

**Wisdom to Live By  
Wisdom in Creation  
(Proverbs 3:13-20; 8:22-36)**

**Introduction:-**

Today I have decided to begin a series of sermons on the theme of “Wisdom to Live By”, which I intend to take us from this point, into the beginning of next year. I believe that there is no greater challenge in these Post Modern times, when truth no longer holds any sure and absolute value, than to rediscover the Wisdom of God, which alone holds God’s created universe together, and provides the only key to wholesome and happy living, as God intended this to be, leading to eternal life itself. And so in this light, we may well say, “Bring on the Wisdom of God”, for without it, we perish in the turbulent seas of our own ignorance and misguided understanding. What better place to begin our study of God’s wisdom, than to see it from its own beginning, when God began to create the world in which we live. May we be encouraged and blessed by this meditation today.

**1. First, we begin with a preliminary word about Wisdom in the Bible.**

In the Old Testament, where we will begin our study of wisdom in creation, scholars have identified a special genre of writing and language which they have called for the want of a better term, the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Much of this literature is written as Hebrew poetry in verse, dependent on patterns of meaning, rather than on sound (such as rhyme). Wisdom literature is largely dependent upon observations about life and how it works, and is therefore the ability to cope well with the demands of life, what is today called life-skill. This is especially concentrated in the books of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes, as well as in some Psalms, which have been called “wisdom books and Psalms” on the basis of language, theme, and content; but is also found throughout the rest of the Old Testament, where words and themes associated with wisdom are also utilized and found, from Genesis right through to Malachi. Even in Jeremiah’s time, in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century BC, three distinct classes of people could be formally recognized at Jeremiah 18:18: the teaching of the law by the priest, counsel from the wise, and the word from the prophet, but there is no evidence that these three groups ever stood in opposition against each other as some scholars have suggested, for in the ancient law of Deuteronomy, the language of wisdom is actually used to exalt the law at Deuteronomy 4:6, and the prophets often used the concept and language of wisdom in order to present their own oracles to their audiences. And finally, what we find in the wisdom book of Proverbs, is lady

wisdom presenting her words as a prophetess at Proverbs 8, no doubt in order to legitimate her claims as words that should be taken seriously, as both words to be heard and heeded. Thus each of these traditions used each other's way of presenting God's Word to the people. Finally, the fact that lady wisdom dons the mantle of the prophet at the beginning of our passage in Proverbs 8, calls us to heed this passage with utmost seriousness. What then does this passage have to say to us today?

## **2. To begin with, what are the principles built into the very fabric of the cosmos? (Proverbs 3:19-20)**

Recently space exploration has given the world amazing pictures of our universe, not only capturing the vastness of our universe with solar systems beyond solar systems, but with pictures that might help scientists solve the riddle of how our universe was first formed. On the basis of the passage before us, scientific inquiry can be regarded as an exploration of God's wisdom. Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), viewed his astronomy as "thinking God's thoughts after him." He incorporated religious arguments and reasoning into his work, such that the basis for many of his most important contributions was essentially theological. His most significant achievement came from the realization, a direct consequence of his failed attempt to prove the contrary; that the planets moved in elliptical, not circular orbits. Likewise, a careful observation of the text before us reveals a world created by God on the basis of order and harmony - the source of all wisdom and knowledge. On this basis, there is nothing "random" about our universe and world, where many think that "fate" and "chance" are our only guides. Rather, our world and universe are finely tuned, and are guided by intricate design and purpose. Here the three attributes of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge, serve not only as the principles by which the Lord separated and ordered the cosmos, but also as the principles built into the very fabric of the cosmos. In other words, the principles by which the cosmos continues to function. In the same way, Exodus 31:2-3 tells us that through the divine gifts of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge, Bezalel crafted designs for the Tabernacle, a portable shrine that served as an earthly replica of the heavenly reality. Through this Tabernacle, God not only made His presence real with His people, but He also journeyed with them to the Promised Land. Thus, the knowledge of God's wisdom in creation, means that even though the world can be a threatening place, where disaster can also strike, undermining our security, and terrorizing us with anxiety, we can counter such menaces by getting in tune with the wisdom of the Creator who operates on the principles of order and harmony, and who journeys with us to the Promised Land. Wisdom in the larger context of this chapter means walking with God, through the storms of life, leading to

surefootedness in the face of traumas (3:23), as well as the enjoyment of peaceful rest and sleep (3:24). It also involves doing good to one's neighbour when the opportunity presents itself (3:27-30). Finally, under this heading, the same wisdom, understanding and knowledge, that the Lord employed to order creation, He employs to order redemption. This redemption finds its fulfilment in Christ, who created and upholds all things (Colossians 1:15-20).

### **3. Finally, unveiling the mystery of Wisdom's link with Creation (Proverbs 8:22-36)**

Wisdom texts find their *theological or God centre* in creation, with regard to both human life (anthropology) and to nature (cosmology). And in this respect, this text before us may be considered as the most developed aspect of wisdom thinking in the Old Testament. Chapter 8 begins with Lady Wisdom donning the prophetic mantle, and standing at the highest point of the city where the two paths of life meet, offering salvation through her wisdom to the discerning, which is more precious than silver, gold, and rubies (verses 1-11). In this way, she also emerges as a figure who contrasts with the adulterous wife of the previous chapter 7, who will become a personification of folly in chapter 9 to follow. Then after the opening introduction of verses 1-11, verses 12-21 then speak of Wisdom's activity in historical time, by which kings and princes are able to rule with justice and righteousness with great reward. Then verses 22-31 speak of wisdom's birth in primordial time, followed by a conclusion in verses 32-36. But our main interest is with the testimony of verses 22-31. What is really being claimed for Lady Wisdom in this passage? To begin with, wisdom is the first of God's works, in terms of time. This is another way of stressing wisdom's primacy and importance in God's creative works. Overall, wisdom was God's co-worker or artisan from the very beginning, but not to be thought of as a distinct hypostasis or deity apart from God. Rather, wisdom was God's major attribute in His work of creation, and while God delighted in wisdom's presence, wisdom itself rejoiced in both God and those who fill His creation. This is only made possible through the personification of wisdom in Proverbs, and by enabling this, there is a sense of playful exploration in the way the world is ordered through wisdom. Also, this is a way of highlighting wisdom as being both a gift of God, and an activity of man. And unlike Job, who was not present at the creation, and so did not understand God's ways (Job 38:4), Wisdom was present at the creation, and so has certain knowledge about the creation order. Therefore, in this personified way, wisdom also as an attribute of God, can also make her final appeal in terms of the two ways presented at verses 32-36, with the choice between finding life in Lady Wisdom, or death in Lady Folly, similar to the choice between the two trees in the Garden of Eden, with one offering life, and the other offering death. What

further practical applications can we make from learning about wisdom's intimate relationship with the created order? First, there is nothing in creation that has not been wisely or skilfully made in all of its intricate parts, including the creation of male and female in the image of God. It is therefore important to understand wisdom if we wish to make sense of the created world. Otherwise, creation, including our part within it, will remain complex and confusing, without light and understanding. This dovetails nicely into the affirmation of God at Genesis 1:31, when God pronounced the judgment upon creation that it was "very good", and would therefore have implications for the "wise" use of our world. Secondly, if wisdom is foundational to the creation of the world, it is also foundational to making wise and good judgments about God's plan for human beings within this creation structure, including one's rule and care of the earth, as well human relationships themselves. Thirdly, at 2 Corinthians 6:1, Paul remarkably describes Christians as God's co or fellow workers in the work of His kingdom. In our passage today wisdom was also God's co-worker in the creation of the world, in whom God took great delight. And so, if we are also God's co-workers in the work of His kingdom, we also are those in whom God takes great delight, and as such, we also need God's wisdom and Spirit, in order to create this world anew. Finally, if wisdom is foundational to the creation of the world, it is also foundational to making a successful path through life. In the end, the emphasis on wisdom in creation in Proverbs 8, is fulfilled in Colossians 1:15-20, where Christ is not only Lord in redemption (vv. 18-20), but also Lord over creation (vv. 15-17), bringing it into being, and sustaining it, as "the wisdom of God" at 1 Corinthians 1:24, 30.

### **Conclusion:-**

If the wisdom of God created this world, and that wisdom is ultimately found in Jesus Christ, by whom, through whom, and for whom all things were created, finally making peace through his blood shed upon the cross, then it stands to reason that we can only exercise ultimate wisdom when all of creation is reconciled to God through the blood of the cross. May we not only become the full recipients of that wisdom through the cross of Jesus Christ, by receiving the forgiveness of sins that it offers us, but may we forever seek to share Jesus' cross with the world. As the Hymn writer puts it, "Make us wise in knowing Thee." Amen.