

Wisdom's Invitation

COMPETING CALLS • PART 1 • PROVERBS 9:1-6

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It is good to be together this morning! If you are visiting with us today, we are especially glad that you are here, and we hope that you will take a moment to fill out a visitor card online. The QR code is on the bulletin (on the wall, right inside the front door), and the web address for that is very simple: www.fourlakescoc.org/visitor.

Before we get to our study of God's word this morning, I'd like to share just a bit of good news from the world at large, and I think it's okay if we do this, as the good book tells us in Romans 13:7, ***"Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor."*** Jim Hellrood is a Christian friend and brother who is truly a pillar of the church up in Wausau. Some of you have worshiped up there, Don Schmudlach (one of our members) did some preaching up there, we have worshiped there several times through the years – but Jim was in the news last week – in a good way! Jim serves as a parking enforcement officer for the Wausau Police Department. Jim is on the right in this picture (in the yellow). We may not always be overjoyed to have a run-in with a parking enforcement officer, but several weeks ago, Jim was first on the scene as someone climbed out on a ledge on the top floor of a parking garage up there, intending to do themselves harm. Jim got there and held on until help arrived, saving the person's life, and giving that person a second chance. I am thankful for the good news this week, especially since it involves a brother in the Lord.

We are here this morning, though, to share the best news of all, that Jesus the Son of God came to this earth to save us. He died in our place on the cross, he was buried, and he was raised up on the first day of the week. We respond to this good news by turning to God in obedient faith, turning away from sin, confessing our faith in Jesus as the Christ, and by allowing ourselves to be briefly buried with Christ in baptism, an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins. And our example of this today comes to us from John Rowe, who preaches the good news down in Phoenix, Arizona. A few days ago, he posted online and says that,

Bryan was baptized tonight. I met him a couple of days ago and asked him about his relationship with God. He told me that he was absolutely sure he was going to heaven. Though he was baptized at age 16, in our Bible study tonight, he realized he had not obeyed the gospel in baptism (2 Thessalonians 1:8). He thought he was saved before his baptism at 16, and discovered that true baptism is a reenactment of the gospel (Romans 6:3-4), for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38),

and for salvation (1 Peter 3:21). When he learned this, he said, "I'm ready to do this now!". To God be the glory!

Great news from Arizona, and we share this as a reminder, first of all, that good things are happening, but secondly (and more importantly), we share this as an example – if you would like to do what Bryan has done this week, we invite you to get in touch, and we would love to study with you. Our contact information is on the front of the bulletin each week. Or you can simply either call or text me at 608-224-0274. Oh, and by the way, thanks to those of you who subscribed to our YouTube channel this week! We made it to 100, and we are now working on taking the next steps in making that resource much easier to share. Thanks so much for your help with this!

This morning, I'd like for us to return to our long-term and very sporadic series of lessons from King Solomon's proverbs! As some of you know, my love for the Proverbs goes back to my first semester at Freed-Hardeman University, when I took a biology class, and the professor started each lecture with a brief reading of several proverbs. I didn't know it right away, but I quickly discovered that the professor got his PhD from UW Madison and was a part of the church here back in the 60's. I am referring, of course, to Milton Tucker. But it was so strange to me, having grown up in the Chicago area, and having attended a public school where my biology teacher actively ridiculed Christianity – to graduate from high school on a Friday and to show up in a college class the following Tuesday and to hear this highly educated professor actually hold the word of God in such high regard.

Several years ago, therefore, I thought it might be good to very slowly work our way through Proverbs in sermon form. We studied the Proverbs in our Wednesday class a number of years ago, and I struggled with the lack of context, but we settled on scrolling through and studying from three translations simultaneously. If you were here, you may remember we had the NASB with the heading "WHAT THE TEXT ACTUALLY SAYS," we had the NIV with the heading "WHAT THE TEXT PROBABLY MEANS," and then we had The Message (a paraphrase by Eugene Peterson) with the heading, "WHAT SOME DUDE THINKS IT SAYS." And this is how we dealt with some of those figures of speech from a culture on the other side of the world roughly 3,000 years ago.

But a sermon series like this presents its own set of challenges. I don't want us to get bogged down in this book week after week for years on end, so I thought we would cover a passage here and there very sporadically over the long term (in a series that will most likely outlive me), and this morning, we have come to Proverbs 9. Starting in Proverbs 10, we lose all sense of context completely, and I am already preparing for that transition (perhaps in several months), but in Proverbs 9, we still have a sense of context – instead of individual proverbs, we still have paragraphs in Proverbs 9. And what we find in Proverbs 9 fits in with everything that has come before it. Up to this point, Proverbs has been an encouragement from Solomon (as a father) to his sons, preparing them for life and encouraging them to pursue wisdom as opposed to foolishness. As parents, isn't this what we try to get across to our children as well? From birth to the age of 18 or so (and even beyond), our message to our kids is, "Don't do stupid stuff!" And this is what we see from King Solomon to his sons, continuing in Proverbs 9.

In Proverbs 9, King Solomon presents the choice between wisdom and foolishness as two women offering competing invitations to a dinner. As most of us enjoy eating and as most of us have been invited to various dinners through the years, this is a picture that most of us can appreciate. Only the invitations in Proverbs 9 are competing; that is, we must choose between one and the other. As much as I would like to try, I do believe it is impossible to eat two dinners at the same time! Solomon, then, presents this as a choice: Two women are calling out to his sons, inviting them to dinner, and his sons must choose one or the other.

Today, we start with WISDOM'S CALL (in verses 1-6). Next week, we will look at a SPECIAL SITUATION Solomon addresses (in verses 7-12). And then, if the Lord wills, we will close this brief series-within-a-series two weeks from today by looking at the invitation given by the FOOLISH WOMAN (in verses 13-18).

Let's start today, though, by looking together at the first six verses of Proverbs 9 – Proverbs 9:1-6,

- ¹ ***Wisdom has built her house,
She has hewn out her seven pillars;***
- ² ***She has prepared her food, she has mixed her wine;
She has also set her table;***
- ³ ***She has sent out her maidens, she calls
From the tops of the heights of the city:***
- ⁴ ***"Whoever is naive, let him turn in here!"
To him who lacks understanding she says,***
- ⁵ ***"Come, eat of my food
And drink of the wine I have mixed.***
- ⁶ ***"Forsake your folly and live,
And proceed in the way of understanding."***

So, we have an invitation to dinner, don't we? As we learn from King Solomon this morning, I'd like for us to pay very careful attention to the invitation that's offered by WISDOM in this passage. As we've seen before in this book, wisdom is personified as a woman, and she is calling out with an invitation to dinner.

- I. **And I want us to notice, first of all (in verse 1) that wisdom is inviting us into a dinner environment that is STABLE AND SECURE.**

In verse 1, ***"Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars."*** So, this is not a tent, this is not a shack by the side of the road somewhere, this is not a dumpy-looking cabin out in the woods, this is not a remote mountain outpost, but this is a large home. And the fact that this house has been built with seven pillars indicates not only that it is large, but it is also stable. This home is substantial. When I was growing up, I remember there was a house on Oak Street we would always pass on our way to church (three times a week for my entire childhood), and this house had some pillars out front. And to me, that was a mansion! To me, it looked like the White House. To me, it looked like some huge home that belonged on a plantation down south. And really, it didn't fit in the neighborhood at all. Of course, if I were to see it now, I doubt it would look as big to me now as it did back when I was 5 or 6 years old. But my point is: If a house is described as having ***"seven pillars,"*** that is most likely a rather large home.

Well, as you can imagine, when we start digging into this description, people have some wild ideas as to what these seven pillars might represent. Some have suggested that these pillars represent the foundation of the earth. To me, that's a bit of a stretch. Others have tied these to James' description of wisdom in James 3:17 when he said that ***"the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy."*** Maybe. One guy just made a bunch of stuff up. I read one sermon where the preacher described seven pillars of wisdom that would help us develop good character, and then he went on to describe the pillar of trustworthiness, the pillar of respect, the pillar of fairness, the pillar of responsibility, and so on. I think I actually yelled out loud, "No!!!" The guy basically used this verse as an excuse for his own opinions. It was painful! He used this verse as a springboard to a whole bunch of stuff that Solomon

never intended. Some have suggested that Solomon uses the number seven as symbolic of completeness. Maybe.

In my mind, though, Solomon seems to just be describing a house that is stable and secure. Lady Wisdom is inviting us in, not to a run-down shack somewhere, but she is inviting us over for dinner, to a home that she built herself and to a home that is stable and secure. And to me, it almost reminds me of a temple of some kind – it's big, it's sturdy, it's supported by pillars. This place we've been invited to for dinner is stable and secure. And it's large; there's room for all who have been invited to this feast. This past Friday, I came over here to mow, and I met a guy from the neighborhood who wanted to drop off clothing for the giveaway. I invited him to worship with us, and he looked at the building, and he noted the large number of cars we have around here on Sunday, and he said, "I bet you're all crammed in there like sardines, aren't you?" Okay, you got me there! We are very friendly sardines! We don't have seven pillars in this place, I suppose. But here, Solomon is describing a substantial venue for this dinner we're being invited to attend. And we appreciate that in an invitation.

II. As we continue with this invitation, we also find that Solomon describes the dinner as LAVISH.

In verse 2, Solomon says, ***"She has prepared her food, she has mixed her wine; she has also set her table."*** We might not think this is lavish, until we realize that the word we have referring to the food being ***"prepared"*** is a word that may also refer to something being ***"slaughtered"*** or ***"butchered."*** So, there is meat involved in this meal, and this is rather unusual. Normally, people didn't eat meat at every meal back in those days. Without refrigeration, they would kill an animal, and they would usually eat all of it right then and there. We've seen this in our Wednesday class as we studied Abraham preparing that meal for his three guests in Genesis 18. Sarah prepared the bread, and Abraham went out and killed a calf. I was just listening to a sermon a few days ago where someone explained that most invitations came in two stages (similar to how we may send out a "save the date" invitation, followed by a more firm invitation closer to the event). In those days, they would send out that first invitation to gauge interest. People would respond, and then they would use those responses to figure out how much meat they needed. Closer to the dinner, they would kill and prepare the animals and then send out the second invitation; basically, "All things are ready, come to the feast! This is it! Come to the dinner you said you would come to!" And if people turned down that second invitation, that meat would be wasted. This is why the host was so angry in the parable Jesus told, when people didn't come when they were invited. They gave all kinds of excuses that they should have known about when they accepted that first invitation.

But here in verse 2, wisdom ***"has prepared her food,"*** that is, she has killed the fattened calf, so to speak. And she has also ***"mixed her wine."*** We hope to get to the foolish woman and what she offers two weeks from today, but for now, let's just say that it's not meat and wine, but it's bread and water. Wisdom, though, has carefully ***"mixed her wine."*** Often, wine was diluted. Ancient Jewish tradition tells us that they would dilute their wine for the Passover meal by a 3:1 ratio, three parts water to one part wine. We often assume that this was true for everyday life as well. Sometimes water just doesn't taste too good by itself. Up at our summer camp, for example, it's just not good, and several years ago, some of the girls started referring to it as "blood water." So, to get kids to drink it, we had to mix it with Kool-Aid; lots and lots of Kool-Aid during that week at camp. Now, thankfully, we have a filtered water fountain and a filtered bottle filling station up there. But in the ancient world, they would often dilute (or mix) their wine with water. And that's what Wisdom has done here.

So, there is a difference in the offerings. Wisdom offers a lavish feast, while the woman of folly offers the bare minimum, barely enough to be considered a meal. And in addition to this, Solomon says that Wisdom ***"has also set her table."*** This is fancy! I hate to say it, but we don't do too much table setting at our house anymore. We

did when our kids were little. We all got together for dinner at the same time every day. Eventually, though, everybody got jobs, and now everybody gets home at different times, and we half-jokingly say that we eat our meals over the kitchen sink. It's so much easier that way! Wisdom, though, sets the table. This is a lavish meal she is preparing.

III. As we move along into verse 3, we also find that Wisdom's invitation is CALM AND RATIONAL.

And again, we hope to get to this in two weeks, but the foolish woman's invitation is loud, obnoxious, and seductive. Wisdom's invitation, though, is calm and rational. In verse 3, ***"She has sent out her maidens, she calls from the tops of the heights of the city."*** There is a plan in place here. Wisdom isn't loud and boisterous, but she sends messengers to some strategic places, to ***"the tops of the heights of the city."*** She doesn't want anybody to miss the invitation, so she sends out her maidens on this mission of calling out from the high places. She's not hiding her lavish feast under a bushel, this isn't some secret gathering, but she is eager to share; and so she invites, she graciously gets the word out – not as a temptress trying to lure men into some scandalous feast, but calmly and rationally, using maidens as messengers. She ***"calls."***

And I believe, based on what we know about wisdom elsewhere in Scripture, wisdom wants to be shared. Wisdom is contagious (in a good way). If I learn something by experience that makes my life easier, something I wish I had known before I did it the hard way, I want to share that information. Today, we may make a YouTube video. We post online. We share what we have learned. Several weeks ago, I shared online that my sister and I drove two hours for some Indian fry bread up in Neah Bay, Washington. Google said the guy was open, we had been there a few years ago, but when we got there, he was not open! So, I decided to go home and learn how to make it myself. We had had it at the four corners area where Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado, come together. I had had it in Neah Bay, and I thought how hard can it be? So, I made some myself. I posted the recipe. And not too long after that, Caleb's mom shared variations from nearly a dozen Native American tribes. I have my work cut out for me, testing all of these recipes. I'm just saying that when we learn something by experience, it's natural to want to share. That's what wisdom does. Wisdom learns and then gets the word out. Wisdom is generous. I have been where you are, and I would like to share what I have learned. So here, in a similar way, Wisdom is pictured as sending out invitations to a lavish dinner in a calm and rational way.

IV. Getting back to our text, we also find that Wisdom's invitation is given especial to those who are SIMPLE.

In verse 4, says (through her messengers), ***"Whoever is naïve, let him turn in here!"*** And then, she continues with an extended invitation addressed (in the second half of verse 4), ***"to him who lacks understanding."*** So, the invitation is open to all, but she is particularly aiming to welcome those who are ***"naïve,"*** (the ***"open-minded"***), those who ***"lack understanding"*** (those who are ***"needy of mind"*** or ***"needy of heart"*** – this sounds so close to Jesus' blessing on the ***"poor in spirit"***). But as I see it, she's looking for those who are open to wisdom. Sometimes, we have a way of getting so arrogant (or so educated) that we don't think we need to learn anything else. We will address this a little bit more next week. But for now, we find that the invitation to wisdom's feast is open to those who are naïve and know it. Again, several weeks ago, we looked at the beatitudes and the special blessing on ***"those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."*** Blessed are the hungry! It is hard to fill a cup that's already full. It's hard to teach somebody who already knows it all. In the same way, if we are already full of ourselves, we don't realize that we truly need what Lady Wisdom is offering!

Lady Wisdom, then, doesn't necessarily put those who are rich at the top of her list. She's not trying to invite the famous or the powerful. She's not necessarily looking for those who will contribute to a lively conversation at this dinner party, but she is looking for those who are willing to learn. She is looking for the *"simple,"* the *"naïve,"* she's looking for those who *"lack understanding."*

And in a sense, this is who we are looking for today. In terms of teaching the gospel, it's so nice when we don't need to "un-teach" somebody. Sometimes, people have been so misled for so many years, it is truly difficult to know where to start. We, also, then, are looking for the simple. This is where Paul had his greatest success, with the simple. As he explains in 1 Corinthians 1:26-27, ***"For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong."*** In other words: Look around you! For the most part, we are not rich and famous and powerful. For the most part, we are not the most highly educated. For the most part, we are not the most wealthy. For the most part, we are not the most powerful. For the most part, we are not the most politically connected. There are exceptions, but generally speaking, Jesus was rejected by the scholars and accepted by the commercial fishermen. Lady Wisdom, then, makes a point of inviting the simple.

V. This brings us to the last two verses for today, as we learn that Wisdom's call is quite APPEALING with some amazing BENEFITS.

In verses 5-6, she says, ***"Come, eat of my food and drink of the wine I have mixed. Forsake your folly and live, and proceed in the way of understanding."*** Enjoy this lavish feast and live! The condition is: You must leave your open-mindedness behind; you must continue on in the way of understanding. It's a free offer, an open invitation, an appealing offer, but we must accept it to receive the benefits, ***"Forsake your folly and live."***

Conclusion:

And this brings us to the end of this first paragraph as we have now seen "Wisdom's Call," Wisdom's invitation. And I hope we've noticed as we've looked at this passage, that this is a whole lot more than an invitation to a nice dinner. Ultimately, what Solomon is doing is trying to describe the indescribable. He's inviting and encouraging his sons to accept the Lord's invitation, to incorporate God's wisdom into their lives. It's God's invitation to us. The almighty and all-wise God is inviting us to participate in his wisdom; he's inviting the open-minded to come and learn. And in the New Testament (in 1 Corinthians 1:24), Paul describes Jesus as ***"the power of God and the wisdom of God."*** Jesus is wisdom in the flesh, and we are invited to share in his wisdom, "Come Share the Lord," as we sometimes sing. We partake of his wisdom, we listen to his voice, we trust and obey his word, and we are given life in exchange. We are invited to ***"Forsake our folly and live,"*** as Solomon says.

King Solomon is encouraging his sons to make a choice, because we truly cannot have it both ways. We cannot be both wise and foolish simultaneously, even though we continue to hear competing invitations. We cannot literally be sophomores. As you might know the word "sophomore" comes from two Greek words, the first meaning "wise" and the second meaning (literally) "moron." In school, a sophomore is a wise moron – at the point of knowing something but needing to know a whole lot more, I suppose. But spiritually speaking, we cannot walk the line between wisdom and foolishness. Yes, there are days we may struggle, but we really do have to accept Wisdom's invitation.

Next week, hopefully we can look at a special concern in the next few verses, and then in two weeks, Lord willing, we can study the other invitation, the invitation Solomon warns about, the invitation to foolishness.

As we close our thoughts on this passage, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

We come to you as your people today, praising you as the all-wise and almighty God. You made us, you know our weaknesses, and you have given us your word as an invitation, as a guide to life. Thank you, Father, for loving us so much to send your Son to this earth, to show us how to live. We ask for your continued mercy, for we are truly in need of your love and forgiveness.

We come to you through Jesus our Savior. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com