

The Beginning of Wisdom, Not the End of Wisdom.

Luke 12:49–13:9

“What’s biblical wisdom?” The fear of the Lord is the BEGINNING of wisdom.

We correctly quote this text, yet we apply it wrongly. For the average churchgoer/Christian, they understand this verse like this: The fear of the Lord is the END of wisdom.

For example: Did you know that the majority of young people walk away from God when they reach their high school and university years? One of the main reasons is this: the church doesn’t have the answers to their questions, their contexts, or their needs. We simply say, “Because the Bible tells you so...” to whatever they ask us.

Today, we will learn what biblical wisdom means in its fullness: interpreting both Scripture and society/the world/culture well.

1. We must know Scripture.

Jesus uses two crucial figures of speech:

A) “I bring fire, not peace.”

The average person in Israel, back in Jesus’ day, believed that when the Saviour showed up, he would bring eternal peace on earth. Their expectations were indeed true, but their timing needed some correction.

Jesus does bring immediate peace between us and God; that’s what we call salvation. But in the meantime, your peace with God would stir lots of reactions, rejections, and spiritual warfare from those who think differently than you.

We can mildly see it in our days. I bet you know of some uneasy relationships in your life, or in the life of someone you know, just because your beliefs don’t match. And we can see it very explicitly in some places at the Middle Eastern world, where changing one’s religion is seen as the worst crime: an attack against the community and one’s identity itself.

That’s what Jesus means: My presence brings fire, and not peace.

B) “I have a baptism to go through...”

This is a clear reference to his death and resurrection. Baptism means dying to the old self and rising to a new self. Jesus uses that same word and applies it to himself: He dies to forgive our sins; he rises to give us new life.

These are biblical interpretations, and that's the beginning of wisdom: We need to know our Bible and our Jesus. Now we can move on to the next aspect of wisdom.

2. We must know our present age.

Jesus uses two figures of speech: the weather and the judge.

A) “Hypocrites, how can you interpret the weather but not interpret what’s right?”

That statement makes our current weather forecasters look bad. With all the technology, they are still “allowed” to make many mistakes and still keep their jobs! “Prepare the shovel because it’s going to snow,” and the snow never comes. “Take an umbrella with you because it’s going to rain,” and it never rains. Jesus points to the average people of his day and says that as soon as they look at the sky, they know what the weather will bring.

But obviously, Jesus’ point is not to remain on the topic of forecasting; he wants to teach a spiritual truth: We have to know our context, audience, and the times we live in.

In his days, that meant the Saviour was there, walking among them. They didn’t need to wait for God’s move; they didn’t need extra signs; all they needed was right in front of their eyes. Each miracle forecasts that God’s Messiah has arrived!

B) What kind of season is that? The season of reconciliation.

Jesus moves from the weather to the court. He gives some practical advice to his audience: If you knew you were at fault with your neighbour and he was taking you to court, you would be found guilty and would need to pay a heavy penalty! Wouldn’t you try to reconcile before he indicts you?

In the same way, the time to reconcile with God is here and right now. God is the judge, humans are the sinners, and Christ is the Saviour. Humanity has an opportunity to reconcile with God in Christ.

Yesterday is past, tomorrow will always be in the future, and there is only one day called “today.” Today is the day of salvation; today is the day of reconciliation; today is the day of repentance and walking close to God.

Application: Just as people didn’t like to hear this kind of message back in those days, they still don’t like to hear it nowadays. Nevertheless, the message is still the same. It remains equally urgent as it was back in those days, and the people’s context—their need to hear it—remains the same.

3. We must know our own condition.

A) Two illustrations describe how much we lack wisdom in this area of our lives:

First, we think that we are good drivers and that others are crazy drivers—we should know that many times, we are the crazy drivers on the road, haha.

Secondly, I had a pastor ask a man in the audience, “Tell me one flaw you need to work on.” The gentleman took FOREVER to answer that question, and once he answered, he said, “I am a perfectionist.” I quietly thought: Really?! Is that your only “flaw,” or are you too proud and lacking in self-awareness?!

B) Everything we have pointed out from the beginning becomes even clearer in chapter 13: Jesus applies Bible to the events of his days, and to people’s spiritual condition.

Pay attention to how up-to-date Jesus is as a Rabbi: (i) He was brought news about the governor Pontius Pilate. Surely, that kind of tragic news was “headline” news in his day. (ii) Jesus adds another “headline” he knows about—the tower in Siloam that fell and killed 18 people.

What would we do with such information? (i) We would protest against Pontius Pilate or vote him out of office. (ii) We would complain about God and ask, “Where’s God when a tragedy like this occurs?!” That’s classic 2026 North America.

Jesus takes those incidents, so vivid in everyone’s mind, and teaches everyone that they should repent. In Jesus’ time, there was a baseline belief that “if something tragic happens to an individual, that must be a punishment from God.” (John 9.1) Jesus disagrees with that perspective, and he puts everyone in the same boat: Everyone must repent, or else condemnation is coming their way.

In theology, we call this “universal guilty” or “total depravation”: humans inherited Adam’s sin and deserve punishment; we cannot save ourselves, no matter how hard we try. Salvation must come from outside — more precisely, from above — as a gracious act from God toward them.

Application: Just as Jesus had to correct his audience’s mindset about salvation, nowadays we need to correct people’s assumptions about eternity as well: “He was a good guy; surely he will be saved.” “Hell doesn’t exist.” “Hell is just for the very bad people; the average guy won’t go there.” “Everyone is going to heaven because God is ‘love’...”

Those are baseline cultural beliefs, and this text encourages people not to act presumptuously, but to repent.

Conclusion -

All of this shows God's kindness to us: He loves us so much that he lets us know the truth.

This sermon finishes with a parable that portrays God's patience and kindness toward his audience: God planted a tree. The tree didn't bear any fruit for three years, but instead of uprooting it, God gave it a bit more time and a bit more pruning in the hope that the tree would bear fruit.

In Jesus' context, that parable describes Israel; for three years, Jesus graciously called them to repentance, but they went and killed him instead.

In our context, we could see that parable as applying individually to every person who hears the Gospel and yet rejects it, while God keeps sending us to preach to them. That displays God's patience and heart, eager that they might be saved.

Application: Remember this: the ***"beginning"*** of wisdom is the fear of the Lord, not the end of it. We want to discern our times, discern our society, and discern our environment so that we may apply God's wisdom accordingly.