

**Earthly and Heavenly Wisdom, Part 1**

Scripture: James 3:13

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Now tonight we're going to look at James chapter 3 in our Bibles as we examine the next in the sections of James' wonderful epistle. We'll be looking at chapter 3 verses 13 through 18, the subject is earthly and heavenly wisdom...earthly and heavenly wisdom.

Let me begin reading in verse 13 and I'm going to be reading from the New American Standard, I'm just doing that a little bit this month to see what kind of reaction we get from all of you. But I'm reading this evening from the New American Standard, James 3 beginning in verse 13 reading down through verse 18.

Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom...or the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exists, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering without hypocrisy and the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Now the essence of that scripture is a comparison between wisdom which is from above--mentioned in verse 17--which is pure, peaceable, gentle and so forth and wisdom that comes not from above but from below, verse 15, which is earthly, natural and demonic. And as we look at this portion of Scripture in an introductory way tonight and then more in detail next week, we will note that what James is saying is exactly what the Old Testament wisdom literature has said and that is that wisdom in the world is divided into two kinds, the wisdom of man and the wisdom of God. Not a foreign subject either to the Old or the New Testament.

Men might say they possess wisdom. The next question to ask is it the wisdom of men or is it the wisdom of God? There's a great difference. In fact, in verse 13 James says, "Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him prove it by his good behavior manifest through his deeds with an attitude of meekness." So if you claim to have wisdom and you claim that that wisdom is wisdom from above, the burden of proof is with you to verify that indeed you do possess that wisdom.

Now wisdom is a magnificent word and I really just want to have a Bible study with you tonight, I'm not going to preach at you. I just want you to get your Bible and have it ready and have it open and we want to chase around a little bit in it and see if we can't come to an understanding of what the Bible has to say about this wonderful reality called wisdom. Wisdom, according to the philosophers through the centuries, is that for which man should most singly strive.

I was reading some of the philosophers' quotes this past week and a little anthology of philosophic quotes that I have and perhaps the best summary I found of the philosophies relative to wisdom was that of Cicero in about 52 B.C. Cicero said, "Wisdom is the best gift of the gods, it is the mother of all good things. The best and that which generates all of the best." And that does sum up what most philosophers and divines through history have felt about wisdom, that if you could get anything, you'd want to get wisdom. Because if you had wisdom you could just about get anything else...wisdom, the chief thing in the pursuit of man.

That fits Scripture. Proverbs chapter 4 and verse 7 says, "Acquire wisdom and with all your acquiring get understanding." You remember the story of Solomon, but let's refresh ourselves a bit with that. Go back to 1 Kings chapter 3. You remember that in Gibeon, verse 5 says, the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream at night and God said, "Ask what you wish Me to give you." This is the question that everyone living on the earth would wish that God had asked them. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have God come to you in a dream and say, "Look, whatever you want, I'll give it to you, just ask." Then Solomon said, "Thou hast shown great loving kindness to thy servant David, my father, according as he walked before Thee in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward Thee. And Thou hast reserved for him this great loving kindness that Thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne as it is this day. Now, O Lord my God, Thou hast made Thy servant king in place of my father, David, yet I am but a child. I do not know how to go out or come in." Here I am young and inexperienced and You've placed me in as a king. "And Thy servant is in the midst of Thy people which Thou hast chosen, a great people who cannot be numbered or counted for multitude."

In other words, what he is saying is I already have so much, I have all the possessions, I have all the honor, I have all the rank, I have all the authority and all the power that a man could have. And what I would ask for in verse 9, "So give Thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people, to discern between good and evil, for who is able to judge this great people of Thine?" And verse 10 says, "It was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said to him, "Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you. And I also have given you what you have not asked, both riches and honor so that there will not be any among the kings like you all your days. And if you walk in My ways, keeping My statutes and

commandments as your father David walked, then I will prolong your days."

And so, in this wonderful dream, a dream which carried a great reality with it, God came to Solomon and Solomon asked for wisdom and God wonderfully and blessedly bestowed that wisdom on this man.

There is more testimony in Scripture about this very thing. In verse 29 of chapter 4 of 1 Kings it says, "Now God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment and breadth of mind like the sand that is on the seashore. And Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the sons of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men, than Ethan the Ezrahite, Heman, Chalcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was known in all the surrounding nations. He also spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs were one thousand and five. And he spoke of trees from the cedar that is in Lebanon, even to the hyssop that grows on the wall, he spoke also of animals and birds and creeping things and fish. And men came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom."

In chapter 5 verse 12 it says, "The Lord gave wisdom to Solomon just as He had promised him." And haven't we all in human history, all of us anyway who know anything about the Bible, extolled the wisdom of Solomon and affirmed that the greatest thing that a man could have was wisdom?

Now Solomon received this wisdom and I would have to say that predominantly it was human wisdom...predominantly it was a wisdom that related to the created world and related to things that were needed to be decided in reference to problems so that he could bring about justice in the community of the nation which he ruled. But there are also certainly was an availability to Solomon of that divine wisdom which comes through the revelation of God. But Solomon asked a question about what he wanted, gave the best and supreme answer, "I want wisdom."

When God pensively cried out in Deuteronomy chapter 32 verse 29, He was crying out over the apostasy of Israel and He said there, "O that they were wise." And there He has in mind spiritual wisdom. "O that they had spiritual wisdom." Job in the midst of an absolutely inexplicably...inexpressible problem and inexplicable series of events for which there was no rhyme or reason in his own mind, sought from God wisdom. And particularly in chapter 28, which we may have time to read a little later, in verse 12, he cries out to God who alone has the wisdom to sort out the amazing set of circumstances which beset his life. He knows that wisdom would be the highest and most noble and most valuable of all possessions.

The Psalmist in Psalm 2 verse 10 called for the kings of the earth to be wise. God gave Ezra, according to Ezra 7:25, wisdom in order that he might lead Israel who had been brought back from captivity in Babylon. You remember the story of Daniel, how that God granted Daniel and his friends knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom, according to chapter 1 verse 17. And the king said

they possessed excellent wisdom in chapter 5 verse 14. Paul, you remember, also prayed for every believer that we might be given the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ.

There's always then whether you're approaching it from the viewpoint of a philosopher or the viewpoint of a writer of Scripture, a premium set on wisdom. And I think in raising children from the time they're young, you want them to be wise. It isn't just a question of knowledge. It isn't just a question of having information. It's a question of wisdom. It's a question of knowing how to apply that information in every given situation.

God in the Bible calls all men to wisdom, to be wise. As believers we are called to be as wise as serpents while being as harmless as doves.

Now, we would all like to claim that we have wisdom. We would all like to claim that we have discernment. But James poses this question: who among you is wise and understanding? Let him prove it by his conduct, his good behavior. Wisdom then from the vantage point of James is made manifest in the way a person conducts his or her life. How you live is the manifestation of whether or not you possess true wisdom. So James asks the question and he even gives the answer. If you're claiming wisdom, then it will be manifest in the way you conduct your life.

Now keep in mind that James, as you remember, is giving a series of tests for genuine living saving faith. He has given us several of those tests and this is the next one...the test of wisdom. You'll remember in chapter 1 he said that saving faith can be seen in how a person responds to trials. Then he said saving faith can be seen in how a person responds to temptation-- solicitation to do evil. And then he said that true faith, genuine faith, living faith can be seen in how a person responds to the Word of God. And then in chapter 2, how a person responds to needy people. And then in the end of chapter 2, James says basically saving faith is manifest in righteous works. And then in the first half of chapter 3, saving faith, living faith is revealed by the use of what member of the body? The tongue. So trials, temptation, the word, the needy, righteous deeds, the tongue, all of these are tests, all of these are tests of living faith.

And now we come to the test of wisdom. If a person genuinely possesses living faith, he will genuinely manifest in his life the wisdom of God. That's his whole point. In fact, the kind of wisdom you have will be made manifest in the way you live. One's relationship to God is revealed by the kind of wisdom lived out. And James tells us here there is false wisdom, verses 14 to 16, and there is true wisdom, verses 17 and 18. And he makes a very clear contrast. False wisdom is earthly, it is natural, it is demonic. And divine wisdom, wisdom from above, is pure, peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering without hypocrisy and producing righteousness and peace, according to verse 18.

So, James then in verse 13 asks a question that calls for self-examination. What kind of wisdom do you have? You say you're wise? You say you're understanding? Then let's look at your life and see who really has divine wisdom. That's the point. Who really possesses the wisdom of God?

Notice again back at verse 13, he says, "Who is wise and understanding?" Now I don't want to make a big distinction between those words because I think basically they're synonyms put there for emphasis. But they do have a bit of a shade of difference in their meaning. This is the only time in the whole New Testament these two words appear together...although they do appear together in the Septuagint version of Deuteronomy 1:13 as requirements for any of the judges in Israel. And again in Deuteronomy 4:9 and I believe it's Hosea 14:9 as qualities to be desired in all God's children. So, from the Old Testament all of God's children and particularly the judges who had to make decisions were to have wisdom and understanding. The simple distinction is that wisdom probably relates to the application of principles whereas understanding relates to the understanding of those principles or the knowledge of those principles. One would have more impact on the mind and one might have more impact on the conduct. But basically they have to do with the same thing. You can't be wise if you don't understand and you can't really understand if you're not wise.

Now James started the chapter dealing with teachers. You remember verse 1? Talking about teachers, don't so many of you become teachers and so forth, and some people have tried to say that this section relates only to teachers. I don't see that at all. I think once he introduced the subject of teachers, he then moved into the subject of the tongue and it related to everybody who has a tongue and that certainly includes all of us. And so he has long ago become very general in his intent in the chapter. And when he comes at this point to the discussion of wisdom, he's not just talking about teachers and those who speak on behalf of God and those who teach the Word and proclaim it but anyone who has a tongue. Because anyone's wisdom and understanding is manifest by how they conduct the course of their life. That's true of anyone just as the speech of anyone is revelatory of what is in their heart.

So he is speaking here to everyone who claims to be wise. And that's a very common claim. I mean, we live in a world where there is no fool who is a self-confessed fool, you know that. Everyone is an expert in our world. Everyone knows all the answers. Everyone can editorialize on everything. We live in a sea of opinions. And frankly, nobody's opinion is worth more than anybody else's unless you happen to be a psychologist and then for some reason your opinion drops like apples of gold and pictures of silver. And I don't say that facetiously, I say that truthfully because I hear when anybody wants an expert opinion, they usually quote a psychologist...unless it's some kind of fact that demands a scientific categorical answer as if they were the people who had insights into reality. But for the most part, we live in a sea of opinion. And in that sea of opinion everybody is an expert, everybody has an answer. And there are no self-confessed fools.

And so, James is saying among all of you who are claiming to be wise and understanding, who is really wise and who is really understanding? That's the issue.

The word "understanding" in the Greek, the word itself is used only here in the New Testament and it refers to a specialist or a professional who is highly skilled in some area of knowing and doing. The word for "wisdom," sophia is a general word. The Greeks used it to mean speculative knowledge, theory and philosophy. But the Hebrews infused it with a much deeper meaning than that and it had to do with the ability to apply knowledge to the matter of living life. To a Greek it was sheer speculation. To a Hebrew it was a matter of practical living with skill and understanding.

So who among you really has practical skill? Who among you is really a professional? Who among you really is a specialist in the matter of living? That's the question. Any of you who claim that, you must show it by your life. Who has real knowledge? Who has real understanding? Who has real skill? Who has real wisdom will show it in life. Why? Mark it very clearly in your mind. Divine wisdom placed into the heart of a person produces a changed life. And so James says let him show by his good conduct his works. Let him show. That's an aorist imperative, it's a command, demonstrate it, don't just say you're wise, show it...demonstrate it.

This is the whole thrust really of chapter 2 verses 14 to 20 where he says, "Faith without works is dead." If you're going around claiming faith, then let me see your works. Verse 18, he says you have faith, I have works. Show me your faith without the works and I'll show you my faith by my works. You can't show faith without works, as we saw. So he's saying again here, you say you're wise, demonstrate it. You say you're righteous, demonstrate it. You say you have saving faith, demonstrate it. Let's look at your life.

And how is it shown? How do I and how do you in our lives show that we possess the wisdom of God? The God-given ability to understand ourselves and understand our nature and understand God's truth and understand our world and understand our environment and understand God's revelation so that we can live practically and wisely in accord with His will. How do we show that we have that wisdom?

Well, he says basically there are three ways. Number one, generally by...it says, look at verse 13...by his good behavior. It's a general statement, good conduct. We could even translate anastrophe as life style, or could translate it behavior, or we could translate it activity, or even movement, or even action. And then the word "good" means lovely, beautiful, winsome, attractive, noble, excellent, a very common New Testament word.

So, first of all, he says you claim to have divine wisdom? You claim to have the wisdom of God? You claim to have a living faith? Then, first of all, generally show it by your good behavior, by your excellent life style, by your attractive action. That's general. In other words, if you have the wisdom of

God, it's going to come out in the way you live. That's generally.

Secondly, he is speaking specifically and he says this: "Let him show it or demonstrate it by his good behavior, his works." And now he goes from the general to the specific. And he identifies the specifics of daily life, those individual behaviors, those separate acts that he calls works, deeds. Here James focuses on the minutiae of life. And he is saying if you have the wisdom of God, it not only generally alters your conduct, but it specifically alters what you do. And so we go from the general to the particular. Each act in life is consistent with the whole life as in evidence of the wisdom of God.

So, James says if you claim to have the wisdom of God, it will show in the totality of your life and it will show in the smallest part of your life. So, generally, then specifically.

Thirdly, we could say he says you must demonstrate that you have the wisdom of God not only generally and specifically, but attitudinally. Not only in what you are generally, not only in what you do specifically, but in your attitude. Because at the end of verse 13 he says, "All of this will be done in the meekness of wisdom."

In other words, true wisdom has a meekness. Most people that I have met who think they're wise are arrogant. Have you noticed that? Most people who think they know everything are arrogant. But what James is saying is if you have the wisdom of God, far from arrogant, you'll be meek. This is wisdom's meekness. Beautiful thought. It isn't arrogant at all. That's why in verse 14 he says, "If you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and lie against the truth." If that stuff's there, you don't have the wisdom of God. And James knows well the angry, arrogant, divisive spirit and attitude often demonstrated by professing Christians who think they're wise, who think they have all the answers.

But such an attitude reveals not wisdom at all, not the wisdom of God because the wisdom of God has an attitude of meekness. Now this is the word *prautes*, the word meek is *praus*, it is a beautiful word. It is the opposite of self-promotion. It is the opposite of self-seeking. It is the opposite of self-ambition. It is the opposite of arrogance. It is a lovely character trait...meekness. It belonged to the dear Lord Himself. You remember in Matthew 11:29 He said, "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me for I am...what?...meek and lowly of heart."

It also belongs to all of those who are in the Kingdom because our Lord said very simply in the Beatitudes, Matthew chapter 5, I'm sure it's verse 5, "Blessed are the meek for they shall...what?...inherit the earth." Coming into His Kingdom we come in with meekness. In James chapter 1, do you remember verse 21 where it says that we are to put aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness in meekness, receiving the implanted Word? It is a fruit of the Spirit. Galatians chapter 5, the fruit of the Spirit involves meekness. It's a trait of believers.

In classical Greek when the word *praus* or *prautes* is used referring to things, it means gentle. In reference to things, it means gentle. It's often used of a gentle voice, a gentle breeze, a gentle animal. When referring to people it means gracious in classical Greek, mild. We might even say tender. The noun form is used of a horse that is broken. And so the Greeks said it means power under control. It is a freedom from malice or bitterness or anger or self-seeking. It is a freedom from any desire for revenge. William Barclay says, "It is not a spineless gentleness, it is not a sentimental fondness, it is not a passive quietism, it is a strength under control." Numbers 12:3 tells us that Moses was the meekest man upon the earth but that same Moses was a man who could act with decision and blaze with anger when the occasion arose.

But obviously in the case of Moses, when true meekness exists your anger is not self-seeking or self-serving or self-justifying or self-defending, it's always in reference to God. I would say that the characteristic of meekness means to be under control. And for a believer it means to be under the control of God.

And may I go a step further? It's my conviction that *praus* and *prautes* as terms have a relationship within human relationships or the human divine relationship. In other words, the only way that we can define the word is in a context of relationships because it has to do with how we treat others.

So James says you think you're wise do you? You think you have all the answers? Then let me look at your life. Is the general pattern of your life revelatory of the work and way and will of God? Are the specific acts of your life also revelatory of the work and will of God? And is the attitude you carry an attitude of humility and gentleness and mildness and graciousness and meekness?

There is a wonderful commentator on the book of James by the name of Robert Johnstone who has been dead for a long time. He was writing in 1871 and he said this, "I do not know that at any point the opposition between the spirit of the world and the Spirit of Christ is more marked or more obviously diametrical than with regard to this feature of character," referring to meekness.

Further he said, "That the meek should inherit the earth, they who bear wrongs and exemplify that love which seeks not her own to a world which believes in high handedness and self-ascertainment and pushing the weakest to the wall, a statement like this of the Lord from heaven cannot but appear an utter paradox. The man of the world desires to be counted anything but meek or poor in spirit, and would deem such a description of him equivalent to a charge of unmanliness. Ah, brethren, this is because we have taken in Satan's conception of manliness instead of God's. One man has been shown us by God in whom His ideal of man was embodied. And He, when he was reviled, reviled not again. When He suffered, threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously. He, for those who nailed Him to the tree, prayed, 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.' The world's spirit of wrath then must be folly. Whilst then a spirit of meekness like His in the midst of



controversy, oppositions, trials of whatever kind, there can be no surer evidence that Jesus is made of God to His people wisdom," end quote.

Now all of that to say this, he recognized a hundred years ago what we recognize today, that the wisdom of man is arrogant and conceited and self-serving and the wisdom of God is humble and meek and non-retaliatory.

So James is saying that the test of living, saving faith is not just your general conduct, it's not just your specific acts, but it is your attitude. And if you have living faith, your life will be a pattern of revealing that wisdom of God, your deeds will reveal that wisdom of God and your attitude will reveal that wisdom of God. And if that's not there, then you do not have the wisdom of God no matter what the claim. The test of true faith then again is bound up in behavior. It's bound up in conduct. It's bound up in attitude.

In fact, Johnstone further says, "We have here again what may be described as the central thought of this epistle, that where religion has real saving hold of a mind and heart, it cannot from its nature but powerfully influence the outward life. And that the more a Christian has of true wisdom and spiritual knowledge, the more manifestly will his life at all points be governed by his religion." Then he says, "Talk of orthodoxy and Christian experience however fluent and animated and clever does not of itself prove wisdom. The really wise man will show his works."

That's it. People running around making claims all over everywhere about wisdom. People in the church saying they possess the wisdom of God, but the proof is in the living. The contrast then between a false wisdom and a true wisdom from God is readily seen.

Now where did James get this? I mean, what's the basis of all of this? What foundation underlies it? He really doesn't describe that much about wisdom, he just throws it out. But after all, he's a Jew. And you remember chapter 1 verse 1, he's writing to Jews. So I assumed as I was kind of going through this that he really didn't have to say a lot about wisdom because there was an awful lot already said in the Old Testament, he was building on that. In order for us to understand the difference between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of man, we need only go back to the Old Testament wisdom literature. You know what the wisdom literature is in the Old Testament? Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and what's the fifth? Song of Solomon. That's called the wisdom literature. It's filled with proverbs, pithy sayings of wisdom, calls to wisdom, expressions of wisdom, and so forth.

And if we want to understand what underlies the thought of James and the contrast he's dealing with, we need to go back into the Old Testament. So let's do that for a little bit tonight and flip back in your Bible to the book of Ecclesiastes. And this is a book that most people never study. In fact, most people find it hard to understand this. It seems like somebody stuck it in here and it doesn't belong because everything in it is wrong. But it's an interesting book. It's been dropped in here for the simple

reason that it belongs in the wisdom literature as a statement of human wisdom. Ecclesiastes tells us how man sees his world, sees God, sees the factors of life from human wisdom's viewpoint. Okay? We're looking at this from human wisdom.

Most people believe it was penned by Solomon. There is quite a debate about whether he wrote it before he was a true believer in God, before he was truly converted, or whether he wrote it after he was converted and filled it with thoughts that he had before he was converted. It could be written in retrospect as he sort of goes back over the way he used to think. It might even well be that he penned this in some time before he had come to the fullness of the understanding of the truth of God which changed his life.

But Ecclesiastes is a fascinating book. It reveals the folly, the uselessness, the senselessness and the frustration of false human wisdom. What James says is earthy, natural and demonic. Let me show you, let's just kind of look at Ecclesiastes for a little bit.

Verse 16 of chapter 1...I don't know how far we'll get with this but it's fascinating..."I said to myself," and you've got a problem if you do that a whole lot, I don't know just exactly where Solomon is at this point, but if there's nobody else to talk to, they say you can talk to yourself, the problem is if you start answering back...anyway...I said to myself, behold, I have magnified and increased wisdom more than all who were over Jerusalem before me."

Now this is why I believe that when God gave Solomon wisdom initially, He gave him wisdom on a human level, wisdom to make human decisions, wisdom to make successful judgments in relationship to the things that he had to decide as the king. But I think in having human wisdom and if the availability of divine wisdom he opted out at least for a great portion of his life for only that which was human and so it never was able to answer the ultimate question. So he says, "I've magnified and increased wisdom more than all who were over Jerusalem before me and my mind has observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge." I mean, this is the...this is the wisest man who ever lived. This is a man who is absolutely the brain of all time. He's got it all in his computer. He not only knows it, he understands it, he can collate it and he can put it out.

And verse 17, "And I set my mind to know wisdom and to know madness," or even better, "extravagance and folly." In other words, I had wisdom and in order for me to understand what wisdom is I decided to study stupidity. That's what he's saying. And it does help sometimes, you know, when you've learned things that are wise and you read things that are stupid, you begin to appreciate what is wise. And so he set himself not only to know wisdom but to know extravagant madness and foolishness. "And I realize that this also is striving after wind."

What do you mean by that? I mean wisdom is useless and so is stupidity. Now things are best known by comparison so he thought he'd work on a little comparison hoping maybe he could even enhance

the value of human wisdom if he studied human folly and he came up with the conclusion that neither one of them means anything, it's just like chasing air.

"Because in much wisdom there is much grief and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain." Listen, somebody said it and it's true, ignorance is...what?...bliss. What you don't know can't hurt you...they say. That's not always true, but the more you know the more you carry, right? And so Solomon says I set out to know everything I could know and all I got was more grief and more pain...the bankruptcy of human wisdom.

Then notice chapter 2. "I said to myself," still talking to himself, "Come now and I will test you with pleasure." I tried stupidity now I'm going after pleasure. I mean, this is the hedonist of all time. He's going to find meaning in life somewhere. He didn't find it in wisdom. He didn't find it in stupidity, now he's going to give a shot at pleasure. This means indulgence, indulgence of every kind. And if you want to read the record, you'll find out how he indulged himself. He indulged himself in every conceivable way. He indulged himself with women ad infinitum. I mean, women upon women upon women, he indulged himself with these massive stables that he put up there in the plain of Megiddo, with incredible wealth, with extravagant living, with great possessions. "And so I said, I'll test you with pleasure, so enjoy yourself." It sounds like "eat, drink and be merry."

"And behold, it too was futility." I can't find the meaning of life in pleasure. I can't find the meaning of life in stupidity or madness. I can't find the meaning of life in wisdom. I mean, I look at our world and that's exactly what I see. Don't you see that? I see people out there going after education. The eggheads of the world with PhD's strung after their name, and studying and studying and gathering and collecting and learning and reading and it's futile. And then you see the madness of the world, the people out there with their hair down the middle of their back, their eyes all blown out, spaced out on rock music and drugs and the other people blasted on alcohol and they're deciding to find the meaning of life in madness. And then there are those people who live for pleasure and possessions. And they want the bigger house, the bigger car, the better clothes, the fur coat, the jewelry, the bigger diamond, the whole shot and they're all in the same game and none of them ever gets anywhere near reality. It's just where Solomon was. They ought to read this.

And then he just tried plain happiness...just fun, just go out and laugh a little. And so he says, "I said of laughter, it is madness." Laughter's no fun. That's kind of interesting. "And I said of pleasure, what does it accomplish? Ah, then I decided to become a drug addict." That's right. Verse 3, "I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine." That's right. I tried drugs. "And while my mind was guiding me wisely...I didn't completely blow it so I could sort of analyze my feelings, he said...I hit the bottle stimulating myself with wine, keeping my mind sort of in control, and how to take hold of folly until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives." He tried drugs to determine if there's any joy in that.

Then in verse 4, "I decided to enlarge my empire." He tried empire building. "So I built houses for myself. How many houses does a man need? How many houses can you live?" I planted, he says, "I planted vineyards for myself, how much can a man drink? How many grapes can you eat?" This is an empire builder. This is a man, "Who my success will come in my power. And I made gardens and I made parks for myself and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I tried beauty. I became a naturalist. I joined the Audubon Society, I smelled the flowers, I laid in the grass, I looked at the birds, I mean, I did the whole shot. I tried everything. I even made ponds of water for myself." You notice who he did this for? Who did he do this for? Always for himself. This is typical of human wisdom. It is in a mad pursuit to fulfill itself. And he made himself a pond. He made a bunch of ponds to irrigate a forest of growing trees.

And then he said, "I just decided that I'd have authority over a lot of people so I bought a whole bunch of slaves, male and female slaves. And then I had home-born slaves. I got all these slaves and I got them all cohabitating and they kept producing more slaves. And I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who proceeded me in Jerusalem." Now this guy's tried every conceivable angle in life to find fulfillment.

Verse 8, "I also collected silver and gold...like a lot of folks today...and the treasure of kings and provinces." I went around and I collected all the fancy artifacts and I was building myself a sort of a museum. He got into collecting. Have you known people who are in that today? They live to collect things...all kinds of things. Some people pay a tremendous amount of money. And then he said, "I provided for myself male and female singers." You know what I got into? I got into music. I got into that, heavy into music. "And then I got into the pleasures of men." What's that? Sex...many concubines. This guy has exhausted himself. He's got to be worn out.

And verse 9, "Then I became great." This is absolutely without doubt the most egoistic nine verses on the pages of holy Scripture. The guy is absolutely consumed with himself. "And I became great. And I increased more than all who proceeded me in Jerusalem. And my wisdom also stood by me." I didn't lose my mind in the process. I didn't go nuts. "And all that my eyes desired I didn't refuse them." Boy, if I saw it, I got it. I see it, I want it, I got it. That's the way he lived. He had the resources to do that. "For my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor." Boy, do we do that? I deserve it, I worked hard. I'm taking it. I want it. I know I don't need it, I deserve it, I've worked... You see, he justified every conceivable indulgence.

Get this, verse 11, "Then I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor that I exerted and behold, all was nothing. And striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun." Boy, that's something to come to that conclusion after all that effort, isn't it? Hmph...sad, how sad, what a tragic person.

Go down to verse 17, what does it say? "So I hated...what?...life." So I hated life. Hated life. I mean, you've got all life could bring. You've got wine, women and song, you've built your empire, you've had your pleasure, you've laughed your head off, you've been a fool, you've been a wise man, you've got more than anybody else and you hate life? Everything is futility. Striving after wind. "I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun. I hated all the gold. I hated all the silver. I hated all the animals. I hated all the plants. I hated all the women. I hated it all. I hated every bit of it." Why? Why does he hate it? Because he finds that none of it brings him satisfaction and so he begins to resent it.

Verse 20, "I completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun." This is the...this is worldly wisdom's despair...worldly wisdom's despair. Back in verse 17 was worldly wisdom's weariness. And verse 18 he says the thing that makes me mad is I'm going to leave it to some guy who is coming after me. I'm going to die and somebody else is going to get the whole thing. That's worldly wisdom's selfishness.

And then the despair, verse 20, "I despaired of all of it." And then hopelessness of verse 21, when there's a man whose labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, then he gives his legacy to one who has not labored with him, this too is vanity and a great evil. He was really bothered by the fact that he would die and leave all this to somebody else who didn't do anything to get it. He just really had a time with that.

And then the great grief of verse 23, "Because all his days, his tasks is painful and grievous even at night his mind does not rest, this too is vanity." I can't even sleep. "There's nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself his labor is good." You know what you ought to do? Go back to zero, just have a meal and drink something and tell yourself you worked a good day and go to sleep. Sad.

Now he knows the answer's with God but apparently in this situation in his life he wasn't reaching out to God to take a hold of that answer.

Go to chapter 8 for a moment. There's so much more we could say about this but go to chapter 8 verse 16. "When I gave my heart," he says, "to know wisdom, to see the task which has been done on the earth even though one should never sleep day or night." In other words, when I really gave myself to this thing wholeheartedly, "And I saw every work of God, I concluded that man cannot discover the work which has been done under the sun even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover and though the wise man should say I know, he can't discover."

You know what he's saying here? You know God's out there, you know God's acting, you know God's at work and you give your best to try to find it out but as best you try you can't discover the reality of

godly wisdom. That's what he's saying. You can't get it from the human view. You can't pursue it from the vantage point of earth. That's what he is saying. Even if you didn't never sleep. And even if you gave your heart completely to know wisdom and to discover God, you can't do it. And this, beloved, is the dilemma of man today who thinks himself wise and the reality is he's a fool. And everything that he pursues is nothing but useless. What a commentary.

The sum of all of this could be said in chapter 4 verses 2 and 3. This is absolutely unbelievable, this statement. Listen to this, chapter 4 verse 2, "So I congratulated the dead." How bout that? "I congratulated the dead," he says, "who are already dead, more than the living who are still living. But better off than both of them is the one who never existed." Now what a...what a view of life. I congratulated the dead. The only thing better than being dead would be never to have existed. That's a death wish and that's the end of worldly wisdom. It is earthly. It is sensual or natural. It is demonic. It ends in futility. It ends with a death wish.

Isaiah 5:21 sums it up by saying, "Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes." And "woe" means curse and it implies the curse of God. In Isaiah 5 he is speaking of the curse of God. God curses those who have only worldly wisdom.

So, the Old Testament gives us a pretty dramatic portrayal of earthly human wisdom. And James is building on that. He's saying look at a life, what do you see? Do you see selfishness? Do you see arrogant self-consumption, self-ambition, self-promotion such as we saw with Solomon in Ecclesiastes? The writer portraying that approach to life? Do you see an indulgent person getting all he can get, all she can get, filling up life with every possible thing? That is earthly, sensual, demonic wisdom, not the wisdom of God. Look at another life, what do you see? Do you see a life pattern of righteous deeds? Do you see individual acts of holiness? Do you see a spirit, an attitude of unselfish, gentle, kind, meek, humility? That is evidence of the possession of the wisdom of God. That's basically what he's saying.

Now the other side of the wisdom literature is to go to Job and Psalms and Proverbs and to see what they tell us about the true wisdom of God and how different it is. It has nothing to do with money. It has nothing to do with sexual fulfillment. It has nothing to do with building an empire. It has nothing to do with amassing a fortune. It has nothing to do with building yourself a huge forest of trees or accomplishing some great goal or being the smartest or the most educated or having the largest empire. It has nothing to do with any of that. What then is true wisdom? What then is that wisdom which can satisfy the heart of man and satisfy the heart of God as well and make life worth meaning...make life worth living, rather, by giving it meaning? What is that true wisdom, that real wisdom?

Well, obviously it's the wisdom of God. And if you go through Job, and if you go through Psalms, and if you go through Proverbs...we don't have time, it will take us years to do that, as you well know...we

would discover over and over and over and over the wisdom of God. And the wisdom of God is always related to a person's relationship to God and a person's behavior. It always has to do with that. It has not to do with amassing self-indulgent kind of approach to life. But it has to do with a selfless humble approach to serving God. That's the evidence of true wisdom.

Well, many texts of the Old Testament tell us that God is the source of wisdom. And that would be a good place to start. True wisdom comes from God. It says of God, for example, in Job 9:4 that God is wise in heart and mighty in strength. God is wise in heart. It is of God's nature to possess infinite wisdom. God as the infinitely wise God is the source of wisdom. In fact, in Psalm 104:24 it says, "O Lord, how many are Thy works? In wisdom Thou hast made them all." Again emphasizing that God is a God whose nature is a nature of wisdom.

It says in Proverbs 3:19, and I'm just picking a verse from each of those books, "The Lord by wisdom founded the earth, by understanding He established the heavens, by His knowledge the deeps were broken up and the skies dripped with dew." Again emphasizing the infinite surpassing marvelous wisdom of God.

The point of it is that God is the source of wisdom. Other texts emphasize this, we could go outside the wisdom literature and find the wisdom of God mentioned in many, many biblical texts. I'm thinking of twice in the tenth chapter of Jeremiah, both in verse 7 and verse 12, the wisdom of God is mentioned. Daniel chapter 1 verse 17, chapter 2 verses 20, 21, 22 and verse 23. You come into the New Testament, wonderful statement made of the wisdom of God in the beautiful doxology at the end of the eleventh chapter of Romans, verse 33, "O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways."

Now, we've seen human wisdom and we saw the wisest man that ever lived named Solomon and we saw the utter futility of the supremely wise human being. Therefore we conclude that human wisdom at its best is bankrupt. So we go to another dimension, we go to God to see His wisdom, to see if His wisdom can provide for us what man's wisdom even at its best cannot. And the first thing we're noting is that God is the source of wisdom. God is the source of wisdom. This, as I said, not only in the wisdom literature but throughout Scripture. I just thought of Ephesians 3, isn't it verse 10? It says that the Lord has done what He's done in the church in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known. God putting His wisdom on display in the church.

In verse 17 of 1 Timothy 1, "Now to the king eternal immortal invisible, the only God be honor and glory forever and ever amen." Some sources say the only wise God. God is a God of great and profound wisdom. In James 1 it goes so far as to say if any man lack wisdom, let him ask of whom? Of God. Why? Because it's God who gives to all men liberally and holds back nothing.

So, true wisdom comes from God. And the kind of wisdom that makes life meaningful, the kind of wisdom that is pure and peaceable and gentle and easy to be entreated and full of mercy and good fruits, without hypocrisy and so forth, that kind of wisdom comes from God. That's what I want to establish.

But one other thought that I want you to grab in your mind. Though it comes from God Scripture says it is to be pursued by man. Let's go back again to Job chapter 28 and we'll kind of pull this together with this sort of final point. There's so much we could dig into.

But in Job chapter 28 there is a call for the pursuit of wisdom. This is a tremendous tremendous chapter, one of my very favorites. It says, "Surely there is a mine for silver and a place where they refine gold. Iron is taken from the dust and from rock. Copper is smelted." And then it goes in to defining the mining process. And look what men go to to get this stuff. "Man puts an end to darkness." What does that mean? He digs down into the earth where there's always been darkness. He puts an end to darkness by going so far into the earth and lighting his candles and his lamps and so forth that he puts an end to the darkness by bringing light as he mines in the depths of the earth. Mining is nothing new. They did it in ancient times. "To the farthest limit he searches out the rock in gloom and deep shadow. He sinks a shaft far from habitation forgotten by the foot." In other words, where people don't walk. "They hang and swing to and fro far from men."

You know what they used to do? They would literally drill a shaft deep into a mountain, deep into the ground, suspend themselves with a rope and hang down there, poking around with their candle or their lamp trying to find some metal, some precious stone. And that's the effort they would go to. And in those times we don't even know how they were able to do that. But they were.

In verse 5, "The earth from it comes food and underneath it is turned up as fire." They may have even had some way in which they could set fire down there, or explode something to create movement and to open up areas. "Its rocks are the sources of sapphires, its dust contains gold." They must have had instruments to break into the hard rock and get this stuff out. "The path no bird of prey knows, nor has the falcon's eye--the most seeing eye of all the animals--caught sight of it. The proud beasts have not trodden it, nor has the fierce lion passed over it." In other words, they're way down in the depths of the earth.

"He puts his hand on the flint--that is he strikes a fire-- overturns the mountains at the base." Again, the idea that he may have had some explosive capabilities to blow things up, or at least to overturn the foundations of the mountains. "He cuts out channels through the rocks." It's amazing to think of what they did and how they did this. We think we invented all that stuff. You have to remember that man is in a degenerative process. He's not getting better, he's getting worse. And the sophistication in this day based upon man then as compared with man now might have been beyond man today to fully understand.



And so, he does all of this. "He hews out channels through the rocks, his eyes sees anything precious, he damns the streams from flowing." And you have to do that if you're digging into the earth because there's underground water. "And what is hidden he brings to light."

But look at verse 12, "But where can wisdom be found and where is the place of understanding?" Isn't this it? Job is saying man goes to all these efforts to find precious metal but he can't find wisdom. And again he is articulating the frustration of the Ecclesiastes, the preacher in Ecclesiastes. And he says even if man found it, he doesn't know its value. "It isn't even found in the land of the living." Isn't that interesting? What an interesting statement. You ought to underline that. Wisdom isn't even found in the land of the living. You can't find true divine wisdom in the world. You can't find it from men.

"The deep says it's not in me. The sea says it's not with me. Pure gold can't be given in exchange for it, nor can silver be weighed as its price. It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir, the finest gold, in precious onyx or sapphire. Gold or glass cannot equal it, nor can it be exchanged for articles of fine gold. Coral and crystal are not to be mentioned and the acquisition of wisdom is above that of pearls." There's nothing in the world that can buy it. There's nobody in the world that can get it. There's nobody in the world that can find it. There's nobody in the world who understands it.

"But where then does wisdom come from? And where is the place of understanding? Thus it is hidden from the eyes of all living and concealed from the birds of the sky. Abaddon and Death, or Destruction and Death say, With our ears we heard a report of it." In other words, we heard about it. Here it comes, verse 23, I love this, "God understands its way and He knows its place." Isn't that great?

If you want true wisdom, where do you go? You go to God. Oh, if we could only believe this, we could clean up the church of a whole lot of human philosophy that has encumbered it. God knows it. He knows where it is cause He looks to the ends of the earth and He sees everything under the heavens. He knows. "And when He imparted weight to the wind and meted out the waters by measure, when He set a limit for the rain and a course for the thunder bolt, then He saw it and declared that He established it and searched it out and to man He said...here it is, folks, one of the greatest statements ever penned in the Scripture, repeated many times...Behold, the fear of the Lord that is...what?...wisdom and to depart from...what?...evil is understanding." That's the message.

What is true wisdom? It is to fear God and depart from what? Evil. It isn't a question of how much you know, it is a question of whether you love the Lord your God and depart from sin. That is wisdom. And men pursue everything there is and even wisdom, but they can't find it because it comes from God. And it can only be known to those who pursue God. Wisdom is available...the wisdom of knowing God, loving God, the wisdom of obeying God, saying no to sin.

Look at Proverbs chapter 1. Verse 5 says, "A wise man will hear and increase in learning. And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel." Here the Scripture says pursue it. Go down to verse 20. Wisdom is everywhere. The wisdom of God is available and here wisdom is personified as if wisdom is a preacher. "Wisdom shouts in the streets." Here is wisdom. It's out there. It's coming through the voice of the Old Testament prophet. It's coming through the voice of the spokesman for God. It's coming through the voice of the teacher of God's Word, of the preacher. It's coming through the voice of anyone who articulates a truth of God. Wisdom shouts in the street, it's not hidden, it's not stuffed away, it's not buried in the depths of the earth, it's right there. "She lifts up her voice in the square, at the head of the noisy streets she cries out. At the entrance of the gates in the city she utters her saying."

Listen, what this is saying is that God has made true wisdom always available. That's wonderful. It's always available. You see, it's just that men are looking in the wrong place. And wisdom is crying and saying, "How long, O naive ones?" The word "naive" comes from a Hebrew root that means an open door. You people with a brain that's an open door, everything flies in, everything flies out. You absolutely undiscerning people. "You open-door minded people, how long will you love your simplicity? O you scoffers." You see, the naive one he just says, "Oh, that's nice...oh, that's nice." No discernment. The scoffer rejects openly. "How long will you delight in scoffing and you fools, how long will you hate knowledge?" The simple one doesn't know. The scoffer rejects. And the fool loves stupidity. And wisdom's crying to all of you.

Ha, wisdom says in verse 23, "I'll pour out my spirit on you. I'll make my words known to you. I have called and you refused. I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention. You neglected all my counsel. You didn't want my reproof." Isn't that true? Who was wisdom most personified in above anyone else? Christ. And He came and He cried in the streets and doesn't that sound exactly like what people did in response to Him?

So, he says in verse 26, "I'll laugh at your calamity. I'll mock when your dread comes. When your dread comes like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come on you and then you'll call on Me and I will not answer, then you will seek Me diligently but you will not find Me because you hated knowledge and didn't choose...what?...didn't choose what?...the fear of the Lord." There it is again. True wisdom is to fear God, to reverentially have awe for God, to respect God, to love God and to turn from iniquity. Wisdom cries. Wisdom screams, as it were, and men don't listen.

Chapter 2, same thing, "My son, if you will receive My sayings and treasure My commandments within you, make your ear attentive to wisdom." Listen for it, pursue it. "Incline your heart to understanding. If you cry for discernment, lift your voice for understanding. If you seek her as silver--valuable-- search for her as for hidden treasure, then you will discern...what?...the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God for the Lord gives wisdom. From His mouth come knowledge and

understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright."

The same two concepts: fearing the Lord and turning from iniquity...fearing the Lord and walking in an upright obedient way. That's...that's the avenue to true wisdom. And the pursuit of wisdom is enjoined upon every person.

Look at chapter 3 verse 13, "How blessed is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding, for its profit is better than the profit of silver, its gain than fine gold." It's a lot better than the route that Solomon took, agreed? It's a lot better than that. "It's more precious than jewels and nothing you desire compares with her. Long life is in her right hand--that's the quantity of life. In her left hand are riches and honor--that's the quality of life. Her ways are pleasant ways, all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her and happy are all those who hold her fast. The Lord by wisdom founded the earth, by understanding established the heavens. By His knowledge the deeps are broken up, the skies drip with dew. My son, let them not depart from your sight. Keep sound wisdom and discretion."

Pursue it, hold on to it. Don't let it go. It will serve you well. It will bless you. It will give you full and rich life. It will give you long life.

Chapter 4 verse 5, "Acquire wisdom, acquire understanding. Do not forget nor turn away from the words of My mouth." Verse 7, "The beginning of wisdom is, acquire wisdom. With all your acquiring, get understanding. Prize her, she will exalt you, she will honor you if you embrace her, she will place on your head a garland of grace, she will present you with a crown of beauty." I'm telling you, you want to really live, you don't go Solomon's way, you go God's way and instead of pursuing all that junk, you pursue the fear of the Lord and an upright life that turns from evil and you will know true wisdom and true blessing...true blessing.

I mean, it just keeps going on like this, I don't know how far we can go but you go to chapter 7, just verse 2, "Keep My commandments and live. My teaching is the apple of your eye. Bind them on your fingers. Right them on the tablet of your heart. Say to wisdom, You're my sister. I'm going to pull you in close. And call understanding your intimate friend and it will keep you from an adulterous and a foreigner who flatters with her words." Boy, hang on to wisdom.

Verse 1 of chapter 8, "Doesn't wisdom call and understanding lift up her voice? On top of the heights beside the way where the paths meet she takes her stand; beside the gate at the opening of the city, at the entrance of the door she cries out, To you, O men, I call and my voice is to the sons of men, O naive ones, discern prudence. O fools, discern wisdom. Listen, for I shall speak noble things. And the opening of my lips will produce right things." Listen...hear true wisdom.

Verse 10, "Take my instruction and not silver." Don't go Solomon's way. "Take my knowledge and not gold, for wisdom is better than jewels; and all desirable things cannot compare with her."

Verse 12, "Wisdom speaks, I, wisdom, dwell with prudence. I find knowledge and discretion. The fear of the Lord is to...what?...hate evil." There we are again with the same idea. The opposite, pride and arrogance and the evil way.

Verse 17's beautiful, "I love those who love me and those who diligently seek me," that is seek wisdom, "shall find me." Verse 18, "Riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and righteousness. My fruit is better than gold, even pure gold. My yield than choicest silver. I walk in the way of righteousness, in the paths of justice, to endow those who love me with wealth that I may fill their treasuries." I'm telling you, it's just incredible the promises connected with the pursuit of true wisdom.

It goes on like that in chapter 9, verse 6, "Forsake your folly and live, turn away from your stupidity."

Well, you get the point...I hope. Chapter 16 verse 16, "How much better is it to get wisdom than gold and to get understanding is to be chosen above silver?"

You see the point? There is a wisdom of men...you can go that route, it's earthly, sensual, demonic and futile. There is a wisdom of God that fears Him, loves Him, seeks to do righteousness, to hate evil, to turn from iniquity, it brings greater riches than all the riches of the world combined. So, pursue the wisdom that comes from God. And Hosea 6:3 says, "So let us know, let us press on to know the Lord." Take hold of wisdom.

Proverbs 4:13 says, "Don't let her go for she is your life." Great truth. She is your life...the wisdom of God.

Do you have that wisdom? God offers you His wisdom. First Corinthians 1:30 says, "Christ is made unto us wisdom." When you receive Jesus Christ, you receive the wisdom of God...the wisdom that fears God, the wisdom that hates evil, the wisdom that thus is blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies, far surpassing anything the word could ever, ever offer. I trust you have that wisdom.

Well, I had a lot to say and I didn't say a third of it. Let's bow in prayer.

Thank You, Father, for giving us Your wisdom. We bless Your name for making us not many noble, not many mighty but really the weak, the base the foolish of the world. Wise...what can we say? You've made us wise...not in human wisdom, but in divine wisdom. Bless You for that. We love You. Our hearts long to turn from evil. Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him demonstrate it in life style, specific deeds and an attitude of meekness. Help us to look at ourselves to see if indeed

we possess the wisdom that is from above, not the wisdom of this world, the wisdom that comes only from Thee.

You need to examine your heart tonight and I don't know what your relationship is to Christ, each one of you, but I trust it's what it ought to be. Don't be a fool and pursue the empty wisdom of the world. The wisest man that ever lived found it bankrupt. The richest man, the wisest man, the greatest man, he was all one man and none of it meant anything. In fact, he began to hate it. He hated it so much he hated everything it stood for and then he hated life itself and then he said, "I..I envy the dead." My, that's not the way to live. But that's the way you'll end up if you think you can find true wisdom in things of this world. Come to Christ.

The song writer says, "Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart, not be all else to me saved that Thou art, Thou my best thought by day or by night, waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light." And then he said, "Be Thou my wisdom and Thou my true word. I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord. Thou my great Father, I Thy true son, Thou in me dwelling and I in Thee one." Boy, what a great truth. Come to Christ and receive true wisdom.

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