

The Forgotten Saviour

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Date: 06 December 2020

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[0 : 0 0] and welcome to our service this morning from Stornoway Free Church. I trust that you're all well and staying safe and that together we'll know the Lord's blessing again this morning as we come together in this way to worship him. I've been asked to intimate one thing before we begin the worship for those in the Laxdale prayer meeting, those who usually attend that. The prayer meeting will start again this coming Tuesday evening, that's at 7 30 p.m. That'll be at the Laxdale mission house. The Laxdale prayer meeting restarting this coming Tuesday.

I'm going to begin our worship singing to God's praise from Psalm 119. Psalm 119, that's in the St. Sam's version on page 159 of the psalm books if you're using these. From verse 33. Psalm 119 verse 33, the same to the tune thinner, as far as verse 40. Teach me to follow your decrees then I will keep them to the end. Give insight and I'll keep your law with all my heart to it attend. These verses 33 to 40 to the tune thinner. Teach me to follow your decrees. Teach me to follow your decrees. Then I will keep them to the end. Give insight and I'll keep you law with all my heart to it.

Lead me in your commandment's path. Lead me in your commandment's path. For there, O Lord, delight I find. Incline my heart towards you lost.

From selfishness. From selfishness. Reset my mind. O turn my eyes from worthless things.

[2 : 2 6] Give life according to your word. To me, your servant, keep your pledge. So that you may be feared, O Lord.

Remove from me the shame I dread. Your loss excel in uprightness. Oh, how I long for your decrees.

Please, please, please, please set me in your righteousness. Now let's read a portion of God's word from the book of Psalms and Psalm 103.

The book of Psalms, Psalm 103, we'll read through from the beginning to the end of the psalm.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me. Bless his holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Who forgives all your iniquity. Who heals all your diseases. Who redeems your life from the pit.

[3 : 5 9] Who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy. Who satisfies you with good, so that your youth is renewed like the eagles. The Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust.

As for man, his days are like grass. He flourishes like a flower of the field. For the wind passes over it and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.

[5 : 1 1] But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children, to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.

The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all. Bless the Lord, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word.

Bless the Lord, all his hosts, his ministers who do his will. Bless the Lord, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul.

We pray that God will bless that portion of his word to us. Let's now engage in prayer. Let's call upon the Lord. Lord our gracious God, we would echo the words that we have sung and read as we come before you today to worship you.

We thank you, O Lord, for the one who is merciful, who does not mark our iniquity against us, who does not hold us to that which we deserve.

[6 : 26] We bless you today, O Lord, for the richness of that mercy that you have shown toward us sinners who deserve your wrath. We thank you today that, as we have been reading and singing, you are the one who guides your people into the paths of life, away from those things of death into which we have plunged in our sin.

We bless you, O Lord, today that your forgiveness is stretched out toward us in the gospel. We pray today that we may reach out by faith and claim that for ourselves.

We thank you that however many times we need that forgiveness, it is available to us. And you teach us, O Lord, and instruct us and require us to show that forgiveness to others also that we have received from God himself.

We thank you, O Lord, today for your wonderful attributes, for your justice and power and mercy and holiness, and all the things that mark you as God that you have revealed to us in your word. We bless you for the way that these are unchangeably the same, that you are not affected in the way we are by change, that you are not deflected from your purpose, that you do not give up on your people.

[7 : 46] We bless you today, O Lord, for that consistency which you have revealed not only in your word, but in your dealings with us from day to day. O Lord, every day virtually that we live in this world, we are thankful for all the characteristics of God.

And we are thankful for the way that our experience itself confirms your word and what it states to us. We pray today that your word will be in our experience also a word of life, a word that conveys the truth of God in a manner that would bring us to enjoy more and more your salvation.

We ask today, O Lord, that you would be amongst your people in all places in the world where they gather. And even in places where they are not able to gather physically, even like ourselves or in circumstances even worse than ours, more challenging than ours.

Lord, we pray that your presence will be known to your people. We do ask today that you would bless us in our circumstances, in your providence. Lord, that you have purposed from all eternity that we would be where we are today.

We pray that we may not regard this in any fatalistic way, but rather in the way of faith. That we may realize that our God rules, that he is one who has purposed all of these events that have come to affect the world through this pandemic, and through other events as well that we know of in our generation and in our day.

[9 : 21] Lord, we thank you that they are not out with your plan and out with your purpose. That they are not out with your control, out with your ability to use them to bless your people and to bring others to know you and to fear in your presence.

We have, O Lord, read and sung in your word today of the fear of God, of that respect and awe that your people have for you, of the honour and the veneration that they hold for your holy name and for your presence.

We pray today that we may be ourselves rooted in our lives in that fear of God, that we may come, Lord, in that respect that we owe to you, to know of your provision and presence more and more throughout this day.

We thank you for this day itself. We bless you that in your wisdom you appointed this day to be a day of rest, that you yourself gave that great example to your people after the work of creation, that we read you rested on this day and set it apart to be a day holy to the Lord.

Forgive us, we pray, O Lord, when we have departed so much from that principle, when especially we look throughout the world and throughout our society, when we see that that principle has been thrown aside and it is regarded as no longer relevant by so many millions of people.

[10 : 46] Lord, we ask that you would pity them and pity us when we have transgressed in this way. We know that your word teaches us so clearly how the honouring of the Lord's day is connected to the mercies and the blessings of God.

You have promised that those who honour your day, who exalt it in their honouring of it, will themselves be exalted by God. And we'll come to share in that glorious victory that Jesus himself

achieved by his resurrection from the dead.

We thank you that this day itself is a reminder to us and a marker to us of that resurrection. We pray, Gracious One, as we begin this week today, on this Lord's day, the power of your resurrection will be with us and will continue with us into the week ahead, each and every day as they arrive by your will if we see them.

We pray, Gracious One, that we may know the power of your word, the power of your resurrection through your word, working in our lives. We ask your blessing today to be with us as a congregation.

We pray for all the households, all the families, all the individuals connected with us, who belong to us and are precious to us. Remember, Lord, the children, the young people.

[12:09] We ask that you bless them during this time. We pray that they may learn more of your word and more of your purposes in the gospel. We ask that you would secure them in the grace that is in Jesus Christ.

They themselves may, as they grow, grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord as their saviour. Remember, too, those today who have trials and afflictions of various kinds.

We think especially, Lord, of those who have lost loved ones, even in recent days and hours. We pray that your blessing will be with them, that you will comfort them, that you will grant to them that restoration of soul that is part of your shepherding, pastoring activity for your people.

And we commit them to you and ask that you bless them. Bless again, we pray, our nation at this time and our leaders. Lord, we are praying for them at all times.

And we pray for them, especially in times of crisis like these. We pray that you would continue, Lord, to furnish them with strength. We pray that you would especially grant them the wisdom that we pray for ourselves, that they may know not only how to handle themselves and their way of life, but also how to head up a people in government.

[13:24] We pray that you would give them the ability to do that. And especially, Lord, we pray that you would be their God and their guide in your ways, that you would turn them into your ways if they are not already following you, and even those who resist you.

Oh, that you would come, O Lord, to win their hearts and draw them into your ways. We ask that you would continue to bless the provision made for us in the vaccine that is impending.

We pray that you would grant to make it a blessing, Lord, to us as a people, and throughout the whole world that many will come to benefit from it. But, Lord, turn us, we pray, from the mind that would trust in mere vaccines, great though they may be, and beneficial.

Turn us, we pray, to trust in yourself. For you are the provider of all that is good. You are the one who gives skills and knowledge to human beings, even to arrive at such conclusions and such provision as these vaccines.

O Lord, help us to honour you, to fear you, to respect you, to trust in you. Grant that we may never be deflected from it, but whatever our circumstances may be.

[14:35] Continue with us now, we pray, and pardon our many sins for Jesus' sake. Amen. Now, children, we're going to once again think about some of the I Am sayings of Jesus, and today we're looking at John chapter 15, where we come to the next of the I Am sayings of Jesus, the beginning of John chapter 15, I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine dresser.

Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes it, that it may bear more fruit. And that's a wonderful illustration for us in this passage about the connection between Jesus and his people.

We need to be connected properly, spiritually, to Jesus, so that our lives will be as they should be, that our lives will be God-pleasing, that our lives will be what God himself created us for.

And the important emphasis in that passage is using the vine, which produces grapes, as an illustration of how we need to be savingly connected to Jesus.

You've probably seen branches broken off, various types of plants or trees especially. When a branch gets broken off a tree and it maybe hangs on for a while, but eventually it withers up and the leaves shred and shrivel up, and eventually that part of the tree dies and the branch dies, and the gardener has to cut it off and it's thrown away.

[16:14] And that's what Jesus is saying about the vine. The branches that get broken off, they're not going to produce fruit anymore, so the vine dresser, the person who looks after the vine, cuts it off and the vine recovers from that.

And the branches that do bear fruit, he does something special with them as well. If you see somebody who looks after a vine, at a certain point of the year after all the fruit is gone and it's been taken in, very often the vine dresser has to then, in fact always, the vine dresser has to cut away the branches and he cuts away so much that you may think, well that's never going to recover and bear fruit next year.

But it does, a lot of new growth comes and the grapes then grow next year on the new growth. And that's what Jesus is using as an illustration of how he deals with his people, how they need to be connected with him.

And even when they are connected with him, sometimes the Lord brings difficult things into our lives, things which challenge us, things which cause us sometimes hurt and pain.

Maybe it's when we lose people we've loved and we can't actually get them back anymore. They've died, they've gone to eternity. That's very, very hard for us to live with when we've loved them and been with them and known them.

[17 : 38] And these difficult circumstances, God very often blesses. And it produces, by his blessing, more fruit, more spiritual fruit in our lives. So Jesus is saying, it's so important to have that kind of connection with Jesus so that our life is as it should be.

If we're not connected that way to Jesus, our life is not going to bear that spiritual fruit, which will be pleasing to God. So how do we come to be connected with Jesus?

We come to be connected with Jesus by placing our trust and our faith in him, by coming to accept him as the Bible offers him to us, as we preach about him in the Gospel.

We accept him as our Saviour, and that way we come to be connected with him by faith. And when we're connected with him by faith, just like the vine with the branches that are connected to, draws the water up through the roots into the branches and on to produce the fruit.

So our lives draw spiritual water, spiritual life from Jesus. Because he is, he says, the vine. And as we are the branches connected to him, so we actually come by trusting in him, by continuing to trust in him.

[18 : 58] We draw the spiritual life, the spiritual water of life from Jesus himself. So it's important for you as children, from the very earliest years of your life, to be savingly connected to Jesus, to be connected to him in such a way as you know his power and his influence in your life, making your life pleasing to God.

And it's important that way that we stay connected to Jesus. Now he tells us this later in that same chapter, John 15 verse 4, Abide in me and I in you.

How do we make sure that we abide in Jesus? How do we make sure that we stay connected with him? Well, pretty much by going on obeying him, going on honouring him, going on trusting in him. We stay connected with him and keep drawing life from him. So there's the picture you have of Jesus, the true vine, and the branches that are connected with him, that bear fruit, so that we bear fruit to God's praise, to God's glory.

First catechism, in the shorter catechism, tells us why God created us in the beginning. What is the purpose of our life? Why do we live?

[20 : 21] What is our chief end? As it says, what is the main reason why we live and exist? Our chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

Isn't it a wonderful thing to be able to enjoy God? To have a loving connection and fellowship with him as your father, with Jesus as your saviour, and therefore to enjoy God.

That's why he created us. And we need to be connected to Jesus in order to keep on enjoying God in worship, in faith, in obedience.

I am the true vine, and you, he says, are the branches. Well, let's again say the Lord's Prayer together. Let's just say it slowly and think about the words as we're using it as a prayer, because that's why Jesus gave it to us.

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.

[21 : 33] And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever.

Amen. Our next reading is in Ecclesiastes 9. We're going to look at this passage now for a short time.

Ecclesiastes 9. And reading at verse 11. We're going to be looking especially at verses 13 to 18. Ecclesiastes 9 and verse 11.

Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favour to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all.

For man does not know his time. Like fish that are taken in an evil net, like birds that are caught in a snare, so the children of man are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them.

[22 : 43] I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. There was a little city, and few men in it. And a great king came against it, and besieged it, building great siege works against it.

But there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man. But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.

The words of the wise heard and quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

As we look especially at verses 13 to 18 today, I'd like to look at these under the title of the Forgotten Saviour.

The Forgotten Saviour, this poor wise man that's mentioned in the passage. Now we've seen already in Ecclesiastes, and indeed it's throughout the Old Testament, that wisdom is not mere intellectual ability.

[24 : 01] Wisdom involves knowledge. It involves knowledge of God, knowledge and discernment of the will of God, as he reveals that to us, especially in Scripture.

And as we come to knowledge and discernment of the mind of God, so there's a corresponding action, which you can say is wise action.

That, of course, is when it's consistent with God's will and God's requirement and God's mind. And that wisdom we've already seen is actually rooted in what Ecclesiastes calls, as we've seen, the fear of God.

The respect, the reverence, the honouring that we owe to God and give to God. Wisdom grows from that. Wisdom is rooted in that. The wisdom that involves action from the knowledge and discernment that God gives through knowing his will.

It's not mere intelligence, but it does involve knowledge of God and of his ways. But you find in verses 13 to 18 an example of that in this poor, wise man.

[25 : 12] But true to form, Ecclesiastes doesn't make it straightforward for us. Yes, there's this example, it says, and it seemed good or great to me, this example that Solomon or the writer had come across.

But there's a caveat to it. It's wisdom is not always appreciated by those who see it, even by those who benefit from it. So you mustn't be overly disappointed if you've seen examples of wisdom and things done by people who are wise after the ways of God.

And yet that's rejected because that's something we're very familiar with in our own day and generation. After all, the gospel is the chief example of God bringing us wisdom.

And yet look at how it's rejected. And as we'll see from our study of today's passage, wisdom is not always appreciated. Even God's wisdom is sometimes rejected and sometimes replaced deliberately by human wisdom.

But let's look firstly at this incident. This is an interesting passage. It's a detailed passage and it has in it some very interesting things. It's a story that's really catches your attention.

[26 : 24] And the incident, first of all, is something that took place, whether in fact it was a literal city or not. It reads like something that really happened, but we're not told anything about the name of it or the names of the people who are involved.

But anyway, that doesn't really matter as such in the context. It's simply saying this example is what I came across. I came across, he said, there was a little city with few men in it and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siege works against it.

This great king, with all the power and might that was his, surrounded this very small city with very few people in it and very easily surrounded it and besieged it and set up all these instruments of war, these siege works around this city that was entrapped under these restrictions under the siege.

And there's a deliberate contrast here in order to give us a frame by which to exhibit wisdom, the picture of wisdom in this poor, small, poor individual, contrasting that with the king and with all this great king and all his forces and all the besieging that had happened under his power.

The contrast is deliberate because what it tells us is that wisdom, as it says at the beginning, is not always with the strong, not always with the swift. Sometimes you'll get wisdom actually in the opposite of power, in the opposite of great human strength, of great human intelligence.

[27 : 59] Sometimes wisdom is actually very opposite to that. It might be in somebody like this poor, wise man who by his wisdom delivered this city, saved this city.

So there's the context. The city is in crisis. It's besieged. It's surrounded. How are they going to actually escape? How are they going to get through this? Well, they were saved by the wisdom of this poor man.

We're not told how he did that. We're not told what his name was. He's simply somebody who's totally anonymous. And you find that so often in the Bible that God deliberately withholds the names of people from us because he will have the glory.

It's not there for human beings to glory in it themselves. In any case, that's what it says. This poor, wise man delivered this city. We're not told how or the detail of it.

That's just simply the fact of the matter stated. Now that reminds us of something, as we said, that's really a principle running through the Bible. Wisdom is not very often coupled with the great of this world.

[29 : 07] Not often coupled with great riches. Not often coupled with what you might call today celebrity status. The Bible pattern very often consistently throughout is that what sinners scorn very often God exalts.

And what God exalts and what God commends is very often rejected and scorned by human beings. This man had no status. He was a poor man.

He's not even named in the passage, but he delivered this city from the threat of the great king and his forces that had surrounded it. Doesn't it remind you really of Jesus himself ultimately?

And we'll make a reference to this as we conclude the study today. But in Mark chapter 6 and verse 3, you remember there that Jesus had been teaching for some time. And people were just absolutely amazed at his teaching, at his wisdom especially.

And you remember there in Mark chapter 6 verse 3, this is what they actually said. Where did this man get this wisdom? It struck them that this was wisdom beyond the usual, beyond what they were familiar with.

[30 : 23] But they weren't prepared to take the step and say, this man is who he claims to be. This man is the son of God. Yes, they could admire his wisdom.

They could say that it was unique. They could say that they'd never come across the likes before. But they did not take the step to trust in him, to accept him, to receive his teaching. At least not those in authority, not those who really had the power in their hands.

In fact, they wanted just to get rid of him. So here is something similar to that in this city incident and the crisis that overtook the city.

By his wisdom, he delivered this city. Now here is the sad thing. Yet, no one remembered that poor man. That is really an important emphasis in the passage.

No one remembered that poor man. I am quite sure that there would be many people in that city who would be most thankful for its deliverance. That it hadn't fallen into the hands of this great king who had besieged it.

[31 : 28] Many people would have said, temporarily at least, well done, good job. But then they forgot him. They just forgot what he had done. No one remembered that poor man.

There is the anomaly. There is the twist in the way Ecclesiastes presents wisdom to us. Yes, wisdom is seen. Wisdom is appreciated for a time. The workings of wisdom, the achievements of wisdom actually bring benefits to people.

And yet the people that brought that to them, the benefits, they are not remembered. They are ignored. They don't leave a mark in people's appreciation.

And there is no emphasis here for this man that he was honoured in any way. He didn't receive any medals. He didn't receive any commendation. There are no such things that you'd find nowadays with a knighthood or with some sort of award like that.

There is not even a record of thanks or of praise to this man. It simply says he delivered the city, yet no one remembered him. It's really a pretty drastic, sad, telling picture, isn't it?

[32 : 37] But it's still the same. It's exactly the same for ourselves today. Because when you look at those who have been great figures in history under God's blessing, led by God, empowered by God, equipped by God to deliver this nation many times, where are they today?

Where is the figure of John Knox? We understand that John Knox's remains are buried under a car park somewhere in Edinburgh. His statue is regarded as too embarrassing to put in a very prominent place, so it's tucked round a corner.

And yet here is the leader or one of the leaders of the greatest movement, spiritually, you could say, that ever happened in Scotland. The Reformation. As it spread from Europe westwards and came to Scotland, it's left us the legacy we have today in reformed teaching, in our understanding of the Bible, the way we understand it, in our appreciation of the Bible, our appreciation of Christ the Saviour, our appreciation of what salvation consists in, how Christ is central to it, how God the Father sent him into the world, our appreciation of the cross and what it stands for, that there is such a thing in the cross, a substitution, and a man who died, the Son of God in our nature died in the place of his people.

How there is such a thing in the cross, how there is such a thing in the cross, how there is such a thing in the cross as propitiation, where the wrath of God is dealt with by God himself through the love of God providing that for us. All of that has come to us as a legacy of the Reformation.

It's delivered us as a people from, under God's blessing, from the darkness of the Middle Ages, from the superstitions and the superstitious practices of the medieval church, of a wrong understanding of Scripture and what Scripture is about and what salvation is about.

[34 : 37] Yet, yet no one remembered that poor man. As a nation, we have many benefits that we've received under the blessing of God, including our education system, including health provision.

All of these things have come from a Christian understanding and a Christian appreciation of the Bible as it being the Word of God and the principles of that Bible as they're applied to human life.

And yet, as you look out sadly over our society, those people who are prominent under God in providing such benefits from us that we still benefit from as a people, they're forgotten.

Nobody's remembered them, apart from a few. I'm not saying everybody's forgotten them. But by and large, they're ignored. And indeed, by and large, they're despised. And they're treated as if they were never relevant, really, in their own age, let alone in ours.

And yet, he is saying the wisdom that is seen in that continues to be wisdom, however much it's rejected. What is the basis on which people forget the kind of figures like John Knox have been prominent in bringing many spiritual and moral benefits to us?

[36 : 05] Why do people forget that? What's the basis of their forgetfulness? It's quite simple. It's their forgetfulness of God. When you forget God and you push God aside in your thinking and you push God aside in what you actually set before any people as a basis for life, a basis for human morality, and when it doesn't feature the will of God and the word of God as it should, then you forget these figures.

You no longer treat them as relevant. They're outdated. They might have been okay for their own age, but nowadays you just put their statues or pull them down or put them away.

They weren't perfect people. They weren't perfect human beings any more than you or I are. But they were people whose memory we should honor, whose achievements we should honor with thankfulness to God.

And here is Ecclesiastes saying to us, this is something that he found himself to be great in his consideration. An example of wisdom, but not only an example of wisdom, but wisdom put aside and wisdom pushed aside and wisdom ignored.

That's why he's saying, yet no one remembered him. That's the incident. That's what it says about this man who was so instrumental in delivering this besieged city from the attack of this great king.

[37 : 39] So what are the observations then, secondly, from the incident? Well, two observations really that we should carry with us into our own thoughts today. There is first of all the observation that wisdom is better than might.

You see what he's saying, yet no one remembered him. But I say, he's really insisting on this despite the fact that that poor man is forgotten, that nobody remembered him.

It doesn't really change this. That wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard.

There's the contrast. The poor man is despised. He's no longer remembered. The contrast with that great king. He delivered that city, yet he is ignored. Yet, despite the fact that he's ignored, the contrast with that is that the wisdom that was shown through what he did remains to be better than the power and the might that had besieged the city in the first place.

So there's the question that arises in your mind as you read this. Who is the wise person in the passage? It's not the person who has the might and the power to besiege the city, to lay great siege works against it, to actually put it into such a situation as you would think would almost inevitably capitulate and give in and give themselves over to this great king.

[39 : 08] That's not the example of wisdom at all. The powerful of that great king was. No, the wisdom is the person, the wise, poor man who delivered the city.

Now that means that the power, the power itself that sometimes people have, like this great ruler, like you find consistently throughout human history that you find today as well.

Power itself is no gauge to what is true and what is wholesome and what is good and what is wise. Even if power comes to prevail in any society, that's to say human power or human philosophy based on something other than the wisdom of God, the word of God, even if it comes to prevail, even if it comes to gain the ascendancy, even if it comes to rule, even if it comes to be in government, that does not actually mean the wisdom that's rejected is no longer relevant.

It still remains the case that the wisdom that's rejected is better than power. And you can actually apply that consistently throughout history.

The power that people may have is no gauge itself to what is true, to what is good for people, to what is pleasing to God.

[40 : 34] And of course you can apply that really to Jesus and to his death especially. As well as to the gospel message. The fact that people reject the gospel message, which contains an emphasis on the death of Jesus as the basis for eternal life.

The fact that people reject that has not in any way evacuated that wonderful truth from its meaning and from its purpose. Even though it's ignored or pushed aside or outdone by human ability, that makes no difference ultimately as this passage in Ecclesiastes is saying, wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard.

Even if the gospel is put aside as it is so largely in our society, in our day in the West, even if the truths of the gospel are ignored and nobody remembers really that anymore with any relevance, it still remains in itself the wisdom of God.

And it always will. Remember that when you think that the world is just so powerful that you cannot really in any way expect the gospel to overcome it.

I am not ashamed, said Paul, of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For it is the power of God unto salvation. What was he saying that about?

[41 : 57] He was saying that about the gospel that God had given him to preach. In what context was he preaching it? In the context of a Roman Empire that dominated the known world. In a context of the paganism that marked the great cities of that empire.

And he is saying for all the philosophies of Rome and the philosophies of Greece before that and the philosophies before that that were contrary to what I know in the gospel, it is still the case, he is saying, that this gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.

Don't ever let go of that. However, it may appear in your day that that is still not likely the case. It is the case. And it always will be the case.

That is the power of God unto salvation. That's the first thing. Wisdom is better than might.

Whatever power human philosophies, human rulers, whatever power in any way is human in itself, that opposes the gospel, that rejects the gospel, remember, wisdom is better than might.

And God's wisdom is always better than any human mind. Secondly, the second observation that the writer makes is that quiet wisdom outranks foolish loudness.

[43 : 24] Verse 17, the words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. It looks like that's a ruler in this case would be the number one fool.

That's the head of all the fools that follow him. What he's saying is the words of the wise heard in quiet, there's the contrast, are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.

Well, you know yourselves, when power is put in the hands of a fool, and remember, the Bible doesn't refer to a fool usually as somebody lacking intellectual ability.

The fool is the person that rejects God, the person that lives as an atheist, the person that impresses or presses atheism onto other people and forces them into his philosophy or other philosophy.

That's the fool, the person who rejects God and wants others to reject God as well. He's saying here, the shouting of a ruler among fools, while the words of the wise heard in quiet are better than that shouting.

[44 : 28] A lot of damage is done when power is placed in the hands of a fool. But that's not the point in the passage, though it's an important point. The point is that the shouting of a ruler among fools is contrasted with the words of the wise heard in quiet.

You've noticed, no doubt, that in our day, and for some years especially, shouting is regarded as a very legitimate way of putting your own point across.

Whether it's a presidential TV debate or a gathering or protest on the streets, today it's sadly the case all too often that in order to get your own way, you don't really listen to the other point of view, however much it's different to your own.

You try and shout it down. You try and shout it out of existence. You just gather people together, and whether it's in gatherings or protests, on the use of social media, which really is a very important, powerful means of spreading the message of propaganda as well as the message of the gospel.

But it's sadly the case that in our day, the shouting of a ruler among fools is far more prominent as a way of trying to get your own way than to listen in quietness to somebody else's point of view.

[45 : 53] And I need not tell you that we are facing a threat to liberty of speech, freedom of speech in our own society, even through the attempts of government to stifle that.

Liberty of speech is a hugely important facet in any society. And that again goes back to what has been bought for us and purchased for us by those who have actually headed up movements such as the Reformation.

We're listening to somebody else's point of view. Yes, there were excesses in the Reformation. Yes, there were people among the Reformers who did not act the way they should have done. But the principles itself that were enunciated and followed as the principles of Scripture are principles that include whatever anybody else thinks and says.

You respect their freedom to think and to say it, even if you entirely disagree with what they're thinking and saying. The wise do not need to shout.

Wisdom does not need to shout to make itself heard. Wisdom is something that has its own mark and is listened to by those who listen to it in quietness.

[47 : 12] And it's better, it says, than the shouting of a ruler among fools. It's a sad mark of our society and indeed of Western society that groups motivated by certain philosophies and gather together under the arrangements of social media, which is so readily available nowadays, to gather together people in so many countries to join in these protests, to join in very largely what is just not in favour at all of biblical principles.

And to try and get your own way, you just bully and intimidate by shouting, by drowning out the alternative point of view. Well, remember, friends, even if that prevails, even if that gains the ascendancy for a time, the words of the wise, heard and quiet are still far superior to the shouting of a ruler among fools.

Here then, as Ecclesiastes is telling us, in this example of wisdom, that it's not always a case of those who have influence politically or influence in terms of human power that actually are examples of wisdom.

Very often, it's those that people ignore. And it tells us that even if wisdom does actually achieve certain things through certain individuals, there's no guarantee that they will be remembered or that that will not be rejected by others after their time.

But it tells us this. God's wisdom remains wisdom. The wisdom of God's truth remains God's wisdom.

[48 : 55] The wisdom of the gospel remains superior to any alternative that tries to shout it down. And we finish with thoughts about Jesus himself.

Now, this is not a prophecy about Jesus. But it does have certain reminders about Jesus. Because when Jesus, the Son of God, came into this world and took our human nature, that is God's wisdom being revealed to us in his plan of salvation.

And Jesus came into this world, the Son of God came to a world that you might say was besieged by a great figure, Satan. And his siege works, which we actually had brought on ourselves by our fall into sin, but power in the hand of Satan keeps us enslaved as his minions until God breaks the deadlock.

And Jesus came into this world precisely to do that. That by death, says the writer to the Hebrews, he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is the devil.

And Jesus demonstrated through his casting out of demons, out of people who were demon-possessed, that he had come to destroy the prince of the demons, that he had come to bind him up, that he had come to this besieged city of the world, by his death and resurrection, deliver us from the thralldom of sin and from the grip of Satan.

[50 : 29] And of course, you will still find many people saying, the death of Jesus on the cross and resurrection from the dead? Nah, I don't accept that.

I don't believe that that's in any way relevant to today's society. That is just foolishness. Well, God as always is ahead of the game.

Because God has already referred to that in 1 Corinthians 1. We'll finish by reading these verses from verse 20 especially.

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

For since in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the foolishness of what we preach to save those who believe.

[51 : 31] For the Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles.

But to those who are called both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men. May God bless to us these thoughts on his word today. Let's conclude by singing once again to his praise this time in the Scottish Psalter and that's on Psalm 111 on page 391.

Psalm 111 verses 6 to 10. We'll sing to the tune St. Lawrence. He did the power of his works unto his people show when he the heathen's heritage upon them did bestow.

A psalm which ends wisdom's beginning is God's fear. Good understanding, they have all that his commands fulfill. His praise endures foray.

[52 : 41] Verses 6 to 10. He did the power of his works. He did the power of his works unto his people show when he the heathen's heritage upon them did bestow.

His handy works are truth and right all his commands are true.

And done in truth and a brightness He sent redemption to his folk.

His covenant foray, he did command holy his name, and reverend his hallways.

Wisdom's beginning is God's fear, good understanding they have all that his commands fulfill, his praise endures always.

[54 : 40] Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore. Amen. Thank you once again for participating in the service. I trust that it's been blessed to you.

If you can, please join us again at 6.30 for the evening service when that will be conducted by Reverend Kenny I. MacLeod. Alright.

Thank you. Thank you.