

We could all agree that crime doesn't pay. The odds are heavily against you that you'll get caught. Police chase for a long time. And crime isn't the wisest of actions. Just look at the kind of foolish things criminals do. For example the attempted robber who fell asleep on the floor. The robbery suspect who left his credit card behind at the store he robbed. Or the man who stole his own car from the police impound. These criminals could be accused of not being very wise which led to unwise actions.

Criminals doing crazy things are really only acting out the same kind of wisdom each one of us has in our hearts. It's a wisdom that comes from the world. It's an earthly wisdom that seeks to better ourselves at any expense. It focuses entirely on me and my benefits without considering anyone else at all. Really it's wisdom that comes from the devil. Sinful worldly wisdom builds up in the heart and comes out in sinful actions.

That's one of the two kinds of wisdom that James talks about in the second lesson, and we've got it too. It's not the kind of wisdom James wants us to have. So we ask questions like am I wise? Do I have understanding? We ask so we can figure out which wisdom is in our hearts and what actions come from that. We want the right kind of wisdom, one that comes from God...

Wise hearts bring out wise actions
Showing itself in humility
Showing itself in peace

Actions speak louder than words. You've heard that before I'm sure. It means you can talk all you want but you must back it up with action. James was writing to people who didn't back up their talk with action. Once you believed in Jesus that was it. How you lived didn't matter. What you did wasn't important. Backing up talk of faith with good works wasn't essential. They knew good works couldn't save them, so they felt doing them was more optional. James is known for making the statement, **"Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do."** A way to see faith is to see faith in action in good works.

In our section this morning he extends it. Good works are just as much a part of wisdom as they are of faith. **"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in humility that comes from wisdom."** A wise heart connected to Christ shows itself in wise actions.

Humility or meekness is essential to the concept of wisdom. Human wisdom wants nothing to do with being meek and humble. Human wisdom wants to show off and have the spotlight on self. That was the problem for the disciples as they walked in the gospel. **"They kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest."** Meekness is the exact opposite. It's wisdom from God that centers in God and trusts in him. It's closely aligned with the fear of the Lord. Solomon writes in the Proverbs, **"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."** When we make ourselves big and God small we don't fear the Lord. Meekness isn't there, doesn't show up in deeds, and true wisdom isn't present.

Have you been in conversations where you felt the overwhelming urge to brag and show off? Maybe it was dumping all the facts you knew about a topic out to show your wisdom. But it sounded like bragging and the other person lost interest. Perhaps you use your wisdom to consider the path this country could take back to firm financial footing. You feel you have the best theory and you'll tell anyone who listens. Wisdom like that is practical and useful in situations. But wisdom like that can be misused if we're trying so desperately to save something that doesn't matter while our faith in Jesus is lost. Maybe you're jealous of someone else's wisdom wondering how come you can't be as intelligent and well spoken. Each of these displays of wisdom can be sinful. Sinful because they are earthly; they don't display meekness or humility, and so they can't be true wisdom.

True wisdom is from above. It is characterized by meekness, a humility that flows from knowing that all wisdom is a gift from God. It is a meekness that knows to look to Christ alone for salvation. In fact it was Christ's humility that gives us our reason for being humble. To understand and know of his willingness to serve us by becoming a sacrifice for us is the beginning of true wisdom. It's what saves you and it comes from Christ. Wise hearts that know Christ, believe in his sacrifice for forgiveness, and humble themselves brings out wise actions.

We aren't in this for ourselves. We aren't here to gain things just for us. True wisdom that comes from Christ demonstrates itself in humility and meekness. We demonstrate a willingness to serve others and help them. We show what Christ told the disciples, **"If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."** We can't be jealous or self seeking. We must fight these temptations. But we fight them and are empowered to fight them with the true wisdom from Christ.

Wherever someone is being self seeking and looking out for their interests, relationships will be harder. Far from humility and putting others first, the self seeking person works for the "me" alone. It creates relationships that are strained at best and broken at worst. A lack of true wisdom and humility destroys peace between people. That's not the true wisdom God wants. He wants you to have a true wisdom in your heart from him that shows itself in peace.

Watch a chaotic classroom and you'll see the height of disorder. There's no wisdom there. Just selfishness and envy playing out as children scramble to get what's theirs, try to claim things for themselves, or envy those who already have claimed things. This selfish bitterness is false wisdom and creates divisions and produces evil actions. Disorder like that can be traced right back to the selfish interests and motivations. **"But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unscriptural, of the devil."** The only thing worse would be a teacher who adds to the disorder by playing favorites or being selfish themselves.

The fact that disorder, selfish ambitions, and envy can lead to sin is clearly seen in our own lives. You find yourself running up against a deadline at school for an essay or paper. With no time to do the research yourself you find some websites with information already written out. You selfishly copy the work and put it in your own paper. Maybe you have information on someone at work that could be used against them. You hold on to it with sinful selfish ambitions hoping for an opportunity to advance yourself by speaking up at the right time. Even churches have these things happen. Just look at the church in Tulsa with the staff charged with failure to report an assault. In their wisdom they felt they could handle it without reporting. Sinfulness in using or misusing wisdom in these situations isn't that far from us.

The source of true heavenly wisdom is God and he gives it to us through Jesus Christ. James does give a list of seven attributes that true heavenly wisdom has. Jesus has them all. **"Wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere."** Jesus didn't insist on his rights. He used his own suffering and death to free us from our sins. Jesus always judged exactly the same way. He judged the whole world guilty of sins but needing the forgiveness only he could offer. And he judges all of us now according to his life given on the cross. Christ Jesus really is the wisdom from God.

Christians can now live this way too with wise actions showing themselves in peace towards others. We can give in for the sake of others. Wisdom like this can only come from the means of grace, so make use of the means of grace. The child of God seeks to help and befriend others that they might have peace in this life and be led to cling to Jesus for eternal peace. A wise heart brings out wise actions showing itself in peace.

Without question we would agree that crime doesn't pay. Being a Christian does pay as we put our wisdom from heaven to use in our lives. With Christ taking away sinful selfish ambitions and giving us peace we put the faith and wisdom that is in our hearts to work in the world. Faith and wisdom in the heart bring out faithful and wise actions in humility and peace to the glory of Christ.