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Sermon Notes

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## **Heavenly Wisdom vs Earthly Wisdom**

**James 3:13-18**

### I. The Timeless Quest for True Wisdom

#### A. Our Context: The “Highest Concentration of PhDs in the USA”(?)

1. Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill, situated in the center is the Research Triangle Park, with major pharmaceutical, software, and other hi-tech companies appealing to a comfortable lifestyle “tees, trees, and PhDs”
2. Overwhelming esteem for intelligence, academic achievement, invention, creativity... all the outworkings of the human mind
3. But it’s not true... actually Bethesda, MD is top-ranked, Palo Alto CA second, and four communities in eastern Massachusetts (Wellesley, Brookline, Needham, and Newton) fill up the top ten
4. Tremendous pride in human achievement, human potentiality
5. “Homo Sapiens”... Humans Separated by Wisdom
  - a. Anthropologists who have believed the lie of atheistic evolution speak of the ascent of man from apes to human beings step by step
  - b. The final step from Homo Habilis through Homo Erectus and many other sub-steps that anthropologists have concocted... the final stage is Homo Sapiens... literally “wise man”, characterized by the development of SCIENCE, wisdom in shaping environment by study and experimentation and the making of tools and weapons and devices and techniques; flint

tools such as scrapers and axes and arrowheads; fishhooks, spears, sewing needles

- c. Evolutionists say this capability is what separated human beings from apes and all other animals... the ability to think, to reason, to imagine, to remember, to observe and compile information from the surrounding world

- 6. We Christians know this capability was given to man from the very beginning of our creation on the sixth day:

***Genesis 1:26-27 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.***

#### B. A Worldwide Esteem and Quest for Wisdom

- 1. All over the world, people have esteemed and rewarded not only the mighty warrior who wins in battle but the clever and shrewd ruler who winnows people out with his eyes, separating the best and brightest from the rest
- 2. Like King Nebuchadnezzar with the Jewish exiles

***Daniel 1:3-4 Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility-- 4 young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.***

So every nation on earth has sought wisdom, intelligence, mental achievement and developed it and rewarded it

#### C. James's Hebrew Context

- 1. The Superiority of the Jewish Nation: Wisdom from God

- a. Before the Jews were born as a nation, there were kingdoms based on human intelligence... the Egyptians were the key example, with their staggering achievements in building the mighty pyramids and harnessing the water of the Nile by footpumps and irrigation techniques
- b. In the Orient, the Chinese emperors had mastered key aspects of hydraulic engineering (dams), animal husbandry, metalworking in the casting of bronze, etc.
- c. There were highly intelligent people all over the earth before the Jews existed as a nation
- d. But God raised up the Jewish nation and spoke to the Jews directly at Mt. Sinai and then through Moses

***Deuteronomy 4:6-8 Observe [these laws]carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." ... what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?***

2. Solomon's top priority... God appeared to him...

***1 Kings 3:9 Give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"***

God was pleased with this request, and lavishly blessed Solomon with wisdom, more than any other man that had ever lived:

***1 Kings 3:12 I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be.***

***1 Kings 4:30 Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt.***

- a. Solomon's top priority

***Proverbs 4:7-8 Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. <sup>8</sup> Esteem her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you.***

3. The “Wisdom Literature”

- a. Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs
- b. Focus: LIVING in light of the existence and holiness of God

***Proverbs 9:10 "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.***

- c. Intensely practical... extending to every detail of life: your words, your use of time, your work habits, your family relationships, your handling of money, your treatment of animals, your training of children...

D. James’s Greek Context

- 1. James, the Jewish brother of Jesus, wrote in polished Greek... so he had a Greek context, even though he was writing to Jewish people
- 2. Like the rest of the world, the Greek people prided themselves on their wisdom
- 3. Alexander the Great had had a fiery zeal for the superiority of the Greek culture... the Greek language... especially Greek philosophy... his conquests paved the way for “Hellenism”... the spread of Greek culture, language, and philosophy all the way from Greece to India and down through Egypt
- 4. Alexander was tutored by the great Greek philosopher Aristotle... the Greeks were overwhelmingly proud of their WISDOM

The city of Athens was named for Athena, the goddess of wisdom

When Paul preached the gospel in Athens, the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were there talking about nothing but the latest ideas; and they mocked Paul calling him a “seedpicker” ... a philosophical vagabond who dragged a tattered bag of ideas that weren’t worth their time

Paul addresses that with the Corinthian Christians who were just a few miles from Athens:

***1 Corinthians 1:18-24 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup> For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." <sup>20</sup> Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?***

5. So James has to address the infinite difference between Heavenly Wisdom and Earthly Wisdom... one of them will save your soul, the other will ultimately damn it

E. The True Wisdom of God: Salvation through Faith in Christ

1. The New Testament has a great deal to say about wisdom
2. The centerpiece of wisdom is the salvation of the soul

***Matthew 16:26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?***

3. Therefore Christ crucified is the true wisdom from God!

***1 Corinthians 1:23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but for us who are being saved, Christ the POWER OF GOD and the WISDOM OF GOD.***

4. Christ often linked wisdom and foolishness to salvation

The wise and foolish builders... the wise and foolish virgins...  
the foolish man who built bigger barns for his harvest

Nothing is WISER than finding salvation through faith in Christ...

***2 Timothy 3:15 the holy Scriptures ... are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.***

- F. So... the issue that stands before us is this... are you a wise person or a fool? Judgment Day will make it very plain

1. There are a lot of brilliant people who have changed the world by their brilliant insights, but they have been biblically FOOLS because they rejected Christ and the gospel... men like Stephen Hawking and Thomas Jefferson and Voltaire... staggering intelligence... names engraved in stone all over the world
2. But the Bible says the simplest uneducated believer in an underdeveloped country is wiser than all of them

## II. The Practical Test of True Wisdom (vs. 13)

***James 3:13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.***

### A. This Fits the Message of the Whole Book of James

1. James 1: Don't deceive yourself about the state of your soul... do you obey the word or merely listen to it??
2. James 2: What kind of faith saves? Only the faith that produces good works!!
3. James 3: What is true wisdom? Learn what it is and evaluate yourself!!

### B. So, James is Challenging Some who CLAIM to be wise but aren't

1. In what way are you wise? What is your claim to wisdom?
2. Many people have a very high opinion of their own wisdom

***Isaiah 5:21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight.***

### C. The Test of Wisdom: It Must Be SHOWN in Daily Life

***James 3:13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.***

1. Your daily behavior is the final test of wisdom...

2. If you claim to be wise but walk in foolishness according to the Bible's standards, you are deceiving yourself
  3. "Let him SHOW it" = same message as James 2; what do your works show about the state of your soul??
  4. The Works AND the Attitude reveal the character
- D. Wise Demeanor: "The Gentleness of Wisdom"
1. True wisdom comes from the converting power of the Holy Spirit
  2. When the Spirit converts someone, he does it first and foremost by convicting that person of their sins and humbling them deeply to the core
  3. Therefore, the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount capture true wisdom of salvation
- These people are spiritual beggars, knowing they have nothing to offer to a holy God
  - They are meek, for they realize how small they really are, how worthless because of their sins, and how weak as creatures
  - They mourn over their sins, they are not arrogant or haughty or throwing parties saying "Eat, drink and be merry"... they grieve and wail over the true condition of their souls
  - They hunger and thirst for righteousness... they know they have none on their own, but they yearn for it
  - They are merciful toward others because they know that, as sinners, they have no hope of heaven other than the mercy of God
  - They are pure in heart, because they hate the native evils of their hearts and the Spirit has worked a miracle in them... taking their corrupt heart of stone out and putting a soft, yielded heart of flesh in its place

When the Holy Spirit converts a person, this is the disposition; this is what it means to be MADE WISE for salvation; and such a person will SHOW their wisdom every day by their humble, meek, quiet demeanor and their works of righteousness

So... by contrast, James exposes and diagnosis the wicked worldly wisdom that will kill our souls, and the heavenly wisdom that saves them

### III. The Origin, Motive, Nature, and Fruit of Earthly Wisdom (vs. 14-16)

#### A. The Origin of Earthly Wisdom

***James 3:15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.***

1. It comes from BELOW
2. James calls it **“earthly”** (*epigeios*) having its origin from the earth; this world system... its goals, prosperity, power, methods
3. James calls earthly wisdom **“unspiritual”** = natural, sense-oriented, tied to our physical nature, not tied to a redeemed nature

***1 Corinthians 2:14 The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.***

4. False wisdom is also DEMONIC **“of the devil”**... at its root, motivated and taught and grown by Satan and his demons; at their root is prideful rebellion against the God of the universe
  - a. All false doctrines ultimately come from Satan and his demonic horde
  - b. Satan disguised himself as a serpent to deceive and mislead Adam and his wife by lies; so all false doctrine has come from him

#### B. The Motive and Character of False Wisdom: Self-Worship

***James 3:14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.***

1. Motivation is what moves you, why you do what you do
2. Earthly wisdom is like Satan, always about self... self-worship, self-love, selfishness... PRIDE... EGO
3. James mentions “bitter envy” or jealousy... the word “bitter” (*pikros*) means something pointed, sharp, pungent, acrid, prickly; so envy cuts and prickles and rankles; a person may hear of someone else being honored or getting the promotion, and they SEETHE with secret resentment; it comes from PRIDE

like James says ***“Do not be arrogant and deny the truth” (vs. 14)***

4. Worldly wisdom is motivated by and characterized by SELFISH AMBITION... whatever advances self-interest, whatever stokes the ego or elevates the person to be worshiped, adored, honored; earthly wisdom is all about self-gratification, self-fulfillment;,,
5. How different is Jesus, who took a downward journey:

***Philippians 2:8 being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!***

### C. The Fruit of Earthly Wisdom

1. This kind of wisdom actually accomplishes much in this world
2. Companies are formed and grow out of competitive drive and desire to conquer the enemies and build an empire
3. Nebuchadnazzar can boast on the roof of his palace:

***Daniel 4:30 "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"***

4. Earthly wisdom has driven some of the most talented human beings in history to achieve great things
5. But look at what James says it produces:

***James 3:16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.***

- a. This selfish, ego-based, demonic drive to achieve produces a fractured, divided world at war with itself; for this same attitude characterizes every unconverted person, but especially the “movers and shakers” of every age
  - b. And as these arrogant achievers MOVE and SHAKE their generation, the others fight back
  - c. So you have DISORDER and EVERY EVIL PRACTICE
6. Disorder = instability, confusion, disturbance, disarray, tumult... the raucous noise of the nations

***Isaiah 17:12 Oh, the raging of many nations-- they rage like the raging sea! Oh, the uproar of the peoples-- they roar like the roaring of great waters!***

- a. Order is God’s way... “a place for everything and everything in its place”... God at the top, leaders and rulers under him, those they rule under them, everything peaceful and orderly
  - b. Sin is ultimately DISORDERLY... like a fragmentation grenade that blows up this orderly universe
7. “Every evil thing” is a wide ranging term for all the practical outworkings of this demonic wisdom... all the crimes and infamies and manipulations and treacheries that have stained human history flow from this earthly wisdom of self-worship

IV. The Origin, Motive, Nature, and Fruit of Heavenly Wisdom (vs. 17-18)

***James 3:17-18 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. <sup>18</sup> Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness***

- A. What a Breath of Fresh Air to read these words!!
- B. Origin: Heaven

1. True, beautiful wisdom comes from heaven, like sweet rain
2. It is not concocted in a human brain by some benevolent genius who finally discovered the fountain of life and the food of wisdom, and we all sit at his feet like he's an enlightened guru
3. It has its origin in heaven... in the mind and character of GOD

***James 1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.***

4. It reminds me of this:

***Mark 1:10 As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.***

5. So, the perfect, pure wisdom James is celebrating comes down from God, and it is worked in us individually by the Holy Spirit through the ministry of the Word, the Bible

### C. Motive and Nature of True Wisdom

1. Pure... FIRST OF ALL

- a. Free from contamination... sacred

***Psalm 24:3-4 Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? <sup>4</sup> He who has clean hands and a pure heart***

- b. The motivation for this wisdom is to stand in the presence of the holy God, to see God, to be with God
- c. The wisdom that comes from above makes us see our own wickedness and corruption truthfully, and then yearn for the perfect holiness without which no one will see God!!
- d. True wisdom is INTENSELY GOD-CENTERED
- e. This attribute is above all others... for James says "First of all, PURE... THEN, after that, ..."

2. Peace-loving: they don't create conflicts; they love peace with God and with all others; they yearn for the perfect peacefulness that will characterize the New Heaven and New Earth
3. Gentle: (one scholar, William Barclay, said this was the hardest word to translate in the entire New Testament!) John MacArthur: "equitable, seemly, fitting, moderate, forbearing, courteous, considerate"... heavenly wisdom PERFECTLY FITS the need of the moment, resulting in a peaceful satisfaction similar to the giving of a cool drink of water to a sweaty laborer under the hot August sun; far from the boisterous rancor that earthly wisdom produces, this is a peaceful reasonableness all the time
4. Reasonable: those characterized by heavenly wisdom are willing to yield to persuasion without arguing or disputing; it is compliant, teachable, NOT STUBBORN
5. Full of Mercy: just like the Beatitude we discussed... they know they need mercy from God, and they LOVE to show mercy to other desperate sinners as well; it results in GOOD WORKS of benevolence toward those without clothes or daily food

***James 2:15-16 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. <sup>16</sup> If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?***

6. Full of Good Fruits: just like that... very full, rich harvest every single day of good deeds
7. Unwavering: not flickering like a candle; a person characterized by this heavenly wisdom is steadfast, not double-minded; not characterized by indecision, vacillation
8. Without Hypocrisy: (sincere) such people with heavenly wisdom are what they appear to be... not covered with whitewash or wearing a mask

#### D. The Harvest of True, Heavenly Wisdom

***James 3:18 Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness***

1. Difficult sentence in the Greek: literally “And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace”
2. Odd because fruit is not usually sown... but all fruit has seeds in it
3. So when God works saving wisdom in a person... heavenly wisdom... as we’ve been describing, a river of good works comes from the work the Spirit has done in their hearts

***Luke 8:15 But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.***

***Matthew 13:8 a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.***

## V. Applications

### A. Evaluate Yourselves!

1. James is a very convicting book!
2. It is meant for each of us to take these words and ask the Holy Spirit to show us our true condition
3. Are we characterized by the earthly, devilish wisdom... do we live selfishly, seeking to advance our own agenda, feeding our egos, feathering our own nests?
4. Is our lives characterized by strife, conflict, bitter envy and jealousy?
5. Are we actually BORN AGAIN? Have we trusted in Christ... or are we deceiving ourselves?

### B. Christians Should Be Convicted by These Words!

1. No healthy Christian will ever look at this passage as I’ve unfolded it today and say “I see everything like this in my life!”
2. We will be “cut to the heart” by much of this
3. But the Spirit will also show where we have a harvest of good works as well, if that is the case

C. Is FBC Characterized by Ego-Driven Intellect... Or Humble Heavenly Wisdom?

1. We have a lot of smart people here... great intelligence
2. But do these words ring true for us?

***James 3:17-18 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. <sup>18</sup> Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness***