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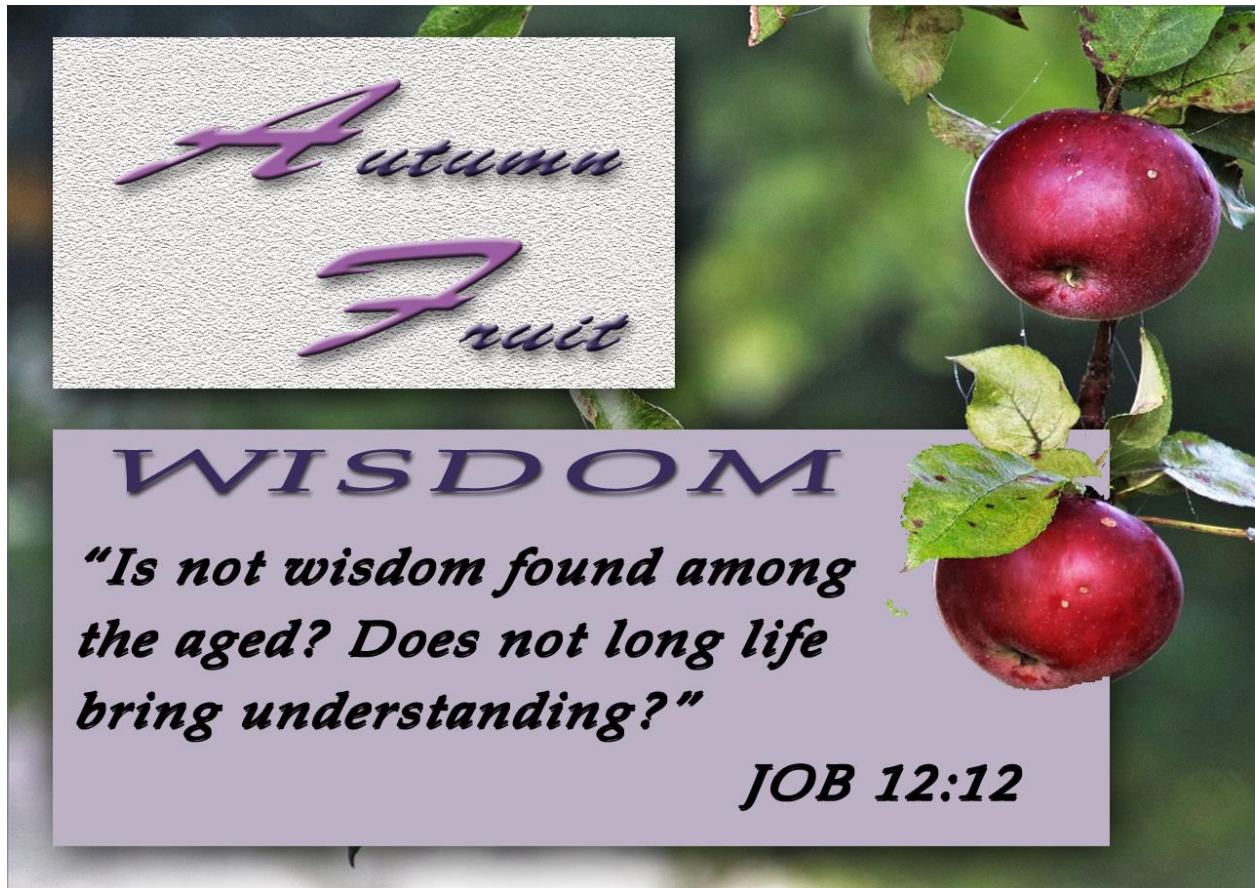
WISDOM

Job 12:12

“Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding?”

Special Music: “God I Look to You” Extended Life Worship

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JV_V0UotfsM



THE QUEST FOR WISDOM

How many foolish things
Have defined my life?
Events and times
That I have sacrificed
Only to find
Foolishness, unlike wine
Does not age well
With time.

When I was younger
I saw wisdom as a sparkling gem
Just out of reach
But never a whim.
Shiney and flawless
I sought its solace
To embrace its essence
In my lawless soul

Wisdom is an acquired taste
A flagon to be drunk
A cup to be sipped
In an attempt to debunk
The foolish drawn
To that which is flawed
Vanishing the mist
Of the veil of fraud

Where we often find ourselves.
People will often
Take the more comfortable option
In spite of our eternal adoption
Into the family of God
Where wisdom is not a façade
Nor painted with brushstrokes
Calloused and broad.

Wisdom is a skill to be learned
Growing with age
Engaging our souls
With each turning page
As long as we bother to read
Planting each seed
To nourish
And outgrow the weeds.

Wisdom is a God granted compass
That points to the truth.
It ignores all the flash
That the foolish pursue.
But we have to want it
And choose not to flaunt it
Built on mistakes
As we learn and grow with it.

**The quest for wisdom
Is an endless pursuit
In spite our intentions
It's always aloof
For the wiser we are
The more foolish by far
As we see our true selves
Reflected in Christ's scars.**

Growing up, I had a wonderful piano teacher. She and I developed a close friendship over the years. But there was one thing that she did that used to drive me crazy. She always wore black, pointy, leather flats. She had a reason for that. She also taught me to play organ and the pointy, leather flats were necessary for playing the foot pedals. Still, at times it was unnerving. When I was at the piano, she would often kick me with the toes of her flats to get me to sit up straight. I think she enjoyed it. She would also kick me when I was working on a difficult passage which required a great deal of iteration and practice. "Again!" she would say and kick me in the small of my back. It wasn't that it hurt as much as it felt like a punishment even when I got the passage right. Don't get me wrong, she is not the only piano teacher that ever did this. It seems to be pretty common. I've been toying with the idea of teaching piano, but I am not sure I can employ such tactics on kids.

This month we are going to be talking about Autumn Fruits, fruits that tend to ripen in our older years. Fruits that cannot be claimed without experience, patience, and desire. Fruits that don't gain just by being a great human but have to be developed through living life. Developed because we learn a thousand ways something cannot be done before we learn how it can be done. Thomas Edison spoke to the naysayers of his day on why he continued to work so hard on the light bulb even though he failed over and over again. "I didn't fail. I just found 2,000 ways how not to make a light bulb. I only needed to find one way to make it work." Now to be completely honest, Thomas Edison did not invent the light bulb. There were a number of inventors around the world that had already

created working light bulbs. But Thoms Edison was the first to invent a light bulb that was both affordable and practical.

But that is the nature of wisdom. Learning from our mistakes in a world that likes to point to those mistakes and tell us what failures we are. Colonel Sanders was an abject failure until his sixties, trying over and over to sell his recipe and restaurant idea. George Lucas's "Indiana Jones and Raiders of the Lost Ark" was rejected by every motion picture studio when Lucas was looking for someone to back the movie. Marie Curie and her husband sifted and strained tons of pitchblende that led to finally winding up with a stain in the bottom of a petri dish that was the discovery of radium.

While these people were extremely intelligent, intelligence does not grant one wisdom. Wisdom is earned, or it is fleeting. Wisdom needs to be fed in order to grow and be magnified. We seldom talk about wisdom among the young. Why is that? We occasionally run into a young person who clearly has the heart of an old soul. But is such sagemess actually wisdom? Or is it the path of an adventurer seeking answers in a world given to the status quo, where we quash the imaginations of young people to the point that wisdom is no longer a quest, but merely a road not taken? We steal the fertilizer that feeds wisdom and expect the same result of wisdom in the adults they become.

My piano teacher had purpose when she kicked me. She was encouraging me to do better, to become a better person, to become a better pianist. Today we often kick young people not because we want them to better themselves, but simply because we don't like what they are doing, harmful or not. "I don't like

your music. I don't like your friends. I don't like your clothes. I don't like your attitude." My parents often used the same approach because they did not understand the world I was living in. They went to school in one room school houses, a world totally different from my own. That's because it wasn't the world that they grew up in. Our perspectives were different. We were the first generation to grow up in a world where we were constantly told to fear nuclear war. I probably understood that fear better than they did because it was me that was hiding in duck-n-cover drills, not them. Today, those drills are long gone, and most people see the foolishness of thinking we can hide our way out of a nuclear blast.

Today, those drills are long gone, and kids today see movies and images of us hiding under our desks and think it was silly. And what is worse is they are right. But we didn't know any better. And yet, the threat of nuclear is something that still hangs over our head by a thread. But we have kind of gotten use to the its ugly presence and we live with it. People are generally not building fallout shelters in their back yard even though in the 60's it was the "wise" thing to do before we realized the foolishness of it all.

And because our parents fed us fear to discourage wisdom, we often do the same thing today, somehow thinking that spreading fear will encourage wisdom. Fear of war. Fear of the environment. Fear of politics. Fear of disease. Wisdom is born out of practical truths, not fear of the truth. "Here is a problem that needs solving, not because we fear the consequences of that problem, but

because of the opportunity for us to do better and create a better world for ourselves and others.

“Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding?”

The generations surrounding the life of Job saw age as sign of wisdom. To them, people that lived a long life managed to learn from their mistakes. Those who refused to learn those lessons often failed to live long in a world that was filled with potentially tragic circumstances, where the wrong word to a passing soldier would get you cut down with no repercussions. While that doesn't happen here, it still happens in other parts of the world. Wisdom brings prudence.

As Christians, we hold up Solomon as the keeper of wisdom, the sage above all sages. God granted Solomon wisdom as a blessing because it was what the king asked for. But like I mentioned before, wisdom must be fed and encouraged. If left to itself, it will slowly wither and die, which is what happened to Solomon. He came to believe that because of his own wisdom, he no longer needed God's wisdom. When God told him not to marry foreign wives, he felt that he was wise enough to avoid all the calamity that would come from doing that very thing. God did not want Solomon to marry foreign wives because he knew that it would bring foreign gods into the kingdom. Solomon in his own wisdom thought it would be just fine because he would just prohibit those foreign gods from being worshipped. But before the end of his life, he was not only allowing those foreign gods into the kingdom. He was also building alters and homes for

those gods as well as worshipping them himself. So much for thinking that wisdom does not need nurturing.

Wisdom is not a destination. We don't reach a certain point where we can cry out to the world, "I am wise!" It's not like earning a degree and walking across a stage to accept a diploma. There is a certain amount of pride when we have achieved our goal of completing the steps necessary to receive that degree. But wisdom is not founded on pride. As a matter of fact, mixing pride and wisdom is a lot like mixing oil with water. It doesn't work, and the attempt pretty much ruins whatever it is we are trying to accomplish. If you try to mix a blue oil base paint and a yellow water base paint, you do not get green. You get some kind of blue and yellow psychedelic slush.

Real life experience teaches us that the wiser we think we are, the more foolish we become to others. True wisdom required humility. Becoming wise is not a "fake it 'til you make it," pull the wool over everyone's eyes kind of situation. The more we try to fake it the more obvious our foolishness comes to light. Wisdom is not a purple robe that we throw on to impress people. Wise people need no such trappings. Wise people do not seek pedestals to stand on. As a matter of fact, the easiest way to spot a fool is to put a self-proclaimed wise person on a pedestal and then watch how quickly they fall off. A truly wise person will not let people put them on a pedestal to begin with nor do they need to toot their own horn. A wise person is well aware that the road to wisdom is paved with one failure after another.

Have you ever met someone in their golden years that projects an aura of wisdom? They won't tell you that they are wise. They might give you sage advice from having experienced life at a level you haven't achieved. That advice is like honey to anyone seeking truth. Those who have lived longer than we have are a tremendous resource to help us live long and fruitful lives. Every generation reads history books, listens to teachers lecturing on great moments in history, watches movies that are blatantly biased about historic events and are often embellished to enhance the story line. But our greatest resources often go ignored. The soldiers who talk of wars in the first person, the survivors of history's great tragedies, the writers who put their life stories down on paper so that future generations can learn from the mistakes and the perseverance that it takes to survive in the harshest of conditions. There is wisdom in these stories. And yet, the tellers of these tales often do not see themselves as wise. They lived through those juxtapositions in history and recorded the events with their eyes, ears, and noses and from the chaos developed opinions and understandings about those events in a way that those who were not there can't.

We are coming up on the 22nd Anniversary of 9/11, also known as Patriot Day. It truly seems odd that it was 22 years ago. And while there are many of us who remember that September day in 2001 when the world came to stop and never returned to what it was before, there are also now generations of children that were not born at that time so everything they know about that day comes from what they are told. Even worse, those that survived at ground zero are dying to soon due to the horrific conditions and toxic chemicals that they inhaled

while trying to either escape or help others escape. There has been a valiant effort to collect those stories, but there are many stories that have already been lost. Wisdom that was never harvested. And those stories that have been collected are slowly being relegated to the pages of history books where the details can be found, but not the nuances that we experienced as a nation during that time.

It is our obligation to instill in our children the wisdom that we gained from that time as we pray they never have to experience such an event themselves. It isn't a matter of instilling fear, but to show that we, as God's Children, can persevere in the most difficult of circumstances. Wisdom comes from the accumulated knowledge that we have gleaned during the difficult times. As we face newer and greater challenges, we draw upon that knowledge to help us wisely address new events.

We can read the read the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes until we know them by heart, but that will not make us wise. We have to embrace the words and understand why they were written before they can become engraved on our hearts. Words of wisdom have no effect on our lives if we simply let them flow into our ear and right back out the other side. No. We have pull them in, mull them over, embrace both the writer and the reason. We have to make them our own. That is where wisdom comes from. Wisdom is not something we quote when we need to pull some succulent quip from the air to feel worthwhile. It is only worth our time if we are greedy for it, hungry for it, begging for it to become so entangled in our lives that it almost takes on a life of its own.

“Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding?”

Why do we find wisdom among the aged? Because the older we get, having experienced generations of change and struggle, it becomes easier with each passing year to see wisdom for what it is. Being old does not make us wise, but being old allows us to separate the lies and foolish gestures of our youth from what we have come to know through experience.

We know the story of Calvary because wise people wrote it down. We know the story of the resurrection because the women wisely proclaimed it to the world. We have an entire Bible full of stories of people who were wise and also people that were foolish. Let us each allow God to speak to us through his love letter to us.

This week, I would like to see if we can embrace wisdom for what it is meant to be. Look in Proverbs or Ecclesiastes and pick a verse to memorize. Just repeat it over and over to yourself during the week. Let it become something that is embedded in your heart. It doesn't have to mean anything to anyone else as long as it speaks to you. That is a first step towards acquiring a mind and heart of wisdom. Once you have embraced it, you can apply it. I can't promise you that you will gain the wisdom of Solomon, but I can promise that you will be wiser today than you were yesterday.

God bless you all,

AMEN

