



Listen to Lady Wisdom

Proverbs 1:20-33

1. Turn to Me! (verses 22-23).

2. Or Face My Ridicule (verses 24-33).

There are many times in life when people make decisions that they regret. Some regrets are small, like the child who ordered chocolate ice cream, only to realize after the desserts arrived that he could have ordered chocolate cake like his brother. It was too late to change the order. That is a small regret, however large it might seem to the child. Other regrets are large, like those who invested their millions with Bernie Madoff, not realizing that he was running a Ponzi scheme that cheated his clients out of billions of dollars. When it was discovered, it was too late to invest with an honest investor, and their millions were lost.

Some regrets have little consequences, like the young professional working in the city who missed the commuter train. He simply had to wait 30 minutes until the next train came along. Other regrets have large consequences, like the young man who cheated in college and was caught. His consequence was that he did not get his college diploma.

Some regrets are able to be reversed, like the one who purchased some garbage bags from Walmart, not realizing they were the wrong size. A trip to Customer Service provided a refund. No big deal. Other regrets are not able to be reversed, like the young man who took the dare of his childhood friends, missed the leap from building to building, and broke his neck in the fall. He will spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair.

Most regrets in life happen because people failed to listen to the wisdom they heard, like the child who was getting too close to the hot burner. His parents warned him, saying, "It will hurt you." Yet, against their counsel, he touched the burner. In this case, the consequences were small, simply a few painful fingers for a few hours.

But other times, the consequences of failing to listen to the wisdom of others will last a lifetime, like the man who was drinking while driving. He knew it was a bad practice. He knew that bad things can happen. But he did not think he was that drunk. He ended up killing the man on a bicycle alongside the road. Forever his life is changed. The man can never be brought back to his family. The driver will spend a dozen years in prison and will forever live with the guilt of his mistake.

This last example is the sort of choice we will be looking at in our text this morning, which is found in Proverbs, chapter 1. If you haven't done so already, I invite you to open your Bibles to Proverbs, chapter 1. We will be looking at verses 20-33, found on page 527 of the Bible in the chair in front of you.

These verses detail those who make bad choices in life against all wisdom, who come to regret their decisions, but there is nothing that anyone can do. Though they wish desperately that they had listened to the counsel of their parents or their siblings or their teachers or their good friends, they utterly regret the choices they made. But there is no way to change what happened. They are stuck with the consequences.

The call of our text this morning is this: listen to wisdom, so that you won't regret the decisions you make in life, and so that you won't face the terrible consequences that poor choices bring. Let's read our text:

Proverbs 1:20-33

Wisdom cries aloud in the street,
in the markets she raises her voice;
at the head of the noisy streets she cries out;
at the entrance of the city gates she speaks:
"How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple?
How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing
and fools hate knowledge?
If you turn at my reproof,
behold, I will pour out my spirit to you;
I will make my words known to you.
Because I have called and you refused to listen,
have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded,
because you have ignored all my counsel
and would have none of my reproof,
I also will laugh at your calamity;
I will mock when terror strikes you,
when terror strikes you like a storm
and your calamity comes like a whirlwind,
when distress and anguish come upon you.
Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer;

they will seek me diligently but will not find me.
Because they hated knowledge
and did not choose the fear of the LORD,
would have none of my counsel
and despised all my reproof,
therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way,
and have their fill of their own devices.
For the simple are killed by their turning away,
and the complacency of fools destroys them;
but whoever listens to me will dwell secure
and will be at ease, without dread of disaster.”

As we can see, our text comes in the form of a sermon. The speaker is introduced in verses 20-21, and the content of the sermon runs from verse 22 through verse 33, from the opening quote to the closing quote.

The speaker is introduced with these words:

Proverbs 1:20-21

Wisdom cries aloud in the street,
in the markets she raises her voice;
at the head of the noisy streets she cries out;
at the entrance of the city gates she speaks:

Now, if you noticed, this sermon was preached by a woman. At Rock Valley Bible Church, we know that women should not be preaching sermons in the church. It is the way that God has mandated the church to be. “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man” (1 Timothy 2:12). Yet here in Proverbs 1, we have a woman preaching. This is not an actual woman, but a personification. It is really wisdom who is preaching. The idea in literary form is that “wisdom” has taken on a personality.

Wisdom is a woman because the Hebrew word for wisdom, *hokmah*, is feminine. So an appropriate name for this preacher is “Lady Wisdom,” which is the title of my message this morning. This is not the only time that Lady Wisdom will preach to us in Proverbs. We will also hear her voice in chapters 8 and 9.

Here in chapter 1, Lady Wisdom is a street preacher, preaching in the open air for all to hear. This is in obvious contrast to those in verses 10-19, who are trying to entice others to join them in their sin. They are secretive, whispering to their peers: “Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us ambush the innocent without reason.” They are secretly making their devious plans.

Not so with wisdom. She is out there crying aloud in the street. She is in the marketplaces, where all the people are. She is in noisy streets, filled with the hustle and bustle of city life. She is at the entrance of the city gates, where everyone will pass by at some point throughout their day. She is preaching in the subways. She is preaching at the beaches. She is preaching every place where there are ears to hear.

The idea here is that all in the city hear the message of wisdom. Quite frankly, wisdom is all around us. It may be the word of your parents, instructing you in the ways of the LORD. It may be the word of a pastor, helping you with a career direction in your life. It may be the word of a trusted companion, directing you how to navigate a sensitive situation at work. It may be the wisdom you read in a book, guiding you in a major financial decision. It may be from the book of Proverbs itself, shedding light on the straight way for you to walk. This is the preaching of wisdom. It is available to all who hear.

So what is her message? It has two points. The first is this:

1. Turn to Me! (verses 22-23).

That is what she wants. She wants people to listen to her, heed her advice, and gain wisdom and blessing as a result.

Proverbs 1:22-23

“How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple?
How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing
and fools hate knowledge?
If you turn at my reproof,
behold, I will pour out my spirit to you;
I will make my words known to you.

We see in verse 22 that she is preaching to a tough crowd. Lady Wisdom is not preaching in a church building to church people who want to hear her message. No, she is preaching to those who are not interested in what she has to say. That is the dynamic of street preaching. You have people who simply pass by. You have people who stand and listen respectfully. You also have some who are going to challenge you and shout back at you.

Verse 22 identifies three different types of people: the simple, the scoffers, and the fools.

The simple is the “open-minded” person who will believe anything. “The simple believes everything, but the prudent gives thought to his steps” (Proverbs 14:15). This is the one who will hear the street preacher respectfully and like the message, but will continue on to believe whatever the next person says, never making a commitment to anything, “always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7).

A second group of listeners are the scoffers. Unlike the simple who believe everything, these are those who believe nothing. They have a negative and defiant attitude that doubts everything and tries to prove everybody wrong. These are the ones who will arise in the crowd and challenge the street preacher. "Scoffers set a city aflame, but the wise turn away wrath" (Proverbs 29:8). They especially hate being taught: "A wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke" (Proverbs 13:1).

The third group in verse 22 are the fools, those who lack sense. They are the ones who do not even slow down to listen to what the preacher is saying. They just carry on their way, as if all is well, because they already know what is right. "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice" (Proverbs 12:15). The fool is destined to continue on in his own mistakes: "Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly" (Proverbs 26:11).

All three of these, the simple, the scoffers, and the fools, are unteachable. They do not listen to Lady Wisdom shouting in the streets. Rather, they shun her. Verse 22 is a question to them: "How long will you avoid my counsel? How long will you refuse to turn to me?" They hear what Lady Wisdom has to say, but they do not believe it. They do not follow after it. They do not pursue it. They have no time for the wisdom she has. They are not teachable, not prudent, not humble, not wise.

She has preached over and over for years, but they will not turn to wisdom. That is her message in verse 23:

Proverbs 1:23

If you turn at my reproof,
 behold, I will pour out my spirit to you;
 I will make my words known to you.

The book of Proverbs is written to give wisdom to those who hear. Verse 23 is a great promise: if you turn to wisdom, you will be given the spirit of wisdom and will know its benefits. They will guard you, protect you, and help you.

The simple point of application here is this: are you one of these types of people? Do you listen to the counsel of wisdom, or do you avoid it? Do you realize that wisdom has been preaching to you for years? Are you listening?

In verse 24, we see the second half of Lady Wisdom's message:

2. Or Face My Ridicule (verses 24-33).

Here is what Lady Wisdom says,

Proverbs 1:24-27

Because I have called and you refused to listen,
 have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded,
because you have ignored all my counsel
 and would have none of my reproof,
I also will laugh at your calamity;
 I will mock when terror strikes you,
when terror strikes you like a storm
 and your calamity comes like a whirlwind,
when distress and anguish come upon you.

The picture here is of the simple, the scoffers, and the fools, who have refused to listen to the counsel of wisdom. They have ignored the counsel of their parents. They have rejected the teaching of their teachers. They have rebelled against the authorities in their lives. They haven't believed the Scriptures. They haven't followed in the ways of the Lord.

As a result, they have made bad choices in life and are facing the consequences.

Perhaps they have smoked for years, and their lungs are charred and black. With every breath comes a wheeze. Now they are diagnosed with lung cancer and are facing months of chemotherapy. For the rest of their lives, they need to carry around a tank of oxygen. For years, they ignored that little warning on every pack of cigarettes: "SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Smoking Causes Lung Cancer, Heart Disease, Emphysema, And May Complicate Pregnancy."

Now they are in the hospital, facing the consequences of their actions. Wisdom laughs at them. She says, "I told you so." There is no turning back. There is no way to reverse the years of foolish living. The storm has arrived. The terror has come. Distress and anguish have come upon them (verse 27). There is no way out.

Some of the most terrifying words in this passage come in verse 28:

Proverbs 1:28

Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer;
 they will seek me diligently but will not find me.

In other words, the day of finding wisdom has passed. You must live with the consequences of your actions.

This is why it is so important to find wisdom as a young person, so that you won't have to face the distress and anguish of those who have neglected it.

Consider the story of Liz Marks, a young woman who neglected the wisdom she heard.^[1] She was texting while driving, and the consequences of that one decision were irreversible. She will not get the sight back in her left eye. She will never smell again. She will forever struggle with hearing. And I am sure that she lives with constant regret.

She can cry out for wisdom all that she likes, and wisdom will only laugh at her calamity, "I told you so!"

This is only one story that could be told. There are millions of others. We could listen to the testimony of girls who got pregnant in high school. They dropped out of school. They lost their friends. Their boyfriend skipped town. They were forced to work a low-paying, long-hours job to provide for their child. Forever, they will face the challenges of raising a child as a single parent. Anyone who has experienced a teen pregnancy will tell you, "It is hard to live this way." Wisdom wants to rescue you from the hardship.

I remember in junior high school being mocked by some girls in my class. They used to call me "Mr. Innocent," because my life was so different from theirs. They were doing things that I wasn't doing. One of them became pregnant and dropped out of high school, and has lived a life of hardship. On the other hand, I have known and experienced the blessing of God upon my life, with five children.

There are many other testimonies we could hear. We could listen to those who married an unbeliever. As a young person, they were not thinking about the Lord. They drifted from church and from all things spiritual. They were only thinking about how much they enjoyed being around their boyfriend or girlfriend. It was their common interests they thought most important: "We loved traveling together! We loved watching sports together! We loved hiking together!" They neglected what was most important, their common interest in the Lord. Though others warned them about getting married, they refused to hear. Now, years later, they are facing the consequences of being unequally yoked. It makes serving the Lord hard. It leads to much heartache. Anyone who is married to an unbeliever will tell you, "It is hard to live this way." Wisdom wants to rescue you from the hardship.

We could listen to the testimonies of those who became addicted to drugs, or to alcohol, or to pornography, and the practical effects these have had on their lives, their marriages, their health, and their employment. All of these things have gripped people and caused irreversible damage. They have led to financial hardship, as they cannot keep a job. They have led to health challenges, as their addictions have ruined their bodies. They have led to divorce, as past images burned on the mind have led to anger and violence and abuse. Those who have experienced these hardships could tell you how difficult it is, and how much better to walk in the ways of wisdom in your youth.

Lady Wisdom does not want to laugh at you, but she will, if you refuse to listen to her (verse 24). Because that is the way that the Lord has created life on this planet. There are consequences to your actions. You will find blessing if you walk in the ways of wisdom. You will find hardship if you walk in the path of fools.

This is what Lady Wisdom says in verses 29-31, repeating herself:

Proverbs 1:29-31

Because they hated knowledge
and did not choose the fear of the LORD,
would have none of my counsel
and despised all my reproof,
therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way,
and have their fill of their own devices.

The message of wisdom is a message of natural consequences. If you hate the knowledge of the wise way to walk, if you choose to rebel against the Lord, if you refuse to listen to the words of wisdom, if you despise living the wise way, then you will be destroyed. It is the way that God has made this life.

Proverbs 1:32-33

For the simple are killed by their turning away,
and the complacency of fools destroys them;
but whoever listens to me will dwell secure
and will be at ease, without dread of disaster."

Lady Wisdom is seeking to guide you into a secure life, without hardship and dread. As Proverbs 22:3 says, "The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it." The prudent person sees the danger ahead and avoids it. The simple just walk straight into it.

Now, up to this point in my message, I have only preached about living wisely in this life for the benefits that will come to you in this life. That is what Proverbs is about: living rightly before God and experiencing his blessings. But everything that is true in this life will have a greater reality in the world to come. Lady Wisdom hinted at this in verse 29, when she mentions "the fear of the LORD."

In other words, these words of Proverbs have application to our natural lives, but only because there is a divine law at work. When we see the Lord and submit to his ways, his blessing will be upon our lives. But if we neglect him, we will face his wrath. What Lady Wisdom shares on the natural level is true on the spiritual level as well.

A great parallel to this is found in Psalm 2. We will end our message there. In this Psalm, we see people rebelling against the LORD, the Lord laughing at them, and the Psalm ending with a call to stop their rebellion.

Psalm 2:1-3

Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?

The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying,
“Let us burst their bonds apart
and cast away their cords from us.”

Here we see people rebelling against the LORD, as if they have the power to thwart his will. We see this played out in the Gospels, where the kings and rulers gathered against the Lord and his Anointed (see Acts 4:23-31). The people thought that by killing Jesus they could put their problems away. But God says: you think you can thwart my will? It is like a little child coming against a heavyweight fighter, swinging with everything he has, while the fighter simply holds him at arm's length. That is what these people are before the Lord. God's response is one of ridicule:

Psalm 2:4-6
He who sits in the heavens laughs;
the Lord holds them in derision.
Then he will speak to them in his wrath,
and terrify them in his fury, saying,
“As for me, I have set my King
on Zion, my holy hill.”

Before the Lord, their power is as nothing. Though they try to fight against the Lord, he will establish his King on his hill. Verses 7-9 make it clear who the King is. It is Jesus:

Psalm 2:7-9
I will tell of the decree:
The LORD said to me, “You are my Son;
today I have begotten you.
Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
and the ends of the earth your possession.
You shall break them with a rod of iron
and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.”

God has given the power of the kingdoms of this world to Jesus Christ. Acts 13:33ff reminds us that the declaration “You are my Son; today I have begotten you” refers to the resurrection. Jesus is confirmed as the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead, and to him all power has been given. All the nations will submit to the Lord Jesus Christ. He will rule and reign over all. The only response is the wise response:

Psalm 2:10-12
Now therefore, O kings, be wise;
be warned, O rulers of the earth.
Serve the LORD with fear,
and rejoice with trembling.
Kiss the Son,
lest he be angry, and you perish in the way,
for his wrath is quickly kindled.
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

When Solomon says “O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth,” we might read: O Herod, O Pontius Pilate, O others. These are the very rulers who set themselves against the Lord's Anointed. The exhortation is for them, and for all who would rebel.

Here is where the good news of the gospel is. Though you have made mistakes in your youth, though you have great regret for your foolish ways, though you are facing some of the consequences of your sin, and though you cannot change those consequences, there is still hope. If you kiss the Son and trust in Jesus, you can make the wise choice for eternity. Think of how many found that.

Consider David. After his adultery with Bathsheba, he faced tremendous difficulty that he could never unwind. But he found forgiveness in the Lord (See 2 Samuel 12 and Psalm 51).

Consider the woman at the well in John 4. She had lived a sinful life, and yet everything was restored in Jesus.

Consider the story of the prodigal son. He wasted his father's inheritance in reckless, sinful living, and yet came back and was made right because he bowed before his father.

Consider the woman caught in adultery in John 8. Jesus said to her, “Go and sin no more.” Jesus offered her a new life.

Consider the thief on the cross. He was dying for his sins. He had natural consequences which could not be changed. But in the midst of dying, he reached out to Jesus saying, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42). Jesus replied, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). He could not turn back the earthly consequences, but eternally he is now with Christ forever!

There is more to life than this life. There is forgiveness of sins, if you but listen to the LORD, if you but kiss the Son, if you but trust in Jesus. He can make you wise for eternity.

Know this: Lady Wisdom herself is, in some regards, a personification of Jesus. As 1 Corinthians 1 says, Christ is the wisdom of God. When Lady Wisdom stretches out her hand and calls, "Turn at my reproof," she is calling you to turn to Jesus, because he alone can save from the wrath of God.

John Piper tells a story in his book *Don't Waste Your Life* of an 80-year-old man who came to Christ under Piper's father's preaching. He was sobbing in the front row of the church, saying, "I've wasted it. I've wasted it." He had spent 80 years in sin. But he found grace in God. He found peace there.^[2]

The message of Proverbs 1 this morning is this: "young people, don't waste your life." Seek wisdom now. Put yourself in a place where you will not make decisions you will regret later.

But if you have made some of those choices that cannot be undone, you can still magnify God's grace through them. As Ephesians 2 says, in the ages to come God will show the surpassing greatness of his power and mercy and kindness to us in Christ Jesus. God's mercy and kindness comes to us in our lives when we have messed up. Remember, there's more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than 99 who need no repentance. So it's not that God is shunning you at all. He'll bring you in.

So I hope you see the tension here in Proverbs and the gospel. In the course of our life, we surely will sin. Our sins will bring natural consequences for us today. But eternally, we know that we have forgiveness in Jesus. We might not be able to wipe away every temporal consequence of our sins, but we can see our eternal consequences of our sins be wiped away, if we just trust in Jesus.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on August 18, 2019 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] Liz Marks, "One Text or Call Could Wreck It All." YouTube, <https://youtu.be/t7911kgJJZc>.

[2] John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), chapter 1.