

Walking Along Wisdom's Way

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking divine wisdom to persevere under trials and to express our love for God through obedience to His law.

Duration: 51:33

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, James 1:9-18

Topics: "Wisdom's Way"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the false sense of security that comes from relying on money and material possessions. He uses the example of a checkbook, highlighting how it can give us the ability to buy anything and feel powerful. However, the preacher warns that everything money can buy is temporary and will eventually wither away. He draws a vivid picture of how even the green shoots of grass in the desert can quickly vanish under the scorching sun, symbolizing the fleeting nature of material wealth. The sermon also emphasizes the importance of persevering in obedience and love, using the example of Peter's denial of Jesus and subsequent restoration.

Transcript

Well now, shall we turn together to the letter written by James in chapter 1, and we come this evening to the passage that begins with verse 9 and proceeds to the end of verse 18. We have entitled it, Walking Along Wisdom's Way. Now you will remember that in introducing this book of James last Lord's Day evening, Mr. McLeod reminded us that the background is one of a somewhat bitter persecution of the Christian community addressed here.

And the reference to trials is probably to be found in that setting. The trials that especially emerge from persecution of one kind or another, and some of the consequences that come with persecution, unemployment, no home, no means of livelihood, no stable means of livelihood, and many other such things. That is the kind of background that we have here.

And yet something of the challenge of this whole book comes right at the beginning when James tells us in verse 2 about his first word, consider it pure joy, my brethren, whenever you face trials of many kinds. What a remarkable word. What a strange word to begin with.

How is it humanly possible for any of us to consider this to be the opportunity of rejoicing when trials of many kinds come cramming around us and pressing in upon us and challenging us? It simply doesn't

make sense at first reading. Now James gives us the key. He tells us in a word that this is possible for the people of God if only we are in possession of what he refers to as the divine wisdom.

And so he says in verse 5, if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given him. But when he asks, of course, he must ask in faith, nothing wavering, nothing doubting, because the man who wavers or the man who doubts will receive nothing whatsoever from the Lord. So the key to the situation is found here.

If only we can ask without wavering and receive without doubting the wisdom that is from God, then it is possible for you and for me, according to James, to rejoice when we face a whole multitude, a whole galaxy. I don't know whether that's the right language to use or not, but a whole vast accumulation of trials and troubles all coming at once, like the waves of the sea coming unremittingly upon us. There is a place in the life of the believer where he can rejoice even in such circumstances.

Now in the passage before us tonight in verses 9 to 18, James tells us something about this amazing wisdom that is from God, a wisdom that turns everything to gold. That is spiritual gold, a wisdom that enables us to transform and transpose our trials into the occasions of the discovery of God's grace. Now let's pause here before we move.

We've all got some trials or other. I've no doubt. There's hardly anybody.

Is there anyone here tonight who is free of trouble, free of trial of some kind or other? I'd really like to meet you so that this is very, very relevant. How now can I transpose this trial so that it becomes an occasion of rejoicing and the means of grace? Well, says James, use this God-given wisdom. Seek it with all your heart, and when you've got it, use it.

And as he leads us into the epistle proper, he tells us something about this wisdom, and that's my territory for tonight. Now there are three things here. We divide the passage into three, though they're unequal in length.

First of all, wisdom's reasoning in verses 9 to 11, wisdom's reward in verse 12, and what I would like to refer to as wisdom's reassurance in verses 13 to 15. Now let's look at them briefly. First of all, wisdom's reasoning, the wisdom that is from above, enables a man to reason different from the man of the world.

Might I say that it enables people to reason in a way which may be quite different from the way a babe in Christ would reason, or a carnal Christian would reason? Now James refers this wisdom and tells us very practically how a humble man should apply it, and then how a rich man should apply it. So what he wants to say is this, he doesn't want philosophically to analyze this wisdom and try to tell us what it's like or what it is in that particular way, but he wants us to see it in action. First of all in the life of the poor man, then in the life of the rich man.

The wisdom of the humble. Look at verse 9. The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. Now you say, that doesn't make sense, have you read it properly? Have a good look at your Bible in case I've made a mistake, will you? The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position.

Yeah, I'm quite right, I'm reading the NIV nevertheless, but I'm quite right, I haven't made a mistake. The reference to the lowly or humble brother seems to point to someone who has become poverty stricken. Now the background is one of trial, persecution, and probably the people that James is now thinking of are

folk who've lost everything.

They're right down at the bottom of the ladder, they've got nothing as far as the things of this world are concerned. They're minus home, minus property, minus two cars, minus even a donkey, an ass to ride on, they have nothing. They've lost everything, the barrel is dry.

And James is evidently thinking of someone or of some people who have been considerably humiliated in that way. Even so, he quite clearly and deliberately bids the Christian brother, engulfed in such dire extremity, to boast, literally to take pride in his high position. James, what on earth are you talking about? This is really a riddle.

I'm right down bottom, I've lost everything. What do you mean when you tell me to boast in my high position? Well you see, he's addressing Christians. And I can put it to you in the simple form of a picture.

If you're a Christian man, if you're a Christian woman, you have two banking accounts. Well, suppose, there may be very little in the banking account that you have down here that contains your few dollars, whatever they're worth, or many for that matter, but you have a banking account and your dollars and your cents are there. But you have another banking account and you lay up treasure in heaven where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal, and wherein flesh untouched the treasure.

Now, says James, don't be silly, don't be foolish. When the one banking account runs a little bit low and you even move into the red, keep your eyes on the other, because it's always full. When in terms of material things you lack and you can say, I have nothing that I can really call my own, don't allow that to blind you to the fact that in Christ Jesus you have all things pertaining to life and godliness.

That you have been blessed, to quote the Apostle Paul, with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ. Now, this is as psychologically sound as it is spiritually necessary. You see, the tragedy is that so many of us forget that we have two banking accounts anyway, and that they're quite separate, the one from the other.

And when things go ill with us materially, we tend to think, well, now I've lost everything. Brother or sister, you can only speak like that. I can only speak like that when I'm blind to realities, if I'm a Christian.

I should not allow an evil day materially to blind my eyes to the fact that whether I'm a pauper or a prince, in terms of things material, I reign with Christ on the throne spiritually, and all things are mine in him, so James is saying. So when you've been thrust right down, groveling in the dust, and you're under the feet of men and of circumstances, being trampled upon, says James, by the grace of God and the wisdom of God, have a good look at your heavenly banking account and see what you have in your crucified, risen, reigning, coming, crowned Lord Jesus Christ. Some of us need to do that tonight, and it'll give ballast to our lives in days of storm and in days of trial, to remember that though we do not have much in the bank down the road, in the bank up in glory, we have all and more.

Wisdom and the poverty stricken, the wisdom of God as it relates to the humble, as the person who's sorely tried. Now, in order for us to see what this wisdom is or what it does, James takes us to the next, the wisdom of the rich. How is this wisdom to apply to the man who is rich? Well now, this is a very challenging word if you happen to be among this group of people, but the one who is rich should take pride in his low position.

He's thinking, of course, of a rich brother in Christ who's lost many things, too. Perhaps he hasn't lost his riches. I don't know how James is thinking about it.

He doesn't make it quite clear, but he certainly has been humble, and he certainly has suffered. He's not unscathed in the persecution, but James says, the one who is rich should take pride in his low position because he will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant.

Its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business. The rich man, catapulted from his earthly comfort, rudely turfed out of his cozy circumstances by persecution, will, if he has found divine wisdom, learn to rejoice in his very lean and low circumstances.

He will learn to say to himself, this is good for me, but I've lost my cozy comforts. Why? For the simple reason that the circumstances of the storm will serve to show up the reality of life. And in James's inimitable way, the realities are these.

Anything and everything that you can buy with silver and gold only needs the heat to rise a little bit further or the wind to blow a little bit faster, and the whole thing shrivels like a flower in the desert. There is nothing that money can buy which you can hold on to and which will hold on to you. It only awaits the rising of the sun into its heat and it'll wither away or the blowing of God's wind a little faster and it's gone.

You see, of all people, the rich man needs to learn that lesson because one of the great tragedies of being made the custodian of riches is this. We tend to have a false sense of security. With our checkbook, we can buy anything.

You can get to the head of the queue. You can do anything with your checkbook. Show a bundle of dollars and you can do anything.

Ah, but don't make mistakes, says James. Anything that dollars can buy will ultimately wither and wilt like the flower of the field. Actually, James draws a very vivid picture here in the language in which the New Testament was written and a very familiar picture to those that read this epistle in the first place.

In the desert places in Palestine, if there was a shower of rain, the thin green shoots of grass would sprout very quickly, very quickly. But if one day's burning sunshine would make them vanish as if they'd never been, the scorching heat called the calzone, we call it in English the simoon, it would suddenly come and the whole thing would be dry, dead, banished as if it had never been. So says James, so are the things that can be purchased with silver and gold.

Such is the transitory nature of all that riches can buy. One blow, one blast of wind is enough. It can cause the entire produce to vanish forever.

So let the man, let the man who is rich, glory in the fact that he's been made low, low enough to see that after all these things are ephemeral and passing and transient. I believe it was something arising out of this passage in the epistle of James, and yet I don't know how that can be, but at any rate I'll tell you how I heard it from my predecessor in Westminster Chapel, referring to the great Philip of Macedon, the great Philip of Macedon, warrior, scholar, and a very rich man. Something had happened, somebody, some godly person had been in his presence and had somehow or other got some aspect of the biblical message across to him, wherever it came from, I'm not sure, but it had struck Philip of Macedon with the fact that he cannot hold on to riches and wealth and position and that he must die.

You know what the man did? He arranged that one of his servants should come to him at certain hours every day, I believe four times each day, irrespective of who was with him in his palace, irrespective of what he was doing, irrespective of anything at all, and this servant was to come up to him and say, Sir, Philip of Macedon, you must die. Imagine a man ordering a servant to do that, and he did it. In other words, he was aware of the possibility of a man such as he becoming so involved with his strength and his power and his riches and his castles that he would think of himself as incapable of death.

Wisdom as it relates to the wise, wisdom as it relates to the poor. Now, whichever category you're in, the wisdom that is from above has got something to say to you and something to say to me. Let's use it.

Wisdom's reasoning, wisdom's reward, verse 12, solitary verse, but here it is. Blessed is the man who perseveres under trials, says James, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. The possessors of the wisdom that God gives are never losers, be they rich or be they poor, it makes no difference.

Let them be guided by their wisdom and their blessedness is sure. Now, look at the basic requirement. The basic requirement, says James, is this, that we should persevere.

Blessed is the man who perseveres. What this wisdom is really going to do for you is this, it's going to enable you to go on in the Christian race and in the Christian life, irrespective of riches or of poverty, persecution or its absence. This is a tremendously important word.

If you and I have this divine wisdom, what it will make us do, what it will enable us to do, is this, it's to go on and on and on in the name of our Lord, irrespective of circumstances. You see it exemplified in our Lord Jesus Christ, you see it exemplified in the apostles, but I simply cannot go after the illustrations tonight. Armed with God's freely given wisdom to those who wholeheartedly seek it, the rich and the poor believer will have a ballast that will save the boat from tipping in the sea of life and enable a person to move onwards and to go forwards and to persevere.

That's the first thing. But now, look at the vital revelation that we have here. Persevering brings up the notion of somebody with his teeth clenched and his fists likewise and every muscle taught and all the energy of his soul and of his body is put into the business of running, moving, fighting, going on irrespective of opposition.

Is this what wins the crown of life that the Lord has promised? Well, what does perseverance through trial reveal? Simply grit, courage, power. Well, notice what James puts his finger on. The crown of life, he says, is to those that love him.

In other words, you see, this heavenly wisdom will enable the people of God if they obey it and act by it, to persevere. But it's not the perseverance in and of itself that earns the crown of life or that brings life to its full glory. But it is something that is undercover, something that lies behind it, something that is deeper than the surface.

What's behind this perseverance of a man or of a woman? Well, it's this love of God, love for God. This morning our emphasis was on the love of God for us in Christ and what a theme it is. But James here refers to the fact that if we really have the divine wisdom that enables us to persevere, basically our perseverance is due to this.

It is due to the fact that in some measure we love our God. And the crown of life is to be given to those who love God. It has been promised to those.

Can I bring out what to me is a very important, another important issue here? A question that our age needs to consider with renewed seriousness is this. How should we Christians express our love for God? You see, we live, whether we like it or not, we live in an age which is quite different from the way things were 20 years ago, 30 years ago especially. Apart from the films, you didn't often hear people talk to one another and say, I love you.

Not that there was anything wrong in it 20, 30 years ago, don't misunderstand me, but people didn't used to talk like that. There may have been a few here and there who were a little bit more open than others and they would say to their partners and say to their children how much they loved them. But 20, 30, 40 years ago, people didn't used to put it in words like that.

Some of us don't realize this, so we've forgotten this, but they loved each other. I never heard my father say to my mother, I love you. Neither did I hear my mother ever say to my father, I love you.

But I tell you, there was not a couple that lived on this earth who loved each other more dearly. And we have got into the habit of thinking that the only way of expressing love is saying, I love you. James is telling us that the way to express your love is by persevering in obedience to your law.

Talk about it if you have the freedom of the Spirit. Sing about it if the Spirit of God is in your heart, as you will. But fundamentally, the way to prove our love is by persevering.

And you see, it doesn't matter how well you and I can sing about love or talk about love or shout about love or write about love or whatever you like, unless we are persevering in obedience, it's all empty rattle. The perfect example of this, of course, is that of Peter in John 21. Remember, Peter had denied his Lord three times.

And then in John 21, Jesus arranged that fire of coals in the early morning when Peter and his friends had gone back fishing, caught nothing. And Jesus was there and he prepared breakfast for them. And he'd become the waiter and he got everything ready.

The fish was ready, cooked, and he was to be the waiter. And he was preparing for something, leading up for something. And then he turned to Simon Peter and said, Simon, son of John, do you love me? He shook Peter a little bit.

And Peter said, yes, Lord, you know that I love you. Okay, says Jesus, feed my lambs. He didn't say write a poem about it.

There's nothing wrong in writing a poem about it. He didn't say sing a song about it. Nothing wrong in singing a song about it.

He didn't say write it on my hand with a bit of charcoal or on your own arm. I love Jesus. Didn't say that.

Feed my lambs, he said. Silence. After the long, apparently long silence, very long as far as Peter was concerned, Jesus said to him again, Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me? Yes, Lord, says Peter uncomfortably.

You know that I love you. And Jesus said, take care of my sheep. Got it? Now we're not over yet.

Another long silence. At least it was long for Peter. And Jesus asked the question the third time, Simon, son of John, do you love me? And Simon was a little bit rattled.

He was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, do you love me? He said, Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you. Jesus said, feed my sheep.

I tell you the truth. When you were younger, you dressed yourself and you went where you where you wanted. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.

But go on feeding my sheep and tending my lambs and tending my lambs. That's the way to prove your love for me, even when you don't want to do it. But that's not everything.

Peter saw John nearby. The disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, Lord, who is going to betray you? And Peter saw John.

You remember, they were great friends. And Peter saw John. He said, Lord, what about him? Jesus answered, if I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You follow me.

My friends, have you got it? A biblical way of expressing love for God is obedience to his commandments and doing his will and persevering on to the end of the road. Come rough weather, come shining sunshine, alone or in the crowd. I don't want anybody to stop writing poems because of anything I'm saying or writing hymns because of anything I'm saying.

Come and sing your songs of love. But my friend, remember this, you can sing and you can sob and you can cry and you can assure people I love Jesus. If you're not obeying his command, it's all froth.

A vital revelation is this, a crown of life coming to its maturity in this world and in the world to come is for those who love him and persevere. The blessing received, he will receive the crown, the victor's crown or the crown of life. Now that must bring me to the last point because there's something too important here to miss.

Wisdom's reassurance, verses 13 to 18. You followed, I trust so far. Now let's come here to a word of reassurance.

Two things. One, God is not the author of temptation to evil. If you're a man or a woman of God and you've fallen upon hard times, be sure of this.

God, says James, is not the source of temptation. This is a very important denial. When tempted, no one should say, God is tempting me.

For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone. Now that's clear enough. It is all too easy, you see, to form false notions of God when things have gone a little bit awkwardly with us, especially when we are going through times of prolonged testing, persecution, loss of material wealth, unemployment.

Oh, it's so easy to talk about this. Lord, help us. In these circumstances, I say it is very easy and very possible to have wrong notions of God, and we think that God is seducing us to evil.

James assures us that God is too holy to be himself tempted. You can't tempt God to do evil, neither does he tempt anyone else. That God tests his creatures is everywhere, conceded in scripture.

That is, he tests us in order for us to show our faith and express our hope in him. He tests us in order to bring out the grace that is in us, that we may manifest ourselves as truly Christian to the world around us and to him above us. He tests us, but God tests us in order to bring out the grace in us.

Satan tempts us in order to bring out the evil in us. God never tempts us like that. He will never put anything on your path to draw you towards evil of any kind.

If it is there, you can be sure of this. God didn't do it. This is part of the divine wisdom.

If you have this wisdom, you will always know that and you will always count on this. God does not tempt you. It hasn't come from God.

There's a very instructive declaration here then. If God does not entice us to sin, then where does temptation come from? And now many of us would find it very comfortable to say, well, it's the old devil again. Poor old devil, he gets blamed for a lot of things and in the first place, he's not responsible.

Not always. Now I've got no pact with the devil. Make no bones about it.

He's too much of a nuisance for me. And I don't want to plead his cause for one solitary moment. But you know there's something comforting in being able to say, oh, it's the devil after me again.

The devil's at my heels. The devil does this, that, and the other. Poor old devil.

Now we've become so devil conscious, we are not God conscious. Listen to what James says. If you've got this heavenly wisdom, you'll recognize it, he says.

Each one is tempted when by his own evil desire, your own, my own, he is dragged away and enticed. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin. And sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death.

The wretched thing called sin actually starts where? Brother and sister, I know it's hard to say it, but the book says it, and I must say it. It starts in your heart and mine. Right there.

It's there like a pea in the pod of your heart. It's there in your desire. In our human desires, as fallen creatures, there are the seeds of temptation in our own desires.

Leave the devil out of it for a moment. The basis of it, the first ingredient in it, is right in our natures, in our desires. Not necessarily desires that are always evil, but just a desire as desire.

But how does our ordinary human desire come to spawn such a monstrous fruit as sin? Well, James replies using two expressive verbs. Look at the verse again. Each one is tempted when by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

Dragged away and enticed. The late Dr. G. Campbell Morgan of Westminster Chapel insisted that there are two metaphors here that come from two different worlds, but they're related. The first verb, he says, comes from the hunting world.

It is a hunting metaphor. Having reference to a creature being drawn away from the safety of its normal habitat, and it's drawn and it's enticed out. You can think of it, can't you? If you're a hunter, or if you know

anything about hunting, you're enticing the creature out of its habitat, and he comes, or it comes, and sooner or later he's enough.

That's the first. The second verb, enticed, comes from the fishing world, and envisages the use of a bait in order to seduce the fish, to make a bid for what is apparently to its taste and advantage. I don't know how a fish thinks, but if a fish does think, it looks up and it sees the bait there coming down into the water, says, my, I like that.

That'd be a great mouthful. And the fish determines, and he jumps even up out of the water, maybe to get it, and only finds that he's entangled to a hook, and death has come. In each case, says Campbell Morgan, there is a deviation from the given line of rectitude in order to satisfy personal desire, and satisfy personal desire in an unnatural way, in an abnormal way.

Now the essence of the temptation that leads to sin is to be seduced, to satisfy what may be a legitimate desire, but in an illegitimate way. To satisfy a legitimate desire in a manner in which God has not appointed, or which God has positively proscribed. There temptation becomes actual sin, then there is a yielding on the part of the individual.

He's seduced out of his habitat, or like a fish out of the water to the bait, he's seduced, and he gives in to the seduction. He agrees to go. He entertains the suggestion or the notion, and he says, I will go for it.

That's sin. It is not sin at the first suggestion. The first suggestion may be rebutted.

Jesus was given three separate suggestions, yet he did not sin. He considered the three suggestions mentally. He examined them.

He scrutinized them. He looked at them. He dissected them.

He saw them for what they were. There was no sin in that, but he didn't heal. He didn't embrace them.

He didn't accept the suggestions. He said, no, get behind me, Satan. Sin is born when I entertain the notion and go with it, and say, okay, I will.

The process is not yet complete. You see, we Christians of the 20th century especially think that the process is complete when sin has happened. The process is never complete with sin.

James goes on and adds, and sin, when it is finished, when it is full grown, brings forth death. So here is the whole thing. Desire, enticed, received, agreed to.

Sin is committed. Yes. Here is the wisdom that is from above.

God never sets you going along that route. Never, never, never, says James. God will never ask you to do anything that will lead you along that route.

Never. Be sure of that. The last thing is this.

God is the exclusive author of every good and every perfect gift. God will never lead you up a street like this, be it a cul-de-sac or be it a way to death. God will never lead you that way.

God is quite a different person. Don't be deceived, my dear brothers, says James in the NIV. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change

like shifting shadows, who chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

Now can I summarize that? That God is not the author of sin needs to be made clear, as James has done in the preceding verse. That, however, is not the end of the story. In order to be reassured in our Christian life and thus enable to persevere through our temptations and trials and tribulations, we need to know not simply that God will do us no harm, but we need to know that God is the source of everything good.

And you see, this is the very thing we need when we're in trials and temptations. In the midst of my trials, in the midst of the chaos, in the midst of the bewilderment, when everything's falling around me, I need to know God is not tempting me. He may be testing me, but he's not tempting me, not seducing me to do evil.

Never. He may be giving me the opportunity of trying my spiritual wings, to claim my spiritual possessions, to call upon his name, to have grace upon grace. Yes, he's doing that, but never seducing me to sin.

But what is more, the God who is doing this is the source of every good and perfect gift, and he has everything I need. I may turn to him for whatever is my need at any given moment. You know, there is a legend.

I don't know whether you are aware of it or not. It's years since I read it for the first time, but I came across it again recently. That's why I'm able to refer to it.

I don't remember these things, but some people are good at this. But there is an old legend concerning the death of a king of an ancient kingdom whose court officials were given the task of choosing a successor from two twin sons that had been born to his wife just about the time when he died. These courtiers went into the room, and the two children, twins, two boys, were sleeping.

They examined them as best they could. They were not medical. They had no means other than that of common mortals to judge between two babies, and they argued with themselves, well, they look very much the same.

They make the same little baby noises, and one is not looking as if he's going to be a giant, the other a dwarf or anything like that. How can we choose? Really, they didn't know how to choose. But as they were going out from the room, one of the men turned back, and he saw something that struck him.

He saw that one of the twins was sleeping with both his little hands tight-fisted like this, and the other little knight was sleeping with both hands wide open. And he said, men, he said, look, one of these twins is sleeping tight-fisted as if he's a fighter or a miser, or both, and the other is sleeping with his hands wide open as if he's a friendly, genial sort of little character. Evidently, they chose him to be king, and they chose a right.

My friend, what I want to tell you is this. It's no fable. It's truth.

We have no tight-fisted God. Ours is an open-handed heavenly Father. He's the Father of the heavenly lights, and we may conclude, wrongly, that as there are shadows caused by the heavenly lights, God changes, too, and there are shadows in the divine character.

No, no, no, says James. There is no shadow caused by turning or deviation in him. He's unchangeably the same open-handed, open-hearted God, and to prove that, he says, let me remind you, of his own will begot he us by the word of truth.

What do you mean, James? This. We've been born again, have we not, fellow believers? We've been given new birth. How did it come about? Of his own will.

We didn't ask for it. You know, this is, I'm amazed that more people don't recognize this. See, you had no say in who was going to be your father.

Now, men and women, forgive me for being so awkward in the pulpit here and saying a thing like that, but I want to get it home. I don't care who you are. You had no say in choosing your own father, nor your mother, but your father and your mother determined they were going to have a child.

They made the choice. Now, says James, how did you come into the spiritual world so that you are rich even though when you're poor you may be poor? Of his own will. There was nothing in you to deserve it.

He didn't even ask for it. You couldn't because you weren't there. He chose you in eternity, and he brought you to birth in time, and he sent his evangelist, he sent his servants to preach the gospel to you, and his spirit to draw you, and he wrote upon you, and he brought you into life, and it was all of his own will eliciting a response from your will.

He chose you first before you chose him. That's the kind of God ours is. He calls you to your riches.

He calls you to be a prince, and he hasn't changed. You need to know that in your trials. Not only that God will do you no harm or tempt you to do evil, he's a God whose hand is always open wide with anything and everything you need.

So what? Keep persevering. Let wisdom have her perfect work. Employ the wisdom that is from above.

Use it. Apply it. Live by it.

Walk by it. Serve by it. Die by it.

An awful lot in this epistle of James. I don't know why Martin Luther called this an epistle of straw. Surely he didn't have a good taste for food at that time.

There's hay here. Better, there's cream here. There's rich fodder here.

There's some of the richest of all the spiritual food of the New Testament here. May the spirit of God grant us gathered here tonight. May the spirit of God enable us to cry and to seek this heavenly wisdom, and in possessing it, to march forward together irrespective of circumstances, in order that we may prove that our God is the God revealed in his Son, expressed in the cross, and he hasn't changed with the years.

Let us pray. Our heavenly Father, your word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our way, and yet we have to confess that sometimes we read it only in the light of our human wisdom, and we know little of the wisdom that comes from above, that reasons in the manner in which this passage tells us we ought to reason, teach us how to grow in grace. Lead us onwards and forwards and upwards, we pray.

Enable us to persevere, though the road may sometimes be rough and lonely, and grant that having fed upon your word and been guests at your table again today, we may find that we are supernaturally enabled, that we have manner that has come down from the very heaven of the heavens, even your own dear Son, and ours is the water of life that springs from beneath the very throne of God, who quenches the deepest thirst of the redeemed. We ask these things with forgiveness of sin, through Christ our Savior. Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/4/SID4737.mp3>

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