

Sermon 99, Mom Has the Last Word, Proverbs 31:1-9

Proposition: Proverbs, a book of wisdom addressed to the wise son, ends with his mother's instructions for him on how to handle ladies, liquor, and leadership (girls, gin, and government; broads, booze, and bureaus; dames, drinks, and dominion; sex, sauce, and suppression).

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are at the tail end of Proverbs. We have looked in detail at the first six sections of the book, the first six pillars of wisdom. Today we come to the final pillar, the seventh one which completes the house of wisdom. In this sermon, I want to emphasize, as the text so clearly does, the femininity of wisdom. Wisdom comes out of a mother's mouth, wisdom describes a valiant wife, and wisdom instructs her sons. Though we know that the begotten wisdom of God is the Wise Son whose name is Jesus of Nazareth, we cannot overlook or forget that wisdom is consistently portrayed as feminine throughout this book. Moms, you care more deeply for your sons than we dads know or understand. Mary, Abigail, Esther, Hannah — these women were wise in their callings, and the Bible rightly presents their God-fearing before us. And we know Jesus is headed for a marriage supper where He will take to Himself His bride, the wise woman we know as the church.

Anyway, wisdom's femininity is highlighted here by giving the last word in the book of Proverbs to a mom. Oh, we have a male speaker — a king, Lemuel by name. The text just might indicate that he is king of Massah in Arabia. More likely, though, it calls itself an oracle, that is, a revelation from God. Even if it's not labeling itself an oracle, its position here in Sacred Scripture means that it is the very word of God to us. So again, let me emphasize that this is the *longest* portion of Scripture that we know to have been originally uttered by a woman. She is not named, but her femininity is highlighted at length in the first two verses, and of course most of her discourse is about women.

So what can we say? Wisdom's last word goes to mom. The structure of the book tells us in no uncertain terms that the greatest reward the wise son can find is a wise and valiant, God-fearing wife who will be a wise mother and speak wisdom to her children.

Your mom wants you to know how to reign with Christ. Lemuel's mom specifically discusses this in terms of handling ladies, liquor, and leadership. So listen up and be wise.

I. Wise Rule Requires Listening to Your Mother, vv. 1-2

The first point I want to make today is that wise rule, and wisdom more generally, requires that you listen to your mother.

A. Lemuel Knew His Mom's Teachings by Heart, vv. 1-31

Have you ever noticed that the chapter clearly mentions double authorship? It is the words of King Lemuel, but it is the oracle his mother taught him. Lemuel wrote these words, but only because he had memorized them. They originally came from his mom's mouth.

I guarantee that every one of you sitting here knows certain catchphrases that your mom always said. Mine said "I could care less." She says all the time to her unruly brood, "The Lord has given us many things to joke about, but He is not one of them." And on it goes.

Lemuel learned his mother's teachings so well that he was able to sit down and reproduce them verbatim. She taught, and he listened. Moms, this is encouragement to you to keep on saying those things you always say that you feel like they never hear. At least some of your children are going to hear! At least some of them will pay attention and internalize wisdom like they should. And on the flip side, children, if you don't listen to your mother then you will never be wise. If you insist on turning away your ear from the rebukes of life, you will dwell among fools, in everlasting shame and reproach. So listen to your mother if you care about wisdom. And moms, if you care about wisdom, keep talking to your children. Dad may have the first word in this book, but mom has the last word. By the way, do you know where else a woman has the last word, or almost the last word? The Bible itself: "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.'" Mom says "Listen." The bride says "Come."

B. Mothers Are Invested in their Children, v. 2

But not only are we informed that this passage is from Lemuel's mother; that fact is basically rubbed in our faces. Three times she addresses him as "my son," adding first that he is the son of her womb (about as feminine as it gets) and then that he is the son of her vows. If you missed v. 1's reference to her motherhood, v. 2 would make it abundantly clear that this chapter comes from a very involved and concerned mother. Particularly that last phrase is significant. What does "son of my vows" mean? Well, references to vows abound in passages about worship in the Old Testament. The basic idea is that when you are really serious about wanting the thing you're praying for, you vow to give something to God to make it clear that you are not half-hearted in your requests. So you might vow to sacrifice an extra bull, or to bring two additional rams to your next religious ceremony. That would be an example of vowing. Hannah vowed to give a son to God if God would give her a son — and He did, so she did. "And she vowed a vow and said, 'O LORD of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head'" (1Sa 1:11). As you can see, the idea is not that God is just desperate for a little boy and so if I offer Him this thing He really wants then He will trade me and give me what I really want. Rather, the idea is that I am desperate to have my request answered and so I will give everything I can to God to show Him how serious I am about this. Well, Lemuel's mother informs him that she wanted him so much

that she made vows to God in praying for him. Presumably, of course, she also kept those vows. She doesn't tell us what the vows are, whether she was dedicating Lemuel to God or what. We can speculate what she vowed, but it doesn't matter. Rather, we need to see the meaning of the text, which is that moms care. Do you know who wants you to be wise? Your mom. She wants it more than anything else in the world. She gave you life — “my son.” She gave you room within herself — “son of my womb.” She cried out in prayer to God for you and promised who-knows-how-much to Him to make it clear how desperately she wanted you.

Now, maybe you're saying “Yeah, Lemuel's mom did all that, but my mom didn't want me.” That may be true. You may have suffered horrible rejection from your earthly mother. But if you can think about how much Mary wanted Jesus, that is a rough parallel to how much your mother the church wants you. In other words, church family, are we making clear to the little ones how much they are wanted around here? Could we call every child in this church “son of my womb, son of my vows”? Do you surround the pregnant mothers (not “pregnant people,” by the way; that's as dumb a coinage as “reigning people” for “queens”) with love and care? Do you welcome the children, love them, and support them by supporting their parents? Mother Church wants you, looks on you as the son of her womb and the son of her vows. She is invested.

What's the point? Even if you don't want wisdom for yourself, want it for your mother's sake. Even if you aren't invested in you, your mom is invested in you. Even if your earthly mom isn't invested in you, your spiritual mother the church is invested in you. So care for her sake, if not for your own. Those who love you best want you to know and walk in wisdom. Or, to repeat myself, your mom wants you to know and walk in wisdom.

II. What Your Mom Wants You to Know About Reigning With Christ, vv. 3-9

The first portion of the advice Lemuel's mom gives relates specifically to reigning, while the second part relates to what wisdom looks like in an actual human life. Not all of us will be monarchs, or even hold executive power in the state. Some of us will be mayors and governors, but not all. That doesn't matter, though, because all of us are in fact co-rulers with Christ. And as such, as the saints of the Most High who possess the Kingdom forever and ever, we need to know how to reign with Him.

A. Living for Sexual Pleasure Destroys Kings, v. 3

Lemuel's mother warns him first against living for sexual pleasure. Women destroy kings. Now, she knows because she's a king's mother. That almost certainly implies that she has lived most of her life in a royal court and seen more than her share of kings brought down by women. Just as I know a lot of pastors because I'm a pastor, so kings generally know a number of kings because they are kings. And so on. Well, the point here is not that women are a problem, but rather that the abuse of women is a problem. If you live for sexual pleasure and give your strength to women (plural), you have handed yourself over to something that destroys kings. What does Lemuel's mom mean by this statement? She means that living for sexual pleasure destroys kings. Wanting to enjoy more than one woman is bad enough. Actually doing it saps a man's moral fiber, first of all. It uses up his time that should be spent on ruling and caring for his children, teaching them the way of wisdom. Look at David — lots of sons, most of them a total

loss because dad spent his days f**king around instead of disciplining his children. Look at Solomon — lots of wives, but only one son, and that one a fool.

Let me just say it as clearly as Lemuel's mother did: Giving your manliness, symbolized by your man-parts, into the hands of more than one woman will suck your strength and blight your rule. You ain't man enough to take care of more than one. I don't care how impressed you are with yourself, and your mom doesn't either. Give your strength to woman, to a single one for a lifetime, and you will be repaid with the joys of the Prov. 31 woman, joys Lemuel's mom is about to discuss. But give your strength to multiple women, and you will be a hollow shell, a sorry excuse for a man. This includes porn. This includes lingerie ads. This includes groping, flirting, and every other form of cheating from fornication to adultery and beyond. The man who is spending his time seeking women is not spending his time seeking holiness, or righteous rule. So if you want to be fitted to reign with Christ, keep yourself to one and only one woman.

B. Living for Alcohol Perverts Justice, vv. 4-5

Lemuel's mom now turns to the other well-known downfall of monarchs. Liquor is not for kings. If you have executive power, you need to have your head about you at all times. Our current president is a teetotaler. Thank God. A drunkard is of no use in leading his people and making decisions. Lemuel's mom specifically warns about that. A king who drinks will forget the law and forget to give justice to those who come to court.

If you are going to reign with Christ, you need to be very careful in your use of alcohol. And the more responsible your position is, the more careful you need to be with it. Jesus drank wine and gave it to others. The words of Lemuel's mother should not be taken as a total ban on the stuff. But she is adamant that if you drink enough to forget what the law is, you are in sin. If you drink enough that you can't exercise all the functions of your office, making decisions and tough calls, then you are in sin.

Brothers and sisters, you reign with Christ. Be very careful, then, about how you jeopardize that by your use of alcohol. It is never wise to get soused.

C. Alcohol Is For People With Sad Lives, vv. 6-7

Now comes the odd words in which Lemuel's mother seems to endorse getting people with sad lives drunk as skunks. If they are about to die, they can get sauced. In one sense, of course, we can take this as validating the use of powerful narcotics on those who are nearing the end. If you are dying, here, get on the morphine drip. There is something to that. In another sense, though, Lemuel's mother is not giving directions on how to help the weak as much as she is contrasting Lemuel's position with that of the weak and miserable and dying. If drunkenness is appropriate for anyone, it is appropriate for those who are in so much pain that this world is slipping away. They are on the edge of leaving it. And so if booze is okay for anyone, it's okay for them. The king, of course, is not supposed to be in that position. If you are a dying monarch, you need to have handed the reigns of power over. If you are so overwhelmed by pain that you feel that life is slipping away from you, then some drink and some drugs might be warranted. But if you are a king, you have no excuse to ever feel that way. Or if you do, you jolly well better divest yourself of that royal power ASAP.

You reign with Christ. You are seated with Him in the heavenly places. You are exalted to the glorious position of “Child of God.” And therefore, you should not waste your position. You should not blow it off, as if it were nothing. You reign with Christ by exercising your earthly authority responsibly. And you flat-out can’t do that with your head in a bottle or your prick in a whore.

Wisdom is about pleasing your Father. But it is also about listening to your mother! You do this because you fear God. You do this because you have internalized wisdom. And when you do, you will reign with Christ in a way that images and enacts His rule.

D. Your Power Is For the Weak, vv. 8-9

You will do His will on earth as it is done in Heaven when you exercise power on behalf of the weak. That is what Lemuel’s mother wanted him to do. We can psychoanalyze from our historical distance here and say “Lemuel’s mother knew what it was to be a second-class citizen in the palace — part of the harem, but not part of the decision-making. And so she urges her son to remember people like her, and those even worse off, as he exercises royal power.” And from all we know about the ancient Near East, that is all most likely true. But even beyond that, the message of the gospel is the message that the High God who rules the entire universe knows your name and loved you enough to substitute His own Son to die in your place. Because this is true, we know that the more power you have, the lower you ought to stoop. The higher your rank, Jesus’ death for us shows, the more you are on the hook to open your mouth for the dumb. Brothers and sisters, our culture has absorbed this lesson in important ways. We understand that the emperor needs to care about dungeon-sweeper. We know that the boss is called to care that the employee’s little girl is sick. Jesus taught the world that lesson, and the moral power of His words and example resound to this day.

But though we now know that this is right in a far deeper way than the people of Lemuel’s day knew it, we still have a very hard time living up to it. Indeed, it is a comparatively easy matter to abstain from giving your strength to women and drowning yourself in wine. But to actually be a voice for the voiceless? To actually open your mouth and judge righteously, advocating for those who have no right to speak? That’s hard. The other two are about abstaining, about being content with one woman and a clear head. But this last one is about stepping out and taking positive action to be righteous by opening your mouth and saying, “You are not doing that to him.” That’s hard, even when you’re king — especially when you’re king. To challenge those who can take away your position is politically costly. But it is morally the only way to do it.

So does this mark your exercise of authority? Are you in it for what it can give you? Or would your worst enemy testify that your door is open and that you will advocate for those who have no voice and are therefore treated unfairly?

Brothers and sisters, your mom carried you for nine months when you had no voice. Then she nursed you for 20 more, while you couldn’t speak for yourself. And now she says “Advocate for the voiceless.” She knows what that means. It means work and pain and agony and tiredness like you wouldn’t believe — and it means the reward of pleasing your Father, who sent His Son

to open His mouth and His side so that we could be saved not just by His teaching, but His blood. A sword pierced Mary's heart metaphorically, but Jesus' side literally.

You reign with Christ. Do it wisely, chastely, soberly — and with a loud voice for those who can't speak. In Jesus' name, Amen.