

True wisdom James 3:13-18

Life is full of choices.

Some of them are **mundane** and **trivial**. Others are **formative** and **directional**.

How do you cope with the choices available in modern life?

In theory it sounds so wonderful. Who wouldn't want maximum options when deciding what to do?

In reality it can all become overwhelming and tiring.

Vicky and I were in bathroom shop the other day. My low moment came when the shop assistant assured me that we could have any combination we wanted. He thought this was a good thing. But at that moment I needed help to navigate the hundreds of options before my eyes.

Choosing a new shower is far less important than deciding how to spend our few decades here on earth.

The **Louis Armstrong song** may declare that we have all the time in the world. But the truth is very different.

Time is ticking and **our tickers** won't last forever.

We are faced with a question, **how should we fill our days, months and years?**

Many of you will have come across the **Jar of Life** concept as a way of helping us work out what we should do when we can't do everything (**Image on screen**). The big principle is that we need to put the big rocks in first. If we fill it with little things then there is no space for the items of bigger significance.

The **Jar of Life** is what we call **a wisdom tool**.

Wisdom is different from cleverness. It's not about how much knowledge we have or how much information we can store in our heads.

Wisdom is about how to navigate our way through life. It's about how to make practical choices in a world full of decisions.

A wise person gets the choices right. A fool gets them wrong.

Or to use the concept of the Jar of Life, the wise person is the one who puts the rocks in first. The fool is the one who tries to fit them in last.

The **critical question** is, **what are the rocks?**

It's extremely popular to say that we determine the identity of our substantial rocks. What I value the most will probably be different from you. But that's okay. We just need to **learn to live and let live**. Chill out about everyone else and focus on our big priorities.

This morning I want to show us from **James chapter 3** that this isn't true. Instead the Bible teaches that there are **two fundamentally different** approaches to how we navigate ourselves through this brief existence.

Either we listen to:

- The wisdom from below (Vs 13-16)
- The wisdom from above (Vs 17-18)

My purpose for today may **not be simple** but it is **straightforward**. It is to persuade us to live according to the wisdom from heaven.

To achieve this we're going to compare the two alternatives in three areas:

The **origin** of the wisdom – where does it come from?

The **heart** of the wisdom – what's at the centre of the instructions?

The **effects** of the wisdom – what results from living this way?

First, the wisdom from below (Vs 13-16)

Look at verse 13. **Read verses 13 to 16.**

- *The origin of the wisdom*

Look at verse 15. **Read verse 15.**

It is earthly

It is human speculation rather than divine revelation.

It is earth bound rather than eternity focused. One live, live it. Create your bucket list.

It is unspiritual

It isn't focused on loving Jesus forever. The only true spiritual reality is Jesus shaped.

It isn't fueled by the Holy Spirit.

It is demonic

Anything to keep us from living for and living with Jesus for eternity.

- *The heart of the wisdom*

What's the driving principle behind the wisdom from below?

It's there in verse 14.

The heart of this way of life is **selfish ambition**.

The **exact focus** of the ambition will **vary** from person to person.

However, the common factor for everyone who follows this type of wisdom is that they will passionately pursue their own dreams throughout their lives.

For some this will be money. For others it will be career or personal development or fame or recognition or success in some particular field. Or something else entirely.

I know this will sound really strange but a selfish ambition can look like a selfless one. Maybe someone is super caring towards others or is living to protect the environment so that future generations will be able to enjoy our planet. This doesn't sound like a selfish ambition does it? However, if the core reason for doing it spring from our own person choice, that is, we do it because we have chosen it, then the heart of our life is selfish. We are **driven** and **directed** by **self-appointed destinations**.

Or to use the language from **the Jar of Life concept**, the massive rock at the heart of the wisdom from below is the rock of personal choice, whatever that is.

This is the common wisdom all around us. Find out what your dreams are and then place then prioritise them at all costs.

- *The effects of the wisdom*

Look at verse 16. **Read verse 16.**

Remember that wisdom is how to navigate our way through life rather than information we store away in our heads that allows us to gain certificates and qualifications.

This means the wisdom we follow will produce fruit in our day to day lives. The only question is, **what effects will we see?**

According to this verse, the wisdom from below will ultimately produce **disorder**.

God produces order out of chaos.

Humans do the opposite. We produce chaos out of order.

In summary: the wisdom from below produces fools.

What's the alternative wisdom?

Second, the wisdom from above (Vs 17-18)

Look at verse 17. **Read verses 17 and 18.**

- *The origin of the wisdom*

This comes from heaven.

It is God spoken guidance for how we are to navigate these earthly roads until we arrive at our heavenly destination.

It is not made up by humans. It is communicated by God.

I find this so encouraging. God knows what he is talking about. Therefore, we can trust his ways.

Most of us trust Google maps when we travel to new destinations.

We do this because they have mapped everything out. Can you imagine using **Pastor Lee map** instead? Trust my guesses for places that I've never been to.

How much more important is it to find wisdom for life from someone who knows what they are talking about.

The good news is that the wisdom from above is wisdom from God himself. We can trust what he says because he has everything mapped out.

Because the wisdom from above is from God it is characterised by some wonderful words.

- It is pure.
- It is peace-loving.
- It is full of mercy.

1 Corinthians 1:24 says Jesus is the wisdom of God. He is the one come down from heaven who reflects all these attributes.

- *The heart of the wisdom*

I want to draw out one word from **verse 17**. It's the word submissive.

At the heart of this approach is an attitude of submission.

Submission to whom? To God.

Unlike the wisdom from below which is characterised by **selfish ambition**, this wisdom is driven by **submissive ambition**.

That is, the people who live by it are **happily moved** to do what God says rather than what they say.

Or to use the language from the Jar of Life, **what is the rock at the heart of this wisdom?** God's ways.

God's words reveal his ways. The one who wants to be truly wise hears them, humbly accepts them and then puts them into practice. That is through a submissive attitude God's ways become our ways.

- *The effects of the wisdom*

Look again at verse 18. **Read verse 18.**

It produces **peacemakers**

It's the complete opposite of the disorder we get from the alternative wisdom!

God's wisdom begins to produce the world we all want. A place of harmony, wholeness and peace.

It's not fully perfected yet. But hanging out with Christians should give us a taste of the community we want to see.

It produces a harvest of righteousness

It certainly produces a righteous life in the here and now.

However, God's wisdom also enables us to be present at the final harvest when Christ returns. It does this by getting us to focus on Jesus throughout our lives.

What does all this mean?

Not yet a Christian? Remove the rock of personal choice and replace it with the rock of Christ. Allow his words and ways to determine the biggest priorities of your entire existence.

You won't be disappointed. Christ is sufficient, satisfying and supreme.

Christian? Let's be on our guard against **worldly pollution**.

One of our dangers is that we see Christ and his words as grains of sand rather than substantial rocks. This results in us constantly trying to squeeze in Christian things into a life full of other priorities. You know something, this never works!

Worldly Christians normally end up feeling guilty in the presence of committed Christians. This normally leads them in two directions. Away or towards.

What if this is a description of you?

- Recognise the description
- Repent of your decisions
- Replace the rocks
- Rejoice in Jesus

Let's pray.