

Praying for Wisdom

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James 1:5-8

January 15, 2023

Sermon Recap

Main Theme: We need wisdom from above to respond correctly to trials, and we need wisdom from God to trust Him in the midst of the trial.

Two main ideas James puts forward:

I. If you lack wisdom, ask God – He gives generously (verse 5)

- Wisdom is God-given discernment. It's the ability to apply the truths of scripture to the realities of life.
- Wisdom, one theologian said, is "situational insight" -- situational insight that is spiritually derived – given by God.
- When its all boiled down - wisdom is the fear of God. Wisdom is having a reverential awe of God.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight." -- Proverbs 9:10

- Wisdom begins with a right understanding of holy God. What is our holy God like?
- One aspect of His character: "He gives generously to all."
- God loves to give, its His nature to give; He loves to supply what we need.
- He gives generously, not sparingly, not hesitatingly. He is not reluctant to give, but eager to give.
- God loves to be asked to give wisdom, for that's what flows from Him. All that God speaks is wise.
- When we ask God for wisdom He'll never say, "Come back tomorrow" or "Didn't I already give you some?"
- We all need wisdom, or situational insight, so that we can face the trials that come in a way that doesn't forfeit what God wants to teach us in them.
- We need wisdom because we all lack wisdom in handling our trials. We all lose perspective in the midst of pain. The fog and pain of a trial can displace a sense of God's presence. We question God's wisdom, when instead we need God's wisdom.
- That's precisely what James is calling us to here. Where we lack wisdom, let us ask God, who loves to give it.
- The wisdom God gives will grant us a wise perspective on the trials we're facing, and grant us the ability to anticipate the maturity He'll bring to us in the midst of it all.
- Wisdom comes from the Lord as we pray for it.

- Note how James puts it – “Let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.”
- What a great promise! Let us come to the Lord and ask Him for wisdom for He loves to give it!

II. Ask in faith, without doubt

- There is one condition, however, in order to receive this wisdom from the Lord. “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind (verse 6).”
- James describes the one who doubts as one that is subject to the twists and turns of feelings and circumstance. They are not grounded upon the Rock of faith. They are like a wave of the ocean driven by a constant, restless surging of water, at the whim of the wind -- up – down – sideways -- not driven by truth but by circumstance.
- If we’re honest, we can feel this way at times, can’t we? When we’re undergoing trials of many kinds, especially protracted trials, they can seem pointless, bewildering, disorienting.
- God is calling us back to trust in Him.
- Now to be clear, James is not saying 'your faith must be flawless...you can never have any doubts or you forfeit the whole thing.' We all at times have questions and doubts can arise within our hearts. We seek to quench those doubts with the truth, but they can still arise.
- God is not requiring perfect faith, but He is looking for believing faith, active faith -- faith that expresses hope in God.
- The kind of doubt James has in mind here, as he describes it, is a “double-minded man.” “For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double minded man, unstable in all his ways (verses 7-8).”
- To be a double minded person is to be one who has not resolved to trust God, whether or not our circumstances make sense to us. To be double minded means that we might think it would be nice to trust God, but first we’re going to weigh whether or not we like what He says, and then decide for ourselves. To be double minded means that our trust in God is not settled.
- It’s like a person at a fork in the road, weighing whether to go God’s way, or to go his or her own way.
- A double minded person demonstrates a lack of faith in God. They think something like, "I’m not really ready to put my whole trust in You, especially when I don’t like the circumstances of my life." That that kind of doubt and lack of faith doesn't lead to receiving wisdom from God.
- God desires us to come to Him with faith

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.” -- Hebrews 11:6

- When we come to Him in faith, it pleases God. It honors Him. It declares to those around us how precious He is to us, how valuable He is to us.
- When our circumstances bewilder us, when we can’t see how He’s going to turn our present circumstances for good, and yet we continue to hold on to faith, to trust Him, to believe Him-- that’s a powerful witness to His goodness!

- What if we struggle with doubt? Is there an antidote to doubt? There is, and the antidote to doubt is delivered to us by looking at the cross. If we doubt the love of God for us, if we doubt that we can trust Him, then we remember what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

“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?” -- Romans 8:32

- God has demonstrated the fullness of His love for you; can you trust Him? “He desires to help us – He is calling us to faith today!

Conclusion

William Cowper, the English poet and hymnwriter, expresses faith by putting His hope in the Lord when he says:

God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never-failing skill,
He treasures up his bright designs,
And works his sov'reign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding ev'ry hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flow'r.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain;
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain.

William Cowper, 1773

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! -- Romans 11:33

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.” -- James 1:5

- R Kent Hughes likens the convergence of joys and sorrows of our lives as God’s masterful weaving a tapestry. Oftentimes we don’t understand. Oftentimes we lack wisdom. We don’t know how the dark hues will contrast with the brighter hues to bring forth a tapestry that only God in His wisdom can put together for His glory and our good. One day we will see it.

“In this life we will never fully understand the particular blending of joys and woes in our lives because we see only the underside of the tapestry. Only when death stills the loom and we stand before God will He turn the canvas over and allow us, to our eternal delight, to see what He has done.” -- R Kent Hughes

Questions for Discussion/Application

- Re-read the text, James 1:5-8. What initial insights and observations do you have from reading this passage?
- This passage is about seeking the wisdom that is from above. It is appropriate therefore to begin our time by considering together, "What is wisdom?"
- In what ways do you presently feel your own lack of wisdom and need for wisdom?
- What does it mean to ask "in faith" for wisdom?
- The text speaks of God's generous character as a reason, a motivation to ask God for wisdom. When we struggle to see God has generous how can that hinder the prayer of faith?
- How does the gospel reveal the generosity of God and how can meditating on the gospel strength our faith?
- How does the promise that God gives wisdom "generously" to all who ask in faith encourage you?
- What is one take home application point for you as the result of hearing the sermon on Sunday and our time here together tonight?
- Considering taking time to pray, asking God to help us to regularly apply this passage and to seek wisdom daily from the Lord.