

## Dr. August Konkell, Proverbs, Session 9

© 2024 August Konkell and Ted Hildebrandt

This is Dr. August Konkell in his teaching on the book of Proverbs. This is session number nine, Wisdom for the World, Proverbs 8.

We're back at Proverbs to another one of the interludes. Before we get to the conclusion, and this is the concept of wisdom in relation to creation, it is laid out at length in Proverbs 8.

This is actually a very, very famous chapter in terms of Christian doctrine because it entered into the whole question of the person of Jesus Christ at the time of Nicaea and in the struggle against the Arians, which was conducted mainly by Athanasius. One of the assumptions that was made was that there is a connection between Jesus, the son of God, and wisdom, that wisdom is related to God as a child, so Jesus is the son of God. And therefore, for the Christian, Jesus must be the embodiment of wisdom.

Now, of course, we don't ever suggest or deny that Jesus is the great teacher who tells us about life and the way that we should live. The controversy came about, though, with the origin of wisdom, because we read in this chapter in verse 24 that the Lord acquired me as the first of his ways. And so, the Arians argued, well, that suggests then that Jesus had a beginning, that he is not equal with God in the same way as Athanasius and the others were trying to define.

According to Athanasius, in the book of John and in the New Testament, the person of Jesus, the Lord, is equated with the Yahweh of the Old Testament. Specifically, those who saw Jesus in John's gospel and refused to believe in him also were the same ones who were identified with Isaiah, who saw Yahweh, and Israel would not believe in him. So, there's just no question in John's mind that Yahweh and Jesus are the same.

Well, that makes Jesus equal to God, but the Arians argued on the basis of this chapter that no, like wisdom, Jesus was acquired. Well, that really wasn't the main concern of this chapter. The concern of this chapter is a discourse on wisdom.

There is a public call to wisdom. There is the speech of wisdom. And in the speech of wisdom, we have this praise of wisdom, which is given in verses 4 to 11.

Then the way in which wisdom operates in society, the benefits that it brings to society. Then we finally have wisdom at the time of creation. And then finally, wisdom makes her appeal to all of humanity.

So, we begin with the appeal of wisdom in verses 1 to 11. Here again, wisdom is depicted as making her call, and it's expressed as questions. Does not wisdom call to you? Does not understanding raise her voice? She's at the peaks of the high places along the way.

She's along the path. So, wisdom is out in the public as she is in the other places where the lanes branch out to the city and at the crossroads that lead to the gate chambers where she is giving her call. And who does she call to? Well, she's got a message for all people.

A close relationship here to the appeal of a wisdom psalm, Psalm 49, 1 to 3. Listen to me, all you nations of the world. So, wisdom makes her appeal, not just to those people who know the covenant and hear the covenant, but this kind of wisdom is profitable for all people, whatever it is that they may know or believe. She has the words of truth.

There is nothing that is distorted or twisted. The worth of wisdom is more than silver. She is to be chosen over the finest of gold.

She is better than pearls. So, all the same motifs that we have seen before show up here again. And what is it that makes wisdom so very valuable? Well, what wisdom has is this insight into complicated circumstances and affairs.

She's got cunning, she's got prudence, but in the best and most positive senses to lead to a good end, to resolve situations. And what does wisdom do? If there's somebody who needs an understanding to deal with complex situations, it's the king. You'll remember Solomon in 1 Kings 4, where Solomon is at Gibeah, and where he has a vision, and where God offers him wealth and honor.

And Solomon in his vision says, you know, this is a people of kavod. That means they're heavy. Now, it could be that they are numerous, but it also could mean that they are troublesome, that they are difficult.

So, what I want to have is wisdom. And so, God grants Solomon that wisdom and that does begin to characterize Solomon's reign. Well, that's exactly what we have here.

That wisdom is this means of being able to deliberate, to understand, to have strength. It's the basis of the order of society. It's the way that you determine justice.

And of course, in that story of Solomon, the first case that comes to him is the most difficult one, in which there are two women both laying claims to a live and surviving child. And Solomon must determine who really is the mother of this child. That's the king's job, justice.

But wisdom is the way to success. Those who love her crave knowledge. And in verse 18 is a very important phrase, wealth and honor.

Now, this is one of those kinds of phrases where the two nouns really are a modification of one and the other. Honorable wealth, is wealth gained through honest means. That's what wisdom is.

It is righteousness that leads to us becoming prosperous. But wisdom really is much more valuable than wealth. And again, her fruits are ethical conduct, intellectual understanding, and material abundance.

So, this is wisdom speaking about herself. In fact, in verse 12, she begins with, I am wisdom. Insight lives with me.

So, all of this is Wisdom's whole little speech about herself. Then we get a description where wisdom is still speaking. But now she says that, you know, I'm really at the heart of the whole of the order of creation.

I am the first of God's works. Now, there's been an awful lot of discussion here about the relationship between wisdom and God. But it must be affirmed that in this chapter and in these verses, wisdom is not to be identified with God.

But rather, wisdom is the companion of God. And that wisdom is the companion who is a part of the establishment of the order in creation. So, God acquires her, and creates her.

So, she is not to be identified with Christ. She is created. And is a parallel to humans.

We acquire wisdom. So, there's a deliberate kind of analogy here that just as God acquired wisdom for the beginning of his great creative work, so we acquire wisdom for the work that we have to do in living our lives. And then the work of God is described.

It's the work of creation in which we have here really a kind of analogy with Genesis in which there is the lack of order, whatever it is that is before creation, that comes into being through God's, that comes into the order of, an order of being through God's will and through God's work. And so, we kind of have the sequence here described as to the way in which we move from the depths to the land with its horizons and from the sky back to the land and the depths of the sea. And who is wisdom? She's the child.

The word here is the word *amon*. We're going to discuss it in a minute. But it's the word that's used in relation to Esther and Mordecai.

Esther was like a child to Mordecai. And so, wisdom is God's delight. She is his child and she is the means by which God creates all things.

But wisdom then in turn delights in humans. Now, we shouldn't pass by this without noticing some of the many, many pages of thought that have been expressed in relation to this word *amon*. Well, essentially there have been three proposals made.

One is that *amon* is a craftsman based on an Akkadian loan word. This is not as far-fetched as it sounds because in wisdom writings we do actually have intellectual people. And they will use words from other languages, related languages, in their own language to express ideas.

However, the Akkadian word that has a relationship to *amon* through the language of Aramaic refers more to a scribe, to a scholar, to an officer. And doesn't really fit the description that we have here in Proverbs. *Amon* is related to the word *amen*.

Whenever we conclude a prayer, we say *amen*. May it be true. May it be faithful. May this be trusted. And so sometimes this is translated as if it were wisdom was there constantly, wisdom was there faithfully. But I think that really *amon* is used as in the sense of raising a child.

That wisdom is God's child. And that God has raised his child and then through his child has brought together all of the order of creation the way that he wants it to be. And this certainly is one of the uses for the word that we have in the relationship between Mordecai and Esther.

So it is through wisdom that we may experience this blessing. We're back to our word here and it occurs twice in these concluding verses of this chapter. Blessed are those who observe her ways.

They are the ones whom God approves. They are the ones who are the kind of person, the character that God delights in. Blessed are those who wait at the door of wisdom.

Wisdom is the choice of life or death, a motif that shows up repeatedly. Wisdom is calling us, all of us, to be among the blessed.

This is Dr. August Konkel in his teaching on the book of Proverbs. This is session number nine, *Wisdom for the World*, Proverbs 8.