

August 23, 2015

Pro. 15:22; 16:9; 19:20-21; 27:1; Lk. 14:25-33; Ja. 4:13-17

Wisdom of Proverbs: Planning and the Future

This morning we are going to talk about the importance of planning and how that affects our future as it concerns the will of the Lord in our lives.

Jesus told his disciples that if they were going to follow him then they must count the cost before they make the commitment. Part of counting the cost involves planning. If a man is going to build something he must first sit down and determine whether or not he is going to have the resources and materials to complete the project. If he jumps in and starts building without figuring these things out then he will fail.

Likewise a king who sets out to go to war against his enemy must first sit down and determine whether or not he has the troops and the firepower to win the war before he attacks, otherwise he will be defeated.

The Bible is full of good and poor examples of planning. A good example of planning is the concentric circle plan for evangelizing the world that we see in the book of Acts. The risen Christ told his disciples that they were to stay in Jerusalem until the gift of the Holy Spirit was given to them and then they would receive power to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, and Jerusalem.

The book of Acts then tells the story of the early church spreading the gospel according to that plan. First, they started in Jerusalem, the holy city. Then they branched out a bit farther into the Region of Judea. Next the disciples pushed further out into the regions of Samaria, and then finally Paul and his co-workers began to push westward to the ends of the earth.

And when you look at the three missionary journeys that Paul took in the book of Acts you will see that there was a method to his madness. He would plant churches but then he would return to them later on another journey in order to regroup them and encourage them and to use them as a springboard to go further with the gospel. And as he would go into each town he would always go first to the Jewish synagogue to preach the gospel because he himself was Jewish and he knew the gospel was to go first to them because they were the benefactors of God's covenant promises. And then after Paul did that, usually with a fair amount of rejection, he would then go out into the marketplace with the gospel, taking it to the gentiles.

Paul's missionary journeys were highly successful and they would forever change the course of human history and the reason they were was because he had a plan and he worked his plan.

An example of poor planning in the Bible would be the parable of the Ten Bridesmaids that Jesus told about his return at the end of the age.

That day would be like the day the ten bridesmaids went out to meet the bridegroom. Each woman took their lamps full of oil with them but only five of the women took extra oil in case the bridegroom was delayed. The bridegroom indeed was delayed and so the women fell asleep, but then at midnight the bridegroom came and when the women woke up to light their lamps to go meet him five of the women discovered they were running low on oil. Those women asked the other ladies if they could borrow some of their oil and they told them they did not have enough

and that they needed to hurry to town and buy some more oil. They did that but while they were gone the bridegroom arrived and took the five bridesmaids who had oil to the wedding banquet and shut the door. When the other five women who went to get oil arrived at the banquet they could not get in, it was too late. That's what the Day of the Lord will be like. Some will be prepared because they have planned and they will make it to the wedding banquet but others did not plan and they will be left in the dark for eternity.

Planning is absolutely crucial for the success of any endeavor. Without a plan you will fail and drift in whatever it is you are doing. I have experienced a bit of this in my preaching through Proverbs.

As the congregation knows after sitting under my preaching for six years, usually I chronologically preach through a whole book of the Bible in its entirety. This is a great way to preach because it teaches the congregation that the Bible is the Word of God in its entirety and when you don't omit any of the texts the congregation learns that- or at least they learn that the preacher believes that! The congregation is also taken through the highs and lows of the text, the mundane and the exciting, the simple and the complex, the comforting and the challenging parts of the text. As for me, I don't have to wonder what I am going to preach on next week. That has already been determined, not by ideas I dream up in my head, but by the Word of God.

But the Proverbs are different. I am not preaching through the whole book of Proverbs. If did I would either end up preaching a thousand different sermons because there are so many different proverbs and the proverbs, for the most part, stand-alone by themselves, unrelated to the ones that come before or after them. Or I could preach through the whole book of proverbs with fewer sermons but have a hundred different points in each one of them.

So what I have done instead of that is I have selected some of the main themes that emerge over and over again in the Proverbs and have decided to do sermons on them. But where my planning has broken down is in ordering those central themes. I have pretty much chosen what order I would go in from week to week and I have made life difficult for Brad and Sarah. I have not planned well, but I am working on it.

Sue and I met last week to look at the rest of the calendar for the year in order to determine what Sundays she will preach on this fall, how many more sermons I will do from proverbs, and how many Sundays that leaves left before the Advent/Christmas season and how those Sundays will be filled because next year I am going to do a series of sermons that takes us through the big themes and stories of the Bible in a whole year. So when we met we hammered out some of this and then after our meeting I got the rest of it hammered out. I feel a lot better than I did a couple of weeks ago because I resolved some of this through planning this week.

There are many things that we need to plan for in life. There are retirement plans that need to be made, plans to be made concerning our own deaths, budget plans, career plans, exercise plans, and eating plans, and most importantly plans to grow spiritually in the Lord.

If we don't do planning in these and other areas of our lives we will end up like the five bridesmaids who ran out of oil or we will be like the people in the days of Noah who were carrying on in life

eating, drinking, and getting married, totally oblivious to what Noah was doing and then when the floods came they were wiped out. We must plan but not only that we would do well to plan with people who can help us in life.

The proverbs teach over and over again that “without counsel plans go wrong, but with many advisors plans succeed.” (15:22)

Don't come to me for retirement and investment planning, that's not my area of expertise, but you could go to Jim Staples or Scott Thompson. If there is an area of your life that you need some help in planning go to someone who is gifted and trained in that area and seek their counsel- and there are areas in every person's life that need planning.

There is one other thing that we need to remember as it concerns making plans in life, and it is probably the most important thing that we need to remember. God is sovereign and we would do well to recognize that and not become arrogant in our planning.

Fools make plans without God in sight and this is what James is talking about when he talks about people making grandiose plans to go to this place or that place to do business in this or that town to make money. James says how can you do this when you don't even know what tomorrow may bring? Your life is but a mist. You are here today and gone tomorrow. Instead we ought to say that if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or do that.

So as we plan for whatever it is we need to plan for in life we as Christians must always be humble and not arrogant and do so with the view in sight that our plans are subservient to the Lord's and that as we make our plans it is not we who are sovereign but it is God. We make plans but God controls our lives. This is what the proverbs teach us. “Man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.” (16:9)

When we realize and embrace this this it becomes a very freeing thing for us because we can live in the confidence that our lives are in God's hands, in both life and in death, and that not a single hair can fall from our heads apart from the will of our Father in Heaven, as the Heidelberg catechism teaches us. So plan well with God and in God and know that God is in the driver's seat. Your life is in God's hands and you have nothing to fear if you are in the Lord.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.