

## Godly Wisdom

- We are studying the book of James (actually a letter) and today we begin a whole new section of this letter that focuses on wisdom and speech.
- James, the half-brother of Jesus, was writing to Jesus-followers about their life and conduct. The entire theme of his letter is that AUTHENTIC FAITH PRODUCES AUTHENTIC DEEDS. Our actions reflect what we really believe about who God is and what he is like.
- James begins the next section of his letter with the following question:

*James 3:13 Who is wise and understanding among you?*

- If I was to ask that question, what would your answer be?
- It's actually seems to be presumptuous to assume you have wisdom, and probably the ones with the most wisdom don't even think they are wise.
- You might think of the wise man with the long beard who lives at the top of the mountain that pilgrims seek about wisdom.
- So let's make it more specific.
- Can you think of decisions you have made in the past that you wish you had exercised more wisdom in?
- Can you think of any regrets from your past because of decisions you made that in hindsight you wish you had made differently?
- That relationship you should have said no to. That purchase you shouldn't have made. That job that seems so right but turned out to be . . . Those words that came out of your mouth that you would have given anything to get back. I wish I had . . . I should have known better than that. If only . . .
- Why is that? Some of our bad decisions are the kind we simply laugh at while others are life altering, and sometimes it feels like, life-wrecking decisions.
- One thing I know about you.
- You participated in 100% of your decisions. Good or bad.
- You were there. You decided. I decided.
- And way too often for many of us, we were faced with a decision and we were our own worst enemies.
- If we're honest, we frequently knew better. Or we convinced ourselves that something was the right choice even though we didn't start there.
- We convinced (or allowed ourselves to be convinced) of something that when we look back we realize that we knew better.
- What does it look like to make wise decisions, the kind of decisions that don't lead to regret?
  
- James realized that many Christ-followers were making unwise decisions. That is bad enough, but worse was that many of them were bragging about these bad decisions. They were promoting them as good decisions when they were completely missing the real wise choices.
- Since the topic of this morning is wisdom, what is it?
- The wise person is not the person who knows the most.
- There are many, many smart people who are well educated and know a lot that are really not wise.
- Some people think it comes from experience, from life.
- There is a reason there are no 15 year olds that you would consider wise. In fact, the statement when we see younger people who are acting righty is that they are "wise beyond their years."

- There is something about experience that seems to be necessary for wisdom.
- But knowing and experiencing more is not a guarantee of wisdom. We all know old people who we would never go to for insight.
- Wisdom is where theory and practice intersect. Wisdom is knowledge in action. It comes from the experience of applying or being involved with the application of knowledge.
- The problem is that that does not guarantee real wisdom.
- There is a “wisdom” that deceives. It sounds good. It makes for a good internal argument. It might even help us sell ourselves on something. But in the end, it leaves us with regrets.
- What is true wisdom? **TRUE WISDOM IS RIGHT KNOWLEDGE RIGHTLY APPLIED.**
- Knowledge of God. Knowledge of ourselves. Knowledge of our world. Then using this knowledge the way God intends.

*James 3:13 Who is wise and understanding among you?*

- How can you make wise decisions? What does it look like to develop and live a wise life?
- He does this by contrasting deceitful wisdom and true wisdom.
- He looks at the source of true wisdom, the nature of true wisdom and impact of true wisdom.
- **TRUE WISDOM IS RIGHT KNOWLEDGE RIGHTLY APPLIED.**

*Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. 14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. 17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. 18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.*

- In the end, we desire to make wise decisions.

## I. The source of true wisdom.

### • **Wisdom that deceives**

*15 Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.*

- James says that the wisdom that should not be considered real wisdom has three things that characterize where it comes from.
- Earthly (world) – this kind of wisdom finds its origins in in our world. The culture we live in decides what is wise or not. It comes from the human mind and is influenced by the society in which we live.
- This is why this kind of wisdom is changeable.
- Unspiritual (us) – there is no higher view than what we can see or figure out. It is self-focused and fills our temporary passions. It is self-oriented.
- Demonic (the enemy) – These are the whispers in our ears and minds that come from the enemy. Satan wants us to believe what is simply not true or is, in the end, damaging to us.

### • **True wisdom**

- James contrasts this with wisdom that comes from heaven.
- The source of true wisdom is not of this world.
- This does not mean that people cannot have things to contribute. God speaks through people and uses people.
- But the origination of true wisdom is God.
- Wisdom throughout the bible is said to begin with a fear of God.
- The implication is that we must be listening. Seeking God. Truly trying to understand the mind of God when we make decisions.
- What is the source of the wisdom that you are following?
- At a basic level, who is telling us what to do?

- Is it the culture around you that simply is reflecting the rules of the day?
- Is it your own selfish desires and wants that are spurring this?
- Is it the enemy?
- Or is it God himself? Flowing from a relationship with him?
- The answer might be obvious, but it also might not. It sounds right, but perhaps I am fooling myself. Perhaps it's just what I want?
- That's why we also need to look at:

## II. The content of true wisdom.

- **Wisdom that deceives**

*14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.*

- Once again, James use some key words to describe this kind of wisdom.
- Bitter envy – the idea behind this is a preoccupation with self. It is making decisions wanted to have more, to have more than others. It is not happy with others and does not put a priority on what is best for others, only self.
- It's that whisper, "Do it, you deserve to be happy." "They need to get what's coming to them."
- Selfish ambition – this is related to the first one, but hold the idea of a spirit of competition. There is a desire to look good, a sense of rivalry. Your decision from wisdom frequently ends up hurting others.
- Boasting – this is pride. Being all about self and what's in it for me. It brags that it knows what is going on more than others. It is unwilling to listen to coaching or instruction. It denies that there might be more to it than what is in front of us.
- Any wisdom that leads you to focus on yourself to the detriment of yourself or others is a deceitful wisdom. Any wisdom that puts you in the center of your world, that puts you ahead by putting others behind, that is driven by a dissatisfaction with life, is a wisdom that will leave you worse off than before.
- On the other hand, godly wisdom looks very different.

- **True wisdom**

*17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.*

- Pure – means unmixed. Undivided loyalty. This kind of wisdom puts God front and center. It is incapable of producing anything evil. The placement in the list in the Greek means that the read of the list is actually a by-product of this.
- Peace loving – not combative. Seeking the good of others.
- Considerate – describes the kind of person who though wronged and has the right to not bend to others, is willing to forego that right.
- Submissive – is to be accommodating, to be open to reason and willing to submit my desires to others.
- Full of mercy and good fruit – it leads to positive results in the life of the person exercising true wisdom and in the people around them.
- Impartial – non judgmental.
- Sincere – genuine, lacking hypocrisy or double standard.
- Do you notice that deceitful wisdom is focused on self, while godly wisdom involves others?
- Decisions that are made with pure motives. Decisions that reflect a desire for the good of others, that seeks to listen, that is open to discussion, to being corrected. That is godly wisdom and lead to making good decisions.
- In fact, James lays out:

### III. The results of true wisdom.

- **Wisdom that deceives**

16 *For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.*

- Self seeking wisdom leads to chaos.
- This same word is used and can go from turbulent all the way up to violent sedition. It leads to instability.
- When decisions are made on this, it leads to all kinds of other evil practices.
- You already know this. Many of you have lives of financial chaos because of decisions you made or are still making that are not wise in regards to your money.
- For some of you, the chaos of family at holiday time is a direct result of unwise relationship decisions. Some of you made unwise decisions that led to having to compensate with an even more unwise decision and now you are so deep in some sinful practices that you cannot figure out how you got there.
- The wisdom that deceives never leads you where it promises and the fruit it produces is poison.
- James bookends the paragraph by showing the impact of decisions made from godly wisdom.

- **True wisdom**

13 *Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.*

- Godly wisdom leads to good deeds. Deeds that are beneficial to others. When we make decisions based on godly wisdom, it shows in how we live.
- It makes us humble. Godly wisdom never leads to pride or arrogance. That's because it looks to others. It considers others. It listens to others. It is focused on others more than self.
- James finishes his discussion on wisdom with a curious statement.

18 *Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.*

- Peace & righteousness – The idea is that living a life of true wisdom leads to peace and wholeness, particularly in relationships and specifically within the church.
- It does not mean compromise, or an absence of problems, but it says that peace is the ultimate goal of true wisdom, and wisdom reaches its fullest potential in the midst of peace.
  
- So what are we to do?
- I heard a saying from Andy Stanley that liked when it comes to this whole teaching.
- It is simply this. When you are making decisions, “pay attention to the tension.”
- When you go to make decisions and something inside of you kind of balks at it, or pushes back, or feels off, press pause.
- Don't rush ahead: Ask three questions:
- 1) Where is the wisdom to make this decision coming from?
- Am I just hearing from those around me who are telling me what I want to hear? Am I succumbing to culture? Is Satan whispering lies? Am I trying to sell myself on something?
- 2) Is this primarily about me and my wants?
- Is it self-focused? Are you just trying to escape? Fill a temporary need? Does this ignore the impact on others? Will it help them?
- 3) Will this decision benefit me to my long term detriment or the detriment of others?
- Will it lead to good deeds? To peace? To righteousness?
- True wisdom is the God-given ability to apply our knowledge of God's words into our lives to produce fruits of righteousness and spiritual maturity.
- **TRUE WISDOM IS RIGHT KNOWLEDGE RIGHTLY APPLIED.**
- Here's the thing. Wisdom is like dominos.

- Decisions made with true wisdom lead to more decisions of true wisdom which lead to more and more. This leads to greater peace, greater righteousness, better relationships, fewer regrets.
- Decisions made with deceitful wisdom lead to more bad decisions. These lead to more selfish focus, to greater chaos, to sinful actions which in turn lead to more bad decisions.
- The good news is we get to choose. Make the first good decision. Then make the second. In time, it will change everything.