

## James 3:13-18

<sup>13</sup>Who among you is wise and intelligent? Let him by his good way of living show that he does things in wise humility. <sup>14</sup>But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not boast and lie, contrary to the truth. <sup>15</sup>This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but it is worldly, unspiritual, and demonic. <sup>16</sup>In fact, where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and every bad practice. <sup>17</sup>But the wisdom that comes from above is first pure, then also peaceful, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, and sincere. <sup>18</sup>And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who practice peace.

## The God Kind of Wisdom

### I.

The year—1938. Construction began on a new bridge. The design for the structure had been chosen for two reasons. The engineer had come up with a design that would not only look slimmer and more elegant than other proposals, but would also cost significantly less to build.

Once the deck began to be built, workers started to feel the deck move vertically in windy conditions. The phenomena became a regular occurrence, so the crews did what workers typically do—they named the bridge. They called it Galloping Gertie.

Attempts were made to reduce the effect, but the methods chosen had limited impact. The Tacoma Narrows bridge opened to the public on July 1, 1940.

The problem continued, so a professor at the University of Washington was commissioned to run some tests on a model in a wind tunnel with his engineering students and make recommendations to fix the problem. Among other things, he proposed drilling holes in the deck to allow air flow to circulate, thus reducing the lift of the deck. Days after his recommendations, this video was taken, November 7, 1940. Sustained winds were 42 mph that day. Shortly after this part of the video was captured, the bridge collapsed.

“Who among you is wise and intelligent?” (James 3:13, EHV). Someone presumed to be intelligent has acquired a great deal of knowledge. An intelligent child in elementary school is one whom teachers have identified as gifted in the ability to acquire knowledge. Having an abundance of knowledge, however, does not make a person *wise*. Wisdom includes the ability to *apply* whatever knowledge and intelligence a person has.

Sometimes gaining both wisdom and intelligence requires an epic failure. The engineer who designed the Mackinac Bridge specifically engineered his bridge to withstand winds up to 150 mph. Whether he already would have planned things the way he did before the collapse of the Tacoma Narrows bridge or not, certainly the Michigan Department of Transportation had a very real-world example of what happens if the structure isn't engineered correctly.

### II.

“Who among you is wise and intelligent?” (James 3:13, EHV). James is asking every single one of us to examine his own heart. How is yours? Are you wise and intelligent? James isn't asking if you know how to properly engineer a bridge. He isn't asking if you know how to manage money properly or perform your job successfully. He is talking about wisdom and intelligence from a spiritual perspective.

So what, exactly, does wisdom and intelligence from a spiritual perspective involve? Two weeks ago James mentioned bridling the tongue. In the verses between last week's lesson and today's James spoke more extensively of the danger of failing to keep the sins of the tongue in check. *That* would be a good place to start. Are you wise and intelligent in the way you use your tongue in daily conversation? Do you use words that hurt rather than heal? Do you misuse the Name of God?

Now that you have looked back at what James has urged you to evaluate before he has some additional things for you to consider. "But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not boast and lie, contrary to the truth. <sup>15</sup>This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but it is worldly, unspiritual, and demonic" (James 3:14-15, EHV).

There is so much bitterness in the world. Does it fill your heart? Worldly wisdom encourages bitter envy. It is human nature to look at others and be jealous—of their money or their intellect or their athletic abilities or some other trait you find admirable. Bitter envy goes hand in hand with selfish ambition—trying to improve your lot in life, even at the expense of anyone else who stands in your way.

Do not boast and lie, contrary to the truth. That kind of self-focused activity does not reflect wisdom from above—wisdom from God—but unspiritual worldly wisdom that is demonic at its very core. "In fact, where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and every bad practice" (James 3:16, EHV). Filling your heart with envy and selfishness seems quite normal to the world, but it does not lead to a Christian life. From a spiritual perspective it leads to disorder and every bad practice.

The Galloping Gertie of your heart—one moment trying to be upstanding, the next moment flailing away with worldly wisdom that seeks only to destroy others—is destructive and leads to an epic collapse.

### III.

"But the wisdom that comes from above is first pure, then also peaceful, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, and sincere" (James 3:17, EHV). James lists some characteristics of wisdom from above, but what *is* this wisdom from above?

Paul speaks about it extensively in his First Letter to the Corinthians. He starts: "Where is the wise man?... Has God not shown that the wisdom of this world is foolish? (1 Corinthians 1:21, EHV). A few verses later he explains definitively what the wisdom from above really is: "We preach Christ crucified—which is offensive to Jews and foolishness to Greeks, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> We preach Christ crucified, because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Corinthians 1:21, EHV).

The "wisdom that comes from above" which James talks about in our Lesson today is knowing Christ Jesus as Lord. It is knowing that Jesus came to pay for the sins of the tongue, as we mentioned a few weeks ago. He came to deal with the envy and selfish ambition James talks about today. He dealt with all that and more by living without envy and selfish ambition his whole life. His tongue was always under control, even when facing the death penalty for crimes he had never committed. He actively kept all these things perfectly in our place. Then, the death penalty was served, though he had done nothing to deserve it. The Heavenly Father abandoned him on the cross so that he would serve the penalty of separation from God that we deserved for all our bad practices. Then, on the third day, he rose victoriously so that we would never have to wonder about our redemption in his Name.

Jesus did it all. Jesus did it for you. Jesus did it all for the whole world. This is the

wisdom that comes from above. This is the kind of thing no human being could possibly know and believe on his own. It doesn't make any sense that One man—even though he is the God-man—could suffer and die for the sins of the whole world. This wisdom comes from above because only by the Holy Spirit working faith in your heart could you possibly believe it.

#### IV.

The epic failure of your moral failings was dealt with by Jesus. He re-engineered everything that was wrong with your heart and gave you new wisdom and intelligence—the wisdom and intelligence born of the faith created in your heart.

Faith alone shows itself by the way the Christian lives. That's what James has taught us over the last few weeks in the lessons. His instruction continues here. "Who among you is wise and intelligent? Let him by his good way of living show that he does things in wise humility... <sup>17</sup>But the wisdom that comes from above is first pure, then also peaceful, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, and sincere" (James 3:13, 17, EHV). Wise humility demonstrates your faith. Boasting and lying, as he mentioned in today's Lesson, can only demonstrate a faux wisdom. Real wisdom lies in humility.

Notice how James says wise humility will show itself in a Christian's life. It is first of all pure. There are no additives mixed into the batter. There is no posturing. There's not some underhanded attempt to manipulate wise humility to the Christian's advantage.

Christian wise humility is peaceful. Peacefulness does not insist on your "rights" in the Christian community. A peaceful attitude does not roam around seeking to start fights or create strife in the congregation or among the family of believers.

Being gentle and reasonable works right alongside peacefulness. The Apostle Paul spoke of becoming all things to all people to reach them with the gospel, even giving up his rights as a Christian if it would help. Be gentle even with those who have not yet attained your level of Christian wisdom and intelligence. Yield even to such people to help lead them to a deeper wisdom and intelligence that comes from above.

"Full of mercy" means to have mercy toward those who have a special need. "Good fruits" are the ways you can take action to show that mercy to others—spiritually first, and even with physical help for those in need.

"Impartial and sincere." Don't change like the shifting shadows in the way you show all these traits of wise humility from above. Show the same sincerity as you deal with others in every circumstance.

"And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who practice peace" (James 3:18, EHV). The first great quality of wise humility was "peacefulness." Peacefulness really encapsulated everything else about the Christian's wise humility. When peacefulness dominates your character as a Christian, there will be a harvest of righteousness. While every bad thing came from worldly wisdom, this righteous harvest comes about by the peace sown by the believer.

Show the wisdom and intelligence of a Christian life in everything you say and do. The harvest of righteousness sown in peace is God's gift to his Kingdom. God bless your life of wise, intelligent peaceful righteousness as you live in God's kind of wisdom. Amen.