

Get Wisdom from Heaven!

Lessons for Overcomers:

James 3:13-18

November 12, 2006

Bethany Church

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I became acquainted about ten years ago. In a short time, he influenced so much of what I do. His example was the inspiration for TEAM Rochester. When I visited his church eight years ago, it had reached four thousand in worship and was increasing 25 percent a year. I spent a week on his church campus in the World Prayer Center, a 5 million dollar, high-tech hub for networking needs and mobilizing prayer around the globe. That was his inspiration. This year his church reached 14,000 in attendance and he served as president of the largest or second largest ecumenical organization in the United States. All of this grew from extended times in prayer and a small congregation that met in the basement of his home. Last week, he was exposed for drug use and immorality. He was overcome by evil. The story for Ted Haggard, former president of the National Association of Evangelicals and the fired, founding pastor of New Life Church in Colorado Springs, is still unfolding. His story emphasizes the first lesson for overcomers. We need to get on the right side. Life is not about God backing us up. It is about us being friends of God in his creation. We all are invitees in God's world.

The challenge with overcoming is that the battle doesn't end when we achieve a spiritual victory. The battle didn't end when Ted Haggard experienced success, and it hasn't ended when he suffered defeat. Another challenge to overcoming is that results are often not immediate. How long did Ted walk the path of impurity before its fruit was harvested? That also happens with obedience. How long does it take for God's wisdom to prove out in your life?

Do you remember the story of Israel's exodus from Egypt? When Moses obeyed God and confronted Pharaoh, things got worse. The Israelites didn't curse Pharaoh; they cursed Moses. They cursed Moses at the Red Sea. They cursed Moses in the desert. They cursed Moses frequently. Turn in your pew Bibles to page 818, John 6:66-67. Jesus, in the synagogue in Capernaum, gave the teaching that helps us today understand both his life and the sacrament of Holy Communion. At the synagogue in Capernaum, Jesus talked about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. It was difficult for his contemporaries to accept it. The disciples complained about how offensive this teaching was. Let's read this passage:

At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him. Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, "Are you going to leave, too?" (John 6:66-67, NLT)

Jesus sounds wistful, "Are you going to leave me too?" I've never uttered those words, but they must be painful. Who could tell that Jesus was implementing the wisdom of God with his teaching at Capernaum? Who could tell a week later? Who could tell a month later? When would his actions be vindicated? Posthumously! After his death!

To some degree that was true of Lincoln and Martin Luther King, Jr. It was true of many signers of the Declaration of Independence. It was true for every American soldier who died on the beaches of Normandy or the islands of the South Pacific. They never saw the fruit of their sacrifice. Their efforts were not validated while they lived.

Are we performing the will of God? Sometimes, the immediate results are deceptive and misleading. They are antithetical or opposite of the goal we're pursuing. That is why we read a description of heavenly wisdom in the Bible. If we are to overcome the challenges we face as individuals, the concerns we carry as a congregation, the difficulties we have as a community and nation, we need to act with wisdom from heaven that is not poisoned by sin. How then, do

we know we have it? For example, how do we know that we as a congregation are doing what God wants us to do? How do we know that we are operating in wisdom from heaven? How do you know whether you are acting in God's wisdom in accepting a job offer? How do you single people know you are operating in God's wisdom in selecting a mate? How do we know these things when the fruit of our actions might not show up for a season?

God has spoken about this. In the third chapter of James, God shows what his wisdom is not, and what it is.

God's wisdom is not self-promoting. It is not self-centered in any way. If we promote Bethany, we are not operating in God's wisdom. If we seek to fill pews, because we'll feel better, we are not acting with wisdom from heaven. If we invite people here because we have something wonderful to share, we have good news for their lives, we have help for their souls, we have blessing for their hearts, and we have hope for them, then we are walking with God's understanding, with wisdom from above. God's wisdom is not self-promoting.

God's wisdom is not jealous. Jealousy is the fear of loss. We are jealous when we fear losing something that we believe we own. We may fear losing the affections of other persons, their partnership in our lives, or losing things we own. Loss brings sadness. However, acting in jealousy, acting out of the fear of loss, is not God's wisdom. We sometimes call someone jealous when they covet what another person has. Covetousness is a form of selfish ambition or self-promotion. God's wisdom is not tainted with those kinds of attitudes.

Instead, wisdom from above is pure from those attitudes. It is peace loving, gentle, willing to yield, merciful, honest, impartial and full of actions that care for others. If that is the nature of the actions we are taking, then we are acting in God's wisdom. That is the sign of God's wisdom, not immediate success.

If Jesus was judged any time prior to his death, he would have been considered a failure. He alienated the opinion-makers in his mission field. Only after death did his wisdom become apparent. Nevertheless, the signs of godly wisdom that we mentioned were there even in his childhood. Remember how he was yielding or submissive to his parents?

Since we can actually see when someone is operating in godly wisdom, how do we get it? How do we get wisdom from heaven?

Joshua, most the time, was an overcomer. However, one time he was overcome. Some occupants of the Promised Land devised a ruse to preserve their life there. They sent representatives to Joshua that looked like they had come from a great distance. When Joshua and his counselors looked at all the facts, they decided that they were making a treaty with a people who lived in a distant land. They thought they were fulfilling God's command; however, the Bible said that they failed to consult God. The result was a lot of trouble down the road.

The keys to divine wisdom are two-fold: asking and believing. They are seen in Joshua's failure, and in Jesus' promise. Jesus promised that anyone who asks will receive, anyone who seeks will find, and anyone who knocks will find an open door. God's Spirit says:

If you need wisdom — if you want to know what God wants you to do — ask him, and he will gladly tell you. He will not resent your asking. But when you ask him, be sure that you really expect him to answer, for a doubtful mind is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. People like that should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. (James 1:5-7, NLT)

In God we have a great Father. In Jesus, we have a terrific shepherd. The Lord does respond to our call. The challenge in overcoming is whether we will ask for wisdom and whether we will believe it as we receive it? Will we look for the signs of divine wisdom that God has give us? The first lesson for overcomers is to get on the right side, God's side. The second lesson is to get wisdom from heaven. It is available to all who will ask and believe.