5 Reasons Wisdom is More Desirable Than...

Proverbs 8:1-36

Introduction:

Good Morning.

“*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do his commandments.*” There are at least 3 sermons in this one verse from Psalm 111, it is so packed full of theological instruction. Thankfully I chose another passage to preach from today, but I wanted to start here because, as the verse makes clear, this is where wisdom starts, and that’s what we’re going to be talking about today. There are 211 mentions of wisdom throughout the New American Standard Translation; 161 in the Old Testament and another 50 in the New Testament. 4 whole books of the Bible are considered wisdom literature; Job (which is chronologically probably the first book of the Bible written), Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. With that much coverage, I think you’ll agree, it’s pretty apparent that Wisdom is a big deal to the Lord. But what is Wisdom? The Scripture often mentions it alongside knowledge, like in Proverbs 1:7, which says “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction.*” So if the fear of the Lord is the beginning of both wisdom and knowledge, and they are mentioned together so often, perhaps that means wisdom is really the same as knowledge? But...That’s doesn’t sound quite right, though, does it? Thankfully Proverbs 2:6 clears it up for us entirely, saying “*For the Lord Gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.*”

That’s what Wisdom is, it is knowledge AND understanding. We can define wisdom as “The ability to use knowledge to discern or judge what is true or right.” Knowledge, on the other hand, can be defined simply as “Information attained through Reason, Experience, or Proximity & Association.” (and, by the way, if there are any epistemologists here today or listening online later, let me say I’m sorry for the brevity of that definition). If knowledge is simply information, then it can certainly exist without wisdom. It’s possible to know things, even a lot of things, but not to use that information correctly or at all. But Wisdom cannot exist
without knowledge. Knowledge is knowing that you need to turn on the next street to get where you’re going; Wisdom is waiting for the light to turn green before doing so. Knowledge is knowing you have a high enough credit score to qualify for that store credit card; Wisdom is talking with your spouse about it before applying. I could do this all day, but you get the point.

Wisdom is vital to the life of God’s people. But you don’t have to take my word for it. And thankfully the wisest man who ever lived, King Solomon, wrote a great deal about it. In the passage we’re going to look at today from the book of Proverbs, Solomon gives Wisdom her own voice. In Proverbs chapter 8 Wisdom tells us in her own words why she is so important. So turn with me to Proverbs Chapter 8. It’s a little long, but we’re going to read verses 1 through 36 and then we’ll start digging in. We’re gonna see 5 reasons Wisdom is so desirable.

(Read Proverbs 8:1-36)

**Provinence:**

The Book of Parables is a collection or an anthology of works, written by at least 4 authors. While most of it can be ascribed to Solomon himself, there are parts that are noted as coming from at least 2 other authors about which we know basically nothing. A man named Agur is attested as having written Chapter 30, a King Lemuel as having written Chapter 31, and possibly a couple of pieces written by an anonymous group simply called “the wise” in Chapters 22 and 24. But, despite what many liberal commentators seem to think, the rest is most obviously attributed to King Solomon, just look at Chapter 1 verse 1. The book is organized into 2 clear sections. Chapters 1-9 acts as a series of discourses on Wisdom explaining its importance and giving instruction on its application. Chapters 10-31 are then made up of the short couplet style sayings we generally associate with Parables; things like Chapter 13:11 which says “Wealth obtained by fraud dwindles, but the one who gathers by labor increases it.”

These kinds of couplets are generalized sayings, and it’s important to note here that they are not meant to be universally applicable to every situation or person. Unlike the Law, which gives straight forward commands of what to do and what not to do, Proverbs or wisdom sayings instead offer strong warnings to think again backed up by some pointing out of what the positive or devastating results
can be. Where the Law says “Do not commit adultery; the penalty for doing so is death”, the proverbs instead say “it’s a really bad idea because it can ruin you, your reputation, or ruin your family. Even if you get caught, the consequences are still not worth it. Think Again!!” So the Proverbs cannot be taken to apply to every circumstance at all times. One must still use sound discernment regarding when they properly apply; as one commentator put it “In a real sense one must have wisdom to correctly use wisdom.”

Dating the book of Proverbs is next to impossible. Depending on where they lay across the spectrum from liberal to conservative, scholars believe it was either completed and compiled shortly after the reign of Solomon or they believe parts come from before Solomon and other parts centuries later. The truth is, it’s impossible to know with exact certainty. Thankfully, that doesn’t affect its truthfulness or its status and role as a part of God’s Word.

Chapters 1-9 of Proverbs act as the guidebook for the chapters that follow. Through several discourses on Wisdom, these chapters build the hermeneutical framework, the theological footing needed to understand the various sayings of 10 through 31.

Narrowing our focus to Proverbs Chapter 8, what we have is in essence the Auto-Biography of Wisdom. Up to this Point, Solomon has entreated the reader (often addressed as his son) to listen and take heed of his wise advice about various things. In Chapter 7 he spends 27 verses advising his son to stay away from harlots & adultery. Describing what the harlot is like and how she behaves in addition to the awful results one can expect from being with her, Solomon then moves in Chapter 8 to allow wisdom to describe herself in contrasting terms. Where the harlot deceives and destroys and leads to death, wisdom is honest and righteous and leads to abundant life. Where adultery is utterly worthless, wisdom is exceedingly precious. And it’s from here that we provided with 5 reasons wisdom is so much more desirable than…well you’ll see. Lets take a look at the 1st reason, Wisdom is valid and true.

**Reason 1: It’s Valid**

We find reason 1 in verses 1-9 of chapter 8. Wisdom begins with a call to everyone possible in verses 2 & 3 saying (read verses 2&3). The picture being painted is of someone standing at the single point with the most coverage, with
the most people within earshot by the city gates. And when she finally speaks, she
doesn’t hold back in any way. She starts boldly proclaiming in verse 5 “O Niave
ones, understand prudence; and, O fools, understand wisdom.” One of my favorite
things about God’s word is how direct it often is. And verse 5 is no exception. She
is, to paraphrase somewhat, saying “hey you fools, listen to me, I’ll give you
common sense.” She then goes on in verses 6 through 9 saying (read 6-9).
Wisdom explains in absolute and unflinching terms that everything she says is
right, and true, and good. The text contrasts this with equally strong sayings of
the reverse; “Wickedness is an abomination to my lips…” & “There is nothing
crooked or perverted in them.”

Wisdom does not lead to sin. In fact, it does the opposite, it keeps from sinning.
The Lord tells us in the Scripture who He is & what He expects of us. That’s the
knowledge. Wisdom then is us acting obediently and evaluating life through the
lens of what God would have us do and be. That is actually one of the biggest
dangers of the Postmodernist movement. Postmodernism teaches, among other
things, that there is no objective truth. That what’s true for you may not be true
for me. That truth is completely subjective to everyone’s own individual point of
view. To which I immediately ask them “Is that True?” Of course it isn’t. Standing
against such foolishness, the Scripture teaches the very opposite. Truth is
completely objective, it is true whether we know or believe it or not. If it were
otherwise, then there is no point to Wisdom. The ability to discern and
understand truth would be absolutely worthless if there was no truth to discern
and understand. Thankfully, Wisdom is nothing but valid and logical and true. We
want Wisdom! And that leads the author (and us) to reason #2.

**Reason 2: Wisdom is incredibly valuable.**

Look at verses 10 and 11 (Read 10 & 11). This is how much better than anything
else wisdom is. Because it is completely true, it is worth more than anything else
on this earth. More than any amount of money, more than any job, wisdom is
more valuable than anything we can acquire in this world. Proverbs 4:7
reiterates this saying “The Beginning of Wisdom is: Acquire Wisdom; and with all
your acquiring, get understanding.” I think the NIV captures this a little more
clearly with this verse “The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.” And this is where the Fear of the Lord comes in. Because to gain wisdom, it will cost all that you have. But we’ll get to that more later on. For the moment, let’s stay with Proverbs 8. Move down to verses 18-21. (read 18-21). Wisdom personified reiterates her value and expands on it a bit. She says “My fruit is better than gold...” Not only is the ability to understand what is true priceless, but the results of using that understanding are also infinitely valuable. It leads to walking in the way of righteousness and to just behavior, which results in wealth. But that doesn’t mean earthly wealth. When wisdom says she will fill the treasuries of those who love her, the text means our heavenly treasuries.

This is the same wealth spoken about by Jesus in Matthew Chapter 6:19-21 where the Lord says “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” This is the kind of wealth that comes from having and using wisdom. Which leads to reason #3.

**Reason 3: Wisdom is Power.**

Go back a little ways and take a look at verses 12-17 (read 12-17). Wisdom is Power. Maybe better put, it is empowerment. It’s not enough to just have knowledge about God. Knowledge without wisdom is called foolishness in the scripture. Foolishness leads to ungodliness and sin. We learn in Romans 1:18-22 “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they
became fools.” So everyone has knowledge of God. But those who don’t use that knowledge wisely, who don’t honor God as God, they are called fools. By contrast, those who have wisdom are empowered to make sound and right choices with that knowledge. It allows good rulers to lead their nations well. It allows husbands to lead their homes in godliness. It gives business leaders the power to make biblical and just financial decisions. Zooming back out to the more generalized principle then, Wisdom is the power to not sin. It’s the ability to behave in a godly way. To be obedient to the Lord’s commands. Not to suppress the truth, but to proclaim the truth in righteousness. In this way wisdom is real, lifelong power for living the godly life to God’s glory. This is made even better when we consider reason #4.

**Reason 4: Wisdom is Eternal**

Look with me at verses 22-31 (read 22-31). As you can see, wisdom has existed since before creation. It says “from everlasting I was established” and later “before the hills I was brought forth” clearly telling us that wisdom is something the Lord created. I won’t try to explain exactly how that works, because truthfully I don’t know. But I bring it up because reading these verses, it could be easy to come to the conclusion that the text is referring to Jesus Himself. In the second century AD, an early church leader named Arius came to that conclusion and used this text (Among others) to try to say that while Jesus may be the Son of God, He was not in fact God because he was created. Thankfully, another early church leader named Athanasius came forward and pointed out (With a lot of Greek scholarship I won’t go into here) that this text was not at all talking about Jesus Himself, but about wisdom as an attribute of God. In that, this text is very important. Because we learn that Wisdom is a tool that the Lord possessed and used in creation. One that delights God the Father.

That’s good news for those who are made in God’s image, because in a similar sense to the way Lord possessed it in verse 22, we too can possess this same wisdom and are in fact invited to do so. Maybe invited is the wrong word. It’s more something like strongly encouraged or commanded. And since Wisdom is Eternal, if we possess it, then it’s something we keep eternally.
Like knowledge, but unlike material wealth, wisdom is something that lasts forever, whether here or in heaven with Christ. The common saying about money is “You can’t take it with you.” But Wisdom is not like that, you can take it with you. Wisdom is Eternal. That brings us finally to reason #5.

**Reason 5: Wisdom leads to Abundant Life.**

Read with me verses 32-36 (read 32-36). The person who has wisdom is called Blessed twice in this passage. For those who follow the counsel of Lady Wisdom, who don’t neglect it and obey her instructions, the text says “he who finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord.” That favor is not meant to be material favor. I know I said this earlier, but I have to say it again here, This isn’t a passage affirming the heretical health and wealth gospel espoused by some famous megachurch pastors. It does not mean that the person using wisdom should expect to have great material possessions in this life. That’s not to say that the wise handling of money or the wise use of that which the Lord has given you won’t lead to some wealth or relative comfort, because it may. But God is not some genie who provides materially for those who obey him, that’s not the abundant life this text is teaching. What it’s referring to is the abundant spiritual life, one that God favors and rewards in heaven.

This abundant life is contrasted in verse 36 with the stark reality of the life without wisdom. They are fools because by the way they act, they hate themselves. Instead of blessing, their ways lead to sin. Those ways are the opposite of what leads to life, they DO neglect Lady Wisdom and disobey her instructions. For them, there is no abundant life, only death.

**Conclusion: Get Wisdom!**

Clearly, there is only one thing we can do, Get Wisdom! Because Wisdom is Valid, pricelessly valuable, it’s power, it’s eternal, and it leads to abundant life. But how do we get wisdom? And That brings us back to the Fear of the Lord. As the text says, we do so by fearing the Lord. That’s the beginning of Wisdom. But the fear of the Lord doesn’t mean to be afraid of God. Nor does it simply mean some kind of worked up feeling of awe and amazement. No, what it means is to know who
God is and to treat Him accordingly. It is the result of hearing, learning, and responding to God’s word. This then aligns our hearts with God’s, so that we love what the Lord loves and hate what the Lord hates. With that knowledge, we can then walk the path of righteousness that Wisdom instructs us to walk and leads us down.

In the context of the original writers and their readers, this text was referring to the Old Covenant. Fear of the Lord meant fulfillment of the covenant relationship between Israel and the Lord. Deuteronomy 10:12-13 says “Now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the Lord’s commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?” For Israel, the fear of the Lord meant to keep His commandments, to love and serve Him, to walk in His ways. It cost them every part of their lives.

In the context of the New Covenant, for us, fear of the Lord means essentially the same thing, only in a post crucifixion sense. If fearing the Lord is to know Him, that means to know, love, trust, and obey Jesus Christ. He says in John 14:4-7 “And you know the way where I am going.” 5 Thomas *said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?” 6 Jesus *said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. 7 If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.” And later in the same chapter, He says “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” And that’s why I said earlier that acquiring wisdom will cost us everything. Jesus makes clear in the New Testament that just as Israel was called to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, the same is true of us with Jesus Christ.

The verse from Proverbs 4 earlier parallels what Jesus said to the rich young ruler in Mark chapter 10. In verse 17, the rich young man asks Jesus “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” and after some questioning, Jesus replies in verse 21 “One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” And we all know the sad ending to that
story, with the young man walking away from the Lord sadly because he couldn’t let go of his material wealth and devote his life to following Jesus. But that is exactly what must be done to acquire wisdom that leads to abundant life; full love, devotion to, and following the Lord Jesus Christ, or in Old Testament terms, the fear of the Lord. If you can pay that cost, then you stand to possess something infinitely more valuable.

And with the Fear of the Lord, James tells us in chapter 1:5 “if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” Once we have the fear of the Lord, then all we need do is ask, and He will provide the knowledge and wisdom we need.

Proverbs 8 makes clear, Wisdom is worth it. I named this sermon 5 reasons wisdom is more desirable than… because you fill in the blank. Whatever you come up with, I guarantee, Wisdom is better. So I leave you again with the words of Solomon in Proverbs 4:7 “The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.”

Let’s Pray.