



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

Serving With Wisdom

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Introduction

1. In an item attributed to *Readers Digest* (March 1993, p. 128), a worker at NASA said that one of his colleagues had been assigned to prepare a presentation on lessons learned from their bad experience with the Hubble Space Telescope. On his chart at the briefing, lesson No. 1 read, "In naming your mission, never use a word that rhymes with trouble."¹
2. In retrospect, that seems obvious. It also demonstrates an adage that, in one form, was expressed this way: "Experience comes from what we have done. Wisdom comes from what we have done badly" (Theodore Levitt, Harvard Business School).²
3. Our title implies a goal to avoid learning wisdom in service by serving badly. At the least, we want to minimize the effects of our frailties so that we can most effectively serve.
4. To make progress, I propose that we look at two things: what the Bible means by "wisdom" and what Jesus teaches to make us servants.

Body

- I. Some Preliminary Observations.
 - A. "Wisdom" is an important Bible theme, but the word is not always used the same way.
 1. For example, in 1 Corinthians, the New Testament book that uses "wisdom" and "wise" most (σοφία, *sophia*; 17 of 51 times; σοφός, *sophos*; 11 of 20 times), several texts demean wisdom (1 Cor. 1:17, 19-22, 26, 27; 2:1, 4-6, 13; 3:18-20).
 2. At the same time, other texts extol it (1 Cor 1:24, 30; 2:6-7; 4:10; also 12:8).
 3. James explains the difference: some wisdom is from above; some is earthly, unspiritual, even demonic (James 3:13-18).
 - B. The New Testament's understanding of wisdom is grounded in the Old Testament term.
 1. First, "wisdom" was practical; for example, the word was used to refer to the "skill" of craftsmen who made materials for the tabernacle (see Ex. 36:1).
 2. Second, ultimate wisdom belongs to God alone (see Dan. 2:20-23; 1 Cor. 2:6-7); it is interchangeable with his Spirit (Prov. 8:22-31; Gen 1:2; 41:38-39; Ex. 31:3-4; 1 Cor. 2:9-13).
 3. Third, true (divine) wisdom was evident when people responded in obedience to God's will (see Deut. 4:6; Psa, 111:10; Prov. 1:7; 9:10; compare 1 Cor. 2:14-16).

¹ <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/w/wisdom.htm> (accessed: June 25, 2017).

² <http://www.sermonsearch.com/sermon-illustrations/7061/quotes> (accessed: June 26, 2017).

C. The ultimate embodiment of wisdom was Jesus Christ.

1. He was fully anointed with the Spirit (Luke 4:18; see Isa. 11:2; 61:1-2).
2. Spiritual people are defined by having his mind (1 Cor. 2:16).
3. He demonstrated God's superior wisdom (1 Cor. 1:24).
4. As wisdom, he brings "righteousness, holiness, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30; NIV).

II. Learning from Jesus (Focusing on Matthew).³

A. Following the teaching of Jesus.

1. Jesus emphasized that his wisdom was at odds with the world's wisdom (Matt. 11:25).
2. He said that the wise people were those who hear his words and do them (Matt. 7:24).
 - a) By maintaining the kind of character that will be "blessed" and influential (5:3-16).
 - b) By going beneath surface level teaching to discern and display:
 - (1) The true nature of moral righteousness (5:17-48).
 - (2) Heartfelt piety that understands that the real audience is God (6:1-18).
 - (3) A depth of trust that shows understanding of what is most important and makes that the ultimate priority (6:19-34).
 - c) By developing the necessary understanding to treat people the right way (7:1-20).

B. Serving in the mission of Jesus (Matt. 10:16-22).

1. Being wise⁴ like a snake is to accompany moral integrity ("innocent"; ἀκέραιος, *akeraios*) as we pursue Jesus' mission.
2. Wisdom is needed in a world filled with "wolves" (v. 16).
3. Wisdom is supplied by the inspiration of God's Spirit (vv. 19-20).
 - a) We don't receive the message as they did because they received it as they did (see 1 Cor. 2:6-13).
4. It will be difficult, but if we endure to the end (τέλος, *telos*), we will be saved (v. 22).
5. To serve this way is to follow his example (10:24-25), having learned from him (11:28-30).

C. I am struck in the above by the emphasis on obeying the word of Jesus.

1. Other contexts which include references to wisdom also demonstrate that emphasis.
 - a) His hometown was impressed by Jesus' teaching because of his wisdom (Matt. 13:54).
 - b) Only in Matthew's account of the parable of the soils do we see the word "understand" (συνίημι, *sunīēmi*)⁵ used in Jesus' explanation of the parable (13:19, 23).
2. Our biggest challenge for serving with wisdom is to go beyond professing faith (and a desire to serve wisely) and commit to actually do what he says (Matt. 7:21-27).

Conclusion

1. Regarding why many have not committed to Jesus' way, G. K. Chesterton said, "'The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried.'"⁶

³ In the Gospels, the words are used as follows: *sophia*: Matthew - 3; Mark - 1; Luke - 6. *sophos*: Matthew - 2; Luke - 1. In addition, the ESV translates φρόνιμος (*phronimos*) "wise" seven times in Matthew and once in Luke (also as "shrewdness" in Lk. 16:8). The word for the "wise men" (μάγος, *magos*) appears four times in Matthew. None of these words appears in John.

⁴ "Wise" here is *phronimos*, "'using one's wits effectively', prudent, judicious" (Frederick William Danker with Kathryn Krug, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* [Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2009], 376).

⁵ To "'grasp significance' of a word or action, understand, comprehend" (Ibid., 341).

⁶ In Randy Harris, *Living Jesus: Doing What Jesus Says in the Sermon on the Mount* (Abilene, TX: Leafwood Publishers, 2012), 13.

2. Matthew 7:24-27 shows the alternative. Wise people don't just study, master, or memorize Jesus' teaching. They do what he said. "Jesus actually expects us to do this stuff" (Harris, 21).
3. Easy? No, Jesus said it's hard, narrow, and unpopular (7:13-14). We'll stumble and meet resistance brought on by the frailties of ourselves and others. Doable? Yes, but only if we decide to do it. When we do, we will be wiser servants.
4. So, do you really believe Jesus? Are you trying to do what he says? It's time to decide.

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