



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for the Second Sunday in Advent

December 8, 2024

Assurance of Wisdom

Philippians 1:2–11

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸ For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

St. Mark tells us that once, when our Lord and His disciples crossed the lake to a secluded place, "many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When He went ashore He saw a great crowd, and He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And He began to teach them many things" (Mark 6:33-34).

The people were "like sheep without a shepherd." They needed the Lord's care, His guidance and protection – they were exposed and defenseless – and so He began to teach them "many things." He did not yet give them bread and fish for their bellies, nor did He give them hugs and handshakes and cooing expressions of affection. "They were like sheep without a shepherd," so He gave them the knowledge of God; He led them into the path of divine wisdom; He began to instill in their hearts and minds the God-given ability to "discern what is best" and by discerning to "be pure and blameless for the day of Christ" (Philippians 1:10). His compassion moved Him to act on their behalf – to act according to their need – "He began to teach them many things."

Now, don't make the mistake of thinking that when Jesus taught them many things, what He did was preach a series of self-help sermons. When Jesus "began to teach them many things," what He did was give them the "words of eternal life" (John 6:68). Through His teaching, our Lord spoke His Holy Spirit into the people's hearts and minds, not merely giving them religious or spiritual *information*, but actually opening their minds and enlightening their hearts so that they could believe.



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In this week's epistle, St. Paul prays that your Lord Jesus would do the same thing for you that He did for that crowd on the lakeshore. He prays that your Lord would "teach you many things," thus enabling your love to "abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment" (Philippians 1:9). He's not so much concerned that you fill your head with Bible trivia, or that you can recite the liturgy by heart, as useful as such knowledge may be. Paul wants you to grow in love for God and your neighbor, and that you do so through what God Himself gives you in His Word.

Many Christians think that, because of their temptations, they don't love God or their family or their neighbors as deeply as they should. If that describes you, pray with the psalmist that God would open your eyes that you may see wonderful things in His Word (Psalm 119:18). Perhaps you're not as loving as you should be – maybe because of your temper or your addictions or your lack of patience or for whatever reason. You can amend that by paying careful attention to the faithful preaching of God's Word. "Read, mark, learn and inwardly digest" the things that God says to you, and God will prove Himself faithful; you will see your love begin to "abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment" (Philippians 1:9).

You see, in this epistle, Paul speaks of the second of God's two great Gospel gifts for you. The first is salvation itself, earned for you when God's own Son hid Himself in your humanity and bore your damnation on the cross. But the second gift of the Gospel is that God would give you knowledge of your salvation; that He would not only proclaim to you the good news that all is forgiven for the sake of Christ, but that He would also give you new ears, a new heart, and a new mind to receive this blessed knowledge and make it your own.

Paul goes on in our text to assure you that the love and knowledge God gives you will do a good work. "It is my prayer," he writes, "that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ" (Philippians 1:9-10).

Jesus "had compassion on them," says Mark, "because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things" (Mark 6:33-34). And through His teaching, Jesus gave them great gifts. He gave them the ability to know Him to be "the way, the truth, the life" (John 14:6) and the only way to get to the Father. He gave them wisdom to discern what is best, so that they by faith would not depart from Him again. He gave them the proclamation of His forgiveness for them – and this proclamation *itself* made them "pure and blameless" in the eyes of God.

In Advent Jesus gives you the very same things. He gave you His love when He gave you knowledge of Him, and with that knowledge comes wisdom. These divine gifts continue to preserve you pure and blameless until the day of Christ. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen