

Sermon outline and notes:

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James 1:5-8 “The Miracle Cure”

Intro. I want to begin my message by attempting to show the connection between vv.1-4 and our text today. In our last message we learned that we should rejoice when we fall into various trials. One reason for this joy is the fact that trials work patient endurance into our lives. God is working in our lives to build character, & lead us toward perfection and completeness in Christ. That is something to rejoice about! As we saw in v.4, God’s goal for your life is that you lack nothing. Trials will help you not be as lacking in patient endurance.

In our text today, James gives another example of what many Christians lack—wisdom. This is another connection to the previous context. You need wisdom to help you deal with the trials & troubles of life. My family is going through a major trial right now. We need God’s wisdom now more than ever before.

Now you may be lacking in other areas of your life. For example, what about your prayer life? Are you lacking in that area? Are you lacking time spent in prayer? Trials will certainly increase your prayer life! Or do you feel that your prayers are lacking power & effectiveness? Or you may lack humility, or self-control, or love, or joy, or peace.

The first step in meeting the deficiencies in your life is to acknowledge that you have them! So we’re going to see that James has some good advice to help us deal with these deficiencies in our lives.

Now my message today is going to follow the problem/solution type of outline. So let’s consider first of all:

I. THE PROBLEM

James says in v.5, “If any of you lacks wisdom...” That’s the problem that James addresses in our text. There may be many deficiencies in our lives, but our focus today is on wisdom. Now there are two points I want to make about wisdom. First of all, you need to know:

A. The Meaning of Wisdom – You have to know what wisdom is to know whether or not you are lacking in it. To James wisdom was more than knowledge and more than intelligence. You can go to any school in this country, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Stanford, and you can pass their courses, get their degree, and graduate from any one of them, and become known as a knowledgeable person. Or you can have the good fortune of being born with intelligence. If you have both knowledge and intelligence, you can probably succeed in many of the employment fields. But that will not guarantee that you will succeed in life. The fact is, you can have both intelligence and knowledge, and yet lack wisdom, for we have all known of educated fools. They have done foolish things, and they have been failures in life. We need more in life than just intelligence and knowledge.

Furthermore, wisdom is not common sense. There are many lost people who have what we call common sense in the worldly affairs of life. James 3 talks about worldly wisdom. That is not what we are talking about here.

What, then, is wisdom? For one thing, wisdom is the application of the knowledge of God. It is having God's perspective about life. One example is in the context. James gives us God's perspective on how we should respond & deal with the trials and difficulties of life. By faith in God we can overcome the trials that come our way.

Let me illustrate this. Did you know that knowledge and reason and logic can sometimes get in the way of wisdom? Take the story of David & Goliath. Israel looked at Goliath and said, "We've got a problem. Look how much bigger he is than we are." David looked at Goliath and said, "Look how much smaller he is than God." Israel looked at Goliath and said, "He's too big to hit." David looked at Goliath and said, "He's too big to miss." Knowledge says, "It can't be done." Wisdom says, "With God all things are possible."

We can give other examples. Do you remember the time when the disciples were in a storm on the Sea of Galilee? Then they saw Jesus coming toward them, walking on water! Now when Peter got out of the boat to walk on the water, it wasn't knowledge that made him do it. It was the wisdom of faith. He relied not on his mind. He relied on the Master. He realized as long as he relied on Jesus, he could do anything. Knowledge, logic, and reason say you can't walk on the water, but Peter realized that wisdom walks where reason fears to tread.

Or just to give one more example, knowledge says, "It costs too much." Wisdom says, "My Father owns the cattle on a 1,000 hills." Knowing God can give you a whole new perspective on life, and help you accomplish things you never thought were possible.

So I want you to understand the meaning of wisdom. But I also want you to understand:

B. The Need for Wisdom - Proverbs says, "There is a way that seems right unto a man, but the end thereof is death." Proverbs 3:5 also says, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding." Don't assume that you do not need wisdom from God; that the "if" of v.5 does not apply to you and that you can figure out what to do on your own. Don't think that you have reached the point where you have all the wisdom you will ever need.

Once again, in the context we see one need for wisdom. The Christian needs wisdom in order that he might see his trials in a true light and make proper use of them. How else can we have a correct and Christian interpretation of the circumstances of life? Wisdom helps us understand how to use the trials of life for our good and God's glory.

Are you facing a problem this morning and you need God's wisdom to solve it? If you are a parent raising children, I can assure you that you need wisdom. If you are trying to manage money, you need wisdom. When you are dealing with people on the job, you need wisdom. If you still need to choose a life's mate, you need wisdom!

The starting place in getting wisdom from God is to admit your need to the Lord. You're going to have to go to God with your problem and lay it at His feet and simply admit to Him that you cannot solve it. You just go to the Lord and say, "I can't do this myself. I can't work out my marriage on my own. I can't handle the finances any longer. I can't take the children any more. I can't handle the trials of life any longer. I need your wisdom!"

Now if you lack the kind of wisdom that will help you be equipped to face life's difficulties, don't despair. We shall see how you can get that wisdom. So we see in our text not only the problem, but also:

II. THE SOLUTION

What is the solution for gaining wisdom? We might expect that James would advise you to gain wisdom by reading and applying to Word of God to your life. The Bible is indeed a great source of wisdom for living. You can find many answers to the problems of life in the Word of God. Yet James doesn't mention that here. He will talk about receiving God's Word beginning in v.21. He doesn't advise you to go & get advice from the wisest people you know. He doesn't recommend that you sit down and think long & hard.

What is the first solution that James recommends? It is prayer! James says in v.5, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God...." So the starting point is to pray. One reason why prayer is the starting point is that wisdom comes from God and from a right relationship with God. Wisdom is a moral and spiritual quality based upon the fear of the Lord, for Proverbs 9:10 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." So if you want wisdom, pray!

Yet it's not just any type of prayer that will do, but the right kind of prayer. Now the main emphasis of James is on believing prayer. James says in v.6, "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting...." We have here two sides of the same coin. First of all, we must:

A. Pray in Faith – Likewise, Christ Himself promised, "And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Mt. 21:22). When you pray, you must have faith that God will answer your pray, and grant you wisdom, or whatever else you lack.

Now I want to help you pray with faith. How can you have greater faith when you pray? Well, the most important thing is not to focus on *your* faith, but on the object of your faith, which should be God. Faith is only as great as the object of your faith.

Right now it is football season. How many are watching football? Well let's suppose that I put together a team to face the Washington Redskins. Imagine that everyone on my team was about my size, and we were all around 50 years old. How much faith would you have in my team to beat the Washington Redskins? None at all! On the other hand, what if someone put together an all-star team from the NFL to face the Washington Redskins. How much faith would you have in that team? Do you see how the size of your faith is based on what you know about the object of your faith? That's why you need to learn about God from His Word. The Bible says, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

Let me share with you a few truths about God that will help you pray with greater faith. First of all:

1. God Is Able to Give What You Need – God is certainly able to give you wisdom, for He is the source of wisdom. He is the all-wise God. He is the almighty God. So He is able to answer your other prayers as well. The Bible says in Jeremiah 33:3, "Call unto me and I will show you great and mighty things that you do not know." Eph. 3:20 says, "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us."

2. God Is Willing to Give What You Need - Most of us believe with our heads that God is able to do what is impossible with man. A more common cause of doubting for many of us is the question, "Is God willing to answer this request?" A certain leper came to Jesus with faith in His ability to heal leprosy, which was considered impossible. That's because He had heard what He had done for others. But what the leper said as he approached Jesus was, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean" (Mt. 8:2). One of the biggest enemies of prayer that I know of is the little word, "if". I hear people pray sometimes, "Lord if it be your will bless our services. If it be Your will, save the lost. If it be Your will, anoint the pastor." Friend, if it is not God's will to

bless the service, save the lost, and anoint the pastor, we might as well lock up the church and go home. If you are going to obtain wisdom from the Lord, you must ask in faith and it must be a constant faith.

I believe that in v.5 James encourages us to have faith in God's willingness to give what we ask of Him. Notice 4 assurances that God is willing to give us wisdom, and everything else we truly need.

a) Because It's His Nature to Give – In v.5 James says, “let him ask of God, who gives....” In the original it reads something like “let him ask from the giving God....” The stress is not so much on the act of giving as on the fact that giving is a characteristic of His nature. It is His nature to give even as it is the nature of the sun to send forth light and heat.

b) Because He Has a Generous Heart - In v.5 James says that God “gives to all liberally....” The Greek word here rendered “liberally” (*haplos*) can mean “simply,” that is, without secondary motive. But it is better to understand the word as denoting generosity or openhandedness. God is not stingy. He is liberal. He wants to give, and even give liberally!

What if you had a financial need, and you went to the wealthiest person in this city and asked for help. Well their ability to meet your need would not do you any good if they were stingy. But if they are liberal in their giving, you would be encouraged to have faith that your request would be granted.

c) Because None Are Excluded - Notice in v.5 that God “gives to all liberally....” God's gifts are not restricted to certain nations, to favored classes, or to particular individuals, but are available to all mankind. He doesn't give just to Jews, or just to preachers & missionaries, but to all. None are excluded. Don't say, “I am a nobody and God will not give anything to me.” No sincere seeker is sent away empty.

d) Because He Will Not Reproach When You Ask – James also says in v.5 that God gives “without reproach.” He does not grant one's request and then reproach him with it afterwards. God doesn't say, when we come to Him, “What use have you made of the last gift I gave you?” He doesn't remind us of our unworthiness to appear before Him. He does not reproach us as you might to a beggar on the street saying, “You deserve what you are going through. I'm not going to give you anything.” He does none of these things. If we only believed that He gives simply because He loves us and that we need never fear that our unworthiness will limit or restrain His gifts!

All of these truths about God should encourage your heart to come to God without hesitation, and with great faith. Whatever you lack, whether it's wisdom, or patience, or anything else, pray in faith, & you will receive!

So on the one hand, we need to pray in faith. But James also warns against having the opposite of faith. In vv.6-8 he says that we should also:

B. Pray Without Doubting - “Doubting” literally means to separate or distinguish one from the other. How descriptive this is of the prayers of many Christians. They separate those prayer requests that seem possible from those that seem impossible.

How many times have you prayed for something, and immediately you had doubts that God would answer your prayer?

Now in vv.6-8 James tells us why we should not doubt. First of all, because doubt leads us to waver. In the last of v.6 James says, “for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.” We are not to oscillate between faith and unbelief, trust and distrust, pleading as it were with boldness, but all the time thinking that it is really useless to ask. When that is the

case, James says that you would be like a wave, driven by the wind and tossed about. Or you are like a cork floating on the wave, now carried towards the shore, then away from it. Such a man is for God today, but for Baal tomorrow. One minute he believes God, the next minute he doesn't. One minute he believes what the Bible says. The next minute he believes what the critics say. He tries to serve two masters and is unwilling to break with either.

V.8 should be taken as a continuing description of the wavering man. When James says that the doubting man is unstable in all his ways, he points up that it is not only in prayer that this lack of constancy manifests itself. It comes out in every area of life. He says he is "unstable in all his ways." He is like the roller coaster Christian. He has a "sense of what is right, but a love of what is wrong." This man whom James endeavors to describe is commonly known as a hypocrite, a man with two souls using either one at will.

I can illustrate this from a story from mythology. Aesop, probably the most renowned writer of myths, speaks in one of his fables about a time when the beasts and the fowls were engaged in war. The bat tried to belong to both parties. When the birds were victorious, he would wing around telling everyone that he was a bird; when the beasts won a fight, he would walk around assuring everyone that he was a beast. But soon his hypocrisy was discovered and he was rejected by both the beasts and the birds. He had to hide himself, and now he can appear openly only by night.

You must not be double-minded. Don't be one way when you are at church, and another way when you are at work or school. You cannot hold on to the world with one hand and to the Lord with the other. If you do, you will enjoy neither the world nor the Lord. The child of God cannot be facing two ways at once. We either put our trust in God or we put our trust in ourselves.

In v.7 James gives the second reason why we should not doubt. He says that such a person should not think he will receive anything from the Lord. The doubting, wavering disposition is fatal to true effectiveness in prayer. Faith unlocks the divine storehouse, but unbelief bars its doors. It was doubt that made Peter sink in the waves as he was walking to Jesus (Mt. 14:22-33). The wavering petitioner dishonors and insults God by doubting the truth of His Word.

We can see that doubting in prayer is a big problem. So what's the solution? I have already shared the fact that you need to understand the character of God, as expressed in the last of v.5. But you also simply need to lay claim on the promises of God. If we meet the conditions, notice the promise found in the last of v.5, "it will be given to him." There is not the slightest suggestion here of mere chance or probability of success. It *will* be given. God doesn't lie. He keeps His promises. Jesus said in Mt. 7:7, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." So if you will have faith, and not doubt, God will give you the wisdom you need to be victorious over the trials of life.

Conclusion: God wants you to be strong, & fully developed as a Christian. In what ways are you lacking today? The first step is to acknowledge your need. [Review rest of message].

Sources: Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 16 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); James Merritt (notes from his sermon on this text); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); George Sweeting, *How to Solve Conflicts: A Practical Study of the Book of James* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Mature: James* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1978); Curtis Vaughan, *James: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969); Spiros Zodiatas, *The Behavior of Belief: An Exposition of James Based Upon the Original Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).