

## The Summer Soul: Jesus, the Wisdom of God

9-10-17

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5



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**Reflection questions...** [please consider the teaching notes, first, as a basis of your reflections]

*“How do you hear the human desire to ‘live well’ being reflected in your conversations with others? What are some of the determinations being proposed? What are some of the proposed means of ‘living the good life’?”*

*“As you attempt to make sense of your world, your life, your God (which is what we identify as our, ‘paradigm’, or our ‘worldview’), how have you found it helpful to begin with God and not your circumstances? What are some of the inherent challenges to attempting to interpret God based on our circumstances, versus allowing God to introduce himself to us?”*

● I found many parallels between the wisdom of Job and the life of Jesus [you could explore them more fully together]:

Both stories had a cosmic setting and cosmic implications. There was more going on than we were aware [Ephesians 1:4].

The wisdom of God was being challenged by the presumptions of evil [Matthew 4].

There was, amongst both accounts, a God-forsakenness to the tone [Matthew 27].

God was speaking, attempting to clarify himself, amidst all of the human assumptions and evaluations [Hebrews 1].

The purposes of God were wrapped up (gathered up within) the seeming tragedy [Isaiah 53].

Both involved the humility of surrender (“I have spoken of things I didn’t know”. “Father, into your hands I commit myself...” Luke 23].

Both were, in the final analysis, vindicated (proven to be in the right) [Romans 3].

The blessing of God ultimately overcame the curse. Loss resulted in gain--- blessing becoming even more expansive [Hebrews 2 and 12].

*“Where are you? Did you eat from the tree? Who told you that you were naked? How do you hear those lines: the gentle and loving invitation for self-reflection and vulnerability, or the harsh and corrective accusations of a scorned deity?”*

*“Do you see the cross as God’s anger being directed at you or his love being demonstrated for you? Do you see it as something Jesus did because of you or for you?”*

*“What story is your life currently telling? Imagine that you could re-tell your story in light of the cross? Does God end up as the ‘antagonist’ or the ‘protagonist’? Could you imagine a scenario in which God could take even the most painful and self-destructive parts of your story and sum them up for a different outcome?”*

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## Teaching Notes...

The ancient writings we possess, both biblical and extra-biblical, were primarily concerned with the question: *“What does it mean to live well? To have the best possible experience of life? To live well?”*

Proverbs personified lady wisdom as the “architect” that was working alongside God before and in creation (8:22-23; 30-31). The architect meets with the builder and gets a sense of their vision for the structure, then designs something which will functionally serve the intent and purpose of the structure; something which will help the builder realize their dream.

### **Wisdom literature offers us a glimpse of what we were meant to be and the kind of life that we were meant to experience.**

Jesus offered his manifesto on wisdom in Matthew 5-7, summarized in a single, repeated expression: *“blessed”*. Blessing, as *the ‘good that someone has decreed in order to cause one to flourish’; ‘the reason for everything’*.

### **There is a dimension of wisdom that is available to us--- that is ‘trusted’--- and there is a dimension of wisdom that you simply have to ‘trust’.**

With wisdom, it appears that we are left with enough information/experience to be able to connect our heart, our choices, and the quality of life that we realize but, beyond that, life is not formulaic or scripted and we are being called upon, at any number of intersections, to trust in the nature and character of God, despite the presence of some pretty conflicting evidence.

Paul, in today’s text, says that Jesus *is* the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24, 30); that *“... in him lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”* (Colossians 2).

### **Wisdom says we don’t start with our lives (our reality), then work backward toward God, adapting him to fit our paradigm. We begin (and end) with God, adjusting and re-orienting our lives around/toward him.**

The process typically looks like this:

**experience** → **interpret** (paradigm) → **respond**, based on conclusions.

Christianity says:

**revelation** (God reveals the way things are) → **lens through which we interpret our experiences** → **we respond, faith-fully** [believing that those instances, taken in isolation, are confusing, but collectively and sovereignly are somehow being woven together for our good.]

*“Jews demand a sign. Greeks seek wisdom. We preach Christ crucified.”*

What the Jews want, Paul says, we can’t give them. They were looking for a nationalistic King who could speak the only language that violent oppressors know: **violence**. They were looking for a someone who could confront the powers, get the (10) commandments back on the walls of the county building, and *“Make Israel Great Again.”*

Any talk of a pacifist Messiah who encouraged his followers to love and pray for their enemies, carry their backpack to work, and had an entourage filled with the lame, the lost, and the losers, was categorically rejected.

What we do have, Paul says in addition, the Greeks don't want because it's nonsense.

In the first century, there was a growing movement in the Greco-Roman culture known as, "*Sophistry*" (Sophists). From the Greek, "*sophia*"... wisdom.

The Greeks believed that if we could somehow distance ourselves from the ignorance of all of the "**God-talk**", we could leverage all of the human resources available to us, and make God virtually unnecessary. Obviously, "*Amazon*" would have to get involved.

Most Greek philosophy held that the first characteristic of God was his inability to be authentically impacted by the human condition. There was no room in their debate for a God who grieved over human lostness (Matthew 9:36) or who cried when other humans died (John 11:35), not to mention talk of a God who would actually give up his own life for the well-being of one of his creation.

### **"Christ-crucified". It was an oxymoron.**

*Low fat muffins. Legally drunk. Computer security. Half-calf.*

Paul says that what we do have is a really compelling, albeit mysterious, God-Story. One which disregards our demands for irrefutable evidence and one which fails to satisfy us, intellectually, but one that resonates with our hearts.

What was even more surprising? People believed him. Those who initially heard what Jesus was offering--- a place to belong, an identity in something other than their sickness or their addiction or their abuse, a sense of worth beyond what they had to contribute, life with a God who was 'for them' and 'with them'--- sounded so foolish, but too foolishly good to pass up!

*"Christianity is a religion you could not have guessed... in fact, it is not the sort of thing anyone would have made up."* C.S. Lewis (Mere Christianity)

There's a unique advantage to telling such a foolish story: 1) there's absolutely no reason to assume that anyone will come to trust this story based on our exacting presentation. If a person hears this message, and believes it, it will be the work of the Spirit of God, not my own convincing presentation (that doesn't preclude us from being able to share the story intelligently and reasonably: 1 Peter 3:15), 2) there is no reason for offering a 'revisionist' version of the story in order to make it more believable or to bolster God's approval ratings, 3) the quality of the seed is never in question, despite the soil conditions (Mark 4). It will land on some good soil, but without me, first, doing a feasibility study or taking a soil sample.

### **The "Fall" did not cause God to re-evaluate his posture toward us, nor alter his intentions for us.**

Experiencing good and evil for themselves--- the self-directed life--- did not prove as satisfying for Adam and Eve as they had anticipated. In fact, it created within them this gnawing sense of "shame" and "fear" that sent them running for the bushes. God's response?

**The cross was not God's need to satisfy himself at Jesus' expense, but to satisfy our need at his own expense.**

If I conclude that God needed to kill his son in order to even tolerate me, how likely am I to pursue the intimate relationship with him that he desires?

Paul says that he [God] is *"just and the one who justifies the ungodly"* (Romans 4:5)

**What sort of God justifies the ungodly? Wouldn't he be more respected if he were to reward the meticulous rule-keepers?**

It says that God is free to love and restore whomever he pleases--- *"whoever calls upon him"* (Romans 10:13) despite our apparent lack of virtue and our failed attempts at self-imposed goodness.

Ephesians 1:9-10

*"And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment--to bring all things ('summing up of all things') in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ."*

**"summing up"** (Gr.)- "gather together"; "sum up"; "recapitulate (retell)"; "adding of a list of figures." Paul is saying that, *"It all adds up in Christ", and "It all adds up to Christ"*.

**Jesus seemed to think evil was real and an obstacle to the fulfillment of his good purposes for the world. It cannot be tolerated or domesticated. It must be eliminated.**

John 10:10: **"destroy"**- lit. *'to ruin; render useless*. This word suggests a defacing of God's good creation which was meant to reflect him as the Creator and bring glory (rightful attention) to him.

**"death"**- is not necessarily just some arbitrary punishment for sin, but the consequence of turning away from life... from God, the source of life.

**A summation of Jesus' mission?**

1 John 3:8 *"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work."*

If God is love, and Jesus came to reveal to us most fully who God is, then the cross is precisely the kind of thing we should expect from God. It says that Jesus did not die "for our sins" **in spite of the fact** that he was God, but **because of the fact** that he was God.

Romans 5:6-8 *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us [1 John 4:9-10].*

**Our dilemma, our identity, and the God we desire are all disclosed (embodied) in Jesus... in the cross.**

**Dilemma:** In some very real way, every word, every action of Jesus is an indictment on all of the ways that we have *"fallen short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23); all of the ways that we have failed to live into the dream of God and, as a result, have abused each other and all of creation.

**Identity:** Jesus embodies for us the humans that we were always meant to be. He comes to "fulfill" all that God had in mind for us. He loves God wholly (heart, soul, mind, strength) and then portrays how that love is meant to characterize and transform all of our relationships by loving others as his loved himself.

**God:** Jesus puts a name and a face to God. “Father”: it’s not simply a means of addressing God, but our posture toward him. Jesus so beautifully portrays for us a God who is both “sovereign” and “gracious”. Who can do anything he pleases and, according to Paul, God decided to bring us to himself and make us part of his family through Jesus... *“that’s what he wanted to do and it gave him great pleasure”* (Ephesians 1:5).

Before we have any explanations or any theories we have Jesus. His life, his death, his resurrection. He entered the scene speaking and acting as if God’s new world had arrived; that whatever God was up to in recovering and restoring all that had gone wrong in his good world was now coming to fulfillment in him. The Kingdom was here. The Kingdom was available to all who would willingly abandon their own self-directed lives for something more robust and healing.

He did it all in the context of the “backstory” of the cosmic struggle against “evil”. Paul would conclude that what Jesus accomplished at the cross was nothing short of the once-for-all-defeat of evil and that he “made peace with everything in heaven and on earth through his death on the cross” (Colossians 1).

**If we are paying attention, the events of the cross and the resurrection are the Exodus and the Exile being played out in “cosmic-3-D”. The ‘rescue’ and the ‘restoration’. The ‘displacement’ and the ‘return’.**

### **Wisdom...**

▶ God has promised that he will restore all of creation so that it will one day become all that it is presently “groaning” to be.

▶ God has made possible, through Jesus, a new way to turn toward (return to) Father, in deference and trust; to turn toward one another, in compassionate care; to turn toward created order, in attentive stewardship.

“New Creation”.

▶ God has made possible a way to live “normally” in an “abnormal” world. He has inaugurated his Kingdom in, with, and among us so that we might experience a sampling of a world set right, in the here and now.