

JESUS: WISDOM AND THE WORD

One of the highest goals of philosophers down through the ages has been to understand the nature of wisdom, what it is, and how one can come by it. Of all the virtues—moral purity, justice, knowledge, love—wisdom has been the most elusive. In fact, from the birth of philosophy 2300 years ago, philosophers have been unable to agree on what wisdom *is*—let alone how it can be attained.

For Plato, wisdom was something we were born with—something hidden deep down inside of us—something that had to be brought out by persistent study and meditation. Once it appeared, he believed wisdom showed itself in a love for justice.

Aristotle thought that wisdom came from applying the power of reason to the study of nature. For Aristotle, wisdom was synonymous with truth.

For Descartes, wisdom was a product of logical deduction from self-evident principles. His famous assertion that, *“I think, therefore I am,”* is an example of Cartesian wisdom.

For Francis Bacon wisdom was the product of inductive reasoning from particular observations to general conclusions. It’s why Bacon is often called the father of the scientific method.

But after all is said and done there is still no agreement among philosophers as to what wisdom actually is. It’s interesting that science, which relies upon human reason, has reached ever-greater degrees of agreement and certainty among scientists in regard to their understanding of the universe, while philosophy, using the same power of reason, has produced increasing disagreement and uncertainty among philosophers. The difference is that science concerns itself with physical creation, which can be observed, measured and experimented with while philosophy concerns itself with things that cannot be observed, measured or experimented with. The bottom line is that after 2300 years, wisdom remains a mystery to philosophers.

Another subject that has fascinated philosophers is the existence and nature of God. From Plato to Descartes to Kant to Hegel philosophers have based their philosophies on the assumption that there is such a thing as God and they have made the knowledge of Him the object of their search. The idea of there being no God at all did not emerge as a serious consideration of philosophers until the late 19th Century when a German philosopher by the name of Fredrich Nietzsche famously declared that “God is dead” as he was dying in an insane asylum. In spite of all their efforts, however, philosophers have been unable to agree upon who or what God is. What we can conclude from this is that God lies beyond the human power of reason. Therefore, all we can know about God is what God chooses to reveal to us.

In other words, philosophy has to turn to theology for the answers to two of its ultimate questions, because theology is the study of God and the wisdom He has chosen to reveal to us. And both God and His wisdom are revealed in one place: the Holy Scriptures

Now the basic message of the Holy Scriptures is very simple: it tells us how God created us, how He gave us one simple rule to live by, how we rebelled against that rule and brought sin and death into the world, and how He sent a Savior to pay for our sins and restore us to eternal life. The *Old Testament* contains the promise of this Savior along with many prophecies about him: where He would come from, what He would do when He came and how what He would do would atone for all our sins and give us eternal life. The *New Testament* proclaims the arrival of this Savior, Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God and Savior of mankind.

Two Scriptures in your bulletins this morning—the *Old Testament* lesson and the Gospel—tell us what philosophers have been searching for down through the ages: what wisdom is and Who God is.

The passage from *Proverbs* summarizes the wisdom teaching of the *Old Testament* and it is from it that we learn that wisdom is not a “what” but a “who.” Wisdom is the eternal Son of God: the prophesied, crucified and risen Jesus Christ. Listen to these strange and marvelous words spoken by the person Wisdom: *“The Lord brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began... Then I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind. Now then, my sons, listen to me; blessed are those who keep my ways. Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not ignore it. Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my doors.... For whoever finds me finds life and receives favor from the Lord. But whoever fails to find me harms himself; all who hate me love death.”* (*Proverbs 8:22-36*).

This is the voice of Wisdom, speaking from eternity. He was given birth before time itself began. He was the craftsman, the architect and creator of the universe. He delights in His creation and rejoices in mankind. Finally, He announces that whoever finds Him finds life and the Lord’s favor, while all who reject Him, find death. So it turns out that Wisdom is neither a philosophical system nor a logical argument; it is neither a moral code nor a body of knowledge. Wisdom is the eternal Son of God who loves mankind and wants us to find Him so that we can have eternal life.

And how does Wisdom—the Son of God—come to us? Our Gospel lesson tells us that He came as the Word of God made flesh in the Babe of Bethlehem.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made: without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life and that life was the light of men.” (*John 1:1-4*)

Notice how the Gospel passage matches the *Proverb* point by point: Both Wisdom and the Word were with God at the beginning. Both Wisdom and the Word created all things that have been created. Only in Wisdom and the Word can one have life and favor from God. But beneath the superficial complexity of these passages there is a message which is beautifully simple and clear and which brings joy and confidence to all believing hearts. God’s attitude toward us, His creatures, is one of love and delight. He wishes for us all to be saved from the individual and collective sins which entrap us daily. Therefore He has taken action to rescue

us from these sins by sending His Son—His Wisdom and His Word—into the world to free us from slavery to our sins, to call us out of darkness into His marvelous light!

It has never been said better than in the message from the angels to the shepherds: *“I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today, in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ, the Lord.”* (Luke 2:10-11)

It is a message so simple that it can be understood by the smallest child, yet so profound that it has overwhelmed the greatest intellects of history. *“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”* (John 3:16)

Will you pray with me? Father in heaven, thank you for revealing your wisdom to us through your Son, Jesus Christ, the Word of life, Who alone gives us the words of eternal life. As we conclude this Advent season, help us to receive Him once again into our hearts and minds, not only as Your Wisdom and Word, but as our Savior. Amen.

Proverbs 8:22-36

“The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; I was formed long ages ago, at the very beginning, when the world came to be.

When there were no watery depths, I was given birth, when there were no springs overflowing with water;

before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was given birth, before he made the world or its fields or any of the dust of the earth. I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, when he established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, when he gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep his command, and when he marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was constantly at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind. “Now then, my children listen to me; blessed are those who keep my ways. Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not disregard it. Blessed are those who listen to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway. For those who find me find life and receive favor from the LORD. But those who fail to find me harm themselves; all who hate me love death.”

1 Corinthians 1:18-25; 2:6-16

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.” Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human

strength... We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived" the things God has prepared for those who love him— these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, for, "Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? "But we have the mind of Christ.

John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe.

He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' ") Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.