

Copyright © Two Journeys Ministry

Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

www.twojourneys.org

Please use in accordance with the copyright policy found at twojourneys.org

How Then Will We Live... in Wisdom or Folly?

Proverbs

I. Wisdom Calls Aloud

A. A Strange Concert in a Washington DC Subway

On January 12, 2007, during rush hour, commuters passing through the L'Enfant Plaza Station of the subway line in Washington, D.C., a man took out a violin and began to play. He played for more than 45 minutes, and thousands of people walked by. A few people threw coins and bills into his open violin case, but none stopped to listen. About six or seven people did pause briefly, but no one stayed for any length of time.

He played beautifully; however, when he finished there was no applause. There was no recognition of his skills. Undoubtedly, if we had been on that subway platform most of us would not have recognized his skills, either. Most of us lack the understanding of the complexity of violin music, and so his celebrity is not universally recognized.

Who was the man playing the violin in the subway? His name is Joshua Bell; he is one of the greatest violinists of our time. He is a winner of the Avery Fisher Prize for outstanding achievement in classical music. He annually books more than 200 international engagements per year. The six Bach pieces he played that day involved some of the most intricate and beautiful violin techniques known to the craft. The violin he played on that day was a 1713 Stradivarius, worth \$3.5 million dollars. Two days before he played in that D.C. subway where almost no one even stopped to listen, Joshua Bell played to sold-out audiences at the Boston Symphony Hall, where the average seat went for more than \$100. But on that cold morning in the Washington Subway, he collected a mere \$32.17 for his skillful playing. Only 27 of 1097 passersby contributed money. Those D.C. subway riders who heard the music could not be expected to appreciate it or recognize how well it was played. They were not trained musicians--they were just normal citizens.

B. Wisdom Calls Aloud in the Crowded Streets

1. A living parable

This is a living parable for a far more significant tragedy that happens in the course of busy everyday life...

This time it is not merely a wondrously skilled violinist who summons our attention... it is wisdom personified...

WISDOM... standing at the busy intersections and crossroads of life, beckoning to us to give up our foolish, sinful ways and follow in the way of wisdom

In the Book of Proverbs, wisdom is personified as a woman crying aloud on a busy street:

2. Wisdom's beckoning call

Proverbs 1:20-22 *Wisdom calls aloud in the street, she raises her voice in the public squares; ²¹ at the head of the noisy streets she cries out, in the gateways of the city she makes her speech: ²² "How long will you simple ones love your simple ways? How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge?*

C. So also Christ Calls Aloud

1. Christ, called wisdom, makes His appeal

John 7:37-38 *On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."*

Matthew 11:28-30 *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

2. We hear or we die

II. The One Central Issue of the Book of Proverbs

A. A Constant Fork in the Road

1. The Book of Proverbs constantly presents us with a fork in the road... in effect a decision that has to be made
2. Many of the Proverbs are written in a contrasting couplet

Proverbs 10:9 *The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out.*

So, I stand at a fork in the road: will I live a life of integrity and thus walk securely, or will I be a deceiving trickster who takes crooked paths?

Proverbs 10:12 *Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs.*

Someone has wronged me... will I hate that person and thus stir up dissension... or will I cover up all wrongs with love?

I'm at the fork in the road again

Proverbs 13:18 He who ignores discipline comes to poverty and shame, but whoever heeds correction is honored.

Alright, I am being corrected... I have done something wrong, and I am being disciplined... someone is giving me a stern word of correction; will I heed that word humbly, change my life and live differently? If so, I will be honored; or will I ignore the discipline and go on in my previous lifestyle? If so, I will come to ruin

Again, a fork in the road, a decision to be made!

I could multiply these examples by the dozens

B. One Central Issue: God

1. The Book of Proverbs is very earthly... but it is GOD'S EARTH that we live in
2. The wisdom of Proverbs is very practical... but it is GOD'S THINGS were must be practical with
3. In all the daily life decisions we must make, one issue stands above all the rest... "Am I in a right relationship with the God who made this world? Are my decisions pleasing to Him?"

C. Two Key Verses

Proverbs 9:10 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶ in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

D. All Other Decisions Flow from this One

1. The constant fork in the road presented by Proverbs is illuminated by this central issue
2. Do I fear the Lord?
3. Will I trust in the Lord with all my heart? Or...
4. Will I lean on my own understanding?

E. Two Key People: The Wise Man and the Fool

1. The wise man fears the Lord and trusts in Him with all His heart... all his decisions come from this basic relationship
2. The fool rejects the Lord and His claims, His wisdom and His ways... all the fool's decisions flow from this fundamental issue

F. Two Basic Journeys flow from this one Central Issue

1. An ascent to heavenly wisdom
2. A descent to hellish foolishness

III. The Ascent to Heavenly Wisdom

A. Step 1: Discipline

1. Hebrew word: musar

Proverbs 3:11-12 My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, ¹² because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.

2. This discipline clearly arises out of love... love from God and from parents

Proverbs 13:24 He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him.

3. Basic idea: we all begin as fools naturally... we need discipline to train us from that basic foolishness... the way to heaven is a way of constant discipline, training us from sin

^{ESV} Proverbs 10:17 Whoever heeds instruction is on the path to life, but he who rejects reproof leads others astray.

B. Step 2: Discernment

1. Hebrew word: binah
2. From the concept of "between" ... making distinctions between this and that... between right and wrong, between good and evil, between what pleases the Lord and what does not, between the true way and the false way
3. A discerning person can see through the Satanic deceptions of this world
4. This is the very thing young King Solomon asked...

1 Kings 3:9 So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"

Soon after he had to discern between two women, both of whom claimed that an infant baby was hers... there he stands, looking at this woman, then at that one, this one then that one

1 Kings 3:23 The king said, "This one says, 'My son is alive and your son is dead,' while that one says, 'No! Your son is dead and mine is alive.'"

That one court case represents clearly the need for discernment; shall I do this or that? Shall I go left or right?

5. This person has begun to understand from experience the lessons that DISCIPLINE has taught; he remembers having been burned by the stove the first time, not to put his hand on it the second time
6. Because he has been trained by pain and by disciplines, he begins to make WISE and DISCERNING choices in daily life

C. Step 3: Understanding

1. Hebrew root word *sakal*
 - a. It takes discernment a step further
 - b. Not only does such a person understand right from wrong, God's ways from the ways of the devil
 - c. This person goes beyond that to understand WHY one option is His preference over another... WHY does God favor marital faithfulness over adultery; WHY does God favor a truthful witness over one who speaks lies; WHY does God favor a diligent son over a lazy one; WHY does God favor an honest merchant using accurate scales over a deceptive merchant who uses dishonest weights
2. This person of understanding begins more and more to sort out the vast array of right and wrong choices into a synthetic whole, a system of godliness that brings glory to God
3. Closely related to this Hebrew word is the concept of SUCCESS...

^{ESV} Joshua 1:8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

Bottom line: a person of understanding sees the big picture of WHY God desires this action and not that, and this experiences the blessings of success in his daily life

D. Step 4: Prudence

1. Hebrew words: orma

Proverbs 1:4 to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth

ESV Proverbs 8:5 O simple ones, learn prudence; O fools, learn sense.

- a. Frequently translated guile, craftiness, subtlety in the negative sense (like the serpent in the garden)
- b. However, in Proverbs it is used positively as something good

Jesus said ***“Be shrewd as serpents, innocent as doves...”***

Paul said he took a certain action

2 Corinthians 2:11 in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

- c. So, the next step of wisdom is the shrewdness to see the trickery of the devil to its depths, to see his dark strategies early on, to know what kind of moves he’s going to make and to be prepared for them

2. Another Hebrew word for prudence is mizemma

Proverbs 5:1-4 My son, pay attention to my wisdom, listen well to my words of insight, ² that you may maintain discretion [mizemma] and your lips may preserve knowledge. ³ For the lips of an adulteress drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; ⁴ but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword.

- a. This prudence keeps its possessor from straying into dangerous traps
- b. He is able to steer clear of treacherous shoals and reefs that lay hidden to the undiscerning eye

Illus. At dawn on October 21, 1520, Ferdinand Magellan led his ships through the first stages of a treacherous straits that would soon bear his name; he was seeking a way around the land mass we know as South America and into the Pacific Ocean; the straits are an amazing 334 miles long, buffeted by an endless succession of gales and rapid, turbulent, unconfined atmospheric currents; on each side of the passageway lay hidden reefs and shoals that would have sunk any of his ships; but Magellan’s discerning eye saw a flow of water that behaved like a river in its riverbed and followed it... after a terrifying and courageous sail of 38 days, this passageway led into an ocean he named “Mar Pacifico” for the peacefulness of its waters

So it is in life... PRUDENCE is a word for the ability to discern hidden dangers and to navigate safely through them

E. Step 5: Knowledge

Proverbs 1:7 “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge...”

1. Hebrew word: “da’at” knowledge
2. Not so much information, like facts and figures you can put on a test
3. Instead, it is GOD-CENTERED knowledge

Proverbs 2:4-5 if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, ⁵ then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.

4. This is the highest knowledge we can possess...
5. Jesus says it is the essence of eternal life

John 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

6. More next week!

Thus we see the wise man in Proverbs... moving from native foolishness as a child to a full mature wisdom of God... step by step, he becomes more discerning, more prudent, more filled with the knowledge of God, until at last that knowledge is consummated in an eternity of searching the very face of God

Don’t misunderstand this... we are not hereby teaching some secret Gnosticism, an ever-ascending pathway of insight or enlightenment... the Gospel of Jesus Christ teaches another way... more on that in a moment

IV. The Descent to Hellish Foolishness

Just as we have the wise man’s ascent from childish foolishness to heavenly knowledge, the Book of Proverbs traces out just as clearly a journey the opposite direction

Illus. Japan, Naruto, the tidal current is the fastest in Japan and the fourth fastest in the world, reaching speeds of over 12 miles per hours; this creates massive whirlpools reaching over 66 feet in diameter... these massive vortices can suck people straight to the bottom of the sea

This is what the force of evil is like in the life of the fool... it starts with simple naïvite...
IGNORANCE

A. Step 1: Naïveté

1. Hebrew word *peti*... a gullible, silly simpleton... naïve, unwise

Proverbs 14:15 The simple believes everything, but the prudent gives thought to his steps.

2. This is a person who willfully exercises his irresponsibility

NAU Proverbs 1:22 "How long, O naive ones, will you love being simple-minded?"

3. This is not a cute or charming naïvite... it is the beginning of a deadly journey

NIV Proverbs 1:32 For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them

4. The naïve simpleton is easily tricked by the seductress in Proverbs 7

Proverbs 7:6-15 At the window of my house I looked out through the lattice. ⁷ I saw among the simple, I noticed among the young men, a youth who lacked judgment. ⁸ He was going down the street near her corner, walking along in the direction of her house ⁹ at twilight, as the day was fading, as the dark of night set in. ¹⁰ Then out came a woman to meet him, dressed like a prostitute and with crafty intent. ¹¹ (She is loud and defiant, her feet never stay at home; ¹² now in the street, now in the squares, at every corner she lurks.) ¹³ She took hold of him and kissed him and with a brazen face she said: ¹⁴ "I have fellowship offerings at home; today I fulfilled my vows. ¹⁵ So I came out to meet you; I looked for you and have found you!"

Proverbs 7:21-23 With persuasive words she led him astray; she seduced him with her smooth talk. ²² All at once he followed her like an ox going to the slaughter, like a deer stepping into a noose ²³ till an arrow pierces his liver, like a bird darting into a snare, little knowing it will cost him his life.

5. The simpleton is not merely unintelligent... he is morally corrupt... he LOVES his folly and wastes his life chasing what does not matter

ESV Proverbs 15:21 Folly is a joy to him who lacks sense

6. He lacks wisdom, discernment, and prudence

7. He does not learn from experience and cannot be warned of the dangers that lie in his path

ESV Proverbs 27:12 The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it.

John Kitchen: "All of us begin naïve and inexperienced in our youth; but left undetected and unrestrained, the power of the vortex begins the downward tug of rebellion that will destroy our lives. At this early stage, the naïve one is still reachable and able to be rescued from the current of his foolishness."

ESV Proverbs 19:25 Strike a scoffer, and the simple will learn prudence

B. Step 2: Stubbornness

1. The naïve person who is rebuked and chastened comes to a key moment in his life; if he yields and learns, he takes a step toward wisdom; but if he hardens his heart, he begins getting sucked down toward hellish folly
2. Step 2 then is STUBBORNNESS...

NIV Proverbs 13:19 A longing fulfilled is sweet to the soul, but fools detest turning from evil.

See that?? He HATES turning away from evil... it is abhorrent to the fool to repent

3. Hebrew “k’sil”
4. He is not stupid, but thick-headed and stubborn
5. He increasingly enjoys evil... develops a taste for it

NIV Proverbs 10:23 A fool finds pleasure in evil conduct, but a man of understanding delights in wisdom.

6. He has certain traits: he loves to hear himself talk (Proverbs 12:23), but says nothing worth listening to; he is unreliable as a worker (Proverbs 26:6) and squanders what money he has (Proverbs 21:20)
7. He is a tremendous source of grief and agony to his parents (Proverbs 10:1); not only does he bring ruin to his parents, he actually despises them

Proverbs 15:20 A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish man despises his mother.

C. Step 3: Hardening

1. The next step downward in this hellish journey of the fool is HARDENING...
2. Hebrew word: *ewil*
3. He refuses counsel, because he is convinced he needs none

ESV Proverbs 12:15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

Proverbs 15:5 A fool spurns his father's discipline

4. He mocks at sin

NAU Proverbs 14:9 Fools mock at sin, But among the upright there is good will.

5. He tends to be very angry and irritable

Proverbs 12:16 A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult.

6. At this point, even the most extreme hardships and disciplines seem to have no effect

Proverbs 27:22 Though you grind a fool in a mortar, grinding him like grain with a pestle, you will not remove his folly from him.

7. Unless this behavior is corrected early in life, the downward pull of the vortex becomes inevitable

D. Step 4: Closed to God

1. The next step downward is openly spiritual... this man has become a dark figure, hardened toward God and the things of God
2. Hebrew word: *nabal*
3. He closes his mind completely to God, perhaps even effectively denying God's very existence

Proverbs 14:1 The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."

4. 1 Samuel 25, we meet a man who is named "Nabal" which means fool
 - a. David and his men, fleeing from King Saul in the desert, were desperate for work and guarded this rich man's flock during sheep-shearing time
 - b. David sent messengers to Nabal to ask for some food in return
 - c. Nabal answered them in a rude and surly manner
 - d. The servants heard this man's response and ran at once to tell his beautiful and wise wife Abigail:

1 Samuel 25:17 Now think it over and see what you can do, because disaster is hanging over our master and his whole household. He is such a wicked man that no one can talk to him."

5. This is the *nabal*... so wicked that no one can talk to him; his death is hanging over his head

E. Step 5: Confirmed Rebel (Scoffer)

1. Hebrew word for scoffer is *leitz*

Proverbs 9:7-8 Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury. ⁸ Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you.

2. His absolutely refuses correction, even from his own father

Proverbs 13:1 A wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.

3. He is no longer some naïve simpleton, investigating folly; he is a confirmed rebel, rejecting all authority

Proverbs 21:24 "Scoffer" is the name of the arrogant, haughty man who acts with arrogant pride.

And what is the outcome? The God toward whom he has scoffed will in the end scoff at him eternally:

Proverbs 3:33-34 The LORD's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the dwelling of the righteous. ³⁴ Toward the scornors he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favor.

And so, we have depicted for

V. Jesus Has Become for Us Wisdom from God

A. Summary:

1. Two different ways to live
 - a. An upward path of wisdom and righteousness characterized by ever-increasing godliness... OR
 - b. A downward path of foolishness and pride, sucked down to hell by a vortex of bad decisions and arrogance
2. But the answer is not a RAW ACT OF THE WILL... "I WILL be wise, I will be righteous..."

B. Jesus Christ Has Become for us Wisdom from God

1 Corinthians 1:30 Christ Jesus ... has become for us wisdom from God-- that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

1. Not so much "Christ can make me wise" but Christ IS my wisdom

2. Not so much “Christ can make me righteous” (in my daily life, so my daily life will become pleasing to God), but rather “Christ IS my righteousness before God”
 3. The wisest thing any fool can do is acknowledge his foolishness and repent, and come to Christ
 4. Next week: Christ and the Book of Proverbs
- C. Use this Sermon as a Diagnostic Tool
1. What path are you on???
 2. Are you living the life of the wise or of the fool?