

James 3:13-18 'The Wisdom Of God; And The Wisdom Of The World'

Friends, last time we looked at chapter 3:1-12 of James, in a sermon I called 'It's All About Control', as he gave us his major work on one of his main themes in the letter: the tremendous damage that an out of control tongue or mouth can do! He began by addressing those with a secret ecclesiastical ambition. "Not many of you should presume to be teachers." The old Commentator uses the word "masters" instead of "teachers."

Jesus explains that true greatness is seen in a desire to serve in Matthew 20:20-28 and Matthew 23:5-12. V2: "We all stumble in many ways," but keeping our mouths in check will help us keep a firm grip on the rest of our lives! V3-4: "bits in horse's mouths", and "rudders for ships" are tiny things and yet have great influence upon their objects. Not evil or good of themselves, they just are. But what they are, are those instruments through which the rider or the pilot exercises authority or control. But the unrestrained mouth, with "one spark," (one careless word) can turn a simple situation into an out of controlled ferocious bushfire! V6: "it's a world of evil (corrupting, not only the mouth) but a person's whole life. And even carrying them down the road to hell! V7: humanity has been given such power by God in accordance with his mandate in Genesis 2, that they have tamed and had dominion over the creatures of the whole world. The skies, the seas, the land, and yet v8: "but no man can tame the tongue." V6: "it's a world of evil." V8: "a restless evil full of deadly poison."

So it never sleeps! Just as the devil in Job 1 and 2 and 1 Peter 5:8: "Beware your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking souls to devour." It's also a double tongue, which "praises God and curses men made in his image." V10: "My brothers this should not be." Yes it's hypocrisy. It's not of Christ, it's of Satan! V11-12: "Freshwater and saltwater (or bitter water) cannot come from the same spring"; its an impossibility. In the same way "olives cannot come from fig trees or figs from grapevines," its an impossibility. Well, so too says James, that the "fresh water" of the true life giving gospel and the "bitter water" (of a self-centred ego driven ambitious deceiver) cannot come out of the same mouth! Again, it's as impossible as "figs coming from a Grapevine" or "olives coming from a fig tree." So we need to guard our mouths, we need to keep a firm bridle upon our tongue. Yes we need to be in control!

And so we pick up the text in v13-18 of James 3, under the title 'The Wisdom Of God; And The Wisdom Of The World!' V13: "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in humility that comes from wisdom." Brothers and sisters, remember he began in v1 by saying: "Not many of you should presume to be teachers," addressing the secret ecclesiastical ambition of certain people who were full of vainglory. And then dealing with the damage that such people, (and indeed all of us can do) with an unrestrained tongue, which speaks as the heart directs it! Well now James tells us what true wisdom and leadership looks like, and from whence it emanates.

Again from Matthew 23:11-12: "The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." And from Matthew 5:5: "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." Friends, it has been said by many over the years, that "meekness" is not weakness, and of course that's true. And from Jesus Himself we learn, as "heirs of the Kingdom," that there is greatness, (Kingdom greatness) in meekness. Yes in humility! The wisdom of the world tells us: *Put yourself forward, get all you can, get to the top of the heap, no matter who you have to crawl over, crush, and even betray on your way to the top. Those wretched*

shows like that Survivor etc, are all about being as cunning and as deceitful as you can be. Betraying everyone along the way that you have sworn your allegiance to, if needs be. Because the prize at the end is all that matters. Yes the ends justify the means. And they actually call it 'Playing the game'. Well may I suggest, if you are prepared to cast aside every ounce of integrity that you have for the sake of a purse of gold, then I don't want to be in business with you! Those wretched shows are a real metaphor for life, I believe. And also where the true person is revealed. And they basically are just an extreme example, of what our twisted world is truly like.

But it is not so with God, and it must not be so among his people! v13: "Who is wise and understanding among you?" So we have "wisdom, sofos" and "understanding." The word in Greek is "epistermoan" and it literally means knowing! It comes from the root word meaning to be the "master," or the expert in some area. So, "Who is wise, (*who has expertise, knowing*) understanding" of what true wisdom and leadership are as God defines them? "Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in humility that comes from wisdom." The Psalmist writes in Psalm 111:10: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise."

King Solomon takes this truth up in Proverbs 1:7: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom." And in Proverbs 2:1-10 we read "My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones. Then you will understand what is right and just and fair, every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul."

And finally from Proverbs 9:10: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." So true wisdom according to His Word, only comes from knowing God! Beloved the world is full of people, that are full of knowing. Yes they are experts. And like those people in v1, they take upon themselves the presumption of being "teachers," even Masters. And yet all they possess, is some kind of knowing, some kind of knowledge on this or that subject or topic. And oftentimes they want to make sure that we know, they are the expert, the Master!

But do you see? Like those people in Pilgrim`s Progress, who did not begin from Yon wicket gate, (even Jesus Himself) all of their knowledge isn't "wisdom" it's merely information. A knowing of something. Whereas according to the scriptures, "Wisdom begins and is made up of "the fear of the Lord." Again, Knowing who God is and who we are. He is God and we are not. And true wisdom James says, expresses itself by one`s own "good life, by deeds done in humility that comes from wisdom." Friends what should govern our words? What should govern our actions? Having a right knowing, a "right understanding" of God. Genuine "Wisdom and genuine understanding", reflects itself in humility as we mirror Christ within us. Yes that's true "Wisdom" and that's true leadership. "Humble yourself before the Lord and he will lift you up." Amen!

Friends, as I mentioned last time a self-serving ambition has no place within Christ`s church. And this kind of striving, can manifest itself in every aspect of our life and also within the church. Even in a godly zeal! We need to be very careful that we don't become that kind of person. And in so doing crush another brother or sister`s desire to serve the Lord. As I've mentioned before, God has given all of his servants, (all of us) different kinds of gifts and abilities and we need to encourage one another

to use those gifts. That's how a body works effectively, with all of its organs and limbs working together. We can't be thinking to ourselves, *'well I'm the best at this, (whatever that thing may be) so I should be the one to do it'*, no. Firstly, because we might not actually be the best at that thing, and that's not the point anyway. It's all about building up the Body of the Lord, His church!

So there are times when perhaps each of us need to take a backward step. To allow others to shine for Jesus, as we are all blessed by God as He uses all of His servants! We used to sing a song many years ago: 'Brother let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you. I pray that I might have the grace to let you be my servant too!' Surely that's what true humility is within the body of the church, isn't it? Seeking the good of one another, so that each of us be encouraged to shine for our Saviour. And this kind of thing, (this kind of humble wisdom) comes not from within it comes from above! V14: "But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth."

Beloved we've just seen that true "Wisdom" and leadership emanates from God and a right "understanding" of who He is and who we are. But now James speaks of another kind of wisdom, and where it finds its` origins. This is what is, let's call, the wisdom of the world. And I like the way the NIV has put it: "But if you harbour bitter envy," may I suggest referring to that "bitter water" of v11. Yet again he uses a wonderful metaphor to explain his point. "But if you harbour bitter envy." Now when we think of a "harbour," it really does conjure up the picture of a safe haven, doesn't it. During the biggest storms and swells (although some waves do come in, and there have even been those who have been known to ride them) the boats in Ulladulla harbour have a sanctuary, a safe haven. The break walls keep the raging swells at bay. Of course that's a good thing.

But here, James is warning of keeping something that is evil safe within us. The Evil One loves us to do this, because he knows he can use it. For example, bitter envy and selfish ambition. What does the 10th commandment say? You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his manservant or maid servant, his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbour. Paul writes in Colossians 3:5: "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry." Surely that's what selfish ambition and bitter envy are. Verse 13 spoke of humility and selflessness. Whereas verse 14 speaks of a burning bitter envy and ambitious desire. One kind of wisdom James says stems from God. The other, please take note of where it does come from. Where have we built that safe harbour for those evil things? In our hearts.

Jeremiah says in chapter 17:9: "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure". And Jesus said in Mark 7:21-23: "Full from within, out of men's hearts come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside, and make a man unclean." So yes these things that James speaks of here, bitter envy and selfish ambition, if we are not very careful and on guard against them, we can find harbouring safely within our hearts.

Friends, this can find us at every level of our lives, and including our ministry. We need to be careful that our consciences do not be considered as with a hot iron Paul says. V 14: "But if you have a bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart do not boast about it or deny the truth." If we find these things at work within us, don't boast about them. Don't deny them before God. We must confess those sins. Friends God is merciful and gracious; he is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will forgive us. But we must confess those sins. We must have repentance in our hearts. Because without repentance, we have this other kind of wisdom of which James is speaking at work within

our hearts. Verse 15: “such wisdom, does not come down from heaven (literally from above) but is earthly, unspiritual (the word is *“psuxiker”* meaning natural) not “from above” but of the devil!”

He makes it very clear. An evil ambitious self-promotion among the people of Christ is spawned by the devil! And if we “harbour” such things towards one another, we are his children! No we are not of “the stars in the sky” (the children of the promise) that were promised to Abraham; we are of the earth, “the sand on the seashore.” It is a terrifying thought, as he continues in v16: “For where you find envy and selfish ambition, you find disorder and every evil practise.” Any place where people gather who call themselves Christian, and yet is full of those who promote other than the truth is not of God, it is clearly of the Evil One. (Not “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” as Paul says, and also has not that spirit within which Paul also says, where “Christ must increase and I must decrease.”)

Yes “bitter envy and selfish ambition” lead to “disorder, and every kind of evil practise.” And why does he say this? Well it's because the goal of such people, (is not the promotion of the glory of God and His Word of Truth, and the benefit and blessing of the brethren) but of self! *Look at me! Look at what I can do! Am I not amazing?* Beloved, the Body of the Lord Jesus is about us all fitting together as a whole. Again, all of us using our gifts and abilities for the benefit and blessing of one another, as we promote the life giving gospel message, of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And when that happens, where there is a humble, joyful desire to serve one another under the banner of Jesus, God is glorified, because there is order. He is the God of order, not of “disorder.”

In Romans 1:20 Paul writes: “For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen being understood by what has been made, so men are without excuse.” What is Paul's point? Simply this: Look around at what you see. Open your eyes and behold the Mighty Hand of the God of the universe. Are there not trees for the birds which also hold tremendous timbers for men to build from? There's fresh water and saltwater for the different kinds of sea creatures. Be amazed at the majesty of the mountains and stand in awe of the stars in the sky that God has set in place. The sun and the moon, the intricate diversity of life within the rainforests. Yes when we open our eyes and look around we can see the Mighty Hand of God, and He is the God of order!

Beloved, in many Pentecostal circles, (not all of them but many) sadly, this is not what we see. A reflection of the God of order among His people, is not what we find. There is “disorder.” There is much that is made of the supposed apostolic gifts. And particularly so, of what is referred to today as talking in tongues, for which there is absolutely no biblical basis. It is even suggested by many, that if we don't do what is basically ecstatic speech, we are not Christian! Now this is not me having a go at our Pentecostal brothers and sisters. I'm simply seeking to address James' point here of “disorder.” And I want you to think about it. If there is a building that is full of people, (the likes of which we have seen so many times being mocked by the world on TV, sometimes with many thousands of people within them) but yes if these buildings full of people are babbling on with no one knowing what anyone else is saying, is that order? Is that glorifying to God? Is that a reflection of the God of order?

Surely the answer to all of these questions is a resounding no. They have in effect, gone back to the tower of Babel, where God in His judgement for humanity's blasphemous idolatry, confused the language of the people of the world, and then “scattered them throughout the whole earth.” Paul put it this way in 1 Corinthians 14:22-25: “Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers. So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if an unbeliever or someone who does

not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, God is really among you." Now where Paul says "prophesying" here, he means explaining the Word of God. Not foretelling, but fourth telling. So not direct or special revelation from God, but expounding His revealed word.

Now granted this is only one example of "disorder." But James` point is that when we find "disorder" in the church, this is directly from Satan, and "every evil practise can then ensure!" Friends there are places in America, where they actually have rattlesnakes in their church aisles, and of course people are bitten and die! There are also places when supposedly in worship, people will be laughing uncontrollably, all rolling around on the ground, supposedly through the Spirit of God. There are still others who claim to be drunk in the Holy Spirit, I kid you not. And they perform as someone who is heavily intoxicated! And there are those in Haiti, who in their demon worshipping gatherings, do exactly the same as these things. If you want to investigate it for yourselves further, look up Justin Peters and his series called 'Clouds without rain', it`s an eye opener!

Beloved I've said it many times over the years, either Christ increases, or man increases within both our lives and our worship. It can never be both. "I will not yield my glory to another" God says. Dear friends, being "bitter" and twisted toward one another in any way and "harbouring" those things while being driven by secret envious ambition among the brethren, comes straight from the pits of hell, the Lord`s brother would have us know! In v17, we have James` second "But," as he returns to that "wisdom which comes from above." From God, but that's for next time.

To bring this to a close this morning, we looked firstly at that "wisdom" from God, which is expressed in any Christian`s life, (and particularly so in that of the leaders) in their uprightness and humble service. Because their "wisdom," stems from the root of all true wisdom. "The fear of the Lord!" Yes understanding who God is and who we are. We come to Him, not in our own strength, but because of His wonderful mercy and grace. Always remembering that truth, we cannot act with pride and vanity, but in response to His great love towards us. So we seek to love one another just as He has first loved us! Doing this in humility, yes humble service. That is the wisdom that comes from God. It is selfless, all about the other person, a clear reflection of our Saviour. But the other kind of wisdom is of the world. It's all about self. What I can do. How great I am. It "harbours bitter envy and selfish ambition." It is not from above; it is of the unsaved natural man. And of their "father the devil!" That wisdom expresses itself, (not in an orderly humble love) but in "disorder," disunity, disharmony, and devilish actions! Because its desire at it's very core, is the destruction of God's church! So we must beware dear friends, of being such tools in the hands of the Devil!

Brother let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you, I pray that I might have the grace, to let you be my servant to. Amen!

Let's pray!