

WISDOM TO PRODUCE RIGHTEOUSNESS

James 3:13-18

Today, we're back in the book of James, chapter 3 in our "summer-ish series" called *Gospel Wisdom in a world that's lost its mind from James the half-brother of Jesus who thought he was nuts but now believes he is Lord.*

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. 15 This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. 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.

WISDOM & RIGHTEOUSNESS

How do you approach the world? What are the lenses and filters that you see everything around you? What gets you out of bed? How do you see others? What motivates you and stresses you? If you live in Dave's world, you might ask: "What's my personality type?" What forms your worldview?

Whether we think through it or not, your worldview is usually shaped by four big questions:

Who am I? What's my identity? What makes me...me?

What's broken? Who broke it? Why is it broken? Can it even be repaired?

How do I fix it? What's the resolution? Am I am able to, do I even understand how?

What does it look like when it's not broken anymore? What's the end result? How will it be better?

We call this your worldview.

Lot's of things can affect a worldview: Culture, Family and Education (Nature & Nurture), Religion, Life Experiences, Environment (media, technology, socioeconomic status, peer influence, geopolitical), and Personal Reflection & Critical Thinking.

"Having a worldview" refers to possessing a comprehensive perspective or lens or filter through which one interprets and understands the world. It encompasses the beliefs, values, assumptions, and principles that shape how a person perceives reality, makes decisions, and interacts with others.

Our worldview, even informs how and where we get information and how we process, filter and reiterate that information. We'll watch a certain news program because it gives us more of the

information we want to hear. We'll follow certain people in social media because it agrees with my position. I'll have a particular opinion about a world event because I was told this my whole life.

Having a worldview is like wearing glasses—you think everything looks clear until you realize you have the wrong prescription.

These things combine to produce a certain type of HOW we approach the world. This is called, for good or bad, wisdom. Wisdom, hopefully, produces a certain type of behavior, action, reaction for good or bad. We call this *works*. And in the Gospel worldview, our goal is for wisdom to produce righteousness.

We're going to talk about two key concepts: wisdom and righteousness.

Let's start with wisdom...

There are two types of wisdom: worldly wisdom and gospel wisdom

Worldly Wisdom: is derived from human experience, reasoning, and the values of society. It is often focused on practical, earthly matters and is influenced by cultural, social, and intellectual trends.

It is usually associated with the pursuit of success, power, and knowledge as defined by the world. It can be pragmatic and self-serving, aiming at achieving personal goals and desires.

The Bible often presents worldly wisdom as limited or flawed. In 1 Corinthians 3:19, Paul states, "**For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight.**" Worldly wisdom can lead to pride, self-reliance, and a focus on material things, which can be at odds with God's purposes.

Wisdom is different from knowledge. Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit, wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad.

Gospel wisdom, or as James calls it in our text today, "Wisdom from above", begins with the good news of WHO God is and WHAT God has done. I know you hear me say that a lot but it's really important that Christianity is not about simply doing good things, sin-management or having correct doctrine. These things don't save us. God does. The Father pursues us, Jesus rescues us and the Spirit empowers us to believe. God is the one that is worthy of worship, not the principle of good, clean living or values that point to what we good Christians do; rather, it is about what Christ has done.

Gospel Wisdom refers to the understanding and insight that comes specifically from the teachings of the Gospel in the Christian faith. It is not just rooted in the messages, parables, and instructions given by Jesus Christ and the broader biblical teachings that align with the Gospel. It is wisdom centered on Christ himself. I would go so far as to say that Christ is saturated throughout rather than the center of (though He certainly is that).

Remember our definition of gospel wisdom. It is first and foremost, gaining, growing and saturating oneself in the knowledge of who God is and what God does. Psalm 111:10 **The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures**

forever! Proverbs 1:7 **The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.**

Gospel wisdom emphasizes not just living according to the values of love, forgiveness, humility, and faith in God. But knowing more and more about Jesus. It often involves the application of these teachings in daily life, guiding decisions, attitudes, and behaviors in a way that reflects Christ-like character and spiritual maturity. This wisdom is seen as divine in origin, meant to lead believers towards a life that is pleasing to God and aligned with His will.

Gospel Wisdom: comes from God and is rooted in the fear of the Lord, which means a reverence for God and His ways. It is imparted through the Holy Spirit and the teachings of Scripture and the spiritual gift of the Body.

Gospel wisdom is characterized by a focus on eternal values, righteousness, and living according to God's will. It involves humility, understanding, and the application of biblical principles to life. It leads to a life of faith, love, and service to others.

- **Worldly Wisdom** focuses on temporary, material success and is based on human reasoning.
- **Gospel Wisdom** is concerned with eternal, spiritual matters and is based on divine revelation and a relationship with God and his people.

And then there's **righteousness** (that's our smarty word for today):

Biblical righteousness is a concept that encompasses living in a way that is in alignment with God's will, character, and commandments. It involves not only outward moral behavior but also inner purity and integrity. This is what Will talked about 2 weeks ago in the aligning of our works with our faith. And what I said last week is that our words matter because we are no longer cursed but rather we get to be a blessing to others with our works and our words. In the Bible, righteousness is closely tied to justice, faithfulness, and the relationship between God and humanity.

Righteousness, first and foremost, begins necessarily with God. As Jim says, God is the first mover, we are the responder. And so, through faith in Christ, acknowledging that He has done what I could not do and resting in His finished work, we have a righted relationship with God. This is achieved not through human effort, at all (other than we provide the occasion needed to be saved) but through faith in God and His grace. Righteousness has always been linked to faith. As J-T says, it is the only currency God accepts. Even in the Old Testament, righteousness was linked with faith in Jesus Christ. Abraham is considered righteous because of his faith in God (Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:3). We know that even that faith is a gift from God. **Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,**

Righteousness begins with God's work, is received by faith and is evidenced by obedience. Righteousness in the Bible is not just about following rules but about a posture and heart that seeks to obey God out of love and reverence. It is rooted in faith and expressed through obedience to God's commands. This causes a transformation in us that involves living a life of moral integrity, where one's actions, thoughts, and intentions align with God's standards of holiness. It means doing

what is right and just, even when it is difficult. The Proverbs describe a righteous person as one who acts justly, speaks truthfully, and shows kindness (Proverbs 21:3).

This leads to a particular outcome so that Righteousness is often linked to justice, particularly in how one treats others, especially the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized. Biblical righteousness calls for living in a way that reflects God's character, justice and compassion in and to the world. It has an outward effect on the world around us. It ought to be seen and noticed by others. It should have an impact.

Most incredibly, this righteousness that we get to offer, walk in and demonstrate is IMPUTED to us!
BONUS SMARTY WORD: IMPUTED.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:21, "**For our sake, He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.**" That's imputed, credited to our account as if we earned it!

We start out dead, enemies and in opposition to a holy God. When Jesus goes to the cross, our sin debt is placed on Christ. This is the curse that Christ became for us, we saw that last week. Jesus pays it all. But for us to enter into that righted relationship with God, having a zeroed balance is not enough. Jesus not only gives us that currency of faith through the power of the Holy Spirit but also deposits all of Christ's righteousness into our account. He imputes His obedience, His works, His righteousness, justice, kindness, humility, compassion to us! His sacrifice, our benefit!

Biblical righteousness is a holistic concept that involves a right relationship with God, moral integrity, obedience to God's will, and a commitment to justice and compassion. It is both a gift from God, granted through faith in Jesus Christ, and a way of life that reflects God's character and desires for humanity. Righteousness in the biblical sense is not just about following rules but about embodying the values and principles that God has laid out for a life that is pleasing to Him.

So that's wisdom and that's righteousness. And that's our introduction!

Now let's jump into the text! Ordinarily, we would start with the text and then dive into all that we've covered so far but I wanted you to have the understanding of wisdom and righteousness so that when we read it in our text you can already come to it in the right frame of mind. Make sense?

A TRULY GOOD CONVERSATION

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.

- **understanding** (endued with knowledge, intelligent)
- **By his good conduct** (conversation, behavior)
- **let him show his works** (to work, toil, effort, occupation, deed, doing, labor)
- **in the meekness** (mildness, humility, think mild-mannered Clark Kent) **of wisdom** (high or low, worldly or spiritual).

Conduct is the word conversation - it means how you conduct your life both in word and deed.

Words and actions mean something. We know this. And because they mean something they should mean the same thing. In other words, your words should not convey one message and your actions a different message. This echoes James 2-faith without works is dead, faith with works is a truly good conversation, conduct, way of life

Gospel wisdom is not just merely intellectual, knowledge based. It necessarily involves our behavior and our words. Meekness was always very looked down upon but Jesus elevated it to a primary Christian virtue. It does not come from cowardice or passivity but rather from trusting God and that he can handle things.

In fact, meekness is the very posture that Jesus came into the world. Creator of all things, preeminent, Lord of lords, King of kings, and yet...a babe, teenager, carpenter, the second Adam

Our posture is one of meekness. Reserved strength, the power of restraint. Gospel wisdom allows us to have a truly good conversation.

We contrast this with wisdom **not** from above...

WISDOM NOT FROM ABOVE

Leads to disorder

14 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.

- Bitter jealousy - pungent, negative zeal or fervent mind
 - Insecurity, fear or envy + resentment & covetousness = division, bitterness, destruction
- Selfish ambition - faction and contention
- In your hearts - thoughts & feelings, the core of who you are, the middle
- Do not boast - glory not, exult against
- Be false to the truth - two senses, being untrue to who you are (imago dei) and to the truth Jesus has recreated you to be (truth is the same word Jesus uses when he say "I am the truth")
- This is the opposite of meekness and therefore the opposite of Christ

15 This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

- This is not from God. Can't be, because it goes against the character of God
 - God is positively jealous - protective, not possessive
 - Desire for exclusive devotion from love + holy, pure, just = aim to restore, correct and bring people back
 - Jesus is the antithesis of selfish ambition
 - Only God is worthy of glory
 - Jesus is the truth

- Earthly - worldly, terrestrial, physical and material - the first stage
- Unspiritual - sensual, perceived by the senses, animated, carnal, the opposite of spiritual
- Demonic - devilish, daemon-like, anti-Christ
- It is a progression of degree
 - How many “policies” have been written in work and political cultures that had a good intent and gradually morphed into something unsustainable, misaligned and sometimes downright wrong?
 - Such behavior is ultimately earthbound (never “gets off the ground”, absolutely sensual (carnal) as opposed to spiritual, and its origin is in the cosmic powers of darkness.

16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

- Jealousy & selfish ambition exist - wherever, in any place
- Disorder - confusion, instability, commotion, chaos, no peace
- Every vile practice - all types of foul, flawed, wicked, evil deeds, business, matter, work or resulting in a material object

Wisdom not from above produces fruit: **Gal 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

Question: if the fruit we bear looks like this, what is the root of our wisdom? (We saw that last week: a fig tree can't produce olives).

WISDOM FROM ABOVE

Leads to peace

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.

- Wisdom from above is first - foremost, firstly in time, place, order and importance. Proton man. Also indicative of affirmation and concession - first this then that
- Pure - wisdom from God is first pure - clean, perfect, sacred, holy James 1:17 **Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above,**
- Then peaceable - pacific, salutary (producing good effects, health giving, beneficial)
- Gentle - appropriate, not out of place, mild, moderate, patient
- Open to reason - easy to be intreated, good for persuasion, compliant
- Full of mercy - of uncertain affinity, active compassion, tender
- And (full of) good fruits - beneficial (literally & figuratively fruit, plucked)
- Impartial - without partiality, actively undistinguished
- Sincere - without hypocrisy, undissembled, unfeigned - no pretense or desire for return

- And a harvest - same as fruit, about to seize, catch, pull take
- Righteousness - equity of character or act, specifically referring to Christian justification, innocent, holy, just
- Sown - scattered, send and receive, promiscuously
- In peace - to join, literally and figuratively (Remember Jim's "maintain the peace"), prosperity, oneness, quietness, rest
- By those who make - BIG word - to make or do, abide, agree, appoint, avenge, band together, cause, commit, continue, deal, without delay, exercise, fulfill, gain, give, have, hold, observe, ordain, perform, provide, purpose, raise up, secure, shoot out, spend, work toward, yield to)(practice, perform repeatedly, habitually, collect, require)
- In peace by those who make peace. This is the polar opposite of selfish ambition and the discord it produces.
- The legacy of those who bring peace rather than conflict is a harvest of righteousness. The "fruit" that comes from peacemaking in the Christian community will be the righteous conduct that God will bless.

Wisdom from above produces fruit: **Gal 5: 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control;**

WISDOM TO PRODUCE RIGHTEOUSNESS

So...how do I grow in gospel wisdom that produces righteousness? James 1:5 reminds us that if any of us lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach. When we ask God for wisdom he will never turn us away, he will never shake his head like, "Again, dude? Really?" I'm 100% sure God says dude. He doesn't hold back. He doesn't take back.

So let's start there. Let's start with God. Let's go to prayer first, asking God who is quite generous. Let's also have a posture that understands wisdom from above is pure, meaning it comes from a state of perfection, completeness, holiness. Real wisdom starts with God. Knowing WHO He is and WHAT He's done. Our goal in seeking wisdom is not a material one, the resolution to the issue, the solution to the problem.

If we've tracked James intentions in writing this book and listen to what the Spirit is saying, what we find is that trials, temptations, to hear, receive and do God's word, committing mercy, our works and our words being evidence of our faith and allowing our words to bless others, those begin with God's work as the first mover and always lead us back to a deeper and fuller understanding of who God is. Gospel wisdom reveals God.

Just like the people that James wrote to, we are also a people that live in a world that is openly hostile to God and the Gospel. And yet, James calls us to be peaceable. Meaning I don't have to fight a battle that is already won for a King that is already victorious.

Gospel wisdom says that Jesus is Lord. I don't have to be nor do I get to be. Since Jesus has won the battle, I don't have to fight one so I can be peaceable, as Jim preached a few weeks ago - eager to maintain peace.

Gospel wisdom says that Jesus is gracious. So I can be gentle and hear others out. I can listen kindly and without judgment so that I might understand how to speak blessing to them and point them to the one who was so gracious to me.

Gospel wisdom says that Jesus is glorious. He is the only one that IS all that and a bag of chips. Because that's true I get to show mercy. I don't have to tear others down or build myself up. What do any of us have that hasn't been given by God? I get to make much of Jesus. I get to be sincere and impartial knowing that apart from Christ we all suffer the same fate.

Gospel wisdom says that Jesus is a good giver of good gifts. That the righteousness that I am called to sow in peace, is righteousness that Jesus has already done and credited to me, to us. Think about what a harvest of righteousness means: we don't invent the seed, we don't provide the sunlight, the rain or the ground it grows from. All of that done for us and we...simply...pluck. Pluck. Pluck. Pluck. And walk into the house with a basket of fruit and say, "Here! Look what I've done!"

Christ has called us to live in a world that truly has lost its mind and is desperately hungry. Lot's of artificial sweeteners and food coloring to look like the real thing. Nothing that's healthy or truly satisfies. Just advertising and diet pills.

And Jesus provides a harvest of righteousness that we get to pluck and share. A little love here, some joy there. Here, a slice of peace and patience. Can I put a few chunks of kindness and goodness on your plate? Faithfulness, you say? Plenty of that to go around. You look like you could use a little gentleness in your life. Ah, a bit of self-control will cure what ails you.

Q. What would change in my worldview, if I really believed these things to be true?

Gospel wisdom produces righteousness. It allows us to see the world from God's point of view. To know that we get to show the world what He is like by how we treat a world that is hostile to God and his Gospel. As Paul writes to Timothy: **"I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. 3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time."**

Gospel wisdom that produces righteousness is how God carries on His work of reconciling His people to Himself. Let's go and have a truly good conversation and harvest the fruit that Jesus has given us to give to others.