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Ecclesiastes - The Failure of Wisdom

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

Prayer: *Father, I just again, I thank you for your grace, I thank you for your goodness, I thank you for your church. I just thank you that we still have a place where we can freely meet and that is a huge blessing and we're grateful for it. And Lord, we just again this morning we are concluding our examination of Ecclesiastes, the wisdom of this world and so again I just want to pray as we look at that, as we look into it that we would have the presence of your Holy Spirit, that you might be speaking specifically to us and giving us the ability to see this and to make it of permanent value. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well as I said, we are finally reaching the conclusion of the book of Ecclesiastes and I'd be remiss if I didn't focus on the very last paragraph of the very last chapter in the book which is the overall summation and conclusion of the entire matter of trying to find meaning in a life outside of the kingdom of God. *Ecclesiastes 12:13 says: Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will*

bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Well Solomon's final words, they're so simple yet they're so incredibly critical to our understanding that we can't leave the book of Ecclesiastes without focusing in on these sentences. We've been examining the greatest wisdom the world has ever seen uttered by the wisest man the world has ever known. We've been studying the wisdom of Solomon and one of the most stunning things about him is his admission in the end that even his wisdom had failed him as well.

I mean way back when when we first started this series, I told you how brilliant Solomon was, how he was chosen of God as the ultimate have in a world of haves and have-nots, how God gave Solomon the wisdom to see all the world had to offer for what it really was. And he found that all of life presented the same four stages of perception. If you recall it started out with delusion when he realized that life was not at all as it appeared. And that was followed by depression when he discovered that all of life was essentially meaningless, which led to discernment, that God alone is who gives meaning and then finally deliverance. He understood that in the end it was a matter of fearing God and obeying his commandments. And so we saw that Solomon's delusion, his

depression, his discernment, and his deliverance, they always pointed in the end to the absolute inability of anything under the sun, and that is anything outside of God himself to provide any lasting satisfaction.

And so today we want to look at the very last of life's distractions, the one that you would least expect Solomon to identify as a failure and that is wisdom itself. It's ironic that Solomon would identify wisdom itself as one of life's distractions that ultimately fail, but it did. And so far we've seen laughter, wine, folly, amusement, sex, work, wealth, all of them has over-promising and under-delivering. But wisdom was supposed to be different. I mean after all, wisdom, that's a gift from God but it's a gift that cuts both ways. The very same wisdom that enabled Solomon to see life as it really was, it also prevented him from escaping into all of life's distractions. And it's life's distractions that most of us use to prevent us from seeing how utterly meaningless life under the sun really is.

In *Ecclesiastes 1:18* Solomon said, "*For with much wisdom comes much sorrow the more knowledge the more grief.*" See, wisdom is the ability to live life skillfully and part of that is the ability to perceive a bigger picture, to connect the dots that others might not even see, but oftentimes those dots don't present a pretty

picture. I mean, there's a reason why ignorance is bliss and it is his wisdom that stole the bliss of ignorance from Solomon and what it gave him in return was this temporary insight that he knew would disappear when he died. Solomon put it this way in *Ecclesiastes 2*. He said: *The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I perceived that the same event happens to all of them. Then I said in my heart, "What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so very wise?" And I said in my heart that this also is vanity. For of the wise as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool! So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind.*

Well, Tim Keller had a term for the horror that Solomon was feeling. It's really a horror that lies at the heart of human futility and Keller called it "cosmic forgottenness." I mean Solomon said what is the point of wisdom if both the wise men and the fool are both equally forgotten? I mean that futility was a cosmic deal breaker for Solomon. The very wisdom he had received from God gave him insight to connect the dots enough to know that wisdom itself was meaningless because everything, including wisdom, was temporary. I mean in the end, the fool and the wise men are both equally dead, they're both equally forgotten. I mean Solomon

readily saw why ignorance was bliss, why with much wisdom comes much sorrow.

Towards the end of the book in chapter 19 he just kind of lays out all of his frustration. This is what he says, he says: *But all this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God. Whether it is love or hate, man does not know; both are before him. It is the same for all, since the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As the good one is, so is the sinner, and he who swears is as he who shuns an oath. This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that the same event happens to all. Also, the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that, they go to the dead. But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun. Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do. Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life*

with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.

I mean, just to boil it all down, Solomon says if you have to choose between the bliss of ignorance or the sorrow of wisdom, by all means go with ignorance. Play the fool. Play it all the days of your meaningless life because where you're going there's no work, there's no planning, there's no knowledge, there's no wisdom, there's nothing. You've got to remember this is Solomon's conclusion, this is not God's. In fact God says it is considerably worse than nothing. *Hebrews 9:27* says: *It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.*

So did wisdom mislead Solomon? Well the answer is yes and no. *Ecclesiastes 8:9* introduces Solomon's thoughts with these words. He says: *All this I saw as I applied my mind to everything under the sun.* Verse three of chapter 9, which we just read said, *this is the evil in everything that happens under the sun.* Solomon's saying if you only look at life under the sun, that means without God, without anything but earthly wisdom, with no pretense, no rose-colored glasses, this is just where man's wisdom is going to

lead you. Solomon's wisdom didn't just stop at what happens under the sun. You see, when his wisdom had run its course, he still had God's wisdom to fall back on and that wisdom is what led him back to God.

You know, in some ways Solomon, he's simply an Old Testament version of the prodigal son. He's someone who's been given this amazing inheritance only to squander it on riotous living. Like the prodigal, Solomon received his gift of wisdom from his father. And like the prodigal he spent it on his pleasures. But unlike the prodigal though it wasn't physical poverty that drove him back to his father, it was spiritual bankruptcy. And laughter and wine and folly, amusement and sex and work itself, those were the pigs that he was feeding when he returned to his senses. And the striking thing here just as it was with the prodigal son is the graciousness of God. I mean, Solomon had taken all of this wisdom that God had given him and then he turned on the giver of that gift. *1 Kings 11* says: *For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and did not wholly follow the LORD, as David his father had done.*

Now the impact of Solomon's rebellion might be lost on our culture where choosing a religion is kind of like choosing what kind of car you're going to drive. But even our culture would be shocked at Solomon's worship of Molech and Milcom and Ashtoreth. God describes that kind of worship in *Jeremiah 32*. He said: *They set up their abominations in the house that is called by my name, to defile it. They built the high places of Baal in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to offer up their sons and daughters to Molech, though I did not command them, nor did it enter into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.* Now Molech was a demon who was married to Ashtoreth who was a fertility goddess and you worship them by sacrificing your children on their altars. Archeologists have uncovered stone carvings of children being slaughtered for sacrifice and whole fields that were dedicated to their burial. You know, we shake our heads at such stunning wickedness and we wonder how could Solomon have fallen that far and yet it could be argued that at least these wicked people respected the children they slaughtered because at least they buried them. I mean they slaughtered their children out of fear that their crops would fail, that they would be attacked. We don't even like to think it but today abortion bills do the exact same thing. They also slaughter children, except the God that they worship is not Molech, it's not Ashtoreth, it's a modern God called Planned Parenthood or NARAL, National Abortion Rights Action

League. I mean the infants are still being sacrificed on an altar, but instead of being buried they're now sold for beauty treatments or embryonic stem cells or dumped along with medical waste or simply incinerated. We don't see it that way because great care has been taken by the abortion industry to keep the public and especially frightened and vulnerable mothers in the dark. I mean we shake our heads at how Solomon could fall so far and yet right in our day we do the exact same thing. So thank God we have a God who forgives, a God who came to earth in the form of a man so that he could live out his life perfectly and then earn the right to lay down his life of perfection in exchange for our life of sin.

As 1 John 4 says: *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.* This is a God like the father of the prodigal son, this is a God who will run to meet us when we return to our senses. And at some point in Solomon's life he did just that. I mean we don't know how close he was at the end of his life when sanity once more returned but we do know that the wisest man who ever lived at the very end offered his very wisest advice. And this is what he said, he said: *Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.* So I would like to unpack that a little bit.

First we need to look at that statement, "fear God." What did Solomon mean by that? I mean we've spent years and years dispensing with the notion that God is a God to be feared. We say our God is a God of love so why would Solomon tell us to fear him? Well the first answer is because God says so, and he says so repeatedly in the Old Testament and in the New. *1 Peter 1:17: And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile. Luke 1:50: And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. Acts 9:31: So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied. Psalm 34: Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. And Proverbs 1:7: The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.* So God clearly endorses the fear of God.

So we ask, okay, just what is that? Well, I've never seen one in person but I've been told by people who have gone whale watching that the only response you feel when you see a creature so powerful, so different, so magnificent is awe, and awe is a form of fear and respect. And if you've ever been to the Rocky Mountains or the Grand Canyon, you know the same experience. Or how about a

huge and intense thunderstorm? I mean there's awe in those things. There's fear and respect. But those are just parts of God's handiwork. *Psalm 18* says at the presence of God the mountains shook. Says -- quote -- "*they trembled because he was angry.*" If an inanimate object like a mountain deems God worthy of fear, shouldn't we?

Last week I spoke about the prophet Isaiah, arguably the holiest man of his age who's given a vision of God. He's taken into God's presence and he describes his experience by saying, "*Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!*" Now the NIV translates Isaiah as saying, "*I'm ruined!*" Well the King James version says it even better, it translates Isaiah's words as saying, "*I am undone!*" It's another way of describing what Isaiah is trying to communicate, and he's trying to communicate disintegration. I mean, what Isaiah is saying is I'm literally, I was coming apart at the seams, having come near the living God.

R.C. Sproul in his book *The Holiness of God* also points out that at the presence of God the doorposts and the thresholds which are, again, inanimate objects had the good sense to quake, says their molecules literally trembled. And I ask do we have that same kind

of sense? You see, unless you -- unless you have a real sense of the awfulness of God -- and by that I don't mean that God is awful, I mean that God fills us with awe, at his immensity, at his power -- if you don't have a sense of the awe of God then you're not going to be moved by the fact that he became one of us, by the fact that that very God took on flesh and lived among us.

Sproul points to a New Testament incident to point out that Jesus himself had the very same awe, the very same power. He points to the Son of God and he's asleep on a boat in the Sea of Galilee and around him is a furious squall and his disciples who are all experienced life-long sailors, they're terrified. You've got to picture, the winds are howling, the waves are crashing, they're not crashing, they're crashing into the boat, they're trying to bail, it's not working, the boat's filling up with water. There in the front of the boat is Jesus and he's sound asleep. So his disciples accused him of careless indifference. This is *Mark 4*. It says: *On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" And he awoke*

and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

So you have to picture this incredible squall, hurricane like conditions and Jesus says, "Stop!" He says, "Peace, be still" and the waters instantly become as flat as glass and the winds instantly stop. And Sproul points out that the fear of the storm was nothing compared to the fear of him who commanded it to stop. Says: *And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"*

So when Solomon instructs us to fear him, he's telling us that the one true source of reverential awe in our lives has to be God. And furthermore he tells us: *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.* So understanding who God is and who I am in relation to him is really the starting point for everything. Get that right and you will be exercising genuine wisdom and life will begin to make sense. Get that wrong and you'll play the fool and this life and the next will not make sense. And you know, most of us play the fool.

Romans 3:10-18 is a terrible passage of scripture relating to the fear of God. It's basically God's indictment to all of mankind. Let me just read it to you. This is God saying: *As it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known." "There is no fear of God before their eyes."* See it's that last part of the indictment that's the ultimate summation of everything God has against us. It's summed up with one simple sentence: *"There's no fear of God before their eyes."*

Why is that? Why is there no fear of God? Well, it's very simple. It's because God's judgment doesn't happen until it's too late. See offend God and violate his laws and apparently nothing happens. But that's not so. God says: *Because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works.* See, it's that fear of judgment that totally escapes those who are outside the kingdom of God. It's been exchanged for a fear of man and for a fear of disease,

for a fear of everything. And this world intensely resents anyone who genuinely fears God. I mean if you treat your faith as anything near approaching important, what does the world say? "Nut case." "Unhinged." "Religious whacko." "Holy Roller." People don't like it. The reason why people don't like it is because people don't like God. They resent his intrusion into their lives.

The first thing we have to realize about fearing God is that fearing him is a gift that comes from God himself. Listen to what God says in *1 Thessalonians 1:4*. He says: *For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.* What God's saying is when the grace of God opens your eyes to the awe, to the power, to the grace and the love of God, it's because the gospel has come to you -- quote -- not only in word, which you're hearing right now, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. When God starts gifting you, you begin to want to know who he really is. That means getting to know the Bible which is our only source of knowledge of God. And the more you know God, the easier it is to receive his power, his mercy, his justice, and his love. See if you know next to nothing about him you won't just be ignorant, you will be actively deceived because the god of this world will see to it that he fills in the blanks for you. And much of what you learn

about God will be lies. They'll be just what Jesus said they would be in *John 8:44* when he described how the enemy works. He said: *"He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it."* That's Jesus describing the prince of this world. That's the name that Jesus had for the devil, he called him, "the prince of this world." And the prince of this world never stops working and he's got his ambassadors as well.

There's a new breed of aggressively hostile atheists who make no effort of their hatred of God. Men like Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens. These are all folks who were New York Times best sellers. They have all tout the fact that they have no fear of God whatsoever. I've read much of what they've had to say and much of it is just as Jesus predicted, flat out lies. But you wouldn't know that if you didn't read your Bible. You see, fearing God is a choice but it's a choice that requires effort.

So again, you say, why should I? Well, again, Solomon has the answer. This is the final word from a man who's been there and done that, covers every human endeavor there is and he did every one of those endeavors to the max. I mean, there's no one better qualified to advise us about life than Solomon, and he said: *"This*

is the conclusion of the matter, fear God and obey his Commandments."

Now those two points are absolutely interconnected because you can't have one without the other. You see, if you truly fear God, you will obey his commandments. And here's why I say that. Martin Luther said we are saved by faith alone, by a faith that is never alone. And what he meant was that when you become a new creature in Christ you're not given just a clean slate before God -- we call that justification -- but we've also been given the righteousness of Christ. And that means that Christians have been given by God a unique will and it is a will to obey that was characteristic of Christ's relationship with his Father, it's now part of the new creatureliness that we have as Christians. We now have inside us a will and a desire that *Ezekiel 36* captures perfectly. God says this: *I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.* I mean God is careful to point out we don't do this, he does this. That is he creates within us this brand new desire to -- quote -- *"walk in his statutes and be careful to obey his rules."* I mean just like the first thing a newborn baby does naturally is breathe, so too a newborn believer in Christ also

begins to do something naturally he's never done before and that is to walk in his statutes and be careful to obey his rules. You see, if you're alive, you breathe. I mean you don't think about it, you don't fret about it, you don't consider the act of breathing to be a burden. Instead it's the most natural part of simply being alive. Well, so too for a Christian should be works, that is obeying God's commands. They should flow from faith as naturally as breath flows from life. Listen to how James puts it. He says: *So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.*

You know in the old days a nurse would bring a mirror up to the nose and mouth of dying people to see if they were still alive, and if their breath fogged up the mirror, they were breathing, so they were living. Well, James applies the very same test of life to Christians except instead of holding up a mirror to their noses, he's holding up a mirror to their works, to their obedience. He says if there's living faith, there's always going to be living works fogging up the mirror. Religion produces the opposite. Religion produces dead people walking. You can take a corpse, you could hook it up to a heart-lung machine, you can force it to breathe but you're not going to make it alive. Breath comes from

life, not vice versa. And by the same token people try to do the same thing with works. I mean, you can take a spiritually dead corpse and force him to do good things but what you have is called "religion." Unfortunately the church is filled with religious corpses largely because people don't really understand what the gospel is in the first place. I mean they understand the gospel largely as just a set of propositions about who God is and therefore if you raise your hand, if you go forward at a meeting, you've essentially completed your end of the transaction, you've become a Christian. Not so. Conversion is a unique act of God whereby he chooses for reasons known only to him, unworthy rebellious sinners and he infuses them with his spirit solely as an unmerited gift. *Ephesians 2:8: For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* So we walk in those good works because now as new creatures in Christ we have a God-given desire to obey. And we don't do that perfectly. But when we disobey we feel the sting of the Holy Spirit's conviction. And that newfound desire to obey is such an integral part of our life in Christ that Jesus was unequivocal about equating our love for him with obedience. Listen to how he put it in *John 14:15*, Jesus said: *"If you love me you will obey what I command."* And

six verses later in verse 21, he says: *"Whoever has my commands and obeys them he is the one who loves me."* And two verses after that in verse 23, he says: *"If anyone loves me he will obey my teaching."* Three times in three paragraphs, I mean, do you think Jesus is trying to make a point? What he's saying is ground shaking because he's describing a brand new type of creature. And to put it simply what he's saying is the way his sheep spell L-O-V-E is O-B-E-Y.

Solomon's advice is to fear God and obey his commandments. That's no longer just consummate wisdom, it's a new way of life for Christians. And again Jesus made that clear in *Matthew 7:21*, he said: *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'*

It's not what you say, he says, it's what you do. You fear God and obey his commandments not because you have to but because now you want to. I mean, Solomon didn't understand that until he had exhausted every single option that this world had offered him. Remember it was Solomon's wisdom that drove him to despair. He

tried everything and everything was meaningless. He had taken all of God's gifts and then turned on the giver. And when everything finally failed, guess who was still there and still faithful? I mean, how gracious of God to take back this prodigal who chose over God laughter and wine, folly, amusement, sex, toil, and even wisdom under the sun. But that wisdom is not the same as God's wisdom. I mean, Solomon didn't realize it but when he repented he was responding to a much greater wisdom than the wisdom that he had been given. God says this in *James 3:13*, he said: *Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.* That's earthly wisdom, that's wisdom under the sun. And it's the wisdom that keeps this world locked in its desperate spiral of meaningless, where the only options people think they have are the distractions that Solomon embraced.

I mean this is a world that's been successfully turned upside down by the prince of this world, who again -- quote -- *"was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there's no truth in him."* He's the one who makes people think that good is evil and evil is good, that wisdom is foolishness and

foolishness is wisdom. I mean, there's a reason why they mock the God of wisdom and there's a reason why they mock the wisdom of God. Listen to what God says. He says: *For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."*

I don't think we realize the privilege that God has given us. What he's saying is if you know Christ, then the living God has taken up residence in your spirit and given you his wisdom. Quote -- *"And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God."* That's the wisdom that God offered Solomon. It's the same wisdom that prompted Solomon's advice, *"fear God and obey his commands."* In the end he feared God and obeyed his commands because a gracious God would not let him go.

Now if you're here this morning, it just might be it's because the same God will not let you go. Perhaps you've lived life like Solomon, perhaps you've been side-tracked by the same dead-ends that he went down. I mean, he had it all and all it gave him was a lifetime of regret. But through it all he learned how to aim his life at God and his kingdom and that took greater wisdom than Solomon had and that wisdom was a gift from God.

And what is absolutely amazing is that God says you can have that gift as well. I don't know how many times I've said this over and over and over again, there's only three qualifications for getting God's wisdom: Number one, you have to realize you don't have it; number two, you have to ask him for it; and number three, you have to believe he's going to give it to you. This is what he says. He says: *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.* All you need for wisdom is to ask for it. God's going to give it to you both to know Christ and to live for him. I mean I pray for that wisdom -- my wife is my witness -- every single day for the last 35 years, and I believe God's given it to me. If I didn't believe it, I wouldn't receive it. It is a divine

supernatural ability to live skillfully for God and his kingdom and it's yours just for the asking.

I mean, God's offering a greater wisdom than Solomon had, and we appropriate it by asking for it, I mean, think of that. Solomon learned the hard way that God was worthy of the reverential awe that we call fear and that mere talk about obeying his commands is cheap. What matters, what proof that God's Spirit is real and is within us is not words, it's deeds. If you love him you keep his commands, not on your own strength but on the strength of his Holy Spirit living inside you. That's faith with works and it's never dead. And when wisdom under the sun failed Solomon, God's heavenly wisdom prevailed because God wouldn't let Solomon go. And if he's speaking to you now, don't let him go. Don't let the enemy play you for a fool.

In the end I'd like us to consider a chorus of a tune by Michael Card. It was entitled "God's Own Fool" and it sums up perfectly the difference between God's wisdom and man's. This is what Michael Card said, he said: "When we in our foolishness thought we were wise, He played the fool and He opened our eyes. When we in our weakness believed we were strong, He became helpless to show we were wrong. And so we follow God's own fool for only the foolish can tell, believe the unbelievable and come be a fool as well."

Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for your foolishness, we proudly, proudly say we are fools for Christ. I praise you and thank you for that gift. I praise you and thank you for the gift that Solomon gave us in telling and boiling it all down to two things: Fear God and obey his commandments. Lord, if we could just do those two things our life would matter, our life would come in order, the heavenly wisdom would be flowing through us in our life. And so we pray those things, Lord, and we pray for the grace and the power to do just that. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.