

Lake Shore Baptist Church Sermon Charlie Fuller

July 5, 2020

Text: Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Title: *What in the World is Wisdom Anyway?*

Have you ever been called wise? I have a few times. Usually by a former student. Usually it's used as a synonym for "old." Always by someone who doesn't know all the stupid things I've done in my life. After all, who buys a puppy three weeks before a pandemic? I've certainly not been called wise by Cindy.

When it happens, I usually respond with Proverbs 26:12:

Do you see persons **wise** in their own eyes? There is more hope for **fools** than for them.

Maybe you prefer Shakespeare's paraphrase: "The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool." (As You Like It)

This story will likely resonate with many of you. One of my mentors in the music business was a man named Buryl Red. Buryl was my predecessor as the Music Director/Conductor of The CenturyMen. The CenturyMen is an auditioned men's choir made up of music ministers from across the country. Buryl was also well-known in Baptist music circles back in the day as a composer.

What most people don't know about Buryl is that he was also an absolutely brilliant orchestrator and producer of recordings. He had his own recording studio in New York for around thirty years. He was truly a genius in the music business and I don't use that word often.

When he would be working with staff on producing a recording in the studio the rest of the world would just fade away from him. He'd forget to eat and nobody could figure out how he went all day without going to the bathroom. He was brilliant, but sometimes his staff would have to figure out how to bring him back to earth.

Have you known anyone who was simply a genius? People who lived in a kind of rarefied air up in the intellectual stratosphere and created brilliance in *their* world, but could never find their keys? We probably have some folks like that in our church. I'm quite capable of losing my keys, but I'm no genius.

In the first part of today's text, Jesus talks about a generation that just can't figure it out. Eugene Peterson's translation says, "John came fasting and they called him crazy. I came feasting and they called me a lush, a friend of the riffraff." They think they've got it figured out, but they don't. Jesus says they're never satisfied.

It's like a story my dad used to tell. A man came into a diner every morning for breakfast. But he was always complaining about something. The cook tells his

partner, “I’m going to make this guy happy this morning. I’m going to cook exactly what the guy asks for and make it perfect.”

So, the guy comes in. And he’s in his usual grumpy mood. He asks for two eggs. One fried. One scrambled. The cook says, ok, and goes to work to make the most perfect fried and scrambled eggs you’ve ever seen. There’s no way this guy will have anything to complain about. He sets the eggs down on the counter and waits for a response. No way he can find any fault with this beautiful plate of eggs.

The guy looks them over for a long time. There’s a silence in the room. Everyone is waiting to see what he will say. Finally, he says, “You fried the wrong egg.”

The people of Jesus’ day were never satisfied. They couldn’t figure out what he was about. And we struggle, too. Even in all our 21st century intellectual accomplishments. *Surely, a pandemic is teaching us that we simply don’t have all the answers.* Jesus calls out the wise and the intelligent. He calls them out specifically. Those who are wise and intelligent say that the wrong egg was fried. They are blind to the beauty and quality of what’s there all around them.

Jesus says, it’s the children who can see. It’s those who are willing to put aside their wisdom and intellectual prowess who can see what Jesus is all about. We can learn more and more about less and less until we know everything about nothing. But the mere accumulation of knowledge isn’t enough. We have to learn to see with the eyes of a child if we’re going to learn to see the world as Jesus does, with the peace that Jesus wants for us.

So, how can we accomplish this? After all, we are an intellectual people. We’re an intellectual church. We put learning and inquiry up on a pedestal. It’s how most of us have lived our entire lives, valuing learning above all and, if I might say so, we’ve collected some of our own monuments along the way. Plaques and books and degrees and honors and accolades are great, but what does Jesus really think of all that? What do all those things really mean in the midst of a pandemic?

Certainly, Jesus doesn’t call us to throw all that away. We’re not called to throw away reason and learning. Those are God’s gifts. We continue to wear masks and keep our distance because of what we know about the science of virus transmission. But we also wear masks and keep our distance because we love our neighbors. Science in this case is the servant of our calling to put others first.

But this is usually a most difficult balance to find. The balance of wisdom and intellect vs. faith. How do we make our wisdom and intellect the servants of our faith? How can we see all this through the eyes of Jesus?

Jesus gives us the answer. The last section of our text is often read at funerals. It’s been often set to music.

11:28 "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

11:30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

It's a most powerful text. One that operates on many levels. One that brings peace in many situations.

But, if we put that text in its context, we see that it's an answer to those who need to put aside their wisdom and intellect and become like little children. Jesus is our model. Jesus is the one who is "gentle and humble in heart." Could it be that we are called to be gentle and humble in both heart and mind, in both our emotion and our intellect? Could it be that the path to grace is the road of humility and gentleness?

May God give us the perseverance to claim God's yoke that is easy and light, but a yoke nonetheless.

Amen.