

# The Wisdom of God

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning. Can I add my word of welcome to what's already been said? My name is Martin Ayers. I'm the Rector of St Silas Church. It's great you can join us. And our aim with these times, even though we're having to live stream on YouTube, is that this isn't just another TV show.

This isn't just something to watch and drift in and out of, but that we would each encounter the living God together as we spend time gathered as his people, wherever we are.

So let's pray. Let's pray for that. Let's ask that God will make himself known to us. Let's bow our heads and I'll lead us in a prayer. Come before him with joyful songs.

Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us. Great God and Father, we praise you for who you are, that you are the creator.

We pray that you will speak to each one of us now by your word and give us ears to hear your voice, heads to know your truth, and hearts that are open to change and follow you.

[ 1 : 07 ] We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, each week we're thinking about a different attribute of God, a quality of God, so that we make the most of this opportunity in this season to know the living God better.

And this morning we're focusing on the wisdom of God. Now that might not be something you've placed much value on before, so we need to see the incredible importance of wisdom.

The Bible reading we heard was from Job chapter 28 in the book of Job, and it describes the effort involved in mining for precious metal or precious stones.

And it describes, you're thinking about mining thousands of years ago, so it describes the process of traveling for miles and miles, scoping the right spot to mine, far from where people live, then digging a mine shaft, immense amount of work, descending down, and verse 9, assaulting the flinty rock with their hands, tunneling through the rock, and then finally in verse 11, they, the miners, bring hidden things to light.

It's an incredible effort. But the sting of the tail is verse 12. Verse 12, have a look. But where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell?

[ 2 : 30 ] No mortal comprehends its worth. It cannot be found in the land of the living. It's not in the deep. It's not in the sea. You can't even buy it. Verse 15, you can't buy it with the finest gold.

He's saying there's something far more valuable and even more elusive than the precious stone we would mine for. That's why it says to us in Proverbs, which really is the seminal book of the Bible about wisdom, chapter 8, wisdom cries out and says this to us.

Wisdom says, choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her.

So what is wisdom? That it could be so priceless. Wisdom is what you need to flourish in life. That's why it's such a precious commodity. It's not the same as intelligence.

You might have seen at the moment around us the great British intelligence test is going on, and there's been programs about that and encouragement to take part in that. And if you take part in it, as many people are, what happens is you get given all these puzzles to do that test your capacity to remember things.

[ 3 : 48 ] So how many numbers can you remember in a sequence is one of the tests. And your vocabulary, how many words, meanings you know, definitions you know.

There's rotation of pictures, and you have to work out, it's working out how good your mind is at rotating a picture mentally to work out how it turns around. The thing is that you can do very well on puzzles and tests like that, have an astounding memory, a great vocabulary, and still completely flounder in life because you don't have wisdom.

It's not the same as knowing stuff. And wisdom isn't usually about morality. So for some decisions in life, there is a clear moral command from God.

If you're thinking to yourself, you know, you're in a coffee shop outside lockdown, and somebody gets up and goes to the loo, and they leave their laptop out, and you think, that's a nice laptop. I really would like that laptop. Should I just walk out with it? No. It's a clear command from God. Do not steal. If you're thinking, you know, I really like this girl in the office.

[ 5 : 00 ] Should I commit adultery? No. Clear commands from God. So what is wisdom? Wisdom is not that. Wisdom is what you need to take the right choices in the huge number of decisions in life where there's no obvious moral right or wrong.

Questions that hit us all the time. Should I take this job? Should I hire this person? Should I marry this person? Should we try for another child?

Should we live in Glasgow or move to a different place? Where do we live? Wisdom is about knowing what to do and what not to do when the moral command doesn't clearly tell you.

It's about knowing when to say things and when not to say things. You can say the right thing at the wrong time, and it's a complete disaster. We know that. It's about all these decisions that we make day by day where there's no obvious moral command, but if you make lousy choices in decisions like that, you will screw up your life.

It's as simple as that. It's as serious as that. Wisdom is absolutely essential. It's what we need to flourish in this world. And more than ever, we need it when we're going through suffering.

[ 6 : 17 ] What's happening in Job that our reading was from? Unjust suffering. Job is a wealthy, healthy man, and he loses everything.

He has disease. He loses his family. He loses his property. It's an absolute shocker for Job. It's a calamity. And for most of the book, he's questioning God, and he's questioning himself.

How has this happened? And what do I do? He longs for wisdom. And thankfully, most of us will never be in a position of suffering as bad as what happened to Job.

But it is in the midst of suffering that we long for wisdom. We're going through that now in the pandemic, through the lockdown and isolation and fear and sickness and grief and loss and economic meltdown.

We need wisdom. So that's the absolute importance of wisdom. In response to that, we're going to see three things. The source of wisdom, the pinnacle of wisdom, and the beginning of wisdom.

[ 7 : 26 ] So first, the source of wisdom. The crucial question came in Job 28 in verse 20. Where then does wisdom come from? Where does understanding dwell?

Well, the answer is in verse 23. God understands the way to it, and he alone knows where it dwells.

Why? Why does God have that wisdom? He sees and he knows everything. So verse 24, for he views the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens.

And he made it all. Verse 25, he established the force of the winds and measured out the waters. He made a decree for the rain and a path for the thunderstorm. Then he looked at wisdom and appraised it.

He confirmed it and tested it. It's his universe. It's his cosmos, his world. So it's God and it's only God who has true wisdom.

[ 8 : 27 ] In Isaiah chapter 40, we get these poetic words. They're written as an encouragement to God's people to trust him, that comfort and rescue will come. But listen to these questions from God to us if we're tempted not to trust God.

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance?

Who can fathom the spirit of the Lord or instruct the Lord as his counselor? Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding?

Of course, the answer to those questions is only God, only God, immortal, invisible, God, only wise. And this is deeply reassuring. It's reassuring because all around us people will say God isn't there for if he was there there wouldn't be so much suffering in the world.

And I know some of us feel that objection very strongly. But if you think about it what we're saying at that point is I am so convinced I could do better than God that I know better than him.

[ 9 : 45 ] I can't accept him. But in the Bible God says to us where were you when I laid the foundation of the world? In other words, as soon as we allow God to be big enough and powerful enough and good enough that we could bring questions like that towards God and hold him in some way accountable for what's going on in the world, as soon as he's big enough and powerful enough for us to do that we have to be willing to accept that he might know things that justify the way he's doing things that we don't know.

He might have answers that we don't have. It's helped me before to draw a circle and say well this circle represents all the knowledge God has which is all the knowledge that there is to have in the whole universe.

and then why not draw a circle like that and then draw another circle within that that represents all of your knowledge proportionately gathered together all the bits of all knowledge there is that you think you have in a circle so that then you can ask yourself how can I be so sure that there is nothing in that vast swathe of knowledge that God has that I don't have that couldn't justify the way that my life is going the way that this world is going the way that God has ordained things to happen.

it's reassuring for us when those questions about the way our lives have gone are very personal and real when things happen to us that go profoundly against what we'd hoped for what we'd planned and we struggle God reassures us he made all of this he knows the end from the beginning nothing takes him by surprise he is wise we can trust him that's our first point the source of wisdom secondly the pinnacle of wisdom in 1 Corinthians Paul alludes to the fact that for the kind of the philosophical mind in the first century that there was a scoffing at the heart of the Christian message Christ crucified and in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 Paul says in verse 30 Christ Jesus has become for us wisdom from God our righteousness holiness and redemption so to the schools of thought that the world most esteems as wise and thinks yeah that's so wise that kind of way of thinking is wise from their perspective often the cross looks like such a foolish idea to lay down your life to follow a crucified saviour the idea of the creator

God taking flesh and entering the muck of our world for us the idea of a God of retributive justice who will hold people to account for their sin the son of God dying a criminal's death it seems so unsophisticated to people so primitive to believe in it and yet it's at Calvary that we see the supreme wisdom of God that he would use the worst evil in human history intentionally directed towards him and he would use that for his good purposes to fling wide open the gates of heaven to make the way for the people who rejected him to come back he takes the worst thing the devil could ever do and uses it to defeat the devil there's an old Christian writer John Chrysostom centuries ago early centuries of the Christian faith said that in Jesus coming

[ 13 : 50 ] God has trampled over death by death he's saying God has used death to defeat death what extraordinary wisdom that by the death of one man the God man he can offer eternal life to anyone who believes in him so that in Ephesians chapter 3 verse 10 Paul talks about how God is making known the manifold wisdom of God he's displaying his manifold wisdom to the angels of heaven and to the world where is that most supremely happening Ephesians 3 10 it's in the church as God is gathering together all kinds of people from all sorts of backgrounds religious non-religious all kinds of backgrounds it's the pinnacle of God's wisdom that through the cross we come back to him and we come together in Christ so when we experience suffering and we don't have the answers what we do have is a God who was wise enough to take the worst evil ever committed and he could use that for the greatest good that's ever been done perhaps you're with us this morning and if you're honest with yourself you feel that God has let you down in some way and you can't let go of it it's a stumbling block for you it's held you back and it's holding you back from growing as a

Christian and from enjoying being a Christian maybe that's you this morning we have disappointments don't we disappointments of answered prayer apparently unanswered prayer where we've longed for something we've brought it to go we've prayed for it to happen and it didn't go that way and it's deeply disappointing could you let the cross speak into that disappointment this morning in your life how does the cross speak into it that it says we don't know the answers as to why things went the way they did for you why things have gone like they've gone but we know what the answer can't be the answer can't be that God doesn't care he's a God who cares enough about our suffering that Christ has suffered for us on the cross he stepped into our world to suffer for us to redeem us and we know the answer can't be

God's not wise God's made a mistake it can't be that because we have a God who took all the evil of the cross and used it to bring about the greatest possible good so I know this is hard but could I urge you this morning don't let your disappointment hold you back from trusting God my own experience in pastoral ministry is that this is so important for us to take hold of if we just think about the experience of unanswered prayer I know it can be terribly disappointing when prayer is no prayer is answered but what I mean is apparently unanswered prayer the reality is that when we've had a dearly held plan and we discover it's not God's plan we've brought it to God we've asked God and it turns out it wasn't God's plan we need to hear that as well as being good and loving and God is good and loving and powerful he is powerful we can be reassured he's also he is wise he is wise Tim Keller puts it like this we can be sure that our prayers are answered precisely the way we would want them to be answered if we knew everything God knows and God's plan for the world is a saving plan it's a plan of drawing people to know him even sometimes through the suffering of his people also he has an agenda for our lives after we've come to know him that is glorious and it's ambitious that he's preparing us to live with him forever so he is at work to transform us to make us like his son and in James chapter 1 he urges us James that we can we can even count it as joy as when we suffer suffering will be painful but at the same time there will be a rejoicing because God can use suffering in his good purposes to make us more like Christ I was speaking to a friend yesterday about he had a breakdown last year a friend of mine and you know terrible depression a burnout and he was off work for months and months and I said as he was talking about it you know it's awful it's awful what you went through he said yeah it wasn't great but it was great you know what you know what it wasn't great but it wasn't great that's what God's like isn't he it was bad it was very bad but actually it's been very good and God has been at work through it all that's our second point the pinnacle of wisdom we've heard about the source of wisdom the pinnacle of wisdom but so how do we take that and live wisely ourselves in the crisis that we're in you know we know certain things that we have to do that we're told to do stay at home save lives social distancing and we're seeing people take that to extremes so I don't know whether you saw the photos in the news of the guy who went out and about with a greenhouse all around him to shield him from people or the people who've put manure on their front garden to keep people away from their home there are these drastic measures but these are about the things that people are doing to follow the rules how do we what we would need to know is how do we actually flourish in this how do we come out of this having grown and flourished well look again with me at Job 28 for the beginning of wisdom in verse 23 we read

God alone knows where wisdom dwells in verse 27 God looked at wisdom and appraised it he confirmed it and tested it but then we get verse 28 and he said to the human race the fear of the Lord that is wisdom and to shun evil is understanding so the beginning of wisdom is to fear the Lord we thought about fearing God when we looked at his holiness that the fear of God is having appropriate reverence towards him living our lives before him in trembling gratitude that if you've become a Christian if you're a Christian we're not terrified of God because we're assured of his grace and his love through his word but while we're not terrified we're still trembling because he is completely awesome and so we live our lives in trusting obedience of him it takes the whole book of Proverbs to spell out what that might look like but in Proverbs 3 5 and 6 we hear this trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your path straight so whenever we're in situations where we are tempted to sin the temptation is to believe that God is not wise

[ 21 : 14 ] God doesn't know what's best for me and the challenge for us is even when my own understanding would lead me a different way will I acknowledge God and lean not on my own understanding will I trust in him and acknowledge him with all my heart so that I believe he will make my path straight another side of fearing the Lord is a stillness that's what fearing the Lord meant for Job that he wouldn't frantically try and obey God to prize a blessing out of his hand as though God is sort of meanly withholding something from us in our suffering and if only we'll be a bit more devout we'll get it off in no rather there's a stillness of submitting to God's wisdom and his will in Deuteronomy 29 29 it says this the secret things belong to the Lord our God but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever that we may follow all the words of this law it's humbling to trust that God is wise that God has made known to us all that we need to have life in all its fullness but there is significant limits to that and the things we don't know we can trust him with we don't have to think well until I understand this I won't trust him now when we're willing to trust him it means we can flourish even in suffering we can be positive in what we're going through just

now we can be enthusiastic we can be energised as we tell ourselves do I understand this no is it easy no but I don't have to understand it

God's got this he's got a plan he's dealt with my past and my present and my future are safe in his hands friends this is the really good news of the wisdom of God let's pray together I'll pray the words from the end of Romans chapter 11 oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God how unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor who has ever given to God that God should repay them for from him and through him and for him are all things to him be the glory forever amen and toazar