

WHO'S THAT LADY? (PART 2)
PROVERBS 8:22-36

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M.I. ENJOYING THE ABUNDANT LIFE DEPENDS ON BEING ABLE TO FIND THE HEAVENLY PRESENCE IN EARTHLY LIFE.

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WHO'S THAT LADY? (PART 2)

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Last week, we were introduced to Lady Wisdom and we have to keep in mind that the poet has been contrasting Lady Wisdom with Lady Seduction. We could say that Lady Seduction represents the temptations to follow Satan, the world, and the lust of our desires. On the other hand, Lady Wisdom represents every godly desire in us to follow Christ. We also said that following Lady Seduction led to disaster and death but following Lady Wisdom leads to an abundant and eternal life.

I think the legitimate question for anyone to ask would be, "Why should we follow Lady Wisdom? Why should we believe her over any other philosophy or religion?" That is a great question and in this morning's passage, she will give us the answer.

It is really important who we choose to believe and trust. Let me give you an example of how trusting the wrong person can be hazardous to your health. In the 1500's when the Spanish soldiers invaded Mexico, they captured a leader of the Inca tribe. Through an interpreter, the Spanish captain told the Inca leader that if he didn't tell him where their gold was hidden, he would burn both of his feet in the fire. Through the interpreter, the Indian said, "I'd rather die than tell you where our gold is." With that, they burned his feet in the fire.

The captain then said to the interpreter, "Tell him that if he doesn't tell us where the gold is hidden, that we will hang him from that noose on the tree over there." Again the Indian replied through the interpreter, "I'd rather die than tell you where the gold is." With that, they took him to the tree and hung him until he could hardly breathe.

The captain ordered the Inca leader to be brought to him. He said to the interpreter, "Tell him this is his last chance. If he doesn't tell us where the gold is, we will skin him alive." The

Indian couldn't stand it any longer. He said, "The gold is hidden in a little cave just behind the large waterfall. The waterfall is one mile over the hill to the right." The captain said to the interpreter, "What did he say?" The interpreter said, "He said he'd rather die than to tell you where the gold is."

If we trust Satan, the world, our own distorted thinking, or if we simply give into and follow our own lust, we will end up in disaster and death.

I have decided to split chapter 8 into two sermons because there is just too much to do in this chapter in one sermon. However, I would love to spend 20 or 30 sessions on just these verses we are studying through this morning. We can look at this passage from so many perspectives, but I will only focus on them from two perspectives this morning. Because these perspectives are so deep, I will only be able to scratch the surface. I would encourage you to take notes, and then do some real in-depth study on your own.

This is a full and mysterious chapter. First, you notice that there are a lot of vocabulary and events that link this chapter with Genesis 1 & 2. Secondly, the New Testament writers link Jesus with this passage as well. I will touch on both of these topics. The main idea of this passage is **ENJOYING THE ABUNDANT LIFE DEPENDS ON BEING ABLE TO FIND THE HEAVENLY PRESENCE IN EARTHLY LIFE.** God created everything with purpose and since He is the designer and creator, we can only find rest and peace when we live life the way He designed it. Lady Wisdom will be our interpreter. She is trustworthy as we saw last week, and this week we will see that she is qualified because she has lived in both realms the heavenly and the earthly.

I. SHE KNOWS THE THINGS OF HEAVEN (Vs. 22-26)

WISDOM WAS PRESENT WHEN GOD EXISTED APART FROM CREATION. SHE WITNESSED HIS DECISION TO CREATE.

In Verses 22-26 we see that she knows the things of heaven: **WISDOM WAS PRESENT WHEN GOD EXISTED APART FROM CREATION. SHE WITNESSED HIS DECISION TO CREATE.** I do not want us to miss how powerful this is.

I'm guessing that most of us know the story of Job, if not I would encourage you to take time to read and study it. In case you do not know where it is found in the Bible, Job is the first Wisdom book and it is found two books before Proverbs, the book we are studying through at present, the order is Job, Psalms, and Proverbs. Job was a good and righteous man but he lost everything dear to him, his property, his wealth, and his children. His friends tried to convince Job that he was suffering because he must have sinned terribly against God. As Job defended himself against their wrongful accusations, he crossed the line and at one point started to accuse God of being unfair. He started to ask for a meeting with God where an impartial umpire would be present. Job asked God to make an appearance so he could argue his case face to face and wouldn't you know it, God appears on the scene. I would recommend that all of you spend some time in chapters 38-40 in the book of Job because it is all directly relevant to this morning's passage. I am going to quote some of how God responds to all of Job's accusations. God speaks out of the storm to Job, "Who is this that darkens My counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone -- while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?"

God goes on like this for two whole chapters asking Job for his credentials to debate God's wisdom. I love the way God ends His speech He says to Job, "Will the one who contends with the

Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer Him!" And I love Job's answer, "I am unworthy -- how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer-- twice, but I will say no more." In other words, Job said, "Well shut my mouth!" a very appropriate response.

If we were to look at Lady Wisdom's response if someone were to challenge her credentials by saying, "Where were you when God created?" She could respond, "Right there even from before in fact, I was there during the planning stage."

A. SHE UNDERSTANDS ETERNITY (Vs. 22-23)

In Verses 22-23 we can see that Lady Wisdom understands eternity. There is a clear shift in the passage. It now focuses on God. Look at verse 22 and verse 35. This is all about God and not just any God. Notice that LORD is spelled out in capital letters. This is God's personal name, this is Jehovah, Yahweh. This is the God of the Hebrews. This is the God and Father of Jesus Christ. God is the creator and the initiator of all the action.

Think about how Genesis 1:1 starts, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." In these two verses, we have several time markers. In verse 22 God brought forth wisdom "as the first of His works." Literally that phrase, "as the first of His works," is "the beginning of His way." Right from the very beginning, Lady Wisdom was with God, and look at the qualifier that follows, before His deeds of old. In verse 23, the words, "eternity, from the beginning, and before the world began" all mark this time reference. So what we are talking about is a time when nothing else existed except God. There were no heavens or earth, and there was no time and no space. All that was in existence was God. The time frame is eternity past.

Next, we have to talk about how Lady Wisdom appears on the scene. Verse 22 describes the event as God bringing "forth." This word has a broad semantic range. The word comes from

the same Hebrew root word for Cain, the first child born to Adam and Eve. Eve names the child Cain and explains it this way, “With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man” (Genesis 4:1). So the word can mean the conceiving and birth process or the word can refer to acquiring something. For example, we are invited to acquire knowledge or it can refer to buying something. Verse 23 describes another aspect of the event. Wisdom was appointed by God from all eternity past. The word appointed can mean to set up, to establish, or to define.

The point is this, She has existed in eternity. She existed with God before anything was created. She knows who God is in relation to Himself, where there are no gaps in being since all that there is, is God. The real question becomes, “Who is Wisdom? Is she created apart from God? Is she a part of God’s nature? How does she appear?” This ambiguity leaves us with some mystery as to the beginnings of Lady Wisdom.

B. HER APPEARANCE IS MYSTERIOUS (Vs. 24-26)

Verses 24-26 reinforce that her appearance is mysterious. Again, we are dealing with a time before there was any time; she is in existence when there were no oceans, springs, or water, she exists before the mountains or hills were made. In fact, she existed before not only the earth or fields, but even before the primordial dust, the stuff that earth is made of. Think about that. If you believe in the Big Bang theory, Lady Wisdom exists before the stuff that is the initial material that leads to the Big Bang exists. Again, we are describing eternity.

And in Verses 24 and 25 we see that Lady Wisdom is “given birth.” The phrase literally means “spun out.” I think these mysterious descriptions of Lady Wisdom’s beginnings are interesting because of how the New Testament writers used this passage to refer to Jesus. Those of us who grew up on the King James Version of the Bible memorized John 3:16 to say, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.” That word begotten has that same

mysterious range of meaning. Only begotten can mean the only one, the unique one, that Jesus is the one and only unique Son of God. Or only begotten can mean the uniquely born Son of God. The Gospel of John starts out describing Jesus like this, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). The Apostle Paul describes Jesus this way, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation” (Colossians 1:15) and in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul states clearly that Jesus is both the power of God and the wisdom of God (I Corinthians 1:24).

As we get further into the Proverbs 8 passage, we will see more of how the New Testament writers identified Lady Wisdom with Jesus. Lady Wisdom here then becomes a type of Christ. Now I think we have to be careful as we make these comparisons. First, the poet is using a technique that is called personification he has taken an abstract quality, and given it person-hood. This is a poetic device and if we take this too literally we miss the point. For example, since there is the comparison between Jesus and Lady Wisdom, some have even worshipped Lady Wisdom as a goddess but that is out and out idolatry.

C. A TYPE OF CHRIST

However, I think that it is important to remind ourselves that God is beyond gender. God is neither a man nor a woman, yet both genders are contained in God. Wisdom is feminine and I think that this is a type of Christ. In other words, we can look back and see how this pre-describes Jesus. For example, the lambs used in the Old Testament sacrifices were not Jesus, but we can look back and see how they were a pre-definition of the ministry of Jesus, who would take away the sins of the world. The nation of Israel itself was a type of Christ; they spent 40 years in the wilderness and Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness. Israel passed through the Red Sea, Jesus was baptized in

order to identify with Israel. Each Hebrew King and each Hebrew High Priest and Prophet were types of Jesus'. Jesus is the Priest, the Prophet, and the King.

Wisdom is part of who God is, just like love, justice, and holiness. Since wisdom is a characteristic of God, it is easy then to see how the New Testament writers would identify Lady Wisdom with Jesus. The early church used this passage to argue the nature and the deity of Christ. This is important for our study because since Jesus existed with the Father and the Holy Spirit from all eternity, Jesus knows what eternity is about. Jesus lived in heaven before He took on human flesh to come and live among us. Wisdom can speak authoritatively about God's purpose and design because **WISDOM WAS PRESENT WHEN GOD EXISTED APART FROM CREATION. SHE WITNESSED HIS DECISION TO CREATE.**

II. SHE KNOWS THE THINGS OF EARTH (Vs. 27-31)

WISDOM KNOWS THE PURPOSE AND FUNCTION OF ALL CREATED THINGS.

Not only does Lady Wisdom know the things of heaven, as Verses 27-31 point out, she knows the things of earth. Because she was present at creation, **WISDOM KNOWS THE PURPOSE AND FUNCTION OF ALL CREATED THINGS.**

A. SHE UNDERSTANDS ORDER AND DESIGN (Vs. 27-29)

She understands order and design as described in Verses 27-29. The phrase that appears over and over again in these three verses is, "I was there when He..." referring to God and the creative process. Did you ever stop to think why the scientific method works and is so dependable? Science depends on the ability to repeat the same experiment again and again and again.

We live in a world in which God imposed order. Look at verse 27 where we are told that God set the heavens in place. The second half of verse 27 literally says He set a circle on the face

of the deep. The circle would describe where the sky and the ocean would meet in the horizon. So God created the heavens and the earth.

Verse 28 describes the process of separating the sky and the sea where the first half of verse 28 says, “He made firm the clouds.” In other words, our atmosphere was created by God. The purpose of the atmosphere is to create a climate in which we could live. The second half of verse 28 describes the creation of our water supply. And in verse 29 God creates dry land and sets boundaries between land and water. Listen to some of the words used here. God fixed in place, He set boundaries, He set a circle on, He fixed securely and he marked out foundations. God created with purpose. He separated the heavens from the earth, the sky from the water, and the waters from the dry land. God designed and created all there is with purpose. Wisdom knows what the atmosphere is for, what water is for, what trees, plants and animals are for. I don’t think we should worship nature any more than I think we should worship Lady Wisdom, but we should be very careful as to how we use the earth’s resources. God did not create them for us to exploit them for greedy gain. Wisdom dictates that before we abuse nature, we better understand the purpose and design God has for it. Our atmosphere protects us from the harmful rays of the sun and keeps our temperature moderate. Plants and trees replenish oxygen, we need clean water to drink, clean ground to grow crops, and animals to balance out our ecosystems. Pollution will have effects on our world that we can not even begin to imagine because we have been seduced by Lady Seduction’s appeal to our lust for pleasure, power, and money. I would encourage all of us to take time to think about how many things have to go right every second in order for us to be able to exist. I don’t know how anyone could look at how intricately designed and ordered our world is, and say that it all happened by chance. Not likely! We have no categories in our minds that would allow us to think of non-intelligence giving birth to intelligence, we have no experience of non-

rational giving birth to rational, we have no experience of chaos giving birth to order and we certainly have no experience of chance giving birth to intricate design. When we honestly look at creation, we have to come to the conclusion that this intricate, ordered, and complex creation was created not by chance, but by an intelligent, complex, and rational creator.

B. SHE LOVES TO LAUGH AND PLAY (Vs. 30-31)

In Verses 30-31, does it surprise some of us that Lady Wisdom loves to laugh and play? In verse 30 we see the location of Lady Wisdom. Day after day, she was at God's side, in God's presence as He created. She describes herself as being filled with delight and constantly rejoicing in God's presence, she is filled with play and enjoyment.

And please don't miss verse 31. She rejoices in the creation of the heavens, the earth, and all that is in them, but she takes special delight in the creation of the children of Adam. Human beings are the masterpiece of God's creation and everything was created as the context for the appearance of humans. We are the only created being that reflects the image of God. Wisdom's task is to convey God's boundaries to us. The earth, land, sea, sky and the plants and animals were created for us. We are charged with caring for them. We are God's stewards of His creation. Shouldn't we be careful not to pollute or abuse creation?

C. A TYPE OF CHRIST

If there is all this design, purpose, and boundaries built into the physical creation, we should not be surprised to find that there is purpose, design and boundaries built into the moral part of our existence. Lady Wisdom in these verses concerning creation seems to be a type of Christ. In the first chapter of the book of Genesis, we learn that God spoke creation into existence, "God said, 'Let there be ... and there was...'" In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, John informs us that Jesus is the Eternal Word of God. It was through Jesus that all things were created there is nothing

in all of creation that exists apart from Jesus. Jesus the Word knows the meaning and purpose of creation. Jesus knows why we exist, what our purpose is, and how to bring us to an abundant, eternal life. Jesus had a great sense of humor, and Jesus liked parties. In general, if we are living in touch with Jesus, then we should be filled with joy and happiness. I still cannot figure out Christians who seem to be angry or depressed all the time. I think as we find our purpose in life and start to live it, we tend to be filled with a lot more joy and happiness. Again, we come back to the conclusion that a full abundant life comes from fulfilling our purpose in life and we find that purpose in the Bible because **WISDOM KNOWS THE PURPOSE AND FUNCTION OF ALL CREATED THINGS.**

III. SHE KNOWS HOW HEAVEN INTERACTS WITH EARTH (Vs. 32-36)

WISDOM UNITES HEAVEN AND EARTH

Here is where I think the passage gets extremely interesting. Lady Wisdom knows the things of heaven and she knows the things of earth. In Verses 32-36 it becomes clear that she knows how heaven interacts with earth; **WISDOM UNITES HEAVEN AND EARTH.**

A. SHE SHOWS THE WAY TO BLESSINGS (Vs. 32-34)

Verses 32-34 indicate that she knows the way to blessings. Keep in mind the battle going on for our souls. Lady seduction is trying to lure us away from God and our God-given calling her intent is to use us and then kill us. On the other hand, Lady Wisdom wants to show us the way to a life filled with blessings. These 3 verses start and end with a statement of blessing. Lady Wisdom says in verse 32, “Blessed are those who keep my ways,” and in verse 34 she says, “Blessed is the man who listens to me.” She is not afraid to compete for our attention. Lady Seduction tried all sorts of tricks to convince us to follow her. She made us feel that if we followed her, our lives would be filled with excitement, pleasure, power, and wealth but we learned that all she delivers is

misery and death. On the other hand, Lady Wisdom is not seductive at all she is a straight-talker and doesn't sugar coat anything. She says clearly that if we want to be blessed, if we want to enjoy this abundant life that Jesus promises, then we have to follow her. We are encouraged to listen to her. How do we do that? We fill our minds with God's words and wisdom, the Bible. I think that I say this so often that people go brain-dead and start to zone out when I say it but, there are no shortcuts to finding the abundant life Jesus promises. We have to saturate our minds with the Bible. I don't know if you're like me, but if the introduction to almost any Motown song comes on the radio, I can sing the opening words and chances are, most of the song before the singers actually sing. Are you like that with your favorite music? Or when you hear the theme song of a television program, do you know what it is without even looking up at the television? I know that my mind is saturated with all sorts of stuff, but I have been trying to change that. I have the Bible on CD, so when I am driving in my car, I'm listening to the Bible being read. I read the Bible all day as I prepare sermons, I read a lot of Christian books, I read the Bible regularly, memorize verses, and listen to Christian radio during the night. I want my mind saturated with God's wisdom. Look how urgent Lady Wisdom takes this. She says we should look for her words. She describes it as watching and waiting. Is that how we approach going to Bible studies, coming to church on Sundays, prayer meetings and other meetings where we study the Bible. Are we hungry to hear a word from God?

But don't miss her point. Not only are we to take in God's Word, we are to act on it. She says that we are not to ignore it and once we hear it, we are to obey it. Remember how we have defined wisdom. Wisdom is taking God's eternal truths and commands, and applying them to our everyday lives in practical and concrete ways.

So for us, the wisdom cycle starts with a desire to hear God's word, then saturating our minds with God's word, and then acting out in our behavior God's word. The cycle must be complete for us to call it wisdom. Anything short of completeness, we again end up in foolishness. A life filled with blessings from God come from desiring, knowing, and living God's word.

B. SHE KNOWS THE WAY TO LIFE (Vs. 35-36)

In Verses 35-36, we can see that Lady Wisdom knows the way to life. Just take a moment to think about the claims and statements she makes here. She says that if we follow her, we will find life and grace from God. There is that personal covenant name for God again, Jehovah or Yahweh, whichever you prefer. How can we not be filled with joy, once we have found life and grace in God?

But look carefully at Verse 36. People often ask me if there are other ways to God. Lady Wisdom, the agent of Jehovah God, the God and Father of Jesus Christ says that if we do not find her and follow her, then not only do we do harm to ourselves, we love death. Those are some pretty strong words. If we are not committed to knowing and living according to the Bible, then Lady Wisdom here is saying that we do not want the abundant life, in fact we are asking for death.

Many people wonder why they cannot seem to find this abundant life that Jesus promises. Some people continue to train wreck time and time again and ask, "What's wrong?" I don't want to oversimplify this, and there are many people suffering because of circumstances beyond their control, but for the most part, in general, people who continue to live their lives as a series of train wrecks are usually not filling their minds with God's words and they are not living according to God's laws. These people tend to fill their heads with things of this world and spend their time, money, energy, and emotions chasing after the things of this world.

C. A TYPE OF CHRIST

In this sense, Lady Wisdom truly is a type of Christ. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me.” Think about this. Jesus knows eternity He has always and presently lives in eternity. He knows the way to heaven because He lives there, but not only does He know heaven and not only does He know the design and purpose of earthly existence, He actually took on human flesh and came to live life as one of us. He experienced our suffering, our setbacks, our disappointments, and our hurts. He was tempted in every way that we are. Jesus knows what human existence is all about. Jesus is the perfect bridge between heavenly existence and earthly existence because Jesus was fully God and fully man. God spoke to us not only through prophets and apostles God spoke to us in person through Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul said speaking of Jesus, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy” (Colossians 1:15-18).

But not only does Jesus know how heaven and earth are connected He has connected them for us because of love. Listen to the Apostle John, “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Did you catch that? Jesus loves us. He wants us to live full, eternal, and abundant lives. He died so that we could be set free from the bondage of Satan, this world, and sin. Please, turn your eyes upon Jesus, and turn away from the things of this world. It is God’s **WISDOM THAT UNITES HEAVEN AND EARTH**. I do not want to be overly dramatic I just want to tell the straight story. If we are not following Christ, then we are headed for disaster.

I want to switch around the metaphor for a moment. In these 9 chapters of Proverbs our relationship with God has been that of two women wooing us for our attention. We are portrayed as males choosing a relationship with either Lady Seduction or Lady Wisdom. In our relationship with Jesus, we are to view ourselves as brides. Our choice as women is either to choose Jesus to be our loving husbands, or to choose Mr. Dangerous by chasing after the things of this world.

In her book A Woman's Worth, Marianne Williamson tells a great story about women who are recovering from attractions to dangerous men. However, it is a perfect lesson for all of us who are attracted to the things of this world in any way. She says,

“When you’re really ill, you don’t even know a snake when you see one. Once recovery begins, you see a snake and you know it’s a snake, but you still play with it. Once you’ve landed in true recovery zone, you see a snake, you know it’s a snake, and you cross to the other side of the road.

Until then, everyone you know can tell you the game is toxic with that person, but you won’t listen because you think you’re different or that he’ll be different with you, or that maybe you’re the first one to have really seen his sensitive side. There’s no forcing the process by which we simply stop being attracted to pain. It’s a long road for some of us. It’s work. It takes deeper thinking and more courage than many of us is used to. But it’s going on everywhere.”

Lady Seduction is clever. Many of us don’t realize how deadly Satan, the things of this world, and our own sinful lusts are, the Devil’s agenda for us is misery, disaster and death. On the other hand, Jesus’ agenda is to give us a full, abundant, and eternal life. Choose wisely.