

Receiving true wisdom

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[0 : 00] Good morning. I'm Hong Park and it gives me great pleasure to be given the privilege to share God's Word with you today.

Thank you to Cassandra for reading the passage for us this morning. Shall we just pray? Our Father, help us as we examine the passage before us today.

By ourselves, we can never understand your wisdom, but we thank you for the gift of your Spirit who illuminates your scripture to us. Please open our eyes to your words. In Jesus' name, Amen. Worldly wisdom. Isn't it amazing? It has put man on the moon. It has pointed telescopes and cameras to the skies to unfold the vastness of the universe.

It has created artificial intelligence. It has peered into the atom and even split it. The messenger RNA has been manipulated to produce vaccines against the coronavirus.

[1 : 08] And thank God for the wisdom of the IT world. If we had experienced this pandemic and lockdown 20 years ago, the word of God from KEC's pulpit would have fallen silent for the last 10 months.

For those of us bunkered in the safety of our homes. But despite all that, human intellect and wisdom cannot tell us what God is like or how to come to know Him.

All the thinkers, the scientists and researchers, philosophers with their wisdom, cannot tell you what God is like. Some simply cannot accept the existence of a creator, one beyond space and time, who sovereignly executes His will for His own purposes.

And so they decided, God cannot exist. And yet, from time immemorial, every human society had an innate need to worship, to look beyond the physical world, to someone or something bigger and wiser and more powerful than themselves.

And even then, no amount of religion, ritual, magic or philosophy can tell us who the Creator is. About the Creator, both the shaman and the scientists can only guess.

[2 : 34] God is simply infinitely beyond us. A prophet wrote, Some in the Corinthian church were influenced by the prevailing culture of the Greek city, where wisdom, knowledge was greatly esteemed.

Many considered themselves mature, wise, and were arrogant because of their social standing, fortifying their status by claiming special relationships to, in their own eyes, eloquent, wise, or more significant preachers who have graced their church.

They measured their maturity and spirituality by their spiritual gifts, their knowledge, and which factions they belonged to. Some had high-brow non-Christian friends who considered the message of the cross a foolishness.

Why make so much of the shameful spectacle of a crucified criminal? And what is this fable of a resurrection? Embarrassed by their friends' scorn, they looked for a message that couldn't be dismissed as intellectual suicide, one that made them look wise and respectable in the eyes of the world.

But Paul resolved to know nothing except Christ and Him crucified. He was not going to dress up the gospel. He was not going to add to the gospel or remove anything from it.

[4 : 22] He did not preach with words of human wisdom, persuasion, or eloquence. He was glad to be regarded as foolish and weak, so that the Corinthian faith may not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but it is the power to those who are being saved, the power of God to those who are being saved.

Only the crucified Jesus can save spiritually dead people. He is the only remedy for sin. The world's wisdom has no cure for sin.

In verse 6 of today's passage, Paul changes course slightly. He did not want to be misunderstood. Paul says, Don't get me wrong.

We do actually speak a message of wisdom among the mature. It may be foolish in the eyes of the world and its rulers, but it is wise in the eyes of the one who matters most, God.

[5 : 29] He says, We declare God's wisdom a mystery that has been hidden, which God destined for our glory before time began. Verse 7. Paul writes about this wisdom of God from verse 6 to 16, and we can divide up the passage into two sections, from 6 to 10, the wisdom of God that is hidden, and 10 onwards, the wisdom of God that we have received, revealed by the Spirit.

God's wisdom is first hidden from human beings. A mystery. A mystery in Paul's letters is something that is hidden, but is now made visible or revealed.

God's wisdom stands in opposition to the wisdom of this age and its rulers. That worldly wisdom that the Corinthians were aspiring for and whose leaders they were so eager to live up to and to impress.

Paul writes, These rulers are coming to nothing. And indeed, the golden age of the Greeks and the Romans are no more. And one day, the current world powers that dominate the world today will also come to nothing.

And it is great folly for the Church to align herself with worldly powers. Paul says, We speak a message of wisdom among the mature.

[6 : 56] Who are the mature? In context, they are the people who have accepted Paul's message. They see God's wisdom in the message of the cross. They are the believers in Jesus Christ.

And Paul purposely used the word mature to subtly remind the Corinthians, since they regarded themselves as mature, that they should have recognized immediately the wisdom of his message. Paul says in verse 7, that this wisdom has been hidden. And astonishingly, it is something God had planned even before he created heavens and the earth, even before he created Adam and Eve. And right there, even before the creation of the world, he has already planned to reconcile a sinful, condemned humanity to himself through the incarnation of his Son and by delivering his Son over to death for our sins and raising him to life for our justification.

Now tell me, which human being using his human wisdom would have uncovered such a ludicrous plan? Indeed, verse 9 says, No eyes have seen, no ear has heard, no human mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.

[8 : 19] The plan, in the words of John Stott, is invisible, inaudible, and inconceivable beyond the reach of human eyes, ears, and minds.

No person writing a story of the salvation of mankind would have come up with this plot line since, as we heard last week, for the Saviour of the world to die on the Roman cross was simply foolish and scandalous.

In every script, probably this would have been there. Live a good life, meet the demands of God, and you will be saved. Try harder. You can do it. Who would have come up with a plot that God himself would meet the requirements of his own justice by dying on the despicable cross?

Inconceivable. The religious and the political rulers of that age certainly did not understand, verse 8, and so they crucified the Lord of Glory instead.

The great irony is that they unknowingly fulfilled the plan of God. This plan was set in motion for the people who loved him.

[9 : 34] But, how would those who loved him know of this hidden plan since they too were equally clueless at this stage? Someone in the know had to reveal it.

Let me ask you a question. What am I thinking now? Some of my Facebook friends might guess that I was thinking laksa for lunch?

Well, no. Some others may imagine that I was reflecting on what wonderful hymns Alison had led us to sing. Maybe, but actually no, that wasn't what I was thinking.

you can guess, but you will never know. No brain scan or probe or psychoanalyst will be able to help you to know what I was thinking.

And this is a great comfort to me. The only way you can know what I've been thinking if, is if I take the time and the initiative to reveal that to you.

[10 : 40] What I was thinking was that why is everyone in black? Until I realized it was their uniform. This comes to Paul's next point.

Verse 11. Who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? If we cannot discern the thoughts of another human being, how in the world can we discern the thoughts of God? God's thoughts are unfathomable except only to His Spirit. Verse 10 and 11. The third person of the Trinitarian God searches or investigates all things.

Only the Holy Spirit knows everything, even my deepest thoughts, and nothing is hidden from Him. And He searches also the deep things of God.

He knows God's hidden plans and thoughts. And here is the wonderful news of verse 10. God's wisdom, which was invisible, inaudible, and inconceivable, God has revealed to us by His Spirit.

[11 : 55] The Spirit takes what is God's alone and reveals it to man. God's plan. Who has the Spirit revealed this to? Who is it that the Spirit has given understanding of God's plan?

Well, in a way, it is true that, as we shall see later, that all Christians receive the Spirit at conversion and so receive an understanding of the things of God.

But here, in the first instance, the revelation of the mystery was given to a specific group of people and not to Christians in general. How do we come to that conclusion?

Now, in the passage before this, in verses 1 to 5, Paul uses the singular pronoun, I proclaim, my message, my preaching. Then shifts in verse 6 onwards to plural pronouns, we speak, we declare, and so on.

This group of people whom Paul also belonged to spoke the same message to the mature. They declared together God's hidden wisdom that God has destined for their glory.

[13 : 10] Let's compare this with what Paul wrote in another part of scripture in Ephesians 3, 4 to 5. He writes, In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to people in other generations, that is, it was hidden, as it now has been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.

There we go. It is clear that the mystery of Christ was first revealed to God's holy apostles and prophets. this is the we that Paul was referring to, he and his fellow apostles.

He writes in 1 Corinthians 15, 9 to 11, while talking about the gospel, he said, Whether it is I or they, that is the other apostles, this gospel is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

When Jesus spoke to the apostles concerning the Spirit, he told them that the Holy Spirit, when he comes, will teach them all things, and will remind them of everything he has ever taught them, and will lead them to all truths.

And this is what has transpired. Verse 12, Paul writes, What we have received is not the Spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us.

[14 : 45] The apostles received two gifts. Firstly, they received the gift that God has freely given them, that is the salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

At the same time, they received God's Spirit who enabled them to understand exactly what they had received in Christ. They received the Spirit of Revelation.

They were not only witnesses to events, for example, Jesus died on the Roman cross, but they were also given the correct interpretation of the events, that is, Jesus died on the Roman cross for the sins of man.

That is revelation. They witnessed the death of Jesus at the time of the Passover feast and understood that Jesus is our Passover lamb.

They witnessed the suffering of Jesus and understood that he was the suffering servant of Isaiah, the one who was stricken by God for man's iniquities.

[15 : 52] They saw the resurrected Christ and understood that he was raised from the dead for our justification and that he was indeed the Son of God in power.

When they interpreted events this way, they got it absolutely correct because the Spirit made sure they got it right. And this is what the theologians call apostolic revelation.

Paul goes on to say that the message that the apostles received was not to be kept to themselves, but they were to be communicated to others willing to listen or to read.

Verse 13 says this, this is what we speak. not in words taught by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.

Paul is saying the contents of his message of the cross used words not arising from his own human wisdom, but using words taught by the Spirit.

[16 : 59] and this extended to all other spiritual realities that the apostles spoke of and later wrote down, now collected for us in the New Testament.

Meaning that the very words, phrases and expressions used by Paul in writing this very passage of Scripture that we are reading today is given by God himself.

It is God's word. Paul says in 1 Timothy 3.16 that all Scripture is God-breathed. And Peter wrote in 2 Peter 1.21 for prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

And this is what the theologians call the inspiration of Scripture. The Spirit inspired the Scriptures, both the Old and the New Testament. When we use the word inspired in this manner, it does not mean this, oh I saw a beautiful sunset, I am inspired to write a poem of praise.

No, when we say the Spirit inspired the writing of the Scriptures, it means that as the biblical authors wrote Scripture, they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

[18:19] The words they used were spirit breathed. They used spirit-taught words to explain spiritual realities. However, the authors were not stenographers.

The Spirit did not dictate Scripture to them, neither did the Bible drop from the sky. The Bible is a human book, 66 books written over a long period of time by various authors.

Each book bears the marks of the author's personalities, style of writing, different human literary genres, and the marks of the times in history during which they wrote.

But at the same time, it was also God's book. As people wrote, God ensured that they wrote exactly what He wanted them to write. So, the Scriptures were their own human words and simultaneously God's divine words.

What the Scriptures say? God says. To reject the Bible is to reject the very words of God. To listen to and obey Scripture is to listen and obey God.

[19:34] The wisdom of God is found in written form in the Bible. and we therefore must have a very high view of Scripture. Pastor von Roberts said this in a sermon.

Every passage is exactly as God wanted when correctly interpreted. Correctly interpreted. That is very important because we are fallible in our interpretation.

It is often said, you can make the Bible teach anything you like. John Stott says, yes you are right, you can make the Bible teach anything but only if you are unscrupulous enough.

It is therefore important for all of us to handle God's Word carefully and correctly, but even more so for our pastors, preachers, and teachers, all those who are tasked to explain God's Word to the rest of us.

When each passage is interpreted in its natural meaning, its literary genre, its context, and its place in the revelation of God's salvation plan in Jesus Christ, there is always one best way of understanding and applying each passage.

[20:56] Since the Bible is the very words of God, wouldn't it be great if everyone could naturally understand it? Beckett Cook wrote this in his book, book. If I ever tried to read the Bible, in my religion class for example, the words seemed dead on the page.

I didn't really understand them and so reading them was boring and tedious. I think that it's a common experience for non-Christians and those who are not yet seeking.

They pick up the Bible and go, huh? Paul writes in verse 14, the person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, but considers them foolishness and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.

A person without the Spirit, other translation says, the natural person or the unspiritual person. this person does not accept and in fact cannot understand that which comes from the Spirit of God.

They cannot accept the message of the cross. They consider such things foolishness. Jesus died on the cross for my sins? Foolishness. Jesus rose from the dead?

[22:16] Crazy. We all once belong to this category of people. Rejecting God, wanting to live lives on our own terms.

It is not that we were not clever enough, but because of sin, we simply were unable to, simply cannot discern the wisdom of God because of sin.

We needed nothing short of a miracle. And only the Holy Spirit can open the eyes of our spirit to understand the gospel. And to understand doesn't mean a mere mental acceptance of a fact.

Many believers can tell you the contents of the gospel. Sorry, many unbelievers can tell you the contents of the gospel as well. True understanding is one that leads to salvation, to saving faith.

The Spirit takes the gospel message, makes it sink into the deepest recesses of our hearts, and make that truth our own, and changes the direction of our lives, God word.

[23 : 28] And our own wisdom contributes nothing to this. Religious scholars can write excellent academic works on the Bible, and yet not believe.

But the humble folk in the long house, when he hears the simple gospel of God, believes and opens his heart and puts his trust in the Lord of Glory.

It is grace. The Spirit does this for every believer individually. This is the work of illumination by the Holy Spirit.

Beckett Cook says this after he believed the gospel. After my conversion, the words came alive, and suddenly the Bible became the most fascinating book in the world.

As I read it, the words seemed to jump off the page and began to make sense. It was as if before my conversion, the Bible was written in a language I didn't understand.

[24 : 29] But after my conversion, I was fluent in that language. A light has been turned on. God, if you are not a Christian today, but you are listening in, perhaps you would like to pray this prayer.

God, if you are there, please help me to understand the message of Jesus crucified. What does it all mean? Please open my eyes as I seek more.

Amen. So, this is how we receive the wisdom of God. The Spirit revealed his thoughts and plans first to the apostles and prophets, then inspired the writing of the holy scriptures, and now continues his work of illuminating spiritual truths from the scripture to each individual believer.

Who, then, is the spiritual person? The Corinthians thought they were very spiritual, perhaps even with a hint of arrogance.

Maybe it's because of the many spiritual gifts God has richly blessed them with. Today, people may gauge spirituality by looking at giftings, ministry, service.

[25 : 49] Our opinions on second tier doctrinal issues. Who is our favorite authors? Our choices in equally valid and godly life choices, like whether to homeschool or public school, to work outside or stay home as a parent?

Here is Paul's categorization of the spiritual person. He is the one whom the spirit in grace has already opened their blind eyes spiritual truths, the things of God.

Again, he is the one, the spiritual person is the one whom the spirit in grace has already opened their blind eyes to understand spiritual truths, the things of God, and in context, the gospel in particular.

God's love. All truly born-again Christians are equally spiritual people. There is no division. And I believe the majority of all watching this morning are spiritual people, according to this passage. Perhaps we are at different stages of our walk with God. Some are just starting, some longer, but all are equally spiritual people.

[27 : 08] the spirit has enabled you to discern and to understand in a new way. As said earlier, God holds those who teach the word of God to responsibly handle and teach the Bible rightly.

But to everyone, everyone, the spirit gives enough understanding of scripture, first of all, to believe the gospel unto salvation, to know the extent of God's love and grace, to love God and to love neighbour, to be able to live godly lives that are pleasing to him, putting to death the misdeeds of the flesh and bearing the fruit of the spirit.

Enough understanding for a godly life. God's wisdom come to us not just when we read the Bible, but when we listen to sermons, to teachings, at Bible studies, and when we have spiritual conversations, the spirit is there every time to illuminate spiritual truths to us.

A word of caution at this point. Some people claim special revelation direct from God apart from the Bible, or they can have an unusual way of reading and understanding certain passages, often taking them out of context and outside of some biblical theology.

Some subtly or otherwise, shifts the emphasis from the historic gospel to a different kind of good news. The prosperity gospel has taken over the historic gospel in some churches.

[28 : 54] God wants you to be rich and healthy now. God will ensure your success and make your life better. You can have your best life now. He will give you everything you want.

Just name it and claim it. If none of this is happening to you, it's your fault. You lack faith. Or there may be an obsession with signs and visions and anointings and powers, esoteric spiritual experiences, angels and demons.

Ask, are they preaching the same gospel as the apostles of Jesus? Are they dressing up the gospel? Is this another gospel?

Where, oh where, is the message of the cross? Where is the centrality of God's message of wisdom in which he deals with our greatest need? Sin, righteousness, eternal salvation, holiness. Paul decided to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified. Verse 15. The person with the spirit makes judgment about all things, but such a person is not subjected to merely human judgments.

[30 : 11] For, who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ. a slightly tricky verse to interpret, but this is what I gather.

The spiritual person, the Christian, can make judgment or discern all things. This doesn't make us infallible. We are still subjected to correction.

But we do have a unique gift for the world. we have God's very revelation of his wisdom in our hands, the Bible.

If we handle it correctly, with the help of the Spirit, it gives us a clear understanding of his will. Therefore, we can say that we have the mind of Christ.

We can see things from his perspective, what he thinks of this world and the things happening in it. the unspiritual person does not have the whole picture.

[31 : 19] God is saying in this passage that Christians do. They are the ones who can see the real world for what it is. We of all people can understand the depths and the effects of sin on this world.

We can understand rightly the helpless state of every individual. We can see clearly the misguided reasoning of humanistic philosophy. The Spirit has revealed to us God's wisdom, the gospel, the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

We can detect false teaching if we just pause and reflect on what is preached and taught. We of all peoples can tell the unbelieving world what God, through his word, thinks of issues like abortion, gender identity, social justice, environmental care, racism, poverty, modern slavery, corruption, and nationalism.

The world can judge us backwards, narrow, and ignorant, or foolish and weak as the Corinthians did Paul. But such judgment does not matter.

Only God's judgment matters. The world may even hate us. Christ has already warned us, if the world hates you, keep in mind it hated me first.

[32 : 46] But let us do this with humility of spirit. we really have nothing to boast. Instead, let us always be grateful for God's wisdom and grace given freely to us.

Knowing Christ has nothing to do with our own intellect or wisdom. It is a miraculous act of the spirit. In the first, God sent his son freely into the world to take the punishment we deserved on the cross, so that we can be reconciled to him.

He sent his spirit to us to open our spiritual eyes, so that we can understand and believe that which he has freely given us. It is all him.

It is all grace. Be thankful. Be humble. And lastly, a word directed to Kuching Evangelical Church. Let KEC be a truly spirit-led church by being a church driven by God's word, holding the spirit's word in high esteem.

[33 : 56] In the Bible, we have enough to know the plan of God for salvation in Jesus Christ and to order our lives according to his will. Have you started on the journey to read the Bible together with your brothers and sisters in KEC?

Join the E100 reading plan. Join a home fellowship. Ask the spirit to show us treasures from his word. Listen to the voice of God as he speaks from his word.

Secondly, let KEC be a truly spirit-led church by being a gospel-centered congregation. Let's not drift from the message of the crucified Christ.

It must remain the content of our evangelism, not replaced by a dressed-up gospel. It is also upon the gospel that we grow into maturity in the faith.

Others may think we are foolish or backwards or weak, but what may be foolish in the eyes of the world is true wisdom from God. By his grace, we have received his wisdom.

[35 : 08] Let's pray. Father, we confess that without your help, we are clueless. We will not be able to know you.

Teach us in all humility to depend on your grace, to open our eyes, to behold your wisdom, to understand your will, and so to live in accordance with it.

Please work in us by your spirit. for Jesus' sake. Amen.