

Lady Wisdom

PART 4: ETERNAL MIND OF GOD (PROVERBS 8:22-31)

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It is good to be back with you this morning! I am thankful that you allowed me a chance to get away for a week or so. I took a week of vacation and used most of it to attend a series of lectures at Freed-Hardeman University in Tennessee. I had the opportunity to speak to a group of Bible majors who are planning on spending the summer in Minnesota. They were looking for some insight concerning what it's like to preach in the North. It was a great honor to speak with them and to bring them some cheese from Wisconsin. After the lectures, I then went north to do some camping along Lake Superior in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and the UP of Michigan. It got down to 21° below zero one night. I got to do some hiking. A highlight of the trip was worshipping with the Douglas County Church of Christ in Superior. My sister and I went door-to-door in Superior roughly 30 years ago to help the church get started up there, so it was an honor to be back in Superior. I am very thankful to Clayton for speaking last week. I started hearing great things about his lesson almost immediately. We hate to see them move to the Nashville area, but we know they will be a great blessing to any congregation.

In terms of our schedule today, while it's still on the wall up here, I should point out that we do 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.

This morning, we have the privilege and responsibility of sharing God's plan of salvation. The good news is that Jesus died for us, he was buried, and he was raised up on the third day. We respond to that good news in faith, with humble and trusting obedience in the power of God. We believe the message, we turn away from sin, we confess our belief in Jesus as being the Son of God, and then we allow ourselves to be buried with him in baptism, an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins.

As usual, we do have an example to share this week, but this one is rather unusual. It happened back on January 9 at the Shelbyville Road congregation in Indianapolis, about two weeks after we worshiped there on our way home from Ohio. I wasn't following their page though, so I missed it at the time, until I read about it in their bulletin that came in the mail this week. And when I read a few lines from their bulletin, I think you will understand why I immediately got online to check out the pictures. Their preacher, Ben Vick, writes this, "To baptize Wanda Young last Sunday night, it took seven or eight men and four women. The reasons were that our

steps to the baptistry are too many, and she could not walk. She had to be taken up in a wheelchair, put into the water, immersed, and brought back down the stairs. There was rejoicing over her wanting to obey the Lord and our being able to accomplish the feat.” He then says, “There are pictures of this on our Facebook page.” And this is when I dropped everything to go find the pictures! I had to see a baptism that required a dozen people. What an amazing picture...although I cannot even see Wanda in the picture! The next picture, though, was just as awesome, because it shows the children up there on the platform – taking pictures themselves and pulling themselves up to see what is happening here. This is something they will hopefully remember for a very long time. We share this here by way of encouragement: What Wanda did several weeks ago, you can do this morning. If we can help in any way, we hope you will 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. Several 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. She speaks words of truth and reason, and the invitation to follow this woman is open to all.

We then 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.

Two weeks ago, we looked at some BENEFITS to taking Lady Wisdom’s advice. Solomon points out that wisdom is essential for the proper and effective use of both POWER and WEALTH.

This morning, we continue in our study, and we come to Proverbs 8:22-31, where King Solomon continues describing wisdom as a woman. And today’s passage is especially unusual, because the description of Lady Wisdom sounds somewhat familiar to us. If I were to ask you to identify a being who existed before the creation of the world, and if I were to ask you to identify a being who assisted God the Father in creating the Universe, who might you suggest? I don’t know about you, but I am thinking Jesus! Jesus existed before the creation of the world. Jesus assisted God the Father in creating everything we see around us. We think of John 1:1-3, where John says, ***“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.”*** Then, we could also turn this around by noting 1 Corinthians 1:24, where Christ is described as ***“the power...and wisdom of God.”*** This seems to be a fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 11:1-2, where the prophet said, ***“Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.”*** We know from Matthew 13:54 that Jesus was known for teaching with wisdom. Well, here in today’s text from Proverbs 8, Lady Wisdom is described as being with God before, during, and after the creation. Some, then, have assumed that Jesus and Lady Wisdom are one in the same. But here’s the problem: In several of these verses, Lady Wisdom is described as being ***“brought forth”*** and ***“established.”*** Some, then, have come to this conclusion: Jesus and Lady Wisdom are the same, Lady Wisdom was created; therefore, Jesus is not eternal, but he is a created being. Several have used this passage to teach this, including the Mormons and the so-called Jehovah’s Witnesses.

From other passages, though, we know this is not the case. Jesus was not created. So, I need to give this reminder here at the beginning (as we have noted several times over the past few weeks): Solomon is using some highly figurative language in this passage. Let's remember: Solomon is speaking to his sons, so he's basically saying, "Sons, if you ever find yourselves wanting to chase women, start with this one!" Of course, Wisdom is not literally a woman, but wisdom is PERSONIFIED as a woman, as a figure of speech, to help us understand. Hopefully we can see this somewhat logically: If wisdom was literally created, then was God lacking wisdom before he created wisdom? Obviously, no! What we are looking at here, then, is poetic language, a figure of speech.

So, let's continue to keep this in mind as we study today. I've given the overall summary up here as wisdom being very closely tied to the "ETERNAL MIND OF GOD." With this in mind, let's look together at Proverbs 8:22-31 – the words of King Solomon in Proverbs 8:22-31,

- ²² ***"The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way,
Before His works of old.***
- ²³ ***"From everlasting I was established,
From the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth.***
- ²⁴ ***"When there were no depths I was brought forth,
When there were no springs abounding with water.***
- ²⁵ ***"Before the mountains were settled,
Before the hills I was brought forth;***
- ²⁶ ***While He had not yet made the earth and the fields,
Nor the first dust of the world.***
- ²⁷ ***"When He established the heavens, I was there,
When He inscribed a circle on the face of the deep,***
- ²⁸ ***When He made firm the skies above,
When the springs of the deep became fixed,***
- ²⁹ ***When He set for the sea its boundary
So that the water would not transgress His command,
When He marked out the foundations of the earth;***
- ³⁰ ***Then I was beside Him, as a master workman;
And I was daily His delight,
Rejoicing always before Him,***
- ³¹ ***Rejoicing in the world, His earth,
And having my delight in the sons of men.***

As we think about Lady Wisdom as the personification of the eternal mind of God, I'd like to break this passage down into three sections, and I'd like for us to look at Lady Wisdom before, during and after the creation of the Universe.

I. And we start with the BEFORE.

In verses 22-26, we find that Lady Wisdom goes back not just TO the beginning, but even BEFORE the beginning. In verse 22, ***"The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way, BEFORE His works of old."*** Wisdom has

always been one of God's eternal attributes. We think of the attributes of God, and we might think of God being "omniscient," he is "all-knowing." We might think of God being "omni-potent," he is "all-powerful." We might think of God being "omni-present," he is everywhere. He is just, and good, and merciful; God is love. Well, today, we are reminded that God is "all-wise." In the very last verse of Romans, in fact, Paul praises God the Father as **"the only wise God."** God is wise, and here we find that he has always been wise, even **"before"** the creation of the world.

And to emphasis this, I've highlighted the word **"before"** in this passage. Wisdom goes back to the beginning, and beyond. God was wise, even before the creation of the world. And I know we have the reference to wisdom being **"brought forth"** (in verses 24-25), but let's remember: There was never a time when God was not wise! The emphasis here is on God being wise from eternity. Wisdom is one of God's eternal attributes. God has always been wise, even from before the beginning. God's wisdom existed before the oceans, before the springs of the earth, before the mountains, before the hills, before the earth and the fields, even before the first dust was ever created. God has always been wise. Wisdom has been God's eternal companion, even before the creation of the world.

If we're ever tempted to think that we can outsmart God, let's remember: His wisdom extends even beyond the beginning, and if we rebel against his wisdom, the creation itself is a witness against us. And that seems to be the point Solomon is making to his sons. Each generation has a way of thinking that it is smarter than the one that came before it, but Solomon reminds us that God's wisdom is truly eternal. God's wisdom is older than dirt itself.

II. As we return to the text, I want us to continue with verses 27-29 as we notice that Lady Wisdom was also present DURING or AT the creation.

Lady Wisdom was with God **WHEN** the earth was created, and once again, we've done some highlighting up here. So, Lady Wisdom was with God **"before"** the creation, and she was also with God **"when"** the earth was created. So, not only was she present beforehand, but she also played a role in the creation, almost as an advisor of some kind (at least that's the way I would take this). Lady Wisdom was a consultant.

And this is where we get back to those parallels between Lady Wisdom and Jesus. Jesus also played a role at the creation. We think back again to those words from John 1, **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. ...He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him"** (John 1:1-3, 10). Or, we might think again of Colossians 1:16-17, where Paul praises the Lord Jesus and says, **"For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together."** Or, we might think of the opening words of Hebrews as the author says that God, **"...in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world."** Or, we might think of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 8:6, when he says, **"...yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him."** All of this takes us back to Genesis 1:26, where God says, **"Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...."** Who is the **"Us"** in this passage? Obviously, Jesus was there, but wisdom was there as well. Lady Wisdom was present at or during the creation, **"I was there,"** she says, **"when he established the heavens," "when he inscribed a circle on the face of the deep, when he made the skies above, when the springs**

of the deep became fixed, when he set for the sea its boundary, ...when he marked out the foundations of the earth." Lady Wisdom was there.

- III. So, Lady Wisdom was present **BEFORE** the creation and also **DURING** the creation, and as we come back to the last few verses here, we also find that Lady Wisdom is present with God **AFTER** the creation, on an ongoing basis.

And I realize there is some overlap here – we are not being dogmatic with the categories (that's not the point), but the point here is: Even after the creation, wisdom delights in God on an ongoing basis. Lady Wisdom is pictured as rejoicing with God continually. She is eternal. And once again, we are highlighting a few of the words indicating this, *"then,"* referring to after the creation, and then *"always,"* indicating that this relationship continues.

The real emphasis here, though, should be on the *"rejoicing"* and the *"delight"* part of this. This last paragraph is incredibly positive as we have Lady Wisdom *"frolicking"* in God's creation (as some translations have it). She's pictured as *"twirling"* or *"dancing"* in some translations. There is some joy in this passage! Wisdom is not just sitting in a corner somewhere, but Wisdom is celebrating. Wisdom delights in God's creation.

And this is where we realize: If Lady Wisdom delights in the creation, then maybe we should as well. Sometimes, we tend to be a bit disconnected from the world around us, especially here in Wisconsin in the winter. But there is a huge value in allowing ourselves to be amazed in what God has done for us. There is a blessing in being *"delighted"* by the world around us. I know, it may be hard to delight in the natural world during a "snow squall" warning like we had this past Friday night. But even in the cold, we stand in awe of God's power. We think of the words of Psalm 147, where the author stands amazed and says,

¹⁶ *He gives snow like wool;
He scatters the frost like ashes.*

¹⁷ *He casts forth His ice as fragments;
Who can stand before His cold?*

Even on a day like this, we rejoice and delight alongside Lady Wisdom. We are amazed at God's creation.

Conclusion:

As we think back over what King Solomon has taught us this morning, we haven't really been directly challenged to change our lives. This isn't really a "this is what you need to do" kind of lesson. So, what is the point? How should this passage affect us this week? Obviously, Solomon is reminding us here that God really did create everything we see around us. This is not new information. We've looked at this back in Proverbs 3:19, when Solomon said, *"The LORD by wisdom founded the earth, by understanding He established the heavens."* We know this. We think of what Jeremiah says in Jeremiah 10:12, *"It is He who made the earth by His power, who established the world by His wisdom; and by His understanding He has stretched out the heavens."* Again, we know this. But the new information we have here is the striking resemblance between Jesus and Lady Wisdom. Like I mentioned earlier, we don't want to make too much of this (understanding this is a figure of speech). And yet, the passage does seem to point to the Lord. Again, according to Paul, Jesus Christ is the *"wisdom of God"* (1 Corinthians 1:24). Any praise of wisdom, then, ultimately leads us to Jesus.

And this is comforting! The God who made us is a wise and loving Father, and he sent his only Son to save us and to show us how to live. Knowing this, don't we also trust that God can help us through whatever challenges we face in this life? The same God who made us has also promised to share his wisdom with us if we will only ask for it! As 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."*** Today's passage has reminded us, then, that we don't rely on worldly wisdom, but our mission in this life is to put our trust in God. Our goal is to structure our lives around this wisdom that traces its roots back to before the creation of this world. Our goal is to put our trust in the wisdom that became flesh in the life of Jesus on this earth. Our goal is to join Lady Wisdom in seeing God for who he really is. Our goal is to think what God is thinking. And to accomplish this goal, we need to make sure we have a close relationship with Jesus. He is the wisdom of God. So, if we are struggling, if we find ourselves making some very unwise decisions in this life, Solomon would remind us that Lady Wisdom represents the eternal mind of God, and his wisdom is available to us through Jesus.

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 eternal wisdom. We know that you are a loving Father. You know what we need even before we think to ask. This morning, though, we ask for wisdom. We pray that we would search for wisdom. We know that you have sent wisdom to this earth in the form of a man, your only Son, Jesus. Thank you, Father! Thank you for scripture. Thank you for surrounding us with Christian friends. We pray that we would encourage each other to make wise decisions.

In Jesus we pray. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com