

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

Theme: "The Testing of Your Faith"

Lesson: 25

Text: 3:17-18

Date: 9-3-23

Trinity Lutheran Church

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TEXT AND STUDY NOTES

(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.

(Prov 11:18; Is 32:17; Hos 10:12; Amos 6:12; Mt 5:9; Lk 2:40,52; 6:36; 21:15
Acts 6:3,10; Rom 11:33; 12:9; 14:19; 1 Cor 1:17-24,30; 2:1-7;
Gal 6:7,8; Eph 1:8,17; 3:10; Php 1:11,17; 2:3; Col 1:9; 2:3; 3:16; Heb 12:11;
Rev 5:12; 7:12)

Commentary on James – "The Epistle of Faith" – Dr. David Scaer - CPH

All such evil behavior contradicts the wisdom which "comes down from above" (3:15). A secular definition for wisdom would be inappropriate here. It will not do to understand wisdom as that virtue which simply describes the way the Christian life should be lived. Wisdom (*sophia*) refers to the comprehension of the Gospel, made possible by the Holy Spirit, especially as it sets forth Christ in the humility of His atonement. Matthew uses it of the preaching of Jesus (13:54). Jesus by comparing Himself with Solomon implies that He has the higher wisdom (Matt. 12:42). While its cognate, wise, may be used in a derogatory way of those who have their own wisdom (Matt. 11:25), it is used in a positive way of the apostles themselves (Matt. 23:34).

In Matt. 11:19 Jesus speaks the almost cryptic phrase: "Yet wisdom is justified by her children (*kai edikaiōthē hē sophia apo tōn teknōn autēs*)."
Christ's reception of sinners verifies, that is, outwardly justifies, His message of God's love for them. God's reception of sinners can be seen in that Christ has table fellowship with them. Jesus' use of the verb "justify" as the visible verification of an invisible truth is no different from its use in James. Jesus' message is verified (justified) in His actions, and for James the faith of Christians is verified (justified) in their actions.

Wisdom involves not only the acknowledgment of the Gospel of Christ as true, but also the expression of that Gospel in the Christian life. It is not enough to be intellectually capable, as James' readers claimed to be; the works of wisdom must be expressed in works of meekness (*prautēs*), a Christological attribute (Matt. 5:5; 11:29; 21:5; cf. also James 1:21 above). Wisdom in Christian life must be expressed in the meekness or humility in which Christ gave it.

Like the good and perfect gift (1:17), James twice describes wisdom as coming down from above (*anōthen*), the term used in the Fourth Gospel to express Christ's coming down from heaven to participate in the human condition through the incarnation (John 3:31). This phrase in John, "He who comes down from above (*ho anōthen erchomenos*)," so closely resembles James' phrase, "This wisdom . . . comes down from above (*hē sophia anōthen katerchomenē*)" (3:15), that it seems impossible not to conclude that John is in some way dependent on it. James anticipates and influences the incarnational language of John.

With several adjectives James describes the character of "the wisdom from above." This wisdom is "pure . . . peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity." First of all the wisdom is "pure (*hagnē*)," i.e., without flaw or divided purpose. Some recent commentators see a clear Christological reference to Jesus as a model of purity.¹³ Similar is the beatitude, "Blessed are the pure (*katharoi*) in heart (Matt. 5:8)." "Peaceable (*eirēnikē*)" means more than outward serenity, but refers to that content attitude which the Christian necessarily has, because he has begun to share in God's content attitude toward the entire world. He knows how to forgive all, because God has forgiven all. "Gentle (*epieikēs*)" suggests a person who does not live insisting upon his rights, but who acts considerately to those from whom he could justly exact a price or a punishment. It is one of Paul's qualifications for a bishop (1 Tim. 3:3), a virtue to be present in all Christians (Titus 3:2). "Open to reason (*eupeithēs*)," used only here in the New Testament, means willingness to let the opinions of others have sway in your thinking. The phrase "full of mercy and good

The phrase "the fruit (or harvest) of righteousness (*karpos tēs dikaiosunēs*)" is important here. In Matt. 3:15 Jesus describes His baptism, i.e., His submission to the Father's will for Him, as fulfilling all righteousness. It seems improbable that James' "fruit of righteousness" is a reference to what Christians do.¹⁴ Rather it is a reference to the manifestation of the divine righteousness in Christ's atonement. The effect or product of God's righteousness is Christ's death. This message, that is, the Gospel, is sown or distributed. Though in the parable of the sower the reference to the sower is explicitly to Christ and only implicitly to those who preach, in James the use of the plural can only mean all those who are involved in the preaching tasks. They are called makers of peace because only through their message can the peace brought about by the atonement have personal effect among people. Those who preach participate with Christ, who first preached the atonement.

Their message is not only about peace, but it must be preached in such a way that the style of preaching does not destroy this content. A heavy preaching of judgment and condemnation with an attitude of condescension towards their congregations was having a disastrous effect on their comprehension of the atonement. Only an attitude which accepted all human beings was proper for preaching the Gospel as the declaration of peace. These harvesters of peace are an answer to the prayer of Jesus that the Lord of the harvest would send workers into the harvest (Matt. 9:37-38; cf. 1 Cor. 3:9).

LIFE APPLICATION-

How does one acquire the wisdom from above and a harvest of righteousness?