

James: Wisdom

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Well we did the first study, the first of the series, in the book of James and it was basically a foundational kind of introduction to the book of James. What we did was, we wanted to make sure we had a really good understanding of the context of James. So we asked the five "w's". We can review those real quick. The five W's are the who, what, where, when and why. It is a really good idea, when you are studying the Bible anywhere, to try to understand the who, what, where, when and why. That gives you a sense of the context of the book. So for the book of James we went through those, we will review them quickly. The who is....James. We said that this is significant because we believe that the writer of this book is James, the brother of Christ. That will give us some additional insight as we see that much of what James was teaching in his book, is parallel to what Jesus taught while He was on this earth. Even though James, the brother of Christ, wasn't a believer in Christ until after the resurrection you can see some of those teachings that Jesus did in the book of James. That gives us some additional insight.

The second was, the what. It was an epistle. That means it was a letter. The significance for us is that this letter was addressed to the churches that are scattered throughout the roman empire. Eventually, that scattering of those churches came across here to the United States, and ends up right here. So we know this letter is also addressed to us. We can picture ourselves, maybe as one of those churches that James was thinking about when he addressed this letter. This letter is for churches, it is for congregations to help them figure out how to live their faith. We have the who, we have the what, how about the when...

Looks like this book was written somewhere between 47 and 49 A.D. Why is that significant? It is significant because Christianity is still in its infancy. We believe that Jesus Christ was crucified somewhere between 25 and 30 A.D. That means that this book is less than 20 years old. What does that have to do with us? Well, I think it helps us understand the nature of the book being very practical. This book is very practical. It is sort of, how you live your life. I think of it, it's like the stereo instructions for Christianity. There is not a lot of high theology here. It's like, what do I do as a Christian. So, we have the who, we have the what, we have the when, there where?

This book was written from Jerusalem. We know that James went on to be the head of the church in Jerusalem. As far as we know, he never left that area. Why is that significant for us? As we study this book we are going to see a lot of Jewish influence in the teachings. As a matter of fact, we will see some of that today. A lot of Jewish influence. We know that Christianity is at its core; a derivative of Judaism. Jesus came not to what? Not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it.

Lastly, the why. I said last week, this is probably the most important question that we could ask. Why did James write this book? It was so that believers, followers of Jesus Christ could mature

in their faith past Biblical infancy, and onto Biblical maturity. On to being more like Christ. Really, that really is our goal here, isn't it? For those of you who are already followers of Christ, the goal is not that you stay where you are in your faith, but that you move to the next level, and then the next level after that, and the next level after that. So you are growing, developing, and maturing in your faith. James is a good prescription for that problem.

Now, today's text is about acquiring wisdom. Quick show of hands, how many people here would like to have more wisdom? Yeah? How many here are already wise guys? Reminds me of a young man who went to the older, wiser man and said what is the secret to success? The older, wiser man said 'well, you have to avoid making dumb decisions.' He said, 'okay, well how do I learn to avoid making dumb decisions?' The older man said, 'well, you learn that by experience.' The younger man said, 'great, where do I get experience?' He said, 'you have to make a lot of dumb decisions.' There is this sense that we only acquire wisdom through activity. There is this sense that we only acquire wisdom through experience. I think on some level that is true. The reality of this wisdom we are talking about, or that we will talk about this morning has to do with handling difficult situation in our life.

Let me just quick, do a review. Look at verse 2, now I believe it was two or three weeks ago we covered this scripture topic in a message I called "inconvenient trees." It was about handling difficult things that happen in our life. "Consider it pure joy my brothers and sisters whenever you face trials of many kinds. Because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work, so that you may be mature and complete. Not lacking anything." If you remember that message, and if you didn't hear it, and you would like to hear it, you can get to it from our website lifepointchurch.com. One of the things we said was, you will be defined in your life not by the things that happen to you, but you will be defined in your life by how you react to the things that happen to you. You can see that about a lot of people. It is not the things that happen to you that are going to define you. That is not how you will be remembered. You will be remembered for how you react to the things that happen to you. So if that is true, and we know that trials are coming, and we know that difficulties are happening, it is not a matter of if. It is not, if I lose my job one day, it is not if I get sick, it is not if somebody close to me dies. If all of those things are happening for sure the question is how do we react to that, and is there some role for wisdom in our decisions about how we react to that. This passage that we study today is connected to the passage we studied a couple of weeks ago, because it says this, "Let perseverance finish its work, so that you may be not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God." You should ask God. So the idea is while we are in the process of some kind of a trial, some kind of a challenge, while we are in that process we at some level, maybe not everybody the same, but at some level we are lacking something. That is the nature of the word process. You are not there yet, you are not totally complete, so, what the writer is saying is if you lack the wisdom to know how to deal with those trials, well then you just have to ask God.

The first statement I want to give to you today this morning is simply this....God is the source of wisdom. As a matter of fact, I think we should say that together. Here we go, "God is the source of wisdom." He is the source. I used to have a friend that I used to work with, he was one of these guys that sort of knew everybody. I remember one day at work I said, 'yeah, I am thinking about buying a new stereo system. Going to go on down to Best Buy.' He said, 'No, no, don't go down to Best Buy, I got a guy!' Oh, you got a guy? I got a guy. So I met this guy,

and he had some kind of little shop, and he hooked me up with all this kind of cool stereo stuff that was like really exclusive. That is pretty cool! He knows a guy! Later, I was going to get some new tires for my car. I am going to go down to Firestone. No, no, don't go to Firestone, I got a guy! You got a guy? Is it the same guy? No, it's a different guy. I went down to that guy, and I got a great deal. This guy was like that all the time. To the point where the people around him they wouldn't even go shopping, they would just go right to him. Hey, do you know somebody that sells running shoes? I got a guy! How can you have a guy?

Here is the deal, you need wisdom? I got a guy! I know who gives wisdom. As a matter of fact, the Bible makes it very clear. I want to read a passage to you and then I will eventually put a part of it up there, but this is from the book of Proverbs. If you are taking notes and you really want to dig into this topic, Proverbs 2-4 and 6 really covers a lot wisdom, and there is a ton of that in the Proverbs. Side note here you can really see the Jewish influence coming out in James writing, remember we talked about that. For the Jews wisdom was something that was practical. It was something that was real. If you got wisdom, it meant that you lived your life differently, you got wisdom it meant that you were a better person, and other people saw it. For the Greeks wisdom was a philosophical concept. For the Jews wisdom is very practical, and you see that. Let me read Proverbs 2:1-6 "My son if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, indeed if you call out for insight, and cry allowed for understanding. If you look for it as silver, and if you search for it as hidden treasure, THEN you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom, from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding." You got a guy! You say what a minute..Can't I get wisdom on my own? Well, I think to some level you can...experience brings some amount of wisdom.

Let me caution you, because there are two kinds of wisdom. There is worldly wisdom, and then there is Godly wisdom. There is worldly wisdom, and then there is Godly wisdom. Sometimes this worldly wisdom says this, 'hey, I have been burned before. I am never going to do that again.' I had a relationship, a friendship with this individual and they burned me. I am never going to put myself out there again like that. That experience has taught me that I can't trust people. That is human, earthly, worldly wisdom. You say, I have been cheated. I know what it is like to be cheated at that job. I know what it is like to be lied too. I know what it is like to be taken advantage. Never again am I going to put myself out there. Never again am I going to trust. That's earthly wisdom. Some people might say, hey, I know what it is like when people gossip about me. I know what it is like then they say things about me. You know what? I am going to be a closed book from now on. I am not going to share my heart with anybody, because that experience has taught me to keep my feelings to myself. That might be a good example of earthly, worldly wisdom.

As a matter of fact, what we are going to do, I think James, I think it would have been cool if he had enclosed this right close to this book, or right close to this chapter, but he doesn't. If you are in the book of James we are just going to go forward like one page to the 3rd Chapter and verse 13, and in my Bible the heading says "two kinds of wisdom". I will start at verse 14, it says this, "but if you harbor bitter envy, and selfish ambition in your hearts don't boast about it or deny the truth, such 'wisdom', does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. From where you have envy and selfish ambition there you will find disorder and every evil practice." He describes a type of wisdom that does not come from God. It is built out of

bitterness. It is built out of ambition, selfishness, and pride. But, verse 17, check this out, "but the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure, then peacemaking, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere." Now that is a good list of characteristics. As a matter of fact, I think we should go over that list together. Starting at verse 17 with the word "pure". Ready?

Pure, peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere. The idea is, there may be two kinds of wisdom, and you may try to acquire some on your own, but be careful that is my caution. Want to make sure the wisdom you acquire lines up with these characteristics, because these characteristics of Godly wisdom. That is the kind of wisdom that you get from God. So maybe I will ask you this...If it is try that you got a guy, then, do you know the guy? If God is the source of wisdom are you connected to the source? Are you connected to Him?

The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ, God's son, came to this earth and lived a perfect life. He fulfilled the law on our behalf, He was crucified, He was dead and buried, He rose again on the third day, the Bible says if we believe in Him and place our faith in Him, that your connected to that source. That is an important question to consider before we move on. Are you connected to that source?

Alright, so you say alright, I want that! I need that kind of wisdom. Well, I have good news for you. If you look at verse 5 in the book of James it says this, "if any of you lacks wisdom you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault." God gives wisdom generously. He is not stingy with it. He doesn't measure it out like it is some kind of precious gem, or invaluable commodity. He gives it out like water. Now for us, we are not used to this. We are not used to asking for something and getting more than we asked for. If you have ever been to a fancy restaurant, you know that the more you pay for something, the less of it you get. Isn't that funny? The more you pay for something, the smaller portion you get. I went to a fancy steakhouse one time, paid \$50 for a steak! \$50! I had a gift card, okay. It was pretty good, I don't know if it was worth \$50. We are not used to somebody giving us something generously. Imagine going to the store, buying a cd, the person behind the counter says, 'you know what, you bought one cd, let me give you ten more.' Imagine going to the apple store, I will take one of those new ipad2's, you know why don't you take two? Take three! How many we got back there? We are going to bring them all out, why don't you give them to this nice person. We are not used to that, so all of a sudden when we read that God gives to all generously it's like wait a minute. Here is the thing, we know that our God is like that. If you were here for a message series, If Money Talks, when we talked about finances one of the things we learned is that God's primary characteristic was what? That He was generous! That God is generous! Romans 8:32, "He who did not spare His own son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also, with Him graciously give us all things." So why should it be a surprise that God wants to give us wisdom generously.

Let me tell you something, God wants to give you wisdom in buckets this morning. He wants to give you wisdom in those cargo containers that they put on trains. He wants to load up one of those freight liners with wisdom and park it at your front door. That's what the Bible says. He wants to give that to you, here is the thing...He gives it to you without finding fault. That is kind a curious thing about this passage. He gives it to you, some versions say without reproach. Some versions say He upbraideth not, that is a good old word. What does that mean? It

means this, you don't have to be ashamed to ask for it. You can go up there very confident, just like the book says, just like Hebrews says, go very boldly before the throne of grace and say I would like a monster dose of wisdom. Sometimes it is hard to do because we are not used to asking for things.

When I was thinking about this message, I remember this story, when I was in 4th grade we used to have lunch, and we would have to sit at the lunch table, and the deal was you got a milk with your lunch. That came with your lunch, it was a white milk. So you would get that, and once you had finished your meal you could go to the counter and you could buy a chocolate milk, which everybody wanted and it was six cents, can you believe it? I am that old. Here is the thing, we used to call the lady behind the counter the chocolate milk monster, because she was so mean when you asked for the chocolate milk. She would have to verify that your lunch was done, and she would make a big scene of it to everybody in the lunch room. "Yes Phil, but is your lunch done, let me see it." You would have to hold your tray up, it was really pathetic. We became afraid to ask. In our lives that happens a lot, sometimes we are trained as young people to do that, sometimes I see that in my own kids, in the way they ask me for something. Asking for something that they don't think they will get. So they have to ask in a way that tries to throw me off the trail, or be super sweet about it, or start bargaining in some way, that is not the idea.

James says, "if you lack wisdom go to God, who gives generously without finding fault." There is a great story about this, I won't go into it, but you can check it out later if you want. It's in I Kings 3 & 4. Who was the wisest man in all of the earth? Solomon. Do you know how he got to be that wise? God told Solomon, He said 'hey, you ask for anything and I will give it to you. You ask for anything!' It is a good thing he didn't ask me for that. I would be like, uh...classic guitars, sweet car, really good golf game, whatever, I mean I don't know. Solomon said I would like wisdom. God said, 'because you asked for that, I am going to give it to you in buckets.' Paraphrase...That is what God is saying to you this morning, if I understand the book of James. He is saying, I want to give you wisdom. I want you to ask for it. I am going to give it to you generously, just like I did for Solomon.

Now here is the thinking here this morning. Okay, this is cool...God is the source of wisdom, He gives generously. There has to be a catch. What is the fine print? Okay, there is a little bit of fine print. Before we get there I want to ask you a question.. this has really puzzled me. Let me ask you this question...Is a prayer that is prayed without faith still a prayer? If you pray a prayer not believing that God can accomplish the prayer, is it really a prayer? It is more of a wish, isn't it? It's more of a hope than a prayer. Think of it this way...last week we bought a 12 pack of diet coke and on there was a little sticker and it said call 1-800 whatever to enter the Arnold Palmer Invitational VIP sweepstakes. I am a golf fan, I have a couple of minutes on my hands and so I called that number and then I hung up the phone. It is like when you buy a lottery ticket, do you think you are going to win? You really know you are going to win? You know beyond a shadow of a doubt you are going to win? No, you hope that you will win. Five days later I got a call on the phone....Hi, is this Phil Ayers? Yes. Did you enter the Arnold Palmer VIP Invitational Sweepstakes? Yes I did. Well, guess what? You are the grand prize winner. I won. Which believe me made my day! I was surprised that I won. I don't know how many people entered, I was shocked that I won. When we pray a prayer to God, why are we surprised when He

answers our prayer? I mean, sometimes I am like that too. We pray for somebody to get better, and they get better. I am like, wow! Why would we be surprised when His word says if we pray. Jesus told His disciples if you pray with faith believing in what you ask for God will give you anything. So, it's not like a wish. A prayer has to be prayed with belief. Now, that is the next little section, and this is a challenging little section.

Verse 6, "but when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea blown and tossed by the wind." This is the first piece of imagery we are going to get in this book. One of the great things about the book of James is he uses a lot of beautiful imagery for you to understand the picture. It's a word picture. He said, "when you pray, you must believe and not doubt, because if you doubt you are like a wave of the sea blown and tossed by the wind." Here is the reality, God rewards faith. What does it say in the book of Hebrews 11, "without faith it is impossible to please God." Now you might be thinking, oh, that is a tough one because I have doubts. Hey, I do too. So what does this mean? Does it mean that God can't answer our prayer if we pray and we have some doubt? It doesn't mean that He is not able to answer our prayer, when we have doubt. I don't think so, because if that was the truth then somehow our actions would have control over God, and that is not Biblical. It's not that He can't. It is that God won't answer our prayer. If we pray and we don't believe and don't have faith that God won't, I don't think so because then I don't think that sort of makes Him cruel. I think it is this, that God doesn't answer our prayer because He knows what is best for us. He knows that if He answers that prayer for wisdom, and that prayer is not prayed in faith, then we are not learning, and we are not growing.

Let's go back to those first two verses, "consider it joy when you face trials, because those trials build perseverance." Perseverance turns into maturity. So the goal in those trials is for us to learn and to grow, and if we pray a prayer that is not prayed in faith we are not learning. Verse 3 says it is the "testing of our faith". So a prayer that is prayed without belief is a failure in the test. It's like flunking the test. This is really interesting, I went over this a lot. I was trying to figure this out. This Greek word for doubt is an interesting one, and I want to point it out to you guys. The word is diakrino, it means to separate or create a distinction. That is weird, because that is not how I think of doubt. I think of doubt as a lack of faith. Here is something interesting. if you look in James and go to the 2nd Chapter, and the fourth verse, I am going to show this to you. It is kind of interesting. James, and this is the same book, the same author, he says this, have you not discriminated, that is the same word, that is diakrino, it doesn't say have you doubted. It says have you discriminated. In the context there, and we will get to this, a few weeks from now, James is saying don't create a distinction between people that have money and people that don't have money. Don't create a separation. Don't love these people one day and then love these people the next. Treat everybody the same. What is he saying? Be consistent. That is the word he uses here...Here is what I think the idea is, I think what he is saying is, don't have all kinds of faith when everything is good in your life, but have no faith when everything is bad in your life. That is tough, because it is easy to do that. It is really easy to do that. I mean, the staff that works with me they know that I am prone to that. We will have a good Sunday with a big offering, and Monday morning in our staff meeting I will be like 'Man, God is good! I have got some faith!' Then we will have a week where the offering is like it was last week, and I will be like 'Oh, God, why?' The funny thing is, that is just my humanity.

What is humanity? That is something that I am lacking. What is God saying? No, no, the test of your faith is to have belief all of the time. When you are on the mountain top and when you are in the valley. That is not easy to do. It is much easier to be like a wave, back and forth. Oh one day everything is great, oh the next day...you know what? There is a term for that, a political term. It is called a flip-flopper. Everything is great one day, and things are horrible the next day. Maybe it is this idea of having one foot on each side, like I have one foot on the faith side, and I have one foot on the doubt side, just in case God doesn't answer my prayer I always have this to fall back on. It takes some risk to put yourself out there and pray that kind of prayer without doubt. There is a risk there.

He goes on to say that person that does that should not that they will receive anything from the Lord. The person who discriminates, the person who separates. Maybe the best way to think of it is the person who waivers. As a matter of fact, some translations say that, that they should believe and not waiver. The person that waivers back and forth, they shouldn't expect to receive anything from God. Why? They are double minded and unstable.

Now here is the thing, I think the point of all of the book of James, especially this passage, is that wisdom is practical. That this can change your life today, and this week. It's not some kind of theoretical thing. The reality is you are going to walk out of this room and something is going to bug you, it could be a small thing it could be a big thing. Something is going to happen to you, maybe it is in your job, with a person, with a friendship, or with a relationship. It is going to frustrate you and it is going to be harder to say God I trust. What we need to know is when we ask for wisdom God wants to give it. Here is the thing, the wisdom doesn't necessarily solve the issue, you still have to make the decision. You still have to decide on something to do, you still have to decide to pray a prayer without doubt. You still have to decide to be joyful. You still have to decide to praise God. You still have to make that decision. God is not going to do that for you, that is why He gave us all free will. As a matter of fact, as we go on, we are going to keep building on this because what James seek to answer is okay, if that is the case how do you do it. How does it work? What does it look like on a day to day basis? That is what we will look at next week and a few weeks after that.