

Wise up!

Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes

Detailed outline from the Sermon on November 18, 2007

The Book of Job

The Divine Drama

The opening act – a view from above

God allows Satan access, and then the freedom to create crisis. That crisis visits Job, a good man whom God believes will hold true even in calamity.

The crisis – Job loses almost everything.

His response? (1:20-22)
Add painful sores, and his wife has had enough.

The cast

Job's wife – “Are you holding onto your integrity? Curse God and die!”

Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar

They start well. They weep with him and spend seven days in quietness, standing by. But when Job finally starts crying out in anguish and confusion, they start in on him with Sunday school answers. (4:1-9) In other words, “You must have brought this on yourself.”

Elihu – more of the same.

God speaks – silences everyone, including the friends with their thin answers. (38:1-12) The short answer to God's speech is this: “I'm God and you're not...” He leaves Job, and all of us, with a lingering humility about our ability this side of heaven to understand the full purpose of calamity in our world and in our lives.

When you suffer, cry out like Job, if you must, but ultimately, we have to fall back or grow back or heal back into a place of fundamental trust. God's ways are not my ways. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. And when a *friend* suffers, stand by and help. Resist the temptation to think that words will save the day. Come alongside and be.

The Book of Proverbs

What is a proverb? (*masal*)

This is a book of wisdom (*hokmah*) (1:20-22) attributed to Solomon.

The Proverb types: I use four categories.

1. *Analogies* and *caricatures*:
(10:26; 21:25-26; 24:26, 30:34; 25:18-20, 26:13-16, 17, 20)
2. *Compare* and *contrast*:
(12:1; 13:7; 17:1; 18:24; 27:6; 28:6)
3. *Truth* and *consequences*:
(20:21; 21:13; 22:6; 22:23; 23:4-5)
4. *Taunts* and *teases*:
(11:22; 11:29; 19:24; 20:1,4; 21:4-6)

The Proverb topics: everything that matters.

Wisdom	Parenting	Discipline
Wealth	Marriage	Friendship
Peace	Business	Aspirations
Dissention	Words	Perspective

Proverbial truth vs. Absolute truth

Proverbial truth is true in principle. It is and should be true, generally and under ordinary circumstances. "The righteous will live in the land. The wicked will be cut off." Most of the time. Not always (Job taught us that), but as a basic truth. It is good counsel; guiding insight.

Absolute truth is absolutely and always true. "God loves you."

The Book of Ecclesiastes

The book of *Qoheleth*: literally the one who gathers a congregation; Teacher or Preacher.

“Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem.” Again, attributed to Solomon by most, but son of David could have been anyone in the line.

Some serious soliloquies: a series of speeches on life.

Deep wisdom or melancholy meanderings: cynical, fatalistic; at best intensely practical, tarnished by life and personal failures. Wisdom, toil, oppression, achievement, advancement, riches? “What is it good for; absolutely nothing!”

Time to get real! (Main themes)

1. There’s a time for everything in life. (3:1-11)
2. Enjoy what you have while you have it. Eat, drink, family, labor...learn to live in it and find satisfaction. (3:12-13)
3. Trust God with awe and reverence. (3:14)
4. Life doesn’t always make sense; find peace with ambiguity (8:14-17, 9:2)
5. Wisdom does matter. (9:17ff, 7-8, 10-11)

Wisdom and the New Testament

The Hebrew notion of *hokmah*.

The Greek notion of *logos* (word, reason). In John 1, Jesus enters the scene (the *logos* became flesh...) Jesus is word, reason and wisdom personified.

The New Testament word for simple wisdom is *sofia*, and we are to seek it among the many benefits of life with God and in the study of scripture. (2 Timothy 3:14-15) And we’re invited to ask for wisdom. (James 1:5)

Back to Proverbs 3:5-6

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”

The great conflict of our day is between two world views:

1. The notion of a higher power and influence to whom we owe respect.
2. The notion of the centrality of humans and personal human determination over other voices.