

Godly Wisdom

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[0 : 00] Good morning, friends. My name is Daniel. I'm a pastor at Church of the Messiah, and like George said, a very hopeful church planter. We're looking to plant a church in Canada, and yeah, it has been a tough go, but these are the times where it seems like God shows off a bit, when things seem very implausible, maybe even impossible, and the Lord shows up so that all the glory will unmistakably be given to him.

So pray for us. It's a real joy this morning to open up God's word. Yeah, we'll get right into it. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for your goodness and kindness to us. Lord, open our eyes to see our ears, to hear our hearts, to understand what your word would say to us by your spirit. In Jesus' name. Amen.

So, first Sunday of 2021, and I have some wise advice for you guys. And here it is. Do not invest in Blockbuster video. Instead, invest in Netflix.

Before you go on and say Blockbuster doesn't exist, it technically does exist. There's one location still around. I think it's in Oregon. And they are still traded on the stock market, at least as of New Year's Eve 2020, when I was putting this together.

It still trades. The stock is down 17.5%. So, if you want to buy a share of Blockbuster, you can buy one for 7 one-hundredths of a penny.

[1 : 44] So, a good deal, probably not given that. It just went down 17.5%. Meanwhile, Netflix, you know, it's worth something like \$30 billion. This is not wise advice.

I say this as a big joke because, ironically, Blockbuster had a chance to buy Netflix back in the late 90s. And they laughed at the founders. Anyways, I don't bring up the story to talk about Blockbuster's blunders.

But just to simply say that this is obvious advice. There's nothing wise about this. But if I was to tell you this back in 1999, I don't know.

That would be pretty ridiculous advice. I would be probably the smartest, most financially savvy 13-year-old at the time.

But it's interesting how wisdom proves itself with the passage of time. Time and again, this current generation, talks as if we are the most wise generation that has ever existed.

[2 : 55] The people that went before us, they were dummies. Maybe not dummies, but not as progressively advanced as us. George kind of cracks a joke about how just because people didn't have flush toilets doesn't mean they weren't smart.

But we treat it kind of like that. As time goes by, we somehow fall into this fallacy that we are the wisest. That the prevailing wisdom of the moment is the wisdom of all the ages.

But it's not quite true. You know, it's interesting. The prevailing wisdom, 150, 140, whatever years ago, from both political parties here in Canada, was to forcibly remove indigenous children from their families and put them in residential schools.

And we know that there's been an absolute... There's horror stories of that. That was prevailing wisdom from our cultural and political elites. The intelligent people at the time.

And I'm not looking back on them and saying, listen, tear down all the statues. I'm just making a point that that was the prevailing wisdom. The prevailing wisdom in the 30s was to turn a boat away that was seeking safe harbor at our shores in Canada that had almost a thousand Jewish people in it.

[4 : 28] And that boat was sent back to Europe. And a quarter of those people died in Nazi camps. That was prevailing wisdom at the time. It's interesting that our culture prides itself at being the tip of the sword.

And yet time and again, the future generations look back just a generation prior and they are ashamed. Or people in the current culture that are more historically minded, they'll look back and say, hey, listen, we're following the same follies that happened yesteryear.

But either way, there is this kind of hubris that says we are the smart ones and those people are, they're backwards. And we have huge national apologies and restitution and all of these, I guess, noble-minded things to correct the mistakes of the past while failing to understand that we're likely creating those same mistakes in the present.

So where can we find wisdom? Real wisdom. A wisdom that doesn't just last one generation, but lasts multiple generations, maybe forever.

Where can we find this wisdom? It's a worthwhile thing to consider on the first Sunday of the new year. And George just read the biblical story of the Magi or the wise men venturing from the east to pay homage and worship the Christ child in Bethlehem.

[6 : 09] I think, and we will see this morning, that this passage, this biblical story is full of examples of real wisdom. Wisdom that has lasted not just one or two generations, but has lasted up until the present from 2,000 years prior.

That this is wisdom that is eternal. So if you have your Bible, please turn with me to Matthew chapter 2, verses 1 to 12.

I'll be reading out of the same version that George was reading, the English Standard Version. So we'll get into the text in a minute, but we'll see just a few aspects of what godly, real, eternal wisdom looks like.

And there's three things I'm going to touch on. The first thing is that real, godly, eternal wisdom, this text will show us that it is inclusive. That it is also authentic and humble.

And finally, it is courageous. And it is something that has deep conviction. So inclusive, authentic and humble and courageous.

[7 : 23] So let's look at the first one, inclusive. So it's important to put this text into context. So this is the passage that is traditionally read on the Feast of Epiphany.

Epiphany on the Christian calendar will be this upcoming Wednesday, January 6th. And like George mentioned, it is the end, it marks the end of the 12 days of Christmas.

And it is traditionally understood as the Epiphany of Christ to the Gentiles or to the nations or to the non-Jewish people. And the Magi are these non-Jewish people.

Although there were instances throughout the Old Testament of non-Jews being included in the people of God, we can think of Ruth. We can think of Moses' wife, Zipporah.

Esther, well, Esther was, but man, so is Ruth. Rahab is what I was thinking of. That these are key people in the biblical story that were not Jews, but were considered a part of God's people.

[8 : 26] But by far, the majority of God's people in the Old Testament were from the historical ethnic seed of Abraham.

They were Jewish people. And although it's very clear throughout Scripture that God's desire was for all the nations to worship him, that the Jewish people had a special job to be the light to the nations, and they failed at that.

And by the time Jesus' birth comes around, there was suspicion among the Jewish people against non-Jews. And it's understandable. There was conquering nations that would come in.

There was constant falls into, falling into idolatry. There was almost like a colonization, first of the Greeks, and then eventually the Romans.

All probably legitimate reasons to be suspicious of non-Jews, but the point is they were suspicious, and this is not what God had called them to. So in walked the Magi, right off the bat in Matthew chapter 2.

[9 : 38] And they were most certainly not Jewish. They come from the East, and we're not sure exactly where in the East. The text doesn't tell us maybe Persia, maybe Babylon. They were diviners.

They were astrologers. Not in the way kind of NASA does astrology, but they look to the stars for prophecy and for signs.

All these things, interestingly, were things that the Hebrew scriptures forbade. The point is these people were as far from Jewish as a part of the in crowd as you could get.

And yet, they are juxtaposed here by Matthew with the in crowd. So take a look with me. Chapter 2, verse 1, and we'll read down to verse 4.

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, Herod is, he is of some Jewish background, but he was essentially put in place to be the king of Judea, but really he was an extension of Rome.

[10:52] But he was the political elite at the time. So in the days of Herod the king, behold, the wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, the wise men, the Magi, saying, Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?

For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him. And assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, those are the religious elites.

These are the spiritual leaders and really the cultural leaders of the people at the time. Herod inquired of them, the scribes and the chief priests, where the Christ was to be born.

And then they go on to tell him. It's interesting here that these people are supposed to be the real leaders, the people that are leading and showing by example to God's people how to be a light among the nations.

And here they are juxtaposed with the Magi. And the Magi are the, apart from Jesus, they're the real stars in this story.

[12:08] Not Herod, not the chief priests, not the scribes. And it's interesting because inclusivity in our day is quite the buzzword.

There is such a push to accept people for how they are regardless of who they love, what they do, what families they come from.

And in a sense, there is a nobility to this. There is a desire to not have people on the out, but have people on the in. But all too often, this inclusivity looks to exclude certain people.

There has to be some sort of uniformity of thought. And when somebody has, say for instance, a traditional view on marriage, on monogamous, heterosexual marriage, that flies in the face of inclusivity in our culture.

That's one example. There are many. But it's interesting that in our day, inclusivity looks a lot like exclusivity. There's an inclusivity when it aligns with a certain type of thought.

[13:30] There is no plurality of thought here. And just in case you're watching at home and you're a Christian, you think that I'm letting you off the hook and just railing on our culture, it happens in the church all the time.

Sometimes really subtly, sometimes overt, but it's there. We have this habit in the church of forcing conformity onto people before they actually join the church.

We expect a certain type of talk, a certain type of dress, a certain type of vernacular behavior, political affiliations.

It's like there's this big list of things you ought to endorse and then you can come into the church. But that's not the way of the scriptures.

That's not the way of the Bible. And yet we see the scriptures speak so favorably here about the wise men, just as they are. Nowhere does Matthew condemn their religious practices as they are seeking out the Christ child, nor does he justify it either.

[14:43] But what he does do is he commends their eagerness and courage to travel the distance they traveled all the way at great cost to see Christ and to worship him.

It's very, very interesting that no longer is the invitation for the people of God just to one specific people group.

But it's for all people. All people, regardless of where they have come from. Regardless of their socioeconomic background, the language they speak, the family they come from, the things that happened in their past, the things that they did in their past, whether they're male or female, regardless of the color of their skin, that there is this wonderful, wonderful inclusivity that we see in the scriptures that the wise men are just so, it's so evidently they are lifted high as the real in crowd in this scriptural story.

So change must come for a Christian, but it has to come after salvation. We have to understand that. It can't be a precursor for salvation. We come as we are.

We are broken. We are beggars. We are sinners. That's the only prerequisite and that is something that is shared by all of humanity. This is what the scripture teaches.

[16:19] If you struggle with that idea that humans are inherently sinful, I mean, I would say take a bit of a survey of history. There is a lot of good, but the running thing that seems to unify humanity is

sinfulness, is brokenness.

The wisdom of the scriptures, of this story, it speaks to this inclusivity. And in many ways to be a Christian is to be your most authentic self.

So we touched on the inclusivity, real, genuine inclusivity of the wisdom of this story. But there is also this authentic and humble aspect of the wisdom as well.

we have this interesting exchange between Herod and the Magi where Herod tries to show how pious he is, wanting to worship the child.

If you join me in verse 7, this is what it says. Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem saying, go and search diligently for the child.

[17:39] And when you have found him, bring me word that I too may come and worship him. We read a bit farther, not in our portion this morning, but just a few verses down in verse 16.

We see that Herod here is lying through his teeth. The Magi are warned in a dream to not go back to Herod so they go in an alternate way. And Herod is so vexed by this.

He is so angry that his true intentions come out. See, Herod here, he is a pretender. He's a hypocrite. He is inauthentic. He makes believe he is godly when he is anything but.

And here's the thing. History tells us that Herod, so unwilling to give up power, so suspicious, so greedy and self-absorbed that he killed his wife and some of his children and relatives because he had suspicion that they were going to betray him.

And here in verse 16, this is what it says. Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under.

[19:02] So I'll read the rest of it. According to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men, he did not want to share the throne with this supposed king of the Jews.

So what does he try to do? For his own pomp, for his own pride, for his own, so to speak, political welfare, he has people murdered.

Inauthentic, humble, not humble whatsoever, prideful man this Herod was. So we don't have murdering megalomaniacs running our country, our provinces.

You can make jokes and snicker at home, but the truth is we don't. But we have this attitude everywhere. We have this inauthenticity that seems to be thoroughly Canadian.

That we have this facade of humility, but inside it is, we are prideful people. People who make themselves out to be humble and authentic and pious and righteous, but when one scratches the surface, you see something different.

[20:18] The practice of cover up is alive and well in Canada. We have non-disclosure agreements to shut people up so the truth doesn't come out.

That is not humble. That is not authentic. And again, guys, this isn't a thing that's just out there in bad Ottawa, bad Canada.

It's in the church too, isn't it? Just in the past few months, two very, very high profile Christian leaders, celebrity Christian leaders in the Protestant church, have had a huge, huge falling away, rattling people's faith, purporting to be righteous and holy and humble and their sin has been found out.

In one case, while the person was still alive, in another case, when somebody passed away. It's also in the Roman Catholic church with the sexual abuse cover-ups as well.

This seems to be a human problem and the church is full of humans, so it's a problem in the church as well. The interesting thing about the Magi are that they are actually cultural elites where they're from.

[21:47] They are people that would be somewhat akin to the scribes and the chief priests, people that are looked to to lead, people that are intelligent and that they have responsibility that extends far beyond their own home.

And yet, with their prestige and their wisdom in their native countries, they travel at great lengths, great lengths, at great cost.

We, I mean, just on a pause, we sing We Three Kings, it was likely that there were more of these, and they weren't kings, they were wise men or Magi, and there was likely more than three.

We say We Three Kings because there was three gifts, but it's likely that there was multiple, that there was a whole entourage with them. I mean, the cost of travel must have been astronomical,

and yet, what do they do?

They seek out this child. They hear this story. It's unlikely that they would have known much of the Hebrew scriptures, maybe enough to know about this prophecy, but here they are with so much prestige, and they suspend it.

[23 : 11] They spend it to find this child, and then they see this child in a home, likely a very, very poor home in Bethlehem.

We remember that Mary and Joseph, when they were presenting an offering at the temple, all that they could afford were two pigeons to sacrifice for Jesus. They were poor.

These rich people went to a poor home, and in the end, they worshipped just the child. They didn't say, well, bring the child to us. We are important people. They condescended, even though Jesus was the true one who condescended from heaven to earth.

But they lowered themselves. And they didn't do it begrudgingly. It says that when they found in verse 9, they went on their way, verse 10, sorry, when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

That this was something that completely enraptured them. And they were very, very, very joyous about finding Jesus. And they fell down and worshipped him, gave him gifts, kingly gifts, royal gifts.

[24 : 28] We have this true authentic and humble wisdom that pursued Christ, pursued the right thing, even though it cost them.

So we have a wisdom that is inclusive and also authentic and humble, but also courageous. Look with me at verse 3. When Herod the king heard this, that the wise men were looking for the king of the Jews, he was troubled in all Jerusalem with him.

And assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They, the priests and scribes, told him, in Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet, and you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah.

For from you shall come a ruler who will be shepherd of my people Israel. When the Magi inquire in Jerusalem to Herod where this king of the Jews would be born, where they could find him, Herod enlists the religious experts of the time, the chief priests and scribes, the thing is they correctly identify the truth in the scriptures.

They know the scriptures very well, and they nail it. I mean, they just do. They cite Micah chapter five, and if you read Micah chapter five, it actually doesn't have that bit at the end, who will shepherd my people Israel.

[26 : 06] But that little bit is from King David's coronation in 2 Samuel. And this is a remarkable thing for them to include in this prophecy because it means that they have deep insight into who the Messiah will be and what he will do.

These people know their Bible, and yet it's just the Magi that go to Bethlehem. King Herod doesn't go, and neither do the chief priests and the scribes.

They had a chance. You'd have to think they had a chance, and they don't go. They know the scriptures and they don't act on them. Maybe because like Herod, they were risking their own political gravitas, their own standing within society, or maybe they were just afraid of Herod.

I mean, it said that all Jerusalem was troubled with him. My guess is that all Jerusalem was troubled with him because they knew that Herod was a paranoid guy that could fly off the handle, kill people. They had a chance. They knew the scriptures and they didn't act on it. They weren't courageous. They didn't have deep conviction. Their wisdom only went so far and proved to be a false wisdom at that.

[27 : 27] This is a huge warning for Christian people. It's a huge warning for pastors. We can say the right things. We can go to church on Sunday. We can take communion, have our children baptized, do devotionals, have a wonderful journal, Instagram with your hot coffee, beautiful journal, your Bible open.

Everybody thinks you are so holy. And when you don't follow through with scripture, when it says something and it convicts you of sin and you brush it away, your heart gets black.

Your heart gets stone hard. It's a huge, huge warning for us. It's a huge warning for me. True wisdom isn't just knowing what to do, but it's the conviction and the courage to do it.

If you feel like a coworker or a superior is encouraging you to compromise, at work, you have to have the courage and the conviction to stand your ground.

There's ways to do it that is a bit more winsome for sure, but there has to be courage or else it's not wisdom. If you're in a relationship and there's an unhealthiness to the relationship and instead of choosing to do the right thing and repent and involve other people, into the relationship or maybe break off the relationship if it's not a marriage and you don't act on it, then that is not wise.

[29 : 13] Wisdom is wisdom if it is acted upon. I don't look at the chief priests and the scribes and think, oh, those guys.

I look at them and it's a mirror right back at me. You know, you have to understand in verse 16, Herod here kills all the firstborn. It doesn't seem like, like at best they were, they were silent on it. They didn't try to stop it. Their successors were actually the ones that would push and push and push to have Jesus crucified.

And yet they knew the scriptures. Real wisdom must be courageous. It must be. In preparation for today, I was going through a commentary written by Bishop J.C.

Ryle. That's our seminary's namesake. And he said this of this specific verse, familiarity with the sacred things has an awful tendency to make men despise them.

[30 : 26] When you think you know what to do and you don't act on it, you become a hard-hearted person. This is why friends, confession is actually a beautiful, beautiful gift to us.

Because it's an opportunity for us to recognize that we are sinful, that we fall short, that we don't act in wisdom in ways and at times that we should.

But we confess it, we communicate it to people around us that we can trust and love, that love us back. But we also confess it and we communicate it to God.

That stuff keeps our heart soft. I'd encourage you guys, as a bit of a sidebar, if you need to confess sins, confess them. You can find somebody to confess them to and pray so that you may be healed.

The end of the epistle to James says that. wisdom, Godly, long-lasting, eternal wisdom that is inclusive, that is authentic, and that is humble, and also that is courageous.

[31 : 44] I don't want people to leave thinking that there is no wisdom outside of the church. There's nothing to be learned from secular authorities. I don't think that's true at all.

There's plenty of good and practical wisdom to be learned from leadership experts and business experts and parenting experts that aren't explicitly Christian one way or the other.

Just yesterday, I started watching a video by Tim Ferriss. He's this, I don't know exactly what he is, but he's something, this lifestyle, whatever coach, and it was how to improve your morning routine. I stopped the video because I realized this is not applicable to me until I don't have young children, but nevertheless, there's tons of practical wisdom to be gained, gained.

But the thing with practical wisdom, there's a whole principle in scripture that says that God sends rain on the just and the unjust, that there is this common grace that allows this world to exist in somewhat harmony.

[32 : 50] But this wisdom can only lead us so far. It can help us to improve our lives, but never fully leads us to the ultimate end, which is the salvation of our souls.

The communion with the triune God that all human beings long for, whether they understand it or not, this hole in our heart that can't be filled with stuff or people.

There's this interesting bit in Dante's Divine Comedy where Dante's guide, Virgil, who represents human reason, can only take him to the entrance of heaven, but no farther.

It's very wise imagery because salvation is not a series of tests or head knowledge or whatever of some kind of conventional wisdom or behavior.

And if you somehow succeed, you get into heaven. heaven. It's not like that at all. Why? Because of sin. Sin is active rebellion against God that even the most wise among us are guilty of.

[33 : 59] The wisest human being is guilty of rebellion against God, of sinfulness, of a type of inauthenticity at times, of pride, of slander.

I mean, go through the Ten Commandments yourself and you'll see, yep, check, check, check, check. The most wise of people fall into sin. It is impossible to avoid all the trials of life, all the trip-ups of life, all the temptations of life.

Living completely sinless is completely impossible. Except for Christ. Christ is born. God, the Son of God, He is incarnate.

He lives a completely sinless life. He is fully God and fully man. In fact, 1 Corinthians 1 calls Jesus both the wisdom and the power of God, that He is literally wisdom embodied.

The wisdom and power of God culminate with Christ on the cross. In God's infinite wisdom and kindness, He sent God, the Son of God, to humbly take on the form of man, to authentically live a perfect life without pretense, without hypocrisy.

[35 : 19] And then, when faced with the opportunity to not see the job through, He has the courage and the conviction to say to God the Father, with great angst in the Garden of Gethsemane, not my will, but yours be done.

And then He is hung upon a Roman crucifix, not for His own sins, but for yours and for mine. And He dies in our place, making us right with God. This is the wisdom and power of God displayed in its full majesty.

It's the culmination of the wisdom and power of God. But it's not the start of it. The start is what we see here in Bethlehem. Jesus makes a way for us to grow in wisdom, to grow into wisdom.

He gives us an opportunity to not live shackled to sin and to death anymore, but to free us so that we can live in obedience, in wisdom.

We can proclaim with our mouth the good news of the gospel to people that are not in the in crowd. The point of the magi really are, it's not so much that the gospel has come to the Gentiles.

[36 : 45] It is true. But now that God's people are expanded, the people of God are expanded. But there are plenty of people on this planet, in our city, in this neighborhood, on your street, that don't yet know the good news.

The wise men, as wise as they may have been, in the end, were led by God to God, by the star. By this light in the sky.

In the same way that the Israelites were led to the promised land, out of Egypt, by this miraculous pillar of fire, and this cloud in the day, the wise men were led by God with this miraculous light in the sky.

We have that, the light of Christ in us. We have the opportunity of proclaiming and leading people to the Lord. Not because we have some kind of power within us that's kind of special about us.

It's because there's a power outside of us that is now in us. The Holy Spirit. It is a great joy and opportunity to share the gospel with other people.

[38 : 05] It is scary. I'd encourage you guys this new year to try to share the gospel. To pray. To pray for courage. The wise men say in verse 2, Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?

For we saw his star when it rose. Matthew calls Jesus the king of the Jews here in chapter 2 right at the beginning of the story.

He also calls Jesus king of the Jews right at the end. At his death. The sign hanging above the dying Christ said Jesus king of the Jews.

That this child was destined to live but ultimately to die for you. And God calls this the wisdom and power of God.

Let's pray. Lord God I pray that you will help us to behold the Christ child. Behold Jesus in all of his glory.

[39 : 18] All of his goodness. All of his power and all of his wisdom. To understand that true wisdom sought us out while we were still afar.

When we were not a part of the in crowd. That true wisdom humbled himself. taking all of his divine and all of his divine prerogatives to condescend to live as a poor likely unattractive man 2,000 years ago.

to live a completely authentic life. To die on the cross for our sins courageously. Lord help us to think about that.

Help us to dwell on that. Help us to have the same attitude as the wise men. That we will rejoice with great joy. That we will fall at the feet of Christ and worship him.

Help us to be wise people. Help us to be people that proclaim your gospel to whomever come across our path.

[40 : 21] To whomever God puts in our path. That we will be truly humble people. That we will be truly authentic people. And that we will be truly courageous people. Lord that we will feast on your word.

And that you will help us to act on it. Lord help us not to look to conventional prevailing wisdom as if it is eternal.

But rather look to your eternal word for true wisdom. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.