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James 3:13-18

WHERE DO YOU GO FOR WISDOM?

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Where do you go for wisdom? We all have problems and we seek advice. Where do you go? Many people may go to their parents if their parents are still alive. It's amazing how much smarter our parents get after we are on our own. Some people may go to one of their brothers or sisters that they respect. You might go to a friend or a former teacher. You might seek the help of your pastor. You might try a newspaper column like Dear Abby or Ann Landers in their heyday. Or you might even try a complete stranger.

King Solomon said in Proverbs: "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." True wisdom is not easy to find. There are many things that sound very good, but they lead to the destruction of our souls. James continues to speak to us this morning as he contrasts two kinds of wisdom. WHERE DO YOU GO FOR WISDOM? We see that worldly wisdom produces selfish living while God's wisdom produces spiritual living.

We live in a sinful world. We should expect sinful attitudes. We certainly are not disappointed. They are easy to find. We can find them today obviously. We can find them in the First Century. James and Paul and Peter and John are happy to share those problems with us. It doesn't matter where we want to look. We see it at the time of Moses or Elijah or Martin Luther. We will see it when our Lord Jesus returns in glory. Things don't change. We are selfish by nature. Our priorities are ME, ME, ME!

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder." Yes, those words describe our congregation. Those words describe any congregation. Those words describe the congregations that James was addressing. Every congregation is made up of sinners and sin shows itself in our thoughts, our words and our actions.

James speaks about envy and selfish ambition. He tells us that this so-called wisdom does not come from heaven, but rather from hell. It is earthly, unspiritual and demonic. Satan will try to lead us into those sins and it's really not all that difficult much of the time. Envy leads us to see what others have. We want it and we want it in the worst way. Greed and covetousness will try to lead us to whatever we have to do to get what we want. Selfish ambition tells us that we come first, second and always.

Do you recognize these things in your life? This is something that we have to do. The apostles certainly recognized them in their lives. Do you think that Peter ever forgot sinking in the water as his heart was filled with doubt or when he cursed and swore that he didn't know Jesus? Do you think that Paul ever forgot that he had been a persecutor of the church and was responsible for the deaths of untold numbers of Christians? Do you think that John ever forgot that he and his brother were called the "Sons of Thunder" because they wanted to call down God's wrath from heaven to punish people who weren't very nice to them? I don't think so.

Look at our Gospel lesson this morning. Jesus wanted to teach his disciples about the ultimate sacrifice. He was going to go to Jerusalem where he would allow himself to be betrayed, arrested and put to death. He would take the sin

of the world upon himself and suffer the just punishment for that sin. That was the greatest example of love that one could possibly show. He would show his ultimate power as the Son of God by rising from the dead on the third day. Yet the disciples did not understand what he meant and they were afraid to ask him about it.

Why do you think that was the case? Well, they weren't paying attention. While Jesus was trying to teach them, they were arguing about which of them was the greatest. They had selfish ambition. They were looking out for themselves. We see it every day wherever we are. We see it in business, in the government, at home and even in the church. You don't have to teach anyone these things. They are all natural. Think about every phase of life. Think about how that plays out in marriage and leads to divorce. Think of how it plays out in the workforce, leading someone to quit or get fired. Think of how it plays out as children hurt one another by their words and actions. The world sees this as true wisdom.

James would go on. "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something and you don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God." We are all saint and sinner at the same time. Here James is addressing the sinner in all of us. The root problem is our evil hearts. We are not merely sinners, but we are sinful. Sin is the root of all evil within us. We want things. We love the things that we have and we want more. We love the things that others have and we want them as well. By nature our hearts are never content.

The Apostle Paul reminds us that "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." Money, in and of itself is neutral. We need it to pay our mortgage, buy our food and clothing and other necessities of life. But the desire for more and more money has caused the downfall of many people, including Christians.

These people were fighting. This was not a noble fighting, a contending for the truth of God's Word. This was a selfish fighting as when two children hit each other because both want the same toy and are unwilling to share. Some Christians were even willing to betray others, which may have led to persecution and death, because they wanted to have a certain standard of life and would do whatever it took to keep it. Judas wasn't the first and he won't be the last. This is the wisdom of the world. This is the wisdom that produces selfish living. This is not the wisdom we want to embrace.

"But 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. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness." God's wisdom is pure. It has no additives. It is not tainted by anything. There is only one true God and he is perfect. God's wisdom is like God. It seeks nothing for itself. What you see is what you get. There are no false motives. There is no lying, no hypocrisy, no insincerity. You do the right thing because it is the right thing.

This wisdom is peace loving. Through Jesus Christ we have peace with God. All our sins have been washed away by the holy, precious blood of our Savior. We want to bring that same peace to others. We look for ways to do so. That wisdom is considerate. It thinks of others even before it thinks of itself. Remember that the Christian is both saint and sinner. Here James is addressing the saint. This is what Christians do. This is how Christians think. We consider how our words and actions will affect others spiritually. We do what is best and good for others.

This wisdom is submissive. We can let others go first. We are willing to yield first of all to God and then to our fellow man. We love and care about others: our spouse, our children, our parents, the people we work with. Is it really that important to always have the last word? Do we always have to get our own way, no matter what it costs?

This wisdom is full of mercy and good fruit. So many people are driven by revenge. If they did not get their way, look out! You are going to pay and pay dearly! We look to the example of our Lord Jesus who looked down upon the people who were crucifying him and said, "Father, forgive them, because they don't know what they are doing." We look for the welfare of others. What can I do to make someone's life better? Think of all the very simple things you can do each day to show the good fruits of your life. Simple acts of kindness can be done for everyone, kind words, kind gestures, a willingness to listen, a willingness to share. James speaks about the fruits of faith over and over. If we are Christians, we do good works.

This wisdom is impartial and sincere. In James' world there were the Pharisees and the other Jews and the Samaritans and the Gentiles. Quite honestly, they didn't like each other and that's putting it mildly. Last week we talked about how the people liked to show favoritism toward the rich and influential. It's so easy to do. The word "sincere" is an interesting one. It means "without wax." Porcelain statues were very fragile and much care needed to be taken to keep them from cracking while firing. Dishonest dealers would buy the cracked figurines at a discounted price and then fill the cracks with wax and offer them for sale at a much higher price. Honest merchants would sell their figurines with signs that read sine cera, "without wax."

We are to be peacemakers. That is a good thing. Our Lord Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God." We look out into the world and we see people at war. They are at war with God, a war that they cannot possibly win and they are at war with one another. We already spoke of the wisdom of the world and what it produces. What we need is peace.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace. He brought us peace with God. Our sins have been wiped away, drowned in the depths of the sea. The waters of Holy Baptism have brought us into God's very family. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through him. If we want to bring peace, we have to sow the seeds of the Gospel. We have to share the message of Christ. It is the only thing that can make a difference for all eternity.

There are two types of wisdom. One of them is the wisdom of the world. It is selfish and it leads to death. The other is the wisdom of heaven. It is selfless and it leads to life. May God help us always to choose the true wisdom!
AMEN.