

True Wisdom

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[0:00] Amen. So I have to begin with a question this morning, and that is this.

Have you ever done something that was really embarrassingly stupid? Anyone? Since we're being open and honest here, I have to admit that I have more than once.

I'm the guy who can trip over my own feet when I'm getting off the couch and severely sprain my foot. And do you guys remember, by the way, when that actually happened? Yeah. Yep. But I was thinking as well, you know, when we were living at our old house where we lived right before where we are now, one fine summer day, we're planning on enjoying the outdoors as a family.

It's beautiful outside. The idea being that we would hang out in the front yard. We even had our greyhound Beatrice out there. So Elaine, Mia, and Beatrice were out in the front yard.

I decided, okay, I'll make my way out there to join them. I close the door behind me, walk down the front porch steps. I see Elaine with this look of concern on her face. She says to me, do you have the keys?

[1:38] I checked my pocket. I found out I didn't have the keys. And I said, why do you want to know? Her answer was this.

You locked the door on your way out. So what did we do? If I remember correctly, Elaine ends up crawling through this open window to get back into the house.

After that, we gave a spare key to the digs who were living a block away from us at the time. And it's a good thing that we did because it was helpful for them to have a spare key when I did the exact same thing over again.

Those of you who know Raymond can guess how he reacted to my locking us out of our house a second time. He gave me a new nickname that day. I'm still not sure how I feel about that one. But the nickname he gave me was Father Spacey. I have no idea why I just told all of you that. So I made the same mistake twice.

[2:44] And that would seem more like folly than wisdom, would it not? In our reading from Proverbs this morning, we see a clear difference between wisdom and folly.

And it is an essential difference. It's one I want us to consider deeply. Because remaining in the kind of folly that Proverbs is talking about is actually way more disastrous than locking yourself out of your house.

So look with me in Proverbs 9. Now in that chapter, we see two women in our reading, don't we? Wisdom and folly. Did you know that wisdom and folly were people?

Now not literally, but they're personified in our passage to illustrate the huge difference between the two. The difference between wisdom and where it leads. And folly and where that leads.

In these two ladies, wisdom and folly, what we're really seeing are two paths, two ways to live. A way to live that is wise and a way to live that is foolish.

[3:50] That immediately causes a question to arise in my mind. Are there any other passages in Scripture where we're presented with two paths or two ways of living? Jesus had something to say about that, didn't he?

From Matthew 7, we read that Jesus says, Enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is wide, and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.

For the gate is narrow, and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. What is this way that leads to life?

What is this narrow gate? Isn't it Jesus himself? When Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life, he meant it.

He is the way. Jesus is the way that leads to life. So we have the way that leads to life. In our minds, we have the way of wisdom, as we see in our Proverbs passage.

[4:53] I'm convinced that both of these ways, ultimately, the way of wisdom, and the way of life, are the way of Jesus.

Are the way of salvation through his blood and righteousness, the true wisdom, the only way to eternal life. And this is important for us to consider, because there are many ways to destruction. It's a wide gate, isn't it? But there is only one way to salvation, and that is through the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is the way.

He is the life. He is the way of wisdom. What does that mean? I want to begin, I think, at the proper place, with what we read in Proverbs about the beginning of wisdom.

The beginning of the way of wisdom. The beginning of the way that leads to life. We read in Proverbs 9, verse 10, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

[6:02] Now, as 21st century Americans, as people who have been formed by the culture that we're living in, a verse like this might come as a little bit of a shock to us. Why is that? I think that there are a number of reasons, as we think about the way we're conditioned to think about wisdom.

First of all, I don't think that we're inclined, really, to think about the difference between wisdom and mere knowledge of facts. In other words, it's completely possible, for example, to have a thorough knowledge, say, of molecular biology or economics or metaphysics, and still live as a fool.

Because wisdom, the scriptures are telling us here, isn't merely about the stuff that we know. You can know all the facts in the world, but it doesn't make you wise.

Wisdom isn't merely about what you know. I would say that it's primarily about who you know, and that is the Lord. Knowing Him and fearing Him, that is where we find true wisdom.

Now, it's also important to note that wisdom isn't found primarily from looking within, looking inside of ourselves. Looking within yourselves, as many religions, as much of self-help philosophy would suggest to us, is not the way to wisdom.

[7:21] No, actually, the way to wisdom is to look outside of yourself to the God who created everything, who has revealed Himself in the scriptures, who has revealed Himself in His law, and who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ.

To be honest, when I look inside myself, much of what I find is folly, confusion, and sin. That's not where I find wisdom. Where I find wisdom is in looking outside of myself and looking to God and looking to the scriptures and looking to Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

That's where we find wisdom. So, if I'm looking outside of myself, still I might wonder, why do I have to start with the fear of the Lord? Isn't that kind of negative?

Isn't that kind of a downer? Why begin with fear? I think the answer to that question is this. If we do not understand who we are and who God is, we're not going to understand the gospel, which is, of course, true wisdom.

As the great preacher Martin Lloyd-Jones once put it, it is an essential part of the gospel that conviction must always precede conversion. The gospel of Christ condemns before it releases.

[8:45] The gospel condemns before it releases. Why is that? Because when we look at the Lord, holy fear is fitting. He is perfectly holy.

He is perfectly righteous. And He is the one who is on the throne. And what do we see when we look at ourselves? We're not perfectly holy. We're not perfectly righteous.

And not only are we not the ones on the throne, we are humble creatures made of dust. And then, when we realize that we have sinned against a holy God, of course it causes fear.

So what does it mean for us? When we realize that God is holy and we are not. Let's say that it means realizing that we have been on the path of folly.

The path that leads to death. And that our only hope is in the path that leads to life. The path that leads to wisdom. It means realizing that we need Jesus Christ.

[9:51] Who is the wisdom of God. And that He is the only way to the Father. The only way to salvation. The only way to eternal life. And we might be thinking, alright, I've messed up.

I've been pursuing folly. I've been pursuing death. I've seen the error of my ways. And now what I need is to try harder to be wise. I need to try harder to be good. But that isn't how it works.

Because if you start with the fear of the Lord, if you start with that being the beginning of wisdom, you realize that you are never going to meet His perfect and holy standards.

If you've ever sinned, ever sinned, you've already blown that opportunity. So what does that mean? Does that mean that wisdom does nothing more than reveal to us that we are out of luck?

No. In our text, what is the message that wisdom is sending out? What is the message that is being shouted out? It's this.

[10:51] Whoever is simple, let him turn in here. To him who lacks sin, she says, come eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways and live. And walk in the way of insight.

So wisdom is actually calling out to the simple. Wisdom is actually calling out to the foolish. Wisdom is calling out to sinners who have walked in the way of death.

And what is wisdom saying? Wisdom is saying, I am calling to you no matter how much of a fool you have been. You don't have to be smart.

You don't have to be wise. To be made wise and to have life. Friends, the message that we see in our passage is to come and eat and drink of what wisdom has prepared for us.

To eat of the bread and drink of the wine that we have done absolutely nothing to earn. That has been given for us. And the only thing required to accept wisdom's invitation, really, is simply to show up.

[12:00] And this is important. Because the highest wisdom which begins with the fear of the Lord and which is given as a free gift is revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ who is the wisdom of God.

And what does the gospel call us to do? How does it call us to respond? To fear the Lord, to repent, admitting that we are sinners, and to come and receive God's free grace in His Son, Jesus.

Jesus has prepared the bread and the wine for us. He is the bread of life, and if we feed on Him, if we believe in Him, if we trust in Him, we will never be hungry again.

We will never lack for wisdom again either, because to have Jesus is to have the highest wisdom of all. And all of this comes to us as a gift to everyone who hears the call to come and eat.

And they will find life that will last forever. Because Jesus has undone our sin through His perfect life and atoning death. Jesus has risen for us.

[13:13] And that means that the banquet is open to everyone who will come in faith and repentance. and the banquet will never end. It will be glorious.

This morning, may we turn to Jesus. May we know true wisdom. Wisdom that begins with fear of the Lord and ends with the joy of being a forgiven and beloved child of the Most High God.

But we need to be clear as well that while there is this one way to life, one way to wisdom, there are many ways of death and folly.

That's why the gate is wide, the way is broad, that leads to destruction. Ultimately, every road we travel that isn't Jesus leads to the same destination.

We need to see that as a warning. Those ways we're tempted to follow, they might seem pleasurable, they might seem reasonable, they might seem appealing.

[14:25] But what does our text tell us about folly? The woman folly is loud, she is seductive and knows nothing. She sits at the door of her house.

She takes a seat on the high places of the town, calling to those who pass by, who are going straight on their way. Whoever is simple, let him turn in here.

And to him who lacks sense, she says, stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he does not know that the dead are there and that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

I want to be clear this morning. Any path that is tempting us, any voice calling out to us that is at odds with the voice of the Lord, and there are so many of them, have one thing in common.

They lead to death. It might seem reasonable. It might seem appealing. But here is a secret that isn't always apparent right away.

[15:36] And that's this. To walk through that gate is to join the ranks of those who are dead. But there is a better way, a way that is wise, but a way that's open to those who have been fools.

A way that is open to the simple. A way that is open to sinners. A way that calls us to turn from our folly. And that way is Jesus.

Who calls us to come to him and find rest. Who promises that all who come to him will have life and never perish. Thanks be to God for the victory we have in Jesus Christ, his Son, our Lord.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.