

Sunday School Lesson for August 30, 2020

Good morning, I hope you are well and blessed.

Sunday School Books for Fall Quarter are available in the Church office. Lessons start Sunday, September 6, 2020 (next Sunday).

Lesson for August 30, 2020, "Two Kinds of Wisdom"

Background Scripture is from James 3:13-18 and James 5:7-12.

James tells us that the wisdom that comes from above; that is, from God, is pure, promotes peace, and results in mercy and good fruit. Wisdom from below produces strife, envy, competitiveness, and selfish ambition. Our world produces advice that is focused on exalting the individual, and this leads to strife. God's wisdom is focused on exalting God and loving others, and this leads to blessing.

From the text section, Stepping into the Word: "We come to the end of this study of wisdom in the Bible and the end of the letter from James. Maybe we can use the passages we have looked at, as a lens for viewing, whose authority we respect, who counsel we value, and whose lives will be a model for our faithfulness. When considering their witness, in light of the letter from James we might think about people we know who put themselves out there to make the world a better place, and who are motivated to it by their faith in God. Think about who does, the work of feeding the hungry in our community, who advocates for the people who cannot afford a lawyer, or for children with special needs, or families with inadequate or no housing? Who take the time to visit people in prison, who shows up when young black men are shot, women are abused, or immigrants risk being deported? Following Jesus' way requires more than coming or just going to church on Sunday; wisdom calls us to act in the world."

James continues in chapter 3 with an open challenge: "Are any of you wise and understanding?" (James 3:13a) The proof he will focus on, how is the quality of their relationships, the product of the things they do as they live their everyday lives. "Show that your actions are good with a humble lifestyle that comes from wisdom" (James 3:13b).

When people show the utmost regard for the ineffable wonder of God's presence, power, and glory, and when they fear the Lord, God fills them with wisdom. The result of this wisdom is a covenant community where people

live in right relationship with one another and with God. People who are committed to “walking blamelessly” must not compromise with evil, however it expresses itself, whether it is pride, arrogance, corruption, or perverse speech. Communities where these things are ignored, excused, tolerated, encouraged, or allowed to multiply, are destined for conflict.

James’s next warning seems to echo Proverbs 16:18: “Pride comes before disaster, and arrogance before a fall.” Bitter envy, selfish ambition, and empty boasts are destructive to the community. Such self-referential behavior is not wisdom at all. It is counterfeit, or as the writer of Proverbs would call it, “folly.” James is not afraid to say that not only does such “wisdom” not come down from heaven, but that it is “earthly, unspiritual, and demonic.” (3:14-15).

James tells us that there are actually two types of wisdom: godly wisdom or TRUE WISDOM and earthly wisdom, FALSE WISDOM. There are two sources of wisdom, two springs, two origins. One is from the heart of man, one is from the heart of God. The true wisdom comes from above, but the false wisdom comes from below. There is “heavenly wisdom” that comes from God, and there is “man-made wisdom” that does not come from God. Whatever does not come from God is destined to fail, no matter how successful it may seem at the time.

The Bible contains many examples of the folly of man’s wisdom. The building of the Tower of Babel seemed like a wise enterprise, but it ended in failure and confusion (Gen. 11:1-9). It seemed wise for Abraham to go to Egypt when famine came to Canaan, but the results proved otherwise (Gen. 12:10-20), King Saul thought it was wise to put his own armor on young David for the lad’s battle with Goliath, but God’s plan was otherwise (1 Sam. 17:38).

The Message Bible translation words James 3:17-18 this way, “Real wisdom, God’s wisdom, begins with a holy life and is characterized by getting along with others. It is gentle and reasonable, overflowing with mercy and blessings, not hot one day and cold the next, not two- faced. 18 You can develop a healthy, robust community that lives right with God and enjoy its results only if you do the hard work of getting along with each other, treating each other with dignity and honor”.

The word wisdom appears in the Bible over 300 times. The Bible tells us what is the wise thing to do, what is not wise to do, it tells us where wisdom begins, and where to get wisdom. From this we can piece together what the scriptures are saying to get at a definition of it.

Wisdom is not just speech, it has a lot to do with our actions and the way we live, our deeds. It is the way we live and not the way we talk. True Wisdom is the ability to live in harmony with the created order of God.

The Bible teaches us that God is an orderly God (1 Corinthians 14:33). He created this world with a certain order to it. According to James, everything we do must be driven by love for others. No one is perfect and we should be kind and understanding to everyone. The Universal Law is Love, it is not talking about the laws of Moses, but the law that Christ asked us to follow: If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. (James 2:8)

James gives a list of characteristics of God's wisdom. He said that godly "wisdom" is first "pure." The fact that God's wisdom is pure means that it is not contaminated, because it comes from a holy God. The person who claims to have godly wisdom and yet lives an immoral or unethical life has not taken even the first step toward having divine wisdom. Second, James said godly wisdom is "peaceable." It promotes peace between God and people, and peace among people themselves. Third, godly wisdom is gentle. A wise person will show the same kindness to others that God shows to him or her. Fourth, the wisdom of God is "easy to be entreated," which has the idea of being reasonable, open to persuasion and willing to be guided. Fifth, the wisdom of God is "full of mercy and good fruits." Instead of jealousy and vile deeds, godly wisdom brings compassion, forgiveness, and good works or deeds.

James chapter 5 verses 1-6, are not part of our printed, text, but in those verses, James, does not address his readers in those verses as "brethren." (James 1:2) It appears that in those verses he is addressing unbelieving rich people (James 5:1-2). As a social class, the unbelieving rich followed worldly wisdom and were often guilty of exploiting and oppressing the poor (James 5:3-5). Many poor among the Jews received the gospel, and many of them believed. But many more rich Jews rejected Christianity, and were hardened in their unbelief and hated and persecuted those who believed on Jesus Christ (James 5:6). The Apostle James is addressing those oppressing, unbelieving, persecuting, rich people that he spoke about in James 5:1-6. In the remaining verses of our text, James returns to addressing his Jewish believers (James 1:1-2).

James sums up his teaching in chapter 5 verses 7-11, by urging us on to patient perseverance in good works. He likens the Christian to a farmer who patiently tends his crops until the harvest. He cites the example of Job, who was faithful through good times and bad, enduring great suffering, receiving a double measure of God's blessings in the end.

Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. (James 5:7)

The farmer gives us a good example of patient perseverance. He knows what he must do, and that the outcome at harvest time depends in great measure on his faithfulness in the meantime. He cannot hurry the process, but must wait patiently for nature to run its course. Yet, he knows how long it takes, so he does not become discouraged or give up, just because the harvest does not come as soon as he might wish. He succeeds simply because he has a proper sense of priorities and expectations, and because he knows what is required for crops to bear abundantly at harvest time.

The Christian, likewise, needs to be motivated by the "harvest" of God's approval, and of the rewards God will give to those who are faithful to Him. He needs to recognize the connection that his present obedience has to his future rewards. He needs to have the proper expectations as to what may be expected of him, and for how long, and when he will receive his rewards. Then, like the farmer, he can expect a bountiful crop if he remains faithful.

Just as the farmer patiently seeks to "strengthen" the crops he has planted, we should seek to strengthen our hearts—becoming strong in faith, obedience and endurance, looking to the time of harvest—"the coming of the Lord"—which is "at hand". The "sap" that makes our hearts vigorous and strong is the love, for God, and for man, that the Holy Spirit creates and energizes within in us. This love is nurtured and increases through Bible study, prayer, confession, worship, evangelism, faithful giving and godly living, the "means of grace" that God has given to us.

We often complain against our brothers when things do not go well for us. Remember how the Israelites constantly complained against Moses for bringing them into the wilderness. Instead, we should learn the blessedness of godly contentment.

We count those blessed who endured. You have heard, of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful. Isn't it true that we regard the prophets "blessed", in spite of the fact that they were so persecuted throughout their lives? If we wish to share in their blessing, we need to follow their example of patient obedience. Job suffered in every earthly way imaginable, yet remained faithful through it all. When you think you have it bad, think about Job. Remember in particular how much God blessed Job in the end, and let this inspire your hope.

The final verse in our scripture passage this week says: "Above all, my brothers, do not swear – not by heaven or by earth or anything else. Let your "Yes" be yes, and you "No", be no, or you will be condemned". James' words here are taken from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:34-37).

The phrase "above all things" indicates that what James is about to say should be heeded by his readers as much, if not more than his previous words. The word "swear" refers to taking an oath. Very often when Jews made a promise, they would do it in the name of the LORD. "Swearing" or taking an oath in God's name had over time become just something Jews would say in order to be believed whether they intended to keep the vow or not. James forbade "swearing" because it hits most directly at God's honor and brings contempt to His name and authority when the "oath" or vow is not kept. What does happen when we take an "oath" and fail to honor it is that it indicates an enmity to God, for the psalmist said *"For they speak against thee wickedly, and thine enemies take thy name in vain"* (see Psalms 139:20). In order to avoid "swearing" by the LORD, thinking they were safe, many Jews would "swear" by parts of the creation as if those things were God. The point is that those who so commonly and profanely "swear" by the name of God as well as by created things put God on the same level with common or created thing. God will not stand for that. What often leads people to "swear" is being suspected of lying. As believers, when we keep our word we will find that there is no need to "swear" to what we say.

In this week's lesson we have seen the importance of true wisdom from God that takes over our lives and generates within us goodness and humility. This means that selfish ambition and pride must go. Knowledge brings with it a certain sense of arrogance. Godly wisdom brings humility. Holiness of life is the product of godly wisdom controlling our lives.

James posed the question, "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom". (James 3:13). Wisdom from the LORD does not cause a person to consider themselves as being superior to others. A man or woman with wisdom from the LORD will be identified by the works it produces. Faith and true wisdom walk together.

Closing: For the love that casts out fear, the faith that sustains and the hope that never perishes, be with us now and forever more. Amen. God watch over us and take care of us.

Next week's lesson September 6, 2020, "Issues of Love"

Background Scripture is from Genesis chapter 37.

Sources for this lesson: The Bible, International Sunday School Lesson and Commentary, Lessons from Bible in Life, South Georgia Advocate Sunday School Lesson, and The Present Word Adult Bible Lessons.