

PP A Mother's Message to the Church

Text Proverbs 31

5/10-11/2014

Illus On May 9, 1914, by an act of Congress, President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed the second Sunday in May as Mother's Day. He established the day as a time for "public expression of our love and reverence for the mothers of our country." By then it had become customary to wear white carnations to honor departed mothers and red to honor the living, a custom that continues to this day.

Mothers, you are to be honored, not just today, but certainly on this, and the Bible does just that, especially in Proverbs 31, yet many women do not appreciate this passage
'An impossible standard', 'Who can live up to it?', 'And where is the chapter for the men?'
 But possibly, just possibly, Proverbs 31 has been a misunderstood chapter of the bible
 For instance, it is likely that it has in mind no specific woman, but rather the ideal woman
 The picture of a person whom Christ has gotten a hold of, who has been transformed by His wisdom into a woman in whom He delights
 My simple goal is two-fold: show what Christ is doing among our ladies by the transforming grace and power of His wisdom; and to reveal their greatest potential in this life

PP 1-The Plea of a godly mother's heart (31:1-9)

Notice with me that Proverbs 31 begins by showing us a mother's heart!

'The words of King Lemuel. An oracle that his mother taught him'

Many believe her words continue to the end of the chapter, not ending at verse 9

The rest of Proverbs contains instructions from a father to his son and leaders to young nobles

But here we see a mother's heart and the wisdom she imparts to her maturing son!

PP Ladies, the bible elevates your influence in the home: *"The wisest of women builds her house, but folly with her own hands tears it down."* **Proverbs 14:1**

Look with me at her exercising this God-ordained influence

"What are you doing, my son? What are you doing, son of my womb? What are you doing, son of my vows?" **Proverbs 31:2**

Listen to the progression... *'my son'*, then *'son of my womb'* and ending with *'son of my vows.'*

Can you hear her mother's heart, for she had given him birth, and with vows, gave him to the Lord, which is what the name Lemuel means

And she pleads with him to be careful in three areas, areas that he was likely forgetting!

"Do not give your strength to women, your ways to those who destroy kings." **31:3**

"It is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to take strong drink" **31:4**

"Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of the destitute...judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy" **31:9**

Lemuel, you are wasting your strength on women and alcohol, and neglecting the poor

Her plea is passionate, straight from her heart, and this is how mothers are to build their homes

Let your children, regardless of their ages, when they are straying from what you have taught, hear from your mother's heart!!

PP 2-The Instruction of a godly mother (31:10-27)

Verses 10-31 are an acrostic poem where each stanza begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, which was often done to aid a person in memorizing the material
 She just taught him what kind of a man he is to be: quit chasing women, stop over-using wine and beer, and stop neglecting your responsibilities to help those in need
 Now she teaches him a poem to understand what kind of a wife to search for
 For she knows how difficult it can be: ***“An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels” 31:10***
‘Excellent’ or ‘virtuous’ is used in the sense of thrifty and devoted, dependable to her family
‘Don’t lower your standards Lemuel, keep them high, and here is what you look for’
 Moms, your influence is incredible, so parent from wisdom and teach your kids what kind of a spouse to look for, being an example for them
 Don’t be discouraged, don’t dread this passage
 Realize that this is the picture of this woman is the goal of His transforming grace

PP a) *Lemuel, look for a trustworthy wife*

“The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.” Proverbs 31:11-12

A faithful, trustworthy wife is the most precious gain a man can acquire
 Because of her, he ***‘will have no lack of gain’***, referring to the rich plunder of a victorious army
 She brings such treasures, material and immaterial, into the home
 Her life is devoted to doing him good, making him utterly convinced of her love for him

PP Martin Luther once wrote, *“The greatest gift of God is a pious spouse who fears God and loves His church, and with whom one can live in perfect confidence.”*

PP b) *Look for a hard-working/diligent wife*

“She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar. She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens. She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong. She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night. She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle.” Proverbs 31:13-19

She works hard inside and outside the home, not grudgingly, but with ***‘willing hands’***
 She shops for her family at the grocery store, getting up early in the dark to provide for all who are dependent on her
 Her husband trusts her so well, that she is free and encouraged to make family investments
 He doesn’t worry when she goes shopping, he knows her discretion and self-control
 From her own earnings she purchases a field and plants her vineyard
 This is not an argument for stay at home moms or moms working outside the home
 Rather, it’s a picture of a hard-working woman whose husband has complete trust in her
 She spends carefully, and when she does, it’s for the benefit of her family
 She knows the value of what she possesses and does not allow herself to be cheated
 Even in the evening, she is still working for her family by lamplight

This section begins and ends with a mention of her hard, willing work making cloth
 Jewish women generally produced the clothes for her and her family, a laborious process
 They would attach wool, or flax from stalks to a rod called the distaff, and use a spindle to spin
 the fibers into threads
 That thread was woven into cloth by running it vertically on a wooden frame or loom, and using
 a shuttle to run more thread crosswise over and under the vertical threads
 The cloth would be cut, and sewn into clothes, or curtains, or towels, or tent fabric
“She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness.” 31:27
 God delights in a hard-working, diligent woman!

PP c) *Look for a compassionate wife*

“She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy.” Proverbs 31:20
 What Lemuel had been prone to neglect was what his mother told him to look for...another
 indication that this is part of what she taught her son
 Opening your hand to the poor meant to stop holding on to material possessions
 She opened her hand and reached out to those in need, her heart full of compassion
 Is there much that is more feminine and beautiful than a woman full of grace and kindness?

PP d) *Look for a wife of character*

“She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household are clothed in scarlet. She makes bed coverings for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple. Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land. She makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers sashes to the merchant.” Proverbs 31:21-24

Threads were dyed scarlet by crushing an insect called the Tola, producing a rich crimson color
 She cares for her children, preparing them for harsh weather, making scarlet clothes that stand
 out against the snow so they can be seen
 But a mother might say, *I cannot be this woman, I don't know how to sew!*
 But you do know how to protect your children, and you are able to help them dress in scarlet
 In **Psalm 22:6**, David prophesies of the crucified Jesus, ***“But I am a worm and not a man”***
 The word ***‘worm’*** is Tola, the very insect crushed to make blood-red dye
 The Father had laid our sins upon His Son standing out against His holiness as scarlet from snow
 Mothers, when you see your children sin, have confidence in the power of your Redeemer
 Dress yourself in ***‘fine linen and purple’***, show your children how to live by the grace of Christ
 Purple dye was obtained from a specific shellfish found on the eastern Mediterranean shores
 A white vessel in its neck contained the colored liquid, call the ‘flower’
 And typically, the color purple pictured royalty, as in the tabernacle hangings, but in verse 25,
“Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come” 31:25
 She knows who she is, dressed in the purple royal robes of the daughter of the King of kings
 That King holds the future, she does not need to be afraid of it!

She lives in such a way that her husband gains fame, he is ***‘known in the gates’***
 It is at the gates that ***‘her works praise her.’ 31:31***
 Let them say to your husband, *‘You really married up’, ‘God has blessed you with her!’*

She does nothing to embarrass him before others, but even more, she is managing the family so well, he can pour himself into his work, not to neglect his family, but to perform his best

Note that this passage says *'her household'* not *'his'* not *'their household'*, for you will mothers will build the house or tear it down

And how does she build her household: ***"She opens her mouth in wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. Proverbs 31:26***

'Lemuel, a wife of this character will build you a house that will bring you endless gain!'

PP e) *Look for a family wife*

"She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness." 27

This is a mother who is always watching the *'ways'* or the behavior of her children, ready to honor or correct them as appropriate

But she also brings order to the family and manages the household well

PP The word *'ways'* was used in **Nahum 2:5**, ***"He remembers his officers; they stumble as they go, they hasten to the wall; the siege tower is set up."***

She sees pandemonium in her family and brings it to order, whether the chaos is because children are running to and fro with soccer games and play practice and homework, or because her children's behavior betrays character that needs to change

She doesn't wait until their father gets home, she intervenes and brings about discipline or praise

PP f) *Look for a godly wife*

"Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised." Proverbs 31:30

Ladies, there is nothing more beautiful in a woman than godliness, and in fact it overwhelms outer beauty!

Lemuel, his mother taught, weight the heart of a woman far more importantly than the body, for her beauty will fade eventually, but her love for God will only deepen!!

Illus Susanna Wesley was a busy mother with 19 children, yet she set aside time each day to meet with God. Some days she spent that time in a chair with her apron over her head, praying. Woe be to the child who disturbed her!

PP And it moves us to the third point **3-The Praise for a godly mother (31:28-31)**

Kids, husbands, honor your mothers, your wives who live out any of these characteristics

Children young and old ought to praise her often, not just on Mother's Day

"Her children rise up and call her blessed" Proverbs 31:28

Rise up, in the family, the church, looking for opportunities to honor these godly mothers

Let Facebook and Twitter be lit up with public praise and do not neglect private praise as well

And where do children learn to praise their mothers...from their fathers

Look at verse 28, ***"her husband also, and he praises her" Proverbs 31:28***

Children need to hear dad say things like verse 29, ***"Many daughters have done well, But you excel them all." Proverbs 31:29***

There are many good mothers, many wonderful wives, but none come to your level

If children aren't praising their mom, the likely reason is they aren't hearing dad praise her
 Even her works praise her: ***"Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates."*** 31:31

She will be the talk of ***'the gates'***, the whole community will see her works and praise her

Many believe that Lemuel was a name for Solomon, and that this mother is Bathsheba
 If so, how encouraging that wisdom had the kind of transforming power to take someone whose story began with adultery, and make her such a wise and excellent mother

PP But ladies, your greatest influence is **4-The Witness of a godly mother**

You see, this Proverb was written with two purposes in mind

The first was to show young men the woman to look for in a wife as well as see that if you cry out for wisdom, skilful living, God will transform ladies into this woman by His grace

But ladies, the second and even greater purpose of Proverbs 31, is that your life would show the world the glory of another woman, whose name is the church, the Bride of Christ

Your life, ladies, can witness to the beauty and power of the church!

The church is often represented by a woman in Scripture

The church's husband is Christ, she is His bride!

The Lord found her, unwanted, cast away as Ezekiel 16 tells us, and took her into His home, raised her, and then married her and became her husband

The church in infancy was Israel but now today is Gentile and Jew, united through faith in Christ

What is seen here is what the transforming grace of Christ is doing in transforming His bride

Now we have warts and blemishes but one day we'll be with Christ forever, perfect and glorious
 Precious to Him, **31:10**, His treasured possession having been purchased by His blood

Bringing Him no lack of delight and joy, **verse 12**

The church working for Him, serving Him, with willing hands, even now working out our salvation as He work in us by His Spirit

Planting vineyards, a symbol also of the church

Dressing herself with strength, as Colossians 3 instructs us to do, and knows how valuable our merchandise is, the message of the gospel

Opening our hands to the poor, **verse 20**, reaching out to the needy

Our clothing is blood-bought scarlet, royal purple as sons and daughters of the King of kings

Making known Jesus Who sits on the gate, ruling over all

Filled with strength and dignity, we learn to laugh toward the future, knowing He Who holds all things in His sovereign hand, and the reward that will be ours for eternity

Many will be born into the family of Christ and they will praise and love the church

Her husband, Jesus, adores her and declares His praises for her, dwelling even now with her

He will not withhold her reward, and will give to her His reward

Ladies, as Christ transforms you into the woman of Proverbs 31, you are being a witness to what He is doing in the church

Mothers especially this morning, thank you!

So let me end with a biblical blessing: ***"The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace."*** Numbers 6:24-26

Amen...Pray

