

## Wisdom's Song of Life (James 3:17-18)

1. Humans are beings seeking after happiness. Under normal circumstances, one would not value misfortune nor ignore happiness. It is for this reason that the ultimate ethical question of philosophers throughout the history of mankind has been "what is happiness?" Dr. George Eman Vaillant, a professor at Harvard University, claims in his book *Aging Well* that there are 7 conditions for happiness: Maturity regarding pain, lifetime learning, satisfactory marriage, regular exercise, abstinence from smoking, moderate drinking, and appropriate weight. He argues that if we can achieve at least four of these conditions before turning 60, we would have a happy life.

Is this true? Can we truly be happy if we follow Vaillant's teaching and fulfill these conditions?

2. The Bible identifies sin as the single source of all human misfortune. The Scripture reading today categorizes people into two types: those who are unhappy, and those who are happy. The unhappy ones live with an earthly wisdom. James tells us that this wisdom is unspiritual and devilish. In contrast, the happy ones live with wisdom from above. This is a gift from God. Thus, the answer to the question "what is happiness" depends decisively on what kind of wisdom we will live with.

3. The source behind earthly wisdom is Satan. Therefore, such wisdom is captive to sensual pleasure and greed. Life grounded on such wisdom only produces emptiness and pain. The end of such life is sinfulness in its various forms.

4. Wisdom from above comes from God. Life of this wisdom is one led by the Holy Spirit. There is true happiness and satisfaction. James tells us how this wisdom from above comes to us.

5. Wisdom from above is founded upon purity. Purity means cleanness without fault. According to the Bible, such purity is unattainable through human effort and toil. It is gained only through the power of Christ's blood. The blood of Christ spilled upon the cross is the greatest love. Through this love God makes us pure.

This love calls us to respond with true faith. Faith is the human response to God's love. The rich young man from Mark 10 asks Jesus, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answers, "sell all that you have and give to the poor." At this, the rich young man went away sorrowful. This man could not respond because he did not know God's love. Jesus teaches his disciples this divine love regarding salvation: "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible

with God." Jesus likened true faith to a mustard seed: "If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you." (Luke 17:6, ESV)

6. Above all, purity calls for true faith in Christ. This faith is seen through the fruit of peace. Jesus taught that we can know a tree by its fruit. Similarly we can know our discipleship to Christ by the fruit of peace in our lives. Peace indicates wholeness in interpersonal relationship. It is the power of love radiating between people. It is the love of Christ working through my life to reach my neighbors. True faith in Christianity is neither speculative or ideological. Instead, it is very much practical. Since Jesus died for us, we in turn love my neighbors. When Christians act as peacemakers, they will be called children of God.

7. In verse 18, James discusses about those who make peace. He proclaims that those who make peace sow the fruits of righteousness in peace. The fruits of righteousness refers to life that is peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy, and good fruits as listed in verse 17. All of these will bear fruit in the life of a peacemaker. Gentleness is patience for others. Openness to reason is respect for others. Mercy is sympathizing with those in pain. Good fruits refer to gentleness manifesting in practical help. Impartiality is a heart that stands firm in truth. Lastly, sincerity is living boldly without lies.

8. James' teaching reflects that of Christ. He is developing in more detail the teachings of Christ. Jesus said that a true Christian loves God and loves neighbors. Loving God means having true faith. Having true faith means believing in the love of Christ on the cross. This love bears fruit in our lives as love for neighbors. Love of neighbors is peace. This peace sows the harvest of righteousness.

9. Matthew 25 describes the scene of the final judgment. On that day, there is only one criterion for judgment: How did you love God and your neighbors? "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Matthew 25:34, ESV) "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." (Matthew 25: 40, ESV)

10. A life without regrets, a life of happiness, is a life overwhelmed by the love of Jesus Christ on the cross. This life is defined by true faith, followed by practical action. This action is to live as a peacemaker.