

The gospel of John and the book of Proverbs connect very intimately.

We heard last Sunday in John 3 –

“The light has come into the world,
and people loved the darkness rather than the light
because their works were evil.”

People.

Not just “those wicked people over there” –
but *people*.

Human beings.

We have a problem.

And the problem stares at me from the mirror every morning.

That’s the same problem that Wisdom identifies here in Proverbs 8.

“All who hate me love death.”

In chapters 1-7, the father has set out the path of wisdom and the path of folly.

In chapter 1 Wisdom had called to the son,
and now, as the father is wrapping up his instruction,
wisdom once again raises her voice.

Last time we looked at the “unchaste wife”–the adulteress–
who moves covertly at dusk and deceives with her tongue.

Now we hear the call of Lady Wisdom:
she speaks openly, and she speaks the truth.

Folly’s mouth is crooked,
Wisdom speaks straight.

Introduction: The Call of Wisdom (v1-3)

Does not wisdom call?

Does not understanding raise her voice?

² *On the heights beside the way,
at the crossroads she takes her stand;*

³ *beside the gates in front of the town,
at the entrance of the portals she cries aloud:*

Does not wisdom call?

You hear her voice in your conscience.

You hear her voice in the way that God made things.

You hear her voice especially in the scriptures.

On the heights beside the way—

as you are driving down the street there are two women:

there is the adulteress “now in the street, now in the market,

and at every corner she lies in wait.”

And there is wisdom, at the crossroads she takes her stand;

beside the gates in front of the town,

at the entrance of the portals she cries aloud.

There is nothing secretive about Wisdom.

She speaks openly.

She speaks truly.

And while the adulteress comes and whispers in your ear,

wisdom cries out for all to hear:

“To you, O men, I call, and my cry is to the children of man.

O simple ones, learn prudence;

O fools, learn sense!”

1. “My Cry Is to the Children of Man” (v4-11)

⁴ *“To you, O men, I call,*

and my cry is to the children of man.

⁵ *O simple ones, learn prudence;*

O fools, learn sense.

What is prudence?

Prudence is thinking before you act;

thinking before you speak.

The prudent man thinks ahead.

Hear, O simple ones!

Think about the consequences of what you might say or do!

Understand that the way of folly is death.

Learn sense!

⁶ *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.*

Why should you listen to wisdom?

Because she speaks that which is noble.

She speaks that which is right.

(As Paul says, “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” (Phil 4:8))

It’s remarkable how many echoes of Proverbs there are in the NT.

Relatively few direct quotations, but lots of echoes.

(You almost might think that Jesus and the apostles were trained in Proverbs and internalized its message so that their language drips with wisdom!)

Why should you listen to wisdom?

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.*

Wisdom speaks straight.

There is no dancing around.

Do you know how refreshing that is?

Truth.

Straight speech.

Wisdom looks you in the eye, and says it like it is!

¹⁰ *Take my instruction instead of silver,
and knowledge rather than choice gold,*
¹¹ *for wisdom is better than jewels,
and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.*

What do you desire?

Do you want a good job?

Are you hoping for a raise?

Do you want people to like you?

Do you want a new toy?

What do you desire?

Wisdom is better.

Why do you pursue excellence in your work?

Because you think that by it you will gain glory and honor (or at least cash)!

How many of us pursue wisdom?

I mean *really* pursue wisdom?

We are so comfortable in our sloth.

We may pursue a little academic knowledge–

and just enough holiness to satisfy ourselves that we are on the right track.

But a hunger for wisdom?

Our loyalties are divided.

We want to appear safely in wisdom’s camp,

but with a little flexibility to spend some time with folly!

Isn’t that how we act?

The central section of our passage – verses 12-21 –

then talks about the fear of the LORD in our daily loves and hates...

2. The Fear of the LORD in Daily Loves and Hates (v12-21)

¹² *“I, wisdom, dwell with prudence,
and I find knowledge and discretion.*

The main body of Wisdom’s speech has two parts:

wisdom’s role in human affairs (12-21),

and Wisdom’s role in the divine council (22-31)

a. “By Me Kings Reign” – the Political Value of Wisdom (v13-17)

¹³ *The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil.
Pride and arrogance and the way of evil
and perverted speech I hate.*

Verse 13 challenges us.

“The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil.”

Do you hate evil?

What do we mean by “evil”?

There are different kinds of evils.

Not all evil is sin.

So, for instance, there are natural evils –

this pandemic is a natural evil.
A virus is not – in itself – wicked.
 There are all sorts of viruses and bacteria.
 Some viruses are useful in killing harmful bacteria!
But when a virus goes berserk like this coronavirus has –
 the result is *evil* – a natural evil.

There are lots of other natural evils!
 Cancer, heart disease, earthquakes, floods.

They are not *moral evils* – they are not *sinful*.
 But they are certainly *evils*.

 They are *bad*.

But Wisdom is saying something more than just “I hate bad stuff that happens.”

After all, Wisdom adds:

Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.

Sure, we all hate natural evils.
But Wisdom particularly hates *moral evils*.
 What she calls the *way of evil and perverted speech*.

Everyone hates evils when they adversely affect *us*.
But do you hate the way of evil when it benefits you?
 If someone says something untrue about someone else –
 which benefits you – or which fits your preconceptions –
 do you let it slide?

Or do you hate it?
 It is twisted speech!
 It is not straight!

Do you hate evil – simply because it is evil?

How often do you correct people on *your side* when they speak in a crooked fashion?
 If you only find yourself objecting to the *other side* –
 that may indicate that you do not truly hate the way of evil and perverted speech.
 There are times when you *love* evil and perverted speech!

And that is the way of Folly!

But Wisdom says:

¹⁴ *I have counsel and sound wisdom;
I have insight; I have strength.*
¹⁵ *By me kings reign,
and rulers decree what is just;*
¹⁶ *by me princes rule,
and nobles, all who govern justly.*^[a]

In my high school history class, we are talking about the writing of the US Constitution.
The US Constitution is a remarkable document.

But the US Constitution is not what brings peace and justice.
No constitution can do that.
What brings peace and justice is Wisdom.

Consider Israel.
Israel's constitution was written by God himself (the Mosaic law).
Did that produce justice?

“If they had followed it...!”

Ah! Yes, if they had followed it...
What good is a constitution if you do not have wise rulers?

No constitution – no set of laws – have ever been framed
that can anticipate every situation.

It is not by *law* that rulers decree what is just.
If the Law could bring righteousness,
then there was no point in the Word becoming flesh!
It is not the Torah that results in righteousness.
But wisdom.

This is true in your home as well.
You cannot come up with a set of rules that will produce faithful children.
You must rule by wisdom.
If you are wise, then you will teach your children both justice and mercy.
Too often we communicate to our children the rule of law:
“You obey me because I am your father!”
But that is not how God has taught us!
“We love because God loved us first”

Or, as wisdom says:
¹⁷ *I love those who love me,
and those who seek me diligently find me.*

Do you love wisdom?

Do you seek diligently and passionately to find wisdom?

Listen to the reward that wisdom promises to the one who seeks:

b. “My Fruit Is Better than Gold” – the Economic Value of Wisdom (v18-21)

¹⁸ *Riches and honor are with me,
enduring wealth and righteousness.*

¹⁹ *My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold,
and my yield than choice silver.*

²⁰ *I walk in the way of righteousness,
in the paths of justice,*

²¹ *granting an inheritance to those who love me,
and filling their treasuries.*

Wisdom is better than gold.

And yet, her paths result in gold!

When you live in a manner that is consistent with the way that God made the world,
then (generally speaking) you do well in life.

(Now, because of sin, there are lots of exceptions to this!

In fact, the books of Ecclesiastes and Job seem to have been written,
in part, in response to Proverbs –
or at least, to this basic Wisdom perspective.

But as you see, over and over, throughout the scriptures,
there is something crucial about *living the right way* –
even when the universe is not being very helpful!)

If you practice proper social distancing, wear a mask, and wash your hands faithfully,
you might still catch Covid-19 and die.

In a world marred by sin and misery, the path of wisdom
is not a guarantee to health, wealth, and status!

And yet our Lord Jesus said,

“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,
and all these things (your daily needs) will be added to you.”

“Come unto me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

The inheritance of wisdom is a treasure beyond comparison.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was offered an inheritance.
Satan tempted him in the wilderness, saying,
if you worship me,
then I will give you all the kingdoms of the earth for an inheritance!
Jesus refused.
He preferred the inheritance of wisdom.
He had learned from Proverbs that Wisdom would reward him
with enduring wealth and righteousness.

3. Wisdom in the Divine Council (v22-31)

a. In the Beginning Was the Wisdom (v22-26)

- ²² *“The LORD possessed^[b] me at the beginning of his work,^[c]
the first of his acts of old.*
- ²³ *Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning 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 had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth,*
- ²⁶ *before he had made the earth with its fields,
or the first of the dust of the world.*

Verses 22-31 then speak of wisdom “in the beginning.”

The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old.
(Literally, Yahweh fathered me—brought me forth—which the LXX translated, “created”)
and the word “work” is literally “way”--
the way of wisdom goes all the way back to *the beginning*.

Is this “Wisdom” referring to the eternal Word – the eternal Son of God?

Certainly that is not what the author of Proverbs was thinking.
After all, Proverbs has been personifying wisdom as a woman.
And that feminine personification continues through chapter 9.
So there is no thought that “Wisdom” is the “son” of God.

Wisdom, in Proverbs 1-9, is an attribute of God that has been personified.
Wisdom was brought forth, or begotten, in the beginning
as God’s workman (v30).
In Genesis 1, we hear that God spoke, and it happened.
In Proverbs 8 we hear that God’s wisdom went forth and accomplished his purpose.

But it is only the NT that we come to realize that this personification of wisdom
has more to it than a mere literary device.

In Colossians 1 we discover that the Son of God is the firstborn of all creation,
the one by whom all things were created
(that sure sounds like Proverbs 8!).

In Hebrews 1 we discover that the Son is the one “through whom also he created the world.”

In John 1 we learn that “All things were made through him.”

In other words,

if you jump too quickly to Jesus,
you will wind up losing sight of the lesson that Proverbs is teaching.

But if you fail to see Jesus in Proverbs 8,
then you will miss what God is saying!

What is the origin of wisdom?

Where does wisdom come from?

Wisdom has always been with God.

God has never been without his Wisdom!

We speak of the doctrine of “eternal generation” –
that the Father has always been begetting the Son.

The Father has always been Father.

The Son has always been Son – he has always been begotten of the Father.

b. Wisdom as Craftsman of the Heavens, the Seas, and the Earth (v27-31)

²⁷ *When he established the heavens, I was there;
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,*
²⁸ *when he made firm the skies above,
when he established^[d] the fountains of the deep,*
²⁹ *when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,*
³⁰ *then I was beside him, like a master workman,
and I was daily his^[e] delight,
rejoicing before him always,*
³¹ *rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the children of man.*

And then in verses 27-31, we hear of how Wisdom was the master craftsman of creation.

Notice the tripartite picture of the world here:

the heavens, the earth, and the deeps.

God drew a circle on the face of the deep,
and he made firm the skies above.

This is a picture of a flat earth established in the midst of the waters,

with a solid dome over the earth.

In other words,

God built this world, with wisdom as his master craftsman.

Why did God build this world?

For the children of man.

Wisdom rejoiced and delighted in the children of man.

This was the purpose for which God made the heavens, the earth, and the seas:
that he might have a place to dwell with his people.

And if you would have fellowship with God.

If you would dwell in his presence,

then you must seek after wisdom.

4. Wisdom's Children Will Live (v32-36)

In the conclusion we see wisdom and the father identified:

³² *“And now, O sons, listen to me:
blessed are those who keep my ways.*

The father has been speaking to his sons –

but now Wisdom herself addresses them as sons.

You aren't just *my* children –

if you heed Wisdom's voice, then you become *Wisdom's* children!

³³ *Hear instruction and be wise,
and do not neglect it.*

³⁴ *Blessed is the one who listens to me,
watching daily at my gates,
waiting beside my doors.*

³⁵ *For whoever finds me finds life
and obtains favor from the LORD,*

³⁶ *but he who fails to find me injures himself;
all who hate me love death.”*

If you would dwell with God,
then find wisdom.

Dwell with wisdom.

Listen to me.

Watch daily at my gate.

Wait beside my doors.

How can you listen to wisdom?

How can you hear instruction?

Listen to the Word of God.

Read the scriptures.

Wisdom calls to you from the sacred page.

Paul tells Timothy, “devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture,
to exhortation, to teaching” (1 Tim 4:13) –

which means that Timothy’s congregation

was to devote themselves to the hearing of the word!

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly

as you teach each other with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

If you find wisdom, you find life.

But if you fail to find wisdom, you love death.

In the end, it is not about whether you *pursue* wisdom or folly,

but whether you *find* wisdom.

In other words, it is not about the journey, but the destination!

Do you long for wisdom?

Then seek Christ.