



Sermon, Sunday September 29, 2024 “Two Kinds of Wisdom”

SCRIPTURE: James 3:13-18 ¹³ Who is wise and knowledgeable among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be arrogant and lie about the truth. ¹⁵ This is not wisdom that comes down from above but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. ¹⁶ For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. ¹⁸ And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Introduction: The Meaning of Wisdom in the Book of James

The Book of James, included in Book 27 of the New Testament, is often misunderstood because it does not directly mention Jesus Christ and seems to place more emphasis on deeds rather than on faith. The Book of James was not recognized as a book in the Bible for a long time in the early church. Even the German religious reformer, Martin Luther, devalued the Book of James. If you read the Book of James in that time's context, it has enough value as the word of God.

At the time, some Christians, who had an extreme understanding of Apostle Paul's teachings, argued that since one had faith alone to be saved, works did not matter. In this situation, James mentions in detail what kind of example Christians should set in the world. However, we should not understand the Book of James only as a moral and ethical guide. At the center of the Book of James is faith in Jesus Christ, and salvation through that faith. I hope that you will come to a deep understanding of that fact through today's text.

In today's text, verses 13, 15, and 17, the word 'wisdom', which is a translation of the Greek word Sophia (wisdom, σοφία), is mentioned. The ancient Greeks considered 'Sophia' to be of supreme value. So what is the wisdom that James mentioned today? Can we say that we are people who possess the wisdom mentioned in today's text?

Body: The heavenly wisdom and the foundation of peace

According to today's text, James divides wisdom more strictly than the Greeks into '**wisdom on earth**' and '**wisdom that comes down from heaven.**' James says that earthly wisdom is 'unspiritual and devilish.'

In other words, earthly wisdom is what humans do to satisfy their own desires such as envy, selfish ambition, disorder, and wickedness of every kind.

On the other hand, James explains the wisdom that comes down from heaven as follows: “**But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.**” (v.17)

This verse does not tell us to be morally perfect, but to pursue high values in life. James warns how dangerous it was for some Christians at the time to not live more dignified lives than the Greeks and Romans, but to only indulge in faith without works.



Many modern-day Christians often misunderstand the meaning of living by faith. We must remember how many warnings Jesus gave against this attitude of life. In the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew, there are many words of warning from Jesus.

In Matthew 5:17, Jesus said, **“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”** Also, in Matthew 5:20, he said, **“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”**

Furthermore, in Matthew 5:48, Jesus said, **“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”** These words of Jesus show that Christians who live by faith should not neglect living a dignified life.

So, after speaking of heavenly wisdom in verse 17, James expresses what it is in verse 18 with the following sentence: **“And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.”**

The key words in this sentence are peace (Eirene, εἰρήνη) and righteousness (dikaiosuné, δικαιοσύνη). In other words, living a life of faith means sowing the seeds of peace and bearing the fruit of righteousness.

Christianity says that the reason why peace was broken in human society was because the peace between God and creation was broken. The Bible calls it 'sin', when the peace between God and creation is broken. The Bible says that this problem of sin cannot be solved by humans on their own.

However, Christians believe that the broken peace between creatures and God was restored through Jesus Christ. Perhaps people outside the church will not accept these Christian beliefs.

As a Christian we must be careful about talking about ‘faith’ without knowing the true meaning of living by faith.

If we apply this to our faith, living by peaceful means is that the heavenly wisdom, (pure, peace, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy, and good fruits), mentioned by James in verse 17 of today's text, must appear in our lives.

During the time James was active, the Roman Empire was at its peak. That is why the term ‘Pax Romana, the peace of Rome’ appeared. In other words, the Roman Empire achieved peace and prosperity.

At the time, to maintain this peace, the Roman Empire used its military power and developed civilization to subdue those who opposed Rome. So, the peoples ruled by the Roman Empire at the time thought of the Roman emperor as the ‘King of Peace.’ In other words, if they followed the Roman emperor's orders, they could live in peace without war.

But Christians believed the words of Isaiah 9:6: **“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”** So, they claimed that Jesus is the King of Peace.

This is the claim that Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified according to the laws of the Roman Empire, is the King of Peace and the Christ. What do you think about these claims?

The basis for Jesus' disciples and early Christians thinking that Jesus was the Prince of Peace was that they received life (salvation) through Jesus Christ. ~~In other words,~~ Christians are those who have restored love from a broken relationship with God.

However, sometimes the problem in our lives is that we do not vividly experience the life gained through Jesus Christ. Why is that so? This is because we are generally tied to the idea that 'life' is only achieved if we are healthier, happier, and better than others.

So, what does it mean that we have been given life through Jesus Christ? How can we know that, and how can we live with confidence?



The answer to these questions is that to Jesus' disciples and early Christians, Jesus was always the 'living Lord.' This may sound strange to some people because everyone dies. And Jesus also died. However, the Lord's disciples and early Christians believed and claimed that Jesus had risen from the dead and was still alive.

Even now, people outside the church view the Christian faith in resurrection cynically. What can we say to them as Christians? What does the resurrection of Jesus have to do with us?

That is, the sin and death that destroy human life were overcome through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through the resurrection of Jesus, Jesus' disciples and early Christians experienced freedom from the problems of their sin and death and made peace with God, the source of life. In today's text, James declares that the reconciliation with God, that we achieved through Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection, is the foundation of peace.

Conclusion: Christians who reap a harvest of righteousness

James says in verse 18 that by sown in peace, we reap a harvest of righteousness. A harvest of righteousness is the heavenly wisdom listed in verse 17. Since they are heavenly wisdom, they can become a reality in our daily lives only when God gives them as a gift.

We cannot be holy, peaceful, tolerant, compliant, or merciful by our own will or effort. We can reap the fruit of righteousness when we achieve true peace with God by gaining life through Jesus Christ and thereby escaping from the fear of sin and death. If Christians do not have this fruit of righteousness, their faith is hypocritical. James called this faith 'dead.' I hope that we all reap abundant fruits of righteousness through correct faith. **Amen!**

