

Part 12: The Decision of the Soul

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Most modern sports fans are familiar with an event in 2010 known by two simple words: "The Decision." LeBron James at that point was a league MVP, scoring champion and perennial all-star for the NBA and as a free agent he was now going to decide which team he was going to play for.

"The Decision" as it was called, was a televised special where 13 million people tuned in live to hear which team James would choose.

Our passage today in the book of Proverbs has been spared all the fanfare of TV contracts and ratings, but for thousands of years hundreds of millions of people have read our passage today not to watch the decision of another, but to actually make a decision for themselves.

Today we are concluding Solomon's prologue to the book of Proverbs, nine chapters where the metaphorical father is writing to us as his metaphorical children for this very purpose: that we might decide which path we will choose.

There have been two primary metaphors for the choices before you today. The first metaphor is that of a path: the path of the righteous or the path of folly. The second is the metaphor of a lover: the Lady Wisdom, or the Lady Folly.

But at the heart of each of these options is not smart people vs. dumb people, or successful people vs. poor people. At the heart of this decision are those who choose to rely on God's wisdom and grace as revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ, or those who seek to live in light of their own understanding in all of life.

Next week we are going to begin the explicitly practical portion of the Proverbs which deals with our time, our wealth, our relationships, our parenting and so many other things. But the wise man in following the righteous path sees all of these things through the lens of grace and the fool refuses to see all or any of these things through God's eyes.

This is what leads us to our big idea today: **There is nothing more ultimate in life than who you decide to follow.**

Which path will you follow? Which lover will you choose? Everything else in life is shaped by this choice.

So to help us make the most informed decisions the text today is going to help us by giving us some **External Comparisons** between Lady Folly and Lady Wisdom, but in the middle of this text he actually gives us our own self-diagnostic tool by calling us to examine our own **Internal Affections**.

So just as we did last week we are going to begin by looking at the comparisons between Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly. We are going to be going a bit out of order in the scripture today as we are going to look at verses 1-6, and then skip verses 7-12 to then read verses 13-18.

But as we read these I want you to be listening for two things that is: Where are these passages similar, and where are the passages different? This is our first point **External Comparisons**.

Read with me **Proverbs 9:1-6, 13-18**.

I want to begin with where we see the similarities in these two passages. Both depict a metaphorical woman who is calling people to her house and to a feast.

Both are found at the highest place in the town, which is to say to places of social, political and religious influence.

Both are targeting the same audience: the simple. In both verse 4 and verse 16 we see the intro of both women and they both offer the exact appeal to simple, calling to the one who lacks sense to turn into her own home.

So who is the simple? Well the simple, or the one lacking sense often stands for the naïve and the immature. In other words they are calling out to the impressionable. But here's the kicker, even if you think yourself to be wise, to have heard all there is to hear on this issue, to have already walked the path of wisdom for decades, this passage is still for you.

Because look at what Lady Folly is doing in **Proverbs 9:14-15**. She calls not just to the self-identified simple, but also to the wise who are on the straight path.

Whoever you are, wherever you are, you are encountering these two voices. Both of whom are in the same places and seemingly offering the same things. In our own world, the high places of society are no longer identified with religion. But the call of Lady Folly is wonderfully adaptive.

Whether the calls look philosophical, political, sexual, simple or docile, all the calls we hear in our world are after the same thing: our heart. They want our worship, but only one is actually able to provide what is promised.

Which is why we must not only see where these two calls are similar, but also where they are different. Solomon paints these differences in three ways. He wants us to see a comparison in quality, in satisfaction, and in results.

We see first ***A comparison of quality***.

Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn her seven pillars. What is the word picture Solomon is painting? Wisdom's house is real, it is hearty, and it is established.

Her work is done and her foundation is fixed. More than that, seven pillars implies that it's plenty big enough for us. And, because she has been diligent to complete the house, now she has made herself busy with the work of satisfying whoever would come with an immaculate feast. She's gone out and butchered the cow, the brisket is on the smoker, the wine was been mixed with spices worthy of the occasion and the table is set.

All that's left to do is to come! That's the wonderful offer of grace! The work is done, you only need to come to the house of mercy.

But look at Lady Folly: **Proverbs 9:13**.

Wisdom has built a house, Folly has a loud voice. Wisdom is skilled to make a house hewn out of stone and a dinner party that would make Joanna Gaines blush. Folly sounds good, but knows nothing.

The Hebrew word translated “loud” in our text was one often used in agriculture to refer to the load moan of a stray camel.

All bark and no bite. Or in this case all promise and no payout. While Lady Wisdom has busied herself for your own pleasure, what is Lady Folly doing? Look at verse **14**.

She's sitting down. She's lazy.

Consider all that sin has done to satisfy you? When has Netflix condescended and comforted you without you opening the app? When have riches gone to the store and purchased peace and returned to the table with it? When has anger bravely fought battles for you without causing your greater harm on the way? When has sloth promised to defend you from the anxiety you fear?

Never! Because the call of sin is a lazy and loud. But Jesus our savior, came down from heaven to us, lived among us, died for us, and through faith has made his Spirit to dwell in us.

While all the voices of culture call for you to turn, only one has a quality of care as abundant as Jesus does in taking us off the streets and putting us by faith in the house of wisdom.

This leads to the second comparison: ***A comparison of satisfaction***.

What does Lady Wisdom offer? **Proverbs 9:5**. Lady Folly? **Proverbs 9:17**.

Remember a couple weeks ago where we talked about the Bandar Log in Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. Baloo warned Mowgli that thought their offer sounds attractive, they use stolen language.

Here we see the stolen language of Lady Folly. Wisdom offers what she actually has. Did you notice the repetition of all she possessed in this passage: her house, her seven pillars, her beasts, her wine, her table, her young messengers?

Wisdom has something to offer! Lady Folly has only what she can steal.

Maybe this is just a problem for men, but have you ever been invited over for a party and you look at the spread and wonder: "Is there enough food here for all of us?"

This is every meal you will ever eat in the house of sin. There's never enough because none of it is actually hers to give.

Whatever pleasure you might get out of sin, there's more of it in the house of Wisdom. Whatever satisfaction sin might offer, the gospel offers more. There's a key principle here that we our modern minds sometimes wrestle with and that is that the most pleasure we can get in life is pleasure that comes where God has prescribed it.

The world offers pleasures from food, sex and comfort, but those things only really satisfy when God gets to determine the boundaries of each. To eat any of it outside those boundaries is to taste the sweetness of stolen water which will quickly run out.

It's not that removing pleasures from the boundaries of God's intention isn't sweet. That's why we bite. Stolen water is sweet! But it never lasts. Bread eaten in the shame of secrecy might be pleasant for a time. But don't miss the huge contrast here: Who would want the bread and water of sin when the steak and wine of grace freely abounds! Look at these two tables and you tell me which is more satisfying!

C.S. Lewis nails this when he says this: **"It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."**

But more than mere satisfaction this displays the reality behind the tables: Look at **Proverbs 9:5-6 and 17-18**.

This is our final contrast: ***A comparison of results.***

It is true that the picture painted here is one of pleasure and satisfaction and wisdom. But if the only lens through which we view the gospel is only joy and pleasure in this world, we miss the seriousness which stands behind this.

Behind our desire for pleasure is the desire to be spared from death. We lack pleasure and satisfaction because we rebelled against God himself. It is our problem and that problem is called sin, but God in his grace has offered a solution and salvation.

If we turn to God's wisdom, we will find life. If we come to Jesus knowing that God is faithful to save us by sending his son to take the punishment we deserve, we will get salvation and life. But to never see God's wisdom in the gospel to not just to miss out in life, it is to lose your life.

Jesus, who is the true picture of Lady Wisdom, tells a parable in **Matthew 22:1-10**.

To reject the call to the feast of God is to be a violent insurrectionist against the King, and to deserve judgement. But in his grace God reissues a call, a call which whether you are a good person or a bad person bases your identity in one thing: Did you come and do you understand?

Because look how the parable closes: **Matthew 22:11-13**.

In that group many came and responded, but there was one man who had no idea what he actually showed up to. In fact we can assume he was indifferent to the glory that was set before him.

Jesus' parable and Proverbs 9 both want us to not be like this man who thought he responded, yet the whole of his life showed he really hadn't. He didn't even change his clothes.

This is why Solomon gives this middle section of our passage today because he wants us to have confidence when it comes to knowing if we have truly responded to the right woman and if we are truly on the right path.

This is our second point where we look at the test of our own **Internal Affections**.

It's in this center portion where we encounter two tests which help us understand how and if we are on the right path in the right way.

The first test of internal affection is the ***Response to Counsel***. Read with me **Proverbs 9:7-9**.

How might you discern if you are walking in the way of life and not in the way of death? Consider how your heart responds to the counsel of God. We actually see two places of this counsel. The first is God's word as typified in the call of Lady Wisdom herself, the second is God's people, the church, the young messengers Wisdom has sent out (vs. 3) to carry her words and call others to them.

Now let's be clear, no one likes correction, no one loves discipline, but there's a difference between liking something and railing against it.

But to respond to the gospel is to respond to a corrective call in your life. The gospel begins with a premise of correction: there is a God and it's not you. Jesus' grace corrects us, puts us in wonderful submission, by calling us to repent of being our own God.

To hear rightly the gospel is to hear the imperative of Lady Wisdom in verse 5: "Come and eat of my bread and drink of my wine." It is counsel which demands a right response.

In 2 Samuel 12 King David has successfully, in his mind, covered a devastatingly wicked sin. But the prophet Nathan comes to him and shares a story with David about a man in his kingdom who has wronged another man. The story Nathan used was an illustration of the exact sin that David committed, and at the end Nathan asked David what should be done to the man who did these things?

David says that the full punishment of the law should be brought to bear upon his head. But then in this wonderfully weighty rebuke Nathan says: "You are the man."

So if you are one who cannot stand the idea of God's word shaping the actions of your life or the affections of your heart, you are the man. If you are one who constantly runs from and even harms your brothers and sisters in Christ who try to gently but firmly call you to the table of grace, then you are the man. You are the fool.

The fool refuses to heed the council of God's word and God's people.

But the wise person understands this and is himself reproofed! No one avoids reproof in the Bible's economy but the wise man learns to love it because he understands that it serves a purpose. It is meant to lead him more away from what is painful and more towards what is joyful.

Are you someone who invites God's word into your heart as king even when it is at odds with what you think is best? Are you someone who though imperfectly, accepts the correction and advice of those who

love Jesus with you? Then you, my friends, should have some confidence that you are walking on God's path of wisdom.

And to us, as the church, the counsel we receive from God is intended to help us disciple others. Remember the goal Solomon stated for you early in the prologue: **Proverbs 1:2-4**. The goal of God's wisdom is not only that you would have it, but that you would give it.

So as we disciple others we have the sometimes hard work of discerning those who are abusive fools, but at the same time we have hope that Jesus, the great counselor, might intercede in those dead hearts and save them just as he did ours.

This is what leads us to the second test of our affections: this is our ***Response to God***.

Read with me **Proverbs 9:10-12**.

The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. Remember wisdom's call in verse 6? Leave your simple ways and live and walk in the way of insight?

What is insight? What does it mean to walk in wisdom? It means that we know at a relational level the Holy One.

I once watched an episode of the show *The Amazing Race*. The challenge was in Japan and the racers stood before an entire room filled with sushi of all different kinds. Somewhere in that room was sushi which was purely plastic and the contestants had to examine them to find which one was this plastic one. However if they identified one which wasn't plastic, they had to eat that sushi.

By the end of the challenge most of the teams had eaten so much sushi they were sick because they couldn't identify the one they needed.

But here, in God's grace wisdom shows us the one we need to know. How? Because he came to us in Jesus Christ. We now know what we are looking for.

Look again at **1 Corinthians 1:20-25**.

Remember our definition for the fear of the Lord? The fear of the Lord is walking in a reverent reliance upon God. Where do we become reliant upon God? By clinging relationally, exclusively, and faithfully to Jesus Christ his son.

Walking in the insight of the Lord is not a doctrinal exam, it is not a moral performance, it is not a socio-economic bracket, it is not a political party it is a relationship to Jesus Christ who is the wisdom of God.

What doomed that fateful fool in the parable of the wedding feast? Though he made it into the house, he didn't know the groom. He had no relational sense of where he stood in the story.

But the wise person sees Jesus and realizes that apart from him, we will dine in the halls of sin forever. Without Jesus, without the knowledge that comes to us like a friend in the gospel, we will never be wise. Without knowing God we will never be wise, and without knowing Jesus we will never see God.

Look at Jesus' promise which echoes our passage today in **John 14:1-3**.

You can dream all you want about the myriad of destinations you want your journey on life to take you. Many of them are noble: good parents, successful members of society, loving neighbors. But if you do not know God by faith in Jesus Christ, then you will never end up where you want to be.

But Jesus gets us there. Jesus gets us there because wisdom's house is his house, her feast is his feast her call is his call to come.

All the practical wisdom which will follow in this book finds its source here in the relational reliance upon King Jesus.

And here's the beauty of the gospel, all you have to do is come to Jesus.

All you have to do is let the call of the gospel correct the course of your heart and the feet will surely follow.

Wisdom isn't calling to the put together, to the fully accomplished or to the already there, it's calling to those who have a need and she's offering the solution of grace in Jesus Christ.

Charles Bridges says it so beautifully when he says: **Here, sinner, is thy warrant—not thy worthiness, but thy need, and the invitation of thy Lord. All the blessings of his Gospel are set before thee—love without beginning, end, or change. Honor the freeness of his mercy. Let him have the full glory of his own grace.**

So how do you respond to this text? Well actually the right response isn't to decide. Because the truth is each of us has already decided who to follow. But the wonderful power of the gospel is that we get to re-decide.

We get to do two things: first whether you think yourself Christian or not, you assess your own heart and its response to God.

But then secondly: you repent and you worship. Do you want to put on clothes of grace? Then repent. And when we repent, we do so only because we've seen the beauty of the Holy One, and now we worship him.

We worship him by relying on him in every area of life and enjoying this fellowship we have here until we have fellowship with him in heaven.