

WISDOM ENJOYED

The Glorious Harvest from Living Wisely

“A Journey Through James” Sermon 15

Texts:

James 3:13–18 *Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. ¹⁵ This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

Matthew 5:9 *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”*

Romans 12:14–21 *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. ¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” ²⁰ To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

Romans 14:17–19 *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹ So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.*

Ephesians 2:14–17 *For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.*

Introduction:

We have been making fairly rapid progress through the book of James and along the way, we have learned many valuable lessons about cultivating a living faith to a dying world – a faith that is wholehearted, single focused and fully trusting in God and His Word. It might be helpful to remind ourselves of some of the main lessons

James has taught us so that we capture them in our minds in order to work them out in our daily lives.

Lesson One: The Lesson of Two Kingdoms. (James 1:1)

James reminds us that we live in two very different kingdoms – The Kingdom of God where Jesus is our King and the kingdoms of the world whose course is energized by the god of this world toward the objective of causing the sons of disobedience to continue in their rebellion against God and their refusal to acknowledge His existence.

Believers have been taken out of the kingdom of darkness and given permanent citizenship in the Kingdom of God’s dear Son – but – while they wait and pray for that Kingdom to physically arrive on earth, they have been called by God to function as salt and light in all the little kingdoms of the world.

Lesson Two: The Lesson of Two Faiths (James 2:14-26)

James speaks very directly and forthrightly to people who claim to have believed in Jesus and identified as His disciples. He asks very probing questions to those who claim to be disciples of Jesus about the kind of faith they actually possess as opposed to the faith they claim to have.

James reveals the danger of a “word-only” or “creedal” faith that believes the right things about Jesus intellectually but has no life and is powerless to transform us in this age or deliver us from the coming wrath of God. In contrast to this “word-only” faith, James describes a second kind of faith – a “living faith” that is whole-hearted, single-focused, and fully trusting in God and in His promises. This kind of faith, says James, is the only kind of faith that will save us from the just and righteous wrath of God.

Lesson Three: The Lesson of Trials and Temptations (James 1:2-15)

James reminds us that God uses trials to *grow and deepen the maturity of our faith* as we remain faithful to God by trusting His word in this life and by living for the promises He has made about the life to come.

James also tells us that we *display faithfulness and vitality of our faith* when we resist temptation and remain loyal to God by loving Him with all of our heart, mind, strength, and soul.

Lesson Four: The Lesson of the Perfect Gift (James 1:16-18)

James reminds us that God is the Father of Lights – He is the Creator of everything in creation. However, the original creation has “changed” course and wandered from God’s original purpose for His creation. This “wandering” happened when the original image-bearers listened to the wrong wisdom delivered through the deceitful words of Satan.

However, God sent down true, life-giving words from Heaven by which we were born again as first-fruits of what the New Creation will one day look like when Jesus comes to establish His kingdom and rule over the earth. As members of that coming kingdom, we have been sent as “light bearers” to all the nations that make up the kingdom of darkness.

However, our success as light-bearers depends entirely on our relationship to the Word of Truth that God helped us to believe and now helps us to receive and obey. And that is the next lesson:

Lesson Five: The Lesson of the Looking Glass (James 1:19-26)

As ambassadors of the coming Kingdom, we are to display the power of God’s Word to bring spiritually dead people to life, rescue them from the coming wrath of God, and deliver them from the slavery of sin by transforming their present every-day life.

If we are to display the power of God’s Word to do all of these things – we must be “quick” to hear and obey that word. We must be very “slow” to argue against that word when it cuts against our will. And we must avoid sinful anger when obeying that Word leads to temporary loss, suffering, or persecution in this life.

God’s Word can do this because it is the ***Word of Truth*** that gives us life (1:18); it is the ***Perfect Law*** that grows and perfects/matures us (1:25); it is the ***Law of Liberty*** that liberates us from sin and frees us to please God (1:25; 2:25), and it does all of this because it is the ***Royal Law*** that Jesus articulated as His will for all who are part of His Kingdom (2:8; Matt 5-7). And James reminds us that the Word that does all of these wonderful things is actually the ***Scripture*** that we hold in our hands this morning (2:8)

But for the Scripture to consistently accomplish the full measure of its intended work in our lives, we will have to do more than merely “studying” God’s Word. We will have to dedicate ourselves to the hard work of consistently doing what God’s Word instructs in every corner and circumstance of life.

When we truly commit to living out the Word of God, the Holy Spirit enables us to display a religion that is acceptable to God and impactful to men as we keep unstained by the World and as we serve others selflessly (1:27) and not selectively (2:1-13).

Which brings us to the final lesson we have learned thus far from James:

Lesson Six: The Lesson of Two Wisdoms (1:5-8; 3:13-18)

James has taught us there are two distinct wisdom systems in the world by which all men operate – Wisdom from Above and all the other wisdom systems of the world (Wisdom from Below).

James describes “***Wisdom from Above***” in five ways:

- Its Source – God
- Its Nature – Spiritual vs Carnal
- Its Location – Scripture

- Its Function – Operating System of our Soul
- Its Operation – Transmission for the vehicle of our life where belief turns to action and what we do reveals whether what we say we believe lines up with what we actually believe about God, the world, and our lives.

James reveals a second kind of wisdom that functions as the universal operating system shaping and driving the beliefs, values, and behavior of unbelievers in the kingdom of darkness – ***“Wisdom from Below”***.

However, James warns that this broken wisdom from below sometimes shapes and drives the beliefs, values, and behaviors of believers who have been enlightened by God, enlivened by the Word of Truth, and given citizenship in the Kingdom of God’s Son. ***And what causes a believer to embrace the wrong wisdom is “doublemindedness” – something James describes as “friendship with the World” (4:4).***

James **tells us how** wisdom from below ***actually shapes the thinking and drives the behavior of a doubleminded believer***. Wisdom from Below is always accompanied by two inner attitudes: “bitter envy” that shapes thinking; and “selfish ambition” that drives behavior. (3:14-16).

“Wisdom from Below” appeals to a doubleminded believer by delivering apparent, and almost immediate achievement of strong personal desires obtained when a believer lives by the same values, priorities, and for the same objectives that drive unbelievers. Furthermore, “Wisdom from Below” is often difficult to spot because the external actions of a friend of the world may look a lot like the actions of a true friend of God (morality, generosity, industriousness, sacrificial serving, etc.)

So this raises two important questions: 1) Why should I choose to live by “Wisdom from Above”; and, 2) How do I recognize its presence in my life?

James tells us we will spot the presence of this wisdom in a person by the good things it produces in his character and conduct; and we will be thankful we chose this wisdom because of the good things it produces from our life!

James' main point in this paragraph can be summed up this way:

Spiritually maturing people embrace a specific kind of wisdom that

*cultivates in them uniquely Christian virtues
displayed through distinctly Christian behavior that*

*manifests humility,
promotes peace,
and grows righteousness*

*that is Rewarded by genuine joy and lasting blessing; and,
that Results in the Glory of God,
the Advancement of His Kingdom,
and the thankful doing of His Royal Will.*

So what does wisdom from above look like and what are its benefits for a person who operates life by this wisdom?

I. It has a Defining Quality (3:17a)

But the wisdom from above is first pure,

- First and foremost, this wisdom is pure and unadulterated.
- The term “first” makes it the chief or defining quality of this wisdom.
- This wisdom is not influenced by “wisdom from the world.” It is unstained by the wisdom that is earth-bound, natural, or demonic.
- James reminds us that we are to avoid “doublemindedness” (1:6-8), and to keep our lives “unstained from the world” (1:27).
- This wisdom is how we avoid becoming doubleminded or stained by the sinful moral and ethical behavior of the fallen world.
- This wisdom will cultivate in us the very quality Jesus described when He said, “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God!” (Matt. 5:8)

II. Flowing From A Gracious Disposition (3:17b)

then peaceable, gentle, open to reason,

The unadulterated, pure wisdom from God's Word shapes a gracious disposition that is very different from that of a natural man.

A. That is Peaceable.

- This is someone who loves, pursues, and strives to make and maintain peace with God and with others.
- This is the kind of person Jesus talked about when He said, “*Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called (known as) the sons of God.*” (Matt. 5.9).
- This is the kind of person who *is willing to pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding (Rom 14:19)*
- This is the kind of person who strives to live out all of Paul’s exhortation, *If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all (Rom 12:18).*

B. That is Gracious and Considerate.

- The term used here describes a person who is gracious and considerate – intentionally looking out for the needs, well-being, and concerns of others.
- Someone who is eager and willing to bend wherever and whenever he can to the wishes or concerns of others even when he has the right not to do so.
- This is the very quality that Paul used to describe Jesus when he appealed to the Corinthians to abandon their harsh, unyielding, and uncharitable spirit toward him and his ministry to them.
I, Paul, entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ ... (2 Cor. 10.1).

C. That is Reasonable.

- This term refers to a person who is easy to talk to, open to reason, and willing to be easily persuaded – they don’t make it hard.
- This person is not determined to impose his will or thinking on another but actually is eager to display a willingness to submit or make reasonable accommodations when a biblical principle or theological truth are not at stake.
- The opposite of this is a person who blows up relationships, ministries, and churches because of a harsh and domineering insistence that everyone follow his view or way of thinking.

III. Manifested by Distinctly Christian Conduct (3:17c)

full of mercy and good fruits

A. *That is full of mercy*

- Mercy is more than feeling sorrow or pity for another.
- It rises up out of a heart of genuine love.
- It always involves sacrificial, personal engagement.
- It seeks more than immediate relief.
- It strives to bring about full well-being, shalom in the life of another.
- Jesus desired this of His followers – “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*” (Matt. 5:7)
- And Jesus made this mercy possible by His active obedience and His substitutionary death so that God’s mercy could triumph over His judgment (2:13).

B. *That is full of good fruit*

- Jesus warned the Pharisees that the Kingdom of God would be taken away from them because their works were evil and instead, it would be given to a people (gentiles) whose lives were marked by the fruits (works) of that Kingdom (Mat 21:43).
- Are not the works/deeds of the Flesh the bad fruit of the Kingdom of the World?

Galatians 5:19–21 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

- If so, then are not the fruit/deeds of the Spirit the good fruit that should fill up the lives of the citizens of the Kingdom of God?

Galatians 5:22–23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

- So, which of these kinds of “works” or deeds fills up your life and flows out of your conduct?

IV. Grounded in Strong Spiritual Character (3:17d):

impartial and sincere

James states that wisdom from above produces strong character marked by two important qualities.

A. That is Unwaveringly Impartial

- The term James uses here can refer to someone who doubts or wavers like the person who is filled with doubts and not faith and as a result he wavers and is unstable in all his ways (1:6-8).
- James also uses this same word to describe someone who is partial or who makes distinctions between people as he decides who to serve and who to ignore (2:1-4).
- A person who operates life by God's wisdom grows strong character that doesn't waver in its commitment to follow God's wisdom and to love others impartially without showing respect for persons.

B. Character that is Transparently Sincere

- The term here is used to describe someone "playing a part"
- Wisdom from Above produces character that is genuine – that doesn't pretend to be something in one context and something else in another context.
- It is authentic and transparent. Sometimes a dishonest merchant would use wax to cover a crack in a clay pot or to cover defects in an article for sale. "Without wax" was often a way to describe something that was unbroken or whole.
- In James, a person who lacks this character will try to present himself as a friend of God or a friend of the world depending on who is watching and what is at stake or can be obtained.

V. Driven by Single Driving Desire (3:18b):

And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

- People whose lives are shaped by this wisdom are driven by a desire for peace – shalom.

- “Peace” is not merely the absence of conflict but the full-orbed shalom of God that seeks to restore men to God and to each other so they can enjoy the fullness and joy that God desires and has made possible through the gospel.
- Therefore, these “peace-lovers” strive to make peace by doing all in their power to live for the things that make for peace and in ways that promote peace.

A. They have received the marvelous peace Jesus made on their behalf and want others to receive and experience that peace!

Ephesians 2:14–17 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace,¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.

B. Therefore, they recognize the things that truly matter and set aside the personal preferences and desires of their own little kingdoms in order to win people to the Kingdom of God.

Romans 14:17–19 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.¹⁹ So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

C. And they are willing to live selflessly, to sacrifice personally, and even to suffer joyfully to advance this peace on earth.

Romans 12:14–21 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”²⁰ To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.”²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

VI. Resulting in a Marvelous Harvest (3:18a):

And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace

- So, what is the reward that this kind of life obtains? James describes the reward as a harvest of righteousness, the seeds of which were sown in the soil of peace by selfless gospel peace makers.
- Earlier, James reminded us that the wrath that is a common response to suffering, opposition, and difficulty does not result in the kind of righteousness that comes from God.
- When a gospel-peace-maker lives faithfully and acts righteously in the face of intense opposition, unbearable suffering, ruthless persecution – what is reaped is a great harvest of the kind of righteousness that pleases God and that comes only from Him – by the enabling grace of the Spirit.

Conclusion: But does this really happen? Is there a Biblical example?

Acts 13-14 recount the amazing story of the very first missionary journey undertaken by the very first missionaries (Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark) who were commissioned and sent out by the first church plant (Antioch) from the very first Christian Church pastored by James.

These first peace-loving gospel-risk takers took the good news of Jesus Christ to Cyprus (Salamis and Paphos), Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. It was a marvelous journey that was filled with intense suffering, strong resistance and persecution, and incredible spiritual response.

By the time they returned to report back to the Church in Syrian Antioch, they had been invited to share the gospel with the Roman Proconsul on Cyprus, opposed by an envious Jewish magician who was a false prophet named Bar-Jesus, led many Gentiles to receive Christ, mistreated by the enemies of the gospel, and even stoned.

But in every city, many Jews and Gentiles came to Christ, new churches were established, and on the way back Paul and Barnabas “*strengthened the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they appointed elders for them in every church, with fasting and prayer they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed.*” (Acts 14:22-23).

When they arrived back in Antioch, they gathered the church together and “*declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.*” (Acts 14:27)

Wow! What an amazing display of the beauty and power of the gospel to rescue people out of the kingdom of darkness and make them members of the family of God and citizens of His Kingdom. You would think everyone would be contagiously happy and unreservedly joyful over what God had chosen to do in opening a door of faith to the Gentiles. BUT THAT WAS NOT THE CASE!

The work God had done and the door He had opened through the peace-making work of these early gospel risk takers was about to be challenged and opposed by a group of people who arrived at Antioch from Jerusalem and began teaching that unless these Gentiles had gladly embraced circumcision and the Law of Moses, they were not genuinely saved – and this teaching was not sown in peace by peace loving people and it certainly did not result in peace but instead, generated massive conflict and debate among the brothers (Acts 15:1-2).

In fact, the debate was so strong and these men so unreasonable and implacable, that the church determined to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to ask Peter and the Apostles to settle the matter (Acts 15:2-4). On the way, they shared the wonderful news with believers in Phoenicia and Samaria who received this news with great joy. And when they finally arrived in Jerusalem they were welcomed by the church, the apostles, and the elders and they reported all that God had done with them.

HOWEVER, some of the believers who were converted Pharisees upon hearing the issue, rose up and began to insist that it was “*necessary to circumcise them (the Gentile converts) and to order them to keep the law of Moses.*” (Acts 15:5). And

they would not yield or back down from their position which resulted in prolonged, intense debate (Acts 15:6).

Peter stood and reminded the assembly that God Himself made no distinction between what He granted Jews who believed and Gentiles who believed – they received the same evidence of the Holy Spirit’s presence. He ended his appeal with these words, “*But we believe that we (the Jewish Christians) will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they (the Gentile Christians) will.*” (Acts 15:11).

A great silence fell upon the entire crowd and then Paul and Barnabas were given the opportunity to recount *the many miraculous signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.* (Acts 15:12).

And then, a wise Christian peace-making pastor stood up and used the Wisdom from Above to sow seed from God’s Word in the soil of peace that resulted in a harvest of righteousness that would extend far beyond his congregation. That wise pastor was the Apostle James. Listen to his wise words from God’s Word:

Acts 15:13–21 *After they finished speaking, James replied, “**Brothers, listen to me.**”¹⁴ Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name.¹⁵ **And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written,**¹⁶ “‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it,¹⁷ that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things¹⁸ known from of old.’¹⁹ **Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God,**²⁰ but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.²¹ For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.”*

And his peace-making words were received by all – “*it seemed good to the apostles and elders, with the whole church*” – and they commissioned a letter and sent it by the hand of Paul and Barnabas and Judas and Silas.

James was wise in that he was slow to speak – he listened carefully and understood the whole matter and its full implication for both Jew and Gentile believers and for the future of gospel ministry among the Gentiles.

James was quick to hear – He listened to the Word of God and used those words instead of his own human reasoning to render his decision.

He was slow to anger – the debate was heated and prolonged. The men who were converted Christian Pharisees were not going to back down. Paul and Silas knew they could not back down. Peter was known for his explosive temper and sharp tongue. Someone needed to speak in a way that would promote the peace of God and not incite the wrath of man – and that is exactly what God used wise Pastor James to accomplish.

James used Wisdom from God’s Word to speak wise words that produced at least three marvelous results.

1. His Wise Words produced immediate peace among the congregation – *“it seemed good to the apostles and elders, with the whole church” (15:22)*
2. His Wise Words produced great joy and encouragement among the congregation at Antioch that had originally been divided by this issue – *“When they were sent off, they went down to Antioch, and having gathered the congregation together, they read the letter. And when they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.” (15:30-31)*
3. His Wise Words made possible a great spiritual harvest of righteousness consisting of multiplied millions of Gentiles who have come to Christ apart from Moses from that day to this! *“That the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old!” (Acts 15:17)*

You and I are here worshiping God as genuine born again believers, in part because James made a choice to operate by Wisdom from Above when others were using Wisdom from Below. Let us go and do likewise!