

Sermon Outline

BLESSED MOTHERS: A MOTHER'S DAY MESSAGE (PROVERBS 31:28-30)

I. To All the Women of the Church

- A. A main goal in preaching from Proverbs 31:28-30 is to encourage the women in the Church to continue being faithful to God's vision for them.
- B. All women are called to be mothers in some way.
 - 1. Mothers are not only those who have children of their own.
 - 2. Just as Paul was a spiritual father to the Corinthian Church (1 Cor 4:15), the Church also recognizes spiritual mothers.
—For instance, in the monastic traditions of Christendom, nuns who oversaw convents and younger nuns were considered spiritual mothers—
“mother superior.”
 - 3. Spiritual mothers are women who teach and care for others who are much younger in life and/or spiritual experience than them.
 - 4. Spiritual motherhood ought to be a life-goal for every Christian woman.
 - 5. Therefore, I dedicate this Mothers' Day message to all women in the Church.
- C. However, since God's Word ultimately addresses the whole Church, God also speaks to the men and the children of the Church, even in a passage that seemingly address mainly mothers and women.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Why is the pastor dedicating a Mother's Day message to all women? (2) What does a Mothers' Day message have to do with the men of the Church?

II. Our Lady Wisdom

- A. Before diving into our text, let's say a few things about the book of Proverbs.
- B. First: The book of Proverbs is Israel's book of wisdom.
 - 1. Proverbs deals with wisdom in life.
 - 2. A central figure in the book of Proverbs is Wisdom, who is personalized as a lady.
 - 3. To help us understand how central Lady Wisdom is to Proverbs, listen to Proverbs 3:13-18:

*¹³Blessed is the one who finds wisdom,
and the one who gets understanding,
¹⁴for the gain from her is better than gain from silver
and her profit better than gold.*

¹⁵ *She is more precious than jewels,
and nothing you desire can compare with her.*

¹⁶ *Long life is in her right hand;
in her left hand are riches and honor.*

¹⁷ *Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
and all her paths are peace.*

¹⁸ ***She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her;
those who hold her fast are called blessed.***

4. In Proverbs 3:19-20, we learn that “The LORD by wisdom founded the earth...”
—Wisdom was the quality by which God made the universe.
- C. Second: Wisdom herself is rooted in reverence for God.
—Proverbs 9:10: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.”
- D. Third: The whole chapter of Proverbs 31 is an attempt to fuse Lady Wisdom to the ordinary woman.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What is the objective of the book of Proverbs? (2) Who/what is the central character in Proverbs? (3) According to Proverbs 9:10, where does Wisdom come from? (4) What does Proverbs 31 seek to do?

III. The Proverbs 31 Woman (Proverbs 31:10-31)

- A. Now we know something about the book of Proverbs, and that Wisdom is the goal of the book, let’s take a look now at the Proverbs 31 woman herself.
- B. Proverbs 31 is intimidating for many Christian women because the standards are so high.
- C. To make matters unnecessarily harder, some Christian men tend to read Proverbs 31 as a rigid list of rules by which to judge their spouses.
1. But let me say two things to that.
 - a. The Proverbs 31 woman is not meant to be a rigid, comprehensive list of character traits.
 - i. She is more like an impression, a portrait, of what a good, wise, and godly lady would be like.
 - ii. We do not want to read Proverbs 31 in a narrow, inflexible sort of way.
 - iii. It seems best to treat the multi-talented woman in Proverbs 31 as a montage of scenes, a composite picture.
 - b. If men judge their spouses based on Proverbs 31, they had better be ready to be judged on the basis of Colossians 3:19 and Ephesians 5:23-29.
- D. Proverbs 31 is not the only passage that teaches women how to be wise.
1. The entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, was written to teach women how to be godly women, not just Proverbs 31.

2. Woman should not only be studying Sarah, Rahab, Hannah, or Mary. —They also need to be studying Abraham, Joshua, David, and the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. All the great fathers and mothers of the faith are given to teach Christian women how to be godly and wise women.
4. Why then are we looking at Proverbs 31 only today? Because...
 - a. we obviously cannot look at every single passage of the Bible on Mother’s Day.
 - b. Proverbs 31 is a text that addresses the godly mother specifically.
- E. That said, the woman of Proverbs 31 is still a vision of the godly woman—the kind of woman that all women should seek to be, whether they pursue marriage or not.
- F. Based on 31:10-31, we get two main impressions about the godly woman/wife/mother.
 1. She is a diligent worker!
 - a. “She *seeks* wool and flax and *works* with willing hands” (31:13)
 - b. “She *rises* while it is yet night and *provides* food for her household and portions for her maidens” (31:15)
 - c. “She *considers* a field and *buys* it; with the fruit of her hands she *plants* a vineyard” (31:16)
 - d. “She *dresses* herself with strength and *makes* her arms strong” (31:17)
 2. She is wise.
 - a. 31:26: “She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue” (31:26)
 - b. Tremper Longman describes the Proverbs 31 woman this way: —“She is the human embodiment of God’s wisdom; a flesh-and-blood personification of Woman Wisdom” (*How to Read Proverbs*, 141)

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How are we *not* to interpret the woman of Proverbs 31? (2) If a lady wants to be wise, which books of the Bible must she read? (3) Based on Proverbs 31:10-31, what are two impressions we get of the godly woman/wife/mother?

IV. Blessed and Praised (Proverbs 31:28)

- A. Verse 28 must be read in light of the earlier verses, Proverbs 31:10-27.
 1. Prior to verse 28, the author of this section of Proverbs (King Lemuel) has been painting a portrait of the godly and wise lady.
 2. Now, we see the response of her children and husband.
 - a. Her children “call her blessed,” and so does her husband.
 - b. Her husband also “praises her.”
- B. For this woman is be praised and called blessed is for her to be affirmed, honored, and valued.

- C. The idea of blessing in 31:28 connects us with Proverbs 3:18.
1. Speaking about Lady Wisdom herself, Proverbs 3:18 states: “She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are *called blessed*.”
 2. If the woman/wife/mother in Proverbs 31 is called blessed, what does that mean?
—She is someone who has laid hold of Lady Wisdom herself.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How do the husband and children of the Proverbs 31 woman respond to her good works and character? (2) To which other passage in Proverbs does the idea of blessing in 31:28 connect us?

V. The Superior Woman (Proverbs 31:29)

- A. In verse 29, we see how the husband praises his wife.
—“Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.”
- B. The husband is not saying that his wife is perfect, the best wife in the whole wide universe.
1. He is simply acknowledging that his wife is superior to many other excellent women out there.
 2. And he praises her on the grounds of her diligence and wisdom.
- C. 31:29 inspires Christian women to pursue excellence in the area of wisdom.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How does the husband praise his wife? (2) How does 31:29 serve to inspire Christian women? To what does this verse inspire Christian women?

VI. Praise for the Wise Woman (Proverbs 31:30)

- A. But where is wisdom to be found? How is the godly woman, wife, or mother formed?
1. Our answer lies in verse 30: “Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.”
 2. Wisdom is formed in the fear of the Lord.
 3. To fear the Lord is to hold him in high regard and awesome esteem.
 4. How do we know that wisdom comes from the fear of YHWH?
—Again, Proverbs 9:10: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom...”
 5. Thus, the Proverbs 31 woman is a diligent woman, and a wise woman, because she fears the Lord.
- B. But verse 30 also contrasts the wise woman with the woman who is merely charming and pretty. It contrasts God-fearing wisdom from mere charm and beauty.
1. This verse serves as both a warning and an encouragement.

- a. It is a warning to Christian women not to put their worth in their external beauty.
 - b. It is an encouragement to Christian women to find their glory and beauty in the Lord.
- C. But what does the author mean when he says that “Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain”?
 1. Because these are proverbs, we must not over-apply these words. —Proverbs 31:30 is not condemning women who dress well.
 2. But Proverbs 31 is condemning beauty that is devoid of wisdom and morals.
 - a. The reference to beauty and charm in Proverbs 31 must be understood in terms of the seductive beauty of the adulterous woman in Proverbs 6:25: —“Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes”
- D. This is something many woman in our society need to hear today.
 1. One of the themes that women of our society imbibe is the vision of the Strong and Independent Woman.
 2. Scripture is all for the empowerment of women.
 - a. The Word of God calls us to seek justice, for both men and women.
 - b. The Word of God forbids any kind of oppression of women.
 - c. The Word of God frees women to be strong, because women are also made in the image of God.
 3. But here’s the problem when it comes to our society: *The Word of God is not the basis for women’s empowerment in Singapore!* And this can only lead to problems.
 - a. While most women in our society want to be empowered to follow their dreams, many take this permission to be strong as a license to be selfish, rude, and arrogant.
 - b. These are the women who may try to look good but are empty inside. Here are some telltale signs:
 - They are glum.
 - They don’t smile at children.
 - They don’t give way to pregnant mothers on the escalator.
 - They are insulting to their husbands and boyfriends, even in public.
 - c. Such women are like the mannequins in the store. —They look great on the outside, but they are non-existent on the inside.
 - d. They can only take from society, but they have nothing of real value to offer. —They are everything a woman must not be—it violates the God-given essence of womanhood!

- e. This is the kind of charm and beauty that many women in our society have.
—But this is also the charm and beauty that Proverbs is warning us about. This kind of beauty is only skin-deep. And it can be empty and manipulative.
- E. And Proverbs says to Christian women, “Don’t be like that!”
—Instead, fear the Lord.
- F. When you allow God to rule your heart, God will make you truly beautiful.
 - 1. Your words will be wise.
 - 2. You will truly be a giver of life—just like our first mother, Eve.
 - a. The Hebrew name for Eve is *havah*, which means, “living” (Gen 3:20)
 - b. Since Eve is the “prototype” woman, to be a woman is to be, among other things, a giver of life.
 - c. To be a woman in the fullest sense is to be a lady who gives life, nurture, and nourishment to others—especially those who are younger and weaker.
 - 3. But how does a woman become a giver of life?
—When she herself lays hold of the wisdom of YHWH (Prov 3:18).

***Questions for reflection:** (1) According to 31:30, how is the wise woman formed? (2) What does the author mean when he says that “Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain”? (3) “To be a woman in the fullest sense is to be a lady who gives life, nurture, and nourishment to others—especially those who are younger and weaker.” Discuss.

VII. A Call for Legions of God-Exalting, Life-Giving Women

Dear sisters in Christ, keep up the good work and keep growing in the wisdom of your God! Look to God for your purpose in this world. Guard yourself from the shallow, anorexic visions of womanhood that the world gives you. By all means, look your best. But don’t ever put your hope in external beauty. Instead, put your hope in God. Find your glory in God.

The Church of Jesus Christ offers the women of the world an alternative vision of womanhood. It is the strong woman, yes. But she is strong not merely because she is well-educated and has accomplished much. She is strong primarily because she is wise, fears the Lord, and has compassion for others. Our society needs women like you; not simply to nurture the young, but to turn our society around. Singapore needs legions of life-giving, wisdom-filled Christ-centered women to undo the ugly, ungracious, unladylike spirit that defaces our nation. And those women are all of *you*, my sisters in the Lord!

***Questions for reflection:** (1) Woman of the Church, are you looking to God for your purpose in the world? Or are you buying into the world’s “shallow, anorexic

visions of womanhood”? (2) What is the alternative vision of womanhood the Church provides her daughters? Does this vision appeal to you? If not, why?

VIII. Behind Every Proverbs 31 Woman Is a...

- A. But what about us men—sons, friends, brothers, and husbands? What does God want us to do?
1. Look again at Proverbs 31:28.
 2. God wants us to honor our women. God wants us to speak respectfully of them—and to encourage them with our *words*.
- B. It is precisely this kind of praise and encouragement that our women need.
1. Conservative Christian men like to insist that their wives must support them.
—This is no doubt true given what the Bible says in Genesis 2:18.
 2. But does Genesis 2:18 exhaust *everything* that the Bible has to say about the husband-wife relationship?
 - a. The most basic relationship between the Christian husband and wife is still one of brother- and sister-in-Christ.
 - b. The duty of Christians to one another is to “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal 6:2).
—and this rule applies to the relationship between husband and wife as well.
 - c. Therefore, if you want your wife, sister, or daughter, to become the wise, life-giving woman God has called her to be, you need to support her.
—Behind every Proverbs 31 woman is an encouraging and affirming husband, or brother, or son; who encourages his wife, sister, or mother to keep up the good work.
 3. Husbands...
 - a. affirm and praise your wives for their God-given wisdom.
 - b. teach your children to honor and praise their mothers.
 - c. teach your sons to respect women in general.
 4. Children...
 - a. praise, honor, and thank your mothers.
 - b. This is part of keeping the Fifth Commandment: “*Honor* your father and your mother...” (Ex 20:12)
 5. Christian men, show respect to and affirm your sisters in the Lord.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What does God call the men and children of the Church to do for their wives, mothers, and sisters? (2) What are some ways you can praise and affirm your wives and mothers this Mothers’ Day week? (3) If you find it difficult to praise and honor your wives and mothers, ask: Why is that the case?