**The Protected Path**

Text: Proverbs 2

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**Scriptures:** 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, Proverbs 2

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL]171, 1b, 119:9-16, 439, 523

**Series:** Proverbs

**Theme:** God’s wisdom may be discovered by yielding to His Word, calling out and searching so that God’s wisdom protects the pathway of life and delivers His people into a permanent dwelling place with Him

**Proposition:** Christ, the Wisdom of God, freely protects God’s people and delivers all of them from death

**Introduction**

We saw last week from the first part of the first proverb ‘*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom’* (1:7). That ‘fear’ here is not terror, not a running away from God, but rather the exact opposite, we could say a ‘running towards God’. We understood that whilst wisdom is the right way of thinking about God, the world He has made, and people who inhabit this world (including ourselves, our family, our friends and others). It is fundamentally and foundationally having the **right relationship** with God – a relationship characterised by faith, hope and love.

**The wise person is someone who fears the Lord, who willingly, trustingly and, in hope, submits to the loving will and purpose of the God with whom that wise person has a living relationship**.

It should not surprise us then to find that we see wisdom taught here in the context of the relationship between a Father and his child. Prov 1:8 “Hear, my son”, 2:1,3:1 “My son”, 4:1 “Hear, O sons a father’s instruction, 5:1,6:1,7:1 “My son”.

Just as all loving parents desire the very best for their children, so God, our Heavenly Father, desires the very best for us (2 Pet 3:9).

Mandy, the wife of our eldest son, Elijah, gave birth to their first child last week. We’ve given these new parents a small ‘onesie’ suit to keep baby Alexandra warm...to protect her from the cold. They will need a car seat to keep her safe whilst travelling. Over the years, as children grow, loving parents instruct them about the need to be aware of danger; from fire, from traffic, from strangers who might lure them away from the protection of their family.

Similarly, but to an even greater degree, God is a Heavenly Father who desires His children to be protected, now and forever. When discovered, his wisdom **powerfully protects** His children and delivers them not only from dangers but from death.

I’ve often thought that tramping/hiking is something of a metaphor for life…There are the uphill bits which can be tough, there’s the heat and the cold, the potential for injury or for getting lost, but also, there are the friends along the way, the magnificent views, the satisfaction of completing the journey.

You can choose whether or not to go on a tramping/hiking trip, but you cannot choose whether you will **walk** the path of life on this earth…you will, one way or another…the journey is inevitable. The book of proverbs frequently uses the image of life as being a ‘path’ or a ‘way’ – 104x in the whole book.

In this book of proverbs – literally of ‘comparisons’, only two pathways for life are presented:

The **easy way** that leads to destruction – many travel this way in the company of fools, sinners, the simple and scoffers – their paths are crooked (v15)

The **hard way** which leads to life – few travel this way, but those who do are wise – theirs is the good path (v9)

We’re going to focus on God’s Word this morning under three headings:

a) Discover God’s Wisdom (v1-6)

b) Receive His Protection (v7-11)

c) Be Delivered from death to life (v12-22)

1. **Discover God’s Wisdom (v1-6)**

Do you know what a conditional sentence is? Here are some examples:

* If it rains, the church picnic will be cancelled.
* If I become Prime Minister, I'll lower taxes.

You may know of the poem entitled ‘If’ by Rudyard Kipling. It begins with the line:

*“If you can keep your head when all about you*

*Are losing theirs and blaming it on you”*

And continues with a series of ‘if’ statements, before reaching the single ‘then’ consequence:

*“Yours is the Earth and everything that’s in it,*

*And—which is more—you’ll be a Man, my son!”*

There are 3 separate, but related conditions laid out at the start of Prov 2 which, if met, result in the precious consequence of:

* Understanding the fear of the LORD and
* Finding the knowledge of God

Notice that these conditions are set out in the framework of a Father addressing his child “My son”:

* if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding
* if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding
* if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures,

We can clearly see from this ‘if’, ‘then’ conditional sentence that to discover God’s wisdom it is necessary for people like you and me to:

**Firstly**, open ourselves up to receive His Word. Not only having our ears open to hear that Word, but also having our heart, our innermost being, in a ‘soft’ sponge-like, yielding state to absorb and retain (‘treasure up’) His Word within ourselves. Just like physical food is of no value to your body if it simply passes straight through you without being absorbed into you, so the spiritual food of God’s Word is of no help to you in discovering God’s wisdom if it is not absorbed into your soul

**Secondly**, to discover God’s wisdom it is very helpful for people like you and me to make it widely known that we desire God’s Wisdom. This truth is expressed in v3 with the words ‘call out of insight’, ‘raise your voice for understanding’. Now this does not mean that you should all call out loudly whilst I’m preaching! But it does mean that we should all let it be widely known that we want to gain God’s Wisdom.

How could you and I do that? – here are some suggestions: Ask others questions about God’s Word…what does it mean? how does it apply to my life? what does this teach me about the Lord Jesus Christ? You are most welcome to ‘call out’ to me, and to others in this congregation when we meet together for fellowship in the hall. Let it be known that you are a person who desires to be wise. ☺ You can ‘call out’ in this way at small group Bible studies, during the question and answer time – ordinarily after our evening service. You can let it be known when we fellowship together that you are a person who wants to grow in wisdom.

As we saw last week, fools & their companions **do not** do this. They **do not want** to receive help, instruction, advice…they are arrogant and proud in their folly. It takes humility to let others know that you need help. Such humility is a **pre-condition** to discovering God’s wisdom.

**Thirdly**, to discover God’s wisdom it is important for people like you and me to seek and search for the riches of His wisdom.

Last week it was reported in the news that the remains of a Spanish galleon called the San José - which sank off the coast of Columbia, South America, on 8th June 1708 - has been discovered by a submersible robot called the Remus 6000, operated by Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. It has been estimated that this sunken treasure could be worth up to $17 billion. It took much diligent effort to seek out and search for the San José …as it does to find the treasure of God’s wisdom

Remember the parable of the merchant in search of fine pearls, who, when he found one pearl of great value, sold all he had and bought it? (Matt 13:45-46) Where do you go looking for the treasures of the wisdom of God? Not at the bottom of the ocean, not in a jewellery shop, but in His Word…the Bible

I vividly remember a men’s breakfast a few years ago, we had been talking about the topic of regular private time reading the Bible. As we went round the room with each person talking about their habits in this area, many said things like: “I do read my Bible, but not as regularly as I would like or should...”, “I really struggle in this area”, “I go well for a while and then get busy and stop…”

One young man said, “I’ve been reading the Bible every day for the last 3 months”. Everyone who knew this man could see that he had grown dramatically in the Lord over this time. He had sought out, searched for, and discovered the wisdom of God. He was far richer spiritually as a result

Perhaps you’re thinking, well if I listen well, make it known that I want to be wise and search energetically for wisdom, then my efforts will be rewarded and then I can say ‘Look I have made myself truly wise’! No. the only reason that these ways of discovering God’s wisdom result in great gain is because of God’s grace. Look at verse 6&7a: “*For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright*”

To discover God’s wisdom, is to discover God Himself – the gracious Giver of that wisdom. To discover God is to discover Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who is ‘*the power of God and the wisdom of God*’ (1 Cor 1:24b).

Are you looking to discover Jesus, to grow in Him? "*Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near*” (Isa 55:6)

1. **Receive His Protection (v7-11)**

Many of us here have insurance policies. We pay a premium to have the risk of adverse events affecting our vehicle, home, contents, and/or our health. I recall once reading through the entire insurance policy whilst a salesperson anxiously waited for me to ‘sign on the dotted line’. ‘Nobody bothers reading all that fine print he said”. There are so many exclusions…so many circumstances not covered. As, sadly many Christchurch home and business owners discovered after the earthquakes a few years ago.

One of the benefits and blessings of receiving God is that in so doing we receive his divine protection. Absolutely comprehensive, no exclusions, no premium to pay for as we’ve seen ‘The Lord gives wisdom’, the Lord gives His Son to all who will hear the call of His Word. Look at verses 7-11: “*He is a* ***shield*** *to those who walk in integrity,* ***Guarding*** *the paths of justice and watching over the way of his saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; discretion will* ***watch over*** *you, understanding will* ***guard*** *you*”

God protects His people by giving them wisdom. God protects His people by enabling them to understand the very best way for life to be lived.

How is that? In righteousness, justice and equity, following every good path. That’s the way that Jesus lived on this earth…perfectly wisely. As we noted last week, Jesus was a learner…he listened to his teachers… ‘*Being found in human form, he humbled himself*’ (Phil 2:8). We know that as he grew, Jesus increased in wisdom (Luke 2:52). He understood that His Father’s plan and purpose was perfectly wise for Him…expressing his wisdom in these words. "*My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work*” (John 4.34). Echoing the wisdom of God in Deut 8:3b “*man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD*”

Jesus understood that God watches over ‘the way of his saints’ – those who are set apart by having access to the wisdom of His word. In the life of Jesus on this earth we see the **protection** which He received as God’s beloved Son:

As a young baby, his life was in danger from Herod who was searching for him in order to destroy him (Matt 2:13), but an angel of the Lord warned Joseph and instructed him to flee for safety to Egypt.

Being led by the Spirit into the wilderness, Jesus was tempted by Satan, yet the wisdom of God’s Word protected Him, and the devil left him (Matt 4:11)

After Jesus had proclaimed in the synagogue to the people of his home town Nazareth that He, as the anointed One, was the fulfilment of the prophesy of Isaiah, they brought him to the brow of a hill, intending to throw him off … but he ‘passed through their midst’ and escaped (Luke 4:30)

When the unbelieving Jews sought to arrest Him, He escaped from their hands (John 10:39)

Jesus was fully protected, and yet allowed Himself to be delivered over to death on a cross. His words to Pontius Pilate clearly show that this was **not due** to any lack of protection from God, in fact the reverse: “*For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father*" (John 10:17)

At the cross, we see the Wisdom of God on display. Is there any more graphic picture of a **lack of protection** than Jesus, the Divine Son of God, fixed by nails to a wooden cross, bleeding, dying, naked, ugly, rejected and utterly abandoned? “*He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not*” (Isa 53:3) Crying out with a loud voice "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" (Matt 27:46)

To those who are perishing, to the utterly unprotected, the word of the cross is folly, not wisdom (1 Cor 1:18), but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

How? Because Jesus Christ has become to us wisdom from God, and sanctification and redemption (1 Cor 1:30). Jesus gave up the protection He rightly had as God’s Son to have his life taken away so that we might be safe with God, safe in this world, safe with ourselves

**Just as** God protected His Son Jesus throughout his life on this earth, watching over His way, s**o similarly** God protects all His adopted children, delivering them, not from suffering, not from trial and difficulty, but from evil and ultimately from death.

Which brings us to our 3rd point:

1. **Be Delivered from death to life (v12-22)**

Traveling the world can be interesting and stimulating, but also potentially very dangerous – that’s why people usually purchase travel insurance before going overseas. However, even for the well-insured, I would not recommend walking through the streets of Catia, a neighbourhood in the Venezuelan capital of Caracas – rated the **most dangerous city in the world** with a homicide rate of 60 people per day. Detroit in the USA is known for a high incidence of violent crime. If you live around the area of West Warren Avenue and McKinley Street, the odds of being the victim of such a crime are [1 in 13](http://twentytwowords.com/the-10-most-dangerous-neighborhoods-in-america-arent-places-youd-expect/) for any given year. Long Street in central Cape Town, South Africa is a particularly dangerous place to be alone, especially at night

Those hearing the parable of the ‘good Samaritan’ (Luke 10:29-37) as Jesus described a man ‘going down from Jerusalem to Jericho’ falling among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, leaving him ‘half dead’ would have known the reputation of this route as being a dangerous path to take, especially alone.

Just like some streets in modern day Caracas, Detroit and Cape Town, and like the route from Jerusalem to Jericho when Jesus walked this earth. Some of the pathways of life are **very dangerous.**

Two particular **threats** are described in our text:

wicked men (v12-15)

wicked women (v16-19)

We’ve already met the ‘sinners and scoffers’ in chapter 1 who delight in enticing others to join them in their deadly folly. These are people who do not speak straight, but distort the truth by twisting it, speaking perversely deviously. These are people who follow the deceptive pattern of Satan “*Did God actually say, “You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?”* (Gen 3:1). In our text, they are those who have ‘forsaken the paths of uprightness’ (2:13). They are like the false teachers John writes about, who ‘went out from us’ (1 John 2:19)

Sometimes those who have grown up in the covenant community of the church and then turn away to crooked pathways of life are very desirous of enticing others to follow them. They are people who have forsaken the paths of uprightness to walk in ways of darkness…sadly we know a number who grew up in this church and no longer walk with the Lord.

The wisdom of God’s Word teaches that we are to seek to redirect the lives of those who have gone astray (e.g. James 5:19-20). In addition, the wisdom of God’s Word also teaches that: **If** those who have forsaken the way of the Lord for the ways of darkness will not listen to repeated exhortations and pleas to return, t**hen**, not only for their good (that they might see the error of their ways), but also for the **protection** of those in the covenant community, they must be put out of the church (e.g. 1 Cor 5:13b).

God wisely protects His people from those whose paths are crooked

**Secondly**, we see the threat of the ‘forbidden woman’ –she represents an adulteress, she offers the taste of an exciting life, but sells you death instead. She represents all that is attractive but leads to death. Think of the wisdom of Joseph when he fled from Potiphar’s wife who sought to seduce him (Gen 39:12). The ‘forbidden woman’ here encompasses not only sexual temptation and sin, but also any and every appetite unwisely fed.

How far have people like you and I strayed from the good path which is wisely laid out for us in God’s Word, bringing much grief, sadness and sorrow to bear not only on ourselves, but on those around us by unwisely indulging in harmful and/or sinful habits? Likely more than you and I would care to admit to ourselves or others.

If we receive the Word of God and treasure it up in our hearts, if we will broadcast our need for his wisdom to others, if we will seek out his valuable knowledge **before** we act unwisely – then His wisdom will deliver us from many threats along the way of life.

However, this **does not mean** that a life lived on this earth with wisdom is going to be without trouble, difficulty and pain. Joseph fled Potiphar’s house but ended up unjustly imprisoned. Yet He was able to say of all that happened to Him in his life as a result of the betrayal of his brothers: “*As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today*” (Gen 50:20)

Ultimately, Christ, the Wisdom of God delivers all who discover Him and receive God’s protection in Him from death. V20-21 this truth in OT terms: *So you will walk in the way of the good and keep to the paths of the righteous. For the upright will inhabit the land, and those with integrity will remain in it…*

In comparison, the fate of those who do not have Christ is expressed in terms of eternal exile from all that is good: v22 “*but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the treacherous will be rooted out of it*”

For the Israelites, ‘the land’ was the place of peaceful prosperous permanent residence promised by God to His people e.g. As He said to Abraham "*I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess*." (Gen 15:7). A physical, geographical region called “Canaan” which foreshadowed the eternal home which God promises to all who have the same kind of faith as Abraham.

A saving faith which God reckons to them as being righteousness (Gen 15.6). “*But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one*” (Heb 11:16). Here is the deliverance which is offered again today: from death to life. From this passing, transitory, unstable world to the wonderfully perfect world to come.

The pathway? Receive the wisdom which the Lord God gives: Follow Christ according to the wisdom of God’s Word. Be fully protected and completely delivered by the free grace of God who gives wisdom to all who will receive His good gift

AMEN