

“A Quest for Wisdom”

Who Needs the Past?, Pt. 4

We are spending the second half of the summer searching for ancient solutions to modern problems in the Book of Psalms. We are living in an age in which we struggle to determine which voices from the past are worth holding on to and which are worth progressing beyond. There’s a lot of noise, but what is the truth? There’s a lot of information, but what is accurate? In short, what we’re looking for is wisdom.

I’ve been picking through a rather alarming book called *“The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brain.”* His basic argument is that the actual delivery system of the internet is making us stupid. Doesn’t matter the content, the technology itself affects us. So, when you read information in a book it focuses the attention of your mind and promotes deep creative thoughts. But the internet encourages rapid sampling of small bits of information that trains you to be adept at scanning and skimming but at the sacrifice of the ability to concentrate, contemplate and reflect.

So we’re a mile wide, but an inch deep – shallow. But compare that to what **Proverbs 18:4** (NLT) has to say about wisdom, *“Wise words are like **deep waters**; wisdom flows from the wise like a bubbling brook.”*

Deep water vs. the shallows. We have loads of information today. More knowledge at our fingertips than even the richest of our ancestors. But what about wisdom? That’s what today’s psalm deals with. We’re calling it “A Quest for Wisdom” but I could have just as easily channeled my childhood Mr. T and titled it “I Pity the Fool”. Because Psalm 14 is all about being a fool. If you’re here in the auditorium, put your mask back on for a minute and let’s read it out loud together.

Psalm 14

1 The fool says in his heart,

“There is no God.”

*They are corrupt, their deeds are vile;
there is no one who does good.*

*2 The Lord looks down from heaven
on the sons of men
to see if there are any who understand,
any who seek God.*

*3 All have turned aside,
they have together become corrupt;
there is no one who does good,
not even one.*

*4 Will evildoers never learn—
those who devour my people as men eat bread
and who do not call on the Lord?*

*5 There they are, overwhelmed with dread,
for God is present in the company of the righteous.*

*6 You evildoers frustrate the plans of the poor,
but the Lord is their refuge.*

*7 Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When
the Lord restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice
and Israel be glad!*

Now, before we get started, you should know that when the Bible calls someone a fool, it is not a statement about that person's intelligence. This has nothing to do with cognition or education or IQ. A fool in the Bible can be brilliant and a fool can be stupid. Foolishness is not a function of your intelligence or your mental capacity. Foolishness is a function of how you use your intelligence and your mental capacity.

The Bible says every human being is born with a heavy streak of foolishness. The old KJV version of **Proverbs 22:15** reads, "*Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child...*" Everybody is born with foolishness. It's like a birth defect. But, it's one that can be corrected. In fact, that's a key part of the parent's job description. Transition your child from foolishness to wisdom.

Even the animals do that. You ever watch the Discovery Channel, "but the young antelope does not follow the example of it's mother and strays too far from the group..." and then your traumatized for the rest of the night by what you just saw! But for human beings foolishness goes even beyond physical survival – as important as that is – because as a Christian, I believe in the spirit as well as the flesh. That there are *spiritual* dangers to be avoided as well as physical ones. And it's foolishness, according to the Bible that destroys our sense of God's reality.

Now, this verse has a long tradition of been used to bash people over the head who are outside of the church and don't believe what we believe. I want to be clear, there are plenty of valid reasons to have trouble believing in God, or to struggle with doubts. I don't think this is saying everybody who says, "There is no God," is a fool; but it is saying that there is a certain kind of fool who says "there is no God." And in general, foolishness in the heart is a strong reason, very often it's a common reason, why people find that God is not real.

Our residual foolishness leaves blind spots in the heart of every human being. And so wisdom dictates that we look at our own hearts and say, "If I have trouble believing, if I have trouble with doubts, is it at least possible that the troubles are not so much intellectual, but there is something deeper?" So here's what the Bible tells us about foolishness, which destroys our sense of God's reality.

Number one, the Bible tells us foolishness is a proud willfulness that keeps us from learning from evidence. You see, for example, right down here in **v.4** it says "*Will evildoers never learn...*" They don't learn. And that's a very important part of the biblical definition of what it means to be foolish. It's not that they don't know truth, it's that they don't really *want* to know truth.

My biggest pet peeve is arrogant ignorance. Not ignorance, I have respect for honest ignorance. I'm ignorant about a ton of stuff – we all are - no shame in that. I'm not even completely turned off by arrogance – I follow some people who are wicked smart or incredible athletes or artists and are almost comically arrogant and I kind of think, “Ok, you maybe earned that.” But what's insufferable is being ignorant and arrogant about it at the same time.

There's a Christian counselor that I really like who wrote about a man who showed up for a counseling session one day – first time they'd met. He meets him in the lobby and walks him back to his office and on the way through the administration area he's looking around and pointing out to the counselor how all of their computers were wrong. Just the wrong equipment, the wrong set up and if he'd just listen to him he could get everything set up right. And the counselor had **Proverbs 18:2 NLT**, come to mind, which says, “*Fools have no interest in understanding; they only want to air their own opinions.*”

And then they got back and sat down and began the counseling session. And the man started right away, he said, “Now before we even start, I want you to know one thing I hate is people analyzing me and telling me how to change my life.” Well, that's a great way to start a counseling session – I wonder how much he was paying for that session?

But the counselor suddenly thought of **Proverbs 23:9 NLT** which says, “*Don't waste your breath on fools, for they will despise the wisest advice.*”

And then when they got into the subject, which was the man's deteriorating marriage, the man continually insisted that the only problem in his marriage was he had let his wife get out of control. That he just had not laid down the law. His only fault in the thing was not taking control of her bad behavior sooner. And then the counselor had the trifecta as he remembered **Proverbs 12:15 NLT**, “*Fools think their own way is right, but the wise listen to others.*” Strike three!

Now what are all those verses after? The essence of the spirit of foolishness is, “I don't need anybody's help. I don't need anybody to tell me what to do. I can do it myself. *Nobody* tells me how to live my life.” That's the essence of foolishness. Why? Because the assumption there is, “People don't have things for me to learn. I never have to depend on anybody. I never need to be taught.” And of course, that is out of touch with reality. That spirit, that proud willfulness that says, “I don't need anybody to tell me what to do. I can do it myself.” - to the degree that you and I are under the influence of that spirit intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually, we're fools.

Because what does it mean? It means you'll *never* learn if you have that attitude. I mean think of it; what kind of person most says, "I do it myself!"? A little child. And we already said they are born foolish. That's childish behavior. And yet, when we see grown adults walking around with that attitude, what's changed? They might be able to do more damage, because they're just a bigger fool.

We can laugh at it when they're little – especially if it's someone *else's* kid – but it's painful in an adult. "I don't need your help. I knew that already. I don't have to listen to anybody. I can do it myself. Nobody tells *me* what to do." And so the Bible says many people doubt God because they don't like the idea that there's someone to whom they have to submit. They want to do it themselves.

The Apostle Paul perfectly lays out the psychology of foolishness in the first chapter of his letter to the church at Rome. He claims that what is known about God has been made plain to all creation but – and he's talking about all human beings, this is the universal problem with us - because they didn't want to glorify God or give thanks to Him, therefore, **Romans 1:22**, "*Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools*"

Paul says that human beings, when they look out at creation - lots of evidence there's a Creator - and yet because we didn't *want* to acknowledge God, we didn't want to glorify Him, we didn't want anybody to tell us how to live our lives...so we just closed our eyes to the evidence and decided He wasn't there. Though claiming to be wise, we became fools. That's the essence of foolishness.

Maybe you say, "Well Anthony what evidence is there?" More than I've got time for in this sermon, but let me just give you one; what's called the teleological argument. Teleology means look at the universe, look at the world - its design, its order, and its beauty – and ask, "Could that have happened by accident?" Because if there's no creator, by definition it just happened by random chance.

But let's think about this for a minute. If there's an explosion in a print shop, what are the chances that the ink and the paper and all that would go up into the air and come down and happen to print out Hamlet? What are the chances of that? Now if you say, "Impossible!"- a statistician would say, "Oh no, maybe improbable, but you could never say that's impossible."

See, one of the things you have to realize is you can hardly prove or disprove anything - except a few mathematical theorems or certain logical transactions in which the premise contains the conclusion - there are a few things you can prove, but not many of them. The fact is you can hardly prove or disprove anything. You can't *prove* Columbus discovered America in 1492. I can't *prove* my wife loves me. I have lots of evidence for it. The fact of the matter is, when it comes down to it, everything we think we know is actually only statistically very, very *probable*.

We have a lot of evidence, and because it's probable you trust it. You come to *know* it. You come to be assured. But there's always a chance it's not, because nothing is proved. In the same way here, could you say it would be impossible for an explosion in a print shop to write the text of Hamlet? Or to say that an explosion in a paint factory could produce an exact Caravaggio? Of course at the *Modern Art Museum*, I think they may have been *exactly* what happened! But come on, what are the chances? You say, "Infinitesimal." Well, of course, but they're there. And yet...I wouldn't bet on it. If I had to produce a play, it wouldn't occur to me to spend all weekend throwing dynamite into a print shop.

Now in the same way, let's look at the world. There's far more intricate order, there's far more beauty,

there's far more design in the systems of nature than there is even in Hamlet. And therefore, the chances of it happening by accident are even more infinitesimal. And yet people will say, "Well, you can't prove there's a God." No, you can't. "You can't prove the explosion wouldn't write Hamlet." Well, no you really couldn't. But why would you ever think of actually resting anything of value on that infinitesimal probability?

Picture a man in Vegas. Who has put *all* of his life, all of his life savings, all of his families future...He's bet *everything* on one number, and the roulette wheel is spinning. What would you call that man? You'd call him a fool. But what if against all the odds he won? Well, at best you'd call him "lucky", but that's a fool. And yet anybody who says, "You can't prove there's a God. I'm going to live as if there is no God until somebody can *prove* to me there's a God," is what? Come on! If you're betting your life on something like that, there's a preconceived bias there.

"I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul." Oh really? How much are you willing to wager on that? So the first thing, the Bible tells us there are foolish people, people with foolishness pride that says, "I can do it myself. I don't want anybody telling me what to do," and it blinds them to the evidence there is for God. That's the first point. So watch yourself. Look at yourself.

Make sure that your so-called intellectual questions - and there are many legitimate intellectual questions about God and whether there's a God - but make sure that there isn't underneath it a proud willfulness that really doesn't want to obey *even if* somebody made a great case. Be careful. You may say, "My unwillingness to obey is based on my inability to believe," but it could be your inability to believe is based on your unwillingness to obey. Two different things. One is intellectually honest. One is not.

Second point, Foolishness is lack of self-knowledge that blinds you to your own heart biases as alternatives to believing in God.

Foolishness, the Bible here tells us, actually resides in the heart. "It's in the *heart* that the fool says, 'There is no God.'" Why does it say that? People think their inability to believe in God is intellectual or emotional. I have people who come to me and say, "Well, my real reason, the reason I don't believe in God, is there are so many intellectual objections. There are so many scientific discoveries that show miracles don't happen," and so forth. And other people come to me and say, "Well, my problems are emotional. I just feel like when I see all the suffering and the misery in the world and in my life, it's just hard for me to believe in God."

And so people like to say, "My real problem with God is intellectual or emotional." No. The Bible says that's superficial. If you can't believe in God, it's because your heart already has put it's faith in something else, a rival. Put it this way. You cannot doubt everything at once. It's impossible. You can only doubt something from the vantage point or from the platform of putting faith in something else. You can't doubt God without believing in your own reason, for example.

You can't doubt biblical morality, without having a competing standard for ethics with which you view the world. Have you examined those other things? Foolishness won't even admit you've already put your faith in something. Consider Aldous Huxley, for example. Interesting guy, a philosopher and writer in the first half of the 20th century. Most famous for his science fiction novel, *A Brave New World*, but he wrote all kinds of things. Not a Christian, described himself as an agnostic. But what I like about him is he was very, very honest.

He talks about his time in university - Philosophy 101. He admitted that, truth be told, he really didn't *want* to believe there was a God. He didn't want there to be a God who had spoken in the Ten Commandments. Why? Because there was a girl he wanted to sleep with. And not one of the monotheistic religions that takes the God of the Bible seriously would allow that outside of marriage. So his heart had good reasons for not wanting there to be a God who demands ethical standards of living. Better to have no standards at all for that matter.

Here's his quote, "I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning; consequently assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption... The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in metaphysics, he is also concerned to prove that there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to do, or why his friends should not seize political power and govern in the way that they find most advantageous to themselves... For myself... the philosophy of meaningless was essentially an instrument of liberation... sexual... [and] political." (End and Means, 272-273)

Let me give you another example. Sheldon Vanauken was an American who studied at Oxford and while there he was led to the Christian faith, in large part through one of his professors...C.S. Lewis. Not too shabby! He wrote about his experience and subsequent friendship with Lewis and he says that as a young skeptic he would say to his friends, "Well, I'll be a Christian if you can prove to me that Jesus is God."

And then he had a horrible experience – his wife took ill and died – he was an older student having served in WW2. And it shook him and in deep soul crisis he began to realize he'd been shortsighted. He writes in his memoir, "If I were to stake my whole life on the risen Christ, I wanted certainty. Then I realized it was

a question of whether I was to accept him or reject. My God, I saw now there was a gap *behind* me, as well as before me. It took faith to accept Christ, but what about the leap of faith to rejection? I had no certainty Christ was God, but by God, I had no certainty he was *not*. This was not to be borne." Now what's he saying? Very simple. He says, "I can't reject Christ unless I already leap and believe in something else."

If you read his discussion he says his other Oxford friends had decided that without religion, without a religious community like the church, without the Bible, they, on the basis of their sense experience, their ability to observe data, how they read reality, on the basis of their own reason, that *they* would be able to decide what was right and wrong politically, socially, morally, and psychologically.

He said, "I began to realize *that* took tremendous faith." There's no way to doubt God's revelation without putting a tremendous amount of faith in your own. There's no way to doubt what God says without putting a tremendous amount of faith in what *you* believe. You should never say, "Oh, you have faith but I don't, I'm a hard-nosed skeptic." That's foolish. If you doubt Christianity, it's because you have a lot of faith in something else.

When I was at UT, I took a class on the history of science – a lot easier than biology! – and we read a very important book written in the 60's by a guy named Thomas Kuhn called *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. It was a real game changer because he showed that really there's no such thing as value neutrality. He exposed the long standing myth that the scientific process in-and-of itself was totally objective. He says, no, there's a subjective, bias element to all science and you have to take that into account in order to get the best results. The only way to overcome the bias is to admit that it exists.

A key element of modernity was value-neutral thinking. For instance, they used to train counselors that you must never let your own personal values enter into the counseling session. If a patient comes to see you and tells you a problem, you must be value-neutral. You must not tell that person what's right or wrong, but let them work it out for themselves. After all, they're the master of their fate, right?

But that's impossible. So imagine a guy sits in front of me as a counselor, and the guy says, "I'm thinking of having an affair with somebody who's not my wife." Now in the old days, the so-called value-neutral counselor would say, "Well, let's work out the pros and cons of each possible alternative. I'm not going to say anything about what is right or wrong."

But that's a sham. By not expressing a standard of ethical behavior, I am imposing moral relativism on the counseling process. I am *assuming* that there isn't a God in heaven who has established a norm of ethical behavior that's going to make this guy's life miserable if he violates it. And that's a value judgement. To say you shouldn't make a value judgement is a value judgement. So Thomas Kuhn said there is no way to be value-neutral.

Everything you see, everything you question, is on the basis of some kind of faith commitment. And of course, you don't have to go to the history of science, you can go to the Psalm, "...says in his heart." You can't separate the head from the heart. You can't think without the heart. You think *through* your heart. When you look at the evidence for God, if you doubt God, it's because you already have faith commitments someplace else and He's threatening those things.

See, this is why I have great respect for skeptics like Aldous Huxley because, although he did not believe in God, he was not a fool because he could be realistic about what he *did* believe in. He said, "I *had* things that I already believed in. I believed in sexual liberation. I believed that it was right. So when I came to looking at the evidence for God, I was not able to believe in God." But he admits why, "I already had a commitment. I already had a *god*. I already had a faith. I already had things I believed in, and the biblical God threatened them."

See at that point, Aldous Huxley is not being a fool; but if *you* say, “I have trouble believing in God because I don’t have faith in anything. I’m a hard-nosed skeptic. I only believe in what can be proved,” you’re being a fool. You’re blind to your own faith commitments. That’s the reason why I always like to say if you are struggling with doubts – doubts about God or doubts about Christian faith – that’s fine, just don’t forget to also doubt your doubts. Why doubt everything except your doubts? Skepticism is a virtue, just be humble enough to be skeptical of yourself as well.

Another way to put it, is examine the hidden faith commitments that are in the heart of your doubts. And very often, you’ll find the things you believe in, in order to doubt God, are far less well-grounded than Christianity itself. Aldous Huxley said, “I was committed to sexual liberation.” How did *he* know it was a good idea? I’ll tell you, the things that in my lifetime they were saying about sexual freedoms have been rolled back. The Me Too movement is proving that maybe unbridled sexual expression isn’t the societal utopia we were promised.

Hmm, but the sex ethic of Jesus and the gospel has done pretty well. Of course people have abused it here and there – even self-proclaimed Christians have bias weakness – but for 2,000 years, people have been basing their beliefs on his teachings and found they have transformed their lives. We did a series a few years ago about the theology of sex – everybody gets scandalized by that, Christians and non. I don’t understand why, it’s a well documented part of Biblical ethics and church history.

See Christianity gives you a basis for *their* sex ethic – our ancestors. What’s the basis for yours? “Well, I read it in ‘Cosmo’. Well, there was this article on Facebook. I don’t know, it just seems to me that…” Examine your biases. If you don’t understand that your doubts are based on faith in something else besides God, trust in something else besides God, you are a fool. I didn’t say you were stupid. You could be brilliant, but you’re not being wise. You’re not showing understanding. You’re not showing self-knowledge. And therefore, you’re foolish.

Ok, so we said foolishness consists of a proud willfulness that blinds you to the evidence about God. Secondly, foolishness consists of a lack of self-knowledge that blinds you to your own faith commitments - the things you already believe in – in order to disbelieve in God.

But thirdly, Foolishness can't understand grace. It doesn't understand Zion. The last verse in this psalm is the key. It's talked about fools – what makes them and what they result in - they “devour my people as men eat bread.” There are real justice issues when society is run by fools rather than wisdom. But what's the solution? Finally it says, (v.7), *“Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When the LORD restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!”*

Now what was Zion? If you don't understand what Zion means, you're going to have a lot of trouble with a number of the psalms because it appears nearly 100 times. At the end of almost every psalm, except a couple of them – and I plan to look at one of those “dark” psalms – but generally there's always hope. In spite of how bad everything looks, this is the cavalry coming in at the end. Somehow God's grace shows up at the end of these psalms, and this is it. Zion. There's a place in the *Matrix* movie where they explain Zion to Neo and say, “If the war was over tomorrow, Zion's where the party would be.” I like that.

The word Zion itself, is the name of one of the hills inside the city of Jerusalem. If you ever visit Jerusalem it is very hilly. But Zion isn't just any hill, it was the hill on which the temple was built.

It's now the home of the third holiest mosque in Islam – the Dome of the Rock. But in reference to the Bible, Zion is always a stand-in for the temple. Like how we say “Washington” when what we mean is the federal government.

And so what is being said here is God's salvation will come out of Zion, out of the temple. So what's the deal with the temple? The temple is the place where God, the great God, He dwells. “The House of the Lord.” That's where His glory dwells – in the Holy of Holies, the center of the Temple. But you can't just walk into God's house anyway you want. You have to follow the rules. What rules? The sacrifice. If you approached God at the temple and you brought with you a blood sacrifice and you spread it on the altar, God says, “I'll meet you over the sacrifice.”

Now what does this have to do with foolishness? It has everything to do with foolishness. Because remember, the fool says, “Nobody can tell *me* what to do. I don't need help. I can do it myself.” Do you remember the first Indiana Jones movie? They find the Ark of the Covenant – which, if the Temple is God's house, the Ark is His bedroom – and the head Nazi's just walks up and yanks it open. How'd that work out for him? You can't just approach God anyway you want.

A professional electrician is very respectful of electricity. Why? Because it's so powerful. You don't just approach electrify anyway you want or it will melt your face off. "I'm just going to grab hold of this wire..." are the last words of a fool. And that's just electricity, how should we approach the Power that *created* that power? See you can get this wrong in a couple of directions. There are two ways to be foolish about the temple.

On the one hand, there are plenty of Christian churches that use temple language as a way to control people. "You have to do it just this way or God won't accept you. And of course, we are the only ones who can tell you what the right way is." I have a pastor friend who took to social media last week to say that if you're not coming to church because of fears of COVID, then he questions your Christianity. Well, he is a fool. He's still my friend, but that is foolishness. You don't control the temple – you don't set the rules.

If you try to come near to God through a church like that it will crush the life out of you – crush you with guilt. On the other hand, there are plenty of people who think, "I don't need any religious structure to come near to God. I can go to the ocean. I can go to the mountains. I can just get near God that way." And let's be honest, some of them are reacting to those controlling churches. That part about

"frustrating the plans of the poor" and "devouring people like bread" – there are plenty of churches that are guilty of that. There are plenty of people who say "there is no God", not because they are fools, but because they have been wounded by the church.

But not all of them. A lot of it is the radical independence bent that we idolize in this country. We all walk around like little Frank Sinatra's, "I did it my way". But God says to us through the Bible - Psalms and *many* other places – "You better not. You can only come to me MY way, and my way is the temple. My way is Zion. There must be a sacrifice. A substitute must pay the penalty with his blood." And if that sounds like bad news to you...it is! But hold on, because that's why we call the gospel, the "good news".

There's a very interesting place in **John 2:19**, where Jesus famously clears the Temple of money changers and he says, "~~Jesus answered them,~~ *“Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”*” And the religious leaders who are arguing with him – because they were making money off those crooked temple practices, just what we were talking about above – they said, "Are you nuts? It took decades to build this temple." And then the payoff in **v.21**, "*But the temple he had spoken of was his body.*"

Jesus was referring to himself. He was thinking about his resurrection. He's saying, "I am the temple. I am the sacrifice. I am the one who lays down my blood. I am the way for you to come to God. I am the way through which all of your foolishness can be forgiven." But the irony...Paul says that (**1 Corinthians 1:18**), "*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*"

Why is the gospel message of the death and Resurrection of Jesus foolishness? Because it's about what Jesus does for you, not about what you do for yourself. And that's called grace. The Greek word for grace is *charis* – where we get our word "charity". And what does the heart of the fool say? "I don't need your bleeding charity! I can do it myself. I'm a good enough person. I can live a decent enough life. I don't need your stinking charity." That's the fool.

The fool doesn't understand grace. And therefore, the cross is foolishness. And yet the cross was actually the greatest and highest act of wisdom that has ever existed. It was on the cross that God, in one stroke, in one event, could on the one hand honor the Law by showing how important it was that sin be paid for, and at the same moment, *save us* by having Jesus pay our penalty. Justice and mercy at the same time in one stroke. Both *absolutely* satisfied and fulfilled.

That's wisdom! That's the highest wisdom ever! And yet for the world, it's foolishness. "I don't need your bleeding charity."

Now let me just tell you what it means to become a Christian. A Christian is somebody who knows he or she is a fool. A fool is somebody who thinks he or she is *not* a fool. And those are basically the two kinds of people in the world. Do you see that? We're all foolish, and the only way to keep from *being* a fool is to realize you're foolish and to approach the Father through Jesus Christ - through the temple, through Zion. And if you do...Oh, it changes everything. Things that used to look foolish look wise. Things that used to look wise look foolish. There's a kind of transplant that happens. It's an amazing thing.

When you really get ahold of Zion logic, when you really get ahold of the grace of God, it's like grabbing hold of the electricity. I was reading last week about a church historian named Kenneth Scott Latourette - if you think church history is boring, I have a book about the lives of 28 prominent church *historians!* But Latourette taught at Yale in the 40's and 50's and his classic work is a 7 volume *History of the Expansion of Christianity*. In it, he was trying to come to grips with the fact that Christianity took over the old Greco-Roman Empire. We know that it did, but why?

Here's his quote, "Why, among all the cults and philosophies competing in the Greco-Roman world, did Christianity succeed and outstrip all others? Why did it succeed despite getting more severe opposition than any other? Why did it succeed though it had no influential backers in high places, but consisted mainly of the poor and slaves? How did it succeed so completely that it forced the most powerful state in history to come to terms with it, and then outlive the very empire that sought to uproot it? It is clear that at the very beginning of Christianity there must have occurred a vast release of energy perhaps unequaled in our history. Without it, the future course of the Christian religion is inexplicable."

There are so many reasons why it didn't seem very likely that Christianity would survive much less thrive in the Greco-Roman world. And yet it did. How do you explain something like that? He says *something*, an enormous amount of energy, was released in the beginning of the Christian movement by the people who knew Jesus Christ, who saw what he did. And the question is what happened to the men and women who associated with Jesus? What happened? I'll tell you what happened. Salvation came out of Zion.

They finally figured out, "He's the temple." They finally figured out that the way to get near God without just aggravating the foolishness of your heart is to go and admit, "I am a fool. I am proud and willful. My heart has false gods and idols. My heart hates the idea of charity, but I see that Jesus died for me. And I see that the cross, far from being foolishness, is wisdom; and my wisdom, far from being wisdom, is foolishness." Paul says (**1 Corinthians 1:25**) "*For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom...*" "Salvation will come out of Zion."

Christian friends, if there's anybody here who says, "I believe all this stuff. Yet I find that day in and day out, I have trouble finding God real," examine your heart. Look for the foolishness. Recognize it and deal with it in the way we're talking about. "The fool says in his *heart*, 'There is no God.'" The Christian continually *in the heart*, everyday, says, "Oh yes there is."

Let's pray...