



BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: Win the Day!

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Message Title: Competing Voices

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Now in [Proverbs] Chapter 9 we hear two competing voices: We hear from Lady Wisdom and we hear from the Woman of Folly or the Woman of Foolishness. When the story is told, the experience of your life will ultimately be decided by which voice you choose to listen to. So, we pick it up in Chapter 9,

Verse 1:

Wisdom has built her house,
She has hewn out her seven pillars;
She has prepared her food, she has mixed her wine;
She has also set her table;
She has sent out her maidens, she calls
From the tops of the heights of the city:
“Whoever is naive, let him turn in here!”
To him who lacks understanding she says,
“Come, eat of my food
And drink of the wine I have mixed.
“Forsake *your* folly and live,
And proceed in the way of understanding.” (*NASB, Prov. 9:1-6)

So, the picture—the metaphor—Lady Wisdom has built a house and it’s built out of these seven pillars. Often the number 7 is a term of completion or perfection or kind of what’s ideal. Lady Wisdom has been there from the beginning. She was the master craftsman of Paradise; she knows what God intended; therefore, she offers the ideal; she offers what God intended for those who are willing to listen. She’s prepared this meal. Literally Verse 2 says, “*She has slaughtered the slaughter*”. In the ancient world, it was a big deal to kill an animal to offer to eat. That was very costly to the owner, so this would be a banquet. She’s mixing her wine with spices, so this would be the best of the wine, the best of a meal that she could offer. Her maidens have gone out to invite others to come and to listen to what she has to say.

Who is she inviting? Verse 4: The naïve. The naïve is a reference to those who are untaught, to those who lack understanding, for those that really don’t get it. It’s really important to understand *the naïve* makes no reference to someone who lacks intelligence. It’s not a lack of intelligence; it’s a lack of teaching. Therefore, we all have people around us—where we work, in our neighborhoods, in our families, at the coffee shop, or a group of friends. These are not bad people; these are not evil people. These are not people that wake up in the morning and say, “I think I’d like to ruin my life today.” They’re simply untaught. They don’t know what Lady Wisdom has to say. They believe the lies of the culture. They’re just going with that, and yet their lives are empty; they’re dissatisfied. They’re

wondering if there isn't something more. So, they just need to sit down at the banqueting table with Lady Wisdom and listen to what she has to say.

The other description in Verse 4 is not only to the naïve, but to him who lacks understanding. The Hebrew word translated understanding is actually the word *heart*, which raises the question: Then why wouldn't the translators just use the word heart? And the answer is: Because what we mean by heart in English is dramatically different from what was meant by the Hebrew writers. Their understanding was that everything flowed from the heart. So, if you think about it that way, then what they understood was your ability to think, to reason, to exercise your will, to figure it out, your ability to feel—all of that flowed from your heart. So, when the writer says "lacking understanding" or "lacking heart" it's the idea again that this is someone who's never been taught. This is someone who just has believed the lies—going with the flow—but his or her life is empty; it's not working; it's not fulfilling; but there's no idea of another way to live. So, Lady Wisdom is offering this banquet.

In the book of Proverbs, the food at the banquet would be everything from Chapter 10 on. It could be the whole of Scripture. Lady Wisdom offers a different way of thinking, a different way of believing, a different way of making choices, and that's why Verse 5 says, "Come, eat of my food and drink of the wine I have mixed." Verse 6 is as close as Proverbs comes to the concept of repentance. It's the idea that, by default mode, everyone's traveling down a foolish path. But what Lady Wisdom says is, "*Forsake that path. Forsake those foolish ones; forsake the foolish path and choose a different path that will bring life.*"

Starting then in Verse 7 through Verse 12, the writer of Proverbs offers basically two different responses to Lady Wisdom's offer.

So, Verse 7:

He who corrects a scoffer gets dishonor for himself,
And he who reproveth a wicked man *gets* insults for himself.
Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you, (Vs. 7-8a)

So, first of all, what is a scoffer? The mocker or the scoffer is one that doesn't want to listen to what Lady Wisdom has to say, because they are know-it-alls, because of arrogance and pride, "I don't need to listen," but then pushes it beyond that with, "I also don't want anyone else to listen." Therefore, I mock or scoff or make fun of everything that Lady Wisdom has to say in order that others won't listen to what she says.

Now look carefully at what the Proverb says here: I think these are very important words in a 21st century culture if we're going to live skillfully. I think it's very common that Christians think, "If I'm going to be a good Christian, if I'm going to stand up for truth, if I'm going to stand up for God, if I'm going to stand up for Lady Wisdom, then I have to always correct, reproof, challenge, or argue with what the scoffer has to say. So, every time somebody says something at school, at the marketplace, by the water cooler, we feel this obligation to reprove, to correct, to argue, to set them straight. Guess what? They're not listening! And what the text is actually saying is, "Don't do that!" Why? Because they're not listening. What the text just said is they will hurt you; they will attack you; they will sling mud on you, and they will hate you.

Part of skillful living is understanding the difference between those who are willing to listen and those who have virtually no interest in listening. I plead with you, as Christians we have to stop all this angry rhetoric on social media! It is doing great damage to the cause of Christ. So, you say, "Okay, what should we do?" The Proverb answers that. We need to find those that want to listen, those who are

willing to be taught, and we need to bring them to the banqueting table so that they might listen to what Lady Wisdom has to say, in order to create pockets of flourishing people. What we need are flourishing marriages, flourishing families, flourishing friendships, businesses, churches, communities, pockets of flourishing people where everyone flourishes together, in such a way that the mocker sees it and potentially rethinks his or her position. It's exactly what the text says.

Middle of Verse 8:

Reprove a wise man and he will love you.
Give *instruction* to a wise man and he will be still wiser,
Teach a righteous man and he will increase *his* learning. (Vs. 8b-9)

The word righteous man is our word, *tzadik*. It's someone who is determined to see the community flourish, someone who is willing to disadvantage himself or herself, in order to advantage the greater community and, as pockets of people flourish, we can begin to change the climate. So think of it this way: if I have bought in to the post-modern narrative and I am my own autonomous self, I am determined to be my own god; I will define my own morality; I will determine my own truth— I'm going to live my life my way. If that's my worldview, if that's what I have concluded, then I am deeply offended when someone corrects me. "How dare you correct me? I am the god of my little world. I define what's right; I define what's moral; I define what's true. You have no right to correct me." You hear it all the time in the culture. People are offended at this idea of being judged. "As god of my world, no one has the right to correct me."

How different it is if you have surrendered to God as God. Rather than me being a know-it-all, I've acknowledged God is the know-it-all. Lady Wisdom was there from the beginning. She does know it all, and I understand that I want to be counted among the righteous. So, when I am surrendered to God as God, then I understand my need for instruction and correction and reproof. This is all a necessary process, in order to grow in wisdom, to grow in my skills for living, in order to help formulate a community where everyone flourishes. So, the core issue is always the core issue. It comes down to whether I am functioning as my own god—therefore don't tell me what to do—or if I'm surrendered to God as God—and I need instruction and reproof in order to grow in my wisdom. So that's what the text says.

Verse 10:

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.
For by me your days will be multiplied,
And years of life will be added to you.
If you are wise, you are wise for yourself,
And if you scoff, you alone will bear it. (Vs. 11-12)

What Verse 12 just said, is if you choose to listen to what Lady Wisdom has to say, you benefit from that. You experience the reward. But if you choose to scoff, if you choose to plug your ears and live life your own way, you will suffer the consequences of that, and that is your fault. We really struggle with this in our community, in our culture. We really struggle with the idea of personal accountability. It's everybody else's fault but mine. But we have to address the hypocrisy in that. Think of it this way: If I

bought in to the post-modern autonomous self—I am my own god; I define my own reality; I define my own morality; I define my own truth; there are no moral laws; there are no spiritual laws; there are no social laws— I’m in charge of my own little world and I’m deeply offended when anyone corrects me. But when my choices as god of my little world lead to a mess, suddenly it’s everyone else’s fault. Do you hear the hypocrisy in that? You’re the one that chose to walk that path. If it’s a mess, it’s your fault. Own it!

The only way out of the mess is to start with owning your own story. This is my life and it’s up to me to make choices that are going to define the path of my life, no matter what’s your past, no matter what you’ve done, no matter what’s been done to you. You have to own your own story and you have to decide for yourself, “Am I going to listen to Lady Wisdom or am I going to listen to the Woman of Folly?”

Every single person has equal opportunity to sit down at Lady Wisdom’s banqueting table and listen to what she has to say. And ultimately it starts by entering into a personal relationship with the One who is wisdom—Jesus Christ. If access to God through Jesus was based on religious performance, it would not be equally available to everyone, but because it is based on the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, because it is offered freely as a gift to every single person—old, young, black, white, rich, poor—has equal access to God’s gift of salvation and an equal invitation to Lady Wisdom’s banqueting table.

So, what will define the experience of your life comes down to your choice as to which voice you’re going to listen to.

In Verse 13, we hear the voice of the Woman of Folly:

The woman of folly is boisterous,
She is naive and knows nothing.
She sits at the doorway of her house,
On a seat by the high places of the city,
Calling to those who pass by,
Who are making their paths straight:
“Whoever is naive, let him turn in here,”
And to him who lacks understanding she says,
“Stolen water is sweet;
And bread *eaten* in secret is pleasant.” (Vs. 13-17)

The Woman of Folly or the Woman of Foolishness, she’s loud; she’s boisterous; she’s overpowering. As a matter of fact, oftentimes it’s hard to hear the voice of Lady Wisdom because the Woman of Folly is so loud. She places herself in the cultural center of the city. She exalts herself, but the text says she doesn’t know anything. She’s naïve; she has no idea how to live, but she presents herself as an expert. The text says she calls out to those who are trying to walk a straight path.

What’s worth noting, is what the Woman of Folly has to offer. Lady Wisdom slaughtered an animal, mixed the wine, created this magnificent feast. What does the Woman of Folly offer? Answer: bread and water. How could you possibly convince people that bread and water is better than the feast? Answer: You try and make bread and water seem more appealing than it is. So, what does she say? “I know it looks like water, but it’s *stolen water*. And I know it looks like just bread, but it’s *secret bread*—and stolen water is sweeter and secret bread is better.” In other words, because we’re people made in the image of God, there is kind of this built-in sense of moral conscience that people have. But the woman of folly comes along and says, “You know life is found outside of those boundaries. It’s when you cross those boundaries and taste some stolen water, when you pursue secret bread—that’s where life is found; that’s what your soul is looking for; that’s what’s going to bring you to life.” So, she tries to make her bread and water seem highly appealing.

But – Verse 18:

But he (meaning the one who comes to her table), But he does not know that the dead are there,
That her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

Basically, the idea is the people are dead and they are casting a shadow on the table. So, somebody shows up thinking this stolen water is going to be sweet and this secret bread is going to really be something special and I get to the table and I notice these aren't really people; these are just shadows. They are shadows of the corpses because the people that listened are dead already. It's a real graphic imagery of what you find at her table.

So competing voices in the culture: Lady Wisdom, who offers life, and the Woman of Folly, who brings forth death. You have to own your own story. Whether you experience life or whether you experience heartache is determined in large part by which voice you listen to. The experience of your life is not determined by chance, fate, luck, or the lottery; it's determined by the choices you make every single day, and those choices are largely determined on the basis of which voice you listen to.

You know, I remember as kids we used to love to watch the water flow down the street in the storm gutter after a big rain. I just remember floating leaves and other things. And now as an adult, I still love rivers. But one of the things you have to learn to respect in a river is the power of the current. It looks so peaceful from the bank, but it can get dangerous in a hurry if you get caught up in the current. So, in this proverb, the writer talks about two voices, both voices inviting us to dinner. One is Lady Wisdom; one is Lady Folly. Lady Wisdom offers us a feast. Lady Folly basically can only offer bread and water. She tries to dress it up by calling it forbidden bread and secret water, but it's just bread and water. So, I would see Lady Folly as like the current of the culture.

If a leaf drops in the river, it goes with the current. And I think that's pretty much everybody's default mode, which means you have to choose to walk upstream against the current. So that's a big part of our study in Proverbs: we need to listen, we need to obey, if we're going to live our lives skillfully. So, we can go with the flow of the culture and make a mess of our lives. But it's a good reminder: *it's never too late to accept the invitation to sit down and feast with Lady Wisdom*. I pray you'll join her today.