**James 3:13-18, 4:1-10**

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. **14** But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. **15** This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. **16** For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. **17** But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. **18** And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. **4:1** What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? **2** You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. **3** You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. **4**  You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. **5** Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”? **6** But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” **7** Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. **8**  Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. **9**  Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. **10**  Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

**“Return To The Lord’s Service”**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen” (Gal 1:3-5). Last week we saw the sorry state of affairs of a boy possessed by an unclean spirit. Today we note how such darkness seeks to entangle much more than a single person. How easy was it for Israel to get off track with God’s prophets? How quickly were the disciples silent before Jesus when asked, “What were you discussing on the way?” In this life, God’s salvation is always in conflict with the way of the world.

James, the brother of Jesus, wrote his letter in the face of conflict. The earliest Jewish Christians were not like the later Gentiles. They had knowledge of the Law as in the Ten Commandments. They had the pride of being part of God’s people Israel. Yet, the Law of works and pride of life caused these Jewish Christians many problems. Suffering family members who rejected Jesus and exile from the temple left a sore spot to say the least. Let alone, being unpopular in their Jewish communities and facing loss of prosperity was nothing to celebrate. These early Christians tried to “fight fire with fire” that turned out to be only hostile to the Gospel. The same struggle with sin and lack of control today can torment us just the same. You need not be troubled because Christ renews our hearts in Him.

There is wisdom that causes all kinds of trouble. It comes from the bitterness and selfishness of the sinful heart lording it over and denying the truth. Of course, this “truth” is the Lord and His Word. James sums up a triad of evil against the Holy Trinity. “This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.” What he calls, “earthly” means a materialistic way of life. It is in those things we own, but also want to own. The base form of such materialism is the love of money as a god. The second characteristic of this evil wisdom is it being “unspiritual.” Here is concern only for the present life, concern over a world that is passing away. The last part in this triad of evil wisdom uncovers what is really at work the demonic. The Devil has control upon the hearts of all caught up in the ways of this world.

Such wisdom is a world of trouble that easily falls upon the church. Look at how the Old Testament people Israel treated Jeremiah. He said, “I did not know it was against me they devised schemes…” Look at the disciples confused and afraid over what Jesus knew would happen to Him. He stated, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.” Look at the early Jewish Christians and how they were fighting, had passions at war with each other, and some even sought after murder. James declared, “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?” Look at us troubled over so much in our time. The world’s demands toss us around. Corrupt teachings go unrestrained. Selling out God’s Word has become the standard.

However, there is still wisdom from above, a wisdom that remains from God. Unlike an evil triad, this is the seven ways to delight in Christ. James made this clear to the Jewish Christians saying, “But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.” We could mistakenly treat this as a list of behaviors to achieve. Yet, this never turns out as grand as we envision. Instead, the wisdom from above perfectly describes God’s Son born of the Virgin Mary. Jesus has a heart uncorrupted and free from the devil’s ways. It is in His Name that our baptism carries what life is already now for us in Christ. “A harvest of righteousness is sown in peace” because Jesus has made the perfect Sacrifice and paid the price for many. His purity has poured out for every sin. His way of the cross is the way of peace. His gentleness is like a lamb lead to slaughter. His reason is open to let any cry out to Him. His mercy and good fruit is without limit. His impartial character comes from bearing the sins of the whole world bound to His cross. His sincerity always calls sinners to repent and believe in Him.

Such wisdom from above renews hearts by returning us to the Lord’s service. It is the humble need to hold fast to our baptism. Repentance means receiving more grace since God’s forgiveness does stand firm. There is a future apart from sin, death, and the Devil. Christ has made it for us by His death and resurrection. The great divide has come not between God and man, but now from the world and its false gods. So consumed by worldly concern, the Jewish Christians were to stop and show concern for Christ. James tells us, “Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”? But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” We dare not miss God’s service that is already at work in the world. This is what Jesus brings by His Word and Sacrament. His humble way continues to love unlike no other. Rather than the raging wisdom of the world, we receive Christ who has done away our sin and death. His wisdom is to stand in our place. He is the last and servant of all so we stand with life in Him that has no end.

To share is Christ’s humility relieves all trouble to trust in Him exalting us. This is foolish to those seeking after glory in this life and not the cross. This is greater than the humility of Ghandi or a Buddha who were never humble enough to avoid hell. Humility has value only if connected to Christ’s humiliation who is God for us. It is to rely upon Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life. His grace is for the troubled and weary in this world. His love is for those who know the failure of their false gods. His mercy is apart from merit because Jesus has made the difference for any. Humility is actually not demanding less, but more, more grace from God saying, “I am a sinner.” You need not be troubled because Christ renews our hearts in Him. Returning to the Lord’s Service, Jesus reigns to forgive, restore, and strengthen us. He makes servants from His humility and exalts us by His glory that has no end. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.