

What is more valuable than wealth? (3:13-18)

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THE TEXT (NASB)

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Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her and happy is every one that retaineth her. Classic KJV - Proverbs 3:13

INTRODUCTION



Wisdom pays greater benefits than wealth.

Three times in rapid succession and in increasing intensity, we read in this text that Wisdom and Understanding are superior to wealth. First silver, then gold, and then jewels are devalued and cheapened by comparison.

What challenges the Almighty Dollar? Is it the Euro, Japanese Yen, or Chinese Yuan? No! It's Wisdom. Let's discover how Wisdom trumps wealth.



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COMMENTARY



Trumping Wealth

There are two unbeatable, but immaterial challengers to the supremacy of material wealth: Wisdom, seeing the real meaning of life, and Understanding, seeing correctly our particular situations and the people around us, our real opportunities and real needs.

Wisdom and Understanding are described as two sides of a coin (heads and tails?), but it's no ordinary coin. It buys more than any coin of silver or gold.

Wisdom is personified poetically as a gracious queen, offering us three gifts: Money, honour, and "long life." She gives with both hands, as she sees fit, to those who come to her. Imagine receiving health, money, and honour from Queen Wisdom, just when we need them most—or can use them best.

King Solomon's Wise Request

God Almighty told the young King Solomon to ask whatever he wanted: "Ask whatever I should give you." Read the story yourself (1 Kings 3:3-14). Solomon answered: "Give your servant an understanding mind... able to discern between good and evil." Solomon asked for Wisdom and the Understanding that comes with it. God was so pleased that also He granted Solomon riches and honour too. In addition, God gave Solomon the possibility (but not the guarantee) of a long life – "if you walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and commandments."

Wisdom offers three benefits: Riches and honour (together) in her left hand, and in her right, long life. Riches and honour are two very different, yet wonderful advantages. To find out which is the greater of these two, you must do more prospecting in Proverbs ([starting perhaps with Proverbs 22:1](#)).



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~~What is greater, more desirable than wealth and honour? Queen Wisdom's right hand, typically the strongest and most dextrous, holds a long life. (This isn't slighting left-handed people, just poetic use of the human average.)~~

Translation

Wisdom is superior to silver, gold, and jewels. Nothing is more desirable. The Hebrew term for nothing (kole lo) refers to material things as in Exodus 10:15: "Nothing green was left on tree or plant." Tangible treasures like real-estate, precious art works, or rare coins—Wisdom is better than all of them.

The expression for longevity or a long life in Hebrew is translated literally as "length of days." The Bible uses it first in Deuteronomy 30:20 (ESV): "...Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers."

Long Life is Much More Than Longevity



"Length of days" means more than longevity. Longevity is not always a good thing! Many people find their senior years unpleasant or meaningless. Some long to end them. A long life without meaning, dignity and proper provision—Wisdom, honour and riches—is prolonged misery. Yet the Bible's expression for a long life always refers to a grateful state of existence. In Psalm 23, it's translated as "dwelling in the house of the Lord forever." So it can be translated loosely as unending bliss.

Long life really arises from a clear conscience. The medical branch called Mind-Body Science

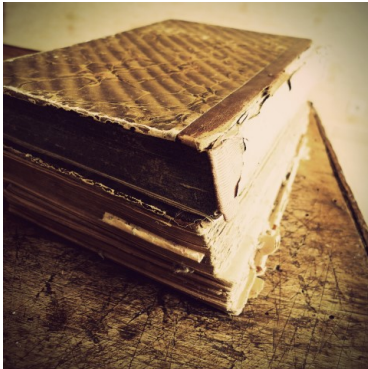


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~~shows that peace of mind has a decisive effect on bodily vigour. The more lies we tell, the more we cheat others and try to cheat God, the more our health is poisoned. So God inspired Solomon to write: "A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones,"~~ Proverbs 17:22.

Wealth Challenges Wisdom



Although wisdom offers riches, honour, and long life, ironically, two of these actually compete with wisdom for our attention and affection. The hunger for both financial gain and public prestige often distracts us from the love of Wisdom. Children want to start earning money too soon in life, rather than furthering their training and education. As my professor at York University, Gordon Shaw, once told me, "Before the age of 30 it's not what you earn, but what you learn that makes the difference in life." My dad taught his children that a good education is much more valuable than mere assets.

This struggle between Wisdom and tangible treasures is a major emotional and habitual struggle. Long life and honour don't usually try to seduce us quite so much as wealth; but this vying for human esteem and affection is described in more detail in Proverbs 8.

A New Car on God's Timing

If we always struggle to remember the Big Picture, Wisdom, God then gives us Understanding, the vision to see truly our particular situations, people, and needs. That includes seeing not only what is the right thing to do, but also when to do it.

My pastor is a modest man. Recently, the senior pastor realized that the car he drove was "long overdue for replacement" (falling apart). So he called out to the church and collected an offering for his colleague. The church gave generously, and enough was raised for a new, but modest vehicle. But suddenly one of his church families was discovered trapped in a hopeless debt. So my pastor talked it over with his wife and, with her leave, gave all the money to that family. So much for a new car.



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Then a businessman stepped forward, saying, “Pastor, it’s been on my heart for a long time to—buy you a new car, but God kept telling me it wasn’t the right time. Now it is.” The businessman’s timing—his inspired Understanding—meant that two families were helped. If we treasure God’s Wisdom why we live, he gives us the Understanding to see what to do and when to do it.

Effort Highly Rewarded



Is Wisdom boring? No—exactly the opposite: “Pleasant ways, peace, a tree of life, and happiness” are all wrapped up in Wisdom. It takes effort and persistence to find silver, gold, and jewels, and it also takes sustained effort to find Wisdom and Understanding. Silver, gold, and jewels are not found merely by walking through the mountains or wading in a stream. Wisdom and Understanding do not come merely by studying a book, even if that book is the Bible.

A wise investor does not take audited financial statements at face value, but carefully reads the notes to the statements, and looks for loose or shaky application of the Generally Accepted Accounting Principles for things that deceive naive readers of financial statements. Wisdom offers true prosperity, of which financial wealth is merely one component. How do we get Wisdom? Where do we find it?

OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus said Wisdom is not inborn. Contrary to popular belief, all of us are not born morally good or even innocent. All mere mortals are born foolish, void of Wisdom (Mark 7:21-22). Wisdom is not a natural part of the human character. Mere academic education cannot produce it. If we want wisdom, we must ask God for it (James 1:5). Yet pride and self-contentment are always our greatest obstacles.

All the treasures of Wisdom are found in Jesus Christ. He claimed to be “the way, the truth and the life,” John 14:6. He did not claim to know about the truth, or know the way to the truth, but really to be the truth. Such a claim is utterly absurd... unless of course, he really is God Almighty.



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APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- Are you more excited about earning more money, or about living in more truth? If you believe there is no truth, or there are no absolutes, watch out. You may be the victim of circular reasoning, since by holding such a viewpoint you have already established an absolute.
- Admit it. Some things are true and some things are false. It's wise to pay money if necessary to get to the truth. Pay whatever it costs, and don't let yourself be deceived.
- List some foolish uses of wealth. Choose to seek wisdom ahead of wealth. This may mean giving up a high-paying job, where you are not growing in wisdom, to take a lower paying job, so that you can devote more time to training in truth. However, avoid humanism and philosophical teachings not rooted in reality.

Which of these steps, if any, does Jesus want you to take now? Ask him.



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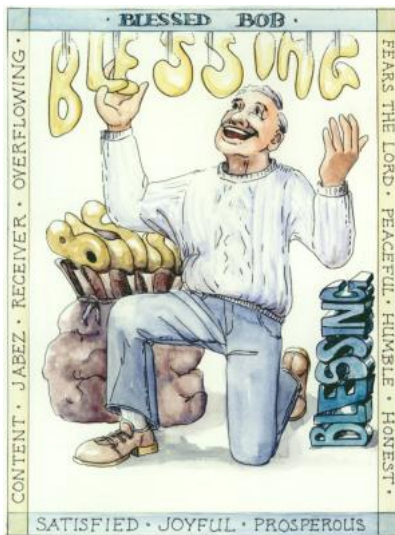
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KEY WORDS

better life (quality), accounting, gold, health, treasure, life, precious, profit, real estate, wealth, silver, wisdom, bf saving

ILLUSTRATION

[Who is Blessed Bob?](#)



Blessed Bob is very fortunate. He recognizes that good things come from God! God is shunned by many, but not by Bob. Bob loves God. He wants to receive all the good things that God has for him. He's not too proud to ask God for help. In fact, Bob prays often. Some think that he prays without ceasing. But he is not without fault. Blessed Bob makes many mistakes, and when he does, he admits his errors. He corrects them and presses on.

Bob gets so many blessings he feels overwhelmed. His cup overflows. But he doesn't hoard his blessings. Like Generous Genevieve, Blessed Bob likes to give to others. He is truly prosperous, even though there are many who are financially richer than he is.

We see examples of Blessed Bob in the Bible in the lives of Job and Joseph. Job went through some very good times (Job 29:2-25) and some very bad times (Job 2:7-8). Joseph had similar financial cycles (Genesis 39:2,21). Both men kept their focus on God, not on their financial condition (Job 1:21, Genesis 50:19-21).

More recently we have examples of those who have lived with the same life focus. R. G LeTourneau was the inventor of the largest earth moving machines in the 1930's and 1940's. He credited God for his tremendous success. He gave away much of his wealth while he was



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still living saying that, "When I shovel money out to God's interests, God shovels money back to me, but God's shovel is bigger than mine." He was called the mover of men and mountains because of his great work and influence. On his gravestone, R. G. LeTourneau left all visitors with these words, SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS AND ALL THESE THINGS SHALL BE ADDED UNTO YOU MATTHEW 6:33.

Blessed Bob is full of joy. He is satisfied with life!

