

# *Sermon Text for July 27, 2014*

by Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Proverbs 11:17-21, James 3:13-18

“The good, the bad, the ugly”

We are finishing up chapter 3 of James which leaves us with only a few, well two more chapters left. James is a constant reminder for us that our actions, what we do, serve as a measuring stick for our relationship with our Savior Jesus Christ. As much as we would like to separate our faith from our works, sometimes using our faith to justify our lack of works or our sinful actions, James says no, the two are connected. Today is no different in our Scripture reading.

While I was in Anchorage I noticed that my friend wore jingle bells everywhere he went and had a set for me to wear. We went and panned for gold in a remote section of Quartz Creek near Cooper Landing and as we made our way out he would call out just so that we would not surprise the bear. The day I arrived the headlines of the newspapers were that of another jogger who had been mauled by a brown bear or a grizzly while they were out on their morning run.

It is important to let others know that you are coming and not surprise them or leave them in a position where they are forced to be defensive. James has nothing surprising in his writings. He gives us insight that we have already learned but wants them to be reinforced so that we can never say we didn't know. We have heard James' lessons, they make sense to us.

Today he tells us that we will sow that which we reap. We know and we are reminded that our actions should be that which God has laid before us, but the world gets in the way and offers so many appealing options and alternatives. The Lord tells us to reach out to those in need and the world tells us make sure you have enough liability and don't get too far involved because they may take advantage of you.

The good, the bad, and the ugly are all reflections of our attempt to replicate the life of Christ with very limited success. The good is a result of wisely choosing the way of the Lord. The bad is when we choose to listen to the world, and the ugly is the result or repercussion of listening to the world.

I'm not sure why it is but there are some Sundays where I have so many stories and examples to share that I feel the exposition of Scripture is a bit overlooked. Other Sundays, like today where Scripture is just screaming to be interpreted without the necessary trappings of examples to frame our Scripture. So today, just follow along as we look at James 3:13-18.

James begins by stating that our lives are a reflection of how we actually live. If we have a good life then we are living according to God's desires. If we have a bad life then there is much ugliness, what we call sin, that is a core part of how we are living.

He begins by talking of the good life and how we can show that life through our works. What we do will reflect, he says, a gentleness born of wisdom. Throughout the morning we are going to have to place ourselves in one of these categories: good, bad, or ugly. They have to do with our relationships with other people. Do we have a gentleness in our dealings with people which will then translate to a good life. James begins with this concept because if we will reap whatever we sow then if we have a gentleness born of wisdom we will have a good life. Hang in there with me, it's not that simple, I know, but James sets it up that way to begin at least.

He then offsets the good we ought to have if we are living right, with the bad which produces the ugly. That revolves around the wisdom of the world. Beginning in verse 14 he alls out the primary culprits which would be envy, which equals the bad, and selfish ambition, which equals the ugly. He tells us that if we have a these attributes in our hearts the product will be: we see it in verse 16: disorder and wickedness of every kind. Boy am I glad that the Trustees painted my office and Laura set it up to look sweet. Disorder on my desk has always been my mode of being. But we are talking about a disorder in life that reflects itself in wickedness and chaos and confusion that is not like running around with your head cut off trying to make one appointment and take one kid after another and not having any sense of when it will end. That is not the disorder that we are talking about.

James is addressing a disorder that leads to wickedness which could manifest itself in being so addicted or caught up in your own life that you may leave your kid in the car for a few hours thinking he might be okay when it is 90 degrees outside. This type of disorder leads you to make decisions based on solely your own interests often at the expense of other people.

The end of 14 and all of 15 give us more details and you can and you should read them on your own. He tells us this wisdom of pursuing envy and selfish ambition is indeed wisdom and it will allow you to succeed, but he calls it worldly wisdom. So the juxtaposition here is the Wisdom of our Father which manifests itself in gentleness and the Wisdom of the world which makes itself known through envy and selfish ambition. Both wisdoms but one produces the good, or gentleness, and the other produces the bad, or envy and selfish ambition.

The underlying assumption in all of this is that there is a direct cause and effect relationship between how we live our lives, or what we sow, and how our lives turn out to be, or

what we reap. We live in gentleness then we will reap wisdom and a godly life. We follow the wisdom of the world then we will succeed in worldly standards but the result will be disorder and wickedness.

If you live right God will reward, if you live wrong, the world will reward. Proverbs gives the same kind of message. The righteous will live, verse 19, but whoever pursues evil will die. We know that there actually isn't a direct line between clean living and a good bounce when your golf ball hits a tree. We know in real life the righteous get cancer and die. We know in real life the wicked are able to avoid a painful death and even seem to be happy. We know in real life that the rain falls on the good and the bad alike. We no longer believe that the good will be rewarded by God with a good, carefree life. How do we know that? Look at the examples of the good that we have in the Bible: Job, he suffered tremendously. Jesus, he was perfect in every way, did not sin, but he suffered more than anyone who lived before or since him.

We believe that all that happens has a purpose and a meaning whether we understand it or not. So when the wicked seem to be rewarded for their dishonesty we don't attribute that to God rewarding them, and the same goes for the righteous. In fact, Paul tells us very directly in Romans 3:10, who is righteous among us? Not one of us, no, not one. He also tells us in Romans 7:15 and following: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want, I do." None of us is able to consistently do the good that we know that God wants us to do. We all want to be more motivated to spend more time at church to help out with new programs and new ways to reach out to the poor and the helpless. That is what we know we ought to do, but we don't.

But we will have an opportunity to do more of that. August 31, mark your calendar, it is vocation Sunday. We need all of you to be in prayer for yourself. You may not be used to it, but we need you to pray for yourself. Ask God to give you insight and wisdom on what he might have you do here at the church. What is your call to do good here for the church. How can you help other people, how can you help your church home. There is a whole variety of opportunities for you. Is it serving in the nursery? August 31 we are going to offer that to God and put ourselves to work. The good, we can't do it on our own willpower. Only by the grace of God.

But the current strife we may be facing in our personal lives is a product of the envy or selfish ambition either of us personally or someone in our lives. We can draw a line between broken relationships and behavior that follows worldly wisdom. We can extend out from our

individual lives to also churches. This was true in Paul's day as well as he wished the church in Corinth would be mature and that the people in the church would follow the wisdom of the Father. We can find an unhealthy church and see that it is filled with people who enjoy rolling their eyes when the same person disrupts the service or when a new piece of information about someone becomes fodder for those who might gossip. The Christian community should not provide another forum for human jealousy and ambition to work themselves out. Disorder and wickedness is a result of sin.

But James gives us a way of being that we are able to follow. He calls it wisdom from above and he lays out 7 attributes of this wisdom that we have to pursue which are in direct opposition to the wisdom of the world that is so dangerous. We simply cannot cover all 7 that James covers, this is an example where if we had a class I would love to cover all those things that I am not able to cover in a sermon

We are called to live a good life. There is one thing we haven't mentioned that needs to be lifted up. The source of this good life must be our Savior Jesus Christ. This very same Jesus who lived the good life by emptying himself as we find in Philippians 2:7 and became obedient even to the point of death on a cross. James tells us our good works have to bear a gentleness, the type of meekness and humility our Savior bore upon the cross. May God bless us as we try to do just that. Amen.