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James 3 v13-4 v10. 'True wisdom'

If you remember, the last passage we studied in James ended with James talking about the need for a pure source, so the outflow from that source can naturally be pure also. Fair enough you may think, but how does this happen-all these sinful and negative thoughts and attitudes that I have, that I thought would all disappear once I became a Christian, how do I rid my life of them? I can see they are harming my relationships and I pray to God about them, but nothing really changes. What can I do? Can I just let God do it all? James is adamant that we are called to 'work out our salvation': he is clearly an opponent of those who reckon that it is all plain sailing once conversion happens. The Bible is clear that there has been a change: we have the Holy Spirit, we are children of God, His Kingdom has come in one sense, but has still to come completely in the world and in our hearts. Why? We ask James. His answer in this passage is that we are full of worldly, selfish wisdom rather than spiritual wisdom that produces goodness. Yes, we may answer, I know about that. I know that it is only God who can give us true spiritual wisdom, Proverbs 2v6, 'The Lord gives wisdom' and I have asked Him for that with complete assurance that He will give it unconditionally as in James 1 v5. 'If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God'. James, however, is clear that if we are asking God with wrong motives, then He will not give, He will delay. We will look at this passage then under three headings:

- 1. What it is that we are aiming for.**
- 2. Where we are at present.**
- 3. How we become spiritually wise and what the benefits will be for the church and us.**
- 4. What it is that we are aiming for?**

We aim to be like Jesus and He was obviously full of spiritual wisdom. The first mark of spiritual wisdom is from Matthew 11v29, meekness: "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls". This can be defined as self-subduing gentleness to God and man. As Christians, we are a family in the sense that we live as brothers and sisters under the rule of our heavenly Father. If we are wise to this, then it puts an end to any inclination we may have to jealousy, selfish ambition or any disorder. We seek only unity in the fellowship, but the bringing about of right relationships which are no longer superficial and hiding all manner of division behind a smiling front. Spiritually wise entails moral purity-there is no way of experiencing God's fullness and wisdom unless we are truly and wholeheartedly single-mindedly for God. Our goodness HAS TO BE genuine. There has to be gentleness, a gracious amenability, an unwillingness to exact strict claims. The spiritually wise will be open to reason, merciful in reaching out to others, even those who through every fault of their own are struggling. Do you stand back and condemn or do you come alongside and encourage a new way of looking at things, a new way of living? We are to be transparent, committed to Jesus and firmly resting on the rock rather than dipping your toes in the water, the inner life reflected in the outer living. Is your love for the Lord reflected in your living? Practical, not just in what we say, but also in the way we live.

- 1. Where we may be at present. We think we are on the way to true wisdom, but really we are stuck. We know only earthly wisdom, because we are full of our wants, our desires predominate. There is much that is seemingly wise in it and it is easy even for believers to be deceived into thinking that they are the true counsellors. Remember Peter's advice to Jesus, 'You are not going to the cross' and Jesus' retort: "Get away from me Satan!" Are you overly concerned with your own rights? Are you arrogant, having great pride in the extent of your Biblical knowledge? Are you happy to use whatever it takes to get your own way, are you even willing to war against fellow believers who stand in your way, have**

you been the cause of 'splits' in the name of 'The Truth', because when Christian fellowships break up, truth is the first casualty. Do we as a fellowship shrug our shoulders and ignore the difficult people, those who have the potential to divide us? If our roots are superficial, our fellowship shallow, not deepened by mutual sharing, hospitality, a whole-hearted commitment to each other believer then we will struggle when things become difficult. Are we jealous that some here have plenty and others little? There are Christians who believe that these present crises will see a huge number turn to Christ. I'm sorry to be a 'damp squib', but many people in this country have lived materially plentifully and they will not like losing those privileges. They will fight to keep them and because they are spiritually blind, they know no other way. It is only if the church is fulfilling its true calling and shining as a bright beacon on a hill that there can be any move this way: so are we this or just a 'spiritual club', the elite, not making it easy for anyone to become part of us? However, how can we know peace as a fellowship if we do not know peace in ourself, the peace of true unity with Christ?

- 2. So, maybe in desperation, we ask, how then do we become spiritually wise? Well, you may have observed that the road James offers is not easy; he is vehemently opposed to anyone who plays at being a Christian, who sees it as an 'add-on' to successfully living. No, he demands as God does, that we get our house in order. Firstly, he tells us why we are not experiencing God more fully: because we are not in the right place to receive from Him. Prayer blockages that are caused by selfishness, divided hearts and attitudes, are we still tempted by the world's pleasures? There is a war going on inside us between our selfish desires and God's Holy Spirit. What is at the core of our being-is it the desire to please God or to please ourselves? James calls us to grieve and mourn, but not without hope: we may despair of ourselves, but God never does- His grace is limitless. The victory was complete when Christ died on the cross and the victor has declared a peace! He has caused His Spirit to dwell in us, but there is still**

a war going on within us. However, He is tirelessly, relentless on our side. Augustine put it: 'God gives what He demands'.

- 3. James gives us six commands to obey:**
- 4. Humility in obedience. Remember Abraham?**
- 5. Submission to God and, of course resisting the devil.**
- 6. Active allegiance. Obviously, knowing James, it's not enough just to say it!**
- 7. Deliberately seek to cultivate fellowship and intimacy with God.**
- 8. Purify ourselves.**
- 9. Repent of your sinful selfishness.**

How then do the loving peacemaking activities of the spiritually wise person affect their Christian fellowship? The love goes deeper, there's no sniping behind backs, no cynical views of others called by God, new people coming in experience this loving honesty and finds all they need to have to know God and grow in Him. Remember Acts 5v13: 'No one else dared join (the believers), even though they were highly regarded by the people. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number'.

Many Christians today have become confused about how they grow closer to God. In many ways it is good that they look to doing something in a big way for God and there can be a real moving forward spiritually from mission trips abroad and so on, but our priority always has to be given to the task of living lives of goodness. It is our interior lives, what we are on the inside that reveals on the outside who we are. There are many believers who have had seemingly staid lives-very ordinary, long employment, raising children and its easy-looking back-to assume that they missed out or opted for the easy life. I would answer that by suggesting that perhaps we are in difficulties currently as the church in Britain because there are now so few of these Christians living lives of quiet devotion. Isaiah 30v15: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says, 'In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength', and 1 Timothy 2v2: 'Pray that

we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness'. Somehow, the small, the everyday has been lost. As we have noted in previous weeks, James does not ignore or discredit the interior life. Ch. 1v1: 'James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ': all else that is good in our lives emanates from this beautiful knowledge.