

## **Sermon Theme: True Peace from True Wisdom**

### **Sermon Reading: James 3:13-18**

Some of you might remember during the spring of 1992 on May 1<sup>st</sup> when Rodney King said, “Can’t we all just get along?” That’s actually misquoted. What he said was, “People, I just want to say, you know, can we all get along? Can we get along?” After three days of riots in Los Angeles Rodney King stood in front of the court house and spoke these words in an attempt to calm the tensions. But the riots would continue for another three days and after a total of six days of riots there would be over \$1 billion in property damage, 63 people killed, 2,383 injured, and 12,000 arrested.

You might not remember Rodney King saying those words, but this paraphrased quote, “Can’t we all just get along?” has been heard and said by countless individuals. “Why can’t you two just get along?” the exasperated parent asks the fighting children. “Why won’t you just get along?” the fed-up boss might ask when it seems like the hundredth time the two workers are arguing. “Why can’t we just get along?” the worn-out husband or wife ask themselves after another fight with their spouse. In these instances (and so many others) what is it that the parent, the boss, the spouse, the child, you as an individual might be looking for? It’s peace. It sure would be nice to have more peace of mind, peace at home, at work, at church, and in society. But how can we get along? How can we have peace in our lives? It’s from having wisdom.

James shows us two very different types of wisdom in James 3:13-18 but both types of wisdom show themselves in action. The individual who has this first wisdom shows it in their good behavior with actions done in the humility that comes from wisdom. These actions are considerate of others, gentle, put other people’s wants and needs first. Notice, specific actions aren’t really focused on here, but the attitude of humility behind the action. This attitude leads to service of others which then leads to peace—as we see in the later verses. This is wisdom that comes from heaven.

The first wisdom is the ideal of what we want—we want peace; but it’s the second that we see more often. Instead of humility there is bitter envy. Instead of service to others it’s selfish ambition—serving me. Envy is that feeling of resentfulness when another person has something better than you. Evil ambition is seen in actions that are done—even when serving others—ultimately for the purpose of serving yourself. The interesting thing about this type of wisdom is that it boasts about itself; it’s proud of its actions and what it does. Or, it denies that it has done anything wrong that it is being jealous or selfish.

You see this when someone boasts about their dishonest get-rich schemes—look how they tricked the system. Or one boasts how they did something because they wanted to—even when they knew it wasn't right—and got away with it. Or one shades the truth a little because no one would notice; it was just a little white lie about something on a form so then you get a little extra. You see the denial where one might deny they are being selfish: it's just not fair how they were treated, therefore they shouldn't be in the wrong. One might deny the accusations or even suggestion they are helping out because they have to; but deep down, they know the truth of where their heart is. There are many other examples of this wisdom.

And it makes sense that we tend to see more of this type of wisdom because James describes it as earthly, unspiritual—so it pertains to this life—and demonic—it comes from the devil, in v.15. Again, we see and hear this when if you want to get ahead in life, you are told you need to look out for yourself because no one else will. Those who are successful tend to put others down so their position is improved. Don't feel bad about using other people; it's their own fault if they can't see it. It's a dog-eat-dog world out there, you may have heard.

But it's not just about putting other people down; it's about promoting yourself. What makes this worldly wisdom so intriguing and tempting is that there's the underlying thought and promise that it's ultimately a good thing for you. When you do those things—look out for yourself, promote yourself—then supposedly you should eventually get to a point when you can have more peace, when you do have some extra comfort, when you can rest from the fighting and scraping to get by. Therefore, it's okay to give a remark to knock someone down here or it's a comment there. Don't forget to point how unselfish you were this one time, or make sure you give a reminder of what you've done in the past. It's not at all surprising that as James says where there is envy and evil ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But eventually, you are supposed to reach a certain point where you don't need to be like this anymore. Until then the ends justify the means.

What a bold-faced lie.

This isn't just talking about the work world of trying to get the promotion. It's in our relationships, it's in society, it's in the church, it's with your family, it's with yourself. When that jealousy, bitter envy and selfish ambition is in the heart there isn't peace when you are trying to impress someone else or uphold an image of yourself you want others or yourself to believe. There isn't much peace when you insist on getting your point across, when you think that your opinion needs to be heard, when you have to be right and “win” the argument, but then it just adds to

the tension or no one seems to listen or care. There isn't very much peace when you serve because you have to, you want to be noticed, so that you might receive something in return, or when you are looking to be paid back; especially if nothing does come your way.

And then when things don't go my way, when someone else gets ahead, gets what they want, when another person gets the recognition, when you don't receive what you think you deserve, "It's not fair," rolls right off the tongue. The feeling of, "No one appreciates me," comes on too easily. The thought of, "I don't get anything out of it" or "What's in it for me?" stops us from serving one another and God's will.

The thing about this so-called wisdom of this world is that it comes from our nature: it's worldly, unspiritual, and from the devil. It's what is in you and part of you. From the moment of conception we are selfish creatures. Think about it: no one has to teach a toddler to not share their toy. Babies only care about themselves. This worldly wisdom makes sense to us because it makes the starring character me. It leads to disorder and every evil practice because it only wants to serve itself.

But that wisdom doesn't give true peace. It wears you down after some time. And even if it didn't, your status in the eyes of others, your position in this world is only temporary. When standing in front of God's throne to be judged he isn't going to ask you your personal opinion, your accomplishments, or how great of a person you might have been in the eyes of others. He will only look at what is in your heart. If there is not faith—if you only have the so-called wisdom that is earthly and unspiritual—you will go to the place where that wisdom originates: to be with the devil and his evil angels in hell.

What makes one truly wise is the true wisdom that is not tainted and ruined with the selfish ambition and envy of this world. It is pure. It's pure because it comes to you from heaven and is shared with you in God's Word. This wisdom works in you a heart that desires to do deeds done in humility. It wants to be peace-loving and not easily provoked when someone tries to get a rise out of you. It wants to be considerate of others—quick to listen, slow to speak or jump to conclusions. It's a heart that is submissive with putting others before yourself. It is full of mercy and shows itself in good fruit of reaching out a helping, caring hand. It wants to be impartial to others and sincere in its actions—not just saying the words or going through the motions.

This true wisdom acts like this because it comes from above and imitates the actions of Jesus. See how Jesus selflessly came to serve under God's law in your place. It wasn't for any personal recognition or to gain anything for himself, but so that he would gain a spot in heaven for you. He is the Son of Man born to be

delivered over to death, suffer on the cross, and to die in the place of selfish sinners. Jesus served your place, going all the way to hell and back for you on that cross so you would be welcomed back into God's arms. The one who could rightfully claim, "Unfair" when living on this earth, was dealt and accepted the greatest act of injustice so that you would be declared justified—not guilty of sin. He served the sentence, was punished, so that you would be given a clean conscience without the guilt of sin and have peace with God. He died so that you will live. He became the lowest, the last, so that you would be made God's child and raised to be with him.

This wisdom from above leads us to be humble because we see what Christ already has done and gives to us. It does not tell us that we deserve something better, it doesn't hide that we were sinners, it doesn't try and lie to us to make us feel better, it doesn't boast in itself. Our boast is in Christ who lived and died to give us the victory over sin, death, and the devil. It recognizes what you were at one time—a jealous, selfish sinner—and shows you that Jesus has forgiven those sins and every sin so that in the waters of baptism you were made a new creation, a holy child of God, having this wisdom from above. It doesn't try and hide sin but instead shows you that all your sin was removed from you as far as the east is from the west. In fact, Jesus claimed that sin to be his own so with his death and blood he paid your debt in full to give you peace of heart and mind with God.

Knowing what Jesus has done, believing it to be yours, it leads us to want to show the same unconditional serving love. True peace comes from knowing and believing that with God your sins are already forgiven and you already have a home in heaven. It recognizes that this life, this world, is only temporary as we look forward to our real, eternal life in heaven. This is the true wisdom that gives us true peace. So while we are waiting to be called home, there's nothing left to do but serve to God's glory showing more people Jesus' unconditional love with our time, talents, and treasures. Amen.