

Proverbs 31: The Two Women of Proverbs

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[0 : 00] to that, and I've decided since this is the last sermon in our series on Proverbs that I'm just going to read the whole chapter in our hearing.

So listen, follow along with me as I read the words of King Lemuel, an article that his mother taught him.

What are you doing, my son? What are you doing, son of my womb? What are you doing, son of my vows? Do not give your strength to women, your ways to those who destroy kings.

It's not for kings, O Lemuel. It is not for kings to drink wine or for rulers to take strong drink, lest they drink and forget what has been decreed and pervert the rights of all the afflicted.

Give strong drink to the one who is perishing and wine to those in bitter distress. Let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more.

[1 : 16] Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously. Defend the rights of the poor and needy.

An excellent wife, who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her and he will have no lack of gain.

She does him good and not harm all the days of her life. She seeks wool and flax and works with willing hands. She is like the ships of the merchant.

She brings her food from afar. She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens.

She considers a field and buys it. With the fruit of her hand, she plants a vineyard. She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong. She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.

[2 : 22] Her lamp does not go out at night. She puts her hands to the distaff and her hands hold the spindle. She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy.

She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet. She makes bed coverings for herself.

Her clothing is fine linen and purple. Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land. She makes linen garments and sells them.

She delivers sashes to the merchant. Strength and dignity are her clothing. And she laughs at the time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom.

And the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed.

[3 : 22] Her husband also. And he praises her. Many women have done excellently. But you surpass them all.

Trumb is deceitful. And beauty is vain. But the woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Give her the fruit of her hands.

And let her works praise her. In the gates. This is the word of the Lord. Amen. Father, thank you for the day.

Thank you for this series and where we are at this juncture. Pray, Lord, that this word from your heart, through my heart and these lips, would address the known and unknown needs of those who are among us.

We commend ourselves to those ends. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen. Proverbs chapter 31. If you've been around the church for any length of time, this particular chapter in the Bible is not strange to you.

[4 : 32] At least a portion of it. It is here that we find the seventh and last collection of sayings.

We've learned over the past week that the book of Proverbs includes seven different collections. This is the last of those. And a few comments are in order before we get specifically to the text about the whole of the chapter.

Here it is that we find, and you heard the last verses 10 through 31, the woman known as the virtuous woman. At least that's what the old King James language, how it describes her or labels her.

Other terminology include the wife of excellence, a noble wife. But I want you to see on this afternoon that Proverbs 31 actually features two women.

The first woman enters the picture in verses 1 through 9. And here's what I want you to see. Her role is a speaking role.

[5 : 48] Her voice is heard through the voice of her son. The second, more recognizable woman, she does not speak in the text.

But the picture of her that we see in verses 10 through 31 is worth a thousand words. In verses 1 through 9, we see the principles of wisdom from a mother to a son.

And he is actually what you would call a royal son. The setting is a court setting. And let me put it in contemporary terminology for you.

In this setting, you have, you might say, those in the upper echelons of life, even in government settings. If you were to look at what they wear on their feet, these are those whose feet are in wingtip kind of shoes.

So that's what we see in, or let me put it in women terminology, spike heels or whatever the women in upper echelons wear. Huh? That's what we see in verses 1 through 9.

[7 : 08] So, but in verses 10 through 31, it's the practice of wisdom that is embodied primarily in the domain of the home.

Stocking feet, bare feet, whatever it is that you wear around the house. Principles of wisdom, the practice of wisdom.

The words of wisdom, a walk in wisdom. A mother, a homemaker, and so much more that we see.

One woman's wise words, another woman's wise walk. But each of these women is worthy on this afternoon of yours and my undivided attention as we look into the text.

So before we turn to the more familiar lady of Proverbs 31, I want us to look at what could be called the forgotten lady of the chapter.

[8 : 14] And a good header for verses 1 through 9 is the following. A woman's godly exhortation.

A woman's godly exhortation in verses 1 through 9. Look at those with me. Look at verse 1. The words of King Lemuel. An oracle that his mother told him.

Words accredited to this king. When, you know, if you know Bible history, you know whether in northern kingdom or the southern kingdom, there was no King Lemuel per se.

It seems like this foreign king and his mother could have been converts to Israel's religion, to Israel's faith, to Israel's God.

And though the words are initially credited to Lemuel himself, we are quick to see that this oracle, that is this weighty message, this message that was lifted up by the voice, was actually, whether it was a threat or a promise, this oracle actually came from the lips of his mama.

[9 : 31] Huh? It's her words that we hear in verses 1 through 9. And what of those words, huh? Look at what we see particularly in verses 3, 2 through 6.

Her words are words of caution. Her words are words of caution. Look at what we see in verse 2.

Here, we have a very earnest appeal. This mother, I mean, hear her heart. What are you doing, my son?

What are you doing, son of my womb? What are you doing, son of my vows? You hear that earnest appeal that she is addressing to her royal son, whom she had dedicated to God either before his birth or after his birth.

That's what it means, son of my vows. After she gets his attention in verse 2, she proceeds to warn him about, and listen to this, conduct that would compromise his standing as a ruler.

[10 : 54] Conduct that would compromise his calling as a ruler. Things that would actually render him unfit for his mission in the world.

His assignment. She issues him cautions about that, on how fitting and how appropriate it is for parents, from when a child is young, even to the point where they're on the threshold of the rest of their life, either in their profession or wherever, for parents to be able to speak words and appeal earnestly to those children.

Those voices are still needed to counter the other voices that are bombarding all of us from all around us. This mother's warning are about two timeless, intoxicating influences.

What? Women and wine. Can I make it sort of without gender? People of the opposite sex and drink.

Here, it just specifically happens to be women because the king was a man. The king was a flesh and blood, live kind of male.

[12 : 21] Huh? In the royal court, both women and wine were both permissible and they were accessible.

And the king who, the kings who often had harem, harems with women that would provide his pleasurable, sexual kind of needs, they were accessible and, in a sense, permissible.

Huh? Huh? Women likely, women of a harem. The warnings of Proverbs chapters 5 through 7, and we didn't, Kevin preached of chapter 5, but we didn't get into 6 and 7, concerning the strange women that were in the streets are applicable to these women that occupied even this place or were in this place of power.

Huh? The other word of caution concerns strong drink. Another subject that we see earlier in the book of Proverbs. I remember in my holiness church learning Proverbs chapter 20, just about one, and one verbatim.

Wine is a mocker. Strong drink is raging. And whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise. Huh? Or as the ESV says, whosoever is led by it is not wise.

[13 : 53] Huh? Timeless warnings from a mother to a royal son that applies to all sons of all ages.

Huh? Huh? Look at verses 3 and 4 particularly. And listen to what he's saying. She is saying, do not give huh? your strength to women, your ways to those who destroy kings.

And listen to what she says in verse 4. Twice as repeated. It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine or for rulers to take strong drink.

Huh? Great words for all of us as it relates to indulgences that can become addictive.

Huh? Indulgences that can become addictive. And what a fitting appropriate word in a university setting.

[14 : 57] Huh? Where oftentimes there are those who come, I mean this is the first time for some really to be away from home and away from the confines and it's like they have been loosed or unleashed into the world.

Oh, what great cautions for them but not only for them for all of us. Huh? Those who are sons and daughters and adults need to hear and to heed these words.

But particularly why these kinds of words for those who were in this setting of power in the royal court as it were. You see that in verse 5?

Lest they drink and forget what has been decreed and pervert the rights of all the afflicted.

Let me qualify what I'm saying here. I don't believe that we can find clear or specific directions against alcohol in Scripture.

[16 : 07] I think that Scripture does exhort us all the time in every place to self-control. So again, and I think that is what is probably in view here.

It's not an absolute don't drink per se, but again, he is warning against overindulgence and the implications of it back then as well as for you and me today.

Lest they forget and pervert the consequences of giving himself, that is, this royal son, to such things are seen in verses 5 and following, and this is what it amounts to, an inability to give himself to things that really count.

If you give yourself over here, it will cripple you or render you ineffective forgiving yourself in ways that really are meaningful and redemptive and healing.

Those in the halls of power, and we've seen it over the last few years particularly, I was looking at a Washington Post article that really highlighted, I mean, just those who are walking in the halls of power and how they have been particularly overtaken by the wows of sexual temptation.

[17 : 39] Highlights representative Mark Sauter from Republic from Indiana back here, it was the latest one who had been snared. He acknowledged an extramarital affair.

And it goes on with the roster, the list of people. Mark Foley allegedly sent lewd text messages to house pages in the house of power.

Governor Mark Sanford, we all know about, a mistress in Argentina. John Enson, payouts to a family member of his former mistress.

John Edwards, Eliot Spitzer. These people who are giving themselves in the wrong directions rather than in things that complemented their call.

They compromise their call because of their addictions and indulgences and friends.

[18 : 42] You and I are not exempt from temptations and those same kinds of faults. Such indulgences, they rob people of time and energy and money and relationships.

They take people away from spouse and children and work and other meaningful endeavors. Less, don't give yourself over here. Here's the warning from this mother.

Mother exhorts and cautions her son about indulgences that can undermine his effectiveness as one who is called to enforce what is just and right and fair, particularly for those in need.

Words of caution. But also look at verses 6 through 9 where we see words of encouragement. Words of encouragement.

She urged her son to serve in ways that complemented his call to rule or to govern. Notice what he was to do.

[19 : 50] Look at verse 6. Give. Give. Give. And I would say give to those in need. Look what the text says. It says give strong drink to those, to the one who is perishing and wine to those in bitter distress.

Let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more. So what is he saying? Go and get a case of wine and give it to homeless people.

Get a 24 pack of beer and stand on the corner and pass it around to all of the homeless that you see whether in High Park or downtown and friends we have them don't we?

Huh? No. Some see verses 6 and 7 as sarcastic commands. And they say it's sarcastic in that they're emphasizing that intoxicants are really useless for kings as well as those who are impoverished.

So some see it as somewhat of a sarcastic kind of statement. Others see the verses as a directive to provide rather temporary relief to the down and out through the numbing effects of alcohol.

[21 : 10] I think there is an alternative that is better than either of those two options. And I think that the alternative is really consistent with what we see in the context.

Notice the cautions have been issued in verses 2 through 5 and I believe that we're into the encouragement section the thing that she is really encouraging her royal son to do.

She's encouraging her son to provide relief though it may be temporary for those who are downtrodden.

What is she saying? Rather than indulging yourself use your resources and use your influence to provide an atmosphere that brings relief for the needy.

And I would say is the drink part of a more comprehensive kind of setting that includes other things including food so perhaps not just drink but could you be saying hey throw a banquet throw a party for them.

[22 : 23] Temporary relief beneficial meaningful beneficial and here's the question that I would ask us on this afternoon. Could Jesus have had this passage in mind in Luke chapter 14 listen to what he said.

he said to the man who had invited him when you give a dinner or a banquet do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors lest they invite you in return and you be repaid.

But listen who are you going to invite? When you give a feast invite the poor the crippled the lame the blind and you will be blessed because you because they cannot repay you you will be repaid at the resurrection of just.

So here's coming from the lips of Jesus and could he have had in mind this particular passage in Proverbs that we're looking at on this afternoon.

Here's an announcement of sorts. CCDA Christian Community Development Association is coming to Chicago on next week.

[23 : 39] And what you will have is a gathering of Christ followers who major in these kinds of efforts ministering to the downtrodden taking justice to those who have been deprived of it.

The ministries and the churches that these dear brothers and sisters are associated with they minister to people who are deemed as throw away people deemed by such other people in society.

They run soup kitchens and shelters and health clinics and other kinds of efforts to those who would be deemed the least in society. They major in the mercy of God dispensing it to people in places where it's needed most.

Our church is not devoid of such efforts. hope for Chicago helps us, trains us, guides us, directs us as to how we can touch Chicago's neighborhoods with the love of Christ.

For when Chicago is coming up in about a month the ministry to the homeless in Chicago in High Park is going to restart as far as the street ministry.

[24 : 59] There are other kinds of efforts that you and I can give ourselves to that are consistent with what should be the conduct of the king and certainly was the conduct of our king when he walked this earth.

Intersection cafe on the west side is another such effort. What this woman's wise words and courage is on display actually in the other woman in the chapter.

As a matter of fact, look at 31 and 20. So she's encouraging but we see this kind of life touching and heart touching and hand touching efforts.

They're on display in the other Proverbs 31 woman in verse 20. Listen, she opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hand, what?

Two hands to the needy. In verses 6 and 7, generosity is in view. But notice also in verses 8 and 9, advocacy is in view.

[26 : 08] On the one hand, give. On the other hand, speak up. Speak up for those without a voice. Be an advocate for those who are voiceless, for those who are passing away.

Defend the rights of the poor and needy. It's what's being encouraged here. In Israel, what we see here was to be the standard for rulers, for leaders, for those who were God's agent.

Listen to David's prayer for Solomon in Psalm 72 and 1. You needn't turn to it. Give to the king your justice, oh God, and your righteousness to the royal son.

May he judge your people with righteousness and your poor, interesting phrase, your poor with justice. While you and I may not indulge ourselves with wine or women, and hopefully or not, do we need to ask ourselves, what are the things that actually do intoxicate us and keep us away from things that may be more consistent with the conduct of the royal son?

Keep us from being agents of the king's mercy. Are there things in our lives that just we have to do and we don't, and I think one of the reasons that we don't do it is because we don't plan to do it.

[27 : 49] We don't carve out time and expend energy and effort to do such things. What keeps us from opening our hands and our hearts and our mouths for the cause of those who are in need?

A life of godly wisdom, friends, includes those kind of efforts. A life of godly wisdom includes those kinds of efforts.

Godly exhortation, Godly exhortation, verses 1-9, and 10-31, and the woman that's going to get changed in this message is the one that we've heard most about.

I'm not going to be as long on her, but I do want you to see some things here. The shift is from the woman's godly exhortation to the woman's godly, another woman's godly example.

godly exhortation verses 1-9, godly example verses 10-31, and there's a shift. But there also, and I really want you to see this, there are also some less obvious things that you and I need to see in the text.

[29 : 05] Venue-wise, it goes from the king's court, the halls of government power, all the way to the home.

Look at the range. from way up here to way over here. Person-wise, the shift is from a royal son, a ruling male, to a home-making woman.

Wisdom is essential for every person, regardless of where you are. Look at the continuum there, the range that's there, and everyone in between, everyone, wisdom.

wisdom is essential, regardless of the venue that you find yourself in, regardless of where you find your feet in life. Wisdom is absolutely essential. So while wisdom's words are heard in verses 3-9, wisdom's walk is seen in verses 10-31.

we see the description of an excellent wife. Who hasn't heard a message regarding this particular woman? She is a wonderful woman indeed. No proper name, but not without reputation.

[30 : 17] Her excellence is seen. Look at verse 10. The excellent wife who can find. Look at verse 29. It's sort of the bookends there. It speaks about many women have done excellently.

everything in between gives you this picture of this excellent, this noble woman. The 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet are used to describe her various virtues.

A very poetic composition, artistic composition that's here. Specifically, what about her worth? Look there, and you can see that in verses 11 and 12.

She is incomparably valuable. Like Lady Wisdom, her value exceeds that of which of the most precious of jewels. She is worthy of trust.

We see that in verses 11 and 12. The heart of her husband, trust in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not harm all the days of her life.

[31 : 19] She's safe. Her heart, his heart, and his household are safe in her hands. She is worthy of trust. What about her works? Look at verse 13.

She works willingly with her hands. She's supportive. She invests in others with her gifts and resources and her abilities. What about her words? She opens her mouth, verse 26, with wisdom and the teaching of kindness is under her tongue.

Again, this description, marvelous description of this woman that we get to see. She's industrious, verses 18 and 19. She is generous, verse 20. She's fearless, verse 21.

All of these things characterize her. And you can go, we could go on and on to see a description of this excellent wife in verses 10 through 31.

But not only is this a description of an excellent wife, it actually is a prescription for an excellent life. And we see that. And here we are, we've arrived at the end of the book, this end of the book that really celebrates the wisdom and the wisdom of God, the fear of wisdom and the fear of God.

[32 : 31] And we see here, once again, the writer extolling, even as they go off this last collection of extolling, are applauding the virtues of wisdom.

In verses 2 through 9, wisdom is promoted through a woman in a royal setting. And verses 10 through 31, personified through a woman in a domestic setting.

She's a wife and mother and homemaker and business lady. She's involved with others in the community. She's a woman of unquestionable character. But foundational to this life of wisdom is what we see in verse 30.

And let me direct your attention to that. Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

She's a woman who fears the Lord, the foundation, the beginning of wisdom. She is a woman of faith. And her profound reverence and respect for the Lord, it touches absolutely every area of her life.

[33 : 44] And they are the key to her. The key to her earthly dealings is her heavenly relationship with God. This woman is fueled by the fear of God.

And the fruit of that is on display in her life for all the world to see. Not only an excellent wife, but a beautiful life is a life of wisdom.

The fear of the Lord is a matter of the heart. It's inward. And it's the best adornment, friends, that any one of us can have on this afternoon. It's the key to functioning in our earthly roles within family and outside of it.

Huh? What am I saying on this afternoon? And how does Proverbs 31 actually help us? Wise living demands that we hear and heed words and follow examples of wisdom.

That we hear and heed the words, but also follow the examples of wisdom. And no better example has been set for us than the Lord Jesus himself.

[34 : 56] Huh? And the realities that we see promoted and personified in the two women of Proverbs 31 are perfected in one man, the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Scripture speaks of him or the one who majored among other things in the fear of the Lord and in wisdom and in justice.

Huh? Isaiah chapter 11 speaks to that. You might want to look it up when you go home, but listen to this as I read. There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his root shall bear fruit.

And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him. This is a messianic prophecy as it relates to Christ that was the coming Christ at the time of writing. And listen, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.

And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord, and he shall not judge by what his eyes see or decide disputes by what his ears hear. But listen to this. But with righteousness, he shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth, and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked or slay the wicked.

[36 : 15] Huh? What we see in these two ladies, it's fulfilled in one person, one man, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So in one person, we have what we hear as well as what we see in the Proverbs 31 women. We see wisdom in a royal son to be displayed in his reverence for God and his execution of righteousness for all of those in need.

And then we see wisdom personified in Christ to the max. The intersection of his life with those he encountered was absolutely life-changing.

Christ. Wisdom epitomized. The wisdom of God. The righteousness of God. The superlatives of the text and all of Proverbs remind us of him.

The one who is altogether lovely. The one who is more precious than silver, more costly than gold. The one who is incomparable and altogether lovely.

[37 : 25] And ultimately, a prescription for a good life demands that we embrace the one who personified wisdom to perfection. And those who get him get life.

And honoring him and obeying him, friends, serves us for both time and eternity. And may you and I be found to be people nothing less than those very things.

Let's pray as we prepare for the Lord's table. through the Lord's table.