

WISDOM FEAST?

SERIES: CHOOSE WISELY



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Proverbs 9:1-6

9th Message

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Proverbs 9:1-6

The younger son had no idea what he had when he brazenly left home to live it up. He had no idea what he had when, at the end of himself, he dragged himself home. When his father ran out to him, killed the fattened calf, and threw a party, however, he had the opportunity to see his father in a new light. Really, the party was going on even before the younger son left; he just didn't know it.

Likewise, the older son had no idea what he had. Unlike his brother, he stayed home and fulfilled his obligations, but he did so resentfully. When his father threw a party when his rebellious brother came home, the older son pitched a fit. He wanted nothing to do with the party (Luke 15).

Did you know that we've been invited to a party—to a feast, as a matter of fact?

Proverbs 9:1-6:

**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.”**

The preparations

Wisdom is depicted as a host who makes careful preparations for her guests. She begins with building a house and hewing seven pillars for it, with the number seven indicating that it's a large house with plenty of room for guests and also, in a poetic way, that it's a complete house, perfectly designed for hospitality.

Then Wisdom prepares the food and drink, the kind that wouldn't usually be consumed by commoners: meat and wine. She goes so far as to slaughter the beasts and mix the wine herself, to her specifications, to make it more enjoyable. She even sets the table for her guests so that everything is just right. She does all this herself even though she has servants.

In verse 3, Wisdom commissions her young women, her servants, to invite people to the feast she has prepared. With multiple servants making invitations, she's more likely to get more people to come to her table. Wisdom stays home to receive her guests.

Everything in verses 1-3 belongs to Wisdom. She builds “her” house, she hews “her” pillars, she slaughters “her” beasts, she mixes “her” wine, she sets “her” table, and she sends “her” women. What she has is for others.

Feast on Jesus

So, what is the feast? The feast is the teaching of Wisdom, first of all in the Proverbs. Behind Wisdom, of course, is God. The feast is the teaching of God that comes through Proverbs. God's teaching, of course, is not limited to Proverbs, so the feast is God's teaching that comes through all of the Scriptures.

Consider the teaching of Jesus in John 6:53-58:

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate, and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.

The feast in Proverbs is the teaching of God, which culminates in the teaching of Jesus, who teaches us that he's the feast! After all, Paul calls Jesus “the wisdom of

God” (1 Corinthians 1:24). Jesus is Wisdom personified. Jesus not only teaches wisdom, he also is wisdom. Knowing wisdom is good. Feasting on wisdom is better. We are not so much defined by what we know. We are more defined by what we want. If you stop to examine what you think about, you’re probably not thinking, “I know this,” or, “I’d like to know that.” You’re probably thinking, “I want this,” or, “I want that.” Do you want an exhilarating feast? Do you want Jesus?

If you come to the Scriptures or to the teaching of Jesus in the Scriptures only to gain knowledge, you’re missing out. If you come to the Scriptures to gain knowledge and feast on Jesus and let the knowledge that you gain inspire you to feast on Jesus, then you’re coming to his house for a party.

In the gospels, the feast that Jesus culminates in the Last Supper. If Wisdom made careful preparations, Jesus carefully directed his disciples to prepare for them to eat the Passover meal (Matthew 26:17-18). If Wisdom built the perfect house for hospitality, the upper room in Jerusalem provided the perfect setting for the Last Supper, when Jesus redefined the Passover meal by placing himself at the center of it. If Wisdom slaughtered her beasts, Jesus, as the lamb of God, was slaughtered for the sins of the world. If Wisdom mixed her wine in order to pour it out, Jesus prepared his body and poured out his blood. If Wisdom set her table so that everything was just right, Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem,” celebrate the Passover with his disciples, and offer his body and blood for all of us (Luke 9:51).

Wisdom’s words in Proverbs 9 anticipate Jesus’ words in Matthew 26, when he shared the bread and wine with his disciples. “Come, eat of my bread / and drink of the wine I have mixed” sounds very much like “Take, eat, this is my body” and “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:26-28).

To partake of the Lord’s Supper is a tremendously intimate—and, let’s face it, slightly weird thing—to do. Some first century observers, hearing that believers ate the body and drank the blood of Jesus, wondered whether they were cannibals. When you partake of the Lord’s Table, you take Jesus into you.

Celebrate the festival

This is not simply food and drink for sustenance; this is food and drink for a feast! We feast not only on the teaching of the Proverbs, not only on the teaching of all

the Scriptures, not only on the teaching of Jesus in the Scriptures, we also feast on Jesus himself. We feast on love and forgiveness and intimacy and redemption and restoration and significance and purpose.

This is the best stuff, the finest of fare. Forget the French Laundry and Chez Panisse and Manresa and any other Michelin-starred restaurant! To feast on Jesus is exhilarating. Those who partake of the feast will “live”—not just survive but really live. This is more than food that just keeps you alive. This is a feast! Partake of this feast, and you’ll experience life in a new way. After all, Jesus says, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).

The kingdom of God, among other things, is a party—and an eternal one at that. As the apostle Paul says, “Let us therefore celebrate the festival . . .” (1 Corinthians 5:8). And to think: Jesus, as Wisdom personified, took great pains to prepare for the feast that he invites us to—the feast that is him.

It makes a difference

When I was growing up, our family often hosted people. My mother was a great host, and she always cooked up a feast. She put her sons, my two brothers and me, to work in order to get ready for our guests. Thankfully, my work had nothing to do with food preparation, for which our guest can be thankful to this day. My job was to clean.

One day, overcome by laziness, I suppose, I told my mother that we shouldn’t clean so much for our guests because it was inauthentic. “They should see how we really live,” I said. She retorted, “Well, we shouldn’t live this way.” I got back to work. In any event, by the time the guests arrived, everything was just right. People loved coming to our house; they loved sitting down at table; they loved the feast my mother prepared.

When I was in my early thirties, my mother prepared what turned out to be her final Christmas dinner right after Thanksgiving because she was facing surgery and knew she wouldn’t be up for it come Christmas time. I walked into the house December 1, and the dining room table was set in all its elegance, with a sheet draped over it so that it wouldn’t collect dust in the coming weeks. Everything was just right. Our last Christmas feast together was an epic celebration. It was in many respects for our family, the last supper. My mother died of cancer a few months later.

It makes a difference when people prepare for us, doesn't it? Jesus takes great pains to prepare for us, and he serves up an eternal feast.

The invitation

The author establishes a pattern. With six short, staccato phrases, he describes what wisdom does, but with the sixth phrase ("She has sent out her young women"), he breaks the pattern. By the sixth phrase, we're familiar with the rhythm. Read the six phrases again, and feel the rhythm. It comes as a bit of a shock that the author breaks the pattern.

What happens? After the sixth phrase, the author describes not what Wisdom does but what her young women do. And what do they do? They invite people to the feast. Verses 3-6 constitute the content of Wisdom's invitation. Everything that Wisdom does is for the purpose of inviting guests to her house so that they can enjoy the feast that she has prepared.

Wisdom sends her servants to call from "the highest places" in town so that as many people as possible can hear the invitation. The invitation goes out to "whoever is simple" and to him or her who "lacks sense." To respond to this invitation, one has to recognize that he or she is simple, or unenlightened, and lacks sense. Everyone is unenlightened. Everyone lacks sense. Who couldn't use more awareness? Who couldn't use more sense? The invitation, then, is an appeal for everyone to *recognize* his or her lack.

Although Wisdom has slaughtered her beasts and mixed her wine, the beasts don't make it into the invitation. Instead, bread replaces meat in the invitation. However, if someone were to accept the invitation, he or she might be surprised to find, upon reclining at table, that the banquet features not only bread and wine but meat also.

The appeal to the simple and those who lack sense is to "turn in here," to Wisdom's house, leaving "simple ways" in order to "walk in the way of insight." The way of insight is, first of all, the way into Wisdom's house. It takes insight to accept Wisdom's invitation when so many other things are calling for our attention.

Hear the invitation

This is a phenomenal feast, the feast that is Jesus, yes? Now, do you know what the arresting break in the literary pattern means in Proverbs 9:1-6? And the

break in the pattern is designed to arrest us, to get our attention, to stop us in our tracks. What does it mean? It means everyone's invited. It means that you're invited! Everything that Jesus does is for the purpose of inviting guests to the feast that he has prepared. This has all the earmarks of the most exclusive party in the history of the world, but it's open to everyone. You're invited.

Jesus not only takes pains to prepare the feast, he also takes pains to invite us to the feast. First, he sent his apostles, and then countless other servants, not to mention the Holy Spirit and the angels of God, through the ages so that we today can hear the invitation—so that you today can hear the invitation. Can you hear it?

The invitation goes out to whoever is unenlightened, who whoever lacks sense. Whoa, unenlightened? Lacks sense? You? The feast is awesome, and you're invited, but for the invitation to resonate with you, you have to recognize your need. You have to recognize that you are insufficient in and of yourself. You have to recognize that you are unenlightened and that you lack sense. Otherwise, the invitation will make no sense. You won't hear it, or at least you won't hear it in a way that makes you want respond to it.

Jesus can send out millions of servants, and they can shout his invitation from the highest places, and you'll say something like, "I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it," or, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them," or, "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." You'll say, "Please have me excused" (Luke 14:15-24).

So if you sense your need, and if something has happened to you that makes you realize that you don't have what it takes, that you are insufficient in and of yourself for whatever is before you, then God has blessed you. If you sense your need, that means not only that Jesus has prepared the feast for you, he has also prepared you for the feast. Those who live their lives thinking they have what it takes, that they are sufficient in and of themselves, will never come to the table (Luke 14:24). For the younger son to come to the party, the party that he didn't even know was going on, he had to sense his need.

Can you sense your need? Leave your simple ways. Walk in the way of insight, which is the way of recognizing that you need enlightenment and insight. Turn in to Jesus' house for the feast of a lifetime, for the feast that makes your lifetime last forever.

My favorite novel is F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. I find one scene in the book particularly searing, even though it is a minor scene. Nick Carraway, the narrator, admits to suffering from "a haunting loneliness" as a young single man, living by himself and working in New York. He describes his reaction when he got off work one day and noticed "throbbing taxicabs" bound for the theater district: "I felt a sinking in my heart. Forms leaned together in the taxis as they waited, and voices sang, and there was laughter from the unheard jokes and lighted cigarettes outlined unintelligible gestures inside. Imagining that I, too was hurrying toward gaiety and sharing their intimate excitement, I wished them well."¹

He wished he were going with them, but he wasn't, and he wished them well, but he felt a sinking in his heart, because he wasn't among them. Have you ever felt left out in such a way? You haven't been left out. You're invited.

The party is for you

The older son refused to go in to the house and party with his brother. He complained that his father never even killed a goat for him. But the father told him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours." The older son, lost in resentment, unseeing and unhearing, needed to follow his father into the house and find, much to his shock, that the party was for him. The party is also for you.

Robert Farrar Capon, an Episcopalian priest, writes:

Grace is the celebration of life, relentlessly hounding all the non-celebrants in the world. It is a floating, cosmic bash shouting its way through the streets of the universe, flinging the sweetness of its cassations to every window, pounding at every door in a hilarity beyond all liking and happening, until the prodigals come out at last and dance, and the elder brothers finally take their fingers out of their ears."²

Take your fingers out of your ears. Wisdom has built her house. She has hewn her seven pillars. She has slaughtered her beasts. She has mixed her wine. She has set her table.

Everything is ready.

Endnotes

¹ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), 58.

² Robert Farrar Capon, *Between Noon & Three: Romance, Law & the Outrage of Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996).