

Prayers

Opening prayer

Lord God, we offer You our hopes and dreams, our thoughts and feelings, and our faith and deeds. Align all these with the priorities both of Your glorious Kingdom and Your eternal plan, and grant each of us who own Your name the joy and happiness of being Your servant on earth. We long to live as Your disciples according to Your call, and we thank You for calling us and using us, Lord God. May we always serve You and bless Your holy Name. ALLELUIA!

Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: WATER

1. For yourself

Offer the Lord your repentance for wasting the resources He has given you of things like water and power. It is only when we accept that such things are God's gifts that we will honour His creation in the way He requires.

2. For your friends and family

Pray a prayer of repentance on behalf of your family and friends for your failure to use God's earthly resources to the full. Find ways to talk about what you have prayed to those you meet this day.

3. For the church and its work

Pray that God's people will demonstrate to the world what it means to use God's resources, such as water, aright. Pray for those who reject such things as irrelevant to faith, and pray that the church might be at one in honouring God's creation

4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)

Pray against the forces of evil that seek to destroy God's work on this planet; remember that all life 'begins' in water, and pray God's protection on this precious resource

Meditation

Jesus, what do You see when You look at us?
Do you see people who put faith into practice?
Do you see people who live as if they know
That without Christ, sin will conquer this world?
Do you see people who talk to you in prayer,
Who share everything with You, in complete trust?
Do you see people who read Your Word,
Willing to dig deep to understand it and love it?
Do You see people who are energised by the Spirit
And transformed by the power of Your love?
Do You see people motivated to work for You,
Confident that God's grace will change the world?
Do you see people who are obedient, all the time,
Willing to do what You ask, whatever the cost?
Jesus, what do You see when You look at us?
Tell us the truth, so that we might be set free!

Bible Study

Bible passage – Proverbs 1:24-33

- ²⁴ *'But I called and you dismissed me,
I stretched out my hand and no one took notice.*
- ²⁵ *So because you have neglected all my advice
and rejected my warnings,*
- ²⁶ *I will laugh at your misfortune,
and will mock you when panic overcomes you;*
- ²⁷ *When terror strikes you like a storm,
and your dismay batters you like a whirlwind,
when distress and anguish overpower you.*
- ²⁸ *That is when they will call to me, but I will not answer,
and they will hunt for me, but not find me.'*
- ²⁹ *For they hated knowledge
and did not choose to fear the LORD,*
- ³⁰ *they have ignored my advice,
and dismissed all my criticism,*
- ³¹ *So now they will have to eat the fruit of their own way
and be stuffed with their own way of doing things.*
- ³² *For wilful disobedience kills the simple,
and the smugness of fools destroys them;*
- ³³ *but those who listen to me will live in security;
at ease, and without fear of disaster.'*

Review

Wisdom speaks out against those who will not hear her words. She warns that those who reject her become irrelevantly self important. Those who accept her receive the benefits of security in all things, under God.

In yesterday's passage, Wisdom raised her voice to shout above the hubbub of the streets, the town squares and the city gates, and claim a right to be heard. We also learned that the Bible uses the literary technique of 'personification' in describing 'Wisdom' as a woman, in order to teach God's truth about life. Her dramatic entrance onto the scene of everyday life came with a prophetic promise that she would reward all those who listened to her; she said, *'I will pour out my Spirit on you and make my words known to you!'* (1:23). This remarkable promise has of course been fulfilled in the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and in the preaching of the Gospel to the whole world ever since. Our passage today contains Wisdom's voice spoken to those of Old Testament times who would hear her; she delivers a stunning attack on those who ignore the knowledge of God and turn from her ways. But the prophecy of the previous verse (23) should warn us that these words are not just for ancient peoples, they ring true for today, and we must be sure to look at why this is so.

The general picture painted by our passage today is clear enough to us (1:24-25), but we need to remember that Wisdom is here preaching to God's people. This is not a moral tale about what happens to anyone; it is a moral tale about God's people, specifically, God's own people, and whether they receive what God has given them and use His benefits. For Israel, the Old Testament people of God, this passage is about their relationship with the God who has been revealed to them because they are the sons of Abraham and children of the Law. For us today, it speaks not to people outside the church but to those of us within it, who have been given the benefits of God's grace in Jesus Christ, and should live according to the teachings of Jesus Christ. So Wisdom speaks to all of us who believe we have a relationship with God and urges us to receive all that God has offered us, not part of it.

So in the Old Testament, Wisdom itself is largely not about salvation itself or about how God breaks down the barriers between Himself and people, it is mostly about life and how we live it. Wisdom insists that God has placed within the world sufficient logic for us to perceive what is true and right and discern the difference between this and what is wrong and evil; for interest, Paul says something similar in Romans 1:18-32. So here, she pours scorn on those of God's people who ignore the moral compass God has both provided in the world and revealed by His Word. Our passage begins with Wisdom's complaint at the stupidity of those who

follow their own moral compass and not God's; *'you have neglected all my advice and rejected all my warnings'* (1:25). Consequently, those who show such folly need not expect help, they will *'call to me but I will not answer'* (1:28). Wisdom muses at the fate of those who will not learn from her; *'they hated knowledge ... they have ignored my advice'* (1:29,30) she says, so *'they will have to eat the fruit of their own way and be stuffed with their own way of doing things'* (1:31)!

One interesting feature of this passage is the description of faults that Wisdom identifies within God's people. She lists a hatred of knowledge and a lack of fear of the Lord (1:29), verse 30 complains that they fail to accept advice or receive criticism. All of these faults are things we see played out in front of our eyes in everyday life, but they are most serious when they are to be found within God's people, within the church. How often do you hear people scorn knowledge and say they have no time to study the Bible? How often do you come across people who treat the things of God lightly, such as going to church or honouring Jesus' command to love our neighbour, or to love other Christians 'as ourselves'? Sometimes, Christian faith is presented as an easy thing, just to make it seem easy for people to join in; but this is no good. Faith in Jesus Christ is indeed a life and death matter, and although Wisdom does not say this about Jesus here, she certainly does say this about God. I am certainly of the opinion that Wisdom gives highly pertinent advice to us here, when she says that we need to be people who bear criticism and take heed of advice; to heed such a rebuke will ready us for much more of God's blessings.

In the last two verses we hear the voice of Wisdom appealing once again for God's people to heed to obvious. People are destroyed for lack of yielding to God, *'wilful disobedience kills the simple, and the smugness of fools destroys them'* (1:32), and in comparison, those who listen and pay attention to Wisdom's calls find the benefits of God's grace that has been promised them. For Christians, this means the benefits of salvation and eternal life; nothing could be greater.

To summarise, if God's people reject the guiding hand of their Lord, then they walk a path that leads ultimately to the death of the soul (1:32); the warning here cannot be more stark. In the end, Wisdom does not offer salvation, any restoration of a relationship with Almighty God, or any escape from the troubles of the world. This is because she is not the Saviour of the world! However, what she does offer is the truly Godly benefits of security in faith, and freedom from the fear of disaster (1:33). It is not an offer that should be turned down.

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. Discuss in your group what it feels like to have done something wrong after obtaining good advice, and how you deal with such feelings.
2. What does this passage of Scripture say about God's attitude towards those who reject the moral truth of Wisdom?
3. What examples can you give from real life of verse 31? How can God help someone who is 'full of themselves'?

Discipleship challenges

- *Can you take criticism? Who can you take it from, and who can you not take it from? This may sound very 'random', but the more you think about this, the more you will realise that it gets to the heart of much of your faith and how it works out in practice. All of us need to be able to take the Lord's criticism (1:30)*
- *Pray for those who are full of themselves and who have neither the confidence to trust others nor the spiritual depth to trust God. Pray that they may be so challenged by the Lord that they will face the inadequacies of their own ways and be forced to consider that they must look for wisdom outside of themselves.*

Final Prayer

Keep me honest, Lord God, I pray. Show me how to live in a way that reflects truth and integrity before others; not so that I might claim any virtue myself, but so that I might demonstrate the benefits of doing what is right according to Your will. I ask this in Jesus' name, AMEN
