

Wisdom for the asking

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0 : 00] Let us now turn to James and the first chapter and the fifth and sixth verses. James chapter 1. Let us read from verse 2.

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into diverse temptations, knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

Then these words, if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God. That giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.

For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. James chapter 1 and verses 5 and 6. Now James is saying something here, which may sound a bit strange to our ears.

He is saying here that when all kinds of trials, called in our verse in divers temptations, when all kinds of trials crowd into your life, do not resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends.

[1 : 15] Count it all joy when you fall into all kinds of trials. Now whatever we may think of this, James of course is absolutely right.

For he is here enunciating an important Christian principle. And it's this. That it's the tested life that has quality.

Testing produces character. The trial of a man's faith produces patience or endurance, steadfastness, perseverance.

And if trial produces within us perseverance and steadfastness to the end, then it is to be seen as a friend.

And especially so, because as this process goes on, says James, our endurance, our perseverance, our steadfastness becomes more fully developed.

[2 : 20] So that he says we are perfect and entire, wanting nothing. Now we come to what the Apostle says here in our text. And it's this.

If in this process of maturing through trial, of being matured through trial, you do not know how to cope with a particular trial or difficulty, that is, if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God.

Who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. So this is the verse then we are to think of this morning, or the verses.

Verses 5 and 6. And the first thing we notice together in verse 5 is this. The wisdom we lack. Where James says, If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.

If any of you lack wisdom, if you do not know how to cope, let him ask of God, and let him ask in faith. Well, first of all, what is this wisdom of which we may stand in need, which we lack?

[3 : 35] What is this wisdom of which the fear of God, as Solomon tells us, is the beginning? Well, as used in scripture, wisdom has a wide meaning.

It's like a rainbow. It is made up of different constituent colors or parts, which merge into one another, any of which can represent the whole.

And the constituent parts of wisdom, as we have it so very often in the Bible, include such things as instruction, knowledge, learning, discernment, and sound judgment.

Indeed, in its widest sense, wisdom, as far as the Bible is concerned, can be said to stand for all that constitutes true religion.

That pure religion of which James speaks at the end of this first chapter, that pure religion and undefiled. Christianity and spiritual understanding are of the same essence.

[4 : 39] The one can be almost taken for the other. And the highest expression of wisdom is to be made wise unto salvation. It is, in fact, a saving knowledge.

That's the highest expression. A saving knowledge. An enlightened understanding by the Spirit of God. As we were singing there in Psalm 119, In understanding I excel those that are ancients, for I endeavor to keep all thy commandments.

This is wisdom at its height. To know him and the power of his resurrection. Well, now, this is something that every living soul needs.

Because every living soul lacks it. It's something that every living soul needs to seek. Wisdom is the principal thing.

And with all thy getting, says Solomon, get wisdom, get understanding. Celestial light within the soul is man's greatest need.

[5 : 45] In the terms of our text. Celestial light. The light of God coming into the darkness of our hearts and our nature. And giving us an enlightened understanding.

This is what it means to be wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. This is the wisdom we all lack by nature. But as used here in our text before us, wisdom is brought before us in the sense of sound judgment.

You see, James is talking here about those who are in trouble. Who are falling into different kinds of trials.

Into diverse temptations. Now, in time of trouble, of course, we need comfort. And we need help. But also, in time of trouble, we need more.

We need wisdom. We need wisdom. We need right judgment. So that we know how to steer ourselves out of our trouble. So that we know how to steer a proper course through all that bewilders us and confuses us in our trouble.

[7 : 02] And when we're going through times of strain and stress and difficulty, we need wisdom so as to make our trouble a blessing to us. And we are able to say, it is good for me that I was afflicted.

We need wisdom to do that. Well, this is the kind of thing we lack. Whether it is this essential spiritual wisdom that gives us an understanding of the Lord and his salvation.

Or this wisdom in the sense of sound judgment. Given to us from above. In order that we might benefit from the very problems and troubles and trials that may come to us in life.

Well, that's the first thing then. The wisdom we lack. And the next thing we notice regarding this wisdom that we lack is, who in fact lacks it?

Who lacks this wisdom? Well, we're told here. James says in verse 5, If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.

[8 : 14] You see, foolishness and ignorance are no respecters of persons. Anyone can lack wisdom. All of us do lack wisdom.

And even the psalmist himself, when he penned that wonderful 73rd Psalm, had to say, So foolish was I, and ignorant. I was like a beast before thee.

Now, of course, it goes without saying, that those who are far from the kingdom of God lack wisdom. The atheist, the agnostic, the humanist, the skeptic.

Those who make the wisdom of this world that comes to naught their only God, they lack real wisdom. Those who glory in their shame, and who glory in their spiritual darkness, they all lack life's supreme blessing, a saving knowledge of Christ.

But not only those who are far from the kingdom of God lack it, but also those who may be very near the kingdom of God lack wisdom.

[9 : 22] Some may be near the kingdom of God. They may have so much to commend them. They may be public-spirited. They may be warm-hearted. They may be church-orientated. They may have three of the four heads of saving knowledge listed within our authorized standards.

The four heads are these. We know something of our woeful condition. That's the first one. The second, we know something about where the remedy is to be found.

The third is, we know that there are means provided in the covenant of grace. We may know these three heads, but we lack the fourth, which is the blessings conveyed to us by those means.

And if we lack the blessings, we are lacking wisdom in its essential form. And we can therefore be very near the kingdom of God.

We may know very much about it and have a certain interest in it, and yet lack this great essential, this knowledge of the truth, as it is in Jesus. But oh my dear friends, it's sadly true that the greatest saint and the greatest Christian on earth can lack wisdom.

[10 : 41] And he does so when, for example, he frets and worries and complains about his troubles. He sees his problems heavier than the problems of anyone else around him.

He lacks wisdom when he forgets God's past mercies. And the Christian believer can be like that. Dr. Thomas Guthrie says this.

He says, It's not wise. It's not wise to forget that our blessings are loans from God, whether they are husband or wife or child or health or wealth.

And when we lose those blessings, their owner but resumes his own. Yes, the Christian believer can lack wisdom when he sees things in the wrong light and he complains and he frets and perhaps even fumes because he feels that his cross is heavier than someone else's.

What of the Christian minister? What of the wisdom that he needs? Is he above receiving wisdom? There is no Christian minister worth his salt who is not ever conscious of his inadequacy when he deals pastorally with people.

[11 : 59] What wisdom is necessary to comfort those who are sorrowing, to guide those who are wandering, to warn those who are careless, to challenge those who are disdainful of the Christian faith for which he stands and to which he has been ordained as an instructor and teacher, pointing men to the cross.

What wisdom is needed? If any of you lack wisdom, well, we all lack wisdom in some shape or form and some may lack it more than others. So this text, I believe, in some way applies to every one of us, whoever we are.

There is this wisdom we lack. But there's one other question I want to ask before we pass on. It is this. Why do we lack it at all? Why do we lack it at all?

Well, for one good reason. The lack is a legacy from the fall. We can't get beyond that. Now we talk of total depravity as a result of the fall, one of the results of the fall.

Total depravity. But total depravity does not mean that we are as bad as we can possibly be. The total there refers to the extensiveness of the fall.

[13 : 20] Not that we are as bad as we can be, but that every part of our being is affected by the fall. The totality of our makeup is affected by the fall.

Including our understanding. Including our understanding. When man fell, he lost his original righteousness. He lost his communion with God. And he lost his original wisdom and understanding.

And so that his very judgment was affected. And we are in this line. We are in this tradition by nature. The fall has affected our very judgment.

And it's part of the legacy of the entrance of sin into the human race and into our own lives in particular. The wisdom we lack.

That's the first thing. Now we come to the second thing and notice the remedy we have. What a blessing that we have this in our text. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.

[14 : 26] There's the remedy. Let him ask of God. If we need water, we go to the tap. If we need medicine, we go to the doctor.

If we need money, we go to the bank, hopefully. If we need wisdom, we go to God confidently. On the ground of this verse, if no other, if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.

And we can go to God confidently for wisdom because he is God only wise. The only wise God. The omniscient God.

All wise and all knowing. Let him ask of God. That's the remedy. We can't get beyond it. That's the remedy.

To ask of God. Whatever our lack is. Well, noticing this first, that to ask of God is the need confessed.

[15 : 28] when we get to the point of asking God for wisdom that is tantamount to a confession of need. No one will ask God for anything until there's felt need for it.

It's alien to our nature to ask God for anything until we feel a real need produced there by the working of God's spirit within us. When God invited Solomon to ask what he wished, notice what Solomon said.

He said, I am but a little child. I don't know how to go out and I don't know how to come in. And because I'm a little child, give me an understanding heart.

You see, for us to ask God for wisdom is in fact to confess what Solomon confessed.

I am but a little child. I know so little. I know nothing. Give me an understanding heart. And if we are honest with ourselves, in the light of God's wisdom and glory and grace, we have to confess that we are but a little child.

[16:50] We know so little and we need to know so much and there is so much to be known. And I believe therefore that to ask of him is the need confessed.

But the second and the very important thing is this, that to ask of him is faith exercised. It's faith exercised. For James says here, if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, but verse 6, let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.

For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. Now, here, guidance is given to us even how to ask.

We're not even trusted with asking properly because we lack wisdom to that extent. And so, James, or the Lord, through his servant James, comes to us here and he shows us how we are to ask. He instructs us even about the very asking. He says, you've got to ask in faith. Well, here is how wisdom is found.

[18:01] Here is how the lack is remedied. We've got to ask in faith. We go to the source. That's the first thing. We go to the fountainhead. We go to God. We ask of God. We go to the all-wise Father.

We go to the Son in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. We go to the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of truth and wisdom. And we go how?

We go with the prayer of faith. Ask of him, but ask in faith.

That's the prayer of faith. Ask in faith. Now, there's no other way. We're shut up to this way and to this way alone for any proper response from God, for any real answer to our plight.

We're shut up to this way to going to God with the prayer of faith. And let us remember this, that countless multitudes have found no need for any other way to meet their lack.

[19:07] Even if there was another way. Multitudes have found this way prescribed by James as utterly satisfying and as highly rewarding. Let him ask in faith.

But there's a very important qualification added here at the end of verse 16. At the end of verse 6. Let him ask of faith nothing wavering.

In other words, with never a doubt. That's what it means. Let him ask in faith with never a doubt. Well, whatever that means, I'm sure it includes this.

That when we go to the Lord, we must go with never a doubt about him. Let's never entertain one doubt about his ability to answer our need and our lack of wisdom.

Let us never have one doubt about his willingness to meet our need. Let us never question anything that God says. Let there be no ifs or buts or reservations of any kind.

[20:15] Let him ask in faith with never a doubt. And so imperative is this approach to God. So imperative is it that without it, without it, James says here so clearly, verse 7, let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.

Unless we go to God with never a doubt, without any wavering, let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. Now here we have one of the, here we have an answer to what is very often called the problem of unanswered prayer.

Why is prayer as far as we understand it so often unanswered? Well here is one answer to that.

Here is one reason. Because we don't go to God with never a doubt.

We go so often wavering. And James says here, he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

That means that we go to God so often we are unstable, we are restless. One moment we are lifted up towards heaven and the next moment we are drawn down into the world.

[21:39] One moment we go to God and we say, good master, what must I do to inherit eternal life? And the very next moment we find ourselves at Delilah's feet like Samson lost and broken.

Therefore when we come before God in prayer and when we ask him to meet this terrible need of wisdom within our hearts, within the inner man, let us pray steadily and steadfastly let us pray with what one person called obstinate faith.

That is the faith that refuses to give up. Let us draw near to God with a faith that not only holds Christ but a faith that holds on to Christ and refuses to let him go until he blesses us.

this may indeed be a very real reason why prayer for us may be an answer from time to time because we are just like a wave driven by the of the sea driven with the wind and tossed or fanned.

oh may we approach God having no doubts whatsoever in our mind about his ability about his willingness about his readiness about his graciousness to meet us at the point of our need.

[23 : 08] And so therefore to ask of him is the need confessed to ask of him is faith exercised and again to ask of him is the answer guaranteed. That's what the Bible says.

If any of you lack wisdom let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally and abradeth not and it shall be given. That's what it says.

Let him ask in faith and it shall be given. Are we going to make God out as a liar? Are we not going to take God at his word?

We are conscious of the darkness within us of the lack of judgment and the lack of a sound mind are we going to say that God is a liar when he says here that if we ask in faith for wisdom then we shall have it it shall be given us.

And so sure is God's answer to us if we ask in faith so sure is it that in chapter 3 and verse 17 we are told the kind of wisdom we shall receive the wisdom that is from above is first pure peaceable gentle easy to be entreated full of mercy and good fruits without partiality without hypocrisy we may put it this way the wisdom we get from God is genuine peace giving considerate congenial fruitful impartial and sincere now there is the remedy we have the wisdom we lack well that stands out very clearly but over against it there is the remedy we have let him ask of God and the last thing is this the encouragement we get who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not that's the encouragement we get and this encouragement comes to us from the very nature of God here in this fifth verse we have

[25 : 16] God's response to our asking for not only does God give but he gives in a way utterly consistent with his nature he giveth to all liberally and he upbraideth not let us look let us look at this then first we can say that he gives generally he gives generally he gives verse 5 says to all men to all he gives to all generally now certain things God gives to all men indiscriminately whether they ask for them or not he gives to them life and health and food he gives to them the blessings of what we call common grace causing the sun to shine on the just and the unjust on the sinner and saint alike the blessings of common grace these come to us even without our asking so gracious is our God he gives gifts even to the rebellious so that there are certain things that God gives to all men indiscriminately but before us in our verse in our text we have this that God gives his wisdom to all men but not indiscriminately he gives the blessings of common grace to all men but not the blessings of the wisdom that's spoken of in our text indiscriminately he gives the blessing of wisdom to all men whoever they are if they ask and seek and knock and petition for it he gives generally this blessing of wisdom to all who seek it with the prayer of faith no one who does so will be turned away empty and no one who does not seek

God's wisdom from God with the prayer of faith will receive anything of the Lord the psalmist puts it in a nutshell he says this poor man cried God heard and saved him from all his distresses there it is this poor man cried God gives to those who cry from the heart who are sincere and genuine in their petition and crave at the throne of God he gives to every one of them he will withhold no good thing from those who love him and to those who are in this category conscious of their own lack of wisdom realizing the only remedy and making use of it in petitioning God with the prayer of unwavering faith he gives to everyone who asks like that generally and also we are told he gives generously as well as generally he gives generously he gives to all men liberally without reserve without reserve

God does not deal in trifles he deals with abundance who with abundance of good things does satisfy thy mouth he deals not tight fistedly but open handedly he gives liberally he gives without reserve he gives generously as well as generally if we look up at a waterfall and I'm thinking of one just now not very far from Strathpefer known as the Falls of Rogi if you look up at a waterfall we see it cascading over the edge out into the air and down into the pool and it does that moment after moment day after day night after night week after week year after year decade after decade and on it goes water cascading over the top down into the pool now this is this is true of the way in which God gives it's not a trickle or a trifle but with a steady flow falling upon us as grace and mercy but of course no illustration of God of God's activity of God's attributes can be perfect that's not possible you see a waterfall can dry up even the Falls of Rogi dry up on certain occasions but God's response to the longing soul and to the prayer of faith never dries up that can't be or he would cease to be God his response to our cry for inward wisdom and light will never dry up he will withhold no good thing from those who love him he gives generally to all who who seek him he

gives generously without reserve and finally he gives graciously without reproach he upbraideth not he gives without reproach he gives graciously now the

[30 : 59] Bible tells us that God is angry with the wicked every day that the wicked are under God's wrath and curse they are under his judgment but those who turn from their wickedness to the Lord and who seek the Lord with all their heart and who call upon the Lord out of a sense of their need God will not upbraid them or reprove them but he will meet their need in grace and in mercy that's what the verse says it doesn't say that God will not reprove the sinner the wicked the man who is under his wrath and curse but God will not reprove he will not upbraid those who turn to him with the prayer of faith calling for God's help and mercy in the time of need and want my dear friends let's be sure of this that

God will never say to us if we go to him like that he will never say to us what an impertinence why should I do anything for you you have abused my gifts time after time and now you are looking for more God will never shut up the heart of his compassion against anyone who comes in from the far country with God will never dishearten or discourage or reprove the true seeker he will not chide continually nor keep his anger still with us he dealt not as we sinned nor did we quite our ill that's what this verse says if any of you lack wisdom let him ask of God with the prayer of faith who gives to all men liberally and does not reprove who gives generously and graciously he will not cast off those who come penitently and humbly to him out of a sense of their need and a recognition that he is the only one who can meet it and he must meet it if it is to be met at all he will not reprove anyone who comes in that spirit because that's the spirit that is pleasing to him it's the spirit of the broken and the contrite heart that

God will not despise nor reprove nor chasten nor cast away well then let us take God at his word let's take God at his word and let us approach him for sound judgment for spiritual understanding let us approach him above everything else for a saving knowledge that we might have the sum of saving knowledge within us by our own experience through the grace and power of the Holy Spirit and let us ever keep before our minds the only remedy let him ask if we lack and who doesn't lack let us ask but let us ask with never a doubt for he who wavereth is like the wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed may

God grant us that steadfastness of faith and that steadiness of approach to him that will move him as it were to give out of his fullness that which we need to fill our emptiness out of the fullness of him who fills all in all let us pray our gracious God we turn our eyes upon thee this day and pray that thou would minister to us in our need in the many wants that we have they are known to thee may they also be known to us and may we become so aware of the barrenness of the land within us that we will constantly petition thy throne and draw near to thee in faith and in faith's assurance having no doubt that thou art able to do for us exceeding abundantly above what we can ask or think hear us oh lord and may we be encouraged to come to thee by the very nature that is thine that thou would not cast out or cast off those who come in sincerity and in truth from the far country to the father's home to the father's door lord receive us this day receive us graciously and love us freely and all for christ's sake amen