

The Tale of Two Women

Text: Proverbs 9

Introduction — Two Invitations

- A. We are all on a path, we are all on a journey. That *path* is a metaphor for *your life* in Proverbs and other Wisdom literature.
 - i. On this journey, we constantly receive invitations. Invitations which invite us to life and blessing; invitations which invite us to death and destruction—deceptively.
 - a) But there are really only two invitations.
 - ii. Discerning the difference between these invitations is found in the details.
- B. Details can be very important...
 - i. One couple decided to have an early morning wedding—8:00, with a large breakfast bar at the reception site. Nearly 200 guests responded and promised to attend, but barely 100 showed up. The bride was devastated and lost thousands of dollars on the catering. That evening she started receiving confused calls from her no-shows who were now showing up at the wedding site for her 8:00 wedding. The invitation simply listed as 8:00 – no a. m. or p. m. **Details are important.**
 - ii. Another couple mailed 250 wedding invitations 4 weeks prior to their wedding. However, a week before the wedding, the couple was surprised to find all their invitations back in their mail-box—returned because of insufficient postage. How insufficient? About 3 cents each. They spent the next 4 days calling their guests to invite them to the wedding. **They should have weighed their invitation carefully.**
 - iii. Another couple planned for a wedding in the middle of June. By early June, the bride was distraught because so few of her responses had arrived. On the day of her wedding, however, even those guests who had responded were no-shows. Of the 150 expected, only the couple's family, five close friends and significant others were in attendance. Her printer had mistakenly printed July instead of June! When the depressed bride returned from her two week honeymoon, her post office box was overflowing with invitation responses. **Not paying attention to details can cost you!**
- C. Not only is it important to check the details when you are inviting, it is important to check the details of the invitations you receive.
 - i. **Our text is about two invitations you have received...**two ever calling invitations. We must weigh them carefully.
 - ii. Two women, Woman Wisdom and Woman Folly, have sent out invitations to all of you...to 2 Feasts... rival Feasts, that occur simultaneously.
 - iii. **You can't be at both, you must choose. So you must pay attention to the invitations, or you may end up at the wrong dinner party!**
 - a) We must examine the invitation carefully, because they sound very similar...
 - b) And we must examine the sender carefully... for again we don't want to mistake one for the other. So let's look carefully at these 2 invitations...

I. Examine the Invitations (Can you recognize the Difference?)

- A. Examine the sender
 - i. One woman has built her house...hewn out its 7 pillars... prepared her meat and wine (this is rich fare), set her table. She is ready and prepared.

- a) Most commentators see this as a direct reference to the contents of the book of Proverbs itself:
- Chapter 9 represents the conclusion of the building of the house and the setting of the table (1-8). Now the invitation (9) to the feast is sent out.
 - The feast (10-31) is to follow. You are invited to begin feasting.
- b) But note the character of the one inviting. She has worked hard, she has prepared... she embodies wisdom itself.
- What she offers has an enduring quality to it. It will last and stand.
 - It reminds me of the “house built on a rock.” It will stand the storms!
 - She sends her invite through messengers. In order to receive the wisdom she offers, one has to be humble enough to hear it from her servants and not directly from her.
 - Her servants in this case were the wisdom teachers, prophets, teachers of the law. And in our case the apostolic message of Christ, and those through whom we hear it.
 - It reminds me of the account of Namaan, General of the army of Aram (2 Kings 5), when he heard that he had leprosy. Sent with a letter to the King of Israel, he was then deferred to the prophet Elisha. ⁹*So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. ¹⁰**Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself 7 times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed."** ¹¹*But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely **come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy.*** ¹²*Are not...the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?"* So he turned and went off in a rage. ¹³*Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, "Wash and be cleansed!"* ¹⁴*So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan 7 times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.*
 - ◆ **A servant** girl 1st told Namaan about the God of Israel,
 - ◆ Elisha sent out **a servant** to give Namaan the message
 - ◆ and **a servant** again appealed to Namaan to humbly listen.*
 - How often do we, like Namaan, demand of God how He would prove Himself to us. He has nothing to do with that. **He sends his servants... Will you posture yourself to listen?**
- ii. The other woman is obnoxious: loud, boisterous. You can't miss her.
- a) She lacks the discipline which was evident in Wisdom's building and preparations. **She has plenty of advice to offer, but nothing to commend it.**
- Other than, it seems a lot easier.
 - She sits at the door of her house, not sending her servants, not even getting off her tush, but calling out to the unsuspecting.

- Waltke writes: *“Her lifestyle so titillates and demands no moral rectitude that she needs no discipline, no industry, and no investment to attract the senseless.”*
 - b) **Who is this woman?** Just as Woman Wisdom is a personification of YHWH Himself and His ways, Folly, then is a personification of the world and its ways. The idols of the world call for us, whether greed or sex, lust or corruption.
 - Wisdom and folly are more than just good ideas vs. bad ideas.
 - To be wise is to live in relationship to God; to be foolish is to live as worshipers of the idols of this age.
- B. Examine the invite itself: what are we being invited to?
- i. 5: *Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed.*
 - a) The food is described in vs. 2 as meat. Wisdom invites us to a meal which truly nourishes and satisfies.
 - ii. 6: Lit. *“Leave the simple and you will live.”* Kidner: *“forsake fools”*.
 - a) This is an invitation that calls you away from one group of associations and into another: to walk with the wise.
 - b) We are invited to walk in the way of understanding.
 - Once again, a very straight-forward appeal. Not dressed up.
 - These young men are not being invited to bed, but to school, to a way of understanding.
 - This invitation calls them to forsake themselves, deny themselves, and follow Wisdom in a new way.
 - iii. 17: Examine the nature of the food being served at Folly's reception:
 - a) Folly's meal? Water and food (which can mean bread or food in general). By implication: this is bread and water.
 - You may recall in chapter 5 the imagery of water being that which satisfies. Here it is stolen...like the forbidden woman...It promises satisfaction, but leaves one hungry and looking for more.
 - Reminds me of Noni-Biscotti's—air. Go to Mazarro's and get a real biscotti.
 - b) *Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!*
 - Eve was persuaded of the sweetness of the stolen fruit. Today most of us no longer need to be persuaded... we believe it naturally. That which is wrong, we think to be the best.
 - As Isaiah 5:20 *Woe to those who call evil good and good evil...who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.*
 - But as Proverbs 20:17 notes, *“Food gained by fraud tastes sweet to a man, but he ends up with a mouth full of gravel.”*
 - Adam and Eve ended up with a mouth full of gravel, and so will you if you pursue the stolen, the forbidden— that which is outside God's will for your life.
 - An Arabic Proverb says, *“Everything forbidden is sweet.”* Folly will allure you, tempt you with the half-truth that sin gives pleasure.
 - What makes it powerful is the half that is true... it does give pleasure.
 - But like the serpent in the garden, Folly denies the connection between sin and death.

c) One invitation call us to God's ways, the other, away. Examine carefully.

II. Examine the Recipients (Which one are you?)

A. Note that in vs. 4 and 16 the list of invitees to both feasts is identical:

- i. *Let all who are simple come in here!*" she says to those who lack judgment.
- ii. So at one level, the invitees to both parties are identical. We all begin as the simple and lacking in judgment.
 - a) What does this mean? The simple, simply lack judgment. That is to say, they are easily led to believe anything. They are not yet committed to either path.
 - They believe lies as easily as they believe truth. They say, "yes, yes" but they will say it to anyone.
 - b) In order to **not** be taken into the house of horrors to which Folly baits them, they will have to make a decision to forsake their folly and pursue wisdom.

B. But there is an irony here: the only qualification to be invited is your deficiency.

- i. No where are the wise called to either party.
 - a) Jesus, the Wisdom of God made flesh, took up *this same kind of call*.
 - b) Woman Wisdom calls to the unwise, and Jesus to the unrighteous. We see in vs. 7-9 that the unwise are the unrighteous. The reality is there are no wise or righteous... **except** those who realize they are **not**.
 - c) **The ultimate fools are those who are fools but think they are wise.**
- ii. Are you on the list? *Let all who are simple...who lack judgment.* Is that you?

C. Ultimately the simple youth will become one kind of man or the other. (7-12)

- i. Which of these two men are you going to become? Wise /righteous man, or a mocker / wicked man? There are only 2 options.
- ii. We don't stay **uncommitted** our entire lives. We eventually become one or the other.
 - a) Important to know that, though this is painted in stark contrast, reality is that all of us have responded as the mocker at some time or another.
 - It is not a single poor decision that determines destiny, but decisions that ripen into character, and begin to define our destiny.
 - b) You are currently on the path to one or the other. Which one are you on?
 - c) If you discover today you are dining at Folly's Feast, this text is calling you to the Dinner of Ultimate Delight...Wisdom's Feast. Respond while you can. Repent.
- iii. The two kinds of men, are defined by their response to correction:
 - a) 7-8a: The Mocker / Wicked Man
 - He insults those who correct him. Of course...*mockers mock*. They think it is funny too. Of course, the reader clearly sees that it is far from funny; it is fatal...deadly. A suicide course.
 - He attacks, either verbally, or physically, or both, those who rebuke him.
 - He despises, hates, the one who brings the correction.
 - Waltke: "A mocker is so full of himself and contemptuous of others that he will not humble himself under any authority, not even that of the Lord."
 - He is certainly not going to receive an invitation from servants!

- **If these describe your response to correction, you are being earnestly warned, to humble yourself and turn.**
- b) 8b-9: The Wise Man / Righteous Man
 - He loves the one who rebukes him. He is grateful that this person had enough courage to love him in a way that is really interested in His good.
 - He actually applies the instruction to his life and so becomes wiser.
 - The wise man is not the one who has arrived, but the one who has postured himself as a humble learner—as being in need of wisdom.
 - Now, this should tell all of us we are not wise, for no one among us naturally loves being corrected. We have to learn, and it is hard. The cross instructs us.
- c) At end of it, the two are defined by either humility or pride.
 - Being wise is defined by teach-ability, humility. James speaks of “the humility that comes from wisdom.” (3:13) **The distinction then, between the mocker and the wise are the ingredients of arrogance and humility.**
 - Or: The difference is determined by the ultimate authority in one's life? (vs. 10) **The Lord** (hence the fear of the Lord; knowledge of the Holy), or **self** (hence pride and arrogance resulting in submission to no one).
 - Wisdom's voice comes from outside of you... it is revealed by the Lord.
 - ◆ Pursuing counsel; hearing input; seeking wisdom
 - Folly's voice often comes from within you; your own ideas of what is true.
 - ◆ Folly invites: *follow your heart* (the montra of our age).
- iv. **The warning:** if you maintain your individualism, you will alone will suffer. (12)
 - a) Though you abuse and mock those who love you most, ultimately, you will be the one to suffer the consequences...no one else.
 - b) Those who feast with Woman Folly will digest their meal in hell.

III. Consider Your Response (You have a decision to make.)

- A. So you have two invitations before you. Both events occur at the same time. You can't go to both... you have to choose. Which will it be.
 - i. In some ways, they look very much the same.
 - a) You are listed on both invites.
 - b) You are drawn somewhat to each... in different ways.
 - c) Both promise pleasure. One, immediate satisfaction that comes easy. The other eternal satisfaction that may not be immediate.
 - ii. Both invite to a meal, which implies an intimate relationship. With whom will you be intimate?
 - a) Woman Folly, who is immediately attractive, but is ultimately *a gold ring in a pigs snout*? Or,
 - b) Woman Wisdom, whom you haven't yet seen, but has sent her servants with an invite. Every thing checks out, everything is in order, and you know, 100 years from now this will have proven much better.
 - iii. You must return a response card to one or the other. You must decide.
 - a) Indecision is a decision. The natural flow of the world's river is to Folly's Feast.

- B. In one sense, choosing Wisdom's invite costs you nothing...
- i. Isaiah 55 ¹"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk **without money and without cost.** ²Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. ³Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live..... ⁷Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. ⁸"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. ⁹"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."
- C. But there is another kind of cost. It will cost you the other invitation. You can't go to both feasts. Which will it be? Where will you dine.
- i. When you leave here today, you will have to decide where you will have lunch.
 - a) If you decide to eat at home, great... but that means you won't be eating out.
 - b) If you decide to eat out, fine. If you go to Miller's St. Pete Ale House, you won't be eating at Cody's. You have to decide where you will eat.
 - ii. It is the same here: It is one or the other. The Feast is a lifetime... a relationship.
 - a) With which Lady will you become Intimate? Wisdom / Folly?
- D. Who is this Wisdom, really? Where do I find her? Luke 14:16-27
- i. ¹⁶"A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. ¹⁷At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' ¹⁸But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.' ¹⁹Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' ²⁰Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.' ²¹The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.' ²²'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' ²³Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full. ²⁴I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.' ²⁵**Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said:** ²⁶**If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. It costs us every other devotion!**
- E. Today the invitation stands. But there will be a day when the party has already begun and it will be too late. (Luke 13:25-27)
- i. ²⁵Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' "But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.' ²⁶Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' ²⁷But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!'
 - ii. May God grant us the wisdom to know we are fools. We lack judgment. We need to listen to Him.