

Good morning! I want to welcome you to New Century on this last Sunday of 2018. Wow...WHAT A YEAR it has been!!! Is everyone as ready as I am for 2019 to get here??? For those who don't know me I am Matt Holland, one of the pastors here, and I will be delivering today's message as Chase and Rebecca are wrapping up their Christmas celebration this week and are away with family, but will be back next week. We have much to cover today so I will dive right in. Let's pray

WISDOM

As we consider the New Year and all that comes with it – the changes that we will inevitably resolve to make and - most likely break, I would like to encourage us all (myself included) to pray for and seek out wisdom. I don't think any of us (unless you're an absolutely crazy impulsive individual) like to do anything without thinking it through, mulling it over – making the list of pros and cons – weighing the possibilities – the risks – the rewards – the costs – the gains – the value – the detriment to our lives and lively-hood. Who in here would jump into a lake without knowing how deep it is/testing the water for warmth...or go into an exam expecting to pass it without proper preparation/study time...drive a car on a long trip without checking the gas gauge...?

WHY WISDOM

Reason #1, God's word has a lot to say about it.

Proverbs 4:6-7 "Do not forsake her (wisdom), and she will guard you; Love her, and she will watch over you."

Name one person in the Bible that we think of when we hear the word WISDOM. (Solomon!) Yes! Solomon, David's son, had not long taken his father's place as king over Israel when the Lord visited him in a dream:

1Kings 3:3-12

"Now Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David, except he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places. The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place; Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, "Ask what you

wish Me to give you.” Then Solomon said, “You have shown great lovingkindness to Your servant David my father, according as he walked before You in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward You; and You have reserved for him this great lovingkindness, that You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. “Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. “Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted. “So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?” ***It was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing.*** God said to him, “Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you.

Did you catch that?? It is pleasing in the sight of God to ask for it. There’s more in here and I will get to that later on.

Reason #2 – Our society is becoming increasingly absent of ideas like absolute truth, morality, accountability, self denial and is moving faster than I’ve ever seen it toward an ego-centered, pride and vanity driven people who are completely deceived in the satisfaction that it brings in the here and now with no regard for the eternity that awaits each and every one of us. In light of all of this, we as believers need to be on our guard – ready and capable to sufficiently and appropriately address it while communicating the beauty and majesty of the Gospel message to a lost world. To do this we need wisdom – and not just any wisdom.

WISDOM DEFINED

Well, what is wisdom? We have to know what it is before we ask for it. Wisdom can mean different things to different people, so we have to define our terms.

When most people hear the word wisdom, they mistakenly use it interchangeably with the word “knowledge”. Knowledge is a part of it, but it is not the whole. Mirriam Webster defines it this way:

“Wisdom is the soundness of an action or decision with regard to the application of experience, knowledge, and good judgment.”

With regard to the experience and good judgment, Will Rodgers said “Good judgment comes from experience, and a lot of that comes from bad judgment”. Anyway, did you catch the distinction? Wisdom is the sound application of knowledge, experience, and good judgment. In other words, we can have knowledge without wisdom, but we can’t have wisdom without knowledge. Example – It has been said that knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit, but wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad. Knowledge can help you answer your wife’s question “do I look fat in this dress?”...wisdom is walking out of the room pretending that you didn’t hear the question. No, but seriously – wisdom is saying “Wow! baby, you make that dress look good!”. For you young married men, that was free. 100 bucks for the next one...I’ll express it another way – wisdom is knowing what to say or do, how to say or do it, and when to say or do it.

KNOWLEDGE – WE HAVE TO HAVE IT

So – we’ve introduced knowledge and I want to talk a little more about that to kind of set the stage a little before I dive into more on wisdom. We have to cover the knowledge – without knowledge to apply, how can one exercise or even offer wisdom? As an Engineer by trade, I’ve got to be on my game; not only do I have to be well versed in all things mechanical and how they work in theory and application, understanding the latest technological advances and how they apply to my trade – I also have to stay abreast of other disciplines in my field – like the electrical discipline – everything mechanical has to have power right? I have to be a constant student of those **disciplines** that affect my job so that I may be effective. Now I purposefully and specifically used the word “**disciplines**”...not only because it’s engineer speak or how we refer to each component of the design team in my job, but because it comes from the same root word for **disciple...matheten** (in the Greek)...literally meaning

student...learner...pupil. My point here is this - if we are believers in Christ, having professed faith in Him with our lips, we must be constant students of the word. By very definition we are “learners, students, pupils” of the Master. As we seek knowledge, being excellent and constant students of word, we must remember WHY WE DO IT – and I’ll give you hint - it’s not so that we can take a test or go on Jeopardy and show people how smart we are - knowledge for knowledge’s sake is no good if it has no intended purpose other than to puff us up, make us feel good about our accomplishment and superior mind. If it can be of no benefit to us (other than to bolster our own pride and arrogance) or to others, it is absolutely worthless.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT WISDOM

So – now that we have defined our terms, we must seek out wisdom. BUT...we have to be careful. What wisdom are we seeking? As I see it, there are two distinct and diametrically opposed kinds of wisdom: Godly wisdom and Worldly wisdom. Neither can exist in the presence of the other. They are incompatible and even exists to blot out and destroy the other. They are a large part of our struggle with the human condition. The battle rages between the two as they tangle for our very souls.

Worldly wisdom is “me centric”, heavily rooted in self gratification of our personal emotions, like pride, laziness, our feelings of the moment at any given time like fear and sadness – even our happiness over using wisdom to achieve monetary gain is at its root a selfish act. Caution my friends - it is a counterfeit wisdom (and I would argue it is not really wisdom at all – it is an evil alter-ego) that is sustained at the banquet of our own selfishness - our desires, ambition, and want to be praised by men – lifted up above others for recognition, power, influence. It tells us things like “There is no absolute truth – what is true for you may not necessarily be true for me”; “Why can’t we just coexist – can’t you just do your thing over there and I do my thing over here; mind your business, and life will be good for all?”; “I am the master of my fate and the captain of my soul” (Ernest Henley be praised); “Go after that thing (insert desire)! You are worth it!; You deserve it!”; “Climb over anything and anyone to get it!”; “I don’t have a God complex, I am God!”; or how about this one...“People are born good, instinctively

concerned with the welfare of others.” On the other hand, it can easily become a weight of emotional stress and demoralization when we don’t measure up to things like image as portrayed in our media – “you’re not anybody until you look a certain way, talk a certain way, act a certain way - achieved the dream”; to use an example like Chase used last week “when everything is in its place and you’ve got the perfect job, wife, home, children, social life, etc., you will be happy.” But have you considered the lives of some folks who by all appearances had it all? Robin Williams, Whitney Houston...when we live our entire lives in the wisdom of “me-centricity” under the delusion that we are inherently good, we can easily become jaded when the contrary is demonstrated time and time again. The late Chris Cornell (former lead singer of Soundgarden – that’s a 90’s alternative band for you older folks and for you millennials) pined once...*When all of a sudden you're successful and sought after overnight, you are instantly opened to a lot of sides of humanity that the average person is never going to see. And those can often be pretty disheartening, and it can make somebody pretty lonely.*

Well friends, we know that God’s wisdom (from the Bible) certainly speaks to this truth – we (all of us) are a broken people who need a savior – “the heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can know it.” (Jeremiah 17:9) “There is none righteous, not even one.” (Romans 3:10) It’s no wonder the disheartening and disillusion is an eye opener for those who have acquired fame. Folks, I don’t use these famous examples lightly – sometimes I weep for the loss of their souls and the abuse and misuse of their God given talents – their access to and knowledge of the truth and wisdom of the Gospel, but by all outward appearances, their wholesale rejection of it in exchange for Worldly wisdom and notoriety saddens me.

And this Worldly wisdom is easier and easier to come by in our age of technological advancements – so let’s not fool ourselves - we so happily feast upon it day in and day out – we are not immune - I can give you countless examples that pull at my heart in social media, television, advertisements, politics - distracting my mind and heart, justifying the time I spent at its alter, soaking it up – because it’s what makes the world go around – it’s how everyone else lives and when you really think about it, I’m not as bad as so and so down the road. Oh how Satan lays such an easy trap for us all in this relativistic way of thinking.

On the other hand, there is Godly wisdom. This wisdom is “God centered” and heavily rooted in self denial and sacrifice on our part – it costs us something – when understood in the context Christ, it is a game changer for us – when utilized and exercised in its purest form, it costs us our lives. Apart from Christ, we would never know this wisdom. It says things like:

- I (Jesus to Thomas) am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the father but by me (absolute and exclusive). John 14:6
- Love your neighbor as yourself. Mark 12:31
- Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you. Matthew 5:44
- “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. “For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? Luke 9:23-26
- Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:3
- You formed my inward parts, you wove me in my mothers womb. I will give thanks to You for I am fearfully and wonderfully made Psalm 139 – oh the joy and satisfaction that should rise up within us when in despair at our “perceived inadequacies” (as compared to the culture) we realize that the God of the universe “is intimately acquainted with all our ways”, He “wove us together” (the miracle of our human bodies) and has reached down and touched you and said “You are mine”. There is no self esteem book ever written that can come close to assuring you the level of worth that Christ has placed on your life as is demonstrated by the gospel. Do you know that He not only made you, but that He died for you? Can I get an Amen!
- But whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” Mark 10:43-45
- For while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us...

All of these can be perceived and weakness and foolishness to a self-indulgent world, but 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 asks...Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater 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 come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Christ is the wisdom of God. It is the wisdom of a Savior in the flesh - miraculously born in humility and perceived scandal, not as a conquering gladiator to erase the rule of the tyrannical Roman empire from the face of the earth - but a servant king, laid in a manger, a feeding trough of all things – the wisdom of God’s plan that there was no room for him, his mother and father that night; OH THE CRUEL IRONY of our struggle to make room for Him in our busy hearts. A man of “no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised and we did not esteem Him.” (Isaiah 53). Yet he bore the weight of the sins of the world when he went to that cruel cross. And to God’s glory, he was raised from the dead to save us.

James 3:13-18 - Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

This is not wisdom in the eyes of the world – it 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, AND CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE.”

Ladies and gentlemen, this wisdom, Christ, is pure and is to be desired above all. This is the wisdom we must seek. However, Godly wisdom is only accessible to those who have repented of their sins and placed their faith in Christ as their savior. Identifying and seeking out Godly wisdom takes SPIRITUAL discernment that only comes from a regenerate heart; one that has “been made complete in Him” (Col. 2:10). In Christ are “hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” (Col. 2:3)

WE MUST SEEK OUT GODLY WISDOM

So how do we get it? Godly wisdom will not drop out of the sky and hit you in the head and “ZAP!” you’re now wise. As a believer in Christ, you ARE on the right track...The fear of the LORD is the instruction for wisdom (Proverbs 15:33). However I believe there are some necessary steps by which we, as believers, can grow in wisdom...

1st Step

Persistence in prayer and petition to God – Prayer is powerful and we should not treat it flippantly or take it for granted. How often are we guilty of praying for something once and then never speaking of it again...”well, I prayed about it that one time...”...”God hasn’t heard from me on it since, but prayed about it that one time.”

The scriptures teach us that wisdom is something to be desired!!!!

- How much better to get wisdom than gold, to choose understanding rather than silver! Proverbs 16:16
- Know also that wisdom is sweet to your soul; if you find it, there is a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off. (NIV) Proverbs 24:14

Better than gold, silver, sweet to the soul, a future hope???...Then certainly this is something we should continually ask God for – God grant me wisdom to lead my family spiritually – God grant me wisdom to deal with my employees fairly and in love – God grant me wisdom to write this sermon – I can’t tell you the number of times I have prayed that prayer this week. God grant us wisdom in using the resources you have given us for ministry. God grant me wisdom to nurture my elder families in the right way – to constantly point them to you.

Solomon, as we already discussed, asked for wisdom - and it pleased God so much that he gave him wisdom and MUCH MORE!!! Now this story in Kings is definitely unique to a certain person at a certain time in history, but James 1:5 is applicable to us and encourages all believers in this way...

- If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. (NIV)

And regarding constant & consistent prayer, let's not forget the account of the persistent widow in Luke 18:1-7.

- 1Now He (Jesus) was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, 2saying, "In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. 3"There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection from my opponent.' 4"For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, 5yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.'" 6And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge said; 7now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? He will and He will not delay!!!!

Paul, in Ephesians 1:17 tells the church at Ephesus that he prays "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation (note this) in the knowledge of Him."

Are we praying for wisdom about these things constantly...a continuous action or are we lifting this thing up once and then twittling our thumbs and waiting expectantly? The lesson here is pray, pray, and pray often!

2nd Step

Persistence in Reading and Studying His Word

God's word is truly a source of inspiration for all of man-kind if they would only open it. For the believer, it is a treasure trove of wisdom from the Almighty for us to glean from and use for the purpose of His gospel message – if WE, His disciples, would only open it and study it. RC Sproul said it this way: "A disciple does not dabble in learning. He makes the pursuit of an understanding of God's Word a chief business of his life." "If you continue in my word, you are truly disciples of mine and you will know the truth and the truth will...EVERYONE SAY IT" John 8:31-32 straight from Jesus himself. To understand God's word, to know it, to own it, and articulate it requires constant immersion in the rich and glorious texts that in His wisdom He has faithfully preserved for us for thousands of years. As believers we need to understand that if we identify with Christ – if we have put on the FULL armor of God as we studied in Ephesians 6 – this must include the sword of the spirit - which is his word. What soldier goes into battle with just his helmet and flak jacket? You're prepared to resist the sting of the bullets (in some cases because you're not completely covered), but you have no means of taking out the enemy. The word of God is our necessary offensive weapon...in every sense of the term. If we don't practice with it, how can we ever become expert swordsmen. Who are my gun folks in here? Brandon Young, range instructor...do you know any expert marksmen who were born that way??? NO!! To be proficient and effective with your weapon, you must constantly train with it.

Psalms 19:7-8 The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure making wise the simple.

If our knowledge base of God's word is limited because we are not training in it, how then can we expect to...2 Timothy 4:2 "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction; or be...1 Peter 3:15 always ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence"

3rd Step

Persistence in Walking in His ways Wisdom, as we learned in the beginning, is the sound application of knowledge. Knowledge for the sake of knowledge is worthless...it is of no benefit to anyone if never applied.

We must apply that which we have learned and walk in the wisdom of God's ways. If we love the Lord, shouldn't we WANT and DESIRE to walk in His ways? Delighting in it as the Psalmist says?

Psalm 119:33-40 Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, And I shall observe it to the end. 34Give me understanding, that I may observe Your law And keep it with all my heart. 35Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, For I delight in it. 36Incline my heart to Your testimonies And not to dishonest gain...**there's that self interest that is in stark contrast to the self denial of God's wisdom...**37Turn away my eyes from looking at vanity...**here it is again...**, And revive me in Your ways. 38Establish Your word to Your servant, As that which produces reverence for You. 39Turn away my reproach which I dread, For Your ordinances are good. 40Behold, I long for Your precepts; Revive me through Your righteousness."

Back in the 1 Kings chapter 3, I said there was more to take away from it...so let's briefly go back and then I will wrap this up. Take note in Verse 3 how "Solomon *loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David...*" and Solomon, elaborating more about his father David we learn in verse 6 that God had "shown great lovingkindness to...David my father, according *as he walked before Him in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward You;*"

Solomon followed his father's example...an example in walking before God in truth and righteousness. Are we setting that example, as believers, for our family to follow; for our friends to follow; for our co-workers to follow? Persistence in walking in God's way can assist us with experience and using good judgment as we work out our salvation and sanctification in obedience God's word. The more we do it, the more it becomes a part of us – a good habit, for lack of a better term. More importantly it offers a living and breathing glorification of the Savior we serve – not to be confused as a means to salvation, but a result of our salvation – when we care for the orphans and widows, give generously to those in need, pray for our persecutors, deal with others with integrity and honesty, show mercy and grace to those who by the worlds standards do not deserve it, or when we suffer loss for the sake of the gospel. The list of martyrs for the sake of the

gospel is a long one – sad and painful, yet inspiring. Martin Luther said this..."From the beginning of my Reformation I have asked God to send me neither dreams, nor visions, nor angels, but to give me the right understanding of His Word, the Holy Scriptures; for as long as I have God's Word, I know that I am walking in His way and that I shall not fall into any error or delusion." Friends...God's wisdom never fails. If we are faithful to act within its boundaries and rely upon it to guide us, we can never go wrong. It may look foolish to everyone else, it may cost us, it may be painful, but we can always be assured that it is pleasing to God – and isn't that the only thing that we REALLY need to concern ourselves with?

GODLY WISDOM for 2019

I said in the beginning that there are two diametrically opposed wisdoms; but that is not really the case. There is only one true wisdom – God's wisdom - Christ. The other is a counterfeit. It is empty and ultimately leads to destruction and death in the here-after. Many have bought it hook line and sinker and they need us to be a beacon – to tell them truth of God's wisdom of the Gospel. Today marks the last Sunday of the year and two days away from 2019. I can't tell you how excited I am about the many things to come for us as a church body this year – I'm looking forward to the sermon series that have been planned, the seminars that we will offer on apologetics, discipleship, etc. We as a congregation have much to consider and pray about in the coming months and for the whole of next year. Today my prayer is that in this new year, we will pray constantly for Godly wisdom in all that we do, study Godly wisdom by daily immersion in His word, and practice Godly wisdom by daily walking in His way. Because in the end, when the trees are laying on the curbs, all the decorations have been put away, the baby Jesus is back in his box for another 300 days or so, and the New Years celebrations are over, we have to ask ourselves this - will our testimony for 2019 be marked with missed opportunities for Christ due to our partnership with Worldly wisdom? Or will we rejoice in knowing that we gave our best and left it all on the field; for the Glory of Christ, the Gospel, and the JOY of changed hearts.

I will leave you with a reading of a portion of Proverbs 8 – a passage that I have been meditating on for over a month now. It is poetic and descriptive; rich with imagery describing the wisdom we seek.

Does not wisdom call, And understanding lift up her voice? On top of the heights beside the way, Where the paths meet, she takes her stand; Beside the gates, at the opening to the city, At the entrance of the doors, she cries out: "To you, O men, I call, And my voice is to the sons of men. "O naive ones, understand prudence; And, O fools, understand wisdom. "Listen, for I will speak noble things; And the opening of my lips will reveal right things. "For my mouth will utter truth; And wickedness is an abomination to my lips. "All the utterances of my mouth are in righteousness; There is nothing crooked or perverted in them. "They are all straightforward to him who understands, And right to those who find knowledge. "Take my instruction and not silver, And knowledge rather than choicest gold. "For wisdom is better than jewels; And all desirable things cannot compare with her.

Let's Pray

At this time I will ask the Ushers come forward to collect tithes and communication cards.

If you're a visitor or a new guest, the tithing part is not for you. But we do want to hear from you - if you are a new guest, please let us know on the tear off communication card. For every new guest notification we get, we will donate \$5 to the Blue Ridge Women's Center. Also, we have a gift for you at the welcome desk out in the Lobby – a small gift to say thank you for worshipping with us.

Please stand for the Benediction (Jude 24)

24Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, 25to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.