



"The Book of James: Putting Faith into Action"

Sunday, January 16 5 PM

Session 2: The Word that Goes to Work (James 1:19-27)

Session 1 Recap

Last week in our opening session, we looked at the authorship, the date, and the audience for the letter of James. Believed to have been written by James "the Just", the half-brother of Jesus around 49 or 50 AD (prior to the Jerusalem Council), James was an early church leader at the Christian church in Jerusalem. He wrote this epistle as a word of encouragement to the dispersed Christian believers across Palestine, who had been displaced because of Roman persecution.

In the opening chapter of the epistle, the author addresses the importance of "understanding" in our faith, especially when we face trials in our lives. Trials are inevitable, and James encourages the readers to face them with "pure joy". Trials can be teaching moments in our lives, where we learn perseverance and patience – knowing that God is walking with us every step of the way. God provides us wisdom during this time to make the right decisions, as long as our focus is God-centered and not self-centered. We must ask with trust that He will answer, rather than doubt like the shifting waves of the ocean.

James then reminded the readers of the "reordering of the world" – seeing Creation as God sees it. Our relationship with Him is the key, not whether we have the most money or how the public sees us. James encourages the poor to exult in their present and future circumstances, because God sees them. He also warned the rich to be humble and live according to God's values, not the world's values.

James closed this section by identifying the difference between trial and temptation. God does not "tempt" us with evil – He is removed from evil. Satan

tempts us. The roots of temptation begin within us, and can take root and lead to sinful nature and desire. God is the exact opposite of this. Every good thing comes from Him, and we should place our trust, faith, and actions in Him.

Opening Questions...

- 1. Godliness is not a trait that any of us would likely list on a resume. The word is difficult to define clearly – and yet in our extended relationship with other believers, we can usually tell who has made progress in godliness. Think of one person in your circle of relationships who truly exemplifies godliness. How has this person’s life been an example to you?**
- 2. Human wisdom regularly produces “proverbs” – i.e. “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me!” These proverbs often hold some truth, but not complete truth! What proverbs or common sayings have been a part of your family and culture growing up?**

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, as we encounter your Word again this evening and the counsel written by your servant James, may we open our minds and hearts to the “fresh” wisdom that you would have us hear this evening. May we be both challenged and humbled by your Word; called to make a difference in the world in which You created. We lift this prayer in the name of Your Son, Jesus the Christ, Amen.

Session 2: The Word that Goes to Work (James 1:19-27)

James 1:19-21 – In verses 19 through 21, James describes the first stage of “response” to the call implied by God’s gift – the giving of His Word and us being His first creation. We have a responsibility. We have work to do. The “implanted word” described in verse 18 can only save the believer – not just the first century Christian but Christians today – if we truly receive it. Christians are called to put aside all those qualities of arrogance, desire, and rage that oppose God’s righteous nature, and instead, put on the qualities of meekness and hearing that will enable us to be reshaped according to His Word.

When we talk too much and listen too little, we communicate to others that we think our ideas are much more important than theirs are. James is encouraging these early believers to reverse this process, similar to how he encouraged them to

reframe how they looked at the world just a few verses ago. Listening shows another individual that you care. Have you ever put a mental stopwatch on your conversations and kept track on how much you talk and how much you listen? This may be an interesting tool to use in the coming weeks. When people talk with you, they should feel that their viewpoints and ideas are valued.

James speaks of anger that is aroused by our egos being bruised. We should not become angry when we fail to win an argument, or when we feel offended or neglected. Selfish anger never helps anybody. When injustice and sin occurs in the world, we should become angry because *others* are being hurt. James is encouraging believers to receive God's Word and invitation with humility, and then start making a difference!

Follow Up Questions...

- 1. Human anger can be dangerous for Christians. James emphasizes the need for patience. Anger is one of the things that happens when patience reaches its limits. We imagine that when the "world" is out of joint, a bit of our own anger will put things straight. What results have you experienced in your life when you tried to make things right through your anger? How would you have changed things looking back on it now?**
- 2. What does it mean for you to receive the Word humbly, as described in verse 21? How do you do this daily/weekly/etc.?**

James 1:22-28 – The final verses in chapter one of James' epistle is clear in its straightforward meaning, yet its mode of expression may seem obscure to modern-day readers. The basic statement and principle that James is making (that is carried throughout the rest of his letter) is this: For faith to be real, it must be translated into deeds. It is not enough to be a "hearer" of the word. We must become a "doer" of the word as well. James states in verse 22 that one's faith is "self-deception", if it is not followed with actions. James is agreeing with many other ancient moralists prior to and in his time in the first century that believed that theoretical correctness matters little if one's life does not conform to the ideas one speaks. This is the "word going to work"! (We see this in Paul's writing 1 Corinthians 13.)

To hammer home his point, James uses the common image in literature of gazing into a mirror for self-improvement. In this case, however, James states that the person who gazes simply at his or her “natural” face and then walks away forgetting what he or she looks like, is similar to the believer who “hears” but does not “do”. There is no benefit gained from gazing in the mirror. There is not benefit gained from the instruction from God. However, the person who “looks intently” into the perfect law that gives freedom (from God), is the one who learns from the examples presented there – Abraham, Rahab, Job, Elijah, etc. The believer learns how these individuals turned their faith into deeds, and they were blessed for it! All these things – faith, word, law, and wisdom – are mutually reinforcing gifts from God.

It is very important for believers to listen to what God’s Word says. However, it is much more important to obey it! To do what it says! We can measure the effectiveness of our Bible study time by the effect it has on our behavior and attitudes. How do you turn the faith things that you study into faithful actions?

James closes the first chapter with a transition that will lead into the essays that follow. He again contrasts the measure of the world, revealed by a foolish religion that fails to control the tongue and indulges/deceives the heart, and the measure of God, revealed by a pure and undefiled religion that resists the measure of the world and shows us authenticity by giving gifts to the needy in the same way that God gives them to all creatures. (We will return to the theme of “taming the tongue” in chapter 3!) In the first century, orphans and widows had very little means of economic support. Unless a family member was willing to care for them, they were reduced to begging, selling themselves as slaves, or starving. James was stating that by caring for these individuals, the church put God’s Word into practice. When we give with no hope of receiving in return, we show what it means to serve others. Who, in modern day society, would be the “widows and the orphans”?

James ends the opening chapter and the introduction to the rest of the epistle with this simple reminder: Live as a friend of God and not as a friend of the world.

Follow Up Questions...

- 1. Why is it often so difficult to “listen to the Word” and do what you know is right?**
- 2. When is it difficult for you to keep a tight rein on your tongue, and how do you seek to do so? What damage have you seen done to the cause of Christ because of the tongue?**

Closing Question/Challenge to Reflect on this Week...

Think about your life – the pace of it, the people you interact with, the activities you are involved. What is one change you could make this week to help you focus more on those in need?

Closing Prayer

Father, help us to hear your voice in the midst of many competing voices in the world. Help us to put into practice the timeless truths found in your Word. Most of all, help us remember that you have set us free from the lures of the world. Thank you for your promise that when the Son sets us free, we are free indeed. In Christ’s name we pray, Amen.

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Session 3 - “No Favorites” (James 2:1-13)

Sunday, January 23 5 PM Facebook Live
