

Choices of the Heart

Proverbs 2:1-22, Matthew 7:13-14, 1 Kings 11:4-6, 1 Kings 11:11-12

Slide 1

I'm going to assume that you're familiar with the game show called "Let's Make a Deal." It's been on forever. The "contestants" are offered various "mystery prizes" from which to choose.

Some of the prizes are really amazing and some of the prizes... well, they're pretty lame. The "choice" is what makes the game entertaining; watching the contestant struggle with their greed, basically.

"Should I take what's behind the curtain? It could be something really big or should I take the little box in front of the host? It could be something really valuable."

Solomon, who wrote this particular proverb here in Chapter 2, knew about making choices since God gave him a choice.

1 Kings 3:5, *"At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."*

Can you imagine, just for a moment, what you would do if God made you such an offer? Well, Solomon's answer was pretty surprising.

He didn't ask for long life. He didn't ask for power or for wealth. He asked for "wisdom." The kind of wisdom that we find in the Book of Proverbs, which as you know, he wrote.

God was so pleased with Solomon's answer that He not only gave Solomon for what he asked, wisdom, but for what he didn't ask, "riches and honor," with stipulations.

If Solomon walked in God's way and kept God's statutes and commandments, God promised him not only riches and honor but a long life.

"If" Solomon chose to walk in God's way and keep God's statutes and commandments, "then" God would give him what was behind Door #1: wisdom, riches, honor, and long life.

Solomon did that, for a while, but... Let's get back to the game show. The beginning of Proverbs 2 says that we're to seek 'wisdom' like we'd seek silver or hidden treasure.

You may not know this, but the audience members of "Let's Make a Deal," those who dress up like Daffy Duck and other things, must audition to be a part of the audience.

They come "seeking," hoping to be selected to be a part of the audience. Once they're selected, then they "seek" and hope that the host will select them to compete for prizes.

Once they're chosen to compete, they "seek" to make the right choice, i.e. the money, or what's behind the curtain, or what's in the box, or behind Door #3. Then they hope to be chosen to compete for the big prize at the end.

Slide 2

What we "seek" reveals what we desire. We don't "seek" pain or suffering, at least I hope you don't. We don't seek misery or failure, right?

We "seek," or search for what our heart desires: fame, fortune, peace, joy, wealth, hope, popularity. Right?

When Solomon tells us to "seek" wisdom like a hidden treasure, he's speaking from experience.

He knows since he made that choice and received the rewards of choosing wisdom. He experienced them just as God had promised.

Now he's encouraging us to do the same thing; to choose what God has to offer over what the world has to offer.

The difference between what God's offering and what the host on "Let's Make a Deal" is offering, is that there's no mystery, no doubt about what choice we should make and why.

In verses 20-21, Solomon, speaking to us as a father would speak to his son, tells us to do the same thing: To "cry out" for insight, to "raise" our voices for understanding, to seek out Wisdom just like Wisdom is seeking us.

As I said earlier, "Let's Make a Deal" is based on making choices. Believe it or not, the words "if" and "then" are the very basis of the game.

"If" you pick Door #1, "then" you get... "If" you pick Door #2, "then" you get... This same thing is happening in Proverbs 2.

"If" you accept my words," says Solomon (v. 1) ...

"If" you treasure up my commandments within you (v.1) ...

"If" you make your ear attentive to wisdom" (v. 2) ...

"If" you incline your heart to understanding (v. 2) ...

"If" you indeed cry out for insight (v. 3) ...

"If" you raise your voice for understanding (v. 3) ...

"If" you seek wisdom (v. 4) ...

"THEN," you will understand the fear of the LORD. "Then," you will find the knowledge of God, but...

"If" you don't accept Solomon's words,

"If" you don't treasure up God's commandments,

“If” you aren’t attentive to wisdom,
“If” you don’t incline your heart to understanding,
“If” you don’t cry out for insight,
“If” you don’t raise your voice for understanding,
“If” you don’t seek wisdom like silver,

“THEN,” you’ll never understand the fear of the LORD, nor will you ever find the knowledge of God, and God really wants you to make the right choice.

When we choose “*wisdom*,” says God, He’ll pour His heart out to us and make His thoughts known to us.

“If” we seek His wisdom, says Solomon, God won’t only give us “*sound wisdom*” but He’ll shield those who walk blamelessly.

He’ll guard the paths of justice. He’ll preserve the way of His faithful one and “then,” we’ll understand righteousness and justice.

“Then” we’ll understand equity. “Then” we’ll understand and follow every good path, not the path of evil and be taken in by the lure of the world.

So long as we accept God’s Words, so long as we treasure up God’s commandments, so long as we incline our hearts to understanding, the LORD will give us “*sound*” wisdom.

He’ll shield us so long as we continue to walk blamelessly. He’ll guard the paths of justice and preserve the way of His faithful ones.

So long as we continue to seek wisdom, He’ll make it possible for us to understand righteousness and justice and we’ll be able to clearly see every good path.

And, as we continue to seek wisdom and travel down every good path, wisdom will come into our hearts, knowledge will be pleasant to our souls, prudence will watch over us, and understanding will guard us.

Slide 3

So, what's behind the door marked "Wisdom."

The Hebrew word for "sound wisdom" denotes clear, proficient thinking in the exercise of power that suggest stability, usefulness, confidence, and resilience.

I like the way that Solomon described it. Wisdom will come into our heart, knowledge will be pleasant to our soul, prudence or discretion will watch over us, and understanding will guard us.

When Solomon says that "*sound wisdom*" will come and dwell within our heart, he's describing God touching our heart, stirring us to the very core of our being, not tickling our ears like the world does.

"Prudence" or "discretion" is the capacity for private, hidden thought. That thought which comes from the wisdom that God has planted in our heart.

"Understanding" is the ability to bring heart and mind together so we don't make the wrong choice or go down the wrong paths of power or privilege.

Proverbs 2:12-15, "*Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse, who have left the straight paths to walk in dark ways, who delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil, whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways.*"

Without wisdom we can't tell nonsense from good advice. We'll be fooled by those who're good at fooling because they "*delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil.*"

Without the wisdom that comes from God, we're likely to walk with them on crooked paths and justify in our hearts our devious ways.

Slide 4

Just as Wisdom calls to us in the streets and in the squares, there's another voice calling us, the voice of Pleasure which Solomon describes as an "adulteress," a loose or strange alien woman.

When you pick what lies behind the door marked "Pleasure," says Solomon, you'll forget the promises you made to God in your youth.

With her smooth words, Pleasure will lead you down a path that ends in death.

Proverbs 2:18-19, "*Surely her house leads down to death and her paths to the spirits of the dead. None who go to her return or attain the paths of life.*"

In Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus, Wisdom Incarnate, advises us to enter through the narrow gate.

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

The few who find the narrow gate don't find it by blind luck. They don't find it by stumbling upon it. They find it, says Solomon, because they have wisdom.

They have God's knowledge, God's prudence, God's insight, and God's understanding guiding them, protecting them, shielding them, and watching over them.

Wisdom, says Biblical scholar M. V. Fox, *"will protect you from the temptations of the wicked man and woman, because when they try to seduce you to their ways, you will be able to look inward, maintain independence of thought, and stand up to their enticements."*

The voice of the "adulteress," this strange or alien woman is smooth but it's not as powerful or as convincing as the voice of Wisdom.

But you can't listen to the voice of Wisdom if you don't seek the voice of Wisdom.

Imagine that you're playing the ultimate version of "Let's Make a Deal" and God presents you with three choices. A small box labeled "Wisdom," Door #1 labeled Power, and Door #2 labeled Pleasure.

Now it's time for you to choose. Voices from the audience shout, "Pick Power," others shout, "Pick Pleasure."

You look at the little box, then you look at the two big doors... you go with the little box. You go with Wisdom. The crowd groans.

"Okay," says the Lord of Hosts, *"before we show you what's in the box, let's see what's behind Door #1 and Door #2."*

You hold your breath as Door #1, Power, opens. The crowd gasps. It's a brand-new car and not just any car but the car of your dreams.

Everything about the car is perfect, the make, the style, the color. A few in the audience chuckle because they would've chosen Door #1 and gotten the car, you didn't.

You look at the box and begin to wonder if you made the right choice. What if there's nothing but air in the box?

At this point, an angel walks over to the car, touches it, and it falls over. You and the audience gasp in surprise. It turns out that it wasn't a car but just a picture of a car.

The Lord of Hosts smiles: *"I told you what was behind Door #1, Power. Nothing but vain, empty promises. Let's see what's behind Door #2, Pleasure."*

The curtain goes up and out steps the most stunning and beautiful person that you've ever seen. Your jaw drops.

The audience "ohs" and "ahs." Then the angel walks over and removes a mask that's hiding a scarred, grotesque face. The audience draws back in horror.

The room falls silent as the Lord of Hosts prepares to open the box marked "Wisdom." For some reason, it looks a lot smaller than it did before. You hold your breath.

The Lord opens the box and it contains the knowledge, the understanding, the insight that's truly pleasant to your soul.

This knowledge will shield you, protect you, watch over you, guide you, and keep you from the way of evil, and save you from the adulteress with her smooth words.

"All this wisdom is yours," says the Lord of Hosts, *"so long as you accept my words, so long as you treasure or store up my commands within you, so long as you keep turning your ear to wisdom, so long as you keep inclining or applying your heart to understanding."*

Proverbs 2:21-22, *“For the upright will live in the land, and the blameless will remain in it; but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the unfaithful will be torn from it.”*

Slide 5

Conclusion

As long as Solomon treasured up God’s commandments, so long as he listened to Wisdom, so long as he sought wisdom and understanding like hidden treasure or silver, he was able to walk upright, blamelessly.

Prudence watched over him until he began listening to the smooth words and seductive voice of the adulteress.

1st Kings 11:4, 6, *“As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done.”*

Because he began to worship the gods of his wives, *“The LORD said to Solomon, “Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son.”* (1st Kings 11:11-12).

When we make the right choice, when we make what should be the obvious choice, this is what we win or, more accurately, this is what Jesus won for us... our salvation.

Our salvation is the greatest treasure. It’s worth more than all the silver, all the power, and all the pleasure that the world has to offer.