

“Feasts of Wisdom and Christ’s Salvation”

Proverbs 9:1-10; Luke 14:15-24

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God’s word speaks to us today in the picture of a house and feasts or banquets. In Proverbs it says, “Wisdom has built her house” (Prov. 9:1). Wisdom’s house is founded on seven pillars (Prov. 9:1). Why seven pillars? Why not four, let’s say? Because seven is the number of completion. On six days God made the heavens and the earth and on the seventh day He rested (Gen. 1:31; 2:1-2). Seven encompasses all God’s work and includes His rest. In this work He made all things. In this work He has made and sustains you and me. In this work He therefore establishes what is true and right and merciful and kind, and He teaches that we need to cease our labor to hear His word and rest in faith in His teaching.

So wisdom prepares a feast: “She has slaughtered [and dressed her beef]; she has mixed her wine; she has set her table” (Prov. 9:2). She sends out the call from the highest places in town so that all can hear. Her call is to come to the feast and dine: “Eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed” (Prov. 9:3-5).

To whom especially does she call? She calls to the simple, that is, to those who think they do not know. She calls to those who believe and confess that they need instruction and the good news of salvation. Those who know it all; those who think they are just fine; those who are full and not hungry, do not heed this call. They are full in themselves.

Wisdom’s invitation is to leave the way of ignorance of God and of truth and salvation and walk in the way of insight (Prov. 9:6). It’s call is to abandon the thought that I have truth within myself and truth is what I make. The way of insight with respect to God and truth and what is right and salvation is something taught to us. It does not come out of ourselves but to us from God.

Jesus also talks about a banquet in our Gospel reading today. He speaks of the kingdom of God as a feast. Here the feast is a parable, though it also points us to the literal feast where there is bread and wine in which Jesus gives His body and blood.

In the parable, Jesus says: “A man once gave a great banquet and invited many” (Luke 14:16 ESV). At Jesus’ feast one dines with the host and with others. At Jesus’ feast, there can be no disregard of those with whom one dines, as if one were an entity unto oneself; as if one were church all by oneself, dining alone with God according to one’s own making and choosing.

Jesus’ feast of which He speaks in the parable prepares one for the marriage feast of the lamb in His kingdom at the consummation of all things. Isaiah spoke of this feast, when he said:

“On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, “Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation” (Isa. 25:6-9 ESV).

But why feasting? Why talk about wisdom and Jesus' feast of the kingdom and the feast of salvation at the end of all things as feast or banquet?

Let's say that an important person came to town. A banquet will be thrown in that person's honor. That person will also speak. You are invited. There is food. So, there is nourishment. There are lots of people there. So, there is community. That important person is the reason for the feast. That person is the focus. When one is at the feast, one can hear what that person has to say. That person provides the meaning for being there, and the content. There is something spoken, something taught. There is a common faith; a common identity.

The banquet also has importance about it. It has the sense of celebration and honor and reverence of the person in focus. You are being lifted up into something bigger than yourself and you find your own meaning and purpose in that bigger thing. To exalt oneself in this setting is obviously out of place. Here there is only what is given by the host. Nothing is claimed; nothing is taken for oneself; no one gets in by rights. There is only invitation, that is call, and being drawn by the call.

So wisdom prepares her feast to feed us. What is on her menu? It is this: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. Knowledge of the Holy One is insight" (Prov. 9:10). The Holy One is God who is known and revealed in and through Israel and in our Lord Jesus Christ. To know God is insight and understanding. To know God is to be wise. And our posture before God by which we gain insight and understanding is "the fear of the LORD."

What does fear mean here? It may be that our first reaction is to think of being afraid; afraid of God. This fear is usually connected with punishment. So fear of God is being afraid of God's punishment.

There is something to that in the sense that we should not want to displease God. If we are indifferent to what displeases God, then there is no fear of God in us. But the wanting not to displease God grows out of something more than just wanting to avoid punishment. One can want to avoid punishment without any regard for what is good and true and right; without actually acknowledging that God exists and is one's creator, the giver and sustainer of one's life. For one can want to avoid punishment just to avoid the perceived pain. A person can try to avoid punishment by just trying to avoid getting caught. But that is not the fear of the LORD. Neither is it just doing what is expedient, convenient, and of benefit to oneself, and great expense to others.

The fear of the LORD involves honor and reverence. It is to honor and revere God as God and the source of life and all that is good and true. It is to acknowledge in submission of one's will that God has the power and authority over all life, including all human life, according to the way He has made humanity and according to His truth and righteousness. Human authority over human life only exists by way of God's express authorization. Human authority over human life does not extend to the innocent (in terms of actual acts). There is no human authority to take life from the innocent.

The fear of the LORD then also involves the heart embracing and acknowledging how God teaches us. He teaches us through His word. He teaches us through the best traditions of human reason. His word elevates reason in faith. It corrects reason when it goes astray. The Psalmist expresses this aspect of the fear of the LORD, when he says:

"The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. More

to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward” (Psalm 19:7-11 ESV).

Through His word, the LORD teaches us the fear of the LORD to produce a heart and mind that rejects what is evil according to God’s word and embraces what God regards as true, right and good, for the fear of God and accepting evil are not compatible (Prov. 8:13).

And so the fear of the LORD involves humility. Proverbs says elsewhere: “The reward for humility and fear of the LORD is riches and honor and life” (Prov. 22:4 ESV). Jesus says: “[E]veryone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 14:11 ESV). He or she will be exalted in God’s grace. He or she will be exalted in knowledge and wisdom and understanding. He or she will be exalted in what God gives and in rejoicing in the giving. But this exaltation is by way of gift and instruction, not by way of rights and choosing one’s own way.

There is a false sense of wisdom and truth today. It is that our choices are wise and true just because we make them; just because they are our choices. This is false and contrary to the fear of the LORD.

In the fear of the LORD, we think of ourselves and life in terms of what God has given. God has given life and all good things. What God has not given, we turn away from. He has not give that we should take as we deem fit. God gives abundantly. God gives in truth and goodness and righteousness. God has given life. God has given community. God has given His way, and His way is the way of insight and life. The fear of the LORD is the way of humility and faith toward God and rejoices in His truth and in what He gives. God has given life. God has given truth.

The most important thing God has given is Jesus, His Son in human flesh appearing. Jesus too has a banquet. He too calls all to come through His servant. The invitation is pure grace. In other words, no one who receives the invitation has done anything to receive it. The sumptuous fare at His feast is also gift. No one who feasts there has done anything to put that fare on the menu and on the table.

But there are some who treat Jesus’ invitation with contempt as if His feast were unimportant. But this is the feast of God’s Son, the one in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3). He is the one in whom God’s grace is found. But many regard it as unimportant. Jesus talks about this in the parable in terms of the cares of this life: buying cattle; buying land; getting married. He is talking about people who treat His feast as something ordinary and not very important. Being right with God and learning from Him through Jesus is not a very high priority. The things of this world are more important.

So the invitation goes elsewhere. It goes to the poor the crippled the lame and the blind. Then it goes out to whomever will hear and come. In the context of Jesus’ day, the poor the crippled the lame and the blind involved those who the Pharisees thought must be suspect with respect to the kingdom of God precisely because they were poor, and crippled, and lame, and blind. Surely such things were the signs of God’s rejection of them, the Pharisees thought. Jesus’ parable rejects that way of thinking (cf. Psalm 103:10). It teaches the good news that Jesus receives those in the grace of God whom the Pharisees thought would never be admitted to God’s feast, while they would be, even though they also found the cares of this life to be more important.

The poor the crippled the lame and the blind also signify something else. These are people in need. They make no claims, they have nothing to give. They hear the call to Jesus’ banquet.

He calls them in their need. They come in joy and thanksgiving, or maybe some don't; but they are called. One comes to the feast when one believes one needs the fellowship of Jesus and the fare He provides. One sees one's need in the fear of the LORD. Those who have no need, who have no fear of the LORD do not come and miss the feast.

But then the call goes out to the highways and byways to anyone who would hear and have their hearts captured by the call. This must include gentiles, for they were also walking the roads and the highways and byways.

The call goes out to every tribe and people and language and nation. And any who hear in need will come and say thank you and yes I will be there in thanksgiving for the invitation. And they will feast on the sumptuous fare of the Son of God. They will feast on Him Himself in His body given and blood shed in atoning sacrifice and life from the dead. They will feast on His sacrifice that takes away our sin according to His word and strengthens us in soul, in faith, by His Spirit to walk with Him and in His walk. He instructs us at His feast and teaches us wisdom and insight, as well as the gift of salvation that He Himself is and He himself has won.

And in His feast here He prepares us for the feast at the end of the age where God will wipe away the tears from our eyes; where the death and the wrong choices we have made are redeemed in His death and resurrection and in life overcoming death.

So may God teach our hearts the true fear of the LORD, as we also rejoice in the love and forgiveness that God gives to us in Jesus and that Jesus gives to us in His feast. Amen.