

'Asking with intent'

Grace be with you and peace from God, our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ

He who possesses the Son of God possesses life. – 1Jn.5,12

Collect:

Almighty God, you have broken the tyranny of sin and sent into our hearts the Spirit of your Son. Give us grace to dedicate our freedom to your service, that all people may know the glorious liberty of the children of God; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

I rest in God alone,
from Him comes my salvation;
my soul finds rest in Him,
my fortress – I'll not be shaken.

My hope is in the Lord,
my honour and strength;
my refuge is in Him for ever,
my trust and all of my heart -
in Him alone my soul finds rest.
I rest in God alone...

O trust in Him, you people,
pour out your hearts,
for God is our refuge for ever,
my trust and all of my heart -
in Him alone my soul finds rest.
O trust in Him, you people.
I rest in God alone...

John Daniels

Reading: **James 1, 5-11**

Sermon:

James 1, 5-11

Dear friends, brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus

To be a Christian and belong to the household of God is sooner or later to face trials and temptations – trials of the kind we could avoid and temptations of the kind we could fine well yield to were it not for the fact that to do so would put us at a distance to God’s word and will! Why is this? It’s because the world’s design about what life is for – how it is best lived and its promise fulfilled – is different from that of God and is antagonistic towards it. We are with regard to life’s true design in a conflict area, involved in an either-or choice that is thoroughgoing.

“No one can serve two masters”, says Jesus. “Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Mammon.”

(Mt.6,24) He alludes to this same conflict and the either-or choice it poses from the perspective of following him when he says: *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?”* (Lk.9,23-25)

These words of Jesus can help us, or even make us, see that the attempt to solve the conflict by somehow blending together the two designs and in places where they differ making them agree, at no cost to the world’s design (!), is a self-deceptive strategy to hide the nature of one’s choice. How does the church, how does the person of faith, prevail in the trials and temptations that arise from this conflict between God’s and man’s design for life? This, it seems to me, is the question James is addressing. And rightly so as he asks what genuine, authentic Christianity looks like.

There is the truth, isn’t there, which experience confirms, that it is not easy to always do the right thing and make the right choices: to think consistently in terms of God’s design and follow the way of faith, to see when your faith is being tried and tested by an invitation, or by pressure, to align yourself with what sets God’s design to one side. And then there is the experience of courage failing and of the will being terribly weak and the powers of discernment and faithful reasoning also!

What is the *Christian* response to this? It is to recognise what is lacking and then proceed to attain it! *“If any of you lacks wisdom,”* says James, *“you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.”* We need wisdom. Yes, of course. But the wisdom we need is that which is from above: wisdom that is coming to us, is given to us, from where it is held for us.

There is a profound reason for this definition of the wisdom we need, and the more clearly we see it the more truly and readily we shall ask God for it.

You see, God’s design is fully revealed and realised in Jesus Christ. This is most important, because without it James’ exhortation to pray for wisdom would lack any basis in reality. In Jesus Christ we see God’s design revealed and realised. We see in him the wisdom that we lack, we see that wisdom in all its glory, in all its strength, steadfast and true, full of faith, hope and love. But not only is Jesus the example of God’s design, Christ is also to be the creator of God’s design in us! That is why he bore in judgment the sins of the world, that is why God raised him from the dead on the third day as He had said He would, that is why he ascended to God’s right hand and that is why he sent the Holy Spirit to indwell the believer: it was all for the purpose of a real *effect*, namely that Christ through

spiritual union with the believer should be the Creator in him of God's design – the image of God restored.

Paul expresses this beautifully in 2Cor.3,18: *“And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory (that is, we see in Christ Jesus the image of the invisible God – Col.1,15), are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”* The effect of a living union with Christ through faith by the power of the Holy Spirit is that we are being *“created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness”* (Eph.4,24).

So we understand that the wisdom we are to ask for comes to us not from within or from the world, but from God, because Christ is with God and Christ is our wisdom. Hear again Scripture: *“Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.”* (1Cor.1) *“...Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”* Col.2,3)

This is what we are to seek and tap into as we face the trials and temptations to faith at the hand of much that seeks to thwart God's design about life as revealed in His Word. We are to ask because there is something God has prepared and wants to give!

James says that we should ask God for it, and we now understand why: because the wisdom we lack for making those choices that conform to God's design and express it and for choosing the faith-option before its alternative, is with Christ in God.

That is, we must seek for it by prayer and must expect that it will be given to us. When James says that God *“gives generously to all without finding fault”* he helps us to trust that God who made Christ to be wisdom *for us* will not count our fault against us when it causes us to ask Him for it! When we ask for God's wisdom in Jesus Christ and in his name, we ask for that which meets our fault with mercy, our sin with grace, our guilt with forgiveness, our failure with renewal, our weakness with strength – and it will be given to us.

Not in a way that gives us fulness of wisdom all at once, we remain needful of asking God for wisdom and so provide for grace to do its work within us. It is a process, a case of becoming what we are in Christ not of instantaneous maturity. And it may at times feel like we are not growing nor becoming wiser in the way we are asking, which is likely to be the case when our understanding is being enlarged about the extent to which we lack wisdom.

But always it is true that *“it will be given to us”*, and so we must expect when we pray.

Indeed, James points out that failure to expect it renders such prayer powerless: *“That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.”* When we doubt while we pray, such that we don't really expect God to give us what He made for us – why do we pray? We might as well not. Such a prayer doesn't pray (doesn't ask), placing as it does God under an ever-changing sea of human reservation: *‘I'll ask, but I just know he won't!’, ‘I'll ask, but I don't really need it!’, ‘I'll ask, but really I wish I did not have to!’* All such asking reveals an unwillingness or inability to credit God with the very thing He did to save us: the saving, helping, redeeming, healing work of Jesus Christ! It removes the condition for/of prayer.

Therefore let us heed James' word: *“But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and instable in all they do.”*

Dear friends, the days we live in ask for the wisdom that realises God's design for life. Let us understand that it is given in Christ and is received through faith by those who ask for it. Let us acknowledge our lack of it and make use of the promise of prayer.

AMEN

Lord God, we thank you that we are not without help in the trials and temptations we encounter on our way. Our help is with you and comes to us from you. You give generously to all who ask, and we are called to ask because asking is just one step away from the praise that is due your name. Grant us a spirit of prayer as well as a heart and mind awake to our need for wisdom, and grant us faith that does not doubt you. We ask in the name of Jesus whom you made to be wisdom for us. Amen

- time of prayer / intercession – [what concerns we have on our heart we pour out before God and seek in thanksgiving the gift of His blessings]

'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen

Now may the peace of God which passes all our understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you. AMEN
