

Finding Wisdom in Christ

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[0 : 00] We're still in our series in Ecclesiastes, deep in Ecclesiastes, and we're looking at finding wisdom in Christ, finding wisdom in Christ. Now, I don't know about you, but do you ever feel so frustrated with the world around you that you just feel like giving up?

That the problems we face are endless, and no matter how hard we try to understand it or fix it, this thing that we want, peace, you name it, happiness, rest, rest, and it's just beyond our grasp. Now, I've got definitive proof of how bad the world is because I just look at my laundry basket, and I just don't understand.

It never gets empty. Now, I live by myself. I can just imagine a household with a couple of kids, what that looks like. But the problem is worse because, for some reason, socks go missing. And so I've started a little container with a sock that goes missing. You can't find the partner, so there's one container with missing socks. I now have three containers of missing socks, and it just gets worse.

[1 : 20] Well, if you feel like this, you can extrapolate that to the situation in our lives. There's many here who are struggling and feel like on the edge, don't understand how this whole thing works, and desperately need some wisdom, some help to make it through life.

But you're not alone, and many pop singers share our pain. If you believe their songs. You've got Queen's, I want to break free.

Desperate. Well, he wanted to break free of certain rules that didn't help him. Freddie Mercury. What about U2's, I still haven't found what I'm looking for? Looking for love, looking for Christ. U2 is a Christian band, is a Christian band in some sense. Still can't find what they're looking for. Beautiful song from the, ooh, probably the 80s. So I'm dating myself there, but if you think that dates me, how about this rousing hit from the 1300s?

Now, I've translated it into English. You might know, it's Karl Orff's Camino Burana, O Fortuna.

[2 : 36] Again, I'm going to date me, the old spice ad. Yeah. Do they still exist? O Fortune.

It's a hit from the 1300s, believe it or not. It was written by monks, but to, going back to ancient Roman times, to the Roman god Fortune, is a goddess.

And she was a real goddess in the way that they thought, and she ruled people's lives. And Fortune, O Fortuna, an English translation, an English translation of Fortuna, fortune is chance. She's known as the one that rules the world. O Fortune, like the moon, you are changeable, ever waxing, ever waning. Hateful life, first oppresses, and then soothes, as fancy takes it.

Monstrous fate, empty, whirling wheel, you are malevolent. Well-being is vain, and always fades to nothing.

[3 : 49] Fate is against me, since fate strikes down the strong man. And the conclusion, everyone, weep with me.

That doesn't sound like someone who's got hope. It sounds like someone who's really frustrated with the world. Without God in our lives, that's exactly how people experience life.

Now, in our passage today, Solomon is looking at the world that is full of things that don't work out. And he's deeply frustrated by the limits of wisdom. To be sure, wisdom can help, and it does help, but woven into this chapter 7, in fact, throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, is a critique that in the end, wisdom, on its own, doesn't really help.

And this, by the wisest man of his day. We could also be struck in this frustrated world trying to work it all out.

Sorry, stuck in this frustrated world trying to work it all out. Except for one person who's wiser than Solomon. We've been singing about him all morning. But for Jesus, who brings a wisdom that totally changes everything about how we live in a broken world.

[5 : 11] Before we get to Jesus, let's first see how Solomon fares with his wisdom as a guide to living in a broken world in chapter 7. And so, we'll see that Solomon's wisdom is helpful, but not enough.

Solomon's wisdom is helpful, but not enough. That's because his wisdom is easy to lose and it's hard to find. It's easy to lose and hard to find.

It seems fragile, breakable, not strong enough to keep the frustrations of a broken world at bay. Now, there is some things that Solomon's wisdom helps with. Now, we didn't read the whole chapter.

The whole chapter was, we're looking at the whole chapter. So, I'm just going to take us through a few verses from before we read from verse 13. And one of the things that Solomon sees is that death is helpful to teach us about life.

Death is helpful to teach us about life. So, I'm just going to read from the New Living Translation of verse 2 and verse 4. Yours might say, I'm reading, let me read from the NIV.

[6 : 15] It's better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting for death is the destiny of every man. The living should take this to heart. And he goes on in verse 4, the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning but the heart of fools in the house of pleasure.

It sounds very similar to that O Fortuna song. The New Living Translation says, better to spend your time at funerals than at parties. After all, everyone dies.

So, if you want to spend time with people, go to where they're going to not be anymore. And he says, so the living should take heart. And in verse 4, a wise person thinks a lot about death while a fool thinks only about having a good time.

So, wisdom, ironically, and gladness can come from contemplating death and sadness. Sounds wrong. Sounds like the wrong way around but it's true.

We've experienced that at St. Mark's. Over the years, we've seen a number of people return to God in a new, revitalized way following the death of a family member or a friend. But the problem in Ecclesiastes is that there's not a lot of hope after death.

[7 : 34] Death brings release but it doesn't bring any real hope. When you read through Ecclesiastes, we'll get to a portion later where death is looked at. We've looked at it already in some of our chapters.

He says, we don't know what happens after death. We're not sure what happens. Are we like the animals? Are we any different? Remember Solomon in all his wisdom is looking at life under the sun as it appears to him on planet earth.

Because from that perspective there's nothing to look forward to after death. Solomon's wisdom in this chapter begins to unravel fairly quickly. The center of Solomon's problem is twofold.

Firstly, that God has made the world this way. God has made it frustrating. And so without God doing something about it, it's impossible to fix.

Have a look at verse 13 and 14. Consider what God has done. Consider what God has done.

[8 : 34] Who can straighten what he has made crooked. Talking about the world. Talking about the things that Solomon is facing. The questions. The problems.

It's God that made the world this way. Crooked. Not straight. Difficult. Easy to trip up. Hard. Not fun. Not nice. Not easy. But, verse 14, when, hey, when times are good, be happy. When times are bad, think about this.

God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, no one can discover anything about their future. So the world is crooked, but it's set that way by God and there's this pull and push situation going on.

Happy times, good times, you can be happy. Prosperous times, you can be happy. But when bad times come, just think. God has made both. That takes a lot of thought to think through now.

[9 : 38] How do we resolve these problems that we face? What is the hope there? What are we hoping for? I'm going to set that question aside. We'll answer it later.

So the world is crooked and then Solomon goes, he keeps looking around him and he says, okay, well what about people? Maybe there's people that can help me. And he says, no. He finds that people are as crooked as the world.

So verse 20, and the end of our chapter, verse 29. So verse 20, surely he says, there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.

Solomon is a wise one. He's not without sin. He's tasted things that he shouldn't taste and done things that he shouldn't have done. And in verse 29, see this alone, I found that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.

Hmm. Schemes. Crafty little plans. Now these are the schemes that the world tries to enact, to live out, to alleviate the pain of living in a broken world.

[10:56] But we do that out of our own broken wisdom. That kind of language takes us all the way back to Genesis 3, when a crafty little snake put an idea into man's head that he knew how to live life.

He didn't need wisdom from God, he needed wisdom from the creature that crawls on its belly. And that caused all kinds of problems in our world.

And when we find that we operate from our own broken ideas, our own broken wisdom, our own unrighteousness, our own sins, instead of fixing the problems of the world, we make it worse.

We end up hurting people. And in this chapter, I just want to bring to your attention three things, because we're going to look at them later as well. Well, we hurt people through oppression, we hurt people through anger, and we hurt people through cowardly retreat into just wishful thinking.

We just, oh, we, we call time and we blurt out of taking part of society. So, we hurt others through oppression.

[12:12] Verse 7, extortion or oppression turns a wise man into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart.

Then verse 9, anger. Don't be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools. or verse 10.

Don't say, why were the old days better than these? Well, he's not wise, or it's foolish to ask such questions. And that's why Solomon concludes this whole chapter that real wisdom is hard to find. It's quick to lose and hard to find. I'm just going to read verse 23 and 24. Solomon's looking around, looking for anything that's going to help him.

He says, all these, all these things I've tested by wisdom. I said, I will be wise, but it was far from me.

[13:19] That which has been is far off and deep, very deep. Who can find it out? Now, something, a few things for us to think about. If Solomon, the wisest person in human history up to that point, can't figure it out, why do we try the very same things he says doesn't work?

Doesn't make any sense. Oppression. Another way of looking at oppression is whether it's overreaching your boundaries to control others' behavior or responses.

you don't like what they're doing and so you try somehow to manipulate the situation to your comfort so that you can win or seem or feel to be winning.

we're guilty at least of one of these broken coping mechanisms, overreaching our boundaries, trying to control, trying to oppress, trying to rule over, maybe getting angry.

It's, eee, there's no one sitting here who hasn't gotten angry too quickly, too easily, too frustrated when things don't go our way. None of us here is not guilty of getting angry and hurting someone with our words or worse, with our fists or hands.

[14:39] or other objects. One other option, a broken coping mechanism, simply withdraw into a fantasy world.

Think about the past that's better than the present. It's very easy to do that in South Africa, isn't it? It's a real temptation to many in South Africa at the current time. But you can withdraw from the real world and many withdraw into a world of books, into a world of gaming, into a world of Netflix rather than dealing with the real world.

And so wisdom has its limits here. It's easy to lose and it's hard to find because God has set this world to sort of broken mode. It's a big surprise. Why has he done that?

But the problem is that broken people can't fix a broken world. And that's why the answer to living wisely in a broken world is not found in Ecclesiastes.

It's not found in the wisest person living up until that stage. He himself says, I don't know what to do here. I'm lost. I've tried everything and I can't make it work. And if he can't do it, there's no ways we can do it.

[15:59] But, this is where we've got to go to the New Testament. This is where we've got to go to Christ. This is where we've got to go to the Gospel that changes everything.

And it has all to do with Christ's death and resurrection. So I'm going to look at two things. Firstly, the Gospel says, yes, this world is frustrated by God and full of death. But because of Christ, death is not the end.

It actually can be full of life. And secondly, the Gospel says, yes, we're living in a broken world. But because of Christ, we can be fixed and gain access to the wisdom of Christ that is both easy to keep and hard to lose.

The very opposite of what we find here in Ecclesiastes. And so let's look first of all at the wisdom of God in freeing the world from frustration. God freeing the world from frustration.

So the Gospel says the world is frustrated by God and full of death, but because of Christ it doesn't end in death. Turn with me to Romans chapter 8.

[17:21] Romans chapter 8. I'm going to read a few verses from verse 18. It sounds very similar to what we find in Ecclesiastes, but with a very important difference.

I consider, Paul says, that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us talking about Christians. For, because, the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.

Because, for, the creation was subjected to frustration. And not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

So, friends, God knows our frustrations. He's the one that set the world this way. When you're feeling, when you're experiencing broken world, it's not out of God's control. As difficult as it is for us to understand why it is that God has made the world this way, actually, these verses tell us why, it helps us to know that God knows that we're living in a frustrated world.

And he made this world frustrated. He subjected it to frustration, not because he wanted to, but in response to the sin of man that demanded the death penalty.

[19:06] And so he introduced death into the world. But the gospel declares that God is not going to let death continue and let the world stay in the state of frustration or death forever.

There's a time coming when the entire world, every experience that we will ever have will be free from frustration and sin and brokenness.

Because we ourselves will be free from those things. Good verse 21 again.

Creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

What exactly does that mean? Well, Paul tells us in verse 23. I'll pick it up in verse 22 actually. He says, we know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

[20:12] So, this is an ancient narrative of the scriptures that there's something wrong with the world. It's not a, not abnormal to struggle through life.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning. Creation has been groaning. What about us as Christians? Verse 22. Well, not only so, but we ourselves, Christians, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, this new life, grown inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoptions as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

And so, the thing that releases this world, this cycle of prosperity and up and down, losing everything, gaining everything, not knowing how everything works, the thing that breaks that cycle, is our resurrection, but our resurrection is only possible because of Christ's resurrection.

Proof of this, that death doesn't get the last word, is Christ's resurrection from the dead, which is promised to us if we trust in Him. And Christ's resurrection changes everything, gives us the power we need to live patiently, here in Romans 8, and cope with suffering while we wait for the redemption of our bodies.

I'm not saying it's easy, suffering is hard, but it doesn't have the final say, so we've got hope, and our hope is in Christ's resurrection and our resurrection.

[21:52] But what if you don't have that hope? What if you don't have God or Christ? Well then, you don't have any hope beyond this life, beyond the end of your life, which makes your life totally meaningless and of the highest order of frustration.

Imagine going through the whole of life, struggling like we all do, and then the end of it is, well, you've just, you've gone, it's all gone. No wonder people talk about life as a cosmic joke, if you're an atheist or an agnostic.

It was all for nothing. Yes, living in this world is frustrating, yes, there's groaning, but friends, it's for a short time. Our lives don't end in death, our lives end in life, but only if you trust Christ and have Him as your living hope.

So we need to hold on to the wisdom of God that frees the world from frustration through Christ's resurrection and later on to our resurrection. God is going to fix the world.

And not only that, in Christ, He is busy fixing us, so our resurrection, our physical resurrection is going to take place in the future, after we die. But what about now?

[23 : 14] Well, we've already got new life if you're a Christian. We've already got a resurrection. He's fixing us so that we can live with wisdom in a broken world and not be overcome by it.

So we want to turn to the wisdom of Christ that can change our situation. The wisdom of Christ that can change our situation. And so, the Gospel says, yes, we're broken, but because of Christ we can be fixed and gain access to the wisdom that Christ has that is both easy to keep and hard to lose.

So Solomon's wisdom is hard to keep and easy to lose because the world is overwhelming. There's no hope. Christ's wisdom is easy to keep and hard to lose.

Now many see Christ as a wise teacher in this world. They like his teaching, but they miss the most crucial part of who Jesus is. He came to show us the wisdom of God not just in his life, but in his death.

So turn with me to 1 Corinthians 1, the passage we read earlier. 1 Corinthians 1.

[24 : 32] Just need a drink. Paul writes, verse 22, Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, which is 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 Christ, the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

So God has done this amazing thing where he takes the most foolish thing that can happen to a human to the savior of the world, to the one that's going to change the world.

He takes the worst thing that can happen to him and he puts him on a Roman cross. And the gospel does this amazing change, this miraculous change, and says the weakest, most foolish thing that can happen to someone is the strongest, most wise thing.

It's an upside-down wisdom. It's only as you think about how Jesus' death is the wisdom of God that you'll begin to make sense of the world and be less frustrated in your life.

[25 : 54] Why is that? Because it's at the cross that the problem of sin, your sin, my sin, is sorted out. It's that sin that constantly drives a man to think of himself more highly than he should, to think that he knows how life can work, to live life in his own wisdom, in his own way, and to make him think he can work out life, how life works and how life is meant to work.

But we use that to avoid pain and to make ourselves happy. The wisdom of the cross totally undermines all of that and says you can't work it out.

The only wisdom you need is to trust in the death of Christ because that wisdom is easy to keep because it's simple trust, simple trust.

but Jesus says to trust him like a child trusts their father. We don't need to work it all out. We don't need to know the details of why God is letting bad things happen.

He's told us it'll be frustrating and we know that he knows and he's infinitely more frustrated than we are with how the world is going and so he's going to bring bad things to a swift end.

[27 : 18] but it takes childlike faith trusting that God is more wise than us by Christ dying so that he can change us because it doesn't look like that's wisdom.

That looks like failure but in God's wisdom that's success. So do you trust in this wisdom?

In the foolishness of the cross that death brings life? That Christ's death gives you life? That the harm that your sinful schemes have caused in the world around you, the chaos that you yourself have caused, the pain and the hurt, that that's all been paid for?

That you're free then to live a life of simple trust and simple obedience. We don't need to work out the details. Solomon was trying to work out all the details.

Too many of us are still trying to work out the details. You don't need to if you trust in Christ and the cross. We don't need all the answers. You can trust that God is working out all the answers even while you are frustrated in the chaos.

[28 : 31] Now when you live like this, this kind of trust, what you'll find, you should find, think about your life now. If you say you trust in Christ and that this wisdom that Christ has got, that the cross is the wisdom, the power of God to change the world, to change you, think about your life now.

Do you find that you're less angry with situations that you can't fix? Are you more at peace within yourself? Are you better at giving off peace to those around you? Do you spend less time pining for the past in frozen indecision, not knowing where to go, but knowing that you don't want to be here in the present?

Do you find that you're spurred on to taking more action in the present? you should find that you're making fewer schemes, fewer plans, bad plans to take away pain or secure success.

That you've got more acceptance through the pain that God is using it for healing. That's where the wisdom of the cross comes in. He kills Christ so that you can have life.

He harms Jesus so we can be healed. Christ comes down so that we can go up. Christ dies so that we can live. And if that's happened to him, it's going to happen to us.

[30 : 01] But we've now got the power of Christ in us and we can endure it knowing that it's going to do the same thing for others as what Christ has done for us. not because of us but of Christ working through us.

You get a deep understanding that death is part of life but because of the cross that death is not the end of life. And your deep dread, your deep anxiety can be replaced by a deep and fierce joy both in the life that you've got now and also knowing that you're going to have eons more time in life to come in the future.

It'll spur you on not to give up hope. Not giving in to your fears. Yeah, it'll look a lot like struggling every day, day by day, through the pain, through the confusion.

But always with Christ with you. Christ for you. Christ in you. Christ carrying you. Never letting you go. Living a life that showcases not your strength but His.

Not your wisdom but His wisdom. And so the only way to live in a broken world is not through your own self-generated wisdom but through Christ living in you. And so friends, we want you to know that and to take this on board and to remind yourselves that yes, we're living in a broken world.

[31 : 24] I need wisdom to handle this broken world. but the wisdom we need is Christ's wisdom, this wisdom of the cross that turns everything upside down and the promise of a future hope that makes everything worth going through.

Knowing that it doesn't last, that it's for our good and for the good of others and build God's kingdom. Christ living in you will help you through all the ups and downs of life.

Let me pray for us. Lord, we've looked at Your Word and we've seen how Solomon is so frustrated with this world and He had mountains more wisdom than we've got here in our own capacity and yet, Lord, in Your plan, You've given us who have the least wisdom the most wisdom because You've given us Christ.

Yes, we don't know the details but if we trust Him, Lord, we know that nothing can really harm us. Nothing can separate us from Your love and nothing can stop us from trusting You and obeying You and doing good.

Lord, we need Your help so badly to do this well. We do it very badly on our own power and so empower us, Father, by Your Spirit, by the blood of Christ, by Christ our King to live lives that are wise and good and hopeful in a world that is broken and needs it from us.

[33 : 15] In Christ's name we pray. Amen.