

Come to the Party

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[0 : 00] Now, if we could have our Bibles open, please, at page 533 at Proverbs 9, and we'll ask the Lord's help. Let's pray.

God our Father, we ask that we will give us the experience that the risen Lord gave to his disciples on the road to Emmaus. We ask that our hearts may burn within us as the scriptures are opened. We ask that our minds may be enlightened, our eyes may be opened. We ask that you will send us out into the world with a message to tell. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Come to the party. That's what our title is this evening. I think you'll agree with me that probably next to property, food is one of the major interests of contemporary people.

Judging by the number of programs on television, judging by the number of books in bookshops, the passion we all have about health and wholesome food, it is a major industry and a major concern.

[1 : 17] And that is what this passage is about. It is about food. It is about eating. It is about invitation to parties. And as it be mentioned briefly, right through scripture, this is a common illustration of the call of the gospel.

In Isaiah 55, the call is to everyone who is thirsty, everyone who is hungry. And Jesus speaks about those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Never just an intellectual exercise, listening to the gospel. It is eating. It is drinking. That's at the very heart of it. And Jesus tells the story of the great banquet, the great party in Luke chapter 14, which is a picture of heaven itself.

So let's keep that in mind as we look at the chapter. Now, a word about the structure of the chapter. It is built around two invitations, wisdom and folly.

And just a word about that. As the book of Proverbs develops from chapter 1 to chapter 9, Solomon personifies wisdom and folly as two women.

[2 : 30] There is lady wisdom and there is lady folly. Wisdom is described more fully in chapter 8 and folly back in chapter 7. They are the two voices, the two women, who are giving invitations.

Wisdom invites us in verses 1 to 6 to her party and folly invites us in verses 13 to 18 to hers. What about verses 7 to 12?

I'm sure as we read it, she felt a kind of change of gear. I've possibly even wondered why they were there, because we don't go straight from wisdom's party to folly's party.

We have this apparently intrusive section here. What I'm going to suggest is that very far from being awkward and repetitive, this is the key to the chapter.

These verses, 7 to 12, are telling us exactly what's at stake if we accept the invitations to these parties. And also, the feasting picture shows us that it's never just accepting an intellectual idea.

[3 : 36] So keep that in mind, please. I want to ask three questions of the chapter. I often feel in Bible study, asking questions of a chapter is a good way into it. So let's do that.

Let's ask three fairly simple questions. First of all, who gives the invitations? Who's inviting us to the party? Secondly, what do they have on offer?

What will we get if we go to the party? And thirdly, what happens as a result of accepting the invitation? That's the way I want us to look at the chapter. So first of all then, who gives the invitations?

And let's look at both wisdom and folly together. You'll notice that verse 4 and verse 15 are identical. Calling to those who...

Well, not identical. Notice, calling to those who pass by. Sorry, I beg your pardon. They are identical. It's the wrong verse I gave you. I've never been any good with figures. It's verse 4 and verse 16.

[4 : 35] Whoever is simple, let him turn in here. To him who lacks sense, she says. And folly harrets these words. Whoever is simple, let him turn in here.

And to him who lacks sense, she says. So keep that in mind. Now let's look first of all at wisdom. In the first two verses, and the very first thing that must strike us is wisdom is careful and meticulous in her preparation.

Wisdom wants to give us a true welcome. Wisdom has built her house. She has hewn her seven pillars. And what are these seven pillars?

Now, commentators expend much ingenuity on that. And like a lot of misspent ingenuity, it doesn't amount to very much. It's always better when you come across a problem in Scripture to look at the context.

And if you glance back at chapter 8, the verses immediately before it, remembering that in the ancient Bible there were no chapters, so chapters 8 and 9 run on continuously, look at verse 22.

[5 : 45] The Lord possessed me. That's wisdom speaking at the beginning of his work. The first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up at the first, before the beginning of the earth.

Then we have this wonderful picture, one of the great creation poems in Scripture. And then down to verse 30. Then I was beside him, like a master workman. I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world, and delighting in the children of men.

This is Genesis 1 and 2. The God who is up there in Genesis 1 comes down in Genesis 2, and delights in the inhabited world, the world of humanity.

So I want to suggest that is the clue to what the seven pillars are. Seems to me that since wisdom is the agent of creation, we are here talking about the seven days.

The six days of creating, and the seventh day of rest, which anticipates heaven. Now you see what that means? If we join the party, if we accept wisdom's invitation, in this world we become what God created us to be, and in the next world we live with him forever.

[6 : 57] The Genesis story again, Genesis 1, and Willie of course has been preaching on these for some time. Genesis 1, everything is good, and good means fulfilling the purpose for which it was created.

That's what good means. So, it seems to me that what wisdom is inviting us to, is to join the festival, the party of creation itself.

And that I want to suggest to you, is what the seven pillars mean. So important to read, and not just the immediate context, that takes us into the whole biblical context.

So wisdom, careful, meticulous, calling us to our true destiny. We'll come back to that. Folly, verse 13, The woman folly is loud, she is seductive and knows nothing.

Folly is slapdash and brash. With folly you feel, if you go there, you have to take your own food. That she'll even may be sent for a carry out. Because there's no preparation evident here at all.

[8 : 00] She is seductive and knows nothing. Not meaning, of course, that she is stupid, but meaning she is one of the sophisticated mockers that we saw in chapter one this morning.

She thinks she's very clever, but actually she is ignorant. And what's she doing? She is calling people simply to confirm them in the wrong ways. Wisdom calls us to change.

Wisdom calls us to become godly. Folly calls us, Oh, keep on doing what you're doing, because the one thing that folly will never do is tell people they need to change.

Folly will simply confirm us in our bad habits and underwrite everything we want to do. So who is giving the invitations? These two voices that call in the public arena.

Notice she sits at the door of her house, verse 14. She takes a seat on the highest places of the town. Exactly what wisdom does in chapter one. In other words, everywhere, all the time, we're going to hear both voices.

[9 : 02] We're going to hear them in our own heart. We're going to hear them from other people. We're going to read them in magazines and books and newspapers. We're going to see them on the television and on the internet.

We're going to hear multitudes of voices. But ultimately, ultimately they reduce themselves to two, don't they? The voice of wisdom and the voice of folly.

And we need to learn how to detect the master's voice in the midst of all this babble of voices. See, we can't just shut ourselves away. We can't hide our head in the sands, because we'll simply hear the voices in our own hearts.

We hear these voices and we have to sift them. That is why the ministry here is Bible-centered. So that week by week we hear the master's voice from the pages of scripture.

That's what drives everything that happens here. The work with the young people, the house groups, release the word, Christianity Explored, and the various other courses. It is so that we will hear wisdom's voice and reject the voice of folly.

[10:09] So who is inviting? Wisdom and folly. Wisdom is the master's voice, the voice of scripture, the voice of the Son of God.

And what does John say? Those who hear the voice of the Son of God will live. Secondly, what's the party? What are we actually being invited to?

It's not immediately obvious that the parties are different. After all, look again at verse 4 and verse 16. The invitation is identical. This is very interesting, isn't it?

When they invite, they invite with exactly the same words. Both of them know how to attract. Both of them invite to their house.

But what are they offering? Let me say just a quick word again about the significance of eating in the Bible. Food is part of the gracious, generous provision of God, is it not?

[11:06] Of every tree in the garden, you may freely eat, except for one. And at the heart of the first sin was the rushing after that one tree, where Eve turns the generous provision of God into a bullying negative.

Isn't that so like human nature? You get 99% right. Oh, you didn't get that right, did you? And so, you know, there's a children's address I've seen sometimes where it shows the children a blank sheet of paper or a white sheet with one little black dot on it.

And you ask them what they see. Now, of course, it's all with some precocious little idiot who gives the answer you don't want. But what you hope they'll see is I see a black mark.

And that is what most of them will see. They won't see the mass of the white. They'll see the black mark. So, eating is at the heart of the first sin.

We've already mentioned Isaiah 55. We've already mentioned the great banquet. And it is no accident, surely, that the words of the serpent in Genesis 3 are echoed at the very heart of the mystery of our faith.

[12:21] Take, eat. This is my body. Take and drink this cup, which is my blood. The act of eating, sinful eating, set aside by the act of eating of the very body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

And it's one of the pictures of heaven. The end of Jude, the great doxology to him who is able to keep us from falling and to present us faultless before his glory with shouts of joy.

The idea there is of a party. And I like that idea. At parties, I love to talk. I love to go to the kitchen and have heart-to-heart conversations with people. And I'm sure that in heaven I'll be allowed to do that and not dragged away.

But the very heart of our faith, this metaphor of eating, and in Revelation we have the wedding banquet, the wedding party of the Lamb.

So that's the background. What is wisdom's food? Verse 2, She has slaughtered her beast, she has mixed her wine, she has also set her table. Meticulous care, everything to make us feel at home.

[13:31] We feel welcome there. We feel we're not intruding. There'd be no sense there in wisdom's feast of feeling that we ought not to be there.

And notice as well the richness. She has slaughtered her beast, she has mixed her wine. We're going to get fillet steak and we're going to get wine, not just bread and water.

The sheer generosity of the creator himself. Now throughout chapters 1 to 9, wisdom has called in many, many ways. Wisdom has called to the mind, telling us to think clearly and see clearly.

Wisdom has called us to a wise lifestyle. Wisdom has called us to obedience. Wisdom has called us to love generously and extravagantly as God does.

And now wisdom seals the relationship by eating together. We are invited into the party of wisdom herself, of the king himself.

[14:32] That is wisdom's food. Glorious, wonderful food and a wonderful home to enjoy it in. Now it follows food. Now it has a superficial attraction.

Verse 17, Stolen water is sweet and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. Now these words sweet and pleasant echo wisdom.

These are the kind of things wisdom would say because one of the devices of the devil is to make us believe that God wants us to be miserable. That God is determined to destroy everything that is joyful in our lives.

Now that is no way to discover the will of God. There are those who think the way to discover the will of God is to say what would be most awful and then say that must be the will of God. That is not the God of scripture.

It doesn't mean of course either that simply because we happen to like something it will be the will of God. It means that God ultimately as the catechism says has created us for himself so that we might enjoy him forever.

[15 : 39] And that's so important. But you see how wisdom appeals to the sleazy fallen side of our nature. Verse 17 Stolen water bread eaten in secret the glamorizing of the wrong paths exactly what happens in Eden look at a replay of Eden again here the woman saw that the tree looked good that it was pleasant to the eyes that it was to be desired to make one wise exactly what lies behind modern advertising isn't it?

The idea that if you use a certain perfume or aftershave you'll become irresistible if you drive a certain car all these sorts of things will happen and this glamorizing of a hollow lifestyle folly parodies wisdom folly calls to unfaithfulness folly calls to sleaziness folly calls to living in a way that is ultimately deadly and what do you get at the end?

You get water and bread you don't get wine and meat you get water and bread you see Jesus turns water into wine that's his first miracle at Cana in Galilee what does folly do?

folly turns wine into water folly gives you the best to begin with and then destroys it folly gives you what looks good but it ends up with nothing that is the party of folly so who issues the invitations what is the party and finally what happens when we accept the invitation now we're going to look at verses 7 to 12 verses you thought I'd forgotten because it seems to me that's what these verses are there for if they weren't there we could simply say oh these are just two highly colored illustrations illustrations which are very glossy very bright we're not actually saying all that much but verses 7 to 12 are telling us what happens if we accept one invitation or the other they're telling us two things in particular they're telling us what will happen here and now in this world and they're telling us what will happen then in the world to come here and now first of all what will wisdom give us wisdom will give us an open and teachable mind verse 9 give instruction to a wise man who will be still wiser teach a righteous man and he will increase in learning oh it doesn't mean we'll always like it most of us don't like being rebuked most of us don't like our faults being pointed out mind you the way some people do it isn't always very kind but that's not the point the point is however gentle it is most of us don't like it but if we are listening to the voice of wisdom then we will accept it we will accept the correction we're always learning always growing that is what happens when we join wisdom's party in this world it's what

George Herbert the poet called a feast that mends in length a party that gets better and better as it goes on or as or as the or as the psalmist talks a pleasure at your right hand there are pleasures on the other hand what does folly offer look at verse 7 and 8 whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury do not reproof a scoffer do not reproof a mocker the cynical and sneering attitude which ridicules godliness which you get so much in the media so much on in the in books have you ever seen a program on television where the church has come out in a good light there may be some but not many many of you watched inspector rebus last Friday evening the church came out in a very bad light indeed I'm not saying what was done was right I'm simply saying that there were no counter balancing things and that's what happens ministers and vicars either tend to be either tend to be pathetic little wimps who are great at opening opening daffodil teas and sales of work but utterly useless at uttering a word from God or else they're graceless bigots who have no who have no sense of Christ at all and you see this is this is thus is built up a picture that the faith the gospel is something that is to be rejected something that is to be despised the attitude that hates reproof and that's all of us at times isn't it we are proud people we are vain

[20 : 27] I used to think when I was younger that pride was something that was characteristic of a few conceited individuals I must confess I realise now that pride is the natural human condition without the grace of God that's why we need what Paul says to Timothy rebuke and reprove notice he says with all gentleness it's so important that we listen to the voice of wisdom and verse 10 hammers home the point the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom the fear of the Lord begins

as we join wisdom's party here and now and as we gain a deeper relationship with the Holy One so that's here and now here and now our lives will be shaped by which invitation we respond to by which words we listen to but what about the future verse 11 for by me your days will be multiplied and years will be added to your life now we know that is not an absolute truth we know that in this world the length of time a person lives bears no relationship to their godliness surely this is going beyond simply earthly life to talk about eternal life one of the things that frustrates me so much in reading some old testament theology and commentators even evangelical ones is that they'll keep on telling us that there is no view of eternal life in the old testament that is simply not true the whole of the old testament impels us to the future right from genesis 1 verse 1 god in the beginning created the heavens and the earth that implies that he's going to finish the job that implies there's going to be a new creation and proverbs itself in chapter 4 says the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn which shines brighter and brighter until the perfect day and daniel tells us in chapter 12 that those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever of course we don't receive the full light of this until the new testament as paul says to us jesus brings life and immortality to light in the gospel it was always there but he brings it to light and look at verse 18 the grim counter image he does not know where does folly's house lead to the dead are there that her guests are in the depths of sheol this is what the new testament calls the second death what leads from following the words of folly and this is very starkly outlined in verse 12 if you are wise you are wise for yourself if you scoff you alone will bear it most of the commentators see this simply as a platitude but nowhere is individual choice outlined more starkly none of the very good commentators on proverbs

Derek Kidner writes this about the verse your character is the one thing you cannot borrow lend or escape for it is you this verse is talking about the me the you that we become as we accept this invitation which invitation is it going to be which party are we going to join you see folly's party is like one of those superficially exciting occasions when you drink too much behave stupidly talk in a silly manner to left with a massive hangover and bitter regrets that is the end of folly's party wisdom's party is like one of those wonderful occasions that sometimes come even in this world when the company is stimulating the conversation is exciting and humorous the food is good there's enough to drink but not to excess and we wish it would last forever and one day it will for Christ is good let's pray

Lord who has prepared for those who love you things that cannot be imagined who has more wonderful things to give us than we are yet ready to accept who has called us to this feast that never ends may we be part of wisdom's party in the here and now so that on the last day we will be invited into the wedding party of the lamb to rejoice forever with him and those who love him we ask this in his name Amen