

Come to Wisdom's Feast

Proverbs 9:1-6, 10, 13-18 (NIV84)

¹ Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out its seven pillars. ² She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table. ³ She has sent out her maids, and she calls from the highest point of the city. ⁴ "Let all who are simple come in here!" she says to those who lack judgment. ⁵ "Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed. ⁶ Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of understanding. ¹⁰ "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. ¹³ The woman Folly is loud; she is undisciplined and without knowledge. ¹⁴ She sits at the door of her house, on a seat at the highest point of the city, ¹⁵ calling out to those who pass by, who go straight on their way. ¹⁶ "Let all who are simple come in here!" she says to those who lack judgment. ¹⁷ "Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!" ¹⁸ But little do they know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of the grave.

We are almost through the John chapter 6 "Bread of Life" discourse. There has been lots of Jesus explaining to the people that they must eat him, consume him, because he is the food that endures to eternal life. It's a similar picture portrayed here in our first reading from the book of Proverbs. There's another meal to be had. But this time, it's wisdom's feast.

Now, what is wisdom? That's a nice philosophical question to get people thinking on a Sunday morning, right? Wisdom is typically defined as having good judgment, intelligence, common sense. Some would define wisdom as the application of knowledge and experience, that in order to have wisdom, you must have lived, experienced life, in order to attain said wisdom.

The book of Proverbs, though, defines wisdom for us. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." (verse 10) Wisdom is not only knowing God, who he is, what he claims to have done, but also believing in him, fearing him, in that we have reverence for him as the God who both created us and everything around us and who saves us from the way of eternal death. The book of Proverbs consistently personified this wisdom as a woman.

So, when we are told that Wisdom invites people over to her house, this is the invitation to know God and know what he has done for you, to believe in him. Everyone is invited to know Wisdom as she sends out her maids and calls from the highest point of the city, "Let all who are simple come in here!" she says to those who lack judgment. "Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of understanding." (verses 4-6) Wisdom, this believing in the LORD, knowing God and what he has done for you, has invited you over. She has a large house, hewn with seven pillars, ready to hold a large group of people. She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine and set her table. This is a fancy, fine dining experience. She wants people to come and get the five star treatment. Hidden agendas? Not at all. She wants the simple to come, to give up their simple ways and live instead of dying. Walk in Wisdom's ways, fear the LORD, believe in him, know who God is and what he has done for you so that you can have food that endures to eternal life.

Who are these simple that wisdom invites over? Who are the people who lack judgment? Proverbs has already defined wisdom as the fear of the LORD, and knowledge of the Holy One as understanding. So, the simple that Wisdom is calling are people who don't have these things. They don't fear the LORD. They don't believe in him. They don't know him and what he does for all people. The simple are the unbelievers of the world.

What if you used this term with people as you talked about religion? Can you imagine the response from someone if you labeled them "simple" and "lacking judgment" when you found out that they do not believe in God? You can picture it now, a childish retort. "I know you are, but what am I?"

In our current academic culture, this labeling would be turned around in a heartbeat. "Oh, you think that I'm simple minded? Show of hands. Who here believes in the childish idea that there exists a mystical, all-powerful, all-seeing, all-knowing, all-controlling, invisible being who exists purely to explain things that you are too stupid to understand and who removes critical thinking from the human race?" Bill Maher, a fairly famous contemporary atheist who is known for mocking pretty much all religions, especially Christianity, has said, "Religion is dangerous because it allows human beings who don't know all the answers to think they do." "Faith means making a virtue out of not thinking." Bill Nye the Science Guy, a childhood icon for me, says that to have people believing in a higher power who created the world holds us as a human race back from further innovation.

You hear these voices, and we are left to wonder, who is right? Which voice truly is wisdom? These anti-religion people are so vocal. Their words seem so well thought out. They make me feel as if I really don't know better than they do. They are so smart. So many people agree with them. Who am I to disagree? Maybe my belief in God as one who gives me eternal life is folly, not wisdom.

Proverbs lets us know that Folly sounds just like Wisdom. Folly also invites all people to have a meal with her. "Let all who are simple come in here!" she says to those who lack judgment. "Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!" (verses 16-17)

Wisdom and Folly give the same basic invitation that those who are simple should come in, but there are differences in their invitations as well. Folly invites those who lack judgment to partake in stolen water, saying that tastes sweet because it's illegal, you shouldn't have it. But it's still just water, something that is easily provided for you every day. Compare that water not only to the wine that Wisdom offers, but that Wisdom offers a fine wine that is mixed with spices to make for an even better flavor. Folly offers bread eaten in secret claiming that it's delicious as no one will witness you eating it. A pale comparison to the meat slaughtered for Wisdom's meal, a delicacy that was reserved for special occasions.

What does this have to do with the Bill Mahers and the Bill Nyes of the world? Unbelievers like them come down hard on religion as being a detriment to society and hindering you in life, but what do they offer you in place of religion? Wisdom, this fear of the LORD and knowledge of the Holy One, who God is and what he does for us, this offers us life. What does Folly offer? "Little do they know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of the grave." (verse 18) Folly may give you a meal of bread and water, basics to survive physically, but ultimately it leads to death. You think that Folly will nourish you, but it does not. Those who tell you that fearing the LORD, believing in God, is folly, the opposite of wisdom, they offer you nothing beyond this life and what you can see. It's only about the here and the now, the physical. There is nothing supernatural. There is nothing that lasts forever. And these people are convinced that they have everything already figured out, and that all other answers are ridiculous. They say, "You are simple if you fear the LORD and hold to this idea of the almighty God."

Folly presses down on all of us. The world is constantly in our ear, either whispering or shouting, that our beliefs are folly, that their ideas are true wisdom, true experience, true intelligence. Honestly, they just don't want us to believe in God because they don't. They offer nothing else comparable to what God's Wisdom offers. Will you be swayed by the words of folly? Will the world convince you that it knows better, that there is no God and that you are a fool if you believe in one? This is the challenge we face. This is the temptation we face.

The only way we can combat Folly's calling, is to take Wisdom up on her invitation. Come and learn what God has done for you. True wisdom offers more than just what we can see with our eyes; it offers life everlasting. Wisdom sets the table with food that endures to eternal life, knowing the LORD and what he has done to take away our sins, to take away death and give us life. God's Wisdom takes away your simplicity of trusting only in the physical, and looking to God to provide for beyond that.

God has never lied to us. He has always kept his promises. You can be assured that as you come at Wisdom's beckoning, you will get what she says that you will have. This will be a fine experience in a large house, with prepared meat and mixed wine, and fancy table settings. As you take in who God is and what he has done for you, you will live beyond just your days on earth. You will live forever with God.

This invitation goes out to all people, not just us. For those who beckon us away from God, those who beckon us to Folly, we can turn around and invite them to know God's true Wisdom which prepares a meal for them that will give them life. We are inviting them to give up the focus and the invitation to have a meal just for a day of stolen water and secret bread and then to die. As we convey Wisdom's invitation, to know God and what he has done for them, we are inviting people to live forever.

Come at wisdom's invitation. It is all prepared for you. This is the food that endures to eternal life. Leave your simple ways, ways which rejected God, rejected believing in one true God, and you will live. Come to Wisdom's feast. Amen.