

INI

St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
September 23, 2018
18th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Jeremiah 11:18-20, Mark 9:30-37
Hymns: 358; 744; 361; 800 (248:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: James 3:13-18

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct *that* his works *are done* in the meekness of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. ¹⁵This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. ¹⁶For where envy and self-seeking *exist*, confusion and every evil thing *are* there. ¹⁷But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. ¹⁸Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Wisdom is in the eye of the beholder. --

I know the expression is really “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” However the real connecting thought in our worship this morning is the subjective nature of wisdom. As we look at the world we see the world not only from our perspective, but also from our own self-interest. It is simply a matter of human nature. I watch the Vikings play the Packers and the very same call by the referees that I think, excuse me, that I **know** is the stupidest call made all day, the Packer fan sitting next to me is going to see that same call as a very smart call fully in accord to the rules of the game. Viewpoints on such matters can get very intense and that’s just a football game. How about when we are dealing with things

that really matter like who we are, and if we are good, and how we get to heaven? That is when wisdom makes all the difference.

The difference is perspective. With a heavenly or divine perspective one sees the world one way, and with an earthly, humanistic perspective one sees the world very differently. Which one is wisdom and which one is foolishness. This is more than a philosophical question which many, not only in the world but also in the visible church, would like to make it. It is a question of life and death, spiritual life and death. However, to state that openly, publicly, to actually state that what we believe is the only way to be saved, is not only regarded as rather arrogant, that in itself is regarded as foolishness. The world would have us believe there are no absolutes, that truth is relative, that one man's truth is his wisdom, and that another culture's truth is equally wise. The Holy Spirit doesn't agree. The Holy Spirit would lead us into --

THEME: Possessing True Wisdom.

In the opening verses of our text a very dramatic contrast is set before us.

James 3:13-14 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct *that* his works *are done* in the meekness of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.

The epistle of James is mischaracterized by many as presenting works as a way of salvation. That is a clear misunderstanding of the Spirit's message. James makes the point that what is in the heart is revealed in one's life. That is the contrast that is presented to us. James' point is that those who do possess true wisdom are dramatically different both in attitude and action from those who possess the wisdom of this world. He makes it clear that --

I. Earthly Wisdom is Contaminated with Selfishness.

James 3:15-16 This wisdom does not descend from above, but *is* earthly, sensual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where envy and self-seeking *exist*, confusion and every evil thing *are* there.

What we quite commonly see in the world is that people do good to others for selfish reasons. It may simply be the pharasaic motive of being praised by society as being a "good Christian." It may be that it would give one an edge on a business deal. It may simply be that it makes them feel good about themselves. Whatever the motive, when envy becomes

apparent, that one is jealous of the praise, credit or attention others are receiving, and when individuals call attention to themselves for their interest and their praise, that doesn't promote wisdom, but rather confusion. When viewed spiritually this confusion confounds souls.

In the many false religions of this world such confusion is apparent. Some Eastern religions talk about building "good karma." This appeals to human nature and creeps into Christian thought. People strive to do good that they might secure righteousness first in their own eyes, and then in the eyes of the world. In contrast to the widow's mite which Jesus noted, the generosity of the pennies coming from the heart of the poor that others disdain, many in the world praise the philanthropist who sets up a charitable trust and dishes out huge amounts of money to charitable causes. Indeed we properly acknowledge such generosity as civic righteousness. It makes it possible to live as a society. The confusion lies in the fact that this doesn't redeem one from sin, death, and hell.

Since this "wisdom" doesn't come from above but is earthly, sensual, and demonic, it cannot secure favor, or peace, or reconciliation with God. As good as it may look it is ultimately still sin because "whatever is not from faith is sin." (Romans 14:23) It serves the devil's purpose when individuals are deceived into thinking that they have done their duty to God and country, and so will enter Paradise. If the righteousness begins and ends with the heart of man it will be self-serving, and it will be contaminated by sin. It is then no true righteousness at all.

On the other hand,

II. Heavenly Wisdom is Pure and Self-sacrificing.

James 3:17-18 "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. ¹⁸Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

Where do we learn of such wisdom? It begins with the cross of Christ. Our gospel lesson reveals the contrast between heavenly wisdom and earthly wisdom. Jesus explained to the disciples what must soon come to pass; that He would be betrayed into the hands of His enemies, that He would suffer and be killed, and that He would rise again on the third day. That is the wisdom of the Lord that secured our salvation. It required Jesus to set aside considerations of self in His love for us that we might be delivered from sin and death. It required of Jesus that He endure great shame and suffering without bitterness, without returning sin for sin. By His sacrifice Jesus secured our peace, peace with God for us, a fallen mankind.

Now what are we told of the disciples to whom this lesson in heavenly wisdom was addressed? “They did not understand this saying and were afraid to ask Him.” (Mark 9:32) They didn’t get it, it just didn’t make sense to them. Indeed we know that they didn’t like it when Jesus talked this way. Eventually with the Holy Spirit opening their minds and hearts they would comprehend the wisdom that is from above, as James demonstrates in our text. However, on that day they were more concerned about who among them was the greatest. Their minds were on earthly things.

What’s the point? The point is that to natural man the wisdom that is from above, the wisdom of the cross of Christ is not seen as wisdom, but rather as foolishness. It is only by the calling of the Holy Spirit that we are brought to faith in Jesus as our Redeemer, and that having been brought to faith in Christ Jesus we can see the beauty of the cross, and the wisdom of God that saves, and brings us that peace. Once that wisdom which is from above possesses our hearts then and only then are we empowered to live that wisdom which “*is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.*” (v. 17) It is pure because it is from above and not from man. It is pure because it finds its source in the love of Christ for us as we appreciate the wonder of His love and the magnitude of His sacrifice. All those special qualities of being peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, (not insisting on one’s own way or the highway), these are hallmarks of possessing heavenly wisdom. When one’s life is full of mercy and good fruits, really caring for those who need help, for those who are suffering and helping them without considering if they will be able to return the favor, or if they are deserving of kindness, or if they are the right race or ethnicity, and it is done with genuine concern, that’s wisdom which has come to us from Christ by the Spirit’s power. That’s “the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” (James 3:18)

“Wisdom’s highest noblest treasure
Jesus lies concealed in Thee
Grant that this may still the measure
Of my will and actions be
Humility there and simplicity reigning
In paths of true wisdom my steps ever training.
Oh, if I of Christ have this knowledge divine,
The fullness of heavenly wisdom is mine.” (The Lutheran Hymnal 366:5)

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen.

(Romans15:13)