“Where are You Headed?”
Proverbs (selected verses)
July 28th, 2019

Strongbow Christian Church
2380 30th Street
De Pere, WI 54115

If dogs wrote letters to God...

Dear God: Why do humans smell the flowers, but seldom, if ever, smell one another?

Dear God: When we get to heaven, can we sit on your couch? Or is it the same old story still?

Dear God: If a dog barks his head off in the forest and no human hears him, is he still a bad dog?

Dear God: Are there mail carriers in heaven? If so, will I have to apologize to them?

Two of those letters regard the future (heaven). Some interesting forecasts have been issued by so-called “experts” in their fields over the years. Here are four that probably wish they could take their words back:

1 - “The ordinary ‘horseless carriage’ is at present a luxury for the wealthy; and although its price will probably fall in the future, it will never, of course, come into as common use as the bicycle.” (The Literary Digest, 1889)

2 - Lee De Forest, inventor of the cathode ray tube, in 1926, “Theoretically, television may be feasible, but I consider it an impossibility—a development which we should waste little time dreaming about.”

3 – A recording company expert in 1962 said, “We don’t think the Beatles will do anything in their market. Guitar groups are on their way out.” By 2014, the official figure for Beatles’ US single sales (only) was an astonishing 1.6 billion!

4 - In 2005, British business mogul Sir Alan Sugar quipped, “Next Christmas the iPod will be dead, finished, gone, kaput.”

These examples just go to show how difficult it is to predict the future impact of technology and trends.

You’ve probably heard about the aging app that’s become all the rage the last several weeks in social media circles. It’s available for use on cell phones, tablets and computers. The premise is that it will show you what you will look like several years down the road. I’m not going to go into whether the Russians are collecting information about those using the app; but it is a contemporary example of the fascination we have of the future.

All of us are concerned, to an extent, with what tomorrow brings. After all, the essence of making plans - a responsible and good practice - is to be concerned with what the future might have in store for us.

We’re just about finished with our brief Sunday morning sermon study on the Old Testament book of Proverbs. Proverbs is jam-packed full of biblical and practical wisdom on a whole host
of topics. We’ve examined many of those these past few months – from pride, to sexual purity, to words, work, motherhood, fatherhood, wealth, self-control – and many more. Last Sunday, we looked at the most popular and well-known of all the Bible’s proverbs, Proverb 3:5 & 6:

“Trust in the L ORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.”

Many of you may be familiar with the works of John Piper, a retired minister and well-known Christian author. He observes of this passage, “Over the years I have come to see that this passage is a call to live by faith in future grace. The call to live by faith is in the words, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart.” The reference to future grace is in the words, “He shall direct your paths.” (Piper, Future Grace, 6)

So, we build upon last Sunday’s sermon text by looking at what the book of Proverbs has to say about the future. There are verses widely scattered through these 31 chapters, but I’ve chosen to fix our attention upon two verses included in Proverbs Chapter 16. The first is:

Proverbs 16:1 – “The preparations (plans) of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.” The process of making preparations/plans infers getting ready for tomorrow – the future. Some take the approach that whatever happens is going to happen, so they don’t concern themselves with preparations or plans. But, as God’s children, we realize that God not only appoints the ends (the future); He also appoints the means (the now). It is irresponsible, for instance, to not put aside some of your earnings for the future because you spend way too much now, on stuff you don’t really need!

Earlier in proverbs, we have an illustration of such preparation/planning. This is Proverbs 6:6-8:

“Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, 7which, having no captain, Overseer or ruler, 8provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest.”

So, for instance, if you have a wood-burning stove to heat your home, you’d best be busy in the summer and fall cutting wood for the cold winter weather. Not to do so is to sow suffering for the lean months of winter.

Unfortunately, we live in a time when people rely more and more on the government (or others) to provide financial resources for them, especially when they are older. It wasn’t all that long ago when parents sacrificed so they could care for their children, and adult children sacrificed so they could care for their parents in older age. The ramifications can be seen in out of control spending for domestic programs that seem to tout free money. We in America have the benefit of wise forefathers. Benjamin Franklin once wrote, “When the people find that they can vote themselves money, that will herald the end of the republic.”
With a deficit of some 22 trillion dollars (and rising), we have crossed the point of no return. The more we are indebted to others, the less liberty we have.

The pairing of “preparations/plans” in the first clause with “answer of the tongue” in the second clause doesn’t seem to fit together. One contemporary version of the Bible puts this verse this way, “Mortals make elaborate plans, but GOD has the last word.” (The Message)

The meaning of the proverb is that despite all our freedom to plan, we are actually advancing God’s designs for us. Our freedom is not freer than God’s freedom with, over, and above us. The things we choose to do in planning and preparing for our future bring about His sovereign plans intended for us from before the time God created the world! This proverb seems to be the source for a saying in our day, “man proposes, God disposes.”

A second (there are more than two) proverb touching on the future is Proverbs 16:3 – “Commit your works to the LORD, and your thoughts will be established.” Dear ones, do you do this already? When you wake up from your sleep, and find yourself at the threshold of a new day, do you offer a prayer to God that you are committing your day, your efforts, to His glory? That is a great thing to do every day. Try it tomorrow morning (or tonight if you work nights). It’s when we are at that point in our spiritual walk that we realize that everything we hope and dream for our future is firmly in God’s hands. It’s a practice to secure each day for His kingdom work, no matter what it is your hand finds to do.

We have a plaque hanging from a wall in our home that says, “I don’t know what tomorrow holds...but I know Who holds tomorrow.”

I was speaking with someone recently who believes she knows what her life calling from God is. She was taking the proper steps to complete classes toward a degree, while also pursuing necessary certifications. When I asked where she hoped to serve after completing schooling, she said she was leaving that part in God’s hands. I was encouraged by that conversation. Here was someone trusting in God’s providence, but also realizing she had works that God would use to bring about for her future.

Dutch watch maker, and - later in life - author, Corrie ten Boom once said, “Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.”

The story is told of a man who, while walking the beach, found washed up on the sand a used magic lamp. When the genie answered his rub, he told him that the lamp contained but one remaining wish. The man pondered for a moment, and then requested a copy of the stock page from the local newspaper, dated exactly one year later.

In a puff of smoke, the genie was gone, and in his place was the financial news. Gleefully, the man sat down to read his trophy; he could invest with certainty, knowing the winners one year in advance.

As the paper fell to his lap, it turned over to the obituary column found on the reverse of the page, and the name on the top of the list caught his attention – it was his!
What this man did, isn’t too far from the truth for many people in our day. Everyone wants to know how things are going to turn out, so they look to nonsensical, and even downright wicked practices to learn about their future.

Some read horoscopes; some go to palm readers, others take the words of their fortune cookies to heart – this past Thursday I had lunch with several people involved with Vacation Bible School. We ate Chinese, so when the fortune cookies came out, we all grabbed one – here’s what mine said – “Contentment is just around the corner for you. Look forward!” Obviously, this is future-oriented.

What does the Bible have to say?

**2 Chronicles 33:6** – Manasseh, King of Judah, who among other evil practices had this said about him, “he practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft and sorcery, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger.” Soothsaying is a form of fortune telling; telling about the future.

**Galatians 5:20** – Sorcery is included in a list of the works of the flesh, on a par with “fornication and adultery, outbursts of wrath, and hatred.” The Apostle Paul says, “...that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” *(Galatians 5:21)* Sorcery is the use of the occult; supernatural powers for evil ends. It’s sometimes called “black magic.”

I’d like to close with a couple brief applications.

**Tomorrow is entirely in God’s hands.** In *Psalm 31:5*, we read, “My times are in your hands...” Because that is true, we should also want God’s will and timing more than we want anything else for ourselves. *James 4:13-15* – “Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit”; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.’”

**We all are headed for an ultimate destination.** Each of us is on a journey through this life. That journey comes to an end with the end of our physical life. But, that endpoint is also the beginning of eternity. And we will all spend eternity in one destination or the other – one is heaven, the other is hell. Do you know where you’re headed? *Psalm 37:37 & 38* – “Mark the blameless man, and observe the upright; for the future of that man is peace. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together; the future of the wicked shall be cut off.”

Peace is the heaven the righteous while inhabit; being cut off from God’s peace is the hell the unrighteous inhabit. Adam and Eve were our federal heads in the Garden of Eden. There was no better person to stand in the gap for us than Adam. God had created and fashioned him directly; he was the ultimate man...that is until he and Eve ate of the fruit and died. Jesus Christ has come to earth and lived the perfect life that Adam did not; Jesus died the death we all deserve as sons of Adam. And, Jesus was raised from the dead to secure heavenly peace for each and every one of us. The ball’s in your court; *where are you headed?*