

REAPING RIGHTEOUSNESS



James 3:17-18

17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

“Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.” Notice right off the bat that we are talking about sowing peace but reaping righteousness. We are planting one thing but harvesting something else. We talked about this concept when we discussed sowing mercy and “Harvesting Compassion.” In this passage, we are sowing peace and harvesting righteousness. What is righteousness and how can we reap it when we are sowing peace?

The dictionary defines righteousness as **“the quality of being morally right or justifiable.”** When we hear that, we are then hearing that when peacemakers are sowing peace, the harvest peacemakers reap is being morally right, that our sowing of peace actually makes our actions justifiable. I don’t know about you, but that just seems to make things too clinical for me; that if I sow peace then my actions are considered moral and righteous.

The problem with righteousness is that it is a lot like Thor’s hammer, if you will pardon the analogy. By the very nature of being human we are incapable of wielding the power of righteousness. Just like thinking we can wield Thor’s hammer, we have a tendency to feel that if we can wield righteousness we can stand above our fellow man; that we can stand in judgement of the thoughts and actions of those around us. We feel justified in our judgement. We trend toward feeling superior and that we are carrying the sword of justice into battle. I’ve often found it curious that both teams in a football game might have a prayer that includes a plea for victory over their opponents; that God is on one side or the other and whichever team is morally superior will find grace with God and be

victorious. Righteousness will prevail. We tend to believe that somehow our relationship with God imbues us with the power of righteousness, when in truth, if we wield righteousness like a hammer, a sword, or even a big stick, we actually drive a wedge between our fellowship with those around us and also between God and ourselves.

This kind of attitude was never God's intention. Righteousness was never meant to be wielded like a hammer or sword in battle. The righteousness of God is based in truth and the law. It is founded in love and grace. Let's reference a few passages of scripture to clarify this:

Psalm 103:6 "The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed."

Psalm 119:142 "Your righteousness is everlasting and your law it true."

Proverbs 21:21 "Whoever pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity and honor."

Roman 9:30 "What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith."

James 1:20 "because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires."

And probably the most poignant of all:

Romans 10:3 “Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.”

Any righteous attitude that doesn’t come from God is inferior to God’s righteousness. The righteousness that we glean from God is tempered with the mercy and love of God and it is by sowing peace that we are able to reap that righteousness. Not a righteousness of condemnation or control, but a righteousness conceived in love and compassion. Un-tempered righteousness results in chaos.

Consider the historic consequences of those who found righteousness in themselves, fully believing that such righteousness was acceptable simply because it was their own righteousness. In that sense, Hitler was righteous. Osama bin Laden was righteous. Stalin was righteous. The perpetrators of the mass shootings that are all too common today believe themselves to be righteous. In all these cases, the people involved believe themselves to be morally superior and therefore, righteous. However, this righteousness that they cloth themselves in, is based on human standards and morals and have nothing to do with the love and grace of God. Their righteousness is not gleaned from being peacemakers. They do not sow peace to reap their righteousness.

The righteousness that we reap from sowing peace is not a righteousness that suggests that we are morally superior, or even that we are in a position to

condemn those who are not like us. It is a righteousness that gives us the ability to love our neighbors as ourselves and see them the way God sees them, as His children and His sheep.

The righteousness of man seeks submission from his neighbors while the righteousness of God seeks to lift His children and bring benefit to the relationship that God offers all of us through Jesus Christ. When Paul speaks of the Full Armor of God in Ephesians 6:14 he speaks of the breastplate of righteousness, not the sword of righteousness and not the hammer of righteousness. A breastplate is defensive armor, not offensive. It protects us as we bring God's light to the world. It provides us with a context in regards to God's love for every person we encounter.

When we encounter the term "righteous indignation" we see the result of man not seeking God's council regarding righteousness. Remember, "God sent not His son into the world to condemn the world, but that through Him the world might be saved." There is no "righteous indignation" with God. Righteous indignation occurs when we transform the breastplate of righteousness into a hammer of righteousness. Wearing the breastplate of righteousness does not give us authority over our neighbors. Instead, it is us acknowledging that God is the authority over our lives; that He is our protector.

The waters become murky here because we often equate the sowing of peace with violent actions. Whether it be with war or with protests, we feel that those violent actions will promote peace. And while we all want to believe that there is a common nature to morality, that doesn't seem to be the case that Jesus presents. What is morally true for Mohammed doesn't seem to be morally true for Jose', Franchoise, Billy, Wang, Gustav, or Benito. We try to wrap logic around the understanding morals in relationship to righteousness when in fact, morals are most often determined by a combination of culture and religion.

We, as Christians are very Judeo centric when it comes to our morals, which are laid out in the Ten Commandments, but the rest of the world's cultures and religions are not bound by the Ten Commandments either culturally or by religion. Most of the world's religions and cultures do have many of the same laws that we find in the Ten Commandments expressed in some context, but those laws are entrenched in each countries culture, traditions and religions. And then there are the agnostics and atheists. I know several atheists whose moral standards far exceed the standards of some of the Christians I know.

The first verse of our scripture today expresses the source of our being able to reap righteousness. **17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.** James is telling us that we have to prepare to reap

righteousness; that it isn't just something we glean because we show up. We have to have the right tools, the first of which is wisdom; and because that wisdom comes from God, it is pure.

I want to take a moment and focus on a different passage of scripture to help us look at wisdom and how we go about sowing peace.

1 Kings 10

- 1 When the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relationship to the LORD, she came to test Solomon with hard questions.
- 2 Arriving at Jerusalem with a very great caravan—with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones—she came to Solomon and talked with him about all that she had on her mind.
- 3 Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her.
- 4 When the queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the palace he had built,
- 5 the food on his table, the seating of his officials, the attending servants in their robes, his cupbearers, and the burnt offerings he made at the temple of the LORD, she was overwhelmed.

It is so easy to be distracted by the opulence of this passage; the fact that the Queen of Sheba was overwhelmed with all that she saw. It is human nature that

says that all of this wealth and pageantry that she is experiencing is due to the wisdom of Solomon. After all, verse 4 points out “When the Queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the palace he had built” we might jump to the same conclusion that all that what she saw was a direct result of Solomon’s wisdom. We get lost in the wonder and forget about the first verse in this passage which is why the Queen of Sheba showed up on Solomon’s doorstep in the first place.

“When the Queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon and his relationship to the Lord, she came to test Solomon with hard questions.” This verse tells us that the Queen of Sheba has not only heard about the fame of Solomon but, just as importantly, she has heard about the relationship that Solomon has with God. She understands that Solomon did not acquire the riches before without the help of Almighty God.

By this we understand it is about the relationship, not the riches, power or extravagance. The wisdom that Solomon presented to the world through his relationship with God served to become a beacon to the world. The message that was sent was about having a relationship with the Almighty, about walking with God, about understanding that wisdom that transcends common sense, comes directly from our creator.

So, where is this wisdom when it comes to being peacemakers. We know that Jesus talks about Peacemakers in the Beatitudes:

Matthew 5:9

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Jesus teaches us that there is a direct connection with God when you become a peacemaker and Solomon shows us that one of the attributes and blessing of being a peacemaker is wisdom. Because we are peacemakers, we have the unique ability to sow peace and through wisdom reap righteousness.

When we examine the rest of the first verse of our scripture today, we see that because of the wisdom that God graces us with, we are also given gifts that include being **“peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.”**

When man tries to wrestle control of righteousness from God, those attributes are nowhere to be found. The proof of righteousness in our lives is seen by others in the context of these attributes.

Peace-loving

Considerate

Submissive

Full of mercy and good fruit

Impartial

Sincere

Sowing peace is the act of promoting community and unity in the midst of diversity, prejudice and discord. This simple act teaches us to not just accept that we have differences but to celebrate those differences. It encourages us to allow each other to be the creatures that God made us to be and not force our values on each other. It is about finding commonality in the Salvation that God offers us.

If we want an example of how to be a peacemaker and reap righteousness, we have only to look at Jesus. The life that He led and the teachings that He gave us allow us to see the righteous side of His nature, a nature not of condemnation but inclusion and compassion. Not once does Jesus use the righteousness that He has reaped as a peacemaker to belittle or condemn the people He encounters. Through humility, His righteousness shines through as He heals the sick, lifts the broken and embraces the people that God has placed in His care, regardless of their past, their color, their beliefs, their gender or their nationality.

Jesus did not come to put people into boxes and categories. He came to set them free from the boxes that the rest of the world was trying to put them in. And He did it by sowing peace and reaping righteousness. That should be our example.

This week take a little time to examine the source of righteousness in your own life. Is the righteousness that is prevalent in your life, righteousness gleaned from peacemaking or is it righteousness that has been formed in your being by factors outside of your relationship with the creator of the universe? In other words, is someone other than God defining the attribute of righteousness in your life? It is something that everyone needs to examine in themselves. We all are guilty of letting some amount of prejudice influence our lives. Use the example that Jesus set and then apply new-found wisdom to righteousness in your life. If you find you have a hammer or sword of righteousness, cast it aside. Then put on the breastplate of righteousness as God intended, and become the peacemaker He want you to be.

Amen

