**Proverbs 23:3-4** August 15, 2019

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*At the wedding of Laura Kramp and Jeremiah Martin, 15 August 2019.*

*“By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures.” (Proverbs 24:3-4)*

Dear Friends in Christ,

 I have a strange question for you. Think a couple years down the line. You have a bunch of people over to your house for an evening BBQ. As it gets dark, you want a fire. Here’s the question: Which would build a better fire? Fifty pounds of hickory wood, or 50 pounds of dried up raspberry brambles? Depends on what kind of fire you want.

 If I want a big show that everybody notices, I’d take the 50 pounds of dried up raspberry brambles every time. You don’t need a firestarter or lighter fluid. Strike one match and within 5 minutes you will—and here I am not exaggerating, right, Jeremiah?—you will have a fire roaring into the night sky as high as your house, shadows dancing on the walls of the neighborhood, neighbors calling the fire department. People will say, “Wow! I’ve never seen a fire like that!” And in another fifteen minutes you will have nothing more than a few smoldering berry canes and a pile of ash.

 Fifty pounds of split hickory will give you a very different fire. Unless you cheat with a fire starter or lighter fluid, you have some work. You will probably need more than one match, some newspaper or tinder, small branches and medium sized branches and bigger branches, healthy lungs and patience. Twenty minutes later people will be asking, “So when’s the fire going to get started?” Children will have long run off to play, their impatient expectations of marshmallows and s’mores totally disappointed. Half an hour later somebody will finally pull up the first chair, real close and announce with surprise, “Hey, I can feel some heat!” The hickory burns. In a little bit a few more pull up chairs and sit around the fire. They start to talk. They remember the snowstorms and family vacations, talk about where people are and what they are doing, sharing the jokes till past midnight. And if you were to totally ignore the good advice of Smokey the Bear and let that fire burn through the night, waking in dawn’s early light you could come back and find under the ashes enough glowing red coals to warm you on a cold morning; heat enough to kindle another fire.

 Marriage. Which kind of fire is marriage like?

 Marriage is not the 15 minute show-stopper. Marriage is not built on a momentary, crazy emotional high. It is romantic interest, yes, mixed with the patient fire of conscious choice, sound judgment and commitment . Unlike the bramble-fed fire that burns brightly and dies quickly, marriage needs the kind of fire that will still be there when one of you is pushing a walker and the other waiting for the results of the biopsy.

The Theme of This Message Is: **Kindling The Home Fires**

 Wisdom. Which kind of fire is wisdom like? You know.

 On this day of your wedding, you have asked your families and friends to hear this Word of God from Proverbs 24:3-4. ***“By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures.”***

 ***“By wisdom a house is built.”*** What kind of house? Of course, this isn’t talking about the apartment you will be living in next week. Nor a three bedroom, two-and-a-half bath dwelling you’ll be putting a bid in on in a few years. This house you build is more than that. It is even more than a home. It is more even than a family. Remember that line from the Christmas story, *“…the house and line of David…”* Still called the “house of David” 1,000 years later.

 I can see it in your eyes. That is what you two have in mind. When God’s word here caught your eyes, ***“By wisdom a house is built…”*** you had the big picture, the long game, the hickory fueled fire in mind.

 Now some might say, “I’m not so sure. Twelve months ago these two didn’t even know each other’s name. Here they are at the altar. Sounds more like a berry bramble bonfire than a well-minded hickory fire.”

 Maybe. But that’s not how I see it. You have wisdom. Really? You are but 21, 22 years old. Is wisdom not the possession of those with gray hair? How can I, who have known much more of life than you, and much less than some others here, call you wise?

 Let’s back up a step. In this book of the Bible called Proverbs, there are literally hundreds of divinely given proverbs. Words like, *“Houses and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from the Lord.”* (19:14) Some people think that if we just heard and internalized all those proverbs we would be supremely wise. But in the opening of Proverbs, before all the hundreds of nuggets of divine truth, the introduction says this, *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”* All wisdom must start in the fear of the Lord. If you don’t start at God’s starting point, all the rest of the wisdom will be rendered meaningless. In God’s eyes, you can be an Albert Einstein, an Aristotle or Socrates, a Ken Jennings (of Jeopardy fame), but if you don’t have the fear of the Lord, you are a fool—God’s choice of words, not mine.

 When today’s reading says, ***“By wisdom a house is built,”*** this fear of the Lord is the precondition. You, Laura and Jeremiah, are wise because in your baptisms as infants God claimed you as his children. From then your parents brought you to hear the true wisdom that the Holy Spirit imparts. You may not have the gray hairs of some of us, but you have the most important piece of wisdom there is. And that wisdom was your starting place for your choice in marriage.

 You are wise enough to know that you cannot believe those self-esteem gurus who tell you: “You are such an awesome person who does everything wonderfully and should be praised and loved by all.” God’s wisdom told you the truth. When you look honestly at yourself, you know that you sin and need someone to cover up all those bad things. You know that your Savior Jesus won the forgiveness of your sins. He doesn’t look at you and lie saying, “You’re great!” He looks at you honestly and says lovingly, “You are forgiven.”

 That is the hickory burning in the fire pit through the darkness and cold of night. That is wisdom you can build a house on, a home on, a legacy on.

 About the house built with wisdom it says, ***“Its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures.”*** Yes, a house founded on a faith in and love for the Lord Jesus will be filled with rare and beautiful treasures. Some of it will be just that: rare and beautiful treasures. God’s people, and you two especially, love the beauty of the God-created world. You enjoy the art that God-given ability generates. You know the blessings that God-given wealth can purchase.

 There are other rare and beautiful treasures than those purchased with cold hard cash. What were your greatest joys growing up? While some of them were purchased, I’ll bet most of them money couldn’t buy.

 And better than all other treasures are the fruits the Holy Spirit daily causes to appear in the Christian home: *“Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”* These Spirit given treasures have a way of building more than a house, a legacy. A legacy that with God’s blessings may live on in the generation after you, and the next and next, until your names are forgotten, but the golden threads still run through the tapestry of those who live after you. And someone will look at the beautiful tapestry of their lives and ask, “Where did this golden thread one come from?” And the only answer they will be able to give is, “I’m not sure.” But God will know. An enduring spiritual treasure that you, Jeremiah and Laura, through the wisdom God’s gives and by his blessing weave into the house that you build, that you found, that you establish today. Amen.