

Which Woman Will You Choose?

This morning we find ourselves in the book of Proverbs. King Solomon tells us a story of two women. He wants us to put ourselves in the sandals of a young man looking for a woman. And, so as you meet these women, I want you to ask yourselves the question: Which of these two women will I choose?

We read verses 1-6: *"9:1 Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out its seven pillars. 2 She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table. 3 She has sent out her maids, and she calls from the highest point of the city. 4 "Let all who are simple come in here!" she says to those who lack judgment. 5 "Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed. 6 Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of understanding."*

First of all, notice what this first woman is like. We can find out so very much about her by what she does. To put it simply, she *works!* She does a mountain's worth of work. What does she do? She slaughters the animals. Now, for us today this doesn't seem like a whole lot of work. For any of us can go down to Giant Eagle and pick up a nice steak or roast whenever we want. Not so back in Solomon's time. If you wanted meat, you had to kill the animal, skin it, butcher it and then cook it.

So very much work. But she's not done yet. She mixes her wine. Here again, it's hard for us to see the effort and care she puts in. For, if we want wine, we go down to the proper Pennsylvania-owned store and buy it. Again, it was different back in the ancient days. The wine was in a wine-skin. The person had to pour it out. Then she had to strain all the dregs out of it. Then she might even have to water it down a little. So very much work she put into this feast she is preparing. And this teaches us so very much about this woman. She cares deeply. And she shows it with her hands.

But she doesn't just work. She also speaks. When she is done getting everything prepared, she sends out the younger women to invite a young man to dinner with her. And even more than that. This first woman, herself goes out to the tops of the hills so that everyone can hear her invite people to her banquet.

And just what is it that she says? She says: *"Let all who are simple come in here!" she says to those who lack judgment. 5 "Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed. 6 Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of understanding."*

Here we start to see where her heart is. She calls out to all who don't know much at all. She lets them know that if they come to *her* house their stomachs will be full of good meat and good wine. But, even more than that, notice what she also says: she invites them to find food and hope and meaning for their lives. For what good is a full stomach if you have an empty soul?

That is the first woman. Will you choose her? Well, we have one more woman to meet: *"13 The woman Folly is loud; she is undisciplined and without knowledge. 14 She sits at the door of her house, on a seat at the highest point of the city, 15 calling out to those who pass by, who go straight on their way. 16 "Let all who are simple come in here!" she says to those who lack judgment. 17 "Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!" 18 But little do they know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of the grave."*

Just as the last woman had a name, so also this woman has a name. The first woman was named 'wisdom.' This woman is named 'stupidity.' And we see it by who she is. First of all, what does she do? Do we see her slaughtering, butchering and cooking? Do we see her mixing wine so that it's good and fresh and ready? No. Where we see the woman 'wisdom' working so hard because she cares so much, we see *this* woman doing nothing.

And where the first woman goes to the top of one hill after another to invite people to her banquet, what do we see her doing? She sits. That says it all, doesn't it? She's just sitting there. Oh, but do not be mistaken. She is very active. In our English Bible it says that she is 'loud.' In the Hebrew the word **הממה** in this context means 'to be restless.' The woman is restless. She is right there, sitting. But, she hates being so bored and she can't find peace. She will not get her hands dirty with work. But even though she's just sitting there, she cannot help from sitting there.

That is the sort of woman she is. But, folly, just like wisdom, has a message to speak and an invitation to proclaim. We read: *"14 She sits at the door of her house, on a seat at the highest point of the city, 15 calling out to those who pass by, who go straight on their way. 16 "Let all who are simple come in here!"*

Folly calls out to these men to side-track them. She calls out to them. And notice what she says: *"Let all who are simple come in here!"* Her invitation is the same as the first woman. She offers true wisdom. She offers true joy. And in the next verse, she fleshes out what she means: *"17 "Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!"*

The first woman offers real food with real fulfillment. The second woman tries to get *you* to do the work. The second woman lies to you and tells you that if you steal it instead of working for it, then and only then will you be able to enjoy it.

At this point, I picture the young men sitting at Solomon's feet laughing. Wisdom shows her love and care by working.

Folly tries to seduce you by getting *you* to do the work. Oh, Folly, you're so stupid. You're so lazy. Nobody is going to listen to you. They will all see you from a mile away. And if they have to walk by you they will never leave that straight and narrow path.

And then, when Solomon has them laughing, he drops this hammer on them. When they are sitting back, laughing at this foolish woman, he takes their breath away. He concludes with this verse: *"18 But little do they know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of the grave."*

She seems so innocuous and harmless. Yes, she's stupid. But, she certainly isn't dangerous. But, what's the truth? There are many go into her home and never come out. There are many who go to her to be given joy and all they find is pain. They go to her to find heaven and instead, they receive hell. And here's the irony: They are so stupid, they don't even realize it. They don't realize that even though they are taking in breath, they might as well be dead.

So, which woman will you choose? Will you choose Wisdom? Or will you choose Folly? It's a no-brainer, right? You choose Wisdom. But, there's the trap, my brothers and sisters. You *don't* choose wisdom. You don't. Again and again, you choose stupidity. And, if you're looking for examples, I can give some. Every time you gossip, slander and lie, you follow Folly. Every time it's easy to watch the Steelers play, but it's hard to open your bible, and it's hard to get that little bit earlier to come to bible study on Sunday morning—at those times you follow Folly. You see, in our lives again and again we see this truth. When we have a choice to make, so very often we make the wrong choice.

We see a wise woman and we see a stupid woman. And we think the decision is so very easy. Just pick the wise woman. But, in our lives, again and again, we pick the lies of Folly. It is a difficult decision. But where is the solution? The dilemma is so difficult that Christian churches have sought an answer to the problem. And so very many have found the wrong answer. Ten or twenty years ago, the solution was legislation. Christian leaders urged people to go out and urge their leaders in government to pass 'Good Christian Laws.' Then people be forced to pick lady Wisdom instead of lady Folly.

Now, the vast majority of them have admitted that they were wrong. Now today, you hear pastors in the pulpit following another voice. They say that if we want to change the world for good, then we must act different than the world. They cite statistics. They say that in a given Christian congregation about a third of men in a congregation look at pornography. They say that, for the first time in history, there are higher rates of divorce among Christians than among those who do not call themselves 'Christians.' And they tell the people in their pews 'why would you come to Christians for help when the Christians are more messed up than the heathen?' And the solution, they say, is to start acting like Christians.

And, when they go down that road they too trade one lady Folly for another. Because a church is not a place for the Perfect. It's a place for the forgiven. It's not a place for those who have lied to themselves and think that they do not sin anymore. It's a place where week after week we see this baptismal font, reminding us that there is where we became perfect in the sight of God even though we daily sin much. There is where we find a solution to this problem. Indeed, everyday we look just like the pagan world around us. Every day we sin too. But, what's the difference between us and them? We know Jesus the one who takes away our sins. We know Jesus who put his name on us in the waters of baptism, so that we do not belong anymore to that sinful stupid woman named 'Folly.' We belong to Jesus.

You cannot make people wise with the perfect laws. And you cannot even make them wise with nagging. The only way you can make people wise is by sharing God's word with them. The only way you can make them truly wise is by introducing them to the LORD. We read verses 1-6 and verses 13-18. But in the middle of these verses is a sentence we didn't read. In verse 10 it says: *"10 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."*

My brothers and sisters, if you want to know true wisdom, then know the LORD. There is an old proverb: *γνώθι σεαυτόν, know yourself!* And, in truth, that is the path to despair. For, the more you know yourself, the more you see your failings. No, instead know the LORD. Open up your bibles and *read* them. Come to bible study class and ask questions. And don't wear yourselves out to do good works until you see so very clearly and joyfully the great and many good works Jesus has done for you. And then, as you find a LORD in God's word whose love is so great and wide and deep for you—then you will know the LORD. And don't be so surprised when lady wisdom come to you. Don't be so surprised that your marriage is strong, because you know the LORD. Don't be surprised when things work out in your life, because you know the LORD. Don't be surprised when you have a wisdom that doesn't need to shout because it shines out in this world of darkness. Don't be so surprised, because you know the LORD. You did not earn him. You did not ask for him. But you know him because he first knew you. Live in *that* wisdom. Amen.