

THE SALMONELLA SUPPER

by Mike Halsey

PROV. 9:13-18

There is a threat to Wisdom's banquet; a code red alert. There's another lady in town who's hosting a banquet, if you could call meager food "a banquet." At the same time Wisdom is issuing her invitation to hers, someone else is holding another banquet in another place with another result.

Solomon personifies the hostess of the threatening banquet as a lady named "Stupidity," if you go by the Hebrew translation of the word "folly." (Prov. 9:13) What makes her stupid is that she has no idea of the consequences and implications of rebellion. From Stupidity's description in Proverbs, she hates Wisdom (all the teachings of the book of Proverbs) and rejects the fear of the Lord. According to Stupidity, sin is there to be enjoyed. The more forbidden, the better to be savored.

To get a better understanding of Stupidity, look at the description in vs. 13—she's undisciplined, that is, "turbulent." Sin brings chaos into a person's life. That's not hard to see—pick up any newspaper, as we will later, and read of chaos. Human beings are not designed to live in chaos. We're designed for the ordered life that Wisdom brings.

She's "without knowledge"—she has no concept that her stupidity has a Neiman-Marcus price tag which she'll pay and pay and pay.

Right off, we notice that she "sits" (vs. 14)—she doesn't build anything; she sits (Wisdom built a large house with 7 crafted pillars), she doesn't prepare anything; she sits. (Wisdom prepared a banquet of meat and wine).

Solomon is careful to point out that she's sitting on a chair (vs. 14). That looks incidental to us, but the ancient reader would catch its significance. We think, "Of course she's sitting on a chair, where else would she sit?" The ancient reader would understand the significance of the chair—it indicated the assuming of a position of authority. When teachers in the ancient world began to teach, they sat down; that's why we read what we read in Matt. 5:1 and in Matt. 23:2. When a teacher was raised to the status of a professor, he was presented with a chair as the symbol of his authority.

"There is no absolute truth." "Man is an accident." "There is no right and wrong." "What's right and what's wrong change." "The Bible is filled with errors." "You can't know anything for sure." These statements are enshrined as authoritative and the studied conclusion of scholars. They sit high up in positions

of authority. They are to be accepted; not questioned. That's what Stupidity does; she elevates herself, sitting at a high point in the city. (vs. 14)

In 2001 Alex Rodriguez, New York Yankee, the highest paid anybody in Major League Baseball, didn't sit down and map out a strategy called, "How to Ruin My Life and Reputation Forever." As he's now admitted, his use of performance enhancing drugs began in 2001 and continued until 2003. No one intends to ruin their lives. This is what verse 15 has reference to: she calls "out to those who pass by, who go straight on their way."

These gullible people are passing by, not intending to go to Stupidity's banquet, they have other goals. Yet there's the enticing invitation to join her. Stupidity has a way with a phrase—she uses the exact wording as Wisdom's invitation: "Let all who are simple come in here." (Prov. 9:4)

But her invitation isn't for an education in wisdom; it's an invitation to the forbidden. There's something about the "forbidden," isn't there. They think that fighter pilots coined the phrase, "Pushing the envelope." "Pushing the envelope" has reference to a "performance" envelope for fighter planes. The "envelope" contains the limitations of air speed, rate of climb and descent, things like that. When a pilot pushed the envelope, it meant that he was testing those limits. There's an adrenaline rush for the pilot who pushes the envelope and survives.

There's something within us (an old sin nature) from birth. (Eph. 2:1-3) This something causes us to have a rush when we engage in the forbidden. Forbidden fruit has a taste to it which pulls at everyone of us like the smell of fresh popcorn in the movie lobby. She calls it "stolen water," and calls it "sweet." She calls it "food (lit. "bread") eaten in secret" and calls it "delicious." Note the skill of the invitation and what she puts first: the stolen water" to catch the attention of the gullible. Wisdom searched for guests; Stupidity sits and waits for them to come by, while they're going somewhere else.

We have to admit it: she's right. The forbidden is sweet to us (Heb. 11:25). When we push the envelope, the rush is there. The gullible are on their way in life, going somewhere else, but there is one person who knows what she wants; she's planning a seduction by means of an invitation.

"Stolen water" in Proverbs is a reference to the illicit; illicit sexual activity (Prov. 5:15-23). I ran across a great quote: "Marriage is the fence around the fountain." To cross the fence is pushing the envelope.

But wait. Look deeper at the two offers: Wisdom offers wine and meat. Stupidity offers what?—"Bread" and "water." Bread and water? There's no comparison between bread and water and wine and meat. Bread and water is what they say to

give prisoners. You'd be insulted if you were invited to someone's house for dinner and they trot out a can of tomato soup and hand you the can opener.

"Like any mother facing a long day in the car and then on a plane with two young kids, ages 4 and 5, Jennifer Krieger of Alexandria, Virginia, thought she was prepared.

"I bought peanut butter crackers," she says, "thinking it would be a great healthy snack to take on the trip, easy to throw in my bag, and it won't go bad."

But things went bad, in ways that Krieger couldn't have imagined. A long-awaited Christmas vacation ski trip turned into a 5-day vigil at a Colorado hospital after her son David, age 4, got salmonella poisoning.

"The hardest thing was watching him in such pain," Krieger says. "He would cry out, 'My tummy hurts! My tummy hurts' and he'd be in a fetal position on the floor." He was in the hospital for four days, with a temperature of 104. He couldn't move because he was in so much pain. He would scream and cry every time the nurses touched him." What was wrong? The peanut butter was infected with salmonella.*

I once saw something ghoulish in a news magazine, one of those things that when you see it, you can't ever get it out of your head, one of those things that when you see it, you wish you never had. Some city in the U. S. had discovered that their coroner had a hobby: when he was all alone, he'd take the dead bodies and pose them, put party hats on them and prop them up and then take pictures of them.

Proverbs is blunt: Stupidity's house is the house of the dead and inside are the bodies of her victims all propped up at the party. Her bread and water banquet, giving pleasure for the moment is a death trap (vs. 18). Lives, families, damaged. Sometimes, due to the sin pattern, physical death results. Stupidity's salmonella supper causes premature death.

If ever there was a poster child for Prov. 9:13-18 and Stupidity's salmonella supper, it's Alex Rodriguez. He said so; listen: "I was stupid for three years. I was young. I was stupid. I was naïve."** (Doesn't that sound like what we're reading?) But then listen to the rest of it, is there a "it's-not-my-fault-clause?" "Back then it was a different culture (Oh, now we see; it was the "culture" which put the syringe in your arm); it was very loose; I just wanted to prove to everyone that I was worth [the 252 million dollar contract] (Oh, now we see, you did it for us!) I felt an enormous amount of pressure." (Oh, now we see something called "pressure" filled those needles. We're glad you cleared that up. We thought you might have had something to do with it.)

A-Rod was headed “straight on [his] way” (vs. 15] to the Cooperstown Hall of Fame, but he heard the call of Stupidity to come to her bread and water banquet. For three years, there was the pleasure of 52, 57, and 47 home runs and all during those three years he was eating at the Salmonella Supper. But now? His name is “dead,” his legacy is “dead,” and the Hall of Fame, maybe that’s dead too. All gone for a Salmonella Supper. He had it made until he heard and heeded the invitation.

You may be thinking, “But this culture we’re in is powerful. With its slick media it’s issuing the invitation everyday. It seems like all the smart people with the degrees, all the beautiful people, so many of the academics and books are inviting us to the bread and water banquet.” And the invitation is relentless; 24/7. It never stops. Man, oh man, it’s never been as unrelenting as it is today. The invitation to the Salmonella Supper is everywhere.

Back in Israel’s history the Northern Kingdom went into deportation to Assyria and the Southern Kingdom went into exile into Babylon. The might of those cultures were overwhelmingly powerful. Everywhere the Jews looked there was Assyrian and Babylonian power on display and magnificently so. The statues they saw were stunningly powerful. The statues and the monuments were their “movies.”

Assyria had its statues of a bull’s body, a man’s head and torso, and the wings of birds. The image of the bull said, “We are powerful.” The wings said, “We are swift.” The man’s head said, “We are intelligent.” On the head was a cap, a sign of divinity. The cap said, “We are god.” On the torso was a belt, saying, “Power.” The statue had five legs, so that when the Jews saw it from the front, it portrayed firmness, stability. When they saw it from the side, it appeared to be striding toward combat.

In Babylon, the Jews of the Southern Kingdom saw the lion, large and looming statues of the Lion of Babylon, the beast of the goddess Ishtar. Everywhere they looked those ancient “movies” said, “We are powerful. It does no good to oppose us.”

And those statues were excellently crafted; some still survive from their time hundreds of years before Christ and are on display in the museums of the world. Though worn by time, they inspire our awe thousands of years later. The Assyrian and Babylonian craftsmen were skilled.

Today, craftsmen with TV and movie scripts, actors hone their craft to put out their destructive messages of there is no judgment; there is no absolute truth as they glamorize their Salmonella Suppers. “We’re powerful; you can’t stop us. You and your children will succumb. We will push the envelope of morality and you will follow.”

Yet, we remember that in Babylon, there was a Daniel. There were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. We remember there was a Joseph in Egypt. Later, there was also a Moses and a Joshua.

So the question is, “How do we keep from joining the A-Rods of this world at the Salmonella Suppers? We’re in the culture; we have our own pressures. How do we keep the impressionable children we have away from the Supper? They hear the invitation.

I think there’s a starting place—Prov. 9:10: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” If those near and dear to you see you believing God’s threats and fearing Him, if those close to you see you believing God’s promises and loving Him, that will go a long way to helping them resist the invitation.

I didn’t say, “If they see you sitting in church.” Many sit in church and have no fear of the Lord in the Proverbs sense. I didn’t say, “If they see you keeping a list of “do-not” rules. I said if they see your life permeated with believing the Lord’s threats and fearing Him and believing His promises and loving Him. There’s a difference.

Is your fear of the Lord a guarantee that they won’t accept the invitation? As the father cautioned his son in Prov. 1, “Don’t go with the gang,” which would indicate, that although his father feared the Lord, his son could still opt not to do so. After all, the odd thing is the one who wrote Proverbs 9, later in life accepted the invitation to the Salmonella Supper! The invitation to the Salmonella Supper has entertained and slain its millions of diners.

Truth to Take Home: Resistance to the invitation to Salmonella Supper is born of the fear of the Lord.