James, the Proverbs of the New Testament

Week 3

**Introduction**

* Review
  + Instruction and Illustration
  + Verbal Linking
* Wisdom and Hard Sayings – Wrestling with the text
* Why must we wrestle with difficult things in order to gain wisdom?
  + Because a simplistic view of life ignores God’s infinite wisdom

Is 55:8-9 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

“Wisdom was always in danger of trying to construct a comprehensive view of the world of experience without reference to God’s revealing acts. One consequence was the development of dogmatic wisdom of Job’s friends. Its attractiveness lay in its sense of perceptible order which was available to man. Its strict notions of retribution in life provided a firm basis for ethical judgement and spoke of a justice in the universe which affected us at the level of daily existence. The warning for us here is that we should avoid the mistake of using proverbial wisdom as timeless general rules, as primarily ethical implications of the moral law of God… The idea of a totally predictable God clashes with the reality of his mystery. This provides us with a creative tension which points us towards a comprehensive wisdom which does not lose sight of God’s revelation in history.”

* + Because sin corrupts our understanding of what is truly good
    - Those who cannot see, have not wrestled enough or had high enough view of God’s wisdom – parables

Matt 13:10-16 Then the disciples came and said to him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” And he answered them, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: “‘“You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.” For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears

and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them. ’But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.

Job 42:1-6 Then Job answered the Lord and said: “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? ‘Therefore, I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. ‘Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me. ’I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore, I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

* + Because it causes us to see the value of faith and rest more fully in God’s wisdom rather than our own

“But until he comes again and all things are renewed, faith in the grace of God must sustain us through many incomprehensible tensions in our experience. The peculiar tension for the Christian is that we know our final goal with its resolution of all ills, but we do not know what tomorrow brings. Slick views on how to get guidance and to know God’s will in daily things must go under the hammer of the crisis of wisdom in Job and Qohelet.”

**Study:** James 2:1-26

*My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. 2 For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, 3 and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” 4 have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? 5 Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?*

Wisdom Issue #1: The fear of God vs. the fear of man (vv. 1-7)

* Distinctions and Judgements
* God’s Order – wisdom beyond our understanding
* The Honorable Name – Lit. “the name that has been called over you’

*Matt 9:10-13 And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”*

*Luke 1:50-53 And his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.*

*Num 6:27 “So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.”*

“The phrase connotes close relationship, even possession, and is frequently found in the OT to describe the relationship between Yahweh and his people. Now Jesus, the Messiah, occupies this place for believers. As those who confess allegiance to him, they bear his name – in a word, they are ‘Christians’. How incongruous that those who blaspheme that ‘noble name’ should be accorded preferential treatment in the church!”

NT Wisdom: Why do we fear man and crave the praise of those who are enemies of God? We ought to live under the name of Christ by honoring our neighbor and being merciful to others.

*8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. 9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. 11 For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. 13 For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.*

Wisdom Issue #2: The Royal Law vs. the Liberty Law (vv. 8-13)

* The Royal Law (νόμον βασιλικὸν): Natural order – Love of God, Love of Neighbor
* The Law of Liberty (νόμου ἐλευθερίας) – The gospel that causes us to live in mercy/grace
* Why is the liberty law better than the royal law? It is because of what Christ has done, he has perfectly lived the royal law to give us a new law, this law of liberty. Are we to be judged according to our deeds or according to Jesus’? If we are in Jesus, we should behave like we are citizens of the kingdom that maintains the law of liberty.

NT Wisdom: Why do we live like people who have not tasted the grace of God? Instead of giving mercy abundantly to others, we judge others to lift ourselves up.

Wisdom Issue #3: The relationship of Faith and Works (vv. 14-26)

* Faith without works is dead like a body without a spirit (17, 26)
* Can faith that lacks works save?
* The foolishness of death Faith
* Examples of works-filled faith

*Romans 3:27-31 Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.*

*Acts 5:1-11 But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.” When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. And Peter said to her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.” And she said, “Yes, for so much.” But Peter said to her, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.” Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.*

*Matt 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

*Jn 16:14-15 The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. And he said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.*

NT Wisdom: If someone says they have faith, but cannot show their faith by what God is working through their lives, that faith is impotent. Works-filled faith shows the reality of our trust in God, and the power of him who is changing us to reflect our savior and to reflect the coming kingdom.