

Proverbs 9 v 1 – 18 A Choice to Make 20.02.221

Today, in our studies in the Old Testament book of Proverbs, we are looking at a sandwich of a chapter. This 'sandwich' form is a Hebraic poetic structure.

The bread, top and bottom, is a parable about wisdom and folly, the butter is a small collection of wise sayings, and the all-important filling is found in pretty much the central verse – verse 10, which is the key verse for the whole book:

**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.**

This is one of those verses which uses another Hebraic poetic device of repeating the thought in a slightly different way. You find it used a lot in the Poetic books of Psalms and Proverbs.

Parables

Today I want to concentrate on the 'bread of this sandwich' – the parable.

Stories are a great teaching tool. Our imaginations come into play as we recognise familiar situations or get drawn into an unfamiliar one. And we tend to remember stories. Jesus used this method of teaching a lot.

He told a story contrasting wisdom and folly – which one? (Mt.7 v 26)

The point about the wise and foolish builders was what? 'Whoever hears these words of Mine and puts them into practice' is like the wise man building on a good foundation.

That pretty much sums up the book of Proverbs – it's not surprising as hearing Jesus and building our lives on Him is fearing the Lord and getting to know Him, which is, as we know, the beginning of wisdom.

So, we're going to look at this parable, which occupies the first 6 verses and last 6 verses of this chapter.

Parables are intended to have a broad sweep of meaning, in this case:

Choose to seek wisdom and you will live a good life; choose to be foolish and you will suffer for it.

Add in v. 10 – The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

That's it.

End of sermon!

However, we do find all sorts of extras in the details of parables.

This can be dangerous if we start to build doctrine on something that was just intended to add colour to a story.

But, bearing that in mind, let's have some fun looking at the descriptions of Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly and see where they lead us.

Lady Wisdom

- **She has built her house; She has hewn out its seven pillars**

She seems to be a wealthy lady in a substantial dwelling.

People have latched on to her seven pillars and T.E. Lawrence, Lawrence of Arabia, wrote an autobiography with that title.

Google tells me that “according to scripture the seven pillars of wisdom are:

Fear of the Lord, instruction, knowledge, understanding, discretion, counsel and reproof.’

I imagine someone put those together from the book of Proverbs.

This lady has decided to throw a dinner party and open it to the whole town.

- **She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine**
- **She has set her table**

Does this remind you of any other scripture?

I thought of Psalm 23 *‘You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.’*

Then she sends out her maids to issue a general invitation to all to come to her feast.

Her invitation is:

- **Let all who are simple, come in here.’**

The NIV says that she calls from the highest place in the town.

Which suggests that her house is the highest place in the town. The highest place would be the Temple, so the writer is perhaps suggesting godliness.

There are many invitations from God in Scripture

e.g. Isaiah 55 v 1 – 2

Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;

And he who has no money, come buy and eat!

Come buy wine and milk without money and without price.

And Jesus offering the water of life and the bread of life – i.e. Himself.

Lady Wisdom’s invitation is

- **‘Come and eat my food / bread and drink the wine I have mixed.’**

In the light of the New Covenant, our thoughts turn to the Last Supper when Jesus said, ‘This bread is My body, given for you – take and eat. This wine is the new covenant in My blood – drink it’.

As is clear in 1 Cor.11 v 23 – 30, taking Communion does not save us, nor will it benefit us if we take it with unconfessed sin harboured in our hearts. It is our faith in the One who gave His actual flesh and blood for us, which saves us.

The beginning of wisdom is to fear the Lord, to know Him, to accept His sacrifice for us which is to our benefit, and be joined to Him.

Lady Wisdom's promise is

- **Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of understanding.**

Here we have the gospel – Leave and Live: repent of your sins, leave that life behind and have new life in the Lord Jesus.

And walk i.e. live your life – behave – in a way consistent with belonging to Christ – His teaching.

An aside here:

This week, I read somewhere an insightful assessment of our society. In that we want our politicians (and other leaders) to be people of good morals and integrity, our society wants the fruit of Christianity without the roots.

People want the benefits of a godly society without God. It can't be done!

So let's look at the contrasting picture (I have drawn from a few translations here):

Lady Folly

- **She is loud/noisy/ raucous, undisciplined/ seductive, and without knowledge.**
- **She sits at the door of her house on a seat calling out to passers-by.**

What a picture this is. She sounds to be what used to be called 'common'. Sitting in her doorway calling out. She makes me think of how I imagine Soho to be like in the evenings – men in doorways calling out to passers-by to entice them in to strip clubs and brothels.

But, of course, the temptations that assail us aren't so obviously evil. Satan appears as an angel of light offering us goodies.

Notice, she is also at the highest part of the city, but she represents false gods, the demonic.

See what she offers:

- **Let all who are simple come in here.**

So far it's the same invitation to the same passers-by.

- **'Stolen water is sweet; Food eaten in secret is delicious.**

Confidentiality is often a good thing, but when people want you to do things in secret, it sets alarm bells ringing. But isn't it true that there is a pull to be part of secret things, to be involved in dark activities? This is often the devil's tactic – 'Come on, it will make you feel good'. And when you discover that pleasure is empty or has worn off, he says, 'Try this variation – it's even better.'

The results of going to her party are not life and wisdom, but death.

Application to us How might we be tempted to turn aside into Lady Folly's house? We all know the temptations of the world – to fit in with society and adopt what is fashionable and acceptable even

though it is ungodly - the sins of the mind and intellect; the temptations of the flesh – greed, sexual immorality, pornography. I have always been a big watcher of TV, but lately there is less and less I want to watch and probably less than that that I *should* watch. There was a headline in Monday's Telegraph:

Water companies are dumping raw sewage into rivers 1,000 times a day.

I thought, 'Yes, and TV companies are dumping spiritual sewage into our homes 1,000 times a day.' And I'm not even starting on the Internet with its lies and hatred. I'm sure you all know that internet porn is a hugely damaging influence on young people – even the under-tens. How can their minds be cleaned of all this filth? How can they unsee what they have seen? How can they un-experience what they have experienced? We can only cry out to the Lord who can make things new.

Back to us – how do we avoid making the wrong choice when Lady Folly offers us her sweets?

Psalm 119 v 11

I have hidden Your Word in my heart that I might not sin against You.

Know what God's word says! So, we can at least discern between right and wrong.

But that doesn't prevent us being tempted.

1 Corinthians 10 v 13:

God is faithful, He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

That way out is usually right at the beginning. Once you have stopped to listen to Lady Folly, you are halfway into her house. Once you've just turned on an ungodly TV programme or something on the internet, you are likely to get hooked and carry on. Once you have entertained the thought of some act of dishonesty, you are much more likely to carry it through.

Get into the habit of nipping the temptation in the bud, don't entertain the thought – turn immediately to the Lord – choose wisdom and life, not folly and disaster.

And this really is the end of my sermon. As we live our lives, let us make good choices -

Let us determine to fear the Lord and choose His wisdom rather than the folly of the world.