



**James 3:13 – 4:3, 7-8a; Mark 9:30-37**  
**Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (September 22, 2024)**

Once again, James' letter sounds like good advice for healthy living: be wise, be understanding, be gentle.

Peterson renders James in *The Message* this way:

“Do you want to be counted wise, to build a reputation for wisdom? Here's what you do: Live well, live wisely, live humbly. It's the way you live, not the way you talk, that counts. Mean-spirited ambition isn't wisdom. Boasting that you are wise isn't wisdom. Twisting the truth to make yourselves sound wise isn't wisdom.” (James 3:13-15)

Christianity isn't about niceties. It isn't about ethical behavior either, although it expresses itself in a just and ethical life.

Christianity is about unity with God in Christ through the Spirit. Choosing this, or better, discovering to be chosen, to consent to this special relationship is wisdom, a gift that is from above (James 1:17) and is “pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits” (v. 17). This is totally different than the “earthbound, unspiritual, demonic” pseudo-wisdom (v. 15) that people are willing to employ “for selfish ambition” to get ahead without merit, to con and to lie, to rob and to slander.

James warns Christians not to be “boastful and false to the truth” (v. 14). Be instead honest, truthful, true.

Wisdom is the ability to discover one's true self,<sup>1</sup> to search and to find the treasure -the implanted word (James 1:21)- buried deep within,<sup>2</sup> and to reach full maturity.<sup>3</sup>

Wisdom is the readiness to surrender to God (James 4:7).

When we are in the light of God, we realize that we have sought happiness outside of ourselves, in all wrong places. It is in the light of God that the conflicts of our hearts are exposed: all the cravings, the ambitions, the jealousies, the fears, the hatred, the competitions. In the light of God, we realize we have been praying for all the wrong things and for the wrong reasons. Nothing we asked for was in accordance with God's will (see James 4:1-7).

Take the disciples, for example. They all had their own plans for success, and "argued among themselves" (v. 34) in the hope of each securing for themselves the best spot in the sun of the kingdom.<sup>4</sup> They totally ignored what Jesus had just told them, for the second time,<sup>5</sup> about his death and resurrection (Mk 9:30-31).

It was hard for them to understand (v. 32), so they moved on to something more urgent and burning on their mind. Fulfilling their own dreams for happiness and success was certainly more appealing than entertaining scary thoughts about Jesus' betrayal, his killing, and a *third-day* resurrection that did not make much sense at the time.<sup>6</sup> Why waste time with that nonsense?

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 16:24 and Philippians 4:3.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 7:7-8 and 13:14.

<sup>3</sup> James 1:4.25; 2:22; 3:2

<sup>4</sup> Today's gospel, Mark 9:30-37.

<sup>5</sup> Jesus already announced it in Mark 8:31-33 and will do it again in Mark 10:32-34.

<sup>6</sup> Resurrection was a belief already present at the time of Jesus: [Jewish Views of Resurrection and the Afterlife \(learnreligions.com\)](http://www.learnreligions.com); [Jewish Resurrection of the Dead - Chabad.org](http://www.Chabad.org); [RESURRECTION - JewishEncyclopedia.com](http://www.JewishEncyclopedia.com)

Yet, true greatness is found in service, Jesus told them. As a teaching gimmick, Jesus puts a child<sup>7</sup> at the center of the group and told them to consider the simplicity, vulnerability, and above all the inability of a child to repay favors.

This is another of Jesus stunts: a child has dreams but not ambitions, being without social status and legal rights, a non-person totally dependent on others for nurturance and protection. Even though she dreams, she lives in the present and finds joy in little things. By embracing the child, Jesus demonstrated his acceptance of one who is a social non-entity and still worthy of respect and care.

Happiness, Jesus taught, is found in full-hearted and extravagant generosity. Give without expecting anything in return.

James counsels us to draw near to God. God wouldn't be more delighted. In the presence of God, we have all we need. God's generous self-giving will bring peace and fulfillment.

May we find our true self in God, our wisdom and our life.  
Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> Talia means both "child" and "servant in Aramaic: John Donahue and Daniel Harrington, The Gospel of Mark, 285.