

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

Proverbs 31:10-31

^{31:10} A capable wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. ¹¹ The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. ¹² She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life. ¹³ She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. ¹⁴ She is like the ships of the merchant, she brings her food from far away. ¹⁵ She rises while it is still night and provides food for her household and tasks for her servant girls. ¹⁶ She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. ¹⁷ She girds herself with strength, and makes her arms strong. ¹⁸ She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night. ¹⁹ She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle. ²⁰ She opens her hand to the poor, and reaches out her hands to the needy. ²¹ She is not afraid for her household when it snows, for all her household are clothed in crimson. ²² She makes herself coverings; her clothing is fine linen and purple. ²³ Her husband is known in the city gates, taking his seat among the elders of the land. ²⁴ She makes linen garments and sells them; she supplies the merchant with sashes. ²⁵ Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come. ²⁶ She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. ²⁷ She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. ²⁸ Her children rise up and call her happy; her husband too, and he praises her: ²⁹ "Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all." ³⁰ Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. ³¹ Give her a share in the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the city gates.

Commentary

This is an ancient wisdom poem directed toward young Israelite men about the woman who is a capable, good or perfect wife. However, the Hebrew literally means "a woman of worth." In ancient Israel "worth" was usually applied to capable men at the height of their power. This term used for a woman during this time would have immediately caught the attention of the men reading it. It was not rare for women of extremely high (or low) status in ancient Israel to enjoy more public freedom than the average woman. Still, the ultimate worth of her work is that it contributes to her husband's good name, gaining him respect in public places of power and influence. This unusual portrait of a woman of worth provides a needed corrective to

common biblical portrayals of women as “loose,” “seductive,” and “dangerous” beings who lead men astray, sap their strength, disrupt their lives, and ruin their fortunes.

Reflection

Do you personally find value in their wisdom poem? Why or why not? What is the relative influence of our culture and our faith on the gifts and goals we most value?

James 3:13 - 4:3, 7-8a

^{3:13} Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. ¹⁵ Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. ¹⁶ For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace. ^{4:1} Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? ² You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures. ⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

Commentary

James begins with a rhetorical question meant to remind his readers that everyone continually must choose whether to live by the wisdom of the world or the wisdom of God. James speaks to the “double-minded” Christian who tries to live by both kinds of wisdom at once. James calls them to convert, to become single-minded, especially dealing with arrogance and envy. He offers them three assurances: If they resist evil, evil will flee from them; if they draw near to God, God will draw near to them; if they humble themselves before God, God will raise them up.

Reflection

How does envy cause us to compete for our own worth and our very existence? How is pride related to envy?

Mark 9:30-37

^{9:30} They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; ³¹ for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." ³² But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him. ³³ Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" ³⁴ But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. ³⁵ He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." ³⁶ Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

Commentary

This is the second of three passion predictions of Jesus, and it is immediately followed by a teaching about what it means to be a disciple. Some believe it was simply Jesus' self-effacing way of referring to himself as a human being. Others believe Jesus took the image from the apocalyptic literature of the Hebrew scriptures. Still other scholars believe that Jesus used "Son of Man" to describe a future transcendent salvific figure, not himself. No one really knows how early Christians would have heard the phrase "Son of Man," given its several connotations. While the disciples were afraid to question Jesus' prediction about the Son of Man, they immediately demonstrated a lack of understanding of its implications when they began to argue among themselves about who was the greatest. This story may reflect the disciples' actual struggles for position and power right after Jesus' death, and it certainly had a strong impact on the fledgling community of Mark's day.

Reflection

What did Jesus teach the disciples about greatness? How is following Jesus like being a powerless child? How does Jesus' teaching about being last and a servant relate to James' view about God's wisdom?

Responsive Psalter

Psalm 1

- ¹ Happy are those
who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
**or take the path that sinners tread,
or sit in the seat of scoffers;**
- ² but their delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law they meditate day and night.
- ³ They are like trees
planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,

and their leaves do not wither.
In all that they do, they prosper.

- ⁴ The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
⁵ **Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;**
⁶ for the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

Closing Prayer

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**