

Grace to the humble

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 November 2023

Preacher: Robin Silson

[0 : 0 0] this book that we've been looking at james all about how to live wisely and what it means to live as a as a wise person and it also is one of the things that i want us to think about this morning is what what does it mean um to to live in in a wise way that maybe uh reflects what it means to be a christian that is what it means to there's lots of ways that the world think says are wise but actually we need to be um aware of what is wise and what is foolish we need to be aware and i wonder sometimes what do we think is when we we might know what the good news is in our heads but what is the good news that we live out what is the good news that the world offers us i've been thinking about this week what if you if you were to ask the world what is the world's gospel i think one of the prevailing messages of the world is this good things come to those who earn it good things come to those who earn it good things to go come to those who try harder who do more it is the get better improvement gospel good things come to those who earn it now on one level i want to say that we that's we know where we might be going this morning but we don't want to write that sentiment off altogether because in the working world that has to be the case doesn't it in the working world in all professions you have to work hard to become a doctor a teacher an electrician uh you have to work hard you have to go through training to get a job and earn and there is something right about that that is true about the working world that good things jobs promotions come to those who work hard who earn it but but we wouldn't apply or we shouldn't apply or perhaps we we don't apply that to the same the same way of thinking if we were thinking about family life you will always be a son or a daughter to your parents your identity as a child of a particular family is unchanging it does not change you can't become more or less of a child there's no family promotions it's just part of who you are part of what it means to be you now i'm not saying that all families are perfect but what i am saying is that you will always be the child of your parents and nothing can change that the temptation is to think christianity following jesus is like the working world and not like the life of the family that is the temptation the temptation is to think that god's way of dealing with us is that good things will come from him to us if we earn it perhaps we think if we live more like jesus then perhaps he'll love us a bit more perhaps he won't be disappointed with us and so as and so what happens as we particularly as we read the book of james which has lots of things about how what james what what the living god tells us how we should live um we come to think like perhaps we may come to think like that i must tighten my tongue i must be kinder to everyone especially those who are different to me i must stop myself from letting the world's values grab my attention i must i must spend time on less less time on social media i must get a better routine to regulate my time so that i can do more that is good and wholesome i must live more like jesus i must be wiser and better i must do it all because otherwise otherwise maybe god won't really love me i must do it it is the gospel of the world has infected how we think about the living god we don't preach we don't believe in fact that the gospel of jesus christ is about trying harder it's not about behavior modification so that you can look good in front of everyone else so that you feel better about life so that you it's not the gospel of self-improvement so that you can compare better to the person next door or even compare better to the person that sat next to you this morning this passage cuts through all of that cuts through all we believe in the gospel the good news of grace that god's love is not earned it is given it's not about what we've done it can't be earned it is given us that is what we're thinking about this morning james has spoken about what the wise life looks like he said in as we looked a few weeks ago chapter one he says three things that the sort of constitute or tell us um what the wise life is uh chapter one just at the end he says those who consider them religious uh sales religious and he says three things they'll keep a tight ring on their tongues so they'll speak well he says that they'll um that they'll look after orphans and widows the poor they'll think well of the poor and he says that they'll keep themselves unpolluted unstained from the

world's values how you speak how you treat the poor what you do with what the world is telling you if you do that right then you're a wise man says james that's true religion the wisdom of the wisdom or the wisdom of what it means to be a christian true religion and then we come to the beginning of our chapter this morning verse 13 it smacks you right between the eyes who is wise and understanding among you who actually lives like this who is the one as we read who contain that who is the one who shows no favoritism who is the one who treats the poor or everyone because as the same as they're made in the image and what we get in these opening in this last part of in in all the verses essentially that we're looking at is is this description of the two ways it's a summary really of what's been going on in james the summary of the foolish way versus the wise way the earthly way versus the way that is from above the heavenly way and so that is what we're going to look at what does it really mean to be wise and we'll start by looking at the earthly way the first thing the earthly wisdom is selfish ambition earthly wisdom is selfish ambition and now it's a funny word ambition isn't it because ambition in itself is not actually a bad thing i don't know if you've ever heard or maybe you've seen this on um nature documentaries and the like uh you've ever heard of the capuchin monkey you've ever heard of the capuchin monkey might have seen it it is the monkey that gets a nut and gets a rock to and holds it with two hands and slams it down on the nut to break the nut if you want to see ambition you watch the baby one you watch the baby one sees its parent smash the nut and then it goes up after the mummy or daddy capuchin monkey has left

picks up the nut and tries to master breaking the nut that is one ambitious monkey it will keep going and going with the rock above its head keep failing and keep trying and in many ways you think well good up go on little monkey good for you keep going it is a good thing the capuchin monkey is ambitious it has a goal in mind it wants food from the nut sees its dad and wants to copy and break the nut itself having a goal a desire to achieve something is not a bad thing having a career goal wanting to improve to grow doesn't have to is not a bad thing is it doesn't and it doesn't have to big be a big thing like that you can have healthy ambition over uh sort of everyday smaller things uh wanting to have friends wanting to gain a new skill get better at cooking wanting to be healthy an ambition to be a healthy person it could even be i've got i've heard of this new tv series i've got this goal this ambition i'm going to relax and enjoy comfort watching this new tv series have a tidy house wanting to see more of your family nothing wrong with those things to have goals and ambitions it is not wrong to be ambitious of course it's not wrong to want to have friends to relax to see family to be healthy however there is a difference between good ambition and selfish ambition but with me in verse 14 but if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your heart such wisdom does not come down from heaven but he's earthly unspiritual demonic where you have envy and selfish ambition there you find disorder and every evil practice selfish ambition on the other hand it is is really another helpful way i think about talking about what sin is it is where the good thing the good ambition the thing that you desire takes over when the good ambition takes over and either one of those one of either one of two things happens either you achieve it or you aim to achieve it at any cost treating people as collateral damage along the way when reaching the goal is more important than anything else in your life or two you are full of envy at the person who achieves your ambition instead of you because envy is just the other side of the coin to selfish ambition it's when you haven't achieved your ambition but the person down the road has and you're not happy for them you're just jealous james has told us that what this that this way of living it is ugly it is ugly he tells us he's told us all the way through all the way through in chapter three you're jealous and what does it lead to that way of living of thinking it leads to disorder it leads to evil practice earlier before it leads to speaking not being able to tame your tongue and saying something that chapter four will get you into a fight a quarrel into coveting into hating in your mind it's jealousy it leads to praying for your only for what for yourself and not for anyone else praying with wrong motives because this is the chief aim or it actually can become the chief aim of your life is to get that thing whatever it is and when someone gets in the way wow if someone if someone becomes an obstacle well well then that's when the real problems start

last week we saw about taming the tongue that when we speak like that way our tongues are like a fire that destroys people and the way of the world promotes this way of life don't we see that the models of the world look after number one how many times did you hear that growing up love yourself first the latest one is you do you the sinful nature is a selfish one and it is so prevalent it's so prevalent in our society that it's actually promoted the world agrees with the deceit in our hearts and says that it's good this is a good way to live this is a way to make a success of your life follow

your feelings and it is difficult impossible I think actually to escape your sinful nature desires it and the world tells you this is how to get it and what you desire is good go for it by any means just one way just one way that we see that in our world you look you think how advertising works you get that drip drip constant feed of proposing suggesting what the good life is the perfect family christmas on the bistro advertises the perfect house from m&s; the perfect car with vw the perfect body the perfect friends the best tv shows the perfect teeth the perfect skin the perfect holiday it's selling to us and appealing to our inner goals and ambitions what we desire this is what you need in life to be happy this is what you need in life to be content be ambitious for it go for it at any costs and well done if you do that well done let's celebrate people who do that chapter 4 verse 4 is very clear don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God hostility anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God if that's not the way of wise living what is what is the way who is wise and understanding among you and then we get to the second way the second way is the wise way of living the wisdom that we don't want is from the world verse 15 it is earthly and spiritual and demonic the wisdom that we do want is from a different place it's different because it comes from somewhere different it originates from somewhere different it is not of this world verse 17 but the wisdom that comes from heaven from heaven from above it is from above is first of all pure then peace loving considerate submissive full of mercy and good fruit impartial and sincere peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness the wisdom that we need is from above we know that from what we've already seen in James you remember the first chapter if any of you lacks wisdom you should ask God he gives you wisdom from above he says every good and perfect gift every good and perfect gift comes down from the father of lights who does not change like shifting shadows he gives generously to all who without finding fault the wisdom for need the wisdom you need for life you cannot find on earth you can't find it you can't find it here you can't find it out there it comes from above it is the word of God to pray and look and know

Jesus Christ to behold him and see if you want to know wisdom you just look you look at the man Jesus Christ and how he lived look at the living God what are these verses in verse 17 what is this verse surely is it not a description of Jesus Christ you replace the word wisdom with Jesus and it makes just as much sense the son of God Jesus he comes down from heaven and he's pure peace loving considerate submissive full of mercy good fruit impassioned that's Jesus is it not that's Jesus Christ if you want to know what wisdom is you look at Jesus you look and behold and see his magnificent beauty it is the living God and the wisest thing that Jesus did that displayed all of those characteristics 1 Corinthians 1 verse 22 Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom but we preach

[17:14] Christ crucified what does he say about that that the cross is the power and the wisdom of God the cross is the wisest thing that has ever happened on this earth it is foolishness to man but it is wisdom to those who are being saved the weakest and most foolish looking thing that Jesus did being crucified dying on the cross was the power and wisdom of God and the spirit you notice how the cross meets all those qualities what James defines the cross is pure the man on the cross was sinless it is peace loving it brought us from being at war with him to being reconciled and having peace with him it was considerate he was thinking of us the whole time as more important than himself he submitted to the father's will it is full of mercy he withholds the punishment from us and receives all the punishment on himself it is good fruit it is impartial offered to everyone doesn't matter where you've been what you've done who you are the cross does not discriminate because of age race social background or anything else the offer of forgiveness is for everyone and then finally the cross is sincere

Jesus meant it he's not two face he doesn't slag you off behind your back he's sincere and his offer stands he won't you won't be left with egg on your face if you turn to Christ Jesus Christ the living God is wisdom and the gospel the good news is the wisest thing that has ever happened now I don't know how you feel at this point because so far there have been two ways presented the unwise worldly way of living out of selfish ambition and envy that results in all kinds of evil of discord of quarry and then the wise way of living that James has that James has just referred to the unwise way and the wise way the wise way of Christ that we've just looked at and the two could not be more different could they and in fact they are completely opposite opposite in what opposite in their outcomes what they bring about one brings death the other brings life and the whole point here the whole point here is to show us what we're really like and I want to stress not to condemn you but to show you that the wise way that Jesus demonstrates the wise life the beautiful life is actually

beyond this humanly speaking to live like Jesus is impossible and we don't want to admit the impossibility we don't want to we actually the gospel of good things come to those who earn it we actually quite like that even though it's impossible we like to be in some sense in control of making ourselves better we like that

I must try harder I must speak better I must be more peaceable we see that list of what Jesus is like and we like to put a plan in action I must be more considerate I must be more sincere I must treat everyone the same I must be more like Jesus do you know what starting next week I'm going to put a plan in action to do everything I can every day to have it all regimented and worked out so that I can be more like Jesus that is what I'm going to do starting tomorrow I'm going to do everything I can to be the best Christian I can be in the village can I tell you if you do that if any of us think that is the way to become more like Jesus you will pray you might modify your behaviour for a day or two but it won't last Christianity following Jesus is not about trying harder to be better trying harder to fit in trying harder to be accepted by the people in your church the wise life that Jesus presents to us if it's down to you to do what he's asked it is impossible we could say it's an impossible command no matter how hard you try you'll never do it and so what do you do if the try harder doesn't work well then we come to verse 5 and verse 6 verse 6 verse 5 sorry or do you think scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he's caused to dwell in us he longs for that spirit to come forth but he gives us more grace that is why scripture says

God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble that word for favour is just the word carrying it's the same word as grace same word as used for grace earlier in the verse verse 10 humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you if you want to live the wise life if you want to be lifted up to live as God intended you to live the only way the only way that you can do that is by admitting to God that you can't do it Lord I've tried to tame my tongue but I can't Lord I've tried to treat everyone the same but I keep giving people preferential treatment I try to convince myself that I'm better than I am I've tried but I can't do it I know I have this selfish ambition and I've tried to do the right way but I can't you know the temptations from the devil are too attractive to resist when it says resist the devil you can't say

I'm going to resist the devil he's a powerful thought and we would love to take credit and resist him by just sheer willpower you'd feel indestructible I resisted the devil but we can't we want to clean ourselves but we can't we want to take credit for being a good person but we can't the grieving the mourning the wailing and the sin comes not just because of the sins themselves but because change seems so elusive out of rage it's the frustration of not being able to change why do I keep doing this it's like running on a treadmill and thinking you're actually going somewhere you put in effort but don't move and then there's this perplexing reality in this passage the perplexing yet beautiful thing about the gospel that the humility in admitting that you don't have what it takes to be wise is the wisest thing you will ever do the humility in admitting that you don't have what it takes to be wise is the wisest thing you will ever do the humility in saying

[25 : 07] Jesus Christ the only way I can live like you is if you change me from the inside if you clean me the only reason I can resist the devil is because you resisted him in the wilderness and my life is found in you the only way to wash my hands we the double minded is by saying Jesus wash me clean me I can't cleanse myself I can't live the wise life without you I can't do all this stuff come to Jesus in human life draw near to him draw near to him and he will lift you up he will exalt you he will make you like himself he will make his impossible commands possible so there's two ways the only way to live like Jesus to come and humiliate and admit that you can't do it you need

Jesus to give you a godly tongue you need Jesus to give you a heart that sees people the way he does and you need Jesus to keep yourself unstained from the world I want to conclude with a parable that Jesus told one of the men is wise and the other is a fool two men went up to the temple to pray one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector the Pharisee stood by himself and prayed God I thank you that I'm not like other men robbers evildoers adulterers or even like this tax collector I pass twice a week and give a tenth of all I get but the tax collector stood at a distance he would not even look up to heaven but beat his breast and said God have mercy on me a sinner I tell you that this man rather than the other went unjustified before God but all those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted the humility and admitting that you don't have what it takes realises the world

God looks on the humble and gives them grace forgiveness peace and transformation let's pray