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Sermon on Christian Higher Education: Proverbs 8:11, n.d.

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SERMON ON Christian Higher Education

Text: Prov. 8:11

What is the likeliest way for parents to start their children on the road to a good and happy life? Not so long ago it was quite generally supposed that the best thing was to lay up for children as much money and earthly goods as possible, so that they would have a good start in a material way and would not have to build from the ground up. That idea is not so widely held nowadays. Experience shows that a large inheritance, in many cases, does more harm than good, that many are thereby led into evil ways, or that they are at least kept from ever amounting to anything themselves. Likewise, material wealth can easily be lost in various ways. More and more men have become convinced that the most valuable and dependable possessions that can be given to the young are possessions that become a part of them and can therefore not be taken away—such things as knowledge, skill, and training. Parents nowadays are above all concerned to give their children as thorough and complete an education as possible.

We Americans are education-minded beyond all other people on earth. From the census of 1900 to that of 1930, our high school attendance increased from 630,000 to nearly 5 million, and the number of students in colleges and universities rose from less than 300,000 to 1,200,000. During the same 30 years the annual expenditure for public elementary and high schools showed an increase of more than 1000 per cent, and the value of school property multiplied by 7½. Over 80% of all persons between 5 and 17 years of age, and nearly one-fourth of our whole population, attends school.

There is certainly no lack of educational opportunity in our country. But since there are various kinds of education, how can one decide which kind is best and most worthwhile? No doubt the best education will be one which enables a man to provide most fully for all the needs of life, which neglects nothing that is necessary to a man's true welfare, but which aids him to make his life as rich and happy and satisfactory from every point of view as can be. What kind of an education will do that? Many people would say: An education that gives most knowledge, for knowledge is power, and the more a man knows the better it will be for him and the more he will be able to make of his life.

Is that true? Is knowledge the choicest possession that man can make his own? Our text, speaking with the voice of God, denies it. It says that the highest of all things that can be desired is not knowledge, but wisdom. Let us try to enter into the meaning of this statement and bring home to ourselves **THE SUPREME VALUE OF WISDOM.**

"Wisdom", we read, "is better than rubies, and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it." Here perhaps someone is inclined to say: But doesn't knowledge make wise—so that wisdom and knowledge are essentially the same thing? No, that is not the case. To have knowledge is to be acquainted with the facts in any matter; it is to be furnished with right information. Knowledge, therefore, is a thing of the head and can be learned from books. Wisdom, on the other hand, has to do with the conduct of life. It flows from an insight into the nature and course of the world, from an understanding of life, and it enables one to choose and apply the best means to accomplish one's aims. Even in earthly affairs wisdom is much superior to knowledge. There are people who have learned a great deal, whose heads are wonderfully well

stocked, but for all their knowledge they make a mess of their lives, for they do not, or cannot, apply their knowledge to life, and so it is of little or no use to themselves or others. The trouble with them is: they have knowledge, but they lack wisdom. Evidently one who has less knowledge but uses it to good purpose, will make more of his life than they. The ideal thing, of course, is for a man to have both knowledge and wisdom; but if he cannot have both, and if he were given the choice, he had better choose wisdom.

Yet there are again different forms of wisdom, and men may have one form and not another. There are those who are extremely wise in earthly matters, who can judge and plan and devise most shrewdly what will advance their earthly welfare and make their earthly life successful and agreeable—but there they stop. Their wisdom goes no farther: it takes no account of what lies beyond this earth and this life. It is indeed wisdom so far as it goes, but it does not go far enough: it is partial and incomplete; it does not attain to the heights that wisdom can reach. The highest wisdom that is within the reach of man is wisdom that will enable him to provide for every need of his nature, to fulfill every part of his destiny on earth, to accomplish everything that he ought to accomplish while he walks in the light of the sun. Such wisdom can be gained from only one source, from the Word of God, in which He who made us and all things tells us what this world is and what this life is for and how we must live it in order to be sure of true happiness while it lasts and of everlasting salvation when it is over. It is this wisdom of which our text speaks and which it declares to be better than rubies, better than all the perishable wealth of the world. Of this wisdom it says that all that may be desired is not to be compared to it: everything else on which men may set their hearts fades into insignificance beside this jewel from the treasury of heaven which God Himself offers us.

Christians are people who have received the gift of this wisdom from God and have experienced its blessings in their own lives. It is to be expected that they will be anxious that this divine treasure may also become the possession of those who are dearest to them, their children. They will, indeed, do all in their power to provide those children with what earthly knowledge and training they need to make their way in the world, but above all they will be concerned that their children's way through life may be lighted by the wisdom of God. That is really self-evident and would be self-evident even if the Bible had not distinctly told us that so it should be. But now, that our natural desire to do the best by our children is fortified by the express directions of the Word of God, it is as it should be when a large part of the income and strength of the Church is spent in commending God's wisdom to the young. The efforts that are made in that direction are by no means a side issue, but, together with the regular preaching of the Word, they are the very heart and soul of the work of the Church.

In saying this, I am, of course, telling you nothing new. Our church is seeking, in various ways, to provide religious instruction and guidance for its children and young people.—(Here the educational work of the local congregation—parochial school, Bible class, Sunday school, Walther League Society—may be mentioned).

But an individual congregation cannot provide for Christian training on all the levels of education, especially not on the more advanced levels. Therefore it has become the custom for congregations to cooperate with each other, so

that together they may be able to do what none of them could do alone. The various synodical institutions of learning are, in this way, made possible through joint effort of our congregations. Valparaiso University, in whose interest I am speaking to you today, is another cooperative undertaking in our Church. When, about 14 years ago, a group of our fellow-Lutherans took their courage in their hands and acquired Valparaiso, to make a Lutheran University of it, they did so in the conviction that such an institution was badly needed. At least 9000 of our young Lutherans attend colleges and universities. At some of these institutions they receive a secular education without any reference to religion. At others there are instructors who go out of their way to ridicule and deny the truths that are dear to the Christian. At still others there are so-called "approaches" to religion that can only be destructive of its values. The official organ of the National Student Federation last year carried an article on Religion in Colleges, in which it reported that of 350 students polled at Swarthmore College, 101 were avowed agnostics. It said, by way of explanation, that at Swarthmore the philosophical approach to religion is the most popular, whereas, throughout the country, the sociological or psychological approach has increased. The trouble is, all these approaches start out from the assumption that religion is a purely human thing. They therefore prejudge the very question at issue, namely the question whether this doctrine be of God or not—a question that can only be answered through the religious approach, which consists in reading or hearing the Word of God and letting the Spirit of God speak to one's heart and soul.

That is the approach at Valparaiso. There the Word of God is set before the students daily in chapel exercises, and the secular studies are presented in such a way that respect and loyalty to the Word of God is upheld. In this the University is doing the work of the Church, work that is dear to our hearts as Christians. It rightly feels therefore, that it need have no hesitancy in asking us to uphold its hands with our prayers, our interest, our sons and daughters of college age, and our material support. The work at Valparaiso is making steady progress, under the blessing of God, and with our continued aid and that of the rest of our Church, it may be expected to measure up more and more to the reach of its hopes and opportunities.

Let us, my friends, each do all in his power, both in our home congregation and elsewhere in the Church, to strengthen all efforts to commend the wisdom of God to the young, and let us also apply what we have considered to our own hearts and lives. Let us not be content with mere Christian **knowledge**, but let us coin that knowledge into **wisdom**, so that it will be a living thing whose power and presence we feel everywhere in our lives. To do that, we must drink constantly at the fountain of divine wisdom, the Word of God, and remain in constant touch with God through earnest prayer. Then, through the aid of God's Holy Spirit, we shall become wise to walk in his ways and wise unto salvation.