

Wisdom for Righteousness

1. Intro

- The Book of Proverbs we're studying this term is all about wisdom for life
 - It's about translating our relationship with God into right relationships with each other and the world around us

- Foundation of this wisdom for life is 'the fear of the Lord'
 - *1:7 ... the fear of the Lord is beginning of knowledge*
 - *9:10 ... the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*

- Wisdom for life starts with a right relationship with God
 - If you're going to get Proverbs wisdom for life ...
 - If you want to live well in God's world ...
 - you must first know, love and revere the Lord

- Unless you're a follower of God ... Proverbs wisdom just
 - won't make sense
 - it won't gel with you

- So wisdom starts when we love and revere God

- Myles illustration last week of being a father was excellent
 - He didn't become a father by doing things fathers do
 - He does the things fathers do because he is a father
 - His doing comes from being
 - Our doing comes from being ... being in relationship with God

- In the book of Proverbs ... wisdom is personified in the person of Lady Wisdom
 - Lady Wisdom calls out to us to come to her > listen to her voice > to gain understanding
 - She pleads with those who will listen to be wise

- As you read proverbs it becomes clear that to be wise is to be righteous
 - They're synonymous
 - The wise are righteous > the righteous are wise
 - There is this constant contrast being put before us
 - The wise are contrasted with the foolish
 - The righteous are contrasted with the wicked

- The clear that message of Proverbs ... is to encourage its readers to be wise and to be righteous
 - To be both these things is to live the best life in God's world
- If you want wisdom for life ... it means being righteous
- So today we're going to mine Proverbs for wisdom for righteousness
- What we'll see are
 - what are the characteristics of the righteous
 - what are the rewards for the righteous
 - what is the fate of the righteous

2. Pursuit of Righteousness

(i) the righteous love what is good

- One thing is clear from reading Proverbs is that the righteous love what is good
- One characteristic of the righteous is they are honest
 - 29:27 – *The righteous detest the dishonest; the wicked detest the upright.*
 - 13:5 – *The righteous hate what is false, but the wicked bring shame and disgrace.*
- They act with integrity > they love the truth
- Secondly the righteous love justice
 - They especially have a concern for the poor
 - 29:7 – *The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern.*
 - Unlike the wicked they understand the need of others and do what God requires
- But the thing that characterises the righteous most throughout Proverbs is the way they speak
 - Not only are they wise in the things they say
 - They are a blessing to others with things that they say
 - 10:11 *The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked.*
 - The wise words of the righteous support and encourage others in a way that promotes life as God intended
 - So good and valuable are the words of the righteous ...
 - 10:20 – The tongue of the righteous is choice silver
 - They're more valuable than a winning the lottery

Why?

- 10:21 – *The lips of the righteous nourish many ...*
- 10:31 – *The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom*
- 10:32 – *The lips of the righteous know what is fitting*
- The words of the righteous are
 - words of kindness
 - words of encouragement
 - words of wisdom > discernment
 - words of comfort
 - words of warning
 - words of grace

- **Application**

- The one who fears the Lord loves what is good
 - That's because our relationship with God impacts the way we do life
 - The righteous are people of virtue
 - They're people who are godly
 - You look at their character and you see a certain godliness to the way they
 - Not only conduct themselves
 - But especially in the way they speak
- Your relationship with God ought to be evident in your life
 - Jesus speaks of good trees bearing good fruit
 - Your character and your speech are the ways you live out your relationship with him
- So while we could ask ourselves ...
 - Are you living the righteous life of Proverbs?
- Probably a better question is
 - What is your relationship with God like?

- **Illustration – Aslan**

- In the movie *Lion, Witch and the Wardrobe*, I love Mr & Mrs Beaver ...
 - Not least because Mr Beaver speaks with this East London cockney accent
 - But also because of the way they describe Aslan ... the great Lion to Lucy and the other children
 - Of course in *L W & W* Aslan represents God
- This is what Mr Beaver says of Aslan

- *Don't you know who is the King of Beasts? Aslan is a lion - the Lion, the great Lion."*
 - *"Ooh!" said Susan, "I'd thought he was a man. Is he - quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."*
 - *"That you will, dearie, and no mistake," said Mrs Beaver; "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly."*
 - *"Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy.*
 - *"Safe?" said Mr Beaver; "don't you hear what Mrs Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."*
- When you consider who God is and who you are before him
 - Are you in awe of him?
 - Does his majesty and power amaze you?
 - Does the fact that you are known by the creator of the universe humble you?
 - Do we pray prayers like Myles > *Dear God, you are big, we are small, thanks for being our Lord of all*
 - Such a good prayer ...
 - Because our understanding of God and our relationship with him will be the thing that moves us to live a righteous life that honours him

(ii) the righteous are blessed

- Not only does Proverbs shows us the characteristics of the righteous ... but it also shows us the rewards of the righteous
- *10:6 – Blessings crown the head of the righteous, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked.*
- Throughout the Bible ... blessing is always the reward that comes to those who are in relationship with God
 - Blessing comes from him
- When a person is in relationship with God ... they're living God's way in God's world ... they're living life as it's meant to be
 - Makes sense – right?
- **Illustration – Go Karts**
- Go Karting
 - Christmas time > years ago > Dad, brothers, uncles > uncles few beers

- Uncles starting cutting corners and driving over the grass
- Didn't go so well
 - Firstly ... lost time, bouncing around like a beach ball
 - Secondly ... got red flagged by course marshal!
- That's because go-karts are meant to be driven on a track ... not grass
 - when you drive them on the track ... they're heaps of fun
 - when you use things for the purpose they were designed for ... it's great
 - when you don't it goes pear shaped

- Same is true for living in this world
 - When we're in relationship with God
 - Then that's going to transpire into living wisely in this world
 - That'll mean we live our lives with the right worldview, starting on the right foundation of Fear of the Lord
 - And that'll mean for the righteous blessings will crown his head
 - Your life will be blessed

- **Application**
- What's that look like?
- You and I are blessed in many ways
 - First of all ... we are alive!
 - Blessed us with families > children > grandchildren
 - God has blessed us with homes, jobs, education, stable government, robust economy, beautiful country

- But all people enjoy those things don't they.
 - What are the blessings that come to the righteous as opposed to the wicked?

- One of those blessings for the righteous is security
 - *12:21 – No harm befalls the righteous, but the wicked have their fill of trouble.*
 - How often do we hear of a shooting or some incident on the news ... and the person was 'known to police'
 - In other words
 - they had a criminal record
 - The righteous live a good life ... so they don't get caught up in that > no harm befalls them

- Another blessing that comes to the righteous is joy and hope
 - *10:28 – The prospect of the righteous is joy, but the hopes of the wicked come to nothing.*
- When a person has a fear of the Lord and is living God's way in God's world ... there's joy, there's hope
 - Joy in the blessings of now
 - Hope for the blessings of the future
 - But the wicked ... those who don't fear the Lord ... don't have that joy or hope
- The ultimate blessing that comes to the righteous who's a relationship with God
 - *10:29 – The LORD is far from the wicked but he hears the prayer of the righteous.*
 - The ultimate blessing of fearing the Lord ... is being in a relationship with the Lord that is so intimate ... that the righteous can pray to him and the Lord listens
- This is the ultimate blessing
 - To know your creator and be known by him
 - To know
 - His grace, his love, his power, his forgiveness, his care, his provision, his plans ...
 - This is the ultimate blessing of the righteous
 - Are you one of them? Are you one of the righteous?

(iii) the righteous will live

- The third thing Proverbs teaches us about the righteous is their fate
- When you observe life in God's world ... over and over again we see
 - It's the righteous who live
 - It's the wicked who are punished
- *10:16 – The wages of the righteous bring them life, but the income of the wicked brings them punishment*
- *11:21 – Be sure of this: The wicked will not go unpunished, but those who are righteous will go free.*
- God created a good world > a world where justice and truth are meant to prevail

- In the face of human sinfulness and wickedness ... God has put in place structures and people to ensure the righteous prevail and the wicked are punished
- In Israel's time it was the judges and kings who administered justice and punished the wicked
- Now we have governments, police forces and law courts to protect the righteous and deal with evil

- Proverbs observation is true
 - Myles Elton ... is not sent to jail ... but Chopper Read was
 - Righteous will live and the wicked will not go unpunished
 - To enjoy life ... you want to be one of the righteous

- But the life Proverbs is speaking about is much more than life here on earth
 - Proverbs also speaks of life beyond death

- *10:25 – when the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone, but the righteous stand firm forever.*
- *10:30 – The righteous will never be uprooted, but the wicked will not remain in the land.*
- *14:32 – When calamity comes, the wicked are brought down, but even in death the righteous have a refuge.*
 - Proverbs recognises there is a judgment that is to come and the wicked will be swept away by it
 - There will come a day when justice will be done, even if the wicked get away with things now
 - But not so for the righteous ... for them there is eternal life
 - Those who fear the Lord will stand forever
 - That in the Lord the righteous have an eternal refuge

- So you see ... the pursuit of righteousness is something worth pursuing
 - Not only are the righteous blessed
 - But the righteous live ... now and for eternity
- So are you one of the righteous?

3. Suffering of the Righteous

- I don't know how you felt hearing all this ... but I know I felt a little uneasy preparing this talk this week
 - Because while we can read these Proverbs and understand what they're saying ...

- But we know that these things aren't always true
- Our experience tells us ...
 - The righteous aren't always blessed
 - Sometimes it's the wicked who prosper
 - The righteous do suffer unjustly
 - At times the wicked avoid punishment
 - The righteous don't always enjoy a long fruitful life ... but the wicked do
- So how are we meant to understand these Proverbs
 - How are we meant to hold in tension
 - the truth of Proverbs
 - and the truth of our experience
- **General Observations**
- We need to understand what Proverbs is doing
 - It's observing life in God's world as it should be
 - It's observing life and drawing conclusions from those observations
 - These are general statements of truth
 - They're not true for all people and all situations
- This is Solomon and other wise men writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and seeing things are generally true
 - When they observe this world ... when they take note of the righteous ... then they're able to conclude, that on the whole
 - Righteous love what is good and the wicked love evil
 - Righteous are blessed and wicked are cursed
 - Righteous live and the wicked are punished
- The obvious implication for the readers of Proverbs and us today is want to be among the righteous
 - This is a much better life
 - Being among the righteous is obviously the best life we can experience
 - To ignore God, to have no fear of the Lord is not a good option
 - So pursue righteousness
- **Counterpoints of Scripture**
- The other thing we need to note is that the Bible recognises that because of the effect of sin on humanity and our world ... these observations in Proverbs won't always hold true

- sometimes ... the righteous do suffer
- sometimes ... things don't always work out well for the righteous
- And God knows this and scripture attests to this
 - The Bible doesn't hold out this idealistic, fairy-tale of a life being a bed of roses ... "trust in the Lord and your life will be perfect" type of worldview
- We see that most clearly in the book of Ecclesiastes
 - Ecclesiastes another of the wisdom books > written around the same time as Proverbs
 - It observes this
 - *Ecclesiastes 7:15 – In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: a righteous man perishing in his righteousness, and a wicked man living long in his wickedness*
 - *Ecclesiastes 8:14 – There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: righteous men who get what the wicked deserve, and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless.*
- Yes its true ... sometimes the wicked do prosper and get away with their schemes
 - But even when we experience that
 - Even when the observations of Proverbs don't match our experiences in life ... Ecclesiastes reminds us
 - *Ecclesiastes 8:12 – Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know that it will go better with God-fearing men (the righteous), who are reverent before God.*
 - The great example of this in the Bible is Job
 - Job was a righteous man > he was blessed with wealth and health and family
 - But he lost it all > he lost everything > health, wealth and family
 - In the midst of his suffering ... he knew it's better to be remain steadfast in the Lord
 - He knew the truth of Eccl 8 – *I know that it will go better with God-fearing men (the righteous), who are reverent before God.*
- ***The Righteous Sufferer***

- But the ultimate comfort we have for those times when the righteous suffer ... is to look to Jesus ... THE righteous sufferer
 - If anyone was ever perfectly righteous
 - If anyone ever deserved to be blessed
 - If anyone ever deserved to live
 - If there was anyone who didn't deserve to suffer ... it was Jesus
 - For he was without sin
 - And yet he suffered greatly
 - He suffered the
 - Humility of becoming a servant to those he created
 - Insult of an unjust arrest and conviction
 - Pain of crucifixion
 - Agony of bearing the sins of the world
- And in times in life when we suffer unjustly
 - And the experience of Proverbs isn't our experience
 - We can look to Jesus as the one who was the truly unjust sufferer
 - Who's experienced injustice and suffering far worse than us
- But not only is Jesus an example for us to follow ...
 - Jesus suffering to deal with sin guarantees there'll be a day when he returns to put an end to our suffering
 - It will be the day when the wicked are judged once and for all
 - It will be the day when the righteous are vindicated ... and receive the crown of blessing for eternal life
- **Application**
- Yes ... Proverbs won't always be true for you in all situations
 - Because they're general truths about living life God's way in God's world
 - Our sinfulness and the sinfulness of others will mean there'll be times when we don't feel particularly blessed or see enjoy the life of the righteous
- But we know in Christ ... *it will go better with God-fearing righteous men, who are reverent before God.*
 - Because in Christ - **the** righteous sufferer ... we know our eternal future has been secured through the cross
 - When he returns we will vindicate all the righteous sufferers once and for all
- So be wise ... pursue righteousness

4. Gift of Righteousness

- Did you notice as we read about the righteous in Proverbs, that righteousness is a status that's conferred on people
 - It's not something that's earned
 - It's something that is given

- It **has** to be a status that is given ... because by nature we're **not** righteous

- We see this explained most clearly in Paul's NT letter to the Romans
 - Rom 3:10 – there is no one righteous not even one
 - Rom 3:20 – no one will be declared righteous
- That's because human beings are by nature sinful
 - You only have to look at the news each night to see that
 - You won't have to look hard in your own life to see it either

- Even Proverbs acknowledges this
 - 20:9 – *Who can say, "I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin"?*
 - Answer of course is ... **no one!**

- Human beings are not righteous ...
- And this is where the good news of Jesus becomes so important for us
 - *Rom 3:21ff – but now a righteousness apart from the Law has been revealed*
 - *This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ*
 - *We are justified (made righteous) by his [God's] grace through the redemption that came by Jesus*

- We're not righteous because we pursue the righteous life
 - We're righteous because we pursue Jesus
 - We're able to be declared righteous before God because Jesus - the righteous sufferer - died to atone for our sin
 - When we put our trust in Jesus ... his righteousness, becomes our righteousness
 - We're made righteous when we're united to him

- **Application**
- And so the good news for us of course is ...
 - as we struggle to be wise and live the life that God desires ...

- we know that our foolishness and failures don't disqualify us from the blessings of the righteous ... because Jesus is our righteousness
- Our trust in Jesus guarantees our righteousness

5. Conclusion

- And so he is the one we pursue
 - The wisdom for righteousness starts with Jesus
 - As we seek him
 - We love what is good
 - We are blessed beyond measure
 - We have life in him ... both now and forever

PRAY