

Sunday January 28, 2024

Lesson 9: All Glory to God!

Scripture: Proverbs 2: 6-7; Daniel 2:14-30

Context:

We continue our new winter curriculum, “God Abides,” focusing on how the Holy Spirit reminds us of God’s constant presence with humanity. The second unit is titled “Empowering Discernment” with lessons on how God orchestrates events from behind the scenes as the figures appeal to God for wisdom. Today’s purpose is to acknowledge the work of wisdom that compels us to give God alone the glory.

We will continue with our exploration of our lesson with our initial scripture passage from the book of Proverbs, and then the second from another part of the Bible. As we have discovered in the past several weeks, the book of Proverbs expresses sayings and allusions to help with Godly wisdom for life. The proverbs fall into two general categories: those which express insights about the human experience and those which have a religious dimension.¹ Today’s category falls into the latter. The writer of these proverbs writes of how the Lord is the one who speaks to give knowledge and understanding. God will give ability to those who possess integrity and is a shield for those who lead a blameless life.

To give these proverbs an example, the next scripture passage gives an example of an individual who understands and exhibits these maxims. The next scripture lesson is from the book of Daniel in the Old Testament. As the name of the book suggests, this book narrates the tales of the prophet Daniel, who is one of the larger prophetic books of the Old Testament. Historically though, Daniel is not placed with other prophets such as Isaiah or Jeremiah as he comes after the fall of Jerusalem and the imagery he presents conveys a different message from the Lord.

Daniel is often most well-known for the story of his time in a lion’s den. Yet the rest of the book of Daniel is rich in narrative about Daniel’s time in the court of King Nebuchadnezzar. In the Jewish tradition, the book of Daniel is placed among the Writings, the third part of the Hebrew Bible because it was written so late in comparison to other writings.² For the Christian tradition, the book is placed among the prophets as it is set during the Babylonian captivity. Thus, Daniel is regarded as more of a prophet in the Christian tradition even though his writing is very different from other prophets such as Amos, Isaiah, or Jeremiah.

Indeed, the book of Daniel is very different than the other prophetic books as there are two distinct genres. In chapters 1-6, Daniel is the protagonist navigating courtly life while chapters 7-12 are apocalyptic literature, giving encrypted interpretations of history and vague predictions about the future.³ The focus of today’s lesson is Daniel and other companions who are faithful to Yahweh and refuse to renounce their faith. After King Nebuchadnezzar has a strange dream, his interpreters cannot decipher its meaning. They will be sentenced to death for failing to do so. Daniel prays to the Lord and God gives him a revelation of the dream and what

¹ Coogan, Michael D., ed., *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 464.

² *Ibid.*, 527.

³ *Ibid.*

it means. Daniel quickly rushes to the king and reveals the meaning of the dream to him. Daniel is quick though not to name himself as the one who has deciphered the dream. He gives all credit to the Lord and is quick to tell Nebuchadnezzar of God's glory. Thus, Daniel saves the sages of Babylonia, his companions, and even the king from causing an uproar. Yet for Daniel, all the credit is to go to the Lord, the giver of life.

Application

At the center of today's lesson is the word "humility." I have discovered in my own journey how humility is often a companion with wisdom. Wise people, overall, are humble about their gifts and graces, realizing how they are one of many in the world and they only know so much about the world around them. For those wise people who are people of faith, they also realize God is the one who gives them any sense of direction and thus God is the one who should receive glory for everything in their lives.

The protagonist Daniel very much exhibits these qualities in both this passage and throughout the book of Daniel. Daniel is fervent in his devotion to worship God, is recorded as extremely self-disciplined, and is quick to acknowledge God as the source for anything good he does or says. Daniel understands how God is the one who moves the world and no human is ever completely wise or discerning on their own merit.

As I read this passage I was struck by counsel given to me in my preaching classes, which continues to speak into how I understand the Christian faith and witness. In every preaching class I took, we learned how we were never to present ourselves as heroes as sermon illustrations. We might use snippets of our lives, like something cute our children did or perhaps a moment we received grace or realized the Holy Spirit was doing something in our lives. There is a beauty and importance to the preacher naming what God has done in their lives and what God will do again. Yet to paint the preachers as the hero is to take the attention away from the one who is truly the source of all good things in our lives: the Lord God. God is the primary mover and shaker in our lives and the lives we are given are a part of God's story.

Once we were taught as much, I realized how much truth there was in this counsel even going beyond preaching. When we begin to think so highly of ourselves and what we can do or say or perform, we begin to lose sight of how God is the one who is at the center of our lives. Instead, we move to center stage and believe everyone is focused on us and what we can do, or say, or perform. The center of the world is not us; it is God, the one who is the giver of every good thing within our being and everything we think we possess.

After I read this passage, I sat down and made a list of people who I see as wise. I realized several commonalities these individuals shared. One is how they are more often to listen to talk. Another commonality was how they were thoughtful in their word choice and even in conflict, exuding love and care. Some of them are extroverts and some of them are introverts; yet when you speak to these individuals, they do not always lead with what they think or believe. Instead, they pick up on the conversation and then have a way of helping you figure out what you need to do or say. Or in some cases, how you just need to live and let live, seeing how God has a way of handling the future.

I thought of these people in comparison to others who show less wisdom. These are people who are always talking about themselves whether it is in person or in other modes of communication. Their social media posts are either about their own greatness, or when you see them coming, you know whatever is happening in your life pales in comparison to either their greatness or their concerns; whatever they are feeling for the day. They may say the glory

belongs to God, yet you can tell what they truly seek is affirmation and their own validation from you or the world.

In the story of Daniel, the focus for him is not his own glory in the court of King Nebuchadnezzar. Instead, his focus is on the worship of his Lord, and then when calamity threatens the lives of others, he implores the Lord to help him guide and protect others. And when the calamity is avoided, Daniel is quick to praise the Lord and the narrative moves on to other challenges Daniel and his companions will face.

As we read the narrative of Daniel, we are given encouragement for how God will give us wisdom and direction. God will help us when we seek to live blamelessly and will show us the way when the clouds seem dense. And God is the one to whom all the glory will belong whenever we make our way out of whatever obstacles come our way. God is the one who is worthy of all honor and praise.

When was a time God gave you wisdom? Who are the wisest people you know? How do you think humility and wisdom tie together? Where have you seen God use a person to protect or help others? How can we give glory to God with our lives?

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