

“The Wisdom of a Different People”
Micah 6:1-8; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31;
Matthew 5:1-12

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I don't know about you, but the world seems crazy to me right now. And in a crazy world, what I'm looking for is wisdom. It's interesting to me that the idea of wisdom comes up again because we spent a lot of the fall talking about wisdom.

There is a lot in the Corinthians passage, and I'm not going to try to do a lot of it. As Donan helped us see in the children's sermon, you can take one little passage and do a lot of interpretation on that one little piece. What struck me from this passage from Corinthians is where it says Jesus has become our wisdom. Jesus is our wisdom.

Let me remind you of the definition I gave of wisdom when we started way back in August. Wisdom generally means knowing how to read the ways and the moral structure of the world and live according to them so that one not only copes with life, but lives well in an upright manner. That's a mouthful. But the main point is that it helps us read the ways and the moral structures of the world, and then using those, enables us to live well in an upright manner.

So as we think about what it means for Jesus to become our wisdom, we notice in the NIV translation it says Christ Jesus has become wisdom from God, that is righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. That clears it all up!

So we have to stop and look at what righteousness, sanctification, and redemption are all about. I would suspect that you're a little tired of me talking about righteousness, but it's here again. Righteousness is linked to wisdom, it's a piece of the wisdom, and what I think biblical righteousness describes is the good, the healthy, the right relationship according to the will of God. God describes what those healthy, right relationships look like, so I'm not going to spend a lot more time on righteousness right now.

Sanctification is one of those words I think most of us look at and say, “That's a real religious word and I don't really know what it means.” I would suggest there is probably some disagreement about what sanctification means. Literally, it means to be consecrated, to be dedicated to God or to holiness. As I was looking at definitions of the Greek word, one of the definitions that came up really catches the flavor of what sanctification is all about: *being progressively transformed by God into his likeness*. If we think about following Jesus as becoming more like Jesus, that's the idea of sanctification. It's the idea of the progress we make toward becoming more the followers of Christ, more engaged with God, more dedicated to what God is about. That's the idea of sanctification. And Jesus is our sanctification because he's the one who enables that, and guides us, and leads us into it.

Finally, there is the idea of redemption. We all know if we get a coupon and we take it to a store, we redeem it for something in the store. The idea is we're liberating that

which is in the store from where it was. When Moses went to Pharaoh, he said God wanted his people redeemed. He wanted them freed. Now Pharaoh didn't really like the coupon Moses was bringing, but after while he was convinced it was a good idea and God's people were redeemed. They were freed from slavery.

So that's what the wisdom of Christ is about. It's about bringing us into right relationships, leading us to be ever more like him, and in doing that, it frees us, it liberates us to be the very people that God envisioned us being. I think the freedom of faith is when we fit into what we're meant to be. I'm not going to keep going on that because I could get off on that for a while. What I really want to talk about is how, when we think of Jesus as our wisdom, and we have these concepts as background for that, we're being guided into a way of reading the ways of the world, the moral structure of the world, so we might live lives well and in an upright manner.

I've been reading a book called "The Righteous Mind," and in it there's this description of us as people who have an innate morality. I guess growing up as a Christian I always believed we had an innate morality, but here's a psychologist who is saying, yes, we do have an innate morality. He says it based around five or six different things. It's based around a sense of empathy or caring for others, a sense of fairness—do we get what we deserve or not. It's based around liberty or a sense of freedom—do we have freedom of action, and in what way? It's based around a sense of authority, some kind of authority in our lives. It's based around a sense of loyalty. We tend to get in groups and are loyal to our groups. Finally, a sense of inviolability, that is something is always right, a given.

What I want to suggest is that we have these innate ways of seeing the world but as we grow and live we give those different weight. We shape them and define them in different ways. As we do that, they begin to determine how we see the world and how we see what we do. Our experiences can shape those ways of doing things. I think we're all familiar with this in our own lives. There are things that are more important to us than others and they get shaped by experiences we've had.

One way of describing this is to look at how somebody characterized some people. Tennessee Williams' main character in "The Glass Menagerie" was Amanda. She lacked the education and skills to support herself so she had a fear that drove her to attempt to control other people in her family. Her husband always had the expectation that he would be a writer, an adventurer, and so there's a conflict between those expectations. How he believed in his liberty and what she believed she needed as a loyalty conflicted.

What I'm trying to say is that it's our lives as we live them that shape how our innate morality comes out. If we just let the world shape us, I would argue that we get misshapen. Why is the world so broken? I believe it's because we have gotten so misshapen. We've let certain pieces of our morality become the most important. Do I let liberty become the most important thing in my life, and what kind of liberty is it? Is it my own liberty at the expense of everyone else? What kind of authority do I listen to? What is the authority in my life, because we all have some kind of authority? What

authority we listen to helps shape our life. What are we loyal to? What are the loyalties of our lives?

What I think is being said in Corinthians is that when we have real wisdom, our innate morality is shaped in a way that fits the ways of the world and the moral structure of the world. And who is the wisdom for us? It's Christ.

So it's another way of saying we tend to be broken people and we need help to be healed. Christ is the way that heals us, that reshapes us. To do that, we have to be open to allowing Christ to do that.

So how do the Beatitudes fit with all of this? What I want to suggest is if we look at them, there's an invitation to see our limitations and our desires and how they fit with what Christ will do with us. It might help if we look at that first one: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they shall inherit the kingdom of heaven. Eugene Peterson has an interesting way of translating it: Blessed are those who are at the end of their rope, for when there's less of us there's more room for God.

I think he's getting at something that's really important. As we allow the world to shape us and as we hold onto that misshapeness, we will struggle. But if we let ourselves see that we're misshapen, that we have brokenness, that we have limits, that we get to the end of our rope, that we can't see fully, if we're poor in spirit then we have an entry into the kingdom of heaven because we begin to open our hearts to the work of God.

The next one is about being humble or being meek. It's about recognizing either our limitation or our desires. Really, what Jesus is doing here is taking a message that has come all the way through scripture. There's a comparison you can do with this to Isaiah 61. He's talking about our limitations and our desires and if we face our limitations and recognize our desires and allow those desires to be shaped for what God calls for us to shape them around, to be peacemakers, to care about peace, to care about righteousness, then we'll be blessed people. He will reshape us.

That's a lot of stuff, but the idea is that we can get misshapen by the world around us and that as we listen to Christ and recognize our limits and our desires, if we let Jesus lead, us we can be blessed. But we have to listen to Jesus. We have to allow him to be our wisdom, to follow where he guides us. When he tells us to give a cup of cold water, or to clothe someone, or to welcome the stranger, we have to listen. It's so easy to get misshapen by our world and we need the wisdom of Christ—the righteousness, the sanctification, the redemption, the reshaping of who we are—and it comes as we listen, through an acknowledgement of our own limitations and our desires, that we might be guided by Christ.

So really it's all about letting Jesus be our wisdom. We're called to be a different people, and the wisdom of a different people is Jesus. Amen.