

Think of some proverbs and you might be thinking of those crazy things your grandma used to say. *An apple a day keeps the doctor away.* A little bit of common sense like *don't throw bricks when you live in a glass house.* Maybe a phrase you hear so much you don't even want too anymore, *no pain no gain.* The Bible book Proverbs might not be high on your list of must-reads. Largely 2/3 of the book contains proverbs from a king named Solomon who wanted them passed on to future generations. Much of these are amusing if not hard to understand. It's the first 1/3 of the book, the first nine chapters, that forms a series of discussions sharing the benefits of wisdom over foolishness. Both are personified, that is given human characteristics. And both try to persuade simple minded people to follow them.

That's where our first lesson picks up today, near the end of these discussions. Wisdom and foolishness both give their final invitations to these simple minded people. Like being faced with a coworkers email about a meeting you've been asked to attend, and a text message from a friend inviting you to a party at the same time. You can only go to one, wisdom or folly. Today it might be helpful if you open one of those Bibles in front of you in the pew to the book of Proverbs. We'll be looking at these verses and comparing them pretty much straight through. Proverbs chapter nine verse one begins us seeing...

Wisdom's better invitation

There's weekly cleaning and then there's fall cleanup day here at church. Toys get scrubbed down, trees get trimmed, and weeds get pulled. Some of these time intensive preparations only happen once a year, but they're done to give our church and grounds a nice look for guests. We wouldn't want to extend an invitation to come and then have things looking bad. Wisdom takes the same approach. Take note of verse 1 and 2, **"Wisdom has built her home; she has hewn out its seven pillars. She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table."** The cooking, finished. The wine, mixed with spices to make it taste better. The table, set to receive guests. Wisdom is ready to entertain guests.

Folly is the very opposite of wisdom. So when folly issues her invitation you can only imagine the preparation that takes place. None. Take note of verse 13, **"The woman folly is loud; she is undisciplined and without knowledge."** If the neighbors are having a loud party you might be drawn to it wondering why you weren't invited. It sounds good and you want to go. Folly makes a lot of noise, but her house isn't ready. Folly didn't have a nice house, no prepared food, no mixed wines. Having no discipline meant a banquet that was thrown together.

It might not look like it judging by the number of college degrees and high school diplomas we have in this room, but we're really a bunch of simple minded people. We lack understanding according to the Bible. We're drawn to loud sinful things. The banquet thrown together by folly looks interesting. Worldly fun and pleasure always does. Like going with the flow and letting our eyes wander around the room enticed by people not our spouse. Like privately sneaking pictures on the internet the world would approve of, but not our parents. For us following worldly pleasures would be folly.

Take another glance at wisdom's banquet. It pictures a slaughter. Isaiah the prophet described a slaughter, a lamb dying in place of the world, **"he was led like a lamb to the slaughter."** Jesus, the Lamb of God, was slaughtered for a world of sinners who needed a Savior. That's you and me. We're part of a world of simple minded people who lack understanding. We're sinners. Wisdom's banquet pictures the preparations God took so that you might join him in heaven. You see the banquet but now you need an invite. Yours is on the way, through Christ.

If you wanted to get a message out, but you couldn't use Facebook, Twitter, or even the old fashioned phone what would you do? Could you climb up on your roof and just yell out? Maybe you could go to the grocery store or bank where a lot of people come by and tell everyone there. Wisdom does that in verse 3, **"She has sent out her maids, and she calls from the highest point of the city."** Folly does the same thing in verse 14, **"on a seat at the highest point of the city."** Both invitations are clearly for everyone to hear.

Why me? That would be my question if I received a formal invitation to some ritzy black tie event being held in a fancy downtown hotel. I feel comfortable in jeans and a t-shirt at a party in my friend's backyard. But dressing up in a tuxedo to attend some stiff party doesn't sound fun. The two invites from wisdom and folly sound the same in verse 4 and 16, **"Let all who are simple come in here! She says to those who lack judgment,"** but they feel totally different. Folly's banquet feels easy. Sin always does. With the invite to wisdom's banquet, we wonder why wisdom would want a simple minded person like me. Doesn't Jesus want special people at his heavenly banquet? I don't measure up. Don't you have to be almost perfect already to come in to God's presence?

Don't you see it though? Wisdom, which pictures Christ Jesus, comes with an invite for you anyway. That's care and compassion. It's amazing God even sends us the invite. The only reason is because Jesus came for all people. That includes simple minded people who don't understand everything the Scriptures say. It includes people who know they lack something in the good works department. It's for people who know they've messed up a time or two. It's for people like you and me that Jesus came. The invitation is for you.

What's the lure of Six Flags amusement parks? What brings people back to certain restaurants? Why will you go to a particular movie theater? It's all in what's offered. Amusement parks offer the thrill of a roller coaster ride. You have your favorite restaurants because you probably have your favorite food there. And certain movie theaters carry the movie you want to see. What you're offered will get you to come. Look at verse 5, **"Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed."** Wisdom is offering food already cooked and wine already mixed. The invitation says come because there's plenty offered here. What does folly offer? Nothing. There are no verses saying come and enjoy. If you do come to folly's banquet you'll be served **"stolen water,"** and **"food eaten in secret"** but not much else. Partial thrills like those wear off quickly leaving you with nothing.

To partake of wisdom's many blessings will take a change of direction. The way you were born into this world gave you no ability to choose to follow God. Paul explained your spiritual condition at birth in Ephesians, **"You were dead in your transgressions and sins."** Even with the offer to come and eat and drink, our spiritually dead bodies can't respond. We can't respond unless God works faith in our hearts. He does by offering food and drink that nourishes sin sick souls. He offers the bread from heaven and the water of life. God offers Jesus. Eating and drinking of him consists of believing in him for forgiveness. We receive through Jesus what God has to offer.

The now completed 'Cash for Clunkers' program is a web of fulfilled and unfulfilled promises. Anyone who turned in a clunker and received a rebate for a new car feels promises were kept. Dealers still waiting for their government checks probably feel promises are still waiting to be kept. Wisdom makes a promise to all those who are invited to her banquet in verse 6, **"Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of understanding."** Lofty promise, don't you think? Hearing a promise like that not only shares what might be, but it gets across to us today what truly is. In Christ we live.

Compare that to what's waiting for those who attend folly's banquet in verse 18, **"But little do they know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of the grave."** That's not living. Folly pictures what sin offers to our lives. Misleading promises of fame and fortune turn into bankruptcy and shame. Living on the edge, walking the fine line between pure pleasure and pain often results in just pain. Sin brings slavery, destruction, and ultimately eternal death. Folly's promises are of no lasting power.

We might know attending folly's banquet is the wrong thing to do. Sinners often recognize what they're doing isn't right. But changing and stopping is a different matter. Today in the invitation to wisdom's banquet is the gospel. It offers encouragement and a gospel promise. We're invited to a heavenly banquet, one that promises life. Not longer life. Not necessarily better life. But life because of a Savior. One we can learn about, believe in, and follow faithfully. Christ our Savior gives life eternal. Simple minded people no longer be simple minded. See wisdom's invitation as the love of God in the face of Jesus. Wisdom has a better invitation.