

GOSPEL WISDOM

WEEK 4: UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE

We all know that the more rare something is, the greater its value. And if there is only one of something in existence, there is great competition among those who can afford it to actually own it. Such is the desire for such items that robbery and murder have been employed to gain possession of them. So, isn't it doubly sad to know that the most unique individual who ever lived is dismissed as valueless in our modern society. Of all the treasures that people will do anything to possess that Individual said

**Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
(Luke 12:33-34 NIV)**

**What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? 37 Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? 38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels
(Mark 8:36-38 NIV)**

These words tell us that the things of this earth will pass away. They have no eternal value. It is the individual soul that will survive and be held accountable when the glory of God will be revealed to the world. Acceptability on that day will depend what the individual has sought after and longed for now.

**But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.
(Matthew 6:33 NIV)**

Over the past three weeks we've seen gospel wisdom defined as everything Jesus said and everything He did because He practiced what He preached. We've seen that personal Deity accompanied by divine wisdom and authority are the credentials that make Him a unique Teacher. So words like this are not just throwaway observations about what people value most in life or advice about what they should value most. They are words that show there are two attitudes to the things of the world. One leads to materialism, so

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prevalent today. People are possessed by their possessions whether these refer to actual things, fame, wealth or power. The other leads to seeing what they possess as gifts from God to be used for His glory. Since both these attitudes will determine an eternal destiny, Jesus brings them to our attention because only He knew that they reflect what Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones has called "The Plight of Man and the Power of God." And only one Person in the history of the world has the qualification to speak authoritatively on both - the Lord Jesus Christ. His is a unique perspective because His deity gave Him the mind of God and His human existence gave Him a thorough knowledge, understanding and experience of what it meant to live in a fallen world. Only Jesus could clearly see the yawning gulf that existed between the glorious holiness of heaven and the evil darkness of the world because of sin. This unique perspective means that He is our only sure guide if we want to escape from a fallen existence and enter into God's presence forever. That brings us to the very heart of gospel wisdom - the salvation of the world.

Establishing Jesus' credentials was a necessary first step, because without them, other aspects of the gospel He proclaimed would have lacked credence then or since. But Jesus' credentials were a means to an end for He is the lynchpin, the Person vital to this whole new spiritual revelation of God which involved bridging the gap between heaven and earth, between God and humanity. That was a monumental task which only the power of God could accomplish. So, when Jesus said that all authority had been given to Him in heaven and on earth, He knew the power of God underpinned it. No other Being, can claim the power of God and authority to deal with the 'plight of man'. This makes Jesus unique, hence all His references to both don't just deserve to be taken seriously, wisdom demands that they must be regarded as the most important words ever to be spoken by a human being, for Jesus' dual nature started from birth. Only the power of God could bring about an Incarnation and the 'plight of man' required a Man of Jesus' calibre to deal with the problems that plight entailed.

When you think of it - and we are coming up to Christmas now, when we will be thinking about it - Jesus is the only human being who had the choice of whether or not to be born, the choice of when to be born, the choice of where to be born, and the choice of how He would be born. And nothing makes a person more human than birth. It's an odd way to put it, but Oswald Chambers has said that the Incarnation was a combination of dust and deity. God had created man from the dust of the ground and his expression summed up Jesus' dual nature, making Him, as was said later, the perfect

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Mediator between God and humanity. Jesus volunteered to undergo the experience of a human lifecycle from cradle to the grave even knowing that it would be crucifixion that would put Him in the grave for Jesus' cradle was the first step on the way to death on the cross. This willingness to suffer brought the almighty power of God to His assistance in all that His earthly ministry would entail.

The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life —only to take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”
(John 10:17-18 NIV)

The command received from the Father was the dynamic behind Jesus' words that expressed His willingness to obey His Father's will. Love for and obedience to God's will was the path of true wisdom according to the Old Testament, and Jesus followed both the spirit and the letter of that path while He lived on earth. As far as His public ministry was concerned, from the commissioning at His baptism to the moment He committed His spirit to the Father on the cross, Jesus never deviated from that path. His focus was always Godward.

Jesus gave them this answer:“Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does
(John 5:19 NIV)

For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken. 50 I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.”
(John 12:49-50 NIV)

“My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.
(John 4:34 NIV)

For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

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40 For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day (John 6:38-40 NIV)

Nothing could be more explicit regarding the total integration of the mind and will of God the Father and God the Son. Jesus was the manifestation of the wisdom of the mind and will of God. That was the key element in His unique perspective of the purpose of His coming to earth and the source of power to accomplish what God had planned for the salvation of the world. This is something the Jews were expecting, but they expected divine power to be exercised by a mighty warrior king like David. They did not expect power to be exercised by a Person whose method of salvation was through being a Seeker and a Servant.

**For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”
(Luke 19:10 NIV)**

**But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice. ’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”
(Matthew 9:13 NIV)**

**For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”
(Mark 10:45 NIV)**

**This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.
(Matthew 26:28 NIV)**

In all of these expressions, Jesus gave insights into the mind of God regarding how the salvation of humanity was to be achieved. In seeking to save lost sinners, Jesus revealed God's mercy. Service meant the shedding of the blood of the Son of God which led to salvation through the forgiveness of the sin that caused the world's problems in the first place.

But as we have seen, majority of His contemporaries simply could not accept that this was how the power of God to deal with sin was to be manifested. Yet, in spite of the divine love and concern for a lost humanity, Jesus did not use His authority to force people to believe. As far as Jesus was concerned, the wisdom of the gospel dictated that He gave people the revelation of

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Himself that God wanted them to have; to give them the good news that salvation was available to everyone; and that all could have eternal life through belief in everything that Jesus represented in word and deed.

In this, Jesus' revelation of God was nothing short of revolutionary, for Jesus replaced Jewish views of who had and who did not have God's favour. Jesus did not alter the fundamental beliefs of God as Creator, Law-Giver, Sustainer of the universe and protector of His people. Nor did He undermine in any way the belief in God as all powerful, all knowing and everywhere present. By the time of Jesus, God's intervention in the lives of individuals was deemed to be in the tangible health, wealth and happiness of individuals regardless of their characters or how their positions and circumstances had been achieved. Alternatively, God's favour was gained by following every jot and tittle of the law regardless of whether or not it caused harm or suffering to others. People who did not fit into either category, which was the vast majority of the population, were left to their own spiritual devices. Jesus broke down these perceptions by, as we might say, establishing a level playing field by stating that He was

I am The Way, the Truth and the Life and no one comes to the Father except through me."

Jesus Himself came to be the power of God working to ensure that everyone had an equal chance of the assurance of eternal life.

As well as this good news, gospel wisdom also contained a warning. Jesus did present an alternative scenario because He understood, as no other person could, that there were two sides to the power of God. Jesus held in perfect balance, the love and justice of a Holy God. That unique perspective enabled Jesus to communicate to people the extent of God's hatred of their sin and also how much God loved them by sending Jesus into the world to be their substitute in paying the price of their sin. He showed them a God who was prepared to endure the worst that the world could throw at Him in order to save people from a fate worse than death. For God's justice would result in an alternate destiny for those who rejected His means of salvation.

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28 NIV)

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Because Jesus shared the holy, righteous and just attributes of God, He knew that no other human being was capable of meeting those standards in order to satisfy God and earn the privilege of eternal life. That is why Jesus also made clear that He fully understood the 'plight of man' for He shared that humanity. Living as a human being He was tempted like everybody else to conform to the ways of the world. And His insight into the root problem caused by taking that path was stark.

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. 35 Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. 36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed (John 8:34-36 NIV)

In recent years there have been reports of modern day slavery where people have been subjected to horrendous, inhumane treatment. It may not be the perfect analogy, but Jesus is saying that sin is even worse than any image of slavery that we may have. Rescue might free some in modern day slavery and willpower will sometimes work to free people from certain habits or addictions. But there is no freedom from sin because it is a hereditary defect that only the power of God can eradicate. That is how Martyn Lloyd-Jones defines the plight of man. Jesus came to do just that. His manifesto in Luke 4 spells out what He would do.

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (Luke 4:18-19 NIV)

Scholars debate whether these intentions related to physical circumstances or spiritual needs. Both may be intended, but the outcome would be the same. They would know the favour of the Lord and this was demonstrated when Jesus sent His disciples out on mission.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field (Matthew 9:36-38 NIV)

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Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. 7 As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give (Matthew 10:6-8 NIV)

He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? 12 How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:11-12 NIV)

"Lost sheep", "sheep without a shepherd", "fallen into a pit" that the sheep could not get out of without help, These sorts of images were just one way in which Jesus described the plight of sinners. They illustrated people's condition before God which needed to be redeemed through what Jesus would do for them. Regarding people as sheep may have seemed insulting to some, but the image conveys the helplessness of creatures, which we are. Those who have closely observed the habits of sheep agree that without care they can more frequently than other animals come to harm or find themselves in danger. The sheep without a shepherd image was used to convey, as no other image could, the love God had for humanity and His longing to keep them safe from every kind of harm and danger. In the texts quoted - harassed, helpless, lost, fallen into a pit - are all images of our spiritual plight. Without the power of God working through Jesus, we remain in that condition.

But Jesus was no sentimentalist. He had no hesitation in revealing in much harsher terms the innate sinfulness and hypocrisy of people. It was obvious that some of His sayings were not to be taken literally, but at the same time, their implications would have been hard enough to swallow. Two of His graphic examples would have had the potential to both attract attention and to foster reflection on what serious point was at issue.

3 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye (Matthew 7:3-5 NIV)

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If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell (Matthew 5:29-30 NIV)

Jesus is saying we have no right to criticise others until we are sure that we ourselves cannot be criticised for our faults and failings. Secondly, if we know in our own minds and hearts that we are allowing our bodies to act in a sinful way, then we must be utterly and completely ruthless in stopping that wrong action. And because of the power and authority He possessed, Jesus was able to issue challenges and present choices that people would find hard to avoid.

32 “Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. 33 But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven. “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law — 36 a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household. ’ (Matthew 10:34-36 NIV)

But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, 20 for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you (Matthew 10:19-20 NIV)

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world (John 16:33 NIV)

Today Jesus is still a divisive figure. Quite literally, a convert to Christianity from Islam will find his or her enemies will be members of their own family. Christians in this country, in some instances, find that they have to choose between their faith and their livelihoods. or their life itself. What have been termed “hard sayings” however, is part and parcel of ‘gospel wisdom’. Jesus never attracted people to Him by promises of an easy life. In fact, He said that His followers would suffer trouble and persecution.

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While some of Jesus' teaching was, and still is, hard to take, we have to admit that Jesus accurately and honestly analysed the sinful evil in human nature, because He had first hand knowledge of what people in the world faced and how they dealt with it. Above all, He knew that their condition could never meet the standards required by a holy, righteous and just God to enable them to enter heaven and live for an eternity in God's presence. Only a sinless Being, prepared to act as a substitute for the whole of humanity could enable a harmony and unity to be established between the two planes of existence.

Knowing what would satisfy God and knowing what humanity needed led Jesus to lay down His life and become the ransom for many. And He expressed this in His most frequent word picture.

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (John 10:11 & 14-15 NIV)

In doing so, Jesus got right to the root of the plight of man and removed the cause of it for all time. This was the most momentous thing Jesus did for the sheep of His pasture. But He did even more. By the power of God in the Resurrection and the sending of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' solution went beyond His departure from the earth.

Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

17 The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you

(John 21:16-17 NIV)

Peter's commission was to feed the sheep with Spirit inspired testimony of all that Jesus was, said and that is what the church will continue to do until Christ returns. Peter and the other disciples knew that this was only possible because the Holy Spirit, the very power of God who empowered Jesus throughout His earthly ministry, would be with them.

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“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father — the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me.

(John 15:26 NIV)

From all of this, it can be said that it was because of His unique perspective as God and Man, the goal of gospel wisdom, the salvation of the world, was achieved. We can take it even further than that, because Jesus changed the spiritual landscape of the whole world. By His intimate knowledge of God the Father, He was able to teach that God is a knowable and accessible Deity wanting an intimate and eternal relationship with each individual person on earth. The prayer that He taught His disciples brings this into very sharp focus, for it establishes a spiritual family relationship with God as the Father of all believers. And in His own personal prayer just hours before He death, He prayed what that would mean for all of us.

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. (John 17:20-21 NIV)

Jesus prayer is the end goal of all that He taught about the plight of man and the power of God and it comes as a result of His unique perspective into the mind of God and His experience of human existence. All His references to sin, repentance, salvation, eternal life are intended to give us the information to enable us to make up our minds about what we believe is gospel wisdom. Today, we are faced with the same choice as the people of Jesus' day. The plight of man has not gone away, but the power of God still exists to deal with it in the Person of His Son. Gospel wisdom requires us to recognise that sin is anathema to a Holy God but Jesus' coming to earth was the means by which this problem could be resolved, because only He had the unique Personality and perspective to satisfy the standards of a holy God and meet the spiritual needs of a sinful humanity.

Meekness and majesty, manhood and deity,
In perfect harmony, the man who is God.
Lord of eternity, dwells in humanity
Kneels in humility and washes our feet.
O what a mystery, meekness and majesty:
Bow down and worship for this is your God.

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