

Mora/Ogilvie UMC

September 19, 2021

Prelude

Welcome

***Call to Worship**

Leader: We come to worship the God who created us.

People: We are people made in the image of God!

Leader: And what is God like?

People: God is gentle and wise, full of peace and full of mercy.

Leader: We come to worship the God who is creating us.

People: God is making us gentle and wise, full of peace and full of mercy.

Thanks be to God in Jesus Christ!

Amen.

***Opening Prayer**

Holy One, as we turn to you with our whole selves, root out any envy or selfish ambition in us that blocks us from living as you want us to live. Free us to do the good that you give us to do. Help us commit to what is good wholeheartedly and with courage. Amen.

***Hymn** UMH # 327 Crown Him with Many Crowns

Scripture James 3:13-18, (4:1-3)

The Wisdom from Above

¹³ Are there any of you who are wise and understanding? You are to prove it by your good life, by your good deeds performed with humility and wisdom. ¹⁴ But if in your heart you are jealous, bitter, and selfish, don't sin against the truth by boasting of your wisdom. ¹⁵ Such wisdom does not come down from heaven; it belongs to the world, it is unspiritual and demonic. ¹⁶ Where there is jealousy and selfishness, there is also disorder and every kind of evil. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is pure first of all; it is also peaceful, gentle, and friendly; it is full of compassion and produces a harvest of good deeds; it is free from prejudice and hypocrisy. ¹⁸ And goodness is the harvest that is produced from the seeds the peacemakers plant in peace.

Friendship with the World

4 Where do all the fights and quarrels among you come from? They come from your desires for pleasure, which are constantly fighting within you. ² You want things, but you cannot have them, so you are ready to kill; you strongly desire things, but you cannot get them, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have what you want because you do not ask God for it. ³ And when you ask, you do not receive it, because your motives are bad; you ask for things to use for your own pleasures

Meditation

Wisdom – Do Good

Have you heard the saying " By hook or by crook " According to Wikipedia it is an English phrase and it means "**by any means necessary**". This definition suggests that any means possible should be taken to accomplish a goal, to get what you want. The phrase goes way back to 1380.

Many of you know that I am a second career pastor. Over the course of my first career I worked in Human Resources for 10 years and then transferred into Purchasing and ended up in Strategic Sourcing.

Although I do not remember, I am pretty certain that I went into Purchasing with a "by hook or by crook" attitude. I was young determined and attempting to climb the corporate ladder. If given a directive I attempted to accomplish it using almost any means possible. But that didn't work – it seemed no matter what I did I was just making my suppliers my enemies and not accomplishing much.

Over time I matured and my idea of how to make a deal, negotiate a contract, how to reduce a price, how to secure a late shipment, all changed, and I finally started to be good at what I did. There is no denying that during this time I had also drawn closer to God and trusted Him to lead, and I tried to submit to his ways. Of course as I turned to God more my work relationships improved.

My suppliers and I formed unique relationships over the years. One of my suppliers joined me at my Wednesday 6:30 am bible study when he was in town. I had two suppliers that I prayed with before we started any negotiations. We prayer with and for each other and our families.

When I retired five years ago many of my suppliers had become my friends. One supplier became my daughters "Michigan parents" while she was a Michigan college student. A supplier from Japan met me at a Blaine Perkins, just for fun and to bring me a retirement gift. And I still communicate with some of these folks.

Over the years my "by hook or by crook" attitude disappeared in my business relationships. I was far more successful using a kind, loving, peaceful style. I attribute my success to the wisdom I had gained as I matured and walked closer to God

By hook or by crook is not the method Jesus would take nor would He want us to take. Our reading from James is totally opposite of the definition of by hook or by crook.

James uses words like wisdom and even goes on to identify wisdom from above as pure, peaceful, gentle, friendly, and full of compassion.

The words pure, peaceful, gentle, and friendly and full of compassion do not represent a by hook or by crook method of getting what you want. I suggest to you that pure, peaceful, gentle, friendly and full of compassion are words one would use to describe wisdom.

James, the brother of Jesus, the leader of the earliest Christian church in Jerusalem, writes this letter to scattered Jewish believers who were going through very difficult times. James comes across as a tough, brutally honest, no-nonsense pastor/teacher.

Our passage today is a continuation of James' whole message. He grabs his audience's attention with the tantalizing question, (3:13) "Who is wise and understanding among your?" Probably every hand shot up. We all want to see ourselves in this light. His audience might respond with "But I'm a good person, I'm not

stupid.” And James might say, *then prove it*. Actions speak louder than words. Make your faith visible by doing good deeds. Don’t talk but walk. This flows from wisdom and leads to humility.

James 3:13-18 identifies two sources of wisdom: wisdom from above (Godly, Spirit-inspired) and “wisdom” from below (worldly, self-centered). They produce different things. Wisdom from above produces good (v. 18 - peace and justice) whereas wisdom from below does harm. We see the repeated theme here that a life infused with wisdom from above leads to good works, not to bring about our own salvation but as a response to what God has done.

Verse 16 shows the connection between personal and social holiness that Wesley was so focused on. When we act from a position of envy and selfish ambition, it will lead to disorder - not just for you, but for the social order, but when we act from a peaceable, gentle, and merciful place, we create a more just and righteous world for all to live in. When our motives and intentions match our actions, both coming from a place of godly wisdom, our “good lives” will be the evidence; however when we have selfish motivations and intentions, James warns us “do not be false to the truth.” Even if our external actions appear to be good, the result will be “disorder and wickedness of every kind,”.

Everybody desires wisdom. When God asked the Prophet Solomon what he desired of all the things in the world, Solomon’s response was that he wanted wisdom. Wisdom is not what you know, but what you do with what you know. **Wisdom is not what you know, but what you do with what you know.**

James tells us there are two kinds of wisdom, but the truly wise seek after God’s wisdom. First, he tells us that we show our wisdom by our behavior (v 13) says ¹³Are there any of you who are wise and understanding? You are to prove it by your good life, by your good deeds performed with humility and wisdom.

The word "wise" was the term used by the Jews when describing the teacher, the scribe, the rabbi. In using the word understanding, he is talking about someone who claims to know what’s going on.

Verse 13 continues with “If you claim to be wise and know what’s going on You are to prove it by your good deeds performed with humility and wisdom’.

It’s not just talking about what you say, but also what you do. Have you ever known anyone who claimed to be wise but who acted foolishly? True wisdom can be measured by the depth of a person’s character.

As noted in the Life Application Bible Notes - Our wisdom can be evaluated by the way we act. — James continues saying you show that you are a wise person by living out a life of meekness that comes from wisdom. When we talk about meekness, we are not talking about weakness, but strength under control.

Strength under control is demonstrated by a horse that has been broken and trained to submit to the bit of the bridle. I spent the first 12 years of my life around horses. I always felt sorry for a horse that didn’t submit to the bit and yet I knew that the bit was needed for my own good.

As a horse submits to the bit, we can compare a human life that shows that it is under the control of the Holy Spirit. Wisdom is the power to see and the inclination to choose the best and highest goal, together with the surest means of attaining it. J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 80.

Again James tells us, as he has through this entire epistle, that the best way to tell someone what God has done in your life is to show them. For some people they won't listen to what you have to say about Jesus until you show them you can live like Jesus.

A Walking Sermon

One of the best stories of humility is that of a man who arrived in 1953 at the Chicago railroad station to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. He stepped off the train, a tall man with bushy hair and a big moustache. As the cameras flashed and city officials approached with hands outstretched to meet him, he thanked them politely.

Then he asked to be excused for a minute. He walked through the crowd to the side of an elderly black woman struggling with two large suitcases. He picked them up, smiled, and escorted her to the bus, helped her get on, and wished her a safe journey. Then Albert Schweitzer turned to the crowd and apologized for keeping them waiting. It is reported that one member of the reception committee told a reporter, "That's the first time I ever saw a sermon walking."

People are far more likely to want to hear about the marvelous light of the Good News of Jesus Christ when we show them that we do not live-in darkness.

Not only does James tell us to let our wisdom show, but he also tell us...we should stay away from false wisdom.

In verses 14-16 James tells us about false wisdom as opposed to true wisdom. In verse 14 he says "14 But if in your heart you are jealous, bitter, and selfish, don't sin against the truth by boasting of your wisdom. Apparently, some of James's readers carried some jealousy, bitterness and selfishness in their hearts. If these things characterize us, no matter if we think we are wise or not, we are denying the truth revealed in Jesus.

Illustration: Dwight L. Moody once told the fable of an eagle who was envious of another that could fly better than he could. One day the bird saw a sportsman with a bow and arrow and said to him, "I wish you would bring down that eagle up there." The man said he would if he had some feathers for his arrow. So the jealous eagle pulled one out of his wing. The arrow was shot, but it didn't quite reach the rival bird because he was flying too high. The first eagle pulled out another feather, then another--until he had lost so many that he himself couldn't fly. The archer took advantage of the situation, turned around, and killed the helpless bird. Moody made this application: if you are envious of others, the one you will hurt the most by your actions will be yourself.

Not only were the ones James spoke of full of jealousy, bitterness and selfishness, but they were bragging about it.

So I ask you, what kind of wisdom is filled with all kinds of evil and then brags about it? False wisdom!

James says that this kind of wisdom does not come from heaven but is earthly. This kind of wisdom is not spiritual but unspiritual.

This is "behavior which is typical of human nature and human nature is not under the control of God's Spirit". This behavior is contrary to Jesus's teachings. We are to stay away from this kind of wisdom and instead focus on wisdom from above.

James tells us that wisdom from above is pure, peaceful and gentle. This is peace that goes beyond inner peace. It is peace between people, and between people and God. This wisdom is gentle and the opposite of self-seeking. It does not demand it is always right. Heavenly wisdom is reasonable, flexible--willing to listen and willing to change.

God's wisdom is full of God's gracious forgiveness. And his love leads to practical action, helping and serving others. We should be willing to forgive even when the problems we are facing are someone else's fault.

Finally James tells us that true wisdom is impartial and sincere. God's wisdom shows no partiality, meaning single-minded and is free from prejudice toward people.

In summary James tells us there are two kind of wisdom, false wisdom which is not derived from following Jesus Christ and is full of jealousy, bitterness and selfishness and true wisdom from God is pure, peaceful, gentle, and friendly; it is full of compassion and produces a harvest of good deeds; it is free from prejudice and insincerity

John Wesley's second General Rule is "Do good." The way we approach other people is meant to be from a place of gentleness, purity, and selflessness, when so much of the world tells us to approach others with the idea of "What can they do for me or I will win by hook or by crook?"

In the General Rules, Wesley emphasizes that "doing good" is not about receiving praise or getting ahead in the world, rather it is about faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus who gave up everything for humankind. People are to do good, "by running the race which is set before them, denying themselves [i.e., their own ambitions], and taking up their cross daily.

What kind of wisdom are you seeking? Amen

Hymn UMH # UMH # 393

Spirit of the Living God

Pastoral Prayer and The Lord's Prayer

Lord of yesterday, today and tomorrow: You alone rule the universe; setting times and seasons according to Your will.

While nations and king come and go, You, only, are King of kings and Lord of lords; immortal and all-knowing, never lacking power and wisdom.

You are strong; and you are good!

Therefore, we joyously and reverently call you God and King.

(Prayer of Confession)

Yet, in spite of all we know of You – we are stubborn and rebellious still.

We think ourselves wise – disregarding Your truth.

We think ourselves strong – using violence to force our will.
We think ourselves right – writing-off others and refusing to learn from them.
We think ourselves good – ignoring our corruption and evil; pointing fingers and wagging tongues at others.
Forgive our arrogance minds, self-centeredness hearts and ungracious spirits.
Take away our hearts of stone; replace them with hearts of flesh, hearts that best after Your own heart.
In silent moments, hear us confess what we're too ashamed to name aloud – forgive and free us,
Lord: (Silence)

Richard Herman

Lord, for the confidence and joy and hope we have because we walk daily with you, we give you thanks and praise in the name of your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ who taught us to pray together

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses,

As we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen

***Hymn** TFWS #2022 Great Is the Lord

Offering

I invite you to give your offerings today from a place of gentleness and peace, to listen to God's wisdom for your life and to let go of the messages you receive from the world about your worth, value and wealth.

***Doxology** UMH # 95 Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow

***Prayer of Dedication**

God of understanding, we thank you for sharing your wisdom with us. May our gifts, given in gentleness, help to make us agents of your peace, that we might produce a harvest of righteousness in our world. Amen.

***Hymn** UMH # UMH # 398 Jesus Calls Us

***Benediction**

Romans 15:5-6

May the God of endurance and encouragement
grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus,
that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.