

Two Invitations

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[0 : 00] Well, friends, would you turn with me, please, to the words that we read in Proverbs chapter 9. Proverbs chapter 9, and reading again verses 1 to 6.

Wisdom has built her house, and 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 and hear. 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.

16 years ago, I was studying for a social anthropology exam during the Christmas holidays. In St. Andrew's, the exams would always fall after the Christmas holidays, and there was nothing worse than having to study for these exams while you were having your Christmas lunch or having your New Year get-togethers.

And this social anthropology exam was a real concern for me. It's the only non-divinity-related subject that I ever took at university, and I didn't enjoy one minute of it.

[1 : 25] In fact, the very moment I sat in the very first lecture, I thought to myself, what on earth am I doing here? And I still, 16 years on, don't know why on earth I chose to study it.

There's some nights I lie awake in bed waking up, and I'm thinking social anthropology exams. You know, these kind of things just stick in your mind and in your memory.

But we all make choices in life, some of them good and some of them not so good. In Proverbs 9, we're confronted with two choices, the choice of a way that leads to life and the choice of a way that leads to death.

And these choices are presented, they're portrayed as invitations from two women. There is an invitation from woman wisdom, and there is an invitation from woman folly.

First, we have the invitation from woman wisdom, and you see that in verses 1 to 12. Here, Solomon focuses on an invitation to be embraced, an invitation to be embraced.

[2 : 26] As we come to these verses, it's important that we note the context. In Proverbs 1 to 9, we find a father, Solomon, addressing his son. Now, that could be his biological son, or it could be his spiritual son.

Either way, this is a mature man, an experienced man, who is addressing a less mature man, a less experienced man. And throughout these chapters, we hear Solomon speaking to his son about the importance of acquiring wisdom.

Now, at this point, we can define wisdom as the skill of living successfully under God. Living under God in a way that causes your life to flourish.

And so, Solomon is saying to his son, I can teach you how to live your life so that you don't need to learn from your mistakes. Solomon is saying to his son, I can teach you how to live your life so that you don't make a mess of it.

Solomon is saying to his son, Learn from me and live. He's not saying that old phrase that we hear so often, You live and learn.

[3 : 34] He's saying, You learn and you live. And in Proverbs 9, we find him describing wisdom. This has been like a woman who gives an invitation.

In verses 1 to 6, we hear the invitation. We can start by witnessing the preparations. Verses 1 and 2, Solomon describes wisdom preparing her house. Verse 1, she builds her house.

She is involved in the construction process, Immersed in the construction process. And she builds her house on seven pillars, Indicating that this is a large house, A spacious house, That it can accommodate anyone who enters into it.

It's interesting when we see that the house is built using seven pillars. Seven is the number of completion, The number of perfection in Hebrew thought. And Solomon goes on to describe wisdom preparing her feast.

Verse 2, She slaughters her beasts. In the ancient Near East, Meat was a luxury that was only eaten on special occasions. Meat wasn't really part of your staple diet.

[4 : 39] And so here is wisdom slaughtering her beasts. She mixes her wine. She adds spices to make it flavoursome, Make it festive. And she sets her table.

She's making everything presentable For those who will be invited to this feast. We can move from the preparations to the proposal In verses 3 to 6. We can see who wisdom sends.

Look at verse 3. She sends out her young women. She sends out those who know her best. Those who have spent time in her company. We can see where wisdom sends them.

Verse 3 again, They're to go to the highest places in town. They're to go to the public places. The prominent places. The places where they're most likely to be seen.

Most likely to be heard. And we can see what wisdom tells them to say. Verses 4 to 6. They're to address the simple. Those who are undecided.

[5 : 35] Those who are uncommitted. And they're to say to the simple, Turn in here. Turn into wisdom's house. They're to address those lacking sense with the words, Come, eat of my bread.

Drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways and live. And walk in the way of insight. This is quite simply an invitation That is too good to refuse.

If someone chooses to accept this invitation, They will receive nothing less than life. That is what Solomon is saying to his son. Accept this invitation from wisdom, And you receive nothing less than life.

Verses 7 to 12. We move from the invitation to the responses. Solomon speaks about two contrasting responses To wisdom's invitation in verses 7 to 9.

He says that there will be those who respond negatively. Verses 7 and 8. The scoffer will abuse those who correct them. The wicked will injure those who reprove them.

[6 : 41] The scoffer will hate, Completely reject those who reprove them. Meanwhile, there will be those who respond positively. Look at verses 8 and 9. The wise will love those who reprove them.

The wise will become wiser as they receive instruction. The righteous will increase in learning as they're taught. And Solomon moves from those contrasts then To the conclusion of the matter in verses 10 to 12.

Once again, Solomon repeats the refrain That the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Verse 10. We've already said that wise living Is the skill of living successfully under God.

A life that flourishes under God. And in Proverbs 1, Solomon said That the fear of the Lord Is the beginning of that kind of life. The fear of the Lord is the starting point For that kind of life.

And here he repeats this as he says The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. And he adds And the knowledge of the Holy One The knowledge of God Is insight.

[7 : 50] Solomon then returns to focusing on the speech of wisdom In verse 11. He quotes wisdom as saying In verse 11 By me your days will be multiplied And years will be added to your life.

The point is clear. All those who walk in the way of wisdom All those who listen to wisdom's invitation Will have a long life. And with that statement ringing in his son's ears Solomon speaks to him about the responsibility That now lies with him.

Look at verse 12. If you are wise You are wise for yourself. And if you scoff You alone will bear it.

Derek Kidner writes This is perhaps the strongest expression of individualism in the Bible. Such statements aren't meant to deny that people benefit or suffer from each other's characters.

But to emphasize that the ultimate gainer or loser Is the man himself. In other words Solomon's son must make this choice As to whether or not He will walk in the way of wisdom.

[9 : 02] He must make the choice Whether or not He will listen to the voice of wisdom And receive wisdom's invitation. And it's a choice That he and he alone must make.

Solomon can't make it for him. No other person can make it for him. This man must make this choice for himself. The responsibility lies with him.

Now friends, as we consider these verses We can hear the call to follow wisdom. The summons to embrace a wise life. That is what we see in Proverbs 9. Solomon depicts wisdom as a woman Inviting people into her large home To enjoy a lavish feast That leads to life.

Solomon is saying to his son I want you to live a successful life. I want you to live a flourishing life under God. But you need to decide Whether or not you will follow that path. You need to decide What you are going to do With wisdom's invitation. And that is important for us to reflect on On the first Sunday of a new year.

[10:14] You see, what we find in the New Testament Is the language of wisdom Being applied to Jesus. If you go to the Sermon on the Mount Matthew presents Jesus As being a wise teacher Who speaks about living a successful life A flourishing life under God.

A life that is built on Him And built on His Word. Later, Matthew presents Jesus As one greater than Solomon When it comes to the wisdom that he possesses.

Meanwhile, the apostle Paul calls Jesus The wisdom of God. And he claims that all the treasures Of wisdom and knowledge Are found in this Jesus.

In his commentary on Proverbs Ray Ortlund writes In Proverbs 9 Wisdom is personified as a classy lady Opening to us her palatial home.

But what is Solomon really talking about? Taking the whole Bible into account This is a picture of Jesus Christ As a wealthy friend A wise friend Who has thought of everything we need And provided it in full.

[11:30] Quite simply, friends Jesus is the one Who says, come Eat of my bread. Jesus is the one who says, come Drink of the wine I have mixed.

Jesus is the one who says, Leave your simple ways And walk in the way of insight. Jesus is the one who says, By me, your years will be multiplied And days will be added to your life.

Jesus is the one who offers A spiritually full, a spiritually flourishing life In the present And a full and flourishing life In the future.

The new creation. The life that goes beyond the grave. Jesus is the one who promises An abundant life, an overflowing life, A deep life, a weighty life, a joyful life To every member of his flock.

And all he invites and instructs a person to do Is come and receive all that he has prepared for them In the gospel. All that he has purchased for them In the gospel.

[12:43] That's all. Nothing more. Nothing less. Just come and receive. And so if you're here tonight And you're not a professing Christian This is Jesus' loving invitation to you.

He is saying, Come and receive. Come and receive this life. Come and receive. And if you're here tonight And you are a professing Christian Jesus continues to give this loving invitation to you.

He continues to say, Come and receive. Come and receive this full life That is found in me. Once again, quoting Ray Ortlund, Jesus said, I am the bread of life.

Whoever comes to me shall not hunger. Whoever believes in me shall never thirst. He said, If anyone thirsts, Let him come to me and drink. Christ overflows with satisfaction.

All authentic Christian experience Comes from what he provides, Not what we provide. But knowing that isn't enough. We must dive into that endless ocean.

[13:55] What I am trying to do And what McMurdo tries to do every week Is we seek to present Christ As this endless ocean of fullness of grace.

We're presenting him as this glorious ocean In which fullness of life is found. And we're trying to say, Don't just look at the ocean.

Dive into that ocean. Don't just look at the bread of life. Feed on the bread of life. Don't just consider the water of life.

Drink from the water of life. And so friends, On this first Sunday of 2023, I want to ask every person Who's here the question, How are you responding To the summons from Jesus To embrace a wise life?

How are you responding To the summons from Jesus To live a life that recognizes him? A life that receives him? A life that rests on him?

[15:12] How are you responding To that invitation? But then second, There's the invitation from woman folly. Look at verses 13 to 18.

Where Solomon now focuses On an invitation to be evaded. An invitation to be evaded. In verses 13 and 14, We can see the description. So far, Solomon has been speaking to his son About the invitation from wisdom.

She has prepared her large house, Prepared her lavish feast, And she has sent out her young women To call people to come into her house And sit down to her feast, And upon doing so, They will find life in its fullness.

But now Solomon draws his son's attention To another woman, And this woman's name is Folly. And he starts by describing what she is. Look at verse 13. She's loud. She's boisterous. She's a restless troublemaker. Drama follows her wherever she goes. You know that kind of person. You can be sitting in a nice quiet room And everybody's talking normally, Talking calmly, And then this person will just come in And they've just got drama. [16:20] Everything's a drama. They're just so restless. They're so boisterous. Not only that, She's seductive. There's something appealing about her.

There's something alluring about her. But she's lacking the classiness of wisdom. She's lacking the wholesome elegance of wisdom. And she knows nothing. Now that doesn't refer to a lack of mental knowledge. It refers to a lack of moral knowledge. Folly knows nothing about the wise life. And Solomon continues by describing where Folly is. Look at verse 14. Wisdom was busy. She was industrious. She was preoccupied with preparing her house And preparing her feast. But look at Folly. Folly sits on the doorstep of her house. She's sluggish. Slovenly. Lazy. Lethargic. She's got no interest.

[17:18] No inclination. When it comes to hard work. When it comes to graft. She's content to just sit on her doorstep And watch the world go by. But she also takes a seat in the highest places in town.

She likes to be seen. She likes to be noticed. She likes to be the centre of attention and admiration. And so whenever she's not lazily lounging around on her doorstep She's found in the public places. The prominent places of the town where she's likely to be seen. Likely to be heard. And then in verses 15 to 17 We move from the description to the declaration.

Solomon tells his son about what Folly does. Look at verse 15. She calls out to those who are passing by. Those who are going straight on their way. These are people who are living Or at least attempting to live In an upright way.

A straight way. A narrow way. That's their aim. That's their ambition. And Folly calls out to them. She's trying to distract them.

[18:23] She's trying to divert them. She's trying to take them away from the place that they're going. And Solomon tells his son about what Folly says.

Look at verses 16 and 17. If you go back to verse 4 Wisdom had her young women call out to the simple Saying to them, Turn and hear. It was an invitation to her home.

And now in verse 16 Folly calls out to the simple With the same words. Turn and hear. It's an invitation into her home. And then like wisdom in verses 4 and 5 Folly invites those lacking saints To sit down and have a meal with her.

Now the meal itself is meager. It stands in stark contrast to the meat And the bread and the wine That wisdom offered. All that Folly can offer is just bread and water.

No mention of any meat freshly slaughtered. No mention of any wine that's just been mixed. And so Folly does all that she can To make her meager meal Sound that little bit more thrilling.

[19:28] That little bit more exciting. She claims that stolen water is sweet. She claims that bread eaten in secret is pleasant. We can move then from the declaration To the destination in verse 18.

Folly has issued her invitation To those passing her home To sit down and have a secret meal with her. A secluded meal with her. It all sounded so thrilling.

So exciting. It got the pulse racing. It got the heart pounding. Many responded by entering her home Anticipating a few moments of pleasure And then they would leave And they would get on with their lives.

And it's at this point That Solomon tells his son That Folly's invitation Always comes with a catch. There's a bit of small print That Folly never discloses.

Solomon says that the person Who hears her invitation Doesn't know that the dead are in her house. And he goes on and says They don't know that those Who accepted her invitation On previous occasions Are now in the depths of Sheol.

[20:38] That word Sheol can mean the grave. It can also mean the shadowy underworld. Many who entered Folly's house Never came out again.

Many who entered Folly's house Were never seen again. This is an invitation Solomon is saying That must be refused.

If someone decides To accept Folly's invitation They will receive Nothing more than death. You remember If you receive Wisdom's invitation You receive nothing less than life.

But if you receive Folly's invitation You receive nothing more than death. And so as we consider these verses Friends We can hear the caution To flee from folly.

The summons to evade a foolish life. That is what we see in Proverbs 9. Solomon presents wisdom As a noble woman An elegant woman Inviting people into her large home To sit down at a lavish feast That will result in a long And flourishing life.

[21 : 54] But he also presents An alternative path Where folly Is a loud woman. A seductive woman. A morally bankrupt woman Who invites a person Into her home To partake in a secret meal A secluded meal That will ultimately Result in death.

Solomon is saying To his son I want you to Live a full Flourishing life Under God. I want you to live A successful life Under God. But you need to do All that you can To avoid anything Or anyone That would distract you Or divert you From the path That leads to life.

I want you to avoid Anything or anyone That would divert you Or distract you From that path And that would lead To your final demise Your final destruction Your final downfall Your final death.

Life. And friends That is so important For us to reflect on On this first Sunday Of our new year. You see what we find In the Sermon on the Mount Is that Jesus The very embodiment Of wisdom The very Enfleshment Of wisdom Says that those Who reject His wise counsel Those who reject His life-giving words Will eventually fall With a great crash.

Like a house That's built on sand. But so often The world tries To convince us That Jesus And that full life That he offers That flourishing life That he offers Is just boring Just restrictive I fully believe That's why many people In Lewis Refuse to commit Themselves to Christ It's not that they Don't believe In the existence Of God It's not that they Don't believe In the existence Of Jesus They want God In their doctor's Surgeries They want God In their hospital wards And they certainly Want God At their wakes And at their funerals I find it amazing And I know Myrtle finds it Amazing too That the people Who never darken The doors of the church From one end

[24 : 20] Of the year To the next Want every family Worship Every wake Every funeral That's on offer They want God They want Jesus In these moments But they've bought Into the world's lie That a Christless life Is more appealing More attractive Than a life That is built On Jesus And his life-giving word And the sad reality Is that while the world May promise much It always Always Always Fails to deliver C.S. Lewis Knew about this And he wrote About it And I hope The younger people Have read this book And if you've not Give it a try C.S. Lewis Wrote about it In the line The witch In the wardrobe And in that book Edmund meets The white witch Who promises him A throne And endless supplies Of Turkish delight If he just betrays His brother And two sisters And gives the witch His full allegiance But upon betraying

His brother and sisters Edmund's not given A throne Neither is he Given an endless Supply of Turkish Delight Not even one piece Of Turkish delight Instead Edmund Becomes the witch's Slave And he ends up Being fed Nothing but bread And water He's left Bitterly disappointed And finds that His life is in danger That the witch Wants to kill him And that friends Is what Proverbs 9 Is warning us about It's telling us That a Christless life Leads to disappointment And ultimately Eternal death A place in the depths Of Sheol A place in that Shadowy underworld Quite simply Jesus is saying To everyone Who reads these verses Don't be foolish With that one life That you have been given Don't be foolish With that very fragile life That you have been given

My friend If you are here tonight And you are not A professing Christian Jesus is issuing This loving caution To you Don't be foolish With that one Fragile life That you have been given Don't play Russian roulette With your soul And if you are here tonight And you are a professing Christian But maybe you have been Feeling the pull The lure Away from the path Of wisdom Jesus is issuing This loving caution To you Don't be foolish With that one Fragile life That you have been given Don't play Russian roulette With your soul You know friends Jesus has such a A loving heart He has a heart That is so full Of gentleness So full of grace

So full of mercy So full of compassion And he will not Let you enter Folly's house Without a final warning And maybe for some Tonight it is that Final warning And it's as if he Stands At the very Entrance To Folly's house Saying Don't go in It's as if he Stands in the very Doorway of Folly's house And he says Don't go in It's as if he Stands in the very Threshold of Folly's house And he says You're going to have To trample over me To go in You're going to have To kick me to the Ground To go in You're going to have To dig my face In the dirt Before you go in

