

Above and Below

Brother James
Երկնային եւ Երկրաւոր

James 3:13-18

In the beginning of 2017 a movie was released called “The Last Words.” The main actress was Shirley MacLaine. She represented a retired businesswoman who wanted to control everything in her life, including her obituary. Strange, she hired a young writer from the local newspaper to write her obituary while she was alive. Poor writer! She interviewed 20 people who knew this rich woman to get some information about her. She got nothing positive about her. And the story starts there. Suddenly this elderly, selfish, retired businesswoman came face to face with what was important in life. Suddenly she faced the reality of life. Who has the last word in your life?

Lent season ended. Resurrection Sunday was last week. So what now? We go back to letter of James. In his writings, Brother James moves deeper into the essentials **of a Christ-centered life**. We all want to live meaningful lives and I believe this desire is God-given. We all want to live significantly and leave a legacy that will survive. Brother James is bold when it comes to **the basic principles in Christian life**, such as **church leadership, teaching, being the Christ-like person from the heart**, not just on the lips. We should be **“doers” rather than “hearers”** only. We cannot claim we **have faith** when we **ignore the poor**, the orphan, the widow. If our actions do not match our words, there is something wrong.

Today Brother James raises an important question:

Who is wise and understanding among you? (James 3:13a ESV)

Wisdom is the ability to discern what is good and the strength of character to act upon that knowledge.

“Wisdom in the Bible originally meant the technical experience or the ability to do a job well” (David Roper).

It means having the right skill in dealing with whatever happens in life: **the capacity to live a life that ought to be lived**. James is not interested in whether one **knows about wisdom**. It is not what we know that makes us wise, **but what we are**. Thus the source is not our abilities; it is not our DNA. You can be a genius but not wise. The source is from God, from ABOVE. Wisdom from ABOVE.

Evidence that one has wisdom from above:

“By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.”

(James 3:13b ESV)

Wisdom from above is revealed, just like genuine faith is revealed and manifested.

Two important words here need to be discussed: **Good and Meekness**. (*καλός kalos*, and *πραΰτης praotes*.)

In Greek, there are two words describing **good: Kalos and Agatos**.

-Agatos means: purely, intrinsically noble. Something that is good whatever someone notices it or not; it is good in itself.

-Kalos means attractive, beautiful, delightful.

James uses *kalos* here. Wisdom will appear on the person whose life is beautiful, attractive, holy, a life that makes our invisible Lord visible.

Peter expressed it best: **“Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”** (1 Peter 2:12ESV)

-Meekness: The word meekness in Greek is *Praotes*.

Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the world. (Matthew 5:

Meekness is not being a doormat. No, by all means, no in fact there is power in meekness.

In the Greek language meek, *Praus* word was used to domesticate an animal.¹

There is power in meekness. **Blessed are the meek**, the ones who trust God, the ones who make a choice to give the control to God, the ones who listen, who wait for the Lord, who are not envious and jealous, the ones who restrain their tongue, the ones who are angry at the right time for the right cause.

So in my own words, James seems to be saying:

“Who is wise and understanding among you?

Let them show it by their good and beautiful life, by deeds done in the gentle meekness of wisdom.”

A life lived wisely is beautiful to behold; it is gentle and humble in nature.

-Wisdom

Brother James spoke about genuine, true faith in chapter 2; faith should be expressed and manifested, right?

James talks about wisdom that is from above and not below.

Wisdom from above, genuine wisdom, Godly wisdom will be expressed also. Its qualities will appear and one's character will change...

Now, watch out:

First, how do we get Wisdom from above?

James already mentioned in chapter one:

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting.. (James 1:5-6 ESV)

We pray for different reasons. We ask God for different things. I wonder if we pray to God and ask for wisdom, not any kind of wisdom, but wisdom that is from ABOVE. Wisdom that is meek and gentle. Wisdom that leads you to trust God and obey Him.

Let me ask the question James raised again:

Who is wise and understanding among you?

Let me quote you Bernard of Clairvaux from the 11th century (1090-1153)

“There are those who seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge, that is curiosity. There are those who seek knowledge to be known by others, that is vanity. There are those who seek knowledge in order to serve, that is love.”

Brother James is interested in **genuine faith and wisdom**. And the source is not us; it is God who gives it to all of us. Be ready to receive it in meekness.

-Watch out for Wisdom which is earthly

Brother Jim describes wisdom from below:

But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic... (James 3:14-15ESV)

-Wisdom from ABOVE

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. (James 3:17-18 ESV)

Illustration:

Dave Dravecky. Dave was a very successful pitcher for the San Francisco Giants baseball team (1987-89) and was quite open about his Christian faith. After seven years in the major leagues, he had to have his arm and shoulder amputated due to cancer. Which means he could not play anymore baseball. A reporter asked him if he was bitter about losing his arm, resulting in the end of his professional

baseball career. Dave responded, “As a follower of Christ I have come to measure success not in the height of my achievements, but in the depth of my relationships.” Wisdom from above teaches us to face life with this attitude.

Godly Wisdom means having the right skill in dealing with whatever happens in life: **the capacity to live a life that ought to be lived**. James is not interested in whether one *knows about wisdom*. It is not what we know that makes us wise, **but what we are**. Thus the source is not our abilities; it is not our DNA. You can be a genius but not wise. The source is from God, from ABOVE.

Again, I will ask the question brother Jim asked: **“who is wise and understanding among you?”**

Amen.

*Be Thou my Wisdom, Thou my true Word;
I ever with Thee, Thou with me, Lord;
Thou my great Father, I thy true son;
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.*

1. William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible*, Matthew P 96

2. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Collier Books, 1952), 109.