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Where to Get Wisdom James 3:13-18 Part Four

Let us read **James 3:13-18**, “**Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. (14) But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. (15) This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. (16) For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. (17) But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. (18) And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.**” The focus of this passage is on wisdom.

Those who are truly wise are those who have been genuinely born again. Those who are truly wise are those who have embraced Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior who the Scriptures tell us is “**the power of God and the wisdom of God.**” What great potential we have!! Because of our relationship with Christ we, and we alone, can live life as life should be lived. Because of our relationship with Christ, we and we alone, can live life abundantly. And therefore we alone can be considered the truly wise.

How can we nurture our relationship with Christ so that we will continually enjoy more of that abundance? How can we nurture our relationship with Christ so that we will continually see more and more of His wisdom manifested in and through out lives?

First of all we nurture our relationship with Christ and draw upon His wisdom by humbly meditating and carefully applying His word to our lives. **Ps. 119:97-100, “O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day. (98) Thy commandments make me wiser than my enemies, For they are ever mine. (99) I have more insight than all my teachers, For Thy testimonies are my meditation. (100) I understand more than the aged, Because I have observed Thy precepts.”**

We nurture our relationship with Christ and draw upon His wisdom by humbly coming to Him in prayer. **James 1:5, “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”**

Those who have received Jesus as their Lord and Savior have received the power of God and the wisdom of God. We have within us an infinite supply of wisdom. Let us get serious about tapping into these resources and let us live life as it should be lived, humbly bowing ourselves before the Lord by spending time in His word and coming to His throne of grace in prayer.

This is extremely important that we do this. Not only in order to live life to the fullest but also to assure ourselves that we in fact are the possessors of Christ’s life.

The theme of the Epistle of James is “Tests of Living Faith.” This epistle was written so that we might know whether or not we are saved or not saved.

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And **James 3:13-18** presents to us the sixth test that we encounter in this epistle. We have called this test the “Wisdom Test.”

How can we know whether or not we are saved? How can we know if we are truly wise? We can know this by seeing the wisdom of Christ manifested in our lives. This is why James gives us the challenge that we found in **v. 13**, “**Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom.** You will know if you are truly wise if your life is characterized by Christ’s wisdom. Even more specifically you will know this if your life is characterized by Christ’s gentleness.

What we should not see is a false wisdom. Therefore, after James gave us a specific challenge in **v. 13**, he then enters into an extended discussion of false wisdom in **vv. 14-16**, “**But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. (15) This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. (16) For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.**” From this passage we learn that false wisdom is motivated by “**bitter jealousy and selfish ambition.**” We also learn from this passage that false wisdom is earthly, natural and demonic. Or in other words, those who possess false wisdom are cut off from God’s resources. They are oblivious to their predicament. And the forces of darkness are committed to keeping them that way.

What is the result of false wisdom in people’s lives? Look at **v. 16**, “**For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.**” One of the words that came out of WW II was “snafu,” which is an acronym for “situation normal, all fouled up.” According to the Chicago Tribune, the Pentagon has now scrapped that word for a new one, “fubb,” “Fouled up beyond belief.” Sadly, both words describe the life of any individual, family or church where the false wisdom of the world prevails rather than the wisdom that can be found in Christ. It is a miserable thing to have our lives caught up in this kind of wisdom.

I am sure there are people here this weekend who from their own experience understand the misery that false wisdom produces. You may have, in your past, by your choices, aborted babies, chosen to be intoxicated or to come under the influence of drugs, or given your body sexually to persons outside the context of marriage. You may have, through your pride and self serving ways, contributed to the breakdown of a marriage or marriages. You may have, through your lack of personal restraint, alienated children. All these things are the product of the so-called wisdom of the world, a false wisdom which produces only misery. I am sure there are people here this weekend who understand the futility and emptiness that results from drawing upon a wisdom that is not found in Christ. Who have pursued pleasure and achieved it. Who have pursued career success and achieved it. Who have pursued financial success and achieved it. But having achieved these things they have found no real satisfaction, no real, true, genuine fulfillment. False wisdom, when it runs our lives, can only produce a life filled with either misery, futility or both.

And it is very good that James in **vv. 14-16** reminds us that the only thing that false wisdom is good for is to produce disorder and every evil thing. Why is this so good? Because it reinforces in my mind, and hopefully in your mind, that this is a place that we do not want to visit again. But rather, we need to press forward to something much better.

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In 1845 Royal Navy Rear Admiral Sir John Franklin and 138 specially chosen officers and men left England to find the Northwest Passage. They sailed in two three-masted ships with the daunting named the Erebus (the dark place, according to Greek mythology, through which souls pass on their way to Hades) and the Terror. Each ship was equipped with an auxiliary steam engine and a twelve-day supply of coal, should steam power be needed sometime during the anticipated two to three year voyage. But instead of loading additional coal, each ship made room for a 1,200 volume library, an organ, and full, elegant place settings for all - china, cut-glass goblets, and sterling flatware. The officers' family crests and initials were engraved on the heavy handles. "The technology of the Franklin expedition," says Annie Dillard, "... was adapted only to the conditions in the Royal Navy officers clubs in England. The Franklin expedition stood on its dignity." The only clothing which these proud Englishmen took on the expedition were the uniforms and greatcoats of Her Majesty's Navy.

The ships sailed off amidst Imperial pomp and glory. Two months later a British whaler met the two ships in the Lancaster Sound, and reports were carried back to England of the expedition's high spirits. These were the last Europeans to see them alive.

Search parties funded by Lady Jane Franklin began to piece together a tragic history from information gathered from Eskimos. Some had seen men pushing a wooden boat across the ice. Others had found a boat, perhaps the same boat, and the remains of thirty-five men at a place now named Starvation Cove. Another thirty bodies were found in a tent at Terror Bay.

For the next twenty years search parties recovered skeletons from the frozen waste. Accompanying one clump of bodies were place settings of sterling silver flatware bearing the officer's initials and family crests. The officer's remains were still dressed in their fine, buttoned blue uniforms, some with silk scarves in place.

The Franklin expedition was a monumental failure by all estimations. It was foolishly conceived, planned, equipped, and carried out. The expedition itself accomplished absolutely nothing. Yet it is universally agreed that it was the turning point in Arctic explorations.

In a similar fashion the same dynamics have proven true in our own lives. Many of us, based on the wisdom of the world, set off perhaps at a young age on a journey foolishly conceived, planned, equipped and carried out. And it was marked by disastrous results. But even though this time period in our lives may have been characterized by personal futility and misery, the Lord used it as a turning point setting us off in a new direction. No longer basing our lives on the wisdom of the world but rather on the wisdom that comes down from above. A wisdom that can only be found in Christ. Certainly none of us here who have been set free from our past would ever want to relive it. But I can be thankful for it in light of the fact that God has used it as a stepping stone to enjoying a life that is based on the wisdom from above. This is what we are going to introduce this weekend.

Let us read vv. 17-18, **"But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. (18) And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.**

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This certainly sounds a lot better than the false wisdom that we have been examining in vv. 14-16.

“The wisdom from above” refers to God’s own divine wisdom, which He graciously bestows on those who trust in His Son. There can be no “wisdom from above” apart from a saving relationship to Jesus Christ, who is Himself “the power of God and the wisdom of God” and who brings sinners into eternal communion with Him. If you are a believer here this morning you are truly rich in wisdom. All the wisdom of the universe is within you in the person of Christ. All we have to do is to mine it!!

This weekend we will begin our examination of the wisdom that is from above. First of all we will look at the motivation for this wisdom.

The Motivation for the Wisdom from Above

This section of verses begins with this statement, “But the wisdom from above is first pure” At the core or at the heart of the wisdom that is from above is the desire to be pure.

The word “pure” (HAGNOS) carries the idea of being free of contamination or defilement and was used by the ancient Greeks of a cleansing ceremony whereby a worshiper was made pure and worthy enough to approach the gods. On the temple of Aesculapius in Epidaurus is the following inscription: “He who would enter the divine temple must be pure.” Even the pagans realized that deity should only be approached with a pure heart. Intellectually the necessity of purity in approaching the gods in the case of a polytheistic religion, or the God in a monotheistic religion, is not something that people hotly debate. But we need to appreciate the fact that those who possess the “wisdom that is from above”, or the wisdom that is in Christ, do not embrace the need of purity in approaching the Lord simply as an intellectual necessity but they actually personally desire it. It becomes a driving force of their lives.

Before the Lord shined the light of the gospel of Christ into my life the thought of being a better person or living my life with purity was a novel idea and I certainly would play with it from time to time. But it certainly had not become the driving force of my life. But this is exactly what begins to happen when a person turns their back on the wisdom of the world and embraces Christ as their Lord and Savior. They will begin to evidence a much greater desire to be pure. It is the mark of someone who is truly saved.

Now listen to the Apostle John in **1 John 3:1-3**, “**See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. (2) Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. (3) And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.**” This desire for purity is not the exception among professing believers but the rule.

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Not only should we expect to see this hungering for purity in our moral victories but perhaps even more so in our personal defeats. Certainly we saw this to be the case with King David . Listen to the words of David in **Ps. 51**. These words were recorded by David after he was confronted by Nathan the prophet concerning his sin with Bathsheba. **“Be gracious to me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Thy compassion blot out my transgressions. (2) Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. (3) For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. (4) Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, and done what is evil in Thy sight, So that Thou art justified when Thou dost speak, and blameless when Thou dost judge. (5) Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me. (6) Behold, Thou dost desire truth in the innermost being, And in the hidden part Thou wilt make me know wisdom. (7) Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. (8) Make me to hear joy and gladness, Let the bones which Thou hast broken rejoice. (9) Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. (10) Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”**

And certainly this is exactly what we will experience as the wisdom which is from above, which is the wisdom of Christ, becomes more and more evident in our lives. And this hunger for purity will continue to be operative in the midst of our personal struggles to live holy lives.

We see this same hungering for purity in the midst of human weakness in Paul’s life. Listen to the words of **Rom. 7:15-22**, **“For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man.”** We can’t help it. If we have received the wisdom from above, we will continue to press forward toward purity both in good times and in bad.

CONCLUSION

All of us at some point in our lives were living in a manner that was being dictated by the wisdom of the world. A wisdom which was false because in reality it was not wisdom at all. Rather than producing good things in our lives all it could produce was either misery, futility or both.

But even though that time in our lives may have been very unpleasant, perhaps even painful, the Lord used that time to break us. He used that time to humble us. He used that time to prepare us to embrace Jesus as our Lord and Savior. He used that time in our lives to prepare us to embrace the wisdom of God and the power of God.

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And when we receive Him, when we receive the wisdom from above, “it is first pure.” At its very core it yearns, it longs to please the Lord.

Listen to the words of the song entitled, “**Higher Ground.**” “ I’m pressing on the upward way, new heights I’m gaining every day; still praying as I’m onward bound, Lord plant my feet on higher ground; My heart has no desire to stay where doubts arise and fears dismay; though some may dwell where these abound My prayer, my aim is higher ground; I want to live above the world, though Satan’s darts at me are hurled; for faith has caught the joyful sound, the song of saints on higher ground. I want to scale the utmost height and catch a gleam of glory bright; but still I’ll pray, ‘til heaven I’ve found ‘Lord, lead me on to higher ground.’” Is this what you want? To live your life in the pursuit of purity. If it is then you need to embrace Jesus as your Lord and Savior and then continue to nourish your relationship with Him by spending extended periods of time before Him humbly studying His Word and seeking His will in prayer.

What is the motivation of the wisdom that is from above? It is first pure, at its core and its heart those who possess long for higher ground and this is what drives their life.