**Lady Wisdom reveals Christ**

Text: Proverbs 8

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**Scriptures:** 1 Corinthians 1.18-24; Proverbs 8

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 171, 78b, 127, 213, 216, 529

**Series:** **Proverbs**. Sermon 11

**Theme:** In a majestic poem, where wisdom is personified as a woman to be listened to, her benefits, origin and link to life are expounded

**Proposition:** Hear God’s authentic eternal wisdom and find Christ!

**Introduction**

“*Lightning danced across the sky*”. “*Your car complained as the key was turned*”. “*I heard the last piece of pie calling my name*”. Now lightning doesn’t dance, cars don’t complain, pies don’t call out. Dancing, complaining and calling out, are all actions which human beings do.

These phrases are all examples of what is called ‘**personification**’ – a literary device or form where ‘a human characteristic is attributed to something non-human or an abstract quality is represented in human form’. For example, in the nursery rhyme: Hey Diddle Diddle, the line “The little dog laughed, to see such fun, and the dish ran away with the spoon”. This line illustrates that personification is often used in poetry. Whilst there are many theories about the meaning of ‘Hey Diddle Diddle’, most scholarly commentators deem this nursery rhyme to be complete nonsense.

Whereas Proverbs chapter 8 is a majestic poem which is rich in meaning. This poem uses personification to convey truth about the character of God and the person of Christ. In the book of Proverbs wisdom is personified as a woman. We’ve already met her in chapter 1. There she is - crying aloud in the street, raising her voice in the markets, speaking at the entrance of the city gates (Prov 1:20-21). Her great worth has been noted in chapter 3 (14-18). Now the whole of chapter 8 presents her benefits, her origin, and calls all who will listen to find her.

For the purposes of this sermon, we’ll call her “Lady Wisdom” and we’ll see that Lady Wisdom points all who will listen to her to Christ, thereby revealing Him.

1. **The Benefits of Wisdom (v5-21)**

Last week we saw the deceptive beauty of the ‘evil woman’, an adulteress who looks attractive on the outside, but whose heart is cold, hard and guarded. She promises pleasure, but delivers a deadly sting afterwards - bringing dishonour, shame, harm, strife and ultimately death to the fool who follows her. The ‘evil woman’ is very much a personification of sin. The world’s wisdom says, “If it feels good now, do it now”.

God’s wisdom says, “Take a longer-term view, sin may feel good now, but the consequences in the future certainly won’t be pleasant – they will sorely hurt you”. In contrast to the evil woman who tempts simple fools into sin, Lady Wisdom only brings benefits to those who listen to her.

There are many gifts which she gives:

* She teaches prudence and sense – understanding of heart (v5)
* She speaks noble/excellent things (v6)
* Her mouth utters truth, without wickedness (v7)
* Her words are not twisted or crooked, but straight and right (v8-9)
* Her companions are knowledge and discretion (v12)
* She knows the fear of the Lord and hates evil (v13)
* She gives counsel, sound wisdom, insight and strength (v14)
* She enables kings, princes and nobles to rule justly (v15-16)
* She brings both material and spiritual wealth to those who possess her (v18)
* The riches she conveys endure (v18, 21)

Who would **not** want to find a woman like Lady Wisdom! She’s all good without any bad! She’s all wise and not at all foolish. When Lady Wisdom is found, her many gifts are received.

Here’s the thing:  **Lady Wisdom’s free offer of rich benefits reveals the grace of God in Christ Jesus.** Like Lady Wisdom, God freely offers His good wisdom to all who will listen. He has preserved His true Word, the Bible that we might gain knowledge, understanding and wisdom about who He is, what He has done and how we should live as a result.

In proverbs 8, Lady Wisdom is an imaginary/literary character who represents the Wisdom of God offered freely to all who will listen. Later in the history of God’s plan of redemption – of saving a people for Himself - Christ is fully revealed as being ‘*the power of God and the wisdom of God*’ (1 Corinthians 1:24).

Which brings us to our 2nd point:

1. **The Origin of Wisdom (v22-31)**

Have you ever read the Bible cover-to-cover? Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22.21? Some of the most challenging sections of Scripture to get through, in terms of pronunciation, are the genealogies (when I ask someone to read a passage in one of our services I can almost hear their sign of relief when they discover that the passage assigned to them is **not** a genealogy). Why so many lists of names in Scripture? Answer: because **origins** are important in the history of God’s plan to redeem His people: for example, consider these credentials:

1. The OT Priests were all descendants of Aaron (note: Levites who were not descendants of Aaron assisted the priests in the tabernacle)
2. The kings of Judah were all descendants of David after him (the Northern kingdom kings were not)
3. Christ lineage is traced back to Abraham in Matt 1:1

Here the origin of a very important person (VIP) authenticates who they are. Proverbs 8:22-31 teaches us that Lady Wisdom goes back to before the beginning of time! She’s not a young woman and she has impeccable credentials! She is a VIP who is authenticated by her origin. She’s no new creation but has been in existence from before the foundation of the universe. She is a ‘possession’ of the covenant God of Israel, the LORD. She has been His from before space and time were created.

She has belonged to God **for longer** than there has been water on the earth. She belonged to God **before** He made mountains and hills, **before** He made planet earth. She was there when God created the heavens above the earth. She was full of joy and delight when God made His whole Creation ‘*very good*’ (Gen 1:31). Why was she so deeply satisfied with the work which God had completed in six days? Because it was so wisely done, so perfectly wisely performed. Lady Wisdom was an observer to what God did in creating the world, inhabiting it with creatures, crowning it with mankind (v31).

She was **more than** just a by-stander who watched God work, she was there labouring alongside Him, to His delight. Notice how she describes herself as a ‘**master workman**’ beside God in the work of the genesis of creation (v30). Remember that Lady Wisdom is not an actual person, not a 4th person of the Godhead, but rather as a personification she is ‘an abstract quality represented in human form’.

The abstract quality here being **wisdom** itself. Wisdom is one of the many ‘attributes’ of God. That is to say that it is one of his essential characteristics which include God being: Spirit, infinite, unchangeable, holy, just, good, true and eternal. There has never been a time when God was not perfectly wise. **Lady Wisdom is God’s eternal, never-changing, authentic wisdom.** That’s part of the truth which this poem in Proverbs 8 contains, but there is more!

Wisdom is here revealed as the **agent** of creation. In our text the role of wisdom in God’s establishment of all things made points us clearly to the work of Christ in Creation: “*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For* ***by him*** *all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities- all things were created* ***through him*** *and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together*” (Col 1:15-17)

A delightful universe made through Christ for Christ. A place of life, peace, joy, harmony, a place where God was once in living relationship with our first parents, Adam and Eve. A universe which is now in bondage to corruption (Rom 8:21).

1. **The Call of Wisdom (v1-4; 32-36)**

How can people like you and me find Lady Wisdom? Lady Wisdom herself promises that “*those who seek me diligently find me*” (v17). She doesn’t hide herself away secretly, but she is ‘out and about’:

* On high places along the way – v2
* Standing at the crossroads –v2
* Beside the gates in front of the town –v3

She isn’t quiet, whispering so that only some can hear her voice. No, she raises her voice – v1, she cries aloud -v 3, she calls out –v4. Why does she call everyone to “*listen to me*” (v32)? Because she has vital words to communicate. Not only do her words bring the blessings we have already seen, she herself, Wisdom, gives life itself to all who find her v35 “*For whoever finds me finds life”.* Which is the same truth about Lady Wisdom that we find earlier in 3.18a: “*She is a tree of* ***life*** *to those who lay hold of her*”. (also note ‘tree of life in Prov 11:30; 13:12; 15:4)

The tree of life was planted in the midst of the garden of Eden (Gen 2:9) and represented the most potent vitality – eternal life. Remember that the book of Proverbs wisely identifies the foundation, or starting point, for wisdom as being “The fear of the Lord” (1:7; 9:10). We saw at the beginning of this preaching series that this fear is **NOT the terror and dread** which comes to those who turn away from God (e.g. Gen 3:8). No, this fear is **willing submissive reverence** toward God (e.g. Gen 22:12)

True wisdom is fundamentally and foundationally having a **living relationship** with the LORD, the covenant God who said: '*Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people*” (Jer 7:23). The blessings which came from obeying God in OT Israel were abundant provision, victory over enemies, and a fertile land to call home (Deut 28). To be blessed by God as one of His people is to receive his favour…which Lady Wisdom promises for all who hear her calling out and so discover her: “*For whoever finds me finds life” and obtains favour from the LORD*”

This favour is the goodwill of God which reaches out to others in mercy and compassion (e.g. Isa 60:10). This divine favour is the gift of God which comes through hearing the voice of His wisdom, that is through hearing Christ, the power and the wisdom of God.

The writer of Proverbs 8 did not know in detail the fullness of what Lady Wisdom reveals about Christ (ref. Heb 11:13), but we do! We know that ‘*God has made foolish the wisdom of the world*’ (1 Cor 1:20). We know that many do not care to pay attention to the call of Lady Wisdom, thinking her words to be foolish. We know that many neglect to hear her instruction and be wise (v33). Many fail to find her, injuring themselves in their folly (v36a). Everyone who hates Lady Wisdom loves death (v36b).

So it is with Christ, to hate Him is to love death, to love Him is to live! As the Apostle John writes **“***Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life*” (1 John 5:12)

**The ‘take home message’ from Proverbs 8 is: “Hear God’s authentic and eternal wisdom, which brings many benefits, the greatest of which is to enable you to find Christ who alone gives eternal life and favour from the Lord”.**

We are to be like Lady Wisdom, not hiding God’s wisdom away secretly, but using our voices to speak out wherever we go “On high places along the way”, “Standing at the crossroads”, “Beside the gates in front of the town” (v2-3).

Brothers and sisters, God has chosen ordinary people like us who are ‘*foolish in the world to shame the wise*’ (1 Cor 1:27). We have heard Lady Wisdom and know that “*the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God*” (1 Cor 1:18)

Perhaps you are someone here today who has not yet found Lady Wisdom, you are someone who has not yet found Christ. **Hear God’s authentic and eternal wisdom today. Listen to this true wisdom which brings many benefits, the greatest of which is to enable you to find Christ who alone gives eternal life and favour from the Lord.**

Lady Wisdom is a poetic personification, but Christ Jesus is a real living person who calls out to us all today: *“Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”* (Matt 11:28-29)

AMEN