7-14-24

James 3:17-18

I’m sure you’ve noticed that James seems to be like a New Testament version of the Old Testament wisdom books such as Proverbs. Indeed, He is professing the words and wisdom of God and God does not change. And along with this, we can often find the teachings of his half-brother, Jesus, in James’ words. This should not surprise us either since Jesus is God.

Last week we began a section of the letter where James reveals that there are two kinds of wisdom: wisdom from above and the wisdom that is from below. We considered the wisdom from below. It is earthly. It is a worldly wisdom that makes the things of the world the primary focus of life. It is the wisdom that seeks money, fame, power, and standing in the world. It prizes the things of the world: material things.

That wisdom is also natural or unspiritual; in other words, it is of the flesh. It seeks out “*the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life*” (1 Jn 2:16). It tends to be very similar to the desires of the world. It is a selfish wisdom; one is able to get what we want with little regard for others. That is the goal: to come out on top.

The third description James gives us is that it is demonic; it is from satan. Satan and his demons are very intelligent and crafty; they are not to be trifled with. They do their best to lead us into the things of the world and of the flesh so that we remain separated from Christ. That is their goal. If we allow them, they are able to give us insight and understanding, worldly wisdom, in fulfilling our worldly lusts. The wisdom they provide is evil and contrary to God; and so, we must “*Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*” (Jms 4:7)

As James tells us in verse 16, “*For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.*” While God has a holy jealousy in which He will not share His beloved people with any false god, the jealousy we have is mostly because we don’t get what we want. Our jealousy is worldly. We are called to have joy for the blessings of others. Christians are called to self-sacrifice through Jesus Christ; not accumulating for ourselves. Our God is a God of order. Worldly wisdom will cause chaos to further its own ends. And our God is holy. He does not tolerate evil or let evil go unpunished. The wisdom from below is contrary to God.

But now James spends a couple verses contrasting the wisdom that comes from above. Where does one get such wisdom? Well the obvious answer is from God; but that may be less than helpful by itself. James tells us that this wisdom we want is from above. So let’s start with Jesus.

In John 6:38, Jesus says, “*For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.*” Jesus has come down from heaven; He has come from above. Next consider what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:24; that Jesus is “*Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God*.” Jesus, being the Word of God, is the embodiment of the wisdom of God; the wisdom from above. Jesus must be the focal point of us gaining wisdom; He must be the source through whom we receive wisdom.

So, very practically, study the four Gospel accounts. Read about the life of Jesus and think of things He said. Study His teachings and parables. Consider how He reacted to different types of people in different situations; notice how He was always teaching, offering us wisdom from above. Try to live and think like Jesus did.

Spend time with Him in prayer. Do you simply read about your family and friends or do you spend time with them? We desire to spend eternity with Him; why would we not spend time with Him now? Prayer is the way to draw physically and spiritually closer to Christ. It is also a means of grace by which He will impart wisdom.

Keep in mind that we serve a Triune God; one God in three persons. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit all have parts to play in bringing us to salvation, through sanctification, and finally into glorification. As we seek the wisdom from above in Jesus Christ, we have the help of the Father and the Holy Spirit.

The Scripture we have and call the Bible is a blessed source of wisdom from above. After all, it is the very word of God. This word of God, when used by the Holy Spirit, has the power to convict a person of sin and then to show their need for Christ Jesus. Blessed are those who heed this conviction and call to salvation. Once a person receives Jesus, they are able to read the word of God through the lens of Christ. Only in this manner is wisdom gained.

You see, God has given mankind two forms of revelation of Himself. The first we call “general revelation” which is creation. People can see from all creation that there is an all-powerful creator God. Because of man’s sinful nature, we look for other explanations for all we see. The second form of revelation is what we call “special revelation”. This is the Bible. This is God’s word given through men by the Holy Spirit. It is only by the Holy Spirit that we can understand and gain wisdom from the Bible; and that only through Jesus Christ.

As a couple of examples. There are still many devout Jews who read the Old Testament daily. They know much of it and are very intelligent; they seek God. Unfortunately, because they have rejected Christ, they cannot have a true understanding for salvation; for the wisdom from above, which we can see from their current society. They suffer a spiritual blindness and so their wisdom remains earthly.

Another example is satan. We know he can quote from the Bible. He probably has it all memorized. He is able to twist its verses to his own ends. But he doesn’t understand it; the Holy Spirit will not reveal the depths of it to him. The verse that shows this the best is 1 Corinthians 2:8, “the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” Yes, that can apply to Herod and Pilate; but it ultimately applies to the true rulers of this age; the spiritual rulers of darkness.

We who are Christians have the indwelling Holy Spirit who will help us to gain wisdom from the Scriptures. Wisdom is a precious gift that God offers to us and He wants us to have it. Follow that desire to gain it; the desire is from Him.

We gain wisdom from association with Jesus; we gain it from the Bible when it is studied through Jesus; and finally we just do what James says in chapter 1 verse 5: Ask for it. God will give it to you when asked for in faith through Jesus Christ and, of course, with the right motivation: to glorify God and prepare the saints.

Now, as opposed to the effects of earthly wisdom, James gives the markers of wisdom from above. I’m afraid that sometimes our tendency with lists such as this is to read through them, group them together as good or bad, and then move on. But let’s look at these a little.

We can look at this list as the things that we will do, the way that we will act if we cultivate the wisdom from above. And while that is true, it is only half the story. These characteristics are gifts we will receive from God as we seek and gain wisdom. So keep that in mind; this isn’t just a list of things to do, this is a list of glorious benefits we will receive from our kind and gracious God.

Wisdom from above is pure. Purity heads the list and is foundational to the others. God calls us to be pure. He calls us to be holy as He is holy. We are to be a peculiar people. We are different from the world and our thinking runs contrary to it. Look around at how society embraces impurity in the name of self-actualization; of autonomy. The world wants to be separate from God; independent from Him: even to its own destruction.

The Christian call to purity means just that: we shun evil. If an action or lifestyle is against God’s word; we don’t accept or participate in it. We love those who do; trying to bring them to salvation through the Gospel of Christ; but we don’t condone it. We hold ourselves to a higher accountability, not to a superior status than the non-believer; we know in our hearts that we fail miserably. But with the help of God we try to live a life of purity.

The gift of purity? Matthew 5:8, “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*.” Not only will the pure see God, they shall be useful servants to Him during this life and pleasing to the One who has provided eternal salvation.

Wisdom is peaceable. That can be difficult in our current caustic environment. There is a definite tendency in our society toward mob rule. The current worldly wisdom is to simply shut down anyone who disagrees with you. But we are called to be different. Romans 12:18, “*If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.*” The Lord knows that its not always going to work; but we are called to try. Also, this is not peace at any cost. We must never compromise on the principles laid out in God’s word.

Of course there is Matthew 5:9 where Jesus tells us, “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*” What a blessing! To be a son or daughter of God. Wisdom gives us peaceableness; which is not only a desire to make peace with adversaries; but it is that gift of peace which will live in our hearts and will not be moved no matter what happens. It is wisdom that depends on Jesus.

Wisdom is gentle. Notice how so many in the world today are harsh; they are wise in the ways of the world but one of main ways of accomplishing their goals is harshness and even cruelty. A Christian must work to be gentle even in the face of harshness. And a Christian must be gentle just as our Saviour: who would not break a bruised reed or put out a smoldering wick. Notice, too, that gentleness is not weakness: Jesus was strong.

Jesus says in Matthew 5:5, “*Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth*.” Our benefit from gentleness is inheriting the earth. That is not the current broken world we now live in; that is the new earth that God will create once He has vanquished satan and all evil. It will be a world of gentleness and kindness and love.

God’s wisdom is reasonable and it is without hypocrisy. What do we see in the world? Again, societal arguments make demands that are absolutely without reason and hypocrisy is part and parcel of attacks on anything Godly. Arguments are made that are so absurd that the only explanation is what Paul tells us in Ephesians 6: we do not fight against people but against demonic principalities.

Still, we are not to engage in these tactics. We belong to Christ and His reason is perfect and He is truth. If we stick to the words we read in Scripture, we will be reasonable and we will not be hypocrites.

When I think of a gift of reason, I think of Isaiah 1:18, “*Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the Lord, “Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool.*” When God gives us the wisdom to be able to reason, He will even condescend to reason with us; and He makes us an offer so full of mercy: forgiveness; complete removal of guilt. When we can reason, we can understand what God has to offer; and further, we can serve Him with single-mindedness; not with the double-mindedness of hypocrisy.

When we have the wisdom that comes from above, we become more merciful and in mercy we can bear fruit pleasing to God. In a world where mercy is often perceived as weakness, we are called to be counter-cultural. We are to have mercy on others; not excusing their sin or wrongdoing, but reaching out with the Gospel in hopes of bringing them to eternal life. In so doing, we bear fruit for the Kingdom of Christ.

The habit of being merciful has tremendous reward. As Jesus promised in Mathew 5:7, “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*” When we consider what we deserve in return for our sinful rebellion against our loving God, the thought of His mercy should bring us to tears. The most heinous act anyone could commit against us pales in comparison to what we have done to a holy God. What a blessing His mercy is to us; His errant children.

It is even by His mercy that we can bear fruit for Him. And then, we look forward to heavenly reward for what He has enabled us to do. We serve a gracious God who loves us and wants to give. Be merciful and fruitful.

The wisdom that comes from God is unwavering. We cling to our faith in Him because we know that His promises are true and that He is all-powerful God. This world allows anyone to have their own truth and it changes with the circumstances. We must be unwavering in standing on the solid and absolute truth of God. That will be challenged in these end times; but truth is still truth and God’s truth is unchanging.

This is difficult for us sometimes; but persevering in those difficult times builds our character and makes us more like Christ. James warns us that we must not be double-minded because we are then simply unstable in all our ways. God will not bless this. But God will bless and give whatever we ask, whenever we stand on His truth without wavering.

The Lord will have a harvest at the end of the age; He will send His angels to gather the tares and cast them into unquenchable fire; He will also send them to gather His wheat and put them safely in His barn. We want to be in that harvest and wisdom from above will keep us on the right track. At the same time, since we are the harvest, we want to bear fruit. As James tells us, live in the peace of wisdom from above so that we may bear good fruit in righteousness.

Prayer

Blessed Lord, Your wisdom is such a desirable quality; it is such a precious gift. Please bestow it upon we Your people; to each of us as we need it. We deserve no good thing from You; but You have given Your only begotten Son for our salvation. With that, we know that You have more for us than we can even ask for. Bless us with wisdom.

Give us that purity that comes with wisdom from above. We know that we are justified in Christ; in Him we are Your sons and daughters; we are covered in His righteousness. Bless us with purity so that we may be pleasing to You; so that our works may be done with right heart motivation and acceptable before You. Help us to be pure before a pure and holy God.

Fill us Lord, with the fruit of the Spirit, that it may produce in the fertile ground of Your wisdom. We keep in mind Lord, that the beginning of knowledge, the seat of wisdom, is reverent fear of You. So although we come before You boldly in Jesus Christ, we also come humbly and gratefully.

Thank You Lord, in Jesus’ name

Amen