

THE WISEST ONE WINS JAS 3:13-4:10
SEVENTEENTH SUN. AFTER PENTECOST SEPT 20, '15

¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. ¹⁵ This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

¹ What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ² You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. ³ You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. ⁴ You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. ⁵ Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? ⁶ But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." ⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

This is a dangerous season for political candidates,
not just dangerous because they could be eliminated
if they don't quickly convince others they are better
but dangerous because this tends to be done
by boasting of how great and smart you are
which makes it very easy to look dumb.

Last week we heard verses which came before text in James 3:

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers...
the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.

Point is, be careful of talking as if you know it all.

If you want to show how smart you are,
do it by how you live, not just how you talk.

A way to picture this is: before you shoot of your mouth,
think about what people have to learn before shooting a gun.
Look not just at where you are aiming but what is behind.
that is, what could be the unintended results.

PROUD, PASSIONATE WISDOM LEADS TO FIGHTS
WISDOM FROM ABOVE HUMBLY MAKES PEACE
GOD'S WISDOM MAKES GOODNESS GROW

PROUD, PASSIONATE WISDOM LEADS TO FIGHTS

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People who accomplish great things, the winners in the world,
often know just what they want and how to get it done.

They tend to be passionate about their goals.

One piece of advice for those who want to be successful
is find what you are passionate about and focus on that.

Effective spiritual leaders may be very passionate.

But James says, just a minute, be careful about passion.

Passionate feelings tend to be subjective,

what feels good and right to me,

which tends to be what feels good FOR me.

watch out for selfishness that comes from my flesh.

This is the standard of wisdom in this world,

but James points out ways of world are at odds with God.

friendship with the world is enmity with God.

Which exposes that the mastermind planting the ideas

is actually the devil who is so good at deceiving us

into thinking what is bad is good.

So, v. 15 says, such wisdom that knows how to get our own way
is earthly, unspiritual and demonic,

that is, coming from the devil, the world & our sinful self.

The result is discord and disaster.

First there is fighting of passions inside of ourselves.

I want this but I want that too, even if it is incompatible.

Then there is fighting with God. Instead of praying
"Thy will be done" it is "My will be done."
which, of course, is not what happens.

So we turn to others to get what we want
but they have their own ideas of what they want
so there are quarrels and fights about who gets their way
and who gets the credit.
and when we assume the end justifies the means
there is disorder and every evil practice.
And so our passion to get everyone to go along with
our perfect plan just ends in chaos and disaster.
This can be seen in world politics, on the local level,
at work, in the church, among friends & in families.
But, James says, there is another way to do things.

WISDOM FROM ABOVE HUMBLY MAKES PEACE

¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct
let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.

¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle,
open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸
And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make
peace.

It takes a lot of smarts to know how to win a war.
But a war is not over until there is peace.
And it is a lot easier to win the war than win the peace.
The wisest one is the one who can win the peace
without waging the war.
Best way to get your way is to get other to think it is their idea.
Is amazing what can be accomplished if it doesn't matter
who gets the credit.
But James is saying real wisdom is not just finding a way
to get my way peacefully, being open to reason, impartial,
being able to come to mutual understanding
rather than just pursuing my passions,
but actually being pure and sincere, full of mercy,
genuinely caring about others rather than being selfish.
Why should I humbly aim at what is good for others?
one reason is what is behind what I aim at, what results,
the harvest of righteousness that is sown in peace
by those who make peace,
which is the best thing that can happen for me as well.

This wisdom changes our hearts and our world
from being a battlefield of desires and wills
to being a fruitful field where what we all need grows.

But this is very hard to do.

It is hard to see how being meek and gentle is a good plan
for being sure I have the things I need
or even the truly good things I am passionate about.
Is no guarantee pushy people who think they are so smart
won't just try to take over.

This is why James says we must trust not just in our wisdom,
even the wisdom that is truly good and pure,
but in the one who is the source of this wisdom
which comes down from above.

GOD'S WISDOM MAKES GOODNESS GROW

⁵ Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? ⁶ But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." ⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

In v. 14 James speaks against bitter jealousy & selfish ambition
but in v. 5 he says God himself is Jealous.

Just like the conclusion of the commandments says
Our God is a jealous God.

We have to understand what the word Jealousy means.

Envy means wanting to get what belongs to another.

Jealousy means wanting to keep what belongs to us.

Problem is we get jealous of what is not truly ours.

But God has a right to jealously want what belongs to him,
which is especially us, & the spiritual life he has given us
which he has put his Holy Spirit in us to preserve.

Even though the world is at enmity with God,
God loves the world and wants to save it.

This is why he calls us to give up on ourselves
and humble ourselves before him.

to cleanse sinful hands by dropping selfish behavior
and cleanse double minded hearts that even consider it.

This seems counterintuitive & foolish to the sinful nature
but the Bible, which makes us wise for salvation
through faith in Jesus,
promises and shows that Jesus exalts the humble
God gives grace to the humble, but the cause of the grace
is Jesus who humbled himself.
God has acted with perfect wisdom to fulfill his eternal plan.
Jesus has come with perfect gentleness and mercy
to win peace for us, a peace that passes understanding.
He has overcome the devil, world and our sinful flesh
by a different kind of passion, by submitting to God's will
that he suffer and die in our place.
He saves us not by first making us do what is right
but by doing himself what is right
and then giving us this righteousness by grace.
The result is a harvest of the good fruits of righteousness in us,
planted by the seed of God's word
and watered by our baptisms.
So that we have goodness and wisdom to boast about,
not how great and smart we are,
but how good and wise our gracious God is.

PROUD, PASSIONATE WISDOM LEADS TO FIGHTS
as trying to get what seems smart and right to us
results in doing things all wrong.

WISDOM FROM ABOVE HUMBLY MAKES PEACE
as we focus not just on what we want or even just on
what others want, but on what God wants for us.

GOD'S WISDOM MAKES GOODNESS GROW
God, in his infinite wisdom has sent Jesus
to humble himself for us to give us his great grace
so that we can reject what is earthly, unspiritual & demonic
and humbly, by God's grace alone, receive
his exalting to live in his peace forever.

Grant, we implore you, almighty God, to your Church your Holy Spirit and the wisdom which comes down from above that your Word may not be bound but have free course and be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ's holy people, so that in steadfast faith we may serve you and in the confession of your name abide to the end; through Jesus Christ, your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.