

**The Strength of Wisdom
Proverbs 31:10 - 31**

Brothers and sisters, as I mentioned last Sunday – there was a Word of instruction a few weeks ago encouraging us to look to the Lord for His strength because we would be in need of it, and so in obedience to that Word by faith, we continue to look at what the scriptures reveal to us about God’s divine strength and how the Holy Spirit can strengthen us as He strengthened our Lord Jesus Christ.

And perhaps one of the reasons the Holy Spirit is encouraging us to look for divine strength is because there is a God-sized task before us that we are being called to take on, and it is such an immense task or responsibility that it is overwhelming.

Certainly as we celebrate Mother’s Day this morning we acknowledge that the responsibilities of motherhood in bearing children and raising them are a daunting task in the best of situations, and the additional expectations of pursuing a career, or the necessity of working, of staying fit and healthy

and keeping it all together are enough to push anyone to the limits of their strength and sanity and leave them feeling like they need to be some sort of Superwoman to pull this off.

Furthermore – this is no longer simply just about you as an individual woman, it’s become part of a larger women’s movement about equal rights and opportunities, breaking the glass ceiling, removing barriers – and what you do is a demonstration what all women are truly capable of.

And thus movies that feature female super-heroes like Captain Marvel and Wonder Woman are lauded for portraying strong, empowered women who are very capable, heroic and can inspire all of us to be strong, to go beyond our limits and discover what we, especially women - are truly capable of.

Now, a key part to any super-hero movie is how they receive and develop their super powers; Captain Marvel gets hers by accident when she destroys an experimental light-speed rocketship engine and Wonder Women is born with hers

because she is an Amazon warrior princess who was fathered by the ancient Greek god Zeus.

However both women must face extreme challenges and adversity before they come into their full power. It is only as they are pushed to their limits and face the real possibility of being destroyed that they are forced to reach inside and find that internal strength to persevere, and then their latent power is fully released and they become stronger and more capable than they were before and they defeat their enemies.

Now I understand that it's good for us to try new things and step out of the box so to speak and we may discover that we can learn how to do things we didn't know we could do – like learning how to dance, or cook, or go rock-climbing or getting your pilots license.

But I haven't seen any situations where people face adversity and the real possibility of having everything fall apart and somehow it is these circumstances that release their inner potential and they become stronger.

In my pastoral experience these sorts of life challenges and situations actually have a negative effect on people and they deplete our physical, emotional and mental resources.

This is why on Mother's Day we recognize what our mothers did for us and acknowledge all the energy and effort that it required.

So we give them cards that say *"thank-you for putting up with me and all the trouble I caused"* we don't give them cards that say *"You're welcome – I'm glad I was able to push you to your limits and help you find your inner strength."*

Now all this is to say that while it's wonderful to have superheroes who inspire us – the reality of trying to live like one – as a supermom, or a super-dad, or just being that person who is always handle whatever life throws at them and take it all in stride – trying to live like a superhero eventually leaves us feeling overwhelmed and inadequate for the task at hand.

When we reach our limits – there’s no superhero movie moment where we somehow reach inside and unlock our latent power and find ourselves stronger than we were before. Do you know what I’m talking about?

Maybe you are in such a situation right now in your life with a relationship, or with work, or with school or your family and you are wondering how you can be strong enough to continue!?

Well brothers and sisters the good news this morning is that God wants to give us His strength – so that we will not only be able to persevere and survive – but we will also thrive!

And we are given a detailed example of what this can look like in Proverbs 31 with the description of the wife of noble character.

Now you and I wouldn’t know it at first glance, but this piece of scripture is an alphabetic-acrostic poem... like M is for mother, O how I love thee and so on...

And there are some very heroic phrases and words which are used in this poem to amplify and embellish the description of this woman as extremely capable and very strong and portray her as an inspiration and role model for us to look up to and emulate.

Her title for example in vs. 10 “chayil ishash” gets translated by the NIV as a wife of “noble character” and this emphasizes her as a person of integrity and forthrightness and there is a strength in that, you may have also heard her referred to as the Virtuous wife or the Good wife in other bible versions.

But the Hebrew word “chayil” is a powerful word – if you look it up you’ll find it often refers to an army, a force, might, ability and efficiency or a man of valor, a champion... so a more accurate translation that gets the meaning across to us would be to call her the “super-wife.”

This is further emphasized by how the poem frequently references her arms and hands and all that she accomplishes with them. In fact the phrase used to describe her bringing

back food is usually used to describe a hunter bringing back his prey.

So if this poem was created in our day and age - it probably wouldn't just be a poem – it would be created like a movie trailer for Captain Marvel or Wonder Woman.

I can envision the opening scene... it's a shot of a home, late at night – everything else is dark but one window at the back of the home, and you hear a whirring sound, the picture cuts quickly to show part of a spinning wheel as it takes up wool to become yarn and we then see her hands deftly and skillfully working the wool - the camera pans back for the reveal shot and we see the super-wife spinning yarn with the determination and heroism just like we would see the Avengers suiting up to take on Thanos.

Then we get a series of slow motion actions shots of her directing the servants in her household, negotiating a business deal with some wealthy looking merchants, and the closing shot of her walking confidently and purposefully towards the

camera with her fine scarlet cloak billowing about behind her while the narrative gives the closing tag line *“Charm is deceptive... Beauty is fleeting... but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised!”*

Now if you have been paying attention so far you might say *“this is all well and good, and it's nice to have a strong female hero from the bible, but how is this any different from Captain Marvel or Wonder Woman inspiring us to be strong and do amazing things in our life?”* when we know that we can't possibly live like a superhero...

And I've certainly heard many people say – especially woman – that there is no way they can live up to the example of the super-wife from Proverbs 31.

But what we need to realize about the Super-Wife, which distinguishes her from superheroes like Wonder Woman and Captain Marvel, is where she gets her strength from and how she becomes strong and empowered – that's the key here.

If we look at vs. 10 and vs. 17 we see that the Super-wife “puts on” her strength. In vs. 10 the NIV gives the translation that “*she sets about her work vigorously*” however the Hebrew wording literally means “*she girds her loins with strength*” (more battle and hero phrases) and in vs. 17 it says “*she is clothed with strength.*”

So this means her strength comes from an external source, she puts it on - it’s not something she has to generate and draw from within herself – and if we are reaching the limits of our own strength and ability brothers and sisters – I think we can see how this is good news.

The super-wife isn’t so much a source of inspiration that makes us feel like we can be strong and do so much – rather she is an example that we are to follow because she demonstrates how to put on strength - so we too can put on strength and accomplish the tasks that are set before us in life - just as she does.

So brothers and sisters this is a testimony of the good news, that God wants to give us His strength! It’s an example of how an ordinary person can become very strong and capable and do extraordinary things – or do things extraordinarily... by putting on God’s divine strength of Wisdom.

So how do we do that?

Well first let me tell you how we don’t do it – because when we read the song of the super-wife we can mistakenly think that the example we’re supposed to follow is being busy and doing lots of impressive stuff and that’s how we become strong – but it’s not.

We need to understand that all the accomplishments which are listed here are proof... they are the evidence of that she is operating out of God’s strength that comes from Wisdom. Do you see the difference?

So the key to “putting on” the strength of Wisdom is mentioned in vs. 30 where it says *“a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.”*

Brothers and sisters - fearing the Lord is how we put on the strength of wisdom - and we know this because Proverbs 9:10 says *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom...”* and Proverbs 1:7 says *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”*

So because the Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom – which means it’s the starting point of our being strengthened by wisdom – we need to deal with this first.

Now I’ve explained before how biblical “Fear” for God is respect, reverence, awe, obedience, correct knowledge, love and yes also a bit of actual fear – not terror or dread but healthy caution... all wrapped up into a way of relating and understanding God.

And I think we can be assured that we are Fearing the Lord in a good way if we pursue our task to steward and develop God’s Creation and embrace that we are created in God’s Image - but we are not actually gods.

And we are Fearing the Lord in a good way in believing that He will hold us accountable for the life and the calling that He gave us and if we have responded to Him by faith.

And we are Fearing the Lord in a good way when we study the scriptures so that we can rightly know what God reveals about Himself to us – and speak of and relate to Him accordingly...

Now there is much more that we could say about Fearing the Lord, but for the purpose of starting to put on the strength that comes from Wisdom this is sufficient... because it defines Wisdom as the ability to pursue our creational calling with knowledge, skillfulness and truth.

So we are strengthened by Wisdom as we grow in the knowledge of understanding of how God as Creator designed

His Creation to function – and as we become more and more skilled at working with the design of Creation instead of against it.

This can be as simple as learning to work a piece of wood by going with the grain instead of against it or it can be as complex as knowing all the precise calculations and measurements it takes to launch a rocket and land it on the moon.

For the super-wife, her fear of the Lord has given her wisdom, which is the insight and knowledge which makes her strong and skilled and thus effective and accomplished as a craftswoman, a manager, a financial investor and a wholesale businesswoman.

And her Fear of the Lord also gives her the wisdom to see these are her particular callings that God has specifically designed her for, and it can do the same for us brothers and sisters.

Now – that calling and task as it comes to each of us in whatever specific way that God has designed each of us might cause us to feel inadequate... or we may have started out ok in pursuing it but now we are reaching the limits of our own strength.

Brothers and sisters, if this is your situation – consider the example of the super-wife and Fear the Lord in a good way – and put on the strength of wisdom.

And you can start this process by simply praying to the Lord and asking Him to give you wisdom – because James 1:5 tells us *“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.”*

And wisdom might just reveal to you that you’re at the end of your own strength because you’ve been working harder... but not necessarily smarter. So isn’t it great that God gives wisdom without finding fault!

Keep asking for wisdom about whatever has you reaching the limits of your strength – that relationship, that job, that school assignment, a phase of life that you need to go through, a challenge with your health – whatever it is, God will give you wisdom for it!

It may come as you gain more life experience... it may come from being mentored by a mature Christian, by reading what others have written about going through such circumstances...

You will find it by studying God's creation to see how He makes it work and then learning to work with God's creation... and you will become strong and skilled and powerful for your tasks in life.

But - all the while you must continue to Fear the Lord in a good way - so that you don't fall into the trap that the Apostle Paul describes in Romans 1: 22 where people *"claimed to be wise, but they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles."*

They no longer feared God and thus their wisdom became foolishness - do you understand what I mean?

And brothers and sisters it's my prayer for all of us that as we Fear the Lord in a good way, and are strengthened by wisdom and we are empowered to accomplish great things in God's world, that the Holy Spirit would also reveal to us the necessity of why scripture says in 2 Timothy 3:15, that we must become Wise for salvation - through faith in Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters the song of the super-wife concludes by stating *"Honor her for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate"* (Prov 31:31) May we Fear the Lord and put on the strength of wisdom in this life so that the same will be said of us...

But may we also receive the strength of wisdom for the next life in Jesus Christ - so that our Lord will say to us *"Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"* Amen