

TITLE: "How Do We Get Wisdom?"

TEXT: James 1:5 (NT p. 228)

⁵If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you.

Introduction – What is wisdom

What IS wisdom? ...Wisdom, as the Bible defines it, is the application of God's love and truth to our lives.

Let me tell you about an American who had great wisdom. This man was an African American pastor and this took place back in the 1960's. He had been involved in the civil rights crusade and one night around midnight, while his wife and little daughter slept, he received a phone call.

It was from the Ku Klux Klan. The man called him the "N" word and said, "...we are tired of you and your mess now...and if you aren't out of this town in three days, we're going to blow your brains out and blow up your house."

I'll tell you what he did after he received that call in just a minute.

1. How do we get wisdom?

First I want to talk about wisdom and how you get wisdom. Last week I preached on the verse from Psalm 111:10: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." In other words, we must hold God in awe and wonder if we want to receive wisdom. In order to hold God in awe and wonder, we have get to KNOW God. And we get to know God by having faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As Jesus says: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). And Jesus also says: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

Once we HAVE faith in Jesus, if we truly WANT wisdom, our biblical text for this morning tells us that all we have to do is ask God for wisdom and God will GIVE us wisdom. God will give us whatever we need to apply the love and truth of God to our lives. All we have to do is ask.

Now for the REST of the story. ...You remember that the pastor, while his wife and little daughter were sleeping, received a phone call from the Ku Klux Klan threatening to kill him and blow up his home. Later, in a sermon, he reflected on what happened that night after the phone call:

I sat at the table thinking about that little girl and about a dedicated, devoted and loyal wifeAnd I got to the point that I couldn't take it any longer. I was weak ... And I discovered then that religion had to become REAL to me, and I had to know God for myself. And I bowed down over that cup of coffee.

I will never forget it ...I prayed a prayer, and I prayed out loud that night. I said, "Lord, I'm down here trying to do what's right. I think I'm right. I think the cause we represent is right. But Lord, I must confess that I am weak right now. I'm faltering. I'm losing my courage.

... And it seemed at that moment I could hear an inner voice saying to me, "Martin, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And lo I will be with you, even until the end of the world."

... I heard the voice of Jesus saying still to fight on. He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone. No never alone. No never alone. He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone."

... Three nights later, our home was bombed. Strangely enough, I accepted the word of the bombing calmly. My experience with God had given me a new strength and trust. I knew now that God is able to give us the interior resources to face the storms and problems of life.

That father, that husband, that pastor asked to have a personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Then he asked for wisdom. He asked for God to help him apply the love and truth of God to his life and the lives of countless others. And God said "Yes" to both requests.

And if YOU ask for a personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ and if YOU ask God for wisdom, God will give them to you as well.

2. True wisdom leads to peace

How do we know that what we have is actually wisdom? In other words, how do we know that we are actually applying the love and truth of God to our lives? ... True wisdom leads to peace. We find in James 3:13-18:

¹³Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. ¹⁴But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. ¹⁵Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. ¹⁶For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. ¹⁷But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. ¹⁸And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

If you want to check if you are wise, examine your motives. ARE you motivated by envy of others, selfish ambition, partiality and hypocrisy OR are your motives pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits? If you are wise, you will plant seeds of peace and you will ultimately reap a harvest of peace.

3. Martin Luther King, Jr., an example of wisdom

The name of the pastor I quoted earlier was Martin Luther King, Jr. He was twenty six when he received that call by the way. Later, Dr. King spoke in Washington DC, in the shadow of the Lincoln Memorial, on August 28th, 1963. I don't have his charisma, his passion or his sonorous voice, but I would like to read some excerpts from that speech.

And I want you to take note of three things: #1 – his concern for Americans in general, not just African Americans; #2 – His insistence upon peaceful demonstrations (which were often met with violence); and #3 – his deep faith in God.

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity.

...Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning. And those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content, will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual. And there will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights.

But there is something that I must say to my people, who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice: In the process of gaining our rightful place, we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again, we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.

The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny. And they have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom.

...even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a *dream* today!

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; "and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together" (Isaiah 40:4-5).

This is our hope, and this is the faith that I go back to the South with.

With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith, we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

And this will be the day -- this will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning:

My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing.

Land where my fathers died, land of the Pilgrim's pride,

From every mountainside, let freedom ring!

And when this happens, when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when *all* of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual:

Free at last! Free at last!

Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!

Conclusion – Be careful what you pray for

Be careful what you pray for.

For if you ask Jesus Christ into your heart, and then you ask for wisdom, God will change your life.

And you may be amazed to find that God will use you to change, for the better,
your family,
our church family,
our community,
our state,
our country
...and even the world!

Amen.