

Woman Wisdom (7:30 am Service)

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Preacher: Rev. James Wagner

- [0 : 00] And give us now an increase of your grace that we could truly hear your word to us. And in so doing, may we bear forth the fruit of your spirit, Lord, the very character of Christ.
- In Jesus' name we pray, amen. Please be seated. Amen. Sometime, and I say sometime, realizing that it could have happened yesterday or maybe even today or tomorrow, your family and maybe friends will gather for a feast to celebrate Thanksgiving, harvest Thanksgiving, that is, because feasts are the way that we do celebrate and give thanks.
- Universally, all cultures give thanks with a meal. They may not call it Thanksgiving as we do on this date or these three dates over this weekend, but universally, cultures give thanks through a meal.
- Every Sunday, the first service of the day, St. John's Vancouver celebrates the life, death, and the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ by remembering his atoning sacrifice with a meal.
- We call it the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion. Others, the Eucharist and the latter, which means actually, literally, Thanksgiving with a meal. This morning and every Sunday morning, we have a Thanksgiving meal or a feast.
- [1 : 27] I didn't know if you know that every Sunday that you come here, but we celebrate through two words, a verbal one and a visual one. Our Lord's saving, his justifying, his redeeming, his reconciling work.
- Verbally, that word is brought to bear in our life in the preaching of God's word. Visually, that word is brought to bear in the celebrating or the receiving of communion, and that too is a word.
- Well, feast or meals are really important. And chapter 9 of Proverbs actually has two meals. I wonder if you noticed that.
- Chapter 9 is the end of the first of this section of Proverbs, chapter 1 through 9. And it teaches us, that is Proverbs, how to live well.
- It's a part of wisdom literature. Psalms teach us how to pray. Ecclesiastes teaches us how to rejoice. The Song of Songs teaches us how to love. And Job teaches us how to suffer.
- [2 : 28] But Proverbs teaches us how to live well. That is, to celebrate, to feast, that which is good and right and true. And chapter 9 is preceded by chapter 8, where we learn about woman wisdom, who shows us the good life throughout that chapter, which was read a portion of that.
- But in that chapter, woman wisdom gives voice to a life lived well explicitly, verbally. She speaks of that. But more also, the value of life is actually recorded there as well.
- Back in verse 8, it says, They are all straight to him who understands and right to those who find knowledge.
- Continuing on, Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice goals. For wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you desire cannot compare with her.
- That's the value of wisdom that's laid out there. The end of chapter 8 then tells us that this wisdom in our life is a great blessing.

- [3 : 41] We didn't continue on there, but the words will read like this. Blessed is the one who listens to me, that is woman wisdom, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors.
- So there's great value to learning wisdom, and wisdom is a great blessing to us. So we're invited actually into this life that's aided, it's captured in these Proverbs.
- And often these Proverbs, which we'll now spill into for the rest of this book, in short, kind of pithy saying, sometimes comfort and other times disturb us. They will provoke us and probe us at times.
- But today we look at these two women. We go back to woman folly, yes, that was preached well last week by Derek, but also, more importantly, woman wisdom. And it's not just a comparison between folly and wisdom here.
- It's more like a competition with one another. And it's a winner-takes-all battle and struggle. It's not a violent one. But don't be fooled, because at the end of the day, it's a matter of life and death with regards to wisdom and folly.
- [4 : 50] So let's look at these two people, woman wisdom and folly, in chapter 9. Let me ask you a question. What's the hardest thing that you've ever done? Maybe it was finishing school or completing a work project, giving birth to a child, maybe raising a family, or maybe confronting injustice.
- Or what about a conflict with a loved one, choosing between good and evil, or maybe just the lesser of two evils? Well, add to your list the gaining of wisdom.
- Gaining and growing in wisdom isn't easy. It's probably the hardest thing that you'll ever do. And even though wisdom is a gift from God, it's really hard work.
- It's actually, in fact, next to impossible. In fact, Proverbs 9 shows us that the woman wisdom is divine work. The nature of wisdom is from heaven, but it's actually for earth.
- And so we don't define wisdom or even discover it, but we receive wisdom by the revelation of God and then energetically put it to work, put it into practice.
- [6 : 03] And so wisdom is house-building work. It's foundational, constructional. It's creative. It's intentional. And the first three verses of Proverbs 9 show us this.
- Woman wisdom, as we read there, glance down with me if you can follow quickly with just the verbs. Built, hewn, slaughtered, mixed, set, sent.
- She's hard actually at work, woman wisdom is. And this isn't work for the sake of work. Work isn't an end in itself. It is actually for something.
- So, when you are hard at work, do you ever think, why? Why am I doing this? What's the purpose? Does this make any difference?
- Those are good questions. And Proverbs 9, I think, tells us something about this work of wisdom. And wisdom's work actually is for something.
- [7 : 03] Her work is actually for two things. And glance down with me to verse 6 then. She says this, after talking about this meal that she invites people into, whoever is simple, let him turn in here.
- To him who lacks sense, she says, come, eat of my bread. Here's this meal. And drink of the wine that I have mixed. And then says this, leave your simple ways.
- And here's the purpose of wisdom. And live. And walk in the way of insight. It's the purpose of wisdom. That's the purpose of this work. That's the purpose of our work of growing and gaining wisdom as we apply it into every area and aspect of our life.
- This life that's full of God. And this insight, which is a seeing into, a perceiving of reality. And so we see here that wisdom actually isn't for getting ahead, or avoiding mistakes, or kind of damage control, or even gaining control over situations.

No, the control of all of our life is in the hands of the Lord, but we apply wisdom in these situations. So wisdom is much better than those things described about mistakes and control.

[8 : 23] No, it's about a man or a woman that has wisdom applied, that is fully alive, has insight into circumstances, knows where value is, and our life is filled with the godliness of Jesus Christ.

This wisdom applied to these situations, it's concrete, it's substantive. It's for everything, every aspect of the life in which we live, day in and day out.

Well, that voice, that value, that vision of woman wisdom, then is actually in contrast, not only contrast, but in conflict with woman folly, as we proceed and jump over some verses and go to verses 13 through 18.

In every way, folly is opposed in the opposite of wisdom. And if you were to put wisdom and folly side by side, you would actually see the contrast in these first six verses, in the last six verses.

But Proverbs doesn't actually put the two right next to one another like that. There's one on top of the other ones actually underneath it. That is because I think woman wisdom is always over, over, and wins, it should, if we follow it, against woman folly.

[9 : 36] So we don't have a photograph, but we do have something of a verbal picture. And the picture is described like this. Wisdom works hard, but folly, as you see in verses 13, is a real loud mouth.

Folly uses volume to get your attention. Folly is a little like the sirens and the seductive women in Homer's Odyssey. But what drives and draws the Christian, the one who listens to women wisdom, is different.

Wisdom initiates. But folly, look at the verses there, just sits there as people pass by, calling to those who pass by, who are going straight on their way.

There she is, verse 14. She just sits at the door of her house, and she takes a seat on the highest places of the town. That's where she is.

But wisdom calls to the simple who are undecided, but folly calls to those who are actually already on the straight way. Folly isn't after the undecided or the uncommitted.

[10 : 46] So there's a big warning here. God's people, while we're not innocent, we are prey to women folly. So we have no excuse.

We have a choice to listen to one or the other. And folly knows exactly what she's doing, or at least she thinks she does. She's counting on and praying on those who are on the straight way.

So the way of wisdom or folly is an either-or way of thinking and living. It can't be a both-and. Some of life, I realize, can be like that, but usually it can't.

And we have our own kind of proverbs, that you can't burn a candle at both ends. And you can't actually have folly and wisdom at the same time in one hand or in both hands.

It's either one or the other. James, that is from the epistle James, our brother's Lord, points out that you can't be double-minded either.

[11 : 44] That means we have to be one or the other. And that means that you're either on the straight path or you're off it. And off the straight path of God means that you're on your own path.

The theme song of woman folly is this, I did it my way. And Proverbs tells us that there is a way that seems right to man and women, but in the end, it leads to death.

So what makes the difference in the end? Is it a matter of choice? Do we simply choose life or death? How do we avoid the one and then embrace the other?

In other words, other than observation outcome between wisdom and folly, what really separates the two? And separates is the key word here.

Literally or literarily. That's actually a word I learned this week. Literarily, what separates the two? And Solomon isn't just a wise and a bold teacher, but he's a beautiful and a brilliant one too in the way he constructs things here.

[12 : 54] So look at what's in the middle of wisdom, verses one through six, and folly, verses 13 through 18. That is, look at verses seven through 12. In between the two is not just a description, as we've had in these other sets of six verses, but prescription.

What separates the two, and maybe you and me, or you and the person next to you, either today or somewhere else that you might find yourself this week, is the six verses in the middle. Look with me at two of them, verses nine and 10.

Solomon writes, Give instruction to the wise man and he will be still wiser. Teach a righteous man and he will increase in learning. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

We are instructed to grow in wisdom. And so wisdom is like a muscle which increases in strength. Wisdom, it's like a kind of a balloon that expands each time more air is added to it.

Wisdom has a moral, it has a social, it has a spiritual quality and value to it. And we're reminded of the recurrent theme here of the fear of the Lord.

[14 : 07] In chapter eight, we heard it again. The fear of the Lord is the hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance follows the verse and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.

It's the fear of the Lord. And wisdom is about what is holy and right. It's good and true. We know that the Holy One, in verse 10, is Christ revealed in the New Testament.

More often than not, it was those interestingly in the New Testament that were actually possessed by demons who recognized that Jesus was the Holy One. So what about us, actually, who have God's Spirit in us?

We can recognize who the Holy One is and hate that which is evil and love that which is good and put into practice these Proverbs day in and day out.

Well, this one who is the Holy One is the one to be feared. And that's what makes the difference between wisdom and folly. It is this fear of the Lord that draws out from us when we're in the face, that is, or the presence of our Lord.

[15 : 17] This fear of the Lord isn't the one that kind of drives us away, as some fears do, but actually draws us in to the power and the presence and the reality of our Lord.

And so fear is a knowledge of the Holy One who compels us to love Him with our whole heart. At the start, I said that gaining wisdom is the hardest thing you'll ever do.

And in fact, I said that it's impossible. But Christianity is the impossible made possible. But how do we gain this wisdom?

Possibly. The most natural look in the New Testament regarding wisdom is James' epistle. The brother of our Lord lays out wisdom in a number of areas that are covered in Proverbs 2.

That is, the use of our tongue, our relationship with the poor. That is, our marketplace conduct or conflict resolution, adulterous relationships, even our murderous attitudes.

[16 : 19] And this is what James says about wisdom. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all, who without reproach, and it will be given to him.

But let him ask in faith with no doubting. Wisdoms for those who ask. But not just those who ask, but those who put it into practice.

Those who put themselves in wisdom's way and stay in that way do so by the grace through faith in God. And Paul says this about wisdom for those who want to practice it, which seems impossible.

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing. But to those who are being saved, it is the power of God. That's what the wisdom of God is like.

And wisdom of the cross is powerful. But we put that into practice. So from here on out, we will hear really practical advice through the rest of Proverbs, which will not speak to our emotions, but that doesn't mean that Proverbs doesn't speak to our hearts.

[17 : 31] It does, but it will speak to our volition and our wills, which are deep within our hearts. And by God's grace, he will stir our wills to practice wisdom with power.

Sometimes failure, but always unto the grace and glory of God. I speak to you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.