

Psalm Genres (Part Eight): Wisdom Psalms

Applying God's Teaching in Life

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In preparing for today's sermon, I spent some time reading a few hundred quotations about wisdom. This is something I do just to kind of get an idea of what other people think about various subjects, and I thought, well, I am going to speak about wisdom, I might as well start there. And obviously there were some very good quotations about wisdom that make one think, and I could have used them in the sermon. I will not, because I do not want to make my sermon quoting 200 quotations about wisdom. But what caught my attention in reading all of those quotations was that men have a vast divergence of opinion about what wisdom actually is.

My trusty *New Oxford American Dictionary* defines it thusly, "The quality of having experience, knowledge, and good judgment. The soundness of an action or decision with regard to the application of experience, knowledge, and good judgment." Now, this definition is very general, quite secular, and likely acceptable to most people because that is essentially what they think of it—that it is just the quality of having good judgment based on knowledge and experience.

Now, the etymology of the word wisdom may provide some helpful background. It is an Anglo-Saxon word. It was *visdom* back then, very Germanic, and of course it came from Germanic languages. It descended from Proto-Germanic *wissaz*. And then all the way back, as far as they can take it, it was Proto-Indo-European *weid*, and it meant to see or to know. So even in its distant origins, the idea of wisdom has been connected to perception and insight; thus, being able to see or to know the right way, the right answer, the right next step, if you will.

But I think the sages, the philosophers, and the prominent figures that came up with those quotations that I mentioned earlier would probably quibble with such a simple definition, both the definition that was in my dictionary and this overall definition from the word origin. And the reason why they

would quibble about it is because they understood wisdom as something more, something intangible that they could not quite get their minds around even. It was something beyond, something other, that was hard to put into words, and so they were forced to describe it in various ways to try to make it more understandable, not just as being able to make a good decision, but that extra essence or quality that is a part of wisdom. So to them, it was not just knowledge or experience applied well, but there was some, I will just say, spiritual essence beyond that simple definition. There was something more—and they were right. But they could not really understand it.

Some of them saw it as an expression of the true heart, almost combining it with the conscience, you know, a person's conscience, their soul, their more esoteric self. Some thought it was the positive result of overcoming foolishness, which is likely. If you get *out* of a foolish stage, then you move *toward* wisdom. Some thought that wisdom's rightful foundation was suffering, and that you could only have true wisdom if you had suffered. Others described it or explained it as demonstrations of pure happiness in the classical sense, that everything was well ordered, or that it was the demonstration of true love—not true romantic love, but true love as we might understand it in the *agape* way, that it was a sacrificial love, and whenever you were applying a kind of sacrificial love, you were walking in wisdom.

Some of them could not describe it other than just plain old sense. You know, we would say horse sense or something like that. That it is just common sense, the plain right thing to do. A few noted that wisdom is patient. It is often silent rather than jabberwocky. It is careful, it is respectful, it is honorable, it is noble, those sorts of things. And, of course, you had a lot of religious figures chiming in about what wisdom is, and they would say, "Well, you can't explain it," except that it is God's intelligence, or that it is God's will, or that it is God's transcendent quality that we cannot grasp. We only get a sliver of it, and it comes out as wisdom. And these things are closer to its true meaning, but not quite there.

So these descriptions of wisdom have their merits, but most of them are just facets of what true wisdom is. But I should qualify that: what true *biblical* wisdom is. In the church we often talk about the big three: knowledge, understanding, and wisdom, implying a rising scale of importance there,

culminating in wisdom. It is great to have knowledge, but we know from Paul that knowledge puffs up. Understanding is beyond that, and that is given through the Holy Spirit. But wisdom, it is greater than both knowledge and understanding because it combines the two and acts, works from there.

Proverbs 4:7 Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom.
And in all your getting, get understanding.

Now, it might be helpful, as we are laying this foundation here, to understand the two words that are used most in the Bible for wisdom, one in the Hebrew, one in the Greek. Now, the Hebrew word is *hokmah*. It is *Strong's* #2451. It is used 149 times in the Old Testament, and, as we will see, it denotes practical skill and shrewdness, and ethical or moral discernment, prudence, divine understanding. Do you see how rapidly this amplified into more spiritual things?

The Greek word is *sophia*. That is *Strong's* #4678 in the Greek. It is used 51 times in the New Testament, and this is a very similar word. It refers to secular knowledge or practical expertise, philosophical insight, and supreme divine intelligence. This is a really wide word. I mean, it can be used for a lot of things, from a skill all the way up to God's intelligence. Very broad, very general, and it can be used in a lot of different ways.

Now, what does the Bible show that godly wisdom is? I think that is the best way to see, and oftentimes we can see God's leaning on these definitions by seeing how it is used first, right? So we go to the first mention, and we find out how a word is used first and that gives us a general idea of the drift of that word throughout Scripture. So we are going to go to the first mention of wisdom in the Old Testament, and that is in Exodus 28:3. We will go ahead and read verses 1 through 3. God tells Moses:

Exodus 28:1-3 "Now take Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister to Me as priest, Aaron and Aaron's sons: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty. So you shall speak to all who are

gifted artisans, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron's garments, to sanctify him, that he may minister to Me as priest."

Let us just go three more chapters to Exodus 31. We see another usage here in the same vein. These are the first two usages of *hokmah* in the Hebrew of the Old Testament.

Exodus 31:1-5 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship."

Here, in its first two locations in the Scripture, wisdom is used to denote divinely given *technical* skill. The first one is in tailoring, tailoring garments for the priests. And later, in chapter 31, it was for doing all kinds of skilled workmanship on the Tabernacle, and we saw there it had to do with jewels, wood, working with the metals, and, as it says, all manner of workmanship. Interesting that this is how it begins.

But did you notice the context? The first context of wisdom is priestly. Very interesting. The second one, is also priestly, if you will. It has to do with the Tabernacle and God's presence. It is an amazing thing. I am just going to leave it right there, but you can mull that over as you go. But I think it is very significant.

Anyway, these passages provide insight into wisdom in this very first, this initial context, and we have to carry that along as we are moving forward through the Bible to understand what wisdom is. So what kind of insight does it give us? First, wisdom is a practical skill. I mean, those men who tailored the garments for the priest did not stare at it, and something just magically went into an ephod, or some sort of linen garment, or whatever. They had to actually work with the material and sew it in a way that was fitting, proper, and excellent.

And skills are developed in a person by gaining knowledge and understanding of a subject. You have to know a little bit about what you are going to do, and then the real growth comes by practicing the craft—whatever it happens to be—to master it and to produce, as I mentioned just a minute ago, excellence, whatever the product is, whatever you are trying to make come out the other end. Whether you are blowing a trumpet, or whether you are hitting a baseball, or crocheting, or whatever—the product should, over time, in the famous ten thousand hours, be excellent. So take this more than just the ten thousand hours. If you want true mastery of a skill, it is a lifelong endeavor. You *never* stop trying to be better. Think about Yo-Yo Ma playing the cello, or somebody that you admire doing things so well, and they keep doing things and producing better and better and better products as the years go on, because they have mastered their craft.

The second thing that we can take from this is that true wisdom is a *gift of God*. It is a spiritual quality. This is what the old-timers, the sages and the philosophers, were trying to grasp: it is a spiritual quality. It has a practical aspect, but in essence it is a spiritual quality that is both given by God and then pursued to refine and multiply in one's life. So we are given a bit of it through God's Holy Spirit. It allows us to understand, but then we have to practice what we understand in order to truly master what it is that we have learned.

Think about this: the reason why those sages and philosophers were grappling with this and trying to figure this spiritual essence out, and they could not quite put their finger on it, is because mankind is not wise. It is not naturally wise. Is it not the fool who has said that there is no God? And what does the world do? (By the way, that is in Psalm 14:1, also in Psalm 53:1.) You know, the fools of this world, which God lumps together as basically everyone, reject God. So they do not have the wisdom of God. They cannot see what you see, those of you who have God's Spirit, because you have been turned from a fool into one of the wise through His Spirit.

So foolish humanity has rejected God. It says it very clearly there in Romans 1:21-23, taking gods from creation rather than the true God. And those people call us who have been turned into the wise, the elect of God who have

been given at least a little bit of the wisdom of God, fools. But Paul says those the world calls fools and weak are the ones that are going to confound those who believe they are wise.

Now, since God's calling entails rejecting this world's ways, the foolish ways of this world, and learning and growing in God's way of life—this is the sanctification process that we all go through after baptism, and we continue on it throughout our lives until we die—the essential biblical definition of wisdom, applying what we understand of godly knowledge, becomes, as my dad defined it many years ago, ***skill in living***. That is the best definition of wisdom I have ever heard. It is so simple. Now, it leaves out a couple of things, but if you understand the skill, and what it is that we are trying to do, that is, that we are following God's instruction, and that living is true godly living, then skill in living is a wonderful thumbnail definition of what wisdom is.

It is where the rubber meets the road spiritually. It is the application of God's instruction in daily living, in big things and in small things. We could say it is doing Christian living right. It is far more than knowledge or understanding. As a matter of fact, it is sheer foolishness to learn God's way and understand it, and then fail to apply it. Knowledge, understanding, and wisdom are a package deal. You must know, you must understand, and you must do—apply.

So wisdom is choosing to conduct one's life according to God's instruction. We can say also it is living as God lives. We can call it endeavoring to live as Christ lived in this world—to follow Him in everything, to put on and practice His character, His image, until we master it. We will never master it, but that is the goal, and produce, then, godly excellence in our lives. We will master it in the resurrection, but not in our human lives. We can try; that is the best we can do.

Let us go to I John 2, and see this is the conclusion that the apostle John came to. We will read verses 3 through 6. And notice the context here. It is in the context of keeping the commandments.

I John 2:3-6 Now by this we know that we know Him [remember, it is eternal life to know Him and the Father], if we keep His

commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him [we are going the right direction, we are on God's side, we are part of His people]. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

This is godly wisdom.

So today we are going to cover an eighth genre of psalms: wisdom psalms, if you had not figured that out. And in these wisdom psalms, we see psalmists providing godly advice about how an upright person should live in an adversarial world, a world that is cut off from God. Many of these psalms we know very well from our hymnal. We sing them, or seem to sing one of them, or whatever, just about every week. And it is good that we sing them, because the words get in our head and they can provide wonderful instruction if we sing the psalms during the week as well. They provide a handy reference for God's people on how to behave generally, as well as in specific situations.

Let me give you a list of the wisdom psalms. These ones that I will give you first are ones that most scholars consistently put in the wisdom psalms category: 1 "Blessed and Happy is the Man"; 37; 49; 73; 112; that behemoth 119; and little itty-bitty 127 and 128. Well, they are not little itty-bitty, they are five or six verses, but compared to Psalm 119, they are small.

Others that are also candidates for being included in the category of wisdom psalms: 15 "Who Shall Dwell on Thy Holy Hill"; 19, which is like a summary of 119; 78; 82; 90, Moses' psalm there; and 133, "How Good and How Pleasant." These two groups, eight in the first, six in the second, are 14 psalms that are generally considered to be wisdom psalms.

Now, in each of these psalms, the psalmist reflects on life's possibilities and also life's problems, and they craft their advice for living righteously before God into poetic or song forms, and those in song form or poetry are very easy to memorize and recite. So these are very special psalms that we should be carrying around in our heads if we can. Now, wisdom psalms have no regular structure. You will go through these and see that they are very

different in the way they are put together. One is real long, a couple are pretty short. So you are not going to be able to see them just from their structure.

But they typically exhibit three elements. They 1) are addressed to people, as opposed to being addressed to God; they are not prayers necessarily. They may have a prayer inside them, but most of what is given in a wisdom psalm is advice to other people. It is generally written or addressed to people who are upright, or are called righteous, or those who fear God. 2) they focus on right doing versus wrongdoing. It is very simple. They usually contrast doing good on the one hand, doing evil on the other, and 3) (I will just slide right into it) they highlight the blessings of godliness or goodness versus the curses of sinfulness or wrongdoing.

So you are getting a pretty straight message from a poet, from the psalmist, and he is saying, "This is the right thing to do, this is the wrong thing to do," and he will also say, "If you do the right thing, this will be the reward, but if you do the wrong thing, you're going to get this curse." Otherwise, other than these three things, they can be very different. For instance, Psalm 1 and Psalm 112 confidently express God's teaching about certain things, and the rewards for following them and the punishments for rejecting them. But on the other hand, Psalm 37 and Psalm 73, while they are ultimately positive about godliness, sometimes approach their subjects a little more doubtfully, and question the apparent prosperity of the wicked, let us say. But they use the psalm to work through their doubt, so that they finally come out with a declaration of faith.

Now, a few of them, Psalms 127, 128, 133, comprise short sayings that reflect on themes common to everybody's human life: piety and work, the balance between labor and rest, the blessings of family life, or the blessings of being in a community that fears the Lord, that sort of thing. So we can conclude, thinking about all these things, that the wisdom psalms cover principles and questions about godly living from the sublime to the very mundane, everyday type of thing. And they have a lot of similarity to things that you will find in Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs, because those are wisdom *books*, and so there is a lot of similarity there. One

thing that we will not find in a wisdom psalm, usually, is theology. There is no abstract mentions about God and faith, or love, hope. Those sorts of things do not appear there. They are very practical psalms.

So they give practical lessons that we can apply every day. They all urge God's people to adhere to God's standards found in His law, and on the other hand, they tell them to avoid or reject the path of disobedience, the path of rebellion, or deceit, or cutting ethical corners in their work, or taking advantage of others, and on and on it goes. They are very practical.

Now, let me give a qualification, though, about these wisdom psalms. Wisdom psalms offer *general principles* rather than *absolute guarantees*. This is especially noticeable in the rewards and curses. Not every time that you do something good are you going to be rewarded with some sort of eternal blessing. And, on the other hand, people who do bad things are often not cursed, at least from where we are standing. From what we can see, you know, these very bad people live in great big mansions, have the best clothes, they eat well, they drive nice cars, and nothing seems to touch them.

That is true in a limited way. But I want you just to know that when you go through these wisdom psalms and see that the upright man is going to receive this, or the wicked are going to receive this other thing that is a bad thing, you cannot say that that is going to happen every time. Yes, in the long run, virtue brings rewards and wickedness usually ends in disaster, but you cannot say it will happen every time, at least not in this life. So we should avoid thinking that the principles that the wisdom psalms deliver to us follow simple cause-and-effect lines. God is not that simple. There are other things involved in the daily working out of life. He often steps in and changes things according to His purpose.

And whether the wicked are punished or not, or whether the righteous are rewarded or not, we have to maintain our faith that God is doing what is best for the time, for the purpose, for *His* purpose. Remember, Romans 8:28, you probably all know that one pretty well, that God works all things together for good, for those who love Him, that are the called according to His purpose. That is a general promise that we can take to the bank, that He is going to work things out well in the end. But we will see that in the end, not maybe in our physical lifetime.

So the ultimate resolution of these blessings and curses may be in His Kingdom, as an eternal reward for a righteous person, rather than a temporal blessing, or a healing, or a deliverance. God reserves the right to withhold things until the resurrection. Let us say somebody is sick, has been sick for a long time, and everybody in the church is praying for that person, but the person dies. Well, first off, everybody dies. That is Hebrews 9:27. Maybe that person was a righteous person, did everything right, but he did not get to live. Well, he will live eternally, and God has decided that for His purposes, at this point, it was best for that person to die. So we cannot question God that way. He sees things far more insightfully than we can.

But generally, what the wisdom psalms do is show that if you follow God's way, you walk the path of wisdom, your life is going to be good—much better than if you walked a path of foolishness and sin. Because if you walk that path of foolishness, you will end up hurting badly, and maybe not just physically, but maybe for all time—the Lake of Fire. So just understand that the wisdom psalms give general advice, and not all the things that it says will be rewarded by, or bad people will be cursed by, will happen in this life, or in the way you think they should come out in the end.

Let us look at one of these. I have mentioned it a time or two already. Please turn to Psalm 128. You can follow along in your hymnal if you like (this is one that we have in our hymnal). We will read the full psalm here, Psalm 128, verses 1 through 6.

Psalm 128:1-6 Blessed is every one who fears the LORD, who walks in His ways. When you eat the labor of your hands, you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you. Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house, your children like olive plants all around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD. The LORD bless you out of Zion, and may you see the good of Jerusalem all the days of your life. Yes, may you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!

This psalm is actually similar to a beatitude, it is an extended beatitude. You know, Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord. And it has a great deal in common with the previous psalm, 127. They share keywords and they share

themes, like God's centrality in life being very important, honest labor, the family and the house being another essential part of a person's life, the blessing of children is in both, and also the idea of blessedness, or happiness, or contentedness that living God's way brings.

Now, the overall message of Psalm 128 is that abundant life, a stable family, and peace—the idea of shalom, which is in the last line there, you will find in verse 6, the idea of wholeness and well-being—these things rest on the foundation of the proper fear of God. Fear of God is the central theme here, central idea. The psalmist here wants us to know that God comes first in everything. He is the foundation of your life, your abundant life. He is the foundation of a stable family. He is the foundation of peace and well-being. And if you take God out of the picture in any way, your chances of having any of those things disappear. Maybe not completely, but the chances really plummet at that point if God is not involved. So his advice is that we should always please Him and not disappoint Him at all.

Let us go back to Psalm 111, because I want you to see here, again, the fear of the Lord. Because this is about what God does for His people, and it is just a good basis to begin with, as we see the advice then in 128.

Psalm 111:1-10 Praise the LORD! I will praise the LORD with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright and in the congregation. The works of the LORD are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them. His work is honorable and glorious, and His righteousness endures forever. He has made His wonderful works to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and full of compassion. He has given food to those who fear Him; He will ever be mindful of His covenant. He has declared to His people the power of His works, in giving them the heritage of the nations. The works of His hands are verity [truth] and justice; all His precepts are sure. They stand fast forever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness. He has sent redemption to His people; He has commanded His covenant forever: Holy and awesome is His name [His character, what identifies Him]. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever.

That is the foundation that we are setting our lives upon when we do His commandments, when we fear Him, and we do what He has instructed us to do.

Now, getting back to Psalm 128, we see that that is how the psalm begins: "Blessed is every one who fears the LORD, who walks in His ways." So a proper fear of the Lord will surely bring blessing. And when he says this, he decides in the next line, in a parallel line, that he better define what he means by the fear of the Lord.

He does not necessarily define it in a dictionary way; that is not what he is thinking about. He is thinking about advice that he is going to give you that is going to help you live, do things. And so he defines the fear of the Lord as a person walking in God's ways. "Blessed is one who fears the LORD, who walks in His ways." You show that you have fear of the Lord by walking in His ways. He is not talking about intellectual agreement with the theology of God, of His covenant, or any of those things. He is not talking about some sort of emotion, that you feel this great devotion or zeal for God. I mean, those are fine things, but he is bringing it down to our everyday life, everyday doings.

So to him, fearing God means living out God's instruction, keeping His law, putting His principles into action in the everyday circumstances of life. Every time he has a decision to make about one thing or another, he harkens back to God's instruction, and he does what God says, and so he shows that he fears the Lord. He reverences God. He wants to please God. He does not want to displease God, and so, in the proper fear of God, he does what God says. And so it is not necessarily a definition of what it means intellectually. It is a definition of what it means practically, in actions.

The New Testament writers picked up on this—Paul and James. James and Paul both talk about being *doers* of the law. Paul, in Romans 2:13, "the doers of the law will be justified," or declared righteous. But let us read what James says in James 1:22. He and the psalmist are in syzygy on this. They are in parallel.

James 1:22-25 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not

a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes his way, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

So here is a New Testament expression of the same thing that we are seeing in Psalm 128. The psalmist is saying that if you want to fear God, be a doer of the law, be a doer of the work that God has given you to do. Do not just look into the law of liberty and say, "Hmm, that sounds wonderful," and then go and do nothing, and forget everything that you have learned and what you should be. But instead, look into that law of liberty, and say, "How can I apply this in my life?" And that shows a proper fear of the Lord.

Back to Psalm 128. Let us read 2 through 4 again.

Psalm 128:2-4 When you eat the labor of your hands, you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you. Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house, your children like olive plants all around your table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD.

He repeats this. Verses 2 through 4 contains two examples of the blessed life of the God-fearing man, or God-fearing family, and then it does restate the blessing of fearing the Lord. Now, notice here that the psalmist speaks directly to you, as the reader: "When *you* eat the labor of *your* hands, *you* shall be happy, and it shall be well with *you*," *your* wife, *your* children. And then he goes back to more general in verse 4. But he is making sure that he is talking directly to you, that it is applicable to *you* right now, in your house, in your family, with your children, in what you do, out in the field, at work, doing these things. You can apply God's instruction and show the fear of the Lord by how you do these things.

And if you do them right, if you do them well, you do what God says, then you are going to reap blessings. They will come automatically. It says if you do these things, you are going to eat the labor of your hands. It means there is a reward for the work that you do as you fear God. Some enemy is not going to take what you earned, or what you grew, what you produced. God

will make sure that you can enjoy the blessings that come from your hard work. Because you fear Him, He will put a hedge about you. He will make sure that you receive back even more than what you put in. Because He loves you, He has promised you blessings, and you have responded properly by practically applying His instruction.

And he says it is the same in your house, with your wife and your children. If the whole family is together, fearing God in their activities that they do around the house, daily chores and whatnot that have to be done, daily decisions that must be made, then you are going to see the whole family blessed. He mentions here the wife will be a fruitful vine, and the next clause here is very important: "in the very heart of your house." The whole house will revolve around her work and what she does, and she makes the house a wonderful place to live for her children—children like olive plants all around your table.

The idea is of growth, and not just growth now, growth later, because those little slips of olives that are around the table grow up to be olive trees, and they pass things down in their generation to their children. So there is an idea here of not just happening now, but future rewards, future blessings, because it started with one man and his wife deciding they are going to fear the Lord and apply the lessons and instruction that they received from God, as well as they could, and this starts a process of generational blessing. Verse 4: "Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD." It restates the theme again, so you do not forget: these blessings happen because of the fear of the Lord. So it is emphasized here.

Let us hit the final two verses.

Psalm 128:5 The LORD bless you out of Zion, . . .

This is kind of a prayer. It is a hope, if you will, but it is kind of a prayer.

Psalm 128:5-6 . . . and may you see the good of Jerusalem all the days of your life. Yes, may you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!

So the psalmist prays for God's blessing to extend. He says, out of Zion. That is where God dwells; that God would send a blessing to you from where He is. And so, immediately, as he says, may you see the good of Jerusalem all the days of your life, the blessing that he asked for—the God-fearing house—extends to a God-fearing nation. And this blessing that he asks for is not just now, but all the days of your life.

Now, this is important, because this again shows a generational thing, that God's blessing never is just for now. There are always intimations of future blessings, that this blessing will increase into other blessings, greater blessings down the road. And not just for you, but your family and the people in your community, all the way out to the whole nation. And we know, with God, ultimately out into the whole world. But he is trying to show you here that if you practice the fear of the Lord and do the things of God, you are starting something big.

It starts with one person, or a couple, and expands to their children, and this, if it is kept up, if people are faithful, if you use the blessings of God properly, it expands. You always get more from the original seed that is put in the ground. And so the psalmist is saying, "Look, if you want to change the world, practice the fear of the Lord, walking in His ways, because it has a chance to grow so large, and it will ultimately encompass the whole world—with God's help." But we have got to start that ourselves, trying to do as much as we can to create that environment, at least within our families.

Now, here is where we have to draw in the caveat I talked about a few minutes ago. He will always, that is, God will always try to bless those who are obeying Him, but larger circumstances may curtail those blessings, because of things like national war, natural disasters, foreign invasions, or whatever is happening. And those things are often curses that God brings on a nation who is not following His ways. So the blessings may be stymied because the rest of the people are not following God's ways. So that limits the way the blessings may multiply.

And this is why he is saying, at the very end, "Peace be upon Israel!" Because if God gives Israel peace, the whole nation peace, then the chances for the multiplication of the blessings of fearing God can actually

commence, they can expand. So pray for the nation, pray for your neighbors, pray that things go well because, as things go well across a broader area, the chances of shalom and blessing and all of those other things multiplies.

Let us go to another one. We have time to get this one in; I think this one is really neat. I know I have read it before, but I never got out of it what I got out of it in preparing this sermon. So we were just in 111, let us go to Psalm 112. And it is good that I read 111, because it is a vital part of 112. They can be read as one psalm, split in half, but we can read them as two, as one as a response to the other.

Now, remember, I mentioned that Psalm 111 deals with what God does to set up things for us. We could say that Psalm 111 deals with God's mighty works done on Israel's, or our, behalf. And then Psalm 112 is the practical, thankful response of the people to what God has done. So let us read 112. We were just there in 111, we know what it says.

Psalm 112:1-10 Praise the LORD! Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who delights greatly in His commandments. His descendants will be mighty on earth; the generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches will be in his house, and his righteousness endures forever. Unto the upright there arises light in the darkness; He is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous. A good man deals graciously and lends; he will guide his affairs with discretion. Surely he will never be shaken; the righteous will be in everlasting remembrance. He will not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD. His heart is established; he will not be afraid, until he sees his desire upon his enemies. He has dispersed abroad, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever. His horn will be exalted with honor. The wicked will see it and be grieved; he will gnash his teeth and melt away; the desire of the wicked shall perish.

Very interesting psalm; hope you followed the pronouns here. Let us go into it here. We could say that Psalm 111 presents theology—it is what God does, what He promises, what He is doing—while Psalm 112 presents humanity,

what humans do, what humans *should* do as a result of what God has done. So we are looking at 111, all about God; 112, all about how men respond to God. So God's deeds and man's deeds.

And if men do what God instructs, as a response to what God has done, then they are in sync, they are walking on the same path. We could also say, this is not mentioned here, except I think there is the word covenant in here somewhere, but they are both performing their duties under the covenant. God does what He does in these great, big, awesome ways that He does, and then we respond by doing these things, which is mostly following His instructions.

By the way, as an aside here, these are both acrostic poems, meaning the lines start with each letter of the alphabet. Both of them start with Praise the LORD—hallelujah! That is not part of the acrostic, but the 22 lines after each "Praise the LORD" start with a new letter of the Hebrew alphabet: aleph, bet, gimel, dalet, on and on through there. You do not need to know that, I just thought I would pass it along. Also, Psalm 111 and Psalm 112 kick off the praise psalms, or the *hallal*, which runs through chapter 118. So pretty important psalms here to begin the praise of God.

Let us look at this in little sections here. Verse 1: I hope you noticed how much it was like chapter 128. "Praise the LORD! Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who delights greatly in His commandments." This psalmist does the same thing as the psalmist in 128. He says that the fear of the Lord, rightly practiced, brings the blessing of God, and he also decides that he is going to define it. And he defines it in his own way, that is, the fear of the Lord, and he says, very much like the one in 128, that the man who fears the Lord delights greatly in His commandments.

Do you remember what he said there in 128? 128 is, "One who fears the Lord walks in His ways." There is not much difference between delights greatly in His commandments and walks in His ways. If someone delights in God's commandments, what does he do? He observes them, he keeps them, he walks in His ways. And so they are basically saying the same thing, that a person who truly fears the Lord responds by doing what God has instructed him to do, keeping the covenant, keeping the commandments, doing what is right and good.

Let us go on to verses 2 through 4.

Psalm 112:2-4 His descendants will be mighty on earth [This is talking about the man who fears the Lord. What is the result? His descendants will be mighty on earth.]; the generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches will be in his house, and his righteousness endures forever. Unto the upright there arises light in the darkness; he is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous.

This is a list of the rewards for fearing God. This is what comes to the person who fears God. His descendants will be mighty, they will be upright, they will be blessed, they will be wealthy, they will possess enduring, or eternal, righteousness. That is wonderful. He is saying, if you apply the principles of God's law in your everyday activities, you are starting something that is going to amount to just wonderful blessings.

Now, do not think of these things in physical terms. I mean, He will give you wealth in proportion to what He wants for you at the time, and those sorts of things, but look further than just the physical here, especially in terms of the last one, "His righteousness endures forever." The pronoun here is talking about the man who fears God, or the person who fears God. His righteousness will go on and on and on, and on, forever. Now, verses 3 through 4 harkens back to Psalm 111:3-4. I want you to catch this—this is very important. Let us read Psalm 111:3-4. What is the pronoun referring to, His? In 111, it is God. Remember, it is God on this one, the next one is man.

Psalm 111:3-4 [Speaking of God:] God's work is honorable and glorious, and His righteousness endures forever. He has made His wonderful works to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and full of compassion.

Psalm 112:3-4 [Speaking of the man who fears God:] Wealth and riches will be in his house, and his righteousness endures forever. Unto the upright there arises light in the darkness; he is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous.

Who is light? Jesus Christ, right? He is the One who shone out of darkness and gave us this marvelous light. "He is gracious"; not Christ, he is not talking about Christ here, or God, he is talking about the man—the man, the one who fears God, is gracious and full of compassion, and righteous. Do you see what the psalmist is doing here? It is almost, you shall be God. He is saying that if you follow the instruction and fear the Lord in the proper way, you are going to grow up in the character image of God, and you will start doing godly things, like being gracious, and full of compassion, and everything you do is righteous. This Psalm 112 takes Psalm 128 and turns it up to 11, in terms of the blessings of fearing the Lord and doing what He says.

Let us go to 5 through 9. This is a long description of the actions and disposition of this righteous person.

Psalm 112:5-9 A good man deals graciously and lends; he will guide his affairs with discretion. Surely he will never be shaken; the righteous will be in everlasting remembrance. He will not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD. His heart is established; he will not be afraid, until he sees his desire upon his enemies. He has dispersed abroad, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever; his horn will be exalted with honor.

So we see things just piled on this man who fears the Lord; or this woman, it does not matter the gender here. This person is gracious, generous, discreet, calm during bad times, steadfast, faithful, stable, compassionate, and strong. These are all remarkable qualities that we all want, and they all result from the fact that this person feared the Lord, and delighted in His commandments, and walked in His ways.

Now, I do not know if you noticed this, in verse 3, verse 6, and verse 9, the psalmist declares that this person's righteousness endures forever, or that he himself will have an everlasting remembrance, or everlasting memorial. Those are words that are usually applied only to God. It is not just his goodness will be remembered forever, but his own right-doing will go on forever. You cannot be righteous when you are dead, but if your

righteousness endures forever, that means you are continuing to live in righteousness.

So again, he is saying, if you follow God's commands, if you keep His covenant, if you keep on fearing the Lord and you do it right, you are going to be just like God. Your righteousness will go beyond the grave. I think that there is more than just a little hint here of eternal life, especially when you consider what comes next. I think that this phrase at the end of verse 9, "his horn will be exalted in honor," takes on the additional meaning of like, "you will be given a crown of righteousness," or you know, you will be given all these great rewards in the Kingdom of God. Because this normally does not take place in a physical life, these blessings, I mean. Some of them do, but what we are seeing is an aggregate of all the blessings that God wants to put on us in the Kingdom.

Now, let us look at verse 10, because the psalmist, as in most wisdom psalms, applies a contrast, so we can see what is going on here, and see it in stark contrast to the other side.

Psalm 112:10 The wicked will see it and be grieved; he will gnash his teeth and melt away; the desire of the wicked will perish.

What we see here is a description of the fate of the wicked. First, the wicked will see the exaltation of the upright and grieve. He will be sorrowful. What is another word? Jesus uses it all the time—there will be weeping. And what does it say secondly, or what does it say after that? He will gnash his teeth! Do you wonder where Jesus got it? Right here. Those who are the wicked will be weeping and gnashing their teeth when they see the exaltation of the righteous. Is that not what happens at the Parable of the Talents? The one who hid his talent was thrown into Gehenna, and there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. I think it is at the end of the Sheep and the Goats it is also used. Was it also in the Parable of the Ten Virgins? I am not sure, but Jesus uses this expression several times.

But notice the second thing here. The first one, weeping and gnashing of teeth; second, what does the psalmist say that is going to happen to the wicked? He will melt away. What makes things melt? What makes snow melt? What makes wax melt? Heat, often produced by a very strong source,

like the sun, or magma, or just a fire. What are we seeing here, that the wicked melt? Seems to me—I do not know if I am stepping too far here—but I think this is an early allusion to the Lake of Fire. That the ultimate curse of the wicked is this sorrow, gnashing of teeth, being angry, and then melting—being burned up.

We are not done yet. Third: and notice here, you cannot see it in English, but the word wicked in the first two lines was singular; now it turns to plural. So these are *all* the wicked, "the desire of [all] the wicked shall perish." The psalmist takes it to the very end. And this is why I think that what he is talking about, in terms of the person who fears the Lord, you know, all his blessings ultimately are in the Kingdom of God. I think here, in the contrast, all of the curses ultimately are at the end of what the wicked can expect if they continue in their way of life and rebellion against God, all the way to the Lake of Fire.

And not just for the single person, or the individual person, but for *all* of them. What he is saying is that all of the wicked go through the same process that the individual wicked person goes through, and all of their desires to rebel against God and to do evil perish. There is no more sin, there is no more wickedness. It is the ultimate fate of the wicked, in their wickedness, is to be snuffed out of existence. No more wickedness ever—not even the thought of wickedness, it will be all gone. He is referring here to the complete erasure of sin and rebellion against God, when all that is evil will be done away, and only righteousness dwells on the earth.

Let us go to II Peter 3, where Peter—he must have gotten it here, I do not know where else he could have gotten it, other than direct inspiration.

II Peter 3:10-14 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt [there is that word] with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness [That is what I have been talking about this whole sermon, the path of wisdom, fearing the Lord.], looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and

the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. [And he does not say it, but he also means that there is no unrighteousness there—none.] Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless.

Drop down to verse 17.

II Peter 3:17-18 You therefore, beloved, since you know these things beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.