

Title: James – Two Kinds of Wisdom

Text: James 3:13-18

“Who is wise and understanding?” James asks here in verse 13.

-And then he says, “Let them show it by their good life, and by deeds done in humility that comes from wisdom.”

My friends, that question, and the exhortation which follows it are quintessential James.

-That the faith that is within us should be displayed by the way in which we live.

If you have been with us all summer as we have been reading this Letter of James together,

-you know by now that James was heavily influenced in his own walk of discipleship by two major sources:

-the Old Testament Book of Proverbs,

-and his brother Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount.”

And here James is drawing on both of those sources.

-He is outlining, just like Proverbs and the Sermon on the Mount do, two very different ways of life:

-the way of the faithful, and the way of the faithless;

-the way of the wise, and the way of the fool.

-the way of the righteous, and the way of the wicked.

The Book of Proverbs is full of this same kind of exhortation to walk in the way of the wise, and not the way of the fool.

And I don’t know if you remember it or not,

-but Jesus ends the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7 in the exact same way.

He says, “*Everyone who hears my words and puts them into practice is like the wise man who built his house on the rock, so that when the storms of life come, the house remains strong on a firm foundation.*

*But everyone who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like the foolish man who built his house on sand, and when the storm came, it beat against the house and knocked it down with a crash.”*

This is the great tradition of Jewish Wisdom literature.

-This is the way that the Rabbis and sages of Judaism spoke and taught and lived.

And Jesus built on that tradition in his ministry, and his brother James did as well.

- Because, lest we forget, Jesus and James were both thoroughly Jewish.
- In fact, you might not have known it, but James' real name was actually Jacob.
  - The Greek and Latin texts of the New Testament all use the name Jacobus.
- But for some reason when the translators of the King James Bible translated the New Testament texts into English,
  - the name Jacob was transliterated as James.
  - And that's true of the 3 or 4 other men in the NT whose names we all know as James.
  - Their names were actually Jacob, too.
    - They were all good Jews!

And the reason I mention this today, is because I want to highlight for all of us the Jewish tradition that Jesus and James (or Jacob) were teaching from.

In the Jewish tradition of the Rabbis, there were always two primary emphases in teaching the Torah, or the Bible.

- They were called the Haggadah, and the Halakah.

The Haggadah was the emphasis on the Torah itself:

- the Scriptural texts, the biblical stories, the doctrines, the laws, the words of the Bible.

The Halakah was the emphasis on the life of the learner:

- the practice of the faith, the character of the disciple, how to live what the Bible teaches.

And the way of wisdom that Jewish children and adults were consistently taught from their Rabbi's, was to hold those two emphases together.

- To combine a knowledge of the truths of God with a life of obedience to those truths.
- To not only know the will of God, but to live it out in one's life.

So when James asks, "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in humility that comes from wisdom;"

- this is James following this great tradition of biblical wisdom that His brother Jesus taught as well.

And James builds on this in the following verses as he paints the contrast between the way of wisdom and the way of the wicked.

And he starts by describing a life that is the opposite of the

way of wisdom.

- It's the way of envy and selfish ambition.
- It's built on envying those who have more than we have:
  - more money, more power, more prosperity than we have on whatever way they have it.
- And it's a life then devoted to the selfish ambition of doing whatever we have to do to get what they have.

So it's a life of competitiveness, of self-promotion, of vanquishing rivals.

- And James says here, "Wherever you find this kind of envy and selfish ambition, there you find all kinds of disorder and every evil practice."

And we know that quite well ourselves, don't we?

- We see this approach to life being lived all around us, and if we are honest, we see ourselves caught up in that way of life all too often ourselves.
- It's not just a Washington, DC problem, or a Wall Street problem, or a Hollywood problem, or a sports world problem.

It's a human problem, and it's found wherever people are found:

- in businesses large and small in every town and city,
- in the world of sports, entertainment, and the arts,
- in churches large and small of every denomination,
- in families, neighborhoods, civic associations.

There are power-struggles, and one-upmanship, and envious comparisons everywhere.

- James says that where you have envy and selfish ambition, it causes all kinds of trouble.
- And I'd say he knew the reality of that in his own day just as we do in ours.

He also says that this kind of lifestyle comes straight from the devil himself.

- Envy and selfish ambition were a part of what the snake used in the Garden of Eden to motivate Eve and Adam to eat of the forbidden fruit.

But then James contrasts that earthly kind of 'wisdom of the world' with a completely different kind of wisdom that comes from heaven.

- It's the kind of wisdom James said back in chapter one that God gives generously to those who ask for it.

It's a wisdom that is pure, and peace-loving,  
-considerate of others and submissive to God,  
-full of mercy,  
-impartial in the sense of being even handed in our dealings  
with others and not prejudicial or showing favoritism.  
-It's a wisdom that is sincere, and bears all kinds of good fruit  
in a person's life,  
-as well as in the lives of others around us.

And think about those qualities for a moment.

-Do they sound at all familiar?  
-Can you hear the echoes of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount?  
-Specifically, the upside down wisdom of the Beatitudes?

James says this kind of wisdom is pure, and Jesus said,  
Blessed are the pure in heart.  
James says this kind of wisdom is full of mercy, and Jesus  
said, Blessed are the merciful,  
James says this kind of wisdom is submissive, and Jesus said  
Blessed are the meek.  
James says this kind of wisdom is peace-loving, and Jesus  
said, Blessed are the peacemakers.

You see the connection?

-Jesus' Beatitudes paint exactly the same sort of contrast  
between the values of the Kingdom of God, and the values  
of the Kingdom of this world that James is emphasizing.  
  
-Both of them are describing for us contrasting ways of  
pursuing life in this broken world of ours.

The way of the world is to try and get ourselves out of the  
brokenness.

-To try to grab for what we want, and demand our rights to  
have it, and protect what is ours, and get ourselves  
ahead, and make a name for ourselves.  
-We try to fix the brokenness in and around us with more  
money, more sex, more power,  
-with bigger and better stuff, with the latest technology,  
with the coolest Instagram pics, or Twitter post, or  
Youtube video.  
-Envy and selfish ambition. We know it well.

The way of the wise, says James and Jesus and the Bible as  
a whole, is to walk in the opposite direction.

-It's a way of trusting in someone outside yourself.  
-Of relinquishing power and submitting to God and others.  
-It's a path which approaches the brokenness of the world

by humbly confessing the brokenness in ourselves.

-And then asking God and others for help with our brokenness.

-It's about admitting honestly that we can't fix ourselves.

-And that no amount of money, sex, or power can fix the problem either.

It's a way of life that looks for help to come from outside yourself, and a way of life that discovers all along the way that that help comes.

-It comes as a gift.

-It comes as an unexpected grace.

-It comes in unlikely guises, but it comes in ways that really work...that are truly fruitful and bring a harvest of righteousness.

This summer, I have been reading a book on adaptive leadership called, *Canoeing the Mountains*.

-It's an odd title, but the author is using the experience of Lewis and Clark and their famous Corp of Discovery as a model of adaptive leadership.

Merriweather Lewis and William Clark were commissioned by President Thomas Jefferson back in 1803 to cross the newly acquired western portion of the country after the Louisiana Purchase.

-They were sent to explore the region, and to look for a water route that crossed the continent and connected the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

-The concept in everyone's head at the time was that there would be a river route from coast to coast.

-And so when Lewis and Clark left on the journey, they expected to travel by water and took canoes.

What happened was they ran into the Rocky Mountains.

-They discovered that their whole conception of the country was wrong.

-There was no water route. There were mountains the likes of which they had never seen before.

-Canoes were not going to be of any help to them.

-They had to completely rethink their journey and adapt to the new reality what faced them.

-They had to go on foot, and they had no idea where they were going.

And part of what they needed to learn, was to depend on others besides themselves.

And do you know who God sent them at just the right time

when they needed help in the worst way?

-Sacagawea.

A 17 year old native American young woman of the Shoshone tribe, who became their guide and translator.

-She was married to a French fur trader, and had just had a baby.

-Lewis and Clark initially thought that her husband was the guy they needed to help them,

-and so they hired him to act as their guide through the mountains.

-And they actually were not initially pleased to have take along a 17 year old native girl who had a baby.

But guess what?

-It wasn't long before they discovered that it was Sacagawea who would be their most valuable asset.

-She was not only a more gifted guide than her husband in that region,

-but because she was Native American, and had a baby, the Native American tribes they encountered all along the rest of the journey were friendly and helpful to them.

-Clark wrote in his journal that the tribes they encountered knew immediately upon seeing them traveling with a native mother and child that the Corp of Discovery were peaceful, and not dangerous.

-But secondly, it was Sacagawea who could also act as an interpreter to communicate with the tribes.

-And when Lewis and Clark decided that instead of canoes, what they really needed for the journey going forward were horses,

-it was Sacagawea who brokered the deal with a local tribe that brought them the horses.

My friends, Sacagawea saved the Corp of Discovery and made a success of their journey in multiple ways.

-Lewis and Clark would later say that without her the entire journey would have failed.

But my friends, by their own wisdom Lewis and Clark did not initially see her that way at all.

-By their wisdom they chose the French fur trader to be their guide.

-In their earthly wisdom they thought a western European white man would be the answer to their problem.

-In their earthly wisdom they thought a teenaged native American woman with a baby would be nothing but trouble.

-But in retrospect they discovered the gift of grace that God had given them in that teenaged mother and baby.

God, as usual, was using the weak things of the world to shame the wise.

- Sacagawea was a display of the wisdom of God,
- and the way she approached the tribes they encountered was pure and peaceable, considerate and submissive, full of mercy, impartial, sincere,
- and that approach brought good fruit and real success to the entire journey.
- Those were all qualities Sacagawea brought to Lewis and Clark, to the tribes they encountered, to her husband and baby.

Not to mention the fact that she and that baby, just like all the others traversed the Rocky Mountains on foot over treacherous terrain in all kinds of weather, and then continued on to the Pacific Ocean and back again.

She is an American hero, and part of what Merriweather Lewis and William Clark learned on that journey

- was to recognize the gift that God had sent them in Sacagawea, and to follow her lead.
- Adaptive leadership meant that they needed to learn to depend on someone outside of themselves, -and someone different from themselves.
- They needed to learn what it meant to be peace loving, considerate, and submissive to her.
- They needed to learn to lay down their prejudices and work with native Americans, and with a Frenchmen.

As they did, it produced a harvest of righteousness.

- And they ultimately came back to Thomas Jefferson having completed an amazing journey of discovery.

My friends, the wisdom of God is often completely upside down to the way of the world and the ways we usually think.

- But it is not an impractical wisdom.
- It is powerful, and effective, and life-giving, and truly successful in this broken world.

We don't need more power politics.  
We don't need more selfish ambition.

We need more godly wisdom.

And it may be in short supply, but James would remind us again and again,

- God gives it generously to those who ask without finding

fault.

God gives it generously...to those who ask.

So let's ask for it in prayer together now.