

Practical Wisdom for Righteous Living

Highlights from the Wisdom of Sirach

I. Introduction

- a. Very practical lesson on how to live a Godly life! We will cover
 - i. overcoming temptation,
 - ii. not getting pulled into the world/sin/unrighteousness,
 - iii. honoring our parents, and
 - iv. eating.
- b. I will be sharing some treasures from the Wisdom of Sirach, perhaps an introduction for some to this book.
 - i. Wisdom of Sirach is one of the intertestamental books (Apocrypha), which were included in both Catholic and Protestant Bibles up until the 1880s, when these books were removed from the Protestant Bibles.
 - ii. Timeline:
 - 382 AD: Jerome's Latin Vulgate Manuscripts are produced, which contain all 80 books (39 Old Testament books+ 14 intertestamental books + 27 New Testament books).
 - 1384 AD: Wycliffe produces his hand-written Bible manuscript, includes all 80 Books.
 - 1455 AD: Gutenberg invents the printing press; Bibles may now be mass-produced. Includes all 80 books.
 - 1611 AD: the King James Bible is printed; contains all 80 books.
 - 1880s: the Apocrypha is removed from the Protestant Bibles, leaving only 66 books. Catholic Bibles still include these books.
 - iii. Whether you understand the intertestamental books to be part of the Biblical Canon (and inspired by the Spirit of God) or not, they contain wonderful wisdom and history of God's people.
- c. Read **Wisdom of Sirach 1 Prologue**
 - i. Jesus ben Sirach was a man who studied the Law and the Prophets diligently. His writings are similar in style to Proverbs and cover many different topics, providing wisdom in handling practical areas of our lives.

- ii. Sirach wrote in Hebrew. His grandson found his grandfather's writings and translated them into Greek, where they found a broader audience.
- iii. Purpose of the book:
 - 1. to provide wisdom and instruction
 - 2. that lovers of wisdom "might live a life according to the law."
 - 3. "those who love learning should be able to help outsiders understand both through speaking and writing."
(evangelism!)
- d. Today's lesson format:
 - i. Share some of my favorite passages from the Wisdom of Sirach
 - ii. We will ask where Sirach may have obtained this wisdom from the Old Testament Scriptures, of which he was such a student.
 - iii. We will see if this wisdom is found in the New Testament with application to us as Christians.

II. **Wisdom if You Desire to Draw Near to Serve the Lord**

- a. I hope we all fall into this category! Some things you should know if this is your desire, intent, and life.
- b. Read **Wisdom of Sirach 2:1-11**
- c. "My son, if you draw near to serve the Lord..." (he gives several commands, I will focus on just three of these)
 - i. **"Prepare your soul for temptation"**
 - 1. Job
 - a. "There was a man in the land of Ausitis whose name was Job. That man was true, blameless, righteous, and God-fearing, and he abstained from every evil thing."
 - i. A man truly committed to righteousness!
 - b. God to Satan: "Have you considered my servant Job...?"
 - i. Temptation comes from Satan. God does not tempt, but allows Satan to tempt.
 - ii. Demonstrates God's confidence in Job, that he will be faithful and overcome.

- iii. When we are facing temptation, we have God's full confidence that we can overcome!
 - c. We need to be spiritually prepared, not surprised, expect significant temptation as we become more devoted to the Lord.
 - ii. **"Accept whatever is brought upon you"**
 - 1. and in your humiliation, "be patient"
 - 2. As gold is tested in fire, so an acceptable man (to God!) in "the furnace of abasement."
 - iii. **"hope for good things and for everlasting gladness and mercy"**
 - 1. Placing our confidence, hope, sights on the good things to come, our eternal reward.
- d. Sirach alludes to examples (in the Old Testament)
 - i. "Consider the ancient generations..." (vs. 10) (see chapters 44-50, describing Old Testament heroes)
 - ii. Sirach asks some great questions!
 - 1. Who believed and was put to shame?
 - 2. Who stood fast in His fear and was forsaken?
 - 3. Or who called upon Him and was overlooked?
 - iii. Many Old Testament examples. A favorite of mine: Joseph (from **Genesis**)
 - 1. A man used by God to save the nation of Israel (and surrounding nations) from a 7-year famine.
 - 2. Faces temptation, demonstrates acceptance/patience, and great hope.
 - 3. Consider his circumstances:
 - a. Brothers throw him into a pit to kill him
 - b. Instead, sell him as a slave, telling his father he died
 - c. Falsely accused of trying to seduce Potiphar's wife and wrongly imprisoned
 - d. Forgotten in prison for years
 - 4. Consider the temptations

- a. Anger, hatred, vengeance, despair, worldliness
 - b. Yet, at each turn, he appears to accept his situation, make the most of it, demonstrate integrity, persevering through the trial.
 - c. God works to raise him up into important positions of authority, ultimately to sit at the right hand of Pharaoh, responsible for executing the operations plan to save Egypt and the surrounding nations from famine.
 - d. God uses this to accomplish His purposes with His people, the Jews.
5. It's a very long story. Two key passages:
- a. "Then it came to pass after these things that his lord's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, 'Lie with me.' But he refused and said to his lord's wife, 'Look, my lord does not know what is with me in the house and has committed all he has to my hand. There is no one greater in the house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?'" (**Genesis 39:7-9**)
 - i. Joseph is a righteous man, when many would have thrown in the towel.
 - b. "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold to Egypt. Now therefore, do not be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to save life. ... For God sent me before you to preserve you as a remnant on the earth, and to sustain you as a great remnant. So now, it was not you who sent me here, but God...." (**Genesis 45:4-8**)
 - i. Joseph sees God's hand working in all this evil.
 - c. Consider also that at the time of his death in Egypt, Joseph instructs his brothers to keep his bones and bring them back to the land promised to them by their fathers. (**Genesis 50:22-26**) Joseph is hoping for the fulfillment of the promise given to Abraham, that Israel will inherit a special land. (For more about Joseph's bones, see *Crossing the Red Sea* (Exodus 13:17-14:31), by Chuck Pike at www.walking-by-faith.org Exodus series.

- d. Joseph, a righteous man, encounters difficult challenges and wickedness done to him. He sees God's hand working in all. Joseph is
 - i. Prepared for temptation,
 - ii. Patient in affliction, and
 - iii. Hopes for good things.
- e. New Testament Teaching
 - i. Read **1 Peter 5:6-11**
 - 1. prepared for temptation (your adversary, like a roaring lion)
 - 2. acceptance of sufferings (being experienced by all the brothers)
 - 3. be strengthened as we are called "to His eternal glory"

III. Don't Be Double-Minded

- a. Read **Wisdom of Sirach 2:12-18**
 - i. Sirach just described those who put their full trust in God.
 - ii. Now he gives the woes to those who don't: to the cowardly, weak, unbelieving.
 - iii. He says they are "*sinner who walk on two paths*".
 - iv. What is this about?
- b. New Testament
 - i. **James 1:8**
 - 1. A person who asks God for wisdom must believe He will give it. If he doubts, he is a "double-minded man, unstable in all his ways"
 - ii. **James 4:1-10**
 - 1. Speaks of the sin that is within us: lust, murder, self-seeking, adulterers!
 - 2. Problem: friendship with the world is enmity (hatred) toward God. A friend of the world = an enemy of God
 - 3. "purify your hearts, you "double-minded"

4. Those walking on “two paths”, those who are “double-minded” seem to be
 - a. Christians divided in their mind and heart
 - b. Those walking in “two paths” – trying to walk in both the ways of God and the ways of the world
 - c. According to Sirach and James, this does not work! Results in becoming an enemy of God, unbelieving, cowardly, weak.
- c. Where did Sirach get this wisdom about being double-minded?
- i. Many possibilities. I thought of a few.
 1. Saul
 - a. Samuel, the prophet, told Saul: “Now go and strike down Amelek and Jerim and all of his things, and take nothing from him. You shall utterly destroy him.”
 - b. Saul does not obey. Takes the king alive and the king’s possessions.
 2. Read **1 Kingdoms 15:17-26 (1 Samuel 15:17-26)**
 3. “For the sake of the people, I listened to their voice, but I also went in the ways the Lord sent me.”
 4. “That sin is one and the same as divination.”
 5. “Because you rejected the word of the Lord, the Lord rejects you from remaining king over Israel” (vs. 23, repeats in vs. 26)
 - ii. Lot’s wife
 1. Story of Lot and his wife in **Genesis 19**
 2. **Luke 17:28-33**
 - a. “Remember Lot’s life.”
 - b. Jesus discussing judgment; compares it to the days of Lot when people were eating, drinking, buying, selling; it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, destroying them all.
 - c. Lot is told to take his wife, daughters and their husband and escape.

- d. The angels tell them something very simple: “Escape for your life! Do not look behind you....!”
- e. But Lot’s wife looks back to Sodom [her way of life?] and turns into a pillar of salt.
- f. What was the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah?
 - i. “Surely this was the lawless action of your sister Sodom, namely, arrogance. For in fullness of bread and abundance of wine, she and her daughter lied in self-indulgence. This belonged to her and her daughters, but they did not give a helping hand to the poor and needy.” (**Ezekiel 16:49**)
 - ii. Lot’s wife: a life of self-indulgence, which she was not ready to flee from?!
 - iii. This self-indulgence also led to sexual depravity, including homosexuality. (**Jude 7**)

3. “On account of his hospitality and godliness, Lot was saved out of Sodom when all the country round was punished by means of fire and brimstone, the Lord thus making it manifest that He does not forsake those that hope in Him, but gives up such as depart from Him to punishment and torture. **For Lot’s wife, who went forth with him, being of a different mind from himself and not continuing in agreement with him** [as to the command which had been given them], was made an example of, so as to be a pillar of salt unto this day. **This was done that all might know that those who are of a double mind, and who distrust the power of God, bring down judgment on themselves, and become a sign to all succeeding generations.**”

- a. Clement of Alexandria, (30-100 A.D., Bishop of Rome writing to the church in Corinth; ANF 1.8)
- b. Ultimately, being double-minded is about distrusting the power of God; resulting in condemnation.
- c. Just as Lot’s wife was a sign to all, we will be a sign to future generations if we are double-minded and are destroyed.

iii. Contrast the double-mindedness of Saul and Lot’s Wife with Daniel

- 1. “Now when Daniel learned that the decree was posted, he entered his house, where the windows facing Jerusalem were

open to him in the upper rooms, and he knelt down on his knees three times that day and prayed and gave thanks to his God, as he was doing before.” **(Daniel 6:11)**

- a. Completely disregarded the king’s decree
- b. Prays out loud in a room with windows open to his enemies
- c. Gives thanks... *just as he was doing before.*
- d. Single-minded obedience, devotion, fearlessness, let the chips fall where they will!

iv. Jesus on double-mindedness

1. “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” **(Matthew 6:19-34)**
2. “I do not receive honor from men. But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you. I have come in My Father’s name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?” **(John 5:41-44)**

d. Dealing with Double-Mindedness (from **James 4**)

i. Commands:

1. Lament, mourn and weep (recognize and be concerned)
2. Repent! (Purify your hearts, you “double-minded”, cleanse your hands.)

ii. Promises

1. Draw near to God; He will draw near to you.
2. Humble yourself before the Lord, and He will lift you up.

IV. Honor Your Parents

a. **Wisdom of Sirach 7:27-28**

- i. Honor your parents who birthed you. You owe them everything!
- ii. Some of us have parents who are living, some of us don’t. As we will see, we can honor our parents both during their lifetimes and after their deaths.

- b. Read **Wisdom of Sirach 3:1-16**
- c. Promises/Blessings & Curses
 - i. Honoring your father (and your kindness to him)
 - 1. will not be forgotten,
 - 2. will be remembered in your day of affliction,
 - 3. will be credited to you instead of your sins, your sins will melt away (at judgment/death?)
 - 4. leads to honor from your own children
 - 5. brings long life (eternal life?)
 - 6. leads to your prayers being heard!
 - a. (This reminds me of **1 Peter 3:7** – dwelling with your wife with understanding, give honor to her... “that your prayers may not be hindered”)
 - ii. Honoring mother
 - 1. storing up future treasure
 - 2. (and reducing treasure here – time and \$?)
- d. The Lord honors parents over their children; He takes it personally if we don't!
 - i. *He who forsakes his father is like a blasphemer (of God).*
 - ii. *He who provokes his mother to wrath is cursed by God.*
 - iii. *He who obeys the Lord will give rest to his mother.*
 - iv. *He will serve his parents as his masters. (As if serving the Lord?)*
 - v. Reminds me of **Matthew 25**: “whatever you did for the least of these, you did for me”
- e. Sirach gives us some commands
 - i. Do not glory in the dishonor of your father
 - ii. Help your father in his old age, do not grieve him
 - iii. Be considerate (if his understanding fails)
 - iv. Honor parents “in word and deed”
- f. Another benefit: remembering our parents keeps us humble!

- i. Read **Wisdom of Sirach 23:14**
 - ii. Remember your father and mother when you are doing things you consider to be quite important.
 - iii. This will keep you humble, in your proper place, where God wants you!
- g. Does Sirach's admonitions fit with the rest of Scripture?
- i. Read **Matthew 15:1-9**
 - 1. Jesus quotes **Exodus 20** and **Deuteronomy 5**. Calls the Pharisees out as hypocrites:
 - a. they honor [God!] with lips but are not honoring God (or their parents) by their deeds.
 - b. they are not taking care of their parents, not honoring them, and not honoring God!
- h. This command still stands, not changed with any New Testament teaching.
- i. **Ephesians 6:1-3**
 - ii. God's command to honor our parents means exactly what it always meant!
 - iii. Honoring our parents in word
 - 1. What do our words communicate about our parents?
 - 2. Are they honored by our words (whether alive or if they have died)?
 - 3. They are/were not perfect. Perhaps very flawed. We still honor them.
 - iv. Honoring our parents in deed. We are to provide for our parents:
 - 1. Financially
 - 2. Help with physical needs (as they grow older and need help with health, chores, daily activities, etc.)
 - 3. Emotionally – staying connected, encouraging.
 - 4. Getting practical:
 - a. Trips, travel, visits (Chuck visiting his mother)
 - b. Letters, notes

- c. Money, vacation time
- v. Sirach says honoring our parents leads to future reward, long life, sins atoned for!
 - 1. Honoring our parents is very important to God!

V. Eating

- a. Read **Wisdom of Sirach 31:12-22**
- b. Lots of good tips here:
 - i. Don't gaze upon a table of food! (Don't have a "greedy eye"/don't be greedy with food)
 - ii. Don't reach for everything you see
 - iii. Don't eat fast (devour)/eat like a human!
 - iv. Be the first to stop eating (for the sake of discipline)
 - v. Show good manners, wait for others when in a large group
 - vi. You will sleep better if you eat in moderation
 - vii. "How small amount is sufficient for a man with discipline."
 - viii. "If you are stuffed with food, get up in the middle of the meal and stop eating."
- c. New Testament
 - i. Read **1 Corinthians 6:12-20**
 - ii. Principles:
 - 1. Body is the temple of the Holy Spirit
 - a. We don't want to grieve the Holy Spirit
 - b. God will raise up our bodies just like He raised up Jesus' body.
 - 2. Christians should not be mastered/brought under the power of anything: lust, eating, etc.
 - a. The body is not for sexual immorality (or for eating), but for the Lord. The Lord is the master, and we are to use our bodies for His purposes. (He allows sex within marriage; He allows eating and enjoyment of eating. But we don't go beyond what He allows, nor are mastered by these things.)

- b. Even the pagans recognize: “We don’t live to eat, we eat to live.”
- 3. “For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”
 - a. You were bought at the cost of Jesus’ death/blood.
 - b. You are not your own; you belong to God.
 - c. Therefore: ***glorify God*** in your body.
 - i. Does what I am putting in my mouth glorify God?
 - ii. How can eating glorify God?
 1. Self-discipline/self-control
 2. Not being mastered
 3. Living simply – giving more to others
 4. Not harming my body (overweight, bad diet, high blood pressure/cholesterol, etc.)
 5. Staying healthy, strong, caring for the body God gave me in order to do His work.