

## The Tale of Two Fruits from Two Very Different Seeds

18<sup>th</sup> Sun. after Pentecost – 09/22/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: James 3:13-4:10 Pastor Keith Besel

vv. 3:17-18, [Literal translation from Greek,] **“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, courteous, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, sincere. And fruit from righteousness is being sown in peace by those who make peace.”**

v. 4:4, **“Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”**

### **Introduction**

✘ This letter that we look at in God’s holy Word this morning, James, some 20 years after Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, has received a bit of a bad rap at times in the history of the Church. Some have said that James has too much law; too much teaching about Christian works above Christ’s saving grace, and the like.

➔ As the biological brother of Jesus, James became the leader of the new Christian Church in Jerusalem. And in Galatians 2:9 Paul lists James, Peter and John as the three “pillars” of Christ’s Church on earth. In fact, this letter has been called “The Proverbs of the New Testament” because of the way that it is structured with numerous one- or two-sentence gems of godly wisdom and teaching.

➔ What’s so important though for us understand is that James, as he says in chapter 1:1, is a “servant of...the Lord Jesus Christ”, writing to “the twelve tribes” – that is to faithful believers of God who have been dispersed throughout the Mediterranean world at that time out of fear and persecution because of their faith and trust in Jesus. So James’ relationship with his readers is kind of like my relationship with you here today. He knows that he is writing/talking primarily with committed Christians; those who already know that they are saved only by the grace of Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit’s gift of faith and in no way or manner by their own good works or their own self-concocted wisdom.

✘ And so James doesn’t see a need to dwell on those truths of Gospel here, because as a faithful pastor, he sees in these new Christians, a grave danger; a threat to their faith that is pulling many souls out of salvation and into the clutches of hell. Many of those Christians, just as so many are still today, were misusing Christ’s gift of faith; proclaiming that they believed and trusted in Jesus but then going no farther than that. They rejected Jesus’ clear teaching that one who believes in Jesus will then bear the fruit of that faith in now following Jesus’ will; that he/she be an active part of His Church on earth, and live each day loving God above all else and loving our neighbor in what we think, say and do. In essence they denied that our faith in Christ necessarily shows itself in God-pleasing works.

➔ So, in this way, James is a very practical book, getting right down to the bottom line; to the core application of God’s Word into the daily lives of those who believe in Jesus. He knows that much of what he writes may ruffle some feathers. But he would rather speak the hard truth that God’s people need to hear in order to lead them to repentance and keep them in salvation, than to only tell them what their itching ears want to hear under the world’s warped definition of “showing love”. To do that would only be to “love them all the way into hell.”

✘ That’s the challenge with which I’ve wrestled this week in preparing this message for you today. Do I tippy-toe around the truth because I want you all to leave “happy” or do I “speak the truth in love” as Paul directs in Ephesians 4:15, even if some of it hits us between the eyes, so that we can together, as Paul says, “grow up in every way to [Christ].” My prayer is that you all will see

me following both James and Paul in “submitting”, as verse seven says, “to God” and His will for you and me here as His redeemed people.

## I. Two Ways of Conduct and Their Origins (seeds)

- ⊗ So, with that in mind, let’s get down to it. James begins in verse 13 with a question that I pose to each of you, “Who is wise and understanding among you?” Raise your hands. Come on, don’t be so shy.
  - ➔ Ok, try it this way, “Who among you wants to be wise and understanding?” That should be everyone in this room.
- ⊗ James’ next sentence is hugely important then. It is an imperative; that is a command. He literally says in the original Greek, “He must show from excellent conduct his works done in humility that comes from wisdom.”
  - ➔ It’s a simple statement of cause and effect that James puts before us: good conduct, done in humility can only come from true wisdom. In fact, in verses 15 and 17 James specifically defines this wisdom as “wisdom from above”; in other words, from God. You and I can’t buy, earn, or attain this wisdom in anyway on our own. It is God’s wisdom, given to God’s people to do God’s works. Ephesians 2:10, immediately after Paul said that we are saved only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and “not” by our own works says, “For we are [God’s] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” It can’t be any clearer than that. Jesus saved you and me “for good works”. Not just to say we are saved but then go out and do our own thing.
- ⊗ Why is James so blunt and direct here? Because according to verses 14 and 16, he is seeing that some of the so-called believers in Christ’s Church were not living the way that Jesus had saved them to live. He says in verse 14 according to the Greek, “But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and so lie against the truth.” You see their self-centered actions toward others; looking out only to better themselves; to improve their income and influence; to build up their reputation is the exact opposite of what it means to live for Jesus; to do His work in humility. As James says, it’s a “lie against (God’s) truth” to be like this yet still try to say that you are a believer in Christ.
  - ➔ As if there’s any question, James says in verse 15, “This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but it is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.” Woe there James. Isn’t that going too far, saying that if I’m more concerned about getting ahead and getting this job done in my way, according to my agenda, rather than God’s, that I’m actually doing the devil’s work? Come on!
  - ➔ Well, Jesus Himself did say in Matthew 12:30, “Whoever is not with Me is against Me,” and in Matthew 6:24, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other ... You cannot serve God and money.”
- ⊗ So again, James gives us a simple statement of cause and effect including verse 16 as well: “Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice” and all of this is caused by “earthly, unspiritual, demonic” wisdom.
- ⊗ That means there are two seeds; two causes – both called “wisdom”, but they cannot be any more different from each other. There is “earthly, demonic wisdom” that when it is planted in a person’s heart, will only try to boast about how wise and great that person is. It will cause conflict and chaos because it will put others down. It will deceive and trick people into thinking it is good, but then it will refuse to obey and act out against Jesus and His Word and will. As chapter 4:1 says, it will cause “quarrels” and “fights” within the Church and among so-called believers because it doesn’t get what it wants. You plant this earthly seed and that’s what you get, just like planting a kernel of corn will always grow a corn plant.

→ The other seed is the “wisdom from above”; that which is only received from and planted by God and His Word through the Holy Spirit. According to verse 17 the fruit that this seed bears is “first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.” This “wisdom” has no desire to boast or puff up the person’s reputation, but its concern is the same as Christ’s concern, the eternal salvation of others; speaking the truth in love and living out one’s faith in a manner that is not a lie against God’s Word.

✘ When this seed is planted and cultivated by God’s Word and Sacrament within a person’s heart, verse 18 says that “fruit from righteousness is sown in peace...”. Here is where James points us straight to Jesus, who is the only truly righteous One to live in human flesh. And it is in our baptism, connecting us to His death and resurrection, that Jesus plants His righteousness in the hearts of His people.

→ That’s both the seed and the fertilizer, if you will, that makes it possible for you and me to live in peace – first with God for all eternity, and then with each other here in Christ’s Church; and even out there, according to verse 18, as “those who make peace.”

## II. The Two Fruits Pointing to Two Different “Friends”

✘ Now, when you think of making peace it’s not uncommon to think of making friends, right? Well, James has something very important for you and me to understand along with those Christians he first wrote to in the first century AD.

→ In chapter 4:1, James tells us more of what he was seeing within the early church. He asks, “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?” Then he explains that the cause is our selfish desire for things we don’t have; things that others have and things that we “ask wrongly” for from God; only “to spend...on [our] passions” (vv. 2-3).

→ “Do you not know,” James continues in verse four, “that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

✘ There he goes again, ruffling feathers. Why, oh why James, do you do that? Because James loves these people so much that he wants them to be at peace with God, not to be God’s enemies.

→ And just as earthly wisdom and wisdom from above cannot be blended together any more than oil and water can mix, so you can’t be at peace with the world at the same time that you are at peace with God. They are two opposite things.

✘ In fact when God sees the people for whom Jesus gave His life becoming chummy with the world’s ideas and priorities and motivations and beliefs; whenever the latest fads, or even the old ways that were unfaithful to God become more pleasing and more important to someone than what God has given us in His Word of both Law and Gospel, then as verse five says, “[God] yearns jealously over the Spirit that He has made to dwell in us”.

→ He’s talking about God, the Holy Spirit’s righteous jealousy that can’t stand to see a soul for whom Jesus shed His blood, falling prey to and submitting to the devil and putting his/her eternal salvation at such risk.

✘ Yes, this is when James directs us, on behalf of God, to see that this is no time to pussy-foot around the truth out of fear of hurting feelings. People’s eternal lives are at stake, and they need to know it before it’s too late.

→ And so he says the most direct, yet loving thing one can say when we see a person becoming trapped in a growing friendship with the world. Verse seven, two more direct

commands from God (literally from the Greek): “Therefore be submitted to God, and resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

→ My dear friends in Christ, to allow yourself to follow both of those commands is both the hardest and the easiest things you will ever do! It’s the hardest, because your sinful nature is already best friends with the devil. And so, at your core you are not going to want to go against his lies and temptations and humbly serve God.

→ But it is the easiest thing ever, because in the end you won’t be the one where the power comes from to resist Satan or to be submitted to God. Every bit of the power and ability to resist the devil comes from God’s gift of grace given to you in your baptism; showered upon you from His Word and fed to You in Christ’s body and blood here in Holy Communion.

⊗ You see, Jesus showed us on the cross what true friendship is really about when He said in John 15:13-14, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you.”

→ First, Jesus lays down His life for you and me, making us His friends by taking our sin and covering it with His blood. And then He washes our souls in baptism and He fills us with His Spirit, which alone gives you and me the power – His powerful victory over sin, death and the devil – to resist the devil and all his ways. In other words, to be His friends and to “live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness...to all eternity” (Luther, meaning of 3<sup>rd</sup> article). So Jesus, through James and His Church teaches us and all His people to believe, confess and live as Christ’s fruit; as His friends for eternity. To Him be all the glory. Amen.