

James 3:16-18

Pentecost 18; September 23 & 24, 2018

Within a period of 24 hours this past week: 3 people were seriously wounded as a heavily armed man opened fire on them at a business in Madison; 4 people were injured in a courthouse in Pennsylvania by a gunman who would be killed by police; in another location in Pennsylvania a gunman killed his parents and tried to kill his ex-wife. It almost seems like a daily occurrence that you see or read a report of another mass shooting. Apparently, there have been 262 mass shootings on the last 263 days. We live in a broken world. It is sad to see so many often, innocent people lose their lives as a result of someone's bitter envy or selfish ambition.

While I hope no one here would be filled with so much envy or selfish ambition to hurt someone else around them, it doesn't mean that we are immune from it. The devil wants us to make me think that I am the point of life. He wants us to think that everything revolves around us and not others. Think about it, it is often envy and selfish ambition that is the cause of many fights between people.

James, the author of this text, understood that. The James, that wrote these words, is the half-brother of Jesus. It appears that at one time James had been an unbeliever, along with other members of Jesus' family. He may have even interfered with Jesus' ministry at one time. James, however, would later come to believe in his half-brother. Jesus appeared to James after his Resurrection. He would become the leader of the Church in Jerusalem. He appears to have even been a counselor for the Apostle Paul.

James writes this letter to believers. Throughout this entire book, James is encouraging believers to live the faith that God had placed in their hearts. He begins in our text: **"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom."** Apparently there were men stepping forward in the Christian church claiming to be wise. They knew what the Bible said, they preached Jesus, but they weren't living it. They talked the talk but they didn't walk the walk. They claimed to be wise, they claimed to be smart and to know what this Christianity thing was all about, and yet they didn't take the knowledge they had and apply it to their life. Instead of living their faith humbly, they loved the feel of importance. They had the attitude of *"look at me and how wise I am."* And James tells them this is not heavenly wisdom. **"But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth."**

These men wanted to be important. They envied it and they had selfish ambition to be the important guys. They craved others telling them how important they were, and James says that this is wrong and it's causing all kinds of problems in the church.

Think for a second about the problems in your life. Where do the problems in your life stem from? Be honest for a second, how many of the problems in your life have stemmed from bitter envy and selfish ambition from your own heart? A lot, not all, the problems in our lives stem from the fact that we don't have something that someone else has, and our hearts can't stop wanting it and our minds can't stop thinking about it.

So how does this look? Well, you want to climb the ladder at work and get that next promotion, so you falsify some statistics or spread some false information about another person to advance yourself. And the scary thing about bitter envy and selfish ambition is that a lot of times we down play it by simply calling it our inner drive. Having inner drive is good, but what is the motivation behind that drive? Is it bitter envy and selfish ambition or is it a drive to make use of the gifts and abilities that God has given you to glorify him? When it's driven by bitter envy and selfish ambition, a lot of times we will do whatever it takes to get what we want. Even if it's at someone else's expense.

For these church leaders during James' day, that was their problem. They were driven by bitter envy and selfish ambition. They wanted people to think they were important and to have the spotlight, and they'd do anything to keep that power. James says that this isn't heavenly wisdom because heavenly wisdom isn't centered on us. It is centered on being selfless. He continues: **"For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven 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."**

How does a Christian, who has faith in Jesus, take that knowledge and apply it to their lives? Well, James lays it out for us. He calls it heavenly wisdom, and heavenly wisdom is first of all **pure**. There are no additives. There's no mixed motives. It's pure. It's centered on Jesus. It's also **peace-loving**. As Christians we don't look to hold grudges or start controversies. Rather we look to be peaceful and loving to everyone. Heavenly wisdom is also **considerate**. We are kind to others. Heavenly wisdom is selfless and being considerate considers others and their needs.

Heavenly wisdom is also **submissive**. A lot of times when we hear that word we think of someone who is like a door mat. Someone tells them what to do and they do it. They can't think for themselves. But being submissive is simply saying, *"Here is what I want, and here is what you want and need. I'm willing to put my wants and desires aside for you."* You know who is the master of this? Jesus. Jesus saw that you needed a Savior. Someone who would live the perfect life you couldn't and someone to take the punishment you deserved. So he stepped out of perfect heaven to live in this evil world, and was submissive. He willingly said, *"I'm going to put your needs before my own."* Even to the point of dying on the cross for us because it's what we needed. Heavenly wisdom submits to others not because we are weak, but because we value others. Heavenly wisdom also shows **mercy**. Mercy is not giving someone what they deserve. Heavenly wisdom loves to show mercy to others because God has shown us mercy. As we do, we do it by being **impartial and sincere**. What happens when all these things take a priority over bitter envy and selfish ambition in our hearts? People don't try to destroy other people. We aren't filled with sinful pride.

This isn't easy to do. James understood that. He knew it first-hand. He wrestled with Jesus. He saw how fighting was hurting those around him. He also knew the peace that only Jesus could give. He knew the forgiveness that Jesus had won for him. That is what motivates us to live by heavenly wisdom. And when there's a time when our wants and desires don't match up to God's wants and desires, we humbly submit to his will and follow him. I want you to think for one second: when has there ever been a time when you submitted to God's will and regretted it? It doesn't happen. He knows what is best for our lives, and we trust him. He knows how to fix the brokenness in our life.

We know Jesus. We know he lived perfectly, he died innocently, and rose again for us. We know this, and we believe it for our salvation. We ask God to help us turn this knowledge into wisdom as we apply it to our lives and live by heavenly wisdom.