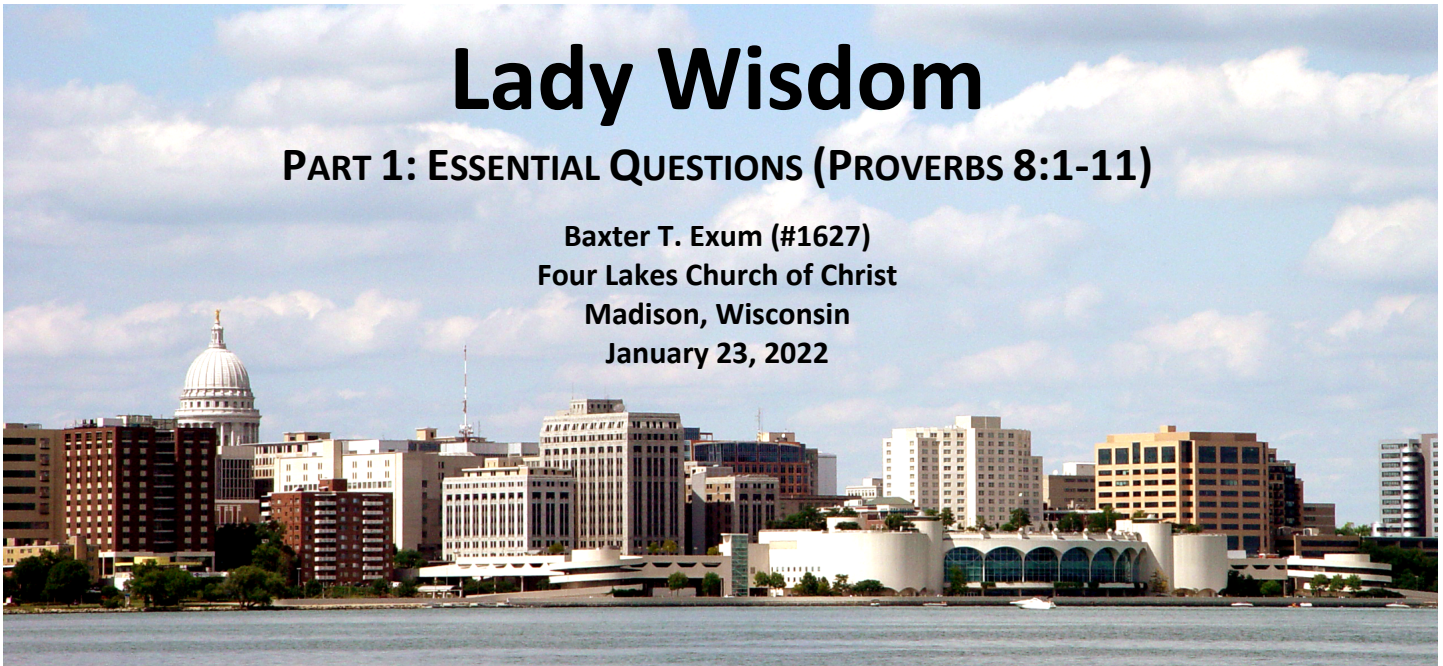


Lady Wisdom

PART 1: ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS (PROVERBS 8:1-11)

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It is good to be together with God's people this morning! We plan on partaking of the Lord's Supper right after our study today, so if you do not yet have the bread and the fruit of the vine, this would be a good time to get those from the table right inside the front door. And then, following the Supper, we will sing several songs together before we dismiss [for class].

As you can see, we are summarizing God's plan of salvation on the wall up here, and we do have some good news from the Lord's church in Honolulu. They posted several days ago and said, "Rejoice! Nati Petelo made the decision to put on Christ in baptism. [We are] thankful for members of the Kailua Church of Christ for encouraging Nati and studying with her. Praise God for another soul added to His kingdom." Amen to that! The good news is that Jesus came to this earth and lived a perfect life, he was put to death on the cross for our sins, but he was raised up on the third day by the power of God. We respond to that by doing what Nati did – we hear and believe this good news, we turn away from sin, we confess Jesus as being the Christ, the Son of God, and we allow ourselves to be immersed with Jesus in the act of baptism, an immersion in water for the forgiveness of our sins. If you would like to learn more, please get in touch.

This morning, and for the next several weeks, I'd like for us to briefly return to our long-term and very sporadic series of lessons based on our extended study of the book of Proverbs! We started back in December 2017 when I realized that we were not taking full advantage of the wisdom being passed down to us from King Solomon. So, we are very slowly working our way through the book of Proverbs. At the rate we are going, I doubt that I will live long enough to finish this series, but that is okay! We need some wisdom from Solomon. So, we are taking a paragraph or a chapter here and there through the years, and hopefully we are able to benefit from some very practical wisdom.

Over the past several years, our very simple and working definition of wisdom has been to note that wisdom is the practical application of knowledge. It is important to know stuff, but it is even more important that we know what to do with that knowledge in practical everyday situations. Years back, I think we noted the meme that points out that knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit; wisdom is not putting a tomato in a fruit salad! In the same way, we might know that $2 + 2 = 4$, but wisdom is the practical ability to manage our finances. Knowledge is knowing that my credit score will let me get a car loan wisdom is checking with my wife first. I hope this helps us to remember that there is a difference. Knowledge is important, but wisdom is the practical

application of knowledge. Solomon, of course, was blessed by God with wisdom, and he recorded much of this wisdom in the book of Proverbs. The first nine chapters basically introduce the value of wisdom as he tries to encourage his own children to pay attention to what he is writing here. And the rest of the book (in chapters 10-31) is basically a seemingly random collection of proverbs.

This morning, we find ourselves in Proverbs 8, which means that more than four years into our study, we are still in the introduction! And that is okay! Do not be alarmed! What I am worried about is how we will handle this series once we get to Chapter 10 – either we really slow down, taking one phrase at a time, or perhaps we sort this book out topically. I am working on it, it's in the background, but we probably won't get there for a while. As Jesus said, ***“So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own”*** (Matthew 6:34).

Today, though, we start a brief series-within-a-series on Proverbs 8. And in this chapter, King Solomon introduces us to a character we might describe as “Lady Wisdom.” Nearly a year ago (in February 2021) we looked at the off-limits woman in Proverbs 7, as she did everything possible to pull Solomon's son off of the straight and narrow path. Solomon had some strong words of warning in that chapter. Today, we come to a much more positive passage, as Solomon pictures wisdom itself as a woman. So, we have a contrast: On one hand, Solomon is warning his sons to stay away from the off-limits woman, and now, he gives the alternative. And this woman (wisdom in the flesh, we might say), is also quite appealing; only this woman seems to speak with God's authority. Instead of pulling us into sin, this woman is leading us back to God. This is a woman we are to follow, Lady Wisdom. The question is: Are we listening?

Here in this world, we are surrounded by voices pulling us in all directions. The inbox is always filling up, social media pulls us this way and that, friends and family are all tugging at us for attention. We are so busy we hardly have time for what God has to say. Solomon, though, gives us a reminder in Proverbs 8, that wisdom is calling as well, and we would do well to pay attention. This morning, then, let's start by answering some essential questions in the text. The passage is Proverbs 8:1-11, the words of King Solomon to his son – he says,

- ¹ ***Does not wisdom call,
And understanding lift up her voice?***
- ² ***On top of the heights beside the way,
Where the paths meet, she takes her stand;***
- ³ ***Beside the gates, at the opening to the city,
At the entrance of the doors, she cries out:***
- ⁴ ***“To you, O men, I call,
And my voice is to the sons of men.***
- ⁵ ***“O naive ones, understand prudence;
And, O fools, understand wisdom.***
- ⁶ ***“Listen, for I will speak noble things;
And the opening of my lips will reveal right things.***
- ⁷ ***“For my mouth will utter truth;
And wickedness is an abomination to my lips.***
- ⁸ ***“All the utterances of my mouth are in righteousness;
There is nothing crooked or perverted in them.***

⁹ ***“They are all straightforward to him who understands,
And right to those who find knowledge.***

¹⁰ ***“Take my instruction and not silver,
And knowledge rather than choicest gold.***

¹¹ ***“For wisdom is better than jewels;
And all desirable things cannot compare with her.***

As we keep this passage at the forefront of our minds for the next few moments, I’d like to answer some basic questions about this new character Solomon is introducing to us.

I. **And we start where Solomon starts as he starts by describing WHERE this woman is calling.**

This isn’t where I would have started this chapter – I would have started with the message itself – but I am not Solomon! It seems, then, that Solomon starts by making a contrast. In the previous chapter, the off-limits woman is seducing the young man privately. She is described as ***“lurking”*** in the shadows, ***“in the twilight, in the evening, in the middle of the night and in the darkness.”*** In Chapter 7, the prostitute is doing her temptation quietly, behind the scenes. In Chapter 8, though, Lady Wisdom is out in public, unashamed. She is described as calling, lifting up her voice, crying out – and she does this publicly, ***“on top of the heights beside the way, where the paths meet, she takes her stand; beside the gates, at the opening to the city, at the entrance of the doors.”*** Lady Wisdom is “out and proud,” as we might say today. Her message is too important to be whispered. She is unintimidated. She doesn’t restrict her message to somewhere like the temple, she isn’t like the proverbial guru who lives on some remote mountain peak somewhere (waiting to be found by the chosen few), but this woman takes wisdom “to the streets,” we might say. She is out there where the people are. She is ***“on top of the heights beside the way.”*** I take this as a reference to a trail or road of some kind. One of our families let me borrow a book about hiking in Wisconsin, and I learned that one of the trails southwest of here follows an old pioneer path along a ridge. That seems to be the picture here in verse 2, as she is ***“on top of the heights beside the way.”*** She is out there where people are actually traveling, where decisions are actually being made. In the second half of verse 2, she is standing in the intersections of life, ***“where the paths meet, she takes her stand.”*** So, this is not theory; this is practical. Wisdom is everywhere, and wisdom is accessible. Wisdom is making herself available.

In verse 3, she calls out ***“beside the gates, at the opening to the city, at the entrance of the doors.”*** This is a reference to the city gates. We talked about this in our study of Amos 5 a week or two ago. I’m sharing a picture of the gate uncovered in excavations of the city of Gezer in Israel a few years back. This is a common design from that time, as gates were designed almost like two capital “E’s” facing each other. If the city was being attacked, they could close multiple sets of doors and soldiers could defend the gate from those little side rooms. In times of peace, though, when the gate was open, this was a gathering place. This is where the old guys would hang out, the Cottage Café of the ancient world. This is where court decisions were made. This is where people would come to buy and sell. In ancient times, everybody had to pass through the gate of the city. Today, we travel from city to city, and we don’t really pay attention to city limits, do we? For us, to cross a boundary is no big deal. Just to get here this morning, I had to cross from Madison into Fitchburg, back into Madison, then briefly through the Town of Madison, back into the City of Madison, through a small piece of Blooming Grove, and back into Madison again. In ancient times, though, everybody had to enter through the gate. The gate was a happening place. Wisdom, then, stationed herself at the gate.

Here in Madison, we might picture someone calling out publicly at the farmers' market or maybe at the top of State Street or on the other end at Library Mall. Wisdom is making herself known – in the markets, in the seat of government, at every major intersection. Wisdom cares too much to be silent. Like a good friend, she cries out to save us from ourselves. She doesn't wait to be discovered, but wisdom makes the first move.

We might think of something God said through the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 30:21, when he said, ***"Your ears will hear a word behind you, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right or to the left."*** In a sense, what the Lord was referring to here is wisdom. As we make our way through life, wisdom has a way of making herself known; she has a way of making herself available to us. And unlike the adulterous woman who is ***"lurking"*** in Proverbs 7, Lady Wisdom is out there in the open. We might ask this a few times in this chapter, but don't we see Jesus here? Like Lady Wisdom, Jesus also went to where the people were. He didn't hide and wait to be found, but Jesus spent time on the streets and in the markets. In the same way, wisdom is everywhere. But again, the question is: Are we listening? Wisdom is available to us wherever we go, but are we interested?

II. As we return to the text of this chapter, we now come to the WHO?

Who are the ones being addressed in this passage? To whom is Lady Wisdom speaking? And the answer comes in verses 4-5 as Solomon switches to the first person and allows Lady Wisdom to speak for herself here, ***"To you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. O naïve ones, understand prudence; and, O fools, understand wisdom."***

First of all, then, Lady Wisdom is speaking to everybody, isn't she? As far as I can tell, the word she uses for ***"man"*** doesn't necessarily mean "man" as opposed to "woman," but it's a word referring to everybody. She's speaking to anybody who will listen to her call. In particular, though, she is calling to ***"the sons of men;"*** literally, to ***"the sons of Adam."*** And I think the reference here is to those who are younger, especially, because of what she says next as she addresses those who are ***"naïve"*** and the ***"fools."*** The ***"naïve"*** are those who are ***"simple."*** We look up the word, and we find it comes from a word referring to something that is "spacious" or "open." Haven't we talked about those who are "open-minded"? I know, in a sense, it is good to be open-minded, it is good to consider new ideas; but at the same time, most of us have also known people who are so open-minded that their brains have fallen out! Here, it's just the idea of being "simple." Not evil, not determined to do wrong, but ***"simple."*** "Child-like," we might say. These people have the thinking of somebody just starting out in life. They don't know, and often, they don't even know what they don't know. Often, this is a trait of the young, but it is certainly not limited to the young. Anybody is capable of being ***"simple."*** The other word, translated here as ***"fool,"*** is similar, sometimes translated elsewhere as ***"stupid."*** So again, not necessarily malicious or evil, but not knowing better.

One of the commentaries suggested that some people are wise (heading toward God), some people are foolish in an evil way (heading away from God), but many in this world are just ***"simple,"*** somewhere in the middle. They just don't know. And it seems to be this group Lady Wisdom is especially interested in here. She's not interested in casting any pearls before swine, she's not reaching out to the scoffers (they don't care), but she's interested in reaching out to anybody who might listen. She's looking for those who might be open to wisdom; she's reaching out to everybody, but especially to the young and to the open-minded. We think of the beatitudes where Jesus said, ***"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied"*** (Matthew 5:6). Those who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness are those who perhaps know they are missing something in life. This is who we are to be looking for with the gospel. We share with everybody, but

we are making a special effort to reach those who are open to it. In perhaps a similar way, Lady Wisdom, then, calls out to those in the middle, to those who are simple. All of us have probably been in this situation. We have been simple. We have been a little too open-minded. Well, her goal is to get the simple-minded to ***“understand prudence,”*** to ***“understand wisdom.”*** Her goal is to help them change their thinking, moving from simple to wise – not by force, not by manipulation, but by calling out, by the sharing of information. All of us are simple at some point in life, and we might even be simple in certain areas at different points throughout life, but the goal is to move. We shouldn’t stay simple. Years ago, I remember traveling to see my grandparents down in Lynchburg, Tennessee. I think we were eating Christmas dinner, and I looked over to see my cousin using her mashed potatoes to arrange her hair into a mohawk. That was a very ***“simple”*** decision, wasn’t it? Thankfully, though, she moved through the mashed potato mohawk phase of life and is now an accomplished author. All of us go through phases of “simplicity” in this life, but the goal is to mature from simple to wise.

Lady Wisdom, then, calls out to everybody, but especially to the young and to the simple.

III. So, we’ve looked at the WHERE and the WHO, and we move along now to the WHAT?

Exactly what is Lady Wisdom saying to these people? We see the answer in verses 6-9 as Solomon gives us a summary,

- ⁶ ***“Listen, for I will speak NOBLE THINGS;
And the opening of my lips will reveal RIGHT THINGS.”***
- ⁷ ***“For my mouth will utter TRUTH;
And WICKEDNESS is an abomination to my lips.”***
- ⁸ ***“All the utterances of my mouth are in RIGHTEOUSNESS;
There is nothing CROOKED or PERVERTED in them.”***
- ⁹ ***“They are all STRAIGHTFORWARD to him who understands,
And RIGHT to those who find knowledge.”***

First of all, she speaks ***“noble things.”*** We might think of what Paul writes in Philippians 4:8 when he says, ***“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.”*** In addition to ***“noble things,”*** Lady Wisdom also speaks things that are ***“right.”*** She speaks ***“truth”*** and ***“righteousness.”*** Her words are ***“straightforward.”*** And to be clear, unlike the prostitute from Chapter 7, Lady Wisdom considers ***“wickedness”*** an abomination, she speaks nothing ***“crooked,”*** nothing ***“perverted.”*** Her words are not twisted or knotted. She speaks the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Her words are plain and can be understood. We might think back to what Mark Twain said, “It’s not the parts of the Bible I cannot understand that bother me it’s the parts that I do understand.” Lady Wisdom speaks words that are straightforward. I think it was NB Hardeman who once said that he could summarize his belief on any Bible doctrine on a postcard and have room left over to write a message to his family. He was making the point that many false doctrines are complicated. People need pages upon pages to explain it. Bible truth, though, is rather simple. And that’s what we find here. Lady Wisdom speaks truth in a way that can be understood. Her message is noble and right. We might remember Festus accusing Paul of losing his mind, but Paul responds in Acts 26:25, ***“I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth,” “I utter words of truth and reason,”*** as some translations have it.

And we appreciate this. We appreciate talking with people who tell us the truth. Most of us have been on the other end of this. Most of us know somebody who is always lying, always exaggerating. And to listen to that kind of person is exhausting. On the other hand, what a relief it is to listen to somebody who is known for telling us the truth. In fact, imagine having a friend who is always right – not just thinking they are right, but truly right all the time, no matter what – and imagine being able to go to that person for advice and encouragement. That's Lady Wisdom! Her words are noble and right and true and straightforward, never crooked wicked or perverted. And we have unrestricted access to this wisdom in the word of God. What an amazing blessing!

IV. This brings us to the last paragraph this morning, as we come to the question WHY?

Why should we listen to what Lady Wisdom has to say? We will come back to some of this next week, but in verses 10-11, Lady Wisdom says, ***“Take my instruction and not silver, and knowledge rather than choicest gold. For wisdom is better than jewels; and all desirable things cannot compare with her.”*** Why should we listen? Because her words are more valuable than silver and gold and jewels and anything else we might ever possibly think of as being desirable. He's not saying that wisdom will make you rich. No, he's saying that if you have a choice between wisdom and riches, choose wisdom!

And Solomon has some experience here, doesn't he? When Solomon first took over as king, probably around the age of 20, God basically said to Solomon, “Ask me for anything” [paraphrased]. Well, young Solomon prayed to God and asked that God would give him ***“an understanding heart to judge [God's] people to discern between good and evil.”*** God was impressed with that request and answered that prayer by giving Solomon not only great wisdom, but great wealth and honor as well. Solomon, then, is speaking from experience here: Wisdom is far more valuable than any earthly wealth.

And this is the “Why?” in this passage. Why listen to Lady Wisdom? Because wisdom is more valuable than any earthly treasure. It's better than silver, it's better than gold, it's better than jewels. If you have a choice between wisdom and anything else, choose wisdom! I was scrolling through social media last week and came across somebody asking the question: Would you rather be given a billion dollars right now or go back in time to when you were 6 years old with all the knowledge you have right now? That's an interesting question. As I thought about it for a moment, I think I realized you could probably have both: Go back to when I was six and buy some bitcoin (or any number of things) along the way. If you have a choice between wisdom and wealth, choose wisdom (often, wisdom will lead to wealth, and a lack of wisdom will often cause us to lose any wealth we have). Choose wisdom. Wisdom is more valuable than anything. The point is: Get wisdom!

Conclusion:

This morning, King Solomon has introduced us to Wisdom, personified as a woman calling out in the streets. Unlike the off-limits woman in Chapter 7, Lady Wisdom is making her appeal publicly – in the streets, at the city gates, at every major intersection – and she's speaking words of truth, inviting us to follow and learn. Next week, if the Lord wills, I'm hoping we can move into the next paragraph as we look at some of the qualities of the wisdom she offers.

This morning, though, we've been reminded of the choice. Most of us have already made the choice to follow wisdom, but sometimes we need the reminder. We need the reminder that once we have obeyed the gospel, we are buried with Christ, our blessed Redeemer, as we sometimes sing, “Dead to the old life of folly and sin; Satan may call, the world may entreat me, [but] there is no voice that answers within.” “Dead to the world, to

voices that call me, living anew, obedient but free; dead to the joys that once did enthrall me, yet 'tis not I, [but] Christ lives in me." Let's take today's message from King Solomon as a reminder to listen to Wisdom's call. She calls out at every intersection – at work, at home, when we are out and around, she speaks up at every decision – so let's listen to what she has to say.

As we close our study, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

You are the source of all wisdom and power. You see us when we struggle to do what's right. You see how we are often tempted by the old life of folly and sin. This morning, we ask for wisdom to listen to your voice in our lives. You speak to us through the written word. You encourage us through the words of Christian friends. We pray for open and humble hearts.

In Jesus we pray. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com