

Sermon 52, How Wisdom Reveals Herself, Proverbs 14:35-15:4

Read Genesis 39 — God was with Joseph!

Proposition: Be wise in your life and in your speech to please your Father, who is watching how you live.

- I. Wisdom reveals herself in how you live, 14:31-33
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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have spoken numerous times about Solomon's missionary impulse. He longed for the truth about Christ to go out to the nations around Israel. He prayed for foreigners when he dedicated the Temple, and he wrote in genres that are read all over the world. Why did he do these things? Because he was a wise man, and wisdom cannot be hidden. She reveals herself everywhere. Does not wisdom cry, and understanding put forth her voice? She reveals herself in how you live, in how you speak, and even in the midst of fools. Wisdom acts to please the Father; He loves to see His children being wise. It makes His heart glad. So be wise in your life and speech in order to please your Father, who is watching how you live.

I. Wisdom reveals herself in how you live, 14:31-33

The first thing we see in our text this morning is that wisdom reveals herself in how you live. Wisdom is not simply a theory; it is a discipline. What would you think of a scientist who never did any science, or an author who never wrote anything? The same thing that one is forced to think of a "wise man" who never does anything wise. Wisdom lives in the wise man's heart, but she is revealed in his actions.

A. The wise show generosity to the poor, v. 31b

The first thing our passage presents as a characteristic of the wise man is his attitude toward the poor. That core principle of this biblical teaching has been internalized by our society, and you will find that our elites are practically obsessed with the problem of poverty. Since LBJ declared war on poverty 55 years ago, in 1964, the problem of inequality and how to help the poor has

been the focus of lots of research, lots of funding, and lots and lots of books and articles, mostly written by (you guessed it) the wealthy. Over that same period, of course, the plight of the poor has gone from bad to worse as a direct result of the anti-moral and especially anti-marriage policies of the welfare state, whose stated reason for existence is to prevent poverty.

This is not the place to preach the failings of the welfare state; I trust that you are familiar with them already. The point is simply to make sure we're all agreed that the obsession with poverty among our national elites is actually a good thing, one that stems from Christian motives. The wise man shows his wisdom by his generosity to the poor.

However, that generosity is not primarily shown by crafting a welfare state that takes money from those who have it and gives it to those who don't have it. There are all kinds of reasons why, but the most obvious is simply this: It is not generosity to force others to give. Generosity means giving what you have.

This is obvious at the individual level. If I say "I am pleased to announce that I'm going to provide an extra-special snack next week, and I encourage you all to stay for snack time because we're going to have wagyu beef and crab legs for snack," and then I approach Tim and say "Tim, you're going to bring crab legs and wagyu beef for snack next Sunday, or I'm going to excommunicate you" — am I being generous? Of course not. I'm simply being manipulative, trying to take the credit for "generosity" when all I've really done is use my office in a horribly inappropriate way to force someone to spend hundreds of dollars on a snack that should cost five.

Well, brothers and sisters, insofar as elite concern with the poor tends toward redistributive measures, it is not particularly generous or particularly honoring to God. Rather, what I encourage you to see here is that if you grasp and hold onto everything you have, and never share it with those who have less, you are not wise. You are not like Jesus, who is the ultimate example of generosity to the poor. He had everything, and gave it up to be homeless and give even His life for us. Jesus was generous to the needy, and we are the beneficiaries of His generosity. If you live without giving, then you do not know the Christ who gave His life for you. It's not that giving makes Him give His life for you; rather, it's that if you actually know Him in His royal saving generosity, it can't help but move you to give.

Now, that said, redemption merely increases our obligation to the poor. The text here roots generosity in creation. To oppress the poor is to insult the God who made them. If you oppress the poor, you are not merely harming poor people. You are actively manifesting your hostility against God. You're telling God that because people made in His image aren't worth much (and yes, we do use that terminology, don't we? "How much is he worth?" "Oh, about \$5 million"), He's not worth much either. How can we describe people made in the image of God as worth some kind of dollar amount based on their total assets? It shows something deeply wrong when we do so, brothers and sisters.

God tells us that the wise are generous. Then He shows us that generosity by giving to us beyond our wildest imagination. Out of the riches He's freely given you, can't you give to

others? I'm talking about things like financially supporting charities that help the poorest of the poor — the unborn, the foster children, the homeless in the ghetto, the refugees and victims of crime and war. Right here in Gillette we have charities that help people and do so wisely: the Women's Resource Center, the YES House, the Salvation Army, and so on. Do you give to these organizations, or others like them? If not, you are walking in folly, worshipping wealth more than you worship God.

B. The wise expect refuge in death, v. 32

Well, wisdom does not just manifest itself by how the wise give. It also manifests itself when they come to die. Most translations say that the righteous "finds" or "has" a refuge, but actually, the text says that the righteous "seeks" refuge in his death. When he comes to die, the righteous is looking for a refuge in death. Now, why do wise people look for something? Because they have every expectation of finding it. They're not like the drunk looking under the street lamp for his keys because the light is better there, even though he dropped them halfway down the block. They have good reason to believe that they will find a refuge in their death. They know that death is not the end, and that life with God awaits on the other side of it. Even as they prepare to die, then, they look not to the experience of death so much as to what they'll find on the other side.

The wicked don't have that expectation in their death. Their own wrongdoing thrusts them down into the grave. The righteous are delivered by the righteousness, not from death but in death. The wicked die by their own fault and have no recourse, no refuge, nothing to look forward to on the other side.

This hope for the afterlife, or not, translates into how you live on earth. If this life is all you have, you have to get revenge. You have to enjoy everything you possibly can while you're here, because you're never going to enjoy anything more after you die. But if this is just a tiny fraction of your life, you can actually live with forgiveness and patience. Which way sounds wiser to you?

C. Wisdom is in the heart of the wise, v. 33a

Well, finally, wisdom reveals herself by her home. She dwells in the heart of the wise. We've talked about this before: The Lord Jesus dwells in the heart of those who trust Him. If you believe, He comes and makes His home with you.

That, in turn, has consequences for how you live your life. If you have wisdom in your heart, where else will you have it? In your life. In your attitudes. In your words. In your actions. Why did Joseph have such favor? Because God was with him in the prison. When wisdom is in your heart, you can expect all the benefits that Proverbs talks about. You see, if you have Christ, then you have everything necessary for life and godliness!

II. Wisdom reveals herself even among fools, v. 33b

But wisdom is not only to be found among the wise. She also reveals herself in the midst of fools. What is this supposed to mean? Ancient translators were so confused that they added a "not" here: "In the heart of fools it is not discerned" (Pro 14:33b LXE). Is that the right

approach? Should we actually say that wisdom is *not* to be found in the midst of fools? No, I don't think so. I want you to think with me for a minute about how much of this book teaches wisdom by negative examples. That is, how much of it tells us what fools are like in order to show us the opposite, which is what a wise man is like? A lot, obviously. We had four "profiles in folly" sermons in the first six or seven chapters. We just read proverbs about the man who oppresses the poor and the man who is thrust down by his own wrongdoing. Clearly, wisdom is known in the midst of fools not by affirmation, but by negation! A few weeks ago I had a fool tell me "There's nothing wrong with having a baby mama and side ho." Well, actually, there's everything wrong with it. But in the midst of that fool's speech wisdom was present, so long as you simply took everything he said and inverted it.

Doesn't wisdom cry out, and understanding raise her voice? Brothers and sisters, wisdom is only another name for the Logos, the true light who enlightens every man coming into the world. We can negate the propositions of fools in order to discover wisdom, because in one sense He dwells with us all according to creation. He is present in us, savingly if we are wise, but as the Logos principle, the rational nature, within every human being, even the unbelievers.

So as the earlier part of Proverbs said, wisdom does cry out, revealing herself everywhere. We have to listen — but if we do, we will hear her, and know what she says and how she is telling us to behave.

III. Wisdom reveals herself in how you speak, 14:35-15:2, 4

But wisdom is not revealed only in actions and by the way of negation. She also reveals herself verbally. Indeed, as we have seen over and over, this is her primary medium. Wisdom is a speaker. She raises her voice, and tells us not to turn away from her words, for she is the alter ego of the Logos who is the ultimate Word of the Father. Listen to Him!

A. The favored servant answers gently, 14:35-15:1

And when you listen to Him, you will learn to speak. One of the medieval Jewish commentators pointed out the connection between these two verses, and I can't unsee it now. Clearly, we know that the king loves wisdom and that His favor is toward a wise servant. We also know that folly is not just foolish, but shameful too. Putting the lessons together, we see that the king's favor rests on the servant who manifests wisdom not just in his actions, but in his speech. The wise man answers softly. He doesn't go for the jugular, doesn't attack harshly the person he's arguing with.

I've told you before about myself as a negative example on this one. A few years ago my in-laws bought an 8-pound fluffball dog. Yes, he's full-grown and only 8 lbs. Well, the dog knocked my one-year-old's stroller over, and I said some harsh things about the dog. My mother-in-law confronted me, and I told her "Fine. I wouldn't have said those things about the dog if I had known how neurotic you are about him."

Well, let's just say that grievous words stir up anger. That's not the way to the king's favor, and it's not the way to God's favor. Indeed, I brought shame to my Heavenly Father that day by my grievous words. Actually, the Hebrew is even more specific: it uses the singular

“word.” A single word can enrage! The favored servant answers gently, because he is wise and answers wisely. He seeks to avert wrath. Even if he has something hard that needs to be said, he says it gently.

B. God is angry with speakers of harsh words, 14:35-15:1

But brothers and sisters, the king is like God, and it’s fair to conclude that God’s anger is against those who speak harsh words. The number-one offenders in this line are parents, and especially fathers. My fellow dads, do you speak harsh words that provoke your children to wrath? Do you lash out at your wives and call them neurotic? Do you needle your mother-in-law (or son-in-law)? Brothers and sisters, yes, we have forgiveness in Christ. That’s why we’re here worshipping Him. He tells us up front that no one can tame their tongue; it’s unruly, full of poison. But what is impossible with us is possible with Him. Christ spoke wisely at all times, and He has given us His Spirit, the Spirit of self-control. With the Holy Spirit, you can control your tongue. You can speak kindly and be that wise servant of God who knows His favor. But if you reject and grieve the Spirit, you will make Him angry. His wrath is against the one who speaks harsh words.

C. The wise speak life-giving knowledge, 15:2, 4

Indeed, we see here a further portrait of our Lord, the wise Son. His tongue used knowledge rightly. He made wisdom attractive, and His words were a tree of life and a fountain of life. “The words I speak to you are Spirit, and they are life.” How do you get to know a person? By listening to their words. How do you get to know Jesus? By listening to His words. And when you’ve done that, you’ll be able to speak wisely too. Wisdom will be revealed by how you talk and whether your speech makes knowledge attractive.

Is your speech life-giving? Do people enjoy talking to you because you refresh and encourage their hearts? Or are you better known as an abuser, a ranter, a person whose words attack and tear down all the time?

D. Foolish speech is soul-crushing, 15:2, 4

You see, foolish speech like that, speech that makes knowledge look ugly, is soul-crushing. A perverse tongue, a tongue that mocks at good things, destroys people’s motivations and makes them a lot less willing to even consider doing right. As C.S. Lewis said about Flippancy, “every serious subject is discussed in a manner which implies that they have already found a ridiculous side to it. If prolonged, the habit of Flippancy builds up around a man the finest armour-plating against the Enemy that I know.”⁵ That’s foolish speech. That’s soul-crushing, because it leads people to think that there is absolutely nothing serious in God, Christ, Heaven, Hell, sin, and so on. The mouth of fools pours out foolishness, and one of the greatest triumphs of folly is in making wisdom sound as foolish as herself.

So speak wisely. Don’t fool yourself or others by how you talk. Make knowledge acceptable. That’s what your Savior did.

⁵ *The Screwtape Letters.*

IV. Wisdom reveals herself to your Father's omnipresent observation, 15:3

Well, the final place that Wisdom reveals herself is to your Father's observation. Wisdom makes herself known above all to the watching eyes of Yahweh. He is omnipresent; if His eyes are everywhere, that means He is everywhere. And He is omniscient, for He sees all that takes place. What does He see in you? Someone who dwells with wisdom, someone who seeks Christ? Someone who who loves Jesus Christ? Or someone whose mouth pours out foolishness? Brothers and sisters, your Savior came to deliver you not only from sin but from folly. Trust Him; spend time with Him; and before you know it, you'll be walking and talking like Him, showing wisdom in all you do. Amen.