

I. Wise Wishing

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Journey Through James / Wisdom; Peace / James 3:13–18

Living in the wisdom of God looks like walking in peace with others.

Notes

Elder led series

Introduction:

One of my favorite nostalgic movies is the Goonies. and I love the scene where this group of kids on the hunt for treasure end up in the bottom of a well. One of the characters delivers a memorable speech that my wife and I both quote at each other to this day. “Chester Copper Pot. Don’t you guys see. Don’t you realize. He was a pro, he never made it this far. Look how far we have come we have a chance...Don’t you realize the next time you see sky; it will be over another town. The next time you take a test, it will be in some other school. Our parents they want the best stuff for us, but right now they have to do what is right for them, because it is their time, their time up there. Down here it’s our time, it’s our time down here. Great speech. But as they were at the bottom of that well, the floor was covered in coins they began to pick them up till someone said we can’t do this these are someone’s wishes. One of the characters says well these were my wishes and they didn’t come true so I’m taking them back. Wise wishing, seems like an oxymoron doesn’t it. It’s not like he could have wished better or done it differently to get a better outcome. Many would say wishing won’t get you anywhere, you need to work harder. But when it comes to being wise can we wish for it?

I. Who is Wise?

A. What about them causes you to perceive them to be wise?

Education? Personality? Oratory skills? What about how much they sound like you? Who is wise? For much of my adult life I have been absolutely dumbfounded by presidential election debates, and not so much the debates themselves but people’s reactions to them. Their exhilaration in claiming who “won” the debate. Nobody won, were you watching the same thing I was? That wasn’t a debate, they weren’t even talking about the same things. There was no thesis and supporting points, it was a gripe and blame session full of self-promotion and boasting. But that’s it isn’t it, whoever was more successful at blaming the other and boasting of their own acumen, “won.” But this isn’t new to humanity. James states elsewhere “Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?” James also admonished

his readers to not show partiality towards the rich. The rich had higher social ranking than most of James's readers. And this, in part, is why he advised that not many should be teachers, who as orators were held as socially important, because the temptation to bless and curse is high. Prestige and power often led to defaming others and boasting of oneself. In the culture of the time, if someone was presented with an opportunity to increase his or her social status, their class, you jumped on it no matter what it took, because most never get the chance, ever. There is a reason James started his letter with "count it all joy my brothers when you face trials." There was a famine in Palestine around the same time James's letter was produced and it is quite possible that several in his own church were dispersed from Rome when Claudius expelled the Jews (which you can read in Acts 18:1-2). Christians were not yet being martyred, but they were under intense economic oppression because of the cultural systems and the church was buckling under the pressure. The two ways the people could respond was either be refined towards unity or as Douglas Moo puts it, "compromise with the world and split apart into bickering factions." Who is wise? Better yet...

B. How does someone become wise?

Education? A degree? Humph, I hope so, I've put off getting one for 20 years, it'll be nice to finally wisen up. Do we gain wisdom through philosophy? Epistemology? Can one really learn anything, for there is nothing new under the sun and we just toil in a meaningless existence... Are we evolving into higher beings, transcending our earthen prison? How about through religion? Memorizing scripture? But then even James states be doers of the word, not hearers only. Retention of facts, does that grant wisdom? So how do we gain wisdom? What is required of us to acquire this life skill? These are questions that James did not write, but he was asking. Rather, it is assumed in connection with the assumption that gaining wisdom is favorable. The ideologies of both Jews and Greeks held wisdom in high regard. So, when James asked who is wise among you, his readers would have pondered that question with a whole subset of preconceived notions, pre-understandings, prejudices, presumptions, and many other pre-uses (not the car). We do the same do we not? Who we view as wise, is often directly tied to how they got there. And when we start to think about who is wise and who isn't, there is a distinction drawn, and if we are not careful about what we call "wisdom" we will end up making "distinctions among ourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?" as we can read in James 2:4. So what if being wise isn't something you can achieve. What if it isn't something we should even pursue? Does that question sound heretical?

Proverbs 14:6

A scoffer seeks wisdom in vain, but knowledge is easy for a man of understanding.

1 Corinthians 1:22

For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom

Ecclesiastes 1:12-18

I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind. What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted. I said in my heart, "I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge." And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind. For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

Ahh but wait now, James said in chapter one that if anyone lacks wisdom, he should...ask for it. Asking is a little different than pursuing isn't it. Chasing after, striving for, dedicated the pursuit of...Nah, just ask and God'll give it to ya...generously. But Proverbs is clear that wisdom is a good thing, and if James is the "proverbs of the NT" then it would stand to reason that he thinks wisdom is a good thing. And in fact, he does, for God gives it when we ask. James believes all good and perfect things come down from the Father of lights and his mention of wisdom from above connects it to these good gifts. So that's James view of wisdom...

C. How does our culture view wisdom?

Well to answer that question I have turned to the most reliable source I can think of. Facebook. A discussion about urinating on someone's pants passes for wisdom these days. You believe that? But then again, so does dismissing the deaths of some people because others have died under different circumstances. All death is tragic. Everything surrounding death is tragic. And it is a big deal and should be taken seriously. The very point of the Gospel was to disarm and destroy death, to correct and reverse its curse. But to treat death apathetically...That's not wisdom. Pointing out that other viruses kill people so COVID is no big deal isn't wisdom. Pointing out that a black man killed by cops isn't a big deal because cops have killed other people isn't wisdom. Publicly defaming others as not loving their neighbors because they don't wear a mask isn't wisdom. But these are the debates of the wise in our day. I'm just as guilty. I see someone post about a celebrity has died and how sad it is. And I think who cares, they made a living out of lying to people and pretending to be someone they are not. But then I get a check in my spirit. "I died for them too." Yes Lord, yes you did. As should I.

Who is wise among us? That can be a tough question to answer, but James asks so we would start thinking about what wisdom is. So, let's look at what James teaches on wisdom. First...

II. Wisdom is not taken.

We need to understand there were

A. Cultural tensions that led to revolt.

There were systems of economic oppression and then you throw a famine on top of that. As I mentioned the Jews were expelled from Rome, but when they were able to return, many

had their possessions and land sold out from under them. So, even those that had some prestige, power, and wealth returned to have none of it. Imagine if you will people steeped in the tradition of Knowing their god is the one true God and that he has promised them land and promised their forefathers to be over many nations. It is no wonder a revolt happened, and in AD 70 the Roman Empire came in and destroyed the temple in Jerusalem. This tension wasn't just in the culture, it was in the church. Specifically, between the Greek Christians and the Jewish Christians in Rome at that time. The Jews resented the Greeks status, the Greeks resented the Jews customs. Much of the "Circumcision" faction was fueled by this tension. This problem wasn't just in Rome either. John admonished believers to love one another. Paul taught on unity to the Ephesians. He instructed those at Galatia that there is neither Jew nor Greek. Peter admonished the believers to have unity of mind, or as Paul wrote the Philippi "be of one mind." These tensions and divisions were widespread. It wasn't because the Jews like to use the Shofar in worship and the Greeks like music better with a Tympanum. No, it was because life was hard and many struggled. That's why the Acts 2 church was such an amazing thing in that no one was in need. Let's be honest many of us here, do not know what it is like to live in a hopeless financial state of not being able to provide even though your fully capable and willing. Many in the US do not know what that type of oppression feels like and what it does to one's psyche. Modern psychology would call it trauma. This is what the readers of James lived in day in and day out, the trauma of existence. Imagine all of us hungry and desperate for change, and we can remember how just 15 years ago we were all able to support each other, but now everything seems hopeless. And then in walks a wealthy patron, this could be our hope. James said no, he is not your hope. Don't treat him better than you treat others, because you think you'll get something from him. That is earthly wisdom, conniving. It may be cunning, smart, but it isn't wisdom from above.

You know what I love about the book of James, is that he randomly jumps to something else and then ties in back into the undercurrent of what he is seeking to get across. Also, there is a...

B. [Connection to creation theology \(two trees and anti-order\).](#)

See what I'm doing here...yeah... So, using our intellect, skill sets, and personality to acquire for ourselves is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. Woah...demonic? OK James the Just, you just went too far...but did he? Let me tell you about a story of a young couple who fell in love in a garden, it didn't end well. Creation theology permeates the OT, and since James would most likely have received the same education in the Hebrew Scriptures as Jesus did, who quoted from the beginning of Genesis, his worldview would have been saturated with creation theology. It is evident in how he describes things and the dual presentation of wisdom. In verse 16 we read that where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. The creation account is a move from disorder and chaos to peace. Each time God declared something was good is when part of the chaos was brought to peace. In the beginning the earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. God created light and saw that it was good. Then there is a day where the heavens are made, but they are not called

good, it is only when dry land appears to give order to the chaos waters God calls it good. Each time God creates in the three-fold areas of creation, water, sky, and land to fill the void of these areas or is set up a ruler to bring order, God declares it to be good. And when God created humanity to be his image bearers and gave them dominion of all the creatures that swim, fly, and walk, he then said it is very good, peace. But then chaos erupted. His rulers chose to take wisdom into their own hands and be the determinants of what is right and wrong. Taking the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of good and bad, brought about death, chaos, the anti-creation. What has resulted is every vile practice. The knowledge, the wisdom that was gained, came about through demonic means, as the serpent was cunning as well. So, when we use our intellect, skill sets, and personality to acquire for ourselves it is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. The acquiring isn't necessarily about stuff. We can acquire recognition, purpose, a mission but if it is at the expense of others or does not align with loving God and loving people, than it is a wisdom that is taken, not a wisdom that was given, just as the fruit that leads to death was taken. If there is someone that disagrees with me about how to do something and it comes about that we do things my way, and I gloat in that. I'm boasting that I've acquired "my way", I have exercised demonic wisdom. Even if it has to do with how we do church. This is a fictitious example, but if I've always hated the pulpit being off the stage, and now to keep social distancing for the chairs in the sanctuary the pulpit needed moved back on the stage. I then boast, Ha ha, the way it is supposed to be; James said this isn't wisdom, it is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. As it is with all...

C. Personal & Partisan pursuits.

James also taught that true religion is the care for those in distress and to keep oneself unstained by the world. How much of our culture here in the US has an overwhelming zeal of factional politics? And how many times are we in the church stained with the same zeal? The word translated jealousy is also translated zeal. Both translations can either be good or bad, depending on the context. For even God is jealous or zealous when we are not united by his Spirit. For he has made us not to be alone and as separate parts combined to make a whole, we reflect the name of God in unity. God is zealous with things concern the holiness of his name. But when "bitter" undrinkable jealousy is offered up, and we become concerned for our own way our own ideas and those that agree with us. When we in the church become divided and factional, we are behaving false to the truth that we are all created in God's image, and false to the truth that Christ died for us all. Christ became the humanity we rejected at the tree. We consistently choose self over others, Jesus chose all of us over his own rights as the Word of God, Origin the Life Giver, the one and only Son of God. He did not consider equality with God as something to be grasped but he made himself nothing taking on the nature of a servant and being found in appearance as a man he humbled himself to the point of death, even death on a tree. But as the Word of God, Origin the Life Giver he had the power to take his life back up again, and so he indeed rose to life and was exalted and given The Name, for Jesus is God. And in him is life. The choice is ever before humanity, do you choose life, or do you choose death?

Do you choose the way of the world or do you choose the way of the cross? For holding onto life in the world is death but dying to the world is life in Christ Jesus. Seems counterintuitive doesn't it? Trying to embrace life is choosing death, while choosing to die to self is in fact choosing life. That is not a wisdom this world can make sense of, because this world only understands taking. Wisdom from above is not taken. It is given. We simply ask for it. There are times it is difficult for me to ask; I'd rather rely on myself to get something accomplished. Mike Vernon is preaching on asking next week, and I am looking forward to James working me over on that topic as well. Back to wisdom, it isn't taken. Secondly...

III. Wisdom is not earned, but it does work.

In verse 13 we see the beginnings of wisdom in James. "by his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. This is the same...

A. Meekness expressed in Matthew 5:5.

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." James does us a great service here, not only providing instruction through God's word, but also giving us an example of what it looks like to apply the teaching of Jesus to current cultural contexts. James applies Jesus teaching on gentleness, humility, and submission to the decisive and factional views of the times. He does so by tying it to the accepted idea of wisdom. If you think your wise, then be wise through meekness. Jesus was the ultimate example of this. When the "enemy" came to him in the garden he made them all bow with a word, but he did not fight and went peacefully. When given the chance to argue back at his accusers in front of Pontius asking him if he was a king. Jesus said those are your words, that is your perspective, my kingdom is not of this world, and this world does not understand its strength. Power under control. The capability to take which is set aside by the unwavering commitment not to. Even Imperial Rome lost sight of classical Greeks concept of meekness. It represented to them noble-minded who remain meek in the face of insults, judges who are lenient, and a king who is kind. Humanity over and over seeks self-promotion, but Jesus calls us to be a different kind of human. And it is in meekness that we show our wisdom. Adam and Eve did not earn the garden, but they were given life, until they took of the wrong fruit, in which lies the seed of corruption, darkness, and every vile practice. But James says to practice good conduct. He is relating wisdom to how...

B. Faith without deeds, is dead.

Just as you cannot separate faith and works. There is no lip service when it comes to faith, wisdom likewise must be lived out. Meekness is not being quiet, its being gentle. It is not passivity; it is showing others respect and dignity. It is actively denying self so that others come first. I recently interviewed someone for one of our janitorial positions at work. I explain how the job isn't just doing janitorial work but that since we promote the inclusion of those with disabilities in the labor force it also involves a fair amount of training others and a perspective

of helping someone else be successful. The response the applicant had was spot on. They stated that as a parent they have learned that much of life is about putting others needs ahead of their own. That my friends, is meekness in action. As Tony mentioned James is all about action, applying the teaching of Jesus to everyday life. Children do teach us to be others focus, as do spouses, and really friendships in general. My wife, as many of you know had surgery recently and has had to take it easy to recover. In that she has had to ask the kids and myself to do things for her. She feels like she is asking too much, because she usually does everything. She has been asking me at times if she is asking too much and I tell her no, Christ calls me to die to self and live sacrificially for her. Christ calls me to pick up fingernail tips at the dollar store. Husbands, it helps to confess that out loud. I am all too familiar with the pressure of time constraints and piled up workloads and feeling overwhelmed to then have one more thing added on. Christ calls me to love and live in meekness. Saying it out loud helps me take my thoughts captive for Christ and focus on the wisdom of Christ rather the wisdom claiming my time is important. It helps to develop...

C. Skills in righteousness.

“Thus, the biggest fool was one who knew truth and failed to apply it. To the Jews, wisdom meant skill in living righteously” -John MacArthur

As it is with any skill, the more it is used and refined, the better you will get at it. Conversely, if you feel a pull to practice unspiritual wisdom than whatever is pulling you in that direction is something that needs to be limited in your life, and it needs to be replaced by things that teach, reprove, correct, and train you in righteousness. Maybe during 2020, you’ve closed off a bit, and become not only socially distant but spiritually distant from your small group, the church, your time to let scripture speak into your life. Now more than ever, we as the body of Christ need to be diligent in collectively walking in Christ. We need to encourage one another, pray for one another, hold one another accountable. We need to love one another and bear one another burdens. We also need to welcome, comfort, and forgive. These are all things Christ has called us to do and be as the church. There is work to do Christian. Wisdom is not earned, but it does work. Thirdly...

IV. Wisdom is peacemaking.

Through and through, it is...

A. Pure – not double natured.

Often the idea of purity is referenced in relation to sexual activities, but since James does not reference that topic in his letter, it is hard to imagine that is what he is saying wisdom is. There is a sense of moral faultlessness tied to purity. James does make mention on several occasions the idea of not having a double mind or a double nature. Within the context of these few verses we can readily see the dual perspective of wisdom from above and wisdom from below. So first

and foremost, James is saying the wisdom from above is all about being from above, a good gift of God. It does not ebb and flow from earthly wisdom to Godly wisdom. But the wisdom from above is first pure, through and through. It is and establishes moral faultlessness. We can appreciate the idea of pure being that which is of one thing. Pure gold, or pure joy. I find it immensely satisfying watching metals melt, and it is interesting to see the dross taken off the top. What is left then is a purer consistency to the metal. or seeing children laugh and play and the pure joy they have in the excitement of the moment. But we also use that word to describe pure evil. This idea does not jive with James. He isn't saying that wisdom can be good or bad as long as it is one or the other. Yes, he believes in solidarity of purpose, but the purposes must be in line with God. Morally faultless. Through and through, good to the end. Wisdom is pure. But it also does not mean the balance between two extremes. Plato and Aristotle held a belief in the golden mean. They saw meekness as the happy median point between passion and apathy. This isn't what James means by pure either. It isn't the comfortable and compromised middle ground. As if we are comparing life in the fast lane and wisdom is...

B. Life in the other lane.

I heard a lot of people mention after a couple weeks into the pandemic that it is helping us to slow down and become more balanced. This isn't the wisdom James has in mind. As if there are three lanes on a road, with some driving fast in a hurry to get to nowhere, some driving slow without a care in the world, and then there is the other lane, were we are better balanced between those two. Determined and purposeful but taking time to enjoy and cherish the things that matter. Nah, James is saying stop, look over in the distance, you're on the wrong road. If there is anything to learn from this pandemic it should be that our sense of security is misplaced. We've grown accustomed to our comforts and how we like to do things. We've taken for granted the stability of our communities. We've been shown that our idea of peace is based in earthly systems. and modes of operation. Here in the US, we have been breathing in the air of comfort and control for years. I listened to a podcast recently where the speaker talked on how we have been able to order things with a click of a button and are connoisseurs of coffee, chocolate, and cupcakes, life on our terms. He stated that when we have an economy that can support specialty stores selling only cupcakes, you have a very comfy culture. And that kind of world does not cause people to turn to God, it doesn't cultivate deep things, like faith, hope and love. Not when we are the masters of our own happiness. humph That's a punch in the gut isn't it? He talked about the pandemic revealing things in our own hearts. And it has mine. It revealed a misplaced sense of urgency. If I don't do something, nothing good is going to happen. God says to me, "Really? So now you're the Father of good gifts?" Ahhh No! But there still is an urgency or maybe more of a conviction to not be action less. James is clear though, it isn't action for actions sake, wisdom is peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. We are to...

C. C. Plant peace to reap peace.

Today we've been all over the place and there is a lot packed into this small passage, because there are some weighty concepts expressed here, but James message is clear. Wisdom that leads to righteousness is done through living peacefully with others. A harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. Are you a peacemaker? Jesus said blessed are the peacemakers for they are called sons of God. Pursuing wisdom is folly, but pursuing peace, is wisdom. The world James and his readers lived in was a tumultuous one, and guess what now we have come to see our world as tumultuous as well. Do we need more people to stand up and declare what is right? Do we need more to rise up and fight for the people? Do we need more people to make their opinions and perspective known on Facebook? Or do we need more people to walk in meekness of wisdom pursuing peace and pointing people towards the cross of Christ? People have been shaken, and people have been questioning the security of our freedoms, and the safety of our population. The time is now to love and lead people to the one that offers true freedom and defies death. Without Christ, there is no peace. Are you planting the peace of the Gospel? I'll be honest, I used to discount the need for practicing evangelism, because I know I am gifted in other areas of the Christian walk. And anytime I heard people discuss the need to do so, it was always couched in bad logic. But I am growing in conviction that making and maturing disciples is a must and if I am prioritizing things in life over that, then I am again not living in wisdom, am I? I am greatly encouraged by my fellow Elder Mike who tells of stories in how he seeks to work Christ and the gospel into his conversations at work. What James is saying is this, if we full of mercy and good fruits and our lives are marked by being impartial and sincere, then we are going to set aside our need for comfort and the tasks that distract us from being servants of Christ. So, we can instead look for ways to plant peace into the lives of others.

Conclusion:

This has possibly been the most relevant passages to the church today that I have every studied. The historical context almost exactly matches what the church is facing today. The only difference is the cause for turmoil. For them it was financial instability that separated the rich and powerful from the poor and marginalized, which was tied to the political structure of the day. Today it is the divide between those who are passionate about health and safety and those that are passionate about freedom and protection. Both are tied to our political systems. There were arguments and public defamation of one another, and the culture was brimming with revolt. And it's getting inside the church. James is saying neither of these sides is the path of righteousness, but those that live in humble gentleness and mercy, pursuing peace are those that have the wisdom of God. Let us go from here and pursue peace.