

Proverbs

Laugh at the Days to Come

August 6, 2017

Flip over to Proverbs 31. Interesting to me that as we started announcing that we were teaching Proverbs this summer, a surprising number of women came up to me and asked, “Are you gonna preach on Proverbs 31?” ...uhhh I dunno we’re still mapping it out. “Just please don’t?” Wait... why? And the reason was that apparently Proverbs 31 has been preached quite a bit as a kind of religious whip for women; a measuring stick for women to make them feel constantly inadequate. I had one lady tell me she was overjoyed when we didn’t preach on Proverbs 31 on Mother’s Day because growing up that’s all she heard. Every Mother’s Day, another bit of Proverbs 31. Another whipping for how she wasn’t measuring up.

I don’t think it’s a great usage of Proverbs 31. I’ve got no intention of whippin’ anyone today. This passage, specifically vs. 10-31 is about what it would look like of wisdom was fully applied into life. In this case it’s a female life. And the ongoing metaphor throughout Proverbs, is that wisdom itself has been personified as a female. So many commentators have recognized that Proverbs 31 is giving all of us a bit of a recap; a holistic personified view of wisdom in action.

So, as you look through this description, you’ll see so much of what we’ve talked about throughout this series: this woman like Lady Wisdom is hard-working not slothful; diligent and disciplined with money; trustworthy and generous in her relationships; doesn’t fall for the lies of vain, shallow beauty and sexuality; speaks love and wisdom to those around her.

I want to focus our attention on one specific picture in Proverbs 31:25.

Proverbs 31:25

Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.

Or as I learned it growing up, she laughs at the days to come. NASB says she smiles at the future. One of the results of a living a life of wisdom is internal fortitude; an ability to laugh at whatever is going to come. In Job 5, Job uses the same word to describe those who are entrusting themselves to God: “At destruction and famine you shall laugh.”

The reality is that there is a lot of unknown about the future. There are a lot of things that keep us up at night. Some of you are financially stressed about the future. Wondering if there’s any repairing the mess you’ve made. I had multiple people tell me last week after the sermon on wealth, “we know God forgives us for our financial sins, but what if there isn’t enough time to ever get our finances in order?” Some of you are concerned about spouses, your family members, your neighbors, your coworkers; you see dysfunction and foolishness in their lives and you don’t know how to help. Some of you are concerned about your own spiritual growth. You look at the future and ask yourselves, “Am I ever going to change? Am I going to keep making the same mistakes and falling into the same sinful patterns for the rest of my life?” Parents in the room... anybody concerned about how your kids are going to turn out?

But Proverbs 31 tells us that wisdom embodied can laugh at the future.

I had this mentor, one of the wisest men I’ve ever known. And along with his overall life wisdom; one of my favorite things was whenever I was just kind of freaking out about life, some big decision coming up, I always wanted to talk to him... because he had this firm, gracious way of saying “It’s going to be ok, Jon.” It’s actually helped me with parenting a lot. This aspect of wisdom in parenting is that moment when you step into your kid’s world as it’s crumbling - they’ve just embarrassed themselves or gotten broken up with and the wise parent says “look me in the eyes. It’s going to be ok.”

This isn't faking it. Not some kind of weird religious burying our heads in the sand and disconnecting from the real pain and brokenness of the world. Proverbs is very honest about brokenness and all kinds of sinful foolishness that leads to it. Job walked in an unthinkable amount of pain. And yet... armed with the knowledge of who God is and how much He loves you, wisdom can confidently smile at the future anyways.

Part of what's always stood out to me in this description is that it's such a contrast to the ways we tend to respond to the unknown variables of tomorrow; all the things outside of our control. Because the truth is, you can memorize Proverbs front to back, know all of how life is designed to work and the truth remains that we are wildly out of control when it comes to what's going to happen tomorrow. All it takes is one phone call and all the illusion of control and self-protection we try to build can come crashing down.

This uncertainty leads us all to respond in different ways. Some of us deal with very overt worry, fear, and anxiety. Some of us get very sad or depressed. The uncertainty of tomorrow drives some of us to escape and veg out and just try not to think about it. Others of us get hyper focused and work an insane amount to try to control every variable, only to find out that will always be some variables we can't predict, control, or plan for. This is actually where some of our anger comes from. I did everything I could and it still didn't work out.

And here's the thing, I don't really have to sell you on this. None of us are thinking, "Nah, I'd really prefer to be stressed out, angry, worried and sad about the future. So, the question is simply, how do we become this kind of people who look at the future and can laugh? Look at 1 Peter 5 where Peter gives us some insight:

1 Peter 5:6-7

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

God actually has a goal for us in all of our contemplating of the future. He wants to actually use it to accomplish something in us. Here's how Paul Miller explains it in his book, *A Praying Life*.

Paul Miller

When you stop trying to control your life and instead allow your anxieties and problems to bring you to God in prayer, you shift from worry to watching. You watch God weave his patterns in the story of your life... Instead of fighting anxiety, we can use it as a springboard to bending our hearts to God. Instead of trying to suppress anxiety, manage it, or smother it with pleasure, we can turn our anxiety toward God. When we do that, we'll discover that we've slipped into continuous praying.

That's wisdom. Shifting from worry to watching. Instead of becoming overwhelmed by all the sources and circumstances of our lives that can lead us to anxiety, we start to watch for God and ask the question, "God what are you doing? Where are you at work?"

I had a friend of mine as an early mom; having a newborn is just something. You get so little sleep you start to lose your mind. My friend said everything started to shift for her when she asked the question, God what are you trying to teach me in the midst of this? God what am I supposed to be learning? Do you see it? She shifted from worry to watching. Peter says this movement from worry to watching; smiling at the days to come requires two things:

Humility. Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God; laughing at the days to come requires humility. Holding onto any of our various forms of anxious approaches to the future requires arrogance. Because we're assuming that we know better how our life ought to go than God does. But thinking about the future is supposed to humble us to remembering that God is God and we are not. God reigns sovereign over all the infinite variables and possibilities of tomorrow.

Remembering. Casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you; laughing at the days to come requires remembering that God cares about you. We humble ourselves under the God who sovereignly reigns over all things and we also remember that the same God who reigns on high stooped low to enter into all the brokenness of our world.

And we don't base our confidence that He cares for us in our circumstances; we base it in the cross. We're confident He cares because He entered into all the complexity of our stress and our worry and our anxiety, and He died to rescue us. Jesus died to invite us into a life of wisdom, a life where we can laugh at whatever might come.

Erica and I have anxiety about our family and worry about our kids and overall rhythms of life. We got away for an anniversary trip and spent some time thinking about how God's been at work in our family. It changed everything. All of a sudden, we were energized to plan for the year to come. All of a sudden, we were thankful instead of crushed. Watching instead of worry.

So, here's what we're going to do: I don't want us to leave today just nodding and agreeing with this idea. I want us to apply it. So, we're gonna devote time to apply this here and now.

If you're a guest with us, this will be a little different but we'd invite you to participate anyway. If you're not a Christian, we don't intend to make you feel awkward. The first part of this you might not be able to participate in. The second part you will. You might spend the first part just asking God if He's real, to reveal Himself to you.

For the rest of us, as soon as we leave this room, everything about life speeds up. There are people to talk to, places to get to, kids to tend to. So, as we wrap up this series, I want to give us some un-busied, un-hurried time.

Get the sheet that was on your chair when you came in [*sheet available on sermon page*]. One side of it says, "Where have I seen God at work?" We're going to start with that side. And all I want you to do for the next five or so minutes, take some time to think on any ways you've seen God at work in the last year. The last season of life. You've got some different little prompts and boxes to think about, but really overall, in your life, in the lives of those around you, where have you seen God at work?

Over and over in the Scriptures we get this command to remember God's faithfulness. The Old Testament talks about these altars - Ebenezers. When you see God at work capture it. Remember it. Rejoice in it. It's part of humbling yourself under God's mighty hand to remember and replay all that He's done on your behalf. Most of all in the gospel; where Jesus sacrificed Himself as your substitute.

Ok flip the page over and we're going to apply what we just read in 1 Peter 5. As David says it in Psalm 62:8 - "Trust in him at all times, o people; pour out your heart before Him." We're going to use this mind map to pour out our heart, to cast all our anxieties on Him remembering that He cares for us. He works for our good and His glory. So, anything in the upcoming season that could give you reason for concern, could cause you worry or anger or fear or anxiety; anything uncertain where you're hoping and praying to see God at work. We're going to take the next little bit to write it down and pray for it.

When it comes to the future, nothing empowers us to laugh at the days to come, nothing humbles us and helps us remember God's faithfulness more than the cross of Jesus. I don't know if you've thought about this before, but in the cross everything in the universe was working against Jesus trying to convince Him to abandon you. And He wouldn't do it. He could have stopped all the pain and torture of the cross if He had just given up on you.

But He held onto you no matter what.

If he wouldn't abandon you then, He won't abandon you now.

We started this series looking at 1 Corinthians that says Jesus Christ is the very wisdom of God. And now we'll end this series remembering once more that wisdom died for us. For our foolishness, for our sinfulness, the very wisdom of God poured Himself out for us. As we take communion we're both remembering that Jesus is the wisdom we're pursuing and He is our confidence that God will never abandon us. No matter what happens in this life we can laugh at the days to come because Jesus endured the cross; scorning its shame.