

SERMON TITLE: The Way of Wisdom

SCRIPTURE: James 3:13-18

DATE: November 20, 2022

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SERIES SUMMARY

In Scripture, we find the life of faith is often a difficult journey. But true faith in Jesus will show itself in tough times and display the reality of Jesus to a watching world. In the same way, we're called to give voice to our words and action to what we believe. This is how our faith can make a transformative difference in our lives and the lives of others. On this side of eternity, a faith not applied is worthless and will make no difference. The book of James regularly asks us to put our faith into action so others can witness the reality of Jesus in our lives. As we turn towards Christ, our faith journey will be purposeful, fruitful, and sustain us through any difficulty we face.

SERMON SUMMARY

James is still addressing teachers and leaders in the early Messianic community and ultimately has in mind unity for the body of Christ. James introduces two "systems" or infrastructures of operating in this life: worldly wisdom and heavenly wisdom. The amazing thing is that Christians are not by default immune to operating according to the world's ways of wisdom, and therefore James is writing to those who claim faith in Jesus, inviting us into a more beautiful and honoring way of living. In short, James brings us into the reality that wisdom, as is stated throughout the book of Proverbs, is a treasure to be desired, and when we live according to its ways, life is better because it cultivates in us the outward fruit of knowing Jesus.

SERMON SCREENSHOTS & KEY POINTS

Indulge this thought for a moment. If God invited you to make one wish which He would grant, what would you ask for? What problems persist in your life that you might immediately erase? What dreams repeat themselves that you would make possible? Would you ask for wealth? Power? Love? Legacy? Fame? Interestingly there's a story in 1 Kings 3:1-15 where God invites this very conversation with the King of Israel, Solomon. This is rare. In response, Solomon does not ask for riches or power but wisdom - an understanding mind that can discern between good and evil. What's more amazing is that God grants this request and gives Solomon a supernatural dose of wisdom.

This may not seem like the most strategic thing to ask for. Of all the things in the world, he could have had...wisdom? And yet the way the Old Testament speaks about wisdom would place it far above riches and wealth. Wisdom is personified throughout the book of Proverbs, and we are told to seek it and live according to its ways (Prov. 8:10-11, Prov. 8:35-36). So maybe wisdom is a good thing to wish for after all.

James picks up the theme of wisdom in our passage, introducing us to two systems that exist in this world: there is earthly wisdom, and there is heavenly wisdom. In typical James fashion, he is still drawing the connecting lines between what we proclaim and how we perform. If we proclaim to believe in Jesus, our lives should be marked by wisdom that finds its source from Jesus. However, James understands that, unfortunately, we are not a perfect mirror image of Christ, and therefore even those in God's Kingdom community could possibly be operating according to a system of wisdom that "makes sense" but is destructive, division, and demonic.

Earthly Wisdom:

- (v14) Those who operate according to worldly wisdom are bitterly jealous, selfishly ambitious, boastful, and deniers of the truth. When these are the values of our worldview, we are far more concerned with

our own power and reputation than that of Christ's. We will treat people poorly because of our insecurities, striving to elevate ourselves above others so that we retain power and influence.

- (v15) Four Characteristics of False Wisdom:
 - Does not come from above - this wisdom does not find its source or its nature in the ways of Jesus.
 - Earthly - physical and temporal, as well as a sense of corrupted morality.
 - Unspiritual - earthly wisdom does not produce the fruitful life which is manifest in union with Jesus.
 - Demonic - false wisdom finds its origins in sources other than God. When our motive is to elevate ourselves, divide the body, and aggressively seek our own goals, we find the source of these motives in a world other than the high place of Heaven.
- (v16) If earthly wisdom is the operating system of God's people, God's people will be divided, and wickedness will be the norm. Control and power will be the anchors.

Heavenly Wisdom:

- (v17) Seven Characteristics of True Wisdom
 - Pure - free from defects and moral pollution and finding its ultimate source in Jesus for those who are in union with Him (1 Jn. 3:3)
 - Peaceable - much more than the person who is "at peace.". This describes the wholeness of the Hebrew concept of *shalom*. Peace with God, self, others, and the world.
 - Gentleness - mercy and mildness. Both envy and ambition are tempered by this wise attribute.
 - Open to Reason - a wise person is persuadable and will not remain obtuse when evidence should suggest a change in their opinion. They must know when to remain firm and when to adjust.
 - Mercy and Good Fruits - James combines two attributes to form one thought. Both of these are outward-focused, shown to those in need, and shaped by Jesus' teaching to love your neighbor.
 - Impartial - without judgment. Showing preference to some divides the body of Jesus. James is referencing what he has already taught earlier in the book (Ja. 2:1-13).
 - Sincere - Without hypocrisy. James definitely has in mind the relationship between what we proclaim versus what we practice, but probably also is warning against where insincerity could lead for the body of Christ: false teaching, immorality, partiality, and division.
- (v18) God's people make peace through peaceful methods.

The bottom line of wisdom, according to James, is that wise people understand God's ways and conform their lives to those principles seen in vv. 17-18. Wise people create a peaceful, loving community with those around them through personal cultivation of God's truths and external application of wise approaches to relationships.

COMMUNITY GROUP QUESTIONS

Read James 3:13-18 together.

- What is something that stuck with you from the sermon?
- What did you learn from the sermon? Where did God illuminate truths from His word? Was there something you'd never heard before or something you were reminded of?
- How has God used wise people to shape your lives? Give specific examples if you can.
- As a group, try to recall the two different systems of wisdom that exist and their unique characteristics.
- Why is it so easy at times to operate according to the earthly wisdom system? When or where do you find yourself tempted to operate out of envy or selfish ambition?

- When or where do you find yourself operating out of the Heavenly wisdom system? How have you cultivated the habits of living God's way with God's people?
- What is one action step you can take this week to continue to grow and apply Heavenly wisdom in your life or to others around you?

The following resources have been a great help to us in preparing messages for this sermon series: *The Letter of James (NICNT)*, by Scot McKnight; *James (ZECNT)*, by Craig Blomberg; Mariam J. Kovalishyn; *The Epistle of James*, by Peter Lange & J.J. Van Oosterzee; *The Letter of James*, by Douglas Moo. Also, I (Charlie) have benefited from the teachings of Tim Keller, Tim Mackie and the Bible Project, and others whom I will credit during my messages. I have adapted and borrowed insights and illustrations from these men and incorporated them into the messages in this series.