

The Wise Man: Why Knowledge of Biblical Truth is Not Enough

Jesus as Wisdom

Matt. 11:2 When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing (τὰ ἔργα τοῦ Χριστοῦ), he sent word by his disciples ³ and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”

Matt. 11:16 “But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,

¹⁷ ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’

¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; ¹⁹ the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her **deeds** (τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς).”

Jesus as Wisdom

Matt. 11:25 At that time Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have **revealed them to infants**; ²⁶ yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷ All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Matt. 11:28 “**Come to me**, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Wise Men as Community Leaders

Gen. 41:39 So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so **discerning** (φρονιμώτερος) and **wise** (συνετώτερός) as you.

1Kings 4:29 God gave Solomon very great **wisdom** (φρόνησιν), **discernment** (σοφίαν), and breadth of understanding as vast as the sand on the seashore,³⁰ so that Solomon’s wisdom surpassed the **wisdom** (φρόνησιν) of all the people of the east, and all the **wisdom** (φρονίμους) of Egypt.

Dan. 2:20 Daniel said:

“Blessed be the name of God from age to age,
for **wisdom** (σοφία) and power are his.

Wise Men as Community Leaders

Antiq. 17:149 (17.6.2) There was one Judas, the son of Saripheus, and Matthias, the son of Margalothus, two of the most eloquent men among the Jews, and the most celebrated interpreters of the Jewish laws, and men well-beloved by the people, because of their education of their youth; for all those that were studious of virtue frequented their lectures every day. ¹⁵⁰ (17.6.2) These men, when they found that the king's distemper was incurable, excited the young men that they would pull down all those works which the king had erected contrary to the law of their fathers, [...]

¹⁵² (17.6.2) So these **wise men** (οἱ σοφισταὶ) persuaded [their scholars] to pull down the golden eagle;

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Matt. 23:29 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous, ³⁰ and you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ ³¹ Thus you testify against yourselves that you are descendants of those who murdered the prophets. ³² Fill up, then, the measure of your ancestors. ³³ You snakes, you brood of vipers! How can you escape being sentenced to hell? ³⁴ Therefore I send you prophets, **wise men** (σοφοὺς), and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town, ³⁵ so that [...]

Wise Men as Community Leaders

Matt. 24:45 “Who then is the faithful and **wise servant**, whom his master has put in charge of his household, to give the other slaves their allowance of food at the proper time?”

Three Responsibilities of Wise Men

1. Apply knowledge to make wise decisions
2. Protect the community from the idolatrous/demonic
3. Understand God's plans for the future

Matt. 5:21 “You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’²² But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You **fool** (**μωρέ**),’ you will be liable to the hell of fire.

Matt. 23:16 “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the sanctuary is bound by nothing, but whoever swears by the gold of the sanctuary is bound by the oath.’¹⁷ You blind **fools** (**μωροὶ**)! For which is greater, the gold or the sanctuary that has made the gold sacred?

Do not answer fools according to their folly, or you will be a fool yourself.

Answer fools according to their folly, or they will be wise in their own eyes. Prov. 26:4-5

Proverbs explains poverty as resulting from ignoring instructions (13:18), injustice (13:23); laziness (12:27), wickedness (13:25), too much talk (14:23), a failure to sow (20:4), loving sleep (20:13), and the use of excuses to justify inaction (23:13; 26:13).

Proverbs provides qualified advice on the disciplining of children: at one extreme the rod is justified (13:24). This is qualified in that the rod should only be used when there is hope that it will have an effect and not in anger (19:18-19). At the other end of the discipline spectrum is reproof and training (22:6).

What tensions/paradoxes can you find in the Sermon on the Mount?

a. *Whether to perform their acts of righteousness in public or private?*

(i) 'In the same way, let your (pl.) light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven' (5:16);

(ii) 'Beware of practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven' (6:1).

b. *Whether to judge or withhold judgement?*

(i) 'Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?' (7:1-2);

(ii) 'Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles?' (7:15-16).

c. Whether or not to give to others when requested?

(i) 'You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you (5:38-42);

(ii) 'Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you' (7:6).

d. *Whether to ask their Father in heaven for help in the mundane areas of life?*

(i) 'Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well' (6:31-33);

(ii) 'Give us this day our daily bread' (6:11), 'Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you' (7:7).

e. *Consistency* between the internal and external:

‘if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light’ (6:22)

‘You will know them by their fruits’ (7:16)

Inconsistency between the internal and external:

‘Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves’ (7:15)

‘the hypocrites’ (6:2, 5, 16)

f. Legal interpretations

The 'least of these commandments' (5:17-20)

Matt. 5:17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. ¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

The essence of the law and the prophets (7:12)

Matt. 7:12 “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

g. To mix or be separate?

Salt and Light (5:13-16)

Matt. 5:13 “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

Matt. 5:14 “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid.

Other decisions or decision-making motifs in the Gospel?

Implications for discipleship?

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Matt. 9:32 After they had gone away, a demoniac who was mute was brought to him. ³³ And when the demon had been cast out, the one who had been mute spoke; and the crowds were amazed and said, “Never has anything like this been seen in Israel.” ³⁴ But the Pharisees said, “By the **ruler of the demons** he casts out the demons.”

Matt. 12:22 Then they brought to him a **demoniac** who was blind and mute; and he cured him, so that the one who had been mute could speak and see. ²³ All the crowds were amazed and said, “**Can this be the Son of David?**” ²⁴ But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, “It is only by **Beelzebul**, the ruler of the demons, that this fellow casts out the demons.”

2Chr. 1:1 Solomon **son of David** established himself in his kingdom; the LORD his God was with him and made him exceedingly great.

2Chr. 13:6 Yet Jeroboam son of Nebat, a servant of Solomon **son of David**, rose up and rebelled against his lord;

2Chr. 35:3 He said to the Levites who taught all Israel and who were holy to the LORD, “Put the holy ark in the house that Solomon **son of David**, king of Israel, built; you need no longer carry it on your shoulders. Now serve the LORD your God and his people Israel.

Prov. 1:1 The proverbs of Solomon **son of David**, king of Israel:

Eccl. 1:1 The words of the Teacher, the **son of David**, king in Jerusalem.

1Esdr. 1:3 He told the Levites, the temple servants of Israel, that they should sanctify themselves to the Lord and put the holy ark of the Lord in the house that King Solomon, **son of David**, had built;

Antiq. 8:42 (8.2.5) Now the **sagacity** and **wisdom** which God had bestowed upon Solomon was so great, that he exceeded the ancients, insomuch that he was no way inferior to the Egyptians, who are said to have been beyond all men in understanding; nay, indeed, it is evident that their sagacity was very much inferior to that of the king's.

Antiq. 8:⁴⁵ (8.2.5) God also enabled him to **learn that skill which expels demons**, which is a science useful and sanative to men. He composed such incantations also by which distempers are alleviated. And he left behind him the manner of using exorcisms, by which they drive away demons, so that they never return, ⁴⁶ (8.2.5) and this method of cure is of great force unto this day; for I have seen a certain man of my own country whose name was Eleazar, releasing people that were demoniacal in the presence of Vespasian, and his sons, and his captains, and the whole multitude of his soldiers. The manner of the cure was this:— ⁴⁷ (8.2.5) He put a ring that had a root of one of those sorts mentioned by Solomon to the nostrils of the demoniac, after which he drew out the demon through his nostrils; and when the man fell down immediately, he abjured him to return into him no more, making still mention of Solomon, and reciting the incantations which he composed.

Solomon_Test 1:0 Testament of Solomon, Son of David, who reigned in Jerusalem, and subdued all the spirits of the air, of the earth, and under the earth; through (them) he also accomplished all the magnificent works of the Temple; (this tells) what their authorities are against men, and by what angels these demons are thwarted.

Blessed are you, Lord God, who has given this authority to Solomon. Glory and power to you forever. Amen.

Solomon_Test 1:1 Once upon a time, when the Temple of the city of Jerusalem was being built and the artisans were working on it, ² (2) Ornias the demon came as the sun was setting and took half the wages and provisions of the master workman's little boy. Also, each day (the demon) was sucking the thumb of (the boy's) right hand. So the little boy, who was much loved by me, grew thin.

Solomon_Test 1:5 (5) When I, Solomon, heard these things, I went into the Temple of God and, praising him day and night, begged with all my soul that the demon might be delivered into my hands and that I might have authority over him. ⁶ Then it happened that while I was praying to the God of heaven and earth, there was granted me from the Lord Sabaoth through the archangel Michael a ring which had a seal engraved on precious stone. ⁷ He said to me, “**Solomon, Son of David**, take the gift which the Lord God, the highest Sabaoth, has sent to you; (with it) you shall imprison all the demons, both female and male, and with their help you shall build Jerusalem when you bear this seal of God.”

Solomon_Test 2:9 Again, I glorified the God of heaven and earth and I commanded Ornias to come near according to his fate. Then I gave him the seal and said, “Go and bring here to me the Prince of Demons.”

Solomon_Test 3:1 (1) So Ornias took the ring and went to Beelzeboul, and said to him, “Come! Solomon summons you!”² But Beelzeboul said to him, “Tell me, who is the Solomon of whom you speak?”³ Then Ornias flung the ring into the chest of Beelzeboul and replied, “Solomon the king summons you!”⁴ Beelzeboul cried out like (one who is burned) from a great burning flame of fire, and when he had gotten up, he followed (Ornias) under coercion and came to me.⁵ (14) When I saw the Prince of Demons approaching, I glorified God and said, “Blessed are you, Lord God Almighty, who has granted to your servant Solomon wisdom, the attendant of your thrones, and who has placed in subjection all the power of the demons.”

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Matt. 13:10 Then the disciples came and asked him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” ¹¹ He answered, “To you it has been given to know the **secrets of the kingdom of heaven** (τὰ μυστήρια τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν), but to them it has not been given.

Dan. 2:18 and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this **mystery** (μυστηρίου), so that Daniel and his companions with the rest of the wise men of Babylon might not perish. ¹⁹ Then the **mystery** (τὸ μυστήριον) was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night, and Daniel blessed the God of heaven.

Dan. 2:27 Daniel answered the king, “No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or diviners can show to the king the **mystery** that the king is asking, ²⁸ but there is a God in heaven who reveals **mysteries**, and he has disclosed to King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen at the end of days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed were these: ²⁹ To you, O king, as you lay in bed, came thoughts of what would be hereafter, and the revealer of **mysteries** disclosed to you what is to be. ³⁰ But as for me, this **mystery** has not been revealed to me because of any wisdom that I have more than any other living being, but in order that the interpretation may be known to the king and that you may understand the thoughts of your mind.

Matt. 24:15 “So when you see the desolating sacrilege standing in the holy place, as was spoken of by the prophet Daniel (**let the reader understand**), ¹⁶ then those in Judea must flee to the mountains; ¹⁷ the one on the housetop must not go down to take what is in the house; ¹⁸ the one in the field must not turn back to get a coat. ¹⁹ Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days! ²⁰ Pray that

Matt. 25:1 “Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. **2** Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. **3** When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; **4** but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. **5** As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. **6** But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ **7** Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. **8** The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ **9** But the wise replied, ‘No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ **10** And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. **11** Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ **12** But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ **13** Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Implications

1. Wisdom rather than knowledge should be the end goal of Christian development
2. What makes a wise decision? Do our decisions need to be the same as those made by others?
3. The wise man focuses on the key threats to the community - idolatry
4. The wise man understands what has been revealed (the *mysteries*) but also what has not been revealed (*timing*)

e. *Whether to divorce or not?*

- (i) A marriage without adultery is not necessarily a healthy marriage. Jesus broadens what constitutes unfaithfulness to include not just the physical act of adultery, but the act of looking at a woman with lust (5:27-30). One cannot appeal to the absence of physical adultery as evidence of marital faithfulness. Jesus is raising the bar pertaining to what constitutes a healthy marriage. This truth can, however, be itself distorted by those who would argue that attitudinal adultery is a valid basis for divorce.
- (ii) Jesus' second point is that divorce should only be undertaken for reasons of adultery, and by adultery I read this as referring to the act rather than the attitude (5:31-34). Here he is raising the bar in relation to valid reasons for divorce. Real marriages live within the tension between these two sayings.