



SERMON RECAP

JULY 12, 2026

The Wisdom of Women “The Paper Bag Princess” Proverbs 31:10-31

The Paper Bag Princess is not the most well-known story in this series, but it has become one of my favorites. It is a wonderful story that subverts gender norms and classic fairy tale concepts. It begins like many stories - a prince and princess are promised to be wed, but a powerful dragon comes and breaks them apart, destroying their kingdom and setting our hero on a quest.

This time, however, it is the princess that must go on a quest because it is the prince who is taken by the dragon. With everything around her in ashes, Princess Elizabeth finds the first thing she can wear that isn't burnt - a paper bag. She sets off to save her betrothed.

When she encounters the powerful dragon, she does not slay him with her might and sword. Instead, she using flattery and preys upon the dragon's arrogance to get him tired. Exhausted from showing off, the dragon puts up no fight when she saves the prince. When she finds the prince waiting for her, he is appalled at her appearance. Instead of being grateful for being saved, he scoffs at her dirty face and paper bag dress. The story ends with these lines:

“Ronald,” said Elizabeth, “Your clothes are really pretty and your hair is very neat. You look like a real prince, but

you are a bum

They didn't get married after all.



The Paper Bag Princess subverts traditional story tropes and has a delicious ending. I can't help but feel that Princess Elizabeth “lived happily ever after” indeed.

It is my opinion that the traditional wisdom that the Church has taken from Proverbs 31 could use a good dose of Princess Elizabeth. Today there is a subculture of social media influencers who use Proverbs 31 as the blueprint for their “Trad Wife” values. These influencers wax poetic about the beauty of feminine wives who stay at home, educate their children, and protect their home against the dangerous (demonic) influence of feminists.

They use Proverbs 31 as a checklist of things that a “capable wife” should do. They, in a very condescending way, explain that women should manage the household, raise the children, and submit to her husband in all decisions - which is NOT a part of the deal in Proverbs 31. Some in the Trad-Wife sphere of influence are going so far as denouncing their own right to vote and point to women's suffrage as the turning point of America's downfall. It is a disturbing, and non-Biblical, understanding of feminism and a gross misinterpretation of Proverbs 31.

Prov. 31 is meant to be a song of praise for women. The only thing men are told to do in this passage is “praise her.” There is nothing of submission or deference. In fact, according to this wisdom, a woman's place is in the market as a merchant and manager. This is not about women staying at home. It is a song of praise for all the incredible things that women do. Part of the problem is the translation of “Capable wife.” This is from the Hebrew *eshet hayil*, which is better translated as Woman of Valor. This is not a list of describing someone who is “competent,” or a minimum standard or to-do list.

A Woman of Valor is someone of incredible determination, strength, and courage. Like Princess Elizabeth, many Women of Valor choose to take matters into their own hands. They slay their own dragons - often using the arrogance of men as their weapon. Princess Elizabeth lived happily ever after without Ronald, and many other Women of Valor would do the same.

Proverbs begins with Lady Wisdom proclaiming the power of justice, generosity, and integrity. It ends here with a depiction of the Woman of Valor whose wisdom is put into practice. This is not about being a “Trad Wife.” it is about living with strength and determination. The Women of Valor in our lives should be praised and followed as teachers, preachers, and leaders. We need more Women of Valor like Elizabeth and far fewer bums like Ronald.

NEXT WEEK:

The Wisdom of Humility, “The Wonderful Things You Will Be”