

Series on Proverbs: Proverbs 9.

Solomon brought to life the concepts of wisdom and folly by painting a picture of two banquets. One was held by Wisdom; the other thrown together by Folly. All the townspeople received invitations to attend both events, but only one was well attended. Promising the people whatever they wanted, Folly won them over.

The Merchant of Venice is one of Shakespeare's famous comedies. In the midst its twists and turns is the story of Portia and her desire to marry. Many men of noble birth desired the maiden's hand in marriage, but she could wed only the one who passed her father's test.

According to the will, three chests must be made of different metals, each having a different inscription. The first chest, made of gold, held the words: "Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire." The second was made of silver and said: "Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves." The final chest, unattractive and made of lead, held a more sober warning: "Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath."

Many men of noble birth hoped to marry Portia, and one of them was the Prince of Morocco. Boldly approaching the golden chest, he believed he should have what many men desire. The prince opened it, and inside was a skull. A note beside it said many men desire death.

Another potential husband was the Prince of Arragon. Thinking himself to be a great man who deserves better than all others, he opened the silver chest. Inside was the picture of a fool and the scroll beside said that many who seem impressive are fools who deserve nothing.

The young noble, Bassanio, longed to marry Portia and held her love in return. Studying the chests, he reasoned that true beauty is often veiled. Gold and silver look attractive, but looks are often deceiving. Bassanio decided upon the lead chest, opened it, and he found a picture of his beloved Portia inside. Her father believed that the only man worthy to wed his daughter would be a man willing to sacrifice everything for her sake in return.

Folly disguises itself with gold and silver while wisdom often appears as lead. Wisdom is rarely the most attractive option. Consider the

wisdom found in Proverbs—live a disciplined life (Prov 25:28); build a savings (Prov 6:6-8); listen to advisers (Prov 15:22). It all sounds good, but then we say to ourselves: *Oh, my life is disciplined enough, and I'm okay financially. Advisers? Eh, I know what I'm doing.* God offers wisdom freely to all, but who really wants it? It seems from reading Proverbs that hardly anyone wants to be wise. Even Solomon himself eventually turned away.

None of us were born wise (Prov 22:15), and wisdom doesn't magically come upon us. If even the sinless Son of God had to grow in wisdom (Luke 2:52), what does that mean for you and me? There are no short-cuts. Becoming wise is a process that begins by fearing God (Prov 1:7) and continues throughout life. It begins by humbly recognizing that we aren't the source of wisdom, that we need help; we even need correction at times (Prov 19:20).

God freely offers wisdom (James 1:5), but will you receive it? Wisdom is a treasure sure to bring joy (Prov 8:30-31), but honestly what's it worth to you? Solomon said it's worth more than all the gold and silver around (Prov 3:13-14). It seems wisdom is a treasure worth giving and hazarding all you have.

WISDOM'S BANQUET

(PROVERBS 9:1-6)

Solomon personified wisdom as a gracious hostess who wants her home filled with guests. If you read the passage, you'll see she's a concerned citizen. She sees the dire situation of her town, has a message that can help, and keeps crying out on the street to be heard (Prov 1:20-21, 8:1-36). There's urgency to her warning, and she wants to save all who will listen.

Leading up to the banquet, Wisdom is the epitome of diligence. Look at how Solomon overuses "she" and "her" in these verses to underscore his point. Wisdom leaves nothing undone. She slaughtered the livestock herself. She mixed the wine herself. She set the table herself. She even built her own home in all its perfection herself (Prov 9:1-2).

While deep in preparation, Wisdom sends her servants to invite the townspeople. They call from the highest places—perhaps the city walls—to ensure that everyone hears. No one can say he didn't know or receive an invitation. The entire town was asked to come, and yet, so few came (Prov 9:1-3).

Wisdom and Folly

What happened? The townspeople didn't like Wisdom's invitation. She didn't ask for a donation or care about banquet attire, but her servants made an offensive request. To come to this banquet you must, "Leave your simple ways, and live, and walk in the way of insight" (Prov 9:6).

Turn from my ways? Follow yours? Ha! I'm doing fine on my own, thank you very much. And so, the townspeople passed on the thing they needed most.

Proverbs 9:8-9—*"Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; 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 in learning."*

Solomon digressed in verses 7-12 to comment on the people. The town is a metaphor of the world, and it is filled with scoffers who reject wisdom. Proverbs is Wisdom's great feast, but to many it's just platefuls of broccoli with goblets of water—nothing much to savor.

Those who love Wisdom see the glory of her feast, love her, and want to attend. After so few arrive, Wisdom speaks, and she's determined to lead them in the path of life.

This wasn't your typical banquet speech. Wisdom puts her guests on the spot, corrects their ways; and though you would expect them to leave offended, they love her all the more (Prov 9:7b-9). She loves them, they love her, and all leave her home blessed (Prov 9:11).

Sadly, Wisdom's evening wasn't the talk of the town. Everyone heard of Folly's feast, and craving the excitement, most of the townspeople went there instead.

FOLLY'S FEAST (PROVERBS 9:13-18)

Folly had heard of Wisdom's banquet, and she's an opportunist. Having no principles, morals, values, or loyalties, she exploits the night. Folly knew Wisdom's banquet wouldn't be well attended, but she ensures that even fewer will attend by creating a more attractive alternative.

Folly knows what the people want, and she hardly lifts a finger to give it to them. She has no servants, and she makes no effort to prepare a meal. She only speaks. Atop the city walls and at her doorstep, throughout the town, Folly raises her voice.

Whereas Wisdom offered the people what they needed, Folly promised what they wanted. What captured the hearts of the townspeople wasn't a lavish, well-prepared banquet, but an enticing voice. Folly seduced the people with empty promises of pleasure (Prov 9:13-14).

Hers wasn't a formal event or much of a banquet. Folly's feast is a party (Prov 9:16). Paralleling with the darkness of Proverbs 5 and 7, Folly has created her own *Hotel California*. She doesn't ask anyone to turn from his ways—Folly wants you to continue in them. "Stolen water is sweet," she says (Prov 9:17). *Stop worrying... no one will get caught. Do what you feel like doing. Follow your heart!* She's the friend who flatters, the teacher who tickles ears, the one who deceives, a traitor. Folly cares nothing about anyone. Working with the father of lies (John 8:44), she'll say what she must to keep the people from Wisdom.

Everything has a price, my friend, and to grow in wisdom will cost you your pride. Foolish living seems to cost nothing, but there's always a cost. Indeed, the devil is in the details, for Folly's cost is your life. To live at her house is a downward spiral going further and further from the life of God unto death (Prov 9:18). Short of God's grace, no one ever leaves.

**"WISDOM OFFERS LIFE WITH NO MENTION OF PLEASURE;
FOLLY OFFERS PLEASURE WITH NO MENTION OF DEATH."**

Wisdom is a rare jewel, but it isn't because she's hard to find. Solomon depicted wisdom as a woman crying out for all to hear her. She's in the open and wants to be heard. It seems when we pray for wisdom often what we'd like isn't wisdom but an answer. We don't want to study a book like Proverbs, apply our minds, humble ourselves, or think. It's easier to pray: *God, just give me a sign. What should I do?!*

It takes a bit of work to glean wisdom principles from Scripture, and it's tempting to set aside wisdom for a more attractive option. Yet, as one of the men in *Merchant* reminds us: "All that glitters isn't gold." Folly looks nice, but there's nothing nice about it. For the sake of your own joy and peace, for the sake of God's glory in your life, open the Bible and read. May the Spirit grow you in wisdom through the application of His Word.