

**“Resist”**  
**James 3:13-4:8**  
**Pollocksville Presbyterian Church**  
**7.25.21**  
**Sermon #108**

**James 3:13-4:8 Common English Bible (CEB)**

<sup>13</sup> Are any of you wise and understanding? Show that your actions are good with a humble lifestyle that comes from wisdom. <sup>14</sup>

However, if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, then stop bragging and living in ways that deny the truth. <sup>15</sup>

This is not the wisdom that comes down from above. Instead, it is from the earth, natural and demonic. <sup>16</sup> Wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there is disorder and everything that is evil. <sup>17</sup>

What of the wisdom from above? First, it is pure, and then peaceful, gentle, obedient, filled with mercy and good actions, fair, and genuine. <sup>18</sup> Those who make peace sow the seeds of justice by their peaceful acts.

4 What is the source of conflict among you? What is the source of your disputes? Don't they come from your cravings that are at war in your own lives? <sup>2</sup> You long for something you don't have, so you commit murder. You are jealous for something you can't get, so you struggle and fight. You don't have because you don't ask. <sup>3</sup> You ask and don't have because you ask with evil intentions, to waste it on your own cravings.

<sup>4</sup> You unfaithful people! Don't you know that friendship with the world means hostility toward God? So whoever wants to be the world's friend becomes God's enemy. <sup>5</sup> Or do you suppose that scripture is meaningless? Doesn't God long for our faithfulness in the life he has given to us? <sup>6</sup> But he gives us more grace. This is why it says, *God stands against the proud, but favors the humble.*<sup>7</sup> Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will run away

from you. <sup>8</sup> Come near to God, and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners. Purify your hearts, you double-minded.

The Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God.**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Well, here we are in our fourth week in James. At the risk of beating a dead horse, I'll remind us of what's happened the last three Sundays. Remember, James' community is a Jewish Christian community living in a land full of Jews. They are dedicated to following the Law not because it saves, but because it

is part of their identity. It gives them a concrete way to live their lives faithfully and to be examples to their non-Christian neighbors.

James emphasizes Jesus' identity as a Teacher. The heart of James is the question that asks: "Why do people call Jesus LORD, yet do not do what Christ calls them to do?"

Three weeks ago, James portrayed God as the Father and Creator of all that is. God is the Master Gardener who has planted a Word within our souls. And we are to be doers of the Word and not hearers only. Our responsibility is to tend to our souls the way Christ has taught us.

Two weeks ago, we were in James 2, which expands upon James 1. Chapter 2 declares that God is the Lawgiver and God's laws free us to serve out of love. Serve our neighbors out of love who may

look and act like us and who may not look and act like us. Even more so, James 2 reminds us that God is God of the outcast, oppressed, and poor.

Last week, we were in James 3:1-12. The tongue, we were reminded, is a powerful weapon. It can destroy. It can build up. We can bless and we can curse. Yet, we can't have it both ways. Like a pond in a backyard with a flowing fountain, we are to be a blessing to all those we come in contact with. We have our own mini-ecosystems. Either we are full of poison or full of healing.

Today's passage takes place immediately following last week's scripture of James 3:1-12. Thirteen picks up with a question. "Are any of you wise and understanding?" Of course, James! I'm wise and understanding. What kind of question is that? I've made it this

far pretty good. I feel the wind is at our backs for the first time in months. New opportunities are presenting themselves!

Wait, what?!?! Humble lifestyle? That's a bunch of bologna.

Humbleness? What do you think James is getting at here? "A humble lifestyle that comes from wisdom....." Wow, that's a punch in the gut. Just when I thought James couldn't do any more to crush my fragile ego, he tells me I've got to be humble. Why be humble? Who cares?

Well.....now that I take another look at this passage, as much as it pains me to admit when I'm wrong, James does have a point. We are to be humble in our lifestyle. Instead of bragging about what we can do on our own and denying the truth, we are to seek wisdom that doesn't come from the flesh, but from heaven.

Fleshly, or rather Earthly, wisdom is quite deadly. We get comfortable thinking that we have everything figured out. Maybe we even get to a point thinking we are doing God a favor and looking out for ourselves and relying on our own strength. Yet, we're lying to ourselves when we think that!

James tells us that when we trust in fleshly wisdom, it leads to disputes with each other! Our fleshly desires lead to anger, jealousy, and disorder! It's our own human wisdom that's at the heart of most, if not all, conflicts.

Really.....think about it. It's all up and down the Bible. Often, people sought fleshly satisfaction like Cain, King David, and the rich ruler. Cain killed Abel because he hated that God favored his brother's offering. All he had to do was follow God's instructions in the first place. Instead, he murdered his brother. King David didn't

have Bathsheba. So, he took her for himself and murdered her husband, Uriah, in order to cover up the truth. The rich ruler came to Jesus asking what he must do to have eternal life. For he had followed every commandment to the exact letter! Yet, Jesus said “Sell your possessions and give it to the poor”. But, in his own fleshly wisdom, the young man went away because he had so much and it made him sad to give it all away.

These three examples, Cain, David, the rich ruler.....they did not seek heavenly wisdom in these stories. And James' community knew most of these stories and I would venture to guess those examples, among others, came to mind for them when hearing these words. Yet, James begs his community to seek wisdom from heaven or they would face dire consequences.



But, what does that wisdom look like? An echo of Philippians 4 comes in James 3:17: Wisdom is pure, peaceful, gentle, obedient, filled with mercy and good actions, fair, and genuine. True wisdom does not look within one's self, but it looks to God who is the Father and Creator of all that is.

Scot McKnight says in his commentary on James: True wisdom transcends our own thoughts.<sup>1</sup> True wisdom is skilled in discernment and judgment. And for this Jewish Christian Community who is highly trained in the Torah, they know that wisdom is more than something that comes above, that is, from the heavens. This wisdom is embodied!

Embodied wisdom for this Jewish Christian Community interprets it as a wisdom that is connected to the Spirit. This is the same

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<sup>1</sup> Scot McKnight. *The Letter of James*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011. 310.

wisdom that fell on many in the Bible. There's Joseph who interpreted the dreams of several people, including Pharaoh. Joshua, who led the Hebrews into the promised land and who depended not on his own strength, but on the LORD's. And then there's Jesus, who preached his first sermon in the synagogue in Luke 4 where he proclaimed the words of Isaiah: The Spirit of the LORD is upon me. To restore sight to the blind and release to the captives!

Wisdom does not come from ourselves, but from the LORD. True wisdom is indeed peaceful, pure, gentle, and full of mercy. It does not seek to boast in one's own doing, but of the LORD's doing. A person full of wisdom from heaven seeks to foster a peace not only with themselves, but with each other, and with God. This wisdom does not seek to create havoc, but reconciliation.

Kindred in Christ, we are called to be doers of the Word. We are to serve all our neighbors out of love. We are to be a blessing to all we meet. And we are to seek the wisdom that does not come from ourselves, but from the LORD, and be an embodiment of that same heavenly wisdom.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.