

Lady Wisdom

PART 3: BENEFITS & REWARDS (PROVERBS 8:14-21)

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Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
February 6, 2022



It is good to be able to worship together 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]. If you are visiting with us, we would invite you to fill out a visitor card online at www.fourlakescoc.org/visitor.

As I mentioned in Wednesday's class, I am heading to Tennessee this afternoon, to attend a series of lectures at Freed-Hardeman University. We will be looking at "The Compassion of Christ in Luke" this week, and many of the lessons will be available online. If you'd like to participate, you can find those at www.fhu.edu/lectureship. Personally, I am looking forward to seeing my daughter down there. I am looking forward to good BBQ. The best BBQ comes from those cinder block shacks in the middle of nowhere, and they have several of those down there. I am looking forward to camping for the week. I am looking forward to taking the scenic route home through Duluth, Minnesota, and doing some winter hiking and camping along the shore of Lake Superior. But I am especially looking forward to speaking to a group of Bible majors tomorrow morning. Several are headed to Minnesota to do some mission work this summer, and they have asked me to come down and to share some advice concerning what it's like preaching in the north. Several of them are from the south, and they were hoping that I could give them some idea of what they are getting into! So, if you could be praying for that discussion tomorrow morning, I would appreciate it. Please also be praying for Clayton, as he has agreed to preach here at Four Lakes next Sunday morning. I am thankful in advance for his hard work this coming week.

We are here this morning to share good news! We preach Jesus here! He died for us, he was buried, and he was raised up on the third day. We are brothers and sisters with others who have believed and obeyed this good news, including Holly Evans. This comes to us from Brian Kenyon, a friend of mine who preaches in Florida and directs the Florida School of Preaching down in Lakeland, Florida. Their church website says that, "On January 24, the Lord's providence brought Holly Evans to [the] South Florida Avenue [congregation] with the urgent request to be baptized. After studying with Brian, she put on Christ through baptism for the forgiveness of sins. Please welcome Holly to the body of Christ." And then he quotes Luke 15:10, where Jesus says, **"Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."** When Brian shared this to his personal page, he says, "The smile on her face says it all! Forgiveness of sins is true happiness (Acts 8:39). Welcome, Holly,

to the family of God! We pray that we all continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ!" We agree with that.

And then we have some good news from another friend, Jake Sutton, a former police officer who now preaches at the Piedmont Road congregation in Marietta, Georgia. Several days ago, Jake said, "Coming to Jesus late in life, is a beautiful thing. Welcome your new sister, Nancy Davidson. She was baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of her sins." Awesome news! And we share this to illustrate what the good news really is. We share this to illustrate what it means to obey the gospel. If you would like to know more, please get in touch.

This morning, we return to a series of lessons based on our extended and somewhat sporadic study of the book of Proverbs! In this series-within-a-series, we are currently working our way through Proverbs 8, where wisdom is pictured as a woman – wisdom personified, or "Lady Wisdom," as we have described her in this study. Two weeks ago, we introduced Lady Wisdom by looking at some ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS. Instead of lurking and tempting in private like the off-limits woman of Proverbs 7, Lady Wisdom (in Proverbs 8) is out there making her appeal in the streets. The invitation is open to all. She speaks words of truth and reason. And in the last section there, she points out that her wisdom is truly valuable.

Last week, we continued with the next little section, where we looked at what we described as Lady Wisdom's ASSOCIATIONS (in Proverbs 8:12-13). On one hand, wisdom is pictured as dwelling with certain qualities. And on the other hand, there are also some qualities she hates in her relationships.

This morning, we continue our study of Lady Wisdom, by looking at some BENEFITS to taking this woman's advice. This morning, we come to Proverbs 8:14-21 – the words of King Solomon concerning Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 8:14-21,

- ¹⁴ ***"Counsel is mine and sound wisdom;
I am understanding, power is mine.***
- ¹⁵ ***"By me kings reign,
And rulers decree justice.***
- ¹⁶ ***"By me princes rule, and nobles,
All who judge rightly.***
- ¹⁷ ***"I love those who love me;
And those who diligently seek me will find me.***
- ¹⁸ ***"Riches and honor are with me,
Enduring wealth and righteousness.***
- ¹⁹ ***"My fruit is better than gold, even pure gold,
And my yield better than choicest silver.***
- ²⁰ ***"I walk in the way of righteousness,
In the midst of the paths of justice,***
- ²¹ ***To endow those who love me with wealth,
That I may fill their treasuries.***

As we continue to learn from King Solomon this morning, I'm hoping we can learn something from the two basic categories here. Lady Wisdom offers benefits with reference to POWER and also with reference to WEALTH. And this is where we need to remind ourselves that although we live in a world full of some very talented people, talent is not necessarily the only factor required for living a successful life. We look around us, and we see some

amazingly talented people. Athletically, we only need to look at what's happening with the Olympics right now. Some amazing things are happening over there. Or we look around us in the field of medicine. Here in Madison, we have some doctors and researchers who are doing some amazing things on a daily basis. Years ago, my dad and I got a call from someone down in Florida who was asking whether we might be willing to go visit one of their members who was up here to have his esophagus removed. As I remember it, we went up to UW Hospital on one of the major holidays (maybe Thanksgiving or Christmas), and we met this man and his family. The guy's name was Charlie Brown! But during that visit, we learned that there is a surgeon at UW Hospital who specializes in the removal of the esophagus – and he was so well known for this, that this man had traveled all the way from Florida to Madison to have this procedure. I had no idea! What an interesting specialty!

So, we are surrounded by talent – but we also know that living a truly successful life requires more than just talent or skill. We know, for example, that extremely talented people can make some very unwise decisions in life. And this is where we come back to Lady Wisdom as she applies her wisdom to the areas of POWER and WEALTH. This morning, then, we will be looking at some benefits that come to those who choose to partner with wisdom.

- I. **I'd like for us to start where she starts (in verses 14-16) as Lady Wisdom explains her relationship with POWER, or with the ADMINISTRATION OF POWER – GOVERNMENT, we might say.**

Would a ruler benefit from exercising godly wisdom? Absolutely! Notice (in verse 14), Lady Wisdom says,

¹⁴ ***"Counsel is mine and sound wisdom;
I am understanding, power is mine.***

¹⁵ ***"By me kings reign,
And rulers decree justice.***

¹⁶ ***"By me princes rule, and nobles,
All who judge rightly.***

If wisdom is the practical application of knowledge (as we've noted a time or two over the past few weeks), I think we understand that anyone in a position of authority would benefit from the practical application of knowledge. It's great to know things, but to be able to use our knowledge to influence and lead others is the epitome of godly wisdom. Wisdom allows (even empowers) kings and rulers to reign and to decree justice. Wisdom, then, is the difference between a ruler who's only in it for himself and a ruler who is truly respected for being fair and just with those he leads. Wisdom has a way of taking talent and using it for good. Wisdom has a way of solving problems – not just religious issues, but practical, everyday problems. Wisdom has a way of getting to the root of a problem and fixing it.

We might even think of Solomon himself. Obviously, Solomon was somewhat wise from the beginning. As Solomon takes over as king, God basically gives him a blank check: Whatever you want, it is yours – just ask for it, and I will give it to you. Solomon, of course, asks God for an understanding heart. He asks for wisdom, and God answers that prayer in a powerful way. Later in that chapter, in 1 Kings 3, we almost immediately come to verse 16, where Solomon is approached by two prostitutes arguing over a baby. One woman had rolled over on her baby during the night, accidentally killing the child, and now both women are claiming the one child who is alive. It's a tough case. There's no law that really deals with this. But, Solomon, in his wisdom, calls for a sword and orders that the living child be chopped in half so both women could truly share. At this point, of course, one of the women speaks up and says, ***"Oh, my lord, give her the living child, and by no means kill him."*** But the

other said, ***“He shall be neither mine nor yours; divide him!”*** Well, Solomon uses this reaction to determine that the first woman is the real mother, and he orders that the child be given to her. The conclusion comes in 1 Kings 3:28, where the text says, ***“When all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had handed down, they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice.”*** That right there is some amazing justice! This is godly wisdom. Again, Solomon is wise even before he becomes king, but once he prays for godly wisdom, Lady Wisdom truly takes Solomon’s leadership to an entirely new level.

We might also think of the young man Joseph, beat up and sold into slavery by his brothers. Joseph, though, puts his faith in God and always does what was right, and God rewards him for that. By partnering with Lady Wisdom, Joseph works his way up through the ranks and ends up second in command to Pharaoh, saving the nation from a seven-year famine.

This, by the way, is why we pray for those in positions of authority. Even if our government officials do not have a relationship with God, we do, and we can pray on their behalf. We pray for them to have wisdom. We pray that they would surround themselves with wise counsel and that they would listen to that counsel. We pray that their leadership will allow us to lead tranquil and quiet lives in all godliness and dignity (1 Timothy 2:2).

But, the first idea in this passage is that Lady Wisdom contributes to effective leadership. Godly wisdom, in fact, is critical in the effective use of power. Our job is to pray for this wisdom for ourselves. Our job is to pray for those in positions of authority.

II. As we return to the text, I want us to come back to verse 17 in a moment, and I want us to notice the second big category in this passage (in verses 18-21), as Lady Wisdom says that she also plays a key role in the acquisition and use of WEALTH.

We have some positive references here to ***“riches”*** and ***“honor”*** and ***“wealth”*** and ***“righteousness.”*** I wouldn’t take this as a rock-solid guarantee: If you pursue wisdom, you will be wealthy. That’s not what Lady Wisdom is emphasizing here. Instead, this is more of a “proverb.” It is in Proverbs, after all! A proverb is a short pithy statement expressing something that is generally true. It’s not a guarantee so much as it is an observation. And this is what we see here. Wisdom and wealth are somewhat connected. We discussed this two weeks ago, when we looked at verses 10-11. That’s where Lady Wisdom said, ***“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.”*** We made the point that wisdom is more valuable than silver and gold; but, having wisdom sometimes LEADS to having silver and gold. On the other hand, chasing gold instead of wisdom often has a way of preventing us from getting wealthy.

Here in verses 18-21, though, we get back to wealth. There is a connection between wisdom and wealth. In verse 19, wisdom’s fruit is better than gold, and her yield is better than the choicest silver. Again, if you ever have a choice between gold and wisdom, choose wisdom! And the reason is: Wisdom has a way of providing wealth, not the other way around. Solomon knows this from personal experience and observation: If our goal in life is to gain wealth, wisdom may or may not come along with that. In fact, if we make decisions based only on money, money has a way of corrupting us. On the other hand, if our goal is to exercise godly wisdom, Lady Wisdom says that she has a way of rewarding that search for wisdom. I think we understand this from personal experience: In general, the person who is wise will probably do somewhat better in business than one who is foolish. Not always, but generally, there is something of a financial benefit to making wise decisions. Again, all

of us can probably think of exceptions to this, but this is a proverb. This is generally true – not a rock-solid guarantee, this is an observation.

Beyond this, the wealth and riches she promises are ***“enduring.”*** Her wealth is ***“better”*** than gold and silver. And this gives us the hint that these riches may INCLUDE but are perhaps not LIMITED to physical wealth. There is some lasting satisfaction that comes from making wise decisions. We gain some lasting satisfaction from walking in the way of righteousness and in the paths of justice. Righteous living has a way of allowing us to sleep at night; whereas that might not be the case with wealth that is gained dishonestly.

In terms of blessings offered freely by God, we think of Isaiah’s prophecy in Isaiah 55:1-2, when he says,

- ¹ ***“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;
and he who has no money, come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.***
- ² ***Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.***

Wisdom, then, offers eternal wealth and riches, not limited to earthly treasure, ***“where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal,”*** but wisdom offers, ***“treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal”*** (Matthew 6:19-20). Lady Wisdom knows that where our treasure is, there will our heart be also.

Conclusion:

And this leads us to the “So what?” part of this proverb. Sandwiched right in between these two “benefits,” these two “rewards,” we have the reminder from Lady Wisdom (in verse 17), ***“I love those who love me; and those who diligently seek me will find me.”*** She is making the offer: If we search, she is making herself available to us. The offer is conditional, isn’t it? And it was conditional for King Solomon. Unfortunately, there were times in his life when King Solomon did NOT love wisdom, there were times when he did NOT diligently search for wisdom, and he ended up making some terribly unwise decisions later in life. He’s teaching his sons here, though, that Lady Wisdom is making herself available to us, to all of us. We think of what James says in James 1:5, ***“But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”*** Wisdom is available to us, but we do need to ask for it, we do need to go looking for it, we do need to pursue it.

This week, I would encourage all of us to make a point of asking God for wisdom. James also tells us in James 1:17 that, ***“Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.”*** If that applies to anything, it certainly applies to wisdom, ***“I love those who love me; and those who diligently seek me will find me.”*** As we return to the world this week, let us ask God for wisdom. And this is where we leave it for today. Again, Clayton will be speaking next week, and the following week I’m hoping we can return to the next paragraph in Proverbs 8.

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

Our Father in Heaven,

You are the only wise God, the source of all knowledge and power and wealth. This morning, we ask for wisdom. We ask for wisdom for ourselves. As we make our way through this life, we pray that you will be with us, that you will guide us with wisdom from above. We pray that you will surround us with good friends who can help steer us in the right direction. We pray that we might use the power and resources we have to influence others for good.

We pray for those in positions of authority, that you would also surround them with wise counsel, and that they would have the wisdom to listen to good advice. No matter what happens next, we continue to pray that we would be able to live quiet lives in all godliness and dignity.

In Jesus we pray. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com