

James 3:13-5:20
September 23, '18

“THE WISDOM FROM ABOVE”

IN RECENT WEEKS, I HAVE HEARD OR READ OF INTERESTING THOUGHTS REGARDING WORSHIP SERVICES – AND PARTICULARLY THE LENGTH OF SERVICES.

I READ THAT THE LEADER OF ONE ENTIRE DENOMINATION HAS SUGGESTED THAT WORSHIP SHOULDN'T LAST MORE THAN 40 MINUTES.

I'M NOT GOING TO TELL YOU WHO THAT WAS & THE DENOMINATION REPRESENTED, LEST YOU BECOME OVERLY-ENTICED AT THE IDEA OF A 40-MINUTE SERVICE!

I ALSO HEARD A COMPLAINT RECENTLY FROM SOMEONE ABOUT THEIR SERVICES GOING ON MUCH TOO LONG – USUALLY AN HOUR AND A HALF.

I WILL TELL YOU THAT DENOMINATION – IT WAS PRESBYTERIAN AND, OF COURSE, THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE BECAUSE THERE ARE A LOT OF CHURCHES WHERE AN HOUR & A HALF WOULD BE CONSIDERED A MINI-SERVICE!

BUT FOR US PRESBYTERIANS, WE SEEM TO HAVE INTERNAL FIDGET CLOCK THAT GOES OFF AT THE 60-MINUTE MARK & WE BEGIN TO QUICKLY SHUT DOWN AFTER THAT HOUR HAS ELAPSED!

LAST SUNDAY, FOLLOWING OUR OUTDOOR 10:30 SERVICE – AFTER THE SERVICE WAS OVER & AFTER MOST OF THE CHAIRS HAD BEEN STACKED & THE PULPIT AND SOUND SYSTEM BROUGHT INSIDE THE BUILDING - I WALKED INTO MY OFFICE & GLANCED AT MY WATCH.

IT WAS 11:30!

THE SERVICE WAS OVER AND 90% OF THE WORK HAD BEEN COMPLETED TO PUT THINGS BACK INSIDE & IN ITS PROPER PLACE WITHIN AN HOUR!

I MUST SAY, THOUGH, THAT DURING THE SERVICE, I WAS WATCHING CLOSELY OUTSIDE AS THE SUN MADE ITS WAY OVER THE TOPS OF THE TREES & HAD JUST BEGUN TO ELIMINATE THE SHADE IN THE BACK ROWS.

ANOTHER 5 MINUTES & I FEAR WE WOULD HAVE STARTED TO LOSE SOME OF YOU – EITHER TO THE COMFORT OF YOUR AIR-CONDITIONED CAR OR TO HEAT EXHAUSTION!

THOSE THOUGHTS REGARDING THE OVER-ALL LENGTH OF A WORSHIP SERVICE GAVE WAY TO THOUGHTS ABOUT SERMON LENGTH & THE VARIETY OF APPROACHES TO PREACHING.

THERE ARE BROAD EXTREMES TO WHICH ONE CAN GO IN CONSIDERING HOW MUCH CAN BE COVERED IN A SINGLE SERMON.

I HEARD OF A PASTOR WHO BEGAN THE YEAR PREACHING IN THE BOOK OF ACTS AND AT THE CONCLUSION OF THAT SAME YEAR HAD YET TO MAKE IT THROUGH – NOT JUST THE *BOOK* OF ACTS – BUT EVEN THE FIRST *CHAPTER* OF ACTS!

ON THE OTHER END OF THE SPECTRUM, SOMEONE TOLD ME RECENTLY OF A SERMON THEY HEARD THAT SPANNED THE ENTIRE BIBLICAL ACCOUNT OF THE EXODUS – COVERING THE BOOKS OF EXODUS, LEVITICUS, NUMBERS, DEUTERONOMY AND THE FIRST THREE CHAPTERS OF JOSHUA IN A SINGLE SERMON!

THE POINT IS – THERE IS A WIDE VARIETY IN UNDERSTANDING HOW MUCH CAN BE COVERED IN A SINGLE SERMON.

I THINK THAT'S ONE OF THE APPEALS OF THE LECTIONARY.

THERE ARE SUGGESTED PASSAGES THAT DON'T COVER TOO MUCH GROUND – BUT ENOUGH TO KEEP ONE MOVING ALONG IN LOOKING AT THE OVER-ARCHING MESSAGE OF THE BIBLE.

AND THAT BRINGS US TO JAMES.

OVER THE PAST TWO WEEKS, WE'VE LOOKED AT THE SUGGESTED LECTIONARY PASSAGES IN JAMES.

WE'LL DO THE SAME TODAY.

HOWEVER, NEXT WEEK – WITH OUR MR. ROGERS EMPHASIS – WE'LL BE GOING A DIFFERENT DIRECTION & SO THE PASSAGES FOR BOTH THIS SUNDAY & NEXT SUNDAY ARE INCLUDED IN OUR SCRIPTURE THIS MORNING.

ACTUALLY, THERE'S QUITE A BIT MORE INCLUDED.

I THINK IT FITS APPROPRIATELY WITH JAMES, THOUGH.

I HAVE SUGGESTED THAT EVEN THOUGH THIS BOOK IS CATEGORIZED AS A LETTER, IT SEEMS AS IF IT'S A SERMON.

JAMES, THE BROTHER OF JESUS AND THE FIRST LEADER OF THE JERUSALEM CHURCH, IS – IN MY ESTIMATION – THE WRITER.

AND I LIKE TO THINK OF JAMES THROWING IT ALL OUT THERE TO THE CONGREGATION IN THIS ONE SERMON – SOMETHING MORE AKIN TO THE PREACHER WHO COVERED THE ENTIRE EXODUS IN ONE SETTING THAN THE ONE WHO SPENT A YEAR ON A SINGLE CHAPTER OF ACTS.

IT SEEMS FAIRLY CLEAR THAT THERE WERE A NUMBER OF CONTENTIOUS ISSUES THAT JAMES FOUND HIMSELF FACING IN THE JERUSALEM CHURCH.

IT SEEMS AS IF THERE WERE DIFFERENT FACTIONS & ADVERSARIAL RELATIONSHIPS.

IT SEEMS AS THOUGH THERE WERE UNKIND WORDS BEING SPOKEN & FRICTION BETWEEN THE “HAVES” & “HAVE NOTS” OF THE CHURCH.

IN ESSENCE, IT SEEMS LIKE JAMES WANTED TO ADDRESS A WIDE RANGE OF ISSUES IN A BRIEF PERIOD OF TIME WITHOUT ELABORATING MUCH ON ANY OF THEM.

IN THE LAST HALF OF THE SERMON, HE TOUCHES ON A MULTITUDE OF ISSUES, ANY ONE OF WHICH MIGHT CAPTURE YOUR ATTENTION & MAKE YOU WISH HE HAD SAID MORE.

FOR EXAMPLE, HE SAYS, “*GOD OPPOSES THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.*”

GENUINE HUMILITY – A RECOGNITION THAT GOD IS GOD AND I AM NOT – AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT THAT ANYTHING GOOD THAT COMES OUT OF MY LIFE IS FROM GOD AND NOT ME – AN ACCEPTANCE OF THE FACT THAT I AM SINFUL & DESERVE GOD’S JUDGMENT.

I WISH THAT WAS ME.

I PRAY THAT SOMEDAY IT MIGHT BE.

IT SEEMS AS IF JAMES IS SAYING – AND I THINK MOST OF US, IF PRESSED, WOULD PROBABLY AGREE – THAT THE MOST OFFENSIVE & REPULSIVE HUMAN CHARACTERISTIC THAT ONE CAN POSSESS IS PRIDE & ARROGANCE.

YES, IT WOULD BE HELPFUL IF JAMES HAD ELABORATED ON THIS STATEMENT.

OR HOW ABOUT WHEN HE SAYS, “*BUT WHO ARE YOU THAT YOU JUDGE YOUR NEIGHBOR?*”

I SUPPOSE THAT ONE FITS WELL WITH THE FIRST STATEMENT BUT ISN’T THAT A QUESTION THAT WE ALL NEED TO CONSIDER?

I NEED TO READ THOSE WORDS AS IF JAMES IS DIRECTING THAT QUESTION SPECIFICALLY AT ME.

“DAVENPORT, WHO ARE YOU THAT YOU JUDGE YOUR NEIGHBOR?!”

THERE IS ONE SECTION IN THE LAST HALF OF THIS SERMON, THOUGH, WHERE I REALLY WISH JAMES WOULD HAVE ELABORATED BECAUSE, QUITE FRANKLY, I FIND THAT I TAKE ISSUE WITH HIM WHEN I READ HIS WORDS WITH NOTHING ELSE ADDED.

IN THE MIDDLE OF A SHORT SECTION ON PRAYER, HE SAYS, *“THE PRAYER OF FAITH WILL SAVE THE SICK MAN & THE LORD WILL RAISE HIM UP...”*

I FIND THAT I HAVE TO AGREE WITH SOMEONE WHO SAID OF THIS, *“IF THIS IS JAMES’ IDEA OF A PEP TALK - FRANKLY, I THINK HE FAILED.”*

BE HONEST.

WHEN YOU’VE HEARD THESE WORDS, DON’T YOU FEEL THE SAME WAY?

EVERY ONE OF US KNOWS SOMEONE WHO DIED BEFORE THEIR TIME, DIED IN A WAY THAT WAS PAINFUL & UNFAIR, DIED DESPITE THE PRAYERS & CRIES OF THE HOLY & THE FAITHFUL.

SO WHEN SOMEONE TRIES TO USE THIS WORD OF SCRIPTURE TO BRING ABOUT SOME SORT OF GUARANTEED DIVINE HEALING, IT FEELS LIKE A SLAP IN THE FACE!

I THINK THE PROBLEM LIES IN THE WORD “SAVE.”

IT’S THE WORD “SOZO” IN GREEK AND IT CAN, IN FACT, MEAN PHYSICAL HEALING.

BUT FAR MORE IMPORTANTLY, IT MEANS SPIRITUAL HEALING.

WHEN JAMES SAYS, “*THE LORD WILL SAVE THE ONE WHO IS SICK & RAISE THEM UP...*” I THINK HE MEANS SOMETHING FAR MORE IMPORTANT THAN MERE PHYSICAL HEALING.

YES, THE LAST HALF OF THIS SERMON FROM THE BROTHER OF OUR LORD IS FILLED WITH COUNTLESS PEARLS OF WISDOM & WORDS OF CHALLENGE & NUGGETS OF INSPIRATION.

MANY YEARS AGO, I REMEMBER READING SOMEONE WHO SUGGESTED THAT IF JAMES IS, IN FACT, A SERMON, PERHAPS WE’D BE MUCH BETTER SERVED TO HEAR IT AS HE WOULD HAVE PREACHED IT – WITH NO ELABORATION AT ALL.

SINCE WE’VE HEARD MUCH OF THE *FIRST* HALF OF THAT SERMON THE PAST TWO WEEKS, LET’S HEAR THE *LAST* HALF TODAY – AGAIN AS IT COMES TO US FROM THE REVISED STANDARD VERSION TRANSLATION (AS OPPOSED TO THE NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION THAT WE FIND IN OUR PEW BIBLES) WITH NO MORE ELABORATION, OTHER THAN WHAT YOU’VE ALREADY HEARD.

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¹³ *WHO IS WISE AND UNDERSTANDING AMONG YOU? BY HIS GOOD LIFE LET HIM SHOW HIS WORKS IN THE MEEKNESS OF WISDOM.* ¹⁴ *BUT IF YOU HAVE BITTER JEALOUSY AND SELFISH AMBITION IN YOUR HEARTS, DO NOT BOAST AND BE FALSE TO THE TRUTH.* ¹⁵ *THIS WISDOM IS NOT SUCH AS COMES DOWN FROM ABOVE, BUT IS EARTHLY, UNSPIRITUAL, DEVILISH.* ¹⁶ *FOR WHERE JEALOUSY AND SELFISH AMBITION EXIST, THERE WILL BE DISORDER AND EVERY VILE PRACTICE.* ¹⁷ *BUT THE WISDOM FROM ABOVE IS FIRST PURE, THEN PEACEABLE, GENTLE, OPEN TO REASON, FULL OF MERCY AND GOOD FRUITS, WITHOUT UNCERTAINTY OR INSINCERITY.* ¹⁸ *AND THE HARVEST OF RIGHTEOUSNESS IS SOWN IN PEACE BY THOSE WHO MAKE PEACE.*

4 WHAT CAUSES WARS, AND WHAT CAUSES FIGHTINGS AMONG YOU? IS IT NOT YOUR PASSIONS THAT ARE AT WAR IN YOUR MEMBERS? ² YOU DESIRE AND DO NOT HAVE; SO YOU KILL. AND YOU COVET^[A] AND

CANNOT OBTAIN; SO YOU FIGHT AND WAGE WAR. YOU DO NOT HAVE, BECAUSE YOU DO NOT ASK. ³ YOU ASK AND DO NOT RECEIVE, BECAUSE YOU ASK WRONGLY, TO SPEND IT ON YOUR PASSIONS. ⁴ UNFAITHFUL CREATURES! DO YOU NOT KNOW 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. ⁵ OR DO YOU SUPPOSE IT IS IN VAIN THAT THE SCRIPTURE SAYS, “HE YEARNS JEALOUSLY OVER THE SPIRIT WHICH HE HAS MADE TO DWELL IN US”? ⁶ BUT HE GIVES MORE GRACE; THEREFORE IT SAYS, “GOD OPPOSES THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.” ⁷ SUBMIT YOURSELVES THEREFORE TO GOD. RESIST THE DEVIL AND HE WILL FLEE FROM YOU. ⁸ DRAW NEAR TO GOD AND HE WILL DRAW NEAR TO YOU. CLEANSE YOUR HANDS, YOU SINNERS, AND PURIFY YOUR HEARTS, YOU MEN OF DOUBLE MIND. ⁹ BE WRETCHED AND MOURN AND WEEP. LET YOUR LAUGHTER BE TURNED TO MOURNING AND YOUR JOY TO DEJECTION. ¹⁰ HUMBLE YOURSELVES BEFORE THE LORD AND HE WILL EXALT YOU.

¹¹ DO NOT SPEAK EVIL AGAINST ONE ANOTHER, BRETHREN. HE THAT SPEAKS EVIL AGAINST A BROTHER OR JUDGES HIS BROTHER, SPEAKS EVIL AGAINST THE LAW AND JUDGES THE LAW. BUT IF YOU JUDGE THE LAW, YOU ARE NOT A DOER OF THE LAW BUT A JUDGE. ¹² THERE IS ONE LAWGIVER AND JUDGE, HE WHO IS ABLE TO SAVE AND TO DESTROY. BUT WHO ARE YOU THAT YOU JUDGE YOUR NEIGHBOR? ¹³ COME NOW, YOU WHO SAY, “TODAY OR TOMORROW WE WILL GO INTO SUCH AND SUCH A TOWN AND SPEND A YEAR THERE AND TRADE AND GET GAIN”; ¹⁴ WHEREAS YOU DO NOT KNOW ABOUT TOMORROW. WHAT IS YOUR LIFE? FOR YOU ARE A MIST THAT APPEARS FOR A LITTLE TIME AND THEN VANISHES. ¹⁵ INSTEAD YOU OUGHT TO SAY, “IF THE LORD WILLS, WE SHALL LIVE AND WE SHALL DO THIS OR THAT.” ¹⁶ AS IT IS, YOU BOAST IN YOUR ARROGANCE. ALL SUCH BOASTING IS EVIL. ¹⁷ WHOEVER KNOWS WHAT IS RIGHT TO DO AND FAILS TO DO IT, FOR HIM IT IS SIN.

5 COME NOW, YOU RICH, WEEP AND HOWL FOR THE MISERIES THAT ARE COMING UPON YOU. ² YOUR RICHES HAVE ROTTED AND YOUR GARMENTS ARE MOTH-EATEN. ³ YOUR GOLD AND SILVER HAVE RUSTED, AND THEIR RUST WILL BE EVIDENCE AGAINST YOU AND WILL EAT YOUR FLESH LIKE FIRE. YOU HAVE LAID UP TREASURE^[A] FOR THE LAST DAYS. ⁴ BEHOLD, THE WAGES OF THE LABORERS WHO MOWED YOUR FIELDS, WHICH YOU KEPT BACK BY FRAUD, CRY OUT; AND THE CRIES OF THE HARVESTERS HAVE REACHED THE EARS OF THE LORD OF HOSTS. ⁵ YOU HAVE LIVED ON THE EARTH IN LUXURY AND IN PLEASURE; YOU HAVE FATTENED YOUR HEARTS IN A DAY OF SLAUGHTER. ⁶ YOU HAVE

CONDEMNED, YOU HAVE KILLED THE RIGHTEOUS MAN; HE DOES NOT RESIST YOU.

⁷ BE PATIENT, THEREFORE, BRETHREN, UNTIL THE COMING OF THE LORD. BEHOLD, THE FARMER WAITS FOR THE PRECIOUS FRUIT OF THE EARTH, BEING PATIENT OVER IT UNTIL IT RECEIVES THE EARLY AND THE LATE RAIN. ⁸ YOU ALSO BE PATIENT. ESTABLISH YOUR HEARTS, FOR THE COMING OF THE LORD IS AT HAND. ⁹ DO NOT GRUMBLE, BRETHREN, AGAINST ONE ANOTHER, THAT YOU MAY NOT BE JUDGED; BEHOLD, THE JUDGE IS STANDING AT THE DOORS. ¹⁰ AS AN EXAMPLE OF SUFFERING AND PATIENCE, BRETHREN, TAKE THE PROPHETS WHO SPOKE IN THE NAME OF THE LORD. ¹¹ BEHOLD, WE CALL THOSE HAPPY WHO WERE STEADFAST. YOU HAVE HEARD OF THE STEADFASTNESS OF JOB, AND YOU HAVE SEEN THE PURPOSE OF THE LORD, HOW THE LORD IS COMPASSIONATE AND MERCIFUL.

¹² BUT ABOVE ALL, MY BRETHREN, DO NOT SWEAR, EITHER BY HEAVEN OR BY EARTH OR WITH ANY OTHER OATH, BUT LET YOUR YES BE YES AND YOUR NO BE NO, THAT YOU MAY NOT FALL UNDER CONDEMNATION.

¹³ IS ANY ONE AMONG YOU SUFFERING? LET HIM PRAY. IS ANY CHEERFUL? LET HIM SING PRAISE. ¹⁴ IS ANY AMONG YOU SICK? LET HIM CALL FOR THE ELDERS OF THE CHURCH, AND LET THEM PRAY OVER HIM, ANOINTING HIM WITH OIL IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; ¹⁵ AND THE PRAYER OF FAITH WILL SAVE THE SICK MAN, AND THE LORD WILL RAISE HIM UP; AND IF HE HAS COMMITTED SINS, HE WILL BE FORGIVEN. ¹⁶ THEREFORE CONFESS YOUR SINS TO ONE ANOTHER, AND PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER, THAT YOU MAY BE HEALED. THE PRAYER OF A RIGHTEOUS MAN HAS GREAT POWER IN ITS EFFECTS. ¹⁷ ELI'JAH WAS A MAN OF LIKE NATURE WITH OURSELVES AND HE PRAYED FERVENTLY THAT IT MIGHT NOT RAIN, AND FOR THREE YEARS AND SIX MONTHS IT DID NOT RAIN ON THE EARTH. ¹⁸ THEN HE PRAYED AGAIN AND THE HEAVEN GAVE RAIN, AND THE EARTH BROUGHT FORTH ITS FRUIT.

¹⁹ MY BRETHREN, IF ANY ONE AMONG YOU WANDERS FROM THE TRUTH AND SOME ONE BRINGS HIM BACK, ²⁰ LET HIM KNOW THAT WHOEVER BRINGS BACK A SINNER FROM THE ERROR OF HIS WAY WILL SAVE HIS SOUL FROM DEATH AND WILL COVER A MULTITUDE OF SINS.

AMEN.

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