

The Rev. Billy Cerveney:

So one of my favorite, viral videos that I saw last year, the caption of it read, it says guy almost dies and has no idea. And in the story or the picture on this video is there's these two guys at a Buffalo Bills game. It's a football game and they're standing on the bleachers, and there's this one guy, it's on a higher bleacher than the other dude, and he is yoked.

I mean, he's this big dude and he is really, really angry. We don't know what he's mad about, but there's a guy that's much smaller than him that's about two steps down, and this guy is losing it again. We don't know what's happening. And he's in this, this, this, this smaller guy's face and he's pointing and he's just spitting mad.

And you can see he's raging in this guy's video, it from afar. And you're thinking to myself, oh my gosh, what's happened? The weirdest thing about the video is the guy, the smaller guy, there's a couple steps down, he's smiling, he's totally calm, and he keeps putting his hand on the guy's chest, and he keeps putting his hand on his guys chest.

And then eventually he turns and he walks away and he walks down, and he just kind of shakes his head like this. And you think to yourself, when you're watching that video, the guy that almost dies and had no clue was the little guy. But what you realize and what the video, the guy that shot the video points out in his caption is, it turns out that the smaller guy was a guy by the name of, Michelle El Chino Rodriguez and Rodriguez, if you don't know, is one of the baddest middleweight boxers in the world.

He is an undefeated war machine. 50% of the guys he fights, he knocks out the last fight he had in the fourth round. They had to stop it because the guy his opponent was seeing double. And this guy was on the bleachers, was picking a fight with this guy, and he didn't know who he was. He didn't realize that this was this boxer and he's getting all rage because he's bigger than him.

He doesn't know the story that he just walked into. He's bringing the wrong weapons to that fight for sure, because he was one bad hand gesture away from eating soup for the next three

months. Right in this guy Rodriguez. What did he do? He was totally calm and he's smiling and he's just walks away peacefully. You got to know the story you're stepping into.

You got to know because it's a good principle in life. You got to know what you're up against because what happens is you think you're in a you think you're playing the game of one story, but if you don't know what's fully going on and you and you can you, you're framing this the entire wrong way and you're bringing the wrong things to the wrong situation.

It's a great principle for life, but it's also a great principle spiritually, isn't it? You got to know what you're stepping into. You got to know the story and things that seem right. It might seem obvious to you or might seem natural to you. Maybe that's not the full story. Maybe that's not what's really going on. Because oftentimes in my own life, I feel like I can step into these battles and I'm doing these things because of the personal battles or their worldly battles or their internal battles.

We know about those. We all have them. And I think I'm stepping in. I know the story. I think I'm bringing the right things to the fight, but all of a sudden I might be doing what seems wise. But what happens on the other end of it? My heart feels sad, or I feel more anxious, or I feel gross and I don't know what's going on.

And it seems like I'm just don't understand what's actually happening here and what Paul writes in the passage and Alex just read. He said he's warning people. He's saying it's so easy to misread the story that you're in the story you're in because when you misread the story that you're in, you begin to use things like the wisdom of the world.

And when you use the wisdom in the world, you're in trouble. Instead. What Paul says, he says in verse seven, he says, you need to embrace the secret and hidden wisdom of God decreed before the ages. I love that decreed before the ages. I like the wisdom of God, but it's confusing to me because when I read something like that and I think to myself, I get it, Jesus died for my sins.

But what is the wisdom of God like? What does that? What does that mean? Because we talk to me when you say the wisdom of something, that means it's an idea or there are concept or there's a list of facts, there's a playbook here, like, because I must have missed that class in seminary. Like where's the bullet pointed list of all of the of the nine things I need to do?

Because oftentimes that's very, very murky in Scripture. But what Paul's saying here, it's deeper than that. And I want us to listen a little closer. You can read a long verse, verse seven, it says the wisdom he declares talking about Paul. The wisdom that he saw was a secret wisdom decreed before the ages and hidden throughout time from the rulers of this age.

None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. There's a couple of things I want you to see here. The first thing is this God's wisdom. When you read it in this flow, he's talking about this, this narrative of being decreed before the foundations of time and how it flows through up into the current day.

God's wisdom isn't an idea. It's not a concept. It's not a playbook. With God's wisdom, we realize here it's a story. It's a plot line that culminates in the crucifixion of Jesus. It doesn't culminate in strength and power, but is God's wisdom. When Paul talks about it's a storyline that we are invited into, not a matter of systematic bullet points.

And the second thing I want you to see here in verse eight, it says, none of the rulers of this age understood this. Now the rulers that he's talking about here, he's not talking about Pontius Pilate, he's not talking about Herod or the Pharisees. He's talking about the spiritual authorities. What he's talking about is the rulers of this age, or that what he talks about in Ephesians six, what he talks about in, Ephesians three, the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places, the principalities, the spiritual beings that sit on these, these like, governmental positions, isn't that weird language he's using?

And then it says of this age and again, what he's talking about, he's not talking about the first century. Just then what Paul is talking about is the entire period of time where sin and death entered. So he's talking about Genesis to the current moment. So these rulers that sit on these thrones in the heavenly realms that are hidden from our eyes, what Paul is saying, and this is where it starts to.

It's cool. He's it's almost like there's this spiritual espionage going on. And Paul says that God hid this storyline. He hid the details of what was happening here from these spiritual authorities. Isn't that cool? And the reason you and I get to see it, and the only reason that you and I get to know what this storyline is that we are stepping into, it is because the Holy Spirit has come and is turned on the lights and allowed us to see it, but it's like a spy novel.

But why the secrecy? Like why would God do that? Why wouldn't he mean his God? Why didn't he just unfold the plan? All I want to do is unpack it a little. God and godly wisdom. Right now, what I want to do is unfold this storyline. I want to invite us a little deeper into it because it's important.

Like I just said in the beginning, it's important that we know what we're up against and we know what we're dealing with. And this storyline begins at the very beginning. You guys all know the story about the story of when the serpent enters the garden, right? The serpent enters the garden. A little spoiler alert, and I think we've said this before, but just to remind us that serpent wasn't really a snake, or it wasn't only a snake, it was a spiritual being.

So Eden was this place that they called a thin place, and it was a place where heaven and earth overlapped. Where were man and the God's divine realm interacted. So that's why you see God walking with Adam in the cool of the day, right? But you also see that there's spiritual beings that are moving about in this context.

And when scholars believe or with scholars discuss what this serpent is, they really think a lot of them think it's probably a seraphim, which is always described with serpent imagery. But it's a seraphim is, is one of God's heavenly beings that served in a sort of council role for him. Right? If you could. The way I would describe it is God had these beings that he created, and they serve like a cabinet post for, for the president.

But these were God's heavenly counselors. You see this in the book of job. You see God talking to them. You really see it in the Book of Kings. Every time you see God's throne room, you always see these things around there. And all of these creatures, all these things are part of God's sort of advisory role. God, God created them and put them in those places.

But this one being the serpent, he was prideful and he hated God. He hated God, and he wanted to unravel everything about God. And what we see in Genesis three, we always read that story about this is when Adam and Eve, eight, ate the fruit. And this is where humanity fall. Yes, it is where humanity fell and we read about the fall of humanity.

But you also, this is where we read about the beginning of a cosmic rebellion. This is when the serpent says, I'm going my own way and I'm taking you with me, because this serpent, what he wants to do is he. He hates God, and as a result, he wants to unravel his plan. So what's the first thing you're going to do?

You're going to go for his image bearers. You're going to go for the things that are those mirrors that were meant to proclaim his glory. And that's you and me. And so when he says, I am going to get them to reject the wisdom of God, I'm going to get them to reject his story and write their own story.

That's why when it says that he deceives the woman, the woman saw that the tree was good and she saw that it was desired. What to make one wise read that before. Pretty cool So sin enters the world, and war and greed and death and a lust for power and humanity spreads and it grows and everything happens and all this mass of humanity.

Then we come to Genesis chapter 11, in this weird story where these people say, hey, you know what we want to do? Let's build this tower, and we're going to build it. And what we're going to do is we're going to build it so that we can be equal with God. And what does God say in that moment?

I'm done with this. I've called you, you've sinned, and you just keep rebelling against you. Keep rebelling against me. You keep rebelling against me. So what he does in Genesis 11 and Deuteronomy tells us he does a couple things. First, he takes mankind and he divides them. He scrambles their languages. He says, over here, I'm going to I'm going to put borders around you as nations, and you won't be able to communicate with you.

And I'm going to divide you into these kingdoms of people. And the second thing he does is he takes his divine counsel and God says, I'm done with this. I'm stepping back. These people are your responsibility. I want you to, I want you to. I want you to manage the world. And it says that was his portion. Turn the page.

Genesis 12 was the first thing we found. And there was a man, and his name was Abraham. And God says, this is my portion. This is the one that I choose. And he goes and he chooses his, his, his people. And he makes a promise to Abraham, and he says that I'm going to multiply you. And as he makes this promise to Abraham, one of the things you notice is all of a sudden when you look around the world, what do you see?

There are idols everywhere. There are. There are people worshipping false gods everywhere that didn't exist before. Because you know why? You remember that little story I told you about the serpent rebelling? All those all those other divine beings that were over those over those people, group and nation groups. They drew worship to themselves. They drew worship to themselves.

And that's how we get the all the religions in the world. But that's also how we get these thrones and these principalities that sit behind these kingdoms and behind these rulers that Paul's talking about. So that's the root of all this. So God goes to Abraham and he says, I'm not finished, you're mine. And what I'm going to do is I'm going to I'm going to take you because not because you're great, but because you're like, good, really insignificant.

And I'm going to multiply you and I'm going to, I promise you, I'm going to turn you into a nation. I'm going to take you a nation. And you see all these other nations that are worshipping the false gods. I want them back. They're mine. I'm jealous, and I'm going to use you to do it. And I make a promise through you.

I make a promise that your descendants, descendants will be a blessing to all nations. And what does he say to Abraham in that place? And he says there's going to be one person that comes out of that you don't really understand. Now, as Christians, we understand, looking back on that story, you know that God's talking about Jesus. You know that God saying that that he's going to

die on this cross, that he would be that his death would conquer sin and defeat death, it would change everything about the storyline and how we stepped into it.

But Abraham didn't know this. Isaac didn't know this. Neither did Jacob or Joseph or Moses or David or Isaiah. God kept this a secret. He kept it a secret the whole time. Why? Why did he keep it a secret? Who this Jesus was? Why did he just come out in the front and be like, here's where it's going to go.

I'm going to my son is going to be born. His name is going to be Jesus. We're going to put him on a cross and he's going to win the game for us.

God kept it from them. He was hiding his plan. He was not hiding his plan from his people. He was hiding it from the rulers in the principalities of this world. Why? Because in verse eight it said, if they had known, they thought that this Messiah king was going to come and he was going to rise and strength and power, they didn't know that his victory would come through weakness in service, in suffering, death and resurrection.

And if they had known that they never would have crucified him, they never would have put the ball in his hands. They never would have crucified him. They thought by killing him they had won the game. But God had set this, this divine strategy in play, this beautiful. And it's like the guy I was telling you about before the rulers of this age were raging in the face of God.

Well, they had no idea what they were up against. God hid it from the rulers, but he didn't leave his people without some clues. And he dropped breadcrumbs. He dropped breadcrumbs all along the way. There's going to be a seed of a woman, and you're going to follow that seed. And then we get to, it gets bigger and bigger.

There's going to be a king. We realize in the book of Samuel that this this person that's coming is going to be a king. We realize in Isaiah that he's going to be a suffering servant. And then when we get to the Book of Daniel, realize it's going to be like the Son of Man. But it was such a mystery.

First, Peter wrote and Peter wrote in first Peter. He said, even the prophets searched to try and understand what they were writing about, and they couldn't understand it. They didn't understand the punch line. And the rulers sought to, the principalities sought to, and they couldn't get to it. And Jesus was born. They knew it. They recognized it. You know, when Jesus goes into the wilderness and Satan is tempting him, you know that part.

And Satan's asking him all these questions, part of what Satan's do, he's like, what are you doing? What is this all about? And Jesus is like just playing it out. They didn't know that the Messiah would reign through crucifixion.

He would conquer sin and death. So who cares? Like what I just went took you on this, like, narrative ride. Like who cares? What does that have to do with you? What does that have to do with me? Let me tell you, you need to know the story that you're stepping into. You need to know what you're coming face to face with.

Because the rulers of this age, they've been defeated. They were defeated at the cross. But let me tell you what. They're still peddling that same wisdom that they used to crucify Jesus. They're still whispering a message of strength. They're still whispering a message of power. They're still whispering a message of conquering. And overcoming through might and wealth and glory and self.

Aggrandizing. Gosh, that's a hard word. Self-aggrandizing. They're still trying to build us up. We've become mighty.

Bigger than you, better than you. And you know what? Our culture, it baptizes that wisdom. It does. And we embrace it. And part of us wants to as well. Just we're in pain and in that part of our life that that struggles with God. We love to embrace it. But what the gospel says, those things that were hidden from the rulers, they have now been revealed to you through the Holy Spirit.

They have been revealed to you by the Holy Spirit, the spirit who is from God, that he might that we might understand the things freely given to us by God. The wisdom. This is not a

storyline. You figure out. It is a storyline that has been revealed to you. Why has it been revealed to you? Because he chose you because he graduated.

He is holding on to you and he will never let go. Why does that matter? Because the cross, when we see it and it seems like it was such an act of weakness and it's it was a it was an act of weakness. And with the cross, when we see it, it would seem like such an act of weakness in its victory, though the cross was also a roadmap for you, because you now live in this inverted kingdom and the suffering that you are experiencing in your life.

The wisdom of the world would say God's forgotten you, God's forgotten you. The principalities and the in the princes of the air would say to you, you don't matter. And what the gospel says, what Jesus is saying is your pain is not evidence of God's absence. Your pain is the arena in which God moves. It's why he came.

He's got you, and he will never let go. In your humiliation, when you step back and you look at your life and you say to yourself, this is not the way it was supposed to be, the wisdom of the world says, you're right. You turn left when you should have turned right. You blew it, man. Look at what you could have been with the gospel says this.

You are participating in the sufferings of Jesus. And when you hold the hand of the Holy Spirit and you walk into those things, it is training your heart to see the hidden wisdom of God. Death is not in the story. When you've lost your purpose.

When your sense of identity is missing, when you're struggling to find meaning, when everything seems meaningless, the wisdom of the world says you don't matter. The wisdom of the world says, what's the point? The wisdom of God says, you are part of a story that is of eternal significance. You are an image bearer of God. You have not fallen through a hole in his pocket.

He has you in the palm of his hand. He will never let go. You are. You are the living purpose, the living meaning. Who is Jesus is holding on to you. You are fearfully and wonderfully made.

That is a wisdom. That is a storyline that the world can't give you. It's a storyline that the principalities and the and the rulers that Paul was talking about, that I is talking about, they despise and they want to blind you from it. So today, when we sit and we and we and we go to war, reading the scriptures like this, because one day you're going to be standing there, maybe one day soon, maybe you're there right now, or maybe you happen tonight when you're standing on that staircase and you're looking above you and the world is screaming in your face and they're telling you things about you, or whispering lies in your ear, you

can stay calm. You can smile. You can put your hand on the chest and just walk away because there is a power at work in you that has already won. And as the Apostle writes, no, I have seen, no ear heard nor heart of man imagined what God has prepared for those who love him. And that's you. That's me, thank God.

Amen, Amen.