Sermon Series: Words of Wisdom in a Whacked-Out World

Sermon Title: A Word to the Wise

Text: **Proverbs 1: 1-7 -- The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: 2 To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, 3 to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; 4 to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth—5 Let the wise hear and increase in learning,**
and the one who understands obtain guidance, 6 to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles. 7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Introduction: Today, I'm beginning a new preaching series called "**Words of Wisdom for a Whacked-Out (i.e. foolish and crazy) World**." I don't think I have to convince you that our world is not in a good place. **Biblical wisdom and virtue, as I'm sure you have observed, seem to be in short supply**! **Just a quick glance at the opening of the Olympics a week ago and the very inappropriate depiction of a nearly nude blue man tells us that something is amiss. Now, SUPPOSEDLY this man was portraying Dionysus, the Greco-Roman god of nature, fruitfulness and fertility, when he was surrounded by food and drag queens** (**hailed by the 1st Lady as spectacular**). I know that many Christians believe they were making a mockery of the Last Supper, but either way, none of that was appropriate for the opening of the Olympic Games, watched by nearly thirty million people. Consider also that Olympic officials have permitted at least **two nonbinary individuals**, in this case, biological males who choose to be identified as female, to compete for a gold medal in both track and field and boxing events against biological women. One of those athletes actually caused a female boxer from Italy (**Angela Carini**) who had trained for years for her event to withdraw in the first **forty-six seconds** of her bout out of fear for her life.

Then there is the pronoun controversy that has led to the demand to use "**they**" and "**them**" pronouns to refer to individuals who do not wish to be identified with either gender. **What is driving this**? **It's the idea that biological gender is now seen as a spectrum and that on one side are men, on the other side are women, and nonbinary people are viewed as somewhere in the middle**. People hold to this view in spite of the fact the Bible teaches that God created us as male and female according to **Genesis 1:27** (**God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them**). I'm not done yet!

At many of what were once our leading universities, we see an unprecedented rise in **Anti-Semitism** – people who hold a prejudicial view of Jews. **In fact, in the three months following the horrific attack by the terrorist group Hamas against the people of Israel last October 7th that resulted in the death of about twelve hundred men, women and children** (mostly civilians), **there were 3,291 attacks in the U.S. aimed at the Jewish population**. This represents a **361 percent increase** over the same period the previous year. These include bomb threats to Jewish schools and synagogues, mobs harassing Jewish students on college campuses, and physical assaults around rallies. According to Time Magazine, **twenty-four percent of young Americans** today harbor anti-Semitic views.

Continuing here on the home front, let's not forget that our government continues to spend money at an unprecedented pace. TALK ABOUT CRAZY AND FOOLISH! Today our national debt has exceeded thirty-five trillion dollars. That equates to $266,275 per household. By the way, the debt one year ago was $32.65 trillion, meaning that it has increased by $2.35 trillion (ALMOST 7%) over the past 12 months.

I could continue, but the goal of this message isn't to DEPRESS you but to make an IMPRESSION on you. **THE REASON WE'RE IN THIS PLACE IS THAT WE NO LONGER THINK ABOUT WHAT GOD HAS TO SAY REGARDING RIGHT AND WRONG AND WISDOM AND FOOLISHNESS.** We are now living in an age of "**enlightened skepticism**" where "**what's right for you may not be right for me; what's wrong for you may not be wrong for me; you've got your way and I've got mine**." **MOST PEOPLE DON'T SEEM TO RECOGNIZE ANY ABSOLUTE STANDARDS OF TRUTH FOR US TO LIVE BY. WISDOM SEEMS TO BE WHATEVER ANYONE SAYS IT IS**. That's why I've decided to teach from the book of Proverbs for the next couple of months. **It's time that we stopped looking to our culture for wisdom and started looking to the Bible for it**. In today's message, I want to define what a proverb is, identify the key verse in the book and then say a few things about its purpose. Next week we'll begin taking a look at the first of several major issues that Solomon, the author of most of Proverbs, addresses and discover what separates the wise from the foolish.

What is a proverb? ***A proverb is a short statement that encapsulates wisdom***. The Latin word for proverb means "**in place of speaking**." **The idea is that a proverb says in very few words what it might take someone else a considerable number of words to explain**. The Hebrew word for proverb has a wide meaning but its root means "**to be like**." Proverbs are comparisons (or sometimes contrasts). For example, **Proverbs 25:25** says, "**Like cold water to a weary soul is good news from a distant land**." As I already mentioned, Solomon is the author of most of the book

(along with King Lemuel, Agur the son of Jakeh, and various other wise men). You may remember in **1 Kings 3:5** that the Lord said to David's son, "**Ask for whatever you want me to give to you**." **He asked for wisdom and God gave it to him** (along with riches and honor) **in abundance** (**1 Kings 3:12 -- I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be**). In his lifetime, Solomon wrote over 3,000 proverbs. Those that are found in this book were selected by the Holy Spirit for God's people to understand and obey in every age.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us that **all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work**. All four of these purposes are fulfilled in the book of Proverbs! These **God-breathed** sayings TEACH US about God, man, sin, creation and other important doctrines. They REBUKE AND REPROVE sinners for lying, laziness, drunkenness, sexual sin and other personal failures. They also tell us how to CORRECT our ways by turning from sin. And they show us how to stay on the path of wisdom and avoid straying again, which of course, equates to TRAINING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS.

What is the key verse in Proverbs? I believe it's **Proverbs 1:7 -- The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction**. There are at least eighteen references to the fear of the Lord in this book (**1:7, 29; 2:5; 3:7; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:12, 26-27; 15:16, 33: 16:6; 19:23; 22:4; 23:17; 24:21; 31:30**). If you studied these verses, you would get a pretty good idea of what the fear of the Lord is. **It means to respect and honor God for who He is** (Creator, Master, Father, etc.), **to listen carefully to His Word and obey it**. **Charles Bridges** defines it this way … the **"affectionate reverence, by which the child of God bends himself humbly and carefully to his Father's law**." Here's a picture of it from **C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia***: In the story, two girls, Susan and Lucy, are preparing to meet Aslan the lion, who represents Christ. Two talking animals, **Mr. and Mrs. Beaver**, prepare the children for the encounter. "***Ooh***," said Susan, "***I thought he was a man. Is he quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion***." "***That you will, dearie***." said Mrs. Beaver. "***And make no mistake, if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly***." "***Then isn't he safe?***" said Lucy. "***Safe?***" said Mr. Beaver. "***Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? Of course, he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the king, I tell you***!"

Why did God give us these proverbs? **Proverbs 1:2-4 -- To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, 3 to receive instruction in wise**

dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; 4 to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth—5 Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance. Here are four reasons why we should read and reread the book of Proverbs.

- **It's where we learn the art of skillful living**. The word for **wisdom** in **verse two (…to know wisdom and instruction)** is **chokmah** (pronounced hokma). It refers not to head knowledge or even just heart knowledge. Hokma in the Old Testament was used for anyone who possessed an unusual **skill**. Moses uses the word to describe a man named **Bezalel** in **Exodus 35:30-31** to whom God gave great skill (wisdom) in the construction of the Tabernacle (**Then Moses said to the Israelites, "See, the Lord has chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, 31 and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts**). Here in **Proverbs**, it refers to the person who acquires GREAT SKILL IN LIVING according to God's point of view. Most of us have been blessed to know a person like that at some point in our lives. **Scripture tells us that we can be just like them when we take hold of the wisdom taught in this book**. That's when we tap into the source of what our Lord describes as "abundant life" in **John 10:10**.
- **It's where we gain mental alertness** (**1:2 – to understand words of insight**). To understand according to Solomon is to be able to make **a distinction between two different things**. Many of the sayings written in this book are about that very thing! **Proverbs 1:8-19** reminds us that **when parents teach their children the wisdom of God it enables them to make the right choice between heeding the counsel of His Word which beautifies their lives like a crown on a king or a necklace on a queen and throwing their lot in with others whose feet run to evil and ambush their own lives. BY READING PROVERBS, YOU WILL BE MENTALLY SHARPER AND ABLE TO MAKE BETTER DECISIONS.**
- **It's where we develop moral insight** (**1:3 – NIV – for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair**). **The word prudent means to be shrewd and clever**. Usually, we think of these in negative terms, but they can have a positive sense. A prudent person understands how the world operates and is smart enough to avoid its pitfalls. Instead, he does the right thing in the eyes of God because he has immersed himself in the wisdom of God. Solomon, himself, is a wonderful example of this. Do you remember when two prostitutes came to him appealing to his judgment on a matter? Both women had given birth to sons only three days apart. During the night, one of the children died so the mother took her dead baby and switched it with the other woman's living child. However, the next morning the lady who had the dead child next to her realized what had happened. Now they needed the man to whom God had given

great wisdom to judge between the two to see who would get the living child. That's when Solomon ordered a servant to cut the living child in two and divide him equally between the two women. The lady whose child had died agreed, but the other woman decided it would be better to give up her son than to see him killed. Solomon ordered the servant to give the living child to the second woman who was his actual mother. That's the kind of moral insight one can gain from acquiring the wisdom of God in Proverbs.

- **It's where we begin to grow up to mature adulthood** (**1:4-5 – for giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young, let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance**). There are two groups in verse four – **the simple and the young**. **The former group`** are those who are gullible and naïve. They are easily tricked. They have "sucker" written all over them. They make the same dumb mistakes over and over again. Some people define insanity as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result. That would be this group! They never learn. **Then there are the young**. They are young in years and just haven't been around long enough to acquire the wisdom of the aged. But if they choose to listen to God and do what He says they will grow up into mature adulthood. The book of Proverbs will make the young person wise, something it cannot do for the gullible person because he never learns! He just keeps right on doing stupid things.

Many proverbs contrast a wise man with a fool. Three Hebrew words are translated "**fool**" in Proverbs.

- **Nabal** – **A person who lacks spiritual perception** (**Proverbs 30:21-22 -- Under three things the earth trembles, under four it cannot bear up: a servant who becomes king, a fool who is full of food** …). Read the story of **Nabal and his wife Abigail** in **1 Samuel 25** and you'll know why his name means fool.
- **Eviyl** – **A morally undesirable person who turns away from what is right and good** (**Proverbs 12:15 – The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice**).
- **Keciyl** – **One who is stupid or silly** (**Proverbs 13:16 -- Every prudent man acts out of knowledge, but a fool exposes his folly**).

Conclusion: Any way you look at it, a fool ignores wisdom and does so at his own peril. Proverbs 16:25 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." On **February 22, 1911**, **Gaston Hervieu** climbed the **Eiffel Tower** to test a new parachute for pilots. He checked the wind, took a nervous breath, and began the test. His silk parachute filled with air, then sailed safely to

the ground. **Hervieu did not make the jump himself; he used a 160-pound test dummy**. To one man this was an outrage. **Franz Reichelt** was an **Austrian tailor** who was developing a parachute of his own. He denounced Hervieu's use of a dummy as a "sham" and, one year later, on the morning of **Sunday, February 4, 1912**, arrived at **the Eiffel Tower** to conduct his own experiment. As Reichelt posed for pictures he announced, "***I am so convinced my device will work properly that I will jump myself***." **Gaston Hervieu** pulled him aside and tried to stop him. **Hervieu claimed there were technical reasons why Reichelt's parachute would not work**. The two men had a heated discussion until, finally, Reichelt walked away. **Modern parachutes use 700 square feet of fabric and should be deployed only above 250 feet; Reichelt's parachute used less than 350 square feet of fabric, and he deployed it at 187 feet**. He had neither the surface area nor the altitude needed to make a successful jump. Hervieu was not the only one who had told Reichelt that his parachute suit would not work. It had also been rejected by a team of experts who told him, "***The surface of your device is too small. You will break your neck***." He not only ignored the wisdom of the experts; he also ignored his own data. He tested his parachute using dummies, and they crashed. He tested his parachute by jumping thirty feet into a haystack, and he crashed. He tested his parachute by jumping twenty feet without a haystack, and he crashed and broke his leg. Instead of changing his invention, he clung to his bad idea in the face of all evidence and advice. **Reichelt fell for four seconds, accelerating constantly, until he hit the ground at sixty miles an hour, making a cloud of frost and dust and a dent six inches deep. He was killed on impact**. **We all know some people who like Franz Reichelt refuse to listen to anyone. Whatever the subject, they seem to know more than anyone. The writer of Proverbs tells us that the wise man will listen carefully to the words and wisdom of God and his life will be much better for it.**