

Wisdom in the word

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[0 : 00] So this week we're thinking, and last week actually when we started off this series in James, one of the big things that we're thinking about is what it means to be wise.

What does it mean to be wise? As we mentioned last week, we spoke about facing trials of many kinds throughout life. Many trials.

I don't know about you, I love watching action series. I love watching TV series. I watched 24. It's kind of been gone for a while now, 24.

That was a favourite of mine. Homeland, if you watched that. But you notice, don't you, in nearly every series, the lead bad guy, they have this amazing ability to deceive everyone.

And often it's someone on, you know, it's often it's someone on the inside who's working for someone else, another government agency.

[1 : 02] I don't know whether to give, I don't know if anybody's still watching 24. I think there might be someone. So I won't give away who's the bad person in series one. But the first passage of, the first verse of our passage today, verse 16, it says, Don't be deceived.

Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. Now, the deception in those TV series is very clever. Because when the series climaxes, when it gets to the last episode and the deceiver is revealed, you're normally left thinking, no way.

I never saw that coming. I never saw that they were going to be the bad guy. Life. Life is not like a series of 24. Where the writers of the show don't want you to know who the main enemy is.

You know, it'd be a terrible TV series, wouldn't it? If episode one, they just told you who the bad person was. That would be a terrible TV series. If in the first episode you find out who the bad guy was.

Well, the Bible, the living God, the living God, if he was writing it, he ruins the show. He ruins the show because he wants to point out the deception in episode one.

[2 : 20] He doesn't want you to go a whole... He wants to point out reality so you don't have to go through 24 hours of destruction, which is what Jack Bauer went through. He wants to point out the deception from in hour one.

Wisdom from God. Wisdom from God is there to stop you from being deceived and enable wise living. Which is what we're thinking about this morning.

How to live. How to live with wisdom from God. How to live with wisdom from God. The first point that we're going to look at is that wisdom for life, wisdom for life from God, comes down as a gift.

Just look with me. It flows directly after that passage that we took last week, where we, verse 5, where we took, ask God for wisdom and he gives it generously.

Comes after that, verse 17. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

[3 : 25] He's there. He's reminding them, James, don't be deceived into thinking that good gifts come from somewhere else. Don't be deceived into thinking that God changes and perhaps is able to give bad and imperfect gifts.

That perhaps, don't be deceived in thinking that God is there to try and trip you up. God cannot tempt anyone. We saw that last week. Don't be deceived about who God is.

There's this potentially strange phrase that occurs, which we often skip over. It's describing God literally. Here we have the Father of heavenly lights.

Literally. It just says the Father of lights. This is not a mystical phrase, but what it's really doing is containing echoes back to creation.

It is God who fathered the lights. He fathered. He gave birth to the heavens, the sun, the moon, and the stars. He gave birth to light itself, who said, let there be light, and there was light.

[4 : 34] Genesis 1. And what was it? The light? He said it was good. He said it was good. Everything, actually. Everything, in fact, that God made, he said was good.

And yet, the living God is different to his creation. Yes, he is good. And the goodness of creation is because it comes from his goodness.

But he is not like the sun and the stars. Verse 17. He does not change like shifting shadows. There's this whole play on the cosmos. But the lights he fathered that he made, they do change. The sun, the stars, they change, don't they? The shadows they create change. But the creator does not change like they do. The living God who gives gifts to his church, to us today, is the same. Did you know he's exactly the same God as he was when he created? He, in the moment when he was created, he's, he's not, he's not, he's, he's exactly the same.

[5 : 41] Time has not aged him or made him more knowledgeable. He has never been affected by time or anything else. It is because he doesn't change. He doesn't change.

He doesn't change. That he is as good, as good, as when he was created. He's as good now.

Which means, which means, you see where we're going with this.

Which means that if he's as good as when he's created, it means that every gift he gives now is as good and perfect as when he said that the light was good. Every gift is as good.

Nothing can hinder him from being good. He gives what is good and perfect. He doesn't have an off day or get up on the wrong side of the bed. He's never in a bad mood. He is totally consistent with everything that he is and everything that he does.

All the time. Goodness. This has everything to do with what we were considering last week.

[6 : 39] Last week we considered that the way to persevere in faith, in following Jesus, is verse 5, to ask for wisdom. And that God gives generously to all without finding fault.

The gift of wisdom that you ask for when it is given will always be good and perfect wisdom.

Because it is given from a God that is good and perfect and doesn't change. The wisdom he gives, how to live a worshipful life, how to live like Jesus.

This is what wisdom is. It's how to live like Jesus in the circumstances of your life. That is wisdom.

When you ask for it, he gives good and perfect.

He gives the wisdom that is good and perfect because he is good and perfect and he doesn't change. It will always enable you to do that. You know when you go and buy something, you need to get something new.

I don't know, new clothes or electrical goods, a new form perhaps. You know, don't you, who made it. Because the clothes or whatever you're buying, they tell you.

[7 : 49] Your clothes have a label in the back. Anything from apple has the half-eaten apple on it. That is how you know where it's come from. You have to trust the makers of each item you buy that the product is worth buying.

With the almighty God, there's no payment necessary. And there's no label attached. But you do have to trust and believe this.

That the good God, where goodness and perfection is part of who he is, gives you what is good and perfect. That the gifts he gives, the gifts he gives, bear his stamp.

The wisdom he gives bears his stamp. It is divine wisdom. It is God's wisdom. And he gives generously. You don't find any fault.

Okay. So wisdom from life is a gift that comes down from above. Where do we find that wisdom?

It's where we need to go next. Wisdom for life is in the word. The wisdom for life is in the word.

[8 : 57] There are lots of ways that God can give us wisdom. Don't get me wrong when we ask him for it. You think of Proverbs. We're told in Proverbs that if you watch an ant work, you can learn from the ant that working hard brings reward over laziness.

That is wisdom from the world, isn't it? It's an observation of something in the world that tells you something true. But I don't think that's the kind of wisdom that James is referring to.

It seems that he's referring to wisdom that comes from God alone. You might call it divine wisdom. And I want to make the case from these verses that the primary way, or perhaps the primary place where we find wisdom is in the word of God.

First of all, just look with me at what God has done through his word. Verse 18. He chose. He chose to give us birth.

He's referring here to spiritual birth. Being given new spiritual life in Jesus, that is. Through the word of truth. That is how wise and powerful the word of God is.

[10:07] You see what's being said? All the way through this chapter, chapter 1 in James, there is this illustration, the metaphor of pregnancy and giving birth.

You saw it last week in verse 15, how if our sinful desires, verse 15, are conceived, and that word for conceived literally means made pregnant in us, if our sinful desires become pregnant in our soul, it gives birth to sin, which gives birth to death.

You see the contrast. If left to our own disguise, it gives birth to sin and death, but God, through his word, gives birth to spiritual life in us.

God's word fathered the sun. Again, this image of creation. God's word fathered the sun, moon, and stars, and God's word fathered you in spirit.

Something on the same scale as creation happens inside the believer. Verse 18 again. Why? That we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.

[11:18] You understand first fruits? It's a farming illustration. It's when you first see, maybe on any crop, but see on an apple tree.

You see the first signs, the first apple. You know that when you see that first apple, that first fruit, it is a sign that more apples are going to come. That is what it put.

That is the sign. It's pointing that your tree is going to be full of apples. The living God is saying that we, his people, we who have been given new life, we're the first fruits of more to come.

We, the church, are a sign that there is more to come, that there is a bigger harvest, that there is a new creation. God's word has done that. That is the power and the wisdom of God's word.

It has made you a new person, a new creation. The first fruits of the new creation. All to say, all to say, when you pray for wisdom, and open to God's word, it has the same power and wisdom to create.

[12:28] It has the same power and wisdom for you in any situation you find yourself in. Any situation you find yourself in. The question then comes to us.

If that is true, how should we live? How should we live? Move on to our third thing of thinking through, that wisdom for life comes from listening. It comes from listening.

Last week, I hope you might remember this story, or if you weren't here, last week, I mentioned how I'm not very good at DIY. Although I'd love to be.

Well, this week, I think it's because I mentioned it. This week, I had another DIY incident. I tried to change my toilet seat. Now, I've changed my toilet seat before.

In the past, a quick 15 minute job. So I want to take off the old seat. Very normal task. But when I got there, I found that the wings on the plastic bolts underneath had given way.

[13:32] I attempted for a long time to get them off, with every passing minute becoming more hot and bothered for two reasons. One, why wouldn't they come off? And two, this is taking me far too long. I gave up and went next door and borrowed some pliers.

The pliers successfully managed to remove my old toilet seat. Great, this is going to be easy. The old toilet seat off. Now I've just got to attach the new. And so I got the new seat, attached it perfectly. Or I saw it, thought, held it up straight.

But it had a bit of a wobble. I went down on the hinge, tightened the screw on the hinge, went and picked it up. Let's just give it, see if the wobble's gone. And as I'm checking that the wobble's gone, the new hinge snaps.

DIY does not mean do it yourself. It means don't involve yourself. And let me tell you, when that hinge snapped, the house was empty, which was a good thing, because it was not one of my finest moments.

At that time, furious, frustration, I was angry. Now, you know, it's a few days past. Now today, even as I'm telling you, it's embarrassing, because it's not really a big deal.

[14:44] Friday afternoon, I went to the shop. It was faulty, replaced it, and now we have. I successfully managed to do it a second time round. Why am I telling you this story?

What would wisdom look like in that situation? When the hinge snapped, what I did next was not actually important.

Whether I fix the hinge, or whether I go get a replacement, is not really the issue. That's not the wisdom that the word will give me.

I'm not going to open the Bible and see whether it tells me to fix the hinge, or go get a new toilet seat. But my heart, how I respond, is where the wisdom lies.

What I needed to hear was verse 19. My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

[15 : 50] Now that, that is true of every part of life. But in the context here, it is especially true of going to God's word for wisdom. Listen to his wisdom in the word.

The Bible, it is the primary way that he is designed and ordained to speak to us. It is wise and powerful. If God can, and does, and did, give life through his word, he is more than able, more than able, to give you the wisdom for anything, any situation you find yourself, more than able.

He will not tell me what to do, but he will tell me how to do it. It should, you think of what I can see in Jesus' life, in Jesus' words, and how he responds to people.

He always gets it right. He shows us how to deal with frustration when things don't go our way, to remember that God is in charge of my life, to remember that my ability to do DIY does not define me, to look at Jesus' life, his patience towards me when I don't live how he would want.

And in response to his patience towards me, could I show patience right now? As we comprehend that in the word, it teaches us how to live, what to do, and how to make decisions in life, how to respond, which honour Jesus Christ.

[17 : 09] Because the word of God, sharper than a two-edged sword, living, active, the breath of God that breathed out light, and the Father's creation shows you how to live in the circumstances of your life that you find yourself in.

Because that's what wisdom is. It's how he answers the prayer of one, verse five. Ask for wisdom and it'll show you in his word. God, in his word, gives the wisdom, the discernment, how to make the wisest, best decision, how Jesus would live in the circumstances of your life.

Not only that, but that heart attitude to approach it. Be quick to listen to him in his word. Be slow to speak. Now, when it says be slow to speak, that doesn't mean be slow to pray.

But what it means is be slow to speak your own wisdom back to yourself. The wisdom you need doesn't come from in here.

It comes from the word of God. Be slow to come up with your own assessment of how you should respond. I needed to be slow in speaking to myself, thinking that my anger was justified.

[18 : 27] And isn't that true of all? As we justify our response, we make our own assessments. I deserve to feel annoyed. This has happened. I'm going to give you six diagnostic things to think about that point out the feelings that we have of when we feel angry.

And the responses that we want when we feel angry. One, how to tell you're angry. One, you desire revenge. You've ever done that when you've had a difficult conversation with someone and in the shower you replay the conversation of what you wish you'd have said.

When you do that, you always win in the argument in your head. That is desiring revenge. Perhaps you fantasize about someone else's misery. Oh, they'll get what's coming to them if they do that.

If they continue in that way, they'll get what's coming to them. You fantasize about someone else's misery. Obvious ones, you curse. You're jealous. You grumble and complain.

You moan about the injustice of it all. Why me? You're cynical. Or you're indifferent. Those responses come from making your own assessments.

[19 : 47] It's coming from your own assessment of what you think it should be. My warning, my warning to us is to be slow to think like that.

It is not easy. I know. I've been there. I'm preaching to myself here. I'm on this journey with you. Be quick to listen to God. He'll make you wise.

Final question we have to answer is what is good listening? What is good listening? Wisdom for life means being a doer. Now here's the question we have to wrestle with.

What does good listening look like? There is a real danger where we can actually really deceive ourselves. We talked about deception at the beginning. We can deceive ourselves into thinking we've listened well by how something made us feel.

You can think you've really listened well. Even in whatever you've listened to whether it's a podcast or whether it's here this morning or anything. You can think you've listened well by how something has made you feel.

[20 : 52] It's moved you or it's convicted you. Now don't mishare me. Feelings, emotions are so important in life. Don't mishare me.

I'm not saying that. The word of God should come and affect our emotions and we should expect that and want that to affect how we feel. But the real proof in the pudding to listening well is that you

do something with what you've heard and how it's made you feel.

That makes sense, doesn't it? If it makes you feel but it stops there, have you really listened well? James is saying you haven't.

This is what James wants us to know. Verse 22, do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Do what it says. And James tells us what being a doer of the word looks like.

Verse 21, get rid of all your moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you which can save you. The word of God is planted in you to save you.

[21 : 59] If you want to let it grow you must get rid of the weeds of sin, the filth and the evil. And he compares the listener only and the listener who listens properly.

The comparison here is devastating. It is a devastating critique of someone who doesn't know how to listen. Verse 23, anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and after looking at himself goes away and immediately forgets what it looks like.

This is the illustration here. This is what it is. The illustration is that you get up one morning, and you go and have your breakfast and just for argument sake, you have jam on toast. And as you're eating you get jam all over your face.

It's all over. It's all over your mouth, it's all over your face, covered in jam. It's everywhere. You go back upstairs to get ready for the day. You go to the bathroom to get yourself washed and changed. You look in the mirror and you can see in the mirror that you've got jam all over your face. And this is designed to shock. Because we all know what you do in that situation.

[23 : 14] You clean your face. But you see what James is saying that a listener who listens is actually not really listening. They're ignoring because it's like someone who sees the jam all over their face and just leaves it there.

And just walks away. Just leaves, gets ready for the day, goes to work with their face covered in jam. What he's saying is he's someone who hears the word.

The word convicts them. It points out. They see the moral filth, the evil, the sin, the conviction and they don't care. They don't get rid.

The word of God is the spiritual mirror of your life. It tells you who you are, what you're like with absolute precision. But the doer of the word is different.

The doer of the word is different. Verse 25, but whoever looks intently into the perfect law, that gives freedom. Continues in it, not forgetting what they have heard but doing it, they'll be blessed in what they do.

[24 : 19] Perfect law here is the same as the implanted word earlier. The perfect law, the word of God, whoever uses that as their mirror, looks at it intently, who sees the jam all over the face and doesn't leave it but wipes it clean, knows that a problem, cares about their holiness and the way they're walking with Jesus.

That law, the law brings freedom. Why? Because you're free of your messy fate. You're free of all the mess that's got on top of you. As you listen to the word, as you put it into practice, you're free of the mess, of the sin, of the corruption that weighs you down, free of the anger in the midst of a trial, free of revenge, free of fantasizing about someone else's misery, of cursing, of grumbling and complaining, free of cynicism and indifference.

Verse 21, literally, it saves your soul. It saves your soul. You'll be blessed in what you do because you do it as someone who is living in the situations of your life like Jesus would.

Today, today, as we've thought about this together, don't, if it has moved you, if you feel convicted of however you feel, don't let it stick with just your emotions there.

Let it make you feel, of course, but make sure you allow it to change your life. Let it change your life to make you wise by the Spirit of God working through His Word in your life.

[26 : 01] That is what the Word of God does. It changes your life because Jesus is a work in you. God won't do it anywhere such as à■■ée.

and we don't clean it off ourselves. You know, whenever Naomi eats jam, she actually had jam on pancakes this morning.

She had jam all over her face. It doesn't mean it was everywhere. Sometimes she has it all over her clothes. In fact, sometimes it's all over the house. But to have a clean face in a clean house, she needs me to clean her.

She needs her father to wipe her face clean. And is God the Father through the blood of his own son who is the one who cleans you of the jam on your face, of the sin in your heart?

Though your sins be as scar, they shall be white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as white. He washes you clean.

[27 : 31] And the on-growing holiness of wisdom which we ask for comes from him. He wants you to be holy and wise more than you do.

His word, his perfect good gift from above is at work in each of us.

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