

May 7, 2006

“Honoring the LORD, Believing His Promises” Proverbs 3:9-10

FCF: The difficulty we have in really trusting the God we serve

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because of “the worthiness of God,”

(magnet) we should offer Him our wealth as an expression of ourselves.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

An interesting exercise in trust is falling into another’s arms. Perhaps you’ve done this yourself. Someone says to you, “*Turn around. I’m going to stand behind you and when I say ‘Go,’ I want you to fall backwards and I’ll catch you.*” It’s a bit unnerving for us. It seems risky. “*Can they catch me? Will they catch me?*” we wonder.

Our Lord is calling us to do the same. “*When I say ‘Go,’ I want you to fall backwards and I’ll catch you.*” Keep in mind He is Lord of all. Which means He’s able to catch us in all. And may well intend for us to trust Him in all as well. Including the areas we would rope Him off, the things as seemingly up to us as our money. He says “*Listen. I have more in mind for you than you think. And don’t worry. I’ll catch you.*”

SCRIPTURE READING: Proverbs 3:1-10

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

The Narnia Book Club just finished The Silver Chair this past week. It’s a great story. To escape from bullies at school, Eustace and Jill run through a door in a wall – and come out into another world. There Aslan has a job for them: to rescue Narnia’s lost prince. The only son of King Caspian, Prince Rillian disappeared in pursuit of a serpent, and no one in Narnia knows what happened to him. But Aslan gives Jill signs that – if she’s able to remember and follow carefully – will help her and Eustace find the lost prince. The children’s journey takes them through a land of dangerous giants and into underground caverns, where they finally encounter the Queen of Underland – and the knight she has enchanted. In this world far below the earth, the witch tries to convince them all that no other world exists. And with her lies and magic, she almost succeeds.

The effect of her lies and magic reminds me of the effect of postmodernism. Here too we can become blinded and numbed to what is real. We are told there is no ultimate truth, no “story” in the backdrop that explains it all. Thus there are no standards, no rules. And, hence, when it comes to money, no concept of “stewardship” as found in the Scriptures. After all, since it’s me and no one else, what I have is mine and no one else’s.

And into this fog come such passages as the one before us from Proverbs. Proverbs is filled with such promised blessings for a life lived for the LORD, all flowing from the well spring of trust in the LORD. You see something of that in verses 5 through 7 and the need to distinguish between trusting in the LORD and trusting in ourselves. Well, this flows over into the arena of finances as well. Here too we are to trust Him, to honor Him, to believe His promises. And prepare to be amazed at what He will do.

I. HONORING THE LORD

What, after all do we see here? First, a call to “honor” the LORD.

A) What It Means

(**READ Proverbs 3:9**) What does that mean, to honor the LORD?

1. To honor

In biblical terms, to “honor” someone is to acknowledge who they are and what they’ve done, to admire them and then to express that in some tangible, practical way.

2. To honor the LORD

To “honor the LORD” then is to acknowledge who He is as the Creator, Sustainer, Judge, and Redeemer of all mankind and to express this outwardly in praise and obedience.

B) *What It Involves*

Now this praise and obedience can take many different forms. One of which – the one we see here – has to do with applications to our finances. No small thing there.

1. With our wealth

We are to “honor” the LORD with our “wealth” – with all our possessions, with all our purchases, with the purposes for which we acquire and the uses we make of them.

2. With the firstfruits of all our produce

In fact, we are told to “honor” the LORD with the “firstfruits of all our produce.” This is a reference to the agrarian context of ancient Israel, to their worship and the cycles of the harvests. Each spring, at the beginning of the first harvest, they were called to offer up to Him the first ripening, the first crop, from which they were not to take (READ [Leviticus 23:9-11, 14](#)). Why? What was the thought behind this? It was an acknowledgement that the whole of the harvest to come was His. It was also an expression of thanks for the harvest, for what He had provided. Yes, they had labored hard but He had provided all.

Illustration:

Some of you have heard me mention this before – a scene from the movie, “Shenandoah.” Jimmy Stewart stars as Charlie Anderson, a Virginia farmer trying to keep his family out of the Civil War. After a long day’s work, the family gathers around the supper table and Charlie leads them with this prayer (READ [“Shenandoah” quote](#)):

Lord, we cleared this land, we plowed it, sowed it, and harvested it. We cooked the harvest. We wouldn't be here, we wouldn't be eatin', if we hadn't done it all ourselves. We worked dog-boned hard for every crumb and morsel, but we thank you just the same anyway, Lord, for the food we're about to eat. Amen.

Well, that’s not exactly what Proverbs is communicating. It’s the LORD who provides.

Application:

What Proverbs is communicating is a challenge to our impulses as we’re shopping through the Best Buy and Land’s End catalogs, assuming we have a right to the brightest, shiniest, new thing. It’s a challenge to how we make our vacation plans, to how much we think we should spend on the next car or the next home. It forces us to consider whose resources are those we are about to spend. Where did they come from? Where should they be going? Because the truth is that the LORD is worthy of being honored – here and everywhere else. And He is worthy of being honored with the firstfruits, all we have.

II. BELIEVING HIS PROMISES

And we are to do such radical things, believing in the radical promises He has made to us. Look now with me again at our text (READ [Proverbs 3:9-10](#)). Filled barns and bursting vats are clearly images of abundance. What does this mean?

A) *Not for Our Getting*

Is it what the TV preachers mean in their talk of how the LORD wants nothing for us but our health and wealth? That all we have to do is have enough faith to “name it and claim it?” Is God really just a great Santa Claus? No, this is not about our getting.

1. The nature of the proverbs

You need to understand the nature of the proverbs themselves. They are intended to be, as one scholar put it, “*snapshots of reality, generally true principals, but not promises.*” It’s the reality of the genre of proverbs. They are situation sensitive, not mechanical.

2. The nature of the relationship

That's the first thing. The second has to do with the nature of our relationship with the LORD. We can make no claims on Him. He is no man's debtor. In no way does He owe us because we have lived a certain way. In no way is this about our getting.

B) *But for Our Giving*

This is about our giving. This is about His promises to us and our trusting in those promises and acting upon them. John Piper puts it this way (READ Piper quote):

Let me stress that God is not promising to make generous Christians wealthy. He is promising to make generous Christians capable of even greater generosity.

1. Calming our fears

This promise is meant to calm our fears. Think back to the offering of firstfruits. It felt risky. This was not a regular paycheck. This was a crop. You had no accountant telling you how much the harvest would be. But they were to give it, to give it to the LORD, their covenant God, whose grace impelled such giving and whose promises freed it.

2. Meeting our giving

Verse ten is the impelling and freeing to carry out verse 9. And this is the case across the board in all the Christian life. God always supplies what He commands. He always supplies what He commands – including in our giving (READ 2 Corinthians 9:6-11).

Illustration:

The story is told of a farmer who was known for his generous giving. He was asked what his secret was. *"It is no secret,"* he replied. *"I keep shoveling into God's bin, and He keeps shoveling into mine. But God has a bigger shovel."*

Application:

This is not about a focus on the gifts but a focus on the Giver – what He is doing already and how He is calling us to “partner” with Him in this kingdom endeavor. This is not about our promise or challenge to the LORD – *“This is what I’ve said I’ll do so you’d better come through.”* No, this is about His promise and challenge to us – *“This is what I’ve promised to do through you. Will you trust me enough to give yet more?”*

Think back to how He’s provided for you. Think forward with the promises He’s made to you. Think of the abundance and fullness of His provision. And trust Him.

CONCLUSION:

Ours is to honor the LORD and to believe His promises. Ours is to rest in His arms. Let me take you back to that exercise in trust I mentioned earlier. Imagine you’ve initiated this with someone and they refuse. They just can’t bring themselves to do it. Now imagine how you’d feel. Hurt. Confused. *“What have I done that they won’t trust me?”* Now take this a step further. The LORD is calling us, in all things, to fall back into His arms. And we can’t bring ourselves to do it. What are we saying? Has He failed us in some way? What has He done that we won’t trust Him? Are His actions not clear enough, His promises not striking enough, His provision not full enough? (READ Romans 5:8) Our hearts may be filled with doubt, worry, and fear. But for no reason.

We’ve let the Queen of Underland, the witch’s spell come over us, blinding and numbing us to what’s real. When all the while, the one true living God, the LORD our God, stands before us with His arms extended, His promises true, and an invitation before us. *“Fall back into my arms, my child, and I will catch you. I will catch you, watch over you, and bless you.”* The only question before us is whether we will we honor the One who makes such promises. Will we trust Him enough to fall back into His arms?

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(magnet) we should offer Him our wealth as an expression of ourselves.