



THE CHURCH THE WORLD NEEDS | THE WAY OF WISDOM

October 10, 2021

It is so good to be with you. We are continuing our journey through the first few chapters of Paul's letter to the Corinthians. It's been our hope that as we give ourselves to this letter, as we meditate upon it here, meditate upon it in worship, and as you take it with you into your Community Groups this week that you will be captivated by Paul's vision for the church,—the church that the world needs—which is a church that has as its central message and as its prevailing hope, the foolishness of the cross.

Paul's claim in this letter and Christianity's claim is that Jesus' death on a cross is the paradigm by which we make sense of everything. In fact, this is much of Paul's point in these first few letters, in these opening chapters of 1 Corinthians. It's impossible to make sense of God, and it's impossible to make sense of ourselves, the church, and our world without the cross. It's Jesus' crucifixion, his death by execution between two criminals that changed the world. The cross changes the way we see the world and the way we live in the world. How we understand wisdom and power and identity and evil and reconciliation and ambition and failure, the cross changes how we understand all of it. The scandalous notion that the messiah, the Son of God, would die on a cross should define us and be our lens through which we see all of reality. In many ways, 1 Corinthians teaches us how to do that.

This is important, and it is relevant for us to be thinking through this and pondering this because the world that you woke up in this morning is so much different than the world was 10 years ago, and even five years ago, and even two years ago. It's changed socially, and politically, and pandemically. I don't think that's a word. There's been a red underline on my manuscript all week. I'm ignoring it. I'm gonna make it a word. Pandemically is a word. Sorry to you English teachers out there. As a result, every one of us, and your neighbors as well, are living in a collective moment of disorientation. Perhaps the one thing we share, whether you're on the left or the right or in the center politically, is that we live with this disheartened disorientation. That's only part of the story because there's also a reason for hope.

The city continues to return to normalcy. I can't find parking anywhere. I'm kind of excited to complain about it with you. So many folks who left the city are returning. Many people are new, and we're seeing more and more new folks moving into the city. We just celebrated our 200th anniversary last weekend, but as late as August, we weren't sure if we were even going to be able to pull that off, pandemically speaking. We have hopes for our mission and ministry for the future. What do we do with this—the chaos, division and confusion of the secular world we're in, mixed with the hope that God is at work in this church, and in the city, and in our world?

Paul wants you to look to the cross. To keep your eyes focused on the crucified messiah because there we see power and the wisdom of God. There we see the love of God, and his intentions to bring healing to the world. We should listen to

Paul because he is surprisingly familiar with the world that you and I inhabit. True, he would not be familiar with alternate side parking regulations. He wouldn't know anything of social media posts, or social media influencers or finstas. I just learned what that was this weekend, and I wanted to show off. I know what it is. If you don't know what it is, you should ask a teenager—they won't tell you. But Paul does know the human heart. That's what he knows, and he knows our desire to know and to be known. He also knows much of what drives the secular world because after all, Paul had been to Corinth. He had planted churches there and Corinth, as Jason has talked about, was a city much like New York that was filled with competing visions for what it means to be human, for who God was and what his intentions were for the world and how we can know him. Corinth had only been rebuilt about 100 years before Paul had preached there, by Julius Caesar. It was filled with religious temples to gods like Apollo and Aphrodite. It was also in many ways, the crossroads of the world. As one commentator put it, "Corinth was an immoral city in an immoral age." Even in an age filled with sexual immorality, Corinth stood out and was known for its licentious lifestyle. Into that chaotic world, Paul wants this young church in Corinth—and he wants you and I—to grow in wisdom, a spirit filled, cross shaped wisdom. A wisdom that will allow us to navigate the mind blowing disorienting complexities of your life and of our world, and to be able to navigate all sorts of different situations.

What I'd like for us to do is read 1 Corinthians 2:6-13, and then give our attention and meditate on how Paul is leading us and calling us to wisdom.

"⁶Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. ⁷But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. ⁸None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹But, as it is written,

*"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the heart of man imagined,
what God has prepared for those who love him"—*

¹⁰these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹²Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. ¹³And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual."

This is the word of the Lord. It's absolutely true, and it's given to us in love.

Would you pray with me?

Our great God and Heavenly Father, Lord, we pray that you would give us the wisdom that Paul speaks of. We long for it. We need it, and you have promised to give it to us. God by the power of your spirit, would you open up our eyes so that we would see, open our ears to hear, open our hearts, so that we would know you and love you

and be your faithful follower showing your love to the world. We pray this all in Jesus' mighty name. Amen.

A few years ago, the New York Times asked readers to dispense wisdom in the form of seven words, Haiku-like poem. This came out during the release of Michael Pollan's book "In Defense of Food," which I did not read because I didn't think food needed defending, but he put on the cover of his book, these words: Eat food, not too much, mostly plants. What the New York Times did was decide, OK, let's get some wisdom in other areas of life following this pattern, and so here's some of the wisdom that they received:

- They got wisdom about family: Call Mom, let her talk, don't argue.
- There's wisdom about finances: Earn 10, only spend nine, happy one.
- Wisdom about relationships: Accept him or dump him. Relationship fixed.
- Wisdom about driving: Drive safely, use turn signals, no gestures.
- Then the last one. This was the winner. Now remember, it was based on the author's: Eat food, not too much, mostly plants. This person wrote: Eight plants, a big heap, still hungry. Which I thought was pretty wise.

Don't you wish giving and receiving wisdom were that easy. I find myself wanting and asking and praying for something called wisdom. I barely even know what that looks like, but I do know that I want wisdom. I'd like it to be given to me preferably in seven words or less, that will clear up for me whatever decisions I have to make, however I have to navigate my life, whatever is going on in my life and in my world. I don't just want wisdom for my life, I want wisdom for you, and for this church. I want us to be people who understand life, who are wise with who we are, and what we have, and what we are to do next and who we are called to be.

Paul, now up until this point, has been really deconstructing wisdom—what he calls wisdom of this age or wisdom of the world. At times, he alludes to something called wisdom of the cross, which to the world is complete folly. In v.6, Paul begins to unpack the kind of wisdom he's been imparting on people and the kind of wisdom that we ought to be pursuing. I want to look at three ways that we are to be pursuing what Paul would call Godly wisdom. First, Godly wisdom seeks the hidden God. Then, Godly wisdom delights in the revealed God. Lastly, Godly wisdom shares in the generous God.

Wisdom That Seeks The Hidden God

First, Godly wisdom seeks the hidden guide. You see this in v.6-8 where Paul once again differentiates the wisdom that he's been imparting in his ministry versus the wisdom of the age. In v.7, he says this, "we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory." When I hear Paul talking about secret and hidden wisdom, I wonder if you're inclined to think something along the lines of like The Da Vinci Code, where Tom Hanks needs to figure out what threatens the very foundation of Christianity in the world, and he's got to uncover the secret and hidden wisdom. Maybe you might be thinking of some secret society of elite Christians who have access to a hidden wisdom, but that's not what Paul's talking about here. What Paul is talking about is the fact that the wisdom of God, and God

himself, is oftentimes hidden from us. This is one of the realities that we experience in life and faith, but notice how he explains this in v.8. He says, “None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”

In other words, the wisdom of God was displayed on the cross, but the rulers and the leaders of the age, they couldn't see it. They couldn't conceive of a crucified God. It made no sense to them, and yet he was right there. Jesus, the Lord of glory was right there, hiding in plain sight. When Paul is talking about the secret and hidden wisdom, he's not suggesting that you somehow are in a cosmic game of hide and seek with God, that he is hiding from you, and he doesn't want to be found, or he doesn't want to be bothered by you. That's not what he's saying. If you open your eyes, you will find the Lord of glory, hiding in plain sight. To be a wise person, to be captivated by the cross of Jesus means that we are to seek after the hidden God. This is really important to understand. God is hidden because our eyes are blind to his power and glory. He's hidden because in our sin and desire to be ruler of our own world. We don't want to see him because to see God at work, to behold him with our eyes of faith is to acknowledge his power and his rule over our lives. That is not something that we naturally desire. That is not something that we naturally seek, so all too often, God remains hidden from us.

Page after page, especially in the gospels, you see this time and time again, the gospel writers kind of screaming out to us as readers, don't miss Jesus. Do you see him? Do you see him? Do you see him as the helpless baby in the manger? That's the King of glory. Don't miss him. Do you see him walking on the dusty road with his disciples with nowhere to lay his head? He's there. Don't miss it. Do you see him eating meals and befriending and healing lepers and tax collectors and prostitutes and sinners? He's there. Don't miss him. And on the cross hanging between two thieves, there he is, where everyone missed him. The religious leaders, the political leaders, they all missed him, but he was there, hiding in plain sight.

The very story of Jesus encourages us that if we're to grow in wisdom, we must be people who seek after the hidden God. I assure you, he is hidden, not because he is hiding from us. He is hidden, because we don't know how to see, and oftentimes we don't know how to acknowledge his power and his presence in our lives. He is hidden from us because we are hiding from him. To seek after him is to look with eyes of faith that God is indeed at work in our world, and he even now is governing and upholding the very world in which we live. The beginning of wisdom is to acknowledge that we are limited in our understanding. In the coldness of our own hearts, we can't see and fully understand the beauty and the wonder of God.

Godly Wisdom Delights In The Revealed God

Wisdom also delights in the revealed God because to say that God has hidden from us is only really part of the story. Paul wants us to see this in v.9-11, where Paul says God has revealed himself through the spirit for those who love him. The beauty of the gospel is that God does not let you hiding from him, keep him from revealing himself to you. While we can't know everything about God, what we can know and what God does reveal to us should be a cause for our joy and our delight. That is what Paul is getting at when he loosely quotes the prophet Isaiah in this passage, “What no eye

has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him.”

Commentators cannot agree on where exactly Paul is getting it. It's kind of a loose translation, a loose interpretation of Isaiah perhaps. Unfortunately, I think because of that, we tend to miss the impact of what Paul is really getting at when he says those words. Paul is saying what God has revealed to us through the Spirit is going to blow you away. The world of grace and renewal of light and life that is being ushered in through Jesus, the world that he does reveal is unlike anything else anyone has ever seen or known. This is the cause and the source of our joy. This is why our worship should be first and foremost marked with joy. This is why when we gather in our Bible Studies, there are always exercises in joy because God has spoken to us through his word, and he is revealing himself to us by his Spirit. This is why when we gather in our Community Groups, we do it with joy because God has given us a community called the church to reveal himself to us and to one another.

Oftentimes we equate wisdom with cynicism. The wise person should be able to see through everything, and therefore believe nothing. For Paul, wisdom and joy and wisdom and awe go hand in hand because to even get a glimpse of what God has done for you, and for the world, is something that leads us to a deep and abiding joy. For many of you, especially those of you who might be walking through a season of grief and sorrow and darkness, or that disorientation that we talked about, and in many ways for all of us, we all want a little bit more. Just a little bit more, or maybe a lot more, of this secret and hidden wisdom that Paul's talking about in the beginning of this passage. We want just a little bit more. We're familiar with the hiddenness of God, and so you're trying to make sense of your life, trying to understand why there is loneliness, why the darkness, why the silence, and if God would just reveal just a little bit more, if he would become just a little bit more real to you, then perhaps you can find some sort of peace. Then maybe you could step out in faith, if you could just get a little more.

I want you to see that the god Paul is introducing us to here is a god who is revealing himself time and time again. It may not be in the way that you want it. It may not be the way you hoped for, but to grow in wisdom is to see that Jesus is closer to you than any darkness you could ever experience or imagine. No matter how dark it gets, no matter the circumstances in your life, the depth of your grief, the intensity of your despair, the extent of your loneliness, you are never alone because this God reveals himself to you and draws close to you by the power of his Spirit. In the same way that the gospel writers are always revealing that God is hiding in plain sight with Jesus, Paul shows us that God is revealing himself to us everywhere and always by the power of his Spirit. Don't miss that God is at work through the people that he has brought to you in your life. Even if the times you find them mildly frustrating. Even if at times they don't know the right words to say. Even if at times they say the exact thing they shouldn't say. Don't miss how God is using people in your life. Don't miss that God is at work with you as you sit with a song in the morning or the or in the evening, hoping just for a glimpse, hoping for God to show up. God is with you in the silence and do not miss the fact that God has promised to be with you here and now. No matter the effectiveness of the sermon, no matter whether the style of worship

resonates with you or not, he has called you here and he is with you now. Wisdom says Godly wisdom learns how to delight in the revealed God. This is the point. This is Paul's point of v.12-13. The Spirit who knows the depth of God is the same spirit now that has been given to us.

Godly Wisdom Shares In The Generous God

True wisdom, it seeks after the hidden God, it delights in the revealed God, but it also shares in the generous God. Did you notice for all this talk of secret and hidden wisdom of God, Paul doesn't want to keep it much of a secret because God doesn't want to keep himself a secret either. In v.12, Paul says that "we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God." The picture here is God day after day freely offering himself, revealing himself to the world. Paul here in many ways is offering a brief summary, a summary of the Psalms, and one in particular: Psalm 19. This is how Psalm 19 opens,

- ¹The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above[a] proclaims his handiwork.
²Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.
³There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.

The remarkable thing about Paul's letter to the Corinthians, and his ministry in general, is that he is never deterred. This church in Corinth that he is writing a letter to is a complete mess. They are divided against each other. They are fighting. They're forming different factions, not long after Paul has left, and he is not deterred. They can throw him in prison, threaten him with death, critique his preaching, belittle his teaching, he's undeterred in his ministry, because Paul knows that he's not sharing his own wisdom, he's offering God's wisdom for the sake of the world. For Paul, wisdom is not something that he has achieved. It is something that has been given to him, and now he offers it to us. You don't earn the wisdom of God. You don't gather enough intellectual capital to achieve this wisdom. God gives it to you freely because he loves you. Wisdom is a gift that he gives because God is a generous God. Paul knew and believed that no matter his predicament, no matter how dark things would get for him, God is generous with his very self, with his son, and with his spirit. Because of that, Paul knew that he would have exactly what he needed at exactly the right time. So often, we rely on our own power, our own intellect, and our own ability to navigate through any myriad of circumstances that we face, but Paul here is inviting us to receive God's wisdom—the wisdom of the cross that tells us that God in his son, Jesus, has come to overthrow the powers of the world, even sin and death itself.

While some of you might find it frustrating to live with the hiddenness of God, and you're longing for more, longing to just see another small piece of the puzzle in your life, so that you can make sense of it. There are others of you, no doubt, who are far more comfortable with the distant relationship that you have with God. Maybe you've given up on hoping and longing for God to show up. In other words, you've grown far more comfortable with cynicism, than with awe, and far more comfortable with

skepticism than with joy, and wisdom for you means just keeping God at arm's length. Let me encourage you: Do not miss the generosity of God. Do not miss the one who calls to you, who reveals himself to you day after day and does so for your glory for your good because he loves you. He never tires. He never grows weary, and he does not hide. The very life and death and resurrection of Jesus is evidence in this. It is this wisdom that we are to seek, and it is this wisdom, not our own wisdom that we need to hear from one another, that our friends and our neighbors so desperately need to hear from us as well.

This wisdom is going to sound like foolishness. The wisdom we carry in our hearts that we proclaim with our lips is wisdom that is not going to get you to the top of any sort of social ladder. It is not going to make you popular in your social groups. It is not going to get you a seat at the table of power and influence in any of your spheres of vocation and calling. Make no mistake, the wisdom that Paul talks about, the wisdom that we are talking about, the wisdom of the cross, is the wisdom that changes the world. Paul is saying that God has freely given us that wisdom, so that we now with great humility, and great hope, can share this wisdom with the world. This is the wisdom that you and I so desperately need to hear from one another. This is the wisdom that your neighbors longed to hear. This is the wisdom that the world is hungry for. It is the wisdom of the cross, but this is the wisdom of hope that will bring renewal to a world that so desperately needs it. God gave us the courage and the hope to reclaim this wisdom.

Let's pray.

Our great God and Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are a generous God that so freely gives us what we so desperately need, Lord. We need this wisdom. We need to see and experience your power and presence in our lives. We confess to you that so oftentimes, we are the ones that are hiding from you, that you are not hiding from us. Lord, I pray that you would make us the people who seek after you, who learn to see you at work in the lives of one another in our world, who learn to see you by the power of your spirit through your word, who now will see you at this table as you feed us and nourish us. We pray this all in Jesus' name. Amen.