

Asking Wisdom of God

Spiritual Maturity

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Bible Text: Job 28; James 1:1-12
Preached on: Sunday, August 27, 2023

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We turn in scripture to Job chapter 28, along with James chapter 1. We continue in our series on the letter of James, but we first read Job chapter 28, and we read Job chapter 28 for two reasons. First, because it's a reflection, it's Job's reflection on wisdom and how men can find so many other things, that men knows all about the things that you can find in the earth, but it's hard to find wisdom. And then we also read this because this is wisdom literature and just taking the time to read it is seeking out wisdom.

So Job chapter 28. The first 11 verses speak of how men have a knowledge of natural things and of how to find gold and silver and rubies, and then the question is, but does man know how to find wisdom? Job chapter 28. This is Job. This is the word of the Lord.

1 Surely there is a vein for the silver, and a place for gold where they fine it [refine it]. 2 Iron is taken out of the earth, and brass is molten out of the stone. 3 He [that is, man] setteth an end to darkness, and searcheth out all perfection: the stones of darkness, and the shadow of death. [So man goes in the mines and he plunges the darkness of the mines, that's the idea.] 4 The flood breaketh out from the inhabitant; even the waters forgotten of the foot: they are dried up, they are gone away from men. 5 As for the earth, out of it cometh bread: and under it is turned up as it were fire. 6 The stones of it are the place of sapphires: and it hath dust of gold. 7 There is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen: 8 The lion's whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed by it. 9 He putteth forth his hand upon the rock; he overturneth the mountains by the roots. 10 He cutteth out rivers among the rocks; and his eye seeth every precious thing. 11 He bindeth the floods from overflowing; and the thing that is hid bringeth he forth to light. [So man can find all kinds of good things in the earth.] 12 But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding? 13 Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living. 14 The depth saith, It is not in me: and the sea saith, It is not with me. 15 It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof. 16 It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire. 17 The gold and the crystal cannot equal it: and the exchange of it shall not be for

jewels of fine gold. 18 No mention shall be made of coral, or of pearls: for the price of wisdom is above rubies. 19 The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold. 20 Whence then cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding? 21 Seeing it is hid from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the fowls of the air. 22 Destruction and death say, We have heard the fame thereof with our ears. 23 God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof. 24 For he looketh to the ends of the earth, and seeth under the whole heaven; 25 To make the weight for the winds; and he weigheth the waters by measure. 26 When he made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder: 27 Then did he see it, and declare it; he prepared it, yea, and searched it out. 28 And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.

So that's Job's meditation on wisdom and now we also turn to James chapter 1. James chapter 1 and let's read the first 8 verses.

1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. 2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; 3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. 4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect [complete] and entire, wanting [or lacking] nothing.

Now the words of the text, I will not reread them, verses 5-8.

5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. 6 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. 7 For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. 8 A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

So far we read God's holy and infallible Word. As I said, the text is verses 5 through 8. We'll be working through that passage this evening.

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, last week Sunday we looked at that very remarkable calling that James gives right at the very beginning of the letter to count it all joy when you fall into various trials and temptations. We are to count it pure joy, James writes, when we fall into various trials. And then we also looked last week at why we are to count it all joy when we fall into diverse temptations. We are to count it all joy because God uses these trials to work on us and to work in us and to grow us and mature us in our spiritual walk with the Lord. God is not trying to destroy you through the trial, but God is intending, in fact, to build you up and lead you to that spiritual maturity that every Christian needs. God is going to develop Christian character in you through the trial and conform you more and more to the image of Jesus Christ and that's what we want. That's what the Christian wants in the depth of his being, to be more Christ-like in my thoughts,

my priorities, my behavior. Jesus is the beautiful one and to be molded more and more after the image of Jesus is something that I do and will rejoice in.

That's what we looked at last week but there is an issue here with all of this, there's a difficulty, and that difficulty, of course, is this: trials are hard. Trials can be extremely difficult and as we go through the trials, it is sometimes very hard to keep this right attitude and this right perspective. Sometimes the trials are so hard that we ask in our hearts, "Why, Lord, why this?" We become sometimes discouraged, very discouraged or overwhelmed with grief and we are tempted sometimes in the trial to ignore this truth of God's word and to find our own way of escape, to break God's commandments, take matters into our own hands, maybe even become resentful towards God and sin against him and we lose sight of the truths of God's word. And in the midst then of the trials, what do we so desperately need? We need wisdom, wisdom to think accurately right now in the trial. Wisdom to think in harmony with the instruction of God's Word. Even wisdom to heed this instruction that we received last week Sunday and that's where James is going in the verses that we look at this evening.

The text tonight is closely connected to what we looked at last week and you can see that especially by looking at the end of verse 4 and the beginning of verse 5. At the end of verse 4, we read, "that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing," or lacking, wanting. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." I shall not lack. Lacking nothing. And then in verse 5, he goes on and uses that exact same word, "If any of you lack wisdom." So God is working on you so that you don't lack anything, and if you right now lack wisdom, let them ask of God. So there's an obvious connection between verses 2 through 4 and 5 through 8. James goes on to write about wisdom because that's what we need in order to handle our trials according to God's Word. We need wisdom. Essential element of spiritual maturity and growing in spiritual maturity is wisdom. In order to count our trials joy, or count it all joy when we fall into a trial, we need wisdom.

Well, this is not only where we are in our series on James, this is also very timely for us tonight. Many of our children are going back to school tomorrow and we can ask the question, what's the purpose of school? Children, I can ask you, what's the purpose of school? Well, the purpose of school, whether it be the Christian school, whether it be homeschooling, is this, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works and there you have that word perfect coming out again, complete, entire, that is complete, spiritually well-rounded, equipped and strengthened to live unto God in his life or her life in all good work, so that that child grows up ready with whatever calling or vocation God gives him to live in that calling unto all good works. And what do you need for that? You need wisdom and that's what school is for, to build you up in wisdom's ways, to teach you not only the facts of life, but then also more and more as you grow up, especially into high school then, to learn how to handle the facts of life in a God-honoring way and that's wisdom, as we'll see in a moment. Parents, this passage is a very fitting passage for school. If you need a theme for this year to help your children through this coming school year, James 1 verses 5 through 8 would be a good passage to keep in front of you, and certainly it's a good passage for all of us.

We take as our theme this evening, "Asking Wisdom of God," and we look at that theme under three points. First, the activity itself. Second, the fourfold encouragement. And third, the serious admonition.

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God." The activity we're looking at here is the activity of asking for wisdom and we start off by asking, what is wisdom? And again, I can ask the children, all right, maybe better to ask the young adults, what is wisdom? In the Bible, you have an entire book in which a father teaches his son about wisdom. You know what that book is, the book of Proverbs. The question is, what is wisdom? Well, wisdom is not just being smart. Wisdom is not just having a lot of knowledge. There are a lot of people who have a lot of knowledge. I think of those people who go on the game show Jeopardy, and they seem to know all kinds of facts, and they're quick with their answers but they are not necessarily wise. Wisdom is something different than that. Knowledge is the accumulation of lots of information. Knowledge is intellectual perception. Wisdom is something different. Wisdom is this, actually living in harmony with what you know and what you know to be true. Wisdom is emphatically practical.

Wisdom is the actual living according to the reality of things and when I think of wisdom, I always think of, I usually think of Jesus' parable of the wise man and the foolish man who have to build their houses, and the wise man builds his house on the rock and the foolish man builds his house on the sand. And the question comes, why is the wise man wise and why is the foolish man foolish? Well, the wise man is wise because he knows you're supposed to build your house on a rock, and he goes ahead and he does it. And the foolish man is foolish because he also knows you have to build your house on a rock because otherwise, if the winds come and the waves come and the waters rise and you build your house on the sand, your house is going to wash away. And he knows that, but he doesn't live accordingly and he goes ahead and he builds his house on the sand anyway. That's what makes him a foolish man, because he knows better, but he doesn't actually live according to what he knows. In the book of Psalms, it's the same thing. We sang it from Psalm 53. "The fool hath said in his heart there is no God." Why does it say it that way? Why is he a fool? Well, he's a fool because he knows there's a God. Everyone knows there's a God and that God is to be worshiped, but that fool is a fool because he puts away what he knows to be true and he doesn't live according to it. And that's foolishness. Wisdom is practical.

So wisdom is knowing that God exists and then living accordingly. That's the wisdom part. Wisdom is knowing the reality of things and then living accordingly. How does scripture put it? Over and over again, Job 28, the book of Psalms, we sang it from Psalm 111, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." That's the beginning of wisdom when you know that God is God, that he is great, and all of life must be devoted to him as an act of worship, and then you live accordingly, and you actually reverence him, and you fear him. In your private life, you live to his glory, that is the beginning of wisdom. So wisdom is practical and that's exactly what James is talking about in this passage. We need to count our trials to be joy because we know that the trials work patience. Trials bring us to spiritual maturity and we know this. We know this. But now the challenge is to actually live accordingly and to have our thoughts and our behavior actually controlled

by what we know about this, about what trials are going to do for us. That's wisdom and that's why James goes into this topic of wisdom, starting in verse 5.

So first of all, wisdom is emphatically practical, living according to what we know to be true. A second thing we can say about wisdom is this, wisdom comes from God. As the text says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God." Wisdom comes from God and wisdom is an attribute of God, and as an attribute of God, wisdom is the exact same thing, it is God's perfect ability to work all things to his glory and the salvation of his people, which is what he wants to do. You see, God not only knows all things, God is not only omniscient, and he not only knows how to glorify his name, but also, very practically, God is able to work all things, and he does work all things to the glory of his name. And that's his wisdom. And how does God do that? Well, he does it especially through Jesus Christ and what he does throughout all of history showcasing himself and his mercy and his grace and his justice and his righteousness and his love in and through Jesus Christ, and he's showing his glory and he's bringing glory to his name and all that shows his wisdom because he does it so perfectly, and he brings glory to his name just as he wants and he does it perfectly in your life and in my life. And that's wisdom.

Jesus, we can even say, is the wisdom of God. That's where you see the wisdom of God. As the Belgic Confession says, the Son is the word, wisdom, and image of the Father. Jesus is the wisdom of God come in the flesh. Proverbs chapter 8, that whole chapter where wisdom is speaking, it's actually Jesus speaking. He was with the Father in the beginning. In Colossians 2, we read that in Jesus are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And in 1 Corinthians 1 verse 30, we read that Jesus has been made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. Jesus has been made our wisdom and when Jesus is given to us through the bond of faith, we are made wise with the wisdom of God, at least in a beginning. Apart from Christ, outside of Christ, we are fools. Apart from Christ, we reject who God is as God and we worship ourselves and that's the height of foolishness. But when Jesus regenerates us and he raises us to spiritual life, he imparts his wisdom unto us. He imparts himself to us and by his grace, by his Spirit, we begin to live according to the reality of who God is. We begin worshipping him, obeying his commandments, walking in his ways. And that is wisdom.

And when you have a trial, wisdom looks like this. Okay, what does God's Word say? God's Word says this. First of all, God is always faithful to his people and he is true to every promise that he makes to his people. We've seen his promises fulfilled and he is true. He is unchanging in his faithfulness. God's word also says this, I'm a child of God. I have been made a believer in Jesus Christ. I have been adopted of God. I'm the precious beloved son or daughter of God. Jesus has died for my sins and nothing shall separate me from the love of God in Jesus Christ. God's word says that he is holy in all his ways and righteous in all his works, and God's word says that he will never leave me or forsake me, that he will avert all evil or turn it to my profit. God's word says that I can cry unto him and pour out my heart to him and he will hear and answer. And then wisdom is this, having all these truths and all these thoughts be what govern and shape my attitude and my behavior.

When you have a trial, wisdom looks like this. What else does God's word say? God's word says, trust and obey. God's word says, follow my commandments. I will lead you, but you must walk in the way of my commandments. And then wisdom says, okay, I will not walk in unbelief. I will not trust in myself. I will do what God calls me to do. I will obey his commandments, acknowledging him in all my ways, and he will direct my paths. I will trust his leading. That's wisdom.

And when we lack wisdom, when we're going through a trial and we don't know what to do, what God's Word says is this, ask God for wisdom and for more wisdom. And when we are going through the trial, a trial, and God's Word commands us to count it all joy, then wisdom says, okay, I will trust that God has a purpose in this, a good purpose in this. I don't understand. I don't have any explanation, but this is what God's Word says. He will work a good work through this, and I must walk by faith. That was Job, wasn't it? That was one of his complaints. That's why he writes Job chapter 28, because his comforters, it seemed like they had no wisdom and Job said, what's wisdom? Fearing God. That's what I need to keep doing. That's the idea.

And when we feel the difficulties of the trials and the difficulty of walking by faith, God's Word says, ask for wisdom. If you're going through a trial, right, James is writing to these saints, if you're going through a trial, you're being persecuted, you're being taken advantage of, you're going through poverty and it's very hard and it's challenging your faith, ask God for wisdom. That is, ask God for the grace and the strength to keep on living and thinking according to the truths of his Word and according to his promises that you might not depart from his truth. That's what the text is emphasizing. Ask God. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God and the meaning there in verse 5 is not, well, there might be some here who are lacking wisdom, but there are others here who have perfect wisdom. No. The meaning is this: if any of you lack wisdom, and we all lack wisdom, that's really the idea. James is writing this way because he is encouraging the saints with his tone and his approach, he's encouraging them to examine themselves. Where do I lack wisdom? Do I lack wisdom? If any of you lack wisdom, I need to examine myself. Do I lack wisdom? Where am I lacking wisdom? If I'm going through this trial and I'm struggling to handle it properly and I've just read or heard the pastor read verses 2 through 4 of James chapter 1 and I'm struggling to receive it and submit to it, I need to go to God and ask God for help, for wisdom, to think rightly. And what James also emphasizes is this, we must continually be asking God for wisdom. In the original, the idea is, if any of you lack wisdom right now, in the present, then ask God right now, in the present, for wisdom and keep on doing this at every moment. You're lacking wisdom, and you need to keep asking God for wisdom.

Well, looking at what James writes here, there's something that needs to be driven home to us this evening, and that's this, we need to ask ourselves, I need to ask myself, is this what we are doing? Are we praying and are we asking God for wisdom? Just think of it this way. If you know that God is the God of wisdom, and if you know, as we're going to see in a moment, that God gives wisdom to all who ask of it, who ask it of him, and if you know that you need wisdom, and yet you're not praying for it, that's the very definition of a fool. You know something is true but you're not living accordingly. Are

we praying for wisdom? Young people and young adults, high schoolers and college students, those in the workplace, those who are dating, those newly married, you need wisdom. Maybe I'm picking on you, but you are also, in a very real way, maturing still in your faith. And we all are. But through all your experiences, you have many new experiences, you have many trials in your life, and you need wisdom. Are you praying for wisdom? Busy parents in the home as you start another school year, are you praying for wisdom? Those who have suffered tragedy in this past week, those who have had very challenging circumstances, and we are struggling to think accurately about who God is and what God is doing, and all kinds of questions arise in our mind, and now Satan comes along and tries to tempt us to doubt and sin, we need wisdom. We need comfort but that comfort so often comes, doesn't it, in the way of shaping our thoughts so that we keep thinking in a wise way. Those with financial stresses, those with great riches, those with disappointments, you need wisdom. You need the grace to think accurately about your situation in life as a child of God and you need the grace to have the right perspective when it comes to the trials of life. You need wisdom.

Are we praying for it? Children, you remember Solomon when he was just a young man, and I don't think he was that young anymore, but that's how he spoke, "I'm but a child." And his father David died, and Solomon was about to become king and God visited Solomon in a dream by night and asked, "Solomon, what shall I give you?" And Solomon knew his need. He knew what God was calling him to do, to be king, king over God's people. He knew that he was rather inexperienced. He knew these people were a great multitude, there would be many challenges and hardships. He knew he needed wisdom. "Lord, give me wisdom that I might rule this, thy so great a people." See, that's the prayer of the child of God, and that's the prayer that also pleases God and God even said that to Solomon and you remember how that went. Beloved, what a call to prayer this is. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God."

Well, not only does James give us this call to prayer, but James also gives us some very great encouragement. He gives us a four-fold encouragement in the text. Let's look at the text again. We're looking at verse 5. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." I've got four encouragements this passage gives us to go to God in prayer. First of all, consider that we are praying to God who, you know, to speak as a man, who just happens to be the God of all wisdom, infinite wisdom. who knows all things, who knows exactly how to work all things to achieve his purposes, and he does it perfectly. He knows who he is as God, the only one who is worthy of all praise and glory and honor. He knows that, and he lives perfectly according to that reality. All wisdom is his and this wisdom of God is not only revealed in creation and in his providence, and we see it, but this wisdom of God is especially revealed in his work of salvation. He magnifies his own name in the most glorious way, so that he makes a way of salvation that was not only impossible with man, but that was even inconceivable with man. He finds a way to punish our sins without punishing us whom he has chosen to love from eternity. He finds a way of showing us mercy while at the exact same time satisfying his justice perfectly. And he does it by himself, taking upon himself our flesh and blood and in that flesh and blood, living and dying for us as our head and representative.

And to those who know this, to those who are saved and who have seen God in the face of Jesus Christ, this is the wisdom of God. The gospel of salvation, it's foolishness to the world, but it is the wisdom of God to us, his people. And we look at the gospel of salvation, we look at God's eternal decree, and we look at how he works everything perfectly and he fulfills all his promises all the way right away from the very beginning. "I will send the seed of the woman to crush the head of the serpent." And that promise is expanded on and added to, built upon throughout the Old Testament, and then he fulfills his word perfectly, and we look at all of this and what do we say? Well, the Apostle Paul looks at all of this, he looks at our salvation in the book of Romans and at the end of Romans 11, this is what the apostle is inspired to say. "Oh, the depths of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counselor, or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed back to him again? No one, for of him, of him and through him and to him are all things to whom be glory forever." And the point that I'm now making is this, the simple point is this, when you go to God in prayer asking for wisdom, you are going to the right place. That's the first encouragement, when you pray to God for wisdom, you're going to the right person for wisdom. Let that be an encouragement.

Second of all, consider what the text says, "let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally." Notice the word men is in italics there, which means in the King James that in the original it's not there, but it's added to help us read it. He giveth to all liberally. That's what it says and the idea is he gives to all who ask liberally, and the word liberal means it doesn't have to do with politics, but the word liberally means freely, without conditions, without ulterior motives. He simply gives because it is his pleasure to give. He gives simply as the deacons are to give with simplicity. He gives freely. He is very generous. He's the God of infinite wisdom, and he is the God who gives of that infinite wisdom freely.

And in the original, the language is even emphatic. The language is like this, "let him ask of the giving God." That's who God is. That's the character of God. He is a giving God. He's the God who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son to die on the cross for our sins. He gives nations for us, Ethiopia and Seba, for his people. He freely gives us together all things with Christ. This is his character, so that even God in the flesh taught his disciples, it is more blessed to give than to receive. That's the disposition of God. He delights in giving.

So ask for wisdom, because he gives to all liberally. What a word for us, beloved, isn't that? Here on the earth, we can be so stingy at times, can't we? And even as Christians, we ought to think about that, am I reflecting Christ because that's not who my God is. My God is the God who gives liberally. Yes, God leads me through trials, and these trials are hard but again, God's not doing that because he hates me or he wants to destroy me or because he's a hard master. No, God is doing that because he wants to give me something. Precisely, he wants to give me more. He wants to give me spiritual maturity.

And where I lack wisdom, where I need help in the trial, God will give that. He delights in giving, so ask him. That's the second encouragement.

The third encouragement is this, "let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not." That means this, God does not rebuke you for asking for wisdom. God is not like a father, maybe when his child is coming to him asking for money. "You need wisdom? I gave you wisdom last week. You need some more wisdom again this week? What'd you do with the wisdom I gave you last week? You wear me out with all your asking for wisdom." That's not how God interacts with his people. God is a God who delights in giving wisdom. He gives it freely. In this respect, God is no respecter of persons. Whoever asks him for wisdom freely receives it and so don't be bashful. Be bold as you go to the throne of grace, asking for wisdom because he's the God who does not rebuke. He takes pleasure in this petition.

The fourth encouragement is this, "and it shall be given him," and that's quite something, but that naturally flows from everything that's been said. God is the God of wisdom. God is generous in giving wisdom. He is patient with those who are asking for wisdom. He never becomes weary of their asking for wisdom. God will give wisdom to those who ask it of him. This is God's promise. As Jesus says in Matthew 7, everyone that asketh, receiveth. Do you lack wisdom? Is it hard for you to put into practice the truths of God's Word? To count it all joy when I fall into a difficult trial? Ask God for wisdom. He will, he has promised to give you this wisdom. That's a great encouragement especially, as I said, as we come off of what we looked at last week's Sunday evening. This is encouragement.

But now, as we move on, we see that James has more to say. Starting in verse 6, James emphasizes the need for faith, "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways." And notice that in verse 8, the word "is" is in italics. You could read verse 8 like this, "he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." The serious admonition is this, we must ask in faith. We must ask God believing in his Word, believing that for Jesus' sake, God will give us this wisdom. And not only that, but we must ask in faith also from this perspective that we really want wisdom, that we want true wisdom. We do want to count our trials to be all joy. We do want to follow God's Word. We love God's Word. We want to live in harmony with what it teaches. And out of that faith, living with that sincere desire, we're going to ask God for wisdom. "Let him ask in faith."

Well, James spends three verses on this whole topic, and there's kind of a question as to what James is actually getting at, and I think there's two ways to understand this warning that he gives, and these two ways to understand the passage go together, all right? First, James could be writing to those who are struggling with doubt, all right? They believe God's Word. They know that trials are for their profit. But it's just hard. And it feels hard to believe that this Word of God can be true when the trial just seems so hard. Our faith is being challenged. Our faith feels weak and we are struggling, maybe even struggling to believe that our prayers are going to do us any good. So we even ask ourselves, is there

even a point to praying this? And so some would say that James is writing to those kinds of people, and he's writing this, "Don't doubt, but trust God's Word perfectly and fully." Well, there certainly is truth to the fact that we must pray without doubting. Doubting is unbelief coming to expression, and we must push that unbelief away and fight against it. And there's an important word here for us to pray confidently, pray as Jesus taught us to pray with childlike reverence and confidence, "Our Father who art in heaven." He's my Father and he is the one who will answer my prayer.

So pray in true faith without wavering but second, I think James also has his focus on another category of people. He has his eye on those who are torn between two desires. They are wavering between two desires. On the one hand, they desire the security and the advantages of being a child of God. They like the idea of heaven. But on the other hand, they really don't want to put away their sin. They don't want to grow in spiritual maturity, and they don't really want to go through those trials of life that are going to bring that spiritual maturity. They know that there are advantages to living a religious life, perhaps especially when all their family members are confessing Christians as well, but they also want to live in sin and they can't really make up their minds about what they want. They're like the people in Elijah's day who were halting between two positions. They wanted to have God as their God, but they also liked the worship style and the earthly pleasures of Baal worship. And I think that also is the stern warning that James is giving here, his eye is on both groups of people, but perhaps especially the second group of people. "Don't waver. Don't be that double-minded man. Don't be those who can't make up their mind about what they actually want."

It's like that story of St. Augustine. Maybe you've heard of that little story about the prayer that St. Augustine made as the Lord continued to expose his sins to him and St. Augustine struggled, especially with sexual sins. And Augustine prayed, "Lord, deliver me from my sins but not yet." And I believe that's exactly what James is referring to, especially those who say they have faith, but they don't care to show forth the works that are the evidence of a true faith. They're always compromising with sin. They want to remain spiritually immature and James says they are unstable in all their ways. They don't amount to anything. You can't trust them for anything. You don't even know how they're going to react to you when you approach them with something. Are they going to act as a Christian should act, or are they going to act like an unbeliever acts? At best, they are spiritually immature. At worst, they are a fraud. And James writes, a man who acts that way, who is not fully honest, who is not fully honestly committed to trusting God, but a man who continues to live a double life and who's double-minded and he doesn't want to put away his sin, James says, don't let that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.

James says that man's prayers are not heard. That man's prayers are offensive to God. That's what he says. That's why it comes out so strongly in verse 7, "let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." No, who is the man whose prayers are pleasing to God? The man who puts all his trust in Jesus Christ, embraces Jesus as his full and free salvation, who knows the joy of salvation, who has a heart that truly loves God and truly desires to serve God with his whole heart, and his heart is united in praising

God. He truly wants to count his trials all joy, and he truly wants the wisdom to do so, and he's praying as the psalmist prays, "Unite my heart to fear thy name, unite my whole being and all that I am to trust thy truth, thy name to fear." We're not going to sing it tonight but, "Teach me with undivided heart to trust thy truth, thy name to fear." That's the prayer that will be heard and of course, that's the prayer that only arises out of Jesus Christ.

Well, beloved, I think we see here how James is encouraging us once again in spiritual maturity. Put away the sins of the flesh. Put away that boasting that you have faith if you are not evidencing the fruits of faith. Put away that boasting. And where you have trials and you are struggling, be encouraged. Be encouraged, first of all, in this, as we considered last week, God has a good purpose in your trial. He wants to bring you further along the road of spiritual maturity. And be encouraged, second of all, in this, where you need help in the trial, where you lack wisdom in dealing faithfully with the trial, keeping the right perspective and living accordingly, ask God, and he will give you the wisdom you need. This is another promise God gives. God promises it, "Ask for it in true faith, and I will give it to you. I will give it to you liberally." What an encouragement, beloved and what a glorious God we serve. In that way, too, let this preaching and let this time this afternoon be a time of worship. He is a good and glorious God. Amen.

Let us pray.

Our Father, thou art the God of all wisdom. thou art wisdom itself. We look to thee in the name of Jesus Christ, who is wisdom come in the flesh. Give us him. Give us more of thyself, that thy Word might truly shape how we think and how we behave, that we can and we do count it all joy when we fall into various trials. We pray, Father, give us the grace to exercise the gift of prayer faithfully, to be diligent and faithful in prayer. May we experience how thy Word is true and when we prove thy promises, even this promise, thou dost show thyself to be the God who gives even more liberally than we can even ask or think. Bless this preaching then to our hearts and to our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.