

## **AND NOW, WISDOM SPEAKS**

**Proverbs 8: 22-36**

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*February 7, 2010*

*Wisdom.* It's a word that makes you think of time-tested truths and being smart and important values. Webster defines wisdom as "accumulated philosophic or scientific learning" – or, simply put, "good sense." Since humanity has been around, folks have tried to be wise in how they do things. Sometimes they're successful at it; other times not so much. For every polio vaccine, there's the medieval practice of bloodletting. For every compact disc, there's the 8-track tape. For every Honda Civic there's a Yugo. For every Lean Cuisine entrée there's a low-carb candy bar. You get the point.

People try to emulate wisdom in not only what they do but what they say. Thomas Edison once quipped, "If we did the things we are capable of, we would astound ourselves." It was Groucho Marx who said, "I would never belong to a group that would accept someone like me as a member." And even Bart Simpson offers some wisdom about the nature of temptation, saying, "I don't know why I did it, I don't know why I enjoyed it, and I don't know why I'll do it again!"

*Wisdom.* I happen to know a thing or two about it. You see, it's who I am. I know that sounds strange, because most people think of wisdom as a quality or attribute. But I can assure you, I've been around a long time. Even the Bible quotes me:

*The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,  
the first of his acts long ago.  
Ages ago I was set up,  
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.*

That's from the book of Proverbs – I'm in that one a lot. But you'll find me in other parts of the Bible. I was with Aaron when God called him to serve alongside Moses as they worshipped God during those forty years in the desert (Exodus 28:3). I was there when Joshua was named to succeed Moses as God's people made their way into the promised land (Deuteronomy 34:9).

When Solomon was named by God to rule Israel at the height of its power, who do you think he called on to help him out (2 Chronicles 1:10)? When Job was arguing with his so-called friends about the ill-fate that had befallen him, who do you think he leaned on (Job 12:13)? When Daniel and his friends were chosen to serve in the king's high palace, what attribute do you think got them there (Daniel 1:4)? The Psalmist praises me as he praises God (Psalm 90:12). The prophets lamented my absence at the falling of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 28:12 and Jeremiah 49:7) and celebrated my presence in the coming Messiah (Isaiah 11:2).

So I've been around the block a few times. And yet it never ceases to amaze to me – because, even given my long history, even with my continued involvement in the ways of the world, it astonishes me that a lot of people still don't know what to do with me. I mean, you'd think folks would want to be wise in what they say and what they do. But as crazy as it sounds, that's not always how it works.

Take the story of the 18-year-old man who was charged with robbing a gas station. He walked in to the store, pulled a gun on the attendant and demanded money.

The employee didn't panic. She calmly said to him, *I don't think you're old enough to be robbing us. Don't you have to be at least 16?* The thief, slightly irked, proceeded to pull out his wallet and show the clerk his driver's license to prove that he was, in fact, "of age." And as soon as he left, the cashier called the police and gave them the name and address of the man who had just robbed the store. The suspect was apprehended two hours later at his home. Not that robbing a store is a very wise thing to do in the first place, but seriously.....

Or consider the true tale of the world-renowned car company who launched a new automobile called the *Nova* back in the 60's. Sales shot through the roof in America. Wanting to make a move into the international market, they began manufacturing thousands of these cars in Mexico and other Hispanic-speaking countries. They went all out – huge billboards, brochures, television commercials – everything they could do to repeat the success. How surprised and disheartened they were to see sales of the *Nova* drop to an all-time low – barely a car was driven off the lots. They had no idea what happened – why did the success not repeat itself? And that was when someone enlightened the powers-that-be by sharing that *Nova*, in Spanish, means "no go." Not exactly the name you want to give to a car you're trying to sell!

Even the Bible talks about some folks who would've benefitted from hanging out with me a little more. There's the story of the great King David and Bathsheba. Entranced by her beauty, David left me in the dust and arranged to have Bathsheba's husband, a great warrior, killed in the line of duty. That way he could marry her for himself. It was only after the prophet Nathan exposed the travesty of his actions that David fully realized the error of his ways.

Even David's son, Solomon – a man revered for his wisdom – even he didn't always put me to good use. His desire for power and wealth made Israel the most influential nation of its time. But eventually these "things" got in the way of him attending to God's will. How ironic that the wisdom God had given him wound up being the cause of his downfall.

Why is it that people fail to use the gift of wisdom in their lives? It doesn't seem to matter if you're a great king of the Bible, a common criminal, or just an ordinary person somewhere in the middle trying to make it in life – everyone stumbles along the way. Life is a series of choices; of walking down the road that lays before you and facing any number of forks in that road. Some of them are a bit ambiguous – where you should go for dinner that evening, what color you should paint the bedroom. Others, though, have a little more weight riding on them. And they're not always the obvious ones, are they?

Why is that? I wish I knew – even wisdom doesn't have all the answers! But it does seem to me that, for whatever reason, folks have a hard time getting hold of me these days. That's not to say they're not looking – I just think they're looking in the wrong places. You see, you won't find wisdom – *true* wisdom – in fancy words from a self-help book. You won't find wisdom in the "things" that supposedly fill your life, like what you see on commercials or the latest fad. And dare I say that you won't find wisdom in the words and learnings of the greatest teachers and sages of the world – wise as they may be.

That's because wisdom isn't something you can capture in a convenient, user-friendly form. I am part of the God you worship every week, part of the wonderful life God has given you to live, part of the challenge and calling to be God's people now and

forever. Being wise is not always about the things you do or say, as much as it's about the person you already are – and who you are in the process of becoming.

And when you think of me that way, it's amazing where you'll find me. I've already mentioned that you'll find me in the Bible – God's self-revelation to the world. That is where my wisdom is truly timeless – things in the world change day in and day out, but God's wisdom, God's word remains the same forever. And the amazing thing is that for every Bathsheba and Solomon, there is the story of a God who somehow turns what's imperfect into something perfect, something wrong into something right. That's the wisdom of the Bible.

You'll also find me in the presence of people of faith; in the fellowship of the church. Every time you come together to worship, to study, to re-create, I'm right there. It's incredible the wonderful things God can do in your midst when you are gathered as one – you're so much stronger when you're together than when you're by yourself.

I must admit I'm constantly surprised at the way some people treat their faith – as if it's a solo venture, maneuvering the ups and downs of life all by themselves. I look around and see all kinds of Christians trying to live their faith on their own. Take it from wisdom – that's not a very wise thing to try to do. From the beginning, God created God's people to live in communion. You *need* each other – you need each other to celebrate the joys of life as well as support one another when times get tough. You need each other to grow and mature in the faith – young and old alike. Like a perfectly pieced-together puzzle, you all fit together into one beautiful Body of Christ. And it's in that collective body where you'll find, among other things, wisdom.

But most of all, you will find wisdom in the person of Jesus Christ. And not just in the things he said – although he did say some amazing things. “For God so loved the world that he gave us his only son....” “I am the resurrection and the life....” Jesus sure knew how to put me to good use in the the words that came out of his mouth.

But if there was ever a person who demonstrated the truth behind the saying “Actions speak louder than words,” it was Jesus. Remember when they brought that woman to him, saying that she had done all kinds of horrible things that merited stoning her to death? They were right, of course – that's what the law said you could do. But Jesus showed them that wisdom is more than following the letter of the law by telling them this: *Whoever is without sin cast the first stone*. Wow, talk about a game-changer! Those guys just looked at those rocks in their hand, their righteousness anger deflated.

Or remember the blind man who hadn't seen a thing from birth, coming to Jesus and looking for a handout. It would've been easy for Jesus to have just given him what he wanted. In fact, by today's standards that would've been the “Christian thing” to do. But Jesus gave him so much more than simply what he wanted; he gave him something beyond his wildest dreams. And it drove the authorities nuts. They made all kinds of accusations, and all Jesus did was just give the guy his sight back! Jesus' wisdom left them absolutely stumped.

And how could we ever forget that fateful day – Jesus standing before his accusers, knowing full well what would happen; knowing where this road would take him. He was given an “out,” you remember – a chance to clear his name and walk out the door. But he didn't – he stayed the course. It was one of Jesus' wisest moments. It was also one of his most loving moments too. Which shouldn't surprise, since wisdom and love are close relatives.

See, the thing about God's wisdom, especially the kind we find in Jesus, is that it utterly defies the wisdom of the world. The world teaches you to love those who love you. God calls you to love everyone. The world says it's okay to do whatever you want, however you want, whenever you want. God asks you to follow God's will rather than your own. The world declares that life is short and you need to get what you want now, while the getting's good. God reminds you that there's a higher purpose to it all. God's wisdom picks up where the world lets off

Indeed, you are blessed people – people who have at your disposal a wisdom that reminds you *who* you are and *whose* you are. And I'm here to tell you – there's no greater wisdom than that. So thanks for giving me a shot. And thanks be to God. AMEN.