

The Epistle of

*James*

“A Series of Messages”

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# From Skeptic to Slave

## James 1:1

This morning I want to begin a new series on the book of James. Although I have been teaching on various topics over the last couple of months, I also believe in teaching through a book so that we can learn from the author and really get a grasp of what he is trying to say and in what context he writes his letter.

If you ever want to learn something about someone, probably the best people to ask are their family. They are the ones that we lived 24/7 with throughout a period of time in our lives. I know that if my brothers were here right now, they would have some stories to tell. Stories about self imposed haircut, or the boxing matches we would have, or the pranks that we would play on the phone. Although my parents know a lot about me, there is something about having brothers with whom secrets and undercover operations remain personal, and things to look back on.

The reason why I begin this morning by talking about my family, especially about my brothers, is because what we have here is a letter from one of Jesus' brothers. James had shared memories and childhood experiences with Jesus. Who better to learn from about Jesus than one who lived with him, who communicated with him, who shared memories with him.

Some may say, "Well, James was biased because he was related to Jesus. Of course he is going to support what Jesus stood for." I think many families are biased and introverted, but I think it is because we really want to see each other succeed. But when it comes to the life of James we find that he wasn't as biased as we think he may have been.

I have titled my message this morning "From skeptic to servant" because we read that James' opinion wasn't always positive. Imagine with me if you would be raised with Mom and Dad telling you about how your older brother was born. How there was an angelic visitation, Kings came from the east, and shepherds searched for Jesus, your brother. Then how Jesus would speak to the religious leaders with such wisdom that they were stunned. I think it would be enough to give any younger brother a complex. How could he ever measure up to his brother?

Then imagine how your older brother was getting all the attention because he was performing miracles, and doing these incredible things all the while feeling like you were overlooked. I wonder if James saw his relationship with his brother as a blessing or curse. We do know that there was tension in Jesus' relationship with his family. After Jesus had chosen his 12 disciples and begins to teach and perform miracles, crowds of people would follow them. **Mark 3:20-21** tells us:

*<sup>20</sup> When Jesus returned to the house where he was staying, the crowds began to gather again, and soon he and his disciples couldn't even find*

*time to eat.* <sup>21</sup> *When his family heard what was happening, they tried to take him home with them. “He’s out of his mind,” they said.*

Jesus’ family did start out believing that he was who he said he was. How would you like it if your family was telling people that you were out of your mind? Jesus’ family didn’t quite support him, and I am sure that James was in on it as well. With this in mind imagine how James and the rest of the family responded when the events of **Matthew 12:46-50**. It tells us:

*<sup>46</sup> As Jesus was speaking to the crowd, his mother and brothers were outside, wanting to talk with him. <sup>47</sup>Someone told Jesus, “Your mother and your brothers are outside, and they want to speak to you.” <sup>48</sup>Jesus asked, “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” <sup>49</sup>Then he pointed to his disciples and said, “These are my mother and brothers. <sup>50</sup>Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother!”*

Although Jesus wasn’t publicly disowning his family, but speaking of how his family was bigger than just those of flesh and blood, I am sure that his statement didn’t score and brownie points with brother James. The Bible also tells us that people didn’t think that Jesus was anything special because they knew his family. In **Matthew 13:54-57** we read:

*<sup>54</sup>He returned to Nazareth, his hometown. When he taught there in the synagogue, everyone was astonished and said, “Where does he get his wisdom and his miracles? <sup>55</sup>He’s just a carpenter’s son, and we know Mary, his mother, and his brothers—James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas. <sup>56</sup>All his sisters live right here among us. What makes him so great?” <sup>57</sup>And they were deeply offended and refused to believe in him.*

The crowd was basically saying “Jesus family is no one special.” Later on in the Bible we read in **John 7:1-5** of another point of conflict. It tells us:

*<sup>1</sup>After this, Jesus stayed in Galilee, going from village to village. He wanted to stay out of Judea where the Jewish leaders were plotting his death. <sup>2</sup>But soon it was time for the Festival of Shelters, <sup>3</sup>and Jesus’ brothers urged him to go to Judea for the celebration. “Go where your followers can see your miracles!” they scoffed. <sup>4</sup>“You can’t become a public figure if you hide like this! If you can do such wonderful things, prove it to the world!” <sup>5</sup>For even his brothers didn’t believe in him.*

Jesus’ own brothers, including James, mocked Jesus, they made fun of him and refused to believe in who he said he was. I am sure that some of this was due to the incredible stress of having a perfect older brother, some may be due to the claims that Jesus was making while all along his brothers just saw him as an arrogant jerk. James’ relationship

with Jesus was definitely stressed and it seems that James eventually becomes not only skeptical but resentful as well.

Today, there are many who still remain skeptical, or maybe even resentful towards Jesus Christ, because of something that has taken place earlier on in their life - a so-called Christian loved one who used the name of Christ to invoke judgment upon you, a Christian leader who failed to live up to what he himself preached, a church that neglected you and turned their back on you. There may even be some here that are skeptical because of a life experience or tragedy. I think that what we learn this morning is that it doesn't matter how skeptical or hurt you may be, Jesus can still change your life.

James begins as a skeptic, probably a hurt skeptic, but something happened that changed him. We don't have a detailed account of James' conversion in the Gospels, in fact we see the exact opposite. Jesus' mother was the only one who attended Jesus' crucifixion. You could say that Jesus was disowned by his family. Jesus even has to ask his disciple John to care for his mother because the brothers and sisters weren't around. Can you imagine such a heartless family?

We do find however that there is mention that James was converted in **1 Corinthians 15:3-8**:

*<sup>3</sup> I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me—that Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. <sup>4</sup> He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, as the Scriptures said. <sup>5</sup> He was seen by Peter and then by the twelve apostles. <sup>6</sup> After that, he was seen by more than five hundred of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died by now. <sup>7</sup> Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. <sup>8</sup> Last of all, I saw him, too, long after the others, as though I had been born at the wrong time.*

Could it be possible that James was changed by Jesus' resurrection? Just eight months prior to this event James and his brothers were mocking Jesus, yet later on in Acts we find that James was one of those who met with the disciples to pray. In **Acts 1:12-14** we read:

*<sup>12</sup> The apostles were at the Mount of Olives when this happened, so they walked the half mile back to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> Then they went to the upstairs room of the house where they were staying. Here is the list of those who were present: Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James (son of Alphaeus), Simon (the Zealot), and Judas (son of James). <sup>14</sup> They all met together continually for prayer, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus.*

Something happened to James. Resentment was replaced by repentance. Prejudice was replaced by praise and thanksgiving. After Jesus showed himself to James all the hurt, the expectations, the doubt had melted away. James was changed because Jesus proved

himself to be the Son of God. Yes, James got to see Jesus with his own eyes and witnessed the incredible miracle of his resurrection. Today we live in a “show me” world where “seeing is believing.” But Jesus told doubting Thomas in **John 20:29**:

*“You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who haven’t seen me and believe anyway.”*

That is why our salvation today is based on faith (trust). Today we can see evidences of God and the work of Jesus only if we are willing to see it. James chose to see that Jesus was the Christ. We know that people still chose to ignore Jesus resurrection, even those who saw proof.

James chose his brother Jesus and we find that he becomes a vital part of the beginning of the church. In Acts 12 we find that the Apostle Peter refers to him as a recognized leader in the church. In Acts 15 we find that he is sitting on church council in Jerusalem being a part of the decision making process and later on in 1 Corinthians 9 we find that James was married and was a man of great respect and influence. In **Galatians 2:9** it tells us:

*<sup>9</sup>In fact, James, Peter, and John, who were known as pillars of the church, recognized the gift God had given me, and they accepted Barnabas and me as their co-workers.*

From a struggling brother, to the skeptic, to resentment, to repentance, to a church pillar, and finally to the term that James uses to describe himself in **James 1:1**:

*This letter is from James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

James the slave. The term slave here comes from the Greek word “doulos” which was used to describe the lowest scale of servitude possible. In the Greek society it was used to describe an involuntary and permanent service and was used in a very negative way. But for James it became the attitude of his heart. I think it is interesting that James doesn’t try to use his position of being Jesus’ brother, but instead becomes known as one who served the church.

One ancient historian recorded that James use to enter alone into the Temple and be found kneeling and praying for forgiveness for the people, so much so that his knees grew hard like a camel’s because of his constant worship for God. And because of his excessive righteousness he was called “James the Just.”

From skeptic to servant. A man changed by the Good News. Historical writing tell us that James was martyred shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The High Priest at the time ordered James to publicly denounce his faith. James was instrumental and leading many to Jesus Christ and the Jewish Leaders were furious. James refused to accept their conditions and he was marched up to the pinnacle of the Temple and thrown

to the ground. He was then finished off by means of stoning as he laid there dying in the dirt.

James did not live a Fairy Tale. He didn't die for a Fairy Tale. He died for Truth – the truth of the Good News of Jesus Christ. He died because he served his fellow man hoping that they would find their way through skepticism, just as he did. He died a servant.

James was a skeptic, like many today, yet he found the truth. Many today, maybe some in here, are skeptics, but if you search with all of your heart Jesus has told us that we will find him. Hope is not lost for the skeptic this morning.

At our prayer meeting this last Wednesday Night I felt that the Lord had given me two verses and little did I realize that my study for this morning was going to harness them both. I felt led to **1 Timothy 1:15-16**. It captures the point that I want us to get this morning. It tells us:

*<sup>15</sup> This is a true saying, and everyone should believe it: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—and I was the worst of them all. <sup>16</sup>But that is why God had mercy on me, so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life.*

The example of James shows us God's patience and how all hope is not lost for the skeptic or no matter how much sin you have in your life. The second is found just a few verses in **1 Timothy 2:1**:

*<sup>1</sup> I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. As you make your requests, plead for God's mercy upon them, and give thanks.*

If all hope is not lost for anyone, then we need to be on our knees pleading for God's mercy upon their souls. When is the last time that you have prayed for God to show his mercy upon someone? We need to be a church that serves, and that means that we should at least be contending for the souls of men just as James would pray for people's forgiveness.

James learned some vital lessons and that is what we find in his letter. He was a man who experienced the two extremes in his life – skepticism and servant-hood or slave to mankind. May we be open to learn from his life and his experience.

# When The Going Gets Tough ...

## James 1:2-18

One of the funniest things that I was exposed to when I first came back to the US in 1985 was the Bumper Sticker Phenomenon. I couldn't figure out why people would stick a cheap piece of paper on such an expensive investment, yet over the years I guess I have been Americanized and find humor, and even at times may even learn something. I saw a sticker the other day that read, "Be good to your kids because they may be choosing your nursing home" which I thought was pretty funny and straight to the point.

Bumper stickers are humorous, yet at the same time they say something about those who place them on their cars. A patriotic sticker will speak of how one loves their country. A Darwin sticker may speak of how one denies that there is a creator. A political sticker may speak of one's willingness to be involved in the affairs of our country. Or a silly sticker may speak of an individual's sense of humor.

As we continue on in our study of the book of James this morning I think we can summarize the first 18 verses with the a series of bumper stickers that go something like this: "When the going gets tough, the tough go shopping (fishing, skiing) or whatever other opportunity that may take one's mind off of their circumstances.

When the going gets tough, what do you do? Some avoid their circumstances with another event or activity, while others will tend to tackle it head on. We need to understand why James was writing this letter in the first place so that we can appreciate the begin of his letter and apply it in our own lives. After the death of Jesus Christ approximately in 30AD, the early church began to grow rapidly and yet persecution was beginning to increase. The Christians in Jerusalem were scattered throughout the Roman Empire with thriving Jewish communities in Rome, Alexandria, Cyprus, and in cities in Greece and Asia Minor.

Many of the scattered Christian communities were becoming discouraged by the constant persecution and were finding themselves in danger of compromising their faith. When I think of today, I see that this same reality is true. Many Christians compromise their faith simply because they want to fit in more with the world, or because they don't like the conflict. James begins his letter this morning by encouraging those scattered Christians and us this morning to remain hopeful and strong. Let's read **James 1:2-18**:

*<sup>2</sup> Dear brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. <sup>3</sup>For when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. <sup>4</sup>So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for anything. <sup>5</sup> If you need wisdom—if you want to know what God wants you to do—ask him, and he will gladly tell you. He will not resent your asking. <sup>6</sup> But when you ask him, be sure that you really expect him to answer, for a doubtful mind is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. <sup>7</sup>People like that should not expect to receive anything from*

*the Lord. <sup>8</sup>They can't make up their minds. They waver back and forth in everything they do. <sup>9</sup>Christians who are poor should be glad, for God has honored them. <sup>10</sup>And those who are rich should be glad, for God has humbled them. They will fade away like a flower in the field. <sup>11</sup>The hot sun rises and dries up the grass; the flower withers, and its beauty fades away. So also, wealthy people will fade away with all of their achievements. <sup>12</sup>God blesses the people who patiently endure testing. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. <sup>13</sup>And remember, no one who wants to do wrong should ever say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else either. <sup>14</sup>Temptation comes from the lure of our own evil desires. <sup>15</sup>These evil desires lead to evil actions, and evil actions lead to death. <sup>16</sup>So don't be misled, my dear brothers and sisters. <sup>17</sup>Whatever is good and perfect comes to us from God above, who created all heaven's lights. Unlike them, he never changes or casts shifting shadows. <sup>18</sup>In his goodness he chose to make us his own children by giving us his true word. And we, out of all creation, became his choice possession.*

I was to tell you that tomorrow would be filled with troubles, I think many of us would refuse to get out of bed in the morning. Troubles are not fun, they are not easy, and they definitely are not always welcomed with open arms. That is why they call it trouble. I remember someone telling me that they knew someone who had a child whose middle name was trouble. It wasn't the child's literal name but it clearly defined what one should expect when that child was ever invited over to their home. Trouble makes us do all we can to avoid it, yet this morning James is giving us a different approach.

### ***1. See your trouble as an opportunity for Joy***

I know that it is a trap for many of us to see challenges and troubles as negative and uncomfortable. We wonder if we have done anything to deserve such a punishment and we only see the challenge without seeing what we can become by going through it. James is not calling us to pretend that troubles don't bother us, he hasn't called us to put on the Christian front or mask, but instead he is asking us to keep a positive outlook because of what troubles can produce in our lives. We learn, we gain perspective, we become more disciplined, more considerate. It grows us up spiritually. In **1 Peter 1:6-7** we are told:

*<sup>6</sup>So be truly glad! There is wonderful joy ahead, even though it is necessary for you to endure many trials for a while. <sup>7</sup>These trials are only to test your faith, to show that it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—and your faith is far more precious to God than mere gold. So if your faith remains strong after being tried by fiery trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.*

Peter tells us in verse 6 here that it "NECESSARY" to endure trials. Challenges or troubles show us who we really are and where we need to work a little harder. It shows us where our faith ends and where human pride begins. How we respond to our

challenges show us how much we rely upon God and how much we rely upon ourselves. How we respond to our challenges show us much we trust God and how much we trust our own effort. ***Challenges are gauges for us to see just how strong of a Christian we truly are.*** This morning in our portion of the book of James I believe that James is giving us three gauges or challenges that we can utilize so that there will be a greater sense of joy in our everyday lives.

#### **a. A tested faith**

In verse 3 James tells “when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow.” I think this is the greatest battle. The battle between trying to figure everything out ourselves, and simply trusting that God is in control. The battle of letting go of what we think should happen, and letting God tell us what should happen. That is why James elaborates for us on a tested faith in verses 5-8.

Have you ever found yourself in a position where you didn’t know what to do? No matter how long and hard you thought about it, you couldn’t decide what would be the best decision? We may have prayed a little prayer but then we went right back to our own thinking patterns trying to figure things out on our own.

Our faith is tested all the time. Things pop up and try to take away our belief and our trust in Jesus. Our emotions tend to fluctuate our faith like the waves of the sea. One minute we have strong convictions, the next we don’t believe in anything. James tells us in verse 6 to believe and expect from God and not let anything come and sway our decision. Have you ever approached your troubles like this? Believing and expecting that God is and will always be with you? Have you trusted that no matter what comes your way, God will be there to help you through whatever you face?

What do you do when trouble comes your way? Do you rely upon yourself or do you go to the one who knows how to get through it? Jesus said in **Matthew 7:7-8**:

<sup>7</sup> *“Keep on asking, and you will be given what you ask for. Keep on looking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened. <sup>8</sup>For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And the door is opened to everyone who knocks.*

<sup>3</sup> *Cry out for insight and understanding. <sup>4</sup>Search for them as you would for lost money or hidden treasure. <sup>5</sup>Then you will understand what it means to fear the LORD, and you will gain knowledge of God. **Proverbs 2:6***

God needs to be the first person we go to with our challenges and not the one we go to at the last minute. He is not the last resolve. He is not the pinch hitter. His is the first. Where we go to for help in our challenges truly does show how much faith we have in

God. Not just going to God first, but sticking with him through the whole ordeal. It is only when we have experienced God's wisdom and his faithfulness to us that we can even begin to have joy in the fact that God truly does care for little old me.

Evaluate your spiritual growth this morning by how much faith you have in God. Where do you go for help and do you stick with God's plan all the way through? Another gauge of our Christian growth is:

### ***b. Endurance***

Endurance is not an immediate thing. It is something that is worked at to attain. A runner practices and practices to build up endurance. When we talk about spiritual endurance, I don't think it is realistic for us to expect new Christians to have a lot of endurance. Endurance is built over a long period of time, over many difficult times, over many experiences where God has shown himself faithful. The more experience we have with God, the more we step out and trust him and follow him, the more endurance we will develop.

James gives us an example of endurance in **James 1:9-11** where talks about the difference between those who are rich and poor. Those who rely upon wealth will wither away, while those who rely upon God will be honored. Many have wandered away from God and have placed more emphasis on money, material objects, and even personal achievements. Endurance keeps focused on the goal and is not distracted.

When troubles comes your way, are you distracted or focused on God? **1 Peter 1:24-25** tells us:

*“People are like grass that dies away; their beauty fades as quickly as the beauty of wildflowers. The grass withers, and the flowers fall away. <sup>25</sup>But the word of the Lord will last forever.” And that word is the Good News that was preached to you.*

I think we need to develop a habit of relying upon God instead of always trying to fix things. I think we need to develop a habit of encouraging each other to rely upon God instead of stepping in and trying to fix everyone's problems. We may be standing in the way of God's best for a person's life simply because we think we know what is best. But **Hebrews 12:1-2** tells us:

*And let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us. <sup>2</sup>We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish.*

*<sup>35</sup>Do not throw away this confident trust in the Lord, no matter what happens. Remember the great reward it brings you! <sup>36</sup>Patient endurance is what you need*

*now, so you will continue to do God's will. Then you will receive all that he has promised. Hebrews 10:35-36*

Patient endurance. Endurance many times seems to have a negative feel about it, especially if you put it in the context of "I endured this morning's message." But what seems to be a negative actually reaps better things. Endurance reaps God's blessing, and if we can keep this in mind maybe we will be more willing to endure life's challenges instead of going for the quick-fix, which may not even be a fix at all.

The third and final gauge of our Christian growth this morning is found in **James 1:12-16**:

### *c. Character*

Character is the qualities and distinguishing attributes of an individual. A person's moral excellence and firmness. Character, or lack thereof, is what we see in an individual especially when times are tough. Each of us find ourselves in situations where even we can see our true character. A perfect example of this is through testing, what James defines for us as temptation. Each of us here are tempted. Each of us are tempted by different things. What may be tempting for one is not for another.

God doesn't tempt us, but our human nature has desires that are evil and can eventually destroy us. For some it may be pride or wealth, while for others it is lust or anything that substitutes God's place in our lives. How we approach and view these lures tells us about our character. Once we have discerned what is from God and what isn't, how we respond speaks loud and clear about who we truly are inside. I don't know about you but sometimes I see things I don't like in myself. I think we have all been there.

But what choices we make after we see our true selves will determine who we will become in the future. In **I Corinthians 10:13**:

*<sup>13</sup> But remember that the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you will not give in to it.*

Every temptation is confronted with a choice – we can give in or take the way out that God has for us. And that is why James then goes on in verse 12-18 to speak of the good and perfect things that God grants those who make the choice to seek righteousness.

How is it that we can view our difficult circumstances – our faith tested, our endurance challenged and our character challenged – as an opportunity for joy? Because when we let God be involved in our decisions, when we remain strong in God's ways and not give into the world, and when we search our hearts and see how our character is flawed and take steps to improving who we are, we will find joy in being a true follower of Jesus – a true child of God.

Joy is found when we have accomplished something of true eternal value. Joy is found when we have made life altering improvements to who we are. Joy is found when we can say beyond a shadow of a doubt that God is with me and will take care of me and help me whenever I need him. Joy is found when we have experienced first hand, a true move of God on our behalf – when God has proven himself over and over again.

The next time troubles come your way, don't go shopping like the world will do, let it be an opportunity for God to do incredible things in your life. Don't simply focus on the problem but focus on the solution – how you are going to get there, and the rewards you will reap once you do.

# “Can You Hear Me Now?”

## James 1:19-21

We have been studying the book of James over the last couple of weeks and we have seen James’ words of encouragement, to learn from our times of challenges and see them as opportunities instead of a dead end to depression and sadness. An incredible lesson that we could learn from, yet an extremely difficult lesson to keep in mind.

I have found myself asking the same old question whenever trials come my way, and that question is only one word – “Why?” Yet, last week we saw that God is more interested in the result of trials as opposed to the trials itself. To learn our lessons and move on in God’s plan and will for our lives.

This morning James gives us another difficult yet true lesson to learn in **James 1:19-21** in regards to listening and speaking. As I was preparing for today’s study I was thinking about the “Verizon” Commercial when the same man walks to different locations with a cell phone in hand saying, “Can you hear me now?” I think the question is posed for us this morning, “Can we hear God no matter where we are at in life, or what situation we find ourselves in? James gives us a lesson in hearing. He tells us:

*<sup>19</sup>Dear brothers and sisters, be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. <sup>20</sup>Your anger can never make things right in God’s sight. <sup>21</sup>So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the message God has planted in your hearts, for it is strong enough to save your souls.*

We need to keep in mind first this morning that this is a continuation of a letter and is therefore linked to the previous verses we looked at last week. James had just finished talking about how the pure and good gifts come from God to his children and therefore here in our verses this morning is continuing on and talks about our relationship with God.

The question then is proposed to us this morning – “What is our state or condition when we approach God?” Are we quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to get angry or are we quick to speak, slow to listen and easily irritated? James wants to get to the root of the issue - the heart. When God speaks where is our heart? Is it hungry or tired? Let’s break these verses down and find more insight so that we can apply what we are being taught.

### **1. Quick to listen and slow to speak**

We find it more and more prevalent in our society, that mankind wants to be heard. We see many who aren’t ready to learn or to listen to reason, but man simply wants to do what he wants to do. How quickly has our society forgotten the very one who has and continues to give them the very breath they have. Their attitude towards God is not open, it is not willing to accept the truth, it is self-centered and almost self-deifying.

There are ancient writings that speak about listening. One tells us, "Men have two ears, and but one tongue, that they should hear more than they speak." Another tells us, "The ears are always open, ever ready to receive instruction; but the tongue is surrounded with a double row of teeth, to hedge it in, and to keep it within proper bounds." When we approach God, we come with a list of what we want and expect. We give our wish list to God and then expect him to answer the way we want him to. We speak to God yet rarely give him amply time to speak to us. The Bible tells us in **Ecclesiastes 5:1-2**:

*<sup>1</sup> As you enter the house of God, keep your ears open and your mouth shut! Don't be a fool who doesn't realize that mindless offerings to God are evil. <sup>2</sup> And don't make rash promises to God, for he is in heaven, and you are only here on earth. So let your words be few.*

Do you and I realize the privilege that we have every time we can come before God? Do we realize who we are dealing with? And yet many still continue to ignore the words God speaks and still try to be heard. **Psalms 46:10** tells us:

*<sup>10</sup> "Be silent, and know that I am God! I will be honored by every nation. I will be honored throughout the world."*

People now a days seem to treat God as their best buddy, which I am sure that God is our friend, yet God's position is not the same as ours. He is God, the creator, the righteous judge, the King, the Savior of our souls, the giver of life and the list can go on and on. We cannot approach God as an equal, and I think that this is where people fall short. Don't treat your relationship with God as you would your best friend, or your family, be sure to treat it as precious gift, a relationship beyond all others.

## **2. Slow to get angry**

Keeping in mind that this is still dealing with one's relationship with God, James addresses a very sensitive subject for some – being angry with God. I know that there have been times in my life, when circumstances seemed so unbearable that I decided to take out my frustration on God. A disappointment, a need for relief, a time when we don't understand. I think all of us have been in a place where we get a little ticked off at God for letting things turn out the way they have.

We need to remember that when James was writing to the Christians spread out among the Roman Empire, they were finding themselves in difficult and uneasy circumstances. I am sure that some were angry that God wasn't doing more for their defense. But James is trying to get these persecuted Christians to see that God wants to do things in our lives that will benefit us. That is why just the verses prior to our portion of scripture this morning he tells us that all good and perfect things come from God. He reassures them that God is not letting them suffer without some type of benefit.

Many people get angry at God without even taking the time to see that difficult times can make us better people – even more capable people who can help others. I think we only need to look at God’s example to us. In **Psalm 103:8-12** it tells us:

*<sup>8</sup> The LORD is merciful and gracious; he is slow to get angry and full of unfailing love. <sup>9</sup> He will not constantly accuse us, nor remain angry forever. <sup>10</sup> He has not punished us for all our sins, nor does he deal with us as we deserve. <sup>11</sup> For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. <sup>12</sup> He has removed our rebellious acts as far away from us as the east is from the west.*

*<sup>1</sup>Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior. <sup>32</sup> Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. **Ephesians 4:31-32***

Anger simply does not bring any benefit to us. God doesn’t function in anger so neither should we. Anger is dangerous. It can fuel itself, turning a small situation into a monstrous ordeal. It feeds off of itself. It can start in one place and then all of the sudden spread to every aspect in life. **Ephesians 4:26-27** tells us:

*<sup>26</sup> And “don’t sin by letting anger gain control over you.” Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry, <sup>27</sup>for anger gives a mighty foothold to the Devil.*

Where will being angry at God get us? It puts us in a dangerous place where we may even turn and rebel against him. It will stop us from receiving even greater things from God simply because we refuse to listen.

Anger does effect how we listen and our need to speak. In fact, when I think about it, it seems that anger isn’t interested in listening – it simply wants to be heard. Those who are angry can’t wait for the opportunity to voice their opinion or frustration. Angry people are not teachable people. They aren’t open to listen to truth.

Although this morning we are talking about our relationship with God, we need to understand that this whole idea about anger can also be applied to our relationships with each other. In verse 20 it tells us that anger never makes things right. Why? What motivates anger? **Ecclesiastes 7:8-9** tells us:

*<sup>8</sup> Finishing is better than starting. Patience is better than pride. <sup>9</sup> Don’t be quick-tempered, for anger is the friend of fools.*

Can we say this morning that most of our anger is due to our pride. Pride builds up walls, it puts people in a box, it looks down at others while holding yourself in high esteem. Pride tears relationships apart. Anger is really a result of being violated and then pride fully holding it over someone’s head, when the reality is that we have probably violated

someone else. In our relationship with God and with others we need to be people who function well in patience and forgiveness. That is what tears pride apart and builds unity and relationships.

The reality for us this morning is this: We cannot hear from God if we don't take the time to realize who he is and listen. We cannot hear from God if we don't keep our mouths shut long enough for him to say something that is far more wise than what we can put together in our own minds. We cannot hear from God if we have emotions of pride that stop us from receiving from him because we have jumped to some type of conclusion. Approach him with the right attitude, respect him in your response, and trust him that he is on your side.

### 3. Be Humble

James wraps up for us this whole idea of approaching God and tells us in verse 21 to get rid of all evil things in our lives and to accept humbly from God the message of hope and salvation. The key word here is "humbly." Everything we have been talking about this morning can be summed up by the word humility or meekness. Meekness means to be mild and gentle, to not be given to anger or rage, but to give time to reflect without jumping to conclusions.

I think that all of us here have something that we can improve or get rid of, or avoid that will improve our communication with God. For some it may be anger, for others it may be a temptation like we had mentioned last week. James is trying to get us to look at our lives and make improvements to our relationship with God, because he knows that in the long run real Christianity is based on a good connection, a good understanding and good communication between us and God. In **Ephesians 4:22** it tells us:

*<sup>22</sup> Throw off your old evil nature and your former way of life, which is rotten through and through, full of lust and deception. <sup>23</sup> Instead, there must be a spiritual renewal of your thoughts and attitudes. <sup>24</sup> You must display a new nature because you are a new person, created in God's likeness—righteous, holy, and true.*

*<sup>8</sup> But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. <sup>9</sup> Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old evil nature and all its wicked deeds. <sup>10</sup> In its place you have clothed yourselves with a brand-new nature that is continually being renewed as you learn more and more about Christ, who created this new nature within you. **Colossians 3:8-10***

We need to be willing to throw off those things that will limit us. To remove those things that stop us from being everything that God wants for us.

What is more important today is not that we have rights to be angry, or that we have things that we need answered, but what is important right now as we sit here in this place is the message of good news, its availability to us and to others. Don't get hung up on all the details of life, but be grateful that God has given us hope. That he has reached down from heaven and has made us his children – those he cares for, those he wants to help grow, those he hopes for the best. When he tells us to do something it is not to make our lives miserable, but it is for our benefit.

God comes to us and asks the question, “Can you hear me now?” We need to examine ourselves to see if we are paying attention, ready to receive, and free from things that stand in the way. Is your reception good? Is your battery charged? Are you free from interferences? Then tap into God.

# Pure and Lasting Religion

## James 1:22-27

This morning I want to continue on in our study of the Book of James. We have been challenged by his words to allow our relationship with God to develop and grow. That we are either struggling in life, and find ourselves in a constant state of discouragement, or we are moving on with God and finding his blessing, his hope, and identity in being a child of God.

This morning James wants to take us a little further and talk about how our relationship with God is more than just acknowledging and knowing about him, but that it is something that is lived out. Proof, evidence, results, fruit, confirmation – these words are the true mark of Christianity. If we were to stand trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict us beyond reasonable doubt? Imagine if you were to stand before Judge Judy – a judge who isn't going to put up with any games, but is going to tell it like it is.

James wants us to know that there is more to being a Christian than merely holding a title. He tells us in **James 1:25-27**

*<sup>22</sup> And remember, it is a message to obey, not just to listen to. If you don't obey, you are only fooling yourself. <sup>23</sup> For if you just listen and don't obey, it is like looking at your face in a mirror but doing nothing to improve your appearance. <sup>24</sup> You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. <sup>25</sup> But if you keep looking steadily into God's perfect law—the law that sets you free—and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it. <sup>26</sup> If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are just fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless. <sup>27</sup> Pure and lasting religion in the sight of God our Father means that we must care for orphans and widows in their troubles, and refuse to let the world corrupt us.*

### 1. Obedience

James begins this morning by telling us that the Bible is a message for us to obey, not just to listen to. Jesus told his disciples in **Matthew 7:21**:

*<sup>21</sup> “Not all people who sound religious are really godly. They may refer to me as ‘Lord,’ but they still won't enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The decisive issue is whether they obey my Father in heaven.*

Every Sunday, churches are filled, many who go through the motions of a church service, yet very few with obedience to what God asks of them. Obedience is the difference between true Christianity and a spiritual image. Being a Christian is about making Jesus

Christ the Lord over our lives. It's about letting God be God. Does God have the authority in your life to come and tell you what do?

It's like a person who enlists themselves in the army, in essence that person is giving up their authority for the authorities in our nation. At work, we go to work for someone who has authority over us in the work place. In life, we give up our authority to God because he has created us. The way we live shows just how much authority we have given away. In **Luke 6:46** Jesus asks us:

<sup>46</sup> *“So why do you call me ‘Lord,’ when you won’t obey me”*

In our culture today we find ourselves in the midst of situational ethics, situational obedience, and many have seen God's forgiveness as means to justify their continued disobedience. They say, “I know that I am not doing what God wants, everybody does it though and it just isn't a realistic expectation for me. But God will forgive me anyway.” To have such an attitude only lessens the value of Jesus' work on the cross. They look at it more as right as opposed to a privilege.

I remember when I took my California Drivers Test and how one of the statements was that driving in the State of California was a privilege and not a right. Having a driver's license is not something that we can demand, but it is an opportunity given to those who don't abuse the privilege. I think the same can be said about forgiveness. That is why Paul tells us in **Romans 3:5**:

<sup>5</sup> *“But,” some say, “our sins serve a good purpose, for people will see God’s goodness when he declares us sinners to be innocent. Isn’t it unfair, then, for God to punish us?”*

As difficult as it may be at times, God wants us to be obedient to his words. That means that there will be times when God's expectations will be different from what we want to do. You see, forgiveness doesn't eliminate the need for obedience - it encourages it. It gives us another chance. **I John 2:3-5** tells us:

<sup>3</sup> *And how can we be sure that we belong to him? By obeying his commandments.* <sup>4</sup>*If someone says, “I belong to God,” but doesn’t obey God’s commandments, that person is a liar and does not live in the truth.* <sup>5</sup>*But those who obey God’s word really do love him. That is the way to know whether or not we live in him.*

<sup>10</sup>*So now we can tell who are children of God and who are children of the Devil. Anyone who does not obey God’s commands and does not love other Christians does not belong to God. **John 3:10***

Obedience is the tell-tail sign of a true Christian. Yet, many today are fooling themselves thinking that they are a Christian but still live the same life they have been living before they became a Christian. Christianity is not only about making a decision to have Jesus

come and live in you, but it is also about making continued decisions to line up your life with God instructions.

## 2. How to evaluate our lives

James goes on in our text this morning and tells us in **verses 23-25**:

*<sup>23</sup>For if you just listen and don't obey, it is like looking at your face in a mirror but doing nothing to improve your appearance. <sup>24</sup>You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. <sup>25</sup>But if you keep looking steadily into God's perfect law—the law that sets you free—and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.*

What is the purpose of looking into a mirror? Is it just so we can marvel at the law of reflection? Of course not, it is so we can see what we look like. So we can evaluate what changes need to be made, what flaws need to be improved upon, to see what new modification works and what doesn't.

When it comes to the spiritual life, the law of God (the ten commandments) is that mirror that helps us to evaluate our lives and see just how sinful we are and how much we need Jesus as our Savior. Listen to the list of the 10 commandments and evaluate your life this morning. It tells us in **Exodus 20:2-17**:

*Do not worship any other gods besides me. Do not make idols of any kind, whether in the shape of birds, or animals, or fish (or sports, or cars, or money etc.) Do not misuse the name of the Lord your God. Remember the to observe the Sabbath (a day of rest). Honor your father and mother. Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not testify falsely against your neighbor. Do not covet (lust, be jealous) of your neighbors house, wife, animals, or their possessions. (Paraphrase)*

When Jesus comes to earth he brings even further clarification to the 10 commandments and tells us in **Matthew 5:27-28**:

*<sup>27</sup> "You have heard that the law of Moses says, 'Do not commit adultery.'  
<sup>28</sup>But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust in his eye has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

Even if we consider breaking the commandments of God we are guilty. Later in **James 2:10** we read:

<sup>10</sup> *And the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as the person who has broken all of God's laws.*

That how bad of a state we are in and how much we really do need God's help. Now, imagine if you evaluated your life, you saw just how sinful you really are, you realized just how much you needed God's help and his leading, and yet you chose to do nothing about it.

That's just like someone seeing that they have put their make up on wrong, they have a huge growing pimple in the middle of their forehead, or they have forgotten to comb their hair, and yet they don't do anything about it. They make no improvement, take no care, could care less what they looked like. Jesus talked about such a person in **Luke 6:41** when he asked the question:

<sup>41</sup> *"And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own?"*

We need to be people who will evaluate our lives and our actions and respond appropriately – to live out what we are taught and obey what God has given us. To take the steps necessary to make changes to improve our lives and to experience God's blessing. Do you know what it means to be blessed by God? The Greek definition of blessing means to be happier, to be more fortunate, to be well off than we were before. With our response comes a promise of a better quality of life. **Psalm 119:1-3** tells us:

<sup>1</sup> *Happy are people of integrity, who follow the law of the LORD.* <sup>2</sup> *Happy are those who obey his decrees and search for him with all their hearts.* <sup>3</sup> *They do not compromise with evil, and they walk only in his paths.*

<sup>18</sup> *When people do not accept divine guidance, they run wild. But whoever obeys the law is happy.* **Deuteronomy 5:29**

I don't think that there is anyone here or in this world that doesn't want to experience and happier, more fulfilling, a better off life than they are experiencing right now. The reality is that whether we do or not is up to our obedience, and our willingness to look at ourselves as we truly are, and then do something to make improvements.

### **3. Being Religious vs. True Religion**

James is telling us this morning that there is a difference between just being religious (saying something with our mouths and yet not having our lives line up) and having true, pure lasting religion (actually living it out, being obedient). In our text this morning James tells us in **verse 27**:

*<sup>27</sup> Pure and lasting religion in the sight of God our Father means that we must care for orphans and widows in their troubles, and refuse to let the world corrupt us.*

Obviously, James is not telling us that the only responsibility that we have is to care for orphans and widows. It is know that in the first century, orphans and widows were the most needy people in society. Unless family members were willing to help them, they were reduced to begging or selling themselves as slaves.

But what James is telling us is that we should reach out to those who are in most need of help. Many times it means that we reach out and help without expecting to receive anything in return. Giving ourselves completely and without strings attached, and simply doing what God asks us to do is true Christianity. I know we can all sit here and think of individuals who need help. What kind of help can we give them? Most importantly, we can give them hope and share the Good News with them. To offer salvation to their soul. Jesus said in **Luke 9:24**:

*<sup>25</sup>And how do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose or forfeit your own soul in the process?*

All of us can give life to another's soul by simply sharing the love of Christ. For some of us it may go a step further – giving and utilizing our resources to show God's love. Acts of kindness speak loud and clear. When you give to others, a grateful heart is more open and more ready to listen, than one that is still in need. **James 2:15** tells us:

*<sup>15</sup>Suppose you see a brother or sister who needs food or clothing, <sup>16</sup>and you say, "Well, good-bye and God bless you; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?*

In a society that tells us to store everything up for ourselves, to make money so that we can have certain things, to enjoy life to the fullest - the whole concept of giving money or resources away is completely contrary or opposite. That is why James finishes verse 27 with the words, "and refuse to let the world corrupt us." I have to admit that at times I find that I have allowed the world to corrupt my giving. At times I want certain things, I want to do certain things, I want to be financially comfortable and I pursue those goals and neglect the needs of those I come in contact with. We have all done it.

God doesn't want the world to hinder our obedience. He doesn't want it to dictate to us what we should think or do. In **1 John 2:16-17** we are told:

*<sup>16</sup>For the world offers only the lust for physical pleasure, the lust for everything we see, and pride in our possessions. These are not from the Father. They are from this evil world. <sup>17</sup>And this world is fading away, along with everything it craves. But if you do the will of God, you will live forever.*

May God continue to make us true Christians:

- a. Not people who simply talk about God, but those who actually follow and live out what he teaches us.
- b. Not people who put on the image of Christianity as a façade or mask, but those who evaluate themselves to see where we need to work harder, where we need help, where we need improvement, where we need humility – who we really are and how God can help.
- c. Not people who just let sin control our lives, but those who are showing evidence of growth.
- d. Not people who think about ourselves and our own needs while many are in need of not only what we have, but also the hope that we can give
- e. Not people who let the world dictate how we should think, but those who look to God for true meaning life.

James challenge is to have true religion and not simply be religious. There is enough religious people in this world. God is more interested in people who are willing to make a difference for him.

# Seeing People God's Way

## James 2:1-9

We have been studying the book of James over the last number of weeks and we have seen that not only did the early church need encouragement but some correction as well. James so far as encouraged them to endure through trials and to allow those difficult times to develop character in them. He has also instructed them to get rid of anger due to their disappointments and remain humble so that they could continue to hear from God. And Last week, he defined for them what true religion looks like – it requires obedience, it requires constant evaluation, and it is not self seeking but others observing and serving.

There were all things that the early church needed to hear, yet they are all things that we need to hear as well. We all face trials, we all get angry at God, we all at times tend to put on the religious costume when our motives are questionable. If we can simply take James' words and put them to heart and action, I know that not only will this church be changed, but our community as well.

This morning James' words are equally challenging, yet equally important. It's about seeing people the way God sees them. I remember as a teen going to the park to play basketball with my brother. There were normally 20-30 guys there on a given weekend simply playing 5 on 5 street ball. It is interesting sometimes how people picked their teams. Some would pick certain people because of the shoes they wore, some would pick simply because of height, yet others would pick certain individuals because they knew them and they knew their skill level. Image does not constitute one's ability.

I had a friend from Hong Kong who came to the US to try to get into Professional Basketball. He was strong, 6' 11'', and looked as if he could play the part, but he was uncoordinated. In our society today many pride themselves on being open minded and more tolerant of people, yet many still show favoritism due to image, money, success yet very rarely is it because of a person's character or their willingness to serve or give.

James' wants to address favoritism this morning, and we find his words in **James 2:1-9**:

*<sup>1</sup> My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim that you have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people more than others?  
<sup>2</sup> For instance, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in shabby clothes. <sup>3</sup>If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, "You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor"—well, <sup>4</sup>doesn't this discrimination show that you are guided by wrong motives? <sup>5</sup> Listen to me, dear brothers and sisters. Hasn't God chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Aren't they the ones who will inherit the kingdom God promised to those who love him? <sup>6</sup>And yet, you insult the poor man! Isn't it the rich who oppress you and drag you into court? <sup>7</sup>Aren't they the ones who slander Jesus Christ,*

*whose noble name you bear? <sup>8</sup> Yes indeed, it is good when you truly obey our Lord's royal command found in the Scriptures: "Love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>9</sup>But if you pay special attention to the rich, you are committing a sin, for you are guilty of breaking that law.*

Church, favoritism is alive and well, especially in the church where we are told to love unconditionally as Christ loves. I have been in churches where judgments were made because of how a person looked or dressed, or because of how they weren't living how another person though they should. I have been in churches where favoritism was shown to the highest contributors, and where those who struggled to give were looked down upon as having a lack of faith and those who gave the most actually determined what a church should do. Treating one person one way, and then not giving someone else the same respect or consideration is wrong.

In his autobiography, Mahatma Ghandi wrote that during his student days he read the Gospels seriously and considered converting to Christianity. He believed that in the teachings of Jesus he could find the solution to the caste system that was dividing the people of India. So one Sunday he decided to attend services at a nearby Church and talk to the minister about becoming a Christian. When he entered the sanctuary, however, the usher refused to give him a seat and suggested that he go worship with his own people. Ghandi left the church and never returned. "If Christians have caste differences also, I might as well remain a Hindu" he states in his book.

This has happened too often in the church as a whole. Favoritism is shown to one and rejection to another. James uses the example between a rich person and a poor person to make his point. In verse four he asks the question "doesn't this discrimination (judgment) show that you are guided by wrong motives?" He defines for us what favoritism is – a judgment made with wrong motives.

We have all played favorites at one time or another – sometimes for financial gain, other times to get something out of someone, yet another because we want to be associated with them because of their success. In the church there are no favorites or should I say there is only one favorite – Jesus Christ. Outside of that God sees everyone equally. Jesus said to the religious people of his day in his defense in **John 7:24**:

*Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment.*

Obviously, in order to make a right judgment we need to understand how God views his people. It tells us in **Job 34:19**:

*<sup>19</sup> He doesn't care how great a person may be, and he doesn't pay any more attention to the rich than to the poor. He made them all.*

Do we realize this morning that we are all important simply because we were created by God. We are all special created for a specific purpose at a specific time. None of us is

more important than the other. Each of us have the capability of being great servants for the Kingdom of God. Every human being is important to God. It tells us in **2 Samuel 14:14**:

*<sup>14</sup> All of us must die eventually. Our lives are like water spilled out on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. That is why God tries to bring us back when we have been separated from him. He does not sweep away the lives of those he cares about—and neither should you!*

Many times we give up on people. We write them off and say that it is because they have committed an unpardonable sin, or that they aren't the kind of people we want to be around, or we don't even give them a chance to speak and we have already evaluated and put a label on them. We need to get away from being judges to being people who give others a chance. Outside of seeing that people are important to God, how should we see people? This morning I have three ways to view people:

### **1. See Them With hope.**

Paul tells us in **Philippians 3:13-14**:

*<sup>13</sup> No, dear brothers and sisters, I am still not all I should be, but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup>I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven.*

Who here is already all that they should be? None of us. I know we can think of a few others who aren't all they should be. But the race isn't over yet! Have hope for those who aren't all they should be.

I am reminded of a testimony of my Dad's secretary of 15 years. She came from a devote Buddhist home yet she was the only one who could speak a little English. She ended up coming to Christ early on in her employment and she began to attend church on Sunday mornings. When her father found out, due to his Buddhist beliefs he would beat her because of the disgrace she was to the family. (Automatically here anyone would make a judgment) She prayed for her family's salvation and a couple of years later her sister attended a Billy Graham Crusade and had made a decision to follow Christ as well. The father only go even more stubborn and abusive, yet May continued to pray for her father's salvation. For 10 years she had contended for her father. He father was later diagnosed with an extreme case of cancer and was only given a few weeks to live. My father went to go visit him and tried to talk about Jesus with him but his heart was still closed to the idea. All hope seemed lost, yet May continued to pray for her father. A couple of weeks go by and an old 80 year old woman from the church decides to go visit the father and asks him point blank "Don't you think it is time to get your life right with God?" His response was, "yes it is!" She led

him in prayer and left. May finds out and tells my father and my father goes to visit him in the hospital. My dad pokes his head in the door and says, "Hello friend." And the father responds "I'm not your friend, I am your brother."

May could have very well given up on her father, but she still continue to hope for his salvation. Maybe you can think of someone this morning that you have written off and have given up on sharing Christ with them. All hope is not yet lost!

My first assignment as a minister was to serve the youth at the Mojave Foursquare Church. At the time that me and Lynn were there, we knew that there were quite a few women in the church whose husbands were not following God or even wanted to follow God. Just a couple of month's ago Lynn visited there and saw that many of those husbands were actually involved in the church. All hope is not yet lost!

As we go through our days, may we look at people and see the hope that can be theirs, may we do all we can to get them to consider God and then may we pray and contend that their hearts will change.

## **2. See Them With Potential**

Another way to view people is to see them with potential. What could God do with them? You only need to look at certain characters in the Bible to find that it doesn't take a certain type of person in order for God to use them. I came across this letter (not a real letter, but an illustration that makes a point) that is written to Jesus from a Management consultant firm who are evaluating Jesus' candidates for Disciples. It reads:

Dear Sir, Thank you for submitting the resumes of the 12 men you have picked for managerial positions in your new organization. All of the have taken the battery of tests and we have run them through our computers. It is the staff's opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background, educational and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. They do not have the team concept and we suggest that you continue in your search for persons with experience and proven capability. Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew has no leadership skills what so ever. The 2 brothers, James and John, place personal interest above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale. We feel that it is our duty to inform you that Matthew had been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau. James and son of Alphaeus and Thaddaeus have radical leanings and have registered high manic-depressive scores. Only one of the candidates shows great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness who meets people well and has a keen business mind. He has contacts in high places and is highly motivated, ambitious and responsible. We recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and right hand man. We wish you every success in your new venture.

When Jesus looked at the bunch of men who would follow him throughout his earthly ministry, he didn't see a bunch of losers but men who would later on change the world and begin to spread the Good News about his death and resurrection. When God looks down on us he doesn't see us as a bunch of people who are a mess and who have no potential, he sees who we can become, how we can make an impact.

Here again, when Lynn went back to visit the Mojave Church a couple of Month's ago, there was a girl that was in our youth group who we constantly had problems with. She had a terrible attitude and we wondered if anything we did made any impact at all. Today, she is one of the sponsors for the youth group in Mojave and is active in the church.

Over two years ago, me and Lynn came to Healdsburg to check out Redwood Foursquare Church and see if it was a place God was calling us to. Do you want to know the key word that brought us here? POTENTIAL. We saw potential, we sensed potential, and today we continue to see the potential that this church had and will have in the future. We all have so much more potential ahead of us.

### **3. See Them With Patience**

Some want people to change right now, but the reality is that many times it takes time. People will not change from unbeliever to super saint overnight. Living a Christian life takes time to grasp. As a pastor it is hard to watch Christians make poor choices. I always want to step in and fix the circumstance. Have you ever felt that way? Maybe with your kids?

The Bible makes it very clear that we are taught the word of God yet the true teaching takes place when the Holy Spirit directs, corrects, and instructs us in our own heart. None of us are the Holy Spirit so many times all we can do is be patient with each other. In **Habakkuk 2:3** it tells us:

*<sup>3</sup> But these things I plan won't happen right away. Slowly, steadily, surely, the time approaches when the vision will be fulfilled. If it seems slow, wait patiently, for it will surely take place. It will not be delayed.*

God has a plan for each of us here. God has a plan for many who don't know him yet. That plan is going to take time to fulfill, to happen. Let's not give up on people too early. We need to trust God that he has his people in process and let him do the convicting and correcting.

From my experience it always seems that the one's that you don't have patience with and who you don't think will remain connected to God will be the one's who surprise you in the long run.

We need to be careful that we don't allow the world to corrupt us when it comes to evaluating people. People who are wealthy and who seem to have it together aren't

necessarily good examples for us to follow. The world's idea of success and God's idea are two totally different things. In James 2:9 James tells us that if we show favoritism we break the command of Jesus where we are told to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

Favoritism is a sin. Judging people is a sin. Giving up on people is a sin. May we be a church where all are welcome. May we be a church where none are turned away. May we be a church that hopes for the salvation of many more souls and that God will fill this church with people who want him. May we be a church that looks to enhance the potential of every individual and who gives opportunity for them to develop and grow not only in their own personal lives but also in ministry. May we be a church that is patient enough to give God time to work in people and that we wouldn't step in the way simply because we want to fix their problems.

Our lesson today is about seeing people like God does and not how the world would view success

# LAW vs. LOVE

## James 2:10-13

This morning I want to continue on in our study of the book of James and look specifically at **James 2:10-13**.

While visiting another country an American tourist was approached by a native Muslim who made the statement, “You must have a small god.” Quickly, the American replied, “Oh, no my dear sir, we have a great and mighty God who created the universe with the simply commands of his lips.” The Muslim unconvinced of the American’s conviction responded, “I still believe you Americans have a small God, because when you pray to him you do so irreverently, and how you live many times is the opposite of what you say. When us Muslims pray, we do so by falling down on our knees with head bowed acknowledging the mightiness of Allah. And when we live, we live out our belief with extreme conviction.”

It is known that today the Muslim religion is the fastest growing religion in the world. Many teens are being converted simply because they wonder that if so many are willing to die (as we have seen in the last year) for the message of Mohammed, then he must be worth dieing for. Their sacrifice has become credibility for many.

This morning James wants to continue to address what it means to be a true Christian, or what he calls “pure and lasting religion.” And this morning he is asking us to portray our God as pure and righteous, full of love, big enough to take our sins and choose to grant mercy instead of judgment. Let’s read **James 2:10-13**:

*<sup>10</sup> And the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as the person who has broken all of God’s laws. <sup>11</sup>For the same God who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” So if you murder someone, you have broken the entire law, even if you do not commit adultery. <sup>12</sup> So whenever you speak, or whatever you do, remember that you will be judged by the law of love, the law that set you free. <sup>13</sup> For there will be no mercy for you if you have not been merciful to others. But if you have been merciful, then God’s mercy toward you will win out over his judgment against you.*

I believe that we can learn the disadvantages of being a disobedient Christian.

### **1. Breaking God’s Law is a Violation of Our Relationship with God**

It doesn’t matter what sin we may be guilty of, if you break one you break them all. I don’t think James is merely talking about breaking the laws of God but instead I believe that he is looking at our relationship with God. Just because one steals something doesn’t make it equal or worse than one who has taken a life. But both types of sin do effect our

relationship with God. Sin breaks fellowship with God. In fact, every time we sin, we put Jesus right back up on that cross. That's why he died isn't it? That puts our relationship with God at odds.

You and I know that when we fall there is a distance that takes place between us and God. A pure and holy God cannot handle things that are unholy, yet at the same time we cannot something that we are not committed to, or to whom we have violated a promise.

If you feel this morning that God seems to be far away, out of reach, then I ask you to examine your life to see if there is any sin that has wedged its way between you and Him. Just as a friendship is damaged because of some type of violation, the same can happen between us and God.

## **2. Breaking God's Law is a violation of God's authority**

You either believe that he has full authority in your life, or you don't. That is why when we don't follow just one of God's commands you denying the authority of God in on all his commands. Look at your life and ask does God have the authority in my life or am I still hanging on to some of it myself. **Jude 1:24** tells us:

*<sup>25</sup> All glory to him, who alone is God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Yes, glory, majesty, power, and authority belong to him, in the beginning, now, and forevermore. Amen.*

Authority belongs to God, yet all too often we try to take it away from him and at times even give it away to someone or something else. In **Romans 6:16** Paul speaks of this when he said:

*<sup>6</sup> Don't you realize that whatever you choose to obey becomes your master? You can choose sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God and receive his approval*

All too often we give away authority in our lives to something that may last just a moment, or to things that leave us more empty than when we first started, or to things that we didn't even realize we gave control to. Breaking the laws of God shows that we have given away authority, but we need to give it back to God where it belongs.

## **3. Breaking God's Law is Proof That We Do Need Jesus Christ.**

Everyday there are people who still try to earn God's favor by their good deeds. We have all heard those who state that they will get into heaven simply because they did a lot of good things in their life. But if it were possible to be saved by good works, then why can't we start by obeying 10 simply commands? If it were possible for us to be saved by our good works then why would we even need Jesus Christ in the first place?

The reality is that we do. The reality is that we can't do enough good things to make up for the wrong that we have committed. That is why **Galatians 3:10-12** tells us:

*<sup>10</sup> But those who depend on the law to make them right with God are under his curse, for the Scriptures say, "Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all these commands that are written in God's Book of the Law." <sup>11</sup> Consequently, it is clear that no one can ever be right with God by trying to keep the law. For the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life." <sup>12</sup> How different from this way of faith is the way of law, which says, "If you wish to find life by obeying the law, you must obey all of its commands."*

There is no way we can be saved by obeying the 10 commandments because all of us can't seem to keep them. That is why **Romans 3:23** tells us:

*<sup>23</sup> For all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard.*

The laws of God are given to us so that we can really see how messed up and in need of Jesus we truly are. Some may say, "if we aren't saved by doing good things then how are we saved then?" **Romans 9:31-33** tells us:

*<sup>31</sup> But the Jews, who tried so hard to get right with God by keeping the law, never succeeded. <sup>32</sup> Why not? Because they were trying to get right with God by keeping the law and being good instead of by depending on faith. They stumbled over the great rock in their path. <sup>33</sup> God warned them of this in the Scriptures when he said, "I am placing a stone in Jerusalem that causes people to stumble, and a rock that makes them fall. But anyone who believes in him will not be disappointed."*

We are saved based on our faith – our belief and trust in God. Faith does not negate the need to follow God's law, but instead it gives us the ability to get up after our fall, brush off the dirt from our clothes and continue on in our journey towards God. I hope that we don't become so arrogant to think that we can live a godly righteous life outside of God. Because if you aren't relying upon God's righteousness you are relying upon self-righteousness.

#### **4. You will be judged by the Law of Love**

As we continue on in our text we read in **verse 12** that we will be judged by the law of love. What is the law of love? James told us what that was last week in **James 2:8** where he said:

<sup>8</sup> *Yes indeed, it is good when you truly obey our Lord's royal command found in the Scriptures: "Love your neighbor as yourself."*

As you look at the 10 commandments you find that the first five commandments are directly linked to our relationship with God, but the last five have to do with loving people. If you don't honor your father and mother, you don't show a love for them. If you kill you show that you don't love people. If you commit adultery you show a lack of love for people. If you steal from someone you show a lack of love for them. If you testify falsely against someone you show a lack of love for them. And if you become jealous of someone and want to take their wife or house, or belongings, then you show a lack of love for them. In **Romans 13:8-10** Paul tells us:

<sup>8</sup> *Pay all your debts, except the debt of love for others. You can never finish paying that! If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill all the requirements of God's law.* <sup>9</sup> *For the commandments against adultery and murder and stealing and coveting—and any other commandment—are all summed up in this one commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself."* <sup>10</sup> *Love does no wrong to anyone, so love satisfies all of God's requirements.*

Our life is suppose to be marked by two things – a love for God, and a love for people. John tells us in **1 John 4:20**:

<sup>20</sup> *If someone says, "I love God," but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we have not seen?* <sup>21</sup> *And God himself has commanded that we must love not only him but our Christian brothers and sisters, too.*

Think of your life this morning. Are you characterized as a person who loves people? Maybe some of us here need God's help to be come loving people. What should motivate us is our relationship with God. **1 John 4:8** tells us:

<sup>8</sup> *But anyone who does not love does not know God—for God is love.*

## **5. Live out what you expect from God.**

As we continue on in our text we read in **verse 13** that if we want mercy, we must first show it to others. God doesn't want us to think that we will get a free ride in life by simply relying upon his ability to save us. Instead, he tells us that if we expect something then we must be willing to give it. If you want God's love, then you must be willing to love others. If you want God to provide for your needs then you need to be willing to help provide for others needs or the needs of the church. If you want friendship then you must be willing to be a friend and take steps to reach out to others. **Colossians 3:13-14** tells us:

<sup>13</sup>You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. <sup>14</sup>And the most important piece of clothing you must wear is love. Love is what binds us all together in perfect harmony.

To receive forgiveness and then not be willing to show it to others is so arrogant of us. To think that someone else's sin is worse than the sins we commit against God is absolutely absurd. Jesus said in **Luke 6:37-38**:

<sup>37</sup> "Stop judging others, and you will not be judged. Stop criticizing others, or it will all come back on you. If you forgive others, you will be forgiven. <sup>38</sup>If you give, you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full measure, pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, and running over. Whatever measure you use in giving—large or small—it will be used to measure what is given back to you."

Judgment, forgiveness, mercy, patience, kindness (the list can go on and on) However much you give it will be given back to you. How you live today greatly determines what you will receive today and in the days to come.

So what have we learned today out of our text in James?

- Sin separates us from God. It cuts us off to where we can't hear from God until we are willing to come back and ask for God's help. When we turn our back on what God asks from us we sever our relationship
- Sin shows us that we need to reinstate God's authority in our lives, giving up our own. The law that God has given us is not something that he wants us to consider, but its something that he wants us to obey.
- There is no way that we can be saved by doing good, or by trying to keep all of God's commands because we just can't seem to do it. That is why no one is saved based on their works because it will never be enough to pay for the penalty that all of our sins has accumulated. That is why the message of Jesus Christ is such good news because we needed help.
- How will we be judged? By the law of love. How we love each other and God, and live it out will determine how God will judge or reward us. To live out love will fulfill the commandments of God.
- We must live out what we expect from God. If you want forgiveness from God then you must be willing to forgive. If you want provision from God you must be willing to give. If want mercy then you must show mercy. Don't think for one minute that you above showing mercy, or provision, or forgiveness, while all through your life God continue to show it to you.

What kind of God do we portray in our lives this morning? Is it a small god, like I mentioned in my illustration this morning. It is a god who expects more from us than we are able to give? Is it a god who has no authority, or who expects us to earn his approval? Is it a god who judges the world and then writes them off? Is it a god who is hypocritical saying one thing while living something else?

I hope not. Because our God is holy and pure, yet wanting to have a relationship with an unholy, dirty, sinful people. He could have left us hopeless and frustrated giving us a list of expectations that we could never keep or fulfill. Instead, he took the striving out of gaining his approval and did it through his Son, Jesus Christ. Now we can be people who can experience forgiveness and love, and who can model the same for those in this world. Our God is a merciful and forgiving God, a God of love and hope. And how we live should show just how BIG God really

# Faith that Works

## James 2:14-26

This morning I want to continue on in our study of the book of James. So far we have gone through about a chapter and half, but within just these few paragraphs do we find the difference between simply calling ourselves a Christian to that of actually living out a Christian life. Just because a person goes into McDonald's doesn't make them a hamburger, so it is that a person isn't a Christian simply because they go to church. The Christian life takes action, it takes honest evaluation, it takes a willingness to let God lead us, and it take humility that is willing to do as we are taught.

This morning James really hits this idea home for us in our text found in **James 2:14-26**.

Once upon a time, an atheist was arguing with a Christian about the existence of God. "Did you ever see God?" asked the atheist. "No," said the Christian. "Did you ever smell God?" asked the atheist again. "No," said the Christian. "Well, then," said the atheist with a smile on his face. "How can you be so sure that there is a God?" The Christian replied, "Sir, did you ever see your brains?" "No," said the atheist. "And did you ever smell your brains?" the Christian asked again. "No," answered the atheist. Finally, the Christian asked, "How can you be sure that you have any brains?"

We all sit here this morning knowing with all of our hearts that God is alive and well, ready to step in and help when we need help, willing to provide when we need provision. Even though we can't see God, we can sure see the effects that God has on people and circumstances. But how does the rest of the world know that there is a God who is alive and willing to do the same for them? James addresses this in our text. Let's read it together:

*<sup>14</sup> Dear brothers and sisters, what's the use of saying you have faith if you don't prove it by your actions? That kind of faith can't save anyone. <sup>15</sup> Suppose you see a brother or sister who needs food or clothing, <sup>16</sup> and you say, "Well, good-bye and God bless you; stay warm and eat well"—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? <sup>17</sup> So you see, it isn't enough just to have faith. Faith that doesn't show itself by good deeds is no faith at all—it is dead and useless. <sup>18</sup> Now someone may argue, "Some people have faith; others have good deeds." I say, "I can't see your faith if you don't have good deeds, but I will show you my faith through my good deeds." <sup>19</sup> Do you still think it's enough just to believe that there is one God? Well, even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror! <sup>20</sup> Fool! When will you ever learn that faith that does not result in good deeds is useless? <sup>21</sup> Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham was declared right with God because of what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see, he was trusting God so much that he was willing to do whatever God told him to do. His faith was made complete by what he did—by his actions. <sup>23</sup> And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: "Abraham believed God, so God declared him to be righteous." He was even called "the friend of God."*

<sup>24</sup>*So you see, we are made right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.*  
<sup>25</sup>*Rahab the prostitute is another example of this. She was made right with God by her actions—when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road.* <sup>26</sup>*Just as the body is dead without a spirit, so also faith is dead without good deeds.*

## 1. True Faith Produces Good Works

I believe that there is a difference between mere acknowledgement and true trust and belief in God. There is a difference in the lifestyles of those who acknowledge that God exists and those who actually believe in God and let their lives line up with what they believe. Is one saved strictly by their faith? We do read in **Ephesians 2:8-9**:

<sup>8</sup> *God saved you by his special favor when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God.* <sup>9</sup>*Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.*

It tells us here that we are saved by our faith and not by works, and it would seem that James' words to us this morning are contradictory. But really, James and the words of the Apostle Paul support each other.

Have you ever volunteered for something that you really didn't believe in? You went through the motions of support but deep down inside, you weren't sold out or really committed to do more than what you volunteered for. This type of mentality is not true support but merely going through the motions.

Have you ever volunteered for something you were really excited about and you believed that it would make a difference in the lives of people. You saw it as something worth investing your time and efforts into. There are two types of volunteers – those who simply go through the motions, and those who are motivated and excited because of their belief and conviction about the difference it can make.

Paul tells us we can't earn our way into heaven by doing good things and neglect a relationship with God (the true object of our faith), and James is telling us that if we have a relationship with God then we will be doing good things. That is why Paul tells us in **Ephesians 2:10**:

*For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*

Good works is a natural by-product of true faith. In **I Thessalonians 1:3** Paul told the church:

*We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. (NIV)*

This Church had good work produced by their faith. James tells us in verse 17 that faith must show itself in good works otherwise it is either dead or useless. How useless it would be if we held the answer to salvation to ourselves and never shared it with anyone else. How useless it would be for us to simply come week after week, hear the truths of God's word and then leave never to apply a single thing said. How useless it would be for us to claim we are a Christian yet not have a single thing change in our lives. Paul said in **Galatians 5:6**:

*<sup>6</sup> For when we place our faith in Christ Jesus, it makes no difference to God whether we are circumcised or not circumcised (what we have accomplished). What is important is faith expressing itself in love.*

That is why true faith doesn't simply turn away someone in need, but it gives because that is what Christ would have done. True faith would also believe that God will not let us go broke or hungry because we have acted out in love.

Faith that doesn't show itself in good deeds is not faith but mere acknowledgement. That is why James goes on in our text and gives us a good example of this fact in verse 19 where he tells us that even the demons believe in God. In **Matthew 8:29** Jesus is called the Son of God, or the most High God by two demons. And then in **Mark 1:24** Jesus was in Capernaum when a demon possessed man acknowledged Jesus as the Holy One of God.

The demons are fallen angels who God originally created. They are the ones who see people's lives changed all the time. I know that they believe in the power and ability of Jesus Christ, because every time they are confronted with the name of Jesus Christ, the Bible tells us that they have to flee. The demons just choose to ignore what they know and do nothing about it.

Many people in our world today believe that there is a God. Some are even more specific that Jesus is the Son of God, yet when you look at their life you really wonder whether or not they really do believe it. True faith produces good works. James goes on to give us a couple of examples in the remainder of our text this morning.

## **2. Example of Abraham**

In verse 21 he gives us the example of Abraham and Isaac. We read of the story in **Genesis 22:1-14**. It tells us:

*<sup>1</sup> Later on God tested Abraham's faith and obedience. "Abraham!" God called. "Yes," he replied. "Here I am." <sup>2</sup> "Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will point out to you." <sup>3</sup> The next*

morning Abraham got up early. He saddled his donkey and took two of his servants with him, along with his son Isaac. Then he chopped wood to build a fire for a burnt offering and set out for the place where God had told him to go. <sup>4</sup>On the third day of the journey, Abraham saw the place in the distance. <sup>5</sup>“Stay here with the donkey,” Abraham told the young men. “The boy and I will travel a little farther. We will worship there, and then we will come right back.” <sup>6</sup>Abraham placed the wood for the burnt offering on Isaac’s shoulders, while he himself carried the knife and the fire. As the two of them went on together, <sup>7</sup>Isaac said, “Father?” “Yes, my son,” Abraham replied. “We have the wood and the fire,” said the boy, “but where is the lamb for the sacrifice?” <sup>8</sup>“God will provide a lamb, my son,” Abraham answered. And they both went on together. <sup>9</sup>When they arrived at the place where God had told Abraham to go, he built an altar and placed the wood on it. Then he tied Isaac up and laid him on the altar over the wood. <sup>10</sup>And Abraham took the knife and lifted it up to kill his son as a sacrifice to the LORD. <sup>11</sup>At that moment the angel of the LORD shouted to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Yes,” he answered. “I’m listening.” <sup>12</sup>“Lay down the knife,” the angel said. “Do not hurt the boy in any way, for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld even your beloved son from me.” <sup>13</sup>Then Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in a bush. So he took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering on the altar in place of his son. <sup>14</sup>Abraham named the place “The LORD Will Provide.” This name has now become a proverb: “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.”

How would you respond if God came to you one day and asked you to do something extreme? We need to understand that Abraham trusted God and we can see in his words that he knew God wouldn’t let him kill his own son. It tells us in **Hebrews 11:17-19**:

<sup>17</sup> *It was by faith that Abraham offered Isaac as a sacrifice when God was testing him. Abraham, who had received God’s promises, was ready to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, <sup>18</sup>though God had promised him, “Isaac is the son through whom your descendants will be counted.” <sup>19</sup>Abraham assumed that if Isaac died, God was able to bring him back to life again. And in a sense, Abraham did receive his son back from the dead.*

But even if he would have sacrificed his own son, Abraham still believe and trusted God that he would bring Isaac back from the dead. That is extreme faith.

Although my experiences are nothing like Abraham’s, I remember a time in my own life when God came and asked something pretty extreme from me – my life. I remember as if it were yesterday, how God moved on my heart that he wanted my life to lived out for him through ministry, even if it meant living in another country.

Because of that request I have moved away from family and friends, I have given up material wealth, I have subjected myself to things that I wouldn’t choose for myself. I

have taken ministerial assignments without even knowing what I was going to be paid. Some may say that I was stupid, or too optimistic, or maybe living in denial. But I see these times as steps of faith which have and still do produce good works. God has, and still continues today to ask me to step out in faith and trust him.

How much are we willing to give up for the sake of Jesus Christ this morning? How are we willing to show our faith? Because of what Abraham did we read that he was declared righteous and even called “the friend of God”.

### **3. The Example of Rahab**

We read of Rahab, a prostitute who helped the spies of Israel, risking her own life for the sake of the Lord’s people. She took a step of faith in God and in fact we read her words in **Joshua 2:11-12**:

*For the LORD your God is the supreme God of the heavens above and the earth below. <sup>12</sup>Now swear to me by the LORD that you will be kind to me and my family since I have helped you.*

Rahab not only believed in God but also took steps to show her faith. In **Hebrews 11:31** it tells us:

*<sup>31</sup> It was by faith that Rahab the prostitute did not die with all the others in her city who refused to obey God. For she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.*

When no one else was willing to help, she stepped up and showed her faith. If your faith is real, then there must be action on your part. Both go hand in hand. In verse 26 it tells us that it is like the body having a soul, one cannot live with out the other. What does James’ words mean to us today?

It is a clear challenge to examine our lives and ask ourselves first, if we do have faith or mere acknowledgement. What are you doing today that proves your faith? What steps are you taking to model your faith to others? Second, just how strong is your faith? Look at your actions and measure just how much faith they really do take. Are you simply taking small steps, or are you making big commitments? Third, how far are you willing to develop your faith? Does God have the authority in your life to ask ANYTHING of you? If not, then we need to heed the words of John the Baptist where he states in **John 3:30**:

*<sup>30</sup> He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less.*

Let’s pray

# What Do You Teach?

## James 3:1-12

This morning I want to continue in our study of the book of James. Over the last number of weeks we have been challenged to tighten up our belts, and take steps that would surely prove that we have Christ living in us. James left us last week with the words, “faith without good works is dead.” Not that we are saved based on what we do, but because of what we believe and what God has done on our behalf, we should be motivated out of our belief to do good things. I am reminded of that scientific formula that states, “with every action there is a reaction.” True belief results in good works.

This morning James continue to hit hard against our human condition and speaks about the power of the tongue in **James 3:1-12**. The words we speak everyday has a reaction of some sort – whether good or bad.

A girl by the name Cheryl Prewitt, was four years old, and use to hand out around her father’s country grocery store. Almost daily, the milkman would come into the store and greet her with the words, “How’s my little Miss America?” At first she giggled, but eventually she became comfortable with it . . . and even liked it a little. Soon the milkman’s greeting became a childhood fantasy . . . and then a teenage dream. Finally, it became a goal . . . and in 1980, she stood on a stage in Atlantic City and was crowned Miss America.

There is power in words and James wants to challenge us this morning in **James 3:1-12**:

*<sup>1</sup> Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged by God with greater strictness. <sup>2</sup> We all make many mistakes, but those who control their tongues can also control themselves in every other way. <sup>3</sup> We can make a large horse turn around and go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. <sup>4</sup> And a tiny rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot wants it to go, even though the winds are strong. <sup>5</sup> So also, the tongue is a small thing, but what enormous damage it can do. A tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. <sup>6</sup> And the tongue is a flame of fire. It is full of wickedness that can ruin your whole life. It can turn the entire course of your life into a blazing flame of destruction, for it is set on fire by hell itself. <sup>7</sup> People can tame all kinds of animals and birds and reptiles and fish, <sup>8</sup> but no one can tame the tongue. It is an uncontrollable evil, full of deadly poison. <sup>9</sup> Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it breaks out into curses against those who have been made in the image of God. <sup>10</sup> And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right! <sup>11</sup> Does a spring of water bubble out with both fresh water and bitter water? <sup>12</sup> Can you pick olives from a fig tree or figs from a grapevine? No, and you can’t draw fresh water from a salty pool.*

## 1. What Does Your Life Teach?

James begins this morning by addressing a problem that the church was facing. One of the greatest places of honor in those days was that of a teacher. Many of those in the church came from a Jewish background where the Rabbi's or "teachers" were viewed as one who had authority and influence. Jesus found himself in this same type of situation in **Matthew 23:7-18**:

*<sup>7</sup>They enjoy the attention they get on the streets, and they enjoy being called 'rabbi.' <sup>8</sup>Don't ever let anyone call you 'rabbi,' for you have only one teacher, and all of you are on the same level as brothers and sisters.*

James, however, didn't want people to simply seek out the title because of what came with it, he stresses the fact that those who have the title have a lot of responsibility and that God holds them more accountable because of their influence upon people's lives.

As a pastor this morning, I know that God holds me accountable for what I teach you this morning not only in word but also by my actions. As I work in the paint store I do so knowing that I still represent God there as well. I am the same person here as I am at the store. I do not simply flip a switch that makes me one person here and someone else in the community. Peter put it this way in **1 Peter 4:11**:

*<sup>11</sup>Are you called to be a speaker? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Are you called to help others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then God will be given glory in everything through Jesus Christ. All glory and power belong to him forever and ever. Amen.*

Although James begins by stressing the accountability of teachers in the church I think we can ask ourselves this morning, "By how I live, what do I teach and what kind of influence am I to others? Do I represent God well?"

## 2. Let Your Speech Lead Well

James continues on in our text this morning and in verse 2 tells us that controlling ones tongue is the ultimate self-control. I think all of us face daily the struggle of controlling our tongue. We have all said things out of reaction and hurt. We have manipulated people by our words. We have even voiced out our opinions without any consideration of how those opinions effect people. It seems to me that the old saying, "think before your speak" all too often gets pushed aside and we just let our tongues roll.

Keep in mind that James is still speaking about teachers in the church, and what he is trying to show us is that a teacher's life can lead to God or destruction. That is why he continues on and talks about a bit leading a horse and a rudder steering a ship. There is a lot of responsibility placed on a teacher in the church. In **Matthew 15:18** Jesus told his disciples:

*But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man unclean.*

If you ever want to know what matters to a person or where a person's life is at, simply listen to what they have to say. Even if a person is being cordial and saying little, eventually you will be able to see and hear the heart of the individual. We all tend to talk about things that are important to us.

The job of a teacher however is to let God speak through them so that people are not led out on bunny trails or on issues that aren't really important in comparison to eternal truths. So that they are encouraged to press closer to God and not find themselves taking on others offenses. Paul told the church in Ephesus in **Ephesians 4:29**:

*<sup>29</sup>Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.*

Our words lead others – even the smallest words lead others.

Two warships with the largest full-load displacement in the world are the US Navy aircraft carriers, The USS Nimitz and Dwight D. Eisenhower each weighing over 91,000 tons. They are 1,092 feet in length and have a speed well in excess of 30 knots with their nuclear-powered 280,000 horse power reactors. They each house 6,100 men and women. The total cost of the Eisenhower commissioned on October 18<sup>th</sup>, 1977 exceeded \$2 billion excluding the more than 90 plus aircraft it carried. As immense as these two ships are they are both turned by one man at the helm controlling a rudder 1/1000<sup>th</sup> the size of the ship. A tiny rudder controls the course of great ships.

I have seen it time after time after time - A simple statement turned into a mountain, leading people away from what God wants in their lives. As a teacher it is very clear here that we can either lead people to God, or to our own hidden agenda. What a huge responsibility we carry. Paul told Timothy in **1 Timothy 4:12**:

*<sup>12</sup>Don't let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you teach, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity.*

I cannot tell you the amount of time I spend searching Scriptures, studying topic, making sure that I put scripture in it's proper context. An average sermon takes anywhere from 8-12 hours to prepare just for the 20-30 minutes I have to share with you on a Sunday morning. I cannot simply sit down and piece a bunch of scriptures together hoping that it will make sense, but my goal is to present the real truth out of scripture each week. Not

my own ideas or interpretations, but the whole truth, holding back nothing simply because I am afraid that the Bible will make people feel uncomfortable.

The reason I put forth so much effort is because I want God's word to change people. I know its not going to be my simple human intellect, but God's truth will and can change every human being. I do not take lightly the calling that God has placed upon my life.

Now you may say to yourself this morning that I am preaching to myself – which is true, but can we agree that there is an overall lesson we can all learn here? If your tongues are like rudders or bits in a horses mouth, where are we leading those we come into contact with everyday? If our words lead others then maybe, just maybe I need to consider the importance of every word that comes out of my mouth.

### **3. Count the Cost Before You Speak**

That means that we have to stay clear of gossip, profanity, or judgment. These kinds of words are useless for the kingdom of God and actually do more damage than good. **Proverbs 10:19** tells us:

*<sup>20</sup> The words of the godly are like sterling silver; the heart of a fool is worthless.*

Gossip, profanity and judgment can also be used against us. Calvin Coolidge once said, "I have never been cursed or judged by the things I left unsaid." Gossip, profanity and judgment gives those who don't believe in God more ammunition to show that Christianity isn't real and it doesn't change lives. In **Titus 2:7-8** it tells us:

*<sup>7</sup> You yourself must be an example to them by doing good deeds of every kind. Let everything you do reflect the integrity and seriousness of your teaching. <sup>8</sup> Let your teaching be so correct that it can't be criticized. Then those who want to argue will be ashamed because they won't have anything bad to say about us.*

There is nothing worse than to speak things without consideration and loosing integrity or credibility with those who we hope one day to bring to Christ. Consider the cost before you speak.

James continues on in our text this morning and tells us that the tongue is like a flame of fire that can set our whole lives up in flames. In fact, our tongues can be used by Satan himself to divide people, to put people at odds with each other, to destroy a work that God has done, even to the point of destroying a church and its credibility, or even to the point of pushing people away from God. Satan can use what we say and God will hold us accountable. In **Matthew 12:36-37** Jesus said:

*<sup>36</sup>And I tell you this that you must give an account on judgment day of every idle word you speak. <sup>37</sup>The words you say now reflect your fate then; either you will be justified by them or you will be condemned.”*

The term idle hear means any words that are empty, useless, lazy and unconsidered – whenever we just let things roll off the end of our tongue. We need to consider more of what we want to say before we actually say it. Is this hard? You bet its hard and at times it almost seems impossible. That is why we need God’s help. We need his Holy Spirit to help us, or stop us, or change us. We can’t do it by ourselves and James makes it very clear in James 3:7-12. He tells us we can tame animals but the tongue is a whole different animal. It speaks words of praise to God one minute and then turns around and curses against a person the next. It supports God one minute and tears apart what God has made or done the next. All of us here today have done this. Does it bother any of us though? I hope it does. It’s a problem that only God can fix.

God can’t use us if we continue to give into this problem and James gives us the analogy of how a spring can’t bubble out both fresh and bitter water, or how you can’t get an olive from a fig tree or figs from a grapevine.

#### **4. The Solution**

Then what is the solution for us this morning? How can I find help with my tongue? James has already said it himself, that if you can control your tongue then you show that you have control over yourselves. In **2 Peter 1:6** we are told:

*<sup>6</sup> Knowing God leads to self-control. Self-control leads to patient endurance, and patient endurance leads to godliness.*

##### ***a. Knowing God***

The more we learn about God, the more we will want to change our lives. The more we understand what he has done and continues to do, the more we will line up our lives to show love and gratitude. You cannot be in the presence of God and leave the same. If remain the same then you don’t truly know God. Get to know God, get into your Bible, read books that will help you understand him – and then your life will change.

##### ***b. Letting The Holy Spirit Live In Us***

Of course the more we know God the more we understand that we need Gods help. In **Galatians 5:23** it tells us what the Holy Spirit can do in each of us:

<sup>22</sup> *But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,*  
<sup>23</sup> *gentleness, and self-control.*

Letting the Holy Spirit work in us – directing us, leading us, stopping us, challenging us. Time after time after time going through different scenarios but submitting to the leading of that still small voice that leads us in godliness. Does this happen over night? Of course not.

***c. Practice, Practice, Practice***

Learning self-control takes practice. Paul said in **1 Corinthians 9:25-27**:

<sup>25</sup> *All athletes practice strict self-control. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize. <sup>26</sup>So I run straight to the goal with purpose in every step. I am not like a boxer who misses his punches. <sup>27</sup> I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.*

If you fail then get back up and try again and again. If you find it difficult to control your tongue then start making change now. Those changes that you make will make a difference not only in your own life, but the life of those who you come in contact with.

We need to be people who consider every word that we speak and the long term effects that they may have. We need to be careful that our words don't become that small flame that can Satan can use to turn into a blazing flame of destruction, but instead we need our words to lead people to God. Consider every word your speak because God holds you accountable. Let's pray.

# The Marks of Wisdom

## James 3:13-18

I want to continue in our study of the book of James and look at another example of self control. Last week we looked at James' words to control our tongues, being sure that we lead people to God by the things that we say and not to our own ideas, hurts, or thoughts. We need to be careful that we don't become stumbling blocks for others. **1 John 2:10** tells us:

*<sup>10</sup>Anyone who loves other Christians is living in the light and does not cause anyone to stumble.*

We need to make sure that our words do not cause others to fall away from God and fall into sin. But this morning James takes it a step further and tells us that we need to model self-control in our lives by allowing wisdom to reign in our lives. The world today views many people as wise, but how does God define wisdom this morning?

A minister, a Boy Scout, and the smartest man in the world were the only passengers on a small plane. The pilot came back to the cabin and said that the plane was going down but there were only three parachutes and four people. The pilot added, "I should have one of the parachutes because I have a wife and three small children." So he grabbed one of the parachutes and jumped. The smartest man in the world spoke up and stated, "The world need my mind and my wisdom. For me to die would be a loss to the rest of mankind." And with those words he grabs a parachute and jumps. The minister turned to the boy scout and with a sad smile said, "You are young and I have lived a rich life, so you take the remaining parachute, and I'll go down with the plane." The boy scout said, "Relax, reverend, the smartest man in the world just jumped out of the plane with my backpack.

Just because one says that they are wise doesn't mean that they are. The true test is found in how they apply what they know, and that is what James wants to talk to us about this morning. Let's read **James 3:13-18**:

*<sup>13</sup> If you are wise and understand God's ways, live a life of steady goodness so that only good deeds will pour forth. And if you don't brag about the good you do, then you will be truly wise! <sup>14</sup> But if you are bitterly jealous and there is selfish ambition in your hearts, don't brag about being wise. That is the worst kind of lie. <sup>15</sup> For jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. Such things are earthly, unspiritual, and motivated by the Devil. <sup>16</sup> For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and every kind of evil. <sup>17</sup> But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no partiality and is always sincere. <sup>18</sup> And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of goodness.*

James tells the church to show their wisdom by how they live. There is clearly a difference between wisdom and knowledge. We can all cram our brains full of facts and information, but wisdom is based on learning from applying what we know. It is experiential knowledge, and in the case of the early church James was calling them to live out what they already know.

The Bible makes very clear that true wisdom is found in God. In fact, the Bible even defines what wisdom should look like. Jesus said in **Matthew 7:24**:

*<sup>24</sup> “Anyone who listens to my teaching and obeys me is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. <sup>25</sup>Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won’t collapse, because it is built on rock.*

It isn’t enough to simply know what God has to say, but we also need to apply it. This is where God can make a difference in our lives, and can make us into people who are wise because of our experience. But why is it that so many hear what God has to say and yet still refuse to apply it?

I believe that all too often we rely more on human wisdom than we do God’s because there is something within all of us that still hates to admit that God does know better. But Paul wrote to the church in Corinth in **1 Corinthians 3:18-20**:

*<sup>18</sup> Stop fooling yourselves. If you think you are wise by this world’s standards, you will have to become a fool so you can become wise by God’s standards. <sup>19</sup>For the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God. As the Scriptures say, “God catches those who think they are wise in their own cleverness.” <sup>20</sup>And again, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are worthless.”*

God’s wisdom is clearly different from how we think, and this scripture verse I just read tells us that our wisdom is considered foolishness compared to God’s. Who should we listen to then, God or man? Obviously God!

The question then must be presented this morning, “When you need an answer in life, or in a decision, to whom do you go to first?” Do you seek out God’s wisdom or do you respond based on another person’s opinion? If we truly believe that God has the most wisdom then in everything we need to go to him first.

James tells us in verse 13 that wisdom produces two things in us: Goodness and Humility. Wisdom shows itself and it gives us a means by which we can truly evaluate ourselves and see just how close to God’s wisdom we remain.

## 1. True Wisdom = Steady Goodness / Good Works

This closely relates to what we read a couple of weeks ago in **James 2:17** where it states that faith without good works is dead. The same can be said in regards to wisdom – wisdom without good works is useless. What good is it for us to have godly wisdom in our lives and still do nothing about it. Paul said in **Colossians 4:5**:

*<sup>5</sup>Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.  
NIV*

Wisdom considers what needs to take place in order for there to result a good works.

## 2. The Attitude of True Wisdom = Humility / Honest Evaluation

True wisdom realizes that it doesn't come from a human source and therefore it isn't something that we should take credit for. Paul said in **1 Corinthians 1:26-29**:

*<sup>26</sup>Remember, dear brothers and sisters, that few of you were wise in the world's eyes, or powerful, or wealthy when God called you. <sup>27</sup>Instead, God deliberately chose things the world considers foolish in order to shame those who think they are wise. And he chose those who are powerless to shame those who are powerful. <sup>28</sup>God chose things despised by the world, things counted as nothing at all, and used them to bring to nothing what the world considers important, <sup>29</sup>so that no one can ever boast in the presence of God.*

True wisdom gives God the credit he deserves and is truly a testimony of just how different he would do things. Wisdom causes us to understand that in any matter in life the only true answer and proper choices can only be made with God as our source.

## 3. Human Wisdom = Jealousy and Self-centeredness

James continues on this morning and shows us just how different human wisdom and Godly wisdom truly are. Human wisdom is full of jealousy and is self-centered. Human wisdom tells us that we need to look out for #1, to help ourselves, to remain selfish, to not give room for God or his principles, to be jealous and envious of those around us and do all that we can to get what they have. To function based on our own agenda no matter what cost it may have. The Bible warns us against this type of wisdom numerous times. In **1 Corinthians 3:3** it tells us:

*for you are still controlled by your own sinful desires. You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other. Doesn't that prove you are controlled by your own desires? You are acting like people who don't belong to the Lord.*

Human wisdom shows us that we still haven't given up our lives to God completely. Instead God wants our lives to be the exact opposite. In **Philippians 2:3** it tells us:

<sup>3</sup> *Don't be selfish; don't live to make a good impression on others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself.* <sup>4</sup> *Don't think only about your own affairs, but be interested in others, too, and what they are doing.*

Wisdom tells us to be people who don't look out for ourselves but more importantly to look out for those we find ourselves surrounded by. Imagine how empty life would be if you had everything you ever wanted but had no relationships, or no investment into people's lives. Our society tells us to stock pile our stuff and let everyone else help themselves. But the wisdom in being a Christian is in investing into the lives of people.

So another question is posed for us this morning, "Who are we investing in?" It doesn't always have to be money, but it may be our time, our effort, or our experiences.

Jealousy and self-centeredness we are told by James come from Satan himself. We need to understand that the whole purpose God created us in the first place is to "Love him and love our neighbors." To go against this purpose is to follow after Satan's choice, to serve himself, making himself God. That is what he convinced Eve to do in the garden, to serve herself and listen to herself more than God, and that is what he will try to get us to do as well. In **2 Corinthians 11:3** Paul told the church:

*I fear that somehow you will be led away from your pure and simple devotion to Christ, just as Eve was deceived by the serpent.*

Human wisdom only seeks to serve itself and not necessarily the truth. That is why people always try to explain away what Jesus Christ has done on their behalf. They use human logic, which is in fact limited logic in comparison to God's logic and they purposeful deny Christ. They rely more on the world-view than on God's. When Peter try to correct Jesus' statements about his coming death, Jesus told him in **Mark 8:33**:

<sup>33</sup> *Jesus turned and looked at his disciples and then said to Peter very sternly, "Get away from me, Satan! You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God's."*

As Christians this morning we need to people who view things through the eyes of God instead of how Satan would love for us to see things. How do we do that? James continues on this morning in verse 17 and tells us how.

#### **4. The Fruit of True Wisdom**

He tells us that we need to be peace-loving, gentle, and willing to help others, full of mercy, results in good deeds, with no bias, no hypocrisy. That's quite a list. But each of these are a characteristic of God. We need to understand that the ideas of this world do not mix with God's ideas. They are extreme opposites. James tells us that true wisdom

is pure, and we need to ask ourselves if our wisdom is pure or a mixture of both God's and man's ideas. Paul tells us in **Philippians 4:8**:

*<sup>8</sup> And now, dear brothers and sisters, let me say one more thing as I close this letter. Fix your thoughts on what is true and honorable and right (pure). Think about things that are pure and lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.*

So what do you feed your minds. If true wisdom comes from God and not the world that means that we should spend more time on understanding God then we should allowing this world to fill our minds. That means sometimes we have to limit what we are exposed to. **Titus 1:15** tells us:

*<sup>15</sup> Everything is pure to those whose hearts are pure. But nothing is pure to those who are corrupt and unbelieving, because their minds and consciences are defiled.*

As believers we can't let our minds be corrupted, and we can tell if it is by looking at our lives and seeing if we truly are full of peace, considerate, submissive to God, full of mercy, sincere, or have goodness flowing out of our lives. Paul told the church in Colossae in **Colossians 3:12-15**:

*<sup>12</sup> Since God chose you to be the holy people whom he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. <sup>13</sup> You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. <sup>14</sup> And the most important piece of clothing you must wear is love. Love is what binds us all together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup> And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are all called to live in peace. And always be thankful.*

To change our lives by adapting Paul's words versus the worlds point of view shows true wisdom. Don't let anyone come and ridicule you because you rely more upon God's wisdom than man's. One of the arguments I have heard in regards to religion is that we should think for ourselves and not let someone else come and tell us what to do. But I think that is part of the problem, we think too much for ourselves in our own limited human intellect and ignore what God, who has complete wisdom.

Instead of think for ourselves I think we need to learn from the one who has complete wisdom and then let our lives reflect what we have learned. Then out of these improved lives we will be able to see peace and fruit. It is only then that we have given God something that he can work through. It is only then that we can show that others can have peace as well. It is only then that we can show that our godly wisdom is the answer to life.

Let God's wisdom reign in your life, and don't allow the world's wisdom to come and distort what God wants to say and do in your life. Live out godly wisdom and then others will see the peace and fruit that we have and may say to themselves, "I want what they have." May our lives be a testimony of God's unlimited wisdom. Let's pray

# Draw Close to God

## James 4:1-10

This morning I want to continue in our study of the book of James. Last week we left off with the whole idea that human wisdom is limited, yet all too often we rely more on our own wisdom than we do on God's. Unfortunately, human wisdom only results in jealousy and self-centeredness yet with God it is more focused on investing in people. The lesson we learned was that we need to rely more on God's wisdom than on what we are fed by the world, making sure that we are not poisoned with merely thinking about ourselves but looking to God to grant us more meaning and fulfillment in life.

This morning James wants to tell us how we can draw close to God and find ourselves more dependent upon him. Being dependent upon God – what a shift from how we use to think, when we thought we knew better, and when we tried to figure everything out. Being dependent upon God is what it means to live a life of faith, to trust something that we can't see with our own eyes, yet we know that our own solution to life is empty.

I can truly say in my own life that I would rather be dependent upon God and constantly struggling financially, than I would to be rich and reliant upon myself, and neglect God. This I believe can only be understood when we view things through Godly wisdom, because the world would think I was crazy (not that they don't already). Dependence upon God is a sign of wisdom, and with that in mind lets read **James 1:1-10**:

*<sup>1</sup> What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Isn't it the whole army of evil desires at war within you? <sup>2</sup> You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous for what others have, and you can't possess it, so you fight and quarrel to take it away from them. And yet the reason you don't have what you want is that you don't ask God for it. <sup>3</sup> And even when you do ask, you don't get it because your whole motive is wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure. <sup>4</sup> You adulterers! Don't you realize that friendship with this world makes you an enemy of God? I say it again, that if your aim is to enjoy this world, you can't be a friend of God. <sup>5</sup> What do you think the Scriptures mean when they say that the Holy Spirit, whom God has placed within us, jealously longs for us to be faithful? <sup>6</sup> He gives us more and more strength to stand against such evil desires. As the Scriptures say, "God sets himself against the proud, but he shows favor to the humble." <sup>7</sup> So humble yourselves before God. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup> Draw close to God, and God will draw close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, you hypocrites. <sup>9</sup> Let there be tears for the wrong things you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. <sup>10</sup> When you bow down before the Lord and admit your dependence on him, he will lift you up and give you honor.*

James begins this morning by identifying a problem in the church, and I think that it is still a problem today in many churches, especially in the United States. The problem

today is called “entitlement” or envy and James got word that the churches were fighting and quarreling over what each other had, whether it be material possessions, positions in the church, or recognition. We live in a society that believes that we are entitled to own or have certain things in life without it costing us anything. This kind of thinking only fuels our human desires and we can find ourselves buying into self-seeking, and self-gratifying desires that James tells us in verse 1 comes from the evil that is within us.

James tells us we are at war with in our minds. Obviously in order for there to be war there needs to be two opposing sides. So what tends to happen within each of us is that our human nature battles against the Holy Spirit within us, each fighting to gain ground either towards God or towards self-indulgence. **Romans 7:5-6** tells us:

*<sup>5</sup>When we were controlled by our old nature, sinful desires were at work within us, and the law aroused these evil desires that produced sinful deeds, resulting in death. <sup>6</sup>But now we have been released from the law, for we died with Christ, and we are no longer captive to its power. Now we can really serve God, not in the old way by obeying the letter of the law, but in the new way, by the Spirit.*

*<sup>23</sup>But there is another law at work within me that is at war with my mind. This law wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. <sup>24</sup>Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin? <sup>25</sup>Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God’s law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin. **Romans 7:23-25***

Paul talks about this struggle between inner evil desires and the Spirit and lets us know that we can find freedom from this struggle only when we rely upon the work of Jesus Christ and let his Holy Spirit have authority in our lives. Paul wrote in **Galatians 5:17**:

*<sup>17</sup>The old sinful nature loves to do evil, which is just opposite from what the Holy Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are opposite from what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, and your choices are never free from this conflict.*

Which side of the battle in our mind are we giving into each and everyday? Are we allowing the Spirit to guide us more than letting our own ideas and desires step in the way? This is something that we need to choose each and everyday. Jesus said, “Choose you this day who you will serve.” That is what determines how we live our lives and what we strive for.

In verse two of our text talks about the extent of what a person will do in order to get what someone else has. People fight, quarrel and will even kill in order to get what they want. Socrates once said: "nothing else but the body and its desires cause wars, seditions, and contests of every kind; for all wars arise through the possession of wealth." We live in a day where people are willing to do whatever it takes in order to have wealth

or fame. They steal, they kill, they will even glorify sin simply because it is appealing to the evil that is within all of us. People look for the easiest way to make a buck instead of going to the author of all things and asking for his provision. It is another example of human wisdom versus God's wisdom.

James tells the church in verse 3 that the reason they don't have what they want is because they haven't gone to God for it. Jesus said in **Luke 11:10**:

*<sup>10</sup>For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And the door is opened to everyone who knocks.*

Who is your source this morning? Is it you or God? I think all too often we neglect to ask God for what we need and instead we take care of it ourselves and put things on our credit cards, or take out a loan, or take other steps to get what we need. But God simply tells us to ask for what we need and he will answer us. But James also tells us here that there is another reason why we don't have what we want and that is because of our wrong motives. Now, I want to make sure that we understand that God at times does want to bless us with things that aren't necessities, but the problem arises when things take God's place or when they are all we live for.

The term "things that give you pleasure" speaks of sensual gratification or self-indulgence. To pray for these kind of things ignores the very reason why we have been placed here on earth – to glorify God. To ask for things that will only fuel pride or arrogance goes against the very idea of living to serve God and people. The question then must be asked, "What or who do I live for?" I know some that live simply to play sports, fish, to ride their motorcycles, to play with their toys each and every weekend. That is all they live for, and all they are doing is living to satisfy their own sensual gratification.

I am not saying that it is wrong to own toys or do activities but when that is all a person lives for then they are only serving themselves. Jesus said in **Matthew 16:26**:

*<sup>26</sup>And how do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul in the process? Is anything worth more than your soul?*

You can't love God and love the world at the same time – you have to give precedence to one or the other. That's what James continues on in our text in verse 4 to say that the world and God do not mix. Paul said in **2 Corinthians 6:14-18**:

*<sup>14</sup>Don't team up with those who are unbelievers. How can goodness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness? <sup>15</sup>What harmony can there be between Christ and the Devil? How can a believer be a partner with an unbeliever? <sup>16</sup>And what union can there be between God's temple and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God said: "I will live in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people. <sup>17</sup>Therefore, come out from them and separate yourselves from them,*

*says the Lord. Don't touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you. <sup>18</sup>And I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."*

Part of our battle in life is due to the fact that we have allowed God and the world to mix, and that is a true formula for frustration and conflict. We need to rely more on God's wisdom than human wisdom, we need to give ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit more than our own human desires, we need to seek God as our source of provision, and now we are being told to separate ourselves to God because the world can taint our proper perspective.

How can I do all these things? It seems that God is asking an awful lot of me. James gives us the solution in verse 5 and 6 when he tells us that the Holy Spirit's desire is to make us faithful, and He gives us the strength to stand against the evil desires we may face.

Every time the Holy Spirit moves in my heart, convicts me when I do wrong, leads me in certain directions, challenges me to grow more than I am, he does all of this because he wants me to remain faithful to God. Isn't it amazing that God gives us the Holy Spirit who helps us desire him, when our human desires are different and self-seeking. Living a Christian life is truly about letting God live through me. Letting God become greater while we ourselves become less and less. Paul wrote in **Galatians 5:25**:

*<sup>25</sup> If we are living now by the Holy Spirit, let us follow the Holy Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.*

*<sup>5</sup> Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. <sup>6</sup>If your sinful nature controls your mind, there is death. But if the Holy Spirit controls your mind, there is life and peace. <sup>7</sup>For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will. <sup>8</sup>That's why those who are still under the control of their sinful nature can never please God. <sup>9</sup> But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you. (And remember that those who do not have the Spirit of Christ living in them are not Christians at all.) <sup>10</sup> Since Christ lives within you, even though your body will die because of sin, your spirit is alive because you have been made right with God. <sup>11</sup> The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as he raised Christ from the dead, he will give life to your mortal body by this same Spirit living within you. **Romans 8:5-11***

The good news for us is not only that Jesus died for our sins and showed us that he satisfied God's wrath by raising from the dead, but also that now we have help to live how God wants us to live. The Holy Spirit now is in us to help us do what God wants from us. As Christians do we every blow it and go our own way and neglect what the

Spirit is trying to do in us? All the time, but we can pick ourselves up and start over and let the Holy Spirit develop us into a faithful Christian.

It is only when we are humble enough to realize that we need God, that we will find God's help through the power of the Holy Spirit. People who think they know it all and who don't need anyone's help will find themselves in a place where they are actually working against God and that is why James challenges us in verse 7 to remain humble. To keep an honest evaluation of ourselves in light of God and realize how great He is and just how lowly we are. Only when we realize that we can't even help ourselves, that is when God can help us.

James goes on and tells us to resist the Devil and he will flee. The word "resist" here means to oppose or to set against. Each and everyday we are faced with challenges and circumstances, and sometimes the Devil will do all he can to get us to deny God and even go against God's will for our lives. Peter tells us in **1 Peter 5:8-9**:

*<sup>8</sup> Be careful! Watch out for attacks from the Devil, your great enemy. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for some victim to devour. <sup>9</sup>Take a firm stand against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your Christian brothers and sisters all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering you are.*

Satan will do all he can to get us to question our faith, while the Holy Spirit within us is working to make us more faithful. We need to be ready to stand firm in the Holy Spirit and oppose or set ourselves against what Satan wants us to do. Satan wants us to question our faith, he wants us to crave sinful things, he wants us to think that we can live without God, that we can make our own choices, he wants us to think that just a small sin isn't going to lead to any greater sin in the future. Satan is a liar and he is not interested in what is best for you. **Ephesians 6:11-12** tells us:

*<sup>11</sup>Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies and tricks of the Devil. <sup>12</sup>For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against the evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against those mighty powers of darkness who rule this world, and against wicked spirits in the heavenly realms.*

We have an adversary that is alive and well and would like nothing more than to ignore God. Just last week I talked about how Peter tried to correct Jesus because he didn't want him to die. Jesus responded "get behind me Satan", telling Peter that he was being used to either tempt or distract Jesus from his true purpose. Church, this morning we need to understand that we can easily be tricked if we aren't ready, and Satan can use us to trip others up as well.

James continues on and tells us in verse 8 to draw close to God and God will draw close to us. How do we do that? James tells us to wash our hands (to clean up our act), to purify our hearts (to take steps to evaluate ourselves honestly and seek God's forgiveness), to be willing to show and voice our remorse for the things we have done against God, and finally to admit that we need God. Humility is truly Godly wisdom. It is only when we are in this state that God is willing to reach down and help, and he does so through the person of the Holy Spirit who lives within each of us and who gives us true worth and dignity.

So what have we learned this morning?

1. In the battle between our sinful desires and God's Holy Spirit we need to relinquish all control to the Spirit if we expect to be a true follower of God.
2. We need to rely upon God as our source of provision. That doesn't mean that we sit around and expect God to drop something out of the sky into our laps, but it means that we need to tell God what we need and seek out how he wants to provide. Understand this morning that God is your source.
3. We need to live for God and not simply for sensual desires because those desires will pass away and God will remain the same. Don't let those desires become a distraction from God's eternal purpose – that of living for him.
4. Don't try to mix worldly ideas with God's. They don't mix and in fact the world's ideas will somehow always lead back to yourself.
5. Rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to live as God expects us to. We can't live godly on our own, but the Holy Spirit desires and can make us into faithful followers of God, producing a fruitful life. We need to give more control of our lives to the Holy Spirit so that we can be strong enough to resist whatever Satan throws our way.
6. We need to admit that we need God. That takes humility, but as long as we keep this attitude in our heart, God will grant us a life full of worth and dignity.

# Admit Your Dependence Upon God

James 4:11-17

We have studying through the book of James for quite some time now, and I know that for not only myself but for others as well, this book has been challenging and has allowed us to really search our hearts to really see how much we really do take our Christian life seriously. The words we have seen so far have been challenging words yet at the same time rewarding because once we can apply what we have learned so far, we are able to see and experience a blessed life that is producing fruit and not merely existing.

Last week we left off with the idea that we are to draw close to God and allow Him to help us with the battle of the mind, the battle of inner desire versus God will, to view God as our source of provision and not become to self-reliant, to let the Holy Spirit come and lead us and make us into more faithful believers in Christ, and to let God give us boldness to stand against our adversary, Satan, so that we won't give into his plan and miss out on what God has for us. The more willing we are to draw strength and insight from God, the more God will begin to draw close to us.

God never turns down and humble and needy heart. He just can't do it because it is not in his nature or character. The more we admit that we need him and are dependent upon him the more he will do in each of our lives. And this is where I believe that we pick up James' words in **James 4:11-17**:

*<sup>11</sup> Don't speak evil against each other, my dear brothers and sisters. If you criticize each other and condemn each other, then you are criticizing and condemning God's law. But you are not a judge who can decide whether the law is right or wrong. Your job is to obey it. <sup>12</sup>God alone, who made the law, can rightly judge among us. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to condemn your neighbor? <sup>13</sup> Look here, you people who say, "Today or tomorrow we are going to a certain town and will stay there a year. We will do business there and make a profit." <sup>14</sup> How do you know what will happen tomorrow? For your life is like the morning fog—it's here a little while, then it's gone. <sup>15</sup> What you ought to say is, "If the Lord wants us to, we will live and do this or that." <sup>16</sup> Otherwise you will be boasting about your own plans, and all such boasting is evil. <sup>17</sup> Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.*

In verse 10 James just finishes by telling us that we need to admit that we are dependent upon God and then hits on two areas where we need to become more dependent – in allowing God to be judge and in letting him lead our lives. These are two areas we all struggle with, yet they are both areas where we need to rely more on God in faith than on ourselves taking things into our own hands.

## 1. Judging others.

We have all done it! We have a tendency to look at others and make judgments based on what we see or hear. It also may be based on how one looks. Every member of the human race looks at each individual and makes some type of assessment, while the reality may be that an individual is much different than what we see or judge.

James was addressing a problem in the church, where Christians were criticizing and condemning each other. The Greek word for this type of criticizing and condemnation is the word “Kreeno” which means to come to an opinion, to call to question, to conclude, to esteem, or to judge. It has the idea of war between two opposing warriors. It has been said before that the Church is the only place where we shoot our own wounded. Some of the most ruthless people I know have been in the church. The one place that needs to be a safe haven is the place where the Prince of Peace is worshipped.

Today, as I think of this church I can truly say that we are a church at peace. To my knowledge there aren't warriors battling against each other, but can it happen here? Absolutely it can. But as Christians who have found the answer in life, we do tend to judge people's actions, or size them up, when in reality each individual is a person created by God who is simply in a holding pattern waiting to decide when to land and find rest for their soul. Some land but many continue on in this pattern hoping that another landing strip will open somewhere else.

James words to us is clear “do not speak against each other, to back bite against each other, or to slander.” The Apostle Paul told the church in Ephesus in **Ephesians 4:31-32**:

*<sup>31</sup>Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior. <sup>32</sup>Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.*

I think all too often we as Christians forget from where we came from, what we have done in the past, and just how much love and mercy we have been shown. We tend to hold things over people's heads when we ourselves have experienced incredible forgiveness and kindness. Peter said in **1 Peter 2:1**:

*<sup>1</sup> So get rid of all malicious behavior and deceit. Don't just pretend to be good! Be done with hypocrisy and jealousy and backstabbing.*

The one place that the world should find good people is in the church, yet if we don't watch it we may be the one who will scare people away. We could become an individual who judges people away from finding grace, mercy and forgiveness. Is that what we want to be this morning? If not then we need to take James' words to heart.

James continues on in verse 11 and tells us that if we condemn each other then we are condemning God's law. What does he mean by this? Jesus said in **Matthew 22:37-40**:

<sup>37</sup> Jesus replied, “‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ <sup>38</sup>This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup>A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ <sup>40</sup>All the other commandments and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”

<sup>8</sup> Pay all your debts, except the debt of love for others. You can never finish paying that! If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill all the requirements of God’s law. <sup>9</sup> For the commandments against adultery and murder and stealing and coveting—and any other commandment—are all summed up in this one commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” <sup>10</sup> Love does no wrong to anyone, so love satisfies all of God’s requirements. **Romans 13:8-10**

In other words, the law of God is based on loving God and loving people. If we choose to go against people, then we show that we are against God’s law. You are basically telling God that he is wrong and you are right. That is a pretty arrogant position to take. To take on the position of a judge. People play this role all the time, but James this morning makes it very clear that our job is simply to obey. The Apostle Paul said in **Romans 2:13**:

<sup>13</sup>For it is not merely knowing the law that brings God’s approval. Those who obey the law will be declared right in God’s sight.

It one thing to know what the bible has to say, yet another to actually apply it. It is easy to quote scripture yet another thing to live it out come Monday morning. Our job is to obey what God has asked us to do.

It is hard not to be judgmental towards people, especially to those we don’t like or who rub us the wrong way. That is where James’ words in verse 10 where he tells us to depend more upon God comes into play with verse 12. The only person who has the right to judge anyone is God. Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 33:22**:

<sup>22</sup> For the LORD is our judge, our lawgiver, and our king. He will care for us and save us.

The Lord is our Judge and we need to let him be that in our lives. And if he has chosen to grant forgiveness and mercy and grace to you, then who do we think we are when we hold things against someone else? Paul asked this question in **Romans 9:20, 22** when he said:

*Who are you, a mere human being, to criticize God? Should the thing that was created say to the one who made it, “Why have you made me like this?”*

*God has every right to exercise his judgment and his power, but he also has the right to be very patient with those who are the objects of his judgment and are fit*

*only for destruction.* <sup>23</sup> *He also has the right to pour out the riches of his glory upon those he prepared to be the objects of his mercy*

God has every right to do whatever he wants and require from us whatever he wants, and what he wants from us this morning is for us to allow him to be the judge in our lives and not take on the task or title ourselves. Is this hard to do? Depending upon God is not always easy, but it is a step of faith. And if we rely upon him in faith he will help us and bless us.

We don't have any right to judge others not matter how small or big it may be. Let God be your judge. Even when things happen against us and we so want to retaliate and cast judgment, that is when we need to let him be Judge, but the reality is that only He will judge justly and will given appropriate punishment. As human beings we always tend to go for the jugular and draw as much blood as possible. That is why in our courts today, people who have faced minor infractions go to the extreme of suing for thousands, if not millions of dollars. But only God will judge appropriately and justly. Depend upon God to be your judge.

James continues on this morning and speaks of a second area where we need to depend upon God and that is in regards to our lives.

## **2. Being to self dependent.**

James begins by presenting a scenario where a person determines their own course in life. They strive to make their own plans happen when all along they neglect who knows what truly will happen. Life is too short to aimlessly wander with our lives, and we need God's direction. James tells us that life is like a fog, here one second, then gone the next. **Psalms 102:3** tells us:

*...for my days disappear like smoke, and my bones burn like red-hot coals.*

*My life is no longer than the width of my hand. An entire lifetime is just a moment to you; human existence is but a breath.” **Psalm 39:5***

*“People are like grass that dies away; their beauty fades as quickly as the beauty of wildflowers. The grass withers, and the flowers fall away. <sup>25</sup>But the word of the Lord will last forever.” **1 Peter 1:23***

We all know that Reebok slogan that states “Life's short, play hard” But the reality for us today is that life is too short to live a meaningless and wandering life. Each of us needs to ask God the question, “Lord, what is it that you want me to do?” God forbid that we miss why God placed us on earth in the first place. James tells us in verse 15 that our motto in life should be, “I will do what you want.” Now that is truly a statement of dependence upon God. **Proverbs 19:21** tells us:

<sup>21</sup> *You can make many plans, but the LORD's purpose will prevail.*

<sup>37</sup>*Can anything happen without the Lord's permission?* **Lamentations 19:21**

Whether we want to admit it or not, God is the one in control, and we can either jump on board with his plan, or we can deny him and miss out on our purpose. We can ask God what he wants, or we can simply boast about something that we have no control over – the choice is ours.

James finishes up this morning with verse 17 and tells us that it is a sin to know what we should do and then not do it. I think this is something in all of us here this morning that acknowledges that we need to depend more upon God than ourselves. For us to know this fact and yet not follow through on it is wrong in the eyes of God.

May we be a people this morning who depend upon God – who will allow him to be our judge so that we will treat everyone equally and let God deal with those who have wronged us. May we be a people this morning who depend upon God – who will not take life for granted and who will seek God's will, not wasting time but letting God use us and give us greater purpose. May we be people this morning who depend upon God – and line our life up with His word, doing what we should with no excuses or delay.

May we be people who depend upon God. Let's pray.

# Warning to the Financial Independent

## James 5:1-6

This morning I want to continue on in our study of the book of James. Last week we left off with the whole notion of being dependent upon God – the two areas are in allowing God to be our judge, giving up our right to judge and letting God judge justly, and in the area of self-reliance, being in a place where we think we determine our own lives and become our own source only to neglect God’s plans and wills for us. Two difficult things for us to do, yet two areas where we need to let God step in.

I know for myself over this last week, I have found myself asking God to help in these two areas. I wanted to judge people because of prejudice or even because what they had done to me, but I found comfort in telling God each time, “God, you be my judge” You take what they did to me and do what is right. I was very freeing for me and if you haven’t done this I encourage you to consider doing the same.

But another thing that happened when making this statement was that I also found that God was exposing things in my own life that need to be adjusted. He was judging me not to condemn me, but simply doing what I asked yet for me good. An accountability if you would through gift of the Holy Spirit.

This morning James continues on in **James 5:1-6** and gives us an example of one who does not depend upon God and speaks to those who rely upon their wealth. He tells us:

*<sup>1</sup> Look here, you rich people, weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you. <sup>2</sup>Your wealth is rotting away, and your fine clothes are moth-eaten rags. <sup>3</sup>Your gold and silver have become worthless. The very wealth you were counting on will eat away your flesh in hell. This treasure you have accumulated will stand as evidence against you on the day of judgment. <sup>4</sup>For listen! Hear the cries of the field workers whom you have cheated of their pay. The wages you held back cry out against you. The cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. <sup>5</sup>You have spent your years on earth in luxury, satisfying your every whim. Now your hearts are nice and fat, ready for the slaughter. <sup>6</sup> You have condemned and killed good people who had no power to defend themselves against you.*

Let me begin by saying this morning that whenever the topic of money is brought up in a church, walls go up, people state in their minds “here we go again!”, and for some reason people take it as that’s all the church wants is money. I hope you know by now that I don’t touch the subject of money often simply because I don’t want people to think that they buy their way into heaven, yet at the same time we need to understand that as a Bible believing church we need to embrace all Scripture including the teachings in regards to money. Money is a spiritual things and it speaks a lot about who we are.

James begins this morning by addressing rich people and tells them just how important and useless they have become to God simply by how they used their wealth for the wrong things. The rich have become more dependent upon their money and wealth than they have upon God. Unfortunately, in our society we have placed such importance on money and wealth that any of us here could find ourselves in their shoes. What does God have to say about the rich? Jesus tells us in **Matthew 19:23-24**:

*“I tell you the truth, it is very hard for a rich person to get into the Kingdom of Heaven. <sup>24</sup> I say it again—it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!”*

*<sup>9</sup>But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. <sup>10</sup> For the love of money is at the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows. **1 Timothy 6:9-10***

Money has the ability to distract us, it has the ability to bring anguish and trouble if we do not handle it properly. It can become, or may already be an idol, that we just can't seem to ignore, yet God is wanting us to utilize his provision properly. For us this morning, money is not the problem for us, but it is the love of money that we need to get away from. Money shows us just who we are and where our relationship with God really stands. It tells us in **Matthew 6:21**:

*<sup>21</sup>Wherever your treasure is, there your heart and thoughts will also be.*

How we deal with our money speaks of where our priorities are, who we trust in, and just how important things are to us, especially in our relationship with God. In James' day it seems, according to our text here that many of the rich gained their wealth by cheating people out of their pay. This went against what every Jew knew was wrong according to the Law in **Leviticus 19:13** which stated:

*<sup>13</sup>“Do not cheat or rob anyone.” Always pay your hired workers promptly.*

As Christians this morning we need to be known as people who deal with others fairly, and at times erring on the side of grace so that we don't find ourselves in a place where God will correct us, and maybe in a fashion that will not be comfortable. **1 Thessalonians 4:6** tells us:

*no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. KJV*

We need to be known as people who operate properly and fairly otherwise God will deal with us. What I want us to see is that how we handle our money is important to God. It

is not placed in our care simply for us to do with it what we want. What is God's purpose for money then? If it is so dangerous what are things that I need to consider when it comes to money?

## ***1. My Faith in God***

Jesus said in **Matthew 6:24**:

*<sup>24</sup> "No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.*

How we handle money shows who we serve. Either God is important to us or money is more important to us. We need to understand that all we have has been given to us by God. Does it mean that that money that he has placed in our hands belongs to us? By no means. God said in **Psalms 24:1**:

*<sup>1</sup>The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him.*

The money that sits in our bank account is God's money given to us to be stewards, to be people who will care for, guard, protect and even invest God's money for him, using it to achieve his will, his plan, and his provision. How we handle God's money shows how important he is to us and just how much we believe and trust him.

To see the money in our care as belonging to God should change how we handle it. This is a whole paradigm shift especially when one has always viewed their income as something that they own. When we look at the money in our care and realize that we have this awesome responsibility of using it properly, it really does keep our eyes on God.

## ***2. My Dependence Upon God***

Obviously, you and I are dependent upon God for his provision and it just so happens that God gives us money to use to take care of ourselves and others. Money is used for a lot of things in life and is the means by which we obtain our food or maintain our health, or any other necessity we find ourselves in need of. That is why Jesus taught his disciples to pray for their "daily bread" in the Lord's prayer. James told us earlier in his letter in **James 4:2**:

*The reason you don't have what you want is that you don't ask God for it.*

I pray that we don't become so arrogant to think that we can survive on our own and that we don't need God's help in provision. The very breath we breathe, the strength we had to get up this morning, the next heart beat, all of these things happen because God willed it. I remember sitting at a stop light the other day on our way up to Pastor's Camp and seeing truck loads of tomatoes being hauled, and I remember thinking how unbelievable

it would be to think that those tomatoes grew by themselves without God's help. That by some human effort they grew. Our food doesn't grow because we have become experts at growing food, but because God causes them to grow. Each and everyday, whether we want to admit it or not, we are dependent upon God, even when it comes to money.

I remember times in my own life where my needs far exceeded my bank account. I remember asking for God's help and through miraculous means the money came it. It is at those times that one begins to understand just who is the source of money.

### ***3. My Giving To God***

We have already established that everything we have has been placed in our care as stewards – to spend and use as we are led by God. When it comes to giving to God however there seems to be some controversy. I want to assure you today that giving to God is biblical, it is not simply reserved for those in the Bible times but is a means by which God can provide for his church today.

Some argue that God only wants a little part of our finances, while some say it needs to be a tenth of one's income. We do know that Abraham and Jacob gave a tenth of their income back in **Genesis 14:20, 28:22** We also know that Jesus spoke of giving a tenth of one's income in **Mathew 23:23** and **Luke 11:42**. That is what the word tithe means, the Greek word “decatoo” meaning a tenth. You may think to yourself, well that's a lot. But let me encourage you this morning with the words of Jesus in **Luke 6:38** where tells us:

*<sup>38</sup>If you give, you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full measure, pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, and running over. Whatever measure you use in giving—large or small—it will be used to measure what is given back to you.”*

*<sup>24</sup> It is possible to give freely and become more wealthy, but those who are stingy will lose everything. <sup>25</sup>The generous prosper and are satisfied; those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed. **Proverbs 11:24-25***

I know from personal experience that you can never out-give God. The more you give the more you get in return. **Proverbs 3:9-10** tells us:

*<sup>9</sup> Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the best part of everything your land produces. <sup>10</sup>Then he will fill your barns with grain, and your vats will overflow with the finest wine.*

Giving is an act of obedience and God will always honor and bless obedience. Tithing is a voluntary act of obedience. We do not police who gives what here at Redwood Foursquare, but we do encourage obedience motivated out of love for God and not out of obligation. In **Malachi 3:10** we are told:

<sup>10</sup> *Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do,” says the LORD Almighty, “I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won’t have enough room to take it in! Try it! Let me prove it to you!*

Some of us have never tried giving tithes, and have missed out on God’s blessings. God asks us to bring our offerings into the church so that he can use it to reach others. The church is on a mission, to share the love of God not only through teaching his word, but also through acts of kindness, by providing support to those in need, and reaching more with the message of hope and forgiveness.

Without the tithes and offerings, this church does not function. We are a self-supported church that simply operates on what comes in on our Sunday morning services. We do not receive help from any outside source. All of the ministries, the repairs, the utilities, insurances, and personnel are all paid for by what we the church give. If we don’t have enough income, we are limited in what we can accomplish.

Each of us this morning have been blessed financially not for the sake of our own fulfillment, but also for the sake of utilizing God’s resources for his kingdom. May we heed the words of Jesus where he said in **Matthew 22:21**:

*Give to Caesar what belongs to him. But everything that belongs to God must be given to God.*

God wants what is rightfully his, but it is our choice whether or not we are willing to give it. May we not squander what God could use to make an eternal impact on people. May we not fall into the trap of the rich that James describes in James 5 where the resources were used simply to fulfill ones desires, but let us make a heavenly investment that we will be able to see in heaven for eternity.

Giving – what a tough topic. But with it comes all types of blessings. If we give, God will give back more. But most importantly this morning I want us to understand what we should be motivated by – our faith in Jesus Christ, our dependence upon God, and our giving back to God that which is rightfully his.

#### **4. A Heart of Worship**

I want to add just one more characteristic this morning that we need to have a heart of worship – an attitude of gratitude and love. **Psalm 96:8** tells us:

<sup>8</sup> *Give to the LORD the glory he deserves! Bring your offering and come to worship him.*

God never wants us to give simply because we have to, but he wants us to respond because we want to. That is the difference between obligation and worship. If we give

with hard feelings you mind as well keep for yourself, because God wants you to give out of willful obedience. Paul said in **2 Corinthians 9:7**:

*You must each make up your own mind as to how much you should give. Don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves the person who gives cheerfully. <sup>8</sup>And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others.*

God wants us to give cheerfully and if you can't do it, then it is not true worship. Do not steal from God, but give to him what belongs to him. I am talking to myself just as much as I am talking to you this morning. I give ten percent of my income because I realize who my source is, and I have seen God bless me and my family in different way. I have tried it, I have seen its effects and I have seen that God gives more than he receives. I pray that you will want to experience the same blessings this morning. Let's pray.

# 3 Models of Patience

## James 5:7-12

This morning I want to continue on in our study of the book of James. A week before last we look at the fact that there are people who misuse their riches, even cheat and lie to obtain it. We saw that it is the love of money that steps into God's place in many people's lives and how this tool, which can be our blessing, can also turn into a curse if we misuse it.

That is why we look at the whole idea of how God views money. First it tests our faith, it shows just how much we do serve God more than our objects. Second, it shows our dependence upon God, He uses it to provide for us and to fulfill his promise to take of us. Third, God asks us to give back to him so that his church can continue to function and reach out and share His love with more who are still lost. Forth, God looks at how we treat money as a form of worship, that we don't simply give because we have to, but because of all that he has done for us, we want to give in return.

James continue on this morning and gives us three models of Patience that we can learn from. Why did the church need to be patient? Well, according to the letter of James we find that there were people in the church who were being mistreated by ungodly rich people, and were even being persecuted because of who they were. This is where we pickup James' word in **James 5:7-12**:

*<sup>7</sup> Dear brothers and sisters, you must be patient as you wait for the Lord's return. Consider the farmers who eagerly look for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They patiently wait for the precious harvest to ripen. <sup>8</sup>You, too, must be patient. And take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near. <sup>9</sup> Don't grumble about each other, my brothers and sisters, or God will judge you. For look! The great Judge is coming. He is standing at the door! <sup>10</sup> For examples of patience in suffering, dear brothers and sisters, look at the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. <sup>11</sup> We give great honor to those who endure under suffering. Job is an example of a man who endured patiently. From his experience we see how the Lord's plan finally ended in good, for he is full of tenderness and mercy. <sup>12</sup> But most of all, my brothers and sisters, never take an oath, by heaven or earth or anything else. Just say a simple yes or no, so that you will not sin and be condemned for it.*

As human beings this morning, we want to step in and make things happen, we want to take things into our own hands so we can get it done, and when we are wronged we want justice (and even a little more pain) to be dished out to those who wrong us. Patience is so opposite of what we want ourselves. And if someone ever comes and tells us to be patience we may at times feel like smacking them across the face, thinking we can knock some sense into them. Why is patience so important? Why should I respond with patience instead of how I want to respond? That is what we are going to look at and that is what we are going to learn from the three examples James gives us this morning.

## 1. The Example of the Farmer

James begins first with the example of the farmer. Notice that the farmer not only waits for the rains in the fall but also in the spring. In Palestine the early rains came in October and November soon after the grain was sown, and the latter rains came in April and May as the grain was maturing. Both rainy seasons were necessary for a successful crop. Knowing this, the farmer was willing to wait patiently until both rains came and provided the needed moisture. The goal of such patience is the reward of the good crop. **Galatians 6:9** tells us:

*<sup>9</sup> So don't get tired of doing what is good. Don't get discouraged and give up, for we will reap a harvest of blessing at the appropriate time.*

I know people who have allowed others to so anger them that they have walked away from their faith in God. They allowed people to take their focus off of the good crop that is suppose to be their goal, and have become people who continue to live in the offenses committed against them. James is telling us that there is still plenty of work to do, let alone the incredible things that await us when Jesus Christ comes back to get us.

James tells the church to be patient and “take courage” because Jesus is coming soon. The term “take courage” literally means to “strengthen your heart”, which has the idea of being strong in the inner man. To be a person who is not swayed by their circumstances, but instead is focused on what lies ahead. David said in **Psalm 27:14**:

*Wait patiently for the LORD. Be brave and courageous. Yes, wait patiently for the LORD.*

Wouldn't be great if we could be a person who was patient and not swayed by what comes our way? That we would be people who stood firm? Just as the farmer keeps his eyes on the end result, so we must do the same and not find ourselves getting hung up in thoughts and attitudes against those who have done us wrong. How easy it is for us to loose focus.

James also addresses the reality that this could also happen within a church, where a person begins to grumble against someone else and all of the sudden the church is split simply because of a person's offenses. We need to be a place where we make allowances for each others faults, making room for forgiveness, and also making room for God to work in that person's life. Otherwise we may find ourselves in conflict with God. This ties into a message that I gave about 3 weeks ago about letting God be our judge, letting him be the one who sets things right instead of me taking it into my own hands and being an unjust judge.

Patience requires focus on what awaits us in eternity and not allow circumstances to come and sway us, but instead remain strong in our inner person. James continues on this morning and tells us to follow the examples of the prophets.

## 2. The Example of the Prophets

A whole series could be done on each prophet. They all experienced opposition and many even losing their life simply because they chose to speak the word of God and call things for what they really were. The writer of **Hebrews 11:33-38** tells us:

*<sup>32</sup> Well, how much more do I need to say? It would take too long to recount the stories of the faith of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and all the prophets. <sup>33</sup>By faith these people overthrew kingdoms, ruled with justice, and received what God had promised them. They shut the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup>quenched the flames of fire, and escaped death by the edge of the sword. Their weakness was turned to strength. They became strong in battle and put whole armies to flight. <sup>35</sup> Women received their loved ones back again from death. But others trusted God and were tortured, preferring to die rather than turn from God and be free. They placed their hope in the resurrection to a better life. <sup>36</sup>Some were mocked, and their backs were cut open with whips. Others were chained in dungeons. <sup>37</sup>Some died by stoning, and some were sawed in half; others were killed with the sword. Some went about in skins of sheep and goats, hungry and oppressed and mistreated. <sup>38</sup>They were too good for this world. They wandered over deserts and mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground.*

We all live in a comfortable society where if just one of our routines are challenged or changed our whole world falls apart. Yet, when we look at the lives of the prophets we find that they went out of their comfort zone and did things, I know they probably didn't want to do, yet they focused more on their purpose than their own comfort. I know that God is more concerned about your process and where you end up, more so than he is with how comfortable you are. In **Hebrews 6:12** we read:

We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised. KJV

*I think we already know that it takes a lot of effort to remain patient. It takes focus. It takes determination and dedication. I think we need to come to an understanding that God has not called us to simply sit back in our salvation and wait for everyone else to catch up with us, but he has asked us to be involved in His business, and that will mean that we all will be pushed out of our comfort zone. James continues on this morning and gives us a third example of patience in the person of Job.*

## 3. The Example of Job

*Many of us have an idea of the story of Job, and how he went from having everything he wanted to losing everything, and suffering incredible things at the same time. I am sure that Job was one whom James was thinking about when he wrote in **James 1:12**:*

<sup>12</sup> God blesses the people who patiently endure testing. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

*Job went through some of the most trying times yet within these times we read Job's words of hope and looking towards the future. On the first day in Job we read how Job's oxen were stolen, his farmhands killed, his sheep and shepherds burned to death, his camels stolen and his servants slaughtered and if that wasn't enough, he lost his sons and daughters to the collapse of a building. And yet after such travesty we read his words in **Job 1:21**:*

*"I came naked from my mother's womb, and I will be stripped of everything when I die. The LORD gave me everything I had, and the LORD has taken it away. Praise the name of the LORD!"*

In the next chapter of Job we read of how Job is then infested with boils from his head to his toe, and how his wife tells him to curse God because of what He has done to them. Job responds in **Job 2:10**:

*"You talk like a godless woman. Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?"*

*Job continue to remain loyal to God even though circumstance should have forced him over the edge. We know then that he is blamed by his friends and family that he was being punished by God, yet their accusations were unmerited. All that could happen to someone, happened to Job yet we know that in the end Job remained faithful and patient. In **Job 13:15** we read:*

*Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him ...*

*I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes--I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!*  
**Job 19:25-27**

And because of Job's patience and faithfulness to God we find that God blesses him with more than he had at the beginning of his trials – in fact **Job 42:10** tells us:

*<sup>10</sup> When Job prayed for his friends, the LORD restored his fortunes. In fact, the LORD gave him twice as much as before!*

Job remained focused on God's faithfulness and then was able to experience the benefits. Job could have come to God and cursed him to His face, even turn away from him – retaliating against God instead of simply acknowledging that God is GOD yet He is faithful.

I think we can all sit here this morning and realize that we could be a lot more patient in our lives than we are. That we could be a little more focused on God's purposes than we are on our own comfort. That we could hold our tongues a little bit more than we have in the past and not retaliate to circumstances that happen to us.

God wants us to see just how patient we can be if we allow him to work in our lives. To learn from the three examples this morning. Patience is not something that we can simply flip a switch and we are patient, but it is a learned characteristic that only God can develop in each of us. **2 Thessalonians 3:5** tells us:

May the Lord bring you into an ever deeper understanding of the love of God and the endurance that comes from Christ.

*<sup>22</sup> But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, and self-control. Here there is no conflict with the law. **Galatians 5:22-23***

We have all heard the prayer that goes something like this, "God, give me patience and give it to me NOW!" It is a dangerous prayer to pray because when we ask it always seems that everything either falls apart, or life becomes more difficult than necessary. And it is in those times where we truly do need God's help and strength. In **Colossians 1:11** tells us:

*<sup>11</sup>We also pray that you will be strengthened with his glorious power so that you will have all the patience and endurance you need.*

Patience comes to us as a result of allowing God to strengthen us. And as long as we believe that God will be there for us and help us through whatever we may face then our patience will grow and grow. Of course, a lesson in patience would not be complete without the model of Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews tells us in **Hebrews 12:1-3**:

*<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress. And let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us. <sup>2</sup>We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish. He was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because of the joy he knew would be his afterward. Now he is seated in the place of highest honor beside God's throne in heaven. <sup>3</sup> Think about all he endured when sinful people did such terrible things to him, so that you don't become weary and give up.*

Patience requires focus – a focus on Jesus. Patience is developed over time and requires one to be focused on the benefits of God and the long haul as opposed to one's temporary comfort. Patience requires trust – a lived out trust in Jesus Christ and his ability to help when we need it, no matter what we may be going through. The next time we need

patience, may we go to God's word to see the examples of men who have gone through even more extreme circumstances than we could ever imagine. And just as they found the strength to remain patient in life, may we to tap into the same source of power.

# God's Prescription for Prayer

## James 5:13-18

This morning I want to continue on in our study of the book of James. In fact, we will be completing our study next week. I hope and pray that each of us have been challenged to take our Christian walk a step further. As I stand here today I can honestly say that God has moved each of us further than we could ever imagine. Some of us here have experienced steps of growth or faith, while other have found hope in the midst of difficult circumstances, and for others this has been a time of really zeroing in on what God want from us. In fact, over the last couple of weeks with Ron being with us and then with women's camp, you can't help but ask yourself, "God what is it that you want from me?"

Last week, we looked at three models of patience. Ladies let me reassure you that while many of you were off at camp, your husbands were experiencing what it means to have patience. James spoke to us about three examples of patience because what the early church was facing was unfair treatment by the wealthy ungodly people who not only used the people, but who also persecuted them. James was telling them not to simply retaliate but be patient and let God deal with them. We saw that a common theme in each of these three examples was that of remaining focused on the end result, and trusting God.

James continues on in our text and offers further instruction to the early church in regards to how they can make it through their dilemma, and he speaks about the topic of prayer. That is where we pick up James' words this morning in **James 5:13-18**:

*<sup>13</sup> Are any among you suffering? They should keep on praying about it. And those who have reason to be thankful should continually sing praises to the Lord. <sup>14</sup> Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup> And their prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make them well. And anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. <sup>16</sup> Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results. <sup>17</sup> Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for the next three and a half years! <sup>18</sup> Then he prayed for rain, and down it poured. The grass turned green, and the crops began to grow again.*

There are many today who take matters into their own hands, who try to solve their own problems, or who simply make adjustments and live with whatever life hands them. These are people who think they don't need any help, and that the reality of God is simply a fairy tale with nice sayings and ideas. Yet, there are some of us in here this morning who have already discovered that when times get tough, there is a way by which we can find help beyond ourselves and that is through the practice of prayer. A simple act that many seem to throw around, but when done properly and with the right attitude and heart, it can produce wonderful results.

I am not talking about the prayer that simply asks for what we want, but a prayer that when times are tough, turns to God and asks for his input. When times get tough, the tough humble themselves, bend their knee towards God, and turn to the one who is tough enough to handle any circumstance that may be thrown our way. James begins by addressing those who are suffering in verse 13.

## 1. Those Who Are Suffering

James last week gave us an example of those who suffer in the lives of the prophets. They were tested and tried, they were beaten, tortured, whipped, stoned, sawn in half – those worst kind of treatment one could imagine, yet they remained patient. If you turn off our cable, or add another meeting to our day, or not have food ready for us when we want it, we count those things as suffering today. I believe that is why James gives us two solutions for those who are suffering – Pray and be thankful.

### a. Pray

We all do face legitimate suffering at times and that is when we need God's help. We read in Luke of Jesus' response to his time of suffering as we awaited being arrested. It tells us in **Luke 22:44**:

*<sup>44</sup> He prayed more fervently, and he was in such agony of spirit that his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood.*

If the Son of God went to his knees in his time of suffering, then you would think that we would understand the importance of doing the same. Only in prayer will we find our help. David said **Psalm 18:6**:

*<sup>6</sup> But in my distress I cried out to the LORD; yes, I prayed to my God for help. He heard me from his sanctuary; my cry reached his ears.*

Isn't it comforting to know this morning that no matter where we are at, we can cry out to God and he will hear us. He is not one who ignores people, but one who hears us no matter what we may be going through. God tells us in **Psalm 91:15**:

*<sup>15</sup> When they call on me, I will answer; I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue them and honor them.*

I like how James tells us to “keep on praying”. Sometimes I think we say our little prayer and we give up contending for an answer. But Jesus told a parable about a woman who wouldn't give up in **Luke 18:2-8**:

*<sup>2</sup>“There was a judge in a certain city,” he said, “who was a godless man with great contempt for everyone. <sup>3</sup>A widow of that city came to him repeatedly, appealing for justice against someone who had harmed her. <sup>4</sup>The judge ignored her for a while, but eventually she wore him out. ‘I fear neither God nor man,’ he*

*said to himself, <sup>5</sup> 'but this woman is driving me crazy. I'm going to see that she gets justice, because she is wearing me out with her constant requests!'" <sup>6</sup> Then the Lord said, "Learn a lesson from this evil judge. <sup>7</sup>Even he rendered a just decision in the end, so don't you think God will surely give justice to his chosen people who plead with him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? <sup>8</sup> I tell you, he will grant justice to them quickly! But when I, the Son of Man, return, how many will I find who have faith?"*

Sometimes our circumstances will require that we plead with God day and night. But if we truly believe that God will answer we will keep asking until something happens. Otherwise we will give up and lose faith in God. James also talks this morning to those who are suffering and he tells us them that if they have reason to be thankful then they should sing praises to God.

*b. Be Thankful(Prayer Worship)*

I know that in my own life that this is the challenge, to remain thankful in light of the struggles. Each of us go through difficult times, yet we also have things to be thankful for. The trap is that we don't get so wrapped up in our challenges that we forget to give God praise for the things we do have. We find a great example of this in **Acts 16:25-31**. Paul and Silas had just been thrown into jail because they were preaching the Gospel. It tells us:

*<sup>25</sup>Around midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. <sup>26</sup>Suddenly, there was a great earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off! <sup>27</sup> The jailer woke up to see the prison doors wide open. He assumed the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword to kill himself. <sup>28</sup>But Paul shouted to him, "Don't do it! We are all here!" <sup>29</sup>Trembling with fear, the jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup> He brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" <sup>31</sup> They replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with your entire household." <sup>32</sup>Then they shared the word of the Lord with him and all who lived in his household.*

Paul and Silas did not remain focused on their situation but instead sang praise to God and focused on being thankful to God for what he had already done. The result was that they were freed miraculously. I think we can draw a spiritual parallel to this story however in that if we remain focused on the things that we are thankful for instead of our circumstances then we too can experience freedom. But it is not simply freedom for ourselves, but our freedom can become a testimony for others and they too will seek out your source and find God in their life as well. James' words to us is to pray for God's help, contending for God's help, and remain thankful for what we already have, preserving a worshipping heart that can also lead others to Christ. In **Philippians 4:8** Paul tells us:

*Fix your thoughts on what is true and honorable and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise*

May our lives be marked with praise and worship to God for his goodness that has, and will always be demonstrated to us. James continues on this morning and speaks to those who are sick.

## **2. Those Who Are Sick**

There is no other time that we feel helpless than when our health is out of our control and we need God to step in and bring healing. James tells the early church that they are to call for the “Elders” of the church and have them pray for the sick.

### *a. An Elder*

The term elder is used in so many different ways but this morning I want to look at what the Bible has to say about an elder. We read in **Acts 20:28** Paul tells the church:

*<sup>28</sup> “And now beware! Be sure that you feed and shepherd God’s flock—his church, purchased with his blood—over whom the Holy Spirit has appointed you as elders.*

The term “elder” which is a borrowed title from the synagogue comes from the Greek word “presbyter” which is where the Presbyterian church derived its name. It is the title given to what would be equivalent to the pastor, or one who was in charge of a local church. But also in **Titus 1:6-9** we read that an elder is a minister with many requirements. Paul tells us:

*<sup>6</sup>An elder must be well thought of for his good life. He must be faithful to his wife, and his children must be believers who are not wild or rebellious. <sup>7</sup>An elder must live a blameless life because he is God’s minister. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered; he must not be a heavy drinker, violent, or greedy for money. <sup>8</sup>He must enjoy having guests in his home and must love all that is good. He must live wisely and be fair. He must live a devout and disciplined life. <sup>9</sup>He must have a strong and steadfast belief in the trustworthy message he was taught; then he will be able to encourage others with right teaching and show those who oppose it where they are wrong.*

It is known that in those days that some of the churches were so big that they required multiple Elders to oversee. I believe that in our day and age Elders are those whom God has placed to oversee his church. Some maybe administrative pastors, youth pastors,

children pastors, or even music pastors. But one thing is for certain is that they must live a righteous life with the goal of bringing others to Christ.

### *b. Anoint With Oil*

James tells us that those overseeing the church should pray over the sick and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. I want us to understand that the focus in this verse is prayer and not some mystical oil that we can use to bring healing. It is known that in biblical times medicinal oils were used as treatment for ailments. In the story of the Good Samaritan we read in **Luke 10:34**:

Kneeling beside him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with medicine (KJV oil and wine) and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him.

James was not saying that we neglect the use of medicine but instead prayer and medicine can bring healing. This goes completely against those religions that state that it is wrong for those to use medicine. Or even those sects of Christianity that if you use medication then you lack faith and won't be healed. God will answer the prayers of those who believe that he is capable of bringing healing.

As a Foursquare church we do believe in anointing a person with oil not with medicinal purposes, but we believe that the oil signifies the Holy Spirit and his ability to give life and healing to our bodies. In **Romans 8:11** we are told:

*<sup>11</sup> The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as he raised Christ from the dead, he will give life to your mortal body by this same Spirit living within you.*

The oil that we use here in the church is only a symbol of what we believe can happen in a person's life – the life giving Spirit who can bring healing.

### *c. The Name of Jesus*

There is a third element that we need to consider when we pray for the sick and that is this – “the name of Jesus.” In **John 14:13** we read Jesus telling us:

*<sup>13</sup> You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, because the work of the Son brings glory to the Father. <sup>14</sup> Yes, ask anything in my name, and I will do it!*

When we pray for people in the name of Jesus, we are rightfully acknowledging the true source of healing, and God will never stand in the way of something that will bring him

glory. We read also in the Gospels of how the disciples were sent out to minister in the name of Jesus and how people were healed and those demon possessed were set free. As you look at the beginning of the early church we read of how the disciples continued on in praying for people in Jesus name and seeing numerous miracles take place. Jesus is not dead, he is alive and well going to the Father on our behalf capable of bringing healing.

James continues on this morning and tells us that a prayer offered in faith will result in healing. I think we can all agree that believing in an invisible power to come and heal is a step of faith. Sometimes in each of our lives we need to risk looking foolish for the sake of someone's healing, and that take faith as well.

#### *d. Sins Forgiven*

James continues on and links some people's healing to an illness that is the result of their sin. This gets into the whole question of whether or not God punishes people for their sin by sending illness. I want to make it very clear that not all illness is the result of God's punishment, but there are instances when they are.

We know that in **Mark 2:5-11** we read of a paralytic man who is lowered down through a roof and Jesus tells him, "*My son, your sins are forgiven.*" And later in verse 11 we read that he is healed. In the book of 1 Corinthians 11 we read of how some became ill because they didn't take the Lord's Supper seriously and were almost mocking it.

There are times when people become so arrogant and disregard God that He uses their health to draw them back to repentance and focus on him. That is why James urges us in verse 16 to confess our sins to each other so that we don't fall into this trap. We need to keep ourselves in admiration and respect towards God.

### **3. The Prayer that Works**

James finishes off this morning by telling us about the prayer that works. The earnest prayer – the one that doesn't stop until an answer is received. The prayer of a righteous man – one who knows what God is capable of, who believes that God is capable, and who expects God will answer. James finishes off this morning with the example of Elijah. Elijah was a human being just like you and me, but his prayers did miraculous things. In 1 Kings 17 we read of how Elijah told the King that there would be no rain unless He prayed for it. Later in 1 Kings 18 we read of how Elijah prays for rain after 3 ½ years of drought and we read in **1 Kings 18:43-44**:

*<sup>43</sup>Then he said to his servant, "Go and look out toward the sea." The servant went and looked, but he returned to Elijah and said, "I didn't see anything." Seven times Elijah told him to go and look, and seven times he went. <sup>44</sup>Finally the*

*seventh time, his servant told him, "I saw a little cloud about the size of a hand rising from the sea."*

And it was from these small clouds that a rainstorm comes and ends the drought. It wasn't answered on the first try, but by the seventh times. What does that teach us this morning? That prayer needs to be earnest, searching, persistent, never stopping until answered. Prayer needs to be full of faith, God-seeking, and God glorifying.

I have had a conviction in my heart that we could change a lot of things in our lives and our community if we would learn the secret of an earnest prayer. I think all too often we say our one-lined prayer and then wait for the answer, when all along God wants us to seek his will, to seek his answer, to seek his involvement.

# Are You Your Brother's Keeper?

James 5:19-20

This morning I want to conclude our study of the book of James. We have seen that the early church faced some very difficult circumstances, yet within them James encourages them to remain strong in their faith, in fact, rely upon their faith rather than anything else. God is fully capable of helping us through any circumstance, he is capable of bringing hope when there seems to be no hope, he is capable of giving us strength when we have no strength, and he is capable of giving us more than we could ever want or ask.

James has painted for us a picture of a God who is God especially when we go through difficult things. It is in our struggles that God's strength can shine forth. It is when we need help that God takes the opportunity to prove Himself faithful. And I hope that we catch the overall theme in James' letter – A step of faith results in God's work.

Last week we looked at James' challenge to rely upon the power of prayer – prayer for those who are struggling and those who are sick. And we saw that within prayer there is unlimited and indescribable power to do things that are beyond us, simply if we are willing to contend for God's answer and rely more upon our faith as opposed to what we see. I don't know about you, but I find that I get more discouraged about things when I simply rely upon what I can see, when in reality God is at work behind the scenes. It is easier to remain hopeful when we look forward to the unexpected, or the immeasurable possibilities. Keep looking forward and pray for what could happen.

This morning we finish off with the book of James, and his words in regards to restoring wandering believers in **James 5:19-20**. Is it possible for a Christian to wander away from God? That is what I want to look at this morning.

*<sup>19</sup> My dear brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders away from the truth and is brought back again, <sup>20</sup> you can be sure that the one who brings that person back will save that sinner from death and bring about the forgiveness of many sins.*

Notice that James addresses these last two sentences to his brothers and sisters in the faith. James was writing to Christians within the church. For some of us here this morning I know that we can come up with names of people who once were serving God, and following God, yet today they are living away from God, some even living in situations that you know they know is wrong.

Why is it that some Christians wander away from their faith? For some it may be because of a tragedy, for others it may be an issue of control (doing what they want), for some it may be that their life is turning out the way they want it to, while for others it may be simply a gradual decline in their priorities (kind of like how one misses a service one week, and then the next, and the next, until they only come to church on Christmas

and Easter). I have seen people wander from God, and it is a painful and grievous thing to watch, and I pray that it is for us this morning.

James' hope for us is that we become troubled by wandering Christians, so much so that we would step in and help them. Paul when writing to the Church in Thessalonica told them in **1 Thessalonians 5:14**:

*<sup>14</sup> Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone.*

## **1. Three Types of Wandering Christians**

Paul identifies three different kinds of wandering Christians for us. He tells us of one who is lazy in their faith. This is a Christian who is disorderly in their conduct and who shows little if any effort in their pursuit of God. They know what Jesus has done for them, yet they have never taken it a step further. To this type of Christian we are to warn them or admonish them (to give strong advice or a strong warning).

Another wandering Christian is one who is timid and fainthearted (one who has become discouraged). These are Christians who are in danger of losing hope and have forgotten what Jesus has done and what he could do. I am sure that many of us have been there, when life has become so difficult and that we have become so discouraged that we don't care anymore, and may even want to give up on our faith. To these kinds of Christians we are to offer comfort and encouragement (the word encouragement means to speak courage into).

The third type of wandering Christian is one who is weak in their faith. These are those who are so new in their faith that their walk with God fluctuates from one day to the next. They have yet to establish key times to learn more about God, to spend time with God, and they can be easily swayed by things they come in contact with. Paul tells us that we are to help them and care for them. To teach them, to talk about our walk with God so that they can learn from both our strengths and our weaknesses.

And Finally, Paul sums up the attitude in which we need to help wavering Christians with the word patience – just what James was speaking to us a couple of weeks ago. It is very clear then that each of us have a responsibility to each other. No, we do not simply live our own faith, and worry about our own faith, but God wants us to help each other as we walk by faith together.

Unfortunately, this is one area of responsibility that often gets overlooked and in most cases is neglected. But Paul said in **Galatians 6:1-2**:

*Dear brothers and sisters, if another Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself. <sup>2</sup>Share each other's troubles and problems, and in this way obey the law of Christ. <sup>3</sup>If you think you*

are too important to help someone in need, you are only fooling yourself. You are really a nobody.

God has no use for people who think they are too important to be involved in the process of helping wandering Christians. In fact, I don't think that God can use a person like this in anything because of their pride. Church, may we understand this morning that we are to help wandering Christians, and not simply sit back and watch them walk away.

More importantly, God has put us together in this church to help each other. If we can't help the people that are already here, what makes us think that we can help others out there? God has created the church as a place where we can come together, learn about him, seek him, pray for each other, fellowship with each other, and learn from each other – to be involved with each other. Then if any one of us are in danger of wandering in our faith, others can come along side and bring comfort, help, and even at times that gentle word of correction to pull us back in line.

## **2. The State of a Wavering Christian**

To bring people back into relationship with God, to bring them back to an understanding of who God is in light of their circumstances, to help them get to know God so that they understand what their wavering does not only to God but to themselves, and to help them see the seriousness of turning away from the only message of hope and salvation. What does the Bible have to say about those who are wavering in their faith? James tells us that they are in danger of death. **Romans 6:23** tells us:

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

<sup>20</sup> *And when people escape from the wicked ways of the world by learning about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and then get tangled up with sin and become its slave again, they are worse off than before.* <sup>21</sup>It would be better if they had never known the right way to live than to know it and then reject the holy commandments that were given to them. <sup>22</sup>*They make these proverbs come true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and "A washed pig returns to the mud."* **2 Peter 2:20-22**

<sup>26</sup> *Dear friends, if we deliberately continue sinning after we have received a full knowledge of the truth, there is no other sacrifice that will cover these sins.* <sup>27</sup> *There will be nothing to look forward to but the terrible expectation of God's judgment and the raging fire that will consume his enemies.* <sup>28</sup> *Anyone who refused to obey the law of Moses was put to death without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.* <sup>29</sup> *Think how much more terrible the punishment will be for those who have trampled on the Son of God and have treated the blood of the covenant as if it were common and unholy.* *Such people have insulted and enraged the Holy Spirit who brings God's mercy to his people.* <sup>30</sup> *For we know*

*the one who said, "I will take vengeance. I will repay those who deserve it." He also said, "The Lord will judge his own people."* **Hebrews 10:26-31**

Those who are wavering in their faith are in great danger according to the verses we have just read. They are in a vulnerable place. They are facing spiritual death, they are in danger of losing the sacrifice that can cover their sins making them an enemy of God once again, they are facing harsh judgment and punishment if they don't change. And you and I need to do all we can to help them make the change. To restore people back to their original relationship with God.

### **3. Our Job of Restoration**

But as in any type of restoration of a car or even a home, restorations are more difficult to deal with than something that is new. Sometimes you have to remove all the rotten wood or rusted metal in order to make it look new again. The same can be said with those who need to be restored to God. It is hard for wavering Christians to get out of habits of sin, or to work through discouragement, but it can be done, it does require patience, and yet just as Paul said in Galatians 6, we need to restore with humility and gentleness.

What does that mean to us this morning?

- a. That means that we do everything out of love, not imposing condemnation upon others, but having an attitude of care and concern.
- b. That means that we don't run around behind people's back and talk about them, and how they need to be corrected, but true love and concern deals with it in private where no one can see.
- c. That means that everything we do is legitimate concern for others and not another struggle for power or supremacy

And if we can't fall in line with these requirements then maybe we need to deal with our own issues before we can help others. Jesus said in **Matthew 7:3-5**:

*<sup>3</sup>And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own? <sup>4</sup>How can you think of saying, 'Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye? <sup>5</sup>Hypocrite! First get rid of the log from your own eye; then perhaps you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye.*

We all need to deal with our own issues so that we can move on and help others. Even if we don't have our lives all together, that fact that we remain focused on God is a sign that we are heading in the right direction.

The job of an involved Christian is very important - having a brother or sister who warns us when we are treading on thin ice, who encourages us when we lack courage, and who will care for and mentor us when we aren't strong in our faith. James tells us that these are people who have saved a sinner and have brought about forgiveness. It think it can be

said that the job of one who restores a wandering Christian is just as vital as the one who goes out and shares Christ with others for the first time. Jesus said in **Luke 15:7**:

*<sup>7</sup>In the same way, heaven will be happier over one lost sinner who returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away!*

You see, our whole goal as Christians in this life is that no one – Christian or non-Christian – miss out on all of God's benefits. And that we be people who will continually walk in the Spirit and not the flesh. But being a Christian is about not only getting our own lives in order, but helping others do the same – having a mutual relationship where we can speak into each others lives honestly and opening, yet at the same time holding each other accountable in love as we seek God together. **1 Peter 4:8** tells us:

*<sup>8</sup>Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins.*

May we be people who will strive to function in love and help those who have wandered from God. Let's pray!

