

Part 30: How To Get What You Really Want

Tyler Velin | Proverbs 23:1-8

July 11, 2021

"It was too good to be true." When we hear that line in a story, we know how the story is going to end before we even hear it.

I remember when I was in high school I went through a muscle car phase. I can hardly change my own oil now, but at that point I had all the magazines and all the zeal to be a true hot-rod fanboy. My dream car was a 1970 Chevy Nova SS. So I would scour the classifieds in the newspaper, grab all the auto-trader magazines at the grocery stores and search for any Nova that me and my non-existent skill could pick up and restore.

But one day I found a listing in Spokane. It was a 1986 Chevy Nova. It was \$2,200. It was too good to be true. So I drove out to Spokane to see it. But what I didn't know is that in 1985 Chevy actually partnered with Toyota, and the Nova which I drove three hours to see, was nothing more than a carbon copy of a 1985 Toyota Corolla.

It was too good to be true.

We live in a world which promises something good, something life changing, something irresistible at every corner, on every screen and in every ad. But, my guess is that most of us we have been disappointed at some point by these same consumeristic promises. This reality produces in some of us a grief, wondering if we can every actually find the promise of the good life, of in others an insatiable gluttony hoping that if we consume enough of what the world offers, someday we might find our fill.

Today, in Proverbs 23 Solomon wants to speak towards these desires and disappointments. He is going to show us that appearances are not always what we seem, and how some things often are too good to be true.

But amidst what might seem to be Solomon's dream dashing is the implied hope of his words to us: That instead of searching to find wealth and satisfaction by our own understanding we would instead turn to the more certain promise of God, submitting our desires to him.

To show us this Solomon is going to give us two illustrations of a dinner table, and sandwiched in between is the central point of what he wants us to see today. What we are going to see today in Proverbs 23:1-8 is this: **Seeing the deceptive riches of the world allows us to see the true riches of the gospel.**

We are going to see this in three ways. First in verses 1-3 we will see that **Unchecked Desire Will Deceive You**, then in verses 5-6 that **Greedy Eyes Will Frustrate You**, and lastly in verses 7-8 we will see that **Selfish Hearts Will Abandon You**.

As cheery as that might seem to you, we will actually see the good news Solomon wants us to take from this as we see that there is a King's table which really satisfies, a gift which really comes from heaven, and a host who really gives us his heart.

I'm going to read for us once more our whole passage and then we will dive into our first point:
Proverbs 23:1-8.

So it's in Solomon's first picture of a feast today we encounter our first point and that is this: **Unchecked Desire Will Deceive You.**

He does this by setting up this hypothetical table and feast in the presence of a ruler. It's not unconnected that the verse which immediately precedes it which we examined last week: **Proverbs 22:29.**

In other words Solomon here is speaking to us assuming that as we work through this world we will have greater opportunities presented to us. In fact I've realized that as I've gotten older my biggest problem is not what I can't afford, but what I can. Loans, zero interest periods, and pay as you go plans allow those who have little to actually purchase much. It's because of these seemingly wonderful possibilities that Solomon cautions us to do three things at this table.

First, observe carefully all that is set before you. Second, if what is put in front of you causes your tummy to rumble and your mouth to water in want, put a knife to your throat. Third, do not desire the delicacies of the ruler's table.

Why? Solomon tells us in verse 3, because they are deceptive food.

What does it mean that the food is deceptive? This is really the important part of the text because if we don't understand the danger of it, then we probably won't be as motivated to put a knife to it.

I think there are two ways in which this food might be deceptive. This first is that perhaps the ruler who gave the feast offered it as a sort of test of the person's self-control.

Thomas Edison famously did something like this when he was interviewing his own research assistants. He would serve them a bowl of soup and if anyone added salt and pepper to the soup before they ate it, he would dismiss them. Why? Because he knew the danger assumption played in regards to innovation. If the individual assumed the soup needed something before they tasted it, they would be crippled by that mindset in their work.

So perhaps the individual who finally gets to the table of the King after all of his hard work thinks that he has finally and fully made it to the sphere of wealth and influence he desired. Yet when the King sees his gluttony, he sees a man with no self-control and therefore he is dismissed from his service.

Or, another way to understand the deceptive food is to not understand the motive of the king. You might think that this ruler genuinely wants to be with you and to spend time with you. But in the end his hope is simply to satisfy you with his food so that he might use you for his own political or social gain. He's fattening you up for his own purposes, impressing you for his own gain.

But despite the lack of clarity surrounding the heart of the ruler giving the feast, what is clear is that Solomon warns us of our own gluttonous hearts at the feast.

If you really examine what you encounter in advertisements in the world you'll find this odd paradox. Most media calls to mind things that you have eaten and left you unsatisfied, in order to convince you to try this new food which they assure you will satisfy you. You don't have to be a philosopher to see this. I was watching a children's show with my kids the other day and in it they showed a girl who was looking at social media on her phone and realizing the feast that was set up before her was filled with seemingly impossible promises.

She saw one friend getting a dream job while she was stuck as a cashier, another friend getting married while she lived alone and single, and another friend who won the lottery while she made minimum wage.

She saw the feast and she was reminded of her own discontent which only made her long for more false promises. Isn't this what social media is designed to do? The effect isn't new but the medium is. It advertises to our desire, it wants you to see its delicacies.

And even though none of us have ever eaten something that satisfied for long, we all keep going back to this buffet of empty desires. We invite it into our lives.

We keep going back to the table because even if we've been disappointed by deceptive foods before, we still want to want what is promised. We are gluttons for the punishment of desire.

But this is where Solomon calls you to look closely at it, and then to put a knife to your throat. Solomon isn't saying that the food is bad. Instead he's saying that the appetite with which you desire the food, the lack of self-control which gives way to lust for these delicacies is the problem.

To prevent yourself from this deceitful lust, what are you going to do about it? Solomon says, metaphorically, put a knife to your throat. Jesus himself, the greater Solomon says something similar in **Matthew 5:27-30**. Jesus is less concerned with what you have and more concerned with what you want.

Lust for things of this world ought to be brought into the realm of self-control in the life of the believer. Now, I'm a big believer in prayer. I'm also a big believer in the help of the Holy Spirit to resist sin and help us with self-control.

But when it comes to our consumption neither Solomon, nor Jesus, simply said: "Pray hard so that you don't desire it." Solomon says go full warrior and, "stick a knife to your throat," and Jesus says, better yet, get a hack saw and go to town. Paul in regards to sexual immorality says, "Lace up those Nikes and go, flee sexual immorality."

This world offers us the excess of deceitful goods and false promises at a table with comfortable chairs and HD lighting. If you are not careful to examine the promises behind our wants and our desires, then you will constantly be consumed with a gluttony which leads nowhere.

What does it actually look like for you to curb your desire for these things?

There are certain stores that I try not to go into. There are aisles of Costco I intentionally avoid. It's not because they have sexually suggestive things in them. It's because they have things I want in them, and I know that when I see them, when I remove that knife from my throat, I will want them. And then I'll

google cheaper options. And then google will target market me for the next millennia about those things.

Most of what my heart is driven towards is not sinful. But that's not the only things which we are to be concerned about. Notice what Paul says in **1 Corinthians 6:12**. What's the knife Paul wants you to put to your throat? Is it helpful? As he puts it in another place in 1 Corinthians, is it helpful to build up others in the gospel?

If the only lens through which we view our longings in this world is the pattern of, "Is it sinful." We might find ourselves thinking like the Pharisees were in Matthew 5. But if we check our desires with what it means in light of its benefit for following Jesus and helping others do the same, we are observing it through the lens of biblical wisdom. And if such an examination finds the meal lacking, Solomon says you would be wise to guard yourself from it.

This sounds joyless and puritanical. But it's in this text we see that Solomon isn't after a frustrated life, he's after a joyful one. This is where Solomon goes next. Solomon warns of the gluttonous guest not because he doesn't want you to have, but precisely because he wants you to have: **Proverbs 23:4-5**.

So here we see our second point today: **Greedy Eyes Will Frustrate You**.

Solomon warns us here that if our desire for the food of the world is left unchecked, it will exhaust you. That's what's behind this idea of toil, it will consume you, spend you and spit you out on the others side.

How many times do we read of CEO's whose family falls apart chasing the bottom line? Who hasn't read of a musician so concerned with their labor that they drive those closest to them away?

Now Proverbs isn't saying that wealth is bad. In fact when we look at all Proverbs has to say, it is generally the faithful, righteous, wise man who is rewarded with wealth by God himself.

Where in the first example Solomon points out the inordinate desire for the food, here he challenges the relentless effort to gain something that you can never have enough of. Paul speaks of this kind of thing in Philippians when he says: **Philippians 3:19**.

In other words these people work to fill their stomachs, not realizing that everything we put into our stomach inevitably leaves us. It's fruitless, it's frustrating. And so is the life consumed with a desire to gain wealth.

Now there's something dangerous here and that is that wealth, worldly goods, and nice beaches are part of God's gift to us. He wants us to enjoy them. But he wants us to enjoy them as they are, not as he is. They are gifts from God, they are not God.

Augustine talks about this distinction in his *Confessions*. He was a glutton for the nice things in life and his problem wasn't that he liked nice things. He said his problem was that he tried to enjoy them apart from the God who made them. He thought that it was food itself which made his tummy feel nice, not realizing that the food tasted good because it was made by a God who is good and who calls us to encounter his goodness behind all the pleasures of this world.

To not realize this is to spend the rest of your life looking back at the gift instead of forward to the giver. It subtly turns us inward instead of outward, backwards hoping for warmed up leftovers instead of onward into the kitchen of mercy.

In the fantasy football community they have a phrase called, "Chasing points." It means that if you've got a guy who's not very good, but who put up crazy points the week before, you're going to be tempted to start him the next week. But it's foolish to do that. Why? Because in light of another investment term you might be familiar with: "past performance doesn't mean future results."

Just because it happened once doesn't mean it will happen again, repeatedly, forever.

That's why Solomon uses this illustration of the bird. You see it, it attracts your eyes, you desire it, but as soon as you try to take it, it flies away and leaves you behind.

I want you to do something tonight (kids especially). I want you to go outside and look up at the sky. I want you to find a star in the sky and want you to notice something. When you look at one star, you'll notice the star next to it. But you'll find that when you try to focus on that other star, it seems to fade away. You saw it so clearly when you were looking at the larger one, but when you actually tried to focus on the new one, it seems to have disappeared.

That's because God made our eyes with rods and cones and it just so happens that some things are seen most clearly only out of the corner of our eyes. To try and focus on it is to actually not be able to see it.

So are the joys of this world. They are meant to be seen only in our peripheral vision, and never are they meant to be the center. For to try and make them the center is to spend your life frustrated and constantly looking for what seemed to be so promising and yet is unattainable.

Instead we place at the center of our eyes the invisible realities of the gospel. This doesn't minimize the joy and light we get from those corner comforts, but it holds them in their right priority in relationship to Jesus. Charles Hodges says this: **"The world apprehends realities only in the objects before them; the Christian only in invisible things. Therefore if our judgment looks upon the one as a shadow, and the other as substance...[we give] the shadow of love to the things of earth, the marrow and substance of the heart to the things of eternity."**

You see, part of what was common in the wisdom writing of this era was to make a point by speaking around it. It's like the concept of negative space in graphic design. Interestingly, it's what is not there that causes us to see what is there.

And here in light of world which never provides, Solomon wants us to see the God who provides something, a host who gives us a table fit not only our desires, but capable of giving us all we hoped for.

This is seen most clearly in our final point today, where Solomon returns to the dinner table and we see that **Selfish Hearts Will Abandon You**.

Read with me, **Proverbs 23:6-8**.

Where Solomon's first illustration cautioned the gullet of the greedy guest, here we are warned of the heart of the stingy, selfish host.

Here we might pause for one second and consider the secondary implications this text might have on the culture of hospitality we have in our church. Jesus invited friends and fringe to recline with him at the table in order to share with them the good news of who he is and what he was going to do to restore us back into fellowship with God.

Therefore we want our church to be shaped by table hospitality. Inviting others into our homes just as Christ invites us to his own table.

Here we can be warned of wanting to host people so that we might impress them with what we have and our capacity to satisfy them with our skills. It's not that we shouldn't use what we have to make people comfortable, but it's a warning that sometimes our hospitality is not for the sake of the guest, but for the sake of our own desire to be affirmed or well thought of.

We should also be wary of miserly, stingy hospitality. That is a hospitality which legalistically invites others into their homes while their hearts are far from them. We watch their kids eat all our ice cream and dirty our living rooms and we think not of the care given but instead only of the cost incurred.

That's the heart of the stingy host Solomon paints here. He lets you into his home, he puts on a feast but the more you eat, the more frustrated and upset the stingy host becomes. Why? Because he doesn't want to give what he has.

Now the question for us might be, why in the world would you want to eat at the house of stingy person? More importantly, how can you tell? If all he says is in his heart, then who is to know.

Some cultural background might help us here. Hospitality was king in the ancient near east and if a guest arrived at your house or invited you over for dinner, it was incredibly shameful to not welcome them.

So what is assumed in this text is a sort of continuation of a greedy heart which lacks self-control. It might assume that you are inviting yourself over to the house of this host in hopes that your relationship and fellowship with this host might provide you with some sense of gain.

Maybe your hoping for that networking connection, maybe you've got a good sales pitch for them, maybe you just want to be seen as someone who rubs elbows with the elite. But in this event both hearts are selfish, the guest who tries to leverage this meeting, and the host who begrudgingly accepts.

But in this meal no one gets what they want. The stingy host is not interested in you. He's only interested in the appearance of care. He's more concerned with what he might lack as a result.

Additionally, by the end the guest has none of what he hoped for. He gets neither the free meal, nor the heart of the host. He's lost the host's heart and vomited his food.

When we stop as verse 1 calls us to, and we actually consider the table and the host, we can find contradictions can't we? We have seen the world invite people in and show an attempt to care for them, it is even bathed in love and security. And yet those who leave the meal with the world leave without any enduring comfort, still hungry.

I had a conversation with a young man once after his parent's divorce. He said he remembered all the times his dad had told his mom that he loved her, but then they got a divorce. Now when his dad says he loves him, how does he know that he actually does?

What a profound and devastating reflection. The world promises the feast of a lifetime, but who is satisfied? Just like Lady Folly, the world opens up to us her table, but who leaves full?

The world talks much of what it gives, but how does it actually treat you? The world offers to you the promise of love but is the world actually willing to give you its heart?

No. It provides the morsel, but keeps the heart. It won't give it. It might show it, but it will again demand more from you if you truly want it. Work for me some more, it says like Laban, and then I'll give you Rachel.

It demands more costs, more efforts, more visits, more collateral, more sacrifice, more desire, more toil but it never gives up its heart. All-consuming and never giving is the heart of the host of this world, but here Solomon wished us to see the host of heaven.

Here is the ruler who says: "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven."

The host who says of himself (**John 4:13-15**): "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

The long awaited one who says: **Isaiah 55:1-3**.

Jesus is the host who gives us his food, shares with us his heart, and seats us at his table.

How do you get to that table? You repent and come to him. You use the discernment of the gospel and you refuse the wealth which does nothing. Our hearts find fleeting joy in the things of this world because our hearts are broken. They were made to find enjoyment in God and until Jesus fixes that by taking away our sin, we will never find true satisfaction. So come to Jesus and find your fill.

How does this salvation in Jesus change the way we live our lives and view our desire?

A study came out a few years ago that tried to quantify young adults who had a healthy relationship with social media and those who were consumed with it. The category of young adults where were least involved with social media, and had the healthiest boundaries with it were those who were in pre-law and pre-med studies in college.

Their schedules were so filled with school that they didn't make time for it. It's not that they didn't see the value of it, it's that their ability to turn away from delicacies of social media was rooted in their desire for something greater. For them that something greater was a high level degree.

For us as the church the something greater that we get to live for in all things is the joy of knowing and making known the beauty of Jesus Christ. When that makes sense we have a whole new relationship with what we possess and how we get it.

Look at how Paul puts this in **Ephesians 3:14-21**.

How do we apply this text? We together as the people of God not only hold a knife to our own throats, but we hold up the love of Christ to each other's hearts.

We get to set a counter-cultural community who sits at the table of the world knowing they were built for the wedding table of the lamb.

With desires satisfied in the heart of Christ, let us examine our own hearts in light of our world.