of person you are.

You are blessed when God shows you your sin, drives you to the cross of Christ for salvation, and then works in you to will and to do of His good pleasure. Because of your faith in Christ you want to please God, walk with God, love God. You are blessed when He is motivating you to rejoice in your trials and to fight sin and seek after Christ. You are blessed when you know you are poor in spirit, you mourn over sin, you humble your heart before Him and others, you hunger and thirst for righteousness, you are quick to show mercy and forgive others, you purify your heart to see God, you are quick to make peace, and you are willing to joyfully suffer for Christ’s sake (Matthew 5:1-12). You are blessed when God is working in your life and you are living the way God intended for you to live in His world. That’s exactly what Proverbs 3:13ff. is about. God says the blessed man knows what is important in this world, namely, God’s wisdom! The blessed person finds God’s wisdom and lives it out in his daily life. I’ve divided this section into five truths about the blessed person.

You have a true understanding of the value of God’s wisdom – 3:13-18.

13 How blessed is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding. 14 For her profit is better than the profit of silver And her gain better than fine gold. 15 She is more precious than jewels; and nothing you desire compares with her. 16 Long life is in her right hand; In her left hand are riches and honor. 17 Her ways are pleasant ways and all her paths are peace. 18 She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who hold her fast.

Warren Wiersbe said, “Some people know the price of everything and the value of nothing.” Have you discovered that this world does not value God’s wisdom? They’ll stay up all night for release of the latest Apple product. They fight, shove, and even shoot their way into the Walmart on Black Friday to get the best deals. But they completely overlook the most valuable commodity in this world – God’s wisdom!

This blessed man or woman, hopefully you, in the midst of all the seductions, deceptions, distractions, the empty promises, the false religions, the lusts of the flesh, eyes, and the pride of life, chooses God’s wisdom. God brought it down to us. You have found God’s wisdom and like that treasure in the field Jesus talked about, you will do whatever it takes to lay hold of it and gain the understanding it provides – how to live and glorify God as a redeemed sinner in His world!

Look how God advertises His wisdom in verses 14 and 15 – God’s revelation in Jesus Christ and in His Word is worth more than all the silver and gold and all the finest jewelry of this world! Do you believe that? Do you live with that value in your heart? If you were given the choice between 50 million dollars and taking the only Bible left in the whole world, what would you take? If it was a matter of eating or skipping a meal so you could spend some time in God’s wisdom, His Word, what would you choose? If it’s a matter of getting a little more sleep or getting up and getting into God’s Word, what will you choose?

Silver and gold are temporary; God’s wisdom is forever. In 1929 Winston Churchill took a tour of Canada and the United States with his brother and son, all the way to California and back to New York City. As he was traveling he met with financially powerful people and kept investing borrowed money into the soaring

stock market. He wrote a number of happy letters back to his wife, Clementine, about how their wealth was multiplying. It was all wonderful until Tuesday, October 29, during his return voyage when the stock market crashed and poor Mr. Churchill lost almost all his investments. He discovered the truth about earthly wealth stated in Proverbs 23:5, "When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For wealth certainly makes itself wings like an eagle that flies toward the heavens." Swoosh, there it goes!

Not only will God's wisdom never fly away like worldly wealth, neither will it destroy your life or leave you with emptiness. Look at her holding out to you spiritual life and riches (vss 16-17)! As you value wisdom and live under her authority, she brings you pleasant ways, peaceful paths, and all of the goodness and abundant life that only Jesus Christ can bring! Pleasant ways and peaceful paths! How many people live in almost constant turmoil from crisis to crisis, angry, bitter, explosive, convinced others have it in for them, taking five, six, seven different pills to try to bring them pleasant ways and peaceful paths!

Jack Whittaker from West Virginia won the 315 million dollar lottery in 2002 and it ruined his life – drugs, drunkenness, thieves drained his bank account of \$200,000, even his house burned down, and he ended up broke. He said, "I wish I'd have torn that ticket up!" My friends, look at verse 18 – Wisdom is the tree of life and happy are all who hold her fast! A blessed man understands the value of wisdom; there is nothing in this world that even comes close to its value! And yet this world doesn't choose it.

You are fully aware that the entire universe displays God's wisdom – 3:19-20.

19 The LORD by wisdom founded the earth, by understanding He established the heavens. 20 By His knowledge the deeps were broken up and the skies drip with dew.

Choose God's wisdom because He knows how life works; all you have to do is look around. Everywhere you look in this vast universe, you are looking at the display of God's incredible wisdom, His powerful wisdom, His glorious wisdom, His finely tuned wisdom! Genesis one glows with God's wisdom. From that scorching 10,000 degree on the surface sun to its 27,000,000 degree core, to the cockroach with its 2000 lenses in each eye, from your lacrimal glands to wash your eyeballs to the wax in your ears to keep dust out of your inner ear. Wisdom, wisdom, wisdom, everywhere on display all the time. Our awesome God is the quintessence of engineering genius, design, and execution. Listen to this, "He stretches out the north over empty space, and hangs the earth on nothing!" Job 26:7 Did you hear that?

Surely one of the greatest hoaxes of history was when Satan vomited his lie of evolution into the world system, stinking up the halls and auditoriums of higher learning everywhere with his assault on God's glorious wisdom seen everywhere in all creation. God created it all, from the sub-atomic level to the vast billions of galaxies out there. He created all of it by His wisdom; He surely knows how life works.

Verse 20, "By His knowledge the deeps were broken up and the skies drip with dew" may refer to the flood when the entire planet experienced catastrophic earthquakes and waters gushed out over the planet and mountains thrust up and valleys sank to hold all the water, to a maximum depth of over five miles! And now the skies drip with dew. John Piper has a meditation about a farmer in the Middle East looking for rain for his fields. How does that happen? Water evaporates out of the Mediterranean Sea, leaving the salt behind, and is transported in clouds that weigh over one and one-half billion pounds to provide one inch of water to one square mile of farmland. But the water doesn't dump down like buckets or elephants from that cloud. No, it drips as God wisely designed it to do so it doesn't smash the crops, but rather irrigates them! <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-great-work-of-god-rain>

If God by His wisdom knows how to create and maintain this vast universe, including the clouds and the rain, then God in His wisdom knows what you need to live a blessed life in His world.

You live your life under God's wise, protecting providence – 3:21-26.

21 My son, let them not vanish from your sight; keep sound wisdom and discretion, 22 So they will be life to your soul and adornment to your neck. 23 Then you will walk in your way securely and your foot will not stumble. 24 When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. 25 Do not be afraid of sudden fear nor of the onslaught of the wicked when it comes; 26 For the LORD will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught.

This world is not a safe place. There are a thousand possibilities to cut yourself with a circular saw, slip on the ice and break your back, or even be robbed out on the sidewalk. One night in 1967 I was walking home from the hospital in Boston where I worked when a couple thugs jumped me, shoved me into the bushes, and grabbed my wallet. They may have been the same punks who later broke into our apartment and stole our TV, record player, among other things. You and I live in a fallen world. Deer suddenly appear right in front of you while you're going down the highway at 70 mph. Or they jump in front of you and send their steaming guts right through your windshield onto your lap. I'm a great deer hunter with a car.

What does God's wisdom promise you here? God is in control of your life; don't forget it. Don't let that truth escape your memory bank. NASB says don't let them vanish (vs. 21), which we are prone to do. We quickly revert to practical atheists when bad stuff happens. We tend to forget all about God. But let's savor God's assurances here. The blessed man who finds and lives in God's good wisdom is protected by His sovereign providence. God will adorn your neck, like those elegant necklaces the ladies wear. God's wisdom transforms your life as you love, fear, and trust Him more and more. He is using pain and suffering to make you more and more like His Son! Romans 8:28-29 applies right here and now. God uses all things, good and bad, in your life to make you more and more like Christ!

Verse 24 says you can face your future with confidence, with courage, with peace and enjoy sweet sleep! Who doesn't want that? No temptation will come to you and no test will meet you but such as is common to everyone. Wisdom tells you God is faithful, sovereign, in control, knows what He's doing, and won't allow you to face a temptation or a trial that He won't also give you the wisdom and power to handle. Do you believe that? He won't let your foot stumble or let your foot get caught by evil (vss. 23, 26).

Does this mean you won't suffer under God's good providence? No, sudden fear and the onslaught of the wicked well may come (vs. 25)! But God is your refuge and fortress, a very present help in trouble. God's wisdom says He'll go with you through the pain and through the valley of the shadow of death. How many people in history lived every night of their lives uncertain if they would survive the wicked onslaught. If you lived as a Jew in Germany or a Christian in Syria, you dreaded the sound of the vehicle stopping out front, the sharp rap at the door. The Lord will be your confidence! Paul said under trial, "But the Lord stood with me." Luther said, "Here I stand; God help me." Count your blessings, but be prepared for that sudden onslaught; don't let God's assurances vanish. God hasn't deserted or forgotten you! Through the most horrible pain and even death, we must cling to the promise that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord! Live your life under God's wise, protecting providence.

You apply God's wisdom in all your relationships with other people – 3:27-32.

27 Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it. 28 Do not say to your neighbor, "Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it," When you have it with you. 29 Do not devise harm against your neighbor, while he lives securely beside you. 30 Do not contend with a man without cause, if he has done you no harm. 31 Do not envy a man of violence and do not choose any of his ways. 32 For the devious are an abomination to the LORD; but He is intimate with the upright.

Now God's wisdom speaks into every relationship in your life. This is where life really gets tough at times. We so easily take advantage of some people, and other people, frankly, are just hard to stomach. How does the blessed man who loves Christ and is living out God's wisdom handle these people? What do you do when you accidentally cut through their cable line and leave them without their only entertainment for a weekend? (You ask forgiveness and buy them a nice gift card – I speak from experience). When your sassy, brassy neighbor slaps you in the face like ours slapped my mom in the face many years ago, and even poured hot grease on our fledgling little pine trees my dad was trying to grow, do you hire a lawyer and drag them to court? Do you live with an "I'm not letting you get away with that, fella!" mind-set? Do you return evil for evil?

No, God's wisdom says love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself! That's exactly what this section is saying. How are you getting along with that neighbor? That friend? That enemy? That

spouse? Those kids? God in His wisdom and personal sovereign providence over your life placed you in the middle of every one of the people in your life. On purpose, to help you learn to love, to learn patience, kindness, forgiveness, to live with a heart of mercy and grace toward every single one, including even your enemies. God made no mistake when He brought that difficult person into your life. Every person is there to help you grow in wisdom. I know, I know. You're probably thinking, "I'm not learning much wisdom here." Pray and ask God for help. All your relationships in your life are between sinners in a fallen world.

As you go through this list, what is God teaching you? V. 27-28 – If you owe something, pay up. V. 29 – Keep all your promises to your neighbor. V. 30 – Don't even think of returning evil for good, like Saul did to David. That's despicable. Vv. 31-32 – never envy bad guys, bullies, liars and cheaters who are making a ton of money, even if it is your brother. The blessed man who finds and clings to God's wisdom treats others with the same kindness and faithful integrity that God poured out on you (Prov. 3:3)!

You know that God will honor every life lived in His wisdom – 3:33-35.

33 The curse of the LORD is on the house of the wicked, but He blesses the dwelling of the righteous. 34 Though He scoffs at the scoffers, yet He gives grace to the afflicted. 35 The wise will inherit honor, but fools display dishonor.

God fast forwards us to the end. Here's what ultimately counts. If you are that man or woman who found wisdom and is holding fast to divine understanding, you are blessed, your house is blessed. God is pouring out His grace into your humbled heart, and praise God, you will inherit honor. This honor is nothing less than a seat with Christ at God's right hand, enjoying the pleasures and joys of Christ forever and ever. You will live all of your days filled with solid hopes and marvelous joys.

For the man or woman who doesn't value God's wisdom and thinks they can live life in God's world their own way, there's an awful price. God allows such fools to entangle themselves in their folly in a way for all to see! They display dishonor, which describes eternal punishment and everlasting shame.

God gives grace to those who bow their knee and receive the wisdom of His Son, but God has only wrath for those who refuse to bow.

"He who believes in the Son has eternal life;
but he who does not obey the Son will not see life,
but the wrath of God abides on him." John 3:36