

True Wisdom and Foolishness

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[0:00] Okay, I'm not going to ask how you're doing because you already told me, and I have a pretty good memory. So, I need your prayers.

I'm in trouble. I'm way in over my head with the things that God has called me to do. To be a dad and to be a husband are things that are just so challenging to me.

It's funny, I didn't know my kids are going to be in today to listen to this, so we'll have to talk about this later. But I learned so much from them, you know, and it's just amazing just to see kids grow up and trying to figure out how to shepherd them, to build a foundation to where they see godly wisdom and they trust the Lord.

And just kids, you know, I'm in trouble. My kids, I have three high school kids or three kids that are going into the high school or age. And just the things that I'm learning in our house, it just catches me in awe.

So, this week, about two days ago, one of my kids, who will remain nameless, and you're going to know right away who it is once I tell this, you know. So, they came in and they said, look at this. And I'm like, what?

[1:16] And they go, can you take a picture of this? I'm like, what? Well, I got armpit hairs. And I want to send them to my class because I'm the first person with armpit hairs. There's three.

Three. Three. But I don't know why. I don't know why they're only on my right side. There's none on my left side. And I said, that's beyond my pay scale. Maybe you can ask Uncle Ian, who's the doctor.

He can tell you why they're growing, you know, irregularly or something like that. And so, this morning, we woke up. And I was trying to get him up. And he got up. He's like, oh, man, I got such a bad back. My back is killing me. And he goes, well, it's because you're unbalanced.

You have too many armpit hairs on this one side. You need to get some more over here. Now, my wife feels like we don't have three high school kids. We have four high school kids, right? Because she's considering me as that high school kid also, right?

But you learn a lot, you know. And I learned lessons about the Lord from my kids. I'll never forget one of the biggest lessons God taught me was through my daughter, Rachel. We were living in China.

[2:17] And Rachel was about two and a half. And she hadn't learned to speak yet. We think it was because she's learning two different languages. Our helper was speaking to her always in Mandarin. And I can remember her first words she said, of course, which is always daddy.

We have some argument about this in our house, whether it's dad or mom. But I remember her first sentence she said to me. And this blew me away because it stuck with me all these years. We were at this retreat.

And we were late. And I had to get her shoes on. And so Christina tasked me with getting shoes on. And as a dad, you don't want to fail at too many things. And so you feel like you could at least get shoes on your kids.

And so I remember putting shoes on her. And as I tried to get this first shoe on her and put it on her feet, this two-and-a-half-year-old, three-year-old kid, what she did next surprised me. She grabbed the shoe.

And she said, I do. And there was this fury and intensity. I do. And I'm sitting there. And my first reaction is to grab it back and say, I do.

[3:19] But at that moment, I know that if I do that, Christina would walk in the room and watch me arguing with a three-year-old. So I can't do that, right? So I have to act more adultish, right?

And so I'm sitting there. And I'm trying to persuade this three-year-old why it's in all of our best interests for me to put her shoes on. And so after talking for about two minutes, feeling like I got this through her head, I went to put the shoe back on her.

And the exact same thing happened. I do. And she grabbed it back from me. And I sat there, and I go, okay, I'll let you do it. And I watched her do it, and I watched her put it on.

Now, in my mind, I'm just thinking, okay, this is this craziness. But, you know, I thought about that story for all these years. And I ponder it sometimes when I think about my struggle with God.

And I wonder if God feels that way with us sometimes. I wonder if God wants to do certain things in our life. And he wants to do some things for us.

[4 : 25] And he wants to change us. And he wants to make something amazing. And when he's trying to do it, we grab it out of his hand, and we say, I do. I do.

I do. I do. The passage today talks about the story I just shared. And what Paul says in this Corinthians passage is there's two types of people.

There's people who say, I do. And there's people who say, God does. There's two types of people in the world. There are people who live by worldly wisdom.

And there are people who live by godly wisdom. There's two types of people in this passage. He says it at the very beginning. There are those who are perishing because they're living by worldly wisdom.

And there are those who are being saved by the power of God. And I think about this, and I realize that, you know, this isn't new to the New Testament, but this story has been going on forever and ever and ever.

[5 : 27] I mean, in the garden, we're told that our parents were there, and they were looking at this tree, and they saw this tree, and this tree looked really good. And God said, don't do that. But we're told that they looked at it, and they saw the fruit, and the fruit looked good, and it looked good to make them wise.

And in Hebrew, what you understand is that this wisdom is coming apart from God. It's becoming worldly. And our parents have this choice.

They can go on this direction and be independent. They can find their identity by themselves. They can find meaning by themselves. They can find purpose by themselves. They can find truth by themselves. They can do all these things apart from God. They can, I do.

Or they can let God do. And they chose to, I do. And what you see right away throughout the creation story is that you and I were never made to be independent. You and I were never made to be autonomous.

You and I were never made to do it on our own. And because of that, we start this search. We start this quest. We start to search for our identity. We start to search for meaning.

[6 : 28] We start to search for purpose. We start to go on this vision quest to look for things that we can anchor our soul to. Because without God, without godly wisdom, we're looking for meaning and purpose in our life.

And we're looking for things to anchor our soul to. So maybe this would be a great time to ask a question before we even start off is, what do you anchor your soul to? What is it that brings you?

What is it that brings you purpose? What is it that you think about and dream about in the quiet moments in Hong Kong, which are far and in between, that you have free time to think?

What is it that you anchor your soul to? Is it godly wisdom? God does. Or is it I do? I have to do this. I got to get this done.

Is it worldly wisdom? And Paul's in this church in Corinth. Remember, we talked about it last week that he started it in 50 AD. And it was going pretty good in the middle of this amazing city. Corinth is probably just like Hong Kong.

[7 : 30] I mean, it's probably more corrupt sexually. And Hong Kong is probably more corrupt business-wise. But they're just alike. And in this city, he plants this gospel message.

He plants this message of wisdom, of godly wisdom, and what God's going to do in people's lives. He talks about the cross, and people's lives begin to change. But then after five years or so, he hears this message.

And what he hears is not good because the people have started to take the worldly wisdom, and they've started taking the culture and the worldviews, and they've tried to integrate it to the gospel message.

They've realized that the gospel message is so intense and so different and so simple and so plain that they've tried to weave those wisdoms together.

And in Paul's day, wisdom just meant knowing how to live life. It meant having this worldview that helped you order all the things in your life, your priorities, and your values, and the things you did, your life, your death, your universe, your cosmos.

[8 : 30] Wisdom was having some kind of world system to put all those things in order and helped you live consistently, helped you live with integrity. Now today, I think wisdom just means you're really good with people skills, and you're talented, and you have a lot of experience.

But in Paul's day, wisdom was everything. And it governed how we lived, and it governed who we are, and it governed the quality of our life. And so I just want to talk in this time, and we're going to keep this short, and everybody that asks when I say that, but I do.

I want to talk about one thing. I just want to talk about the wisdom of God. And this passage is interchangeable because it also calls it the foolishness of God.

So I want to talk about the foolishness of God. And what we see from the very beginning is that Paul, in this passage, he's going back through history, and he's talking through the story, and he's saying from that moment in the garden when we said we want to do, I do, and worldly wisdom, worldly wisdom didn't work out very well for us.

It didn't really change the quality of our lives. It didn't make us better people. It didn't help us get rid of things. And we're told throughout these stories that as we are going farther and farther and farther away from God, that God, in his wisdom, is pursuing us.

[9 : 47] He's pursuing foolish people. And God is on this quest in your life, whether you know it or not. God is on this quest in your life to give you godly wisdom, to change your life, to change how you think, to change how you live, to change your purposes, and to change your values, whether you know it or not.

And we fight and we struggle with that because we have this worldly wisdom that we've owned and we've earned and we have and we value in our lives. And Paul begins, very beginning in verse 18, and he says God pursues us and tries to fight off that worldly wisdom through the word of the cross. And in Greek, the word of the cross just basically means the message of the cross, the historical fact that the cross is real, the things that the cross destroys. And it's this message that in Paul's day and in the church of Corinth, and I think in Hong Kong too, if you're wise, if you're worldly wise, you have a hard time hearing this.

I mean, let's be honest. What did you think the first time you heard the gospel? If you're in the family of faith right now, what was your reaction the first time someone told you you needed Jesus to die on a cross to save you?

You know, my first reaction, and this is on, I got in a fight. I was with my best friend on a basketball court, and he told me that I needed Jesus Christ in my life, and I punched him.

[11 : 11] Because the thought of me not being okay and not having my life together and not being able to do it on my own, I was just infuriated. And I got in this massive fight with him.

Because I didn't like hearing the fact that I needed help. And when you share the gospel, this message of the cross, this foolishness of God to people, most people's reactions are, well, that's kind of interesting, but you know, that's not where I'm at.

And that's not what I need. It doesn't apply to me. And if you think about it, the message of the Bible, I mean, it's pretty messed up, isn't it? I mean, the message of the Bible is pretty crazy, don't you think?

I mean, when you talk about the Bible and God's written word over 4,000 years, over three continents, we talk about creation, we talk about our need for forgiveness, we talk about sacrifice, we talk about judgment, we talk about heaven, we talk about sin, we talk about brokenness.

I mean, to the people who live in Hong Kong, in the real world, in the business world, those ideas are foolishness.

[12 : 22] I mean, if you're educated, I mean, it's easier, and I don't understand why it is, but it's easier for people in Hong Kong to understand and believe in Buddha and feng shui and reincarnations and aliens.

Maybe it's because there's history channel specials about all these things, and you can watch them every week, and people like it, but that's just easier. I think maybe it's also because we get to do something, and we get to earn our way to God.

But when we hear the gospel, either you go, wow, that's amazing, or that's the dumbest thing I've ever heard in my whole, whole life. One of the top atheists today said it this way when he was presented with the gospel for the first time.

This is what he said in his book. He said, many of the teachings of Christianity are, as well as being incredible, they're mythical, and they're immoral.

The idea of redemption on a cross for my sins is crazy. I would argue in my book that I can take your place in prison, but there's no way I could ever free you from your responsibility of your sin.

[13 : 29] To even suggest that is evil and foolishness. To even suggest that is evil and foolishness.

And what we see is the world struggles with getting rid of I do. The world struggles with letting go of I do. The world struggles with its wisdom that it holds onto, that makes their lives okay.

And verse 19, it's a very famous verse. If you look at it, for it's written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the cleverness of the clever, I will set aside. And it comes from Isaiah 29. And what was happening in the world of Isaiah at that time is there was a king, his name was Hezekiah, and all of God's people were in Israel.

And it was bad. It was like the worst time ever because this Assyrian army was coming in on Israel and they were gonna decimate Israel. And so King Hezekiah woke up one day and he's surrounded by like hundreds of thousands of soldiers.

And it looks hopeless. It looks impossible. It looks, there's no way. And Isaiah comes to them and he says, God has sent me to you and God wants you to know that it's gonna be okay. And they're going, yeah, yeah, yeah.

[14 : 39] Okay, yeah, sure, for sure. Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's all gonna be okay. He goes, no, God's gonna take care of you. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. And he goes, no, God is gonna take care of you. Will you trust him? And the passage says that at that time the people of God have a choice.

Do they trust in their wisdom? Or do they trust in God's wisdom? And you know what happens, right? What do you think, who do they trust in, their wisdom or God's wisdom?

Well, they trust in their wisdom, right? Because their wisdom's so much better. So they make these alliances with Egypt and all these other countries that come in and help them against the Syrians.

But God still says, hey, I love you so much.

I'm pursuing you so much. And even though you don't want my wisdom, I'm gonna pour it upon you and I'm going to save you from these people. And he does. They wake up the next morning and all the soldiers are dead.

And the Israelis go out and they plunder the bodies. And so there's this struggle within the church of Corinth. And I think in the struggle in the church in Hong Kong and maybe even within Watermark, even though we're not five years old yet.

[15 : 44] And we struggle with this idea of God does versus I do. We struggle with this idea of worldly wisdom versus godly wisdom. He goes on in verse 22 and he says the Jewish people wanted signs.

They wanted power. They wanted success. They're like most of the people in your office today. When they hear the gospel, the gospel turns them off because it just sounds stupid. Do we have a slide here?

We have a slide. This is a slide from a house. This was in a house of one of the churches, around one of the churches was planted about the time of Paul. And it's about a guy named Alexander. And so they found this in a carving of a house.

And so the archeologists went ahead. And so this is what people thought of Christians. And in Greek, it says this. It says, this is Alexander worshiping his God. So in the culture that the church was being born in, in the culture that the church was growing out there, this is what the people who depended upon the worldly wisdom, this is what they thought of Christians.

They're worshiping Jesus. But Jesus has a head of a what? He has a head of a donkey because he's stupid and he's foolish. And what the passage is saying is that everybody you go into to talk to today, everybody who doesn't know the Lord, everybody in your culture and at work and at school and at your classroom, when they hear this message that God wants to save them, what they hear and what they think is foolishness, stupid, impossible.

[17 : 21] The Greeks in 22, they wanted knowledge and the Greeks just spent all day just listening to new things. And, you know, Socrates said, Socrates said the key to success is the key to life. The key to have a perfect society is just to educate everybody.

So if you educate everybody, then society is just going to get better and better and better. And this idea of Jesus dying on a cross, that's foolish. There's no way that anybody could save you. And what Paul says in his passage in verse 21 is what he's saying is that you and I on our own wisdom, you and I left to our own, we just can't find God.

There's no way that you and I can even understand God. There's no way that you and I can even think about God. There's no way we can even get halfway to Him. And the only way that we can come to God is if we trust Him. The only way that we can get to God is if He does it in our lives. And this message that you're going to share and you're going to live by your life with and your work and in your home, people are going to think that's foolish and that's terrible and it makes no sense. In verse 25, Paul goes on and he says, This foolishness, the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

And what he's saying to the church of Corinth and what he's saying to you and I is that God is doing things in our life that are going to look foolish. And God is doing things in our life that are going to look crazy.

[18 : 42] And God is doing things in our life that are going to attack my pride. And God is doing things in our life, in our friends' lives, that's going to attract their self-centeredness. And when people hear the message that we talk about at Watermark, hopefully every day, when they hear the message that God made a way for them to get back to God, and that process is independent of them, they don't have anything to do with it, they just go and God does it all for them, it bothers them.

And so don't be discouraged when you're sharing with people in your family. Don't be discouraged when you're sharing with your spouses. Don't be discouraged when you're sharing with people in your work because this message seems so incredible to them and it assaults every part of them. And it was so strong to the people in Corinth that the church started to, and it happens in Hong Kong and it happens in America, the church started to change the message of the cross. They started to compromise the message of the gospel.

They started to soften the message of the gospel because they really struggled sharing that with the world because the world thought that that was stupid, that it seemed illogical and that there was no way that that could happen. So Paul was concerned about that and he goes on and he writes that, you know, we walk in darkness and that we can't see God and we can't comprehend him and we can't understand him and in our own wisdom, we can't even make it to God.

And now I'm going to offend you by saying this, but we're going to say it over and over again because it should be something that we rejoice in. But what Paul is going to say in this passage is he says, you and I are broken. You and I are rebellious.

[20 : 16] You and I are deceitful. You and I are in bondage. You and I are slaves. You and I are selfish. You and I are self-centered. And when Jesus comes and he's crucified for us, what he's saying is what Jesus does on the cross goes right to the heart of our problem and the heart of our problem is our heart.

The heart of our problem is our wisdom. The heart of our problem is when we first said, I do instead of God does. And when the church started to preach this message, the society kept hitting against it.

But what about this? What about that? What about this? What about that? And the church was tempted to compromise. They were tempted to change what was going on and they were tempted to change the message of the gospel.

And Paul kept telling them, don't do it. Don't do it. Don't do it. Because if you change the message of Jesus crucified, you're going to be in trouble. The message of Hong Kong's wisdom is this. You can fix everything. You can fix the brokenness, but what Paul is saying here is you can't. Because people in their own wisdom don't see the main problem.

[21 : 31] they see the consequences of the problem they see poverty they see abandonment they see abuse they see broken laws they see all these things out there and so when the world looks at this world that we live in and they say well the way to fix this is to use worldly wisdom and so what we're going to do is we're going to make more laws and we're going to make more regulations and we're going to make more feed more hungry people we're going to educate more people we're going to do politics and we're going to do medicine and all of those things are really good things don't hear me those are all great things but the message of the gospel isn't about those things what Paul is struggling to keep this church on focus and what we will always struggle to keep us on focus

is that the message that we present to people is about jesus christ dying on a cross and that message goes right to the heart of our problem it goes right to your and my heart it goes right to the place where i do comes out the i do my wisdom comes out of my heart and paul says that when jesus died on the cross which is amazing it's scandalous uh it's it's but god in all his wisdom attacks the problem not the consequences and jesus comes in and in one step on the cross he destroys our heart problem he takes away our problems and what we're told in this passage is that jesus frees us from everything that entangles us jesus frees us from everything that snares us jesus frees us from everything that puts us in bondage and that the cross helps us it takes away the things that kept us from knowing god it kept away the things that kept us from seeing god it kept took away the things that kept us from obeying god and jesus on his cross comes in and he destroys all of our worldly wisdom all of our pride all of our self-centeredness and the reason he does it by himself is so at the end only god can get the glory so when people come to christ they don't go i found it like they did in the 70s there was a big campaign it was a great campaign it was evangelistic campaign and all the cars in america had a bumper sticker on the back and the bumper sticker said i found it it meant they came to faith what this passage says is you can never find it because you have blinders on and the only way in your own wisdom that you can find it is god this step visor and shows you jesus we've had people come to watermark for weeks and weeks and i met with them and talked to them about the gospel and we've intellectualized and we have answered all their questions and in the end they walked away dissatisfied i was on a mission trip to thailand i was teaching at probably the most prestigious university in bangkok and i had a group of rotc candidates and we were talking about buddhism versus christianity and in about two hours i was able to in a very kind way to dismantle all their beliefs about buddhism and show them why it was so much more reasonable to believe in the cross and jesus christ and that that would free you that would make you free and at the end i asked every one of them so do you want to become a christian and they looked at me and said no i'm a buddhist and that shouldn't bother you because the greatest miracle that's going to happen in church the greatest miracle that's going to happen in hong kong the greatest miracle that's going to happen in your life as the holy spirit comes into your life opens your eyes takes your blinders off and frees you up and the church struggled with this because it didn't sound nice and it didn't sound fun and it beat against what the culture was telling them of what success looked like and what freedom looked like so let me ask you a question are you free?

have you experienced this freedom that paul's talking about? i know for a long time as a christian and i was a christian i didn't feel that freedom i struggled with doing and being and doing all these things and making sure that i did everything right and perfect and that's not the message of the gospel that's not what christ is talking about that's not what paul is talking about he's talking about at the cross christ came and he did everything necessary to bring us to god and that frees us he gives us a new heart he gives us a new way to think of god he takes away our anger he takes away our guilt he takes away our shame he makes everything new and so the question is do we do we believe it?

do we believe it? and that's what the church was struggling with in corinth because they had come to faith it changed their lives but then as they lived with their friends and they saw their friends life and their friends were great people and they were powerful and they had wealth and they were great speakers and they had all these things and as they started thinking about this message over and over their head they said well this message seems kind of crazy to them this message seems kind of foolish to them maybe we should start talking about Jesus and we should start talking about how to make your life better maybe we should do self-help courses and one, two, three and if you do these three things you're going to be rich you're going to be a millionaire and Paul comes in and says don't do it don't do it because if you do it you take away the power of the gospel does that make any sense?

I've got to end but I want you to think about two things the first thing is this today as you leave here in this week if you're a child of God you're going to be tempted by worldly wisdom you're going to be thinking about this message that we've talked about and you're going to say it really sounds harsh I don't know if it's going to work in the business world in Hong Kong I don't know if it's going to work in the academic world in Hong Kong and you're going to be tempted to soften the power of the gospel in your life you're going to be tempted to look just like the people in your office and to talk just like the people in your office hopefully you're not going to treat your family the same way you treat your colleagues but it will be a struggle and Paul says if we do that we've lost the power of the

gospel we've lost God's power to change our lives you're going to walk into your classroom and in your workplace and you're going to feel foolish because of the message of the cross you will and when people put you down for your faith you're going to struggle with wanting to compromise and what Paul is saying is if you do that you've forgotten who your savior is if you do that the message that you're going to share with your colleagues or your friends or wherever you're at isn't going to be the message that's going to change their life and it happens everywhere guys it happens in the church right?

I mean in the church when I first started working for a church I was given this book and it was an interesting book it was Dynamic Church Growth and it said if you do these ten things in your church your church will grow and so it said examine all the ten things you're doing and if any of these things are wrong then keep doing it better and if you get bigger then it will get higher and you can have more capacity to fill people in and if you do that then your church is going to grow now is that is that worldly wisdom or godly wisdom?

[29 : 26] now all those things might be good things but if we're depending on those things instead of the cross to grow the church then we're going to fail I mean in your workplace you're going to go into your workplace this week and you're going to be tempted to display business behavior as opposed to normal behavior business behavior where things aren't said is it right or wrong but the question is is it permissible?

and what Paul says is if you do that you're compromising the message that God saved you with and even if those people happen to listen to you the message that you're giving them isn't the message that's going to give them life it's going to be the message that's going to put them in bondage and kill them worldly wisdom in your home it used to mean to train up a child in the way he shall go and that should not depart from him that used to mean to give your child a foundation of the gospel and God's word and build their life on that foundation today in Hong Kong it means give your kid the best education possible and give them everything materially they need is that godly wisdom?

I'm just getting to the age now where I'm counseling some of your kids who've had everything and they've had the best education and what I realize is that most of them are lost because they have no anchor for their soul my prayer for us is that we wouldn't compromise God's message because the culture around us makes us look foolish and stupid one last thought what does it look like for you to live this message out in your workplace what does it look like for you to live out the message of the word of the cross in your workplace or your home or in the university or wherever God sends you there what does that look like?

what Paul's going to tell us later in this book of Corinthians he's going to say this is what it looks like it looks like love it looks like joy it looks like peace it looks like patience it looks like kindness it looks like gentleness it looks like self-control as you and me go out and we live this message of the cross out what we're told is that God is going to use us because there's a world desperate for meaning for truth for identity and they're trying to anchor their souls to anything and they're lost they're lost let's pray Father we thank you for your word we thank you that it is living and active and that it changes us

Father I pray for us I pray for me and the staff that we would never become so enamored with numbers and finances and competition that we would lose the message that your son came to give us I pray for those of us in here who are living by worldly wisdom I pray that you would show them that this worldly wisdom is folly and the only way you can do that is if you open their eyes to your son Jesus Christ Lord I pray there's anybody in here right now who's on that search that they would just pray this prayer that God will you show yourself to me this week if you're real will you open your eyes open my eyes to you will you help me see you will you show me will you bring people into my life that can talk to me about Christ and what he's done and the power of the gospel and what I pray for those of us who are on this journey of world godly wisdom and sometimes we are like the church of Corinth and we tend to compromise and we mix and we match because we don't want to seem stupid and strange and weird and harsh

[34 : 22] I pray for us Lord that you would guard our hearts help us to go back to the beginning and help us to realize that the only reason that we're here is because of your mercy and your grace and you opened our eyes help us not to get prideful like the church at Corinth did and they started boasting of all the great things they did and all the great accomplishments they did but they realized they missed the focus of the cross and the cross is saying that it's not about us it's about God getting the glory and it's about God doing and about God boasting and I pray for us Lord I pray that

if any of us are boasting in ourselves or we're boasting in this church that you would just rebuke us and we'd realize that you and you alone get the glory and so we come before you as a church as your people and we just we are so humbled by your mercy and grace to us may Hong Kong be different as we love those around us well love them through the power of your son and through your spirit

Father we love you we need you desperately we pray these things in your son Jesus name Amen