

A Sermon  
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Grace Baptist Church  
Bryans Road, Maryland  
October 6, 2019

## **You Are What You Eat**

Proverbs 9:1-18

It's Sunday morning, and the table is set. No, that doesn't mean we're having a fellowship meal today. Not even cake in the foyer. But just hang in there for a couple more weeks. Our church picnic is coming up. Rather, what I mean is that thanks to Geri Webb, the bread and the cup are prepared and ready for us to come and partake in the Lord's Supper.

And in today's Scripture passage, another woman has prepared a table. Her name is Wisdom, and she's eager to have us come and enjoy what she has prepared. She's not selective about her guest list. She basically welcomes anyone and everyone who wants to come. You don't have to be among the wealthy and the elite. The simple and those with less education, and fewer resources, have a place at the table too.

No worries about space. Wisdom's new house has lots of square footage. It's large enough to accommodate all her guests. She has spared no expense on the construction, or on the menu. There's plenty of meat and wine, the kind of food and drink that most common folks couldn't ordinarily afford. But Wisdom is generous. Generous with her resources, and generous with her call to come. So she gets onto social media, sends out the invitation, and soon notifications are popping up on everyone's phone: "House-warming party at Wisdom's place. Come one, come all."

This isn't really an invitation to fill your stomach. It's actually a summons to be satisfied with the knowledge of God. Wisdom herself states it well in verse 6: "Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of understanding." That verb "walk" reminds us that what we're being fed isn't a body of information but a way of living in the world. The "understanding" that's on the menu involves not only getting our minds around God's instruction, but most of all getting our conduct in line with his will.

In a technology-driven time like ours, there's no shortage of information. Even in the early 1990s, one writer was commenting: "[T]he very amount of information that computers make available threatens us with cognitive overload: overwhelmed with facts, people tend to mistake data for truth, knowledge for wisdom." She went on to quote another author who said: "Info-mania erodes our capacity for significance, . . . 'With a mind-set fixed on information, our attention span shortens. We collect fragments. We become mentally poorer in overall meaning.'"<sup>1</sup>

Processing data and analyzing information are important and valuable. But wisdom is about being able to go beyond just mastering the facts. It's about being able to take the knowledge and the understanding that we gather, and interpret them within a larger framework of meaning and significance and purpose, which in turn shapes our attitudes and actions. This means that the outcome of wisdom isn't primarily a data set, but a way of life.

I like the way that Old Testament scholar Ellen Davis puts it when she says that wisdom is "living in the world in such a way that God, and God's intentions for the world, are

acknowledged in all that we do.”<sup>2</sup> This kind of living isn’t necessarily determined by your IQ, your SAT score, or your level of education. It’s more a function of the orientation of your heart. And in the book of Proverbs, this orientation of the heart is regularly captured by the phrase, “the fear of the Lord.” It’s actually repeated in verse 10 of today’s text: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”

“The fear of the Lord.” There are many proposals about exactly what this means. But at the core of it is a sense of awe and reverence toward God, recognizing that God is so much greater than we are. “The fear of the Lord” means an awareness of being created by God, being dependent upon God, and living in God’s world. It means acknowledging God and taking seriously our accountability to God for our lives. As Tremper Longman III has summarized it, “This fear is not the fear that makes us run, but it is the fear that makes us pay attention and listen.”<sup>3</sup>

The fear of the Lord is grounded in humility, and this humility generates openness to God and receptiveness to God’s word and instruction in our lives. Not simply so that we may know the Lord’s teaching, but most of all so that we may live the Lord’s teaching. Wisdom isn’t wisdom unless it leads to a life shaped by the will and way of God.

That’s at the heart of why you’re here today. You didn’t come simply to download some Bible knowledge and add to your database of Scriptural insight. You didn’t come just to accumulate some more experience in how the church does things. You didn’t come mainly to feel like you’ve done your duty on Sunday. Hopefully, you’ve come primarily because you want to know what’s good in God’s eyes, and do what’s good in God’s world. You want to be a wise person. You want to live wisely. And living wisely requires an appetite for the word of the Lord.

Several years ago, *The British Weekly* published a provocative letter which read:

Dear Sir:

It seems ministers feel their sermons are very important and spend a great deal of time preparing them. I have been attending church quite regularly for thirty years, and I have probably heard 3,000 of them. To my consternation, I discovered I cannot remember a single sermon. I wonder if a minister’s time might be more profitably spent on something else?

For weeks, a storm of editorial responses ensued, ended by this letter:

Dear Sir:

I have been married for thirty years. During that time I have eaten 32,850 meals—mostly my wife’s cooking. Suddenly I have discovered I cannot remember the menu of a single meal. And yet . . . I have the distinct impression that without them, I would have starved to death long ago.

Every Sunday is an opportunity to accept Wisdom’s invitation to come and take a place at the table, where you can enjoy a generous portion of God’s word. I realize that my sermon isn’t the only way you feed on the Lord’s instruction, and that Sunday isn’t the only day that Wisdom throws open her doors and welcomes you in. You have other ways of showing up at Wisdom’s party during the rest of the week as well, by observing what God is showing you, listening to what God is saying to you, and learning from what God, through experience, is teaching you. In whatever ways you have an opportunity to practice the fear of the Lord and acquire wisdom, the main thing is that you say yes to the right invitation.

After all, according to today's text, Wisdom isn't the only one trying to welcome you in. There's another house, with another meal. This one is being hosted by Folly, aka "Foolishness." And Folly is offering the same basic invitation: "Come on in, you're welcome here. There's a place at the table for you." But Folly isn't serving meat and wine. She's serving bread and water. These are sure signs that whereas Wisdom is calling you onto a path that leads to life and flourishing, Folly is trying to lure you onto a path that leads to death and destruction.

Each day you encounter situations, circumstances, events, experiences, and relationships where you have to discern between the wise thing to do and the foolish thing to do. You have to be able to distinguish between the path of wisdom and the path of folly. You have to decide which invitation to accept. The invitation that helps bring you closer to God and more in line with his will, or the invitation that draws you away from God and more out of line with his will.

As you strive daily to discern between the way that brings you into deeper union with God and the way that separates you from God, you need the Lord's guidance and instruction. It comes to you in many forms. Through Scripture, particularly as it's preached and taught, as well as the ways you open it and explore it on a daily basis. Through prayer, as you open your heart and mind in attentiveness to God. Through experience, as you examine and reflect on the moments and events of your life. Through worship, both individually and as a congregation. Through the life of the community of believers. We need each other's help to discern and do what's wise.

Remember that when it comes to wisdom, you are what you eat. That's part of what's signified by the Lord's table, prepared for us here today. The table is set. It's not meant to be a meal eaten in solitude. Rather, all those who know the Lord Jesus are welcome to come, eat, and enjoy fellowship with him. After all, from a Christian perspective, wisdom is much more than just a body of knowledge or the transmission of tradition. For us, wisdom is a person, the living Savior Jesus Christ. And being wise means being joined to him by faith, and becoming more like him in your life. This is how you walk in the way of understanding, and truly live.

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<sup>1</sup> Michiko Katkutani in the New York Times (August 20, 1993). *Christianity Today*, Vol. 38, No. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Davis is quoted in Scot McKnight, *Pastor Paul: Nurturing a Culture of Christoforimity in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2019) 172.

<sup>3</sup> Tremper Longman III, *The Fear of the Lord is Wisdom: A Theological Introduction to Wisdom in Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017) 13.