

E100 Block 9.1 Psalms and Proverbs Gonerby only May 2011

Provs 23:29-35 ; Prov 27: 1-17

Introduction

"Like one who seizes a dog by the ears.....

is a passer-by who meddles in a quarrel not his own." (Proverbs 26: 17)

(Cut this paragraph if said earlier in the service)

[the last two week section of our journey through the Bible in 100 key passages -- was The Fall of Israel, and this marked the end of the historical books of the Old Testament -- as far as our essential 100 readings go. There is a little more history -- the accounts of those Israelites carried away into captivity in Babylon and Persia is described in the book of Esther, and some of the books of the Prophets -- e.g. Daniel.

The return from captivity back to Israel, with the consequent rebuilding of the temple, is described in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.]

But our next block of readings, are the Psalms and the Proverbs.

These were written in the historical period from Kings David and Solomon onwards but the Psalms and the Proverbs are very different genres of writing to those we have just finished.

The book of Psalms (easy to find -- right in the middle of the Bible as you open it up) was the hymn book of the Old Testament.

We don't know much about the music from those times -- or indeed any ancient music (none of the actual iPod's have survived). We know what instruments they used -- from harp for quieter pieces, to trumpets and cymbals and drums for the noisier ones. But in the Psalms we have the poetry -- the words preserved. Often very personal and very heartfelt -- words which down through the centuries, people have been able to relate to, and make them their own - when feeling distressed, or thankful, or joyful.....

The Proverbs fall into a different category of writing -- we call it the Wisdom literature -- because it's all about wise sayings and deep thoughts.

Apart from the book of Proverbs, the other Wisdom books are the book of Job -- which is a book written to attempt an answer to the question of suffering, the book of Ecclesiastes -- a book written by a wise and powerful person at the end of their lives -- about what has been useful and what has been useless in their lives.

Now, the book of Proverbs itself is a collection of -- well Proverbs!

Memorable sayings about how to live in a wise and God pleasing way.

If you want to contrast the two books, I like to think that **the Psalms** are about showing your devotion to God through the heart, while **the Proverbs** are about showing devotion to God through your head. (I hope we do both)

Proverbs

This morning I want to open up briefly the book of Proverbs.

The book is in two sections

The first nine chapters are an extended father-to-son teach in on what wisdom is. Chapters 10 to 31 is a collection of pithy statements -- historically compiled by King Solomon himself.

So what are the **Major Themes**

(obviously wisdom and foolishness)

Words And the Tongue

Proverbs places great stress on the power of words and speech -- for good or for evil. What we say, and how we react to what others say -- advice... or rebuke... or gossip... or tempting suggestions. Our reactions show up what we are.

10:19 You will say the wrong thing if you talk too much -- so be sensible and watch what you say... saying foolish things is like setting a trap to destroy yourself. (18:7)

11:9, "dishonest people use gossip to destroy their neighbours.... A gossip tells everything, but a true friend will keep a secret. (11:13). There is nothing so delicious as the taste of gossip -- it melts in your mouth (26:22)

12:6 "bad advice is a deadly trap but good advice is like a shield... Listening to good advice is worth much more than jewellery made of gold. (25:12)

12:18 "sharp words cut like a sword, but words of wisdom heal.

Sexual unfaithfulness

This was as common then as now, and there is lots in the book about sexual unfaithfulness

In this area, it's easy to mis-read the book and think that its anti-woman... because all the negative examples are of women -- "*the sheets on my bed are bright coloured cloth from Egypt and I have covered it with perfume... Lets go*

there... My husband is travelling and is faraway. He took a lot of money along, and he won't be back home before the middle of the month. And so she tricked him with all her sweet talk and her flattery. He followed her like an ox on the way to be slaughtered."

Remember that this is a book of advice written for men. So obviously it's from a man's angle -- warning men against the dangers of the wrong kind of woman. Women -- you have got to read it the other way round.

But women there is a compensating factor - in the book, although temptation is a woman, Wisdom - is also woman.

The Family

Wives. The last chapter is all about the perfect wife. (Again, remember this is a man's book-- so it doesn't have a section on the perfect husband).

But also -- the less than perfect wife "a quarrelsome wife is like a dripping tap on a rainy day" 27:15

Strife within the family

17:1 "a dry crust of bread eaten in peace and quiet is better than a feast eaten where everyone argues"

Parents and children

10:1 "children with good sense make their parents happy but foolish children make them sad"

13:1 "children with good sense accept correction from their parents... if you love your children you will correct them; if you don't love them you won't correct them(24)

23:22 "pay attention to your father and don't neglect your mother when she grows old"

28:7 "you disgrace your parents if you make friends with worthless nobodies"

Laziness and Hard Work

Proverbs contains many sketches of the lazy man, too idle to begin the job, too slight to see it through, yawning his way through life until it is too late, and poverty and hunger hit him.

22:13 "don't be so lazy that you say "if I go to work a lion will eat me"

24:33 " a little sleep, a little slumber a little folding of the hands to rest -- so shall your poverty come like a prowler "

26: 14 " a door turns on its hinges, but a lazy person just turns over in bed"

10:26 "having a lazy person on the job is like a mouthful of vinegar or smoke in your eyes "

Always useful -- "Consider the ant - you sluggard"

Other Themes

Many other themes -- the righteous and the wicked, the rich and the poor, friendship -- "*a truly good friend will openly correct you. You can trust a friend who corrects you, but kisses from an enemy are nothing but lies.*" (27:6), kings and rulers, anger, the world of business.

I could quote all day -- but better is to read them for yourself.

Conclusion

When I go into schools and talk to young people, I am more and more convinced that we are bringing up a generation which does not know what is right and what is wrong, any more. Not immoral but amoral.

I used to think it rather old-fashioned to stress that children should know the 10 Commandments. I'm beginning to make it a priority. But you know, Proverbs is the 10 Commandments -- it's all about God's law, but in a much more amusing style.