

“WOMEN WHO LAUGH AT THE FUTURE”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden

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Text for the Sermon: Proverbs 31:25-31; Proverbs 28:1

Our text is Proverbs 31 and the famous Proverbs 31 wife/woman.

This section of Proverbs is a well-known acrostic poem based on the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. That means that the author sat down and decided to write 22 praiseworthy things about his wife. It is a string of pearls in praise of a woman who fears the Lord (31:30).

That's the focus of the whole text in particular and of the whole book of Proverbs in general. Proverbs 1:7 starts us off by giving the theme, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” And it ends as it began. A praise of someone who has taken this wisdom to heart and lives it. The woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

Let's look more closely at the closing verses of this text which deals with the special virtues and rewards of a woman who fears the Lord. Please apply anything specific I say about mothers to all women, single, married or widowed.

First, let's consider what does it mean to fear the Lord and then what does it look like practically and then finally consider her reward, that she should be praised.

The word fear has basically two meanings in Hebrew and in English. It can mean being afraid of or terrified of or apprehensive about. We are afraid of heights, of mice, of failing, of certain people or all manner of things. But the word fear can also mean to regard with reverence, awe, to venerate.

The fear of the Lord can be of either kind. It can be a *frightful fear*, like between a slave and master. A fear of punishment. A dread that comes from sin and guilt. The ungodly/unrighteous fear the Lord and His coming wrath. They try to flee from His presence.

There is a positive fear of the Lord also. It is a *filial fear* that only a child of God can have. It is an attitude of reverence for the Father. It includes love, forgiveness, joy and a desire to please and serve.

The fear of the Lord is said to be this woman's greatest asset. This makes her of far greater worth than rubies and far more rare. This is the pearl of great price. This is to be desired more than much fine gold. This is the path of a well-lived life.

Listen to the Psalms:

Psalms 25:14 The friendship of the Lord is for those who *fear him*.

Psalm 31:19 How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who *fear you*.
Psalm 34:7 The angel of the Lord encamps around those who *fear him* and delivers them.
Psalm 103:11 As the heavens are high above the earth so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him. Verse 13 As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who *fear him*.
Psalm 145:19 He fulfills the desire of all who *fear him*.

This positive fear of the Lord is very practical. It impacts daily life and thoughts and feelings and attitudes. Notice some of the practical implications for this woman.

First, she can laugh at the future.

Proverbs 31:25 Strength and dignity are her clothing; and she laughs at the time to come.

Now be honest who of you despite all the nice things said and done on this Mother's Day, still have a bit of fear or anxiety or worry in your heart and soul? Maybe some concern for a child, a relationship, some financial matters, health issues, something coming up?

Moms and worry go together like moms and apple pie. Most moms are good worriers. They carry great burdens for their husbands and their children and the future.

Who can really laugh at the future? Some would say only those who don't have a clue about what's ahead? How can worry be turned to laughter? How can we actually laugh at the future and whatever it holds? Wouldn't the ability to do that be a tremendous gift to you?

Living out of fear is stressful. Parenting out of fear is stressful.

When we parent out of fear we cause ourselves and those around us much grief and loss of joy.

When we discipline out of fear, we come down too hard and harsh.

When we worry and get anxious, we over react. We speak before we listen. We don't trust.

Proverbs 28:1 says,

"The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion."

The unbeliever fears everything and nothing. He is paranoid, worried, always looking back over his shoulder. When you make God your enemy, everything becomes your enemy, and you fear everything. Sin makes us cowards. Afraid of shadows.

The wicked flees from no pursuer, though truly their conscience is their great pursuer. There is a better way.

Hebrews 10:19, 22 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus ...22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Notice where this righteousness that makes us bold comes from. It is not from within us. It is not a matter of screwing up our will-power screw or getting it all together or doing righteous stuff.

The lion-like courage of the righteous comes from our conviction and confidence in God and in His promise to uphold us.

It's a dark and scary jungle out there but the righteous are as fearless as the King of the jungle. The fear of the Lord trumps every other fear. If God be for us, who can be against us?

What about Satan?

Doesn't Scripture say he's a roaring lion? Yes, but what else does Scripture say? Resist him and he will flee. He's a chained lion, a captive lion. With boldness you can say, "Satan, you don't terrify me. No matter what you try, no matter how loud you growl, no matter what you dangle in front of me, no matter what sicknesses or diseases or miseries or losses or heartaches the future might hold, the righteousness of God gives me courage and boldness to laugh at your threats."

One of the fruits of righteousness is being able to walk through the valley of the shadow of death and fear no evil.

Psalm 23:3-4 ...He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

No matter how daunting the darkness, this woman fears nothing when she fears the king of the jungle, the King of Kings. She is like Him, as bold as a lion.

She has nothing to fear, because she fears the Lord. The fear of the Lord takes away the fear of fear. The fear of the Lord takes away the fear of the future. Fight human fear with godly fear. Fight the fear of the future with the fear of our heavenly Father.

Not only does the woman who fears the Lord laugh at the future, she instructs the future generations in the fear of the Lord.

Proverbs 31:26 She opens her mouth with wisdom, the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

Mothers see and hear so much. They have almost constant opportunities for instruction, when they get up, go about day and when they lie down, in the kitchen, in the car, while watching TV. Capitalize on these informal opportunities, they are gold.

Faithful instruction means Torah. Torah means instruction in wisdom. Make the Bible the most important book in your family's life, in your children's lives. Make it a central part of your life.

The family is a school; it's God's primary school for raising godly children. Seek all the help you need and can get from relatives, church, books, internet, but pray and make it happen.

II Timothy 1:5 and 3:14-15 I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your *grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice* and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. 3:14 continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it (grandmother and mother), 15 and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Instill in future generations the gift of laughing at the future. Are you worried about leaving an inheritance? This is the richest inheritance any child could ever have, faithful instruction, wisdom. Give as liberally as the Lord gives you opportunity and pray for more opportunities.

William Quayle, a great old Methodist preacher from the early part of last century looked back on his childhood and wrote, "I would rather have been the son of a woman and a man, who in their [poverty] could not leave ... anything but a Bible, than to have been descended from all the [royalties] of history." (William Alfred Quayle, M.S. Rice, 1928, p. 31)

I tried to communicate that to my father. He was concerned about leaving some kind of inheritance. I told him, if he dies penniless, don't worry about it, it doesn't matter. I already have my inheritance, I have faith in God and the fear of the Lord. Those are eternal riches. They won't burn up in the great fire to come. A drop in the stock market won't effect the value of my eternal portfolio one-percent.

The home where the Lord is feared is already filled with good things.

Wealth and riches are already in that house. (Ps. 112:3)

In this home there is contentment, peace, joy. In this home is the Lord's blessing and protection.

Finally, there is her reward. The woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

Proverbs 31:28-29 and 31

28 Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:

29 "Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all."

31 Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.

After all that has been said, we finally hear some response from those in the house.

A word to children of all ages.

Praise your mother. You owe your very life to her, at least in a penultimate sense.

All of us owe this debt of honor. It is God's command and our duty.

To reject her or dishonor her is to reject and dishonor yourself.

It is right that we should praise her and if she fears the Lord, she should be doubly praised.

Savor the grace of God in your life expressed to you in your mother. This is the work of God. This has been done according to the pleasures of God, according to the eternal counsel of His will.

Let there be praise on your lips for His goodness and grace. Bless the Lord.

Scripture says over and over, honor your father and mother. Honor her today. There is a terrible price to pay for the person, the family and the society that will not do this.

It was by God's grace and for His glory that you were born to the mother you were born to. And if that relationship was broken by sin, neglect, abuse or anything else, we share your pain. The ravages of sin are real and hurt all our relationships, especially the ones we care about most. Comfort yourself in the perfect love of your heavenly father and the imperfect love of a church family.

A word to husbands.

C.S. Lewis in his wonderful little book on the Psalms gives the powerful insight that praise is not merely the expression of joy, it is the consummation of joy. "Praise not only expresses but completes the enjoyment." (*Reflections on the Psalms*, p. 95)

We praise what we love. It is not only natural, it actually completes our love. It makes it full when we praise. Love and joy are not complete until they find expression.

Give her her reward, what is her due. On every occasion, speak well of her. Publicly praise her. The worthier the object the more we praise it.

Savor the grace of God in your life expressed to you in your mother and in your wife. This is the work of God. This is the greatness of God.

Proverbs 18:22 He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD.
Prov. 19:14 Houses and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from the LORD.

When you praise your wife you are putting a hedge of protection around your marriage. Praise, appreciation, verbal and otherwise, strengthen a marriage, give security to a home and please God. Build her up, strengthen her and encourage her.

A word to our mothers.

Savor the grace of God in your life expressed to you in your motherhood. This is the work of God. This is the greatness of God.

If you are a mother, it's by God's grace and for His glory that you are a mother. Your calling is a great and holy calling. It's by grace, not all woman receive it.

Do you realize how important this one verse in Proverbs is in this incredible list of virtues and attributes. If this verse is missing, what are all the rest? If you pull this plank out the whole house collapses.

This is the one most needful thing.

Proverbs 14:26-27 He who fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for his children it will be a refuge.

27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death.

Proverbs 19:23 The fear of the LORD leads to life: Then one rests content, untouched by trouble.

Cultivate a Godly fear of the Lord, it is life and hope and courage.

Today we give and receive all manner of gifts, flowers, chocolate, cards, lunch out, a nap, but whatever it is it will be fleeting.

Here is your lasting gift for today. No matter how you feel about yourself. No matter how guilty you are, no matter how crabby you have been or short with your husband or children. No matter how much time you have wasted watching TV or how much you have overeaten or overspent or fallen short of your own ideas or your mother's ideas of a good mother. If you will cast yourself on the mercy of Jesus and put all your hope in Him and trust yourself and your family to God, He will count Jesus as your righteousness and you can sleep tonight in peace without any fear of what tomorrow may bring.

This is God's gift to you on this Mother's Day. With this gift you can truly rejoice and laugh all the way to heaven, however many days away that is.

A word to us all.

That gift is just like the box of chocolates you got mom. We all get to share in it. It's for all of us.

May the gospel of God's free righteousness in Christ take your heart captive and may this new fear of the Lord set you free from fear so that with the boldness of a lion you can laugh at your future and rejoice in the Lord. May Jesus be praised today and always.