

# The Wisdom of God in the Cross

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[ 0 : 00 ] You can be seated. We'll dismiss our kids to children's ministry. The main idea for the message today is to look at the cross of Jesus Christ.

! We're in John 19, according to our schedule. We're in John 19, and the main purpose for today is to look at the cross of Jesus Christ as God's most painful proverb.

I think that one of the most overlooked aspects of the cross is that it is the wisdom of God. That's what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 22.

For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews, and folly to Gentiles.

But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

[ 1 : 01 ] So the cross is both the power and the wisdom of God, or it teaches us both about the power and the wisdom of God. It's the power of God unto salvation. And mostly, if you were to ask people, what's the cross about?

They would say, it is about the fact that I had incurred a great sin guilt against God Almighty that I could not repay through law keeping. So that Jesus came and received and gave what is referred to by theologians as a double imputation.

Our sin on Christ and Christ's righteousness on us. So if you were to ask most people, what's the cross about? They would point to its salvific power, which Paul says is indeed one thing that the cross is doing.

But the cross is also revealing the great wisdom of God. The cross is, I think, God's most potent and painful proverb.

I'm a big fan of the proverbs, and I read them and study them and think about them. A proverb is really just a condensed saying. It is a very dense collection of words that uses innumerable, that yields innumerable moral lessons as you mine it.

[ 2 : 23 ] I think of a proverb as something like a single chunk of coal. Why do we mine coal? Like, what's going on there? Well, because in this small thing, there is an incredibly compressed amount of carbon.

And we can, by applying oxygen, burning this, release all of this potent energy, so that you take a piece of coal and a piece of wood.

They're both going to burn, but one is going to burn much brighter and longer. Proverbs are wisdom compressed. And if you meditate on them and think about them over and over and over again, you'll see additional light and heat yielded every single time that you meditate or mine these dense little nuggets of truth.

And the reason why I think that the cross can be thought of as God's most potent and powerful proverb is because the cross takes place in an afternoon.

As we've talked about before, the gospel writers all do the same things as they record the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. They spend very little time, relatively speaking, on the life of Jesus.

[ 3 : 43 ] It all goes by pretty quickly. Three years of public ministry all goes by pretty quickly. And then, when we get to the week in which he was crucified, time begins to crawl.

And suddenly, the disciples' attention is very granular. There's a compression of time that I'm talking about, a density, I suppose you might say, of time.

And if you meditate on the cross, you will just always yield more insights and more wisdom. I've been thinking about the cross for more than 30 years.

And every time I seriously just look at it and read the text, new insights emerge. For instance, just to tease your appetite and get you to think about, you know, I want to meditate on the cross.

Here's an insight I just picked up this year. 30 years down the road, pick this up this year. The cross is really the consequence of a bunch of people who were just doing their job.

[ 4 : 48 ] You ever thought about that before? The cross is really just the consequence of a bunch of mindless, bureaucratic, just-doing-their-job types.

You've got Caiaphas. Caiaphas is the chief priest. His job is to ensure theological purity amongst his people while also ensuring they are protected and remained kept intact against the Roman occupation.

And so Caiaphas is a key instrument of the cross. And here is a man who is just doing his job to ensure theological purity and protection for the Jewish people.

In John 11, 48, Caiaphas says, well, they're talking, the chief priests are talking, and says, If we let him go on like this, Jesus, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.

But one of them, Caiaphas, who was the high priest that year, said to them, You know nothing at all. Do you not understand that it is better that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish?

[ 6 : 03 ] So the whole plot to crucify Jesus is really just a guy doing his job, ensuring what he believes to be theological purity and the prosperity of his people.

They arrest Jesus, and they hand him over to Pilate. And here again, Pilate is just a guy doing his job. Pilate's job is to keep peace in Jerusalem, to prevent and or put down riots.

And so even though three separate times Pilate declares Jesus to have no guilt at all, at the end of the day, Pilate's just going to do his job. And he turns over Jesus to be crucified.

And then finally, the third actor in the story, the Roman soldiers who crucified him. These soldiers had nothing against Jesus. Jesus had done nothing to them. They simply just had a job to do.

They reported to Pilate. They had to do what Pilate told them. Questions of guilt were above their pay grade. So when Pilate ordered that Jesus be flogged, they flogged him.

[ 7 : 07 ] And when Pilate ordered Jesus to be crucified, they nailed him to a cross. They too were just doing their job. So think of all the years I've been reading the crucifixion story, gaining insights each time I work through it.

And now all these decades later, I'm reading this and realizing, oh my goodness, even bureaucracy, even a non-thinking automaton type career, like even that's here.

And I thought, oh my goodness. And it goes even further than that because you see, as all of these three guys are just doing their job, we're reminded it is possible to be faithful in your career and faithless to God, right?

Like we're reminded of those kinds of things. But simultaneous to that, you have Jesus who is also just doing his job. And so in some way, Jesus' work seems to be the least efficient, the most fruitless, the most shameful.

No one would look at Jesus and say he was doing a good job. Everyone would say that Pilate was doing what he was supposed to do, and Caiaphas what he was supposed to do, and the Roman soldiers what they were supposed to do.

[ 8 : 19 ] But they'd look at Jesus and say you're not doing what you're supposed to do. And yet at the end of the day, which career, which work, which vocation yielded the most fruit? It was Jesus because his work was done in a kind of faith that transcended mere pragmatism.

Well, that's just like, I just wanted to throw that out to you because I want you to understand that you could not over-meditate on the cross. You could think about it over and over and over again, and insights will yield themselves because this is an incredibly dense, full-of-energy kind of passage.

Now, today we're going to talk mostly about the wisdom of God shown the cross through his sovereignty, the wisdom of God on display through his sovereignty.

Let's go ahead and just read several sections of John 19. I'll begin in verse 16, at the end of verse 16. So they took Jesus, and he went out bearing his own cross to the place called the place of the skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha.

And there they crucified him with two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross.

[ 9 : 35 ] It read, Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. Now, look at verse 23. When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier, also his tunic.

But the tunic, that would have been the undergarment, but the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. So they said to one another, Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be.

This was to fulfill the scripture, which says, They divided my garments among them and my clothing, and for my clothing they cast lots. How about verse 28? After this, Jesus, knowing that all was finished, said to fulfill the scripture, I thirst.

A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to its mouth. So when Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, It is finished.

And he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. Look at verse 31. Since it was the day of preparation, and so the bodies would not remain on the cross for the Sabbath, for the Sabbath was a high day, for that Sabbath was a high day.

[ 10 : 49 ] The Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and they might be carried away. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and the other, who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.

But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. Now, I believe that if you're going to be wise, you have to start with this foundational understanding, that God is perfectly in control.

I don't think it's possible to act wisely without believing that God is in total control. When the book of Proverbs says, the fool says in his heart there is no God, no one was an atheist back then.

That's not what they were thinking. They were thinking there is no one God over all things. The fool says in his heart there is no transcendent overseer over every single affair of man.

That's what a fool says. And a wise person begins his pursuit of knowledge and wisdom by fearing the Lord. And fearing the Lord means believing in God's power, and his transcendence, his bigness, and his separateness.

[ 12 : 08 ] So while there are all sorts of Proverbs about all sorts of things that will give you all sorts of wisdom, there is a foundational layer to Hebrew wisdom.

And that foundational layer is God exists and he is over all things. We see this in a number of Proverbs.

Proverbs 16, 9. The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps. Proverbs 19, 21. Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.

Proverbs 16, 33. The lot is cast into the lap, but it's every decision is from the Lord. Proverbs 20, 24. A man's steps are from the Lord.

How then can man understand his way? And the thing about the cross is, is that even if these early Christians did not yet fully believe in the sovereignty of God, by time they observed all that had taken place at the cross and reflected on all that had taken place, they had no more questions about whether or not there was a God overseeing all things.

[ 13 : 22 ] The question of God's sovereignty was immediately strengthened and concreted in their minds when they saw all the events of the cross. In fact, in Peter's very first sermon, he makes the remarkable statement that has something to do with a great paradox we all think we see as a paradox being the free will and God's sovereignty.

He makes this statement that is, for him, there's no contradiction, but listen to this. In Acts 2, Acts 2, 22. Men of Israel, hear these words, Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did them, did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know.

This Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

God raised him up, loosing the pains of death because it was not possible for him to be held by it. So Peter sees no contradiction between a group of people acting in their own free will and God sovereignly orchestrating the events according to his own foreknowledge and definite plan to accomplish what he chooses to accomplish.

And what we see in the cross, the reason why the early believers got so shored up on this concept of sovereignty is because they looked at the cross and saw all of these threads going every

possible way, all of these paths that appeared to be sort of just the product of human will and they all kept winding up doing the thing God wanted them to do.

[15:07] For instance, we see in the story of the cross that God's sovereignty is shown as he speaks through leaders who don't like him. God's sovereignty is on display as he speaks through the rebellious rulers.

Psalm 21, or Proverbs 21.1 says, the king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord. He turns it wherever he will. And you see God doing this with the rulers surrounding the cross of Christ. I mentioned Caiaphas. He says, you know nothing at all, nor do you people understand that it's better for one man to die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish. He says that, and then John offers the following commentary.

He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

God's speaking through a rebellious ruler. He's turning a king's heart in his hand like water. Later on in the story, when Pilate declares Jesus to be guiltless three times, and then as an act of provocation and embarrassment toward the Jews, he demands a sign be painted.

[16:37] A sign be painted in Greek and Aramaic and Latin, and that sign read Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews. We see again what Pilate meant for spite.

God sovereignly worked through, turning the heart of Pilate to pronounce the truth about Jesus to all in all of the main languages of the known world at the time just about.

So we see one area where the sovereignty of God is on display at the cross is that he is able to work through those who are most opposed to him. Psalm 2 says, Why do the nations rage?

The kings of the earth conspire together to overthrow the bonds of the Almighty. And then it says, The Lord laughs. He holds them in derision.

It says, You guys can conspire all you want, and all of your conspiracies will wind up serving my main purpose, which is to bring glory to Jesus Christ.

[17:41] That's what Psalm 2 is about. From there, we can move on to see the sovereignty of God at work to bring ancient prophecies to pass. We talked about this last week as we went through four common objections to Christianity, one of them being, Is the Bible really reliable?

And I said, There are like 60,000 cross-references in the scriptures. A book written by 40 different authors over the span of 1,500 years.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. The Bible's reliable because God is the author. And we see in the story of the cross this way in which God is able to bring prophecies as old as 1,000 or 1,500 years old to fulfillment that day at Golgotha.

Look at verse 23 of John 19. When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier, also his tunic.

But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. And so they said to one another, Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be. Now here you have an incredible working of God's sovereignty.

[19:00] Okay, I don't know how to talk about this. Okay, so someone had to sew a tunic without seams, which is incredibly complex bit of needlework.

someone had to give that to Jesus. He had to be wearing it that day. Why? Because all of the other garments that someone would normally wear can be cut up and divided.

And so that soldiers would routinely take sort of a bit of their pay was to recover the goods of the prisoners of the people who were to be crucified. But God had ordained that Jesus have this seamless tunic.

Who knows who sewed this thing? And that Jesus be wearing it on the day of his crucifixion. Why?

So that when it came to the seamless tunic, the Romans would say, Well, hold on. We can't split this up.

This is too important. This is too precious. Let's just have one of us take it. And the soldiers were like, Well, how do we do that? How do we decide which one of us takes it? And they said, Let's cast lots.

[20:05] And whoever wins the dice throw, they get the seamless tunic. And the scripture says that that was in order to fulfill something David wrote 1,500 years ago in Psalm 22 where he says, They cast lots for my garments.

They divided my garments among them and for my clothing they cast lots. That's Psalm 22 written 1,500 years beforehand. And just think of all of the layers of God's providential working that had to make it even feasible in that particular moment for the Roman soldiers to do exactly what David had written 1,500 years prior.

In verse 28 of John 19, we see this. After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said to fulfill the scripture, I thirst. A jar full of sour wine, this is my insert into the text, just so happened to be there.

And so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. Well, that's from Psalm 69. Psalm 69, verse 34, You know my reproach and my shame and my dishonor. My foes are all known to you. Reproaches have broken my heart so that I am in despair. I looked for pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found them. They gave me poison for food, and they gave me sour wine to drink.

[ 21 : 32 ] Do you see why? I'm sure the early Christians had lots of questions. Maybe some we don't have. The one question they did not have was, is human free will and God's sovereignty compatible in such a way as to neither of them are ever violated and God is able to sovereignly accomplish all of his purposes?

They simply did not have that question because of their proximity to the cross. They just could see far too many examples of God sovereignly working not over the course of a day, but over the course of a thousand plus years.

Look again in verse 31 of John 19. Since it was the day of preparation so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath, for that Sabbath was a high day, the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and they might be taken away.

So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and the other who had been crucified. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear and said, and at once came out blood and water.

Well, here we have the convergence of two completely different sets of scripture. In Psalm 34:20, God says of the righteous man, he protects all his bones.

[ 22 : 56 ] Not one bone will be broken. So that's one stream of scripture. And then we go to the Pentateuch for the other stream. And we are reminded in Exodus 12, 46 and Numbers 9, 12, that the Passover lamb was expressly said, you cannot break any of its bones.

And then you have all the obvious typological fulfillments. In addition to Jesus being the fulfillment of the scapegoat type, driven outside the camp to suffer for the sins of his people.

Jesus is also the providential Passover lamb, who God provided on Passover during the Passover celebration. So yeah, whenever the early Christians were wondering, who's in charge here?

By studying the cross, they were able to see, yeah, God's, God is completely, completely in charge. Here's something else new that I hadn't seen until this year.

Look at Galatians 4, 4 through 5. I just think this verse had not caught my attention before.

Galatians 4, 4 through 5.

[ 24 : 15 ] But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons.

This phrase, the fullness of time, it's from the Greek that just means perfection, filled up. Whenever I sit, sorry to put this mental image in your mind, but whenever I sit in the sauna at my gym, they have an hourglass there, right?

And you turn the, because it'll survive the heat, and you turn the hourglass upside down, and it's for 15 minutes, and all the little pieces of sand have to go through the little choke point, and then eventually, you've got the bottom filled, and 15 minutes have passed.

When Paul says here that God sent Jesus to us in the fullness of time, he means that there is a God who has overseen every particular nanosecond of recorded and pre-recorded human history, and made it flow in such a way as to know exactly the moment when Christ must come into the world.

See, all the way to the very beginning of the Bible, we see that God had always had the cross of Jesus Christ on his mind. When God promises an avenger to Eve in Genesis 3:15, he's thinking about the cross.

[ 25 : 36 ] When God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, he is thinking about the cross. When Joseph is betrayed by his brothers only to bring them into his own blessing, he is thinking about the cross.

When God ordains that the blood of a lamb will cause death to pass over the Jews, he is thinking about the cross. When he initiates the sacrificial system, he is thinking about the cross.

When he brings King David, the greatest of all the kings, to power through suffering, he is thinking about the cross. We have no reason to doubt that God's in charge simply by looking at the cross.

There's another angle that the early Christians took and that was to consider the role that God's creation played in the cross. The thinking went something like this.

Think about and meditate on the earthly materials involved in the crucifixion. So let's just do that for a minute. First of all, we have the nails. The nails that pierced his hands were forged from hematite and magnetite that Jesus, Colossians 1, Hebrews 1, Jesus deposited into the earth's crust and its creation.

[ 26 : 59 ] There was a forge that would be necessary to melt the steel, turning it into nails. Well, now you've got each O<sub>2</sub> molecule, double bonded structure, reactive electrons played a role in making every single electron.

God's in charge of it and he allowed some of those electrons to be used to make iron, to make oxygen, to create the nails that would pierce the hands of the one who created those things.

The early Christians would meditate on the wood involved for the cross, the wood of the cross, and I'm just adding our current scientific understanding to their early meditations. The wood of the cross grew from seeds that fell from the original trees that God spoke into existence.

Do you realize that at some point in the timeline God was able to say that tree will make that tree will make that tree will make that tree will make that tree will make that tree which will make the cross? Do you realize that God knew every single leaf that was there and fell on that tree through its life cycle?

You know, the seed itself is programmed with DNA. Let me just tell you a little bit about DNA. In 2023, a study demonstrated that if you take a gram of DNA, you can theoretically store 215 million gigabytes of data on a gram of DNA.

[ 28 : 32 ] It's nothing like that. There's nothing like that in terms of the storage we use for electronic storage we use today. Think about this. That seed grew into a seedling and it sprouted up leaves and through the, quite honestly, the miracle of photosynthesis, that seed was able to absorb the radiation heat of the sun which is 92.96 million miles away from the earth, a sun which is 846 million miles, 846,000 miles, 100,000 miles in diameter.

You've got this thing out there in deep space that's a fusion reactor along with another 100 to 400 billion stars in the galaxy and it is growing the seed that will turn into a cross to hold the one who spoke the sun into existence.

this raw material of iron and wood was fashioned by good old human ingenuity. All the creative energy, all the physical energy needed to mine the ore and forge it and hammer it into nails to cut the tree and to saw it into timbers.

All of this came from the pinnacle of God's creation which is the human body. In the world of robotics we now understand just how incredibly elegant the human body is.

We try to make robots do things that humans do without thinking about them. We realize, oh my goodness, this is an incredibly complex system. Just even the complexity required to hold a nail while standing on say uneven ground and hammer that nail into an uneven surface would be a project of years within the realm of robotics.

[ 30 : 31 ] Think about this. As this Roman soldier is holding this nail, doing this, but it's probably more like this, and he's hammering this, the hand-eye motor coordination right now, you're cooperating with the brain's visual cortex, the motor cortex, and the cerebellum.

Like, it's all just working. And the God of the universe who sustains all things is actually allowing this Roman soldier's nervous system, his hand and his eye, to work together to drive a nail through the hand of he who created all things.

And I think that once you get this sense of my God is completely in control of all things, and that is more than demonstrated at the cross, I think it sets you up for the second layer of proverbial wisdom.

The first layer of proverbial wisdom is God's in charge. What's the second layer? Because I think Proverbs builds in layers of importance. The second layer of proverbial wisdom seems to me to be trust not in your own understanding.

Lean not on your own understanding, but trust the Lord and in all your ways acknowledge him and he shall straighten your paths. That seems to be the next thing.

[ 31 : 57 ] After you have the sovereignty squared away, the next thing is I don't trust my senses because my senses lie, my understanding lies. Indeed, that's another example of another piece of wisdom from the cross.

No one looked up there and saw winning. But it was quite the victory. So we take God's sovereignty, we layer on top of that the next implication.

I'm just not going to lean on my own understanding. And now we have the recipe really for potent Christianity. We really do have that recipe in these two things.

William Cooper wrote the poem, God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform. He plants his footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm.

Deep and unfathomable minds of never failing skill, he treasures up his bright designs and works his sovereign will. Cooper's just putting Proverbs 3, 5, through 6 to a poem.

[ 33 : 09 ] Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways submit to him and he will make your path straight. Now the third layer, I think, of proverbial wisdom is that you recognize not only God's power and you recognize your limitations of perception, but you also recognize God's kindness.

You recognize God's kindness. because, I mean, it's great to have some understanding that somebody is in charge, but what separates Christianity from Islam or Judaism it is that we believe in a God who got so intertwined with his creation and so committed to saving them that he took on flesh and allowed his own creation to kill him.

That's the third layer of wisdom. There's this idea, God's in charge of everything, I shouldn't trust in my own understanding, and then you get all of these Proverbs about forgive, forgive, and mercy. Listen to these. Proverbs 10, 12, hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses. Proverbs 19, 11, good sense makes one slow to anger.

It is his glory to overlook an offense. Proverbs 17, 9, whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends.

[ 34 : 48 ] Proverbs 20, 22, do not say I will repay evil, wait for the Lord and he will deliver you. Proverbs 24, 29, do not say I will do to him as he has done to me, that I will pay back a man for what he has done.

That's all at the cross. Not only is that Jesus at the cross, that's the father at the cross. He is overlooking our offenses, placing our guilt and shame on Jesus.

God is in charge. I shouldn't lean on my understanding. God is also extremely kind and loving.

You could go through the book of Proverbs this week and just ask the Lord, show me the cross in the book of Proverbs, and you would see it all over the place. But I don't know of any other proverb that has the cross more clearly in view than Proverbs 16, 6, and with this we'll introduce communion.

Proverbs 16, 6, By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for. By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for.

[ 36 : 02 ] And by the fear of the Lord one turns away from evil. This brings us all the way back to what Paul said about the cross in 1 Corinthians 1. The word of the cross is folly 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 the discernment of the discerning I will thwart. Where is the one who is wise? 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 did not know God through wisdom it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe for Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom but we preach Christ crucified a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles but to those who are called both Jews and Greeks Christ the power and wisdom of God for the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men so as we focus on the Lord's table today we see that God has used all of his sovereign power to bring your salvation into being he has orchestrated through the fullness of time through speaking through rebellious leaders through fulfilling ancient prophecies through using his own creation to kill him he has orchestrated the means by which you and I can say you really do love me and you are really in charge and now we get this incredible privilege that I talk about all the time to call the creator of the universe father what a glorious gift and so as you come to the table today if you're a follower of

Jesus I want you to come to the table today and I want you to take these elements return to your seat and let's face together let me pray father god we pray that now as followers of jesus come to the table that you would fill our hearts with all the grace you intend for this sacrament to bestow upon us lord it is probably nothing new to anyone in this room that god is completely in charge but may the message today may your word today shore that up underline and bold it. And may people, as a consequence of seeing your glorious sovereignty employed for our salvation, may people worship and praise you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.