

Come Dine With Wisdom: The Choice Between Two Feasts We Cannot Avoid

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[0 : 00] Well, we're going to turn now to our Bible reading for this morning, and you'll find it in the book of Proverbs. Proverbs chapter 9. Paul Brennan is going to be preaching for the next few weeks on Proverbs again.

He's taken us through some of these in the recent past. And Proverbs is one of the, we call them the wisdom books of the Old Testament.

There are a number of books, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and so on, where the approach is a little different to, for example, the law of Moses, the book of Deuteronomy, or something that teaches explicitly in didactic form.

This is what the Lord says. This is how you're to live. You must do this, and you must not do that. Proverbs and some of the wisdom books come at things very differently. They're written to stimulate our thinking, to provoke thought, to give us things to chew on.

It's a different way of God speaking his same law, his same commands, but coming often from an intriguing angle. And it can be puzzling at first, just reading these things, wondering just how we're to apply it.

[1 : 15] Well, that's what Paul's going to help us do. And we're going to read together the whole of Proverbs chapter 9 this morning. And by the way, if anybody doesn't have a Bible, there are church Bibles scattered about the place at the sides and so on.

So do feel free to grab one and pick one up so you can follow along now or when Paul will be preaching. So Proverbs chapter 9 then, beginning at verse 1.

Wisdom has built her house. She has hewn her seven pillars. She's slaughtered her beast. She's mixed her wine. She's set out her table. She sent out her young woman 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.

[2 : 23] Reprove a wise man and he will love you. Give to a wise man and he'll be still wiser. Teach a righteous man and he will increase in learning. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

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's seductive.

Knows nothing. 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 likes sense, she says, stolen water is sweet. Bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he does not know that the dead are there.

[3 : 31] That her guests are in the depths of Sheol, the place of the dead. Amen. May God bless to us his word.

Well, please do have Proverbs chapter 9 open in front of you. It would be very helpful to have that there.

Now, Proverbs 9 really serves as the kind of end of the introduction to the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 1 to 9 serve as the main introduction before we get into the Proverbs themselves.

So chapter 10, you encounter all the short, pithy Proverbs. And to really understand those Proverbs, to grasp them, then you really must lay hold of what is contained in chapters 1 to 9.

Because that is fundamental to be able to grasp and make use of these Proverbs from chapter 10 onwards. So that is why we are beginning this short series at this point in chapter 9.

[4 : 49] As a way to introduce us to the rest of the book of Proverbs. Now, if you leave this service today thinking that there is a neutral third way in life when it comes to the biggest questions that we face, if you think there's a neutral third way, then you've not grasped the message of Proverbs chapter 9.

That, or I failed completely to communicate the essence of this chapter. So in a bit for clarity, hear the message of Proverbs chapter 9.

There are two choices before you, and only two. There are two voices calling to you. There are two feasts. There are two women issuing invitations.

There are two types of people. Two destinies. Two choices. You either choose the way of wisdom, or you choose the way of folly.

You'll be wise, or you'll be a scoffer. You will choose life, or you'll choose death. You will choose to fear the Lord and follow His ways, or you will reject Him and follow your own way.

[6 : 05] To not choose is actually not an option. There is a choice to make. There's no third way.

It's either or. As somebody helpfully put it, I was listening to something this week, and they put it this way. It's not whether, but which.

It's not whether you'll make a choice, but which choice will you make. It's not a question of whether you'll serve God. It's a question of which God will you serve. Because you're going to serve one.

Proverbs 9 lays before us a choice. We don't have the luxury of sitting this one out. To not make a choice is actually to make a choice.

It's not a case of whether you'll choose wisdom or folly, but which one will you choose? It's not a case of whether you'll choose life or death, but which one will you choose?

[7 : 07] It's not a case of whether you'll choose to embrace Lady Witham or Lady Folly, but which one are you embracing? Because you're embracing one of them. And so the writer's plea, Solomon, as he pens these words, his plea is a straightforward one.

His plea is to choose life. Choose wisdom. You will make a choice. Which one is it? Now the writer lays out this chapter very carefully so as to make it plain what our choice ought to be.

You read chapter 9, and the answer is obvious, isn't it? There's no doubt as to the choice the writer is urging upon us. Choose life.

Choose Lady Wisdom. Feast at her table. Do not choose death. Do not choose Lady Folly. Do not dine at her table.

Be a wise man, not a scoffer. So it's a picture of two feasts. Which feasts will you choose to dine at?

[8 : 18] Because you will dine at one of them. So look at this chapter in the three sections it's laid out for us. First, verses 1 to 6. Then 7 to 12.

And then 13 to the end. So look at firstly at verses 1 to 6. Solomon's message is choose life. Dine with Lady Wisdom.

The imperative here is clear, isn't it? Here is a dinner invitation to accept. If someone ever offers to take you out to a Michelin star restaurant, the answer is yes.

It's not yet happened to me. But when that invitation is issued, I will say yes. You don't have to think about it, do you? The answer is yes. And this is the sort of feast.

This is the sort of dinner invitation that's laid before us. The answer is yes. That is a meal to go to. The care, the preparation that have gone into this meal, make it an invitation to think about for about a millisecond before accepting.

[9 : 26] This is an invitation you must accept. Accept it because of who has issued the invitation. Accept it because of what is on offer.

Accept it because of the destiny it promises you. You must dine with Lady Wisdom. Let's consider the detail.

We're told about the host of this particular feast. Lady Wisdom. Wisdom has built her house. She has hewn her seven pillars.

She has slaughtered her beasts. She has mixed her wine. She has set the table. Lady Wisdom is a woman of action. A woman of industry.

A woman of careful preparation. Notice all the verbs that cascade down the page as you read the first couple of verses. She is built.

[10 : 25] She is hewn. She is slaughtered. She is mixed. She is set. She has sent. She constructs her home.

She prepares her banquet. She sends out the invitations. This is a woman of creative industry. Energy. She works hard. She has built her home.

She has hewn her pillars. It's not a case of knocking together a quick IKEA flat pack. This is hard graft. This is a beautiful building.

This is a substantial home. Huge effort. Huge energy. Creativity have gone into constructing this house. This house conveys the skill and dedication of the builder.

Seven pillars. This is an immense property. It's an impressive building. And as we peer through the massive pillars that she set up, we can see the diligent preparation that's gone into the meal she sets before us.

[11 : 35] Verse 2, she has slaughtered her beasts. These are beasts that she owns. This is her herd. And she selected from that herd the fattened calf.

She's not popped down to little. She selects the beast. She has reared herself. She slaughters it with her own hands. Her hands are bloodied because she has slaughtered her beasts.

Effort and care has gone into this feast. She herself mixes the wine. Her own vineyard. She selected the grapes.

She's mixed the wine. No trip to Majestic. No delivery from Lathwaite. She's done it herself. She mixes the wine to perfection. So that you might enjoy it.

Lady Wisdom is attending to every detail. To ensure maximum enjoyment and refreshment and goodness for her guests. This is a meal that will truly satisfy.

[12 : 43] This is a meal that will bring great joy. Lady Wisdom is serving up steak with a glass of red. This is a meal to savor, to enjoy.

End of verse 2. She's also set her table. The table's set.

The tablecloth. The tablecloth. It's clean and pressed. Every place is made ready. The cutlery precisely placed.

The crockery is set out. The silver's polished. The glasses have been cleaned. It's an attractive picture. It's a beautiful picture. In the Hebrew, the words in verse 2 all end with the same sound.

So as you read it, it sounds pleasant. This is a pleasant picture we're being painted. It's a pleasing scene to hear read out. This is a very attractive feast that Lady Wisdom is setting out for us.

[13 : 51] Our hearts ought to be stirred by what we're seeing here. This is one epic feast. Are you in any way interested in having a seat at this table? And with the preparations made, she sends out her personal staff to issue the invitations to all who would come.

And here's the invitation. Verse 4. 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. This is an invitation to all.

Whoever hears the call is welcomed in. Whoever is simple, let him turn in here. This is not a VIP access event.

No. Lady Wisdom has sent out multiple of her young women to issue the invitation. To every corner of the town, the invitation is issued.

[15 : 12] And there's an urgency, isn't there, in her appeal. Come, eat of my bread. Leave your simple ways. Come and eat. It's a public invitation to all who will accept.

And notice what it results in. Where does accepting this invitation lead to? Well, life.

Leave your simple ways and live. Walk in the way of insight. To embrace this invitation from Lady Wisdom is to embrace goodness and life.

There are great things on offer as you sit at Lady Wisdom's table. But before the enjoyment must come the turning aside.

The invitation is to turn in here. To stop walking down the road you're on and turn in. Verse 4. It is verse 6 to leave your simple ways.

[16 : 24] In other words, this isn't a drive-through scenario. This isn't a quick McDonald's on the way somewhere else. Which involves a brief detour before resuming where you were going anyway.

No. To accept Lady Wisdom's invitation is to turn off the road we're on. To step into her home. And to enjoy all that she has to offer.

We are leaving behind our simple ways. And so to accept Lady Wisdom's invitation. It requires a rejection of our previous understandings about life.

To humble ourselves. To enter Wisdom's house. And to receive all that she has to offer. There's no credentials presented at the door. There's no, you must let me in because of who I am.

No, it's an invitation to all. You leave behind your simple ways. You go in. You accept all that she's offering. And to embrace Wisdom.

[17 : 32] To embrace Lady Wisdom is to embrace and enjoy God's best gifts. This is not a stingy meal, is it? The picture we're being presented with here is of richness and wonder and joy.

It's the best. This is the very best feast you can imagine. The very best steak you could eat. The most sumptuous of surroundings. The most attentive of hosts.

To embrace Wisdom. To embrace God's ways. Is to embrace life. In all its goodness.

Is to embrace life and not death. But you see, our enemy would have us believe the opposite.

That was his tactic from the very beginning, wasn't it? We've looked in recent weeks at the opening chapter of Genesis. What was the serpent's tactic then? In the Garden of Eden.

[18 : 33] In the bounty that God had given to Adam and Eve. Satan comes in and says, Did God really say? Did God really mean that?

Did God really mean the best for you? Sowing doubt into their minds. Sowing doubt into their minds. As to the goodness of what God had given. And that is a lie.

The enemy wants us to doubt God's goodness and his provision. But consider, just look at what Lady Wisdom offers.

Look at her feast. And the implication is obvious, isn't it? Choose to embrace God's wisdom and God's ways.

Choose to submit yourself to God's revelation in which we find all his wisdom. Choose Christ who is wisdom. The one in whom we find life in all its fullness.

[19 : 38] To choose Lady Wisdom is to choose Christ. And it's in dining with him that we find abundance and goodness forever.

You see, what God offers us in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is not stingy. It's not some meager looking meal. No, it's Lady Wisdom's feast. It is wonderful in its bounty.

It is rich. It's the very best of steak. It's the very best of wine. It is rich. It's life in all its fullness. You must dine with Lady Wisdom.

That is Solomon's exhortation to us. How do we do that? We've seen the beauty of this meal. This is a very attractive feast.

It's a meal we ought to want to go to. How do we do that? How do we dine at Lady Wisdom's table? Well, the middle section of this chapter helps us.

[20 : 43] And it might seem like a bit of an interruption. You've got these two pictures of two feasts at the beginning and end. These bits of this bit of the middle, verses 7 to 12, seems like a bit of an intrusion.

A bit of an interruption into these two feasting scenes. But actually, these verses are the key, linking the two feasting scenes together by making the distinction between them even clearer and bringing clarity to the choice that faces us.

So verses 1 to 6, Solomon urges us to choose life. Choose to dine with Lady Wisdom. Verses 7 to 12, Solomon says, Fear the Lord.

Fear the Lord. Be a wise man and not a scoffer. Be a wise man, not a scoffer. Having read the first six verses, we are forced to examine ourselves.

Who? Who will receive the invitation issued by wisdom? What sort of person will accept the invitation to wisdom's feast?

[21 : 56] And what sort of person will reject Lady Folly's invitation? And as this chapter makes clear, there are two options. Which feast will you be found to be attending?

And the answer, well, it depends on whether you're a wise man or a scoffer. That's the dichotomy presented in verses 7 to 12.

And the key thought is there in verse 10. Those who fear the Lord choose wisdom. To fear the Lord is to choose knowledge.

It is to gain insight. It is to choose life. A wise man fears the Lord. A wise man dines with Lady Wisdom.

A scoffer rejects wisdom. A scoffer will not fear the Lord. So the passage confronts us. Which are you?

[22 : 59] Are you a wise man or are you a scoffer? And part of the answer that it gives is relational. You can work out what sort of person you are by how you receive correction and instruction.

Look again at verses 7, 8, and 9. Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse. And he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury.

Do not reprove a scoffer or he'll 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. You see a scoffer gives, verse 7, abuse when reproved.

A scoffer hates those who offer instruction and wisdom, verse 8. They inflict injury on those who seek to help and instruct. So the question is, what sort of person are you?

[24 : 13] How do you react when someone with past responsibility for you seeks to address an issue in your life? How do you respond when a church leader or senior saint confronts you with a particular issue in your own life?

Are you defensive? Do you push back? Do you reject it because you know better? How do you handle it when God's word is applied to your life from the pulpit and you don't like it?

Do you go away and search the scriptures? Do you examine yourself? Do you pray about what you've been challenged by? Do you talk it over with the preacher and ask him to help you out with it?

Or do you grumble about it with those who love to gossip, those who love scandal, seeking to justify yourself and undermine the authority of those who've been set aside to teach and instruct?

How do you respond when God's word ruffles your feathers? Proverbs 21 verse 24 says, Scoffer is the name of the arrogant, haughty man who acts with arrogant pride.

[25 : 42] This sort of person, a scoffer, will not hear the truth and will abuse those who teach it because they dare to challenge his own self-importance, his own ego.

A scoffer is always right in his own eyes. Whoever cracks a scoffer gets himself abuse. Whoever approves a wicked man incurs injury.

So if you respond to instruction by abusing those who speak it to you, then you are a scoffer. You are eating at folly's table. And we'll see where that leads in a moment.

But what about the wise man? Well, in response to the same instruction, the wise man responds in the opposite way.

Look at the second half of verse 8. Reprove a wise man and he'll love you. A wise man responds to those who speak truth with wisdom and love.

[26 : 53] The wise man's desire is to know the truth, to grow in wisdom. And so when confronted with reality and truth, he doesn't push back, but in humility, receives it and loves the one who has spoken it to him.

And as a result, he becomes wiser still, verse 9. So which one are you? That's the implicit question for us.

Will you be a scoffer? Or will you be wise? And the first step to being a wise man is there in verse 10. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

And knowledge of the Holy One is insight. And this fear of the Lord is the affectionate reverence by which the child of God bends himself humbly and carefully to his father's law.

That's Charles Bridges' definition. Affectionate reverence by which we humbly bend ourselves carefully to our father's law.

[28 : 11] If you want to be a wise man, then you must carefully submit yourself to the revealed will of God. You must seek to obey his word.

Submit yourself to the scriptures. Eagerly soak up what you hear Sunday by Sunday. And with God's help, seek to put it into practice in your own life.

Being a hearer and doer of the word. So welcome instruction. Welcome God's instruction in every area of your life because it's instruction from the God, the creator of the universe, the one who made you, who sustains our every breath.

That is what we read in his word. This is revelation for life. The one who made us, the one who knows us better than we know ourselves, he knows what is necessary for our flourishing.

And so to be wise is to submit ourselves to what he has revealed. If you wish to benefit from the bountiful wisdom contained in the rest of this book of Proverbs, this is where you must start.

[29 : 25] You must start with the fear of the Lord. And as we do that, we will benefit from all the wisdom contained in its pages about how we manage our time, how we prioritize our commitments, how we manage our relationships, how we treat our wife or our husband, how we parent our children, how we use our homes, how we spend our money, the films we watch, the friends we spend time with.

Wisdom in all these areas of life are contained in these pages, but before we can receive it, we must learn to fear the Lord, to humble ourselves before him.

So we want to benefit from all the wisdom that Proverbs provides, all that it offers. We must not be a scoffer. We must be a wise man.

We must reject feasting at Lady Folly's table and dine with Lady Wisdom. So ask the Lord to make you wise.

Ask the Lord to help you to fear him. Ask him to transform the very deepest affections of our being so that we reject our arrogant self-importance and submit ourselves to him, our Father in Heaven.

[30 : 50] Ask him to do that for you. And note again where the way of wisdom leads.

It's not merely about making good choices in the here and now. Look at verse 11. For by me your days will be multiplied and years will be added to your life.

Life in the book of Proverbs is not merely referring to life in this temporal age. Life in the book of Proverbs refers to abundant life in fellowship with God, a living relationship that extends beyond death and into eternity.

It is life in all its fullness. Yes, there are benefits now but eternity is always the horizon in the book of Proverbs. The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn which shines brighter and brighter until full day.

Proverbs 4 verse 18. In its pathway there is no death. Proverbs 12 verse 28. So the choice is obvious isn't it?

[32 : 10] What sort of person do you want to be? A wise man or a scoffer? Choose life says Solomon.

Fear the laws and then lastly reject death. we must live with the consequences of our choice. Note verse 12.

If you are wise you are wise for yourself. If you scoff you alone will bear it. There is real personal responsibility laid on all of us for choosing or rejecting wisdom.

So what choice have you made? The writer set out his case for wisdom. her feast is wonderfully attractive but he also sets out the alternative.

So let's look finally then at verses 13 to 18 and the writer's message here is clear. Reject death. Do not dine with Lady Folly.

[33 : 14] Now at first glance there are superficial similarities with Lady Wisdom's feast. But look a little closer and an ugly deeply unattractive picture a dangerous picture begins to emerge.

Look at these verses Lady Folly in contrast to Lady Wisdom Lady Folly instead of building her house instead of preparing her banquet instead of sending out her servants to spread the word of the invitation instead of doing all that Lady Folly pompously sits on her elevated throne at the opening of her house.

You get none of the active verbs that we saw with Lady Wisdom. Lady Folly sits she calls.

There's no building going on here. There's no hewing, no slaughtering, no mixing of wine, no setting the table, no sending out, none of that.

Lady Folly is lazy. She steals. but the invitation looks at first very similar to the undiscerning man.

[34 : 37] And that is where the danger lies. This is a loud, seductive woman we are told. Look at verse 13. The woman Folly is loud.

She is seductive and knows nothing. Nothing. But she appears to offer similar things.

Her initial invitation is exactly the same. Look at verse 16. Whoever is simple let him turn in here.

And to him who lacks sense she says. Cast your eyes back to verse 4. We've heard these words before. Whoever is simple let him turn in here.

To him a lack sense she says. Exactly the same words from Lady Folly's lips as Lady Wisdom's. Folly is a deceptive woman.

[35 : 45] She is sly. She is sneaky. Her words are disguised. They appear to be like Lady Wisdom's at least initially.

And what she offers she says is sweet and it's pleasant. Don't worry about the fact the water is stolen. Don't worry about the fact you've got to somehow eat this bread in secret.

Look at verse 17. Stolen water is sweet. Bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But what she actually offers is significantly deficient when compared to what Lady Wisdom was actually offering.

There are no slaughtered beasts here. There's no sirloin steak. There's no wine. There's only bread and stolen water. water. And that is always the way with Lady Folly.

Sin always over promises and under delivers. What Lady Folly offers looks good. It's loud and seductive.

[37 : 01] It makes a noise. But it doesn't come close to the goodness and enjoyment that come from going wisdom's way. Folly allures her victims with the half truth that sin gives pleasure.

But like Satan, she denies the connection between sin and death. She promises pleasure but death's just behind the door. Her feasting house is not a place of life like Lady Wisdom's but rather it is a den of death.

death. Verse 18 But he does not know that the dead are there, that our guests are in the depths of Sheol.

You can imagine the scene. The ignorant scoffer strutting along the road. Here's Lady Folly's invitation.

He's seduced by her call. She's loud. She's seductive. He walks in.

[38 : 20] He's been seduced by her call. He wants what seems or at least what she says seems sweet and pleasant. But he finds himself alone as he sits down at the table.

And pretty soon rather than the smell of bread and food, his nostrils fill with the putrid stench of rotting flesh. Looking around, his gaze moves downwards and between the floorboards he sees the horror of the corpses of previous victims, the dead.

The dead are there. Lady folly's guests are in the depths of shale. Our scoffers pulse quickens.

He's sweating now. Panic sets in. Her house is a trap. He never intended to end up there, did he?

In the house of death. He didn't set out. Seeking lady folly, notice verse 15 he was going straight on his way. But a bad decision.

[39 : 40] And he's found himself somewhere he never intended to go. It is a horrifying picture, is it not? Lady folly's feast. Complete antithesis to lady wisdoms.

Lady wisdoms is bountiful and full and rich. And lady folly's is a den of death. The writer is unveiling the horrors of lady folly's house so that we would not go there.

Hers is an invitation to reject, to flee. It leads ultimately to death. To go lady folly's way will mean not only that life is lived in monochrome rather than technicolor, not only is it a life marked by meager bread rather than steak, but it's a life destined for death and destruction.

This chapter appeals to us to make our choice. Which feast will you attend? We need to see, don't we, the great clarity, the goodness of Christ's wisdom.

To choose God's ways as set out in his words, that is better by far. To accept Christ is to enjoy the very best, is to reject the anemic offerings of this world.

[41 : 11] That's what we're being shown here with folly's feast. It's very loud, but it's awful. What this world offers is very loud, but it is anemic.

We're presented with two ways to go. It's always been that way, to go God's way, to submit to his word, or to go our own way.

To go the way of Abel, or to go the way of Cain, as we're here tonight. There are those who, like Cain, ultimately belong to the evil one and choose to go their own way.

But there are others, like Abel, who are people of faith, who choose God's way. There are only two ways. It is not a question of whether, but which.

It's not a question of whether you'll attend one of these meals, but which meal are you attending? Which path will you go down? Who will you worship? Which destiny is yours?

[42 : 18] Which feast will you choose? Proverbs 9 would say, choose life, fear the Lord, reject death.

So are you a wise man? Are you a wise woman? Have you submitted yourself to Jesus Christ as your Savior and your Lord?

Or are you a scoffer, going your own way with self on the throne? Make your choice. Proverbs 9 would say you must choose life, choose wisdom, choose Christ.

Well, let's pray. Father, we thank you for the clarity of your word and for the choice that it presents before us.

Lord, help us to see the goodness of all that is in you, the goodness of following Christ today and forever.

[43 : 29] So please help us, each one of us, to be a people of faith who walk according to your word and not by the seductive sights of this world.

So help us please to be a people that choose life. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.