

Dr. August Konkell, Proverbs, Session 6

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This is Dr. August Konkell in his teaching on the book of Proverbs. This is session number six, Wisdom as a Tree of Life. Proverbs 3.13-20.

Welcome to our lectures on Proverbs.

We've discussed a number of the little talks that the parent has with the child in terms of wisdom for life, what it is to follow, and the way of wisdom that you may come to the end of having a life that you want to have. But these talks are interrupted by various interludes. One of these interludes happens in Proverbs chapter three, and it's verses 13 to 20, where wisdom is called a tree of life.

Now, this picture of wisdom as a tree of life is one that bears some pondering because the tree of life is going to appear again in Proverbs as we shall see in our future lectures. But also, the concept of the Tree of Life as being something that's simply fundamental to all of the ways that God has ordered his creation and our life to function within it is something that can be called wisdom. And we're going to come to that in chapter eight.

So, this little section in Proverbs chapter three, verses 13 to 20, is in fact related to the future chapters. Now, the idea of a tree of life does not begin in Proverbs. It is introduced here as defining those who are blessed.

As we shall see, those who are blessed are those who have learned wisdom, those who have learned the kind of character that is approved by God. They are the ones who are called blessed. They are the ones who have wisdom, and wisdom here is more precious than pearls.

She's more desirable than silver. She grants you a long life. She is a tree of life.

In verse 18, to all those who grasp her, she is, all those who find her, that is all who those who find wisdom are those that can be described as blessed. This is a very special category. It applies only to the wise.

That is those who know the fear of the Lord. Others are not blessed. Just these are the ones who are blessed.

So why a tree of life? I want us to go back a little bit in thinking about this tree of life in the Bible because there is a tree of life in the past. There's a tree of life in the future, but there's a tree of life in the present, and that is wisdom. Now the tree of

the life in the past we know about from Genesis chapter 2. God planted two trees in the midst of the garden, the tree of life and the tree of knowledge.

Now the tree of life was to always tell us that God is the source of life, all life. The universe teems with life, but life is not innate to the universe. The universe apart from the life that God gives us is merely minerals.

It is nothing else. The life that God gives is something that makes all the world of the common more than just substance and minerals, whether it's plants, animals, or people. But in the garden for people, there was to always be a reminder.

Life is not something that you innately possess or that you can control. Life is something that comes from God, and as we learn in Psalm 104, God granted breath by breath or heartbeat by heartbeat. Now the tree of knowledge, as we've already mentioned, was defined as a knowledge of knowing what is good or a knowledge of everything.

And this of course we don't have. So, if we seek to lay hold of this tree of knowledge and as the serpent said, try to become as God, knowing good and evil, that's when we're going to go off into the wrong path. There is a tree of life in the future.

And of course, we read about that in Revelation, and that is the conclusion of all of our revelation which comes from God. And the conclusion of all of our revelation essentially is the fulfillment and the completion of that which God began. And we read about that in Revelation chapter 22, where there is a river and beside the river is the tree of life and it yields its fruit for every month of the year.

In other words, there's no death. Life is continuous. It's accessible.

It's a tree that's accessible for those that God has redeemed, those that he has given life, and those that have the washed garments. And it's derived from the words of truth, which is what John emphasizes over and over again. So denial of this truth is a denial of access to the tree of life.

But in the present, we have a blessedness described there as you see it by the Hebrew word, asherah. That's the very first word of verse 13. Now, this also the very first word of Psalm chapter 1 verse 1, where it says, blessed is the person who does not walk in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of the scorner, but whose delight is in the instruction of the Lord, the person who thinks on this, meditates on it, continuously it governs their mind.

So, what is asherah? What is that blessedness describing? It's describing a character. It's describing a kind of person, the kind of person who avoids the seat of the

scorner, who's referred to quite often in Proverbs, and who chooses the Torah, the teaching of God, so his life, in fact, her life become fruitful. That's that blessedness.

And Jesus chooses that word to talk about his kingdom. What kind of person qualifies to be in his kingdom? Well, he uses the word blessed in a modern Hebrew translation of the New Testament. Asherah is naturally the word they would use.

We don't have the equivalent quite in Greek, but especially we don't have it in English. So, in Greek, it's makaras, and we sometimes call these makarisms, these descriptions that Jesus gives of saying this is the kind of person that's blessed. And who are they? The poor in spirit.

In other words, they don't think they have access to all knowledge and can decide for themselves which is good. They mourn. Why? Because they know that they aren't always doing that which is good.

They are meek because they're submissive. They have the fear of the Lord. They hunger after righteousness.

That's what Proverbs, of course, is describing. So, this is the blessedness of this tree. This tree yields this blessedness if we can grasp it.

And as we find out in Proverbs 3 verses 19 and 20, it is wisdom that enables us to understand God's world. It is in wisdom that the Lord laid the foundations of the world that he established the heavens in understanding. It is in his knowledge that the deeps were formed and the clouds from above give their dew.

In other words, the mystery of the whole working of the natural order that we know is part of this order that God himself created, and that can be described as wisdom. That which God has ordered for the way in which life should be. Now this idea of a tree of life is something that became a symbol for what it meant to know Torah, a symbol for what it meant to follow the path of life and to follow the path of righteousness.

And so, it is symbolized by a menorah. Now as you can see in this photo, the menorah was the lamp that was in the temple. And the lamp in the temple was really a collection of seven lamps.

And in the total of all seven, there was the provision of life. And of course, when you see it there, it looks something like a tree. So really this tree symbolized what Jewish people believed gave life.

Now, as most of us know from history, in about the year 70 after Christ, the conqueror Titus, the General Titus came to Jerusalem and destroyed it. And the

result was that all Jews were banned from living in Jerusalem. That city was forbidden to them.

It was a way of crushing forever the Jewish resistance movement. And in recognition of that, there is to this day, the Arch of Titus in Rome. And this of course is an entryway, a symbolic kind of entryway that was built in order to honor the Roman victory over Jerusalem.

And what depicts the Jewish people and what depicts Jerusalem on this arch is a menorah, which is a representation of this tree of life or a representation of what Proverbs here says is wisdom, the wisdom of knowing how to live. So, we sometimes think that we've lost the tree of life. Well, yes, because we have chosen to be like God, knowing good and evil, it's a universal response that we have within us.

We no longer have access to that tree of life, but God has found a way to redeem us, wash our garments, and bring us back to that tree of life as we see in the book of Revelation. But in the meantime, there is a tree of life and it's found right here. It's found in the teaching of the wise who say that if you stay on this path, the end will be life.

If we stray from that path, the end is death. As Moses said, I set before you life and death.

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