

Who Are The Wise And Understanding People?

Text: Deut 4:23-31

1) Who Are the Wise and Understanding People?

Suggested Hymns:

2) The Certain Benefits And Advantages Of Obedience.

175, 125, 163, 282, 161

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Deuteronomy 4:23–31, ***23 Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the LORD your God has forbidden you.***

24 For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. 25 When you beget children and grandchildren and have grown old in the land, and act corruptly and make a carved image in the form of anything, and do evil in the sight of the LORD your God to provoke Him to anger, 26 I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that you will soon utterly perish from the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess; you will not prolong your days in it, but will be utterly destroyed.

27 And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD will drive you. 28 And there you will serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. 29 But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul.

30 When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the LORD your God and obey His voice 31 (for the LORD your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them. (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Earlier in this chapter, in Deuteronomy 4:5-6 we read, ***Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God***

commanded me ... ⁶ Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’

“A wise and understanding people.” If Israel would give diligent study to the statutes and judgements which the Lord had taught them through Moses, then they would show themselves to the neighbouring nations as *“a wise and understanding people.”* Moses exhorts the people to walk in all the ordinances and commandments of God. That will secure them God’s blessing.

We read in Psalm 111:10 that ¹⁰ *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do His commandments.* And in Proverbs 9:10 that ¹⁰ *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

God has made known His grace and love to men. It is an act of wisdom to take heed of all His mercies. The people who have received mercy and have experienced the goodness of the Lord should show their gratitude by rendering obedience to Him.

If we neglect to do that, if we are disobedient people, then we shall forfeit all those favours which God has intended for us. But *who are the wise and understanding people?* Our text gives the answer. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Who Are the Wise and Understanding People?

The children of this world have a wrong conception of wisdom and understanding. They consider it wise to do anything that may add to their own comfort and enjoyment. They disregard God’s Law and will entirely, even considering it to be a hindrance to their progress.

Whatever people may find to be of advantage to their material welfare, that they will pursue. They even look upon the Christians, who for the sake of conscience will avoid certain things and who seek to please God, as foolish and deluded people.

Sin in their sight is only a trivial thing. *“What difference does it make in the end whether men obey God’s will or not?”* As long as they get out of life what they possibly can, they think they are acting wisely.

But listen to the advice which Moses, the servant of the Lord, gives to the people, ²³ *Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the LORD your God has forbidden you.*

In other words, *‘Do not follow after false gods.’* However, the majority of people refused to heed this solemn admonition. Often they turned away from their covenant Lord and worship at the altar of idols! Often they provoked the Lord to anger!

Our text says ²⁶ *I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day.* The children of Israel soon experienced how true it was what their leader said, ²⁴ *For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.* God fulfilled all the threatenings announced to those rebellious and ungrateful people.

Oh, that they had remained a wise and understanding people! To forsake God and disregard His will was their greatest folly. Their departure from God was at the bottom of all their misery.

This is a very timely admonition for the people of our day. How many still care for God and His Word? In the days of prosperity there was the spirit of pride on all sides. Our people exalted themselves. *“Look at the wonderful country we have built up.”* *“We are among the greatest people among all nations.”* *“Behold, how wise and understanding we are!”*

But our people worshiped at the shrine of their pet idol. Mammon was their god. Very few people ever thought of giving honour to the heavenly Father, from whom alone every good and perfect gift comes. Many people deem it as unnecessary to give any attention to the important matter of religion.

Nor have things changed much for the better in the past years. We do not see that people are turning to God in great numbers, and that they are seeking to walk in the commandments of God. Oh, the terrible folly!

If you think it is wisdom to follow the ways of the world, then Satan has deceived you. God’s attitude toward the disobedient never changes. ²⁴ *For the*

LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God is still true in our modern times. The departure from God and disrespect of His holy Word are the underlying causes of all the trouble in the world today. True wisdom demands that we realise and acknowledge that fact.

To show that it is not wisdom when people forsake God and forget His statutes, call attention to the terrible judgements which the Lord pronounced upon the Jews in the Gospel Lesson for this Sunday.¹ The Jews neglected the time of Jesus' gracious visitation.

God says in Psalm 1:6, ***For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the ungodly shall perish.*** Eternal ruin and misery are the fatal consequences of disobedience. Wise and understanding people will heed the warning.

2. The Certain Benefits And Advantages Of Obedience.

Our text continues, ***29 But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul.***

30 When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the LORD your God and obey His voice 31 (for the LORD your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them

Moses reminds the people that true prosperity will depend on their piety and their loyalty to God.

If they seek the Lord, they will find Him and enjoy the land of inheritance. Even when because of their grievous waywardness they have suffered the great tribulation of the captivity, if then they will turn to the Lord and obey His voice, God will accept them again as His children.

God is merciful and faithful as our text says and He will never forsake those who put their trust in Him. We read in Psalm 51:17, ***17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart — These, O God, You will not despise.***

This is true at all times, and it applies to nations as well as to individuals. ***“Godliness is profitable for all things.”***² This does not mean that true Christians and servants of God will never have to suffer trials and tribulations. It will

always remain true: ***“We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.”***³

It may even seem at times as though the ungodly are the favoured in the land, and the Christians are the sufferers. But we must not allow ourselves to be deceived by appearances. While the children of God may be deprived of some of the comforts and joys of life, they rejoice in the possession of the gifts which God bestows in His mercy.

They have the assurance that for Christ’s sake God has pardoned all their sins, and that in Christ they have peace with God. They have the comfort of Romans 8:38–39, ***“For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”***

Why should Christians be envious of the foolish when they see the prosperity of the wicked?⁴ Follow the example of the psalmist, and you will receive wisdom and understanding. We read in Psalm 73:16–17, ***“When I thought how to understand this, It was too painful for me — Until I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end.”***

Let us learn to say, as written in Psalm 73:23, ***“Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand.”***

Yes, consider the end. Then you are wise and understanding people. When you see the apparent happiness of the ungodly and you are tempted to compare them with the lot of the believers, consider their end. You do not say when the sun rises in the morning, *“This has been a fine day,”* but you wait until the sun has set.

You do not judge a painting by the first strokes of the brush, but you wait until the painting is finished. Think of the ungodly man lying on his death-bed. His fun, his pleasures, his riches, are all gone. There is no hand to guide him through the valley of the shadow of death. He must sink into the night of gloom and despair.

Then look at the person who has trusted in the mercy of God. He knows that his merciful and faithful God will not forsake him even in the last and greatest

tribulation. *The LORD knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the ungodly shall perish.*⁵

The righteous man is *like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither.*⁶

Lifting his eyes heavenward, he can say with St. Paul as written in Romans 14:8, *⁸ For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.*⁷

Therefore, the wise and understanding people are those who have learned to know God as their merciful Father in Christ. Out of gratitude they consider it joy to render obedience to Christ. They are secure for they have eternal peace, prosperity, and happiness.

Let us close with the words of the hymnist,⁸

Would you know what most I prize,
Learn the truth that makes me wise?
Would you see my treasure-trove,
Know my glory and my love?
Jesus Christ the crucified. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Luke 19:41-47

² 1 Timothy 4:8

³ Acts 14:22, see also 2 Timothy 3:12

⁴ Psalm 73:3

⁵ Psalm 1:6

⁶ Psalm 1:3

⁷ Cf. Psa. 23

⁸ Hymn 163 v 1