

Ben Libby

Sermon

September 26th, 18th Sunday after Pentecost

To the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the One who is, who was, and is to come, to Him be glory forever amen. (Rev 1:8 NKJ)

Our sermon text for this Sunday is taken from the prophet James, chapter 3, the last 6 verses:

Who among you is wise and intelligent? Let him by his good way of living show that he does things in wise humility. 14 But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not boast and lie, contrary to the truth. 15 This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but it is worldly, unspiritual, and demonic. 16 In fact, where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and every bad practice. 17 But the wisdom that comes from above is first pure, then also peaceful, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, and sincere. 18 And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who practice peace.

This is the Word of the LORD!!!

Mercy, Grace, and peace are yours through your God and Father, and through His Son, Jesus Christ, true God and Man, dear fellow Sons and Daughters of the King...

How is wisdom determined? It's a hard quality to quantify. And yet, we certainly have criteria for it. When you're in school, often Grade Point Average determines it. Once you graduate, perhaps it is the number and kinds of degrees that speak to it. Once you get into the work force, the level of professional success makes a case for it. The amount of money you make working might also say something about your wisdom.

But the thing is, you can have high levels of all these things, and it doesn't mean squat in terms of real wisdom! The person who is attributed to being the "wisest of all time" is often thought to be King Solomon. What did he say about wisdom? **"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. (Pro 9:10 NKJ)**

The problem is that there are different kinds of wisdom. Those things that I previously mentioned are ways that the world determine wisdom. But God has different criteria than the world does. And His criteria are far better than the world's. After all, He says, **"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. 9 "For as the**

heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts. (Isa 55:8-9 NKJ)

We like to compare ourselves to others. We do this in just about every aspect of life. But when it comes to wisdom, it does not matter how wise you are in comparison to anyone else. The only thing that matters is "Am I wise?". What kind of wise are you? To determine this, we need to ask certain questions. Where is your wisdom from? What does your wisdom say and do? Whom does your wisdom reflect? This is how real wisdom is determined, and it is the only kind of wisdom that matters, because real wisdom doesn't produce degrees, success, or riches, rather real wisdom produces salvation. And so, we pray: LORD, SANTICIFY US BY YOUR TRUTH, YOUR WORD IS TRUTH, AMEN!

The book of James is a book of the Bible like no other. It's thought that it was written early in the Church's history, perhaps the earliest of all the New Testament. The reason it's so unique is the purpose for which James is writing and the audience to whom he is writing. He addresses this letter to the

dispersion, that is, Jewish Christians scattered all abroad. These were “mature” Christians, and these were Christians who were going through hardships.

The whole point of this letter is one of “Put your faith into practice”. He doesn’t really address how one is to be justified before God, rather he focuses on how one is justified before men, that is, how one can best show their light of faith. It is a book which emphasizes how we should act now that we have been saved by faith in Jesus. He points out that a saving faith is an active faith. A simple knowledge of Jesus isn’t enough. Faith without works is dead. That’s true because true faith naturally bears fruits.

Who among you is wise and intelligent?

James shifts from faith to wisdom, another topic which scripture says a lot about. Faith and wisdom are very similar. You can make the case that they are the same thing. Wisdom is faith in Jesus. But from the point of view of the world, faith and wisdom are polar opposites. They say that we have blind faith in an ancient book. They would claim that they have wisdom derived from science and technology. This is incorrect of course. First, they too have faith, even though they are uncomfortable saying that. They have faith in mankind and its “collective wisdom”. But that is just the blind leading the blind. Secondly, they don’t have real wisdom. The only way to get wisdom is by faith in the LORD. Like Solomon said, **The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.**

Faith and wisdom are certainly related. They are similar in remarkable ways. #1 They are both given from above. Faith is something that can only be given to us by the Holy Spirit. Earlier, James wrote, **Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights (Jam 1:17 NKJ)** There are no greater gifts than faith and wisdom.

#2 Faith and wisdom are both similar in that while they can both be possessed, yet they are both only displayed by works. We cannot see into the heart. But we can see outward deeds. You can have faith that Jesus is your Savior, but if you really believe that you

will reflect that by how you act. Similarly, you can have wisdom, but if your actions aren’t very wise, then how wise actually are you?

#3 Both faith and wisdom reflect Jesus. Solomon might have been the wisest man. That is until Jesus came along. He is the Word incarnate. Wherever He went, people were amazed at what He both said and did. When we have fruits of faith, they are fruits that reflect what Jesus has already done for us. When we show forth wisdom, it is only because our Wise Savior implanted His holy Word inside of us.

James’ point here is that if anyone among us is truly wise and intelligent, it will reflect and be because of Jesus. Here he talks about the wisdom that comes from above. That is real wisdom.

You can be seen as wise by this world. But the only way to be truly wise is to have wisdom that comes from God. Real wisdom comes from above, that is, from our Heavenly Father.

To contrast this point, James also shows us where the other “wisdom” comes from: **14 But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not boast and lie, contrary to the truth. 15 This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but it is worldly, unspiritual, and demonic. 16 In fact, where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and every bad practice.**

The question is not “how wise am I?”. NO, the question is “what kind of wisdom do I have?” If you have wisdom, but it is wisdom motivated by envy and ambition, then that’s not wisdom at all. It’s sin. Where does this non-wisdom come from? **it is worldly, unspiritual, and demonic** It is of our enemies, the world, Satan, and our own sinful flesh. If your wisdom comes from these places, it’s not wisdom, no matter what it does for you.

17 But the wisdom that comes from above is first pure, then also peaceful, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, and sincere.

Once when Jesus was having a dispute with the Pharisees. He called them hypocrites, contrasting how they treated John the Baptist in comparison to Himself. His conclusion was a bit enigmatic. **"For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' 34 'The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' 35 'But wisdom is justified by all her children.'" (Luke 7:33-35 NKJ)**

Jesus' point is that wisdom is not just a quality. It performs actions and words. In that case, the highly esteemed Pharisees showed themselves not to be so wise. John was eccentric to them. He lived in the wilderness and lived a minimalistic existence. He ate wild locust and honey; he wore simple clothes. For this, the Pharisees called him crazy. Jesus came and had a different approach. He lived with and among people. He ate and drank with all kinds of kinds. For this, the Pharisees called him a drunkard and a glutton. The Pharisees "wisdom" wasn't really wisdom, it was hypocrisy. It was revealed by what they said and did.

And this is James' point here. If anyone among is to be called wise, how will this be displayed? **Let him by his good way of living show that he does things in wise humility.** If we are truly wise, then we will live a life that does things in humility.

What does this wise humility look like? First it is pure, then peaceful, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good works, impartial, and sincere. Do these things describe you? If we are being reasonable, as wisdom is described here as, then we must reason that we are not. These are terms that describe Jesus, but they do not describe us, at least not as often as they should. Our sinful old Adams are the opposite of all of this.

Since wisdom is a personal thing, and not something that comparison is relevant to, allow me to let you into my own lack of wisdom. It's your typical Sunday, and I have just preached God's Word in

service and Bible class. I feel good because I have done my job. Then, I go to get drive through. And how do I act? Not like this, especially when someone else is driving slowly in front of me or cuts me off. My mouth has just blessed the congregation not even a few hours ago. And next thing I know, I am saying unkind things about someone in the car ahead of me who I do not even know. James says just a few verses prior to our text, **Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. (Jam 3:10 NKJ)**

No, to be any of these things which wisdom are, we all need a great deal of help. That is why real wisdom is only given by God. We all need more of it, and there is only one place to get it. That is why we come to church. To get more wisdom. As a "wise" man once said (wise in term of the world, one Will Shakespeare) *"The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool."* And where do we sinful fools look to receive wisdom? Another wise man once said (this time wise in the spirit, our human author James) **If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (Jam 1:5 NKJ)**

The last question we need to ask ourselves about what kind of wisdom we have has to do with whom it reflects. Does our wisdom reflect ourselves or someone else?

Has someone ever commented to you that something you said was notable? I've had this happen, but quite often the "notable" thing which I have said was not original. You can play it off like it's your own, but again that isn't wise. We often just spit out what someone else has said. There is a difference between wisdom and memorization.

But not really when it comes to the Word of God. And that is why we memorize it. The more ingrained the Word is in us, the wiser we are. But we need to make use of it! Say that you memorize the entire Bible. That would be a good thing. But as is repeatedly

pointed out here, wisdom is only something that can be seen in action. If you memorized the entire Bible, but don't internalize it and apply it to yourself and your life, then what good has it really done you? The Word of God is living, and you have to have it alive inside of you to be beneficial.

James concludes this chapter by saying, **18 And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who practice peace.** When he says this, he is talking about that Word having free course in our lives. The Word has been sown in you by those who practice peace. That is, peacemakers who brought you the word of peace, people who taught you about the LORD. The Word is a Word of peace because it tells us that we have peace with God. **Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Rom 5:1-2 NKJ)**

And we are a part of that harvest of righteousness. The seed of righteousness is that of Christ. His righteousness has been given to us on His cross. It was given to His disciples, who in turn made other disciples of all nations. That seed of righteousness has made its way all the way down to us here today. It is sown by the Word and Sacrament. And it is harvested when our Lord takes us home with Him.

That is what real wisdom looks like. It looks like Jesus. When we quote Scripture, we did not make it up. It's not original wisdom, but real wisdom isn't original. It's revealed. It is the revealed knowledge of God. When we speak and act like Jesus, that is the only time when we are truly wise.

So, how wise are you? You can't point to GPA or educational degrees to answer this question. You can't point to personal or career success to answer this question. You can't point to riches or possessions to answer this question. All you can point to is your fruits of wisdom, that is, your fruits of faith.

And there's the rub. We don't produce fruits like we should. We should be so much wiser than we are. Have often have we missed that opportunity to share Christ with others? How many fruits have we failed to produce? So often, we act out of **bitter envy and selfish ambition** instead of acting with **wise humility**.

But you are wiser than you know. You are wiser than you realize because that wisdom that has been given to you is more powerful than anything else in this world. It has the power to give life to the dead. We ourselves have been made alive by Christ. It is the wisdom that allows us to trust in Jesus and allows us to serve Him in love. It is the only thing that matters.

These words that James writes to these early Christians, it doesn't seem like great advice to the World. Be patient and loving? Be humble and kind? That won't get you anywhere in this world! And that's exactly the point. No, it won't serve us to be these things in this life. But it points ahead to the life we will lead when the temporary things of this life pass away. We know from faith the Jesus is Wisdom and truth. And the World killed Him. Being His followers won't make us prosper here. But listening to His Word produces spiritual life and works of righteousness. **and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. (2Ti 3:15 NKJ)**

How wise are you? It doesn't matter how wise you are. That's the wrong question. The right question is "what kind of wisdom do you have?" The answer? I have Jesus, therefore I have real wisdom, wisdom that saves me from my sins, and wisdom that enables and emboldens me to serve Him all the days of my life. Amen!!!