

Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus Christ, we read about the most dreadful things in the papers and on the news. Evil raises its head with vicious power, it seems, and makes innocent people suffer; some lose their faith because they say; 'how can there be a God?' Give us the courage to sustain our faith and pray for those in dire need who go through the darkest of times; and give us victory over the enemy wherever and whenever we come across him: to Your praise and glory we pray: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: 'Anointing'

Ask the Lord to prepare His people for their work in the world, and to anoint them with the Holy Spirit to be an effective witness to all that is good and true in a world of evil and hate.

On-going prayers

- *Pray about waste disposal, and your own attitude to this issue*
- *Give thanks for the gift of music its use for worship within churches*
- *Pray for the nation of Iran and against evil and repression*

Meditation

Jesus, what do You see when You look at Your disciples?

Do you see people who live as if they know

That the world is a place where sin rules

Unless it is defeated by the power of the Cross?

Do You see people energised by the Gospel

Those who have been completely changed,

And filled to overflowing with Your Holy Spirit?

Do You see people motivated to do Your work,

Totally confident in the power of the Gospel

To transform the whole world and be at peace?

Do you see people who are utterly obedient,

Willing to do for You whatever You ask of them,

Whenever it is needed, and whatever the cost?

Jesus, we don't know exactly what you see,

So make us obedient to Your eternal Word;

Yours, because we love others, and do Your will!

Bible Study - Proverbs 8:32-36

³² *And now, my children, listen to me:
happy are all who keep my ways.*

³³ *Listen to my instruction and be wise,
and do not let it slip away.*

³⁴ *Happy is the one who listens to me,
watching every day at my gates,
waiting for me outside my doors!*

- ³⁵ *For whoever finds me finds life
and receives favour from the LORD;*
³⁶ *but those who miss me, harm themselves;
and all who hate me love death.*

Review

This is the end of a long speech made by wisdom in which she appeals for people to hear her and understand the godly nature of what she has to offer (8:1-9); reason, righteousness, morality, love and order. She appeals to the moral nature of the whole created world (8:10-21) and then describes her involvement in the very creative acts of God, showing herself to be part of the very fabric of the universe and part of the very nature of God Himself (8:22-31). In our passage, she concludes her speech with a final appeal to the one who learns. She says; listen and live by what you have learned (8:32), persist in wisdom and hold on to it (8:33), never rest in search of truth and all that is meant by wisdom (8:34), and in the end you will find life (8:35), but those who choose to walk on a different path will find themselves heading towards death (8:36).

This set of instructions sounds straightforward enough, but it hides a number of problems, of which the first and foremost is this. Is our passage simply about Wisdom, or does it speak about Jesus? Be careful how you answer this, because Wisdom, as defined here in the book of Proverbs, is female, and Jesus, of course, was a man! Now, in verse 35 it says 'whoever finds me finds life and receives favour from the Lord'. This sounds very close to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the connection becomes even clearer when you realise that the word for 'favour' is the Old Testament equivalent of what the New Testament calls 'grace'. If you read my comments on verses 22 and 23 (two days back) you will discover that people in the past (and some still today) like to equate Jesus Himself with the figure of Wisdom in the Old Testament. This opinion appears to be strengthened even further by verse 35, for a Christian would indeed say that whoever finds Jesus finds life and is blessed by the grace of God.

It is at times like these that a Christian must be careful and wise in the use of God's Word, for surely Scriptures do not say that Jesus is the same as the feminine figure of Wisdom in the Old Testament? The 'me' in verse 35 is Wisdom, not Jesus; and the prize of finding wisdom is not the same as that for finding Christ. In verse 35, the word used to describe the prize for finding wisdom means 'life in general', so the interpretation of this passage is this, the fruits of attaining wisdom are a full life in which we will have a hold on the reason, morality and truth of God. This is not the same as the reward of faith in Christ Jesus, which is eternal life with God the Father, as described by the New Testament. It is very important to note that if we read a passage such as this too casually, then we will mistake the work of Wisdom for the work of Christ. However, by careful examination of the text, we have cleared this matter up, and we find that the two are completely different.

In the Old Testament, Wisdom offers us a glimpse of what the New Testament tells us is found in Christ, and this is true of almost every part of the Old Testament. The character of David points us to Christ, but although David is Jesus' ancestor, he is not 'the Christ'! The Psalms point us to Christ and they describe some of the things that will happen to Him, but they do not tell us everything. They are powerful and fascinating, but they are an incomplete understanding of our Lord. I could make the same points about almost every other person and story in the Old Testament, from the Laws of Moses to the individual Prophets.

In our passage today, we must stay close to Wisdom to find out what God would say to us through the text. It is good advice, because if we follow it, we will do something of what is needed for us to stay close to Jesus Christ our Lord; but Wisdom is no substitute for Jesus

and this is very clear in the very last verse (8:36). Here, those who miss wisdom are said to 'harm themselves'. It is a council of despair, and it is far removed from the picture story Jesus told about those who went astray from His 'fold'. He described Himself as a shepherd who would do everything in His power to draw His sheep back into the fold of His own care and protection. Wisdom is not Christ, and 'she' is not our Saviour, however much she can teach us!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss what can be learned from Old Testament Wisdom, considering what we can learn from Proverbs 1-8.
2. How can we honour and apply the important truths that Wisdom can teach us today?
3. How much of Jesus Christ do you perceive in this passage of the Old Testament? In what way does this help our understanding of Jesus and His work?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

How many Christians are conscious of seeking what Scripture calls 'Wisdom'? I have summarised this elsewhere as reason, morality, love, truth and even science, but do these earthly qualities and attributes have any real meaning for people and their faith? I ask the question because the Biblical use of the term 'Wisdom' begs us to do just this. Wisdom is part of God's created order and is to be found within it if we search for it.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Read through Proverbs 1-8 yourself and see what you make of it having read it and studied it recently. What do you find that is new and different from what you would have thought about it before the study?*
- *Pray for God to give His Wisdom to His people, so that they may show the world that morality, science, reason, love and truth may all be found in Jesus Christ, who is our Saviour.*

Final Prayer

We love You, Jesus Christ. We love You with a passion beyond all earthly meaning, because in You we find life, freedom from death, victory over evil, healing from pain and suffering, and the liberty to be true to ourselves and to You. Because of this, the only word that can possibly sum up what we feel is 'love'. We love You, O Lord our God, with all our heart and soul and mind and strength! ALLELUIA!