

“If You Need Wisdom, Ask God”
(James 1:5)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. James has been telling us:
 - a. That we shouldn't resent or despise trials, but rejoice in them.
 - b. We should rejoice because God is working good things through them:
 - (i) When He stretches our faith through difficulties.
 - (ii) When He brings temptations into our lives which we either successfully resist or fall to.
 - (iii) He sets up resistance for our faith.
 - (iv) And in the same way that weight resistance builds strength into our muscles.
 - (v) And mental resistance increases our ability to think and to think more clearly.
 - (vi) So trials build strength and endurance into our trust in God.
 - (vii) It forces us to mature, to grow up, to be better Christians and better equipped to fight the Lord's battles.

2. James also told us:
 - a. This endurance is necessary if we are to reach heaven.
 - b. If we give up part way through, if we decide the road is too hard or the race too difficult and give up, we won't arrive at the finish line.
 - c. We must persevere under these difficulties – we must keep moving forward to reach the end if we are to wear the crown.
 - d. This is the ultimate demonstration of our love and affection to the Lord: only those who love Him most of all will cling to Him and not let go to the end.
 - (i) Just examine your own love for other things: you will not let go of the things that are most important to you.
 - (ii) If God is that to you, you will not forsake Him.
 - e. On the one hand this means difficulty for us: we must persevere, we must strive forward.
 - f. On the other, this ensures that we have God's help, and that we will make it to the end.
 - (i) Remember, only those truly converted have this kind of love.
 - (ii) If we have it, it shows we are God's elect.
 - (iii) And if we are, we know the Lord will never remove His love from us, which means we will never cease to love Him, but continue to press forward.

B. Preview.

1. But James has more to tell us about persevering through the trials of life:
 - a. The whole book tells us how to face several different trials in a godly way, *e.g.*:
 - (i) Of being tempted to think that God is responsible for our sins, since He sovereignly brings temptation into our lives (vv. 13-18).
 - (ii) Of struggling with unrighteous anger (vv. 19-20).
 - (iii) Of struggling with corruption in general (v. 21).

- (iv) Of indifference to God's Law (vv. 22-25).
 - (v) Of being tempted to use our tongue for ungodly purposes (v. 26).
 - (vi) Of being indifferent to the destitution of orphans and widows, or being tempted to indulge in the sins of the world (v. 27).
 - (vii) These are just some of the topics of chapter one.
- b. But sandwiched between our texts from last Lord's Day are two more subjects that have to do with trials:
- (i) How to gain the wisdom we need to conduct ourselves righteously in our trials (vv. 5-8).
 - (ii) And how to deal with the trials of both poverty and riches (vv. 9-11).
 - (iii) We'll look at this second issue next week.
 - (iv) Today, we're going to deal with how to gain the wisdom we need to face our trials.
 - (a) This evening, at the importance of faith and trust in the Lord.
 - (b) This morning, with seeking the Lord for wisdom.
2. This morning, I want us to see three things:
- (i) Why we need wisdom.
 - (ii) How we are to get wisdom.
 - (iii) And how God gives us wisdom.

II. Sermon.

A. First, why do we need wisdom?

1. This is a question we shouldn't really need to ask.
 - a. Notice James says, "If any of you lacks wisdom."
 - (i) He's not saying that some of us don't lack it.
 - (ii) Which one of here knows everything we need to know to face our trials?
 - (iii) It's true that as we grow in our spiritual maturity, we learn more of what we need to know.
 - (iv) But which one of here knows everything we need?
 - b. One of our greatest difficulties is not knowing what to do in particular situations, besides our other problem of knowing and not doing what we are to do.
 - (i) We need to know how do to things right.
 - (ii) This is what wisdom is all about: applying knowledge to a situation righteously, so that what we do is what God wants us to do.
2. Why is it that we don't know everything we need to know? There's really a variety of answers to this question:
 - a. We were born in darkness and sin.
 - b. We spent at least some measure of our lives in this darkness.
 - c. Our parents might not have been able to teach us what we needed to know.
 - d. Maybe they did, but we didn't listen to them.
 - e. We haven't studied God's Word as we should.
 - f. Maybe we haven't listened to it preached and taught as we should.
 - g. We're still facing situations we've never faced before.
 - h. Or we still haven't learned how to face them the way we should.

- i. There are a variety of reasons as to why we don't have the wisdom we need.
- j. But there's no doubt that we do, in some measure, lack the essential wisdom we need to love and serve God correctly.

B. Second, how are we to get wisdom?

1. James gives us a simple answer: "Let him ask of God."
 - a. In the Greek, it's stronger: "He must ask of God." It's actually a command.
 - b. The solution to our lack of wisdom is prayer.
 - (i) Unless you can think of another way to get it.
 - (a) What about man?
 - (b) There's a whole field of study devoted to this subject: Philosophy.
 - (c) How many have gone this direction?
 - (d) Is Philosophy always wrong? No. Sometimes it intersects with truth (of course, this presupposes a standard of truth).
 - (e) But is it ever wrong? What do you think?
 - (f) Was Nietzsche wrong about his concept of the superman: the one who doesn't follow the herd mentality? Hitler thought he was right and applied it to Nazism. Jesus says we should be greatest by being the servant of all.
 - (g) Was Kant correct when he said that we can't really know whether God exists because all we can know are the outward characteristics by which something is known and not its essence? Jesus says we should trust God's Word and what it says about the noumenal realm.
 - (h) Was Hume right when he said we really can't know the ultimate cause of anything, but only the customary relationships that exist between when one thing happens and another, such as when it rains, we get wet, but we really can't know that it is the rain that is making us wet? The Lord says that every cause has an effect, and He is the ultimate cause of all things, yet He is without sin.
 - (i) Was Hegel right when he supposed that history was God's evolving or becoming aware of Himself? The Bible says that God is working His will out in the creation, but He is not the creation.
 - (j) Was Joseph Fletcher right when he said that ethics are determined by the situation, and there are no absolutes? Our Lord tells us that there are absolutes.
 - (ii) We want to make sure we're making the right choice and not the wrong one.
 - (iii) The only way we can is by asking the One with infinite knowledge and wisdom: The way we do this is through prayer.
2. But will He give us what we're asking for? James says yes.
 - a. "It will be given to him."
 - b. God gives generously to all His children who ask.
 - (i) He is generous to all men, generally providing all they need to live, certainly everything they have.
 - (ii) But I believe in context this wisdom – including the grace to see it as wisdom – is reserved for His people.
 - (iii) However, if a man desires to know how to be saved, he may also seek this from the Lord.

- c. Not only this, but James tells us He will not reproach us or insult us for our ignorance.
 - (i) We mustn't be afraid that God will turn us down, or think less of us.
 - (ii) Can He when He knows better than we do our lack of wisdom and our need for His?
 - (iii) He will not rebuke us for coming to Him, admitting it, and seeking His help.
- d. I can't think of a promise in Scripture that is more certain than this one: James tells us that if we ask, He will give.

C. Finally, how will God give us the wisdom we seek?

1. We do know that He will not speak to us directly from heaven.
 - a. He did speak this way to certain select individuals in the past.
 - b. But it was never common to all, and He doesn't do this at all today.
2. But He does still speak:
 - a. Through His Word: the primary way: reading, hearing it read, studying it, through sermons.
 - b. By His Spirit, who leads us in the truth.
 - c. Through wise counselors: "Without consultation, plans are frustrated, but with many counselors they succeed" (Prov. 15:22).
 - d. Sometimes through unwise counselors: contrasting their counsel with the Scripture.
 - e. And sometimes through circumstances – by opening and closing doors – but here we must be careful:

"If therefore, in doubtful cases, you would discover God's will, govern yourselves in your search after it by these rules:

 1. Get the true fear of God upon your hearts; be really afraid of offending Him.
 2. Study the Word more, and the concerns and interests of the world less.
 3. Reduce what you know into practice, and you shall know what is your duty to practice.
 4. Pray for illumination and direction in the way that you should go.
 5. And this being done, follow Providence as far as it agrees with the Word, and no farther" (John Flavel, *Treasury*).
3. And so if you need wisdom in your trials, difficulties, decisions of life, ask God, and He will answer.
 - a. Let's not forget, that we're not asking for the wisdom to escape our trials or to have them removed: they are for our good; we are to rejoice in them.
 - b. But we're asking for wisdom to make the best use of them: to learn, grow, mature, be equipped better to serve the Lord.
 - c. And for the grace we need to conduct ourselves in a way that would be honoring to the Lord in them.
4. This evening, we'll consider a little more about how we are to ask. Amen.