

True and False Wisdom

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[0 : 00] Father, we thank you that we can be together in your presence. We thank you that you delight in having your children be present with you on the Sabbath, the Lord's Day.

Father, we know that you are the great giver and that we are one unending need. And so, Father, we ask that you would tune our hearts with that humility, that we might receive all that you desire to give us this morning, and that we might respond to what you give in a worthy manner.

And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. There's a small movement in British intellectual circles over the last few years.

Obviously, it's not all British intellectuals, but it's a small but surprising number of British intellectuals who are atheists or agnostic, who over the last few years have started to write about the importance of Christianity, to actually, in a sense, the importance of Christianity to their agnosticism and their atheism.

Two of the best-known examples of these public intellectuals, one of them would be Tom Holland, whose book *Dominion* talks about his surprise. He was challenged by a Muslim because Tom Holland had written a book sort of trying to show the origins of Muslim ideas, not to Islam's credit.

[1 : 32] And so a Muslim challenged him to do the same thing for his secular atheism, and he thought that was a reasonable request. And he did that, and *dominion* is the result of his quest.

And he discovered that basically everything that he valued as an atheist, as a secular intellectual atheist, all was from the Christian faith, to his complete and utter surprise.

Douglas Murray has written some books as well. So just after Easter, I was reading one of these public intellectuals, agnostic, who talked a little bit about how they've now come to appreciate the Christian faith.

And one of the things he was talking about is that he grew up, you know, I guess probably those private schools that British kids, richer British kids have to go to. They had to do morning and evening prayer and all that type of stuff.

And he said as a child, as a teenager and as an adult, he loved the Norse gods, the gods of Norway. And now he's come to realize, he said, that the Norse gods sound like something invented by a teenage boy.

[2 : 35] And that the Greek and Roman gods, which many intellectuals like, he said he realizes that they were invented by somebody who wrote, they sound like something invented by somebody who writes soap operas for the Greek and Roman gods.

And then he said, but he loved the Norse gods, and he was fine with the Greek and Roman gods, because he thought Christianity sounded like something invented by an elderly aunt who is displeased if anybody has any fun.

And that was his experience of the Christian faith, an elderly aunt who is displeased if anybody has anything at all funny or fun or life-giving. Here at Church of the Messiah, one of the things we do is we preach through books of the Bible.

We've taken a break for Holy Week for obvious reasons, and we've been going through the book of James, we're going to return to that today, James chapter 3, verses 13 to 18. And if you don't read the, if you read the text at a superficial level, it sounds as if it's a text written by an elderly aunt who wants to make sure they don't have any fun, where you have to keep the rules and no fun.

But if you actually pause to look at the text, it says something quite shocking and surprising about human flourishing, and about how, about what human flourishing is, and about the Christian faith.

[3 : 52] So if you would turn with me in your Bibles to James chapter 3, beginning at verse 13. And I might, in a bit, give you a little bit of the context of it, but right now we'll just plunge into that text.

And here's how it begins. And by the way, when I preach, I use the English Standard Version, which is a really good version. And it's quite literal. In fact, often when I'm looking at the academic commentaries and they have a little translator's note about what the little phrase is literally, that's actually what the English Standard Version is.

But those of you who know more than one language know that sometimes, I mean, there's times when having it very, very precise and literal in a little phrase is very, very helpful, which is why I always work on my sermons from it.

But often it can make it hard to understand when you get to the unit of the sentence or the paragraph because the languages don't match up. So I'll read the English Standard Version. It's quite literal. But in this particular, and then I'm going to read the NIV version of it because actually the NIV, which is a bit of a, we'll take a, anyway, it's a bit of a different translation technique. [5 : 01] It'll help us to get the idea better. But first the ESV. And it goes like this. Who is wise and understanding among you? By his or her good conduct, by the good way, by their living, how they live, by their good conduct, let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.

And if I read just to you how the NIV translates it, it's a bit more of a dynamic translation, but it actually in this case will help you to understand it easier. It goes like this.

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. Now, they both say the same thing, but that's a bit easier for us to understand in English.

I'll say it to you again. Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. Now, you can easily see how hearing that, it sounds like it's something written by an elderly aunt.

Because for most of us, humility means saying bad things about yourself, not looking down your nose at yourself. And good deeds, well, that sounds like there's a list of good things that you have to do, and you try to check them off.

[6 : 14] And that's what the Christian life is. But the text actually is saying something completely the opposite of what we think of from the elderly aunt perspective.

It's saying something completely and utterly different. And it can be seen by the fact that the word translated as good in the original language is also the word for beauty. It's also the word for beautiful.

So, and most English translators have translated it as good. In fact, that word is actually very common in the New Testament, this word.

But English commentary writers or Bible translators almost always translate the word as good. I actually think it would be more helpful in our day and age if they chose the other word, which is beauty.

beauty. Now, just what being said here, and I'll explain the significance of it in a moment, is what's being said here is something that, in a sense, the beauty is not just sort of merely attractive.

[7 : 12] Beauty is something that has a type of weight to it, a worthiness to it, a dignity to it, a presence to it. But at the same time, if you've ever been in a situation which is just beautiful, you realize that there's not only is there a sense of worthiness or thickness to it, but it's also actually light.

You don't feel oppressed. You feel like your spirit feels lifted a little bit when you're in the presence of something which is sort of worthy and has a type of weight to it. But if you understand that what the Bible here is saying is that human flourishing is living a life of beauty.

The Christian life is a life in a quest, a quest in terms of how you live towards beauty, towards living a life of beauty.

And once you understand that that's what the New Testament is saying here and in many other places, you realize that the view of the elderly aunt as the writer of the Christian faith can't possibly be true.

In fact, you actually understand something else as well. Because if you think about it, most of the decisions, like we make hundreds, maybe, I don't know, hundreds, thousands of decisions every day.

[8 : 22] I'm going to have coffee. I'm going to, you know, in my case, am I going to make an Americano? Am I going to have French press? You know, am I going to have decaf? I'm going to have peanut butter with my toast or not.

Like, you know, we make all these, we make a wide range of decisions throughout the day. And most of them aren't moral. Most of them aren't about good and bad. And if the Christian life is just about doing good things and not doing bad things, well, that's, I guess, could just sound like there's not much to do about fun.

But if you understand that human flourishing, because that's what the Bible text is saying here. It's not just saying that Christians, I mean, Christians are like, non-Christians aren't called to go to church every Sunday, but Christians are.

So there's certain things which are particular to Christians. Non-Christians aren't to share the gospel. I mean, why would they? They don't believe it. But Christians are to share the gospel. But here it's talking about something which is human, human flourishing, which is common to Christians and non-Christians.

And if you understand that your life should be a quest into beauty, you realize that just following moral rules isn't going to be enough. See, it's not a moral rule whether you paint your room a drab institutional gray or beige.

[9 : 35] It's not a good thing or a bad thing to do that. But the Bible here is saying, in a sense, I mean, and some of you like gray and you like, I'm not making any comments about that aesthetically.

But in a sense, the Bible is saying, well, why wouldn't you make it more aesthetically pleasing? Like, why wouldn't you pick a nice, interesting color? And why wouldn't you think about how things match?

And why wouldn't you think about it? And this idea of beauty is expansive. It's expansive in terms of the beauty of relationships. It's the beauty of a family that seems to get along well.

It's the beauty of friends. It's the beauty of a type of beautiful way of being old. It's the beauty of a singleness that is just there's something beautiful and wonderful about the way the person embraces and lives into their singleness, which is just beautiful.

Like, you know, there's a beautiful way to organize an administration or organize a project or a concert or a meal or your neighborhood, that beauty is expansive and it's a quest towards living a life of beauty.

[10 : 40] And if it's living a life of beauty, beauty isn't going to be less than right and wrong, good and evil, but it's going to be more. And you can't understand the quest for beauty if you merely follow the Ten Commandments.

If you cheat on your wife, it's going to ruin the beauty of your marriage. If you lie to your friends, it's going to ruin the beauty of a friendship. But beauty puts you to realize there needs to be more.

You need to think about something more and you need wisdom to help you to understand what it means to be on this quest into beauty. And that's what this text says.

I'll read it again in the NIV, which is going to be a bit different than on the screen. Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their beautiful life, by deeds done in humility that comes from wisdom.

So what is wisdom? What is that wisdom that helps you to make those decisions? And to realize then that if, in fact, it's a quest towards a life of beauty, you know, it takes some understanding.

[11 : 45] Let's say it's just involving paint about how paints work and how they match. If it involves the music that might be in the background or the ambience. It's just, by the way, if you come to the house and I, you know, back when, eventually when we can have people come over, if you come over to the house and let's say Louise is gone and I've set up the meal.

I'll just be honest. Why? You know, you cook it in the pot, serve it in the pot. Like why waste an extra dish, right? It would be purely functional.

It wouldn't be beautiful. But if you came in after Louise has set everything up, you'd go, oh, this is a really nice room. This feels good. And we all know people have some spectacular gifts of hospitality and all.

And you just go in and you think, what did they do? Like just everything about this just, I remember I've been in some rooms and I'll come back to Louise and say, it's the oddest colors in the world.

All of the colors that you would never pick if you're looking at paint chips and different walls and different parts of the room. But somehow when you're in the room, gosh, it was just something about it.

[12 : 47] There's understanding, right? And wisdom. So what is wisdom? Well, this is what the Bible is going to say, talk about, which has a few things which are a bit shocking to Canadians. And

that shockiness comes right off in the very first thing in verse 14.

So remember the quest now, as we understand, the Christian quest is the same as the human quest, is to walk, is a life that moves into beauty, into having a beauty in relationships, beauty in your home, beauty in your soul, beauty in your appearance.

For some of us, there's not much we can do about that. One guy said a smile always makes your face look better. And everybody can smile. But if it's into beauty and we need wisdom to do it, well, listen to verse 14.

Verse 14, 15, and 16, in a sense, is the bad news. It goes like this. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.

Now, what bitter jealousy and selfish ambition is really referring to is the habit of your life. People make micro decisions all the time, one way or the other, micro decisions.

[13:59] And we can embark on a path of micro decisions that makes it more and more, that we become more and more self-centered. More and more see everything in terms of how it affects us.

And not only, and as we go on a journey, a bark on a journey of micro decisions, which are more and more self-centered, what happens is that it becomes then that my other people increasingly become threats.

If people have a type of prominence that I think I should have, they're a threat. If somebody else has a good idea, well, and I start to think that I'm the only one who can have good ideas, where people side with that person's good ideas rather than ours, they become threats.

And this is what's being described here is this path of micro decisions, of being increasingly focused around yourself, your party, your tribe, your interests, just you.

And it's saying that, what it's going to be saying is that if we understand that the human flourishing quest is a life towards beauty, something which is going to be something which is going to walk us away from beauty, is a life characterized by bitter jealousy and selfish ambition, a life where us becoming the center and the most important is something that comes to dominate who we are.

[15:19] Usually it's unconscious. By the grace of God, sometimes a word by a friend or a boss or a spouse or a child will shock us into realizing how we've been walking down this path of increasing self-centeredness.

But that's what's being described. And an interesting thing, it's a very, very profound truth, which the Bible is saying here as well. Many of us are familiar with the phrase, I don't know if it's true, but the first casualty in war is the truth.

I don't know how many of you have heard that expression. The first casualty in war is the truth. I don't know if that's true, but what the text here is saying is that if you embark on a journey, when we embark on a journey, when you embark on a journey to increasing self-centeredness, truth is always the casualty.

That you will start to repress the truth, suppress the truth, ignore the truth, deny the truth, experience truth, not as a friend, but as a threat.

That you will be like, you know, back when we go to restaurants, those waiters are waiters who have that ability to not notice that you're waving at them because you want attention. You know how there's those waiters and waitresses that seem to have the ability to always see you as if you're invisible?

[16:42] That that's how you start to be towards the truth. That's a very profound insight. It's a really important one. And by the way, because you think about what's one of the best pieces of advice that we can give somebody in our culture?

The type of advice, it wouldn't matter if you're in Tim Hortons, it wouldn't matter if you were in Bridgehead, it wouldn't matter if you're in something more trendy than Bridgehead. But if you were somebody who's talking about their problems and you said to them, you be you, you got to be you, you be you.

We all go, yeah, yeah, you be you. Oh, one moment. Isn't you be you a slogan into self-centeredness and self-absorption? Like the fact of the matter is, is that all of us are better than our philosophies or most of us are better than our philosophies.

And so, you know, people will take that and not go the full route into what it's going to necessarily mean. But, you know, at the heart of that, you be you. At the heart of the fact that only you can figure out who you are and you need to pursue who you are.

And you need to have the you need to have the buy in and the and others. You need to have the applause as you try to be you, as you try to be autonomous. And that's what's seen as wisdom in our world.

[17 : 53] And yet, if it's taken, really, it means it doesn't matter what chaos you cause in your family. It doesn't matter what chaos you cause in the business or in government or in your neighborhood or with your spouse.

You be you. You be you. And this this leads us to the next thing. If you think about it, verse 15. This is not the wisdom.

In other words, what the text is saying is that there's false wisdom and true wisdom. That's what it's going to be saying. There's false wisdom and true wisdom. And so we need to try to figure out a little bit about what false wisdom is and what true wisdom is.

And here's the shocking thing in verse 15. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly and spiritual and demonic. So when it says here's the shocking thing.

All true wisdom comes from the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. And if the wisdom is not coming from the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, it wouldn't matter if Canada had the Wise Book of the Year award and it wins overwhelmingly, if in fact the heart and the bulk of the wisdom in that Wise Book of the Year award, according to Canada, if it's not in fact ultimately wisdom, which is coming from the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, it's not true wisdom.

[19 : 22] In fact, it says that it's earthly, unspiritual and demonic. Now, what those three words mean are very interesting words. Earthly, if you read the Book of Revelation, you'll see often earth dwellers and other types of words like that word group used throughout the Book of Revelation.

And it's also found in different places in the New Testament. And basically it's the perspective that there is no transcendent perspective, that there's no eternal perspective, that all it is is the here and now.

What you can eat, what you can put on, what you can wear, you know, what you can sleep with. And that's the only thing that matters. In a sense, the great song of it would be that he who dies with the most toys wins.

It's a purely here and now perspective, which takes nothing at all about whether there might be eternal consequences, whether there might be a God, whether there's a higher purpose that you might have, a higher power, as they talk about in AA.

It's just all flat, all of this world. The word unspiritual actually could probably translate it more literally as soulish. It appears, you know, at different times in the New Testament.

[20 : 32] And there's two basic ways to understand that. The first one is to understand that it means human nature, human life, completely outside of the Holy Spirit having any type of influence.

But the other way to understand it is that, in a sense, it's life lived purely out of appetite and instinct. Life lived purely out of appetite and instinct.

So that the first type of source of false wisdom is that which is merely of the earth, merely of the here and now. The second source is ultimately stuff which shuts the door to anything that's coming from the Holy Spirit.

But it's basically just, in a sense, enthroning or acting out of your appetites and your instincts. And the third one is demonic, which means literally from demons.

So the text is making this very, very shocking claim that true wisdom, which is going to help us to live the quest towards beauty, has to come from the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, or it's not true wisdom.

[21 : 42] I'm going to explain it in a moment, but I want to look at the rest of the bad news, which is verse 16. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, it's the same words as up above in verse 14, there will be disorder in every vile practice.

So 14, 15, and 16 are sort of a group. And one of the things it's saying is that if the human quest towards flourishing is towards a life of beauty, that in fact, if the opposite of that will be increasing self-centeredness, self-obsession, self-concern, self-ambition, self-exaltation, me, me, me, me, I, I, I, I, and that's going to go against a life of beauty.

It's going to go against knowing the truth. And here it's saying that what it causes is disorder and evil, or vile things or evil things, that it encourages evil because there's no check on doing things which are wrong.

Like, if I understand that telling a lie destroys the beauty of friendship, if I understand that telling a lie destroys or wounds the beauty of a good marriage, that if I tell a lie, it ruins just how I see. If I tell lies about people groups, that's what racism comes from and prejudice comes from is believing lies about people. And you can see that. It hurts it.

[23 : 11] It wounds it. But it's not just that. It will then, when you're completely and utterly consumed with being yourself as the center, then the question is, if I need to be on top, why shouldn't I tell a lie?

If I can be on top. Like, what's wrong with that? That's why it ends up contributing to evil. At the end of the day, it makes science impossible because you can't acknowledge that you were wrong. And science works on being wrong time and time and time again as the path towards truth. But disorder, it's not a fascist thing. In fact, what the text would say is this.

It's not that you have to keep order no matter what happens. In fact, if you think about it, what communism and fascism does. Fascism and communism are, in a sense, the same thing. In both of them, you have the high leader, the supreme leader, and the party that crushes anything other than them having power. And so whenever there's a communist society and whenever there's a fascist society, they have to wound churches.

[24 : 15] They have to wound families. They have to wound political associations and poetry groups. They have to wound and destroy and put their thumb down, their big, thick books, boots down on the heads and the necks of those organizations because there can be nothing in the way of the will of the party.

So even though there can be a type of order, it's an order of terror, an order where the citizens are encouraged to report on each other. I'm not going to say anything more about that.

I've just said it. But that's not what the order here. You see, all that is is just at a bigger level, the selfish and ambition.

It's not the type of order that the Bible means here. The other thing that it's talking about in terms of disorder is if you watch movies like Contagion or Greenland, you know, and there's some threat of a contagion or some threat of destruction, and then the police stop functioning, the army stops functioning, people loot.

There's no human flourishing that can go on in a situation like that. And that's what happens in a sense, the Bible is saying, when there is a pursuit of these micro decisions that build within you a habit of being the center of being the thing which is the absolute most important.

[25 : 33] And these things will not lead towards a life of beauty. Now listen to verse 17. And then I'll try to explain a little bit about why it makes this bold claim that only the triune God can be the source of the wisdom that leads to a life of beauty.

Listen to verse 17. But the wisdom from above, you hear from above, it means from God's throne, from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But the wisdom from above is first pure.

And pure here means morally pure. It means morally blameless. It means a commitment to telling the truth. It means a commitment to not stealing.

It means a commitment to that which is pure, moral. Then peaceable. You see, this is a real direct contrast with what you're just saying beforehand.

It means that in the life of beauty, you're looking for a type of peaceable order. You know, I guess it would be a little bit like the difference between, my wife was so much better with the kids than I am.

[26 : 41] I tell everybody, you know, I don't know, my kids would all maybe be in jail or something if I'd been a single dad too long with my kids. My wife was so important to a well-functioning family.

So I might get the kids to settle down out of fear. So long. I get mad at them. They all sit there. But my wife will think of a game or distract them or something fun to do.

Two types of order. One of them is the way to beauty. The other one, you know, maybe it settled them down enough for my wife to do the good thing. I don't know. But anyway, but peaceable.

The third thing is gentle. And only the strong can be gentle. Open to reason.

Full of mercy and good fruits. Now just sort of pause. You know what's at the heart of a lot of these? And this is very important to today. One of the big, you see, if you are pursuing a path towards the self being enthroned and the party that you like, the groups that you like being enthroned, the ideology that you like being enthroned.

[27 : 53] And when that becomes the thing which starts to dictate how you live, at the heart of it, what happens is that you see evil as out there.

Evil is out there. And so if evil is out there, you've got to stop it. You've got to quell it. You do whatever you have to do to stop it. But at the heart of the biblical understanding isn't that evil is out there, but that evil is in me.

And the evil is in you and in you and in you and in you and in us. That as Solzhenitsyn put it very well, the line between good and evil runs right down the center of every human being.

And if you start to understand that, then you realize that these virtues are the virtues that are going to be important even when you're dealing with evil. Like in a good family, even when you deal with the wrongness of what a child has done, and it has to be done consistently, and it has to be done rightly, and it has to be done sternly or strongly, especially the more evil, the greater the bad thing is that the kid has done, the more it has to be clear to them.

But there is a way of doing it which is gentle, and there is a way of doing it that is harsh. And the way that we are to choose is the gentle way, because the gentle way is part of the path, the quest to the beautiful life.

[29 : 14] Peaceable, if you think about it, means that there is a chance for the amendment of life. There is a chance for the restoring of the relationship at the heart of being peaceable.

I'll start reading it again from the top, that the wisdom from above is pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason. Open to reason. Nobody would describe our current cultural moment as a moment of open to reason.

I mean, it's just so lacking in our society.

Full of mercy and good fruits. The word here, impartial, some of your translations might say unwavering, and that's one of those cases where the original language, the word, can go either way. Both of them are very good words, by the way.

The impartial is just that, obviously, that it's the opposite of being self-centered. You're impartial. Unwavering is, the idea behind unwavering is that you know where your loyalty is.

[30 : 18] Your loyalty is to the wisdom from above. Your loyalty is to the life of beauty. And so you're unwavering in that. Your commitment, your loyalty is sure. And sincere means that it's not just surface, but it goes all the way down.

I just want to say something to you. Doesn't that sound beautiful? Wouldn't you want to have that characterize your life? Wouldn't you want to have that characterize your church, your family, your marriage, your friendships, your community, your work, what has just been described?

If that doesn't do something within you of some type of a longing, I don't know what I can say to you.

Why does the Bible say that it can only come from the triune God? Well, there's several things. If I was to find a guitar in an attic somewhere, and then I was to use it to prop open the door on a windy day, and JP and Jill and Alan came over and they saw that guitar and they went, Do you realize how valuable that guitar is?

What are you doing? But they might come to that guitar and say, The only thing that guitar is good for is to hold the door open. That's just a piece of crap.

[31 : 53] You see, the fact of the matter is, you know, if I said this isn't a good cup because I tried to break a rock with it, and you know, I have four cups like this, and the other three that I tried to break the rock with, it didn't break the rock, so it's not a good cup.

You'd go, George, you don't use cups to break rocks. The idea of something being good implies that you know what it's for. And you see, at the very heart of the Christian faith is that there is a God, like, if you believe that everything just happened for no reason, that it just happened by chance, which is what our culture fundamentally means.

If you believe that everything just happened by chance, there can be no purpose for anything. And in a sense, then, it means that there is no good. You can't have, in a sense, a good life because the good life implies that there's a life that had some type of a purpose, but there is no purpose, so it's not good.

But the Bible believes that God created all things, and because he created all things, he created everything for a purpose. There's a good. And if there's no purpose, there's no meaning. And the Bible says that God has created everything, and so therefore, things have purposes, things have meaning, things have value, things have worth.

And in fact, part of that meaning is which we must have a sense at least a tiny bit of longing for it when we hear the adjectives to describe it, when we hear that it's connected to loving the truth and a quest towards a life of beauty that's going to be characterized by open to reason and gentleness

and peaceableness and purity, that it's going to be connected by it being unwavering about these first principles, that you have this sense that there is a purpose, there is a direction, there is a meaning to life that comes from the fact that there is this triune God.

[33 : 38] But only the triune God, and it means when the God created all things, just as there's a type of physical order that means that a glass like this won't break rocks, but that there's also a moral and a physical, a moral and a spiritual order.

And just as I wouldn't give you engine oil to drink because it's not going to fit with that physical order, that there is a moral order, there is a spiritual order, and only God, who knows the beginning from the end, can possibly know the purpose and the meaning of all things.

And so we need to get that wisdom and understanding from him. And it goes even deeper, because as the text went on before this, if you go back and you listen to the sermon from two Sundays ago, that human beings, there's this fundamental mystery about what it means to be a human being.

On one hand, we're natural, but on the other hand, we're not natural. That dogs are always dogs, and cats are always cats, and dolphins are always dolphins. But we have people groups that created both Bach and Auschwitz.

I can tell, I can be articulate and say loving things to my wife, and I can be rude, I can be hateful. Like, how is it that both of these things naturally come out of us?

[34 : 44] And what the Bible tells us is that while God created this order that is both physical order and spiritual order and a moral order, that is, and that was what God intended, things are not the way God intended.

That evil has come in. And not only has evil come in and bent things, it's given us this direction towards selfishness and self-centeredness, but it also means that it's dark in the intellect that our minds by ourselves cannot always detect fully the order and the physical and the spiritual and the moral order that God has woven into all things.

And on top of that, we Christians believe that there is the normal that was meant to be, and there is the normal that will be when there is the new heaven and the new earth, and we live in that in-between time.

And so the only way to understand the meaning of things and the purpose of things is to receive that knowledge from God. Now, the Bible has the distinction between special revelation and general revelation.

It means that God reveals, and it also has the distinction between special grace and common grace. And common grace is why people can get that idea of you being you, and they don't take it to their logical conclusion and just wreck everything, because there's this common grace that tempers it, common grace which is found in just the, well, the fact that the rain will come, that things grow, that people can still know the truth.

[36 : 10] There's this common grace. Special grace is Jesus, is life and death and resurrection. And there's this general revelation that people still can know some true things, but special revelation is the Bible and preeminently Jesus.

And so what the Bible is saying is not that it just, if it doesn't come out of the Bible, it can't be true or it can't be wise. But what the Bible does is, is that you're gripped by the gospel as you receive that special grace, which is that God, the Son of God came amongst us, that wisdom walked amongst us, that wisdom is at one with goodness and beauty and truth and love and peaceableness.

And so that wisdom itself incarnate and in flesh died upon the cross because what human beings needed was not just more insights, but we needed to be rescued. We needed to be saved.

We needed to be God to do what we could not do for ourselves, which is to be reconciled to him. And it is as we receive special grace and are grounded in special grace that we start to see the common graces of the world better and more clearly.

And that as we, in a sense, are more gripped with the special revelation of Jesus, his life and death and resurrection, and see it how it is from that that we understand the Bible and from the Bible that we understand that, that we can go from that as that grips our mind that we can start to recognize that which is true wisdom that ultimately comes from God, even if it doesn't specifically come from the Bible.

[37 : 36] It is the way, in a sense, we acquire the taste to recognize as we immerse ourselves in the word and in the gospel as individuals and in discipleship and mentoring partners and in small groups and in Sunday schools and in families and in churches, that that's what the Bible is calling us into.

Only God understands the meaning and the purpose of things and the order of the world, which is physical and spiritual and moral. And so we need that wisdom from him and that understanding from him that we might live a life not that is drab and dreary to merely follow the rules, but to understand that human flourishing is to move more and more into a life of beauty, which is what God has called us to.

Please stand. Just as we stand, Jesus is for you. The gospel is for you.

The beautiful life is for you. There is none whose life is so messed up or so wrecked that Jesus will not take. There is no one so far gone that Jesus will not take.

There is none so self-righteous or so self-centered that Jesus will not take. The Bible here is just telling us that I need to understand every single day of my life that I need more wisdom because I am not wise.

[39 : 07] I need more wisdom. And I need to have the gospel help me to understand and recognize wisdom to propel me and to move me into this life of beauty and to be thankful for it.

And if you have never received the gospel, there is no better time than today. You've been walking towards beauty without knowing that one that will truly lead you into a beauty that is not only begun to be tasted in this life, but just goes into life everlasting.

And I encourage you to reach out your hand towards him and he will take it. Let's pray. Father, pour out the Holy Spirit upon us. We thank and praise you, Father, that you have not called us to a drab and dreary life.

Father, some of us have very hard times that we're going through. And I know that there's times emotional hardness or emotional dryness or troubles in our marriage or troubles in our jobs or troubles with our finances.

And things can be very, very hard. And Father, we know the harder things are, the more we need your wisdom. We know that we know the more we need the wisdom that ultimately comes from you.

[40 : 15] And we give you thanks and praise that you have called us towards beauty, to a life of beauty, a life with you that is true and good and beautiful.

And we give you thanks and praise that when you accept us as your child, you don't weigh our merits, you pardon our offenses, you take us, but that you nudge us, you draw us, you propel us, you ground us, you stand us on this quest towards a life of beauty.

And we ask that you would help us day by day to call on you to be more wise and more desirous to walk in this path. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior.

Amen.