

Sermon: James: Inside / Out: True Wisdom

IN *Opportunities to connect and pray as a group*

1. At this Christmastime, what do you wish you had done more of / or less of? Why?
2. Who in your life do you / have you looked to for 'wisdom'? How did they show their wisdom? Why did you choose that person?

UP *Time that is devoted to the Word of God*

1. James opens this passage with a question. (James 3:13-18)
Look back through James 1:1 – 3:12 to look at the other questions James has asked.
How did his use of questions help lead up to the question in 3:13? (NIV)
2. Review the characteristics of the 'wisdom' of the earthly kingdom (3:14-16) and those of the 'heavenly' kingdom (3:17-18)?
Look in a concordance to find two – three additional verses that expand the meaning of the characteristic.
(Example: 'envy' – Prov 3:31; 14:30; 1 Cor 13:4; 'pure' – Ps 51:10; Phil 4:8)
Discuss how the verses you have found describe the self-centered 'earthly kingdom' versus the God-centered 'heavenly kingdom'?
3. Compare James' description of the 'heavenly wisdom' with the description by his brother Jesus in Matthew 5:1-12. What similarities are there?
4. Why does James end this passage with the words 'a harvest of righteousness'?
How would you define this phrase?

OUT *Seek to be the Community of God's people in your community*

1. Identify a time from this past week when you responded with 'earthly' wisdom.
According to 3:17-18, what response could have aligned with 'heavenly' wisdom?
2. This second week of Advent focuses on 'Peace.' Is there someone with whom you need to be reconciled? What choice will you make this week using the steps of James 3:17 to reach out to that person?
3. In your day to day interactions, how can you make this Season more peace-filled for other people?
Meditate / memorize 1 Corinthians 1:30 and / or Philippians 1:20, 21;
James 3:17.

UP – IN – OUT reflect a balanced life including a focus on our personal relationship with the Father (UP), staying connected to the Body (IN), and reaching our world (OUT).

THE WORD (NIV)

1 Corinthians 1:30

³⁰It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

Philippians 1:20, 21

²⁰I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

James 3:13-18

¹³Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵Such "wisdom" is demonic. ¹⁶For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. ¹⁷But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

Sermon Study Summary

Most of us can relate to a time when we have run across an irritating situation that resulted in our attempting to search out the source. One solution to this irritant is to simply avoid it – put in the proverbial ear plugs to muffle it. Previously, James tells us that what comes out of our mouth is a direct reflection of what is happening in our heart. What comes out of the tap is what is in the well. Hence, if we find negativity and sarcasm rather than encouragement coming from our lips when something isn't right inside us. One solution is to put in the 'ear plugs' and ignore it, or we can ask the Holy Spirit to examine our heart and point to the real problem and show us the path to victory through Jesus (the living Word) and the Scriptures (the written Word).

Nobody has ever said their goal in life was to live a miserable, boring and meaningless life. Yet to not do this we must stop from time to time and ask ourselves what is behind our negative thoughts or behaviors right now. Why am I putting this person down or envying them? Why am I insecure or fearful? James says there are two overarching systems of thought – two Kingdoms actively vying for our affections. Each would have us believe certain things, want certain things, embrace certain values and live our lives certain ways. One such kingdom is earthly, unspiritual and demonic – based on false wisdom, while the other is heavenly and eternal – based on true wisdom (James 3:15).

The earthly kingdom is:

1. Earthly. It is based on the premise that this world, and this life is all that there is. You have one shot so live it up, so don't let minor things like debt, moral guilt, or hurting others stop you from getting what you want.
2. Unspiritual. This is a life lived without God, or the Spirit of God, in mind. In James 2:14, James reminds us that if we say we believe in God but live as if He doesn't exist and don't do what He says, then we are only fooling ourselves. God is not the center of our universe.
3. Demonic. James says no demons are atheists (vs 2:19). Still, they won't live for God because they want to 'be' worshipped rather than worship the living God. That is something Satan tries to tempt us with as well. He used it in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3) suggesting that Adam and Eve would have much better lives with them being in control of their lives. Running our own show is one of the great temptations we will face in our lives.

If we do not believe in God, our identity and significance cannot come from who we are in God. Thus, we must find it apart from God. We must make it happen. The way to become significant and valuable is to compare ourselves with others. We compare how 'fit' we are by looking at the fitness level of others. Comparison and competition are the mainstays in this life to out-perform one another. Accumulating symbols of our success is the way we keep score. And we envy or are bitter toward those who are better than us (James 3:16). This leads toward insecurity, fears, judgements and slander which characterize the earthly kingdom. It is the false wisdom which is behind the discrimination (ch2), curses and slanders (ch3), and the tension and conflict (ch 4) because our identity is at stake.

The heavenly kingdom is:

1. Built on the premise that God is the center of our lives. It is about Him, not us, and if we surrender our life to Him and daily cultivate our friendship with Him in humble dependence, then our lives will be blessed and we will find true meaning, value and satisfaction in life. In this space, we can enjoy all that God has given to us and use our gifts and talents to bless others and do good. We aren't in competition to prove our worth but to bring glory to God. This is the foundation of true wisdom. To worship anything else is to descend into a miserable, despairing and unfulfilled life because it won't last. Without God, it is meaningless (Ecclesiastes).
2. True wisdom is pure; Heavenly wisdom is pure. This means 'clean' – forgiven and set free by God. James says entrance into God's heavenly Kingdom begins by acknowledging we can't perform well enough to merit favor with God. It is humbly accepting what Christ did on the cross for us, and in Him is rooted the source of our identity, significance and value that nobody can touch. Because of this we are free to live differently from those in the earthly kingdom and to fulfill the calling God has given us, and to celebrate the achievements and faithfulness of others. Pure also means focused on one pursuit and only one pursuit. That pursuit is God – to make Him the center of everything and to know Him and do whatever He asks us to do.

When He comes into us He will begin to transform us from the inside out by His Spirit. Consequently, we will be increasingly peace-loving, seeking reconciliation with others. We will be considerate and mindful of others, submissive to God and humbly teachable. Others will see in us mercy and good fruit (Gal 5:22, 23) as the Spirit transforms our character into the character of Jesus.