

Walking in Wisdom: Two Feasts

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Date: 18 June 2017

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[0 : 00] Good morning, church. Good morning, church. Turn with me to Proverbs chapter 9. Proverbs chapter 9 is found on page 533 in the Pew Bible.

Let's read this chapter together. Wisdom has built her house. She has hewn her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her beasts.

She has mixed her wine. She has also set her table. She has sent out her young women to call from the highest places in the town. Whoever is simple, let him turn in here.

To him who lacks sense, she says, come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways and live and walk in the way of insight. Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse. And he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury. Do not reprove a scoffer or he will hate you. Reprove a wise man and he will love you. Give instruction to a 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. For by me your days will be multiplied and years will be added to your life. If you're wise, you're wise for yourself.

If you scoff, you alone will bear it. The woman folly is loud. She is seductive and knows nothing.

[1 : 59] She sits at the door of her house. She takes a seat on the highest places of the town, calling to those who pass by, who are going straight on their way. Whoever is simple, let him turn in here. And to him who lacks sense, she says, stolen water is sweet and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol, of the grave.

Well, this morning we come to the end of the first section of Proverbs, chapters 1 through 9. And in most of this section we've heard the voice of a father speaking to his son. And his son is sort of a boy on his way to becoming a man, and the father is advising him and counseling him and warning him and directing him how to walk on the path of wisdom. And we've seen that behind the voice of the father in Proverbs, we hear the voice of God, our heavenly father, who is speaking to us as his sons and daughters guiding and disciplining and directing us. But in this concluding chapter, in chapter 9, it's not the father who's speaking, but we hear the voice of two women, wisdom and folly. The picture is as if the young man has left his father's house and is going out to establish his life in the world. And he's walking down the street and he hears these two voices calling out to him from a house on either side of the street. Wisdom is calling out to him and folly is calling out to him. And they're both saying, come to my house, join me for dinner. And you know what? They're not just saying, come and get a bite to eat and go on your way. They're saying, come and live with me. Come and share intimate relations with me. Come and marry me, if you want to think about it that way. Now, the scene that Proverbs is painting here is perhaps particularly relevant if you're a young person, if you're somewhere transitioning from being a dependent child to a responsible adult, whether you're in high school and you're starting to spend more time out of the house with your friends or working a part-time job this summer or working this summer, perhaps. Maybe you're going away to college or starting your first job or living on your own. And you must now make choices.

And no one else will make those choices for you. And Proverbs is very relevant to that season of life, but it's not only relevant to young adults. It's also relevant to all of us as we walk through the journey of life. Don't we hear different voices calling out to us day by day saying, listen to me, come with me, come with me, trust me, follow me. And the question is, who will we listen to?

[4 : 52] Are we listening to the invitation of wisdom or are we listening to the invitation of folly? So this morning, I want to look at three aspects of the invitations that wisdom and folly present.

I want to look at the character of their invitations, the content of their invitations, and the consequence of their invitations. So first, the character of the invitations.

I want to start with the character of wisdom's invitation in verses 1 to 4. But before I jump in, let me say a couple words about the fact that wisdom is portrayed here as a woman. Now, every so often, especially if you hang around Yale, you will hear people say that the Bible has a low view of women, that the Bible reflects the male-dominated culture that it was written in. You know, isn't it true Eve led the human race into sin and so women should not be trusted? Isn't that what the Bible says about women? Well, the answer is no. And for one thing, throughout the book of Proverbs, wisdom is personified as a woman. That's partly why Proverbs ends with chapter 31, the portrait of the excellent wife or the virtuous woman who opens her mouth with wisdom and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. She is someone whom the Son in this book is instructed to pursue and to embrace, to become intimately involved with and deeply shaped by.

If the Bible writers believed that men were inherently wiser than women, they would never portray the divine attribute of wisdom as a woman. And yet, Proverbs does. Now, of course, Proverbs has no illusions that women are always wiser than men either. Folly is also portrayed here as a woman. And it's not only in the book of Proverbs where wisdom, the figure of woman wisdom appears.

Jesus himself refers to this proverbial figure. For example, in Luke chapter 7, Jesus says, wisdom is justified by all her children. Now, the interesting thing is, in that verse, in the context of that verse, Jesus is actually speaking about himself. The woman wisdom, this personification in Proverbs, points us forward to Jesus Christ in an important way. She embodies the character of Jesus. Now, woman wisdom is not identical with Jesus. We don't worship woman wisdom.

[7 : 21] Neither do we worship Moses or David or other Old Testament characters or figures who pointed forward to Jesus. But the point is, the Bible has a very honoring view of women. And this is just one example of that. So having dealt with that, let's consider the character of wisdom's invitation.

In particular, what we see here in verses 1 to 3 is that wisdom is a very hard-working woman. Look at all that she does. Wisdom has built her house. And you know, her house is not just a little shack by the side of the road. It says it has seven pillars. She has hewn, she has carved out these seven pillars. Now, normal houses did not have pillars. This means this is a palace or even a temple. It's a building of solid and magnificent construction. She has slaughtered her beasts. Again, in the ancient world, you don't have meat for dinner every night. Meat was a luxury. This means it's a royal feast. It's a special occasion. And wisdom has prepared a special royal feast for her guests. She has mixed her wine. That doesn't mean she's watered it down. It means she's mixed it with honey or spices to make it fragrant and sweet. She has set her table, prepared a place for her honored guests. She has sent out her young women, that is her followers or her disciples, to call out verse 3. Verse 3 could also be translated, she has sent out her young women. She calls out from the highest places of the town. In other words, wisdom is calling out through her ambassadors, inviting people to come into her house. Wisdom has done all this work to build her house and prepare a great feast and invite her honored guests, but then look at who she invites to the feast. Whoever is simple, let him turn in here. And to him who lacks sense, she says, come. Now, the word simple in the book of Proverbs, it doesn't mean what we usually think it means.

It doesn't mean just someone who's sort of happy with, you know, the basics in life and content. And the word simple in Proverbs means naive or gullible or irresponsible or immature or aimless. It's connected to the verb deceive or seduce. It means someone who's easily led astray, easily deceived. So when you read simple in Proverbs, think immature or irresponsible or easily deceived.

[9 : 53] And this is who wisdom invites into her house. And then she invites those who lack sense, that is, those who lack understanding, those who lack discernment. Isn't this a striking contrast? A royal feast prepared for undeserving and unremarkable guests.

Now consider the character of Folly's invitation in verse 13 through 16. Now, one thing is the same. The invitation is issued to the same group of people.

Verse 16, to the simple and those lacking sense. Both wisdom and folly are calling out to the same group of people. And the assumption here, by the way, is that none of us are born wise.

We all start out in life simple and lacking sense that is easily deceived, immature, and irresponsible. That's the nature we're born with in this fallen world. And if we just follow the natural course of our nature, our human desires, our immaturity leads us into folly. Proverbs 14, 18 says, the simple acquire folly.

[11:08] Proverbs also says, folly is bound up in the heart of a child. That's the natural progression that we follow. And folly in Proverbs is not just being immature and irresponsible and easily deceived.

Folly is a more settled condition. It means being stubborn and unrestrained and unteachable. It's a more hardened and more permanent condition.

Now, wisdom and folly both extend their invitations to the same group of people. But unlike wisdom, consider the character of folly. Folly has not diligently built her house and prepared a meal for her guests.

What is the woman folly doing? She's lounging around and mouthing off. She's just sitting there, verse 14, at the door of her house.

And she's loud, verse 13. Now, this is not a general criticism of people who speak with a high volume. Okay?

[12:13] We're all right here. Okay? You know? The half Italian side of me, we like to speak with a loud volume. All right? The word loud is used for a chaotic and disturbing kind of noise.

In other words, it's saying folly's always making a commotion. She's stirring up a racket. She's sort of creating chaos.

Then it says she's seductive and knows nothing. I think perhaps she doesn't even... She's not even fully aware of her own foolishness.

Right? She's seductive and she's not even fully aware of it. And that's the nature of folly or sin in the Bible. It isn't true. It makes us blind. Sin makes us blind to our own faults and blind to our own pride and blind to the ways that we hurt others.

Deceiving others and being deceived in ourselves all at the same time. We think we're always in the right when really we might be quite far in the wrong. That's the nature of folly. So folly's causing chaos.

[13:27] She's deceiving and being deceived and she does nothing productive. Wisdom has built her house, made her bread, mixed her wine, slaughtered her beasts, set her table, organized the invitations.

Folly has done none of those things. And the only thing she offers in verse 17 is something that is not rightfully hers to give. So that's the character of the invitations.

Now let's consider, secondly, the content of the invitations. Go back to wisdom's invitation, verse 5 and 6. In verse 5 we see that wisdom's invitation is free and generous.

The first thing she says is, come, eat, drink. Wisdom has prepared this royal feast and she invites people who are immature and irresponsible and easily deceived. And she says, eat my bread.

Drink my wine. I've made it for you. I've prepared for it all. I've paid for it all. This is not a potluck. You don't need to bring anything. There's no entrance fee.

[14:29] There are no prerequisites. There's no admissions test. Whoever is simple, let him just come. Turn in here. Whosoever will may come. This is a free and joyous and gracious feast and all may come.

You are invited. But also, if you look down at verse 6, her free and gracious invitation is accompanied by a call that can sometimes feel costly and difficult.

Leave your simple ways. And live. And walk in the way of insight. In other words, wisdom says, come as you are. Come to the feast.

But if you come to my feast, you will not say, you will not remain just as you are. I've come to meet you right where you are. I love you that much. But I love you too much to let you simply stay right where you are.

Leave your simple ways. Walk in the way of insight. This is a call to conversion, to repentance. What the Bible calls turning from sin and following Christ.

[15:41] To leave behind immature and irresponsible ways. To launch out on the path of insight. And verse 10 says the path of insight is characterized by knowledge of the Holy One.

That is by a living relationship with God Himself. And you know, sometimes that can feel very intimidating. You know, some of you might be just hearing this message or just starting to follow Christ.

And doesn't that sometimes feel really intimidating? To walk with the Holy One. To leave behind the familiar old habits.

Even if you know they're bad habits. And you know you really should and want to get rid of them. But they're familiar. And they've been part of your life for so long. And they give you comfort. And they make you feel at ease.

And God's saying, leave those behind. And that feels hard. It feels costly. It's also a call to leave behind former associations. And commit to a new community.

[16:43] The beginning of verse 6 can also be translated, leave the company of the simple. And Proverbs talks a lot about the importance of growing in wisdom as part of a community. It's not something, it's not a path that you just walk solo.

Proverbs says, he who walks with the wise grows wise. But a companion of fools. If you hang out with fools all day, you will suffer harm. As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another. And so Proverbs is, and again, that can feel intimidating, right? You walk into a church. I mean, I know how I feel as a pastor of a church. If I just happen to visit another church that I've never been to before. And I'm used to being in church.

So I understand it can feel intimidating. Especially if you've never been in church. And we talk about joining a small group or coming to a Sunday school class. And you think, I don't know. You know, or praying with another Christian, like out loud, really?

I get it. It can feel intimidating. It feels new. But that's what wisdom is calling us into, a new community. Where we're walking together.

[17:54] And seeking to grow in wisdom together. Now look down at verse 8 and 9. These verses show us that walking in the path of wisdom looks like humbly receiving correction and instruction from others.

Verse 8. Reprove. Well, that means rebuke or correct. A wise man and he will love you. In other words, wisdom isn't so much about being knowledgeable as it is about being teachable.

Wisdom isn't just grudgingly accepting correction when you're backed into a corner and you know you're dead wrong and you can't weasel out of it.

Wisdom means an eager willingness to listen and learn from others even when you think that you're mostly or completely in the right. Some people are very knowledgeable.

You can be very knowledgeable even about the Bible and theology. But that's not always the same thing as being humble and teachable. And if you're very knowledgeable but not teachable, according to Proverbs, you are not wise.

[19:05] But let's be honest. Cultivating a teachable spirit does not come naturally to most of us. How many of you are honestly eager for someone to rebuke and correct you?

Raise your hand high. And everybody else take notice of who those people are. Right? I mean, I know I have a ways to go. Many times I don't respond well when I'm criticized.

But I can look back on many times in my life when someone has spoken a hard word to me in love. And I'm thankful they did. Because even if I didn't respond well right away, I'm a better man today because of it.

So wisdom is about being open to receive correction. But it's also about being open and desiring to receive instruction. Verse 9. Give instruction to a wise man and he will be still wiser.

Teach a righteous man. He will increase in learning. In other words, being teachable is not just a phase in life that you go through as a child or as a young adult. And then you become an adult and you know everything.

[20:12] No! Teach a righteous man and he will increase in learning all the way to the end of his days. Now, every once in a while, I have spoken to an older Christian.

Someone who's been around the church for years and years. Longer than I have. And they've become jaded. And they say things like, I've heard so many sermons I don't really need to hear anymore.

I'm not really going to learn anything that I don't already know. I've sat in so many Bible studies. I'm not interested in those anymore. Maybe I'll come to church once a month.

That's about it. And if it's too hot and the church has no AC, forget about it. Brother, sister, if that reflects your attitude, let me be the first to acknowledge that the church has often fallen short, including the sermons.

But if you think that you have nothing more to learn from God's holy and inspired Word, written for our instruction and our correction, you have fallen into sinful arrogance and self-reliance.

[21 : 35] And you do not fit this chapter's description of a wise person who wants to add to their learning. It's not just about, is the preacher smarter than you? He might not be.

But are you listening to the voice of God Himself speaking to you through the preacher and through your brothers and sisters in Christ? 1 Thessalonians 2.13 says, When you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the Word of men, but as what it really is, the Word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

Now, some of you may be weary. Some of you may have endured ugly conflicts, silly debates, and disappointing results in the church far more than I have.

But I know this. Jesus Christ has seen everything you have seen and far more, and He still loves His church. He still loves His bride with an undying love and an unwavering loyalty, and He wants you to do the same.

If you respect a man, you don't diss his wife. And if you love Jesus, don't give up on His church. And don't ever stop learning from His Word. Let the wise listen and add to their learning.

[22 : 58] So that's the content of wisdom's invitation. It's free and generous, but on the other hand, it feels costly and difficult to us because it calls us to change and to humble ourselves.

By contrast, consider the content of folly's invitation. Verse 17, Stolen water is sweet.

Bread eaten in secret is pleasant. Do you notice that folly makes no demands? Folly says you don't have to change. You don't have to humble yourself and listen and learn.

Just come and indulge yourself. We're going to have a great time. It all seems so easy at first compared to the way of wisdom. On the one hand, we should notice the feast that folly offers is nowhere near as good as the feast that wisdom promises.

Wisdom has prepared a royal feast, meat and wine. And bread. Folly only promises bread and water. Sometimes we miss that. What the true God promises is far richer and far better and far more enduring than anything this world can offer.

[24 : 20] And sometimes we miss that when we're listening to folly's invitation. But even though the feast of folly pales in comparison to wisdom, the feast of folly still has a present and immediate and perverse attraction.

I mean, let's be honest with ourselves. Ever since the Garden of Eden, there's a very real attraction to indulging in forbidden pleasures. Whether it's binge eating, or drinking alone, or using drugs, or masturbating, no one else can see me.

No one else knows. At least not now. And there's an initial high, or a comfort, or at least a numbing of the pain that comes from secretly indulging in forbidden pleasures.

Now, the pleasure doesn't last very long, and then you're left either wanting more or disgusted with yourself for what you've done. But the pleasure is very real, even if it's fleeting.

Our easily deceived hearts feel a perverse attraction to folly's promises. But you know, it's not just the base forbidden pleasures of folly that tempt us.

[25 : 40] There are also more sophisticated forms of folly that we can fall into. Verses 7 and 8 and verse 12 refer to the scoffer. We might call him the cynic.

The scoffer has no interest in being corrected or instructed. In fact, he dismisses or even retaliates against people who try to correct and instruct him. He looks at others with disdain, those unenlightened ones.

He sneers and mocks. He's always skeptical. He's always questioning. But his motive is not to learn the truth, but simply to undermine what other people are saying.

Undermine. Because in the end, the scoffer is loyal only to himself. And sometimes this kind of folly can appear in very sophisticated guises.

It's prevalent in elite academic circles. If you walk in those circles, beware. You can be initiated into the guild of scoffers who are all in the know and who know what everyone else in the world doesn't.

[26 : 56] So we see the content of wisdom's invitation can seem at first costly and difficult, and the content of folly's invitation seems at first easy and pleasurable and rewarding. But finally, we need to see the consequence of the invitations.

Not just the character or the content, but the consequence. If you accept wisdom's invitation, and if you follow its costly and difficult path, where will it lead you in the end?

And verse 6 says, and verse 11 says, it will lead you to life. Leave your simple ways and live. Really live. Verse 11, for by me your days will be multiplied and years will be added to your life.

Proverbs says that following the path of wisdom will add years, days, and years to your life. And Jesus says even more. Jesus says, if you follow me, if you take up your cross and follow me, if you enter by the narrow gate and walk on the hard way, it leads to life, not just now, but eternally. Following Jesus leads to life and joy that will last for all eternity. This week I was talking to somebody who was going through a really hard time. And he said to me, if I keep following God, does it get any easier?

[28 : 19] And I said, I can't promise it will get easier, but it does get better. And he said, well that's good, because better matters more than easier. I said, yeah brother, that's right.

You know, we read earlier from the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus said, everyone who hears these words of mine and does them, that is, takes them to heart, believes them, trusts them, and begins to obey them, will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

And the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall because it was founded on the rock. You see, whether you choose the wise path or the foolish path, if you go to wisdom's house or folly's house, troubles and trials in this world are going to come either way.

And in the end, we will stand before God on judgment day when everything that can be shaken will be shaken, when heaven and earth will flee from his presence and we will stand naked before him and exposed and we can't hide anything.

But here's the promise. If you trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, if you build your house on the rock, if you build your life on Jesus Christ himself, he will hold you fast.

[29 : 42] He will hold on to you through all the troubles and trials of this life and he will save you from the judgment to come so that you do not need to fear that day. He has died for our sins, he has risen from the dead and he will come again in glory and we can stand firm on his promise.

The path of wisdom, the path of following Christ is costly and difficult at times, but it's a better way and it leads to life. But the passage today ends by reminding us of the consequence of following the foolish path.

Folly's calling out. She doesn't make any demands. It's an easy path to go on. It's pleasurable in the here and now. But verse 18, but he does not know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of the grave.

The passage ends with a note of dire warning. The invitation of folly is a total sham. However easy and pleasurable it may seem at first, its end is certain and final death.

And of course, the Sermon on the Mount, the words of Jesus end in exactly the same way.

everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.

[31 : 21] And the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat against that house and it fell. And great was its fall. There are only two ways to live in the end.

There are only two paths and you cannot choose both. You cannot go into both houses. You cannot go both ways at the same time. You cannot choose neither.

There is no third option. It is with Christ who is to us wisdom from God for it is following our own path and the idols of this world into folly.

One way ends in eternal life. The other way ends in eternal death. Have you committed to follow Christ? Have you received his invitation? Don't postpone that decision.

Look to Christ. Come to him today. Jesus is the divine voice calling out to us behind wisdom's call in Proverbs.

[32 : 32] Let us hear and respond to him. Let us pray. Father, Father, we thank you for speaking to us in your word.

And we thank you that when we had fallen into sin, you did not leave us alone. We thank you that you came after us. You sent your son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for us, to prepare a feast for us, to welcome us, prodigal sons and daughters, home to you.

We pray that today by the... that your Holy Spirit would enable us to respond rightly to you. whether that's for the first time or by fixing our eyes on you in a fresh way and committing to walk with you on the path where you lead us.

We thank you that you do not leave us alone. Thank you, Father, for sending your son. Thank you, Jesus, for sending your spirit to us. Draw us near to yourself, we pray that we may feast on you with joy.

In your name we pray. Amen.