

# The Wisdom of Saints, From A to Z

## Meta

Date: June 30, 2024; Pentecost 6B

Location: Apostles Anglican Church

## Readings

Deuteronomy 15:7–11

Psalm 112

II Corinthians 8:1–15

Mark 5:22–43

## Opening

“Here you go—the A to Zed—this is the one book you’ll need to navigate the North East.” It was a gift given to me when I began driving in northern England the first year I served in ministry. Mapquest was a bit new and GPS wasn’t on our phones yet. And because printing the internet is a bad idea, I was given the A to Zed. Here was the Bible of navigating British roads around Northumberland and County Durham. Once I figured out that Zed meant Z; after I got in the driver side on the right hand side of my Volkswagen Polo, then all that was left was using said road atlas while driving on the left and fearing for my life at every roundabout with 8 exits. Once I shook the nerves and came to *like* said roundabouts, I used my A to Zed regularly and found it to be the gold standard of road maps that it is.

In our hands we have an atlas of the wise saint in Psalm 112. Though we do not perceive it in English, this psalm is an acrostic. Every line of this poem begins with the next letter of the alphabet. The first line begins Aleph (A) and the last line begins with Taw (Z/Zed). When one finishes praying Psalm 112, you’ve followed the Hebrew ABCs without knowing it. It’s the A to Zed of a life seeking God’s wisdom.

Why would the Psalms be written this way? To be creative and artistic? Well, yes and no. I wouldn’t emphasize this feature of the psalms if it’s *just* an artistic flourish. There’s a message here, communicating in this A to Z, or Aleph to Taw way.

Hebrew psalmists wrote in this way to help Israel memorize these prayers. But there’s an even deeper meaning that leads us into the riches of Psalm 112. Using the alphabet in this way, the psalmist gives us a vision of completeness in a small space.<sup>1</sup> We have a vision of the wise saint given to us in a concise, artful way. It’s a portrait of a life meant to woo us in the ways of wisdom.

---

<sup>1</sup> Gordon Wenham, *Psalms as Torah*, 82.

## Recovering Wisdom

Thinking of wisdom, I think of another poet closer to our time, T.S. Eliot. In *Choruses from the Rock*, Eliot asks:

*Where is the Life we have lost in living?*

*Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?*

*Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?<sup>2</sup>*

To Eliot's poetic questions, we might ask of our own age, 'where are the saints who *desire* wisdom?'

Wisdom is a major theme throughout Scripture, especially the Old Testament. Wisdom is not intellectual knowledge of the Scriptures alone; wisdom is the skill of living well. Wisdom is the pearl of great price, a price that cannot be acquired without great struggle. Wisdom cannot be acquired through scripture memory alone or knowledge of Christian doctrine. Wisdom requires meditating and wrestling with the meaning of Scripture for real situations. But wisdom doesn't come through analysis. Wisdom comes through prayer; by waiting on the Holy Spirit, trusting in the Lord, not leaning on one's own understanding.

There's much more we could say about the pursuit of wisdom, but that will have to be for another day. For today's purposes, let's recover the love of wisdom, for that is synonymous with saints. I pray that will be a priority for Christian parents rearing their children and grandchildren—teach your children to love wisdom, to pray for wisdom, to struggle for it.

## Delight in the Word

'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.' The fear of the Lord is the aleph, the alpha, of wisdom. That is the abiding refrain about wisdom in Scripture and that is how Psalm 112 begins.

*Praise the LORD! Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in his commandments!<sup>3</sup>*

The fear of the Lord is often compared with **reverence** and rightfully so. But the fear of the Lord also means **humility**. To stand in the presence of a holy God humbles us. 'I am undone,' Isaiah said when he saw the Lord in the Temple. 'I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips.' My righteousness cannot compare to the holiness of God Almighty. To kneel and humble oneself in God's presence is wisdom. This is the gateway to wisdom for the saint.

Let's look closely at another feature of wisdom—blessed is the man (the saint) who greatly **delights** in his commandments.

Our Lord Jesus said, 'where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.' What does the heart seek? You can know a saint most by what he or she **desires**.

The saint does not just *keep* the commandments. The saint is not a person of minimum effort or fulfilling basic obligations. The saint *greatly delights* in the Word of the Lord.

---

<sup>2</sup> T.S. Eliot, *Choruses from the Rock*,

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 112.1

The psalms are soaked with saints gushing about their love for the Word of the Lord. You may know the infamous phrase, 'scripture should interpret scripture.' Today we allow the psalms to interpret the psalms.

Psalm 19 and 119 are hymns of praise to God for the beauty and wonder of his Word. 'Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.'<sup>4</sup> 'The decrees of the LORD are clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.'<sup>5</sup>

The Word of God is not a chore and the saint knows this by experience. They have read the Word of God when it was a struggle, when it was an act of obedience and discipline, and they have the fruit of that struggle. They see that the Word and Wisdom of God is sweeter than anything this world has to offer.

## Wealth for the Sake of Mercy

And that brings us to the topic of wealth and prosperity in today's psalm.

This psalm speaks of wealth in the household of a saint, both material prosperity and relational prosperity. It's interesting that in this psalm, wealth and riches does not contradict the holiness in the saint's life.

'Wealth and riches are in his house, *and his righteousness endures forever.*' Righteousness is the goal for the wise, not wealth. Wealth has been a secondary outcome to ordering his life wisely and well. And here we must let the psalms interpret the psalms again.

Let's recall a key teaching on wealth from Psalm 62.10: 'if riches increase, set not your heart on them.' The psalmist of Psalm 112 is a man who has flourished in material things but he has not set his heart on these temporary riches. His heart remains steadfast. He has a single eye on permanent, eternal things. He desires that his righteousness, not his riches, endure forever.

And thus he applies his wealth to fulfill the commandments of the Lord. He greatly delights in the commands of the Lord and the Lord loves the poor.

A common refrain among theologians from Scripture through the church fathers to the present day is that wealth is entrusted to the saints to care for the Lord's Church and to care for the poor. And the two go together—the Lord's Church must convert her wealth to care for the poor whom God loves.

This week I attended Provincial Assembly outside of Pittsburgh and I heard Archbishop Foley report about several provincial ministries caring for the poor of our country and our world. It's wonderful to see how Anglican Relief and Development Fund are singularly focused on funding and resourcing development projects around the globe. Another ministry in our Province is the Matthew 25 initiative which focuses on ministries in America that serve the least, the last, and the lost. We belong to a church that takes seriously this call to steward the wealth God has entrusted to us—to take care of his Church, and that his Church take care of the poor.

---

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 119.18

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 19.9-10

*Psalm 112:5 (ESV) It is well with the man who deals generously and lends; who conducts his affairs with justice...He has distributed freely; he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever; his horn is exalted in honor.*

This is why we teach the spiritual practice of tithes and offerings. Tithing is the scriptural teaching of contributing 10% of one's income to the church. Offerings are gifts beyond tithes to generously support Kingdom ministries doing the work of God around the world. Generosity is not only the mark of a saint; it is a mark of wisdom.

## Facing Darkness & Bad News

No matter the humble pursuit of wisdom, no matter the devotion to seek holiness, or whether riches increase for the righteous, trials will come. As our Lord Jesus taught, 'God sends rain on the just and the unjust.'<sup>6</sup> Saints will endure times of darkness. Sudden, unexpected, bad news comes to their households.

Saints will be shaken and suffer, but *they will not be moved*. There's a difference. To be shaken means that we will not avoid the brokenness of this world. We will suffer and suffer greatly. But though a saint be shaken, though a saint may suffer, he will not be *moved*. Let the psalms interpret the Psalms!

*Psalm 125:1–2 (ESV) 1Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore.*

I love the teaching of the Catholic theologian Father Martin Laird on this verse. Martin Laird says that saints are like Mount Zion which cannot be moved, but all kinds of weather will move in and out and around the mountain. *But you, whose lives are hidden in Christ with God, are not the weather. With Christ in you, you are like Mount Zion. The weather will move in; it may look like the mountain is shaken. But the mountain stands firm.*

Back to Psalm 112. Bad news may shake the mind and the soul of a saint, but his heart remains steadfast. You cannot move him when he is anchored in the unshakeable foundation of Christ Jesus, our Lord. This is why, if wealth increases, one cannot set your heart on them. If all is stripped away, what can save you? What keeps you anchored, able to withstand the worst news? Verse 7: A heart that is firm, trusting in the Lord.

The beauty of the saint's life is that his life is not fragile. It does not depend on wealth or always receiving good news. It depends on the pursuit of wisdom and holiness. On placing all of one's hope for this life and the next on God alone. It depends on making one's heart firm in the Lord who does not change. Yes, his heart is generous *and* it will be steady, come what may. He will not be afraid. God will exalt a saint such as this.

O, praise the Lord. Greatly desire his wonderful Word. Seek the treasures of wisdom and truth therein. Give generously from your wealth and set your heart firmly on the Lord who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

---

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 5:45

## Closing

I close again with a doxology by John Mason Neale, written for Psalm 112:

*Glory be to the FATHER, merciful, loving, and righteous; glory be to the SON, Who hath dispersed His bounties abroad, and given them to the poor; glory be to the HOLY GHOST, the Light which ariseth in the darkness, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.*<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> J. M. Neale and R. F. Littledale, *A Commentary on the Psalms from Primitive and Mediæval Writers: Psalm 81 to Psalm 118, vol. 3* (London; New York: Joseph Masters; Pott and Amery, 1871), 466.