

Seeing things differently to the world

Reading: John 18:36 “.... *My kingdom is not of this world*”

Introduction:

Mankind has been able to do some pretty great and clever things over the centuries. Consider some of the technologies that we have today;

- the ability to see and talk to someone on the other side of the world using the internet (*e.g.* Skype).
- being able to get into an aeroplane, fly ten kilometres high in the sky, and travel over thousands of kilometres in a matter of hours.
- the types of life-saving medical operations that can now be performed where, a hundred years ago, you would have had no hope.

Or consider some of the great physical feats that people have done;

- sailing solo around the world in small boats across oceans that are thousands of kilometres across, enduring storms and loneliness.
- climbing great mountains like Everest in the harshest of environments.
- or the great survival stories of people being lost or buried alive for several days and before being rescued.

For the most part, I don't see any problem in acknowledging these things that mankind has done or been able to achieve.

But when it comes to spiritual matters – matters that relate to morality and ethics, righteousness and godly living – it becomes a very different story. The world may think that it is wise and has all the answers to these issues, but it doesn't (**Proverbs 14:12; 16:25**). In becoming “very clever” with regards to knowledge and technology, the world falls into the same trap that the people of Babel fell into (**Genesis 11:1-4**). They felt that they were so advanced that they didn't need God, and that they could ignore what He had commanded¹. They trusted in their own abilities and wisdom. However, God showed them who is really in control - He confused their language and caused them to scatter (**Genesis 11:5-9**).

In **1 Corinthians 1:21** we read;

*“For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.”*²

Worldly wisdom makes people blind to God and His Word – it prevents them from seeing true wisdom (**Proverbs 2:6; 9:10; James 3:17**). But through the gospel message, God has made foolish the wisdom of this world. In this lesson, we will briefly consider how He did that through the life of Jesus, and then draw some application for ourselves.

LESSON

1) God chose the foolish things to put to shame the wise

There is a big difference between what the world sees as wisdom, and what God knows to be wise. This is probably because the world thinks differently to the

¹ God had said after the flood, “*Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.*” (**Genesis 9:1**). But the people of Babel did not want to scatter across the face of the earth. (**Genesis 11:4b**)

² New King James Version Bible.

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way that God thinks (**Isaiah 55:8-9**). In general terms, the world sees things from the perspective of this physical realm; the tangible “here and now”. And so its judgements about what is right or wrong, what is good or bad, what is wise or foolish, are often based on this limited perspective.

But God sees things from the eternal. He made this earth (**Genesis 1:1**), and He also knows that it will not endure forever - one day He will destroy it all (**2 Peter 3:10**). He knows that we are spiritual beings, more than just the flesh and blood in which we currently live (**Genesis 1:26**). And so while God does provide the things that we need for this physical world (**Matthew 5:45; 6:30-32**), more importantly, He is concerned for our spiritual welfare (**Mark 8:36; Ephesians 1:3-12**), for it is our spirits that will live on for eternity after our time here has ended (**Romans 2:7-8**).

When you look at the events that surround the life and death of Jesus, they stand in contrast to the thinking of the world. It’s as though God was deliberately making a distinction between what the world considers to be important, and what God knows to be important. Consider the following three points.

a) The birth of Jesus

Jesus was the Son of God (**Romans 1:3-4**); the “... *King of kings and Lord of lords* ...” (**1 Timothy 6:15b**). From a worldly perspective, surely such a person would be born in the grandest of royal palaces, surrounded by wealth and riches, and tended to by the finest physicians and midwives in the land.

But what do we find with regard to Jesus’ birth? Because of a Roman decree, His parents had travelled a long way³ from their home in Nazareth to be registered at Bethlehem in the land of Joseph’s tribe, Judah (**Luke 2:1; 3:23-34**). We don’t know exactly how long they were in Bethlehem before Jesus was born⁴, but it seems that the only accommodation they could find at the time was in a stable – a place where animals were kept – because there was no room for them at the inn (**Luke 2:7**). And instead of being born and resting in a bed with the finest of linen, He was wrapped in swaddling clothes⁵ and laid in a manger – a trough used for feeding the animals.

Those present on the day of His birth were not the kings and princes of the land, but humble shepherds – people who slept with their flocks out in the fields at night (**Luke 2:8-16**)⁶.

Point: God chose the humblest of places and the most un-likeliest of people to be present when the King of Kings was born, rather than Him being born in a palace, surrounded by dignitaries in all their finery.

³ By Caesar’s decree, everyone had to go to their home city to be registered (**Luke 2:1-5**). The distance from Nazareth to Bethlehem is approximately 160kms (100 miles) if travelled by the east side of the Jordan to avoid going through Samaria.

⁴ All we know is that while they were in Bethlehem, “.. *the days were completed for her to be delivered* ...” (**Luke 2:6**) NKJV Bible, *i.e.* have the baby.

⁵ “*Swaddling clothes*” were strips of cloth tied together and wrapped around the baby to keep it warm.

⁶ Wise men from the east also came, but the context of **Matthew 2:1-17** suggests that they probably arrived sometime later on after the birth. When they arrived, Mary and Joseph were now in a house (vs.11). When Herod realised that the wise men had tricked him by not returning to him after they had visited the child, he determined that Jesus could have been anywhere up to two years old by then (**Matthew 2:16**).

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b) The life of Jesus

Jesus was not raised in the king's house, or educated to be like the religious rulers of the day. Rather, He was raised in the home of a humble tradesman (**Matthew 13:55**), and learned to be a carpenter (**Mark 6:3**) until the time of His ministry.

When He chose His disciples, He did not pick the brightest of religious minds that were around at the time. He chose ordinary men of various backgrounds, some of whom were "... *uneducated and unlearned* .." (**Acts 4:13**), and others who previously held jobs that were despised by the Jews (**Matthew 9:9-11**).

He did not spend the bulk of His time with the religious leaders or other "important" people of the day – He met with them only on a few occasions. Instead He went and spent time with the common people, including "... *sinners and tax collectors*" (**Mark 2:15**), the people that the religious leaders rejected (**Mark 2:16; Luke 18:10-11**).

During His ministry, He had no possessions - He had no place of His own "... *to lay His head* ..." (**Matthew 8:20**). When He died on the cross, the soldiers divided the few possessions that He had – His clothes (**Matthew 27:35**).

While He came to "... *seek and save the lost* ..." (**Luke 19:10**), He did not do so in order to seek publicity for Himself. In fact, there were times when He told people not to tell others about Him (**Matthew 8:4; 16:20; Mark 7:36; 8:26; 9:9**). When He healed the sick and taught the crowds, it was because of His compassion for them (**Matthew 14:14; Mark 6:34**) and His desire to do the Father's will (**John 4:34; 12:49-50**). It was not because He wanted to seek glory for Himself (**John 8:50**).

Point: The life of Jesus, our Lord and our Master, was centred on doing the Father's will and giving Him the glory. It was not centred on acquiring wealth, fame, or the praise of men. He came to serve, not to be served (**Luke 22:25-27**).

c) The death of Jesus

In the world, someone who is considered to be the victor in a contest is the one who is seen to have defeated his or her opponent – it is the one who "comes out on top"; the one who has overcome their competitors and left them behind.

For those who plotted to kill Jesus (**John 11:47-53**), finally seeing Him crucified must have seemed like a victory to them. They had unsuccessfully tried to trip Him up throughout His ministry (*e.g.* **Matthew 12:1-14; Mark 12:13-17**), but now, here was the moment – He was nailed to a cross. He was given the same shameful treatment that would be given to a criminal. And while He hung there on the cross, appearing to be "helpless", they mocked and ridiculed Him (**Matthew 27:41-43**)⁷. The day seemed to be theirs.

⁷ They had heard Jesus say that He would be raised from the dead, but they didn't believe it. So they took steps to make sure nobody could "steal" the body from the tomb and "pretend" that He had risen (**Matthew 27:62-64**).

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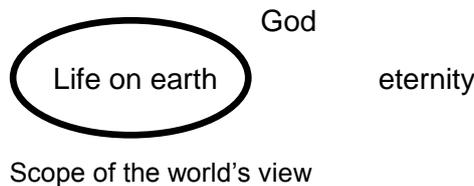
From a worldly perspective, it appeared that Jesus was defeated. But such was not the case. Jesus achieved a great victory in allowing Himself to be crucified (**John 10:18**). His life had been a victory over temptation (**Hebrews 4:15**), and now His death and resurrection would be a victory over the fear of death – He destroyed the power of the devil (**Hebrews 2:14**), and made it possible for us to be saved (**Colossians 1:21-22**).

Point: To the Jews, Christ's death on a cross didn't look like a victory at all. And to the Greeks, this talk of a resurrection was foolishness (**Acts 17:32**). But to those who believe; to those who understand that cleansing from sin requires a sacrifice (**Hebrews 9:22b; 10:4; Leviticus 17:11**), it is the wisdom and power of God unto salvation (**1 Corinthians 1:23-24**).

2) Application

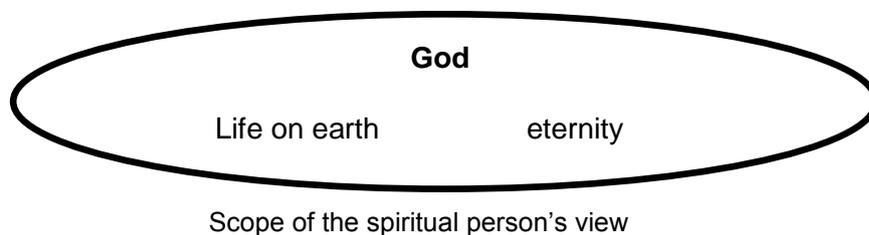
While we live in this world, many issues and problems will arise. That's unavoidable – it's the nature of things (**Job 14:1**). And so we often ask ourselves, "*what should I do in this situation?*" or, "*how should I respond to what is happening to me?*"

But we need to be wary that we don't look to the philosophies of the world to seek the answers – to seek what is right; or what is wise; or what is important. I mentioned earlier in this lesson that the world's view of life is short-sighted – it is limited to the "here and now"; the tangible. It leaves God and eternity out of the picture.



Therefore, it looks to itself for wisdom, ethics, morality, and truth (while at the same time rejecting the notion of an absolute truth **John 14:6; 17:17b**). But its understanding is darkened – it walks in futility (**Romans 1:21; Ephesians 4:17-18**) – it is blind and deaf to the real issues of life (**Matthew 13:14-15**).

But the spiritually minded person looks beyond the "here and now". They see things in the context of eternity, with God at the centre of all things.



When we come from this perspective, we see things differently from the world;

- the way that we examine ourselves – our attitudes, actions, thoughts and motives. Are we seeking to please men? or God?
- the way we "see" other people – not by their appearance or social status, but as souls that need saving, edifying and help.
- even the way that we view and respond to the things that happen to us.

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Instead of seeking the wisdom of the world, we need to turn to the Word of God. He gave it to us (**2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21**) - He created us, He knows how we “work”, and He knows what is best for us (**Psalms 25:8-10**). His Word contains all that we need regarding “... *life and godliness* ...” (**2 Peter 1:3**). In other words, whatever the issues we face in this life, God’s Word will contain the answers we need, whether it be;

- relationships within the family (**Ephesians 5:22 – 6:4**),
- attitudes towards other brethren (**Romans 14:19; Ephesians 5:21; Philippians 2:3**),
- attitudes towards those who are outside of Christ (**Matthew 5:14-16; Romans 12:18; Galatians 6:10; 1 Peter 2:11-12**),
- responding to those who harm and offend you (**Matthew 5:44; Ephesians 4:32**),
- the work environment (**Colossians 3:22 – 4:1; 2 Peter 2:18**),
- submitting to those who rule over us (**Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 2:13-17**),

and we could go on.

But most importantly, it teaches us what to do to be saved and to remain saved (**Acts 2:38; 2 Peter 1:5-11**).

Conclusion

Through the life of Jesus, God showed up the foolishness of the world. He showed us that the thought processes of the world are not based or focussed on truth or what is really important - they are based on man’s wisdom.

What is important in this life is not where you were born; not how much wealth you have; not your social or academic status, and, in a sense, not even what happens to you in life. Rather, what is important, first and foremost, is being right with God, and secondly, loving your neighbour as yourself (**Matthew 22:36-40**).

- it is having your name recorded in the Book of Life (**Luke 10:20; Revelation 20:12-15**).

We are in the world, but not of the world (**John 17:14-16**) - our citizenship is in Heaven (**Philippians 3:20**). Therefore, we ought not think like the world, nor see things as the world sees them. Rather, we are to be led by the Spirit (**Romans 8:14**), allowing His Word to renew our minds (**Romans 12:2**), seeking that wisdom that comes from above (**James 3:17**).