

Title: "Wisdom and Worldliness"

Text: James 3:13-4:12 (ESV)

Introduction

On May 25, 2020, the American populace was thrown into an uproar over the death of a man by the name of George Floyd, who was killed during detention by the police. There were many who most definitely were angry, and yet while this injustice took place, the response that followed was the promise of conversation and reconciliation. However, what actually took place were bitter ramblings behind comment sections. As opposed to opening our doors and preparing our dinner tables, we opened our social media platforms and prepared lackluster pontifications in the name of social justice, a concept rooted in a biblical text we are often too lazy to tread (see Leviticus 19). Personally, I was astounded when I read our passage and studied it in preparation for this evening, because I found out what anger, bitterness, jealousy, rage, and the like ultimately represents. It represents worldliness, worldliness that is so wicked, James the half-brother of Jesus goes as far as to call it demonic.

Background

James had spent the previous two chapters and half of chapter three addressing the weak faith of the dispersed tribes, because it had nothing to show for it, the sins of favoritism and the need for taming the tongue, for it can build or destroy. This portion of James' letter would continue that theme of making sure that the Christian faith is not just knowledge but also character, specifically in regards to jealousy and bitterness.

The passage begins with a question about who among these twelve dispersed tribes (see 1:1) is wise and has understanding. The text continues to say, in summary, that the ones who are wise and understanding are marked by good conduct with meekness, and that those who have bitterness and jealousy are marked by worldliness and are even characterized as demonic.

After asking about what causes quarrels and fights among the dispersed tribes, James concludes that accusation doesn't belong to any specific people in the group, but to the collective sinful desires of everyone in those tribes. He warns them to not speak evil of each other, but to humble themselves before the Lord.

As the church today, living in the context of 21st century western America, our call is not to use words that hurt, but to proclaim the living Word that rescues. Our wisdom is not of this world, but from another one.

MAIN POINT 1: Christian Wisdom is Shown by Godly Character

When we read the text, what is said about God involves not only his actions, but the proof of his character as God being one of goodness and grace. Here are a few:

1. God yearns jealously over the spirit that has been made to dwell in us (4:5)
2. He gives more grace, opposes the proud, gives grace to the humble (4:6)
3. God draws near to those who draw near to him (4:8)

APPLICATION 1: Prove Yourself Wise through Your Words and Actions

MAIN POINT 2: Worldly Wisdom is Shown by Fruitless Words

James helps us immensely in the work he's done in comparing and contrasting the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of Christ through the character traits mentioned in this part of the text, here is what he says:

1. Those who are wise and understanding display humility and obedience. Jealousy and bitterness are what worldly people display.
2. A harvest of righteousness is done in peace by those who make peace. Sinful passions will cause arguments and divisions among brothers and sisters in Christ.
3. Those who submit to God are humble, and take his presence seriously. They are lifted up before him. No one can judge their neighbor as God does, as there is only one lawgiver and judge.

APPLICATION 2: Prove Yourself Humble through Submission to God's Word

CONCLUSION: The people of God are people who find their wisdom and shape their character by God's Word alone.

(PRAY)