

“Understand We Need to Speak Up”

Proverbs 31:1-9

In 1984, then President Ronald Reagan initiated that the 3rd Sunday of every January be declared the Sanctity of Life Sunday. It's almost hard to believe its only been around for 37 years and at the same time somewhat sad to think we have to actually set apart a day for this because we live in a world where babies are aborted, euthanasia is encouraged if you can't have the quality of life you want and people are still judged by their race. It's a good reminder that followers of Jesus need to be proactive in speaking against injustice and speaking up for the oppressed and voiceless in society.

On this Sanctity of Life Sunday it would be a good remind us of our need to understand the times in which we live, the social issues that dominate our culture that as followers of Jesus we should speak into. To identify the marginalized, the oppressed and the voiceless whose concerns and needs must be heard. In many places in the Old Testament we see God's concern for the widows and orphans, the poor and the oppressed. God never distinguishes whether they are believers or not. He just commands us to do it because that reflects His character and love.

We want to go to Prov. 31:1-9 this morning to help us learn how we can speak up for those who can't or whose voice is not heard for whatever reason. Prov. 31:8 is often applied to speaking up for the rights of babies who are needlessly aborted.

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute.

V.8 is actually in the context of defending injustice and speaking up for the oppressed from vv.1-9, so let's explore this passage.

The sayings of King Lemuel—an oracle his mother taught him:

‘Sayings’ are a synonym for proverbs. The Book of Proverbs is a collection of Spirit guided wisdom statements that help one live a God-centered life. Solomon authored most of them but wisdom sayings and proverbs were not limited to Israel. We read of Solomon in 1 Kings 4:29,

²⁹ *God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore.* ³⁰ *Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt.* ³¹ *He was wiser than any other man, including Ethan the Ezrahite—wiser than Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol. And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations.* ³² *He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five.* ³³ *He described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish.* ³⁴ *Men of all nations came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.*

And we have an example of this in 1 Kings 10 when the Queen of Sheba arrives with her entourage:

When the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relation to the name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions. ² *Arriving at Jerusalem with a very great caravan—with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones—she came to Solomon and talked with him about all that she had on her mind.* ³ *Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her.*

I point this out because toward the end of Proverbs we have the sayings of Agur in 30:1 and here in 31:1 of King Lemuel – actually King Lemuel’s mother. So wisdom literature and proverbs were a part of this historical time and God used this as a way of communicating truth.

Who was King Lemuel? We don’t know other than he wasn’t a Jewish king. We know all the Jewish kings from the Bible so he must have been a Gentile king, probably living around the time of Solomon, who converted to the faith of Israel. And most likely his mother had and was teaching her son to continue to follow God, especially as a king. Because a king has Opportunities to do good that others don’t. In particular, to speak up for injustice and for the poor and oppressed in society whose voices are drowned out because they don’t have political clout or financial resources that sadly seem to be necessary in order to be heard. So she reminds her son, whose not just a king, but God’s king for his time at which he lived.

And while we may not be kings or politicians or people of status or wealth, every believer is uniquely gifted by God and positioned culturally and geographically to make a difference where they live and in their own spheres of influence. Using these 9 verses, let’s ask ourselves 3 questions from the text that will help us speak up for those who can’t or feel powerless.

If you and I are going to be speaking up for injustice and for people’s rights that everyone should have (fairness) and valued) then we have to listen to the right voices.

Whose Words do We Need to Heed? **(31:1-3, 5)**

Lemuel’s mother reminds him of her words which are guided by God’s Word. We read,

The sayings of King Lemuel—an oracle his mother taught him: ² “O my son, O son of my womb, O son of my vows

If we’re going to be prepared to speak up for those whose basic rights need defending we have to listen to

Godly instruction (v.1)

‘Oracle’ is often linked to revelation from God. However, she received and learned these truths, they are from God. Proverbs are not just wise sayings about life but they are revelation from God. The Spirit oversaw and led the writing and compiling of Proverbs. We see this purpose back in the opening Chapter:

The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

- ² *for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight;*
- ³ *for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair;*
- ⁴ *for giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young—*
- ⁵ *let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance—*
- ⁶ *for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise.*
- ⁷ *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.*

The knowledge and disciplines these proverbs encourage are rooted in fearing God. Fearing God is equal to obeying God. You obey God because you are in awe of Him and are aware of the consequences of not obeying Him but also the blessings of obedience. So she reminds Lemuel of

essentially God's Words. Without which he will not succeed in speaking up for injustice, equality and fairness. The king is responsible for all his subjects. So who is better positioned and equipped to make just decisions and treat all people fairly?

The more time we spend in God's Word, the more God's Word shapes our thinking and forms our speaking. God's Word speaks to everyone's uniqueness - made in God's image – but also everyone's need – to have our sins forgiven. The reason we will speak up for those who can't is because we see them as God sees them, our equal. We won't think of helping people if we don't let God's Word shape our thinking and speaking and actions. No change ever comes about in our life without God speaking to us in His Word about our need to change.

So of course we need God's Word but we don't and can't live in a vacuum so we need

Godley mentors (v.2)

Lemuel's mother pleads with her son in v.2 by ending with 'son of my vows'. Most commentators believe she, like Hannah in 1 Sam. 1-2, made a vow to God that she would give him in service to the Lord, or dedicate to instructing him in the Lord. She uses her godly influence to remind Lemuel of his need to act like a child of God, all the more so as he has the power to speak and care for the oppressed and unjustly treated people under his sphere of influence.

Likewise, if we're to become more sensitive to the needs of our world around us we need to listen to God's Word and be influenced and mentored by people who believe only God's Word brings about real change. Listen to these words from Paul to Timothy about these things:

² Tim. 3:14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 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. ¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

And who did he first hear the truths of God's Word from? His mother and grandmother (1:3-5). Then he met the apostle Paul in Acts 16 who took him with him in ministry and trained him. And then Paul commanded Timothy to do the same:

² And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

This can happen formally and informally. Essential, develop relationships with other Jesus followers with whom you can mutually strengthen each other by pointing each other to what God says in His Word. About spiritual growth, about raising a family, about marriage, about sharing our faith and about helping those in need. So if we're going to speak up for those who can't we need to ask ourselves am I listening to God's word and not society's or even my own excuses?

As Lemuel's mother continues to remind her son of how he needs to live in order to defend the rights of the marginalized, she warns him about the dangers of excessiveness that comes with wealth and power. She writes in vv.3-7

³ *do not spend your strength on women, your vigor on those who ruin kings.*

⁴ *"It is not for kings, O Lemuel— not for kings to drink wine, not for rulers to crave beer,*

⁵ *lest they drink and forget what the law decrees, and deprive all the oppressed of their rights.*

- ⁶ Give beer to those who are perishing, wine to those who are in anguish;
⁷ let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more.

If we're to speak up for those whose rights are not being heard and protected, we must also ask ourselves

What Negative Influences Do We Need to Avoid? **(31:3-7)**

Sadly, a king in those days usually had a harem and the power to have access to satisfy his

Sensual lysts (v.3)

She warned that indulging your unhealthy sexual desires would lead to ruin. And one can't help but wonder if there's an autobiographical hint in the text of Solomon's demise. All his political marriages (700 wives of royal birth) plus 300 in his harem. This opened him up to their religions and worship and drew him away from God. But it only takes one illicit relationship, or a few dangerous clicks on your computer to draw you away from God. Once you're drawn away from God through sin, you can't and won't see clearly the needs of those around you. You get too wrapped up in your own sin. Or, we fail to meet the needs of others because we've

Desensitized ourselves through entertainment (vv.4-7)

His mother spells out the consequences of excessive use of alcohol. As a king there's always a banquet to attend, always a foreign dignitary to entertain and impress. Alcohol flowed. Just because its culturally acceptable doesn't mean its beneficial. 'Too much wine numbs the mind'. You can't think clearly. How are you going to make wise decisions under the influence of alcohol? You don't. People make terrible decisions under the influence of alcohol. And alcohol was the entertainment temptation that he had but there are all kinds we turn to.

We all turn to entertainment to distract us from the worries and problems we face. And we all need a few but they can desensitize as well. If we constantly watch degrading and sarcastic comedy shows, will it not rub off on us? If we constantly watch or read about murders and horror or totally unreal reality shows where people are always pitted against another, will that not desensitize us from seeing people how God sees them? Think about your entertainment choices? Do they build people up or do they tear people down?

Perhaps our lack of caring for people's needs around us come from the negative influences that we have allowed into our lives. When we hear or see of a legitimate need of someone within our sphere of influence that we have the resources and time to defend, assist or speak for, do we quickly dismiss it? Why? Because we're desensitized due to the addictive and negative entertainment choices we've allowed to damage our minds and God's Word rarely is followed.

So Lemuel's mother warns him that negative influences and people will prevent you from doing what you have been given the responsibility to do; look after the needs of those around you where God has placed you in a position to help. Our third question then is:

Whose Rights are We in a Position to Represent? **(vv.8-9)**

She mentions those who can't speak for themselves, the destitute (people who were needy because of circumstances), those judged unfairly and the poor and needy. In general we are to watch for and seek to minister to the

Moral and legal rights of those God has placed us in a position to help.

Sanctity of human life is about honouring all life, the yet to be born, those born with physical and mental limitations, people of all colour, children, men and women exploited for slavery or sex, seniors who can't make decisions for themselves and the list goes on. Rather than focus on one particular group like the unborn or colour of skin, can I challenge you to take some time this week and write down the names of individuals you know that are being treated unfairly? Neighbours, family, friends, co-workers, schoolmates? And ask God what am I in a position to do for that person? Can I help with resources? Do they need a friend to stand with them even if it means being mistreated or criticized? Do I need to be their voice to those who wronged them so their injustice can be heard? Do I need to write a letter or sign a petition?

And what about on a broader scale? How are we doing as individuals and families to support or let our voice be heard for the unborn, for indigenous peoples, for minorities or foreigners, for the poor or needy, the orphans, the widows? If James said in James 1:27 that

²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Then is what we're demonstrating as Christianity helping those in distress in our communities, country and world?

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us
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