

Wisdom from Above

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. Good to be back again. I apologise for what happened two weeks ago. I did appear! I did appear briefly downstairs and then disappeared again. I was supposed to be here for your church! But my church had put on a T for me because I'd been at the church for 10 years. It was so secret, not only did I not know what they were doing, they didn't know what I was doing. So I suddenly found I was within two places. So I'm here today and we will share afterwards. That'll be great. Thank you.

So we're in James. James 3, 13 to 4, 12. I mean, 33 points. Is that all right? You know, I just, there's so much here in this passage. There's so much we could preach for about a month on here.

So go for three. We'll stick with three. Earthly wisdom, heavenly wisdom and living with wisdom. So I was on the tube the other day and I was stood up by the doors and the tube was coming to a stop.

A lot of people looking to get off. A lot of people looking to come on. The tube stopped, the doors opened and a guy jumped on and bumped my shoulder. Now, obviously as a godly minister, I bumped him back. I know, I know. This is confession time. Confession time. He bumped me. I mean, he didn't, he didn't just graze my shoulder and say, Oh, I'm sorry. He bumped my shoulder.

I kind of bumped back and he says, You're in my way. I think, Hang on a second. This, the whole etiquette is when the, when the doors open, you let the passengers off first before everybody else comes on. I'm in the right. I know I'm in the right for this. You know, so, and I went off and I was mumbling to myself and I was, but I was in the right. I'm in his way. He was in my way. I went up the escalator and it's about then that, you know, it's like the Holy Spirit comes and taps on your other shoulder, isn't it? And says, Richard, really, is this really the right way to act and react to this situation? So, earthly wisdom says you stand up for yourself, doesn't it? Don't let anyone push you around. You bump me, I'll bump you. It's the wisdom of pride, of self-interest. It's the, we hear this a lot, isn't it? It's rights instead of responsibilities. James was quite harsh when he talked about this kind of wisdom, or perhaps insightful. He said it's earthly, it's unspiritual, it's even demonic.

[3 : 0 7] It produces quarrels, it produces pride, it produces division. I mean, to be honest, when I first told this story when I got home, Jenny, my wife, was like, and when I said then they tapped me on the shoulder, they were like, what, the bloke? You know, they was half expecting the bloke to have come after me. He said, why did you get involved? Why are you starting a quarrel? Why are we, you know, anything could have happened? It's not the way of Jesus. To act and behave in that way is not the act of Jesus, but it's so easy to get caught up in the moment and to act that way.

Heavenly wisdom. A number of years ago, a church member said something to me that really upset me, and it really cut deep, and another occasion where I went away mumbling. And I went to another pastor, and I told them the story. I told them what had happened, what the background to this was, and I explained what they'd said to me, and how much they had hurt me. And the pastor listened carefully and turned to me and said, give them a gift. And I said, no, no, no, I think you misunderstood what I said. They hurt me. And he says, yeah, yeah. He said, I heard you. Give them a gift.

I didn't want to. But after praying about it, I think, oh, you know, I've got to do something about this. It's affecting me. It's affecting, it's dominating all those, you know, sometimes when you have a thing at work and situation, and it just dominates your thoughts, doesn't it? You can't seem to get away from it. So I think, oh, I'll do it then. Oh, I will send a gift to this person.

And you know what? It didn't make the blindest bit of difference to them, but it changed me. So there I was thinking I was giving a gift and it might soften them.

No, actually, it softened me. And actually, that whole process of giving the gift to the other person, almost as if all my anger and hurt went with the gift. And it blessed me.

[5 : 30] And I thought, wow, that's a bit of heavenly wisdom, isn't it? That actually, sometimes we do, we want to come back, we like, we like. And again, I could have bumped back. I could have said something hurtful back.

But it's not the way of Jesus, is it? Heavenly wisdom goes against what the world says. It's not eye for an eye. It's not a bump for a bump. We're trying to tune into the spirit of Jesus, aren't we?

Jesus said, if someone forces you to go one mile, you go two. Bless those who curse you. Turn the other cheek. It's counter-cultural.

James says, this wisdom from heaven is first of all pure, it's peace-loving, it's considerate, it's submissive, it's full of mercy and good fruit. Wow, it's a lot to live up to, isn't it?

But we recognise it when we see it, don't we? We recognise it perhaps when we're recipients of it and you have an experience of it or when someone does something out of the blue for you or against the grain and you think, wow, what a blessing.

[6 : 38] So it's not about being clever. It's about being Christ-like. James asks, what causes fights and quarrels amongst you? He doesn't say the world.

He doesn't say other people. He says, it's the desires that battle within you or me. Oh, and then you think, oh, this is now a little bit like self-reflection then, isn't it?

Looking back and think, well, what am I like? How do I react in these situations? Because it's often that what's going on inside us steals our own peace, isn't it?

Because of the turmoil and the things we're thinking and going through. And when I bumped the guy back on the tube, I wasn't thinking about him.

I was thinking about me. You know, he bumped me. He was in my way. I don't know. What kind of day had he had? I wonder what it would have looked like to have reacted with some heavenly wisdom to say, I don't know.

[7 : 48] Are you okay? Have you had a bad day? Can I do something for you? I'm sorry I was in the way. I don't know. I don't know what that looked like on the day. Now, looking back, but I wonder how God would have had us react in that situation.

Instead of thinking about me, my rights, my frustration, my pride, what it would have looked like if it was different.

And that's the thing, isn't it? Earthly wisdom pulls us inward. Defend yourself. Don't let anyone win. You deserve better. But heavenly wisdom pulls upward.

It calls us to submit to God, to let him fight the battles we can't win in our own strength. Great spiritual sandwich, isn't there, that James talks about.

We always go for the filling, don't we? If you ever ask anyone about a passage from James, resist the devil and he will flee from you. But it's a spiritual sandwich.

[8 : 53] It has things either side of it that are really important. You might have a baloney sandwich, but if you only have a baloney, you miss all the other stuff. I don't know, whatever the illustration might be.

But James says, submit yourselves then to God. Resist the devil. He will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

We're quick on the resist the devil. And we forget about the submit to God, the draw near to God. They're essential parts of that thing that James is saying. When we humble ourselves, when we stop needing to be right, when we stop matching the world's energy of anger and pride, perhaps that's when peace starts to flow again.

Heavenly wisdom doesn't make us weak. It sets us free. Free from having to win every argument. Free from bitterness. Free from the need to be seen as right.

Because when we draw near to God, he fills the space that pride used to occupy. When we let go of that stuff, we let God into that space instead.

[10:10] And that's when we receive his peace and his wisdom. Yeah, but look what happened. I'm a broken Baptist minister. I bump people on the tube.

There's a story of a farmer who carried two buckets from the well each morning. One bucket was perfect. The other had a crack. It leaked water the whole way home.

The cracked bucket felt ashamed. It said, I'm sorry, I can never bring back a full load. The farmer smiled and said, but haven't you noticed?

The flowers on your side of the path. I planted seeds there and you've been watering them every day. The bucket was flawed. But in its weakness, it was blessing others.

And that's the beauty of living with God's wisdom. When we submit our flaws, our pride, our impatience, God turns them into something fruitful. He uses what's cracked to make something beautiful.

[11:15] Heavenly wisdom doesn't erase our weakness. It redeems it. So, we live in a noisy, divided world.

You know, dog eat dog. Why don't they say cat eat cat? I don't know. A world that says bump back. A world that values power over peace.

Pride over humility. But James reminds us that true wisdom, wisdom from above, is pure. It's peace-loving. It's gentle. It's merciful.

It's sincere. Because when we think about wisdom, sometimes we think about knowledge. But James very much puts it into the place, it's then how we live that out.

How we go about our day by day. And do we put God's peace into practice? And so, when we think about going ahead, we think about our week ahead and think, well, am I going to sow peace or pride?

[12:27] Will I draw near to God this week or to the world's way? And when I get it wrong, because I do, there's grace.

Grace to repent. Grace to learn. Grace to try again. Because when we get back up, when we repent and we turn back around, when we decide to walk in God's wisdom and we resist the enemy, we welcome the presence of God himself back into our journey and into our life.

Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. So may our prayer be, Lord, give us wisdom. And we thank you. to speak and to love in the way of Jesus.

Amen.