

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: Proverbs 8:1-11

Sermon Title: "Wisdom: Do You Hear What I Hear?"

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Everybody is searching for the truth. Especially during this election year, in which we will choose our next president, every American is looking for the truth. One of the candidates and his VP selection will stand before crowds, and tell them something about the economy and healthcare and immigration, and they will say it is the truth. And then the other side will have their candidate and VP selection stand up before different crowds and say that the other side is not speaking the truth. So they talk about the economy and healthcare and immigration, and they say it is the truth. And then the first side will stand up and say that it isn't the truth, and they will give us the real truth. And then the second side will stand up and say that isn't the truth, and they will give us the real, real truth. In the middle of all of this is the media. They have employees sitting in front of computers and searching for the truth in what each side is saying. These fact-finders research and compile the data and come to their conclusions, and they tell us what the truth really is.

What we have in Proverbs 8 is this thing we call wisdom. Wisdom is called a “she” in the passage, mainly because the Hebrew word for wisdom is a feminine noun. English does not have masculine or feminine words, but languages like Spanish, French, and Hebrew do. Wisdom takes her stand on the top of the highest hill, high enough for everybody to see, lofty enough for everybody to hear. Wisdom even finds her place on the path near some major crossroads. She cries out for everybody to hear, and what she gives us is the God-honest truth.

But what is this wisdom? What are we dealing with here? To begin with, we can say that wisdom is not human-made. The wisdom that cries out in Proverbs 8 is not invented by any political party or even the media. It does not come from the ragings of some political pundit who believes that every political decision we make will either bring about Armageddon or world peace. This wisdom doesn't come from talented professors from Harvard or Yale. It doesn't come from a philosopher or scientist or pastor, who thinks he has all the answers to life neatly packaged in his brain. Wisdom is not human-made. It is God-made. Wisdom itself originates with God, and God loves us so much to share this wisdom with us, as strange and vast as it might seem at times.

What is wisdom? Job 28:28 is an easy verse to remember, because the number for the chapter is the same number for the verse. Job 28:28 says, “God says to humanity, ‘Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding’.” When we talk about fearing God, we don’t mean to be so afraid of God that we cannot talk with God. It doesn’t mean being afraid that God is going to do something awful to us, so we better stay clear of him. Fearing the Lord does mean to have some sort of uneasiness with God, an uneasiness that tells us that we are in the presence of the Holy. Perfection is standing next to us, and that is a big deal. We are not dealing with just anybody, but we are dealing with the God of the universe, the God who has put breath in our lungs and gives us every good thing we need to sustain life. Everything we have and everything we are depends solely on God. So we should feel different before God. Our hearts should beat a little faster. Our eyes should be wide open and our ears should be tuning in to everything God has to say. Wisdom is feeling differently before God, being more respectful, offering free worship, feeling joyful and thankful and hopeful.

God’s wisdom is offered to anybody who wants it.

Everybody can have this wisdom. We don't need a special education, we don't need to have a certain amount of money, and we don't have to connect with the right sorts of popular people. "To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live," wisdom says.¹ When wisdom speaks from the top of the mountain or at the gateway of the city, wisdom speaks with words that we may understand clearly. She speaks to anybody, young or old, rich or poor, who has ears to hear and hearts to receive.

I remember a story that I heard, way back in seminary (my first time around), about a girl who loved to go to church. I don't remember her name, but I think we could go with Lizzie as her name. Everybody knew little Lizzie. She brightened everybody's day, when they saw her in church. She attended worship with her mother and father, always clinging on to her mother as they walked the halls. Little Lizzie was always shy when people greeted her, but she would offer a bright smile when people talked to her. She couldn't talk back; in fact, she couldn't talk very well for, you see, little Lizzie had Downs Syndrome. And she was only little in stature, standing about five feet. Little Lizzie was in her 20s, and her parents could never let her go to some care home – she would live

¹ Proverbs 8:4, NRSV

with them for the rest of her life. But little Lizzie knew about church. She knew about Jesus. If somebody gave her the name Jesus, she would brighten up even more. Her smile would widen from ear to ear, her eyes would look like big saucers, and she might do a little dance at the name. Little Lizzie could never live on her own. She could never take care of herself without Mom and Dad. But she had wisdom. She understood how to fear God and even love God. Little Lizzie understood the good feeling wisdom gives.

Any one of us can have wisdom. God wants to willingly share wisdom with us. Wisdom cries out to all who live, so that all who live may know the living God and all the blessings he offers.

Wisdom even understands that we might too dimwitted to comprehend the words: "O you simple ones, understand prudence (understand carefulness, understand good sense); and you fools, be of an understanding heart (discern and consider well everything placed before you). Wisdom knows that sin makes us dimwitted. Sin takes away all our reasoning. It causes us to do things that ruin relationships. We end up making choices that put us in deep dark holes that might take us longer times to get out of. Sin is not prudent. It does not consider

well everything or even discern the right things to do. We may act like we are simple and foolish, when sin gets a hold of us. We give into such sin, and make excuses for why we sin: “Because it feels good, because it’s what I want to do, because I’m angry, because he or she made me do it, because, because, because...” The excuses are just as simple and foolish as the sin.

But wisdom still speaks. Wisdom still calls to us. “Listen, for I will speak of excellent things, and from the opening of my lips will come right things; for my mouth will speak truth.” Ah, yes, that elusive truth. The treasure that people seek, especially during this election year. The truth that wisdom shares is that sin is not all it’s cracked up to be. Sin is not an excellent thing – it isn’t even a mediocre thing. Sin tells us lies about who we are, whereas wisdom tells us the truth of who we are. We are not victims to sin, we are children of God. We are not bound to our sin, whatever it is, we were purchased by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and thus are set free from our sin. These are excellent things to know. Wisdom talks about these.

Wisdom tells us how we are redeemed through Christ. Christ paid the price for our sin so we don’t have to. Wisdom also tells us how we are constantly

redeemed through Christ, because we still get tripped up by sin as imperfect human beings. Sin still tries to lie to us, make us do things or say things we ought not to do or say. Just as we were redeemed through Christ once we accepted him as Lord and Savior, that work continues in and through us until the day we are fully redeemed in heaven. God ain't done with us yet. The work keeps going on. This is an excellent thing.

God offers us his wisdom so we know how to act differently than from the way the culture would act. His wisdom shows us how to worship, even when some crisis occurs in our lives; how to pray, even when we have no clue what we are doing; how to offer our money and time and talents, even when we feel we have little to give; how to walk on the paths that God lays down for us, even when we do not feel worthy to walk such paths. We may trust this wisdom of God, since it will never lead us astray. Wisdom will always point us toward God. Wisdom will always speak of the excellent things we need to hear.

In John's Gospel, the first words that come to us are, "In the beginning was the Word." John tells us about this Word that was with God and was God, and how this Word came to earth and lived among us, whether people realized it or not. We all know that the

Word (capital W) is Jesus Christ. But do we know that the word for *word* in Greek is the word *logos*? In Greek philosophical circles, the word *logos* meant wisdom to them. John tells us in his Gospel that Jesus is Wisdom.

Wisdom came to us as a human being, perfect in every way. Wisdom didn't just stay on the mountain and shout at us. Wisdom didn't stay at the outskirts of the city and again shout at us. Wisdom came down to live among us. Wisdom lived the kind of lives we live, struggled with the same issues, solved similar problems, helped people in similar needs. Wisdom showed us how to fear God and to shun evil, and thus live the kind of redeemed lives that God wants us to live. Wisdom became a physical presence in Jesus Christ, our living example to follow and to reflect. And at the right time Wisdom died for us, so that all the excellent things that Wisdom spoke of would be ours forever.

Everybody is looking for truth, especially during this election year. We already have truth. We don't need to go far to seek it out. Jesus Christ is our Wisdom, our Lord, and our Savior forever.