

## Sermon Notes

# WORSHIP SERVICE -

12.18.2022

## PROVERBS 31

### I. INTRODUCTION

Proverbs 31:10-31

10 An excellent wife who can find?  
She is far more precious than jewels.  
11 The heart of her husband trusts in her,  
and he will have no lack of gain.  
12 She does him good, and not harm,  
all the days of her life.  
13 She seeks wool and flax,  
and works with willing hands.  
14 She is like the ships of the merchant;  
she brings her food from afar.  
15 She rises while it is yet night  
and provides food for her household  
and portions for her maidens.  
16 She considers a field and buys it;  
with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.  
17 She dresses herself with strength  
and makes her arms strong.  
18 She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.  
Her lamp does not go out at night.  
19 She puts her hands to the distaff,  
and her hands hold the spindle.  
20 She opens her hand to the poor  
and reaches out her hands to the needy.  
21 She is not afraid of snow for her household,  
for all her household are clothed in scarlet.  
22 She makes bed coverings for herself;  
her clothing is fine linen and purple.  
23 Her husband is known in the gates  
when he sits among the elders of the land.  
24 She makes linen garments and sells them;  
she delivers sashes to the merchant.  
25 Strength and dignity are her clothing,  
and she laughs at the time to come.  
26 She opens her mouth with wisdom,  
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.  
27 She looks well to the ways of her household  
and does not eat the bread of idleness.  
28 Her children rise up and call her blessed;  
her husband also, and he praises her:  
29 "Many women have done excellently,  
but you surpass them all."

30 Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,  
but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.  
31 Give her of the fruit of her hands,  
and let her works praise her in the gates.

## II. THE CONTEXT

- Original audience of Proverbs was Solomon's sons; lessons from a father to a son.
- The book is for the princes of Israel, young men working in the royal court as part of Israel's nobility.
- This is part of collection VII in Proverbs and is attributed to King Lemuel.
- Prov 31:1 The words of King Lemuel. An oracle that his mother taught him:
- We don't know who Lemuel is, he is not one of Israel's kings, and it is likely that his family were converts to Israel's faith.
- Lemuel is recounting what his mother taught him.
- There are two sections in ch31.
- Vv1-9 are the admonitions from Lemuel's mother, they are warnings to avoid any intoxication that would hinder his ability to govern righteously.
- He is to avoid unrestrained sexual gratification
- Prov 31:3 Do not give your strength to women, your ways to those who destroy kings.
- "Strength" is the Hebrew word "ḥayîl," which means strength, capacity, noble, competent, excellent.
- Avoid succumbing to drunkenness as that will hamper his ability to rule. (31:4-5)
- She warns him against intoxicants that can dismantle just decrees that protect the poor. (31:8-9)
- The king should rule with restraint, self-control and compassion.
- Don't give your excellence to intoxicants, they will zap your strength.
- Instead, what he is to do is give his excellence to an excellent woman.
- That is the second section of ch31.
- This is poetry, not narrative.
- It is an encomium: writing or speech that praises someone or something highly.
- It is in the style of heroic poetry, which recounts a hero's mighty deeds.
- The description in the passage has many references to military terminology, allusions to her strength that would be used of soldiers or warriors. - this is a heroic poem.
- Vv10-31 is a highly technical work of poetry in Hebrew.
- It is written as an acrostic poem.
- Each verse of the poem starts with the successive letter of the Hebrew Alphabet.
- The idea is one of completion, fullness.
- Psalm 112, Psalm 119, Psalm 145 are other acrostic poems.
- Read Psalm 112, it is a parallel to this passage.

## III. THE WOMAN WHO FEARS THE LORD

- The poem starts with a question, "An excellent wife who can find?"
- Last week we looked at what Proverbs had to say about an excellent wife.
- "An excellent wife is the crown of her husband..." (Prov 12:4)

- “He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord.” (Prov 18:22)
  - “...a prudent wife is from the Lord.” (Prov 19:14)
  - Can an excellent wife be found?
  - Truthfully, in this fallen world? No.
  - Is she a role model women should strive to be and emulate? Yes
  - Can they be her? No
  - At least, not completely, especially not apart from Christ.
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- Proverbs has been about the two paths--wisdom and folly.
  - Personified as Lady Wisdom and Woman Folly.
  - Solomon instructs and exhorts his son to follow Lady Wisdom, to choose her and live.
  - The focus of the entire book has been putting the spotlight on Lady Wisdom. Why would we come to the end of the book and find something different here?
  - Proverbs 31 is not written as a list of commands.
  - It is a praise poem extolling wisdom's virtues.
  - It is a capstone which brings to a head all of the themes of Proverbs.
  - It is showing us what happens when wisdom rules in your life.
  - It is a portrait of wisdom in action.
  - It is a snapshot of a life lived on the path of Lady Wisdom, she is THE EXCELLENT WIFE!
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- The picture of an excellent wife puts into practice many of the major themes found in Proverbs.
  - It is wisdom on display, wisdom demonstrated by right actions and right living.
  - Pursue and commit yourself to wisdom in the way a man would to the perfect wife.

A simple outline of this passage:

I. Her Preciousness - vv10-12

II. Her Productivity - v13-27

III. Her Praise - vv28-31

### **I. Her Preciousness**

- She is rare - “An excellent wife who can find?” (10)
- She is of inestimable worth. - “She is far more precious than jewels” (10)
- Prov 8:11 for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.
- She is trustworthy, she won't fail him. - “The heart of her husband trusts in her.” (11)
- Prov 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. 6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.
- She enriches her husband and family. - “And he will have no lack of gain.” (11)
- Prov 3:14 for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold.
- Prov 8:18 Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and righteousness.
- She is a blessing all the days of her life. - “She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.” (12)
- Prov 1:33 but whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster.”

- Prov 2 says that when wisdom comes into your heart, she will watch over you, guard you, deliver you from the way of evil, and keep you from men whose speech is perverted and whose paths are crooked. (Prov 2:8-12)
- Prov 3:18 She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called blessed.
- As long as she lives she will do him good, not evil.

## **II. Her Productivity**

### **a. She Works Hard**

- She is not idle or lazy. (27) She's not the sluggard. (19:24; 21:25)
- Wisdom is active, not passive.
- Wisdom is a skill, the skill of living rightly. It's something you do, not just something you know.
- Her hands are productive. (13, 19)
- She's cooking. (15)
- She's planting a vineyard (16)
- She makes her arms strong (17) she is physically competent to carry out the hard tasks she is doing.
- She dresses herself with "strength" meaning she "girds her loins" like a soldier dressing for battle.
- She is always at the ready, always working for the benefit of her family.
- She is tireless - "she rises while it is yet night" (15) and "her lamp does not go out at night." (18)

### **b. She Builds Wealth**

- She is an entrepreneur. Manufacturing, selling, and trading. (14, 18, 24)
- She evaluates the potential revenue of a property and buys it. (16)
- Through her diligent hard work she is generating wealth and improving and increasing her family's economic outlook.
- Prov 13:11 Wealth gained hastily will dwindle, but whoever gathers little by little will increase it.

### **c. She Plans for the Future**

- Consider the ant (6:6-11); the ant gathers in the summer in order to be ready for the winter.
- The prudent son is the one who gathers in the summer time so that his family won't starve in the winter time. (10:5)
- She prepares like the ant.
- "She is not afraid of snow for her household" (v21)
- "All her household are clothed in scarlet" (v21) - clothing of double thickness.
- Prov 1:33 but whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster."
- She's not afraid of the future because she has prepared for the future.
- "She laughs at the time to come." (V25)
- Wisdom brings a fearlessness of the future.

### **d. She Brings Life and Flourishing to Her Home**

- Everyone in her household flourishes; her husband, her children, her maidens. (15)
- "She looks well to the ways of her household." (27)
- Her husband is highly esteemed and everyone knows him at the city gates. (23)

- Prov 10:7 The memory of the righteous is a blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot.

#### **e. She is Generous**

- It's not just her household that benefits and flourishes, the whole community does as well.
- "She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy." (20)
- Prov 22:9 Whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor.
- Those same hands that work hard to provide for her home also are open to bless the poor and needy.

#### **f. She Speaks Wisdom**

- "She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue." (26)
- She is the reflex of Lady Wisdom.
- Prov 8:6-9 Hear, for I will speak noble things, and from my lips will come what is right, 7 for my mouth will utter truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips. 8 All the words of my mouth are righteous; there is nothing twisted or crooked in them. 9 They are all straight to him who understands, and right to those who find knowledge.
- Her speech is qualified by wisdom.
- "Teaching" is the Hebrew "torah" used for the instruction of the law.
- "Kindness" is the Hebrew word "hesed". This is not the general word for someone who says kind things, but means the steadfast, loyal love of God who keeps his covenant; the kind of love that flows from God to his people.
- She speaks wise words. She speaks God's truth.
- She doesn't use flattery or the seductive speech of the forbidden woman. (7:21)

### **III. Her Praiseworthiness**

- She is praised by all, not just those of her household, but everyone in the community.
- "Her children rise up and call her blessed; (v28)
- "her husband also, and he praises her," saying the following, "Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all." (28-29)
- Those who know her best and intimately, sing her praises, because she has blessed them in many ways.
- Prov 27:2 Let another praise you, and not your own mouth;
- "And let her works praise her in the gates." (31)
- Here is another callback to Lady Wisdom who cries aloud from the gates.
- Prov 8:3 beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries aloud:
- She's not only praised privately in her home, but also publicly.
- Ultimately, the highest thing that can be said of her, the most noteworthy thing she can be praised for, is for possessing what is the key theme of Proverbs.
- This is a woman who fears the Lord!
- "Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised." (30)
- She incarnates the key theme of the book—the fear of the Lord. (1:7)
- Prov 9:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.
- That she fears the Lord puts everything in perspective.

- Charm and beauty are **not the foundational things to look for and certainly not the things to build your life upon.**
- Charm and beauty are **relatively worthless traits in comparison to what is of greatest importance—the fear of the Lord.**

## CONCLUSION

- This glorious passage isn't a to-do list for women but a praise hymn, an ode to Lady Wisdom—to wisdom itself.
- She is something to aspire to. We want to learn from wisdom and grow in wisdom. She is worthy of emulation.
- But she is not presented in the book as a benchmark to discourage women but is extolled as a vision to inspire a pursuit of wisdom.
- At the beginning of the book, Lady Wisdom is calling out from the highest places in the town, sending out an invitation for the simple to turn from their simple ways and to enter her house, to feast with her, she has the choicest meats, her table is set, they are invited to eat of her bread and drink of her wine and live and walk in the way of insight. (9:1-6)
- At the end of the book, we have the happily ever after.
- Here is what it looks like when the simple man turned into Lady Wisdom's house, he chose the path of wisdom and took wisdom and his wife.
- This passage should drive us to the source of wisdom and life—Jesus Christ.
- Christ is wisdom himself — Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Cor. 1:24)
- Christ is wisdom incarnate. In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Col. 2:3)
- Christ is who need to have a relationship with. If we have him, we have wisdom.
- Lady Wisdom's call is the gospel call.
- A call to pursue Christ, to believe Christ, to trust Christ, to learn from Christ, to rest in Christ's perfect, complete, and finished work.
- It is a call to live out our lives in wisdom through the His Spirit who teaches us and empowers us.
- The invitation is for each one of us.
- When we have Christ, we have our reward.
- He is the treasure of inestimable worth.
- He will never fail us, he is trustworthy.
- He enriches us in every way.
- He will bless you every day of your life and on into eternity.
- He is tireless in making intercession on our behalf.
- His work ensures our salvation, sanctification and future glorification.
- He has already prepared our future.
- What's left to do but turn to him, marvel at his beauty and praise him for his excellency and perfection.
- "The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." (1:7)
- "The one who fears the Lord is to be praised. " (31:30)
- I hope you can see this glorious passage isn't a to-do list for women but a praise hymn, an ode to Lady Wisdom—to wisdom itself.
- But she is not presented in the book as a benchmark to discourage women but is extolled as a vision to inspire a pursuit of wisdom.

## APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

In light of today's message....

- What did I learn about the gospel?
- How can I apply what I learned about the gospel to my life?
- With whom can I share the gospel this week?