

*Getting Wise:
The Book of James*

**A Translation and
Application Commentary
Based on the Greek Text**

By Rev. Jonathan Srock

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Table of Contents

Introduction to James	4
James 1:1 – Introduction	5
James 1:2-8 – Joy Through Trials	9
James 1:9-11 – Go Down to Go Up.....	14
James 1:12-18 – The Inner Tempter	18
James 1:19-27 – Redefining Religion.....	23
James 2:1-13 – Mercy Vs. Partiality.....	31
James 2:14-26 – Like Peanut Butter and Jelly.....	38
James 3:1-12 – Sticks and Stones	45
James 3:13-18 – The Character of Wisdom.....	52
James 4:1-12 – The Friendship Dilemma	57
James 4:13-17 – Zero Hour.....	67
James 5:1-6 – Poor Rich Guy	72
James 5:7-12 – Final Entry	78
James 5:13-20 – Power Play Prayer.....	86
Conclusion	93
Appendix A: Section Summaries.....	94
Appendix B: Theology and Application Cliff Notes	97
Appendix C: Complete Translation	103

Introduction to James

As we begin our Bible Study on James, we will find a wonderful book that has been accepted and rejected for different reasons in Church History. While Martin Luther, one of the fathers of the Protestant Reformation would refer to it as "an epistle of straw" because of its emphasis on works, others would herald this letter as a marvelous work of metaphorical art.

Some scholars have complained that the book of James lacks enough emphasis on Christian theology, citing that the Christology (the parts that talk about Christ's work and effects) and the overall gist of the letter lies in Jewish Theology. To this, I can only say that they have not looked deep enough, for there is abundant Christian Theology in this book as we will see throughout our study.

The book of James has always been one of my favorites because of its seamless integration of the theoretical and the practical. We will find that James actually does quote Jesus in a few places, as well as the Old Testament and he deals adeptly with Scripture and the application of Scripture to his own Jerusalem Church, of which he is the pastor. Pastors today would do very well to study James' method of practically applying the issues of the Bible to his people.

This book is all about heavenly wisdom, social justice, what it means to be a Christian in our world, and how we should treat other Christians and other humans. Join me as we move through the book of James and discuss the issues that James brings up to his own church about how to live wisely in a world that deeply needs an example of true Christian wisdom.

Introduction

TRANSLATION

1:1 James, a slave of God and the Lord Jesus Christ: To the twelve tribes who are in the Diaspora, greetings.

INTRODUCTION TO JAMES

After reading this very first verse of James, we can discuss the important issues of the book's origins and find out the author, date, audience, and other important information that will help us interpret James' message not just for his church but for our own lives today.

As we study these issues for the origins of James' work, we will find that different situations can be given for the book of James. We will present our own situation taking into account all of the evidence from the areas of Author, Audience, Date, and Genre. Then we will discuss a conclusion on these matters that seeks to synthesize all of these facts together under the heading of Main Issues, where we will show some of the main issues of James.

AUTHOR

The writer calls himself James. You would think that if a writer used his name that would help us to know who he is except for one minor problem. There are about six different men just in the New Testament accounts with that same name! So we have to ask the question to find out which James we are referring to: Who is James? It is also interesting to note that the person with this common name of James actually has the name of Jacob in the Greek Text. But we have translated it as James in all of church history.

Some Possibilities for the Author:

- James the father of Judas (Not Judas Iscariot)?
- James the son of Alpheus, a disciple?
- James the Younger?
- James the brother of John, sons of Zebedee, a disciple?
- James the Just, the Lord's Brother?

James the Just is the most widely accepted author. He was the leader of the Jerusalem church, referred to by Paul as a pillar of the church (Gal. 2:9), and an arbiter in the Jerusalem Church Council of Acts 15. He was well-respected by Jews which made him an excellent leader in the city between Christians and Jews.

AUDIENCE

Now the Audience is most interesting because there are two different ways we could take the audience of this letter.

- Was James speaking metaphorically of the Church when he used the words Diaspora (which speaks of the scattering of Israel in the Old Testament) and Twelve Tribes (as a metaphor for the Twelve apostles and the Church)?
- Or was James writing his letter to the Jewish nation as a literal and historical nation, so that Diaspora actually referred to the scattering of the Israelites and the Twelve Tribes were the twelve tribes of Israel that had been split up?

For this study, we are going to maintain that, since James the author was the Leader or pastor of the Jerusalem church, he was using these terms as rich metaphors for the church and those who were scattered abroad. After the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7, the Church was disbanded and forced to run from the Leaders of Judaism, such as Paul and his group. It could very well be that these people from James' church missed hearing his sermons and this letter was written for that very purpose (see Genre below), to keep members of the Jerusalem Church aware of what was happening in their church while they could not attend because of persecution.

DATE

The date of James must be before 62 AD because James the Just was martyred then. Some would say it is as early as 45 AD because it doesn't seem to take into account the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15. The reason for this is that the Jerusalem church was persecuted by people like Paul in this time period, right before the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in 70 AD. This battle changed Judaism and Christianity for the rest of history, and such changes are reflected in some of the New Testament books.

The Fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD brought changes to the entire region of what the Romans called Palestine. Along with sacking the city for the insubordination of a few small groups that did not like the Romans, Solomon's Temple was demolished, ceasing the sacrifices in the Temple courts. Judaism would begin to create Synagogues and turn from sacrifices as markers of Judaism to studying Torah (the first five books of the Bible. Torah is the Hebrew word for "instruction")

Christianity would spread away from Jerusalem because of this event and the continued pressure and persecution from other Jews. Originally, Christianity was seen by the Roman empire as a sect of Judaism, giving Christians the same sanction to practice religion instead of Emperor Worship as the Jews. However, all of that changed when those of Judaism let Rome know that these two religions were not the same.

GENRE

Genre refers to what type of literary work the letter of James is. For instance, we know that it is what is called an epistle (a Greek letter with defined parameters and structure). But beyond that, what is the book of James considered to be. Genre determines how we interpret the book's images, use of Scripture quotes, and driving themes and purpose.

For example, if we look at a poem, we expect certain literary conventions, such as rhyme, meter, repetition, parallelism, vivid imagery, terseness, and the like. We will not expect to see a statement logically defined with a body and a reasonable conclusion. Poets write to display and express emotions related to life. In the same way, we need to know what conventions James is using so that we don't misinterpret his method and message to us.

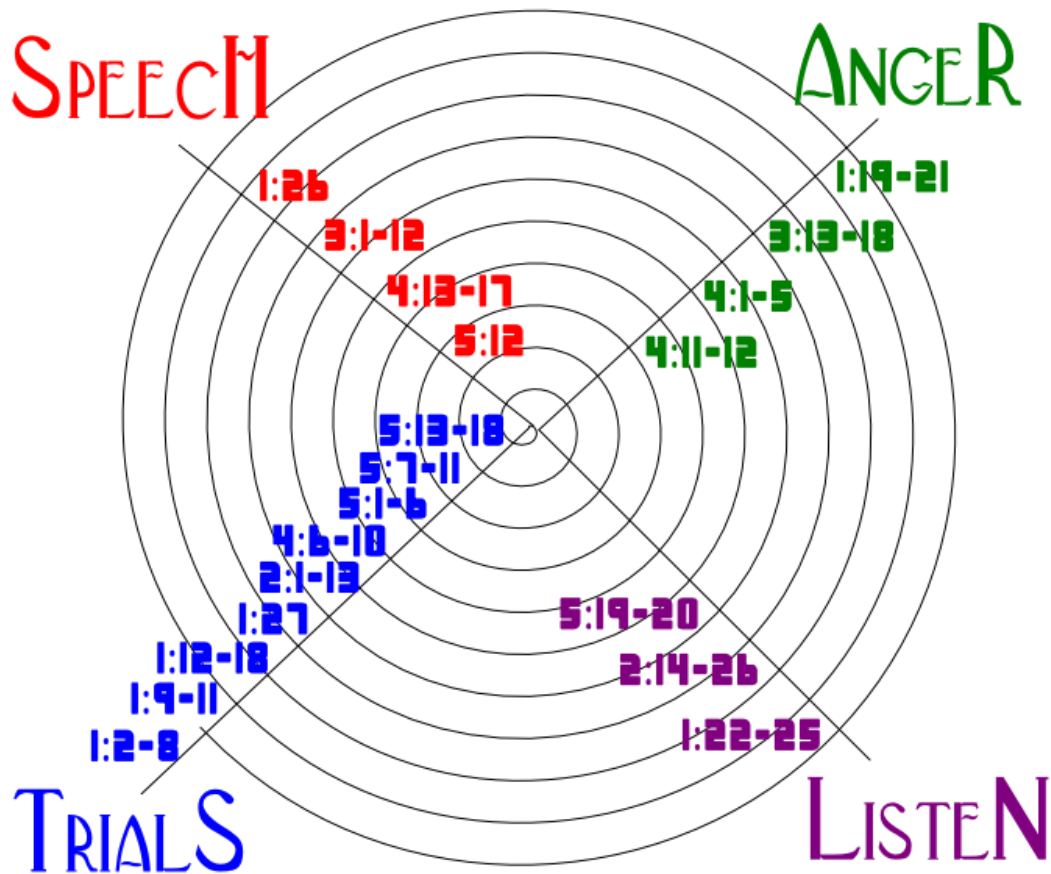
Several attempts by scholars have been given to better understand the genre of the book of James. Here are a few possibilities:

- New Testament Prophetic Flavor. Prophetic in the sense of addressing a major issue within James' congregation and applying biblical ideals as a response to the issue. Not prophetic in that James tells the future. James addresses the issue of squabbles among Christians (Chap 4), the problem of the tongue (Chap 3), and relations between the rich and poor (1:9-11, 2:1-10) to name a few.
- New Testament Proverbial Flavor. Much like the Proverbs, the whole book of James is arranged or disarranged in a collection of short wisdom sayings that present paradoxes.

The book has material unrelated and disconnected from other material in the same book. A road system without an interstate system. Each saying would be taken as a stand-alone passage.

- Series of Collected Sermons. Each issue builds on the last as the sermons are tied together through catchwords and phrases, ideas, and concerns. A perfect example would be James 1:2-8 connected to 1:12-18 through two or three catchwords (approved, trial/temptation, etc). This would explain how the book circulates between the same types of issues.

For the purpose of this Bible Study, I have compiled my own view of the structure of James based on a combination of all of these genre possibilities. In this [PDF Document](#), I arrange the main issues of James from James 1:19 as a key, in a spiral of issues that James continues to revisit throughout his letter. I have mapped out the themes of the letter as poles in the spiral. So we will see James take on theoretical issues and apply practical wisdom to them.



MAIN ISSUES

James will be seen for us in this Bible Study as a collection of James' sermons to his congregation as the pastor of the Jerusalem Church. I am placing the date in the realm of the late 40s to early 60s AD and suggesting that James wrote this after the church was forced out of Jerusalem around the time of the stoning of Stephen. The audience was the metaphorical "scattered saints" who were part of the Church, whose authority rested in the 12 Disciples (Twelve Tribes).

Some of the central themes of James, such as wisdom, prophecy, faith, and the last things must be understood in a biblical context rather than the popularized caricatures we use today. For instance, in prophecy, we tend to focus on a minor trend that prophets could tell the future. While this does happen at times in the biblical prophets, a prophet was not some soothsayer or mystic future teller.

Prophets stood out in their time because they focused on social injustices and sin in people's lives and nation's character. Then they told the whole world what God thinks about those issues. Prophets were prophetic because they had the gift of being God's mouthpieces, speaking to the issues that God was concerned about, calling out rulers and people to live God's way instead of their own way.

Wisdom also has a different nuance today than it does in the Bible. Today, wisdom is some unattainable, spiritual or secretive ability, like intuition or a "gut feeling." But in the Bible, wisdom is always a path chosen to deal with an issue or theory in everyday practice. Wisdom was extremely practical and real, not some intuition. It was knowing the facts and acting on what you know to be true in every situation. We will see James do this time and time again prophetically.

In the same fashion, faith is lived out, not some head knowledge. It is seen with every deed and word. Faith is active belief. And faith is placed in the context of the last days or things. In this ending time of suffering and trials, James gives us the best nugget of wisdom any pastor could, to turn to the Lord in faith, expecting that God's going to get you through!

Joy Through Trials James 1:2-8

TRANSLATION

2 Count everything pure joy, my brothers, whenever you run into various trials, **3** knowing that testing your faith is achieving endurance. **4** Now endurance must have its complete work so that you become mature and complete, in nothing lacking. **5** But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask from God, the One who gives everything without reserve and does not reproach, and it will be given to him. **6** But he must ask in faith without doubt, because the doubter is like a wave of the sea, driven and blown by the wind. **7** Now that man should not expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, **8** a double-minded man, unsteady in all his ways.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Because James is writing an epistle (a special Greek letter with a specific form), we know that he is in a hurry to begin with his reasons for writing the letter. We know this because a typical epistle has a certain structure to follow, much like our professional letters. For instance, a block letter consists first of the date, then the recipient's name and address, then the business's name and address, then a salutation or greeting, and then the body of the letter, and finally a concluding ending with your signature.

Greek letters (epistles in this case) also had a form. Usually, they were structured like this:

- The sender
- The recipient(s)
- Greeting
- Thanksgiving or blessing
- Reason for writing
- Solution
- Greetings from others
- Final conclusion or prayer or another blessing

Because James immediately starts off with a command in verse 2, we can assume that he skipped the prayer of blessing or extended greeting for a special reason. I might suggest that because James jumps right into the issue of trials, this might be the core issue of his congregation.

THE TEXT AND CONTEXT

Let's begin to move through the passage, making notes as we go about what happens there that will help us see the message James has for us. **(1:2)** James starts with a command to consider everything pure joy in trials. Right away we notice that James has a burning issue to deal with in his church. Remember that the church is going through great persecutions because of Christianity's association with Judaism early on.

Paul was a member of this group that persecuted the Church. They stoned Stephen in Acts 7 and Paul was there approving of it all. From there, the Jerusalem church was scattered abroad to flee the persecution and Paul began the mobile persecution machine to stop

Christianity from spreading. Although Rome saw Christianity as a sect of Judaism, those who were in Judaism said Christians were a different religion and attacked them openly. These may be the "trials" James refers to.

But such persecutions are not the only types of trials, because James refers to trials of "various kinds." There are other trials in life that we should still count all things about those trials as things that cause us joy. Now this command flies in the face of human nature. After all, one of the burning questions of all time is, "How can a good God allow bad things to happen?" That we would ask this question shows our natural response to trials and tribulations. But this is exactly what James commands, that we act differently to trials than we are used to.

Why do we act positively to trials? Because it improves our character as Christians.

(1:3) This verb for "know" is a participle (an -ing verb) that hinges upon the other verb (count). It gives a circumstance of that first verb. In other words, we count it pure joy based on the fact that we know God is using it to improve our character. This testing or trial makes our faith grow and endure through hard times. He is saying that as we go through the trial, with God there walking through it with us, we achieve a higher level of faith because we learn to get through the tough stuff of life and we never lose sight of God's promises and God's purposes.

This word for endurance is the same word for patience. Now patience, faith, and hope are all part of the same eschatological (end times) system. In view of the Day of the Lord when Christ returns, the great promise of the New Testament and of Jesus, all Christians live within a time between the proclaimed promise and the completed culmination of that promise. In this time, we live affected by this world still, although we are promised a perfect world. So as we deal with all of the trials and problems that come with living between these ages, we must have an endurance that stands the test of time and space while such things exist, because they will no longer be in effect in eternity. Faith is the active belief based on our hope that this promise will one day come to pass. And patience is our attitude until that day arrives!

(1:4) As we suffer through trials and learn to be patient and endure them, and even to grow in them, our hope growing in God and our feeling of not fitting in anymore on this earth because we look to a much better time, we must allow that endurance to work through us completely. The purpose for letting endurance fully work in us through trials is that we as Christians will gain maturity and completeness.

The words for maturity and completeness here contain the substance of James' reason for approaching trials in a positive way. The first word is a word used for completeness and perfection (Greek teleos). This is the word used in the context of the end, the culmination of creation and time. But when you see the description of "perfect" for a Christian, it does not refer to no mistakes. It refers to this idea of maturity or being to the highest level of effectiveness, a finishing or completeness of a goal. To be finished is to complete a project. Until we have fully endured what God needs for us to endure, then we are not finished with our time in this decaying world, but we are getting closer every time we pass the test.

The other word is a word also used for completeness, but in a slightly different way. This word refers to all of the needed parts being present. Where maturity uses time and circumstance to come to fruition, this completeness refers to no parts lacking. In other words, a Christian is composed of several attributes or virtues. Until we have all of those virtues, we are not a complete picture of a Christian. This is also part of that already-but-not-yet situation every child of God finds himself or herself in. This is why James says "lacking in nothing."

Trials are the program God is using to grow Christians into the mature and complete children He desires. This is why we can view trials in a positive light. We gain endurance

through them and improve our character. Our faith is increased because it is exercised in endurance, much like our muscles are also strengthened through the adversity and weight we put on them. James is using the same picture here to explain that although trials aren't any fun, they are useful for us to become what God is making us to be.

As James thought about all of the parts that Christians need to be complete, he began to think of a key trait - wisdom! **(1:5)** James introduces a condition for the members of his congregation here. In Greek, this is called a first-class condition. This means that James assumes that some people in his church don't have wisdom. If that is true, then this is what to do to fix it. So, James says, if someone doesn't have wisdom, he should ask God. Now it may seem so simple of an answer that we sometimes overlook this option. But James is going to back up his suggestion with a description of God.

God is a generous God who gives without reproach and gives to everyone. God is a kind God who does not take into account our deeds when He grants our requests. God is a God who doesn't hold things against us. There are no conditions, such as the conditions for health insurance or having credit to buy a car. No, this God gives to everyone without reservations. So we should not be so afraid to ask for something that we need, like the wisdom to know what to do in our daily situations.

Then James takes into account that some are afraid to ask our Father for His help, or they are unsure of what they really want. So when they pray, they pray without knowing what they're actually asking God to do. **(1:6)** So James provides a condition when we ask God for wisdom: we must not doubt when we pray for God to help us. When we doubt, it lessens that faith that has been strengthened through endurance. To ask God for wisdom and not expect to receive it, since He is so generous and would grant wisdom to His children that He loves, is to show disbelief in Him to be able to give wisdom. In other words, when we doubt God as we request things from Him, it is the same as believing that He really can't help us or that He is unable to answer the request!

Such types of people have failed in the testing of their faith from verses 3-4. They are the types of people that are wishy-washy. James introduces a beautiful metaphor or image of the doubter here. Waves do not control themselves. They are controlled by their surroundings, by the wind and currents around them. People who doubt have no inner center of control granted through endurance. Instead, they are controlled by their circumstances and don't know what God can do. That is why such people should not ask God for wisdom, because they will not receive it.

(1:7) This kind of doubtful person must not expect anything from God. What's interesting is that in Greek, the emphasis is on never receiving from God in this instance! James is sure that such a doubtful person will not get what they ask for in prayer no matter what. It's like when you offend someone to the point that they can't even deal with you anymore. You go so far that you push them over the edge so that they can't even talk about that thing anymore with you. When we doubt God, we offend Him to this end, and He won't give us what we ask Him for because He is more offended by our assertion that He can't do it anyway.

(1:8) James calls this type of person a "double-minded" person. What does that word mean? James is the only person to ever use that word and he uses it twice in his epistle: once here and once in 4:8. Because he is the only one to use this word, it is much harder to figure out what he means by it. It is a combination of the two words in Greek for two and mind, literally, "two minds." This makes sense in our section because James is talking about someone who can't make up their mind. What's more, James then goes on to describe them in a more holistic way.

He tells us that these same people who are unsure of whether or not God can do what they are asking for are unstable in everything that they do.

If they are unstable in prayer, they're unstable period. These are those ones who have no wisdom. They don't know how to talk to God or what they want. They are lost among the circumstances and stuff going on in life, controlled by their situation, not their faith in God. They are driven and controlled by the outside, not an inner foundational conviction that God can do whatever they ask.

WHAT'S JAMES SAYING?

Although James releases a shocking command to be joyful in trials, he backs it up with a great and accurate reason. God uses trials in our lives to further the strength of our faith. We are tested through the fires of persecution and other tribulations that come our way in life. James does not yet reveal the source of these trials, but he doesn't discount the fact that they happen even to believers.

Some have held that because Christians are God's children, then if a trial happens to them that they don't have enough faith or that the devil is attacking them. While we cannot discount the fact that the devil may be involved in causing some trials, we also can see how God can take a bad trial and turn it into a chance to increase our character and faith in Him. If your God isn't bigger than your trials, then He's not the God of the Bible. God is so great that His power extends over the devil's, so that when a trial meant for your destruction hits, God changes its purpose and you actually gain strength from it!

Maturity and completeness are hallmarks of the Christian. Our faith in God should be increased to the point that we expect that God's doing a work in us that will continue to the end. When trials come our way, we need to have practical wisdom to do what God would want us to do, what would be best for that situation. This is why we pray for wisdom, and ask God for it, for He is wisdom! The proverbs speak of wisdom personified, and God is ultimately wise. So to ask Him for wisdom is to ask for His help and will in the situation or trial we are in.

We must be careful when we come to God without faith. When we ask God for His infinite power and help in a matter, we must expect that God can do what we cannot. Faith is the active expression of our belief and understanding that God is able to do anything, so there is nothing we can ask Him to do that He can't do! But oftentimes, when we pray for healing or wisdom or something that we're praying for because we know we can't do it, we don't pray expecting that God will grant it! He can do anything. We say we know that in our heads, but it's got to go beyond our heads and into our hearts so that we don't just mentally ascent to God's omnipotence, but we believe actively in expectant hope for Him to do what we ask.

The Hebrew word for mind and heart have the same range, meaning that both mind and heart are part of that word when it is used in Hebrew, and James is a Hebrew writer using Greek. When he says heart, we might be able to put both heart and mind in that sense. Both must be actively believing in faith that the request is not only heard, but is answered. This does not guarantee that God will always do everything that we ask, but He does answer our prayer. Just like a father knows what is best for his children, we sometimes ask for things that are not in line with what God knows is best for us. But He still answers yes or no to every prayer request.

How Do I Live It?

Christians are not exempt from living in a fallen world. We are still susceptible to the results of a sinful world and sin in the world. We still get sick and we still go through trials in our

lives that we can't explain. Trials will come your way. You can expect that since Jesus has not yet come back, we are still enough a part of this world that its problems will still affect us.

But when trials and troubles come your way, instead of trying to get rid of them or blaming God or the devil for them, why not start by asking, "What can God teach me in this trial?" If it is true that God uses those tribulations in our lives to strengthen us, when adversity comes, we should be prepared to learn more about God that will increase our faith in Him and our dependence upon Him.

It's so easy to look back on God's hand in your life in the past, but when it's happening right now, we tend to not see His hand. We don't understand now, but we will later. God is preparing you for something great, and He is using everything in your life: the joys, the trials, the good, the bad, and the ugly to bring you closer to Him, His will, His heart, and His mission. So the next time you find yourself in the midst of a trial, ask God for the wisdom to pull through stronger than before, and don't forget to give Him the glory when it's over!

We must learn to stop being so unstable and double-minded in our lives. Wisdom helps us to choose the right path right now. Wisdom is a practical way to deal with current issues. We need not be tossed and driven by the things or people around us. God wants to place in us an inner core of trust and hope that will outlast any trial we come up against. In these last days, it will not be easy to rely on God for hope, but we hope in what comes at the end of the last days, the time when God finalizes all of the promises He has given to us.

Go Down To Go Up James 1:9-11

TRANSLATION

9 Now the humble brother should boast in his high position, 10 but the wealthy in his humiliation, because like a flower of grass, he will perish. 11 For the sun arose with scorching heat and dried up the grass and its flower withered, and the beauty of its appearance utterly destroyed. So also the wealthy in his pursuits will waste away.

INTRODUCTION

In a country where the dollar is king and people spend their entire lives in the pursuit of financial gain, I am forced to almost pause over this passage. America is one of the richest nations on the planet, if not the richest. We spend money we don't have to maintain the look of the wealthy, as well as the lifestyle and upkeep of the wealthy. Our celebrities are celebrities because they are rich and we watch them because we are intrigued with their lives.

If you're not rich in America, you're on some process to get there, and that is why immigrants, legal and illegal, come to this nation. Life for us is more about money than relationships. In fact, we talk about relationships and relationship building because it is a means to the end of profit. Businesspeople all over America talk about being a servant to others, a friend to the customer, or building business and consumer relationships for one reason: the bottom line.

We have no shame, no recourse, and no idea how deep in the temptation and lust after wealth we are in. Just ask any wealthy business owner to give it all up and you'll probably get the same response as the Rich Young Ruler! Why can't we give it up? Because it controls us and because we like it. After all, you make time for the things in life you think are really important, and you spend time in life on what you think is important. In America, we spend most time and money on the rat race – getting ahead of the next guy in line, looking at the bottom line, and finding ourselves so far away from our neighbors that in a crowd of people, we feel all alone.

With our deep pockets and shallow friendships, we come to this text in utter shock and horror. We have no idea to take James' statements in verses 9-11. Some of us will make them hurt less when they hit, claiming that the passage isn't really about what it's plainly about. Others will say, "Yeah, but I'm not as rich as the next guy." Still others will ignore the message, calling it James' problem and not mine. But if I can't turn all of the money I've made down to follow Jesus or listen to these statements from a pastor in the first century, then I am doomed to fail at hearing and adhering to his wise counsel. So let's take a look at what this man had to say about the rich and the poor in his church.

THE TEXT AND CONTEXT

After James has immediately introduced the prospect of trials of various kinds, we find he is beginning to outline those different struggles and tribulations that humanity goes through. The Christian slant to these issues is the wholly other way that Christians react wisely to the same issues and problems that all humans face. First we saw that the Christian reacts to troubles and hardships with a joy that comes from knowing that God is going to work every problem to the advantage of the believer by improving the strength of faith through the ordeal. And the Christian turns to God asking for wisdom in prayer. The third difference between a believer and

nonbeliever is that the believer relies on their hope and asks in faith without doubt. Believers grow through trials to be single-minded in their affections and active faith based on the hope that God is on their side.

Now after James has introduced trials of various kinds, specifically life trials that come along, he will now move to the trial a poor person faces when seeing the rich and the stumbling block for the rich. You see, James is going to approach the next trial, that of wealth, with intentions on helping both the wealthy and the pauper deal with the prospect of riches in life. How does a rich person act and how does a poor person act in a world that seems to favor some with wealth and to disgrace others with poverty?

(1:9) James commands the brother in humble circumstances, the lowly or poor brother, to exult in his high position. This seems just as much a paradox as rejoicing when trials come our way! What is James talking about, you might ask. Either this guy is on some illumination path that is pure genius, or he has gone mad in his advice!

Jesus made an assertion or two about this sort of phenomenon in His teachings, and the entire New Testament supports the same issue. At one point, He simply stated a reversal of roles in that those who humble themselves will be exalted and those who exalt themselves will be humbled (see Matthew 23:12 and Luke 14:11). In the Kingdom of God, these roles have been switched, turned on their heads so that the principles the world operates on are opposite the principles the Kingdom operates on.

He did it also in telling the story about the rich man and Lazarus in the afterlife (Luke 16:20ff), the response to the Rich Young Ruler (Matthew 19:16ff), the widow at the temple who gave all she had in coins (Mark 12:41-44), and the list goes on and on. Over and over we see Jesus ignoring the world system of who's the richest and the best and focusing on the heart, not the bank.

But does this mean that wealth is bad? We will deal with that when we talk about what James meant below. The important issue is that in the Jerusalem church, there are a number of wealthy and poor people, classes of society that conflict every time they meet to celebrate the Lord. So James, with a pastor's heart, will use wisdom to explain what the Kingdom looks like for both of these groups.

(1:10) Not only does the role reverse for the poor brother, but also for the rich man. James now turns to the humiliation of the rich person. He likens it to a flower that fades away and dies. James is taking into account here the rich person who desires and chases after wealth itself. His whole life's goal is to gain riches and glory for himself. As we will see later on in his epistle, he condemns this attitude that simply searches out profit (4:13-17).

Now James is going to use a metaphor to show the end result of the man who seeks wealth above all things in life, the man who spends his entire life gaining this wealth. James says he is like a flower of the field. Now the interesting thing about this image is that it has two different looks which I believe are both intended by James and the New Testament writers. First, a flower is beautiful and splendorous when it blossoms. Many people look to the wealthy as the epitome or best picture of what life's all about. They see all of these people rolling in the dough as beautiful and they want what those pretty people have: wealth and fame.

But the core image produced here is not the beauty of that lifestyle. It is the shortness, the brevity of the image. You see, a flower does something more than looks beautiful. It also dies very quickly. It lasts but a very short time on this earth and then it is gone. This is why, by the way, I cannot understand why a woman would want a flower (something that dies within a week) as a symbol of a man's undying love. It doesn't make any sense to me.

(1:11) Now James waxes eloquent on the image and adds some Old Testament background to it. In fact, that's probably where he came up with the image in the first place. Isaiah 40:6 speaks specifically in these poetic forces about the short life of the beautiful flower. The point of the poetry, so wonderfully and artistically wrapped, is that life is short. Why waste life on something that does not last beyond yourself?

You see how practical James' wisdom is? He uses poetry and image to get to the core issue of waste, and makes a pun on the idea all at the same time. What a waste it is to vainly seek after things that do not last! Life is a short waste but searching and seeking after wealth instead of eternal life and caring more about a coin than a person smacks of a waste. This may remind you of Jesus' point in the parable about the rich man who built bigger barns and God killed him in the end (Luke 12:16-21). The poetry of James and Isaiah looks like this:

11 For the sun arose with scorching heat A
and dried up the grass A

and its flower withered, B
and the beauty of its appearance utterly destroyed. B

WHAT DID JAMES MEAN?

Is James really saying that wealth is bad? In biblical times, wealth was popularly seen as God's favor and blessing upon a person. We can see examples of this with Abraham, Job, kings in general, and others. Many times wealth was not just money, but lands, cattle, wives, etc. Possessions were a sign of wealth and wealth was understood as a sign of God's favor. Conversely, poor people were seen as people rejected by God, or sinful people.

What's interesting to note is that God actually favored the poor, the sojourner, the slave, and the outsider in the Law of Moses. There were laws to take care of the widows and orphans and poor and outsiders, people on the fringe of society, marginalized people. God cared for them greatly, despite the popular opinion that He favored the rich. The rich tended to take advantage of the poor as we will see in James 2:1-13.

James is not declaring wealth evil. He is declaring the pursuit of wealth evil. That is the key to understanding James in this passage. He rants and raves not against wealth, but people who think that wealth is the goal of life! Instead, the goal of life is to serve the Lord, to live out Kingdom character, and to love God more than anything else in your life. Wealth is not the end to the means. Love is the end of the means.

So the rich man is brought low because his prized possessions mean nothing and are a total waste at the point of death. But the humble or poor brother has not to worry about this trial of living life without wealth. He can take to heart that God is not placing favor on someone else. Anyone who is a child of God has God's favor! Instead, he should take heart in that high esteem, that God has called him a friend.

Another issue that must be brought up in the meaning of this passage is that of role reversal or the turning of the tables. When the world says that wealth is all there is in purpose and meaning to life, God reverses that decision and concentrates on the poor. When the world system decided worth by dollars and cents, God determines worth by how close we are in relationship to Him and His Son. There is a reversal in the Kingdom, a whole different economy. You don't get ahead by having more! You get ahead by serving, by loving, by sacrificing. That's what God's Kingdom is all about!

We must remember even among believers that there are no classes. This Kingdom of God is a classless society. We are not out to hold monetary things against one another. We're out to love one another and bring others in. Don't forget that grace is free and that we can't purchase it.

Don't forget that nothing belongs to us, but that it all belongs to God. Don't forget that we're just passing through and we're strangers in this foreign land. Forget about classes that are here today but will be gone tomorrow. Look deeper than the world does and see the treasure God sees when he looks at every person on the planet. God doesn't see bank accounts; He sees people that He would very much like to make perfect and complete.

No longer is there a hierarchy among believers of status. We are all equal in Christ, all heirs of God's gift. The gospel turns the tables so that social structures are reversed in the light of eternity.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ME?

James isn't dogging every rich person in the world, Christian or not! He's dogging anyone who puts some other pursuit ahead of knowing Christ and serving God to the fullest. James is really striking not at some outward and noticeable thing like riches but at the inner motive. Why do you have riches? Why are you so wealthy? Is it because you look for ways to get wealthy and you seek out that type of lifestyle, or is it because you simply are wealthy.

We must be careful when it comes to class distinctions. I have known wealthy Christians who give an enormous amount of their wealth away to others in service or to missionaries. You see, money isn't the issue. Your heart is the issue. Can you walk away from all of your possessions if you were asked to? Maybe that might be a better indicator of where your motives and heart are.

There is no more "I'm better than you." All of us need to be saved from God's wrath and all of us need to be humbled like a poor person. In God's economy, money and math don't mean a hill of beans. What matters is everything you can't see, like a person's soul, their heart, their motives, and their love. Ask God to give you His eyes to see in His kingdom His economy of grace.

Let's stop noticing people in our lives the way the world does. Who cares if someone is rich or poor? God only cares that they will be with Him for eternity. It's time we started looking at people through God's eyes instead of our own. We can't see all of the things that matter in a person. So let's take the actual picture we do see with a grain of salt.

And let's be careful to monitor our desires and motives for the things that we do. Do we do them because a side benefit will be to be exalted? If we do, then it's the wrong motive even to do something good for God. Unlike our brothers and fellow humans, God sees what others don't. And you can't hide anything from God. Give others the benefit of the doubt. It's not your decision and you can't truly see them for what they are anyway. Let God decide all of this. Instead, don't even hesitate to do what you would do as a representative of God.

The Inner Tempter *James 1:12-18*

TRANSLATION

12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation, because after the approved testing happened, he will receive the crown of life, which He promised to those who continually love Him. 13 Let no one when he is tempted say, "From God I am being tempted!" for God is not tempted by evil, and He tempts no one. 14 But each one is tempted by his own desires, being dragged away and lured. 15 Then desire, after it has conceived, brings forth sin, and sin, after it has matured, gives birth to death.

16 You must not be deceived, my beloved brothers. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is coming down from above, from the Father of Lights, within whom there is no shifting or turning shadow. 18 He desired to give birth to us by the Word of Truth, unto which we are a kind of firstfruits of His creation.

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever met someone who blamed God for their misfortune? It seems logical. After all, if God rules the entire universe and everything that goes on within it, then He's at fault for all of the evil and bad things that happen, especially to good people! You know, even people in the church want to blame someone else for the temptations and problems that come their way. It seems this is a core problem of all of humanity, which goes the whole way back to the happenings of the first sin in the Garden of Eden.

Remember when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden and then hid from God. When God came up to them, what did Adam say? He told God, "It's this woman you gave me!" Then when God turned to Eve, who did she blame? "It's this serpent. He tricked me!" So what did God do? Whose fault was it? Paul places the blame on Adam (Romans 5:12-14). Adam placed the blame on Eve. God ended up cursing the whole earth because of their disobedience and pride!

But isn't that what we still do today when we are faced with an ethical or moral issue, or when we are even caught red-handed, as it were. We blame someone else. It's so much easier to point a finger at others than oneself. And that's exactly what James' church was doing. They were blaming God for the temptation that leads to sin! James won't allow that, though. As we find in this passage, James takes the finger pointed outwardly at others or God and places it inwardly.

THE TEXT AND CONTEXT

As we come to this passage, we must consider our context once again. Remember that James began his letter quickly getting into the main issues of his congregation. He first brought up the word trials and then he proceeded to explain God's system for using trials to strengthen Christian character and faith. We pray through those trials and God generously and eagerly gives us the wisdom to deal with our situation.

Next, James brought up a key contention amongst his church family when he began to address the issue of the rich and the poor. We can see even in Acts 6 how widows were sometimes overlooked in that Jerusalem Church. When you're pastoring a growing church of at

the bare minimum 3,000, it's time to find some leaders that can help you delegate. But there was theological and historical baggage that came along with these issues of trials and riches.

Now James is going to bring up another form of temptation different than how the rich and poor deal with wealth. He is going to bring up temptation, which is the same word in Greek as trial. As he continues to address the issue of trials in the last days and what Christians do about them, James will weigh in on the problem with temptation. James has two essential issues he wishes to dispel with:

- Where does the blame for temptation reside?
- What role does God play in temptation?

So James will approach the subject of temptations and explain how Christians are supposed to accurately view temptation in the life of a believer. He will give us key points on how God is involved and how we are involved. He will ruin the excuses we make for sin and temptation by pointing to others. And he will leave us with the reverse picture of a good God who does not lead His beloved children astray. Although many scholars see these two paragraphs (12-15 and 16-18) as two separate issues, I am going to present them as a coherent response to one problem: God's role in temptation.

James begins his response with a forever truth that sums up what he's already been saying about trials and tribulations. (V12) James uses the same type of language Jesus used in the beatitudes and applies it to the person who stands the test of trials and has strengthened faith. This man is one who has stood the test of trials and persevered with God's approval. He points to the time after the trial, in the end of time, when the man will be rewarded with the crown of life, here probably referring to eternal life.

When James uses the phrase "which He promised to those who love Him," he is recalling that this is a gift of God upon His children. This is the first gift that we see in this passage, but there will be others as we travel along with James. Notice that this is a promise that has a prerequisite or set criteria. The people who receive that eternal life are people who have received a promise from God because they love Him. This word promise reminds James' readers of the promise God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and brings up much of the foundations of the revelation of God's Word.

(1:13) James then turns to the issue at hand, that of blaming God for temptations, and commands that no one should do this. He lists two reasons for not blaming God for temptation:

1. God is not tempted by evil Himself.
2. God does not use temptation to tempt us.

First, God cannot be tempted by evil. He is outside of temptation and He does not have evil as any part of His character at all. He is wholly and completely other than evil. Evil is the anti-thesis of God's character, as James will point out in verse 17. Second, God does not operate on a temptation principle. In other words, God doesn't use temptation to get what He wants or to prompt us to be changed. God does not initiate the temptations that we struggle with.

Now this is not to say that God will not use those times of temptation to strengthen us. Remember that temptation and trial are the same word. So God does not initiate temptation, but he can and will use the temptations that we do have to strengthen us in our faith and character. James is only forcefully demanding that we don't blame God for temptation, because temptation has its origins in another source.

(1:14) In fact, James is about to let us know just where temptation does come from. But, as is his poetic and pastoral norm, he will do it using images unrivaled by some of the greatest preachers of all time. Instead of pointing the finger for the cause of temptation to some outside source, such as God or even the devil, James points the finger to the inside of each person, to the desires or passions that we have within us! Notice that James specifically uses the words “his own desire.” It’s our fault, pure and simple, and no one else’s. That is what the devil uses! He finds out what our desires are and then tempts us to commit to them over our desire to serve God.

There is something we have been wrong-headed about in church circles for a long time. There are good passions and bad passions, passions that cause problems and passions that cause blessing and prosperity in our lives. God made passions and He is a very passionate God! We can be passionate in our love and service to Him, and are indeed commanded to do so throughout all of Scripture. But we can also allow our passions to lead us away from Him and His plans for our lives. This is when passion turns to lusting after the things of this world, which lead us down the wrong path to the other end of death instead of life.

James uses the vivid imagery first of hunting or fishing and then of the birthing process to explain just how temptation works in us to produce sin and death. The words for dragged away and lured are hunting terms that explain how at first, we are simply toying with the temptation, sort of giving it a little ground in our minds and letting the desire lead us only a bit. We still have the power to stop it where it lies. But the next word, the one for lured, produces the picture of the trapped animal, the fish caught on the hook being reeled in. It’s too late now to get away. Once we bite down on the hook, we’re caught. No longer can we get away scot-free! We have allowed ourselves to be taken by our desires into the process of temptation.

From these hunting terms, James then switches to birthing terms to take us from point A of lured by desire to link us to the final point, which is death, physical and spiritual! **(1:15)** Now our desires logically lead next to temptations, which inevitably lead to sin in our lives. Let me remind you that we are past the point of saying no to the temptation at this point in the process. James has already put us on the track we chose when we were lured in to our desire, when we gave into it. Now all that is left is the logical sequence of events that leads to our demise.

In showing us the unstoppable process, James is letting us know that the trouble we have gotten into is of our own doing, not God’s. God is powerful enough to use even this process that we go through to teach us a lesson, such as, “Don’t let your desires and passions lure you into a process you can’t stop!” When we let desire reign over us, it produces the act that is based on the desire, the act of sin, whether thought about, spoken, or a deed done, it is all sin.

That sin has one more inevitable and logical consequence: death. This death specifically refers to physical death that occurs as we continue to live outside the bounds God has set for a happy and healthy lifestyle that maximizes the very best life has to offer. But this is also spiritual death, because we have given into our own ego, what we want rather than what God wants. We have allowed the process to lead us to the pride that we think our passions and desires are more important than Gods. So we subtly move from God’s desires for us to our own desires for us, setting ourselves in opposition to God so that we finally end up spiritually dead, separated from God!

But James’ main point is that God does not cause this process. Think about this: He sent His one and only Son to die the worst death possible for you. All of that was done to bring you as close to Him as you could possibly get! Now why would the same God who did all of that to get

close to you be the source of a process that moves you away from Him? That is what James is saying. We have thought the opposite of God's actual and real attributes. We have made a picture of Him that is completely different than the true picture He presents of Himself throughout history. We have remade His revelation of Himself and placed the blame on God. That's what happens when we take pride in ourselves. We change God's revelation of Himself to us! Paul corroborates this same idea when he tells us that we suppress the truth of God in our lives (Romans 1:18-23).

Now after James has confirmed the source of temptation and sin inwardly upon our desires, he then makes a statement that makes perfect sense. **(1:16)** He tells us to not fall into the deception that we paint when we blame God for temptation. Don't play the name game where we are left with a lie about God! But what is God really like? James is about to explain who God really is, the kind of character that we can attribute to God.

(1:17) This verse now moves us from what God is not to what God is. God is not a God who begins the process to move us farther from His presence. He is not the source of evil and temptation. He is not the source of the process into sin and death. But God is indeed all-good. He does indeed give us only good gifts!

God provides every good thing that's ever happened to you. James once again uses vivid poetic imagery to explain God's character. He says that God is the Father of Lights. Light in the New Testament is an archetype, along with darkness, as good versus evil. God is not evil; He is only good. There is no evil in His character at all! This is the point when James uses the unusual words of shiftings or turning shadows. God does not have darkness in Him. He is pure light, pure goodness.

Aside from that, this imagery also has a double-meaning for James' readers. The words for shifting, used as a weather term for clouds in some Greek manuscripts, and the words for turning shadows also speak to God's character of unchangeableness. God does not change at all. He's outside of time and does not act differently in different eras. Instead, God always acts the same. His unchanging deeds flow from His unchanging character. If there's anything good in your life, it is a gift from God alone. God is always good all the time!

(1:18) Finally, James has already mentioned eternal life as a gift from God. But now he's going to go further than that. God actually willed and desired that all of creation was formed and put into place. Now I don't know about you, but for me, life on this earth and all that God has made is a wonderful gift. God said in Genesis that it was all good. But even more of a gift than creation is the regeneration, the re-creation, of us as Christians after the Fall of Man has tainted everything that God had made good and perfect.

You see, the fact that you can be given eternal life and changed into a person that can live in the presence of God is a great gift! The fact that when you accept His Son, God re-creates you into one of His children who gains the promise of eternal life (1:12) and gets to live eternally with God is an amazing gift. In and of ourselves, we are way too depraved to ever turn to God on our own. Remember, we would rather deceive ourselves into believing that it's someone else's fault than to see the truth for what it is (James 1:13-16, Romans 1:18-23).

We need the Holy Spirit, who works in our hearts and begins to lead us out of the unchangeable process of desire that leads to death. Although we cannot stop the process once we give in to our desires, God is omnipotent. He can change the process and lead us to Himself. He can go against all of the natural processes we have begun and change us from the inside, where our desires are, to the outside. The process can be reversed only by God's power. We can do

nothing, but nothing is impossible with God. He gives us good desires and changes the process so that we end not in death but in eternal and perpetual life. And that is the greatest gift God could ever give.

WHAT'S IT MEAN TO ME?

Faith is a trust in God that what He reveals about Himself is genuine and accurate to the reality we live in. We need to trust that God's revelation of Himself is true and not turn to ourselves to define and explain God. Only His explanations will do. So when God proclaims something, it is the real reality, not merely what we see in the here and now. You know, we can see how God has acted in the past and we can understand from previous revelation how true God has been. It's not that we accept everything on blind faith. God has a track record that is undeniable.

When we are faced even with the trial of temptation, we must be prepared for the process. James is kind enough to let us know that the battle of temptation begins with us. We cause our own sin problems. We can decide to sin or to not sin when we are enticed or dragged away by our own desires. We don't have to give into them! We can accept God's given desires instead of our own passions.

God revealed Himself to us so that we don't have to perish and pass away! We can live. It is the greatest gift He could have ever given to us. Enjoy God's gifts! They are good for a reason. We were meant to enjoy regeneration, to enjoy living for God's purposes and plan, to enjoy eternal life and immortality in His presence, to enjoy every good and perfect gift from creation to eternity.

Although we must be careful to not fall into the same process of rejecting God's truth about Himself and putting up our own ideas about him, which are off-base from reality, we need to live in the freedom of the gifts of God in our lives. He loves us so much that He sends the best gifts our way. We must be careful, as Christians who know what God's really like, to not even joke about false attributes of God, like saying that He causes our temptation. When we do this, we are continuing a false revelation of God to others and misrepresenting Him.

So instead of focusing on some rules this all-powerful being demands we follow, let's see God for who He really is. God gave us the bounds in which we could live the best life possible even in this world tainted by our own failures and sins. Don't focus on the rules. Focus on the gifts. Don't muddle through your entire life thinking, "Why does God tell me that I can't have any fun, can't do this, can't do that?"

Spend a lot more time thanking and praising God for every good thing in your life, every gift you know for sure comes right from His throne. When you spend time thanking Him for all the good things, you won't have time to complain about how He cared enough to tell you how to have the most abundant and full and purposeful life this side of heaven.

Redefining Religion James 1:19-27

TRANSLATION

19 Know this, my beloved brothers! Every person must be ready to listen, slow in speech, and slow in wrath, 20 for man's wrath doesn't work toward God's righteousness. 21 For this reason, as you are laying aside all moral impurity and excessive wickedness in gentleness, receive the implanted Word, which has the power to save your soul.

22 But become doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is hearing the word but not doing it, that person is like a man who examines his natural face in a mirror, 24 for after examining himself, he then has gone away and immediately forgot what he looked like. 25 But the one who intently gazed into the perfect law of freedom and kept it, he is not a forgetful hearer but an active doer, this one is blessed in his doing.

26 If anyone presumes to be religious while not controlling his tongue but continues deceiving his heart, such is an empty religion. 27 Religion pure and spotless to God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, to keep oneself untainted by the world.

INTRODUCTION

We all deal with the types of trials and temptations that James has been talking about. Temptation is part of life, as well as trials and tests. Life itself is a test. And no one is except from the trial of having a social status, a niche on the totem pole of society, an unseen stereotyped category that people who judge give you when they see you.

Because every one of us has passions and desires, we all have temptations. Now, the Christian must not give in to these temptations because our evil desires conflict with our desire to serve God and obey Him rather than ourselves. So our struggle is where to draw the line and not give those temptations a foothold, because once we let them go, we cannot stop them. The battle is in the very beginning of the temptation. It must be squelched there.

But now James is going to deal with those things in our lives that have caused some of our biggest problems. And he has a solution! According to James, anger is one of the roots of the human problem. On top of anger lie the effects of the anger mode, when we talk instead of listen and ignore the advice and counsel of others and God's Word. Our tongue becomes a tool for evil instead of good when we are angry and enraged. James will touch on all of these throughout the rest of his epistle.

THE TEXT AND CONTEXT

After speaking to the issues of trials, social status, and temptation, James now brings into focus the solution to all of these issues, which is the implanted Word, the ultimate source of wisdom for everyday life. For the rest of his epistle, James will be bringing up these same issues of anger, the tongue, religion, social status, and how to live in a fallen world as a child of God and use God's wisdom instead of the wisdom the world offers.

(1:19) I have seen this verse as a sort of table of contents, or centering locus, for the entire book of James. All of the General Epistles (from Hebrews to Revelation, arranged at the end of the New Testament because each book has a different author. Paul's Epistles follow Acts,

from Romans to Philemon) deal with the main issue of suffering and persecution, including James. James speaks more to the issue of how to practically live today in those trials, whereas some others will speak to actively waiting for the return of the Lord.

So if we take the issues raised in 1:19 as a table of contents for the book of James, we see that he will deal with speech, anger, and listening skills. All of these are key components of practical wisdom in our day and age, between the ages of Christ's sacrifice and the culmination of time in the eschaton (the Greek word for the last thing or end of time).

Now James will first address the social status problem again in the beginning of Chapter 2 and will speak then to the issue of the true religion mentioned in 1:26-27 in conjunction with social injustice. He will speak of faith and works. In Chapter 3, James will deal with the tongue and the issue of heavenly wisdom stemming from the discussion of the tongue. He will then move to worldliness, which we allow in times of wrath, rage, and anger, and speak directly to the Church about anger issues. He will return to the issue of the rich and poor in the beginning of Chapter 5 and then speak about suffering and give last-minute helps for the Church to deal with sickness and sin.

But here James gives some of the wisest counsel of his entire letter. We know James is dispensing wisdom when he gives a command like, "Know this, my brothers," or "Come now, brothers." He will use this formula throughout his epistle to give us the clue that his pastoral advice is on the receiving end of such formulas. Here is his first round of advice on how to deal with all of these trials he has so illustriously described to us so far.

James would love for every person in his congregation to be slow to speak and wrath. He wants to make listeners out of all of us. Communication has always been seen as a speaking or outpouring time. We say that people are communicating when they are the ones doing the talking. But communication experts have long known that for what we call communication to happen, there must be a sender and receiver, along with a message. Now the sender is indeed communicating a message through words and actions, but the one who is receiving is listening!

James calls every Christian not to speak, but to listen. How many of our problems and quarrels would be settled through listening to one another, hearing the message others are broadcasting instead of reacting to everything we don't like to hear? Through listening, we can get a better sense of the real deal that the person is trying to communicate. In our world, we do plenty of talking, but a listener is hard to come by. Listening is a discipline that few of us have cultivated in our lives. But that is exactly what James is calling for.

Notice how the inability to become a listener leads to talking and then to wrath. The process happens so fast when we choose to speak instead of listen that when we do speak, we speak from ignorance because we didn't really hear the issue being presented. We end up land blasting a straw man instead of being able to confront the burning questions or problems that people have. My mother used to always tell me that when my mouth is open, my ears are closed. How biblically accurate she was! James is essentially saying the same thing.

Oftentimes, we think that it will save time when we half listen and then rant and rave with that tongue of ours. We think we heard enough of the issue to produce the blanket statement that fixes all of the problems. But we missed all of the details that make the issue worth the speaker's time to explain what's going on. It is disrespectful of us, and that leads to anger on the part of the speaker.

(1:20) When James states this axiom, I wonder if it is not a quote common to his congregation. It seems to poetically flow from the page as something that is catchy enough to stick in the brain. James is a great preacher because he uses sayings that create what one of my

professors calls an earworm. When most of what people say goes in one ear and out the other, these sayings get stuck in the ear and the brain cannot get away from them. But look at what James is saying here. Human anger doesn't jive with God's righteous plan! We think so many times that we have a right to be angry, but James says we've overreacted or that we've reacted too quickly. It's called an injustice, and we think that we understand what that is.

So when we feel that we've been wronged, we put the boxing gloves on and head into the ring. Some of us have a mean left hook, too. You see, our wrath is misplaced. God's wrath is much different because it is always from a wider perspective. We see only the here and now, stuck in the hourglass of time with no way to see the bigger picture. God is outside of time and when He gets angry, it's for the right reasons at the right time to the right issue.

Consider when you think you've been wronged how Jesus reacted to being wronged. For instance, we have all been born into sin. None of us are perfect or sinless, so at some point in our lives, we've unjustly wronged someone else, either God or another person. Injustice is part of our atmosphere, our universe. But Jesus was sinless. He had never wronged another person. And when humanity hung Him on a tree, He forgave us! We don't hold a candlestick to the Light of the World. When you think you've been wronged, if you can forgive instead of allow your wrath out of its nice gift-wrapped box, then you're moving toward being like Jesus.

And that's James' goal as a pastor for his church in the first century. He wants them to realize that our wrath is off-base. The fact that we get angry cannot be changed. Emotions are a part of God's image in us. But remember that emotions are marred along with the rest of God's beautiful creation, so that they cannot be trusted as easily now. It's not a sin to become angry because it is part of us. All of our emotions are gifts from God and in some way resemble His image and character.

But when we wrongly become enraged, we allow a devilish cat out of the box that is hard to control, almost as hard as controlling the tongue, as we will soon see. And that hissing cat does things that are so uncharacteristic of who we usually are. Isn't it so hard to fix what that dirty cat does when we let it out? It may even create wounds on the closest of friends that may not ever heal. That's one mean cat.

And it's not part of God's righteous plan! When do you think a God who wants us to have fulfilling relationships with Him and others would ever want us to inflict or endure a wound scratched in out of a raging storm of wrath? When the storm's over, no amount of money or resources can heal a wound like that! And damage control takes such a long time. It would be better to use rage and wrath much more sparingly, and for the right motives and at the right times, when it is actually deserved and helpful. That's why so many of the authors of Scripture counsel us to leave injustice up to God!

(1:21) So if our wrath doesn't help God out, then let's get rid of the wickedness and filth that results from such rage. You know, when people are mad, it's like they're completely different from the person you thought you knew. Rage alters personality and lets that monster out of its cage. You've heard the saying "Hurt people hurt people." Well, it's very true. When we let rage take over, we open ourselves up to saying things that we really don't mean at all, to doing things that are meant to hurt and even kill someone. Jesus tied anger to murder in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-26).

So we need to put away or get rid of all of these wicked things that we have done in our anger. We need to turn from that and turn to the "implanted Word." Notice that the gentleness with which we receive the Word is totally opposite the wrathful vengeance we react with. Hmm. Maybe James is pointing out something opposite as he did with social status and how we deal

with trials! Maybe Kingdom character is opposite that of the world. Indeed, we will see this in Chapter 4 when we talk about worldliness and godliness, but that is a feast for another time in the future.

The “implanted Word” is an interesting word picture. In fact, here James goes again! What a communicator! This word for implanted is used only here in the entire New Testament. Implanted suggests agriculture, a farming term but with the idea that it is planted inside of us. And that’s what preaching does to God’s Word, isn’t it? When the word is preached, Paul even uses the idea that it is planted when he says that some plant, others water, and God grows (1 Cor 3:6). This same word that rebirthed us at creation and as a new creation in 1:18 shows up here again. The Word of God is planted deep within us until it becomes a part of our very nature! So the implanted word that is accepted with gentleness will in turn be the solution to our natural inhibitions to fly off the handle and let rage and wrath rule our relationships. The answer is to let more of God’s Word become part of your nature than the wrath that already has a hold on you.

Now this word that is implanted has more power than our wrath. It has the power to reverse the results of human rage by saving our souls, returning us to the One who can be angry and not take it too far, the One who restores with His anger and does not tear down. That is why anger is a mirror of God’s image in us. We use it wrongly almost all of the time, but God never uses it wrongly. Where we fail, God succeeds.

(1:22) This starts a new paragraph but not really a new thought. James is continuing on his “Know this” formula to release more heavenly wisdom to us. The reason I say that is because we have another imperative or command from James here. To become doers and not hearers hinges on what James said in verse 19. He said that everyone should be quick to listen or hear, and now he claims that we must not only work on listening skills, but also upon acting on those listening skills, hearing and doing the message, not just hearing the Word that is implanted in us through preaching and proclaiming.

This deception comes as a second deception to that of verse 16. In that verse, we have the deception of believing that God causes evil or bad trials and temptations. Now in this verse, the deception is that a believer must rely only on hearing the message and not on doing this message. There were probably people in James’ congregation that would mark faith as a mere head knowledge or acknowledgement of some principles or precepts, but who refused to actually do something to show that they had this belief upstairs. They lacked true faith, religion, and belief because it did not carry through from theory to practice, from doctrine to deed. James is attacking this notion that one can be a “head Christian” and not a “hand Christian.”

We will see in 2:14-26 that James revisits this group of individuals in more depth. But here he is content merely to whet their appetites for the coming feast, or to prepare them for the storm. As a practical theologian, also known as a pastor, James will not allow for his congregation to only go so far in their religion. This is why he is out to change what it means to have religion. James is on a first century religion revolution.

(1:23) As he is so fond and effective at doing, James will summon yet another pastoral image to present to his flock. In this verse, James begins the metaphor of a man who looks at himself in a mirror. There are a couple interesting features of this metaphor. First of all, the phrase “natural face” could be translated and applied several different ways. One might suggest from this phrase that James could have used “original appearance” or “appearance of his course of life.” A most literal translation of this phrase would be “face of origin.” But we could note that while the most common image is of a “natural face,” James could be talking about a person’s

entire life, as if the person looking in the mirror were looking back upon their life. We will continue, however, with the imagery of a man looking at his facial features in a mirror.

Another word of interest is the word for mirror. Mirrors in the ancient times of James were not like our mirrors today. This word is used twice in the New Testament, once by Paul in the Love Chapter (1 Corinthians 13:12) and here in James 1:23. These mirrors that are being referred to in both passages are polished pieces of metal that reflect an image that may not have been very clear. The metal was probably a cast and polished bronze.

So this man in James' image is intently looking through this mirror at his face, noticing what he looks like, his facial features. The key is not the mirror, but the fact that this man is looking so intently at himself. This is not a glance; it is a studying stare, the kind that burns into one's memory the image being observed studiously.

(1:24) The most striking feature of this verse is not usually picked up on in the translation. I have tried to do my very best in my translation here, but it makes for a harder reading. In Greek, there are six main verbal tenses to denote types of action (completed, incomplete, started in the past with present consequences, etc.). Well here, there are some interesting happenings on the verb tenses. Look at these verbs and their explanations.

24 for *after examining* himself, he then *has gone away* and immediately *forgot* what he looked like.

- After examining – an aorist active indicative – The aorist verb denotes a completed action. It does not tell us the timing of the event, but simply that the event has happened and is finished. This is why I used the word after with the verb, because the sequence of events follows closely with immediately forgot. The voice of active says that the man was doing this himself and the indicative is the most common mood in the New Testament that states that something happened descriptively.
- Has gone away – a perfect active indicative – Now the perfect is interesting because it denotes an action that happened in the past with present ramifications. In other words, it happened and is completed, except the effects are still felt at the time that the author writes. The significance of this is that the man went away, but his not being in front of the mirror sets us up for the surprise in the next verb. It is a declaration of the absence of the mirror so that what the man so intently studied is only in his mind. He cannot rely on the mirror when he forgets.
- Forgot – an aorist middle indicative – Even after all of that examination, the moment he leaves the mirror, he forgets everything he painstakingly studied and burned into memory. His examination is worthless.

Now after all of this grammar stuff, we can see the full brute force of James' image, can't we? The man in the mirror is the same as the man who relies on head knowledge rather than on the job training in his religious system. Sure the precepts may be logically perfect and the logic must be so appealing, but when he doesn't do anything, when he moves away from the deeds his doctrine espouses, he is left forgetful of the doctrine.

James is telling us that the creeds of Christianity, the belief of our Bible is not just in the declarations of theology and doctrine or the writings of theses and mental calisthenics, but the foundation of our beliefs is just as much in our deeds and works, our doings and actions! It's not

just about being an intelligent and knowledgeable Christian; it's just as much about being an active and accomplishing Christian!

Now let us be very careful not to pick one over the other. James is teaching works harder because of the slant to the opposite end of the spectrum in his congregation. We need both doctrine and deeds. We tend to pick one over the other when we need both to be faithful to God. The head, the heart, the hands, the feet – all are vital and necessary to your growth as a Christian into the person God is making you to be.

(1:25) Now James dovetails his image with the point of the illustration. He uses the same word for looking intently as he did in the man in the mirror image. This creates the link between image and point. He calls the Word used earlier in verses 18, 21, and 22 the perfect law of freedom. This Law of Freedom is mentioned in James twice, here and 2:12. If you look that up, you will see that that verse is also in a context of speech and act, along with this verse which speaks of not simply hearing but acting.

Now one question to raise about this law is what James means by the phrase “perfect Law of Freedom.” One might suggest that because he uses the word freedom, he is not referring to the Old Testament Law of Moses. His congregation, and Christians, as well as Paul and the entire Church of the New Testament, would disagree with a following of the Mosaic Law. Instead, that word freedom belays the legality of those 600-some laws and concentrates on the perfect law, that law that is fulfilled in action, not prescription.

So this law that James is talking about is a law that is active, not simply descriptive or prescriptive of what actions to take. It is a very practical law that finds its doctrines and rules in the rule of life, when one helps the orphan, the widow, the outcast, as in verse 27. This Law of Freedom is the Christian ethic, the heart of the moral law and the hand accomplishing in active obedience the precepts of the Christian law. It is the ethic of Christ in humble active engagement with the world of societies and communities.

So for James, the person who is actively doing what the Christian ethic refers to as excellent within his or her community sees the blessing or happiness of God upon their deeds and their life. If you want to see God smile over you and what you do, make sure your deeds and motives stem from the love and passion the Christian law of freedom empowers in you. That is the perfection of the law, not written on tablets of stone, as Paul would have said, but upon the hearts of humanity.

(1:26) The final paragraph of our passage comes next, speaking of what religion should be all about. James now points out that a person who cannot control his tongue has a false religion. He also says that such a person is deceived. Three times now in his opening chapter, James has mention deceitful practices that humans eagerly commit. The first was to believe that God is not all good, second to only hear and not act on knowledge of God's Word, and finally, to presume that you've got religion all figured out when you can't even control what you say.

This IF...THEN conditional statement is what is called in Greek grammar a Second Class Conditional statement. Conditions classified under this are known as “contrary to fact” conditions. In other words, the author presumes that the IF part of the statement is not true, but for the argument's sake, the author allows it to be accepted as true. So James does not see the truthful correlation between an uncontrolled tongue and a true religion that is worthwhile.

The words “bridal” and “tongue” are a reference to a later issue in James 3 that speak to being able to control speech, like controlling a horse's direction with a bridle. Such religion that neglects what is said and neglects the truth in a person's heart is worthless or empty. Another word for this would be vain or full of air. There's nothing to it. Any religion that does not do

anything for anyone, that does not address the thoughts of the heart, that does not even give the ability to control the parts of the body means nothing to everyone.

(1:27) James uses two synonyms to speak of pure or true religion. These synonyms have a very slight variance of meaning, but they are both throw-backs to the cultic purity espoused in the temple of the Old Testament worship practices. The first word is more of a physical cleanliness while the second word is concerned with a purity or unadulterated, undefiled sense. Both of these words used together strengthen the idea of clean and pure religion.

In an epistle that is questioned as to Christian doctrine, James here mentions the God and Father. The fact that he uses the term Father leans a bit more to the Christian side. What is very interesting is the next phrase where James returns to some of the tenets of the Old Testament Law of Moses that focused on helping those less fortunate, who don't have a male figure in their lives, such as orphans and widows. Both of these groups of people in James' time would be on the fringe because they would not have a father or husband respectively to take care of their needs. It has been mentioned that God has always had a place in His heart for the marginalized of society and it is reiterated here by James. He will continue this theme as we move into Chapter 2.

James defines pure religion, usually a cultic or internal idea based system in active terms here. We must never lose sight that religion without action means a hill of beans to the believer and the person being evangelized. There are two legs to pure religion

Religion that takes an active role in assisting those whom God cares about, such as widows and orphans. These are people who are in great distress or affliction. They are going through rough times because of their great loss. This is pastoral work if ever there was such a thing. And these people see God through the people that minister to them by heeding James words here.

Religion that maintains an active standard of cleanliness and purity by not allowing the world to taint you. Now the world here is not the idea of being in the world from John's "in but not of the world." This is the evil of the world, the things that clog us up or make us dirty, the everyday stuff that we can use as a diversion to remain close to God. James will talk about worldliness in Chapter 4 in more detail, but here begins the discussion to be picked up later on in his letter.

WHAT'S IT MEAN TO ME?

Although it appears that James has switched gears about five times in this first chapter, everything maintains a coherence unrivaled in most sermons. James opens with his first set of advice, which is to slow your anger and get listening skills. It's a hard pill to swallow. We find it so much easier to just live in a state of rage without having a reason. Have you ever been in a fight with someone and completely forgot what you were fighting about? That's what James is pointing out in this passage. We need to not let it go to a point where we never knew what we were enraged about.

Keep the line of communication open not by talking more, but by learning how to listen. This is so hard to do because we all find value in the release of information rather than in simply being present while someone else is talking. But that silent and undivided attention a listener gives ministers more to a person working through issues than anything else in the world. Pause for a moment and answer these two questions:

- How many times have people been hurt by moments of uncontrolled rage?
- How many times have people been hurt by genuine and sincere listening?

We live in a world that loves drama. We watch shows on TV that depict mad people going at one another and hating on one another. Why? What is so great about rage? Well, it causes all of the things that James talks about, like wickedness and filth. People swear up a storm, throw things at one another, use words to cut the heart of their adversaries, do anything to rip their reputations to shreds, and just plain kill a person from the inside out. Nobody wants to live with the people we watch in these shows!

Be after the righteous life that God wants you to have. Spend more time in the Word of God reading and studying than yelling and tossing couches. Instead of giving evil a platform to reign in your life, let God transform you through the power of His Word, which has been implanted like a seed into your life. Let it be your gut instinct, not abuse and violence.

And don't just sit in church and yell, "Amen" when the preacher says something you agree with as you snidely look at Sister Evil across the pew, whom you know is being "ministered to" because you and your friends were gossiping about all of her dirty laundry sins in the foyer. Or don't shake your head, which most preachers take as a nodding off to sleep by the way, guys, and then go out of those four walls untouched and unchanged.

The world is not impressed with knowledge. The world is impressed with action. Movies aren't inspired by people who sat around all day and talked in circles. They are inspired by people who went out and did something defying and relevant. Think about God watching you right now. What kind of movie is he watching? A boring melodramatic autobiography or documentary? A hopeless romance that is concerned only with guys and girls and human relationships that don't outlast this life? How about an action film where there's tons of stuff going on but the guy totally missed the point? You make the movie, director!

And hey, it wouldn't kill you to go visit the homeless, the orphans, the widows. Don't just send money. Remember, the presence of listening intently above? They can get money, but when I go to them during the Christmas season especially, they're so happy someone cared. What they mean by that is someone actually physically is there and attentive. Go do it! It's just as much a part of the Bible as believing Jesus existed and did a bunch of important stuff, taught a bunch of important and true ideas, and did a whole bunch of suffering so you could be free for eternity. It's just as important. You want true religion? You want all that you do to be blessed by God? Then go where no one else will and do what no one else does.

And while you're at it, keep yourself free from the filth of the world and keep connected to Jesus. Go a week thinking about how connected you are to Jesus and how easily you get distracted from God in just one hour of the day. It's not as easy as you think. It's quite a challenge. I'm studying for a Masters of Divinity and I have trouble staying focused on God throughout my day, and I'm in class for three hours talking and thinking about Him! Let me know how it goes. We'll compare notes.

Mercy vs. Partiality

James 2:1-13

TRANSLATION

1 My brothers, continue to hold the faith of Jesus Christ, our Lord of glory, never with showing partiality. 2 For if a man with a gold ring in radiant clothing should enter your assembly, but also a destitute man in filthy clothing, 3 but you look favorably upon the man wearing radiant clothing and say, “You, be seated in a good place!” but to the destitute man, you say, “You, stand there!” or “Sit by my footstool!” 4 Did you not distinguish among yourselves and become judges with evil motives?

5 Listen, my beloved brothers! Did not God choose the destitute of the world to be wealthy in faith and heirs of the Kingdom, which He promised to those who love Him? 6 But you dishonored the destitute, not the wealthy, who are exercising power over you and they are dragging you into court? 7 Do they themselves not blaspheme the beautiful name of the One who called upon you? 8 Yet if you are fulfilling the Royal Law according to Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well! 9 But if you show partiality, you labor in sin, being exposed by the Law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law, yet stumbles in one part, he becomes bound to all of it. 11 For the one which says, “Do not commit adultery!” also said, “Do not murder!” Now if you don’t commit adultery but murder, you have become a transgressor of the Law. 12 So keep on speaking and keep on doing as those about to be judged with the Law of Freedom. 13 For judgment without compassion does not accomplish mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

INTRODUCTION

How interesting our world is! Think about the kinds of man-made things we love to do to one another, like create labels and social structures. You know they naturally happen amongst us. When you walk into any meeting, leaders and pastors are trained to look for the “real leader,” the one who actually gets things done because everyone looks to that person, whether he’s wearing the leader badge or not.

Well, the debate and the classification between the rich and the poor has been going on for such a long time that it just might be as old as humanity. Every religion and organization must have a response for it. Some abuse the poor and some abuse the rich. Some try to get rid of the classes without success. There’s something innate in each human that does not allow these social structures to work very well. But what does the church say about riches and poverty? Good question.

We’ve already discussed how having wealth is not a sin or even a bad thing for Christians. But James did condemn the innate desire to gain riches above all other things, like holding riches as more important than Christ. But how do we deal with this social status issue in the Church? Remember that we live between the ages, between the sacrifice of Christ on the cross in which a new and eternal life was granted to believers, and the culmination of that age when those promises and inheritances are in actuality and reality ours. There is much pain and trouble in that Between-the-Ages time that we endure even now.

James had this trouble between the classes in his church too. As a pastor, he had to find a way to have both groups without all of the tension between them. Any pastor with a shepherd’s

heart is unwilling to simply cut a parishioner off from the church and kick that person out. It is a pastor's hope to find a better solution than excommunication at almost all costs. So how is James going to deal with this sticky situation of the haves and the have-nots? The wealthy and the poor? The high and the lowly? The arrogant and the humble? Or are these just our classifications and labels?

THE TEXT AND CONTEXT

Now James will speak to the issue of the rich and poor once again in his epistle. So far, he has mentioned them and their situation only in 1:9-11, and there briefly dealing with the arrogant decision to chase after wealth instead of Christ. He will deal more directly with his congregation's specific practices in this thirteen verse passage, taking on the hypothetical situation of how humans naturally treat someone they think better than themselves and how to deal with that on a theological level.

He will incur an example of the Law and compare it with the Law of Freedom once again. And he will leave us with an attitude that we need to work on so that we don't find ourselves as Christians making class and social distinctions in a community that is about sharing and the free gift of salvation. We have already said that each Christian approaches the new life in Christ on an equal playing field, we all came into grace freely without works and so we all stand together, remembering that we have nothing of our own here.

Here is an outline of James' passage on partiality:

1. James opens with a forever true statement of how the community should address social status.
2. James presents a hypothetical depiction of the way the community practically operates now.
 - a. They judge by external appearances the visitors among them.
 - b. They are drawn to show favor to the rich.
 - c. They humiliate the poor among them by offering a lower status, signified by a lower seat or standing.
3. James then asks rhetorical questions to set the mood for its resolution.
4. James spends time developing the idea that they must turn to the Law of Freedom rather than the Royal Law.

(2:1) We see once again this vocative of address, this calling out to the members of his congregation right from the start. "My brothers..." It almost sounds like instead of simply reasoning with people, James is a pastoral and relational person who seeks to serve the community by showing them all of the sides of the story.

Then he hits them with the flat-out truth he wants them to catch, sort of the main point of it all. Partiality, deferring to one person over another on the basis of any human judgment whatsoever, is not allowed in the faith. I love how he ties partiality to faith here. He makes faith the background issue. He's not calling into question their faith in Christ if they do show partiality, but he is, I believe, reminding them of the facts of faith in Christ.

Christ did not show you partiality. What kind of free gift of salvation would that be? What if there was a certain criteria for salvation besides believing on Jesus Christ? What if there was a weight limit? Or even worse in my case, a height limit! What if you had to give so much

money, or do so many certain ritual things, or do some quantifiable measure of your passion for Christ? Salvation in Christ does not work that way. It makes no distinction. So neither should we. That's James' point.

Now the grammar bears this out even more so. The head verb here is not the word for partiality, which is actually a noun, not a verb. The head verb is to hold the faith. The description James makes contains the fact that we hold our faith in Christ, and in doing that, we don't show partiality. It is an earmark of the Christian to not judge outside appearances, to show partiality, or to be partial to any side based on this external stuff.

(2:2) James now presents a hypothetical situation of how events would play out to show partiality. He begins with a third-class conditional statement in Greek that calls for a situation that the author hopes is completely unlikely, but is still possible. In other words, James does not see them actually doing this, but he is warning them that it should not ever happen in their midst. So this is more of a warning than a scolding for an act committed by Christians.

Now he sets up the vision, the situation that will cause him angst if it were to happen in that church. First, a rich man, described with a gold ring and radiant clothing, all signs of a wealthy person in the first century, comes into the assembly. This is the standard, or stock, description of a rich person. It is not a certain rich man or anything like that. James is introducing a stock character to the story in general.

Then the poor person, on whom a ring is absent and the clothing is the reverse of the rich man's, also comes in. What's so interesting is the word that James uses for this poor person. The word is more of the idea of destitute, which in the first century would be something like a homeless person who did not even have a slave job, where you would get paid a bit as a slave in Roman society. This poor person is the same as the rich in that it is a stock poor person, nothing special or any specifics about him.

James expresses a great truth in keeping these both general characters. You see, if there were special cases for each character, like the rich man is actually a ruler or an authority, or a diplomat, and the poor person were a thief or something of an illegal nature, there would be a much more interesting situation. But this is the standard and common image. By the way, even if a diplomat or king and a thief were to walk into the church, they should still not raise any suspicion or special privilege.

(2:3) James moves after the image to the reaction of the people to the two very different persons. First, they hold the rich man in high esteem. Giving someone a choice seat, the best seat in the house, as it were, was the sign that such a person was better than someone else. Remember Jesus' example of the guests at a banquet in Luke 14:7-11. The person came in and sat in the place of honor and Jesus' advice was to sit in a lower seat so that you would be honored when the person who invited you came in. Seating at feasts was arranged in this way in the first century, and even still today!

So in this synagogue or assembly, if they were to let a wealthy man have a seat of honor purely based on the external appearances, this would be partiality. We need to notice from the descriptions of these characters that the believers could only judge their importance by what they wore, their external or outward appearances. That is the rub of this entire hypothetical situation. For the poor man in the situation, to sit on or by a footstool, a lower seat nearer to the ground, or to have to stand and have no seating at all, was the equivalent of dishonoring a person.

So the image is complete, this hypothetical situation that James presents. What's neat about this image is that this type of thing happens even in our culture. It's so easy for us to understand this preference based on status and appearance. Just go to any formal banquet or

event and you'll notice the tension as soon as you walk in the door. It's one of the reasons I hate fancy restaurants.

(2:4) James comes next to the rhetorical questions that cause his listeners to think through what they hypothetically just did. In looking at external appearances and assigning a certain value to people based upon that frame of reference, James brings into their minds the fact that they have become judges of those people. Anytime that we make distinctions based on externals in Church or really anywhere for that matter, whether between Christians or in a mixed group, we are violating God's right to rightly and perfectly judge. It is not, and never has been, up to Christians to judge. That is why James says that such people who show partiality have become judges with evil motives. Because judging and distinguishing seek to divide into cliques and social orders. But the Kingdom comes without social pricetags!

(2:5) Here the great preacher of the first century once again offers a vocative of address, probably to show the weighty matter as much importance and attention as possible with his opener, "Listen, my beloved brothers!" James' second rhetorical question goes even farther. He states, through the question that expects an affirmative answer, that the poor have been chosen by God to be heirs of His Kingdom and rich in faith (compare Matthew 5:3 and Luke 6:20). This bears marked resemblance to the Beatitude for the poor in both gospels and seems to be a theme of the poor of the time period.

They would inherit what they did not have while on this earth in the Kingdom. Note the phrase "which He has promised to those who love Him." It is here a second time in James, first showing up in James 1:12 with the gnomic, or all-the-time truth of a blessing for those who endure, that crown of life will be given to this same group, those who love God.

(2:6) James makes an observation about the wealthy in these next two verses. First, he finishes his rhetorical questions about the poor man by concluding that these hypothetical judges have dishonored the poor man, because they are all on the same plain inside the Kingdom. You are either a citizen of the Kingdom or you are not. When you are, there are no distinctions.

He then reminds his listeners that the wealthy in general, that social group, likes to exercise and hold power over them. Many wealthy people are so drawn to wealth because it has a power over others. They do not really seek riches, but power. It is a striving that also ends in futility. These are the same wealthy people who drag people into court to get earthly justice, another way of having power over someone. They want their cut and they want it now. There will be no reasoning or working a problem out with them. They don't care about the poor, unless they have reason to gripe against them.

James' point is that these rich people that the church is catering to do not even follow God's justice system and they treat those poor people in church with a distinction as well. So why would these believers give them even more power in the community of the Kingdom, where power belongs to God alone, judgment is His to execute, and every believer is on equal footing? Why import the world into the Kingdom? We left the world to be part of something better. Now living it out is James' desire as the leader of that community.

(2:7) In James' day, historically, the rich and wealthy were calling blasphemy upon Christians because of their ties to Jesus. You see, Jesus was a cursed criminal because he hung on a tree, and the wealthy would say things like, "You know, those Christians and their criminal leader..." These were the people that the believers would have supported if they would treat them as in 2:1-4. James simply explains that to prefer those unbelievers who blaspheme Christ over another is the farthest step from where they should be.

The name of the One who called upon you is a Hebrew idiom, speaking of Jesus. Christians had joined the camp of the crucified and accursed Christ. He is the one who called them to this life and into this community. Now when a stranger comes dressed as the wealthy of the world, and characterized as such by James, will they turn to this person who has no intention of ever being kind to them instead of to the characterized poor who have no quarrel with them? That is James' question, the hardest blow in his argument saved for last.

After spending time dealing with the image he created through rhetorical questions that state the heart of the issue in the case of the wealthy and poor visitor to the assembly, James moves on to his main argument of this section, namely, how those who practice partiality break the communal Law of Freedom discussed earlier in his letter.

(2:8) So what moral Law or which one of the Ten Commandments does showing partiality break? James points to the second most important commandment in all of the Law: Love your neighbor as yourself. The first is to love God with everything that's in you. The first four commandments speak to that effect about how to love God with your everything. The last six highlight your relationship of love to fellow human beings. And James is going to put the sin of partiality under that umbrella.

The "royal law" James speaks of here refers to the moral law of the Old Testament, and possibly the rest of Moses' Law. He cites Leviticus 19:18, the heart of the holiness code, for this reference to Scripture. He also mentions that people who are doing this are doing very well. They have no quarrels or problems as far as the Kingdom community is concerned.

(2:9) But those who do show partiality break this commandment! Indeed, they are not just breaking the royal law of the Old Testament, which illustrates the love of the Kingdom community, but also the Law of Freedom which James has already mentioned. They break the law because they lower the worth of their fellows by preferring one person in status over another.

It is a direct violation of the freedom that is in Christ for all who believe. That three letter word all is all-important! James says, "Hey, you like labels and status so much? Then if you show partiality, here's a label for ya! Lawbreaker. Transgressor. Sinner." James labels them with their own labels, turning the tide to show how crazy it is to act more like the world than Kingdom citizens.

(2:10) Now James provides the rationale for his actions against them. The main principle here is that to fail in a part of the Law is to fail on the whole. It's not about percentage or maximum effort. God is wholly holy. The Law is a picture of His holiness and humanity's inability to attain or maintain that same holiness. That's the point of the Law, that we can't do it. So the principle is not a percentage or even a majority. The moment one fails at any point of the Law, the whole point of the law has been proven, that we are not anywhere near the holiness of God on our own.

(2:11) How about some examples? Well, to start with, there are the two most popular of the man-ward commandments, those of adultery and murder. The first-class conditional statement (IF...THEN) Assumes that a person commits murder, but not adultery. In other words, the person does not break all of the law, just one of them.

The THEN part of this statement, the apodosis, affirms the overarching principle in practical example. Because this person didn't break the whole Law, but did break just one part of it, the fact that the person broke any part makes that law broken, and therefore, the whole Law has been compromised. No matter how small the infraction, the person is labeled a transgressor.

(2:12) After providing a principle about the law, proving an example, and explaining the principle, James now turns to another law, the Law of Freedom for the Christian. This is the same law mentioned in 1:25, which was the Word of God. James is saying that Christians should act according to the Law of the Bible, the law of Christ, that of the freedom Christians have, living in unity and grace.

It is this key of living under mercy and grace, not under the judgment of others based on external appearances as in the hypothetical situation above, not under the Law of the Old Testament that demanded in impossible perfection of humanity, but under the grace of the cross, the grace of Christ. With so much grace so freely given, yet so expensively gained on a tree, how could the Christian settle for another law or another way of life? Live under grace! That's James' message for his church in Jerusalem.

(2:13) James states almost a parable or proverb here. It may have been one of those sayings that was passed around his church or spoken by someone to him. No matter where it came from, the statement remains true. Human judgment, either external or internal, is void of the perfect perspective God has and does not accomplish the mercy that God's judgment always accomplishes.

Mercy is the scale God uses while humans use the scale of empirical judgment or judgment from what we know or sense. But God is much bigger than us in his perspective and He can perceive what we cannot. Judgment is best left to Him. Mercy is stronger than judgment because, like every other attribute of the Kingdom, it builds up and edifies rather than tears down and destroys. In judgment, the person's character and person are manhandled, but in mercy, the person is treated as they do not deserve.

WHAT'S JAMES SAYING?

We must notice as we look at James' words and images and propositions that he is not taking on the social status issue as much as taking on an attitude of those in his church that does not resemble the Kingdom character he expects as their pastor and leader. Yes, James uses the social status between the rich and the poor in this section, which may show us just what a big issue this was for the members of this church, but the main point is not this illustration.

The main point of this entire text is to not show partiality, to not fall short of the high calling of the Law of Freedom. Even in comparing the Old Testament Law of Moses to the Law of Freedom directly points out the fault in the original law, that is the impossibility of following it completely, and therefore, the inability to follow it period.

Christians must live on a higher plain, not worrying about percentage or majority obedience, but full and complete obedience to the command and call of Christ. It is so much harder to operate in mercy than in judgment. We love to keep score, but we hate to give away free stuff. But we don't have the right to judge anyone, not another Christian, not another human being. This place of judge, this office, belongs to God and God alone. Any attempt to usurp such authority is the same attempt as in the Garden of Eden, the desire of the pride of humanity to become God. To judge in His stead is to unrightfully and unlawfully covet and steal His divine right.

WHAT'S IT MEAN TO ME?

Sometimes I wish that I could judge others. It is so easy, and we actually do it automatically without even thinking first. It is ingrained in our nature to judge by what we see

and by external, measurable observance. We must get past that natural tendency and see people as God sees them, as God once saw each of us.

I think as Christians, we take God's grace and our former way of life so flippantly. Grace is free for us, but Jesus paid so high a price to bestow it to humanity. We must remind ourselves that not too long ago, God didn't judge us when we deserved it, and He not only didn't judge us, but He also mercifully gave us what we don't ever deserve. Now we need to be the image, the illustration, the example of that same grace and mercy to this world. That means that we don't judge others by what we see and hear.

We can learn to ignore all of that about them. It really shocks people when you treat them to a blank slate, when you don't treat them with contempt or as special or as peculiar, or as unusual, or as worthless. We do it all the time, but we need to stop and treat everyone the way God treated us. In a world that operates on empirical worth, what you see is what you get, stereotypes, social strata, status, your job is who you are, and classes of better and worse, constantly comparing this apple to that pear to that grape, we need to step up and remind everyone that God made each human being unique in so many ways that we can't compare ourselves to anyone else or anyone at all.

Stop meeting people with a pretense. Stop worrying about what a person can do for you. Or what a person can do period. In fact, let's accept others on the basis that they are humans with the image of God in them and God can take anyone who exists and change them to be one of His kids. You know, in the Kingdom, character is intrinsically defined in each of us, built over time through trials and faith and relationship with a God who cares enough to accept us for who we are, not what we can do, and change our character (the who we are part), not what we do.

He works on the inside out. We should not hold to the outer part, the part that's always in transition even for believers who are on a journey to build God's character inside of them. Look to the inside and see what God sees, a person whole and complete who can be much more than they already are. God did it for you, now it's your turn to try it on someone else.

Like Peanut Butter and Jelly
James 2:14-26

TRANSLATION

14 What advantage is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but has not works? This faith cannot save him, can it? 15 If a brother or sister should become naked and lacking food for the day, 16 and any one of you says to them, “Go in peace! Be warm and well-fed!” but does not give them what is necessary for the body, what advantage is it? 17 Likewise, even faith, if it does not have works, is dead by itself.

18 But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works! Show me your faith without works, and I will show you from works my faith.” 19 You believe that God is one, you do well. Even the demons believe and shudder. 20 Do you wish to be shown, O foolish man, that faith without works is worthless? 21 Did not Abraham, our father, become righteous from works when he carried up Isaac his son, onto the altar? 22 You see that his faith worked together with works and from his works faith was completed, 23 and Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Now Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him unto righteousness” and he was called God’s friend. 24 You see that out of works, he was declared a righteous man and not out of works alone. 25 Now likewise was not also Rahab the prostitute declared righteous when she received under her roof as guests and sent them another way? 26 For just as the body without a spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

INTRODUCTION

The age-old argument between Paul and James on the faith vs. works question has been in swing especially since the Reformation, when Martin Luther actually created a canon within a canon and stated that James served little purpose in the Church. Of course in his day, arguing against the works approach of the Roman Catholic Church, Luther didn’t want there to be any rebuttal from Scripture to refute his firm and Pauline understanding of salvation by faith without works.

But what do you do with this passage? At first glance, it seems that we have an apostle versus a pastor on a central salvation matter. Modern atheists and agnostics love to use passages like these to dispel any sense of unity and coherence in the Bible, attacking the authority and inerrancy of Scripture by suggesting contradictions. To ignore such suggestions would not be a smart move, as well as extremely rude and self-centered. There is no contradiction here, as we will discover.

So how do we respond to people who claim they have faith in Christ, then turn around and lead a life of sin? Or those who lead double-lives? What about people who do great and humane things but have nothing to say about Christ as the motive? Our world has been ushered into secularism and pluralism, where there are many ways, especially those uninvolved with God, religion, and the Church, to accomplish good. What does James have to say to the people who have head knowledge of Christ, but no practical way of backing it up or giving evidence to their belief system? Let’s take a look to see how James deals with faith and works in the Christian life.

THE TEXT AND CONTEXT

The question that James opens up with may be the beginning of an inclusio, which is a brief part of text that begins and ends with the same word or saying. Starting in verse 14, the question “Of what advantage?” begins and then ends at the end of verse 16 with the same question. James is placing emphasis on the useless faith that does not reach its world with actions.

What kind of believer stands aloof on the side and watches the kinds of injustices that would send God’s fiery wrath from heaven on the perpetrators? That is the real issue James is getting to. **(2:14)** What’s it matter says he believes in Jesus, but doesn’t witness to others or aid the cause of the homeless? What good is a Christian who says that everyone should hear the message and then passes the empty offering plate to the next person? That’s the kind of issue that is at the heart of this entire section. James is using another rhetorical question, for the answer is, “Why, such a believer is no good at all, pastor James.”

Notice again that vocative, “My brothers.” This is so confrontational and sermonistic, as if James were preaching! And that’s exactly what the book of James is, an inside look at a first-century preacher and his message to a specific congregation of Christians. In fact, this section could be a diatribe, which is a debate between two imaginary characters as the style of the author’s arguments. A logical discussion played out through two character’s bantering back and forth.

This person is saying one thing and doing another. He claims a proposition, that he has faith, without backing it up with hard evidence, works. It’s a virtual Christian, much like virtual reality, a simulation of a Christian! SimChrist! (Maybe only gamers will get that last one, but the point still stands.

Looks real, but nothing tangible. That’s the kind of person James is depicting here. The question about such a faith saving him often raises the eyebrow of the trained theologian, whose eyes become transfixed with pictures of crosses and wonders about the systematic view of salvation by grace and faith, not by works of the Law. But he gets the theological deer-caught-in-the-headlights look too quickly without seeing the argument James presents here.

This is not asking if someone must do works to be saved, as Paul was dealing with, but whether an inactive believer, someone who says and doesn’t do, is backing up the faith they say they believe in. It’s not about earning salvation; it’s about providing evidence for salvation. These are two sides of the same coin, if I may borrow another’s phrase.

Paul was dealing with Judaisers who wanted Christians to follow the customs of Moses’ Law. They were claiming that Christians must do certain works and observe certain rituals to be fully saved. But Paul fought them tooth and nail on the point that righteousness, justification, and salvation come out of faith alone, not any extra works. You cannot earn a gift. James is not dealing with this issue. He is dealing with a bunch of Sunday morning Christians that do not put their money, time, effort, hands, and feet where their mouth and heads are.

This is not a theological issue that James strikes at. It is a practical issue. James is thinking more of the people who aren’t being helped, the reverse social injustice that might happen in such a group of “head-Christians” that have no “heart and hand work” to go with their propositions and ideas and theological frameworks. Such people, who speak instead of act, help not the widow, the orphan, the homeless, and the person on the fringe. This is reverse social injustice. The very people that claim to have God’s ear, mission, and heart, do nothing for the people that have God’s heart.

So James asks the question of people who are already “saved.” He says, “If you don’t do anything that God or Jesus would do for these people while you’re still hanging out ‘between the ages,’ then what good are you?” They’re not any good to themselves or to the people who need them to assist in this time. This is not a question of salvation by faith alone. It is a question of what we will say to the Great Judge at the end of the age when He asks what we’ve been up to all this time.

(2:15) James goes on to set up another hypothetical situation, using the Greek conditional sentence structure again. This one’s another third-class conditional. This type of condition is uncertain that the situation would ever happen, but leaves room for it to be likely. The fact that James uses “brother or sister” shows familial terms which tell us that this hypothetical example picks a fellow Christian as the main character in need. You know, Christians are in need many times, especially if they go to Bible College and Seminary and have giant school bills... But we will discuss this issue as well as others that James raises in the next section.

Now the way that James pictures this brother or sister shows them not in dire need for a month or a year, not someone that would need to be supported by lavish resources. So the person can’t say, “Well, I can’t take care of sister so-and-so because I have to take care of my own family and she would be a drain on our resources.” It’s not that easy of an excuse with James. This believer only needs enough clothes for say, a couple of days, or enough food just for today, not tomorrow or a whole week.

James is careful not to make the request too lavish so that we don’t have the excuse that we don’t have the resources. No, instead he is introducing us to someone that we could easily help out for a day or so. That makes the “limited resources” card unavailable. Now what’s our excuse? We are presented with a fellow Christian, one of our own, who is in need of something that we can provide. As the marines would say, “Leave no man behind.”

(2:16) After the setup, James goes for the kill. He presents another believer (“one of you”) who gives a blessing. “Go in peace” was a common blessing for departing from synagogue or assembly. It would probably be equivalent to “Have a nice day” or “Until next time.” But the rub comes when the believer sees the need of the other believer and then says a pious and insensitive, “God will bless and prosper you because he owns everything.”

That is a theological excuse to not help a brother. That is the kind of thing that would make Jesus overturn a table or two, the kind of thing that would make Ghandi say, “I like their Christ, but I don’t like their Christians.” Such a statement would make God burn a few mountains or open up a few holes in the ground or send a few flaming and brimstone type rocks your way. That’s the statement that gets you out of the obligation to love one another, as John would call it, to bless each other, or to have “all things in common and share your goods” as Luke observed of the early church in Acts.

Needless to say, a Christian who does not help when the resources are there is not much of a Christian at all. This snobbery would not go over well in a community that depends on one another, which is exactly what the Kingdom is all about. Saying “Be warm and satisfied” is like seeing them without clothing and food and then sarcastically replying, “Oh, you’ll be okay anyway.” And then that famous Christianese quote that makes me angry as a fellow believer, “God owns the cattle on a thousand hills. Just ask him to slaughter one for you!” Wow. I don’t want to be that Christian’s friend. I don’t even want to be associated with them.

(2:17) Then James finishes his argument by restating the issue in a more provocative way. Such faith that does not reach out a resourceful hand to those in need is dead, useless, empty, worthless. The propositional faith that does not go out into the community and hand those cups of cold water to strangers or clothe the naked or feed the hungry or provide for abandoned children and orphans or work with those who need any form of help in life has no worth. It lacks the power of action.

(2:18) James next introduces the hypothetical person who claims exactly that he has works, and the other person has faith. This is like the person who today would say, “Christianity works for you, and atheism works for me.” Here James is doing something stylistically common when moving through a theological or any argument for that matter. He is trying to be balanced by seeking out the types of objections opponents would raise to his stance, in order to discredit him.

The fact that James brings up this response shows that he is not advocating just works or just faith, as Martin Luther sorely misunderstood. This statement proves that James is not advocating an either-or solution, but a both-and solution. It takes both propositional and spoken and thought-out faith as well as in the dirt, hands to the ground work. A person cannot simply have a hidden or unseen faith. And a person cannot simply do good things and be guaranteed the category of Christian.

James responds to this “I only need works” statement by pointing out that faith and works go together like peanut butter and Jelly, like Bonnie and Clide, like butter and jam, like principle and practice. Instead, James advocates that works or deeds are the best way to broadcast that belief system you hold to so secretly. It was Peter who said that people would see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven (1 Peter 2:12). That is what James is getting at.

(2:19) James takes a common theological issue, the fact that God is one, and applies it with a shocking twist for them. This is a fundamental basic of the Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4. James says that the person who believes this, or mentally ascents to it, does well. But even the demons know this fact that God is one. But look at their actions. They don’t help elderly ladies cross the street or give up their time to help in a kitchen or even put money in the offering plate to help the benevolence fund. Nope. They shudder at the truth. And demons do a lot of evil stuff! Their God-knowledge and actions don’t add up or agree. Why should yours?

(2:20) With a question, James continues his tirade. Using the vocative “O foolish man” takes you back to the Proverbs. That’s why some people see James as a proverbial book. He is setting up the person who argued that faith doesn’t have to be accompanied by evidential works. Here, instead of saying as he did earlier that faith apart from works is dead, James says they are useless. And we have already seen the logical connections of why they are useless both to the person who espouses such faith and to the needy.

(2:21) The examples James will provide from the Old Testament two examples of how faith is backed up by works. We will start with Abraham and Isaac’s Sacrifice, found in Genesis 22. You will remember that God commanded Abraham that if he really believed in God’s promise to make a great nation out of him, he would take Isaac, the promised son, and offer him on an altar of sacrifice. This was a test to see if Abraham believed God’s promise or not. Abraham passed with flying colors by doing the deed God commanded, except that God stopped Abraham from sacrificing Isaac and sent a ram instead. So James asks the question of the hour. When Abraham did this, he was acting on an inner belief that God would still come through for him, right?

(2:22) Abraham acted out of faith. The Bible actually tells us that Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac because he believed that God could raise the dead! (Hebrews 11:19) Abraham acted upon his faith, for his actions would not have made sense if he didn't believe God could raise the dead. He was about to sacrifice the promised son, through whom the promise would come, the source of the promise, we could say. It doesn't make sense to end Isaac's life unless Abraham acted out of faith in resurrection.

And the Genesis 22 passage clearly states that God was testing him from verse 1. This was a test to see just how strong Abraham's faith in God was. And how did God test him? By making him do something! That's what James gets out of Genesis 22 as he pastorally goes through the passage for us, making notes to show why he takes up this issue with his church. That's how faith was completed by his works. It was in his going through with God's command to sacrifice Isaac that God knew Abraham really did have faith. The work proved the faith.

(2:23) This Scripture quote is the same that Paul uses in his argument! It is cited from Genesis 15:6 and shows up in Paul's arguments with the Abraham illustration in Romans 4:3 and Galatians 3:6. The word used for reckoning or accounting is a legal term, as well as the word righteousness. All of these legal terms together speak to a specific practice of God's salvation coming to Abraham based on his belief. Now inside of Abraham's belief were both the unseen faith he had, and the outward actions that can be observed. Based on belief in God, God accounted righteousness to Abraham.

Now after the quote, James adds his own commentary, that Abraham was called a friend of God. In 2 Chronicles 20:7, in a prayer, King Jehoshaphat refers to Abraham as a friend of God. Isaiah also uses this phrase when he speaks of Israel as the offspring of Abraham (41:8). And we will see James use the word friend when he speaks of worldliness in Chapter 4. Whatever friend of God means, it certainly implies a deep relationship with God that most humans can't even fathom.

Abraham is the only person in the New Testament referred to with the title "Friend of God" and one article that I read on this term friend said that it has to do very specifically with God calling Abraham his friend because of the works that he did for God, and probably confers with the other title of the one who is just through faith. This title and the quote from Scripture are probably synonymous in that they both speak of the same event and same result, that Abraham was God's friend and that he was declared righteous by an accounting are the same idea. No matter how you slice it, Abraham and God were close.

(2:24) James simply concludes this first Scriptural example of how faith and works work together by restating that principle after the explanation. This time he does use a theologically and legally loaded word, justified. He is not, as we have said, suggesting that works alone or faith alone save, but that both work together in possibly a mysterious relationship, to produce the faith that saves and justifies us before God. If we could explain every little thing about God or our relationship with Him, then first of all, He would not be the infinite God we worship, and second of all, Christianity wouldn't be as much fun.

(2:25) James provides a secondary example, that of Rahab's saving of the two spies Joshua sent into Jericho in Joshua 2:1-21. Rahab risked her own life to save theirs by telling the authorities that they had come and gone. She then sent them on their way on a different route. James mentions her in passing as just another example, as if he could sit here all day and give more and more until you were sick of it.

(2:26) James leaves us with one final and poignant image that has astounded the human mind for thousands of years, especially those who are materialists and believe that there is nothing but what can be empirically verified. The body and the soul. The soul, that part of us that seems to animate us and make us not only operate of our own free will, but provides us with that essence that cannot be quantified, examined, or visibly explained. It is that part that philosophers focus upon, theologians spend almost all of their time defining, psychologists attempt to comprehend and mend. These two things, the body and the soul or spirit, go hand-in-hand as well. Without one, the other cannot complete the person. A person is made up of these two and we can disqualify the spiritual part of us or hate the physical cage we dwell in, but we cannot be a person without the two. James then ends with the checkmate, the point-set-match. Just as much as we need both the physical body and the spiritual soul as the make-up of a person, so also to make living faith, we need the belief system as well as the action that it commands. Without works or without faith, faith is not a worthwhile endeavor.

WHAT'S JAMES SAYING?

So after all of these examples, reiterations, and images, what can we say that James is trying to get at here? Well, we see the main point that James has clearly and eloquently made, that same point started in 1:22, that we must not be unmoved thinkers. There is so much more to the Christian faith than correct and perfect definitions, propositions, and statements. These have their place, but they are not the only thing that qualifies the image of a believer.

Works, especially those that help others who desperately need Jesus with skin on to come to their aid also show our faith. These actions let the world know where we stand, yes, but more certainly where God stands. We represent God on this planet. When we ally ourselves with Him and His purposes, people see our actions as coming from Him. What we do needs to line up with what we say. What we say needs to be carried out in the world we live in everyday. The two are like a beautiful dance.

We can't say we believe something and not do anything at all about it! We can't do stuff just to do stuff either. When you do good things, people wonder why. We have the best reason in the universe to show others kindness, that God showed us personally that same kindness, and we now extend it to others in His name. But there are a couple of other small issues James brings up here, in keeping with his trials motif.

Have you ever met someone that believed that adversity and poverty aren't part of the Christian's life? They make a bit of sense, don't they? They say that if God owns and provides everything that we need, and we are God's children, then we don't ever need to be in need. It does make sense, logically at least. But I've got a question for them. Just a minor dilemma. If that's true, then why did James use the image of a brother or sister in need?

Hmm. Something here. Something we need to think and meditate on. Remember how we talked about living between the age of what was promised and the age of what will actually be, what will happen, the fulfillment? Here it is again. Should a Christian ever be in need? Well, we know that it happens. James doesn't avoid it. Instead, he uses it as a driving image to hit home the fact that if we don't take care of our own, what good are we to God, ourselves, and the world out there? Ouch!

So to these people who don't believe that Christians should be involved with trials, diversity, sickness, struggles financial and otherwise. To them I have just one question: How blind have you been to not notice other Christians in need? If you can't see them, then can you

see the world of unbelievers who not only have physical needs, but spiritual ones as well? Maybe it's time to reorganize the way you think about the lost and the found.

We need to stop seeing people as souls to be saved. We need to look more holistically at each person and help them with all their needs, not just the saving of their eternal soul. That is very important, but so are the others. If the body weren't so important, than why are we promised a new one for eternity? Having a body is part of being a human being. And so is having a soul. We jump to either end of the spectrum instead of balancing in the middle.

WHAT'S IT MEAN TO ME?

I think that it is clear James once again practically issues the pastoral statement to do something. Don't just talk about Jesus; go do what He did. Isn't that why we're here anyway? There's a world in need out there. There's a person in need even in your local church. Just look around this Sunday. In my church, I'm one of those people in need. As a seminary student without a car or drivers license (because I'm legally blind), I need to find a way to eat lunch every Sunday. There is a family that takes me in every week.

You see, you don't have to be in sin to need help with something as a believer. It could be a special situation. Why do we even get to know why a believer, or an unbeliever for that matter, needs financial or physical or otherwise help? All we can do is offer what we have and what we are to one another. Remember from the last study that we don't have the right to figure out all the whys, all the qualifications and criteria that people have and are going through.

But the driving question of this passage is simple. As a Christian, a person who professes the Christ we see in Scripture and His commands and example, when you see someone in need, no matter who or what they are, are you the first to stretch out a helping hand? If not, then maybe you don't have a living faith. Maybe you don't have an active and vibrant belief system.

It may not be the system's fault, either. It may be you. So one question remains to apply this to you. We all know what Jesus would do because He exemplified it throughout the gospels, and the Church has continued that example. Will you? Don't just say it 'cause that ain't the point. Go do it. Then we'll believe you.

Sticks and Stones James 3:1-12

TRANSLATION

1 Not many should become teachers, my brothers, while knowing that we will receive greater judgment, 2 for we all stumble in many ways. If someone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able to control even the whole body. 3 Now if we put bridles in the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we direct even their whole body. 4 Look! Even the large boats also are driven by fierce winds, by the smallest rudder they are directed wherever the impulse of the pilot wills, 5 Likewise, also the tongue is a small member of the body but it boasts greatly. Look at how small a fire kindles such a great forest! 6 Even the tongue is a fire! A world of unrighteousness, the tongue is set among our members, defiling the whole body and burns the course of life and is set on fire by hell (Gehenna). 7 For every kind of wild beast and bird, reptile and sea creature is tamed and has been tamed by the nature of humanity, 8 But the tongue not one person is able to tame, a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless the Lord and Father and with it we curse people, who have been made according to God's image, 10 out of the same mouth come blessing and cursing, my brothers, these things should never happen. 11 Can a spring of water out of its opening gush with sweet and bitter? 12 It is not possible, my brothers, for a fig tree produce olives or a vine figs, is it? Neither can salt water produce fresh water.

INTRODUCTION

It's the window to our thoughts and our soul. When someone speaks, you become aware of what they're thinking, how they're feeling. Speech does a lot for us in communication. Although it's not the only form of communication, it is one of the most powerful and effective methods to let others know what's going on.

Some people actually get paid for talking, like ministers, politicians, public speakers, and others. A good speech, well-crafted with a great wordsmith, combined with an undeniable passion and logical connection, with a catchy phrase or word here and there, is more powerful than any other force on this planet. It is the reason diplomacy is sought before conflict. That there tongue is pretty important.

But for the world of good a tongue can do, it also opens up a world of evil, a dangerous and destructive force unlike any other force we know. A person can cut flesh and bone with a knife, sword, gun, or other weapon. Sure it hurts. And we have doctors for those wounds. But the tongue is a weapon on a whole new level. We can use a tongue to cut the heart, the soul of a person, their invisible qualities such as character and personality and reputation.

Like any sword or gun, the tongue is a weapon either for good or for evil. And you would think we get to decide how we use it. You would want to say that we get to control that most valuable tool of the body. But sometimes that thing gets away from us, goes against the commands our brain sends to it, and it gets us into more trouble than we could have imagined.

It ruins relationships, flays friendships, and kills comrades. Even worse than turning a friend to foe, the tongue also provides a way to make an enemy an arch rival, a nominal friend a nemesis, and an acquaintance a blood-thirsty avenger. Out of all the tools at our disposal, this one tool is the most destructive or the most valuable muscle in the whole body! And we can't even control it. Indeed, the person who can control the tongue, the speech, and the

communication he or she delivers is in a class of maturity only imagined and envied by most of us. James agrees. So what do we do about it?

THE TEXT AND CONTEXT

James opens his section on the most deadly weapon in the human body with a small discussion about teachers. **(3:1)** James once again uses the vocative of address, “my brothers” as he begins a new section, speaking now from that same idea in 1:19 that we should be slow to speak and 1:26 when he talks about bridling the tongue, from which he will develop an image of a horse’s bridle. He suggests that many people should not desire the position of a teacher. Then he gives the basis for such a statement, that teachers will be judged more strictly.

James is broaching an idea that has been discussed in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament and even Jesus has hinted about this principle, that those who teach or train or are responsible to lead people into truth, will be judged according to their teachings. Teachers lead a greater number of people into or out of truth. What is taught will be judged. Did it help the students or disciples to become more like Christ or to know God in a deeper relational way? Did it lead them away from God? God will judge those teachings as to their relation to truth and to the function of the teacher.

Also, teachers spend a lot of time talking, and using that tongue to pass on truth and the substance of the matter being studied. **(3:2)** For this reason, James feels it necessary to talk about the tongue. When he says that everyone stumbles in many ways, this is a very accurate statement, isn’t it? You see one Christian that seems to have it all down pat, that perfect Christian. Or so it seems. Maybe that specific Christian you’re thinking of just doesn’t struggle in the same areas you do, but I assure you, they do struggle with something. Usually it’s more than one issue.

We are all on a journey. Can a person live without sinning or offending God and others? Jesus did it under the power of the Spirit as an example for us. If He did it to show that it can be done, then it is possible, if short-lived, to actually live in a state where we are pleasing God. I don’t believe that this state lasts very long, though, because we all stumble even after becoming children of God. We are all in process, on the journey, learning more and more about God, getting closer and closer to Him, and most of all, learning from our failures how to become more of a success than we already are in living out God’s righteousness and holiness.

Now James knows this as a pastor, dealing with his community day in and day out. So he says that we all stumble as if it were a fact of even the Christian life, because it is. He uses another conditional statement, in Greek a second-class condition, which suggests something that is contrary to fact. James says that we stumble in what we say, and when someone claims that they don’t, that is contrary to what we know to be practically true. It is common to mess up in our speech.

So if it were possible to find someone that doesn’t mess up in the things he or she says, that person is a perfect or mature person. This goes back to the imagery of 1:4, the mature man who stands in trials with endurance. We don’t usually do that without practice either. The word used here for bridling the tongue and the body is the same word used in 1:26 for bridling speech, so James is referencing the whole way back to chapter one here. But notice how far James is willing to go in talking about that person who doesn’t exist. If he can control his tongue, then he can control his whole body. In other words, if a person gets speech right, then they have the self control to keep from other types of sins, such as murder or lying or not making false oaths or any of these types of issues. Now that’s self-control.

However, we see that since James uses this second-class condition, he doesn't believe that person exists. So therefore, we can't control our tongue or our body. We struggle every day to live more like the righteous and holy God we so deeply love.

(3:3) It's time for yet another well-placed and effective image. How about horses? Any farmer or horse owner is right on James' page, and there were probably a bunch of them in that first century Jerusalem church. The tongue is like a bridle or bit that we stick in a horse's mouth to control it. But here's the trick, that small bit controls the whole body of that horse, so that it goes where we want it to go as fast as we want it to go. We control that horse with a little tiny bit.

Now I went this past Christmas with my family on a horse-drawn carriage through a Christmas light exhibit. It was awesome! But one of the drivers told us that the horses they were using were like the Clydesdales, but a different horse. Then she hit us with a number that blew my mind. Those horses are 2,000 pounds each! 2,000 pounds! That's a lot of horse! And a little tiny wooden or metal bit controlled that 2,000 pound horse.

(3:4) Second image – large ships controlled by small rudders. The new part of the image is that strong winds can control these ships. You know, we try to control our tongue. We think that we have enough willpower to do it, that we have enough discipline, that if the wind of our will is strong enough, we can handle that tough tongue all by ourselves. The pilot controls the ship; you control your body, but you can't even control your tongue.

(3:5) James brings the message of these images to the forefront as he restates the proposition. The tongue is maybe the smallest member of the body, but it causes the most trouble! How many arguments and yelling matches have ended good and close relationships? How many times have you been hurt by what someone said about you? No matter how hard we try or how secret we make our conversations, they usually end in destruction, guilt, anger, and pain. That tongue talks big and boasts about all kinds of things.

The images continue to flow from our first century preacher as he moves to yet another. This movement begins a new paragraph, although it is in the middle of verse 5. The last image of the tongue's destructive qualities, found in the beginning of a forest fire, once again provides a way of understanding what James shares about the tongue. The flame is a very small thing, but it sets ablaze an entire forest, turning into a raging inferno that leaves those giant trees in ashes. The point is made yet again.

(3:6) But now James will link the fire to the tongue. He uses a metaphor in saying "the tongue is a fire." He qualifies that statement with calling it a world of unrighteousness. This is then understood by the next point, that the fire is set among our members like a flame is set among a forest. He won't let up on the whole destruction analogy. But he's got a point. Oftentimes it is the tongue that causes our downfall.

James says that the tongue is set amongst the members of our body, a world of unrighteousness or evil among them. It stains the whole body, shaming and disgracing it morally. James returns to the image of fire when he says the tongue sets the course of life ablaze. This phrase for course of life is literally "pattern of events in our existence." Your tongue can change your life! And the tongue is set on fire by hell.

This word James uses for hell is the word Gehenna. Gehenna is a geographical place, a valley where the corpses of animals and criminals were burned. They kept fires in constant burn to always be ready to burn garbage and animals. But it is used as a figure in the New Testament for a fiery place of eternal punishment. James essentially says that the tongue can control us so

that our whole life is controlled by what we say about ourselves and others until we have pushed ourselves over the edge into eternal punishment. That's a pretty big deal for such a little muscle! Maybe we should be paying much more attention to what we say, for our words seem to have eternal consequences.

(3:7) We really think that we can control ourselves. But do you know that every category of animal has been tamed by man without the tongue being tamed? That's what James says. He lists the categories of his day, the general categories of the mammal, the beast of the field, the bird, the reptile, and the sea creature, or marine life. All of these are subdued by man as commanded in Genesis 1:28.

Other New Testament writers have used this type of categorization as well, almost exactly as James. Paul uses it in Romans 1:23 to show that the whole of creation has been worshiped by humanity. Luke uses it to explain in Peter's vision of the sheet from heaven that every manner of animal life is created by God and should not be marked 'clean' and 'unclean' (Acts 10:12; 11:6).

(3:8) He finally restates the point in a complete way, leaving our willpower solution alone in the dark cold night. Willpower is not enough to keep our speech straight. It has never worked and will not work. We can tame animals, but not our own speech. We fall short in this area and are unable to control our tongue.

More descriptive of the tongue ensue in this passage. When James calls the tongue a restless evil, the word for restless is the same word that he used in 1:8 to describe the double-minded man. So it creates and maintains instability and unruliness. The tongue is also full, or filled with, deadly poison. The word for deadly is used here in James only and has the connotation of bringing death and the word for poison is used by James twice and Paul once in Romans 3:13 to describe the venom of asps (a snake) that is on the tongue of deception.

(3:9) Now James goes from describing the tongue as a weapon of the body to explaining how it functions, or rather should function, in our lives as Christians. There is a malpractice of the tongue going on in James' church. The same people who stand and praise God with their lips on Sunday morning are slandering possibly one another throughout the week, or at least cursing people that they are in relation with of some kind, whether it be bosses at work, family members, others in the community, or other brothers (see especially Chapter 4).

What's so wrong with cursing people? Well, James is going to raise a theological issue about how we treat one another. There are many social sciences out there, and everyone agrees that ethics and morality have an importance in at the very least respecting others to the point that you get what you want out of them. But is there something deeper than that, another reason to not treat people like trash?

James brings up the fact that humanity contains the image, or likeness of God! Because they have God's likeness, to curse them is to backhandedly curse God. So that's the issue at hand. Respecting other humans is respecting God. Treat others as you treat God. Don't curse humans and bless God. It doesn't work that way. God left his likeness in man, created man in his likeness, and we must be careful to remember that no matter how depraved an individual has the ability to become, that person still has the image of God in them, at least to some extent. Let it also be mentioned here that Lord refers to Jesus Christ, God the Son and Father refers to God the Father. And James has mentioned the Father before in 1:27 when he speaks of religion.

(3:10) Summed up, James commands this practice to change. The tongue is a tool, like money or any other tool. Now every tool can be used for God or for the devil, for good or evil.

For instance, we can use money to glorify God, or we can use it to glorify the devil. It all depends in the use of the tool of money. So also, we can use our words and our tongues to praise God or to curse and bring condemnation on others and ourselves.

The point unsaid here by James is that for the Christian, although humanity cannot control the tongue, God can. You see, when we try on our own to control anything, well, it doesn't work out so well. It's called failure. No matter how hard we try. But when God controls us, our life, our hearts, our minds, and our words, then it is a whole different matter. This is the true Law of Freedom, that God controls us and we need not to control ourselves, but we must sacrifice our desire and pride to control to the Great Controller.

When we finally give in and surrender ourselves to God wholly, as we will see in 4:7, God takes us over and He makes the control issue a non-issue. It is so freeing to surrender to God! We no longer have to fail, but God will help us! That's what He's all about. There is an interesting theological point that many Pentecostals like to make about the tongue. In the act of speaking in tongues, or glossolalia, God's Spirit controls speech so that an unknown language is spoken. This has been an application by Pentecostals, that God takes over or controls the very thing we cannot control on our own when we allow ourselves to fully submit to God and accept the immersing or baptism of the Holy Spirit.

James uses an unusual construction in Greek to condemn this practice. He says "these things should never be." Now in Greek, word order is only important when it helps us to see the emphasis the author wishes to make. In our case, James makes an emphasis on the negative and the word used only here in all of the New Testament for necessary or fitting, followed by another vocative "my brothers" and then "these things." James emphasizes the command against and then addresses them and then refers to the things he has been talking about, blessing and cursing matters.

(3:11) It's time for some more rhetorical questions. Rhetorical questions in Greek are designed so that they demand a negative or positive answer in the question. We don't do this in English, so it is sometimes a bit confusing to translate these literally. So when James asks if a spring can bring forth both fresh and salt water, the expected and obvious answer is "No." These words may also be bitter and sweet instead of fresh and salt, but the context is a spring. These words would probably be used when speaking about wine, bitter and sweet wine. But a natural spring does not produce wine.

(3:12) Once again James expects a negative reply to the next rhetorical question, stating that the tool of the fig tree produces what it is: figs. The grapevine produces grapes. But these two tools cannot switch uses. They produce what they are. Christians are people of blessing praise, not of cursing and evil speech. So when they use the tool of their tongue, it should produce what they are: blessing and praise.

Then James reiterates the salt and fresh water image but this time with a pond, a static or stationary water source. We see James using the vocative "my brothers" more and more. The principle given in these two verses (11-12) is illustrated as a very foundational and elementary principle. You produce what you are. You use all of your tools for that singular purpose.

WHAT'S JAMES SAYING?

For people who teach, there is a certain judgment of the material and motives for each lesson. The reason we who teach are held to a higher standard is that we impress upon the minds and hearts of others, students, the teaching and instruction in the faith and in doctrine. We train

people and teach people how to think, what to think, as well as attitudes for life, practices to live by, and we help to set goals. This is a big responsibility and with it comes a stricter judgment from God. God will closely evaluate the product of our teaching, whether it was to bring others closer to Him, or to cause dissention and division and separation from God.

We all stumble. This is James way of saying what Paul said in Romans 3:23 “All have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory.” Don’t think or suppose or say that you’ve cornered the market on holiness or on perfection. We all know deep down inside that there is a falling short, a missing of God’s mark.

On our own, we cannot tame the tongue. We cannot control the smallest member of our body. This implies that if we can’t control the tongue, then we can’t control our body either, and possibly, we have no control over ourselves at all. No matter how much effort we put into this control, we are not strong enough to be successful.

What we say controls our life and the paths that we choose. We choose a lot of things with our mouth. Words mean much more than deconstruction would desire to admit. It is with words that we accept Christ’s work on the cross for salvation. It is with our mouth that we confess our sins one to another. It is with the mouth that we praise God. What we say, the message we bring, about ourselves, what God thinks of us, what we think of ourselves, the gospel message itself, is all done with the words we speak. Words represent the feelings and thoughts of our hearts and minds.

Although this tongue of ours is so unruly and uncontrolled, for the Christian, it is used as a tool only to bless. Humanity has within it, an innate quality, which is part of the image of God. Disrespecting others is disrespecting the image or likeness God left within them all, and disrespecting God Himself. We must be very careful to see humans as valuable and higher in importance than parts of creation without the image of God.

We can use the tongue to bless and to curse. It is a multipurpose tool, but we get to choose the purpose. We should not be flip-flopping between blessing and cursing, just like we should not be double-minded in our prayers, swaying from trust to doubt to trust again. Producing such a result as blessing and cursing from a Christian makes the Christian two-faced, or hypocritical, to the world and to other Christians. We must be one or the other. And the choice is ours.

WHAT’S IT MEAN TO ME?

Watch what you say! That’s the message James has for you today. Don’t play with being one way with one group of people and being a different way with another group of people. Bless everyone! Christians are not called by God to curse the world. We are the light of the world. So be that light. Bless, and do not curse. Represent.

Treat people with genuine respect and kindness. Treat them as you treat God because He has placed a redeeming quality, the quality of His likeness, into every person. They all have that image, marred though it might be. We must be peaceable, honorable to everyone, no matter whether they are believers or unbelievers.

You have the power to decide with your mouth life and death, heaven and hell, good and evil, God and the devil. The whole course of your life is determined first in your mind and heart, but then you speak it out. Pay attention to the things you say about yourself, about others, to yourself and to others. Let’s not let our tongues get the best of us. Give it to God. Let Him change you from the inside (your heart and mind) to the outside (what you say and do). Speech has the power to build up and destroy.

Look back on your life. Can you see how you got where you are by the choices you made with your mind, spoke with your mouth and did with your hands? Our speech plays a very important part in our lives and the lives of others. It has the power of influence. Now we must be careful not to give speech too much of a place in our lives. Some people go over the edge with this principle. Hold it in balance.

For just one day this week, monitor your words in all of your relationships: during your devotions, your prayer time, with your spouse, your children, your friends, your boss and other employees. Just monitor it for one day. See where you stand in your thoughts with your words. Notice what kind of product your tongue is making and look at the results. How much does it get you into trouble, cause turmoil?

What good things are happening in your life because of the things you said? Build a consciousness about what you say. And when you try to control it, you'll see how hard it really is. For all those people who think they're perfect, they've got it all down, give this a try. There's always something to work on with God in your character. It can only get better from here.

The Character of Wisdom *James 3:13-18*

TRANSLATION

13 Who is wise and knowledgeable among you? Let him show out of good conduct his works in gentle wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and ambition in your hearts, you must never boast and lie against the truth. 15 This is not the wisdom that came down from above, but earthly, worldly, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and ambition, there is disorder and every wicked deed. 17 But heavenly wisdom is first holy, then peaceful, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, genuine. 18 Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

INTRODUCTION

Wisdom concerns practical paths to apply truth. In our world today, it would be somewhat of the philosophy or explanation of the method we use, the way we operate. Wisdom would be the description of what to do when to do it. James is concerned with two major ways of wisdom, the way of heaven and the way of the earth.

Both systems of wisdom utilize different methods and tools, expecting different results and consequences. James is concerned to explain what's better about the heavenly wisdom way. We're talking about ethics here. Pure ethics. This is the rationale for why we do what we do. In our world, different teams have different strategies for winning games, different companies have different operational steps and hierarchies.

But in James' church, the people are dealing with two different systems, which are causing confusion and problems for the Christians. The Romans and the world in general did things differently than the Christian world. And it was awfully tempting to work the way the world worked, because you didn't have to be different or stand out in the crowd. James' desire for his congregation of believers demanded he speak out against the world wisdom and asserted the way of heavenly wisdom.

THE TEXT AND CONTEXT

This section flows right out of the application of how to use the tool of the tongue. James had just finished saying that the tongue should not be mixed in its uses, for blessing and also for cursing. And he demanded that the Christian only use his or her tongue to bless, not to curse, because cursing humans was still cursing God's image in them. Blessing and cursing are results of the two ways, the wisdom of heaven and the wisdom of earth respectively.

(3:13) Each of the two ways of wisdom has a character about it, a certain noticeable personality, so that you can see it coming from a mile away. Heavenly wisdom is meek or gentle in its application, doing good things and good works. Doesn't that remind you of 1:17 where James says that God only gives good gifts from heaven? The connection is that an only good God has an only good path to wisdom that leads us away from the methods and results of the earthly or worldly wisdom.

James asks a rhetorical question here to challenge these Christians to think about how they do things in this world. If someone claims to be wise, not knowledgeable, but wise in the way that they approach life, then they will be gentle and will have good works (2:14-26). James

once again will not let those who have a different idea of wisdom get away. He says that they've got to show their wisdom through works. They cannot merely sit on the floor in some strange pose and hum to themselves. They've got to have a clock-in card showing their wisdom. Wisdom is not related to paradoxical phrases spoken by the tongue, but it is tied to how you live your life for God doing good works today and right now.

(3:14) Now the other wisdom, what we will find in verse 15 to be earthly wisdom, has a different method and a different result, different means that bring a different end. This type of wisdom from the world is characterized by what the business world has sometimes been characterized by: ambition and jealousy, boasting and exaggeration.

Look at these for a second. These methods do not consider others. They are self-oriented and self-consuming. To be jealous is to be unhappy with yourself. To be ambitious is to assert your desire over others' desires. To boast is to encourage yourself instead of others. And to exaggerate is to tell yourself a minor lie instead of to fess up to the truth. The word for bitter in bitter jealousy here is the same word used when James was talking about bitter (or salt) water in 3:11. How interesting that he would use that term to describe a type of speech and a type of attitude, both of which are undesired.

The four methods of earthly wisdom are very closely related. Bitter jealousy and selfish ambition speak of that one desire, the pride in oneself, that permeates everything done. Now James is surely talking about our attitude, not even the noticeable works. In other words, this is the stuff under the hood, not the miles on the engine. This is the stuff we're made of, not the stuff we make. It's an attitude and a way of thinking and living instead of just what we do. But rest assured, what we do will come out of our attitude, and people will be able to see our attitude even in the things we do.

Boasting and being false to the truth are essentially saying the same thing. To boast is to exaggerate or tell others or yourself that something is better than it is, or more important than it is. To bear false witness about anything or to lie against the truth is to ignore what is in plain sight, to deny or suppress what everyone knows is really there. These are methods of the darkness for sure!

(3:15) James will come to that same conclusion, that this method of living, this wisdom, is not even just earthly, but also demonic. Look at the way he describes the two ways of wisdom. He affirms that this worldly way did not come down from above, from heaven, but is characterized by three increasingly unheavenly terms.

First it is earthly, which is simply the opposite of heavenly, farther down than the heavens. Next, it is unspiritual, which begins to lower this outlook on life even more and presses the issue that such an unspiritual way does not give a person all of the facets of life, for life is physical and spiritual. Lastly, it is demonic. This word is used only here by James in the entire New Testament, but it suggests that earthly wisdom may have its origins in the demonic. Nevertheless, such selfish and prideful wisdom does indeed have demonic fingerprints all over it.

We live in a society, a culture, which tends to ignore the spiritual in favor of the natural or material. Our sciences are only beginning to open up to possibilities that are not so measurable and material. Science has a long road ahead in this fashion, because science is designed specifically to objectify with numbers and quantities, to explain the unexplained and to map out the unknown. It is not designed to even discover the spiritual world or anything "metaphysical" (which literally means after or beyond the physical). Metaphysical is not a scientific term. It is a philosophy term. Science has many answers and helps us understand many things in our world.

But it does not and will not present to us the most complete picture of life and it will not answer every question we could ever have. That's why there are so many different disciplines!

(3:16) Now we will examine the results of the methods of earthly wisdom. James says that selfish ambition and jealousy bring or produce chaos and evil practices, or disorder and vile practices. Disorder and chaos are contrary to God's own attributes. He is a God of order, as Paul affirms in the end of the discussion on spiritual gifts in services in 2 Corinthians 14. God seeks that which does not cause confusion, does not seek to undermine understanding, and leave people with miscommunications.

How neat that James includes the practices and doing along with the attitude of disorder. He says every vile practice, which contradicts God's character in 1:17 mentioned earlier, that God only gives good gifts and is all about good conduct and doing good. So this earthly wisdom is purely antithetical, purely opposite, of God's character and methods and ways! Even the product of such a wisdom is opposite the product of God's wisdom. These two ways of wisdom have different origins, different purposes, different methods, different goals, and different products and results.

They cannot be confused or mixed, just like our speech! James is drawing a line in the sand, demanding that we can't have it both ways. We can't habitually commit evil acts and expect to be called children of a good God. We can't say things that break down a person's reputation and expect that we are part of the Kingdom community. We can't accept the methods of this world we live in and cheat our way out of ethics and moral purity. It's all part of the bag of heavenly or earthly wisdom, and it makes for easy recognition which side every person is on, based not only on what is said, but what is done, not only on who we are inside, but what we do on the outside.

(3:17) After presenting the results and characteristics of earthly wisdom, James turns to that wisdom that he calls his own congregation, and Christians everywhere at every time, to live out. This wisdom that is from heaven, from God Himself, is pure. The word for pure is in the same range as our word most commonly translated holy or sacred. This is a wholly other purity, an undefiled, perfect purity.

The next three adjectives for heavenly wisdom continue to outline its almost pristine picture. It causes peace to flow everywhere it is utilized. Heavenly wisdom is gentle, not demanding its own way or seeking its purposes, which opposes the prideful and selfish ambition of earthly wisdom. Heavenly wisdom is open to reason, or compliant with truth, easily persuaded in light of reasonable and truthful claims.

Full of mercy dredges up reminders of James' speech on mercy and judgment in 2:13. Such wisdom also contains good fruits, or products and results. The word fruits is mostly used by New Testament writers to show the results, the rubber meets the road practices and final application or products of something unseen, such as wisdom. It is a way of concretely identifying the abstract. Wisdom is an abstract term referring to an idea, but fruit is a concrete word picture of a result, a product of an abstract thing, something concrete. Remember, James will not let anyone get away with a wisdom that is only in the head and not on the hands, a wisdom that talks without walking or speaks without doing.

The final two adjectives remind us of other sections of James as well. The word impartial reminds us of the partiality issue in 2:1-10. Sincere is a synonym for that same idea. Impartial means that we approach everyone equally, without deferring to status or special credentials. Sincere demands of us that we not fake our relationship with anyone or maintain an empty acquaintance with other members of our community.

(3:18) This final saying is actually a combining of different wisdom traditions from the Proverbs and others who have quoted the same idea, also combined with Jesus' take on peace and righteousness. So James is sort of quoting others on the matter as he ends out this chapter on the two wisdoms. Notice the farmer's language of a harvest and fruit in this section. This returns us to the principle that wisdom is just as much practical as it is paradoxical (in our minds at least).

Righteousness is the result of peace. When you "sow" peace, another farmers term, you get righteousness. And you cannot get righteousness if you don't make peace. You cannot produce what you are not. In other words, if you are a peaceable person, you are a peacemaker who can sow peace. And when you do, you will reap righteousness in every situation that peace is sown as surely as a farmer plants corn and reaps corn in the harvest time.

WHAT'S JAMES SAYING?

James finally defines wisdom in the most practical way possible. As a pastor, he is concerned with the false dichotomy between who I am and what I do. People misunderstood that their character and identity, and their works and deeds, were not supposed to be different from one another or separated into categories.

Maybe people in James' church were saying one thing and doing another or living one way and still trying to call themselves part of the community of faith. But James does not want them to misunderstand that being part of the Kingdom community requires different speech, different action, and different attitude. The Church is always meant to surprise the world by its completely different and God-centered ethic and belief system.

Faith and works are not meant to be separate. What you do and who you are were never supposed to be categorized into different areas of you. Instead, you do things out of who you are, and who you are is reflected through your deeds. The two are in league with each other, and there's no way around it.

So James brings his people, and us, to a choice. There are two roads to walk down. Which one will you choose. You can choose the one that looks like it gets you ahead in this world faster, that one that looks after you, number one, and no one else. If they didn't take care of themselves, that's their problem. They put themselves in that situation. Or you can choose the other road, the one that is always looking to help others, always seeking peace and righteousness, always understanding and open to discussion and reason, always seeking the best for everyone involved, taking care of widows and strangers, speaking life instead of death... Are you getting the whole picture the whole book of James is illustrating?

What will your Christian walk look like if we drew a picture. Would you be holding the hand of the orphan with one hand and feeding the disabled and debilitated with the other? Will you be shoving your parents into a home at the age of 65 or will you be taking long trips through the night to take care of them as they took care of you when you were an infant? Will you take care of Number One or will you see to it that everyone gets a voice?

James refuses to make Christianity a walk in the park for anyone! What does your Christianity look like in that painting of you? Only you can decide. And only two brushes will be used to paint the picture.

WHAT'S IT MEAN TO ME?

This section strikes at the core of what it means to live out the God-given Christian life. In practice and experience, what makes you as a Kingdom citizen look different from Joe Shmoe? I can tell you this for sure: it will not be your words which make you different. It will be your actions.

People do not even listen to us until we earn the right to speak. You earn the right to speak by doing things different than what they expect. So think about these two ways. Both are methods to live life here on this planet while you're stuck here. But you can't just say, "Oh, that heavenly wisdom stuff looks great on my resume!" and then do what you want. Nope. No way you'll ever get away with it. And there's no way that someone who just meets you for one week and observes you saying that and also looking out for yourself will ever think that you really are a Christian.

Your actions and words must line up to produce one solid image of who you are and what you're about. You can say you're a Christian until you're blue in the face, but it means absolutely nothing if you never do anything to prove it. Don't be a plastic Christian. Don't live the fake life. It's so much harder to pretend you're something that you're not and to keep up and maintain that lie than it is to just dive in and give it all up to live it for real.

In business, they always operate on the "bottom line" principle. Well, in Christianity, there's also a bottom line. What are you saying, thinking, doing? What is your motive, your attitude? And if you think that these questions about what we can't see in you, your heart, motives, and attitude, will never be answered by someone who observes you, then you're missing a key piece to the puzzle. They're watching what you do and listening to what you say. And when things don't line up, the bottom line is that you're a hypocrite, and they hate that, because it reminds them of themselves. And if what you're doing in the end reminds a sinner of themselves, then what do you think God's going to say about you?

The Friendship Dilemma *James 4:1-12*

TRANSLATION

1 From where do word battles and from where do quarrels come among you? Do they not come from out of your desires which make war among your members? 2 You desire but do not have! You kill and become jealous, but do not obtain! You quarrel and make word battles! You do not have because you never ask— 3 You ask, but you don't receive, because you ask wrongly, so that you may spend on your desires. 4 Adulterers! Don't you know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, if one desires to be a friend of the world, he is being appointed an enemy of God. 5 Or do you suppose that Scripture speaks in vain, "With envy the Spirit longs for the one whom he caused to dwell in us," 6 but he gives greater grace, therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but to the humble, He gives grace." 7 Therefore, be subject to God, and resist the devil— he will flee from you; 8 draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, double-minded. 9 Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning, and joy into gloom. 10 Become lowly in the presence of the Lord, and you will be lifted up.

11 You must not speak evil of one another, brothers. The one who speaks evil of a brother or judges his brother speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if he judges the law, he does not do the law, but judges. 12 There is one Lawgiver and Judge who is able to save and to destroy, but who are you to judge your neighbor?

INTRODUCTION

There is a debate within the halls of theology that has practical implications for every Christian in this world. Many scholars have taken on the debate of how to be, as John so eloquently and succinctly put it, "in the world, but not of it." Under the category of ecclesiology (theology concerning the Church), many have asked the question, "Should we maintain a distance and separateness from the world or should we embrace the world?"

Sounds like a simple question, doesn't it? How close can you get to the world and not look, act, or be like it? If we get too far away from the world, will the lost even listen to us about salvation, let alone actually understand us? That simple question invokes a hard answer, one that must be thought through and carefully considered.

And it was a question that James spearheaded in the midst of speaking of the tongue and its evils and heavenly and earthly wisdom. Don't think for a second that this new chapter even begins to start a new subject. You'll see why in just a minute. This section of James will help us to understand just what kinds of problems James was having in his church. And he had a solution!

THE TEXT AND CONTEXT

As we have mentioned already, James took up the argument against the tongue in the beginning of chapter three. Then, immediately after his precise and powerful metaphors about making the tongue either a tool for good or for evil, James then moved to the topic of heavenly wisdom and earthly wisdom. Next, he contrasted the two and called his church, and us, to operate within the methods and bounds of heavenly wisdom.

Just in case you thought he was done, James now will take the beginning of chapter four and meld the two former topics together into one, addressing the worldliness of the believer. That's right! He's going to take the results of the tongue, brothers speaking against brothers in cursing and heavenly versus earthly wisdom and recast them within the framework of what it means to be worldly or godly.

(4:1) Do not be persuaded to think that because we have a new chapter with a fresh new verse that James has switched gears for one second. In fact, he's just getting warmed up! James sees a church that can't get along to save their lives. So he asks the rhetorical question that he will later answer.

The two words in this verse, word battles and quarrels, give away the essence of the connection to the section on the tongue, and we will see the connection between the two wisdoms and worldliness in just a little while as well. Might I suggest that because of the types of battles James points to here, those of word battles and quarrels, probably give credence to the idea that James' members were at one another's throats, not physically, but with those dangerous tongues of theirs.

First appearance indicates that James was the pastor of a roaring, ranting, and maybe even raving church in that first century metropolis of Jerusalem. This might help us understand why he was so hard on the tongue in chapter 3. The Jerusalem church seems to be at war, but with words, and James is caught in the middle. So he does what any good pastor would do. He gets out his field rations, hunkers down in the bunker, and steps right into the middle of the firefight.

The rhetorical question is meant to cause thought about why the Christians were so verbally violent to one another. After all, this was not how Christians treated one another in word or deed. All of this that James saw around him, the bickering, the backbiting, the slander, it all reminded him of something very familiar: the way the world does business.

James answered the question with his own ideas of what the cause of such bickering would be. Inner desires or lusts that war within. Hmm. Wait a minute. Do you remember chapter one, when there were people saying that God was at fault for temptation? What did James say was the source of temptation? Oh. Desires within. The connection is unmistakable. So for James, not only are desires or passions or lusts the source of temptations, but they are also the source of worldliness and division and fighting.

Now the word used here for passions or lusts is not the same as in chapter 1. But the idea, the bad inside of humanity, is still right on par with James' theology of the inner self. Aside from this inference, we will see him use the word from chapter 1 (epithumia) in the next verse. But note the subtlety of James' arguments for all of the things we hate about this world, for the temptations and the quarrels. They're all caused by us!

In the next two verses, James is going to use sort of literary link, linking words to chains of phrases to show an action and its results, and then taking those results and cataloging the next result, and so on. **(4:2)** First, they desire something, which is the cause of their temptation from chapter 1. Even though they hotly desire something, they don't ever have it.

So what do they do? Well, they kill to get what they want. Now James is probably making use of rhetorical language here. I would doubt that the members of his church were murderers. Maybe he is using the terminology here as reminiscent of Jesus' arguments that anger was the root issue for murder in Matthew 5:21-26. Along with the figurative murdering comes jealousy, which was one of the characteristics of earthly wisdom in chapter 3. But the results are the same as in the first case: they still don't have what they wanted.

This reminds me of the toddler or child who throws a temper tantrum to try to get what he or she wants. After all the kicking, screaming, making spectacles for their parents, and any other rabbits they pull out of their hat, unless the parent is incredibly weak (sorry if that's you), the child goes away with nothing. James' point is that the worldly and earthly method doesn't accomplish the goal. It's a faulty method.

The quarreling and word battles continue. But James offers a suggestion that may have been seen as a pure stroke of genius, and it's the same advice he offered wisely in chapter 1 to the person without wisdom. Why don't you try asking for it? Sounds simple, yes, but the world doesn't think that straight forward and truthfully. But that's exactly what James has offered for sage advice twice now.

(4:3) Okay, James. Maybe you're being too harsh. Maybe they do ask every once in a while. But James won't give in one bit. He allows for the possibility that they do ask, but when they do, they don't get what they asked for. Have you ever had that happen to you? Every once in a while, when I go to a restaurant (okay, so I'm a college student and I mean fast-food restaurant, but it's still a restaurant) I sometimes do not get exactly what I ordered. Maybe they forgot something or just flat out missed what I had ordered.

But what happens when you ask God for something and you don't get it? Well, James suggests that their motives are all messed up when they ask. You see, they don't ask God for stuff because it's within His will. They ask for stuff that jives with what they want out of life and what they think they need. They want money to spend on their Lexis or they want a new car to go on a road trip. But they don't ask God for what He wants. They are using Him like some kind of vending machine or common human services representative.

But that's a dangerous game, because God does not cater to the whims of a selfish human. God thinks and acts on a bigger scale than inner desires. He is more concerned about others rather than Himself, which is only one of His attributes that makes Him better than us, by the way. The word here for spending, or spending freely, indicates a financial situation. From this data, we might postulate that James is speaking to the issue of asking God for money to be happy in life. This would then begin to include one of the other big themes of the book, that of a poor person's response to the rich in begging God for money to be like them.

(4:4) This verse begins the transition out of James' example of the possibly real life situation in his own church into the response that Christians should have toward this line of thinking and acting. James calls them adulterers! Whoa, James, aren't you getting a little hot under the collar? Not if he's a New Testament prophet, borrowing from the imagery of the Old Testament Prophets.

These prophets tended to use the imagery of a husband and wife for God and Israel. So when Israel acted more like the nations around it in opposition to God's will and Law, God used the prophets as mouthpieces to broadcast his concern that they were adulterers, the ones wronging Him. So now that James has identified the congregation's allegiances to worldly wisdom, he responds in kind as one of the prophets of the Old Testament would have.

Then James proposes the ultimatum between God and the world. He uses the example of friendship and enmity, which is probably what happens in these word wars. People tend to pick sides and make friends and enemies in a verbal or physical conflict. So James uses that imagery to expose the principle of worldliness versus godliness.

And the principle is that you cannot have both. You cannot be in league with the world and in league with God at the same time. You must choose your friends and foes wisely. They are diametrically opposed to one another. As if he could not make the point any clearer, James

restates it in a different way, using a third class conditional statement. This is the kind of condition in which the author is uncertain of fulfillment, but allows for it to be likely.

So in this example, James is saying that he doesn't know why a Christian would choose to be a friend of the world, or use the worldly wisdom, but if they did, then it is most guaranteed that they would become an enemy of God. This verb for appoint is a present passive verb, meaning that for as long as they commit themselves to worldly wisdom, they will continually and passively resist the possibility of friendship with God, or of following the heavenly wisdom.

(4:5) Now James, like any preacher, is about to produce the substance of his argument by appealing to a higher authority, that of Scripture. However, a somewhat interesting predicament for us twenty-first century readers produces a slight problem. James quotes a Scripture we cannot find within the bounds of the Old Testament.

How shocking! How dare he quote "Scripture" without giving book, chapter, and verse! There must be parts missing from the Old Testament canon! Sound the alarm, send out the excavators, for we are on a mission to discover the book of Scripture missing that James quoted. Or maybe we deal with this fact in an even worse way. Maybe we suggest that the Greek text has been messed with throughout time and we begin to tear it apart until there is no message left.

No. There must be a better way. Maybe if we understood what it meant to quote a source, not in the twenty-first century, but in the first century, we might not do these things to God's Word. It is indeed true that James here quotes a part of Scripture we cannot completely identify. But look at the quote for a moment. Does it have to be a direct quote or an idea produced by the Old Testament as a whole?

Let me provide a common example to explain. I can read a book of over a thousand pages and quote the author's unique contributions to the subject discussed. Am I quoting exactly or directly? In a sense, yes. I am giving the unique information. That is a quote of that author's words and work. In a sense, no. You could search that entire book with a computer-aided database and not find my quote, because I have so integrated the author's ideas into my person that I quoted the author in my real life, not in his or her paper and ink. I've so begun to live what I read that the quote comes out of life, not out of writing.

We know for sure that the authors of the New Testament practiced quotation in this way in the first century. Not only that, but it was not illegal. Remember that our culture in the west is so much more detail oriented than other cultures. We seek specificity, exactness, numbers and empirical values, precision. But that was not the goal of James. James quoted the idea from the Old Testament that God longs for Himself in us. His image is in us, and as Christians, His Spirit is in us. God's Spirit longs for us to live in heavenly wisdom, not in earthly wisdom.

The idea of God's jealousy permeates through the pages of the Old Testament. You can see it in God referring to his relationship with Israel as a marriage, God's demands that the entire Canaanite land be subject to the sword so that the Israelites would not be distracted and drawn to idols. One look at Judges shows the result of their failure to clear the land of idolatry. God is indeed jealous for us, and who can blame Him? We are His creation. If nothing else, this quotation from Scripture is an allusion to the major theme of the Old Testament, that God wants us, that he seeks and desires us.

Although this text in Greek is one of the most puzzling in the entire book of James, we will be taking it that God is yearning for us as Christians to stop thinking, living, and doing what the world does. He longs or jealously yearns for you to personally quit doing it the world's way and turn to Him, to seek His divine and heavenly way of wisdom.

(4:6) This is that greater grace God gives to us. We will fail and we will do what the world does, because we are so closely related to the world. We live in it every day! But oh how amazing it would be if we took the time to change that around, so that we are more close to God than the world, because we live in Him more than we live in the world. Rest assured that in times of failure, when we don't obey the Spirit's voice, we still receive grace and another shot at living more in God than in the world.

Next comes James' second quote from Scripture, this one we can pin down. It comes from Proverbs 3:34. It is one of the basic principles of Jesus' teachings and the teaching of the Old Testament. God hates prideful people because they stand in opposition to His commands and rule. His wrath comes upon them, but to those who are enraptured by God's power, to them He reaches out His hand and gives grace.

In God's economy, it is not the ones who live by the worldly principle of pride but those who live by the heavenly wisdom of humility that are precious. You see, we read above that people were steeped in word battles against one another, arguments and counterarguments. Did you ever notice that when we go into word battles or when we fight, it is often for ourselves? We fight for the one, not the One. We entertain violence in light of our own desires, not God's. We fight wars so that we feel safe, not so that the helpless are helped.

In the above parts of this section, that is how the church was acting in James' congregation. Brother brought accusation and argument against brother, sister against sister, when the pastor stood between them and reminded them that this is how the world does it. And when the world does it, it doesn't get what it wanted in the first place. Faulty methods don't get the job done. Yelling at one another does not solve the problem. Instead, we need to remember God's grace to us, and bestow that grace to others, no matter who they are.

(4:7) Now we come to the active and command part of this teaching on worldliness. It starts out with "therefore." That means that everything we have been discussing, the world's way is ineffective, the church should not live the world's way, heavenly wisdom is better than earthly wisdom, and all of the arguments Pastor James has been making come to a head in his wise and forceful counsel.

The first step demands that we become God's subjects, that we let God rule our hearts, our desires, our motives, our mouths, our mind. If the heavenly Master is in control, then heavenly wisdom will proceed from our thoughts, feelings, and actions. Notice that this is a passive command. We do not put ourselves under God's control. We passively accept God's rule of our lives.

The next step commands that we resist the devil. Now this one, unlike the other verb, is an active verb. We are actively engaged in thwarting the devil's plans and will to overtake us and this world. We can choose to fight against the devil and we must if we are to stop worldly wisdom from gaining a foothold. Christianity is not just a passive acceptance of God's message and will, but an active allegiance to Him. Remember what James said in chapter 2 about faith and deeds!

Next we see the result of our active insubordination against the devil and worldly wisdom. He flees. He goes away. That result happens because he cannot stand up to God. When we allow God's rule in our lives and actively resist the devil, he has no grounds to bother us. You can only have one master, and if that master is the Lord, then the devil's got to find a new stomping ground.

(4:8) James takes the time to sum up what happens when we choose God's way over the devil's way. When we draw near to God, He draws near to us. The principle: choose God and He'll choose you! It is a reciprocal relationship just like that of human to human. For instance, if a husband draws closer to his wife, she will feel affection and draw closer to him. When we feel loved, we give love. That is how we work. So when we do everything in our power to get as close to God as we can, God does everything in His power (and mind you He's quite powerful) to get as close to us as we will let Him. But He does not force Himself upon us. He is gentle and loving.

Many times I have been asked, "How do I know if I've blasphemed the Holy Spirit?" or "How much sin can I commit and not be in trouble of going to Hell?" My answer can be understood with a small parable. Imagine you are driving up a mountain. The higher you go, the more steep the drop off to your right. You don't want to end up down there! So how do you avoid it? Well, get closer to the mountain. Hug that big old rock to keep from getting close to the edge and putting yourself in danger! Same thing with sin. Why flirt with the edge and put yourself in danger. Why not drive as close to God as possible and stay as far away from the edge you can?

These next two phrases share some parallelism. They seem to be the same command reiterated to two different types of groups. And James isn't playing around here. He comes right out with it. Remember as you read through James that he is speaking to Christians! He says, "Cleanse your hands, sinners!" Now this word for cleanse is the word used to clean from defilement or dirt or filth. Interesting how he says hands for sinners. Sinners are labeled sinners because we can see their sins. The acts are done by the outward body parts, like hands. And they are labeled because everyone knows what they did. This is the easiest and most blatant sin to take care of.

But there is a different kind of sin, one that can't be legislated or seen or dealt with or even preemptively struck. It is the sin no one sees, deep in the heart and mind. That is why James says to "Purify your hearts, you double-minded!" The word for purify is a synonym to cleanse. But it is a more ritualistic purification, a more inward type of cleanliness. James may see the heart and mind as one, for there is a Hebrew word that has the range for both the mind and the heart. Here is also the second and final time we will see the word "Double-minded" from 1:8. Those who are unstable in the mind or heart, the double-minded, must purify themselves, but it is not something that can be objectively measured or seen. It is a work and matter of the heart that only God can see.

(4:9) James still speaks to these people who are setting themselves up in prideful arguments against their brothers and sisters when he calls for what Jesus called for in the Sermon on the Mount and when He pronounced woes upon the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law. This is not new language to anyone who's read the Old Testament. The prophets have said it as well to the opposing parties. This is why we see James as a New Testament prophet as well, speaking with passion and emotion and with reason to a situation that should not happen in a Kingdom community. He is prophetic in his addressing the problem in the community and applying biblical ideals to that problem, demanding a change.

Those who have been using this worldly way against their brothers and sisters must lament, mourn, and weep. These are essentially synonyms, but they almost seem to gradually indicate a more solemn attitude moving toward a more withdrawn attitude. Lamenting is the kind of thing that required sack cloth and ashes in the Old Testament, and then there was mourning, which was more of a long-term attitude, maybe lasting a few days for the death of a family

member. Weeping is something that is done for a shorter period of time. Either way you splice it, these guys aren't supposed to be enjoying their current position in the community because of their choice to enact worldly wisdom.

This is not a time for celebration. It is a time for repentance. Instead of choosing to be joyous and laughing as one would at a banquet or in the good times, these perpetrators are called to an attitude of repentant mourning and gloom. All too often, we make it too simple when we address sin in the Kingdom community, in Church. We let people get off scot-free. We tell them they've sinned and within ten seconds, they are asking for forgiveness and everything's hunky-dory again.

But that's not how it looks in the Old Testament or the New Testament Church. When people sin in the community and are discovered, they go through a period of experiencing the full blows, the complete consequences, of their sin and how it affects them personally, their relationships with the ones they have offended, and with God. Rest assured, when you commit sin, you don't just hurt yourself and make God angry. Just as it takes a community to teach us how to love ONE ANOTHER, it takes a community to help us realize that no sin is done in SOLITARY confinement.

There is a time to mourn and a time to realize the grave mistakes we have committed, the negative impact we have had on our community, on our family, our friends, our brothers and sisters in the Lord. The disappointment of sin, the disapproval of sin, and the destructive force of sin must be fully inhaled. Perhaps this may be the reason for so many disjointed communities in our day and age. We don't ever have to face what sin does to a community, so we are more apt to commit that sin again.

(4:10) The gem of James' pastoral advice rests in this last sentence. He has diagnosed the problem for bickering and arguing with words against family members as pride and our own desires. The external war is simply an outworking of the internal conflict within the desires and heart of the Christian. The best way to shrink pride is to become humble. People who are prideful can't do it! They can't surrender or offer apologies or anything of the sort. So if you can apologize or surrender before the Lord, then you're on your way to actual repentance.

You know, I think our biggest fear about submission to the Lord and humility before Him stems from our experience with other humans. When you sacrifice yourself to another person here on earth, you open yourself up for the kill, give them an open shot, let down your guard so they can come in and destroy you. Maybe that's happened to you and you've experienced first-hand this vile rejection, this false and worldly way of kicking you when you're down. So you buckle up, put up those walls higher than ever before, and don't let anyone in because the last time that happened, you were left destroyed, destitute, and devoid of hope.

But it's not like that with God! That's the key to this phrase "in the presence of the Lord." You see, while God could thwart and thump you when you surrender to Him, when you give up and give in, He does nothing of the sort that you have been used to all your life. God doesn't go in for the kill. He doesn't disappoint you and finish you off. He doesn't take the free pot shot.

Instead, He does what all of those other people you gave in to could not do. He uplifts your spirit and brings you out of your despair, out of your humiliation, out of your sorrow and dread, and into His marvelous and glorious light. All of this happens in His presence. And when you give in to God, the Master treats you like no earthly master ever has. He gives you your dignity and reminds you that you're His child and He loves you more than anyone else in the

whole world. And it's all because earthly wisdom fails at completing its task while God's heavenly wisdom could not be any more effective than it already is.

(4:11) Although we begin a new paragraph, James is not finished providing heavenly wisdom which traces its problem the whole way back to the problem of the tongue in the beginning of chapter 3. James puts the wisdom in the form of a command, demanding that the brothers not speak evil against one another. This was probably the equivalent to mudslinging in their arguments and word wars.

James uses a negative imperative with very strong language. His reason for such a strong rebuke will be made clear as he presents the result of such slanderous and malicious name-calling and rivalry. The reason is actually quite simple. To speak evil of other brothers and sisters is to judge them. We already have seen what James believes about judging others in 2:1-10.

To review, the brother who judges his neighbor sets himself above his neighbor, caused by pride, which connects this paragraph to the last one. But James is also going to point to another issue where judging is concerned. When we judge one another, we break the law. Now, what law is James speaking of?

Well, some would point to the heart of the Old Testament Law of Moses, which stated that we must first "Love the Lord our God with everything in us" and then "Love our neighbor as ourselves." This second rule would be the one that we violate. Some might say, "Who cares about breaking the Law?" Remember that James' church is mostly of Messianic or Jewish Christians. The Law is still at least culturally important.

Another possibility some may present is that James is referring to the law of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7, where Jesus specifically addresses the problem of Christians judging others, other Christians and other people who may not be believers. Here, a word warrior who takes on his brothers and sisters would be violating the law of judging the moment he speaks ill of anyone.

You may pick whichever theory you wish, because both of them are being violated. Without any doubt, James points to the law that binds Christians together, the law of treating others like God and Jesus treat others. The moment we treat them any other way, we no longer look like our Founder. We no longer look like Jesus and we no longer imitate Him. When we no longer look like Him, then we have sorely missed the point and the mission! And this is exactly what James sees.

James now uses a first-class conditional statement in Greek to explain that one cannot be a doer of the law and a judge at the same time. This means that James assumes that it is true that someone is violating the law by judging. If someone judges and violates the law as he has postulated, then what would happen for sure is that they would not be doing the law at all. So which is more important: judging the law or doing the law? Judging whether or not the Old Testament Moral Law was true or could be better, or doing the Old Testament Moral Law? Judging that Jesus was spot on when He told us everything He did in His ministry, everything that we would need to obey and know God, or to do everything Jesus said?

You see, in either case, whether you have an aversion to the Old Testament Law, you are still bound to Jesus' law in His words. Church is a kingdom community that looks like Christ. That's why we are called Christians and Jesus showed us by word and deed exactly what the Kingdom looks like. So the moment we don't look, act, speak, like people of the Kingdom, then we have lost the way of heavenly wisdom.

(4:12) James affirms the truth of Jesus as being the only Lawgiver and Judge. That is why His law, His teaching, preaching, and statements while He was on earth and through His

Holy Spirit are not only so effective, but also our only direction and obligation as believers. To be sure, the Old Testament Moral Law has been integral to Jesus' teachings. God's Law outlasts the test of time, for He never changes and His Law therefore does not change either. However, it can be subjected to the misunderstanding and misrepresentation of humanity.

Because Jesus is the Lawgiver and Judge, only He can judge and explain truth to us, and only He knows everything about a person, so that His judgment is accurate. Our judgment is so subjective, based on our background and subject to our whims. But God judges the things we see and don't see. His judgment and law are perfect. When we judge, we usurp His authority and take His place. That is the point of contention, our pride overcomes God's transcendence in our own eyes and we suddenly believe that we are at least close to the same authority God has, if not worse. But we must realize that only God has the power to destroy and to save. Only God has the authority to judge and to command.

WHAT'S JAMES SAYING?

James was demanding a paradigm shift from world principles and practices to Kingdom message and methods. What James saw inside the community of believers was nothing different from what he saw in the marketplace, in the Sanhedrin, in any other place where unbelievers hung out and did business.

But the community of believers must be different than the world, not necessarily in dress or in matters that are peripheral, but in motive, in belief, in active faith, in deed, in spirit, and in word. We operate different. We do stuff different. We have a different spirit about us, a different goal, a different method, a different message, a different way, a way of heavenly wisdom, not earthly wisdom.

We must remember that our words do matter. They do have the power to hurt and to heal people. They have the power to uplift and to bring low. We must be extremely careful and mind what comes out of our mouths and how we are using our tongues. We can use the tongue to start battles amongst one another, but that is what the world does. We have the ability to offer intelligible arguments against one another, but that's what the world does.

We do what the world does by default, because at one point in time, we were the world. But you know what's harder to do? To live contrary to our former nature. To actually live life inside of the bounds of heavenly wisdom, to obey Christ and His teachings, and to fight for peace instead of pride. We also have the power to be peacemakers with our deeds and words. We also have the power to present arguments for Christ and for our brothers and sisters. We also have the power to speak for instead of against people. And we have the power to live above reproach, to live out God's law in our lives, our community, and our world.

James was pointing out that we have the choice to be a friend of the world or a friend of God. But we cannot befriend both, for they are opposite and antithetical to one another. Choosing one is rejecting the other. So we must decide which one we want to be on the side of, which one we want to support with our actions, words, and wills. We can draw near to God or draw near to the devil. Once we start down a road or path, it becomes easier to stick to that path and it becomes natural as we go farther and farther, deeper and deeper. Which path will we, as believers, choose?

WHAT'S IT MEAN TO ME?

What do you use your tongue for? What about your mind? Which path have you chosen or are you walking down? If you're going down a path you don't want, it's harder to change to a

different path, but you can do it. It starts with the will, the desire to choose a different way of wisdom, a different Leader, a different purpose, method, and message. It starts from the inside out and it's done by God, not by you. When you make the mental effort, the desire, God takes it from there.

You may not know how to get there, but you don't have to know because God's doing it. You don't have to fight for yourself anymore. You can fight for God. You don't have to count on yourself anymore. You can count on God. You don't have to beat others up to make yourself feel good. You can look to God to tell you what He thinks of you. And you know He doesn't just like you. He loves you, no matter what you've done or where you've been. He loves you for who you are because He made you. He's crazy about you, and He wants you to be what He made you to be from the beginning. It's hard to run from such a wonderful challenge.

So for those who are sick of doing it the world's way and not seeing any results, sick of seeing some getting recognized while others are being ignored, sick of observing the cliques and classes of our societies and surroundings, sick of the judging and jockeying for position and power, there is another path, another road that leads to another wisdom.

This is the wisdom that gets results because the means and the ends are justified, where everyone who is part of the movement of God, the Kingdom of God, gets recognized for being who they are and doing what they're designed to do, where the only judgment comes from a loving Father who cares about every child, where the position and power belong to God, and the way to become part of that power is to humble yourself and become a servant to everyone.

Sound interesting? Like a roller coaster ride worth checking out, like something that will be a challenge, go against the grain? Well, you're welcome to become part of something bigger than yourself. All it takes is desire to get started. And for those of you who have already been on the journey, take a mental check to see if you're looking like Jesus. If not, then it's time to figure out what He looks like and go through a makeover.

Zero Hour James 4:13-17

TRANSLATION

13 Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow, we will go to this city or that city and we will do this for a year and we will go and we will profit.” 14 No one knows what your life will be like tomorrow; for it is a vapor that appears for a little while, but thereafter it disappears. 15 Instead, you should say, “If the Lord wills, we will do this or that.” 16 But do not boast in your arrogance— all such boasting is evil. 17 Therefore, the one who has known what is good and does not do it, to him it is sin.

INTRODUCTION

Every day, we all have jobs to keep, schedules to follow, and agendas based on what we do for a living. Oftentimes, we go into churches where pastors chide us for not spending enough time with Jesus or in prayer or some other Christian discipline. We are so busy in our culture today that we have unlearned how to be at peace, to stop and listen to the voice of God, to relax and enjoy God’s presence in and around and through us.

But James is not going to specifically mess with our schedules or the fact that we understand how to be too busy for God. He is going to deal with a deeper issue here, the fact that we don’t include God in all of our plans. This section is still linked to the matters of our speech because the character James uses here speaks of his plans that exclude God’s working in his life. James has a very important reminder concerning our lofty plans of busywork and long life and health.

Although the very important message of leaving time to wait on the Lord and to spend more time with Him is an integral and special message American Christians need to hear often, James is going to a different issue with our calendars and agendas. He wants to know if we realize our own mortality and if we include God into our plans. Plans are not wrong in themselves when they include room for God to work and move in our lives.

THE TEXT AND CONTEXT

After a strong warning against worldliness, which is the result of operating in earthly wisdom, James covered the issues of the tongue, that of word battles and backbiting within the four walls of his church, and that of misrepresenting or wrongly speaking against those in the Kingdom community. Now he continues with yet another problem our tongues portray when in use, the issue of our own pride and arrogance when it comes to making plans.

(4:13) Although we see another separation marker in “Come now...” which is common to the sections of this book, I have already suggested that this is not as much a separator of subject matter as it is a call to the attention of the heavenly wisdom James is about to once again offer his congregation. Next we see that this is definitely an issue within James’ church because he addresses a certain group of individuals, those who say that they will make plans to go somewhere and make a profit for a year. Since he addresses a specific group, we know that this is one of the issues the Jerusalem church under James’ leadership is dealing with. Unlike the hypothetical situations James has been bringing for illustrations of his heavenly wisdom, these are flesh and blood members of his church that are presuming upon tomorrow.

We can hear in this quote James presents of what he has heard in the foyer after church alarming phrases that tip James off about the sin of pride and arrogance in his congregants. The quote betrays a lack of understanding of the mortality of humanity. It lacks the affirmation that life could be over in a number of ways for a number of reasons in less than a second. These Christians were neglecting a key factor of human existence, that it can cease at any point in time. The quote says that they will go into some city, meaning that it doesn't really matter what city, either today or tomorrow. This statement basically lays down the loosest plans I've ever heard!

Think about it. When you make plans, you include the time of the plans exactly, the location exactly, the goal exactly. You do not write in your calendar, "Maybe Monday, or no, Wednesday looks good right now to me, or maybe Thursday?" That's not a plan! That's the lack of an agenda or plan. You don't guess your destination either! "Maybe that day I'll go to Pittsburg, or wait, maybe Philadelphia or Paris would be better!" No, in our plans, we have specifics. That is the very nature of a plan.

But here we see just from the first phrase of this quote that these believers didn't really make solid plans to do anything, which equates to a waste and lack of stewardship of the time God has given each of us mortals. We cannot be wishy-washy about our plans because not only do our finances require stewardship, but all of our resources. Everything we do and say and think and spend should be managed according to God's will and plans. That's the message James has for these believers.

The next part of the phrase shows another problem with these "plans." There is no problem with trading and making a profit in the Bible, as long as the scales are honest, as we see countless times in the Old Testament, especially the Proverbs. That's not the part I'm seeing a problem with. The problem I see is spending a year in whatever city. Am I saying that you can't have a "Five-Year Plan" or something? Not at all.

But in this statement, I notice a lack of attention to the fact that you could cross the street five minutes after reading this, get hit by a car, and tomorrow would never come. I'm not wishing that upon you by any means, but do you see how quickly life can be snuffed out? In your plans, do you come to grips with the possibility that we may not have one year left? Especially when everyone's persecuting the church here in James' first century church. They were scattered throughout the book of Acts because of intense persecution. We must be careful in our plans to acknowledge our mortality and to acknowledge God's hand and will in our endeavors, but we will get to that soon.

(4:14) So eloquently and pastorally, not with the crude illustration that I just presented above, James illustrates with the poetry attributed to the prophets and Jesus concerning that mortality of humanity. Several passages throughout both Old and New Testaments immediately come to mind which also refer to human life as a short-lived. The closest reference to our lives being like a mist comes from Psalm 102:3, where the word for smoke is closely related and expresses the same idea as James. Isaiah 40:7 speaks of the frailty of human life, comparing it to the grass of the fields which is here today and gone tomorrow. And we saw earlier in James (1:11) that James fed off of this prophetic imagery to show this idea as well. Jesus took a different route and, instead of referring to the arrogance and pride of humanity that ignores its mortality, taught that people must not become anxious about their existence in Matthew 6:25-34. Finally, 1 Pet 1:24 expresses the like idea of human life being as mortal as grass. There is ample evidence in the Bible concerning the mortality of humanity.

Presuming upon tomorrow presumes God's right to rule and sustain creation! We saw in earlier passages how we presume His position as a Judge when we speak evil of our brothers and

sisters in Christ, and when we judge, we steal God's position and right. Here again, with our mouths, we are setting aside God's divine authority over history and placing ourselves in control of days and months and years. Neglecting our mortality to do whatever our vain desires, which have gotten us into trouble from the beginning of James' epistle, wrongly stewards the time God has given each of us. We not only usurp God's authority of history and mastery over human destiny, but we also waste one of God's greatest gifts to us: life!

So how do we solve this double-edged dilemma we have created for ourselves? The answer comes in James' wise counsel to include the Lord in our plans and to include ourselves in God's will. (4:15) Although we have violated with our words God's authority over time and have wasted instead of managed God's gift of life to us, there is a cure for our boasting arrogance. James offers his advice countering our current attitude. The word translated "instead" is the Greek conjunction "anti." We understand the meaning of this word. It is used to refer to the enemy of Christ in end times by John, the Antichrist. This word means the opposite of something when added to a word like antifreeze or antithesis. So here, James heavenly wisdom counters the earthly wisdom in practice by the Kingdom community members mentioned in verse 13.

Not only does he offer this counter-action advice with the conjunction anti but also he uses the subjunctive mood of the verb to direct them out of what is happening in reality to what must become reality, "Instead you should say..." The quote James offers in response to the arrogant quote in verse 13 is a conditional statement (3rd Class in Greek). This conditional statement has the force of saying that the fulfillment of something is uncertain, but still likely. How perfect a condition to introduce thoughts of God's will into our calendars and day planners! James allows for the possibility that tomorrow never will come. He brings the Lord's will into the midst of the plan.

It is not a sin to plan short-term or long-term. It is a sin to presume that those plans are guaranteed to happen. When we include God's will into our lives, it acts as a focusing agent for us. Instead of being unsure of our plans, it gives us the motive and focus to steward our lives until either Christ returns or God takes us from this world. Our plans and our deeds become secondary to completing God's will in our lives right now. This is the cure for human arrogance in expecting tomorrow to come. Technically, tomorrow doesn't exist. At 11:59 PM tonight, the very next minute will not be tomorrow. It will be today! So why put so much stock in something that doesn't exist or never arrives! I'm being facetious, but the point is biblical. Don't waste today on dreams of tomorrow. Use the time you have been given wisely, for God's glory and will. Our life and works are contingent upon the Lord's will.

(4:16) In this verse, James sums up the sin of these people who presumed upon tomorrow. He offers, without the clarification of his charge, that they are boasting and arrogant. This attitude from the quote in verse 13 that they would go wherever they wanted and make a profit within a year was boasting. Not only were they presuming God's authority over time, but they were also presuming to know God's will! Did you ever think about it that way? When we ignore God's will, we are presuming that whatever we do is God's will. But this may not be the case, especially if it is labeled boasting.

We see Paul boast in his second letter to the Corinthians, but only to point out the boasting of the Corinthian Christians. Here James says essentially that to presume upon God's authority and will is boasting and arrogance, because humanity is not immortal like God nor is humanity in control of creation like the Creator. When we say these types of statements with our mouths, they reflect our inner pride and boasting, our misunderstanding of where we are on the food chain, as it were. James labels this type of boasting, where we neglect God's will and

authority, as evil. Now the kind of boasting Paul did in 2 Corinthians was boasting about serving God, which is not evil. One of the other mentions by James of boasting is the lowly brother boasting in his high position in God (1:9). But the kind of arrogance and boasting James sees and hears which he addresses in this section of his epistle is definitely evil in its connotation and use because it neglects known Christian understandings about God.

That last thought will lead us into the proverb of this next verse, which is often taken out of its context here and preached or taught as some general truth. But let us examine it more closely with its context and also relate it to a parable which I believe would easily parallel this teaching on presumption. **(4:17)** This last verse is inextricably connected to the whole discussion here on presuming God's will and authority. It begins with the connective conjunction "therefore." James is making a direct link from this proverb that he quotes to the situation at hand. Although many of the commentaries I read attempted to discover this proverb's origin, they did little to explain how it relates to the subject matter of this section. I will attempt to do better here.

Many times this verse is quoted as some kind of random "It says that in the Bible somewhere" statement and linked usually to sins of omission, those things that we should be doing in the Christian life, but aren't, such as reading our Bible, praying, fasting, etc. But this verse is not directly speaking of sins of omission, although it may sound like that on the surface. These people who were presuming upon tomorrow were aware of the Christian understanding of mortality and God's authority and will. They knew that they were doing wrong by making such fruitless and arrogant plans. They knew that they were not managing their life as a Christian would. That is why James quotes this proverb to them.

They know that they are to live within God's will and not presume immortality for themselves, but they did not act that out in their lives, so they have sinned. This idea of sinning is linked to the above section on worldliness, for this issue is just as much allowing the earthly wisdom in action, the worldliness, to be practiced by these believers instead of the heavenly wisdom of living life with God's will in mind. So that is the sin they have committed. They know they are mortal and that life is a gift that must be managed by godly stewards, but they are not doing what they know to be good and true. So they are sinning against God. That's what this verse means in its context. It may secondarily refer to sins of omission, but here it is calling these people on the carpet for their lack of practicing Christian doctrine.

On a separate sort of endnote, I would like to point out an especially pertinent parable Jesus gave in Luke 12:13-21 concerning the Rich Fool. This is the man who was so rich and his fields produced such a harvest that he bothered himself with how to store it all. He decided to tear down the barns he already had and build bigger ones to store the harvest. His sin was that he didn't even think of giving it away. The idea of the parable is that he meant to hold it all to himself and then basically retire, to quit and relax for the rest of his life. But this violated the work ethic Christ taught and it also presumed upon tomorrow as these people in James' church are doing.

Jesus was teaching that our life doesn't consist only of our possessions. We need to steward all of our resources, including our very lives which are a gift from God. Do you remember what happened to this man who built bigger barns? God killed him that night and everything he had was for nothing. All of his possessions didn't mean anything when judgment night came along. So don't ever retire or God will kill you! I'm being facetious again! But the point stands that God expects us to be working until His return. And we need to be good stewards of everything we are and have, because nothing in this world belongs to us and nothing

we have or are is our own. It is all God's. I'm not against retirement. People who retire can offer themselves to the church and to God's mission still. There is never a time until death that you cannot be effective for God, and that's what righteousness is all about. That's what this verse is saying, that you can do good so go out there and do it!

So now you are very much aware of what you must not do, the evils of presuming upon the future, God's authority, and God's will. Make God part of your plans. According to James' proverb, if you don't follow this biblical advice, you're in sin.

WHAT'S JAMES SAYING?

James has it out for these guys who are walking around acting like they own the place, like they can do whatever they want. But they can't, and they know it. And James calls them out for their behavior and words. He reminds them that they are not immortal. He reminds them that God controls all of time and their lives and this whole world. He reminds them that when they do what they know they shouldn't, they're in sin and they're arrogant.

James has already mentioned in the section on worldliness (4:1-12) that God hates the arrogant, the proud, the haughty. So they need to quit saying these things and doing this because at its very core, it denies God's authority, God's control over time, the mortality of humanity, and God's will. Those are some dangerous waters to venture into. God is generally pretty zealous about these things, so it is a better idea to include God in their plans. It is a better move to stop being so presumptuous and so arrogant.

WHAT'S IT MEAN TO ME?

This short little section packs a powerful punch for all of us because we all presume certain things, such as the next breath, the next minute, the next day, etc. In fact, we build plans for that upcoming time. To not build any plans whatsoever would be bad stewardship in the other direction. But we must be very careful not to forget that we are on a mission for God, to fulfill His will in our lives and in our circles of influence.

We can have plans without ignoring our own mortality and God's control and God's authority. Do you leave room for God in your day? I'm not talking about those five minute devotions or that quick read from a chapter in the Bible. I'm talking about as you go about your day, are you open to the Spirit's leading? Are you prepared for an appointment with someone that God has made for you? We live for the One. Every breath that we take is a gift from God, and we need to put that life we live to good use, to God's use. I'm not saying that everyone has to become a full-time minister. If that happened, who would be in the world enough to reach the world? I'm also not saying that full-time ministers don't reach the world. They do. But I am asking how effective you are for God in your life right now.

Do you think about the Lord's will in your life often? Do you take into account the possibilities of being His ambassador, His servant, that Jesus with skin on to people desperate in need? I think that we have all had moments where we have grieved the Holy Spirit by ignoring his promptings. But that should never happen if we consider our lives secondary to the call of God to do His will on the earth. So get out there and live that gift of life. Get out there and do that stuff for God. May everything you think, say, do, believe, feel be motivated with the purpose of putting a smile on God's face!

You Poor Rich Guy *James 5:1-6*

TRANSLATION

1 Come now, you rich people, weep while lamenting for the hardships coming upon you. 2 Your wealth has become corrupt and your clothing has become moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and silver have rusted over and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. You stored up in the last days. 4 Look! The wages of the workers harvesting your lands, which you deprived through fraud, cry out against you and the cry of the harvesters has entered the ears of the Lord of Hosts. 5 You lived upon the earth in luxury and self-indulgence, gorged your heart in the day of slaughter, 6 you declare guilty and murder the righteous one— he does not oppose you.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout all of human history, wealth has always been a fundamental issue. I wonder if the cavemen fought over land, cave space, and other materials. I know that we do today. It seems that materialism has had a hold on society even from the very beginning of history. Economic status has had a key role in overall social status. In America, it's so bad that people no longer have dignity in and of themselves, but only in their work because work is money and money is everything.

No longer are you worth anything unless you're doing something important in the workforce. People who don't work, even if they're disabled or legitimately not part of the American workforce, are viewed as lazy, slothful bums. We look with disdain upon anyone making less money than us or under our supervision. They're not good enough or they're not a hard worker or they're just not intelligent enough or savvy enough to get a better job. Wealth and material-mindedness is a disease that has been rocking this country for so long that I don't know when it was ever not there.

We seek after wealth at the cost of our health, our families, a holistic peace in our lives. We lose sleep, time, relationships over wealth and making money. We disguise our workaholicism with "good reasons" to avoid rest and relaxation, time with the family, deeper relationships with friends. Why? Have you ever felt the need to ask why we've so unbalanced our lives? It's an age old question that may never be answered. Perhaps greed plays a factor. Maybe it is the feeding of our pride. For some reason, wealth speaks volumes to humanity.

We love stuff. We love stuff we don't need. We love stuff we can't use. Slap the word "Free" on anything and people will take it. You can give just about anything away for free. From this disease we have made a few great "American" sayings. "Time is money" is one that I hate. Time is not money. Time is time. Money is different. All this saying does is provide an excuse for us to work longer hours instead of tending to our souls, which are caving in as deteriorating walls because of our neglect. Is standing at a factory conveyor belt putting one more part on that product really more fun, more stimulating, more healthy than cozying up to your wife with your kids in your lap talking about friends and emotions and perspectives? I don't think so.

But most of America disagrees with us. And now we face numerous problems on numerous fronts. Children shooting other children at school because daddy spends more time at the office than in the backyard playing ball, Fear in the economy's slumps because money determines our happiness and well-being. A divorce rate that skyrocketed and is not showing any

signs of decreasing any time soon because spouses sit alone at night in boredom and loneliness, searching for the adventures that they cannot have with their soul mates. I'm not speaking in euphemisms here. This is what I see of America and the Western world.

In a sense, James sees the same thing 2,000 years ago. He even packaged it in the same way. You see, to someone who actually lives for money or wealth, everything must be measured and translated into gains and losses. So in these short six verses, James is going to do just that. The operating question of this passage is: Now that you've spent your entire lives for the purpose and goal of material wealth, how rich are you really? And this section of James answers that question with the same pity for the rich that wealthy Americans show to bums on street corners begging for money.

THE TEXT AND CONTEXT

We have seen that James has been dealing all through this book with trials and temptations in our lives. He has taken on the trials that face the Christian community in which he operates in the Jerusalem church. From anger to wealth and poverty to speech to temptations, James has searched out the materials humans are made of inside: anger, greed, desire, even hate, and the list goes on. Then he has challenged each of those indwelling issues in the Christian community, where Jesus taught us a better way than the world, a better wisdom than the world. And through his promptings, James is making progress in teaching us how to handle these fundamental blocks of our make-up. We now have a new make-up, that of the new creature that shuns these ways and now comes from heaven, the heavenly wisdom operating in everyday heavenly community with others.

So it comes as no surprise that James would come to an issue such as wealth more than once in his wisdom sayings. We first saw the issues of the wealthy versus the poor in 1:9-11. We see this affluence showing up also in the sayings of the businessmen of James' church in 4:13-17, not to mention the hypothetical situation of how to treat rich guests to the community in 2:1-13. And now, James is going to go to the bottom line in this section, to the heart of the matter, to the end, the goal of the wealthy. He will answer the question: Has your wealth paid off for you? Was all that you cherished and sought and prioritized really worth it? Ironically stated, "Was your wealth of resources worth the wealth of resources you put into acquiring it?"

We will see that the answer to the question is couched in the finality of the eschaton, the end of time. James is not even looking at the final bank statement on planet earth, whether you finished in the black. He is looking at your heavenly bank statement, whether you finished as a friend of Jesus or not. I don't see this as a salvation issue, but I do see that there is much pain for the rich who have gained their wealth in the worst way, those who would say things like, "The ends justify the means." James is once again questioning the motives and methods of the wealthy, not the fact that they are wealthy. He is questioning their hearts.

(5:1) Another vocative marker creates the subject change at the beginning of chapter five as James moves back to wealth, "Come now, you rich people..." He then offers a command that may shock you because the rich aren't usually seen doing this. He tells them to weep and lament! I thought wealth produced happiness! But apparently, in the heavenly bottom line, it has very little to do with happiness. The verb "weep" here and its accompanying participle for lamenting are synonyms denoting a strong emotional reaction to the hardships. This is not just shedding a few tears. This is the kind of weeping we see in the Old Testament that the prophets do for Israel and the kind of lamenting we see over catastrophic events.

Hardships have come upon the wealthy. What kind of hardship is James talking about? He's speaking of the ruin and misery that will be coming upon the sinfully wealthy in the eschaton, the ending of time, when the Lord judges the motives and means of the wealthy. James here is suggesting, and will later on in this section confirm, that they have failed the test or trial of how to deal with wealth properly. Remember in 1:12-18 how James is describing the man who is approved after the testing or trial.

We have already discussed how trials have a quality of proof involved in them and how James has talked about the trials of having wealth and not having wealth, the trials of temptations, anger, controlling the tongue, earthly wisdom, and the list goes on and on. As we will see in the vivid imagery of James' masterful words in this passage, the hardships are brought upon the wealthy by the Lord Himself because of the way they have treated their workers and the way they have lived on this earth

(5:2) James makes an observation not necessarily based on the here and now but on the result of the eschaton. He claims that the wealth of the rich has actually become corrupt or has eroded. This idea reminds me of what Jesus said concerning wealth in Matthew 6:19-21 where He talks about the futility of amassing earthly wealth that is subject to earthly decay and ruin. James is offering the same sage advice here, as a prophet calling out those in the Kingdom community who have refused heavenly wisdom for the sake of earthly wisdom and are now reaping the benefits of that earthly wisdom: a corrupt, eroded, and rusted wealth that did not last but actually depreciated over time. They spent more to gain a depreciating wealth that has never produced worth. They have wasted resources on the wrong wealth. The irony is astounding.

Both of these verbs in verse 2 are perfects. Now the perfect contains an action that happened sometime in the past with present results or circumstances. The perfect is one of the most theologically rich Greek verbal aspects in the New Testament. And here it shows that the wealth has been rotting for a while, not just in the end. The time spent gaining was wasted all along. In a sense, James is saying that the things we find valuable in materialism have never ever been valuable!

The second verb is actually singular, but referring to the plural subject "clothing." This is fairly common in the New Testament. In such cases, the plural subject is thought of as a whole or a singular group. All of the clothes have become moth-eaten, not just some. The whole group of clothes has depreciated in value. Not just selling value, but in useful value as well. I used to have a few wool sweaters that were eaten through by moths or mice or some kind of furry little creature. They were ruined and could not be replaced. The whole garment's use and value hit rock bottom when just a small part of it was destroyed. And that is what James says here, that the whole treasure, the whole wealth has been corrupted, and therefore all of it holds no value whatsoever.

(5:3) As James specifically recounts the perceived assets of the rich, their clothing and their wealth, he now mentions their financial assets, silver and gold. These precious metals have corroded and rusted over time. They have now become common instead of precious, no longer holding their value as metals. Once again, we see the perfect tense of the Greek verb here, showing the gradual decay over time. The corrosion of the metals, the rust, is personified by James to also cry out against them in witness to their wrong motives and means. There is a dative of interest here in the disadvantaged sense. This means that the rust will not speak well in its testimony of the wealthy. It will tell the story of their inward corruption over time. The corruption will be visible as rust, but will speak of an inner corruption of their souls!

In fact, the testimony of their wealth will disadvantage and discredit the rich. It will eat away at them, like the flames of a fire that consume flesh. This is all predicated on the eschaton, the last day, which is viewed as a judgment day here. Corrosion will eat away at the money, at the souls, and at the flesh of the rich. And James speaks ironically as he affirms, “You sure have laid up for the last days!”

The way James places here what would normally be used as a positive affirmative continues the dark picture of the judgment of the rich in the last day. The irony is that their treasure is evaluated as actually causing them all of the grief they are in, not helping them avoid it. All of the things that they chased after have put them in this position of hardship in the bottom line of the eschaton. They sure have laid up for themselves. Although not viewable in translations very well, the word “treasures” in this sentence is unmistakably missing! For instance, the positive inference of this statement would be “You have laid up treasure for the last days.” But in this sentence, treasure is missing. In other words, by leaving out the word “treasure,” James is saying they have laid up wrath in the last day. So that’s exactly how he says it in Greek. “You laid up for the last days.” But they have caused their own grief. They have laid up their own demise. The negative word pictures abound in this warning to the wealthy.

(5:4) James continues with the imagery of the rust personified as it witnesses against the rich. One specific illustration of how the wealth of the rich testifies against them lies in its testimony for the harvesters and field workers. James uses the oft exclaimed “Behold” or “Look,” a vivid command that calls to one’s attention the real situation they face. It is often used in prophetic literature. But the wages are also personified in this verse as they cry out against the rich. The reason for their cry is given. It is because the workers for all of their hard labor were defrauded by the rich. They were underpaid and over worked.

But the fear for the rich should not be just that they have committed an injustice, which would be enough to condemn them. No, it is the Judge who has heard these cries that would frighten these wealthy frauds. The Lord of Hosts has heard these cries! He is not just a judge who hopes to teach the wealthy a lesson. He is a Judge who can condemn them for their actions, who can make sure they pay for not paying the workers. He does not just acknowledge the social injustice of the wealthy. He makes them pay for it. He has the power to punish as well as to pass judgment.

On a side note of interest, the literal translation of “Lord of Hosts” is “Lord of the Sabbath.” Sabbath means “rest.” And the interesting thing about this is that the workers have been overworked for the money they do get from the rich. It is almost a silent indictment of the rich for taking away the Sabbath rest of the people that work in their fields. Because they don’t get enough money to live on, perhaps they may have had to ignore the Sabbath to make a living. I do not know if this is certain, but it is an interesting prospect. The Lord of Hosts will judge and punish righteously in the stead of the righteous workers who have been abused by the rich in the eschaton.

(5:5) Then James brings home the indictment of the Lord of Hosts against the rich for their living practices. James claims they have lived in luxury and self-indulgence. They have not cared about others, only themselves. For this, God is thoroughly irate. At the expense of the righteous, the rich have had their hay day. This reminds me of how Abraham had pointed out that the wealthy have enjoyed luxury here on this earth but will endure the trials of Hell for eternity in Jesus’ parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31, especially verse 25).

They have fattened or gorged their hearts in the day of the slaughter. Not only did they defraud the workers, but they kept on doing it. The continual action shows that they did not care

at any point for the people they were hurting at all. They continued in this course of action and they never lifted a finger to help the workers. They lived in their luxurious homes and kept on worrying about self, number one, and that attitude may anger the Lord of Hosts more than the fact that they committed fraud against the poor workers. Remember how we have previously discussed how much the poor seem to matter to God? He provided for them within the Law of Moses that they would be taken care of and they have always been part of God's plan for restoration. The rich have ignored the people who are close to God's heart.

(5:6) Now James expands his indictment from just the injustice done to the workers in the field to the injustice done by the rich to the righteous person. He claims that they have condemned the righteous or passed judgment upon the righteous and even murdered the righteous. But at the same time, the righteous person has not acted in opposition to them. This picture is often seen of the righteous in the Bible, that they suffer under heavy labor and do not complain or move against their overlords in battle. That is the implication of the word for oppose here in this verse.

The picture James paints is of the utmost social injustice that he assures will be repaid in the eschaton. When the Judge comes and judges, the rich who have done these things will find themselves on the receiving end of their own medicine. And they will drink the dregs of God's wrath and judgment for the way they have lived on this earth in selfish and lavish luxury while maintaining and even cultivating an attitude of indifference and condemnation on the poor, their employees, and in the larger picture, the righteous.

The contrast of the righteous not retaliating matches scriptural examples of the chasm between the methods or wisdom of the righteous versus the wicked. Isaiah pointed out the inaction of the servant of the Lord, specifically Jesus at His crucifixion, how he was silent as a lamb to the slaughter. Jesus did not oppose the wicked men who hung Him on a tree for the sins of the world. The righteous throughout the Psalms seem to get a "bum deal" when they see how the wicked get away with murder, so to speak. And here, a common picture of the righteous not retaliating but waiting for the Lord to retaliate for them shows a biblical picture of retaliation. Wait for the Lord to avenge. This counsel is clear from Scripture also. In the final analysis, the rich are condemned for their attitudes and actions because they refused to live for others and only lived for themselves. It is a startling warning to those rich who live in such a way and a forceful turning of the tables upon the rich.

WHAT'S JAMES SAYING?

Wealth isn't everything. In fact, wealth gained with worldly wisdom is too costly. Once again, the prophetic voice of James refuses to be ignored as his vivid imagery implants the word of God's wisdom concerning wealth into our minds and hearts. Wealth wrongfully gained comes at the cost of the loss of innocence and righteousness in the heart of humanity. For the greater loss of character in the face of wicked wealth decisions and priorities, the rich must weep, wail, and lament at their standing or position before the Lord of Hosts in the eschaton.

The final tally or bottom line has the wealthy who gained much in this life woefully poor in the next. All of their wealth which cost them a great deal to amass has cost them more than they could have imagined: it has cost them their soul. They have given up the wealth they had inside of themselves for an outer wealth that has continued to depreciate in value so much that it was not worth what they have given away to obtain it.

They have given up good relations with their employees and even the wealth they have gained will testify against them before the Judge. It will speak of their indecent activities, of their

fraud, their condemnation and murder of the righteous. It will speak of the lack of inner treasure and wealth. It will speak of the corruption and erosion of their self. Although they lived lavishly, luxuriously, and for themselves. they will be without any comforts in the end and their self is just a shell, empty and alone. They must be warned that they will gain nothing in the end time bottom line and will only suffer hardships which they did not suffer in their lavish lifestyles.

WHAT'S IT MEAN TO ME?

This section may not hit home for you. After all, maybe no matter how wealthy you become, because we constantly compare ourselves with others, you would never label yourself a rich person. But look at the world statistics. If you eat one or two meals a day, you're a millionaire compared to the majority of the world! James' words should hit home even if you don't consider yourself rich.

We would love to take parts of the Bible that speak a principle to a specific group that doesn't match our criteria for ourselves and say, "That doesn't apply to me." Oh, but it always does. You see, we're all selfish. We just lack the financial backing to support our habit of selfishness and desire for luxury and laxity. If we had the money, and we were honest about it, we would live just like these rich people James is talking about. And now all the sudden that principle James is speaking of refers to us.

As James calls out the rich for their selfishness and materialism, he calls every human being out because we're all the same in our inner desires. We all have pride and we all seek our own wants. We all have a moral breaking point. We would all be okay with dealing someone else a bad hand to get ahead. So we all stand condemned with the rich, whose only difference from us is that they actually have the resources to do what James is claiming.

So if you're rich, pay attention to how you are gaining your wealth. Wealth can and should be used for the glory of God! Look at the method, the wisdom you're listening to. How do you operate with your wealth? Are you missing out on the best things in life such as relationship, friendship, family, and God's love? If not, then always monitor your wealth and use it for God's glory. You are blessed so that you can be a blessing to others. Don't let your wealth turn inward on you and cause the disease of materialism and pride and selfishness.

For the rest, when you are blessed with any amount of wealth, how you use it is important to God. We must be so careful to check ourselves for selfish motives, attitudes and actions. It is so easy to slip up in this area because we really do love ourselves more than anyone else. That's why God commands us to love our neighbor AS OURSELVES. We must all continue to lay up our treasures in heaven, as Jesus put it. Why settle for the material and the perishable? Here today and gone tomorrow. But those things that last forever are true treasure.

We are a conglomeration of material and immaterial parts. We have a body, which is material, and a soul, which is immaterial. Let's not get stuck on those things that only last a short time. Let's put our treasure in the eternal things, like the wellbeing of our soul, the wellbeing of others' souls, and the eternal qualities of love and faith. Let's store up treasure that stands not only the test of time, but lasts beyond the test of time.

Final Entry James 5:7-12

TRANSLATION

7 Therefore, be patient, brothers, until the coming of the Lord— Behold the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient for it, until it receives the early and latter rain. 8 You also be patient. Establish your hearts, because the coming of the Lord has come near. 9 Do not groan, brothers, against one another, so that you may not be judged— Behold, the Judge has been standing at the door! 10 Take the example, brothers, of the affliction and patience of the prophets, who spoke with the authority of the Lord. 11 Behold, we consider those who endured patiently to be blessed. You have heard of the patience of Job and you know the purpose of the Lord, that the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

12 But above all, my brothers, do not swear neither by the heavens nor by the earth nor by any other oath; instead, let your “Yes” be yes and your “No” no so that you may not fall under judgment.

INTRODUCTION

Almost everyone I talk to shows great interest in the coming of the Lord, what that means, when it will happen, and other such talks. It seems our world is enamored with talk of the apocalypse and the end of time. While these are interesting subjects to converse about, I have found that many people seem to have an apathetic approach to the Parousia, the coming of the Lord. This surprises me because of all of the times we are told in Scripture that the Lord is coming soon!

Many people have told me, “Well, we’ve been waiting for 2,000 years and we’ll probably wait a long time still.” But these same people don’t live life with an expectance of Christ’s return. That’s the saddest story in Christianity. In the early era of the Church, the Parousia spurred people on to live expectant lives, to wait with anticipation of that great event, the promised return of the Christ. They lived moral and loving lives amongst other Christians and they witnessed to the world because Jesus had so many times promised His soon return.

But when we begin to feel like Jesus won’t be coming back very soon, we begin to live a dull life. We begin to lower that expectation until we begin to think He isn’t coming back! Personally, I believe that if God was faithful throughout all of Scripture to His word throughout history, and He says He’s coming back soon, I believe that too. I know Christ is coming back soon and I want to be on the cutting edge, in the midst of the events that are about to happen. That’s part of what it means to live in perseverance and expectance, to long for the day of His return because this world is not my home.

Everyone loves to talk about the end, but very few are ready for it or even looking for it. But we’re not the first to suffer from this malady of becoming impatient and unprepared for the Lord’s return. Apparently, James’ church was having some of these same problems. Like any great pastor, James has in mind to remind his listeners that the parousia, the coming, must be patiently expected 24/7/365. We must never let down our guard or give up hope of the return of Christ. And while we’re waiting, as in many of the letters of the New Testament, James has some advice.

THE TEXT AND CONTEXT

For some who take the whole book of James as wisdom literature and maintain that it has no organizing center, this section seems to be thrown in there for good measure, willy-nilly if your will. There is no reason or motivation to throw in a section about dealing with what it's like to lose expectations of the parousia. They consider this a natural phenomenon in the New Testament as the expectant writers began to realize that they may not live to see the return of Christ. So they began to write the books of the New Testament as a historical testimony before all of the first generation of believers had passed on.

This probably has a bit of truth to it, but I see here a centering locus for the whole book of James in which this section fits perfectly as James begins to close out his book of wisdom based on the subject of trials. We have spoken of many different kinds of trials in this book up to now, and this section is no different. We have the trial of being double minded, the trial of wealth, the trial of temptations, the trial of anger, the trial of how to treat wealthy visitors, the trial of the lack of an active faith, the trials that controlling the tongue bring, the trial of following earthly wisdom instead of heavenly wisdom, and so on. The book is centered on everyday wisdom to effectively pass the test of trials in your life.

This section is no different. If I were to title this trial, it would be the trial of learning patience in the last days. James has just finished warning the rich of their wisdom, their method, concerning ill-gained wealth and the response of the Judge on the last day, the day of judgment. After mentioning the end of time, now James has been sparked into dealing with another issue in his community, the patience of the believer in the face of a promise that is yet to be fulfilled. This is a common symptom of living between the ages of Christ's promises from the cross to the time of culmination at the parousia, the second coming. And James sees a dangerous trend that needs bucked, the inability of his congregation to wait patiently for the coming of the Lord and to live expectant lives in the meantime.

(5:7) The word "therefore" predicates upon the previous section. It connects the thought of the eschaton, the last day of judgment, with the parousia, the coming of the Lord. Because James was chiding those who gained wealth at the cost of the righteous, he is connecting the day of judgment with the coming of the Lord. The Lord is seen as the Judge who will repay the wicked wealthy. So the righteous may be impatient for that judgment to be cast onto the wealthy now. James addresses that attitude of impatience in this section after he warns these wicked wealthy people about their coming demise.

James then offers up a command to be patient to his congregation. We see the vocative of address, "Brothers." He is calling them to a patience, a persistence and perseverance in these last days. No one in the early church operated outside of the idea postulated in Acts 2:17 by Peter that the era of the last days spoken of by the prophets had already begun. The word patient expresses with it an endurance, a perseverance. That is why I label the waiting that Christians do between the ages as a trial. We long for the Lord's return, for the culmination of all things, but we must wait in patience for God's time.

This patient waiting is not passive. We are not sitting on a porch in the heat of the day watching cars pass by and sipping lemonade. It is nothing like that! This is an active waiting. We are spreading the gospel as we wait. We are living morally exceptional lives as we wait. We are living by faith and through love as we wait for the blessed hope to become reality. James had talked about this in 2:14-26 as he described a faith that moved and breathed and was not just some belief system.

Our patience has a timestamp on it. We must only persevere and endure trial until the parousia, the coming of the Lord. It is at the coming of the Lord that our patience will be rewarded. When Christ returns, the long wait will be over and the hope will be realized! It is unclear whether James was preaching about patience in the last days because the congregation had become lethargic in its waiting for the parousia, or if it had neglected the possibility of the parousia, or if they simply were not living in expectance and persistence of the parousia. For whatever reason, James finds it necessary to remind them to wait for it. Perhaps, based on the context of the previous section, there was an immense class issue between the rich and the poor in James' congregation and James must deal with the cries of the poor concerning the coming of the Lord.

James then takes another image into consideration when he speaks of waiting and the timing of the Lord. He tells them about how the farmer waits for the rain to come so that his crop will properly grow and be ready for the harvest. The farmer's very livelihood is bound up in the rain coming, in waiting for the lands with his crops to drink in the life giving rains. It is commonly known that Jerusalem usually had two rains, one early and then another later that helped the crops along in their growth toward harvest. James presents these rains as guaranteed to come, but the farmer waits for them actively.

The farmer does not sit around and do nothing until the rains come. Instead, he actively waits in patience for those rains, taking care of the weeding of the crops and everything else he must do to prepare for the harvest. But the rains will come as surely as the Lord will come. We simply have to actively wait for that time to arrive.

(5:8) Now after laying the foundation of the illustration, James moves to the point, that the congregation must also wait patiently. This is the second time he gives the command to the congregation to be patient. They must really have wanted the parousia to arrive because of their great suffering. He then commands them to establish their hearts. This is an exhortation to moral excellence.

The word "establish" is used here to refer to an active strengthening or fortifying of the heart, the course of life and the inner person. James is commanding them to be morally prepared in the way they live their lives for the parousia. The coming of the Lord is many times intricately connected to the way Christians live in these last days throughout the New Testament. It seems a foundational tenet of the teaching of the parousia to exhort people in light of the Lord's soon return, to live the morally excellent life of the righteous person. So here, James teaches the same, that the believer can be established in the coming of the Lord on that day by living every day until then in the power of God's law and Spirit.

The reason for this active pursuing of the moral life in Christ is His return. The causal relationship is initiated here by the Greek conjunction *hoti*. Another interesting fact about the early church's teaching on the parousia is that they use that theologically loaded verbal tense, the perfect, to describe its arriving. Jesus said in the gospels that the kingdom of God "has arrived" or "has come near." This perfect means that it has happened already and continues to have results in the present.

James uses the same perfect to describe the parousia because Christ has already come and will come again. Because He came the first time, in the incarnation, we know that He will come again. The event of the Lord's coming draws close to human history. The parousia is guaranteed through the most recent events in salvation history, that of Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection, and the bestowing of the Holy Spirit upon believers at Pentecost. Because of all

these things, the imminence of the Lord's return, the second coming, has come very near to all of us and will come upon us at any moment.

(5:9) After twice commanding them to be patient, James issues a negative command to not groan against one another. This may go back to the bickering and backbiting amongst brothers in the congregation in chapter 4. It could be related to the previous section as well. But this is a stronger negation in Greek, which shows the emphasis, the strength of the command. Perhaps the strength of the command must meet the strength of the groaning and lack of patience in his congregation. James' reason for issuing such a forceful command lies in the purpose of keeping them from being judged. Once again the strength of the same negation shows the dire circumstances of the congregation. They are on the edge, close to beginning to groan against one another, and their judgment is not far behind.

James as pastor seeks to squelch that attitude before it becomes a full-blown and grown problem that will gain momentum and destroy the community. James reminds them with the word "Behold," as we have seen so often in this last chapter, that the Judge, the Lord Himself, is standing at the door. They will soon be judged by the Judge if their attitude does not soon change. I don't believe that James meant this as a statement that would scare them into not groaning. I think with his pastoral heart, James sought to encourage them to not go so close to the edge, to not even begin the actions that lead to being judged as a believing community to be unlike the Lord they mirror.

(5:10) Two examples of how to be patient from the halls of the past come to James' mind. The first example of patience in the face of affliction or suffering comes from the general group of the prophets. As you read through Scripture, you see the afflictions of which James speaks. Jeremiah was thrown into a pit, Hosea married a prostitute. Elijah and Elisha constantly suffered the anger and malice of the early kings of Israel, to name a few. But these prophets stood the test. They were established in heart, which makes them great examples.

These men spoke the words of God, in the name of the Lord. This phrase in the name of the Lord could also be translated "with God's authority." These prophets were chosen by God to be His mouthpiece to Israel and to the world in their time. And because they were chosen to serve, they also suffered afflictions and had to wait for what they prophesied, the Day of the Lord. Just as these people had to wait patiently, so should these members of the community learn from their example and become living examples themselves until the Lord's return.

(5:11) Another example James provides is Job. First, though, he mentions that the congregation of righteous believers considers those from the past who have endured patiently the afflictions of this life as blessed. That word for blessed has been used several times by James and has the idea of being happy or satisfied. Happy is not something normally associated with patience or suffering, but here James uses that word to describe those who have remained persistent in the face of affliction. Possibly he has the idea of 1:12 that they have passed the test and that is why they are blessed.

James recalls the entire narrative of Job as he states the second example of patience in suffering. You remember that Job was a man who lost everything, had a knock-down, drag-out philosophical debate with God, lost the debate, was put in his place as a human, and then blessed because of his righteousness. Job had it out with God because as a human in the midst of trial, he could not understand God's purpose in allowing him to go through suffering for seemingly no reason at all.

You will remember that only the reader is informed in the first chapter of Job that Satan was at work and God was displaying Job as one of His faithful servants. Job maintained his patience and trust in the Lord and that is why James refers to him here. We may not always know the reasons or purposes of God when we face trials in our lives, but we need to be patient like Job. We learn at the end that God was merciful to Job because he had such a limited view of what was going on in his life. God, in great compassion, returned to Job twice what he had in the first place. But God's purposes were made known to Job in the end. And that's what we're talking about here: the end.

(5:12) According to almost every commentator, this verse does not fit here. Many cite the opening "But above all" as either a beginning to the conclusion of the letter or a reference to previous material in the letter. Not only is the language a bit of a shock to the listener or reader, but the subject matter seems to come out of nowhere. Oaths? Why talk about oaths right after talking about having patience for the Lord's coming?

Some scholars have attempted to make a connection with the immediate context, referring to the Lord's coming and judgment, and then oaths as a way of backing up the truth. These connections are not as strong to me. I believe a better connection would be with one of James' main subjects: tongue trials. The actions of the tongue from Chapter 3 on have been condemned by James from backbiting and fight speech in chapter 4, presuming upon tomorrow with what we say, the sin of grumbling against one another in light of the parousia in the previous section, and here oaths being spoken.

This may be the best connection. If that is so, then this verse fits in best with this section, as I have placed it with 5:7-11 here. I would disagree with commentators that "But above all" must mean the closing of the letter. When Paul closes his letters, he most commonly uses the word "Finally." This is not about a stylistic way to close the letter out. It is about the importance of the wisdom that comes after the saying. It is a marker to denote the emphasis on the importance of the life principle of not using oaths as Christians. It does not necessarily bear upon the closing of the letter. It is more in connection with the theme of speech.

This phrase is followed once again by that vocative of address "my brothers." James has been using this formula many times throughout his letter. That is one of the reasons I believe that this letter could be considered a sermon or collection of sermons to the congregation in Jerusalem. Possibly all of these vocative statements are meant to grab the attention of the listeners.

After this attention-grabbing vocative, James commands them to not swear by oaths. This negation in Greek is the second strongest of three Greek negatives.

Oath swearing was a common, probably all too common, practice in the ancient world. An oath was designed to guarantee the truthful testimony of a witness in court. But it was used on the streets as well in common conversation. The problem was that it was so overused that the oath became instead of a guarantee of truth, an almost certain indicator that someone was lying! People would swear by whatever was sacred: the heavens, the earth, a god, whatever. The Old Testament law contains precepts for oath-taking, sometimes calling for an oath to be taken. There are so many warnings, like the ninth commandment, concerning the taking of oaths because it was a serious and sacred practice. But many of those warnings went unheeded and it became all too common.

So here James throws out the whole thing. He says to not even take an oath because they were used by shift characters nowadays. Don't bother with guaranteeing that what you say is true. Just say it and let your character stand behind it, not some appeal to whatever is sacred. We

see this same sage advice for the Christian community from Jesus as well in Matthew 5:37. In fact, the two sayings are so closely related that it may be a great case for the accuracy of Jesus' saying between two different New Testament authors.

Oaths were taken, as I have said, with the collateral of anything sacred. Here, James mentions the common types of oaths taken, such as oaths by heaven or by heavenly bodies. I would probably say that this would include God or gods, supernatural phenomenon, and celestial bodies. Next, swearing by the earth could probably refer to anything on the earth, like swearing by other well-reputable people, basing your statement on their character. The third possibility is to swear by another oath. Although all of this may sound strange to you, it was a way of, in a sense, loaning someone's truthful character onto one's own statement of truth. It was a way of saying, "You don't believe me that this is true, well God is truthful and He would back me up on this." So they would swear by God, that is to take on His truthfulness to confirm the statement.

Now I don't believe that James is talking about court cases here. I believe that he is addressing something that almost flies under the radar, a habit, if you will. We do the same today. Except we label it as taking God's name in vain, like when you stub your toe and yell out an explicative or some kind of curse in surprise. That's sort of how this oath taking was done in the ancient world. The two are somewhat similar. They are not exactly alike because oath taking is concerned with using someone else's credibility while taking God's name in vain essentially curses God's name and violates His authority and character. Oath-taking was essentially plagiarizing someone else's good character.

And that's the central reason why James says to just get rid of the practice of taking oaths. It's a character issue. Christians don't need to take oaths. We are the children of God. We need not borrow someone else's character because we are being made into the likeness of Jesus, who has the greatest character qualities out there. We need to stop fibbing and lying about the truth. When you tell the truth, people will know it. We need to be reputable because Jesus is reputable. We need to stop using oaths because we shouldn't be lying or even stretching the truth in the first place.

Oaths are a crutch that keeps us from fully sacrificing our full person to God for His changing grace to make us into the person He already sees that we are. So when you say "Yes" about something, people need to know and believe that yes is the truthful answer. When you say "No," that's the actual response you have. This is really about being the genuine article, enacting the character of Christ in you. Don't use oaths because you're above backing up the truth with someone else's character. You are being made into the likeness of Christ. You don't need crutches. So live in heavenly wisdom by not even using oaths.

WHAT'S JAMES SAYING?

After a blistering warning to the wicked wealthy, James turns his attention to the issue of the parousia, the coming of the Lord. He orders patience in the time between the ages, in these last days. This patience must actively pursue righteous living until the eschaton, the last day of God's judgment comes. To be patient is to endure and persist in faith until the day of Christ's return. We must not lose heart and groan against our own brothers and sisters. We must be encouraged and spend our energy on becoming more like Christ so we are ready on the day of His return.

Christians would do well to continue to grow into the likeness of Christ until the day He returns. The establishment of the heart is a moral excellence learned from Christ and integrated into the mind, heart, and hands of every child of God. Examples of this steadfastness in the midst

of the trial of waiting for the Lord's return when he will judge righteously can be found in all the prophets and in Job's faithfulness to God and perseverance. Those who endure patiently are blessed!

Finally, James states a most important principle that cannot be exaggerated. Because we live in expectance, practicing a moral excellence because of our growth into the people God already sees us as, into the reputable character of Christ, we must not use oaths. Oaths steal someone else's character and speak volumes about our inability to be truthful and honest. Because we are growing into that kind of character, we need to lay aside the hindrance of oaths because they keep us from relying on the character God is placing inside of us as His children. So when we speak, our word should always be the truth, the reality. We have little need for swearing an oath because we are growing into the awesome character of Christ. All of these speech actions, like groaning against one another and swearing by oaths are just more problems our tongue provides for us. It's time to choose the path of heavenly wisdom in our daily lives, conversations, and thoughts.

WHAT'S IT MEAN TO ME?

One of the toughest trials we face as Christians is living between the ages of Christ's crucifixion, where the New Covenant began, and the eschaton, where the covenant will be culminated and finalized and eternity for us begins. Think of it. We are new creatures in an old world. We are the righteous living among the wicked. We are not unaffected by the curse, by the sin in this world. But we are simultaneously blessed beyond measure with a bright future and the promise of things that have begun to come to pass but still have not been completely fulfilled.

Some get completely healed, some experience partial healing, and some don't experience healing. Some experience more fullness in God than others as we all grow into the fullness of God. It is not a matter of points, but a matter of process. There are specific events and points along the process. But the whole thing that has been promised is not yet a reality. So it is difficult to pin down sometimes the exact reasons why things may or may not happen as we think they should. Even creation is still groaning for the day of fulfillment. Everything affected by the curse has longed for that day and lives in between the promise and the fulfillment. It's a hard place to be in.

And that's where James' congregation is in this passage. They are groaning even against one another because of this uncomfortable position. They so eagerly long for Christ's return that they become discouraged and even mean-spirited because it has not arrived yet. But James gives to us who live in this situation a timeless principle: the principle of patience. There is a time coming when the Lord returns and avenges the evil done to His children, but not quite yet. We must be patient so that all of history dances to the music of God's will.

Don't groan against others. Sure this is a tough spot, but we're all in this together. Even Jesus didn't know the return date when He was asked, but I know He's ready to come back for us because He loves us so much. In the meantime, let's work on becoming what God has made us to be. Let's continue to establish our own hearts, continue to grow into that beautiful masterpiece God has been painting. May the canvas of your heart experience the heavenly brush strokes of completeness and wholeness.

Let's be careful how we treat everyone else around us. We don't want to be judged as the world when the Judge returns. We want to be different, so different that it pleases the Lord at His arrival. He is coming soon! It is one of the most oft repeated promises for us to put our hope and then our faith into. I want to be ready for Him. I want to look even just a little like Him when He

comes for me. Like the prophets and like Job, I want God to say to Satan, “Have you met my servant, (Your name here). There is none like this one in all the earth.”

Even in our lives when it comes to oaths and to the way we speak, we must be careful to always be advancing our character growth. We are a truthful people. That’s part of the definition of your character and mine because we’re connected to Jesus. We don’t need oaths. They do us no good. If we speak the truth, there is no need to back it up. But first we have to accept the character God’s making us out to be. Sometimes we’re a little fuzzy on the details of our new skin, but when we hold true to who we are, to who we will be, there’s no use for oaths. Why would we want to take on someone else’s character. The Lord of the universe is teaching us to be just like Him. Let’s live that way. Let’s cast aside the worldly wisdom of using someone else’s credentials. Let’s use our own because we now “come from good stock.” Take the steps to become more truthful in everything you say and there will be no need for oaths. That’s the kind of place God’s taking that uncontrollable tongue we harbor. He’s redeeming even our speech. He truly works from the inside out.

Power Play Prayer *James 5:13-20*

TRANSLATION

13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. 14 Is anyone sick among you? He must summon the elders of the assembly and they must pray for him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will deliver the sick and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore, confess to one another sins and pray for one another, that you might be healed. Very powerful is the entreaty of the righteous person while it is working. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it not rain, and it did not rain upon the earth for three years and six months. 18 Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain and the earth produced its fruit.

19 My brothers, if anyone among you strays from the truth and someone turns him back, 20 know that the one who turns a sinful person from wandering on the road saves his soul from death and covers over a multitude of sins.

INTRODUCTION

In an age where we wait for the Lord's return, many people are looking for the power of God to be manifested in the world today and among us. Do they expect too much? Sometimes when we pray, we do not see the results that seem to have been taken for granted by James and his church. While we cannot pinpoint the reason for the weakness in prayer, I might say that we don't pray as often or for long enough. It is clear that prayer is an excellent thermometer of the passion in our relationship with God.

In James' time, where persecutions abound, the final point of contact for this extraordinary preacher, the point most people remember in a sermon, brings to light the most important and powerful tool in the box of every Christian facing the various trials of life between Christ's resurrection and return, that of prayer. But how do we make it the most effective, the most adequate, the kind of prayer that gets results? To this question about prayer in the end times we now turn.

THE TEXT AND CONTEXT

James has just finished speaking to those who endure suffering in these end days. Those who seek the Lord's return have been grumbling against one another, becoming impatient for Jesus to come back in the Parousia. James' word as their pastor is to do exactly the opposite, to endure suffering in patience, to establish their hearts and allow their circumstances to empower their character. Just as he has mentioned the prophets and Job as examples of his principle of patience, he will provide an Old Testament example of powerful prayer in this section.

The time has come to end the letter, so James will end with the paramount tool for end times living. James highlights the ministry of prayer and reconciliation, the ministry that has the ability to turn things around in life, to turn back the wayward sinner, to heal the sick, to forgive the sins of others, and to produce cohesion and confession among the saints. This effective weapon is the most useful and available tool that, when coupled with faith, brings to the Christian an ultimate power play on the most destructive enemies of affliction, sin, sickness, and backsliding.

(5:13) James opens with some rhetorical questions seeking the current situation of members of his congregation. For each instance, James has sage advice once again. To those who suffer, James prescribes prayer. God knows what you're going through. Talk to him and seek out His help. Trials and afflictions, as we have already seen, can be agents to draw us closer in trust to God, to give our faith a stretch and workout.

But not everyone in the congregation is suffering. Some are cheerful. Where some suffer afflictions and setbacks, others have blossomed in this time of affliction and persecution. I wonder how much of our outcome in the end times, whether we suffer persecution and affliction more often or we are cheerful more often have a direct correlation to our time and effort in prayer. When we seek God's face, we put our eyes on God and see from His perspective, not from our own. Situations begin to pale in comparison to His glory. That's why those who are cheerful should sing praise songs and rejoice in His greatness.

(5:14) And then there is the one who is sick, or physically weak, representing those who have illnesses and sicknesses throughout the congregation. James issues a command to that person who is ill. He must summon the elders. Although people think that when they get sick, it is all on someone else to do something about it, James here tells them to seek out those who are righteous, those who are respected in prayer, who are effective. James calls on them to call on the leadership of the church for prayer.

The elders have the job of praying for the sick person and anointing him with oil. The means of anointing a sick person with oil, a symbol of the Holy Spirit, speaks of the power of prayer to see healing come to pass. These are absolute duties of the elders. They must do this when called upon. So for them to pray and anoint, they must be righteous people, people of prayer and power that comes from a close relationship with God. Intimacy with God becomes a necessity when you are in a leadership role. It is the means of operation, the way God will be able to work through you. Leaders without a vibrant prayer life suffer a dull and dreary ministry.

The name of the Lord signals us to the authority of God over the sickness or whatever is being prayed for. We saw earlier in 5:10 that the prophets spoke in the name of the Lord, that is, having the authority of God behind their speech, as His own speech. They were His mouthpiece to the world. Now here, we see that same authority invoked through prayer and the means of anointing with oil. It cannot be stressed enough that leaders and those who pray for others, those in intercessory roles, must have the relationship with God in order to pray and anoint in his authority. It is no small task which elders of a community perform.

(5:15) James expects prayer to be the final stop-gap, the final answer to all of the problems his community faces from sin to sickness to suffering. There's no question that the book of Acts records extreme circumstances of the church which were answered by fervent and penetrating prayer of the saints. The early church operated in the power of prayer without the question of whether or not it would be answered.

In case there were ineffective prayers coming from leaders and prayer warriors in the community, James has the reason why and the cure for such ineffective prayers. For your prayers to work powerfully in a person's life, you must have faith. Faith is the active ingredient in powerful prayer. Without faith, nothing will happen. We have seen this powerful message from others in the New Testament as well. Jesus told us that we must have faith in Him numerous times. In fact, when there were people around him that did not have faith that He could do miracles, they were kicked out of the house!

Faith is the common denominator of all acts and moves of God throughout history. James guarantees with his statement that when we pray in faith, expecting God to hear and answer our prayers, we can be sure that whatever we ask will be granted within His will. When we ask unbelievers to pray the prayer of salvation, what do we expect? Do we expect God to say no? Of course not. But how do we know that He did the work of salvation in their life? Because God answers the prayer of faith. When someone steps out into trust in God for their soul, God willingly answers that faith-filled prayer. Faith pleases God in our prayers. Without faith, James has already said, do not seek God's wisdom when you pray (1:5-8)!

Faithless prayers are not worth the words spoken. Why do we turn to God in prayer if we do not believe He can do what we ask? The very nature of praying to God demands faith on our part. We must hear the voice of God in our prayers and have a close relationship with Him. That is what encourages and strengthens our faith. Once we have faith, when we pray to God, He will hear and answer because He knows us and He wants to do His will in our lives and the lives of others.

The word for save or deliver here is one of the most holistic words in the New Testament. It is the word used for saving a person's soul, for deliverance from evil spirits, for healing from sickness. This is what Jesus came to do, to bring deliverance to the captives, from Isaiah 61, which He read in Luke 4:18-19. So here its multipurpose use is called upon by James for the sick or weak brother. Theologically, the verb "to save" brings us to a more holistic understanding of God's complete work in a person's life.

God does not just save an imperishable soul. His power extends to the healing of the body, which was also provided for in the atonement. His power extends to the casting out of the demons in the person's spirit. God saves wholly and completely, every possible thing that ain't right in you when you come to Jesus is fixed and dealt with. God's salvation is complete and effective. So when we pray, we ask God to continue His saving work, to deliver, to heal, to save, all of these things God does for us when we ask!

So don't let it surprise you that James brings up sin in our lives when we're asking for prayer for our sickness. To the first-century Jew and Christian, a holistic view of salvation was taken. So if you weren't completely well in any way, body, soul, spirit, or whatever, they would ask for all of it to be taken care of in prayer. They sought a complete work when there was any problem.

This goes against the pop-culture of praying specifically in our day. It is important to pray for a person's specific needs. But why do you think we pray in tongues? We want God's Spirit to pray in intercession for the things we know and don't know as we pray to God. Since when do we compartmentalize what's happening with our body as opposed to what's happening with our spirit? They're all tied together! We are a whole being, not something made of parts.

The parts are interconnected and so our prayer needs to address the whole of a person's life. There's nothing wrong with specific prayers. But when we pray for others and we just ask God to do what He does best, God does a complete work. We need to understand that God does not just fix our booboos. He's not in our life to fix what we think needs fixing. He's in our life to fix us the way we need to be fixed, which we may not be aware of. God knows us well enough to fix everything in us. We need not worry if we miss something specific in our prayers. God knows what He's doing in us.

James is expectant that when the ingredient of faith is present in the prayer, God will raise up the sick. There is no questioning why some are healed and others are not. James simply expects God to heal. That's what God does! Not only does God heal the sick, but He forgives

sins. We saw the combination of these two, being sick and needing forgiveness in the gospels as well. Remember the paralytic man on the mat (Luke 5:17-26; Mark 2:1-12)? Jesus viewed both healing and salvation in the same light. When a man came to Him for healing, He forgave the guy's sins! He was making an object lesson that God and His Son have the authority to do both. And God will do both in each of our lives every day if only we'd ask Him.

(5:16) The word therefore in this verse ties all that we've been discussing together in one swift statement. James is dealing with healing in his church, and the subject of sins has been tied to that healing. So now, he will issue a pastoral call for his people when it comes to both sin and sickness. He commands them to confess their sins to one another and to pray for one another.

Many people are uneasy about confession of sins to others. For some, confession is hard because there must be a level of trust built up between believers, so that the confessor is not judged by the person to whom he or she confesses. Backstabbing, blackmail, and gossip have no place in the Church. The Church is not a place to tear down, but a place to build up. God did not create the Church for beating people up. It is a hospital, not a tabloid.

There must be a level of trust between people when confession occurs. We must remember as others confess to us and as we confess to others that we were all under the same death penalty because we ALL fell short at some point in our lives. We must not judge because we are no better. We all sin. We all fall. But the beauty of confession is that we can learn that we are not alone in our struggles, that we can support one another and continue to experience grace.

Jesus forgave each of us. Why would we hold another person's sins against them or expose them? What if Jesus did that to you? We must learn how to love one another in grace and mercy. This is the prescription of the Bible, that the Church is a safe place for confession of sins and for healing to take place in our lives. If people cannot experience this grace in the Church, where would they go?

Plus, there is a guarantee that those who confess their sins will be forgiven by God, and also by us. Forgiveness is the heart of unconditional love. God is teaching us that kind of love by forgiving us, so we must forgive others in the same way. Unconditional love is like a disease in that it is communicable. So pass it on. Healing is not always just physical. There are emotional and spiritual scars that take place as well. God wants to heal everything.

James issues another facet of effective prayer in this verse. Righteousness is an absolute necessity for prayer to do its powerful work in a person. We saw earlier that faith is the active ingredient in prayer, but the prayer that is made must be made by a righteous person. Righteousness speaks of our moral character, which is actually given to us by God. We must be people of moral uprightness for our prayers to be effective. Without faith in the foreground and righteousness in the background of our lives, we will not see God move and answer our prayers.

This verse could be translated two different ways. The first possibility is "The effective prayer of a righteous person has great power" so that the participle modifies the righteous person. The other possibility is how I have translated it. "Very powerful is the prayer of the righteous person while it is working." Here the participle modifies prayer instead of the righteous person. The difference does not carry much importance, for James' point is well made. Righteousness plus power from faith equals effectiveness and results in prayer. In my translation, the prayer has power as it works in the person. In the other translation, the righteous person exerts power as he or she prays. Either ways, righteousness and faith go hand in hand to produce powerful prayer in the life of the believer both for others and for the believer.

(5:17) If you don't believe James about righteousness and faith being wedded together for powerful prayer that produces results, then look at the example of Elijah from 1 Kings 17-18. There is no question that Elijah was a man of faith and righteousness. In a land that had turned to Baal from the king's house down to the lowly, Elijah stood up to the idolaters even on his own and took on the 400 prophets of Baal. He is the one who prayed for it to stop raining, and it did. Why? James contends that he maintained faith and righteousness, and his prayers produced results that no one could deny.

Now James' point is that Elijah was just like you and me. He was a man used by God. His prayers were effective not because of him, but because of his faith and righteousness. In verse 17 here we have a Hebrew idiom for "prayed fervently" where the participle follows the head verb. This happens often so that the literal translation would say, "He prayed praying." We see this throughout the Old Testament. Such a stylistic notation brings evidence that this was indeed written by a Jewish author, which serves as confirmation that James wrote this document.

(5:18) Notice that Elijah prayed within the will of God. God wanted this drought to occur so that the people would see His provision after Mount Carmel. So when Elijah prayed, he represents the righteousness and faith that James is talking about. When Elijah prayed again, God opened up the heavens and rain poured out upon the earth.

Because of his prayers, the Israelites learned that God is the true God. Baal was the weather God, but it was only when this true man of faith and righteousness, this prophet of the living God prayed, that the weather changed. Elijah's prayer was God's power play to win the hearts of the wayward Israelites. If you want to see extraordinary things in your prayer life, have faith in God as you pray and live the spotless life of a righteous man or woman of God.

(5:19) Now we turn to the ultimate matter of importance to James in this last part of the epistle. A trained eye will notice the lack of a finishing greeting to anyone, as in Paul's epistles. This letter is meant to end with this specific matter, which is closest to James' pastoral heart. He turns to the matter of those who become wayward in their journey toward complete salvation from God. He turns to the backslider, the brother who loses his way on the path.

The mention of those who are sick or have committed sins in verse 15 has not left James' mind as he presents the "No man left behind" campaign in which every believer should be involved. The vocative "My brothers" for the last time in this epistle calls to attention the staunch importance of this final statement with which James leaves his listeners. This third-class conditional statement in Greek shows that James does not want there to be anyone who wanders from the truth. But if that were to happen, for which he leaves the possibility open, and someone is there to help them come back to the truth, that person is a hero.

This is almost like issuing a Wanted poster for those who are backsliding, those who are beginning to waiver in their faith. James is calling all of the people in the church to grow with one another, to become mature and help others become mature in their walk with God. When they fall short, the people there to help them through these times, to give them encouragement, reproof, guidance, or whatever else they need has the privilege of taking part in their repentance, their return to the truth, to the gospel.

Make no mistake. Living in community is the only way to grow in Christianity. That's why we have church. We need each other to help us maintain our walk with the Lord. This is not judging one another. When a brother's in sin, every Christian has an obligation to reach out to that person and present to them the truth. This does not mean you attack them either physically or socially or mentally, but that your goal is their return to the faith. We are not in this to harm

the other person. We are in this to leave no one behind. We are not in this for ourselves and our own reputation, but for that person who has fallen on the path to eternal life. We are there to help them return to the truth of the gospel. This must be done tactfully with love and grace. Any other way is unbiblical and unchristian.

(5:20) Those who are committed to this ministry within the body of Christ, the ministry of restoration and reconciliation, have a key role to play in the discipleship of every believer. This is why it is so imperative that the church meet together in fellowship. Christianity must be lived in community. Its precepts and demands, its encouragement and exhortation are invalid without believers and unbelievers to help each believer grow into the faith of Christ. The ethical requirements of Christianity require interaction with other human beings.

But this treasured ministry of restoration brings an importance to the saving of a person's soul and the healing of a person's body. The ministry of healing and restoration, of ministering to backsliders and those who waver in their faith strengthens the whole community by making its weaker parts stronger. God desires all to be saved. Where would we be without people who are mature in the faith and wish to help others in their faith.

No one walks the road alone. We are all in this together. So those who do this ministry, which is taxing upon the minister, a great stress to bring others into reproof, correction, and exhortation, must know that the rewards far outweigh the stresses. Nothing is more important to the Father than seeing a wayward son return under His roof.

Salvation here is from death, that is total and eternal separation from God's presence, and also provides a covering over the multitude of sins. We can mess up a lot in this life, but think of all the sins that Christ covered while on the cross just in your life personally. Those who minister in this capacity emulate and illustrate Christ to the wayward person because the results of such ministry lead people back to God and to faith. No greater task lies before us than the ministry of restoration for those who have lost their way. Leave no person behind in the journey toward the Son.

WHAT'S JAMES SAYING?

To finish out this great epistle on the wisdom of God over the earthly wisdom that may even run rampant in the Church, James settles on the most powerful tool in these last days. Prayer is the ultimate and only means of giving God's power to Christians. If you want the power of God to minister to the sick, the hurting, the lost, the weak, then you must live a life focused and centered on prayer.

But to be effective in this absolute necessity, to exert the power that prayer poises each believer for, a life of righteousness must always be in effect and each prayer must be done with the greatest amount of faith. There's no sense in praying to God if we don't believe He will not answer the prayer. Without righteousness as our background, we open ourselves up to ineffective prayer. Righteous living flows out of a close and intimate relationship with God, and prayer is just a product of our desire to draw near to God.

Not only these are important, but the ministry of restoration for those who may have wavered in their faith is at the heart of this wise pastor. James seeks to see the backslider, the wayward sons and daughters of the King return to the truth and walk in that truth. The people on the front lines who put their own resources into making this repentance and restoration occur in the church empower the whole body of Christ because they lead people to Christ by example and even provide a covering for the wayward so that they might experience the grace of God in their lives again.

WHAT'S IT MEAN TO ME?

Every believer must have an active and vivid prayer life. Without prayer, you have no power to walk out your own life, let alone assist others in coming to the faith. Prayer is the link that we have with God. Without prayer, we cannot see the sick healed, the weak restored, the sinner forgiven. These are the very ministries of God to everyone. We must be “prayed up” to minister to others.

When you're sick, let someone know. Call on the elders of the church, the pastor, the board, the people of God. Let them anoint you with oil and pray over you. The amount of faith and righteousness needed to make the prayer work for your healing will astound you. You need to be connected to a community of believers so that you can receive ministry and also minister to others. We need community to grow correctly in Christ.

As a Christian, part of your responsibility is to be involved in confession. John tells us that if a believer says he does not sin, that the truth of God is not in him. We all fail and fall and sin. We need one another to walk the path together. You don't have to go it alone. You have brothers and sisters who want to help you and need your help.

We count on the experiences of the entire body to fully minister to one another. Confess your sins to others, and don't you dare judge or gossip about people who trust you enough to be genuine, authentic, open, and honest about their own walk with God. Minister to them instead of continuing to hurt them. They came to you for healing, so be Jesus with skin on to them. You are an ambassador of Christ. Help your brothers and sisters in the path as they grow, and you will find that when you need ministered to, you will receive that ministry. I challenge you to participate in the duties and joys of being a Christian living in a community of believers. Work in the grace and mercy of our God with those around you.

Finally, the power of prayer and intercession cannot be overstated. There are people who will struggle in the faith. You know that, because somewhere along the way, you struggled as well. These people need everyone in the community to love on them and present the truth to them, to challenge them to repent and return to the truth. They do not need someone bashing them for their sins and throwing up their dirty laundry in their face. They need love and grace and mercy. They need a picture of Christ to remind them of the Lord they fell in love with before. May you go and minister in the faith and righteousness, the love and grace of our God and King. May God use you in these ministries on the front lines of the Kingdom!

Conclusion

What a powerful and needed word for our day and age! To think, Pastor James wrote this in the first century, but it is still so applicable in our own century. That is the beauty and power of Scripture, always a word from the Lord in due season. As we look back on the lessons in heavenly wisdom we have learned from the Pastor of the first century Jerusalem church, we have learned practically how to be Kingdom believers in a dark world.

Now wisdom is not meant to be read once and studied once. You will find that if you go back through James again, there will be so many more words from the Lord for your everyday situations. Life is meant to be lived in the wisdom of God. And all we have to do to receive wisdom from God is open His Word. I hope that you gained practical guidance for your life and for your actions from this epistle.

May God bless the implanted Word which He has placed inside of us through this study. I pray for you that God will remind you of these lessons in daily wisdom and encourage you to live through heavenly wisdom instead of earthly wisdom. As we all face the trials of the last days, may we find in the pages of this book encouragement and wisdom to live the best way possible in an age that lacks heavenly wisdom. May God bless you as you walk wisely before Him and before others!

Appendix A

Section Summaries

- **James 1:2-8** – Trials are a fact of life. When we face trials, we can rejoice not because we love trouble but because we know that God’s going to use our trials to make us more like Him. The process started with a trial in life ends in endurance and maturity. The words for perfect and complete mean that all the parts are there and we are mature, a finished project. Many times in trials, we need wisdom to do what God wants of us, to do His will. But all we have to do is ask, and God will give us wisdom to know His will. Don’t doubt God when asking for things, because this sends the message that we don’t believe He can really do what we need. Have one single mind in your prayers.
- **James 1:9-11** – James turns the tables on the idea that rich people are God’s chosen and poor people are not important. In James’ church, it is the reverse. Rich people are fine, but the poor people are the ones that God has been helping out. God has a special place in His heart for those who are lowly and poor, those marginalized and rejected by the world and society. He will take care of them from the time of the Old Testament Law to now. And in the Christian church, they are one of the main missions. Knowing Christ sets the rich and the poor on the same playing field, because both receive a gift of salvation from God.
- **James 1:12-18** – The same word for trials comes up again, except in the context of temptation. There were probably people in James’ church blaming God for their falling into sin through temptations. They suggested that God made the temptations. But James puts the full responsibility for temptation on their shoulders. He says that temptations don’t come from outside of us, but from inside, from our evil desires. Not only does God not operate on a temptation scale, He only gives good gifts to all of His children. Anything that’s good in life comes from God, especially our salvation.
- **James 1:19-21** – Contrary to doing God’s will in the beginning of the chapter, anger is one of the first things to put us out of the will of God. Human anger often ends up in wickedness and sin. We make enemies out of people who offend us but this is not what God wants from us. God calls for righteousness in our lives, which is the opposite of the wickedness anger puts in our hearts. So we must learn to listen before we leap.
- **James 1:22-27** – James moves from the topic of righteousness to showing us what that looks like. It looks like people who do whatever God tells them to in the Bible. They don’t just listen, but they obey. The perfect law is not the one Moses wrote up, but the one that Jesus commanded. We will see this again in chapter 2. But God wants pure religion from us – to help the marginalized of society, to take care of others and ourselves in avoiding the grime of the world. True religion is not spoken but acted out on the stage of real life.

- **James 2:1-13** – We must remember the issue does not concern the rich and the poor, but the way they were treating one another. In James’ society, the rich were seen as being blessed by God because they had many possessions while the poor were seen as not blessed by God or lazy. James turned the principle on its head so that God favored the poor because they understood grace better than anyone, the free gift that they could not afford. We can also see God giving special preference and attention to the alien, widow,

orphan, stranger, and the poor in the Old Testament Law. He was all about taking care of the marginalized people in society. We should be as well. The true issue comes down to judging between each others as believers, thinking that some of us are better than others and therefore deserve special treatment. In James' church, the rich were getting the best seats in the house while the poor had to stand or sit at their feet. James said that God is our example and He shows no favoritism. The Gospel got rid of class and social distinctions. All believers are just as precious to God, so they should all be just as precious to us.

- **James 2:14-26** – When it comes to faith and works, James takes a very practical side of the issue. It must be said that Paul was speaking in terms of salvation while James was speaking in terms of sanctification. In other words, Paul was saying that we can't do anything to earn salvation ourselves because it's a free gift given by God. But James was saying that if we truly believe in God, then we will do certain deeds that please Him, like feeding the poor, treating others like they have God's image in them, and seeing every person through God's eyes and not our own. Both Paul and James use Abraham as an example and the same verse: "He believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness." This tells us that James was stressing that both faith and works should not be thought of as an either/or principle (Faith or works) but as a both/and principle (faith and works). Works prove the inner faith. But an inner faith without outer signs is not really a true faith at all.
- **James 3:1-12** – James talks about the perfect man again (see also 1:4) but this time qualifies him as a man who can control his own tongue. Then James gives three descriptions of the small muscle that controls the whole body and even our lives using a bit, a rudder, and a flame. He concludes that the tongue is naturally evil and that it must be used as a tool either for blessing or cursing, but not both.
- **James 3:13-18** – James contrasts heavenly wisdom and earthly wisdom, saying that heavenly wisdom produces righteousness and earthly wisdom produces hate and evil and every form of wickedness. He will use this section to address anger in the next section.
- **James 4:1-12** – James picks up with the idea of anger and how it doesn't bring God's will about (1:19-21). Once again James points to desire as the origin of humanity's problems (see also 1:14-15). Then he talks about the difference between being a friend of the world (worldliness) and a friend of God (righteousness). But you can only live one way, not both, and the way to live a righteous life is to draw near to God in humility, which gets rid of the pride of our own desires and demands and anger. He ends this section by pointing out that when we judge others who live under the grace of Christ, we overstep our bounds because only Jesus is able to judge in matters of law.
- **James 4:13-17** – When we plan without considering God's will or our finite and mortal humanity, we arrogantly move against God. This is outright sin because we do not have the authority to know the future. Instead, when we make plans, let us remember that God is in control and that we will be doing whatever He wills.
- **James 5:1-6** – The rich were abusing the poor, a grave sin against God who prepared for their care in His Law and provision. The rich spent all their time gaining worthless

possessions that were decaying while they neglected the immaterial and eternal goals and treasures of God's kingdom.

- **James 5:7-12** – Everyone will experience suffering in the end times. But when we live between the age of Christ's coming (the promise), and the age of His return (the inheritance), we must be patient and not turn in on each other. We're all on the same team and we must concentrate on being ready for Jesus' return, because we do not already know when He is coming. But through suffering, we learn endurance and patience to face the worst of this age until God comes back and rescues us from this foreign land.
- **James 5:13-20** – When we pray, we must pray in faith and with righteousness in our lifestyle. Only such faith and righteousness make prayer effective so that God hears us and answers our prayer. Salvation, healing, and deliverance all come through God's Holy Spirit working within the spiritual and physical realms to make us whole again. We must watch out for each other especially when it comes to sin, because the person who stands between God and sinners is right in the middle of God's kingdom work.

Appendix B
Theology and Application
Cliff Notes

CHAPTER 1 THEOLOGY

- **Trials:** God uses trials even in the life of a believer to grow their character and endurance, to make a stronger Christian.
- **Maturity:** God is looking to make every one of His children complete and mature, lacking no benefit or development. He wants the very best for us. He seeks to finalize our becoming like His Son.
- **Faith and Doubt:** When you ask God for something, expect that He will do what's in your best interest. If you don't, you will become unstable and unable to trust God to answer your prayers. Faith and wisdom come from God. Wisdom is the ability to act on faith and believe that God will answer your prayer.
- **Social Status:** No longer is there a hierarchy among believers of status. We are all equal in Christ, all heirs of God's gift. The gospel turns the tables so that social structures are reversed in the light of eternity.
- **God the Father:** God does not use temptation as a means to an end. He wants us to grow, but He does not initiate temptation. But He will use it to strengthen our trust in Him and our endurance against the desires of sin. Instead, God only gives goodness, because He can produce only what He is. God's character contains not even a hint of evil. He is all good all the time.
- **Inner Human Desire:** We cannot blame outside sources, such as God or the devil or even others, for our sin. Our sin comes from our own inward warring desires and is birthed by our passions. Then sin brings forth death because that is the result of sin. These desires are evil inclinations inside of us. There are good desires as well in the NT.
- **Regeneration and Creation:** God's crowning act of good is prefaced by His first good act – creating the universe and us to have relationship with Him. The crowning act of good was providing for us to be saved from the inner desire to sin and to save us into eternal life, passing up death. Then He re-created us as His children and as people with a new nature, of which Jesus is first and foremost.
- **Unrighteous Anger:** Anger is an infection in humanity. It is opposed to God's will and implies that humans know more or better than God knows. It sets humanity up over God as a ruler over Him. And it has baggage, bringing filthiness, wickedness, and finally the loss of the human soul. Only the implanted Word of salvation brings us around to God's will and redemption.
- **God's Perfect Law:** The perfect law of God is the Scriptures. But just knowing them will do no good. The word for obedience is an active form of the word for hearing, meaning that when someone hears in the NT sense, they obey what they heard. This requires the action called for in the heard Word. Only through doing God's Word does a person move toward perfection, completion, and maturity.
- **Widows and Orphans:** God had a special place in His heart for these marginalized people on the fringe of society. There's a dignity in humanity of all social types because God placed His own image inside of humanity. No one should be left desolate or

considered unimportant. God cherishes every human life to the extent that He gave up His own life for each person. God always provides for those who are trampled on by others.

CHAPTER 1 APPLICATION

- We learn from our mistakes. If a person grows up without ever failing, that person is immature and does not grow at all. We should face any trial in life that comes up and ask the question, “What does God want to teach me through this painful circumstance? How can I hear God’s voice in this? What good does God have planned for me?”
- During prayer, for big and small things, we must always pray that God will hear and answer every prayer. If we don’t believe He can do it, then why are we asking Him for it? No matter what the size of the problem, God is bigger and we need to not just get that in our heads, but in our hearts.
- There is no more “I’m better than you.” All of us need to be saved from God’s wrath and all of us need to be humbled like a poor person. In God’s economy, money and math don’t mean a hill of beans. What matters is everything you can’t see, like a person’s soul, their heart, their motives, and their love. Ask God to give you His eyes to see in His kingdom His economy of grace.
- God is the best Father ever! Think of all of the great things He has given you: salvation, the Holy Spirit, eternal life, and personal benefits such as healing, wholeness. He will even use bad situations to your good when you’re walking with Him! Don’t ever forget to thank Him for all He’s given and done for you.
- When we sin, let’s look inside before we blame others. It is natural to blame someone or something else, but it is godly to first check yourself and then other things. Take responsibility for your thoughts and actions and always be willing to let God change you before He changes someone else!
- Ask God to deal with your anger issues in life. When you are angry with someone, take the time to stop and pray about it, seek God’s word through Scripture, and let God counsel you. Often, we make enemies when other people anger us without them realizing that they are our enemy.
- One excellent way to do God’s Word is to help widows and orphans just as James says. Take some time this week or through this study to help people less fortunate than yourself in some real and tangible way. Spend time with these fringe people. Get to know the people that God loves so much. You will find a rich gem hidden inside of a poor person.

CHAPTER 2 THEOLOGY

- The section has nothing to do with the rich people. For James it had everything to do with the principle that God’s people are not part of a class-system in society. Whether rich or poor, we all come to faith in Christ by a free gift.
- Along with Paul, James is making the point that we should not look down on one another for any reason as fellow believers. We all have experienced God’s grace together.
- Partiality is a sin because it is not part of God’s own character. He does not choose sides. He does not distinguish between believers. He is a loving Father who sees all of us as His children and loves us because of that.

- Faith and works have been argued over from the times of Paul and James even to the present. But James and Paul are not at odds with one another. James speaks of the faith everyone can see because of the actions. He calls for an active faith, not a faith that merely ascends to certain principles.
- Our faith should never be written on a page. It should be alive and proven through everything we do. There is no separation of the sacred and secular for Christians, because all that we do is praise to God or acts against Him.
- Abraham had faith because he actively obeyed God's command to sacrifice Isaac. It was a test for Abraham and the only way to prove that he did trust in God. The world needs a witness of God through our deeds. This is the best way to prove the character of Christ to the world.

CHAPTER 2 APPLICATION

- What kinds of ways do we look down on other Christians today? How about holiness and legalism, doctrinal issues? How should we treat other Christians?
- We can keep from judging others by looking for the good in people instead of the things we don't like about them.
- It should never matter how rich or poor, how talented or untalented, how holy or how unholy other Christians are. We are all in this together. Approach situations like judging others with the opinion that God is working in others as He once worked in you.
- James suggests all types of faith proofs like visiting widows, taking care of orphans, blessing the poor by fulfilling their needs, and there are so many other ways to show the love of Jesus in our world today. What are some of your ideas on how to do this?
- Approach everything you do this week thinking about how it glorifies God or if it doesn't, what you can do instead to glorify God. Even the things we say and think are actions. Live this week with an active all-out-for-God faith!

CHAPTER 3 THEOLOGY

- The Mature Man's Speech
 - To be complete and mature, not only does a person have to seek wisdom, but that person must also speak wisely. Although the tongue is such a small muscle of the body, it controls your life. With our words, we confess Jesus is Lord and speak our own wills into existence. The tongue does control your life.
 - We must be careful how we use such a powerful weapon or medicine. Think of the saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me." That's nowhere close to true. With our words we can heal or harm and we can bless or curse. Our words are more powerful than any weapon.
 - With our mouth, we choose which type of wisdom to follow, which path we choose comes from how we use our words, for good or for evil, for blessing or for cursing. We cannot do both. It's one or the other.
 - The mouth is a tool and words are a tool. Either we can build people up and worship God with our mouth, or we can destroy people and speak worldliness into our lives, speaking against God as enemies.

- How interesting that God takes control of the tongue in the act of speaking in tongues. This has been considered by Pentecostals before. It is true that when God has control of us, we begin to work toward maturity and perfection.
- Two Ways of Wisdom
 - There is the way of heavenly wisdom and the way of earthly wisdom. Both have different methods and different results.
 - The heavenly way produces righteousness and peace while the earthly way produces wickedness and strife.
 - These are practical issues and ways of living life. Not just some force or some kind of suggestion. Wisdom is the way you live, the choices you make, and the way of thinking and acting you choose.

CHAPTER 3 APPLICATION

- **Speech** – what we say has tremendous consequences. We can kill others with our speech. We can heal others with our speech. What type of person are you? Which way of wisdom will you choose? When anger gets involved in our speech, we tend to choose the worldly way. Be careful not to speak from anger, like James said in 1:19. Think of what God would say to others in a situation, how He would see and treat them first. Then speak from that point of view to them. Remember you represent God with your words just as much as your actions!
- **Heavenly Wisdom** – Heavenly wisdom is a choice that everyone must make. When you choose it, you need to do it. You can't have vacations from heavenly wisdom. Every action, thought, and word comes as a product of the way you have chosen. Heavenly wisdom is a way of thinking, doing, and speaking. It takes skill and prayer from God to make it happen.

CHAPTER 4 THEOLOGY

- Worldliness Is Against God's Way
 - The terms for friend and enemy in James are exact opposites. James calls on his community to stop the fighting by choosing to live according to heavenly wisdom.
 - Although we are unsure of the reference in verse 5, it is familiar to James and his readers and speaks of the spirit of man, that spirit that causes haughtiness in man and pride. That is why God gives us more grace.
 - It is from our own selfish desires that evil occurs. James pointed to this in 1:12-18 as well. These selfish desires cause us to violate God's moral Law and become His enemies.
 - The earthly way of wisdom must be outright rejected in favor of the heavenly way of wisdom. A direct turning to God is required for us to stop these evil desires which come from the demons. It requires us humbling ourselves and turning to God.
- God's Will and the Future
 - Arrogance is the presumption that tomorrow will definitely happen. Planning is not evil, but it is planning without consideration of God's will or of human finiteness and mortality that are the arrogant maneuver.

- But instead taking into account God's will and the fact of human mortality, no sin is committed. Sin is falling short in an area where you know you fell. Arrogance in the pride of life is a sin because it neglects the truth of God's will.

CHAPTER 4 APPLICATION

- **Worldliness** – Worldliness is something that even Christians need to watch out for, or James wouldn't have written to his church about it. Above all else, we want to be considered friends of God. How often do we fight amongst ourselves over the smallest issues or things that aren't even important? We need to stop judging each other and be impartial like God. He loves every one of us because we are His children and we need to learn to love one another as well.
- **God's Will and the Future**
 - When planning, take the time to discuss big plans with God. Find out what He wants you to do. Include God in all your plans.
 - Leave room for the Holy Spirit to alter your course of action for the day, week, and even year. Never allow your schedule to overtake your openness to God's Spirit. Always be prepared for God's plan to change your plans.
 - Make tentative plans and goals and always be ready for an adventure instead of a scheduled event. Follow the Lord as He moves. Be in the thick of what He's doing, not what you're doing.

CHAPTER 5 THEOLOGY

- **The Rich and Poor**
 - In the day of the Lord, the rich will reap what they have sown. They have taken advantage of their fellow human and now God will repay them. Others have the image of God in them, and we must be careful how we treat everyone, whether believer or nonbeliever.
 - The rich seek after material possessions, and after the treasures of this world, fleeting though they are. All that is gained from such a lifetime of wheeling and dealing pales in comparison to eternity. Everything material loses its value and the rich who sought great value are left with the most worthless material possessions.
- **Suffering**
 - Suffering is part of waiting for the coming of the Lord. Patience is gained through the system of building endurance to trials. With patience, God's beloved wait in eager hope and expectation until His return.
 - When waiting, keep working on patience and establish your heart for His coming. Be prepared because we live in the already-but-not-yet. We live between the ages and that's why we must be firmly established in faith.
 - We must not turn inward on other believers in this time of trial and expectation. We must also be people of our word, because we show our likeness and allegiance to Christ in being people of the truthful word.
- **Praying**
 - Effective prayer must be done by righteous people, not by the double-minded. Righteous people pray in faith, knowing and expecting God to act on their behalf.

- God really moves in the natural and physical through the working of the Holy Spirit, as evidenced by oil and by the laying on of hands. When we physically act on a person's behalf in prayer, God acts in the spiritual to produce the result in the physical.
- Healing, Salvation, and deliverance are all tied together. Sin, sickness, and demonic activity are all signs that something is amiss in a person's whole being. We minister to the whole person, to their soul and their body when we pray to save them, heal them, and deliver them.
- We must watch out for one another in matters of sin. When we retrieve others from the clutches of the enemy, we do God's work, to reconcile others to Him.

CHAPTER 5 APPLICATION

- The Rich and Poor
 - Seek true treasure and wealth in Kingdom acts and dealings. Spend more time working on the eternal, like witnessing and good acts toward all humans instead of seeking money or pleasure.
 - In your treasure and blessings, and even in your wealth, make sure that the eternal balance is never in the red. Consider sharing your wealth if you have it or giving to missionaries or other works of the Kingdom. Spend and steward your wealth wisely while here in this foreign land.
- Suffering
 - Although suffering is hard and tedious, it brings benefits to believers. It is like weight training. We endure the pain of each weight because the extra weights tune our muscles and strengthen them. Adversity breeds strength.
 - Be careful not to turn on other Christians, because we're all on the same team. We're all trying to help each other out. We must concentrate on preparing ourselves for Christ's return, because it can happen at any moment.
 - We must be honest and be people of truth in our speech and character. We are representatives of God on this planet until He returns and our attitudes and actions reflect His character in us.
- Praying
 - Be ready when you pray for others. You must maintain the faith and life of a believer connected to God to see God answer prayers and to remain effective. Prayer is not an event, but a process and lifestyle.
 - When you pray for people, don't be afraid to anoint them with oil and feel God working on them. God works in all facets of reality through many means. He does the work through you.
 - Think of the person you minister and pray for in a holistic sense. The person is not just a soul to save or just a body to heal, but both, a complete person who completely needs Jesus!
 - Never take for granted the work you do with other Christians in discipling them. It is tough sometimes but the person who stands as a priest between sinners and God is at the heart of His Kingdom.

Appendix C

Complete Translation

CHAPTER 1

1 James, a slave of God and the Lord Jesus Christ: To the twelve tribes who are in the Diaspora, greetings.

Trials Build Faith

2 Count everything pure joy, my brothers, whenever you run into various trials, 3 knowing that testing your faith is achieving endurance. 4 Now endurance must have its complete work so that you become mature and complete, in nothing lacking. 5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask from God, the One who gives everything without reserve and does not reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But he must ask in faith without doubt, because the doubter is like a wave of the sea, driven and blown by the wind. 7 Now that man should not expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, 8 a double-minded man, unsteady in all his ways.

The Rich and Poor

9 Now the humble brother should boast in his high position, 10 but the wealthy in his humiliation, because like a flower of grass, he will perish. 11 For the sun arose with scorching heat and dried up the grass and its flower withered, and the beauty of its appearance utterly destroyed. So also the wealthy in his pursuits will waste away.

God and Temptation

12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation, because after the approved testing happened, he will receive the crown of life, which He promised to those who continually love Him. 13 Let no one when he is tempted say, "From God I am being tempted!" for God is not tempted by evil,

and He tempts no one. 14 But each one is tempted by his own desires, being dragged away and lured. 15 Then desire, after it has conceived, brings forth sin, and sin, after it has matured, gives birth to death.

16 You must not be deceived, my beloved brothers. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is coming down from above, from the Father of Lights, within whom there is no shifting or turning shadow. 18 He desired to give birth to us by the Word of Truth, unto which we are a kind of firstfruits of His creation.

True Religion

19 Know this, my beloved brothers! Every person must be ready to listen, slow in speech, and slow in wrath, 20 for man's wrath doesn't work toward God's righteousness. 21 For this reason, as you are laying aside all moral impurity and excessive wickedness in gentleness, receive the implanted Word, which has the power to save your soul.

22 But become doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is hearing the word but not doing it, that person is like a man who examines his natural face in a mirror, 24 for after examining himself, he then has gone away and immediately forgot what he looked like. 25 But the one who intently gazed into the perfect law of freedom and kept it, he is not a forgetful hearer but an active doer, this one is blessed in his doing.

26 If anyone presumes to be religious while not controlling his tongue but continues deceiving his heart, such is an empty religion. 27 Religion pure and spotless to God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, to keep oneself untainted by the world.

CHAPTER 2

Partiality Not in God's Playbook

1 My brothers, continue to hold the faith of Jesus Christ, our Lord of glory, never with showing partiality. 2 For if a man with a gold ring in radiant clothing should enter your assembly, but also a destitute man in filthy clothing, 3 but you look favorably upon the man wearing radiant clothing and say, "You, be seated in a good place!" but to the destitute man, you say, "You, stand there!" or "Sit by my footstool!" 4 Did you not distinguish among yourselves and become judges with evil motives?

5 Listen, my beloved brothers! Did not God choose the destitute of the world to be wealthy in faith and heirs of the Kingdom, which He promised to those who love Him? 6 But you dishonored the destitute, not the wealthy, who are exercising power over you and they are dragging you into court? 7 Do they themselves not blaspheme the beautiful name of the One who called upon you?

8 Yet if you are fulfilling the Royal Law according to Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you do well! 9 But if you show partiality, you labor in sin, being exposed by the Law as transgressors. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law, yet stumbles in one part, he becomes bound to all of it. 11 For the one which says, "Do not commit adultery!" also said, "Do not murder!" Now if you don't commit adultery but murder, you have become a transgressor of the Law.

12 So keep on speaking and keep on doing as those about to be judged with the Law of Freedom. 13 For judgment without compassion does not accomplish mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

Faith And Works Work Together

14 What advantage is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but has not works? This faith cannot save him, can it?

15 If a brother or sister should become naked and lacking food for the day, 16 and any one of you says to them, "Go in peace! Be warm and well-fed!" but does not give them what is necessary for the body, what advantage is it? 17 Likewise, even faith, if it does not have works, is dead by itself.

18 But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works! Show me your faith without works, and I will show you from works my faith." 19 You believe that God is one, you do well. Even the demons believe and shudder. 20 Do you wish to be shown, O foolish man, that faith without works is worthless? 21 Did not Abraham, our father, become righteous from works when he carried up Isaac his son, onto the altar? 22 You see that his faith worked together with works and from his works faith was completed, 23 and Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Now Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him unto righteousness" and he was called God's friend. 24 You see that out of works, he was declared a righteous man and not out of works alone. 25 Now likewise was not also Rahab the prostitute declared righteous when she received under her roof as guests and sent them another way? 26 For just as the body without a spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

CHAPTER 3

A Most Dangerous Weapon

1 Not many should become teachers, my brothers, while knowing that we will receive greater judgment, 2 for we all stumble in many ways. If someone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able to control even the whole body. 3 Now if we put bridles in the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we direct even their whole body. 4 Look! Even the large boats also are driven by fierce winds, by the smallest rudder they are directed wherever the impulse of the

pilot wills, 5 Likewise, also the tongue is a small member of the body but it boasts greatly.

Look at how small a fire kindles such a great forest! 6 Even the tongue is a fire! A world of unrighteousness, the tongue is set among our members, defiling the whole body and burns the course of life and is set on fire by hell (Gehenna). 7 For every kind of wild beast and bird, reptile and sea creature is tamed and has been tamed by the nature of humanity, 8 But the tongue not one person is able to tame, a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless the Lord and Father and with it we curse people, who have been made according to God's image, 10 out of the same mouth come blessing and cursing, my brothers, these things should never happen. 11 Can a spring of water out of its opening gush with sweet and bitter? 12 It is not possible, my brothers, for a fig tree produce olives or a vine figs, is it? Neither can salt water produce fresh water.

Two Wisdoms

13 Who is wise and knowledgeable among you? Let him show out of good conduct his works in gentle wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter jealousy and ambition in your hearts, you must never boast and lie against the truth. 15 This is not the wisdom that came down from above, but earthly, worldly, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and ambition, there is disorder and every wicked deed. 17 But heavenly wisdom is first holy, then peaceful, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, genuine. 18 Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

CHAPTER 4

Worldliness Condemned

1 From where do word battles and from where do quarrels come among you? Do they not come from out of your desires

which make war among your members? 2 You desire but do not have! You kill and become jealous, but do not obtain! You quarrel and make word battles! You do not have because you never ask— 3 You ask, but you don't receive, because you ask wrongly, so that you may spend on your desires. 4 Adulterers! Don't you know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, if one desires to be a friend of the world, he is being appointed an enemy of God. 5 The one who supposes that Scripture speaks in vain, "With envy the Spirit longs for the one whom he caused to dwell in us," but he gives greater grace, therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but to the humble, He gives grace." 7 Therefore, be subject to God, and resist the devil he will flee from you; 8 draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, double-minded. 9 Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning, and joy into gloom. 10 Become lowly in the presence of the Lord, and you will be lifted up.

11 You must not speak evil of one another, brothers. The one who speaks evil of a brother or judges his brother speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if he judges the law, he does not do the law, but judges. 12 There is one Lawgiver and Judge who is able to save and to destroy, but who are you to judge your neighbor?

Presumption Against God's Authority

13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow, we will go to this city or that city and we will do this for a year and we will go and we will profit." 14 No one knows what your life will be like tomorrow; for it is a vapor that appears for a little while, but thereafter it disappears. 15 Instead, you should say, "If the Lord wills, we will do this or that." 16 But do not boast in your arrogance— all such boasting is evil. 17

Therefore, the one who has known what is good and does not do it, to him it is sin.

CHAPTER 5

The Rich Pay on the Last Day

1 Come now, you rich people, weep while lamenting for the hardships coming upon you. 2 Your wealth has become corrupt and your clothing has become moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and silver have rusted over and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. You stored up in the last days. 4 Look! The wages of the workers harvesting your lands, which you deprived through fraud, cry out against you and the cry of the harvesters has entered the ears of the Lord of Hosts. 5 You lived upon the earth in luxury and self-indulgence, gorged your heart in the day of slaughter, 6 you declare guilty and murder the righteous one— he does not oppose you.

Patience, the Key to Suffering

7 Therefore, be patient, brothers, until the coming of the Lord— Behold the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient for it, until it receives the early and latter rain. 8 You also be patient. Establish your hearts, because the coming of the Lord has come near. 9 Do not groan, brothers, against one another, so that you may not be judged— Behold, the Judge has been standing at the door! 10 Take the example, brothers, of the affliction and patience of the prophets, who spoke with the authority of the Lord. 11 Behold, we consider those who endured patiently to be blessed. You have heard of the patience of Job and you know the purpose of the Lord, that the Lord is compassionate and merciful. 12 But above all, my brothers, do not swear neither by the heavens nor by the earth nor by any other oath; instead, let your “Yes” be yes and your “No” no so that you may not fall under judgment.

Prayer, the Key to Victory

13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. 14 Is anyone sick among you? He must summon the elders of the assembly and they must pray for him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will deliver the sick and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore, confess to one another sins and pray for one another, that you might be healed. Very powerful is the entreaty of the righteous person while it is working. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it not rain, and it did not rain upon the earth for three years and six months. 18 Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain and the earth produced its fruit.

19 My brothers, if anyone among you strays from the truth and someone turns him back, 20 know that the one who turns a sinful person from wandering on the road saves his soul from death and covers over a multitude of sins.