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Living the Good Life Now
James 3:13-18

I typed a Google search into my computer this week, “The Good life” and came up with a list of web sites and magazines dedicated to helping people enjoy the good life. The bulk of them talked about exercise, vacation, rest, relaxation, financial security, health, relationships, food, and luxury items. When people typically think of the “good life”, they think of pursuing those things that make them happy, makes life more comfortable for them, things that can reduce the stress in their life and make things go smooth. Often this pursuit surrounds the “things” we can accumulate that can brings in the good life. In Luke 12 Jesus tells a story about a man who was in pursuit of the “good life” and had accumulated for himself all the best stuff the world had to offer at that time. It still failed to satisfy him, the carrot of contentment was still elusive for him, so he decided to tear down his warehouses and build even bigger ones to store even more stuff. God calls this man a fool because he invested all his efforts and energy in pursuit of the good life storing up stuff and made no effort at all in pursuing God, understanding God, getting rich toward God.

From the perspective of many people in the world, this man had it all together, what more could you want. If he lived in our day, he would have been featured on “Lifestyle of the rich and famous”. This man had decided that the good life was something we possess, but in actuality, the good life is something we express, meaning the good life is expressed from what comes out of us from the inside, not what we happen to have parked in our garage or stacked in our bank account. If you desire to pursue the good life you must know that it has very little to do with the

externals and a whole lot to do with what springs from the inside, our attitudes, our values, our heart.

How then can we be wise enough to see what the good life looks like right now. Hindsight is often 20-20. Often we can look back and say, that would have been best for me. Why did I spend so much time doing that, I would have been far better investing in family, or friends or I would guess those who die without Christ and are standing in the afterlife, they know the truth about God now, looking back on their life here on earth would say, "I sure wish I had spent more time pursuing God." In the midst of the moment, life is not always crystal clear is it? We can miss the truth, we can miss the wisdom that leads us to the good life.

In 1951, A prominent businessman was quoted as saying; "the world could use about five computer and no more", and he was the chairman of IBM. The director of the United States patent office in 1889 said, "everything that can be invented has already been invented." Must have been a slow month. Harry Warner of Warner brothers movies said in 1927 "who the bleep wants to hear actors talk?" President Grover Cleveland in 1905 said, "Sensible and responsible women do not want to vote." The Nobel prize winner for physics in 1923 said, "the power of the atom will never be harnessed". In 1893, "Lord Kelvin the president of the London's Royal society of Math whom the Kelvin temperature was named after stated, "heavier then air flying machines are impossible."

We humans have much knowledge, but we obviously do not know all, because hindsight constantly reveals our own ignorance and how completely wrong we can be. If this circle represented all the knowledge in this world we may know but a pin-prick. So how can we possibly assume that the wisdom of man knows it all, or even that is greater then the wisdom of God. It doesn't make sense to continue ignoring the wisdom from the One who created us. But we do so to our own hurt.

This morning we are looking at James observation of wisdom and the outcomes produced by the two kinds of wisdom. God's wisdom and the worlds wisdom. One path of wisdom leads to peace, rest, satisfaction in our relationships with each other, the other path, the worlds wisdom leads to conflict and disorder. James wants us to choose well so he describes for us the origin of each and where both kinds of wisdom lead.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the book of James, the 3rd chapter. The whole point of our "Faith Works" series is that if our faith is real it ought to make a difference. Faith that works ought to work, it should be observable. James has just said if our faith is genuine and vital we ought to be able to see a change in the way we use our tongue. If our faith is vital then we ought to see it in the way we treat people without partiality or playing favorites. If our faith is vital then we will see it in the way we treat those who the rest of the world have shoved out to the margin and discounted as irrelevant. We will see vital faith in the deeds we do. Not that the good deeds earn salvation, but the good deeds are evidence that salvation and change and new life has occurred. Just as leaves and fruit on a tree do not create life in a tree but they are a very strong indication that there is vital life in the tree. James now turns us to think about what is on the inside. What is the wisdom that we are pursuing that will produce the good life that we desire to enjoy? What do I need to avoid and what do I need to pursue? Read with me James 3:13-18 (READ)

V. 13 "Who among you is wise?" James calls us to do a little introspection and ask ourselves a question. What kind of person am I? What kind of wisdom am I pursuing? Am I engaging in the wisdom that will pursue the truly good life that I desire? Our behavior will reveal whether our not our pursuit is truly wise. James says there are two kinds of wisdom. These two kinds of wisdom have two different origins. One kind is from heaven and one kind is worldly, natural and even demonic. James is saying that the world's wisdom may seem very wise, but don't be too impressed by it. You must ask yourself: Is the wisdom of

the world I may be following...is it giving me what I want? Is my pursuit of the worlds' wisdom producing in me the kind of fruit that I want to have? Do I have a peace in my heart? Do I have a rested satisfaction and contentment? Are my relationships marked by enjoyment and unity?

James describes the qualities that the wisdom of the world produces. Bitter jealousy, selfish ambition, arrogance, lying. These qualities are not produced from heavenly wisdom, no they are the natural outcomes of earthly wisdom.

We have the choice to choose which kind of wisdom we will follow. Will it be God's wisdom or worlds wisdom. The disciple Peter fell into following the worlds wisdom when Jesus told them we was going to Jerusalem and when he got there he would have to die. Peter stepped into the middle of the walking path and said, "no way, over my dead body, I'm not going to let you simply walk down there and let them kill you." Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind me Satan." Why? Because Peter best shot at trying to protect Jesus was natural, it was earthly, it was Satan driven thoughts. It made perfect logical sense to Peter, but terrible spiritual sense and so Jesus exposed Peter for following the world's wisdom.

When Saul wanted David to put on his large armor he was following the worlds wisdom. It made perfect logical sense to Saul, but terrible spiritual sense. When the disciples tried to send away the crowds back to the town to buy food, it made perfect logical sense to them at the time, but terrible spiritual sense. When the disciples were on the stormy sea of Galilee and tried harder to pull their oars to shores, it made perfect logical sense but terrible spiritual sense.

The natural mind cannot understand the spiritual things of God. Just as there are many things we don't know about the world around us. The scientist tells us the further out in space we get the more the laws that govern this world don't work. The deeper they search down past the atoms and muons and quarks the more they realize how little they really

know about how things work. So too, the spiritual forces are unknown to the rational logical world. To those who are not spiritual, it makes no sense. The heavenly wisdom simply does not make sense. I Corinthians 1 tells us they are foolishness to them, but v.25 says, “the foolishness of God is wiser than man and the weaknesses of God are stronger than men”. The world’s wisdom may seem wise, but don’t be so impressed, look what the wisdom of the world has produced. Simply an improved means to an unimproved end. They work harder at getting there faster and faster and surprised that the place they arrive at is a dead end. Is there greater satisfaction, contentment, joy, relational unity, more love, more peace, more sense of hope and purpose. No. In fact the people, the stars, the wealthy, who are supposed to have the “good life” I read in the paper about their messed up desperate lives. It seems the more of the so called “good life” people have the more desperate they become.

Anyone recognize these qualities and lies that are believed reflecting the world’s wisdom? Hears what the world’s wisdom looks like: Arrogance says “It’s all up to me”. I deserve this far more than he does. I must push and force to get it done. Lies that says, “It doesn’t get any better than this.” If I put myself first and look out for number one....then I will be happy. Lies that say, “I must pump myself up to get the respect I deserve. I need to impress that person. Lies believed that “Life is always fair on this earth...Oh really?” And when it’s obviously not we lie and fight and claw to get our piece. World’s wisdom says it’s OK to distort the truth at times to bring fairness back to your world. Jealousy whispers, “You deserve better pay, more respect, better situation than her”. Bitterness says, “God is not good. God has not acted kindly to you and you present evidence in deep anger. AA definition of resentment fits here: Resentment is a poison and you yourself drink while at the same time wishing the other person die. Maybe that anger is towards another individual and the situation is clearly not right. God is seemingly doing nothing about it, so you have decided to punish them with your bitterness, harboring a

grudge for your friend who has been wounded. Nursing a pain that has been stabbed into you. The world's wisdom results in v.16 "disorder and every evil thing." Can you see how the world's responses can produce great tension and the fruit of multiplied evil as bitterness begets bitterness, as jealousy rips apart relationships, as arrogance destroys friendships. As lying crushes marriages. As selfish ambition destroys churches and businesses.

The world's wisdom focuses only on the temporary instead of the eternal. It's a way to escape a short-term problem by creating a lifelong disaster. Mark 8:36 "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world but forfeit his soul? Hebrews 11:24-26 "By faith Moses when he had grown up refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter choosing to endure the ill treatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin; considering the reproach of Christ greater than the treasures of Egypt.

How can we pursue heavenly wisdom that leads us to the truly good life? It's important to catch James' call to apply wisdom. There is a big difference between accumulating knowledge and applying that knowledge. Remember we have more knowledge than we know what to do with. Since 1955 mankind's accumulated knowledge doubles every 5 years. Can you see what the amount of knowledge our high school seniors are struggling to comprehend. Our high school graduates are exposed to far more information than Plato, Socrates, or George Washington ever was. Yet, our world is producing a bumper crop of brilliant failures. Highly educated people who know very little about how to live life well, know very little about how to relate well with each other and know very little about the God who created them. Knowledge is not enough to meet life's problems. We need God's wisdom to handle life skillfully and enjoy the truly good life. Wisdom is more than just knowing about life, it's actually doing life well. Wisdom is the use of the knowledge. It is not wisdom to be able to see the needs or understand

the perspective, or even analyze the problem. To know is not to be wise. Many men know a great deal and they are the greater fools for it. True wisdom acts with practical help.

Some people think that wisdom is being able to see from God's perspective, just like a controller of a subway system can see from his control panel the various trains in moving blips of light. He can see when they need to slow down and why they need to stop until another train passes by. Those down on the subway trains cannot imagine why they are not moving, but the controller knows it is saving them from a crash. That is God's perspective. Its very good to know and understand that God's perspective is not our and good even to trust God to be the ultimate controller of our life...but that is heavenly perspective, not heavenly wisdom.

JI Packer says that Heavenly wisdom is more like learning to drive a car. Some of you are learning to do that right now and I hope you learn to drive well because the roads out here to town are deceptively difficult and very few of our teens manage to escape unscathed from car crashes. Let me offer that as a challenge for you to be one of the very few to try and make it past graduation without a car wreck. What is important about driving a car is make the appropriate responses to the scene that is constantly changing. to make sound decisions regarding your speed and when to begin breaking. You don't spend a lot of time railing the Engineers who built the curving, bumpy river road. You don't spend a lot of time thinking about the philosophy of the order of the colors on the street lights. You don't wonder what is causing the woman in front of you to speed up and jam on breaks, speed up and then slow down again. Rather you simply try to observe and drive based on the conditions presented as you are heading down the road, be it fog, snow, rain or slow drivers. In order to drive wisely you must observe the condition and respond to them. Being wise doesn't mean you understand everything

that is going on around you, but it means that we do the right thing when life comes along. True wisdom acts with Godly action.

What does it look like? How can we tell if we are walking in God's heavenly wisdom? In v.17 James says true wisdom from God will be pure. Pure means untainted and free from what harms. My thoughts, my words my actions will not be soiled or corrupt or given with mixed motives. Gods heavenly wisdom will be peaceable: not quarrelsome, not picking a fight or contentious but loving unity and restoration. When God's heavenly wisdom begins to have an impact on us we are going to know because there is a cleaning up of my motives. I am going to have an increased desire to be a healer and a mender of relationships. I am going to be drawn to build people up and restore. Instead of picking fights and causing conflict, I am going to be the one who is the pointman for unity. Now that doesn't mean we are called to be doormats that people run over and wipe their feet on. This does not mean we are supposed to be someone who avoids conflicts and wants peace at all costs and gives in whenever opposed. No. A peacemaker is one who is a voice of reason, coupled with compassion and gentleness with wise control open to discussion and negotiation, not stubborn or short-tempered. That is what gentleness and reasonable looks like. Fair, proper, considerate of the other. Willing to hear the other persons point of view and accepting who the person is and intentionally trying to understand their perspective. When we notice those things beginning to show up in our conversations, then we can point to the fact that God's heavenly wisdom is beginning to take hold of us.

When we are reasonable we will be able to be reasonably persuaded. That can only happen when we are humble, because at times we don't want to be reasonable. We want to get our point across and make sure the people see that I'm right. We refuse to give up any ground for fear of being stomped on and dismissed. Our minds have been made up and we will not let anything change it.

One time during the civil war, Abraham Lincoln issued a command to transfer a certain regiment in order to please a certain politician. When the secretary of war Edwin Stanton received the order, he refused to carry it out saying that the president was a fool. When Lincoln was told of this, he replied, "If Stanton said I'm a fool, then I must be for he is nearly always right. I'll see for myself." Lincoln sought out Stanton and as they talked the president realized what a terrible mistake the decision would have been and promptly withdrew it. The heavenly wisdom from above requires a teachable, humble attitude, reasonable, gentle and peaceable. When those kinds of things come flowing into my life I then experience the incredible peace and satisfaction of the truly good life. Good things begin to flow out of my life, an expression of an inward Godly wisdom. They flow out toward others and the good fruit begin to multiply.

In heavenly wisdom I show mercy. Instead of tearing the other person down with my words, I am looking to build them up and responding to their hurt and need with compassion. Unwavering. Steady and consistent not given to the wild waves of emotion and fads. When Gods wisdom comes I live life without hypocrisy. That is the Greek word, hypocrites. Double minded. It was used to refer to the actors that would play on a stage wearing masks. In real life they would act one way they on stage they would play a totally different person. When I move in God's wisdom I can have the freedom to be real, genuine. I don't have to put on masks and hide and pretend. That causes the truly good life to begin flowing through me and back to me.

The righteous fruit v.18 is peace. Here the seed of peace could be fruit that is produced or the fruit of peace itself could be the seed that produces even more fruit. You can take it either way. Others are fed and satisfied from the sowing of peace and they in turn bear fruit of peace that multiplies to others. I like as Wiersbe says, 'What we are is what we live, what we live is what we sow. What we sow determines what we

reap.” What are you living? God’s wisdom or mans’ wisdom. Who are you going to choose to follow? Whatever you chose is what you will sow and then reap.

While those who follow the world’s wisdom believe certain lies. Following God’s wisdom means there are some heavenly truths you must stand on. Truth. God is in control...its not all up to me. Truth. God will ultimately decide my place, position in life...so I don’t have to fight and claw my way to the top. Truth: Any talent, advantage comes from God as a blessing. If He has not chosen to give me one then Father knows best, I have no need to envy what another may have been given. I trust in God’s wisdom. Truth: God’s wisdom rarely has to flex its muscles, rank or rave to get respect. Truth: We live only for an audience of One...God. Truth: Seeing people as those for whom Jesus died helps me be gentle, reasonable and full of mercy toward them.

James asks us a penetrating question. Who among you is wise and understanding Let him show by his good behavior in the gentleness of wisdom. Take a personal inventory this morning. If we play back the cassette tape in our minds listening to the words of our mouth this past week and we hear words that are wracked with bitterness, filled with jealousy, or arrogance, or lying then we had best wake up and realize the source of those kind of attitudes. Its not from heaven. We need to confess those attitudes and ask God to begin to change us from the inside out. If we see those attitudes of selfish ambition, bitterness, and envy and lying and jealousy then we ought to wake up because they will cause disorder and every evil thing. We can no longer excuse, discount or minimize these things because they are not sourced from God. Repent of the attitudes and plug into heavenly wisdom that is pure, peaceable, reasonable, gentle, full of mercy.

Let me close with a story from Daniel Taylor that illustrates the wisdom of man verses the wisdom of God that is full of mercy. Daniel Taylor writes in his book “Letters to my children” about a time when he

was in the 6th grade and back then school kids were taught how to dance. The teacher would line up the boys on one side of the classroom and the girls on the other and the boys would have to choose their partner. Imagine what it would be like for the girls waiting to be chosen, wondering who they would be matched with perhaps even someone they didn't like. When one girl, Mary was always chosen last. Thanks to a childhood illness one of her arms was drawn up and she has a bad leg. She wasn't pretty. She wasn't smart and she was overweight. Now, the assistant teacher of the class, went to Dan's church and pulled Dan aside and said to him, "Next time we have dancing I want you to pick Mary." Dan couldn't believe it, pick Mary? Why when there was Linda, Shelly or even Doreen? The Assistant teacher saw the questioning look and told him that would be what Jesus would have done. Deep down Dan knew she was right but it didn't make it any easier. All Dan could hope for was that he would be last in line and have to pick Mary. That way he could do the right thing and no one would be the wiser. Instead Dan ended up being the very first in line to pick. Here is the story as Dan tells it in the book. "The faces of the girls were turned toward me, some smiling. I looked at Mary and saw that she was only half turned to the back of the room. She knew no one would pick her first. Mr. Jenkins said Ok Dan choose your partner. I remember feeling very far away. I heard my voice say, "I choose Mary. Never has reluctant virtue been so rewarded. I still see her face undimmed in my memory. She lifted her head and on her face, reddened with pleasure and surprise and embarrassment all at once, was the most genuine look of delight and even pride that I had ever seen. It was so pure that I had to look away because I knew I didn't deserve it. Mary came and took my arm, as we had been instructed to do and she walked beside me bad leg and all just like a princess. I never saw her after that year, but I'd like to think she has a fond memory of at least one day in the sixth grade. I know I do.

I wonder what kind of peace and joy was multiplied in the life of Mary and Dan that day by even a reluctant follower of God's wisdom being full of mercy? Worlds' wisdom says pick the cutest girl, the smartest, the funniest. But aren't you glad that Jesus didn't use the worlds wisdom when he came to us? He chose us in spite of us, in spite of our ugly sins. The world doesn't understand why Jesus would come and die for us but he did. John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. Perhaps today you will receive the wisdom of God and say yes to God and receive his gift, his offer of salvation.