

Wisdom Sees The Lord (Ecclesiastes 7:15-29) 26 April '15

We are continuing our study in the book of Ecclesiastes. It's a series called "Life Under the Sun", and in particular today, we are looking at Ecclesiastes chapter 7 and verses 15 all the way to 29. You may want to flip there, have a very quick glance at the verses before you, because this is not an easy chapter. This is not an easy passage of Scripture, but I think it is so needful.

You see, Solomon in Ecclesiastes is now teaching us wisdom-wisdom for life. And wisdom is absolutely necessary for life because life is not simple, it is not simplistic, it is not always one plus one equals to two. There are perplexities and questions, and mysteries of life that we have to grapple with. For example, there is this question that many of us are stumped at: Why do bad things happen to good people? Correspondingly, why do good things happen to bad people?

Timestamp 0:01:10.7

This is a very difficult question to answer because deep in our hearts, we somehow believe in retribution. We believe that good things should happen to good people and bad things should happen to bad people. Different religions call this differently. They call this karma, they call this retribution, whatever you want to say. But it remains that this is a difficult question to answer. This is a question that perplexes even the writers of the books of the Bible. For example, the psalmist struggles with this. He says:

Behold, these are the wicked;
always at ease, they increase in riches.
All in vain have I kept my heart clean
and washed my hands in innocence.
For all the day long I have been stricken
and rebuked every morning.
(Psalm 73:12-14 ESV)

The psalmist is puzzled. How come the wicked are having a good life and he who regards God is having a difficult life? Why do bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people? Jeremiah equally says:

Righteous are you, O LORD, when I complain to you;
yet I would plead my case before you.
Why does the way of the wicked prosper?
Why do all who are treacherous thrive?
(Jeremiah 12:1 ESV)

Why do evil people we read of today in the papers do so well in life? Why are Christians, the followers of Jesus in such a bad state? Doesn't quite square up. I thought good things should happen to good people and bad things should happen to bad people. Habakkuk says:

You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?

(Habakkuk 1:13 ESV)

"Why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?" See, this is not an easy question when Habakkuk, Jeremiah, the psalmist, all echo the same question.

Solomon opens chapter 7 verse 15 with these words:

In my vain life I have seen everything. There is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evildoing.

(Ecclesiastes 7:15 ESV)

So Solomon says, I observe the same things as what Jeremiah, what Habakkuk and the psalmist would have observed, and let me now tell you what wisdom is all about. Wisdom is necessary as we deal with these difficult questions of life. Now interestingly, actually Solomon doesn't answer this question right up front. He doesn't. Instead, he tells you something else. Instead of telling the answers to the perplexities of life, he says, go beyond the perplexities of life and see the God-the Lord who is responsible for life, or who is sovereign in life. Because he says in verse 18 (referring to the phrase "for the one who fears God"), this is the key, this is the verse, this is the phrase that holds verses 15 to 29 together.

It is good that you should take hold of this,
and from that withhold not your hand,
for the one who fears God
shall come out from both of them.

(Ecclesiastes 7:18 ESV)

The key to life, the wisdom of life is not that you know all the answers to life, but you know the person who is sovereign in life. You may not know all the answers to the question why, but you know the person who holds all the answers to the question why. He says this is the key: the one who fears God. Wisdom today is not being someone who is able to give all the right answers. Wisdom is someone who is able to

see the Lord, who fears the Lord; and that, I think, is the central thinking and thought that holds this passage together.

Timestamp 0:04:58.1

Let me reason this with you. Let me show you what Solomon is trying to say in these 15 verses. Challenging passage, but this is the central thought. Solomon says in verse 16:

Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself? Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool. Why should you die before your time?

(Ecclesiastes 7:16-17 ESV)

Now, this is a very strange statement or verse, isn't it? He says, "Be not overly righteous." Now, I know, this is where we struggled. Now, Solomon, are you saying that we should not be too godly? Don't be such a on-the-ball Christian, don't be too fervent, don't read the Bible too much, don't pray too much, don't come to church too often, just do your bare minimum, don't be overly righteous-is that what Solomon is saying? Well, clearly no.

You cannot be overly righteous in a good sense. The whole of the Bible says we must pursue righteousness and it is a beautiful thing to be like God, it is a beautiful thing to be like Jesus. He is not saying, be not overly righteous in a sense of pursuing the right things that God would want you to pursue. Moreover, he tells you, in verse 20:

Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.

(Ecclesiastes 7:20 ESV)

"There is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins." So Solomon is saying, "No, I'm not saying that you should not be too godly." Why? Because I tell you, there's no one who is even able to approach that state. There is none righteous; there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.

Now, this is where you may say, "Ah, I may not agree with you, Solomon. You say there is not a righteous man who does good and never sins." You say, "No, I don't agree. There must be someone who is good and is righteous and does right." Solomon sort of pre-empts our objection, and he says, "Okay, then think about this, alright?"

Do not take to heart all the things that people say,
lest you hear your servant cursing you.

Your heart knows that many times

you yourself have cursed others.

(Ecclesiastes 7:21-22 ESV)

"Do not take to heart all the things that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing." He states a very common scenario. Now, have you gone around hearing what people say about you? You say, "Yeah." What did they say about you? Sometimes nice things but often times, not so nice things. They curse, they talk behind my back. You see, a lot of people talk about bad things, right? A lot of people gossip, slander, have malicious words. You say, "Yeah, that's true." And this is where he twists the dagger in your heart when he says, "Your heart knows that many times you yourself have cursed others." (Ecc 7:22) Solomon is saying, no one can be exempt even from the sin of the tongue.

Timestamp 0:07:39.5

So there is none righteous, there is no one that does good. And therefore, when he says, be not overly righteous, he's not saying you can be too godly for God-no such thing. This overly righteous is a self-righteousness he is talking about. Be not overly self-righteous-it's the fake kind of righteousness-and Solomon says, don't go there. Don't be someone who prides yourself in the fact that you have done so much and you are so good. And now, God has to bless you, sort of like you have obligated God to bless you, because you have lived that good moral charitable life. He says that is not right.

But there are some people who have self-righteousness, then the other group is that they are overly wicked. So if the first group depends or live their life based on morality, there's another group that lives their life based on immorality. And Solomon says, these two groups (the people who pride themselves in the morality and those who indulge themselves in their immorality), both groups are foolish people. Both groups will destroy themselves and die before the time. They will face judgment. So there is that moral people and there is that immoral people. There is that group that tries to earn favour with God, to gain something from God; and there's that group that has nothing to do with God and just wants to live their own lives.

But this may be a bit complicated for you to grasp, but the Bible has a brilliant illustration to bring all this together. The Lord Jesus Christ is a master teacher, and He is a great teacher because he gives great stories and illustrations that brings light to our confused mind. Remember the story He gave in Luke 15, about a young man who has no regard for his father? This young man, he says to daddy, "Give me the share of property that is coming to me." (Luke 15:12 ESV) He actually is saying to the

father, "Father, I know you're not dead yet, but I wish you were dead. But in any case, give me what I should have and I will have nothing to do with you." The father sadly gives the son his share of his inheritance and the son now goes away. He doesn't just leave the house. The Bible says he leaves to a faraway place. He wants to run as far away from his dad as possible. I think he hates his father. Just give me what I want and I will have nothing to do with you.

Timestamp 0:10:35.6

But this young man wasted all the inheritance his father gave him. The Bible says he lived in riotous living. Riotous living means he wasted, extravagant. That's why we call him the prodigal son, the wasteful son. He wasted it all on himself, lavished himself; and now he's penniless, he's bankrupt. He has nothing to do except to live amongst the pigs and to feed amongst the pigs. Now, for a Jew to live with the pigs is an ultimate dishonour and insult, but he had no choice. He has so wasted his life he is now down in the dumps. And when he was in such a state, something came on in his mind. He realised he had sinned against the father and against heaven, against God. He said, "I must go back. I remember my father's house and how the servants, even the servants are well-treated by my good father. Look at me today." So he turns.

And as he turns, the Bible tells us the father, as it were, he is looking out of the windows of his house, always looking in the direction where the son has run. And in the long way off, when he sees the son turned, the father doesn't just wait for the son to come home. The father pulls up his long skirt and runs towards the son and embraces him. My son who is lost is now found. They embrace, they rejoice, and the father says, "Bring the robe, bring the shoes, bring the ring. My son is now back! Let's celebrate! Let's have a party!" And so, they slay the calf and they had a great feast and party together. Everyone is happy. Everyone is rejoicing that the prodigal son has returned home, except for one man. This man is not happy at all. This man looks at the party from the outside, and he's angry. "Who is this man?" you say.

The Bible says the father has two sons. The younger son has wasted his life. The older son, we call him the elder brother, has been a good boy at home. He's the one who has stayed with the father. He's the one who has been a good boy, the goody two-shoes. But now that the bad boy is home and the father is taking, he's taking his inheritance, to feast and to set up the party for the boy. He cannot take it. He's upset. And the father, knowing that he's upset, goes out to him and says, "Son, why won't you come in? Your brother who is lost is now found. Shouldn't you be happy?" The elder brother points at the dad and says:

Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends.

(Luke 15:29 ESV)

The elder brother stayed with the father because he wanted the same thing as the younger brother; the elder brother never loved the father as well. They all (the two of them), sadly, didn't want the father. It's just that the way they wanted to get things, the strategy by which they wanted to get things were very different. The first one is blatant and say, just give me my stuff, let me live my rebellious life. The other one says, I want your stuff but I'm going to do it by being the righteous guy, the 'guai guai' guy, the goody two-shoes ("guai guai" means goody-goody in the Hokkien dialect). Both were equally alienated from their father. One was alienated at home, the other one is alienated far away from home; but both were lost. You see, these both men wanted the same thing. They had no love for the father.

Timestamp 0:15:05.6

Jesus gave this masterful illustration to highlight to us that in this world, there are people who are rebellious and there are people who are religious. Both are equally lost. There are those today who have no regard for God nor His Word. They're not interested in coming to church, they're not interested in any religion, they just want to live their life for themselves-they're lost. But then, what is even more tragic is that there are people who come to church, who do all religious kinds of things, who read the Bible, who pray, but they do all this even though they do not love God. They just want to do these things to earn favour from God, to obligate God to save them or to bless them. They have no love for God; they are equally lost.

Rebellious and religious. Jesus spoke this parable or this story because he was talking about the Pharisees. He was eating with the sinners and publicans and they were asking, "Why we want to sit with them and eat with them?" Jesus says, "I'm here to save them. At least some of them, like the prodigal son, would turn, repent and believe. But you, you religious leaders, you are like the elder brother. You are religious; you obey every little command, at least externally. And you assume that because you do all these things, you have been a good boy in the temple, you are saved. I say to you, you never love the Father." Could it happen to us today, right here for you? So Solomon says, these two philosophies of life (referring to being overly righteous and overly wicked, as stated in Ecc 7:16-17) lead you to destruction. There is one who depends on his self-righteousness and there is the other who has no regard; but both are equally lost.

There's a third way to life and the only way to life-the only way to have life with God. And that's why Solomon says in verse 18:

It is good that you should take hold of this,
and from that withhold not your hand,
for the one who fears God
shall come out from both of them.
(Ecclesiastes 7:18 ESV)

This one who fears God shall come out from both of them, shall surpass the both of them. This is the wise man who fears God, who knows him to see his own sinfulness, and recognize the grace and the goodness of God, like the prodigal son recognized the goodness of the father. This is the only way.

Timestamp 0:17:45.1

So today, there may be some who are rebellious. You came to church today. Actually, you are not interested to come. Right after service, you probably won't think or consider any of the things that you have experienced here and you just continue living your life. This is a kind of way of living many people take. But there are those who say no, no, no, I'm not going to be like this, I'm going to be a good boy now. I'm going to come to church, and I'm going to be participating in the things of the church, I'm going to try to read the Bible, I'm going to be a goody two-shoes, I'm not going to sin so much, I'm going to cut down on my sins. Maybe if I do all these things, God will be happy with me (the religious way, the elder-brother way, the earn-my-way-up-to-heaven way). But both are wrong ways because there's only one way: the repentant way. Like the prodigal, you would see your unworthiness, and have nothing to claim but the mercy and goodness of the father-when you realize I've said this is where the father runs to you.

Rebellious Eg Prodigal Son (Before)

Religious Eg Elder Brother

Repentant Eg Prodigal Son (After)

Wisdom is seeing God in the Gospel; in His goodness; in His grace; in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is true wisdom and this wisdom is so precious. Solomon goes on to say:

Wisdom gives strength to the wise man
more than ten rulers who are in a city.
(Ecclesiastes 7:19 ESV)

Ten good strong rulers cannot match one person who knows God-so precious!
Solomon really is a man who is convicted about wisdom; he is, not only in
Ecclesiastes-it may not be so familiar territory for most of us-but look at the
Proverbs. He says... he speaks a lot about this wisdom. He says:

Blessed is the one who finds wisdom,
and the one who gets understanding,
for the gain from her is better than gain from silver
and her profit better than gold.
She is more precious than jewels,
and nothing you desire can compare with her.
Long life is in her right hand;
in her left hand are riches and honor.
Her ways are ways of pleasantness,
and all her paths are peace.
She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her;
those who hold her fast are called blessed.
(Proverbs 3:13-18 ESV)

"Blessed is the one who finds wisdom." Wah, a lot of people say, blessed is the one
who finds gold, blessed is the one who finds business opportunity. He says this is real
blessedness: you find wisdom, you get understanding-for the gain from her is better
than gain from silver, profit better than gold. She is more precious than jewels and
nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left
hand are riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are
peace. She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are
called blessed. It is a tremendous blessing to have wisdom, to know God, Solomon is
saying. He goes on to say:

Get wisdom; get insight; do not forget,
and do not turn away from the words of my mouth.
Do not forsake her, and she will keep you;
love her, and she will guard you.
The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom,
and whatever you get, get insight.
Prize her highly, and she will exalt you;
she will honor you if you embrace her.

She will place on your head a graceful garland;
she will bestow on you a beautiful crown."

(Proverbs 4:5-9 ESV)

Get wisdom. Make sure you get it; this is the pursuit of your life. Not business, not just about money, no. Get wisdom, he says, get insight. Do not forget, do not turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not forsake her, she will keep you; love her and she will guard you. The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom and whatever you get, get insight. Prize her highly, she will exalt you; she will honour you if you embrace her. She will place on your head a graceful garland; she will bestow on you a beautiful crown.

Are you lost? I hope not because it really is just this: Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore, get wisdom. In all your getting, get wisdom (Prov 4:7). Get it, go for it.

Timestamp 0:21:25.5

At this point of time, pause for yourself: What's your goal in life? Every one of us pursue something, everyone. What are you pursuing? Solomon says get wisdom, know God, know Him, fear Him-this is the principal thing. But, even though this is the exhortation from Solomon, the reality is that getting wisdom is an extremely difficult thing. Reality check: Yes, we should all look for wisdom, seek after it, pursue with all our heart, but wisdom is an extremely difficult thing to get. It's extremely difficult to know God. It is. You say, "Why?" Well, Solomon says:

All this I have tested by wisdom. I said, "I will be wise,"
but it was far from me. That which has been is far off,
and deep, very deep; who can find it out?

I turned my heart to know and to search out and to seek

wisdom and the scheme of things, and to know the

wickedness of folly and the foolishness that is madness.

(Ecclesiastes 7:23-25 ESV)

"All this I have tested by wisdom. I said, 'I will be wise,' but it was far from me. That which has been is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?" He says I've tried, I've looked for wisdom all around this world. In this life under the sun, I seek wisdom. I know it's important, it is going to help me more than ten rulers, but I find it so difficult to get. Why so difficult to get? He throws in this verse that is really puzzling on the first glance. He throws in verse 26 when he says:

And I find something more bitter than death:
the woman whose heart is snares and nets,
and whose hands are fetters (added by pastor: "or chains").
He who pleases God escapes her,
but the sinner is taken by her.
(Ecclesiastes 7:26 ESV)

Suddenly he throws in a woman here. Solomon, what are you talking about? I thought you are talking about wisdom and life, then you throw in a woman. I mean, okay, Solomon has a thousand women in his palace; he has 300 wives, 700 concubines. But why the woman, in this case? Some people say, oh, this is about adultery and so on. Well, you can take it that way but I don't think it really fits the context very well.

Timestamp 0:23:28.8

To me, the only way to really look at this in the whole flow of Ecclesiastes 7 is to understand that the woman here is not just talking about one particular lady. But this woman is a picture, she is a metaphor, she is the personification of something called folly. Solomon says it's so hard to find wisdom in life under the sun because folly, like the woman, like the seductress is all over this world. And she is here to tempt you, to seduce you, to imprison you, to chain you in her clutches. You see, this is not unique in Ecclesiastes because in Proverbs 9, Solomon says:

13 The woman Folly is loud;
she is seductive and knows nothing.
14 She sits at the door of her house;
she takes a seat on the highest places of the town,
15 calling to those who pass by,
who are going straight on their way,
16 "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!"
And to him who lacks sense she says,
17 "Stolen water is sweet,
and bread eaten in secret is pleasant."
18 But he does not know that the dead are there,
that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.
(Proverbs 9:13-18 ESV)

"The woman Folly is loud." Ah, he is talking about folly. But to make you, help you understand folly better, he says think of her like a woman, think of her like a seductress, think of her like a temptress, think of her like a prostitute. This folly is

like a prostitute. She's very loud. "Come! Come!" she shouts to you. And "she sits at the door of her house"-she is visible, she's seen everywhere; "she takes a seat on the highest places of the town"-she is from the bottom to the top, the top to the bottom of this whole world (Prov 9:14). And she's so loud, "calling to those who pass by, who are going straight on their way" (Prov 9:15). There are people who want to walk straight, there are people who want to seek God, but seductress Folly will say, "Come!"

"Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" (Prov 9:16). Come, rest on my bed; come, sleep with me. And the wayfarer or the pilgrim is easily seduced. She says to him who lacks sense, "Stolen water is sweet"-it's great to come with me; and "bread eaten in secret is pleasant" (Prov 9:17). But, he does not know, he does not know that she's like a Delilah, "that the dead are there, and that her guests are in the depths of Sheol" (Prov 9:18).

Timestamp 0:25:56.4

Folly is a temptress that you see throughout this world, calling people who want to know the truth away from truth. You say, "Where is folly?" I tell you where it is. It is found in your MOE (Ministry of Education) curriculum: in your primary school books, in your secondary science, in your JC (junior college) biology class - that the world started millions and millions of years ago with a big bang and there is no creator; there is no God; don't believe in some superstitious God; Genesis is to be torn up; this world came about by chance. It's there. I can tell you it shouts loudly to your kids. They will study dinosaurs and animals and they'll ask, "How did they come about?" The teachers will say, "By chance, son. It's by chance. No God."

Folly shouts out in the streets of Orchard Road. Come, look at the glittery jewels and look at the cars, look at this high life. This is what life is all about. And though you want to pursue God, you have gone into the brothel of materialism. There's a brothel as well of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, and so many of us have gone that way. And her brothel is not just set up outside, it is sometimes set up in the church. Folly comes out from the pulpits or from the preaching of God's Word, not God's Word, but preaching of man's opinions. False teachings creep into the church, folly cries out everywhere. No wonder it's so hard to find true wisdom today, because it's everywhere. And so Solomon says to you, I've tried to find it in life under the sun. It's difficult, I can't find it.

Timestamp 0:28:11.2

And then he throws in this strange verse again. You know, Ecclesiastes is absolutely challenging because he throws in these pictures and stories and if you don't get focussed on the theme, you are thrown aside. He throws in a woman again, alright?

Behold, this is what I found, says the Preacher,
while adding one thing to another to find the scheme of things (added by pastor: "I'm trying to figure life out, find wisdom")

- which my soul has sought repeatedly, but I have not found.

One man among a thousand I found,
but a woman among all these I have not found.

(Ecclesiastes 7:27-28 ESV)

Now, this sounds really chauvinistic. You're biased against women, Solomon. You say amongst a thousand, I can find one man who knows wisdom. Amongst all the women, I can find none. Now, for those of you whose wives are not here, please don't take this verse and go home and say, "You see, you have no righteousness, you don't know wisdom, you are a fool." Please don't do that. That's not what Solomon is saying at all.

I don't think Solomon is someone who is a misogynist, or a... MCP (male chauvinist pig), a chauvinistic person. No, I don't think he is. Why? Well, because he writes very well and writes highly about women in his books. For example, if you look at Proverbs, he exalts the lady, he exalts womanhood. For example, Proverbs 31, about the virtuous woman. So Solomon is not someone who runs down women. That's not biblical at all, that's not God's desire or intention at all. Moreover, if you think about it in a practical way, if Solomon really thinks that women are hopeless, he is going to be in for a hard time-when he has a thousand women to face back in his palace, and added to the thousand women, all the mothers-in-law. He's going to be really tortuous, so I don't think at all Solomon is saying, men are better than women and there is no righteous women. No, that's not the point.

I think he's speaking in hyperbole, he's... You see, we got to understand the genre we're reading now is not epistles, is not instructions, is not theological treaties like the book of Romans. This is poetic language. We're in the wisdom genre, the poetic language. And you know poetic language, they do have hyperboles to emphasize something. For example, I can say, "Wah, this is so nice; I eat already can die." Of course, you don't really die lah, you don't really mean that you want to die but it's to exaggerate to prove a point. I think Solomon here is saying, wisdom is so difficult to find that if I can find one in a thousand men, I'll be lucky and what more about women who do not have the same opportunities and exposures as men in my time. So he's not running down women, I think we need to be clear. He's emphasizing the

rarity of wisdom or wise people in life. You say, "Why has this happened?" Verse 29, he says:

See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.

(Ecclesiastes 7:29 ESV)

This folly that is pervasive in the world, this deception that is all throughout the world, is not the fault of God. God made man upright, but because of sin, because of Adam and Eve's fall, man has gone astray. And now folly is pervasive, wisdom is rare. The fault is not the Lord's; it's ours.

Timestamp 0:31:42.7

But, in the midst of all this confusion and folly, the wise man sees the Lord. You say how is this possible? How can a wise man see the Lord? The Bible says wisdom is the principal thing; therefore, get wisdom (Prov 4:7). You say, "Wisdom... How do I get it?" Well, the picture tells you the answer. Wisdom, the knowledge of God, can only be found in Scripture. I think today, we are tremendously privileged to both have the Bible, to be educated in our languages to be able to understand the Bible; and we have the freedom to worship and to hear the preaching of the Bible. Now, you must not take this for granted because in generations past, these privileges are not accorded to all men. Today, you have access.

You see, if you want to find wisdom from psychological books or self-help books or whatever books, they do not lead you to God. They lead you to yourself, but the principal thing is wisdom, the knowledge of God. And God is known not by imagination, but by revelation. We are so twisted, we are so corrupted in our minds that nobody on his own can figure out who God is. You can't. If we were Adam, maybe we've got a chance, but because we are so corrupted and twisted by sin, you cannot figure God out by imagination. Therefore, God can only be known by revelation. You can't figure Him out, but He's got to reveal himself to you and only then will you know Him. So today, the key is: knowing the Scriptures. Solomon says:

My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.

(Proverbs 2:1-5 ESV)

So much in these verses. Solomon says pursue wisdom, seek; it's all about a passionate pursuit of wisdom. If you just come to church, and you just want to pass this one and half hours passively, you're not going to find wisdom. If your ears are not attentive to the Lord's Word, you're not going to find wisdom. If you just every morning open the Bible, read it as if it's just a ritual and routine, you're not going to find wisdom. Yes, start with the Bible, but start with a heart that cries out for wisdom to find the knowledge of the Lord, the fear of the Lord in the midst of a deceptive, seductive world. Go for it.

How are you reading, my friends? Have you progressed in the Bible, in your reading at all? Maybe you have read more about Her World (a women's magazine) and 8 Days (a magazine that features predominantly celebrity gossip and TV news) than the Bible. You've read more about the gossips and the Facebook posts than your Bible. You see, I'm not saying you can't read the newspaper, I'm not saying you can't read anything else but who have you been listening to? Have you unknowingly entered the brothels of folly and that's where the dead, spiritually dead, are found? Folly calls out to you. But there is a still, small voice of God in the pages of Scripture—hear Him, cry out, "Speak, O Lord, to me." Wisdom is the principal thing; wisdom sees the Lord.

Timestamp 0:35:59.9

I want to apply this to those who are undergoing difficulties and trials of life. You're perplexed because your husband just walked out on you, your doctor just said you have stage IV cancer, you've just lost your job, your family is breaking up. You say, "Why? Why do these bad things happen to me? No, you can't give me these things, God. You must give me a good life. You must give me blessings, and health and wealth, and a smooth journey." But you see, wisdom is not always knowing that all these things is going to work in my favour, in the way I want. Wisdom is the ability to go through difficulties, perplexities and still at the end of it all say, "God, you are God, you are sovereign, you are wise and you are good."

You see, Job struggled with this. Job had everything taken from him. Initially, he was fine. But when his friends come and "add salt, add oil and vinegar" (figurative expression in Chinese that means embellishing and exaggerating), they made it worse and Job was messed up in his mind. He listened to foolish words and he started to complain, "God, why did you do this?" And God asked Job, "Where were you when I created the world?" Basically, God is saying, "Job, who are you to question my ways? My ways are not your ways."

You see, as we go through the difficulties of life, it is not the ability to solve every puzzle that equates to wisdom. Wisdom is saying, even though I can't solve the questions of life, I trust in the God who knows the answers to life. That's wisdom. My friends, trust in the Lord with all your heart (Prov 3:5). It's tough but our God is greater than our own imaginations.

Now, by the way, just a sideline, I think that's why the prosperity theology is a false theology. What is prosperity theology? Prosperity theology is the belief that God wants health and wealth for every one of his people. You see, it's a very reductionist theology, it's a very... it's a thinking and understanding or misunderstanding of God that He must operate at our level. Because if we think health and wealth is good for us, God must always operate in that way. It reduces God to be a God who can only think like we do. But you see, Scripture offers us a high view of God that even though we don't get what we want, we trust it is better for us that way because He knows what He wants.

Wisdom sees God for who He is and this produces a deep and lasting joy, even as we go through the shadows of life. Just now, we sang a song, "O rejoice in the Lord" and there is this verse that says, "I cannot see through the shadows ahead; so I looked at the cross of my Saviour instead." So easy for us to say, "God, I don't want the shadows, I don't want these dark periods and patches of my life. I want everything to be easy and nice." No, you can't. So how, God? Look back to the cross and see that He is sovereign, see that He is holy, see that He is gracious, see that He has poured out his mercy on you. So though you walk through the shadows of life, you trust in His unfailing love, you rejoice in the Lord. This, my friends, is wisdom; and you will need it as God put you through the trials of life.

Timestamp 0:40:16.7

Lastly, I say to you, especially friends, guests, you are here for the very first time: there are two ways to live life and this is what the world is all about. Basically, there are two major categories of people in this world: those who are rebellious, no spiritual religious desires; and those who are religious in a sense of being self-righteous, earning their way to heaven. Wisdom says no, I can't, I can't earn favour with God. Wisdom says I must come, like the prodigal son, repentant of my sin, recognizing my deep unworthiness and rejoicing in the amazing grace of God in sending His Son to die for me. Wisdom sees the Lord.

I will skip this verse and I'll just say this very difficult question: Why do bad things happen to good people? We end with where we started. Why do bad things happen to good people? I love this quote from R.C. Sproul Jr. He says this and you've got to

think a little bit to understand this: Why do bad things happen to good people? He doesn't quite answer the question, but he sees the Lord when he said: "That only happened once and he volunteered." That might be your expression in your heart: "What is he talking about?"

Well, it's very simple actually. Why do bad things happen to good people? Let me tell you. There's only one time bad things happen to good people because there is no good people except for this one man. You get it? There is no good people, there is none. You say, "No lah, there must be good people." No, no, no, no, no. Have you heard other people curse you? Yeah. You have also cursed other people, right? Yeah. There is none righteous, all have sinned.

If I may put it this way (this is harsh, I know; it sounds terrible): But if bad things happen to us, it is not God's fault; we deserved it, that's the wages of sin. Why do bad things happen to good people? Because he volunteered for it. This "he" is Jesus Christ, God's Son. He is the only one who is truly good; and amazingly bad and terrible things happen to him when some 2000 years ago, he went to the cross and took on all our sins and the punishments due for it. He volunteered. He went, knowing this is what He is going to get because He loves you.

Wisdom is seeing God sending His Son. Wisdom is seeing the grace and the love of God on the cross. My friends, He volunteered for you. Would you turn from your sin and believe in Him? Let's bow for a word of prayer together.

Timestamp 0:43:47.8

I appreciate your patience and your attention in this extremely challenging passage, I understand that. But it is so important, isn't it? The wisdom from God to see Him, to see Him in the Scriptures, and to rejoice that even though you go through the difficult situations of life, you're assured that He is sovereign and that He is for you. The wisdom today that you need: to cease being that religious self-righteous man, and to rest completely in the finished work of Jesus Christ, God's Son.

My friends, I believe God must have spoken to you today. Would you take this time, consider, reflect, and then pray to God? Maybe you need to pray: "Lord, help me to have a heart that pursues wisdom, to strive after it, to long for it and to see it and get it in Your Word." Maybe it's a prayer in your heart that says, "Lord, I'm going through a very difficult situation of life and I want to give up, but help me to see You in Your Word." Or maybe it is today that you have realized you're like the elder brother. You've depended on your attendance, on your parents being Christians. But you've realized today for the very first time, Jesus paid it all. I must come as a

repentant sinner, and there is forgiveness for me, freely, at the cross. Whatever it is, folks, let this be a time where wisdom will be deposited within your soul. I pray God's Word will find good soil in your heart and you'll be blessed, and God will be glorified as you obey Him, and as you respond to Him.

Father, we thank You today that Your Word gives light in a world of darkness, in a world screaming for Folly. Thank You this morning, we can be still to hear Your still small voice and know that You are God. We are of all people greatly privileged to hear Your Word and to see You through it. Grant, therefore, each one of us true wisdom-wisdom from on high, as we navigate and as we journey in this pilgrimage. Guide us, dear Lord, closer and closer to you. Speak regularly into our souls till Jesus be seen in us. We pray all this now in Jesus' name. Amen.