

Listening to The Young

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[0 : 00] I've got this theme that's been given to me for this week that we're focusing on being older and wiser and listening to the young and here in the midst of our reading of our Old Testament reading of Elihu and we aren't told how young he is but he speaks out in the midst of what is a very very complex situation. Now some people here may be sceptical about listening to young people especially if you've brought up teenagers. Perhaps these slides might resonate with you.

When your children are teenagers it's important to have a dog so that someone in the house is happy to see you. Maybe this next one as well. Teenagers, tired of being harassed by your parents? Act now, move out, get a job, pay your own way while you still know everything. Slide three. I don't need Google. My teenager knows everything. But this thing where we can be sceptical maybe about wisdom being the right thing. Remember we too we're teenagers and some of us in the 70s dress like this. I hate to say some of us still do.

A theme in this series is listening to the young and Elihu is it's not only the old who are wise, not only the aged who understand what is right. Therefore, I say, listen to me because I too will tell you what I know. In 1997 it was Steve Jobs who headed up Apple Corporation, decided to narrate a very iconic advert which really grabbed not only my attention but maybe grabbed a generation of the world and in so many ways reflected his view on wisdom.

Let's just catch a bit of what he said. They pushed the human race forward and while some may see them as crazy, we see genius because the ones who are crazy enough to think that they can change the world are the ones that do. Steve spoke from a place of wisdom because in 19...yeah, it was in the early days of his career while he was still at college. He went to Atari and with his friend Steve he went along with what was shaping the first Apple computer and they said to them, can you take what we have and use it? In fact, we've even used some of your parts. And they looked at them and they said, no. They then went to Hewlett Packard and said, actually, would you like this? And they said, no, we're not interested because you're still at college. There's issues here where we see that in 1977, Ken Olson, a guy later in years who was heading up the Digital Equipment Corporation in the US, said this, there is no reason that anyone would want a computer in their home. 1977.

[3 : 31] As Russ said last week, isn't it great that as we get older and wiser that we get wisdom? I'm not so sure in my own case. But wisdom is not the automatic accompaniment. It doesn't come with a calendar. It's not because of a number on our birthday cards. Wisdom in our reading this morning.

Job, the one book that we all flip over really quickly because we can't even believe why God wouldn't step in and sort things out. And yet here in verse 32 this morning, we have what is this young person speaking into this situation. But first of all, we've got his three friends.

His three friends that have tried to give him a solution from their wisdom. And as I read that thing, I thought, they're the sort of people who maybe shake your hand when they come out from a funeral and say, time's a great healer. Very helpful. They're the sort of people who when your heart has been broken in your first teenage romance, the person who you thought you were going to spend the rest of your life with at 14, tells you that there's plenty more fish in the sea. There's the person who looks over at you when you're managing that six foot fencing panel, trying to get it on your own saying, do you know what? I'd have got somebody else to help you with that.

It's great how people are ready to give you their wisdom. But here it is. Here in this reading is this young people, this young person who's going to step forward and give Job some really, really good advice. You see, these three people are reading it, described as Job's friends, but they hadn't really grasped the situation. They were trying to say to Job, do you know what? This is all because you've done something in your past. This is all because of past sin. That wasn't the case. Job knew that

wasn't the case because Job was a man who had clean hands and a pure heart who had lived with God.

And so he knew about that. And here we have this young person who is listening in on the conversation. Now, I don't know about you, we think that young people don't listen. Believe you me, they do.

[6 : 03] And if ever you've raised young people, you will know that they can be doing something totally different and yet will tell you every word that you've said in the last sentence. And Elihu, which is what makes gospel come real and alive for us today in the Old Testament, is there. He's listening in.

It's burning up in him. He's saying, this isn't the right advice. You're not listening. And so he brings in this new perspective. It sparks into the situation. And he said to him, if I was Job, I think, he says, Job, this isn't because of past sin. This is actually what's happening now. I think you're feeling a bit sorry for yourself. Now, if I was Job, I think I would be feeling a bit sorry for myself.

I think I'd be in that situation. But here is Elihu. He comes with this new perspective. And he brings a new thing into the conversation. He looks at Job's situation and says, actually takes a far higher spiritual plane. He recognized the truth that God was the only source of true wisdom. He saw the potential of light in the middle of his situation. And as you read in chapter 35 later on, he's calling him now as a friend. And he's beginning to speak into that. He's saying he reminds Job of God's power. He reminds Job in 37 of stop and consider the wonderful miracles of God. And then when we get to the next chapter, it's even to the point as Elihu draws breath, because he's got this thing that he wants to pour out this wisdom, then God speaks to Job.

And reminds him of the blessing and challenge that's been there for him. Where is God's wisdom with us this morning? Perhaps through someone else, perhaps somebody through younger that has spoken to you, perhaps a situation where you need wisdom today. Where will you find that wisdom? Where will you seek it? It was in 1996. I was on Explorer Youth Camp.

We were, Mandy and I had gone along with our own children. I'd been given that wonderful opportunity, be full of evangelical zeal to get to the bit where you actually make that response.

[8 : 36] And you say to young people, and now are you going to give your life to Christ? There they were. The prayer team were ready. Everybody was ready there. We were expectant of what God was going to do.

Little did they know that most of the people in there, that inside I was absolutely in turmoil. I knew that God was calling me to ordained ministry. I knew that was it. But in my heart, I could find 101 reasons why I shouldn't do it. How was I going to afford it? What was I going to do?

Why should I do this? Why should I do that? I was there. I'd heard all of this stuff. I knew. But was I responding? No, I wasn't. But there I was, handing out this message, handing out wisdom to young people. There's a lad, we'll call him Chris. He was age 10. And he sat there. And I see him sat there. And he's riveted. He's got like this eyes on me all the way through. And I'm thinking, whoa, when we get to that response, he's going to be the first one that's up and moving over there.

And I said, if you'd like to give your life to Christ, just move over. Chris was up there. No hanging about. But he didn't go to the prayer ministry team. He came straight to me.

And he said some very, very wise words. He looked at me directly and no hesitation. And he said, you've just said, if you're going to give your life to Christ, you give everything. Is that right, Clive? And I said, that's absolutely right, Chris. That is absolutely right. You give everything.

[10 : 19] And he said to me, so that's everything, isn't it? I said, yeah, that's right, Chris. And he said, but are you ready, Clive, to give everything to Christ the way he's asking you?

You know those thin places where you meet with Jesus? Those thin places where the Holy Spirit breaks in? Those places where wisdom comes? That is really special if we listen to our young people.

I'm meeting with somebody at the moment who can vividly remember the day that he spoke wisdom or tried to speak wisdom into his father's life. In fact, he held on to the bottom of his leg while his father was dragging him towards the door and his son was begging him not to leave him and his mum and his younger brother. He says now, 40 years later, that my dad now knows of that wisdom because he never, ever found peace in the whole of his life. Sometimes we need to listen to our younger people. Many churches don't have the blessing that we have. They don't have young people as we have.

They don't have the connections during the week. They don't have the opportunity to listen to the wisdom that young people will bring to us if we take the time to listen.

I love that when you look through the Bible at all those people, all those young people that spoke wisdom.

[12:07] And Mary, a young woman, really took up that sense of hearing God and speaking wisdom and hearing that wisdom being spoken into her life and speaking wisdom into the lives of others. I love that call of David as well. That's when Samuel comes along to Jesse's sons. And it's almost, I think it's a bit like Britain's Got Talent, you know. You know, Jesse lines up all his sons one at a time, you know. Oh, this must be the one.

This must be the one. This must be the one. All go through it. Samuel looks at him and says, no, it's not any of these, mate. Is there any more? And he said, oh yeah, it's David, but he's only out looking after the sheep. And he said, yeah, that's the one. And David spoke wisdom into, was truly a man of God with all his flaws.

I don't know about you. Here we've got this story. And this story that we've heard today, it sounds to me very much like Jesus.

In fact, a great story of Jesus when he went to Jerusalem and his parents lost him for three days. Can you imagine losing him for three days? No, no, maybe I wanted to lose a teenager for three days. But, no, he lost his teenager for three days.

And found him speaking wisdom to the leaders at the time. I think we've got a lot to learn. I hope we listen as a church of all ages and stages to what our young people have to say.

[13:50] And sometimes as adults our wisdom is blinded. And wisdom gets narrowed down. Certainly that's been my experience. Gets narrowed down. We get too hung up on minor issues.

We get too hung up on politics, on church politics. And actually the wisdom of God has to speak through people like Elio to say, look, I am doing a new thing. And that's certainly been my experience.

That's been my experience to listen to young people and see the new thing that God is doing and wants to do for this generation. In case you've been away on another planet for the last few years, for the last year, you might have missed a girl called Greta.

Greta is an amazing girl. She's 16 year olds now. She's from Sweden. She's become world famous now. And in August 2018, she launched a solitary school strike through the Swedish, outside the Swedish parliament building.

She was on her own a year ago. And she stood outside there with a sign calling for urgent action against climate change. From the beginning, her argument was both full of wisdom and yet was single and it was compelling.

[15:17] The adults who are destroying the planet are forcing her generation to face an existential threat to human life and the natural world.

Something must be done right now. That was her call. That was her wisdom. Listen, millions of young people have captured that message.

Captured that message about God's world and saw that she was passionate about this world, passionate about her future and they joined in with her across this globe, seized in their attention. Can you think of anybody else that did that? What an amazing message. And because of that, many adults have tried to dismiss her.

And in fact, a right-wing British MP dismissed her as the Justin Bieber of ecology. A guy in Australia, a blogger named Andrew Bolt, took a veiled swipe and said that her mental health describing her as deeply disturbed.

[16:25] This young woman, in her wisdom, came straight back and told the world about how she was on the autistic spectrum and how actually she suffered from Asperger's syndrome, which in many ways is a blessing to her to be able to speak out in truth.

Greta loves the world so much. Do we, as Christian adults, do that as well? Does God love the world so much?

I believe he did because he sent Jesus. And here we have an opportunity because her gift lies in her wisdom and ability to sum up issues in one thing.

She said, climate crisis, climate crisis is due because we have to stop emissions and greenhouse gases. It's a simple message and the world caught it.

If we too, if we wish to see this world change, maybe we need to listen to our young people because I believe there's a fundamental gospel message in here that our young people will connect with our faith because God so loved the world and so do they.

[17 : 37] And we're at our peril if we don't listen to that message and engage where they are. And maybe it needs a quantum shift in our church culture to actually understand and join in with what they're doing.

Thank you.