

Learning from Jesus in Proverbs

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[0 : 00] Bible's most well-known book of wisdom, Proverbs. Let me ask you, how do you read it and interpret it?

For that matter, how do you read and interpret any Old Testament book? Do you read it the same way as an Orthodox Jew would read it today?

You know, a faithful Jewish person believes that the Old Testament is the Word of God. But they do not believe that Jesus is the Old Testament's promised Messiah.

They do not believe that the New Testament is the authoritative Word of God. An Orthodox Jew would read the book of Proverbs to learn lessons on how to live wisely.

How to live a morally good life. But he or she would not consider how Jesus Christ fits into Proverbs.

[1 : 12] Nor would they turn to the New Testament and allow God's Word there shed light on understanding Proverbs.

They wouldn't do that with any Old Testament book. I want us to understand this morning. I want us to be real, very clear. We as Christians must not read Proverbs or any book of the Old Testament as if Jesus had never come.

As if He had never come into this world. As if He has not come into this world and taught and died on the cross for our sins. And risen and ascended back into heaven.

And sent His Holy Spirit. And gave us a fuller explanation of who God is and what God's doing in this world through the New Testament.

In the life and ministry of Jesus. God reveals Himself and His plan.

[2 : 21] His plan of salvation. His plan for what He's doing in this world period. He reveals it more clearly and more completely than He did in the Old Testament.

And the Bible explains that. Look on the screen at Hebrews chapter 1. The first three verses. It says, In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways.

Now that writer is explaining how God has spoken through the Old Testament. But in these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son.

Whom He appointed heir of all things. And through whom also He made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory.

And the exact representation of His being. Sustaining all things by His powerful Word. The book of Hebrews is a great place to look, to study.

[3 : 37] To understand the Old Testament as we should understand it today. For an example, in the book of Hebrews, you'll find that the Old Testament sacrifices, the temple, the priesthood, things like this.

They were signs that pointed to Jesus Christ. They pointed way into the future. To the coming of Jesus. And who He was and what He would do.

Hebrews describes these things in the Old Testament as being like shadows. But the reality is found in Jesus Christ.

Now that Jesus has come. He's completed His work of providing salvation. Those signs from the Old Testament are no longer needed.

They have served their purpose. They now are still the Word of God. But what they pointed to has come in Jesus.

[4 : 46] For an example, why don't we ever go, why don't we think we have to go to Jerusalem and worship in the temple? Why don't we continue to offer animal sacrifices and observe those dietary laws and rituals that we learn about, for example, in the book of Leviticus?

The reason being, those shadows have been replaced by the reality of what God has done in Jesus.

In who He is and in what He did when He came into this world. Understanding this will help us to see why we must read the Old Testament in light of God's more complete revelation detailed in the New Testament.

That means we must not leave Jesus out of our study of the Old Testament, including the book of Proverbs. You know, Jesus made it clear to both His own disciples and to His enemies that the Old Testament reveals me.

Jesus told them, I'm there. You just haven't read it. You just haven't understood it. Let me give you two examples. Jesus actually condemned His opponents.

[6 : 09] Those Jewish leaders who were always trying to trap Him, out to get Him. He condemned them for not believing what the Old Testament taught about Him. Look in John chapter 5.

Jesus said, You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life. And it is they that bear witness about me.

Jesus was chastising them, condemning them, because they failed to see Him in the Old Testament.

Going on in Luke chapter 24, following His resurrection, Jesus rebuked two of His own disciples for their failure to see Him in their Scriptures, which was the Old Testament.

Look at it. And He said to them, O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory?

[7 : 17] And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures, I underline that and put it in bold on the screen, the things concerning Himself.

As we study Proverbs, it's important that we open that book and read it, study it, interpret it, just like any other book of the Bible that we open.

As we read in Proverbs in the weeks to come, and I don't think I said it in case you're here for the first time, we're in a study called Becoming Wise.

We're going to be focusing primarily on the book of Proverbs. As we open these pages in the book of Proverbs, we're going to be looking at the meaning of words.

We're going to think about the day in which they were written, their context that way. We're going to look at the context, where they're found, the Scriptures before them and after them.

[8 : 20] But we're also going to look at the big context of the Bible. The book of Proverbs does not exist in isolation. The book of Proverbs is a part of the Old and New Testament together, our Bible.

That means we need to read Proverbs in light of the person and work of Jesus Christ as explained in the New Testament.

That's the goal of today's message. I want us to see how we as Christians should study Proverbs in light of God's fuller revelation of Himself and His plan in Jesus and in the New Testament witness to Jesus.

I'm going to use some material from a man by the name of Anthony Salvaggio. Anthony Salvaggio. He is a pastor and theologian from New York.

And he has written a little commentary, not real long, on the book of Proverbs. And he pointed out some things about how Jesus fits into Proverbs and explained it so well that I want to share some of it.

[9 : 32] I'm adapting it some. If you've got his book, you may say, well, you misrepresented him. So I'm not going to say, I'm saying everything he said. But I am using his material a good bit.

It's a good little study, what I've read of it, but this part especially. If you're interested in further study, pick it up. In our first study of Proverbs two weeks ago, we began in chapter 1, verses 1 through 6.

And we found that the purpose of this book, the book of Proverbs, is to make us wise. We saw in that message that while Proverbs will certainly teach us much about wisdom, and we need it, don't we?

The greatest source of wisdom is found in Jesus Christ. And Jesus makes that very clear in the New Testament. And we read it last week, but let me refresh your memory.

Actually, two weeks ago. Matthew chapter 12. Jesus said this, The queen of the south will arise at the judgment and with this generation and condemn it.

[10 : 37] For she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here. Proverbs begins.

These are the Proverbs. These are the sayings, the teachings of Solomon. They're not all from Solomon, as we saw two weeks ago. But the book of Proverbs, we normally associate the wisdom of Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived.

And Jesus says, in himself, well, look at me. One greater than Solomon, one wiser than Solomon, is here before you.

That's why we need to listen to Jesus as we study wisdom wherever in the Bible. Let's look in more detail now at what Jesus and how Jesus will teach us wisdom.

First, Jesus taught that the entire Old Testament points to him. Jesus himself taught, you cannot have a full understanding of the Old Testament if you leave me out.

[11:42] Look at what he said. I want to read one verse. It's the same as several verses we saw a minute ago or from several verses. Luke 24, 27. And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them and all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

But then Jesus went on in that same chapter 24 of Luke to say this. It's on the screen. Then he said to them, these are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.

That was his way of describing the whole Old Testament. Then he opened their minds to understand the scripture. Understand the scriptures. That's verse 45 there.

I want you to think about that. Jesus opened their minds to understand the scriptures. Do you know that while we should, we must read the Bible for ourselves.

I mean, God expects you. God will never give you knowledge just out of the blue. He's not going to just zap you and make you wise about the things of God. God expects us to open the Bible, to read it, to study it, to think about it.

[13:03] Just let it sink in. Try to understand it. Try to figure it out. But the only way that we're ever really going to understand what God is saying and how it applies to our lives is if God enables us.

And God will enable us if we're Christians through his Holy Spirit who lives within us. That's what Jesus was telling his disciples there about himself.

The English Standard Version, ESV Study Bible, has a good note on verse 45. Look at it. They say, true understanding of the Scriptures so that one understands how all of redemptive history fits together is a gift of God.

God has to be the one to sort of turn the light on for us to understand his Word and to understand how the New Testament completes, fulfills that which is taught in the Old Testament.

Let's look now more specifically at why we cannot exclude Jesus from our study of wisdom in Proverbs. Number two, Jesus demonstrated wisdom throughout his earthly life.

[14:14] I want you to really pay attention here. I want you to note with me how from childhood, from childhood, Jesus Christ was wise.

He demonstrated it. He grew in wisdom as the God-man that He was. Jesus revealed wisdom, His wisdom, at the beginning of His life.

Luke chapter 2, verse 40. The very first description of Jesus as a child says this, and the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom.

The only things that we know about Jesus as an infant, as a little child, Matthew 1 and Luke chapter 2. Luke is telling us here, after he's told us about the birth of Jesus, Luke is doing sort of a summary statement here.

Jesus still, this little child, how He grew, became strong, and even then filled with wisdom. The next thing Luke tells us is the only information we have from Jesus as a little child until He was 30 years old.

[15:38] That's a big gap, isn't it? Jesus as a little child and then He's 30 years old. What happened? Well, we don't know. And I want to encourage you, don't waste your money and time reading a book that fills in the story for you as to what Jesus did, what was going on between His childhood and adulthood.

Nobody knows. We're not intended to know because it's not in God's Word. But there's one incident. One thing did happen that the Scripture tells us about when Jesus was 12 years old.

He went to the temple. He sat with the Jewish teachers. He sat with the scholars of His day. And He listened to them teach.

He understood what they were talking about. He asked questions. And just by, I guess, the way He sat there, the way He listened, and the questions that He asked, they were just blown away.

They were just so impressed with the 12-year-old Jesus. And this is how Luke describes Him. Luke chapter 2, verse 47.

[16:55] And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. Smart people. Jewish scholarly types, as well as the common people.

all were amazed at His understanding and His answers. Not questions here. And His answers. Now Luke goes on in this same chapter to conclude this account of Jesus' early life like this. Luke 2, 52. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man. man. Jesus is described as being wise as we see Him. He demonstrates it as a 12-year-old. He's described here as one who was wise and grew in wisdom as He grew into adulthood. Now Jesus also revealed His wisdom throughout His public teaching ministry. There's many examples we could turn to. Jesus' wisdom was evident in the way He taught, the content of His teaching.

[18:10] Here's an example from Mark chapter 6 and verse 2. It says, And on the Sabbath, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many who heard Him were astonished, saying, Where did this man get these things?

What is the wisdom given to Him? See, when Jesus came on the scene, He was unknown. Or the ones who knew Him, they knew His parents.

He was not a well-trained, formerly trained rabbi. But they were blown away with what Jesus taught, the content of His teaching, the wisdom that He displayed.

And then Jesus' wisdom is also seen in one of His primary teaching methods, the parable. If you know anything about the teaching of Jesus, if you know anything about Matthew, Mark, and Luke especially, Jesus taught many things about the kingdom of God, about life, by telling little stories, parables.

Now, the Greek word translated parable in the New Testament comes from the Hebrew word for proverbs in the Old Testament. So Jesus taught, we can say, by using proverbs.

[19:35] Just like we see in the book of Proverbs, except He demonstrated and He taught greater wisdom. Jesus demonstrated wisdom throughout His life.

It was an obvious characteristic that He possessed. It's who He was. And it came out in the things that He did and the things that He taught. Jesus is the perfect proverbs man, a man of wisdom. But wisdom is not just evident in the earthly life and teaching of Jesus. Number three, Jesus embodies wisdom. This is more, this is a more difficult concept to understand, to grasp hold of, but the Scripture teaches it.

And so bear with me here. Let's look, let's think about this real carefully. The Apostle Paul describes Jesus this way in 1 Corinthians 1, verse 30.

By the way, Paul describes Jesus as being the wisdom of God in various ways in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2. But look at this. Paul writes in, because of Him, God, because of Him, he's talking about God in the previous verse.

[20:51] Because of Him, because of God, you are in Christ Jesus who became to us wisdom from God. Jesus is a gift of wisdom.

He embodies it. Look at what Paul said in Colossians 2. He says, My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Paul, in writing the letter to the Colossians, makes much of the glory of Jesus Christ. I mean, he just points out the supremacy of Jesus Christ in creation.

And a part of what he's talking about here, look at it there. It's still on the screen. Look at it. The mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Old Testament scholar, Tremper Longden, says that Paul is teaching us that Jesus is the very incarnation of wisdom. That means he personifies wisdom.

[22:17] He embodies wisdom. It might help us to think along this line. If you want to see one of the greatest demonstrations or displays of wisdom in print, read the book of Proverbs.

I mean, if you really want to study a body of material, you can read it. Something that's in print. Great wisdom. Then you'd read the book of Proverbs.

But, if you want to see the greatest display of the wisdom of God in human form, look at Jesus.

Jesus, he modeled it. He personified it in just who he was, what he taught, how he taught. Let's look at one more reason for not leaving Jesus out of our study of Proverbs.

Jesus is the ultimate wisdom God calls us to choose to follow in life. Jesus is the ultimate wisdom that God calls us to make the choice, make the decision to follow in life.

[23 : 33] Throughout the book of Proverbs, we're going to be called to choose the way of wisdom instead of the way of foolishness. Throughout the book of Proverbs, the writer's going to say, if you want to live a way that's wise, that'll be to your advantage, a way that will make you or enable you to live just the best possible life, then you live this way.

Or you can live this foolish way. It's up to you. The paths are laid out for us. If you live this way, it'll result in you being wise, and it'll be the best way you can live.

If you live this way, it's a fool's way, and it can kill you, but it will certainly hurt you even if you live. Well, in a similar way, we're called in the New Testament to choose the way of God instead of the way of the world.

The Apostle Paul explains it in terms of choosing the secret wisdom of God, now revealed in Jesus, instead of the foolishness offered by the world.

Look with me if you would, 1 Corinthians chapter 2. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.

[24 : 54] None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. You know what that secret wisdom, secret knowledge is that he's writing about?

It's about Jesus, the Son of God, the Messiah, coming into this world, but not like in the Old Testament they thought he would, not like the Jews thought he would.

They thought and hoped he would come in as a political leader, as a military leader. In the first century, the Jews had this hope that the Messiah, when he comes, he's going to destroy the Romans.

He's going to set us free from Roman rule. He's going to set up a new earthly Jewish kingdom, like we enjoyed under David and under Solomon.

But God's plan was to send his son, the Messiah, to save the world a different way. God's plan was to send Jesus into the world to die on the cross, to pay the penalty for our sins, so that through faith in him, all people could be liberated from sin.

[26 : 08] All people could be saved from death and hell. All people could be free, truly, spiritually, and eventually, physically, in a new heaven and a new earth, eternal life.

That was the great mystery. God was going to unite all people in Christ, the suffering servant of God through his death on the cross. Old Testament scholars Raymond Dillard and Trimeter Longman describe this connection between Proverbs and Jesus like this.

Look at it. Thus, as Christians read the book of Proverbs in the light of continued revelation of the New Testament, they are confronted with the same questions as the ancient Israelites, but with a different nuance.

Will we dine with wisdom or with folly? Foolishness. The wisdom who beckons us is none other than Jesus Christ, while the folly that attempts to seduce us is any created thing that we put in the place of the Creator.

If you want to be wise and live this way of wisdom, you will do it by following Jesus.

[27 : 35] What they're saying is the foolish way is just choose whatever else you want to choose. Anything other than Christ. You can choose to follow the crowd.

You can choose to follow money. You can choose to follow popularity. You fill in the blank. But in the end, the way of following Jesus is the wise way.

And everything else eventually will prove to be the foolish way. As we study the wisdom of Proverbs over the coming weeks, we're going to see what God is saying in that Old Testament book.

Proverbs speaks to us today. It's relevant for our lives today. We're not just going to stop with what we see in that book as if Jesus has not come.

God has given us an even greater source of wisdom that will help us to better understand and live according to the wisdom of Proverbs. The source of wisdom is the person and work of Jesus Christ as explained, as presented in the New Testament.

[28 : 50] Here's what I want us to understand. Jesus does more than just help us to understand what it means to be wise. Jesus can actually help us if we are His to live wisely through His

indwelling Spirit.

When a person becomes a Christian, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of God comes to live within us. And He's the one who will enable us to put into practice the teachings that we learn, the truth that we learn about wisdom in the book of Proverbs.

If we seek to live wisely as Proverbs teaches and the Holy Spirit enables us, we will be living more and more like Jesus. We will be conforming more and more to His likeness, developing His character, which is God's goal for us, as you well know, as we've studied on other occasions.

But before we can ever really live like Jesus, we've got to have a relationship with Him. And I want you to listen very carefully. We're about at the end because this is vitally important.

Do you truly have a relationship with Jesus Christ? He is your Savior and Lord of your life.

[30 : 15] If you have such a relationship, you should be able to point or point out the way God has and is changing you and conforming you more and more to the likeness of His Son.

In other words, helping you to develop Christ-like character. Lisa and I went to fall for Greenville Friday night. Ate a lot of junk food, things that, you know, not good and healthy for you, but we enjoyed it.

Well, in that sea of people, we came to one spot and there were some individuals there who were passing out tracts, religious tracts. And one person handed one to Lisa.

He didn't hand one to me. And I just thought, he must think Lisa needs it more than I do. The little tract said, are you born again?

Lisa brought it home and I looked at it when we got home. It was an excellent tract. It asked the question, are you born again?

[31 : 23] And as you opened it up, it explained from the book of 1 John how a Christian will live. Very biblically sound.

If we're Christians, we will live a certain way. It will be evident in our lives that God has put his spirit in us.

We'll have a desire to love God, to do his will, to obey his word. We'll have a desire to love one another. The book of 1 John tells us it's written to give Christians assurance of their salvation and it explains what really will happen, how a Christian will think, how a Christian will feel, how a Christian will want to live in this world.

Salvation is by the grace of God through faith in Jesus. But saving faith is continuing faith. Saving faith is not invisible.

James tells us, as we've said it on Sunday morning even, not too long ago. Saving faith is life-altering faith. If we truly are believers in Jesus Christ, it'll be evident in the way that we live our lives in our home, where we work, where you go to school, wherever you are.

[32 : 55] Is such faith, saving faith, life-altering faith evident in your life? It really does not matter if you claim to be a Christian.

I'm a Christian because I prayed a certain prayer. You won't ever find anything in the Bible that tries to offer you any assurance based on you praying a prayer. Or because you walked down an aisle in a church and spoke to some pastor.

Or even because you were baptized. Saving faith will be evident in your life by the way that you live, by the way you seek to know and love and serve God, please Him by doing His will, love other people and serve other people truly.

Is saving faith evident in your life? If it is, thank God because it itself is a gift from God. Continue to cooperate with Him and to obey Him and live for His glory.

Live according to the leadership of His Spirit. You have to have that. But saving faith is really not evident in your life. But you want to be right with God today.

[34 : 14] You want to have a real relationship with Jesus Christ. I want you to understand that can happen right now. If you'll admit to God that you are a sinner, that you are guilty of sin against Him and truly repent.

That means change your mind about it. Turn away from it. Hate it. And ask God to deliver you from it. And as you turn from your sin, you turn to Jesus Christ.

In faith and trust, you're confident that when He died on the cross, He actually died for you to pay the penalty for your sins. And if you'll truly call upon Him to save you as you turn from your sin, He will.

The Bible says that whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. God will save you now if you will humbly, sincerely, wholeheartedly turn from your sin, put your trust in Jesus and surrender control of your life to Him.

He's got to be Lord of all. Or as that little cliché says, He will not be Lord at all. The wisdom of God certainly is revealed throughout the Bible, especially in the book of Proverbs.

[35 : 34] God is the most powerful but most powerfully seen and experienced in the person of Jesus Christ. Make sure you have a relationship with Him if you truly want to be wise and have a relationship with God now and forever.

Let's pray together. Father, show each person in this room how they should respond to you and your word this morning. Lord, especially make it clear that salvation is by your grace.

It's undeserved. It is through faith in Jesus Christ. But help everyone here to understand that saving faith, it continues.

It is evident by the way that we live. Help everyone here to understand that if you have saved them, your spirit's in them and they will know it.

They will know it by looking at their life. Other people will know it. Help them to ask questions if they need to.

[36 : 53] But right now, dear God, make it clear how we all should respond to you and to Jesus. In an attitude of prayer, you respond to the Lord.

If I could help you, pray with you, talk with you right now, I'll be happy to hear it at the front. But the important thing is you respond to the Lord as He speaks to you right now. Let's do that.