

Wisdom for the Asking
James 1:5-8

September 23, 2012

A. Introduction – Text: ⁵ But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, ⁸ being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. James 1:5-8, NAS

1. Last Week: Pressure-Treated People^A

2. The Connecting Link

a. the word L_____

b. a difference of opinion: is this passage about wisdom in the face of trials or about wisdom in more general terms?

B. The Wisdom

1. Specific Object of This Prayer

a. three prayers God answers^B

b. the exact promise of this text is ...

2. What Is Wisdom?

a. knowledge?^C

b. intellect?^D

c. Greek philosophy?^E

d. spiritual?^F

C. The Asking

1. How to Ask

a. the link with faith^G

b. the appropriateness of this link

2. How Not to Ask

a. what ‘without any doubting’ includes^H ...

b. the connection to being ‘double-minded, unstable’^I

D. The Provider’s Character

1. He Is the God who Can^J

2. He Is the God who Gives

a. generously or L_____^K

b. the broadness of His giving^L

c. the graciousness of His giving

E. Conclusion

^A James 1:2-4

^B verse 5; Matthew 6:10, Luke 11:2, 18:13

^C 1 Corinthians 13:8

^D Romans 12:1-2

^E Acts 17:21, 1 Corinthians 1:22

^F Proverbs chapters 1 to 9; e.g. 9:10

^G Matthew 17:20, 21:22; Mark 11:24; Luke 18:9-14

^H verse 6; Mark 9:22-24

^I verses 7-8; Psalm 12:1-2; Matthew 6:24

^J verse 5; Ephesians 3:20, Philippians 4:19

^K verse 5; Psalm 23:5

^L Psalm 145:15-16, 147:9; Galatians 3:28

A. Introduction

1. Our Text – But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (James 1:5-8)

2. Pressure-Treated People

- a. was the title of the sermon last week on verses 2-4 of this chapter
- b. we saw that God has a purpose in the trials that come into our lives;
- c. that purpose works through endurance to a three-fold result
 - (A) of being perfect; that is maturing in our relationship to God
 - (B) of being complete; that is showing the fruit of the Holy Spirit
 - (C) of not lacking or falling behind in anything; that is, that being on course with God’s plan for our spiritual growth
- d. now, that raises a question in most Christian’s minds
 - (A) Lord, am I where you would have me to be?
 - (B) Lord, what is your will for me at this time?
 - (C) God-given wisdom is the answer to these and other questions

3. The Connecting Link

- a. between last week’s passage, and, our passage today
 - (A) is the word ‘lack’
 - (B) verse 4: ‘lacking in nothing’
 - (C) verse 5: ‘but if any of you lacks’
- b. now students of the Bible differ
 - (A) as to whether this is a deliberate connection by the Holy Spirit through the pen of James; that is, that our text speaks particularly of wisdom as it is needed to face trials

- (B) or if this is another instance of the way in which James writes
 - (1) that just as the first verse concludes with the word, 'Greetings' which is literally: **take joy**, or, **rejoice**
 - (2) and the second verse starts '**consider it all joy**'
 - (3) where James will echo a word from a previous subject when he starts a new subject
- (C) we shall not settle this questions this morning
- (D) yet it does seem that today's text deals with a larger scope than just the application of wisdom in the face of trials – although indeed it is very relevant to that
- c. we shall consider this text in three parts
 - (A) the Wisdom
 - (B) the Asking, and,
 - (C) the Provider's Character

B. The Wisdom

1. Specific Object of This Prayer

- a. there are three prayers that
 - (A) if asked of God in sincerity and truth
 - (B) God always answers yes
 - (C) the first is obvious: '**Thy will be done.**' as in the model prayer
 - (D) '**Lord, have mercy on me the sinner!**' of the tax gatherer
 - (E) '**Lord give me wisdom.**' as we find here
- b. now I want you to notice particularly that the promise in this text
 - (A) that is to say, the promise of answered prayer
 - (B) is specifically addressed to the object of wisdom
 - (C) '**... if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God ...**', verse 5
 - (D) in passing, note that this is not a mere suggestion but a command in the third person – **let him ask** – a command which God expects his wisdom-lacking child to obey
 - (E) there is a second thing for us to notice:
 - (1) some have taught, starting at verse 6, ignoring the context of verse 5, that whatsoever we ask

- in faith. God will give to us
- (2) the book of James has a number of sections on prayer which qualify and explain the promise of Christ, 'ask and ye shall receive,' made to those who would be His apostles
 - (3) this is one such instance
- c. it is the prayer for wisdom, if prayed aright, that God will answer 'yes'

2. What Is Wisdom?

- a. it is important to be clear about what you are asking
- b. it is not knowledge: 'if any man lack knowledge, let him go to college'
 - (A) in fact, knowledge is nowhere near as important as wisdom
 - (B) 1 Corinthians 13:8 tells us that knowledge will be done away
 - (C) there is never any such statement concerning wisdom!
- c. it is not intellect:
 - (A) yes, that is God's gift but given to believer and unbeliever alike
 - (B) according to Romans 12:1-2, the new creation we are in Christ to submit the intellect along with our bodies to the will of God
 - (C) but it is not a spiritual gift as is wisdom
- d. it is not the wisdom which the Greeks so eagerly sought (1 Corinthians 1:22); a speculative wisdom: an endless debating of things old and new, of cause and effect (Acts 17:21)
- e. it is not even the practical wisdom of prudence – getting this wisdom will not enable you in the choosing of sound investments, although it may prevent you from being defrauded on account of greed!
- f. no, this wisdom is spiritual – and just as James will later have more to say on the subject of prayer, so he will also have on wisdom
 - (A) it is the wisdom that is described in Proverbs chapters 1 to 9
 - (B) at one point in those chapters, wisdom is described in such terms that, in fact, can only be a description of God the Son Himself
 - (C) so such wisdom that can only be bestowed by God, and that is through God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ
 - (D) it is a gift to the believer whereby he can recognise and realise

- (1) (1) the awesome character of God – ‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom ...’ (Proverbs 9:10)
- (2) (2) that divine rule of life called righteousness
- (3) (3) God’s hand working and leading in their life
- (E) you can see then, its ready application of such wisdom
 - (1) to the matter of trials and temptation, and,
 - (2) to the matter of living in God’s will, among other things
 - (3) that is why wisdom is so spiritually practical
- g. this, then, is the wisdom for which we are to pray

C. The Asking

1. How to Ask

- a. verse 6 gives the way: ‘But let him ask in faith’
- b. the place of faith in prayer, and in this prayer is amazing
- c. why is it that God should choose to use that which seems to us such a tenuous thing as faith to make it the condition
 - (A) of His answering our prayers
 - (B) and especially His answering our prayer for something of which we are all in need ... this spiritual wisdom
- d. yet that is the case,
 - (A) Jesus links prayer and its answer with faith
 - (1) ‘And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.’ (Matthew 21:22)
 - (2) ‘Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you.’ (Mark 11:24)
 - (3) and when the asked why they could not heal the boy who had seizures, falling into the fire and the water, ‘Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief’, Matthew 17:20
- e. how appropriate it is that God has chosen faith
 - (A) faith is not man’s work nor man’s accomplishment
 - (B) in Luke 18, the Pharisee thought his prayer would be answered because of all of his good works

– by the way, note that he never asked for anything! he spent his time admiring himself!

(C) faith is the admission of

- (1) our complete dependence upon God
- (2) that He alone answers our every need

(D) God honouring faith thus qualifies prayer to be answered

f. we sometimes sing this chorus

My Life is in You, Lord.

My strength is in You, Lord.

My hope is in You, Lord.

In you, it's in You. ^{-(2)}}

g. that is the expression of faith: the confession that all we are, all we have and all we ever hope to be is to be found in God, in God alone

2. How Not to Ask

a. verse 6 continues, ‘... without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.’

(A) now you might well comment: ‘well that makes sense, since doubt is the opposite of faith’ – that is true

(B) but ‘without any doubting’ goes a little bit further

(C) this doubt is not the same as the doubt expressed by the father of that same boy we mentioned a moment ago.

(1) in Mark 9:22-24 he said, “... But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!” And Jesus said to him, “If You can?” All things are possible to him who believes.” Immediately the boy’s father cried out and said, “I do believe; help my unbelief.”

(2) that father desired single-heartedly to believe, asserted his belief and yet, like us, felt inadequate in his faith

(D) ‘doubting’ as used twice in this verse, means

(1) first, from the form of this wot, this doubting is not a single instance but an ongoing or habitual condition

- (2) second, from its composition of two parts which together mean 'judge between'
 - (3) it describes a man, then, who is divided in his mind, habitually wavering between two opinions; at one time the 'yes' of faith and at another, the 'no' of unbelief
 - (E) our text is intended to settle this endless self debate: this is God's will: God can and God will answer 'yes'
 - (F) otherwise – and here James uses one of his many illustrations from nature, much like did the Lord Jesus – this man is like a heavy wave, which as it comes to shore, is blown about and send hither and thither being fanned by the wind
- b. the second reason that the prayer of a man persisting in such doubting will not be answered 'yes' follows in verses 7 and 8: 'For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.'
- (A) verse 7 saying what he should expect from prayer ... nothing
 - (B) verse 8 describes him again with the same idea but a different word: as having a double mind, or, literally, a double soul
 - (C) this affects not only his approach to God in prayer
 - (1) but his whole life – he is 'unstable in all his ways'
 - (2) the prayer of faith involves the turning of the whole self to God, but this man has not firmly settled himself before God
 - (D) a similar ideas is found in Psalm 12:1-2, '... For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men. They speak falsehood to one another; With flattering lips and with a double heart they speak.'
 - (1) where the faithful – those who are both trusting and trustworthy – disappear, replaced by double-hearted men
 - (2) people who have their soul or heart set on two conflicting things should not expect an answer to the prayer for wisdom
 - (3) as Jesus said, 'No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.' (Matthew 6:24 NKJV)
 - (E) how can you expect an answer to a prayer for wisdom if your heart is not set on following the will of God by that wisdom?

D. The Provider's Character

1. He is the God who Can

- a. we return to verse 5 for a moment
- b. the very command, 'let him ask', that is given to the wisdom-lacking child of God brings with it the assurance that this same God can answer that prayer
- c. the various Names of God found in both the OT and NT are very instructive – each one reveals some part of God's character and being – His attributes; what He Is
- d. one of those is the Hebrew El-Shaddai, which is usually translated, God Almighty – he is the God who is able to do this; as Paul says in Ephesians 3:20, he is the God '... who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think...'
- e. if wisdom be your need, then '... my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.' (Philippians 4:19)

2. He is the God – 'who gives to all men generously'

- a. consider the generosity or liberality of God's gifts
 - (A) David says in Psalm 23:5 (AV), 'My cup runneth over.'
 - (B) He is generous in respect to the abundance of His gifts
 - (C) He is generous in respect to the spirit in which He gives
- b. consider the breadth of God's gifts – 'to all men'
 - (A) God's generosity extends to all His creation –
 - (1) Psalm 147:9 – 'He gives to the beast its food, [And] to the young ravens which cry.'
 - (2) Psalm 145:15-16 – 'The eyes of all look to You, And You give them their food in due time. You open Your hand And satisfy the desire of every living thing.'
 - (B) but especially to His new creation, those born again by faith – to these He gives to all without respect of persons
 - (1) perhaps here there is a note that yes, this extends 'to your new brethren, the Gentile believers among you'
 - (2) in speaking of the promises of God, in Galatians 3:28 Paul points out, 'There is neither Jew nor

Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.'

c. consider the graciousness of God's giving

(A) verse 5 again, 'without reproach' ('upbraid' AV no longer in use)

(1) ever been caught in this? ... a son or a daughter comes asking for something and you respond, 'Didn't I give you such and such yesterday? ... and you wasted it!'

(2) James says that it is part of God's gracious nature not to scold

(3) God doesn't say, 'but I gave you wisdom yesterday and you didn't even use it; what a waste giving it to you!'

(4) no, we read here, 'and it will be given to him.'

(B) Faber, the hymn-writer expresses this truth

There's a wideness in God's mercy Like the wideness of the sea

...

For the love of God is broader, Than the measure of men's mind,
And the heart of the Eternal Is most wonderfully kind^{3}.

E. Conclusion

1. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him asks of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith ...

a. the first step towards spiritual wisdom is to come to God through Jesus Christ, the One who took our sin upon Himself

(A) confessing our sin and accepting Him as Saviour

(B) the first exercise of faith, of admitting our dependence on God

b. for the one who thus becomes the child of God; the second step is simple: you can have this wisdom for the asking!

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ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version of 1769
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of my commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

- BM - Biblical Museum, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870
- EBC - The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan - Volume 12, James, by Donald W. Burdick, Professor of New Testament, Denver Seminary, ISBN 0-310-36540-6
- EGT - The Expositor’s Greek Testament, *James*, by W. E. Oesterley, Hodder & Stoughton, 1910 (Liberal, but generally helpful on Greek idiom.)
- Lange - Commentary on the Holy Scriptures by John Peter Lange, translated by Philip Schaff, Volume 9 of the New Testament; Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1915 (His interpretations sometimes take strange twists.)
- NICNT - The New International Commentary on the New Testament , *Commentary on the Epistles of James and John* by Alexander Ross, Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1954 - ISBN 0-8028-2192-8
- TYN - Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, *The General Epistle of James*, by Professor R. V. G. Tasker, The Tyndale Press, 1956
- Kerux - The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site, www.holwick.com.

2. ‘*My Life Is in You, Lord*’ by David Gardner © 1986 Integrity's Hosanna! Music
3. ‘*There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy*’, by Frederick William Faber (1814-1863)