



Present, Past, Future

Proverbs 6:20-8:34

Grace Church | 7.25.21

We have quite a lot of text to get through today, as we are going all the way from the end of chapter 6 and finishing up chapter 8. Next week we will cover chapter 9 and then spend a few more weeks in a few select proverbs after that. I want to spend some time here though to reorient ourselves back to the macro structure of Proverbs. You remember that we said Proverbs can be broken down into two sections, based on the headings that call us back to the authors. Chapters 1-9 begin with the heading “The Proverbs of Solomon”, but are really a set of speeches that are teaching us how to understand wisdom before getting to the real Proverbs. Then the real proverbs come in chapters 10-31, where we find hundreds of short proverbial sayings attributed to Solomon and also to two other foreign kings in Chapters 30-31.

The characters of these Proverbs are introduced to us in chapters 1-9, that is why they are so important. It's also been very interesting to see that characters presented to us are meant to personify wisdom itself. So we found from the beginning of chapter 1 two primary characters: first, there is the royal king or father. He is the one who has been instructing his son or his child in the way of wisdom. But there is also another character who is female: the mother or lady wisdom. So in this way we have both male and female personifications of the wisdom of God. In both of these personifications have counterparts: for the Royal father of wisdom his counterpart is the Wicked Man or foolish man. We saw the Wicked Man calling out to us in chapter 1 to take part in violence and greed. The counterpart for Lady Wisdom is described as the “Forbidden Woman” or “Lady Folly”. And we saw her back in chapter 5 and will see her again today in chapter 6 and 7, enticing us to take part in sexual sin and adultery and indulgence.

The reason I bring this up is because both this week and next week are going to serve as a distinct dichotomy between these two kinds of characters: specifically Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly. And I want you to see how our text frames this dichotomy or comparison in the structure of the story of God. Again and again in Proverbs our attentions are pulled back towards creation, and we see it in these characters. There are male and female, both rulers and givers of life, just as man and woman were created male and female in the garden. And you remember a few weeks ago in chapter 3, wisdom is compared to the tree of life in the garden. Solomon himself, who is a historical picture of the wise king, is kind of an Adam figure in Scripture: he is meant to represent a new beginning of flourishing for the people of God. He talks with God, like Adam, and receives this gift of wisdom from God. But Solomon fails, in a similar way to how Adam fell. Solomon's foreign wives tempt him to idolatry, as Eve was tempted, and Solomon succumbs, just as Adam does.



So we have in Proverbs an opportunity to zoom all the way out and ask the question: how is the world supposed to work? What is the world supposed to look like? How are we humans meant to live? And that question is first answered by going back to the garden, going back to creation. This is what both the Royal Father and Lady Wisdom represent in Proverbs: how things were supposed to be. They are a picture of Adam and Eve before the fall, calling out to us from the past and saying: don't make the same mistakes. I know this is kind of meta, but the ones they are warning you about: this wicked man and forbidden woman—are their own warped selves. They are what all humanity is and will be in sin apart from the wisdom of God. Foolish, sinful, enticing, violent, adulterous, hedonistic, with no fear of God. And as we know, since Adam failed and sin entered the world, the reality we live in is a reality full of warped humans in a warped world. This is the way things are: and we have to be wide awake to it. This is the focus of chapter 7: being wide awake to the temptations of the way things are. But it's also helpful to see the past, to look and notice the value of what could have been. And this is the focus of chapter 8, to look back to creation and see lady wisdom there, the wisdom of God creating and guiding all things. Finally this morning we will end with good news—being wide awake to the ways things are, and being awed by the way things were, we can find hope in the way things will be.

Present: Sin Waits on Every Corner (6:20-7:27)

Let's start with the way things are. In other words, we are asking the question: when I step out of these doors and into the world today, what will I find? And the answer is: sin. The book of Proverbs is aware that the world around is full of temptation. And here in chapter 6-7, that temptation is modeled for us in the form of sexual temptation. Now, we have already discussed some of this a few weeks ago in chapter 5, so why bring it up again. It's because, I believe, that there is something about sexual temptation and sexual sin that acts as a picture, a mirror, into the seriousness of all sin. Sexual sin is personal sin with public consequences. It's because, as the apostle Paul says, "Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body (1 Cor 6:18)." In other words, sexual sin lies deep in the heart of all of us. God cares about sexuality—he made us male and female for a reason. It's one of the first things we notice about someone we meet. It's part of his created order, in fact it's at the very heart of his created order: two sexual kinds subduing the earth together. And because it is so special to God, it has the ability to be twisted grievously by sin. All of history points this direction—sexual desire has driven nations and kingdoms to destruction. And here we are, in 2021, in a sexualized age, where our sexuality becomes linked to our identity. We have to clarify which direction our sexuality is oriented, whether toward the opposite sex or the same sex, and for any institution or religion or creed or person to try to speak into and inform how our sexuality is meant to function is oppressive, an attack on self! Pornography is a health emergency, but more than than a spiritual barometer to show us the wickedness all around us. It's a spiritual pandemic of global proportions, eating us away from the inside. But Scripture speaks still. It says simply: God created our sexuality, and it's actually *sin* and *foolishness* that has warped and distorted it. Nowhere do we more clearly see how



sin has changed our understanding of the ways things are then how it has changed our understanding of sexuality.

This is the gist of **6:20-24**. Keep my commandments, bind them around you always, because they will lead you away from sexual confusion. Notice **verse 23**, these commands, this standard of God for our sexuality, is not a vice that limits our freedom. It's a lamp that leads us to the way of life and away from the distortions of the wicked man and the forbidden woman. God's teaching on sexuality is not meant to be confusing or restrictive. It is meant to keep you from the temptation you cannot see, that lies deep inside you, a temptation that, as **24-25** says, is smooth and attractive, enticing with a flutter of the eyelashes. All sin is outwardly attractive, but especially sexual sin and sexual confusion. It promises not only physical fulfillment, emotional fulfillment, or personal freedom. Let's consider four realities about sin, personified as Lady Folly or the forbidden woman, that are true of the world we live in and how things are.

Lady Folly is Inevitable (6:27-31)

By this I mean that the consequences of lady Folly are inevitable. The picture of **verses 27-28** are so vivid. Playing with fire gets you burned, everyone knows that. Fire burns, it never cools. It's not meant to be carried close to the chest, it's not meant to be walked on. The reality of the world we live in is that sin will come, and it's consequences will come with it. Your sin will catch up to you, **verse 29** says.

Lady Folly is Irreversible (6:32-35)

Not only are the consequences of sin inevitable, they cannot be reversed. Once sin is committed, it cannot be reeled back in. **Verse 33**, Sexual sin, again, is our example. An act of adultery cannot be undone, it cannot be erased, and it cannot be forgotten. But in reality neither can any sin. The fallen world we live in bears the wright of our sin. The image in **verses 34-35** is of a man who has been wronged, whose wife has been taken by another. He cannot lose that jealousy, he cannot simply forget, he cannot accept payment. What has been done is irreversible. This is how serious sin is—this is the state of the world we live in.

Lady Folly is Irresistible (7:1-12)

Verses 1-5 give us another admonition as to the seriousness of walking out the door every day. Wisdom must be our sister and intimate friend, the teaching of the Father must be bound to our hands and sealed to our eyes and written on our hearts if we are to be kept from the temptation of the forbidden. It's war out there. We need new hearts and minds and hands if we are to survive. Why? Because without wisdom bound up to our very person and sealed in our very spirit, temptation and sin is irresistible.

Now, I don't mean that Christians are not able to resist sin. I mean that we are unable to resist sin in our natural state. And this is what Proverbs 7 is teaching us. We are not strong enough on our own. **Verses 6-9** give the image of a young man walking down the streets that he knows he is not meant to walk. He passes along the dark corridor, in the evening, when no one can see. He browses the internet late at night, with no one around, poking around the sites he knows the forbidden lie close to. And verse 10, what a surprise, the forbidden is there, waiting. Dressed in just the way he



likes, **verse 12, waiting at every corner**. There is no escape now, the steps have been made, the path has been set, and so, **verse 13**, sin seizes us.

You are not strong enough on your own to resist temptation. Don't wobble close to the edge, don't try to handle fire. Again, the example here is sexual sin, but we are taught something here about the nature of all temptation. This is the way things are! This is the world we live in, this is the depths of our depravity! In sin we have plunged into a den of temptation. Rightfully this should set you on edge, this is God's purpose—to shake and wake you.

Lady Folly is Inescapable (13-27)

Sin promises much. She says: "I am religious. I'm not harmful. I was on my way to a great sacrificial feast, and I've come just for you, to bring you with me." My bed is made, comfortable and beautiful, my house is not dingy or dirty, it's specially made for you to enjoy. We can spend all night there, we don't have to think about any consequences or any pressures tonight. Sin promises love, delight. No one will ever know, or needs to know, she says. It's just us. Oh friends, listen to the promises of sin, do you see how extravagant they are? No wonder, as **verse 26** says, many have fallen in this way, dead bodies all around. Who can resist such promises?

But all of them are empty. When we give in, we are led, says **verse 22-23**, like an animal to slaughter. We have lost our humanity and have become the sacrifice of lady folly. Once we give in, we are given over to death, for the wages of sin is death. **Verse 27**, we enter into the house of sin expected the lavish banquet and we realize the stairs of her house lead not up to delight, but down to the prison of death.

Adam and Eve were tempted in such a way in the garden. They could not avoid the inevitable consequences of their sin. They could not reverse the course they put in place, they could not go back into the garden. No longer did they have strength to resist sin, but it carried on to their children and their children's children. And they could not escape death—though they lived a long life, they died and their bodies decayed, just as our does. Death was the enemy they were never meant to know, but now could not escape.

This is the state of the world. This is what lies around every dark corner of every darkened heart. And no, it is not good. But it is not how it is supposed to be. Turn the page with me, and I want to take you back to creation, to before the fall, to where God was. Before anything existed, he was there. And what was with him, part of him, belonging to him in full measure, with what he created the world and the one thing that is meant to make the world flourish? It was wisdom.

Past: We were meant to live in Wisdom (8:1-31)

Let's get the picture of **verses 1-3**. Wisdom is standing at the gates of a city on a hill, God's city. This is a different kind of house. She is looking down from the place where God dwells in all his holiness, the place of perfection, and she calls out. What does she say?



First, we can trust her (6-9, 12-13).

The speech of Lady Folly is “seductive”, but the speech of Lady Wisdom is “righteous” (v 8) and “noble” (v 6). She utters truth (v 7) and there is nothing crooked in her speech. In other words, she makes no false promises. All her paths are straight and right. This is way things were meant to be. God’s wisdom is meant to be trusted, we are created to trust him and to believe him by faith and sight.

Second, she is valuable and leads to value (10-11, 17-21).

The adulterous Lady Folly promises pleasure and physical value, expensive and exotic fabrics and scents and food. But Lady wisdom says her instruction is actually better than all those things. She is worth more than what we can see, and what she offers is beyond what we can imagine. Nothing can compare (v. 11). What can compete with our desires? Something beyond them, something we don’t even know we desire. Sin promises something better than what is promised by wisdom, but in reality, there are hidden depths to the delights of wisdom we cannot understand, joy that is not measurable in purely physical terms.

“To complain that I could only be married once was like complaining that I had only been born once. It was incommensurate with the terrible excitement of which one was talking. It showed not an exaggerated sensibility to sex but a curious insensibility to it. A man is a fool who complains that he cannot enter Eden by five gates at once. Polygamy is a lack of the realization of sex; it’s like a man plucking five pears in mere absence of mind.” G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*

Third, we depend on her for all things (14-16).

The word for “decree” there has the connotation of a “carving”. Wisdom is saying that by here, kings have carved out laws that are just. So any just law that exists comes from wisdom. Any positive power that any ruler has, comes from wisdom. There is no justice or order without wisdom, there is only chaos and false promises. Any treasure there is to be found in their world is found in wisdom (v. 21).

Fourth, she has and always will be there (22-29).

This is fascinating, pulling us back before even the garden. Lady Wisdom as the personification of God’s attribute of wisdom, is not before God. But, she has always existed, because God has always possessed wisdom. Before anything was, there was God’s wisdom. The word “made firm” in **verse 28** and “marked out” in **verse 29** is the same word for “carving” back in verse 15.¹ The text is saying that God has crafted and carved the world in wisdom, he is the wise king who has carved the natural law of wisdom into the fabric of reality. There is no escaping wisdom, she has always been and always will be there.

¹ Helped by the Bible Project study guide of Proverbs 8.

https://d1bsmz3sdihplr.cloudfront.net/media/Study%20Notes/VC-Proverbs8_Study%20Notes.pdf



Fifth, she is the delight of God and delights in man (30-31).

Finally, wisdom is the delight of God. He intentionally crafted the world in wisdom, and loves that he did. And wisdom delights in mankind and creation—showing us that the way of wisdom is joyful and not burdensome. We were meant to be wise, it is our original programming. There is nothing we can do without it. Wisdom is the “secret code to reality.”² It is the way things used to be, and the way things were meant to be. It’s the way to find true joy in the world, not temporary pleasure. Wisdom is the path to happy rejoicing in the creation of God, to get pictures of what was in the present of what is.

Imagine a world where we listened to and believed the words of wisdom. There would be perfect justice, perfect peace among men, and delight and joy and rejoicing. It would be eden. But we can’t go back. There is no returning to the land of wisdom that was. There is no reversing the sexualization of our culture back to the innocence of the garden. There is no way to go back in time and scrub away our addictions to pornography and our discontent with our sexual state. There is no way to reverse any of our sins and our foolishness, no path through space or time to before the world began.

But there is a path forward.

Future: Jesus Christ is Coming Again (8:32-36)

Listen... can you hear it? Listen, O sons, God is saying in **verse 32**. Listen, little ones, those who are without knowledge. Today is the day you can heed my call. Today is the day, **verse 33**, where you do not have to neglect it. Today is the day of blessing, **verse 34**, if you can sit now, sit still and wait watching at the gate and by the door. Today is the day where **verse 35**, you can find me and my favor, and escape death. What are we listening for? We can’t go back... we have lost wisdom, we have neglected her, we have chosen the forbidden way and the adulterous woman, we have not heeded the instruction of the kingly father. What are we waiting and listening for? We are waiting and listening not for the way things are, or the way things were, but the way things will be. We are waiting and listening by the door for the news of wisdom being reborn.

The New Testament authors loved Proverbs 8. It was surely on John’s mind when he said: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.” It was definitely on Paul’s mind when he said: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by[f] 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.”

² Ray Ortland, *Proverbs*, 119.



Praise God, because in Proverbs 8 we find a personification of God's wisdom. But in Jesus Christ coming to earth, we find an incarnation of God's wisdom. Not personification—person. He is the holy one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who ascends the hill of the Lord and stands at the house of God calling out. He is the one whose every word is true, he is the Word, and all God's promises find their yes and amen in him, meaning he can be trusted. He alone leads to value: why else would he call us to sell all our possessions and leave father and mother for him, if he did not offer to us a satisfaction and a glory that is beyond imagination? He is the one in whom and through whom all things depend, because he has been given the keys to the earth and not a single molecule finds its place without him. No king is set up above him, and no king rules justly without pointing to and bringing about his just kingdom. He has always been there, and he always will be, Alpha and Omega, beginning and end, he is inescapable and irreversible and unignorable. He is the delight of God, the son in whom God is well pleased, and he delights over his own, cherishing them and keeping them and shepherding them and giving them his very own spirit to indwell them. All the joys of the earth find their pinnacle in him and in his presence, and his house leads to intimacy and joy and life.

Turn back and look at 7:1-5. While we readily acknowledge that every street corner is darkened by the shadow of sin and temptation and the foolishness and false promises of Lady Folly, and we are too weak to walk by without falling into that temptation, we also rightly acknowledge if we turn from sin to depend on him, Wisdom himself has made us the apple of his eye, he has bound us to his fingers, he has written himself in the tablets of our hearts, he has said to us "you are my brother and my sister" and "my friend". Jesus Christ the son of God came and lived and died and rose and ascended so that we might have hope that although the world is not as it was, and not as it should be, it will be made again, all of our God's foolish children who wait on him will be made new with it.

Eden is coming again, wisdom will rule and reign there in all people. And it will be glorious. So don't play around with sin. Be wise, and prepare yourself for what is to come by learning to listen and enjoy God's wisdom now.

