



# 2023 Weekly Devotions

Week of: July 3<sup>rd</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup>

Sermon: July 2<sup>nd</sup>



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH  
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July 3

**Proverbs 1:7**

Acts 27 offers an interesting contrast between the Lord's wisdom and the foolishness of mankind. This week's devotions will be dedicated to unpacking the difference between foolishness and wisdom. There is no greater need in our world and, frankly, in our churches today than wisdom. So many of the mistakes and misdeeds that are perpetrated by lost men and believers alike are bound up in this distinction between what is wise and what is dumb (to use a big word). If we are going to both honor God and preserve our joy and blessed state, we must learn the difference between foolishness and wisdom and then walk in wise paths.

As Pastor Robert pointed out two weeks ago, the scene begins with Paul's advice to the sailing crew not to embark upon their journey. Paul's exhortation is not some supernatural insight, instead it is simply the product of a man who understands the nature of creation and recognizes God's wisdom and relative predictability within the confines of creation. Paul knew that God had designed a world that functioned in a very predictable way. He knew that it was unwise to attempt to navigate the seas in those months and he feared God in the sense that he recognized that the relative tiny ship was no match for the power of God's sea.

One can almost imagine the interaction between Paul and the sailors. If you lean in close enough, the reader can picture the indignant look on the faces of the captain and crew as they hear this prisoner with no experience tell them what they should be doing. I can imagine the deckhands getting out of Paul's earshot and muttering and complaining about Paul's nonsense. Who was he to tell them what to do!?!?

The truth is that Paul was an instrument of wisdom in the moment and the response of those who should have heeded his advice is indicative of the teaching located in Proverbs 1... "fools despise wisdom." What Paul was saying was not controversial, in fact it was accepted practice. One did not have to be a Christian nor a sailor to know that the decision this group was making was potentially dangerous and yet these men were altogether unwilling to heed sound advice.

Fools make all kinds of excuses for their unwise decisions. Oftentimes a fool will exalt his uncanny ability as a reason for his decision. Perhaps these men thought they were simply the exceptions! Maybe they considered the situation and then concluded that they were able to persevere where other, more common, crews could not.

The result of this kind of pride is a foolishness that despises instruction. Regardless of the motivation or reasons behind the crew's disregard for Paul's admonition, the truth remains that they were fools who despised instruction. As we walk through this topic more thoroughly in the days to come, we will see the result of this kind of foolish behavior.

July 4

**Proverbs 14:12**

Did the sailing crew in Acts 27 have a death wish? The answer is obvious both in our natural assumptions and in the text. Those who were responsible for charting the course in Acts 27 did not think they were going to die when they set out, instead they simply thought they could navigate the difficult circumstance. It strikes me that this is the way that all fools operate. Those who live foolishly do not think they are going to pay for their indiscretion, they simply think that the typical result will not apply to their circumstances.

Over the years, I have seen countless men and women make foolish decisions and suffer predictable outcomes yet so many of them seem shocked! Why? Because they simply thought they were right. Their calculus didn't include the obvious ramifications that are manifest all around them, instead they moved forward in their foolish endeavors thinking they were going to be just fine. This is the real challenge and danger of foolishness; it doesn't appear foolish to the one that is wrapped up in it!

Think about how often you've seen this play out in the lives of others. Consider for a moment the student who drops out of high school to pursue a get rich quick scheme or the spouse who leaves his better half to be with someone who offers more spontaneity. In all these things, the result is obvious and has played out numerous times and yet the person who is wrapped up in the circumstance moves forward like there is no danger whatsoever.

The above examples are indicative of the truth that we read in our Bible text today, the fool thinks he is right even as he is careening towards death and destruction. I guarantee you that the captain and every sailor on the boat knew that Paul was giving sound advice, or at least they knew that he was espousing conventional logic. There is simply no way that these men could have grown up in that geographic area without knowing that it was dangerous to put out during that time of year and yet their decision must have "seemed right" to them.

The scary reality that undergirds the assertion of Proverbs 14:12 is that foolishness blinds and this is why foolishness is tied to lostness. We believe that the god of this world has blinded the minds and hearts of unbelievers and this supernatural blindness works itself out not only in eternal negligence but also in the unwise and dangerous decisions that are so characteristic of individuals today. Spiritual blindness is the reason why fools can run headlong into decisions and circumstances that we see as dangerous and foolish, and it is the reason why foolishness is so obvious to Christians and so unapparent to everyone else.

Do I mean that only unbelievers can be fools? Hardly! All of us are prone to wander but the unrepentant and impenetrable foolishness that is so characteristic of our culture today can be understood only in light of the fact that what is so obviously foolish seems right to those who cannot see the truth.

July 5

**Proverbs 14:16**

We will spend the last 4 days talking about wisdom and its characteristics but before we round that corner, I do believe it is wise to consider some of the attributes of foolishness. This is a far more important topic than many think precisely because what seems wise to the world is foolishness to God and what is foolish in God's sight is often seen as wise in the world's view. So, how do we know the difference?

Today's Proverb gives us two attributes of foolishness that are helpful. First, fools are "reckless". The idea here is that fools are guilty of charging headlong into all circumstances with little consideration for the outcome or consequence. There is a grave difference between bravery and recklessness. Bravery is grounded in hearing God's truth and trusting Him even in difficult and challenging circumstances. Recklessness is choosing to do something with a high degree of danger irrespective of the risk. Reckless people do not count the cost, instead they simply do what they purpose to do and let the proverbial chips fall wherever they may.

Recklessness is usually demonstrated by a lack of understanding or a discounting of what is obvious. In the case of Acts 27, it was reckless to put out to sea at that time of year precisely because there were loads of data points that demonstrated that sailing at that time of year was unwise and dangerous.

Carelessness is akin to recklessness of course but it does have some nuanced difference. A careless person is one who is not concerned with the details. He may make the right decision in theory, but he is unwilling to make the proper preparations and considerations to see to it that the job is done correctly.

As an example, a careless person might be a sailor who waits to sail until a more favorable season but neglects to inspect his boat before he gets going! A careless person is one who assumes too much. He simply believes that everything will "work out alright in the end" and he does so without any preparation or concern for potential problems. The careless person is one who neglects to save for difficult financial moments. He is the one who drives the car without ever changing the oil. He is the man who assumes that everyone who promises him something is honest and will deliver. He is too trusting, too naïve, too indifferent to make the proper inquiries and preparations for life's inevitable challenges.

Both of these individuals would be labeled "fools" and they are everywhere in our world. There are fools who despise truth and fools who are so indifferent to the dangers of the world that they live in ignorance. Fools come in all shapes and sizes, but they must be avoided, and this is why wisdom is so critical to our daily walk.

July 6

**Proverbs 2:6**

We have established that foolishness abounds in this world. There is no shortage of unwise counsel but the mere understanding that fools exist doesn't help us understand where to find wisdom! If we are going to be wise in the company of fools, we must seek to build the foundation of our lives and thoughts on something else. Today's Proverb shows us where we should run for instruction, namely the Word of God.

Notice first the source of wisdom. Wisdom comes from God! This makes sense when we stop for a moment to contemplate the assertion. God is the giver of wisdom because God is the all-wise, all-knowing and all-powerful Creator of all things. Who else should we look to for understanding in this world than God? Who else would be able to speak with authority and insight? Who better to trust with our decisions and thinking than the One who has made all things and who superintends and stewards all things?

Second, notice the beauty and grace in our God as we read that God gives... The Lord did not have to give us anything but in His mercy, He has chosen to reveal to us what is wise and good. Folks, there are many evidences of God's grace but one, often overlooked, demonstration of God's love for us is found in His willingness to speak to us regarding truth and the way of life. What a demonstration of love that God would choose to teach us what is true and right.

Third, notice that this wisdom is located in His Word. It is from the Lord's "mouth" that wisdom flows. As Christians, we understand that God still speaks but His primary way of revealing truth is in the written Word of God. It is in the Bible that God "speaks". God has spoken through the law and the prophets and the Apostles and in all of these things God's speaking terminates on His Son. It is the person of Jesus and the way of Jesus that is the ultimate ground and spring of Godly wisdom.

If Proverbs 2:6 is true, and it is, then we must live in light of what God has revealed to us and this means that wisdom flows from the knowledge of God as revealed in His Word. Do you want to be wise and discerning? Read and follow your Bible. Do you want to know why the world is falling apart and what we should do in order to navigate these difficult times? Read your Bible. Do you want to know how to lead your family, love your spouse, raise your children, honor God with your time, reach your neighbor, make good decisions and the like? All of these things flow from the Scripture.

It strikes me that Smyrna is a very unique church for a very simple reason. God has blessed our fellowship because there are hoards of people who have taken the call to gain wisdom seriously and have heeded that call through studying the Word of God. There is no other way to wisdom, but the way God has provided, and that way is His revelation of His all-wise counsel.

July 7

**Proverbs 4:7**

Yesterday we saw the source of wisdom, today I want to talk a bit about the priority of wisdom. If the Bible is the primary source of wisdom for us, then it must speak to the need of gaining wisdom. So, it is legitimate to go to the Bible and see how God speaks about the topic of wisdom. Is wisdom something that is just nice to have or is it something that is far more crucial in our lives and walks in this fallen world?

Today's text gives a clear answer as the Bible tells us that wisdom is of first importance. The language in this verse always strikes me as incredibly direct. Here, the Bible shows us that wisdom is so important that it is worth everything you possess! Though it cost you "everything you have", wisdom is to be pursued. The picture here is one of immense value. There is nothing in life that is worth more than wisdom!

It strikes me that so many have excuses for neglecting the source of wisdom in their pursuit. If we believe that wisdom comes from the Word of God primarily, then the pursuit of wisdom must be a pursuit of biblical understanding and yet so many seem unwilling to pay the price. I can't tell you how many times I've heard people justify their lack of Bible study. Many folks claim they don't have time, or they're not good readers, or they just don't understand what they read and to all those excuses, the Bible would say "it doesn't matter what it costs you... get wisdom anyway!"

Do we pursue wisdom in the Word in this manner? How big of a priority is wisdom to us? My guess is that most Christians haven't really considered the relative value and worth of wisdom. Wisdom to many seems like the kind of thing that is nice to have but it rarely ascends to the place of priority that Proverbs 4:7 says it should maintain.

Some may be tempted to ask why wisdom is such a big deal. The answer to that inquiry is certainly multi-faceted but Acts 27 demonstrates one reason why wisdom is a very important treasure to possess. Wisdom would have preserved hundreds of people from peril in our passage from Sunday and wisdom preserves individuals in every generation since then. This is one of the reasons why gaining wisdom is such a big deal! It is worth so much because it is the means that God provides to guard and guide us on life's journey.

So, the admonition for today is very simple... get wisdom! Start now! If you already have some assemblance of wisdom, gain more. Pursue understanding for the glory of God and for your good and the good of those around you. There is nothing more worthwhile than God-honoring and Biblically saturated wisdom.

July 8

**Job 12:12**

Today's passage might seem like a contradiction to the thoughts and assertions we have made thus far in our study of wisdom. If wisdom comes from the revelation of God, how does it also come from the aged? The answer is that wisdom's source is the same, but it is distilled and often taught by those who have already been taught by God and others. Stated differently, wisdom is God's, but God gives wisdom to those who have walked with Him.

I want to try to unpack both the logic and the insight in this key text today. First, we must understand that wisdom's source is singular. Wisdom comes from God and God communicates, primarily through His Word. This means that all wisdom should come back to some biblical insight and principle. This being the case, some have posited that all we need for wisdom is the Bible. That might sound pious, and it is partially true, but the problem is that the Bible itself teaches us differently. If we believe that the Bible is the ONLY resource we need for wisdom then we contradict the Bible's clear teaching that wisdom flows from other sources.

Second, we must understand how this meshes together. The Bible is not denying the preeminence of the Bible, the Bible is simply shedding light on the reality that the Word of God needs to be taught in order for it to be understood and applied. We have need, first, to understand the Word. Sometimes the Bible is complex, and this is why God provides both the Holy Spirit and others who are indwelt with the Spirit to teach us what is true. Second, we need to learn apply the Bible to our specific circumstances. There are many times in life when we need to understand how God would have us take what is objectively true and leverage it in our circumstance.

These two truths converge on the point of our passage today. The aged (a kinder way of saying those who are "old") are often people who have been taught many things by God and who have learned how to apply what God has said in various situations. This means that they are instruments of gracious wisdom in our lives. It is a marvelous resource and treasure to learn from wise saints.

This text brings with it two admonitions. First, for the "young". It is wise and important to find folks older than you who can teach and model wisdom. Don't fall victim to the fallacy that those who are more advanced in age are out of touch, they often avoid what you love because they are wise! Second, to those who are "aged", pour into the next generation. Don't allow your God given wisdom to die with you! God has given you experiences and insights in order to assist others in their journey. Teach where you can and look for ways to invest in those who come behind.



July 9

**Ephesians 5:15-16**

It strikes me that one of the primary battlefields in life is fought in the arena of time management. We are busy people! No matter the age range, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Americans live at a frenetic pace. Busyness alone is neither good nor bad, but we must discern the reason and goal of our efforts if we wish to honor God and live wisely.

A wise man once told me that the worst outcome in life is not failure, it is succeeding at something that doesn't matter. I believe that statement to be both exceedingly true and convicting! We are constantly confronted with people, activities and responsibilities that vie for our precious time and these things are not morally neutral. Every activity and every commitment have certain ramifications and it takes supernatural wisdom to discern the difference.

Folks, I do believe that the most heartbreaking sight we see in ministry is bound up in families who are so frenetically working towards setting their kids up for success that they miss what's most important. These are individuals who have not found a way to make the best use of their time, even though they think they are doing so, because the days are evil.

It takes great wisdom to know what to say "yes" to and what to deny. It takes insight and understanding and biblical categories to know that something would be useful and valuable. Time is a zero-sum game; you can't make more and you will run out! Therefore, how we use our time is of immense importance.

How do we make wise decisions with our time? The first answer is that we allow the Bible to inform our goals. What should we most desire for our careers, marriages, children and hobbies? If the Bible does not speak first and foremost into that discussion, then we are not going to make the best use of our time. Second, we must allow the Bible to dictate how we operate within those spheres. God has not placed you in your workplace for the sole reason of greed. He has placed you there to support your family, further the Kingdom through the resources a job provides and make disciples. When viewed through this prism, we are in a much better place to make the best use of the time and energy we are given.

Furthermore, we make the best use of our time when we consider that the days are characterized by evil. We must see, with supernatural wisdom, that we are engaged in a battle and one of the best weapons in the hands of our enemy is distraction. This means that every "opportunity" should be vetted, and every endeavor should be weighed against the biblical truths that we have been graciously given. May we be faithful to live with wisdom in a contentious day through biblically bestowed insight and goals!