

Woman Wisdom

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[0 : 00] I want to echo David's Thanksgiving Day wishes, a very happy Thanksgiving to all of you. And I heard David say at the beginning when he said to ask people, who does the turkey in your home?

I misheard him and thought he said, who is the turkey in your home? And I thought it would be very interesting to hear the answers to that. I realized early on that wasn't the question. So it's Thanksgiving.

This is a very appropriate passage, Proverbs 9, for Thanksgiving. We have a feast. We have a marvelous picture of God's goodness to us.

And it's a call to receive God's great and glorious gifts, very thankfully and actively as well. If you remember, we're in a section of Proverbs, chapters 1 through 9, that's like a prologue.

And it's calling us to receive this extraordinary gift of wisdom, to live according to God's ways. And it tells us what wisdom looks like in everyday life.

[1 : 09] It urges us to seek us. And it says, this is the way to the good life. This is the way to have the life that God wants for you. And in this chapter 9, all of the things in the prologue come together.

And we see here what wisdom is and how a person gains it or doesn't gain it. And it's so important to us because we as Christians, we at St. John's, our goal is to be wise people.

To be wise people. To live the good life that God has for us. And it's important for us to know that wisdom, as we're seeing in Proverbs, is not for smart people or for charming people or learned people, people who know the Bible super well.

It's not confined to that. Wisdom is available for everyone. It is low-hanging fruit. It's something God says to reach and to take it over and over again in this prologue.

When I was thinking of this, I was reminded of Karl Barth, who is considered to be one of the greatest theologians of the 20th century. He wrote thousands and thousands of very profound words.

[2 : 24] Your bookshelf would be filled with his writings or your hard drive and your computer. That's how prolific he was. Because, you know, he started out life doing this too.

When he was five years old, he was spending hours writing upstairs in his room. His mom came up to him and said, Karl, what are you doing? And he said, I'm writing my memoirs.

That's what kind of person he was. At the end of his life, somebody asked him, what was the most profound thing that you learned, that you have written about, that you have shared with the world?

And he thought for a second and he said, one thing, Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. That's wisdom. You know, that's something that a child knows and understands.

And it's also something that the most learned person in the world may not know, may not accept in their life. And this is the essence of God's good life for us.

[3 : 27] And this reality of Jesus is what wisdom is about. It's about living your life in accord with that. And so these nine chapters are a real personal call to receive what God has for you.

It's written to a young son. He's thinking about the way his life is going to take. He's going to set out and make a life for his own. And his father wants the best life for him.

And he says, look to wisdom. Look to the wisdom of God. And we are meant in Proverbs to know that God is that loving father for us.

And he makes each of us his son or his daughter. And in Proverbs, he lovingly shows us the wise way to live. I want you, I urgently want you to live the good life, God is saying in Proverbs, the path of life.

But there are temptations to leave this path for a very different deadly path that we heard David preach about from Proverbs 7 last Sunday. And therefore, we're faced with an urgent decision

every day.

[4 : 37] Will we listen to the call of wisdom, which is real life, or will we listen to the call of folly, the way of death, the way that leads towards death?

So that call to receive wisdom is urgent, and it's very personal as well. And that's why this passage uses a personification for wisdom and folly.

It talks about woman wisdom and woman folly, who each call to us. A couple of weeks ago, I had coffee with a good friend who used to be our neighbor for many years.

And he is Jewish. We became such close friends. We're like family, really. And I was telling him over coffee that we were entering into this sermon series on Proverbs.

And his eyes lit up. And he said, I love Proverbs. I said, well, why is that? And he said, it's because Proverbs tells you not only to hear God, what he is saying in his word, but to heed God.

[5 : 39] You know, to really obey and to follow through with what God is speaking to you about. To live out what he says. And he says, I love that about Proverbs.

And he says, the thing that's great about Proverbs is it helps you to remember that. It gives you pictures, beautiful poetry, memorable scenes to remember what wisdom is about, what it means to heed God.

And that's what this passage does. It gives you two women who are memorable pictures so we can remember the choice that we make every single day. Will we choose folly or will we choose wisdom?

That's what chapter 9 is about. And so let's look at this. It's on page 533, chapter 9 there. And the passage is really, we're going to break it up into three sections.

The first section talks about woman wisdom and her invitation. And the last section is a perfect symmetry. And that's in verses 13 through 18.

[6 : 45] It's about the counterfeit, woman folly, and her call and invitation. And then in the middle of that, sandwiched between those two, is a description in verses 7 through 12 of two very different ways to respond to wisdom.

It's very practical.

She's a beautiful, well-designed house. She's a beautiful, well-designed house that's meant for hospitality.

It's big enough for lots of people to come and have a lively feast. It's a beautiful, strong home. And wisdom devotes herself to preparing this feast in the most loving, self-giving, careful way.

She has personally prepared the main dish right from the butchering of it to the cooking of it to the serving of it. She has mixed also the perfect spices with the wine.

[8 : 16] She sets the table beautifully. She has personally given great thought and effort in all the preparation for one reason. So that everyone who comes will experience the very, very best that she has for them.

It is really the greatest Thanksgiving feast of all time on this Thanksgiving day. And notice what she does. She sends out personal messengers to call from a number of the highest places in town because this is the most important thing to hear.

That's what it means to be called from the highest places. And it's the most important thing to have everybody respond to this invitation. That's why she sends out very carefully all these messengers. And the invitation is this. Come, eat of my bread, and drink the wine that I have mixed. Now that picture is important. It is a sumptuous, extravagant feast, which in the Bible is always a picture of salvation.

It's always a picture of God saving us in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. So if you were to go to Isaiah 55, God says this there. He says, Listen diligently to me.

[9 : 33] Eat what is good. Delight yourselves in rich food. There's no diet here. Incline your ear and come to me. Hear so that your soul may live.

You see, the feast is so that your soul can live. That's why Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a banquet. Remember his parable about the guy who invites all the people to come to his banquet that should come.

And they say, I have an excuse. I cannot come to it. And so he goes out to the highways and the byways, and he says to the poor, blind, and lame, Come to this great banquet.

It is the banquet of salvation. And then, of course, Jesus gives us the gift of the Lord's Supper that he himself prepares for us. So he takes bread and wine, and he says, This is my body.

This is my blood given for you for the forgiveness of your sins, for your salvation. Do this in remembrance of me and what I have done for your salvation.

[10:37] And at the end of the Bible, we remember from Revelation 19, The picture of the new heaven and the new earth, the life where God lives with us, we live with him forever, in perfect relationship.

God says, Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. That is the picture of salvation for us. And that's why verse 6 says that those who accept woman wisdom's invitation will live.

So here's a definition of wisdom that I think is helpful. Very simply, it is living out God's salvation. It's making decisions, speaking, and acting according to God's reality as the one who saves us and created us.

In his wisdom, God created the world and also saved the world by sending Jesus Christ to us. This is the great gift of who he is for us.

Our deepest needs are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. We are all, our souls are starving for the meal of salvation. And you can see this around us in the world.

[11:52] You know, there are so many sort of spa places. There's several right near our office too. And they'll say things, Are you stressed? Are you anxious? Are you overworked? Are you too busy? Are you hungry?

Are you hungry? Come and receive rest and refreshment. In fact, the one right by our office says, Welcome to the happy place, your happy space. We are hungry.

Our souls are hungry. And God, from the foundation of the world, prepared this food for our soul. It was his wise plan from the very beginning.

So just quickly look on Proverbs 8, which is just above that big nine there. And here we have a beautiful description of wisdom. It's very attractive.

And it tells us about wisdom going right back to the foundation of time. Verse 29 says, You see, it was according to wisdom that God designed everything and delighted in all that he made, especially humanity, especially you and I.

[13:14] And right from the very beginning, he designed us for relationship to him. He designed us for salvation, to know the Father's love for us forever. And that is reality.

That's the reality of the whole world and the created universe. If you want to know goodness, the joy and delight of God, that God, the creator, designed for you and intends for you, if you want to be fed, truly fed in your souls, you accept the call to live according to his wisdom.

And that's why the first half of Proverbs 8 says, Wisdom is better than jewels. All that you can desire cannot compare with her. So we need that beautiful picture of that feast and this woman because there is another woman, Folly, who is active in each of our lives.

And we need to see how stark the contrast is. She knows, too, that humanity is hungry in their souls. So she mimics wisdom as she calls out and invites.

She does the same thing. In fact, it might even be louder. Verse 13 says she's hard to ignore. She's loud and she is seductive. And she also sits at the highest place in the city because she's saying, I am the most important person.

[14:36] I'm the most important thing you can hear. I am the one to build your life on. And we hear that voice in our culture over and over again. Everyday media preaches to us and invites us into a belief system in which our desires and our hopes, our own selves take center stage.

It offers a good life without God, without the one who designed us, without the one who saves us. But what she offers has nothing to do with what we were created for.

She actually knows nothing in verse 13. She offers a poor, shabby imitation of the feast of what woman wisdom offers. And she's just going from day to day and just making it up as it goes along. There's no self-giving or sacrifice in preparing the meal. There is only stolen water and stolen bread. It's a corruption of what lady wisdom offers.

And she has to make up for that poor food by the excitement of doing things that are forbidden by God and censored. And that may be all kinds of things from what we've talked about.

[15:49] Greed, sex, indulgence, falsehood. There's an attraction and excitement about this. And that's the excitement that Adam and Eve felt.

I'm rebelling against God. I'm going my own way here. I'm staking my own way of life. But it's a short-lived thrill. And so in verse 18, there is a sober end to the party.

You know, there's this promise of a lively party for the one who accepts woman's folly, that invitation. But when they go in, you see in verse 18, they do not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of shale.

What a shock. You know, the promise of a lively party actually ends up that house is a gateway into death. You just have these ghostly figures there.

There is no food. There is only death. And there's a strong warning here for us because our world dresses up the way of folly. And it entices us.

[16:54] And we are all starving in our souls, but always it ends in death. Proverbs says, reject that poor imitation of wisdom.

Reject it. And desire instead this beautiful life-giving, glorious gift of wisdom that is true good life. I think that a very memorable way, since we're talking about being memorable, is an illustration from C.S. Lewis, which you probably know from his sermon, The Weight of Glory.

And he says this. He says, It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite love and joy is offered to us.

It's like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

And you see, wisdom, woman wisdom, is living according to that infinite joy. It's always living in reference to the God who has saved us.

[18:12] In Jesus, our Savior is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And because of that, he is the one great reality to build our life on.

You know, his is the life which is unimaginably good. And we need to desire that. That is the strongest desire that we can have.

All other ways of living will be out of sync with that reality. And it will lead to death. So that's what wisdom is, first of all. And the second question is, how do we get wisdom?

Well, there are three ways that I briefly am going to touch on. First way to get wisdom is very simply verse 10, which is an important, important verse in Proverbs, a theme.

The first way to get wisdom is to fear and to know God. And we've heard in the previous sermons that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, the knowledge of the Holy One is insight, because the fear of the Lord always involves knowing Him.

[19:19] You see, wisdom always begins when you believe that the one who is infinitely greater than you are, who has the keys of death and life, and who holds the universe in His hands, that that person loves you and knows you better than you know yourself.

And he saves you by the gift of Jesus Christ. That is holy fear to know that. You know, there is an awesomeness of God that attracts us to Him.

We want to know Him and His ways, His insight and His wisdom, and that is available to all of us. A child can know that this is true, as Karl Barth found out.

That child, she can know this God who has saved her. She has the insight that many powerful, learned, intelligent people in this world have not a clue about.

They do not know. They don't have that wisdom. So always in the Bible, wisdom begins with a personal relationship with God. All through the Bible, you see it.

[20:25] The only way to fear and know God is by reading His Word, by knowing Him in His Bible. And as you take in His glory, as you take in His character, His promises, His commands, His corrections in your life, His encouragement to you, you have an insight, a basic, fundamental insight that the world cannot offer.

Woman folly has no idea of the riches of the gospel. Now the second thing, besides fearing God and knowing Him, that we get wisdom, wisdom is by reproof.

It is by correction that we grab hold of wisdom. So verses 7 through 9 says there's two responses to woman wisdom. There is the scoffer who hates being reproofed, who hates being corrected.

He believes that he knows best no one should have authority over him, that wisdom is a fairy tale, it's old-fashioned, it's not realistic, it infringes on my rights and it blocks my opportunities.

Have you ever heard wisdom talked about that way? It's very rampant. But in contrast, the wise person loves reproof.

[21:44] So throughout the book of Proverbs, this love of being corrected is the hallmark of a wise person. And I want you to look at that verse for a second. Verse 9 says, Give instruction to a wise

man, he will still be...

Oh, sorry. Do not... Verse 8. Do not reprove a scoffer or he will hate you. Reprove a wise man and he will love you. It's an extraordinary response to wisdom and being corrected.

They love it. They love being corrected. And this is a gift. This is what we... This is how we grab hold of wisdom is that we seek reproof.

We seek correction. We want God to keep us on his path. We want to hear from him and how to live life from God's perspective. We want to hear how to be changed for his sake so we can live his life. And I think this is one of the big differences between the call of woman wisdom and the call of woman folly. Because they both call the simple. And we can all be simple.

[22 : 52] Remember what the definition of the simple is? It's somebody who's kind of aimlessly wandering around spiritually. They're uncommitted towards God. They're willing to believe anything in a situation.

I saw an example of this or heard it in a Thanksgiving CBC interview. There was a sociologist and he was very learned and he was actually giving helpful advice about how to be thankful people in our society here in Canada.

Some very wise things that he said. But in the end, you're thinking, in fact, all through the thing, I was thinking, well, who are we thankful to? It was an aimless sort of thankfulness that was just sort of out there.

He was the simple person in Proverbs, in a sense. He was not committed to what the reality of God is all about. That we praise God from whom all blessings flow.

And I think we can at times fall into the way of living as though God does not exist. We can be uncommitted to him, especially when it is difficult to follow him. We become that simple person.

[23 : 59] And woman wisdom can be more difficult to live with because she says, in verse six, leave your simple ways. And that's what can make woman folly attractive.

But she says, you know, do this. Love reproof. Love repentance. And you will really live. You will walk in the way of insight. So the question to us is, do you love it when the Bible contradicts you? Do you love it when it tells you of a way to live that is different from the way you're living now? It's a good question. Are there people in your life who you trust and you can ask to reprove you when you walk away from the way of wisdom?

You see, repentance is at the heart of our life with Jesus. It is the way we live our lives in reference to him and to his salvation. It's the way to grab hold of wisdom.

So besides fearing God, besides loving reproof, the last thing, way for us to grab hold of wisdom is very simply to grow in wisdom every day.

[25 : 08] So as I said at the beginning, our goal at St. John's is to be wise people. And verse 9 says, when you give instruction to a wise person, they will be still wiser.

If you teach a righteous person, they will increase in their learning. And that's saying that no matter how long you've been a Christian, if you want to be wise, you must be growing.

It doesn't matter whether you became a Christian yesterday or 90 years ago. You need to love being taught by God's word. You need to be a teachable person.

Every day I need to learn what it means to live a life that lines up with God's reality, with his salvation, always in reference to Jesus. And that means that comes into my business decisions, the way that I spend my money, the way that I lead my family, the way that I schedule my time, the way that I use my talents, all of this is meant to be done in according to Christ and his salvation and his plan for my life.

That is the way I grab hold of wisdom. So this Thanksgiving, may we be deeply thankful for wisdom, for woman wisdom, that gift of living life according to God's reality, his salvation, his sumptuous feast that he has made for us from the beginning of time.

[26 : 34] God calls you with his wisdom every day. So listen for it. Grab hold of it. Treasure it. And you will truly live. Amen.