

Lady Wisdom

PART 5: ETERNAL MIND OF GOD (PROVERBS 8:32-36)

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It is good to be together this morning! 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.fourlakesc.org/visitor.

As we get started, I'll just give a brief encouragement: As the city-county health department seems to be lifting the mask mandate this coming Tuesday (March 1), the COVID situation does seem to be improving. So, if you are only joining us online or on the phone each week, we would invite you to take this as an opportunity to jump back in to worshiping with us in-person. The cartoon goes back to 1986, but I love the concept: If you have been absent for worship for a while, consider March to be "Amnesty Month." Just come on back! We would love to see you again! I know some of you still have some medical reasons to be away, and we understand that, but we do miss seeing you in person. I saw another cartoon this week (from many years ago), and the church sign basically said, "Please give us another chance." I love that as well. Much has happened over the past two years, I feel like I have personally dropped the ball here and there, but we would invite you to seriously reconsider jumping back in to the "assembling of ourselves together" (as the writer of Hebrews describes it). And for those who may not want to cuddle up to your neighbor here in this room, we do still have the monitor downstairs. If you are concerned about being too close for all of class or worship, please know that downstairs might be an option, if you are interested. And just a reminder for most of us: For those who show up in a mask next week, let's give them some extra space. They will have their reasons, and following the Golden Rule, let's perhaps take the mask as a reminder that we may need to be extra careful. And, by the way, I am especially thankful for the HEPA filters Gary installed a year or so ago.

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, and this one comes to us through Michael Madden at the Spring Hill Church of Christ down in Florida. A week or two ago, he says that "Dave Perry was baptized this afternoon. We welcome him to our family at the Spring Hill

Church of Christ. All glory and praise to God.” We are thankful for Dave’s decision to obey the gospel, and we would invite you to do the same. If you would like to study the scriptures together, we hope you will get in touch.

This morning, we conclude our series of lessons based on our extended and somewhat sporadic study of the book of Proverbs! In this series-within-a-series, we have been 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) willingly and openly shares her wisdom with 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.

We then 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 was especially relevant to Solomon’s sons, who would most likely rule at some point in the future.

And then last week, we looked at wisdom’s close relationship with the ETERNAL MIND OF GOD, and we found that Lady Wisdom was with God BEFORE, DURING, and AFTER the creation of the world. And we also noted some very interesting parallels between Lady Wisdom and the Lord Jesus himself, who was also with God BEFORE, DURING, and AFTER the creation as well.

This morning, we come to the end of this chapter, as Solomon wraps all of this up with a **“therefore.”** This comes in verses 32-36, where Solomon explains that the decision as to whether to follow Lady Wisdom is a CONSEQUENTIAL CHOICE. It is a choice, in fact, between life and death. What he’s saying is: Everything I’ve said about Lady Wisdom in this chapter is relevant – 1.) She makes herself available, 2.) She influences our relationships, 3.) She influences how we handle power and wealth, 4.) She reflects the eternal mind of God, and now, 5.) All of this matters, all of this is incredibly important! The decision as to whether we follow Lady Wisdom has some eternal consequences. This is a consequential decision. She starts then, by saying, **“Now therefore, O sons, listen to me.”** This is important! And again, as we are about to discover, this decision is a matter of life and death.

We will get back to the text in just a moment, but as we prepare to hear what Lady Wisdom has to say, I’d like to point out that we don’t often think about life and death. Often, we are too distracted to think about life and death. Maybe we distract ourselves on purpose, but maybe we just don’t slow down enough to think about these things. But maybe we should. We die. All of us, in fact, will die, unless the Lord returns before that happens. And death can come at any time. Here in the United States right now, we have an average life expectancy of just over 78 years – roughly 76 for men and just over 80 for women, but averaging right around 78 years. To try to encourage us to think about death for just a moment, I want to try to illustrate what 78 years looks like.

We’ll start with a box, representing a week. One box equals one week. This box is a week.

We then move on to 52 of these boxes representing a year. This line represents a year.

And then we combine 78 of these lines, and we are looking at the average lifespan for those of us who live here in the United States right now.

In this next slide, I've broken it down a bit to try to help us plug ourselves into this illustration. We have the early years, followed by school (K-12), then college, a career, and then retirement. This obviously doesn't apply to all of us. We all take different paths, and that is okay. Also, some of you are beyond the age of 78, and that is awesome. You are literally, off the charts!

Personally, I am roughly 40 weeks into my 49th year, so I have put a star where I am this morning.

I've put another star at 33, the age at which Jesus was crucified.

I've put another one up here for Martin Luther King, Jr., who died at the age of 39.

I've put another star up here for John F. Kennedy, at 46, the age at which he was assassinated.

I've put one here for Abraham Lincoln, who died at the age of 56.

And I've put one down here at the bottom for Joe Biden, who is 79 at this point.

And I've done this to try to encourage us to think about our own mortality. All of us will die. Some of us have already outlived some of the most influential people who ever lived. Others have not quite made it to some of these milestones. But all of us will die.

And I share this because of the ***"therefore"*** in this passage. The choice as to whether we follow Lady Wisdom is a consequential decision. Sometimes we play a role in how long we live. Sometimes others make that decision for us (as with some of the men on the wall up here), but other times we personally make some incredibly important life or death decisions. And the choice as to whether we follow Lady Wisdom is one of those decisions. As we finish this chapter, let's look together, then, at the last few verses of Proverbs 8 – the words of Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 8:32-36,

³² ***"Now therefore, O sons, listen to me,
For blessed are they who keep my ways.***

³³ ***"Heed instruction and be wise,
And do not neglect it.***

³⁴ ***"Blessed is the man who listens to me,
Watching daily at my gates,
Waiting at my doorposts.***

³⁵ ***"For he who finds me finds life
And obtains favor from the LORD.***

³⁶ ***"But he who sins against me injures himself;
All those who hate me love death."***

As we think about Lady Wisdom as the personification of the eternal mind of God, I'd like to apply the whole chapter by breaking this passage down into two parts (as Solomon does) – we have the encouragement to follow Lady Wisdom, and that choice has some life-or-death consequences.

I. And we start with the choice of LIFE (explained to us in verses 32-35).

Lady Wisdom is begging Solomon's sons to listen: Listen, because there is a blessing on those who ***"keep my ways,"*** she says. Not only are they encouraged to listen, but they are invited to ***"heed instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it."*** And the blessing is for those who watch daily at her gates, for those who wait at her doorposts. So, she describes not only listening, but an eagerness to listen, being there before the gates are open. Maybe you've had the experience of standing in line, waiting for concert tickets or waiting to buy something on Black Friday. We show up early for what is important to us. Some of you know I like to get to Cottage Café right when they open at 6 o'clock every Sunday morning. A year or so ago, another old guy started showing up, but the clock in his car is off, so he always gets out of his car and waits ten minutes in the cold. I've been getting out and waiting with him, talking about old guy stuff as we wait (today we talked about the planet Venus, we talked about his recent gambling adventures out in Nevada), but we get there early, because breakfast is important to us. And that's the idea here: Being there outside Lady Wisdom's gates every day, eager to learn. I think of one of my favorite verses in the book of Acts, where Cornelius has called for Peter, and when Peter shows up, Cornelius says to Peter (in Acts 10:33), ***"So I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord."*** Cornelius and his household were eager to hear what Peter had to say. When something is important to us, we show up on time, even early. We don't walk in 5 or 10 minutes late, but we show up early. I remember a professor at Freed-Hardeman 30 years ago who would lock the door of his classroom at exactly 7:30 a.m.. When the lecture started, that was it. People stopped being late to his classes. But if something is important to us, we show up early. It's this eagerness Solomon is encouraging here in Proverbs 8. Listening to Lady Wisdom may not be convenient. Listening to Lady Wisdom might have a way of disrupting our schedule.

But, pursuing her is worth it. And the reason comes in verse 35, ***"For he who finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord."*** The Lord is the source of this life! This favor comes from the Lord. God is a God of life. He is the giver not just of 78 years, but he is the giver of eternal life, ***"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."*** The passage is not limited to eternal life, though. Life is not just limited to a long life here on this earth, either. Life might also refer to fullness of life, a good life, a blessed life, to a life well-lived, a fulfilling life. And the reason is: Wisdom just has a way of making life better. We think of what Jesus says in John 10:10, ***"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."*** We are talking, then, about spiritual life, abundant life, a fulfilling life. And this life comes from following and pursuing Lady Wisdom. Those who search for her and find her will find life and will obtain favor from the Lord.

First of all, then, the choice as to whether to follow Lady Wisdom is a consequential decision. If we choose to follow and obey, the blessing is life.

II. As we return to the text, I want us to close with verse 36, as we notice that the choice to reject Lady Wisdom leads to DEATH.

As she says in verse 36, ***"But he who sins against me injures himself; all those who hate me love death."*** So, on one hand, he who seeks Lady Wisdom finds life, but on the other hand, the one who misses wisdom, injures himself (or treats himself violently). And the ones who hate Lady Wisdom actually ***"love death."*** When we turn away from wisdom, the consequences are severe. In fact, we have the same consequences that come along with the decision to follow Jesus. In John 3:36, where Jesus says, ***"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."*** It's a decision the

Jewish leaders were having a hard time with in John 5:39-40, when Jesus warns them and says, ***“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life.”*** Spiritual life or death is a decision we make. We choose life by walking in wisdom, or we miss it, and we treat ourselves violently; we hate wisdom, and we love death.

To choose death (even eternal death) is a choice we can hardly imagine, but it is a choice we make. We might think of the warning God told Ezekiel to give to the people in Ezekiel 33:11, ***“Say to them, ‘As I live!’ declares the Lord GOD, ‘I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?’”*** God invites us to choose to life, but sometimes we do choose spiritual death. There was a time in his life when even Solomon chose death. There was a time in his life when even Solomon ignored God’s wisdom and acted in a way that brought pain and spiritual destruction into his life. But this is the warning: The one who sins against Lady Wisdom injures himself, and all of those who hate Lady Wisdom actually love death.

Conclusion:

As we come to the end of this chapter, we have the reminder that the choice as to whether we follow Lady Wisdom is a decision with consequences. This is a matter of life and death. It is impossible, in fact, to be neutral. We cannot just put off a decision. Remember: Choosing to follow Lady Wisdom involves an active pursuit. Either we are showing up early to the classroom, eager to learn, or we really aren’t concerned about this pursuit. There is no neutrality here. And the same thing is true of following Jesus: Either we choose to follow, or we don’t. We think of what Mark wrote in Mark 8:34-38,

³⁴ And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. ³⁵ For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”

Either we are all in or we have decided on death as the default. Either we take up our cross on a daily basis and follow Jesus and live, or we don’t, and we give up our soul.

And what is true of following Jesus is also true of wisdom. I know we’ve referred to James 1:5 several times over the past few weeks, but notice again the focused determination in this passage (in James 1:5-7),

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. ⁶ But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸ being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Following Lady Wisdom is a decision we make. This week, then, let’s pray for wisdom. And let’s make the decision to listen, and to keep her ways, and to follow her instruction, and to not neglect it; because we know that choosing to follow Lady Wisdom is a decision with some life and death consequences.

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. This morning, we ask for wisdom. We ask for the wisdom from above that is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. We pray that we would always be humble and obedient, trusting your word.

Thank you, Father, for blessing us and for taking care of us as a congregation. Thank you for watching over Abe this week. Be with John as he continues his struggle with cancer. We are thankful for good medical care here in the Madison area.

Father, we ask for your blessing on our brothers and sisters in Ukraine this morning. We pray that you will be with the governing authorities in this world, so that we as your people would be able to live quiet lives in all godliness and dignity. We pray that your light would shine through us, especially in difficult times.

Lord, come quickly! In Jesus we pray. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com