

**Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God**

Date: 10 September, 2023
Services: *Across the diocese*
Passage: Proverbs 1:1-7
Title: **Wisdom for living**

PRE-LIMINARY

- We're nearly at the end of our OT overview...
- We've seen the storyline and all the main features...
- And we're just going back to see how some of the other elements fit...
- Last week – the Psalms
- This week – the Wisdom literature = Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and some Psalms.
- The way we are going to do this is by looking at the one main and common theme throughout these books: namely – that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. ///

INTRODUCTION

- How **wise** are you?
- I don't mean how **intelligent** you are, or how many **degrees** you have, or how **quick witted** you are, or how you do at **trivial pursuit**... I'm asking how **wise** you are?
- Traditionally in our society, wisdom is associated with **old age** and **grey hair**... but I'm not asking about your **experience**, or your **age** or your **maturity**...
- I'm asking how **wise** are you? //
- Let me ask you – how do you think one **becomes** wise?
- Is it through the **experience** of time, the **sadness** of tragedy, the **rigours** of illness, the **pain** of loss...?
- Does it come by **introspection**, by **withdrawal** from the world?
- Does it come by **reading widely**, by **philosophical reflection**, from **theological discussion**?
- **How DO you become wise??** //
- The **Bible** explains it very **clearly** and very **simply**.
- You become wise by **fearing God**...
- Proverbs 1:7 *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge...*
- Proverbs 9:10 *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*
- Proverbs 15:33 *The fear of the LORD teaches a man wisdom and humility comes before honour.*
- Job 28:28 *'The fear of the Lord - that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.'*
- Psalm 111:10 *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding.*
- But // '**FEAR of the Lord**'...? how do you react to **that**?

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- I suspect that most of us feel that is a now out-of-date response to God... we know **better** now surely.
- Isn't **fear of God** – something from the **dark ages**, or something from the **fire and brimstone** preachers of the past
- After all – we know God is full of **mercy** and **compassion** and **abounding in steadfast love**? Haven't we been recalling that?
- Don't we tell our children that Jesus is their **friend**? ///
- But let me ask you – is there is **ANY SENSE** in which we **ought** to **fear God**? //
- To **fear** the one who merely **spoke** and things came into **being**?
- To fear the one who put **Adam and Eve** out of the **garden**?
- To fear the one who **destroyed** most of **mankind** in the **flood**?
- To fear the one who kept his people in the **wilderness** for **40 years** when they failed to take him at his word?
- To fear the one who wiped out **nations** as his people conquered the promised land?
- Who **banished** his people from the **promised land** because of their **disobedience**? //
-everything we've seen of God in this series so far!
- The one before whom Isaiah, when given a vision of God, said '**woe to me for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips**'
- Is there **any sense** in which we ought to fear the God who in the person of His Son Jesus, **stilled storms, opened blind eyes, raised the dead, condemned the religious leaders, battled Satan** and in his **resurrection**, won **victory** over **sin** and **death and evil**?
- Is there **any sense** in which we ought to fear the one before whom the Apostle **Peter** fell and said, '**away from me, for I am a sinful man**'?
- Is there any sense in which we ought to fear the one who will one day finally put an **end** to **all evil** in the world placing it as a **footstool** for his **feet**?
- Is there any sense in which we ought to fear the one before whom we will **all** one day give an **account** for every word **spoken**, every deed **done**? //
- Jesus himself said to his disciples in Luke 12 "*I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into **hell**. Yes, I tell you, **fear him**.* //
- **The fear of the Lord – is the beginning of wisdom.** //
- You may recall the story of **Job** – a man who in one day lost his entire **family** and all his **possessions**.
- **Satan** figured he was only **righteous** because he had it so good! And God agreed to **test his faith** by the removal of all that was **good**.
- Job cannot possibly understand why he had to suffer so **greatly**...
- his not-so-helpful friends come up with all sorts of ideas – like there must **unconfessed sin** in his life, or there must be something in his **past** which deserved such treatment.
- Job replies by saying look he knows he is not perfect, but there is no way he **deserves** what he has **got**.

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- He is downright **angry** with God in the end – and accuses him of being **unjust**.
- Towards the end of this great book, **the Lord answers Job...** // well not so much **answers** Job, but **questions** Job.
- Was it you and me **together** Job who created the world...?
- did we **share** that on **equal terms**? – where were you when I laid the earth's **foundations**?
- Who **measured it out** – surely you know Job?
- And for **pages** and **pages**... God **questions** Job – who set the limits for the **sea** Job?
- Have you ever given orders to the **morning** Job, or shown the **dawn** its place?
- Have the gates of **death** been shown to you?
- Where does **light** live Job – and where does **darkness** reside?
- Have you entered the **storehouses** of the **snow** Job?
- What is the way to the place where **lightning** is dispersed?
- Were you there when we set the **southern cross** in the sky?
- Did you give the **horse** his **strength**?
- Did you teach the **hawk** how to **fly**? ///
- On and on these questions flow.
- And Job **responds** – how can I reply to you?
- **I put my hand over my mouth.** //
- But the Lord **continues**... brace yourself like a **man** Job and I will **question** you...
- Would you **discredit** my **justice**?
- Would you **condemn ME** // to justify **YOURSELF**?
- Do you have an **arm** like **God's**?
- Adorn yourself with **glory** and **splendour** and clothe yourself with **honour** and **majesty**...! //
- and **more pages** of **challenges** are put before Job //
- look at the **elephant** Job – yet I **made** him and can **control** him... or the **crocodile** – can you pull him in on a **fishhook**? Can you make a **pet** of him **Job**?
- **Do you know your place, Job?** //
- And Job in the end replies – *surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things **too wonderful for me to know**... now my eyes have seen you, therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.* ///
- Do you think for a **moment** we approach God as his **equal**? //
- SO: do you think there is **any sense** in which we **ought** to **fear** God?
- **Holy, majestic, mighty, powerful**, the **high** and **lofty** one who **inhabits eternity**... the one who **made** everything, **sustains** everything... //
- And the one who **loves us**, has invited us to **know** and **trust** him, who has given his own **Son** that we

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might be **forgiven** and that we might turn from **ourselves**, to **him**. //

- Don Carson – wonderfully clear **Canadian** preacher – tells the story of a friend of his who asked his 17 year old daughter if she feared him as her dad?
- Her initial reaction was – ‘**of course not**’...
- He **pressed** her – is there ANY sense at all that you would fear me?
- **Silence.**
- And as she thought through the question... she realised there was an **appropriateness** to **revering**, **respecting** – yes – even **fearing** her dad.
- He asked – is that a good thing?
- She answered – **yes** – I guess it is.
- Now, he told her, “Go and reflect on fearing the Lord... //
- What does it mean to ‘**fear the Lord**’?
- it means having an **accurate estimate** of **who God is**... understanding that **God is God**.
- ...whose ways are **higher** than **ours**.
- Whose **thoughts** are **higher** than **ours**.
- Whose **foolishness** is **greater** than our **wisdom**.
- Whose **understanding** no one can **fathom**.
- Its understanding the words of the prophet **Isaiah** as he proclaims in chapter 40: that God has measured the waters in the hollows of his hands, that he sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, that he reduces the rulers of the world to nothing!
- Fearing the Lord means understanding the Apostle Paul’s words from Romans 11:33 *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!* ³⁴ *“Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor?”* ³⁵ *“Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?”* ³⁶ *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.*
- The fear of the Lord involves understanding who **GOD** is – and understanding who **YOU** are...
- He is the **creator**, we are his **creatures**...
- from **dust** you **came** // to **dust** you will **return**...
- its remembering in the words of Psalm 103 that we flourish like a flower of the field and when the wind blows over it is gone and its place remembers it **no more**... but the merciful love of God endures for ever.
- Its remembering that we were in fact God’s **enemies**; that we are but **unworthy servants**; that we are only God’s **children** not because of our **good works**, but because of his **good mercy**.
- He is the great **shepherd** and we are the **sheep** of his pasture;
- **Christ** is the **head** and we are his **body**;
- He is **Lord** and we, his people, are his **temple**...

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- The fear of the Lord is that **appropriate** and **awesome reverence** for who **God is** and understanding of who **we are**. ///
- I wonder how we would feel if he were to turn up in **person**...
- If suddenly we found ourselves in his presence in a **physical** way – how do you think we would **react**... how do you think **YOU** would **react**? //
- Is there **any sense** in which you think you would be **fearful**?
- How would **you** react?
- Is there any sense in which you think we would be fearful?
- How would you react?
- Would you be on your **knees**?
- Would you be **silenced**? ////
- Does this help you understand a little about what the fear of the Lord means? //
- It is a **reverent awe**... /// A reverent awe!
- Now, why is the *fear of the Lord*, the **beginning of wisdom**? Why is that the starting point for being wise?
- Because when you get right who **GOD** is and who **YOU** are – then you **begin** to know how to **live** in God's **world**!
- once you have **that** right... everything else will begin to fall into **place**.
- The **wisest** way to live in God's world, is as God **intended** us to live – **revering** him, **trusting** him, **enjoying** him – and **servicing his Son** the **Lord Jesus Christ**.
- That right and appropriate **fear of the Lord** will mean that you will come before him with **humility**, with **repentance**, with **trust**, with **submission**, with **reverence**, with **adoration**.
- That right and appropriate **fear of the Lord** will mean that you will love him with all your **heart** and love your neighbour as **yourself**.
- That right and appropriate **fear of the Lord** will save you from **trivialising** God, trying to **contain** God, trying to **dictate terms** to God... it will keep you from **ignoring** him, or **side-lining** him, or **treating** him as if he didn't really **matter**.
- That right and appropriate **fear of the Lord** will mean that you **know** you cannot **negotiate** with him... **test** him, make **deals** with him.
- That right and appropriate **fear of the Lord** will mean that you **bow your knee** before his Son Jesus – trust him as **Saviour**, turn to him as **Lord**... this one whom the Apostle Paul calls our **wisdom**!
- That right and appropriate **fear of the Lord** will mean that you look on the **cross of Christ**... // that many take as foolish, and you see it as God's wisdom! /// that through Jesus' death and resurrection, we can be forgiven and have eternal life.
- That right and appropriate **fear of the Lord** will mean that the things of **the world** will gradually lose their **attraction**, as all that is important to **God** and which matters for **eternity** will become what is important for **us**.

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- ...that right and appropriate **fear of the Lord** will mean the Christ is enthroned as **Lord** of our lives, that we **trust** God to be our **shepherd** – our **ruler** our **pastor** our **guide** our **provider** our **protector** – and therefore find all our needs met in him. ***The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. //***
- The **fear of the Lord** is the **beginning** of **wisdom**.
- **Reverent awe** and **submissive trust**.
- The **wise** way to live in God's world.
- The **ONLY** way to live in God's world.
- In **submission** to **God** and his **Son the risen Lord Jesus. ///**
- **How wise are you?**

POST SCRIPT

The entire body of wisdom literature - Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and some Psalms – is an expansion on that great theme – that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom – and then shows us how that plays out in many and different aspects of practical living ...

...and ultimately – we find Jesus is our wisdom – and that loving and serving Jesus as Lord and Saviour, is the only wise way to live in God's world.
