

97-09-27a

For our scripture reading this morning, if you will turn with me to the book of Proverbs, chapter 31. This is a familiar passage. It comes up a lot in the context of appreciation of our wives.

And since in Genesis this morning we are looking at the last and perhaps greatest of God's creative acts, it's not often pointed out that the creation of the woman is the final act of creation. I think God considers his work to be finished at the point that he sees the woman finished and in the company of the man in the garden. And in that light, we know that there are abundant scriptures that talk about the role of women in God's plan and in the life of mankind.

Of course, none of us would be here without them. But this is a great passage that bears reflection and review from time to time. So, our scripture reading this morning is Proverbs, chapter 31.

The words of King Lemuel, the utterance which his mother taught him, What, my son? And what, son of my womb? And what, son of my vows? Do not give your strength to women, nor your ways to that which destroys kings. It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes intoxicating drink, lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the justice of all the afflicted. Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to those who are bitter of heart.

Let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more. Open your mouth for the speechless, in the cause of all who are appointed to die. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.

Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies. The heart of her husband safely trusts her, so he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life.

She seeks wool and flax, and willingly works with her hands. She is like the merchant ships. She brings her food from afar.

She also rises while it is yet night, and provides food for her household, and a portion for her maidservants. She considers a field and buys it. From her profits she plants a vineyard.

She girds herself with strength and strengthens her arms. She perceives that her merchandise is good, and her lamp does not go out by night. She stretches out her hands to the distaff, and her hand holds the spindle.

She extends her hand to the poor. Yes, she reaches out her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of snow for her household, for all her household is clothed with scarlet.

She makes a tapestry for herself. Her clothing is fine linen and purple. Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.

She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies sashes for the merchants. Strength and honor are her clothing. She shall rejoice in time to come.

She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness. She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed, her husband also, and he praises her.

Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all. Charm is deceitful, and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates.

We could easily spend our morning this morning developing some of the wonderful truths that are contained in this parable, but I think it's important, or this proverb rather, but I think it's important to keep the entire thing together. We often hear this section of scripture quoted beginning at verse 10, but a lot of the context that helps us to appreciate what the king here called Lemuel has to say occurs in the first nine verses. First of all, he didn't come to these observations on his own.

He was taught these things by his mother. So his mother understood the role of the virtuous woman, and also the proper place of women and treatment of women by men, especially by a king who is a leader of men, has authority over men, and should be an example to men. And so she warns him of the abuse of women, which is compared with the abuse of alcohol.

Alcohol has a legitimate use. Interesting section there in verses 6 and 7. Who is it that ministers to the poor and needy in the household? Well, the lady of the house, in verse 20, extends her hand to the poor. She reaches out her hands to the needy.

She has the opportunity, in many cases, to minister in that specific way to those who are in need. How does the king minister to the poor and to the needy? He ensures that they receive justice, that they're treated fairly, that policies and decisions and judgments that are made where they are concerned are fair and just. One of the biggest problems with intoxicating drink that's pointed out in verses 4 and 5, why is intoxicating drink not for kings, not for those who exercise authority and have influence over the lives of others? Because it causes them to wrong those who are subject to their authority.

In many cases, this is one of the most damaging side effects of alcoholism, is the damage that it does to those in the periphery and the injustice that is done. And that's what the Bible points out here. They drink and forget the law and pervert the justice of all the afflicted.

That's the rationale that the Bible gives for the king not to get near intoxicating drink.

There is a rightful use, a well-known passage in Timothy, where Paul encourages him to use medicinal wine. Strong drink is for those who are perishing, those who are in extremis, to help them through the closing phase of their life.

We think of cancer patients and those who are undergoing painful process of death. We prescribe medication to ameliorate those awful effects, and that's what's in view here. But the king is to, in verse 8, open his mouth for the speechless, and in the cause of all who are appointed to die, or the sons of passing away, as it were.

Those who have no hope, have no recourse, except to the authority of the king, or to one who is in authority. And he is exhorted to open his mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and the needy. Now, where did this take place? Where was the place of judgment, the place of justice? Today, we have a county courthouse, where a lot of these things take place.

Cities, counties, even states have courthouses. We have the federal court, which is the place of justice. Where did this take place in the ancient world? We often had city-states, and the court was held at the gate of the city.

This is where people from the surrounding region would come. They would come to what we would call the county seat, and plead their case, bring their accusations, plead for justice, and for the righting of wrongs. And there would be someone in authority there.

In part of the history of Israel, the judges sat in the gates of the city. Later on, the kings would hold court there, and the elders of Israel. So, this is one of the responsibilities of the man to do this, and it's mentioned in connection with the woman.

I find it interesting that in the midst of her virtues and her activities that are listed in the latter part of this chapter, verse 22, she's clothing her house and making tapestry and clothing and so forth. Then in verse 23, her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land. She is doing these things, and that enables him to perform his function, which is not just to make a name for himself, but to plead the cause of the poor and needy.

So, both of them have the opportunity to be a blessing and a benefit to those who are in unfortunate circumstances. He looks out for them in terms of justice and law. She looks out for them in terms of physical needs.

She extends her hand, in verse 20, to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy. So, she ministers to their material needs. The man ministers to their needs in the area of legal things, relationships with others, those who have wronged them or shortchanged them or abused them in some way.

But it's a reminder to us that we don't live in a vacuum, and in any age, the people of God should be a blessing. Association with believers ought to be a positive, not a

negative. It ought to be a benefit and not a curse.

And whether we are the husband or the wife, a man or a woman, we have opportunities in the areas of our responsibility. The man has been given responsibility for justice. The woman has been given responsibility for the meeting of material needs.

But this is one of the great passages, and it doesn't mean that every woman should be doing all of these things. Not every woman considers a field and buys it. In fact, this is a relatively rare thing in the ancient Near East.

This was normally a function handled by the man. But this gives us an idea of all of the facets of life, whether it be supplying material needs or tending to the needs of the household, tending to the needs of those that are outside, being a complement to the man, to the husband. This was also true of daughters who lived in the household of their father.

And so it's not limited to those who are married. She is trustworthy. She does him good and not evil all the days of his life, speaking of her husband, and so on.

Well, this is a passage worthy of reflection because it gives us a picture of the complementary opportunities and complementary functions that take place in the married relationship, which is the general pattern of life for the human race, which we find originating in our passage, Genesis chapter 2. Now last week we studied in some detail the Sabbath day, the origin of our Sunday worship, the rest that God engages in on the seventh day. And we know that on the sixth day God created man in his own image, as 127 tells us, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. Now this is an important detail because on the sixth day of creation, male and female were created.

Now this was a busy day because as we're going to see in Genesis chapter 2, Adam is going to name all the animals on this day, and he is going to be put to sleep and have his rib removed so that God can create the woman on this day. So this is a busy day. And people have said, well, this is an argument for days not being literal, 24-hour days.

How could Adam have possibly named all of the various specimens of genus and species and so forth? And the biblical account doesn't force us to believe that Adam named every insect, every variety of bird and so forth. It is likely that he named the major categories, the more common animals. But this need not have been a process that was completed.

He didn't write a biology book on the sixth day. But we want to remember Genesis 127 because it clearly says that male and female were created on the sixth day. And it is on the seventh day that God reviews all of creation and ceases all of his creative acts.

And as we noted last week, this means that Adam and Eve observed the seventh day.

They noted that day. And while they did not see any of God's acts of creation, it's interesting to me that Adam didn't even get to watch the creation of Eve.

All of God's works were completed before man was on the scene. It would have been just as easy for God to create Adam first, put him in a little space suit or something, let him watch the creation of the earth, let him see the dust being formed into animals and the ground producing plants and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea come into existence. What a wonderful thing to watch.

The angels got to see that. The stars of heaven sang together in praise of the glory of God when these things happened. Why do you suppose God waited until the very last thing to create the man and the woman and didn't give them the privilege of seeing his acts of creation? Even when he creates Eve, the final, greatest, culminating act of God's work in creation week, where is Adam? He's asleep.

God put him to sleep so he doesn't see it. He wakes up and finds this wonderful, finished creature before him. Well, this is the first opportunity for faith.

Could there be an alternate explanation for the existence of things? Adam wasn't there when they were created. Much as we do, he looks around the world and sees these things and the explanation is given that this is the act and the work of the Lord God and he believes that. He hasn't seen it.

And these things that pre-exist Adam and Eve are important because this is going to be the basis of the fall. This is going to be the place where Satan, in the guise of the serpent, is going to insert the crowbar and begin to pry apart God and man. The relationship between Adam and Eve and the Lord God who walks in the garden in the breeze of the day, we get the idea that he was invisible but his presence was manifest by a stirring of the air, as we will see later on.

But this is a common sight and they come and they converse. Hearing the voice of the Lord God is not an unusual occurrence in the garden. We also know that reproduction was an anticipated event, an anticipated part of life for Adam and Eve before the fall.

Because God tells them in Genesis 1.28, God blesses them and God says, Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. We sometimes think that childbearing and so forth is a part of the curse. Not at all.

Childbearing and the multiplication of the human race is something that was a part of perfection, was a part of God's perfect plan for man, to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it and to have dominion. Also the normal function of eating and digestion and replenishment of the resources of the body was a part of the perfect state, as we see in Genesis 1.29. God said, See, I have given you every herb that yields seed, which is on the face of the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed. To you it shall be for

food.

Some of this is going to be food for the animals. Some of it is going to be food for man. Man is free to eat the grain of the field but his main staple is the fruit that's in the garden.

He probably only ate cereal grains as a variety type of thing. He probably had salad sometimes along with the fruit. Every beast of the earth and every bird of the air and to everything that creeps on the earth in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food.

All of the animal life was vegetarian. Now this is a point that is wrestled with in the modern day because you look around and if you watch the wonderful nature programs that you find on PBS on Sunday afternoons when everyone's taking a nap, you find these people who've gone out with cameras and have studied the wonder of God's creation and show the interaction between animals. You see the way that they have quote unquote adapted to their environment and how the carnivorous animals have just the right kind of teeth.

They don't have the flat molars for chewing like cattle and horses have. They've got these sharp teeth. The sharks and the carnivorous fish have these rows and rows of razor sharp pointed teeth that are made for the tearing of flesh.

The entire food chain seems to be built on one animal devouring another in many cases. So did they all have these sharp pointed teeth in the garden and not make use of them? How did that work? The Bible doesn't tell us specifically, but it would appear that these things took place after the fall, that creation is altered by the curse. And that originally you didn't have your saber toothed tigers.

All of the animals were given vegetation for food and the originals of these animals did not have the flesh tearing teeth. That this is an alteration that was introduced by the curse. It's extremely difficult to eat vegetation when your teeth are all pointed and sharp and designed for the tearing of flesh.

Even the chemicals that are involved in digestion are different in animals such as cattle, which chew the cud and ruminate and are built specifically for the transforming of green plants into useful fuel in their bodies with those that are carnivorous. They have a different type of digestion. Well obviously, it would appear at least, that this is an alteration that takes place at the fall.

So everything is vegetarian, the plants. You may have run across this where people sing to their plants and play music for them and get the idea that, I read once that they could hook up a lie detector type of thing to a plant and if they tore up the plant next to that plant, this plant would react in panic and give off all kinds of readings and that they

somehow had life. Well, this is nonsense.

They have been literally fodder ever since God created them. They're designed to be eaten. There's no harm in cutting plants.

They can't hear music. They don't respond to voices. They exist to be fuel.

They exist to provide us with breathable air and to filter the atmosphere and to, in the perfect state, they were there to be eaten. So, you know, not that that's been a big point of debate, but I thought I'd set your mind at rest. There's no harm in cutting your grass or trimming your trees or this sort of thing.

I saw a special this past week where, in Hawaii, a lot of the natural vegetation and the ecology there that started out, you know, they started out being volcanic. Various seeds and animals and so forth arrived there in ancient times and created this very paradise-like place. And this special was bemoaning what man had done to this paradise.

The Polynesians came and introduced some animals and some plants that began to damage the environment and make extinct some of the unique species that grew there. And then with the later incursion of man with Drake and all these other explorers that came there, well, then wild hogs, which are a big problem there, and plants that were just garden bushes in Europe, when they introduced them in Hawaii, it was such a perfect climate and soil for them that they have taken over whole areas of what would be just a shrub in your garden in England, turned into this raving blanket of vegetation that's wiped out and killed a lot of the other forms of plants and rendered extinct a lot of forms of plants that lived in Hawaii. And these people are just crying the blues about what a terrible thing.

Hey, they're plants. They're food. They're fodder.

If they go extinct, there's plenty more plants. If we don't happen to see a certain shape of a leaf and a certain color of a flower, big deal. It's not important.

We're here to fill the earth and subdue it, and that includes Hawaii. And if we filled it and subdued it, well, great. I just fail to see the pathos in a couple of plants.

They've got guys, you've seen this thing where they strap them to a boom and run them out on a cliff 600 feet in the air to get a little brush and pollinate these rare flowers so that they'll let them die. There are thousands of flowering plants, and this one particular kind of flower, these guys knock themselves out each year. Well, we don't know what the original pollinating agent was for these.

Well, it's probably extinct. So if it's extinct, let the, well, anyway. Plants are not important.

They're grist. They're food. They're decorative.

You know, all of the agony over the rainforest and so forth. We do need to be balanced in our view of the environment. It is not good to rape, pillage, and plunder the land.

It's not good to, I mean, look at the Dust Bowl, if you need an example of husbanding the natural resources. And the wholesale ransacking of any natural resource, including the rainforest, is a violation of God's injunction to man to have dominion over the earth, to till the soil, to husband and cultivate rather than hack down and destroy. But there's balance in all these things, and to agonize over some of these things is going too far.

So now we're in Chapter 2. We've seen the Sabbath day in the first three verses. God pronounced holy that one day. He doesn't say from now on this will be a perpetual reminder.

Every Saturday is a holy day. He didn't say that. Nobody observed the Sabbath from the garden until Mount Sinai.

The first Saturday after Moses brought down the law from the mountain was the first time that man observed the Sabbath. And it was a ritual for Israel, like a lot of other rituals. And when the rituals for Israel came to a close shortly after the departure of the Lord Jesus Christ from this earth, Sabbath observance went out with animal sacrifice.

And if you're going to observe every seventh day, just be sure you're doing it as unto the Lord and that you understand what you're doing and that you are doing it in a way that glorifies God and not in a self-righteous way or in a way that makes you think you're generating some form of righteousness because it's not biblical. Sunday worship is no more biblical than Saturday worship. We choose to worship on Sunday because our culture conveniently gives us that day off.

And if we want to refrain from labor, we should do so with the express purpose of meditating on the things of God. But as we saw last week from Hebrews, every day for us should be a Sabbath day. And what does that mean? Does it mean that we should not work? Not at all.

It means that whatever we do, we should do in the energy that comes from God. If we're working in our own steam, if we're working toward our own goals and our own purposes, we're breaking the Sabbath. And the penalty for breaking the Sabbath in Israel was death.

The first man that went out and picked up sticks on the Sabbath was stoned by the entire company of Israel. And God expressly pronounced the death penalty on that man. He went out and gathered an armload of sticks, and it cost him his life.

We should have the same sober view of our lives. In this age, every day should be a day

of rest from our own labors, a day of confidence and reliance on the work of God. And every day that we get busy and start trying to hustle around and think that we're providing for ourselves, and we're making our own way, and we're accomplishing our own goals, we're breaking the Sabbath.

And we suffer the same consequence, death. What kind of death? Not physical death, obviously. We suffer the death of fruitlessness, of being a branch that bears no leaves and no fruit, a branch that has been grafted into the vine to soak up resources and without trying, without straining, to produce fruit.

A branch of an apple tree doesn't sit there and sweat and groan and clench its teeth trying to push out apples. It simply abides in the trunk. The trunk supplies the sap.

The trunk supplies the nourishment, the water and all other resources necessary. The design of the branch is such that at a certain season of the year, it produces blossoms. Those blossoms swell and become fruit.

It's natural. It's built in. All the branch has to do is maintain its connection to the tree.

And that's what we should do. That's our rest. It doesn't mean that we don't labor, that we don't till the soil by the sweat of our brow, but what it means is that as we do those things, we do them as unto the Lord and we rest in God.

We recognize that even as we perform our employment, our sustenance doesn't come from our efforts. It comes from God. And we're not dependent on our own labors.

We're not dependent on our boss or our company or our situation in life. We're not dependent on the goodwill of those around us. We don't have to compromise in order to please our superiors.

We don't have to compromise in order to please our customers or our clients or whatever relationship we have with other people. Our sustenance does not depend on those things. And if we think that it does, or if in practice we act as though it does, we're not resting.

We're breaking the Sabbath. And that's going to result in death, fruitlessness. We're not reflecting the glory of God.

We're not accomplishing His purpose. We're not reflecting His glory. We're not resting in His perfected work.

So now in Genesis chapter 2 verse 4, this is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, and the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens. Then we have an interesting detail in verse 5, before any plant of the field was in the earth, and before any herb of the field had grown. Now this word field in Hebrew, a

better translation would be plain.

This gives us the idea of flat ground. You will recall that during the creation week, on the third day, God said, Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear. And it was so.

God called the dry land earth, and the gathering together of the waters He called seas. This is so graphic, I wish we could all take a quick semester of Hebrew, and then come back and look at these sentences, because when you read this in Hebrew, it's a very pictorial language. And the idea that is conveyed here is that when God caused the dry land to appear, there's one continent.

There's one patch of ground. God didn't create seven continents. He created one.

And the reason it says that the water is gathered together in one place, is that there's one continuous sea that surrounds the earth. And if you go to the west, or to the south, or to the east, or to the north, each of these is a sea, as it were. And that's why the seas are in the plural, because you have seas on every side.

But all the water is in one place, and by definition, the dry land is also in one place. If you want to see something very interesting, and you have a computer and the wherewithal to do so, or I can show you this sometime online, I got one of these little free Grolier multimedia encyclopedias on CD. And one of the neat things about an encyclopedia on CD is that not only do you get text and still pictures, but they also put some little quiz man things in there, some video clips of famous events.

You can watch the Hindenburg crash over and over and over. You can see speeches by the presidents and so forth. They also have a lot of diagrams.

You can see the heart pumping. You can see the way that an eye focuses and how the lens works and so on. And one of the things they have in the multimedia encyclopedia from Grolier is a discussion of continental drift.

And in that discussion, they talk about the tectonic plates that make up the surface of the Earth. Between these plates, the scene between these various plates is called a fault. The most famous one in the United States is the San Andreas fault out in California.

And any time there's... As these tectonic plates continue to slowly drift, their sides are sort of stuck together and pressure builds up as these plates are continuing to try to move. It's just like when a door is stuck. If you're like me in your house, everything's not plumb and square and one top or bottom of a door will stick on the floor or on the door jamb or whatever.

And when you grab ahold of the door and you first start pulling, it doesn't yield and the pressure increases. And what happens? When you finally exert enough force, it jars loose

and you have a jerking motion that takes place. Well, that's where earthquakes come from.

As the pressure builds up, eventually the friction between the plates is not enough to hold back the shift and these things move. And there's a great amount of vibration and this produces an earthquake with an epicenter and it wreaks all kinds of havoc on the surface. But that's because of these tectonic plates.

Well, they've got a great video, a little graphic in the Multimedia Encyclopedia under the article, Continental Drift. And they say if you work backwards from the way these plates are moving and if you look at the shape of the continents as they now exist and work this backward over thousands and quote unquote millions of years, you find that all of the continents drift back together into one landmass and they run this. They show a map of the world and they run this all backwards and show how these things all fit together.

And they talk about how the soil types are similar where South America and Africa used to meet and where the United States and Europe used to meet and how Australia and all these other, even the landmass under Antarctica, all originally were part of this one great landmass. This is also preserved in the myths and legends of ancient cultures. The whole idea of Atlantis stems from this.

This was in the memory of mankind. Later on in Genesis, we're going to see the individual who was alive at the time that the Earth was divided when one of these great shifts took place and a huge sea separated two landmasses. This is an action that began during the flood and continued for many hundreds of years afterward.

And all of that is recorded in Genesis. So the point of this being that once this initial landmass was created by God, he then populated it with plants and animals. It has an elevation, obviously, so that it can stand out of the water.

And on that elevation, there apparently was a nearly flat land and much of it was plain, P-L-A-I-N. So in Genesis 2, when it says in verse 5, before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field, this word field in both cases is plain. And it has the idea of the type of plant life that in more modern days grows in the plain.

We're not talking about forests. We're not talking about trees. We're talking about the vegetation that is useful for food.

We don't typically eat oak leaves and cactus leaves and this sort of thing, pine needles, although I've heard people, you know, Yule Gibbons used to try to eat various parts of the pine tree. But normally, there are certain plants that we consider foodstuffs, your cereal grains and various shrubs, lettuce, cabbage, that kind of thing. But it says that there was a time after God had made the earth and the heavens when these plants were not growing in the way that we are accustomed to see them grow today.

Let's talk about corn for a moment. I had an interesting experience when we first moved to Oklahoma from California when I was a boy. And we had a great patch of land there.

My dad had purchased 40 acres. And right behind the house was a very large section that was supposed to be a garden. So after we'd been there a little while, Dad went out and plowed that and we put in a garden.

We thought, boy, we're going to have all kinds of plants. We got tomatoes and carrots and snap beans and all kinds of things. And along one edge, we thought, well, we'll put in some corn.

And so my folks planted corn in two long rows that extended along one side of the garden. All the rest of the garden was other tomato plants and so forth. Well, the corn just didn't do well at all.

A lot of the ears, the kernels were missing and it was just anemic and small and didn't seem to do well. And we thought, what on earth is the matter? What did we do wrong with the corn? Well, corn, those tassels of silk that it puts out, corn has to cross-pollinate with other corn stalks. And each of those kernels has gotten a piece of pollen or whatever you want to call it from some other corn plant.

You can tell I'm not real knowledgeable on farming. I don't know all the technical terms, but that's the reason they plant corn in fields. And there's lots of rows side by side so that all of this material can be exchanged and that gives you good, healthy corn.

You never plant one long row of corn. It'll never come in right. Well, we didn't know that.

But this is sort of what it's referring to here, that there wasn't a way to really optimize these plants of the field and to plant them in rows that would really optimize them for food. Because why? There wasn't the right amount of water for them. It doesn't mean they didn't grow.

It just means they weren't optimal. You couldn't go out and harvest a field of corn. You had to run around and find the stray corn plant or the stray oat blossom.

They're just growing wild and indiscriminately mixed. And their watering is not optimal. Rice needs a completely different level of water than oats and so forth.

Your more moist types of grasses need a different level of water than your dry grasses. So there's kind of a general watering that God provided for. The Lord God had not caused it to rain on the earth.

And there was no man to till the ground. And the idea here doesn't mean that the ground had to be plowed up before they would grow. It means he's not there to husband these, to organize them into crops.

It takes organization. And it takes husbandry to optimize these food-type plants that grow in the plain. And the idea of the plain is this is a field.

This is an open patch of ground where you can plant many rows of corn and so forth. But a mist or a spring went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground. Now, it doesn't say springs, does it? It says a spring.

And we're going to find out more about that in the upcoming description of the land in which God is going to place man. But just as the spring came up and watered and refreshed the ground, this is a good place for us to stop and refresh ourselves in the midst of our study this morning. And so we'll stop.

And when we come back, we will see some details of the creation of man. And then we're going to see the environment that God specially prepares on this continent for him to dwell. But let's pause and take a break.