

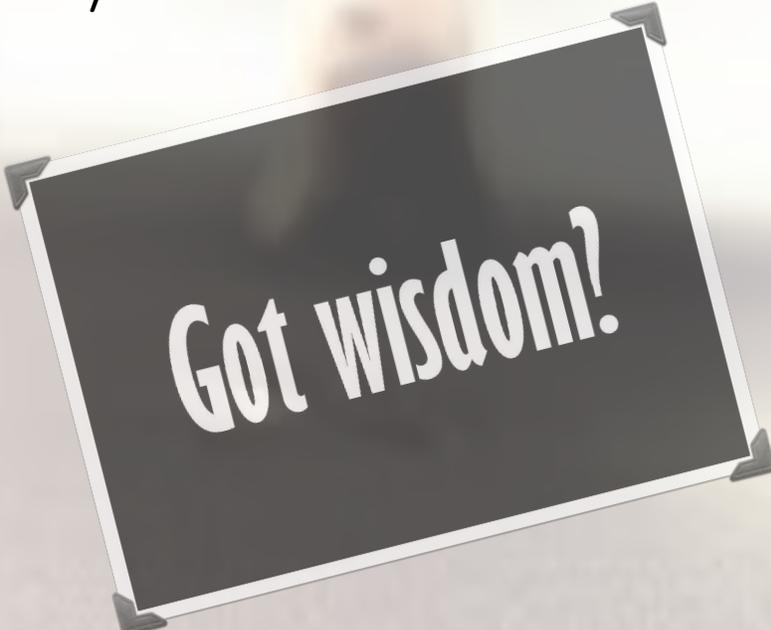
October 10-14, 2022 Edition

Following
The Year Of ^ Jesus Part 41

James On Wisdom

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Got wisdom?

When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well yuo knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday:

If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. James 1:5 (NLT)

Reflection: Last weekend we looked at who wrote the book of James and why he wrote... if you're interested in the authorship or situational context you can go back and listen to last week's lesson online, but I do think it's important to point out once again that James is writing to a group of Christians in the grip of persecution over their faith. These people are losing their jobs, their freedom, their homes, their families and many of them... their lives.

So last week we looked at the beginning words of the book of James. Instructions for how to handle it when trouble and trials come our way. Just for a refresher I'll point out that James said to expect troubles... that they are a part of life. Then he said to prepare for troubles so you'll be ready whenever they come your way. And then he said that after you've done everything you can to prepare for trouble in your life... then you need to stand before those troubles. Don't run away from them. Don't try to weasel your way out of them. Don't do something that will numb you to the trouble and allow you to not think about them.

Ok... so here's what James says next:

If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do. James 1:5-8 (NLT)

Most of my adult life I've thought that this passage of scripture was a different topic from what James was talking about right before this in verses 1-4 and from what James will be talking about in the next passage in verses 9-12 where he again is talking about trouble and trials.

I pictured James doing what preachers do all the time... jump from topic to topic by pulling scriptures out of their context when we read them to back up our positions... sometimes it's pretty funny:

Found above a nursery changing table in a church:

We will not all sleep... but we will all be changed. 1 Corinthians 15:50 (NLT)

And used as a scripture for a Christian potty training class:

Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it. Proverbs 22:6 (NKJV)

I do it from time to time, I admit. It's hard not to. I do my best not to but every once in a while someone will ask me about a scripture I used out of context and I have to say, oops. Sometimes scriptures get used out of context... but I don't think that's what James is doing here. In fact... I think if we try to separate this passage from the overall context of how a follower of Jesus should handle trouble and trials in his/her life then we are using this out of

context. I'm not saying that God doesn't offer wisdom to those who ask for it... I believe it's one of the greatest benefits of being a follower of Jesus... but that's not really the point James is trying to make here.

What I think James is trying to do here is tell us about how God's wisdom can give us the power we need to stand before trouble. This is part of the hyper stand model that we talked about last weekend. When trouble comes you keep doing what you've been doing to prepare for the trouble that is coming. Here I believe James is saying that when trouble comes, wisdom will give you the power you need to stand before it and not be shaken. Why? Because it gives us a view of how things really work, rather than lofty platitudes about how the world thinks things are or how the world thinks things should be.

I don't know if you've noticed this before... but God's wisdom and the wisdom of the world don't generally align very well with one another. In fact, when the two collide there is a shaking of world views that depending which side you choose to follow will determine how you handle trouble in your life. If you read the first 3 chapters of One Corinthians (sorry... I couldn't help myself after all that hubbub with Donald Trump trying to quote the Bible at Liberty University a few weeks ago ;o) you'll find a lengthy exposition about the difference between God's Wisdom and the wisdom of the world. This is how Paul sums it up:

The wisdom of this world is foolishness to God. 1 Corinthians 3:19 (NLT)

And vice-versa. The world sees God's Wisdom as complete hogwash. It doesn't make sense to the world. But God's Wisdom will give you the power and the world view you need to withstand trouble and trials when they come your way. Why? I'm glad you asked that question... We'll look at that this whole week.

Tuesday:

If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do. James 1:5-8 (NLT)

Reflection: I think my favorite part of this passage is that it was written to people who were already Christians. It isn't promising a confident certainty to those who would come to Christ. It's telling us how to find confidence on days when we feel "blown and tossed by the wind" despite our Christianity. Just as James warns us not to be surprised when we have troubles, he adds that we don't need to be surprised when our first response isn't to handle them well.

It is human nature to react to troubles with a confused and stressed out mind. We fear loss. We hate lack. We resist struggle. The world lives in constant slavery to getting and fixing because humans naturally fear scarcity and discomfort. In order to prevent these experiences, we're willing to try almost anything to "cover our bases" and "hedge our bets" against loss and hardship.

The problem is that troubles come anyway, unimpressed by our preparations to prevent them. The thing about the world is that it's everywhere we look. It's hard not to react to what we see, no matter how firmly we believe that what we see doesn't have the final say on what is true. That's where faith comes in. Faith is choosing to respond to life's troubles believing that God has our backs. We may not see it, but we choose to "act as if" the kingdom of God is just as real as gravity. That God's reality is the reality I will focus on. This kind of faith requires cultivation and that won't be easy because the world isn't going to stop bombarding us with challenges and selling us on how to fix them just because we cry, "time-out... I want to work on cultivating God's Kingdom in my life!"

The solution isn't to condemn ourselves for our limitations and sit around wallowing in our humanness. Instead James reminds believers about the nearness of God and His willingness to give us the wisdom to endure each step of our trials. Just ask, James tells us. God isn't surprised when we need help yet again to turn away from our natural instincts. He isn't interested in scolding us. He is patiently waiting for us to invite Him into the messy world we find ourselves in.

As someone who knows what it's like to feel "blown and tossed" about, I find this very reassuring. God doesn't ask me to solve the problem of my human foolishness. He's got that covered in Jesus. He just uses the stress that comes from reacting on auto-pilot to remind me that there's a better way. I'm still human, but I'm not trapped (enslaved) by my human nature.

Wednesday:

Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see. Hebrews 11:1 (NLT)

Reflection: Faith means trusting the promises of God, but we also need to make sure that we're not expecting (believing for) something that God has not promised us -like a trouble free life. Oh, I believe that God will provide for us, but I try not to be too picky in my expectations about the accommodations. We're talking about someone who let His Holy Son be born in a stable.

Some preachers use this text to tell believers that if they lack something, they should just believe with more certainty. "Name it and claim it," they say. But I find that humans are particularly poor judges of what God has in store. We are also terrible at figuring out what is going to lead to our greatest joy and happiness. I'm a big fan of faith. God wants us to have faith in His character, His love, His plans, His faithfulness. But how can we have faith in a specific outcome unless God has promised it to us?

So many of the greatest moments in the history of God's people came on the other side of a terrible situation. I, personally, would have skipped Joseph's time in prison. I would have given Abraham his son in his early thirties (when they still had the energy to raise a baby). I don't like delays. It bugs me that evil often seems like it's prevailing. Don't even get me started on the cross. I would never have thought that was a promising plan. And yet, without it, we wouldn't have the resurrection. We wouldn't have access to the Holy Spirit.

God's kingdom could only come at the cost of His Son's great sacrifice. It was an idea no human could possibly have predicted or planned.

The truth is that we often don't know what's best for us. We want the strength without the strength training. But God knows it doesn't work that way. He understands when a struggle is what we need to prepare us for what we most want. He doesn't enjoy our difficulties, but He doesn't whisk us off to heaven so we don't have to experience them either. He knows the growth that we're capable of. And He'll give us what we need to get through each step on the way. He's generous that way, even when it doesn't feel like a path we had in mind.

Thursday:

Stop deceiving yourselves. If you think you are wise by this world's standards, you need to become a fool to be truly wise. 1 Corinthians 3:18 (NLT)

Reflection: See... here's the thing. If you are a follower of Jesus then part of the deal is you accept His view of reality. That's what the first 3 chapters of 1 Corinthians is about- two different views of reality. One (God's view) is rooted in how things truly are... even if His reality seems so strange to us. The other (the world's view) is nothing more than illusion. Compelling illusion, sure, but illusion none the less. That's why the world's view of reality leads to despair and hopelessness while God's view of reality leads to hope and joy and meaning and peace, even in the midst of the worst circumstances human beings can imagine.

To people going through the worst of what this world can throw at you, James says this:

If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. James 1:5 (NLT)

Why would I need wisdom if I'm going through horrible troubles? Wouldn't strength or power be more important? The reality is that while strength and power do eventually come from the proper handling of trouble it turns out that it's wisdom that will give you the endurance to get through the worst this world will throw at you. Why? Because the world doesn't believe suffering is fair... God would say, "you're right... it's not fair... this world isn't about fair anymore. It never has been. Before sin entered this world life was about unearned favor which still isn't fair. Since sin has entered the world life has been about a wild swinging back and forth between unearned favor and unearned suffering. But it's never been about fair and it never will be. Paul puts it like this in 1 Corinthians chapter 3:

Stop deceiving yourselves. If you think you are wise by this world's standards, you need to become a fool to be truly wise. 1 Corinthians 3:18 (NLT)

What's Paul talking about? He's talking about putting aside the wisdom of this world (things are supposed to be fair) and accepting God's wisdom.

This is especially true in our modern civilization. We live in a culture where we have created so much technology which provides us with an unprecedented level of comfort and safety that no other society has ever enjoyed. I have to admit... I like it. Not only does it make life easier and more enjoyable and in many respects productive, but it also provides that safety that we all crave. But because of that we have this idea that when something goes wrong, something must have gone wrong. Does that makes sense?

In other words, if something bad happens we immediately begin trying to figure out who/ what to blame. There has never been a society that is so lawsuit happy. Whenever something bad happens the first question we ask is, "who can we hold responsible?"

I spilled boiling hot coffee on myself- the cup didn't say the coffee was hot- I think I'll sue the people who sold me the coffee that shouldn't have been THAT hot.

I could go on and on. Now I'm not saying lawsuits are all bad. But I am saying that if something goes wrong in our current culture we never ask ourselves if it was our own fault... or maybe just an accident. We have to blame somebody. We have this idea that trouble is always bad... but Jesus never saw it that way. Even if the trouble was somebody else's fault, Jesus always faced trouble head on and didn't act like it was somehow unfair. That kind of wisdom gave Him the ability to handle whatever life through His way. His life was about delivering the truth to world gone crazy:

The reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me. John 18:37 (NLT)

Do you want to understand truth? Then listen to Jesus. We've been looking at it for the last couple weeks and we'll continue as we go through the book of James- trouble is part of this world. It's sort of the new default setting. Ever since Adam & Eve chose to eat that forbidden fruit that shroud of illusion has been covering this world and impacting every part of our lives. Jesus came to poke some holes in that shroud.

Growing up I was taught that the definition of a miracle was, "a temporary suspension of reality". That reality was a person's sickness and Jesus suspended reality to heal that person. That reality was a person's hunger and Jesus would suspend that reality and feed them. That's what a miracle was... the temporary suspension of reality.

I don't think so anymore. Now I think a miracle is a temporary reinstatement of reality. Now when I read about Jesus' miracles I see Him reaching up and poking a hole in the shroud of illusion that covers our world and letting the light of true reality filter down into a person's life. I can almost hear Him saying, "you want to know what reality is? It's not death- that's the illusion. Let me show you what true reality is by resurrecting this guy. You think reality is blindness? Not a chance. Let me poke a hole in the shroud of illusion and show you what true reality is- sight."

Over and over He did it. He not only is the Truth, He also came to show us the truth. To show us what true reality is. Is suffering hard? Yes. Jesus didn't like it any more than you or I do. But is it part of the world we live in? Yes. That's just the way things are. Once we accept that we'll be much more able to handle the trouble that comes our way.

Friday:

Jesus answered, "My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world." John 18:36 (NLT)

Reflection: The Bible is constantly reminding us that we are living in a world of illusions. We do have to live in this world but never forget that this world is not what you were made

for... you were made for a place that is much different and the Bible is constantly reminding us to live in this life as though it is not the final destination. Look at what James says next:

But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. James 1:6-7 (NLT)

What's James saying? I think he's saying not to get caught up in both worlds at the same time. If we're not careful we'll end up trying to live in both the reality of God's truth and the illusion that this world offers up. We'll buy into the idea that this world is all there is while also looking forward to God's reality that this life we're living is just the beginning of the beginning. We have to be careful not to let ourselves buy into the spiritual reality of God's truth while also believing that the secular world we see is also reality.

The word, "secular" comes from the Latin word that means, "now". The idea behind a secular view of existence is that this world we are living in is all there is. There is not "after" life. That means that if you're going to be happy then it has to happen now. And if you lose something in the here and now, then you've lost it forever. If you lose love in this life, you'll never experience love. If you lose wealth in this life, you'll never have wealth. If you lose someone you love in this life then you will never be with them again.

But God's reality says, if things aren't going well for you right now, don't let that destroy you, this isn't even close to all there is. Saint Teresa of Avila wrote this:

In light of heaven, the worst suffering on earth will be seen to be no more serious than one night in an inconvenient hotel.

How could she say something like that? Because she believed this life is just the beginning of the beginning. Should we try to live happy, joyful, peaceful, loving lives on this earth? Absolutely... but if something goes wrong (and even if a lot of somethings go wrong) remember that this world is not your final destination.

When Jesus was talking to His friends, just before He was going to be arrested He told them this:

Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. John 14:1-3 (NCV)

What's He getting at? Well one thing He's telling them is, you weren't made for this world. You were made for another one. A better one. A world where He lives. A world that will be vastly different from this one. That's part of what can give us the power to stand before troubles when they come our way. This isn't all there is. And the reason I am so devastated by the way things are is because the part of me that longs for the way things should be is offended by the illusion that we are confronted all around us.

That song we listened to during communion this last weekend (Blessings by Laura Story)- that song was filled with God's wisdom. The whole song is good, but there are two phrases almost at the end that I kept thinking about as I was preparing for this lesson:

When friends betray us ~ When darkness seems to win we know ~ That pain reminds this heart ~ That this is not our home.

What if my greatest disappointments ~ Or the aching of this life ~ Is a revealing of a greater thirst this world can't satisfy?

When trouble causes you pain that you didn't think was possible... when you are just sure that this is not the way it's supposed to be... James says, "you're right. It's not supposed to be this way. You weren't made to live in a world like this. That dissatisfaction is a revealing of a greater thirst this world can't satisfy. A world that Jesus promises is coming. In fact... He promises He's in that other world right now, preparing a place for you and me. The people we've lost, the beauty we crave, the peace we need... it's all in that other world. When you remember that it can give you the ability to stand before whatever trouble this world can throw at you.

Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven. Philippians 1:27 (NLT)