

Searched by the Psalms Series at Brentwood

August 1, 2010

The Wisdom of the Lord

**Psalm 49:1-12 & Luke 12:13-21
(Hymns 425, 428, 530, 556)**

This Psalm is what Biblical scholars call wisdom literature.
It is the kind of teaching found in Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, and Job.

In this case, the teaching is offered in worship
and is accompanied by a harp.

It's kind of like a folk song
in the 60s when I was growing up.

The singer essential says in the introduction,
"Listen up, everyone!

I've got something important to say.

This is a basic human problem that we all face.

I want to help you understand God's wisdom
on this hard question
that makes us all stop and think hard."

The hard question, as the rest of the Psalm makes clear, is
"Where do you put your trust in this life,
in wealth and power or in God?"

On the surface, the answer is simple and plain.
Trust in God rather than riches and control.

It's the message of Jesus' parable that we read this morning from Luke.

Our true life is not made up of the things we own,
of the material wealth and possessions
that enable us to eat, drink, and enjoy ourselves
at that level of life.

Our true life is found in our relationship with God in Jesus Christ,
in our friendship with and service to the God
who is the source of all true riches and enjoyment.

Material wealth and control over things is fleeting.
Death is the great equalizer.

"You can't take it with you," is a recurring theme in these passages.

Anything that is confined to this phase of our lives,
that will not go with us into the next,
is not worthy of our ultimate loyalty.

Wealth is not worthy.
Riches are not worthy.
Possessions are not worthy.
Power is not worthy.
Control is not worthy.

People who think these things are worthy of their ultimate loyalty are,
in the light of these two passages of wisdom teaching,
just plain fools.

They lack understanding.
They just don't get it.

They do not know how to live life responsibly and successfully
in the face of life's hard questions.

So, what is worthy in God's sight?
What does the wisdom of the Lord say
about living responsibly and successfully?

What Jesus says in the parable of the rich fool
is not to be greedy.

The truly rich life is not made up of what we own,
of the riches that individuals have piled up for themselves,
but of the closeness of their relationship with God.
That relationship is marked by a mutual friendship,
a bond of mutual loyalty and faithfulness.

For humans, it involves obedience to the wisdom of the Lord.
And that wise obedience is summarized in Jesus' great commandment –

Love the Lord your God
with all your heart, with all your soul,
with all your strength, and with all your mind,
and love your neighbour as yourself.

But the question that the teacher of the law asked
at the beginning of this episode in Jesus' life
is particularly interesting in light of our reflections this morning.
"Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"
What must I do, in other words, to avoid the Grim Reaper,
to avoid death.

The wisdom of the Lord says nothing about wealth or power.
It is all about loving relationships –
with God, with others, and with yourself.
Indeed, if loving relationships are the focus of your loyalties,
you will experience true riches right here and now,
in this life in this moment.

The wisdom of the Lord is not about what we have,
but about who we are,
with God, with others, and with ourselves.

Loyalty to wealth and power distorts, disables, and denies
life as God intends it to be lived among his beloved friends and children.

God longs for a humanity that is free
to love, be joyful, be peaceful,
be patient, be kind, be good, be faithful, be humble,
and be in self-control.
In the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ,
he created the conditions for humans to choose this way
of being rich in wisdom and understanding.
That is God's gift of grace to us.
And through the power of God's Holy Spirit,
we are continually invited to choose that way of life.
But we do have to choose.

At the beginning of the chapter in Galatians
where Paul lists the what God has freed humanity to be,
he affirms what God has done for all humans:

*Freedom is what we have – Christ has set us free!
Stand, then, as free people, and do not allow yourselves
To become slaves again. (Gal 5:1)*

We are free to choose life over death,
the riches of genuine loving relationships
over the foolishness of possessions and power.

And we are fed for that freedom
here at the Lord's Supper,
at the table around which the original disciples
who got what is important in life
gathered for their last meal
before Jesus paid the price for our freedom.

Let us eat again with him in joy and gratitude
for the great price paid and the great gift given.

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