

When Decisions Are Difficult – James 1:5-11

We saw last week that perseverance is the key to enduring and maturing in tough times

This week we turn our attention to difficult decisions, in good times *or* bad

Who hasn't faced those?

Decisions where you're just not sure what to do

Situations where the way doesn't seem clear

Circumstances where you just can't get your mind around the issues

Obviously we've all faced difficult decisions like that

The same was true for the believers in James' day

Which is why he addresses the issue here in James 1 (Bibles)

Having ended v4 by saying – if we persevere in tough times, we will be *lacking in nothing*

It's almost as if he continues in a stream of thought sort of way, and says – speaking of lacking something, *if any of you lacks wisdom* . . . (read v5)

If any of you lacks wisdom – there's little doubt that we all lack wisdom

I don't think anyone is so arrogant as to argue against that

But it's never more apparent than when you're facing a difficult decision and you're not sure what to do

James says when that's the case – just ask for it

When decisions are difficult . . .

Ask for wisdom (v5)

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God

Duh – you don't have to buy the Bible for dummies, it's right here

If you lack wisdom, ask for it from the one who has it all

Even unbelievers are aware of their need for wisdom when decisions are difficult

But for believers, it's especially necessary, because W should characterize our walk with Christ

Paul says Eph 5:15 – *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise*

We need wisdom in order to live the life God has called us to

And since we so often lack it, especially when decisions are difficult, we should be asking for it all the time

That's why it's a permanent request on my prayer list

- But all of this begs the question – what is wisdom?

Quite simply – it's knowledge applied

More specifically, it's the capacity to understand a situation, and apply the appropriate truth or take the appropriate action

For believers, it's the means by which God's people can discern and carry out God's will, despite the distractions and obstacles at hand

A perfect example of this comes from Solomon, who recognized his need for wisdom as

Israel's new king, and asked God for it

In 1 Kings 3:12 God says – *Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you.*

No sooner had the celebration ended, than he was tested with a difficult decision

You may remember the story

2 prostitutes who lived in the same house, and had babies at about the same time

Came to Solomon saying that one of their babies died in the night

Problem was, they both claimed the one alive as their own – somebody was lying, and Solomon had to figure it out

So he said – bring me a sword and I'll divide the one child into two, give ½ to each of you

Obviously that would kill the baby

Listen to the response of the 2 women – read 1 Kings 3:26-28

Solomon asked for wisdom, God gave it, and he used it

Wisdom is knowledge applied, and we are to ask God for it especially when decisions are difficult

- Unfortunately, God is often the *last* place we turn

We look for wisdom in self-help books

We talk to our mom, our friends, our family

We talk to people who spout unbiblical platitudes and tired clichés

We go to those who falsely promise wisdom by delivering u fr your supposed demons

We go to psychologists, specialists, even Christian counselors – where far too often you get secular psychology with the word Christian in front of it

We got to every Tom, Dick, and Harry we can find, *except* for God

Asking him for wisdom is often our last resort, instead of our first – stop that

When decisions are difficult or times are uncertain – get on your knees, *first*

And ask for wisdom from God . . .

Who gives generously to all without reproach

Who gives abundantly *to all* – God is not a respecter of persons

Without reproach – without a reprimand

God won't chide you for not having W; He won't condemn you for squandering it

He won't scold you for not asking sooner

To the one who asks for wisdom, *it will be given him* (5b) – it's a promise

But you have to . . .

Ask in faith (v6)

Let him ask in faith – believing that God hears, and that he will respond

Believing that God will supply all your needs according to His riches (Phil 4:19)

When decisions are difficult, ask for wisdom, but ask in *faith*

Problem is, faith is such a messed up concept these days, we don't have a clue what it is

Sometimes it's referred to as a religion – Do you have faith?

Some would say that the object of your faith doesn't matter, as long as there is one

It doesn't really matter whether you trust Mohamed, Buddha, Karma, or Jesus

As long as you have faith in something; and it works for you

But that's not biblical faith – biblical faith is . . .

Faith is believing the Word of God and acting upon it no matter how I feel, confident that God promises a good result

It's believing that when the Bible says God will give you wisdom – he will give it

It's acting on that no matter how you feel – i.e. asking God for it even when you fell like it's useless or hopeless

And it's knowing for certain that God promises a good result – in this case, increased W James says if you ask with faith like that – you can expect to receive God's wisdom

- Some of you may have a hard time asking in faith because you think you're undeserving That's true, but it's irrelevant – because God says do it; ask away Others of you think your needs are not worthy of God's attention – true again . . . But in his sovereignty, he's chosen to care not only about your difficult decisions, but the very hairs on your head; the smallest detail of your life And waits for you to ask for the wisdom necessary to live it

When decisions are difficult – ask for wisdom, ask in faith, and do so with no doubting In other words . . .

Dispense with doubt (v6-8)

6 – *Let him ask in faith, with no doubting*

With no uncertainty or disbelief or hesitation

Then, as if that's not enough, he launches into a diatribe against doubters Against those whose life is *characterized* by the unbelief and open defiance of doubt As opposed to those who occasionally waver/struggle in their faith He's not talking about those whose faith is *weak*, but those who chose not to have it Does so to help us understand what faith is, by telling us what it's *not*

Doubt and faith are diametrically opposed

They are the antithesis of one another like The Joker is the antithesis of Batman The North pole is the opposite of the South

Whereas faith is the *assurance* of things hoped for, doubt is the *lack* thereof Therefore, they can't both be true/present at the same time in the same person To the extent you doubt, you lack faith If you lack faith, it's impossible to receive wisdom So God wants us to get rid of it – to dispense with doubt

To make sure we get it, he cites 4 main characteristics of a doubter:

1. He's unsettled

6b – *the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind* Boaters call that choppy – when the water is roiling and boiling And the waves lack any consistent pattern, texture, shape, or intensity

Becky and I experienced that firsthand last summer on a sailboat Where the ocean was like a great big pot of boiling water – it was awesome to behold And we were getting pounded with 10 foot drops from one unpredictable peak to the next unpredictable trough that sometimes followed and sometimes didn't After the initial rush, it left us *unsettled* to say the least, and eager to return to land

That's how it is for the one who doubts, lacking faith in the goodness/promises of God They're anxious, worried, troubled, ill at ease, and unsettled Longing for the calm of "peace" but unwilling to trust the God who gives it

2. He's presumptuous

7 – *that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord*

A doubting person is one who is not completely convinced that God's way is best, and yet expects the same blessing of wisdom as if he is That's the kind of bold, presumptuous attitude that James addresses here

It's like the doubter is saying – "Hey God, I don't really believe you, or even think you're capable of giving me wisdom – but just in case, bring it"

James is like, "dude, sorry to burst your bubble, but you got nothin"

You *must not suppose that you will receive anything from the Lord* (7) if you're a presumptuous doubter

3. He's double-minded

8 – *he is a double-minded man*

One who wants the best of God when they're in trouble, and the worst of the world when they're not

They walk on both sides of the proverbial fence

Despite façade, deep down they're conflicted, especially when decisions are difficult

John Bunyan illustrates this in his classic allegory, *Pilgrim's Progress*, by calling such a man "Mr. Facing Both Ways"

Living one way in one situation, and the opposite in the next

If he's smooth enough, maybe nobody will notice the incongruity of his life

Today we might call him "Mr. Two-Faced"

That's a double-minded man, characteristic of a doubter

4. He's unpredictable

8b – *unstable in all his ways*

Unstable – a word that was commonly used to refer to the effects of a violent storm

Like mudslides that leave a house (**photo**) perched precariously atop a hill

That's a doubter – where the hard times of life leave him unpredictable/unstable

You have no idea what they're going to do as they vacillate between truth and feelings from one moment to the next

You have no idea what will set them off, or what the damage will be

They're unstable and unpredictable in *all* their ways – affecting their whole life

Unsettled, presumptuous, double-minded, and unpredictable

That's not a pretty picture

And God won't bless that person with wisdom because they won't use it for his glory, if they use it at all

When decisions are difficult, dispense with doubt so that you can ask in faith

Then, in v9-11, he says . . . (read them); In other words . . .

Get some perspective (v9-11)

This is more of James' stream of thought here

Whether it's tough times, difficult decisions, or life in general – your perspective makes all the difference

He starts with the lowly brother in v9 – *Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation*

James is speaking of a legitimate form of pride that even the most destitute Christian should have . . .

Because he has a privileged place at God's side; An exalted position at his table

He may be considered the scum of the earth and the dregs of society, but in God's eyes, he is exalted

He may be hungry for food, but he has the bread of life

He may be thirsty for drink, but he has living water

He may be poor in this life, but he has riches in the next

He may be cast aside by men, but he's adopted by God

He may be homeless here, but he has a place in heaven

I don't know about you, but that's something to boast about

10 – and let *the rich* [presumably the rich believer] boast *in his humiliation* . . .

If you're among the rich, like some of those first Jewish believers who fled the persecution of Jerusalem and lost all their wealth . . .

If secularism, materialism, and the intrusive presence of things/money have put out the light in your soul and turned you into a zombie (as AW Tozer says) . . .

Be thankful for the perspective that a humiliating loss of possessions, position, and power brings to your life

Otherwise you may never know the spiritual wealth that is yours in Christ

- It dawned on me this week that this is my story

This is part of what God used to get me into ministry

It was a humiliating trading loss in early 1999 that eventually brought me to my knees (literally), and caused me to finally listen to that still, small voice that had been saying for years – “Rob, why don't you be a pastor?”

Were it not for that loss, I may never have listened; I may never have yielded to the call of God on my life

That doesn't mean that every setback in your business is a call to ministry

Far too many people think that way

But it very well could be God's way of giving you a perspective on him that you never had or appreciated

If that's the case, it's important that you get it, because life is fleeting

- The poor man knows that perspective all too well with death/hardship all around him

But the rich man, who trusts in his riches/position, thinks he's indestructible

So James focuses on him to drive home the point that *he will fade away in the midst of his pursuits* (11), just like a flower fades under the scorching heat of the sun

It's only a matter of time

If you're rich, don't wait for God to take it away before you “get it”

If you're poor, don't wait for God to bless you, before you “see it”

Rich or poor – get some perspective in life, God's perspective

And see if that doesn't help when making difficult decisions