

The Wise Farmer - Isaiah 28:23-29

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[0 : 00] Isaiah 28, 23 through 29. Well, good morning.

Your preacher this morning has not been replaced with Rodney Dangerfield. This is my voice. Lost it yesterday somehow. And drank 120 ounces of water and four cups of tea to get to this level. So, Lord, help me. But no, I'm excited for this morning. We get to dive into yet another parable in the Old Testament. And after you've been following us, we have been working through a number of parables from prophets.

We've worked through one of Ezekiel's parables. We've already worked through one of Isaiah's parables. And now we're going to be in another one of Isaiah's parables. But as we jump into the text this morning and we look at this story, I just want to encourage us.

To have an open mind, an open heart, and most appropriately, as the text says, an open ear.

[1 : 57] And we would metaphorically take our ears and expand them out to catch any and all that God may be saying this morning. So, if you would, turn to, if you're already there, Isaiah 28.

We're going to be looking at verses 23 through 29. And I want to give us the context, as we have been doing every week. The context in this chapter of the book of Isaiah is a harrowing one.

As we know, the book of Isaiah is like a roller coaster of God's work in his people. Isaiah moves from promises of restoration and joy and deliverance to condemnations of sin and threats of exile. The mercy of God and the judgment and justice of God continually in flux, moving throughout the book of Isaiah. And in chapter 28, we're going to see a picture of both in this parable.

But in this context, in the point that we're in in Isaiah, we have to know this. That in this moment, Isaiah is preaching against godlessness, specifically through earthly, worldly counsel.

[3 : 16] The people have been listening to false voices, following godless wisdom. And the leaders of the northern kingdom here, Ephraim, are being careless.

And they are leading their own people astray. The leaders at this point are saying, nation, let's follow after the wisdom of the world. They've got it great.

And that is the context that we walk into this parable. So the point, the Lord speaks through his prophet Isaiah, and his intention here is to get Israel in a place where they are listening again.

But not to the worldly voices, to his voice. So let's read the parable again all the way through. Verse 23 to 29. Give ear and hear my voice.

Give attention and hear my speech. Does he who plows for sowing plow continually? Does he continually open and harrow his ground? When he has leveled its surface, does he not scatter dill, so cumin that he put in wheat and rose, and barley in its proper place?

[4 : 25] And emmer is the border, for he is rightly instructed as God teaches him. Dill is not threshed with the threshing sledge, nor is a cartwheel rolled over cumin, but dill is beaten out with a stick, and cumin with a rod.

Does one crush crane for bread? No. He does not thresh it forever. When he drives his cartwheel over it with his horses, he does not crush it. But this also comes from the Lord of hosts.

He is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom. This is the word of the Lord. And what we have here is an agricultural parable.

Now, the Lord is no stranger to stories that take in the world of agriculture, farming, cultivation.

Jesus himself had more parables centered around the theme of agricultural than any other theme.

This is an important piece to understanding how God teaches in stories like this. Because here's what he wants. He wants the people to connect the dots between that which is plain in the world, in the laws of the world, in the universe, and that which he is teaching, the divine, the spiritual truth from God.

[5 : 49] And so, we have metaphors like farming to connect the dots between that which is practical on earth and that which is spiritual from God. But I want us to notice verse 23.

It says this, give ear and hear my voice. Give attention and hear my speech. In Mark chapter 4, Jesus teaches the parable of the sower.

A very similar parable. And here's what Jesus says leading up to that parable. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

So, before we understand and look what's happening in the parable, I want to make a plea to us. If you have ears this morning, right now, sitting where you're at, if you came into the church full of anxiety or worry, if you came into the church high, excited about life, wherever you may find yourself now, if you have ears, this word is directly for you.

If you have ears, extend them out. In fact, hearing is such an important theme to this parable that actually comes up three times. Look at verse 23, hear my speech.

[7 : 05] Look at verse 26, he is rightly instructed, his God teaches him. God is telling something to man that he might listen. And then verse 29, he is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom.

The Lord has something to offer for him or her who extends the ear. So let's get into our parable. What is happening here? Well, it seems like it's just a random story that doesn't have an explanation to it.

And that's actually the way that Jesus teaches a lot of times. He'll tell the story or a parable and then he'll just leave it to people to ask questions and to wonder.

And so too, that's what Isaiah is employing here. But thankfully, through God's spirit and his wisdom, we are able to see what the Lord has. And here's the parable. Imagine a farmer who goes out onto his field ready to sow seed and reap a harvest.

And he takes his plowing tools and he works the ground to get it ready for planting the seed. He gets it all plowed. Everything's ready. The soil is built up and torn up.

[8 : 15] So all the nutrients are mixed. It's ready and ripe for the seeds to go down. What happens next? That's what the parable is saying. What happens next? Well, then he grabs his plowing tools and he goes back and he does it again and he plows the dirt and he gets it all mixed up and then, all right, it's great.

And then he wakes up the next morning and grabs the plow and does it again and just continues to raise the soil. And then he goes back. Do we see the foolishness? Verse 24, does he who plows for sowing plow continually?

Does he continually open and herald its ground? When he has leveled his surface, does he not scatter dill, sow, cumin, wheat, barley, emmer? In other words, the first part of farming is what? You need to plow the soil. This was true in this time. This is true today. But why would a farmer continually plow the soil? Makes no sense.

Any person that has any sort of common sense in farming is going to say, I plow the soil so I can put the seed down. That's exactly what is happening here. You plow in order to sow and that moves us into our second piece of agriculture here.

[9 : 30] Sowing. First stage, plowing, getting the ground ready. Second stage, sowing. And here's what's fascinating about the parable here. It actually gives us five different grains.

Five different seeds. And they're actually meant to be in two categories. And the two categories are first, dill and cumin. That's the first category of seed.

Now what's special or unique about dill and cumin? Even today, you can look and maybe you've actually bought dill seed or cumin seed. They come in tiny little vials and they're puny. They're so small, they're about half the size of a grain of rice maybe smaller.

In other words, with that type of seed, how do you sow it? Even today, it's sowed in the same way. You take it in handfuls out of your bag and you scatter it.

That's the first category of seed, dill and cumin. The second category of seed here is wheat and barley. And then emmer, which is a type of wild barley or wild wheat.

[10 : 33] All three of these have bigger grains, bigger seeds that are at least ten times bigger. And what you do with these is you want to plant them in rows. So the farmer would take his soil that's torn up and ripped up and ready and he would hand by hand put one in, one in, one in.

Today, we have incredible technology that actually plants it for you in rows. My wife grew up in Colfax, Washington and we get to drive down there all the time and there's nothing more beautiful in the state of Washington, I'm convinced, than when you drive down in the spring and the wheat is

growing, it's green, it's beautiful, it's in rows and it's just waving on the hills.

And then towards the summer months it turns gold, amber waves of grain. You want to see that line played out in real life? Take a drive sometime in May or June down to Colfax and you'll see it.

But even today we have technology, massive tractors and combines that can plant them one by one in the ground. So here's the second piece of the parable.

A farmer knows to plow the ground once and then the farmer also knows that when it comes to planting seeds he doesn't mix up the dill, human, wheat, barley in one big bag and say alright let's just do this and throws it out.

[11:54] No, you plant based on the right way to do things. And that's the appeal to common sense we're seeing here. So there's the first two steps of farming.

Plowing the ground, sowing the seed and then there's a third step in this parable and it starts in verse 27. Dill is not thresh. That's our third category, threshing. It's not thresh with a threshing sledge nor is a cartwheel rolled over cumin but dill is beaten out with a stick and cumin with a rod. So here's the first category again, dill and cumin, small seeds, they produce smaller plants that come up in stalks and the way to harvest, thresh if you will, the grain that comes from dill and cumin is this, you cut the stalks and you take a rod, maybe a metal rod or a strong piece of wood, you hold them out and you just hit them until all the little seeds fall out and then you throw away the stalk. That's how they did it then and that's how common sense would have dictated you thresh or you harvest. But there's a second category again and it's wheat and barley, verse 28.

Does one crush grain for bread? No, he does not thresh it forever. He drives his cartwheel over with his horses, he does not crush it. So here's the second category again, wheat and barley.

[13:17] Bigger stalks, bigger pieces of harvesting happening here. Now you're going to take massive stalks of wheat and barley, you're going to get them in a bunch and then you're going to scatter them on the ground in a massive circular area and then you would take a donkey or an ox, attach it to a sled that has a huge rock behind it and or a huge piece of wood with spokes in it.

And then they would drive the donkey over the massive plot of laid out wheat and barley. And as that would happen, the grain would separate from the stalk and that's how they would capture, harvest their grain from wheat and barley.

Here's the common sense speaking to the farmer and to Israel who would have known all of these ways. Here's what Isaiah is saying. If you take a threshing sledge, the massive sledge, and you drive it over dill and cumin, you're going to absolutely pulverize those tiny little seeds.

You can't do that. You're going to destroy your crop. You've got to beat it out with a rod. But if you thresh your wheat and barley like you should to get them separated out, the chaff, the stalk, and the grain, good.

You've got tools to do that. That's great. God has given man the ability to be creative and create ways to be efficient in his work. But here's what the appeal is in verse 28. How long do you thresh?

[14:49] How long do you drive it over? Do you just keep doing it? Well, I don't know if it's separated. Let's just do another pass and another pass and another pass just like the plowing continually.

Do you just continue to drive it? No. If you did that, you would destroy the wheat. You would pulverize it. So there's a way to do things.

That's what this parable is showing. Plowing, scattering, threshing. There's a right way to do things. What does this mean for us?

The entire point of this parable is to expose something to Israel. That you understand the practical truths of the world you live in, don't you?

That when Isaiah talked through this parable, there's no one in Israel that would have said, yeah, yeah, you do. You continue to plow the ground. You never sow the seed. You just do that day after day.

[15:52] No one would affirm that nonsense. They'd say, of course you don't plow it continually. They would also affirm that you scatter seeds according to their type. That's common sense, right? And Isaiah does a third one.

What about threshing, guys? Of course you thresh the right way. You gather the grain the right way. You don't destroy it. This is a trap. This is an inquisitive tool to get Israel to realize their own foolishness.

And here it is. Verse 29. This also comes from the Lord of hosts. He is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom.

And here we are blessed with clarity. What is the purpose of the agricultural story? First, that we would learn that all source of knowledge and wisdom comes from God.

even the knowledge that you should not continually plow but instead cast seed. Even the knowledge of how to scatter different types of seed.

[16:58] Even the knowledge of how to thresh different types of grain. God is the source of all knowledge and wisdom.

Even the practical common sense ones. Not just the Christian doctrines that we confess. The verses we read today are the worship lyrics we sing today even. But this parable is highlighting that even the counsel and wisdom that we take for granted is from God.

He is the source of it. He is the author of it. The very laws of the universe that govern all things that we see and experience come from God. The daily practical truths that order life rightly on this earth. and we call this in theological circles and this is something that hopefully we can understand together something called general revelation. Isaiah is showing that God's law and order are clear and logical in a practical sense and they're above questioning that any person in Israel that would have heard this parable and said no that's wrong you should scatter all of them together would be ruled a fool in the society.

That's because they appeal to the very intuition that God gave every man every woman. Surely Israel you agree with these practical common sense truths don't you?

[18:23] That's what Isaiah is doing here. We have a societal term for this and I've already referred to it it's common sense. Common sense truths of the world are acknowledged and practiced by not just Christians not just the Israelites but every culture society and civilization on earth from all time.

How do we know that? Because every culture and civilization has figured out how to cultivate grain and they figured out the order of plowing sowing and threshing.

If you plow fertile land and sow good seed you will reap a harvest. Common sense actually goes by another name in scripture though. It's called wisdom.

In Proverbs chapter 8 wisdom speaks and it's personified as a human speaking about its experiences and it says this the Lord possessed me from the beginning of his work the first of his acts of old ages ago I was set up at the first before the beginning of the earth.

So in some ways you could actually argue that common sense has predated even us. I was with God before all was created. So what about general revelation?

[19:40] How does the Lord show himself the ruler and creator and sustainer of all things? And do we buy that there are practical truths that are God given that are true all the time every scenario of life?

Well let's go through a couple scenarios here. How about some other modern day practical truths common sense that we all can agree on? If you wait too long to shovel the snow off the driveway your driveway will freeze over and turn into an ice sheet.

Thank you Lord for that common sense. That's true all the time. After playing in the sun on a summer day drinking water will cool your body and replenish your fluids. If you eat well and exercise and limit junk food you will be healthier and happier.

If you procrastinate studying to the last minute you will cram at 3am and probably not do well on your test. If you forget your anniversary you might end up sleeping on the couch.

These are universal solid maybe not the last one but we understand the point common sense and here's the move from the parable and for Israel if common sense practical truth is to be trusted fully then spiritual truths from God himself should also be trusted fully.

[21:06] Why? Because God is the author of both. God is the truth setter of both the practical and the spiritual. God rules the physical universe and the rules of the spiritual one.

God spoke into order that plowing dirt leads to planting seed and then bearing fruit. The same God that spoke that into order in his universe is the same God that speaks this into order.

If you listen to his commandments and follow them you will find life and joy. What are some of the practical truths of the universe that you rely on every day and maybe even take for granted like Israel took farming for granted.

Maybe it's the spreadsheet that you use every day at work that has the right formulas and if those formulas stopped working all of a sudden everything would fall apart but you trust in that

spreadsheet because the math maths right?

maybe maybe it's the engine that you work on all day and you know that that car or tractor or whatever it is will run well if all the parts are maintained and the fluids are topped off.

[22 : 22] You rely on that truth. Maybe it's that rain, sun and fertilizer will cause your crops to grow in due time like a farmer! today.

And here's the appeal be tutored by common sense. Mr. Sense has been the apprentice of God since before all of creation and his job is to make God known through what can be observed plainly. But the move in the parable is not just that they would acknowledge all the truths of the universe are true because God is true but that they would make the move from the natural the practical to the spiritual.

This is special revelation refers to God revealing his redemptive grace which leads to a knowledge of himself through miraculous means culminating in the person of Jesus Christ.

This is a revelation of God that cannot be understood or acquired by activities such as farming, playing in summer, or enjoying a hike in the woods, all good things, but instead a knowledge of God and his redemptive grace for you and for me is only only ever acquired through the mediation of his very word.

[23 : 49] Whether read privately, preached publicly, God's word is the means by which we come into fullness of life and joy.

What is that word? Well, the Bible tells us the word was with God, was God. And who is that? Jesus Christ. Verse 29 says that God is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom. Isaiah chapter 9 tells us that Jesus had the title of what?

Wonderful counselor. Father. Here's my call to us this morning. Lend your ear to wonderful counsel. Lend your ear to wonderful counsel.

Look back at verse 14 real quick with me of this chapter. Let's remind ourselves of where Israel is. Verse 14 says this, therefore, hear the word of the Lord, you scoffers, who rule this people in Jerusalem, because you have said we have made a covenant with death and with Sheol we have an agreement.

[25 : 07] Here's what the Lord is saying to Israel, you have led your people astray, you leaders of falsehood. You've trusted in the ways of the world. You've trusted in your own wisdom. You've lended your ear to false truth.

So here's my call to you, the parable, I am wonderful in counsel. And just as you take the truths of the world, the practical ones at face value, so you take my direct special counsel as well.

In other words, the Lord is saying, I am your advisory counsel. When every business gets to a certain size, they create something called an advisory counsel, made up of many wise people who convene and deliberate over the best course of action for the company.

This is not new, it's standard practice today. Israel in her sin has filled her advisory counsel with fools, false gods, kings of rival nations, and even the moral compass of the world.

We want to be like the nations. Here's what I want to ask us this morning, which voices have a seat in your advisory counsel? The Lord is condemning Israel's advisory counsel because it has more than one person on it.

[26 : 27] He wants to be their only counsel and He deserves to be. What about us? Who's on our advisory counsel today? Maybe the voice of the masses, popular opinion.

Things like Twitter or TikTok or news outlets. You want to find out what the masses believe? Go to one of those three and just scroll for a little while and you will see what the masses believe and what they are calling you to believe.

Maybe it's the voice of power. Leaders, politicians, legislation, trusting in the systems of the world to bring about what only God can bring about.

Maybe the voice of the spiritually enlightened has a seat on your counsel today. False teachers, even celebrities that we hold in esteem and when they speak we say that is worth more than the average person's voice.

One of the most devious false teachings today is the reversal of sin and the reversal of the Savior. What I mean by that is this. I see this message everywhere in our world.

[27 : 35] The problem is not you. The problem is the world. And you are enough and you are the hero. Why is that false teaching so condemning?

Because it literally takes sin and reverses it. The Bible and the gospel teaches this. The problem is within us. The problem is our depraved hearts.

And that salvation must come from beyond me. Salvation is not within me. It has to come somewhere else. And the world would say to you, the world is the problem, you are good just as you are, and you are enough.

false counsel. This is false counsel. But lastly, maybe this voice has a seat on your advisory council and it's the voice of shame and accusation.

Oftentimes as believers we can give a seat to the very enemy to allow him to accuse us and berate us about sin in our lives. Maybe even past sin that we've been forgiven of, that we have no condemnation over.

[28 : 51] But oftentimes when we forget the gospel, we forget that Jesus conquered the very powers of sin and darkness, we can let that voice back in. Speak to me how terrible I am.

Speak to me how shame-filled I am. Speak to me how I am so unworthy and unloved. Here's what I want to call you to do.

If you have any of these sources of falsehood in your advisory council, boot them off. And this is the message for Israel. Isaiah wants them to see you trust in all of these things that God has made right, but yet you will not listen to God and his divine voice.

The call to Israel is the call to us. Boot off all falsehood. There's only one who deserves a seat on your council and he is the author. and source of all counsel.

In this we have a call. What does it mean? What does it mean to seek God's counsel? Again, verse 29, it's a fabulous verse.

[30 : 01] All of these truths, they come from the one who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom. I want to make a couple calls to us. First, surround yourself with godly counsel.

God himself is the only person that has a seat or should have a seat into what is right and how we should live. But also, here's what God does. He uses people like you and I in the church to be the conduits of his truth sometimes.

So if you're in here today and you're a child and you've got parents for you, God has placed your parents in your life as a source of his excellent wisdom and his wonderful counsel.

I want to just call you, youth, children, listen to your parents. God will speak his wonderful counsel through them.

But also mentors. If you're in here today and you're saying, I lack experience, I lack wisdom in this world, I don't know what I'm doing, I have hard time making decisions, maybe the call for you this morning is to find a mentor.

[31 : 14] Find somebody that God has grown in his wisdom over years of experience and ask them, plead to them, would you disciple me? I can tell you every person that's ever come to me with that plea, everything in me says yes.

What a wonderful heart. of an open ear. But then number two, surround yourself with godly counsel. Number two, read the word of God.

We cannot skip past this. I want to just drop a few statistics here that will hopefully drive this home. what is godly counsel. Recently a study was done that concluded 42% of Americans believe the Bible is true, accurate, or relevant, down from 70% in 2000.

70% to 42 in 20-something years. 12% of Protestant evangelical churchgoers, you and I, read the Bible at least once a week.

12% of us are reading it once a week. Of people who read their Bible three to four times a year, 26 million stopped reading the Bible altogether post-COVID.

[32 : 27] That means through the pandemic, 26 million people decided I'm not going to read it again. Where are we headed? We are headed towards biblical literacy, and I think we're already there.

But what is wonderful counsel? Well, there's an amazing scientific study that was done in 2009 that surveyed 10,000 Christians in the evangelical world, and said read the Bible for four days a week, and we'll come back and do a survey.

After a long time of reading the Bible four days a week, they took a survey, and here's what they found among these Christians. Sinful behavior, sexual immorality, drunkenness, all of it, down 68% in their lives, they reported.

Sharing their faith went up 228%. The desire to disciple someone else went 231% up, and the desire to memorize scripture went up 400%.

Now, those are just statistics. Those aren't necessarily going to compel your heart to be in God's word, but here's what I hope will. The big idea for today is lend your ear to wonderful counsel, and as we're told in Isaiah 9, who is the wonderful counselor?

[33 : 43] It's Jesus Christ. number three, and finally, know the wonderful counselor. I really believe in the power of reading God's word, and I pray that every person in here would open up God's word this week, they would soak it in, do a devotional reading, just read it.

Don't worry about getting deep dive into it and studying all the words, just read it and let it soak through your soul. Maybe you want to take a Bible study, maybe you take the pens out, and you start underlining verbs, you start underlining the name of God, you start circling action items, or whatever it may be, great, and I pray we would do that this week, but here's also what I want to say, the Bible is actually not God.

Let me say that again, the Bible is not God. It is his inspired, authoritative word, and it contains all of God in it, in his wisdom, and his truth and his counsel, yes, but we don't worship the Bible.

It's not a divine person of the Trinity, so what is it? What is the Bible supposed to be doing? Don't miss this. The Bible points us to Jesus.

The Bible reveals the glory and beauty of God's Son in Jesus Christ is God's highest revelation to us.

[35 : 13] Highest. The end of all revelation is to illuminate the Son, Jesus. Colossians 2 says this, for I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those that lay to see and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged being knit together in love to reach all the riches of full assurance and understanding in the knowledge of God's mystery.

Listen to this, which is Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. He's not part of God's knowledge. He's not part of God's wisdom.

All of this, and then Jesus is here. Paul just said that Jesus Christ contains all of his wonderful counsel and excellent wisdom. All of it. So quite literally, what I'm telling you to do, hopefully this will spark in us a desire to be in God's word, because here's what the truth of the matter is.

God's word directs you to Jesus, and Jesus directs you to joy. Jesus directs you to turning away from sin. Jesus directs you to placing faith in his divine work.

Jesus brings all the fulfillment that our hearts were created to hold. As a pastor, I'm often asked for advice from others specifically, what's your greatest advice?

[36 : 36] Every time I hear that, I just shrink and say, oh Lord, I can only fail here. But I want to encourage us what the greatest advice ever given is.

What God says to Israel, and what Jesus says to us, humble yourself. Turn from your sin, and believe in me.

It's the greatest advice you'll ever hear, because it's the gospel. Creation, farming, gives way to God being understood in all of his truth, so that we would trust in the eternal truths that transcend farming.

after knowing Jesus, everything works backwards. Once our eyes are illuminated by the love of the gospel, we see all of creation in a new light.

Everything points back to him of whom it was all created through and for. God will be for. So, this morning, I pray that our affection would grow for Jesus, and that we would seek the counsel of God through the things he has revealed.

[37 : 50] When you see creation, when you go on that walk, when you see the beauty of it, when you read the word and it's talking about the sinfulness of man and the grace of God found in a Messiah, or when you pray to Jesus directly, I pray that your affection would grow for God's true, wonderful counsel that's found in a person, Jesus.

Lord, I pray this morning that we would take these truths, but I pray that in any way that we rely on your practical truths this morning, in any way that we see the world around us and say, that is wonderful, I'm so glad that that is true, that we would recognize that you're the author of that. You're the author of all truth, and God, may our trust in you be grown because of it. As we live and experience life on this earth, Lord, I pray every single time we recognize the beauty of your creation and what you've done, that we would be drawn back to the one through whom and for whom it was all created.

Jesus Christ, our Savior, in the name we pray. Amen. Amen.