

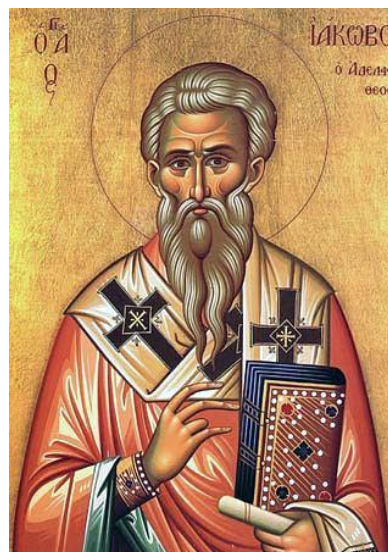
## James

Of the Father's own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. 1:18 The book of James, one of the catholic epistles (letters addressed to the whole church), has us look to God as the giver of all good gifts while then using those gifts responsibly.

### *Who?*

As it is spelled, the name James comes to us from Old French and Latin. But the name that we have as James comes from the Greek and Hebrew name, Jacob. Meaning that the names James and Jacob are the same but come from different languages. Much like how "Alleluia" is the Latin take on the Hebrew and "Hallelujah" is the actual Hebrew for the same word.

The name James then means, "one who grasps" or "supplanter." This is named in honor of the Patriarch Jacob who was born grasping the heel of his brother Esau.



Which James is this, however? The New Testament lists 5 James:

1. Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13 lists a certain James as the Father of Judas (not Iscariot).
2. Matthew 27:56 names James the Less, brother of Joseph/Joses, and son of a certain Mary.
3. James the son of Alpheus, one of the Twelve. Matthew 10:3.
4. James the Son of Zebedee and brother of John the Apostle. Beheaded in Acts 12.
5. James the Just. Half-brother of our Lord Jesus Christ, Acts 15, Galatians 2, Matthew 13.

In Christian history and Scholarship, the first three have never been serious contenders. The listing of James in 1:1 makes it sound that he well known by his introduction with just his name and little else to identify with.

That leaves us with options 4 and 5. James, the brother of John, the Son of Zebedee was certainly a big name in the New Testament, being that he was one of the inner three with Peter and John. However, the likelihood of it being this James is low since he was beheaded in Acts 12, in 44 AD. And no one in the early church thought it was this James.

This leaves us with option 5. James was called James the Just by the early Christians to distinguish him from the rest of the listed people named James. There is a lot from this James in the New Testament and he is also listed in sources outside the New Testament (Josephus). His nickname, the Just, comes from his exemplary character and reputation.

This James seems to have been a major pillar in the early Church and leader of the Church in Jerusalem until his death. Peter refers to him in Acts 12 and James fields the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15. Clement of Alexandria (150-215 AD) wrote of James, "Peter, and James, and John, after the Savior's ascension, though honored by the Lord, did not contend for glory, but made James the Just bishop of Jerusalem."

James is said to have been martyred in 62 AD. Josephus, a Jew, writes about James' death in his Jewish history. The Roman Governor, Albinus seized a chance due to a power vacuum to kill off Christian leaders. James was falsely accused of sedition and lawlessness and handed over to be stoned. Another account suggests he was tossed off the temple mount with stones thrown down on him from above.

### *When?*

The book of James is best dated to around 48-50 AD. This makes it one of the earliest books of the New Testament. Evidence is that James' speech at the Jerusalem council in 48 AD echoes themes in his letter. The letters 1 Clement and Shepherd of Hermas also have direct quotes or allusions to James. This suggests that by the year 100, the book of James was well circulated.

## *Where?*

James is most likely writing from Jerusalem, but his audience is addressed to the “Twelve tribes in the Dispersion.” This, along with the very Jewish nature of the letter, could mean that the audience of James is the Jews. This would fit with what we hear and observe from James in the book of Acts and Galatians.

However, by referring to the twelve tribes could be more of a metaphoric and literally device. The twelve tribes have long since vanished with only a few remaining by the time of Christ. To be a Jew was shorthand for Judah. And many churches, even in Jerusalem though maybe few, had Gentile members in their midst. James could be using twelve that is often used as the number for the whole church, which we see used often in Revelation.

Internal evidence in the letter suggests that people are used to the weather in Judea. Sirocco win in 1:11 for example is one that only is blown in that area of the world. And yet that itself is not conclusive either.

Debate goes back and forth as to who is recipient of the letter.

## *Why?*

From much of what we can gather about the topics in the book, James is addressing brothers and sisters who share the same faith in Christ but have gone astray and are also divisive.

James sees this as a threat as we wait for the coming of the Lord Jesus. He urges patience and hope in suffering and endurance that causes us to wait for Chrit to set things right.

James quotes and alludes to every major section of the Old Testament. The similarities between James and the Sermon on the Mount is also striking at times.

Major themes of James include gifts from God that end up being abused. Wisdom, faith, the tongue and wealth are all gifts that God gives from heaven, and James in his letter will warn of their abuse.

## *Reception of James in the Church*

James had a mixed reception in the early church. Along with Hebrews, 2 Peter, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, and Revelation, James forms what is called today to be the antilegomena. This means these books were spoken against at times in the Church. The rest of the New Testament forms the homologoumena, or the books always spoken for. Still in the life of the Church today, all doctrine is pulled from the homologoumena and supported by antilegomena. Ideas that are hard or difficult in the book of James never form a binding conclusion unless they can be found in the other books.

Some lists of books of the New Testament do not include James as one of them, even into the 4<sup>th</sup> century, even though it will list James as read in the Churches. This was a key part of the books of the New Testament being in the New Testament and that was if they were read in Church. This would set canonical writings apart. Many churches did read James, but some did not.

By the time the church was united in publicly witnessing the faith without persecution, the books that we have in the New Testament today were settled since churches could openly talk and share witnesses about what they had received. James was firmly settled into the canon.

Luther of course, had problems with James, noting that James was an “epistle of straw.” Meaning that James had use for common things, but nothing that was lofty. But by the end of Luther’s life he found great use for the book of James. While Luther had his reservations at times about the book of James, he always supported its use in the canon and quoted from it quite often in his life.

## *Commentary:*

### **1:1**

*James:* With his name being known as Jacob, we have a reminder to the OT patriarch Jacob. With him writing to the 12 tribes, this reminds us also that Jacob from the OT had 12 sons. James here is perhaps thinking of himself as a new Jacob, writing to the new Israel, the Church. Since we are new creatures made in Christ the Word of God.

*Servant:* the word can also be translated as bondservant/slave. Paul will call himself this and is a reminder that people like Paul and James are not speaking on their own authority, but rather are bringing a message and a word from the one they represent. Throughout the Bible, the prophets and apostles and patriarchs are all designated with this as well. “You are not your own, you have been bought with a price.” 1 Corinthians 6:20.

*God and the Lord Jesus Christ:* The Greek can go two ways here. God and Lord could be conjunctive. Meaning that James is calling Jesus: God and Lord. Thomas does this in John 20 when he says concerning the Risen Christ: My Lord and my God.” The other way is what is usually taken here though: God refers to the Father and Lord refers to Jesus. This is rather standard in the other letters of the NT. See Romans 1:7 for example. Or 1 Corinthians 8:4-6

*Twelve Tribes in the Dispersion:* James will refer heavily to OT verses and ideas, which might suggest that his audience is to the Jews. The Church in Jerusalem was mostly Jews, and perhaps James is only writing to them. But the letter appears to be more general and any audience outside of Jerusalem would find itself having more and more Gentiles. And by this point, the 12 tribes are largely gone. So many take this to mean those Gentiles who are grafted into Israel as Paul notes in Romans 9-11. However you take it, to refer to the 12 tribes indicates: People of God, those who have faith in the Messiah. The Diaspora/Dispersion recalls the exile when Israel was scattered among the nations in 587 BC. Peter will

greet the Christian church in the same way in 1 Peter 1:1. This leans into the eschatological character in the book.

*Greetings:* Most translations will fumble on this translation when they just write: greetings. The verbal root for greetings comes from the word rejoice! This is more than a “hey,” This is a “Great to see you!” James’ letter exudes joy.

## **1:2**

*Consider it all joy, my brothers, whenever you encounter various trials:* consider here is often used in regards to religion. Read 1 Peter 1:3-9 for similar thought. Suffering here has religious connections. The joy in the greeting in verse one is extended here. James wants us to see him as a fellow sufferer and one who does it with joy. Hence why he calls them and us “brothers” See Hebrews 12:1-2. Jesus went to the cross with joy for his work to set us free from sin and death. We are to see then in suffering a chance to be like Christ (2 Corinthians 1). James wants us to see suffering and trials as a gift from God! Instead of wanting to be rid of our crosses, we are being called to endure them and with joy. The following words tell us why it is a joy. “Whenever” tells us that we don’t need to find crosses, God sends them we are to receive them and endure them, because they will shape us to be the people that God wants us to be “a first fruit of his creatures.”

## **1:3**

*for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness:* James will remind us at the end of the letter of the steadfastness of Job. Job may well be on his mind here as well since he will begin and end the letter with this call to hold on. Without trial, faith will not be able to prove itself and improve. This is something we need to make it through this life and to stand before God. Perseverance, another word for steadfastness here, also has in mind the return of the Lord and the second coming. James’ mind and goal is focused on the last day. Look at Acts 9:16 or 14:22.

## 1:4

*And let steadfastness have its full effect:* Being steadfast has a goal in mind. Here the word “full effect” is the word that Jesus said on the cross “it is finished.” The word transliterated into English is “telos.” James will use this word 7 times in his letter. Paul loves this word when referring to the Christian life and hope as well. See 2 Timothy 3:17, Philippians 2:2, Ephesians 3:19. Full effect means complete, perfect, whole, the goal, what we strive toward. We are not whole without suffering. That is the character of God revealed by Christ on the cross, and as his people, we will as well. Otherwise we are illegitimate children.

*that you may be perfect and complete:* perfect again is the word for “finished.” Our telos is to be like our Lord. His joy in our salvation becomes my attitude. As Jesus suffered and came to the end of his suffering, he was “made perfect” as Hebrews 2:10 writes and Hebrews 10:14. Perfect here is more than moral perfection that we attribute perfection too. Being made perfect is arriving at where we need to be or who we are becoming.

*Lacking in nothing:* Strange as it sounds, suffering gives us what we need for a life of faith. God uses suffering not to grieve us, but to shape us. And since he is the Lord of suffering, God will bring us through it. Luther would note that to become a theologian, one must have oratio, meditatio, and tentatio, (Anfechtung). That last one means suffering, or the pangs of death. See Psalm 34. James is looking to move us from proud, arrogant and haughty people that God will shape through sorrows and sufferings to become the people we need to be. Humble, rejoicing, and perfect.

## 1:5

*If anyone lacks wisdom...* “Lacks” brings us back to the previous verse that suffering causes us to lack nothing. James notes that suffering bringing us joy is something that does not come natural to human beings. We reason that it brings sadness, not completeness.

Wisdom here is not just understanding or smarts. It is the creative tool and skill that causes all things to work in the universe. How a cell works is wisdom. How a chef puts ingredients together to create culinary masterpieces is wisdom. Read Proverbs 8. Wisdom is about beauty, goodness, and truth. Which have been seen as essential qualities of a good life and creation. Wisdom is often connected to fear. It is a desire to live rightly and do rightly in the eyes of God. Wisdom is then given by God through suffering. Tentatio (suffering as the pangs of death) Wisdom helps us view the world as God sees it. By having wisdom, we are enabled to see how suffering completes us, matures us, and allows us to work with God through suffering.

*Let him ask God...* This is an imperative. Not “if you want” but “do this”. This brings to mind King Solomon in 1 Kings 3. God is seen in the Bible as the source of Wisdom. Read Job 32 and Proverbs 9:9-12. God alone gives wisdom. This also invites us to see the nature of prayer: one of a beggar who needs from God.

*And it will be given generously to all without reproach.* This gives us the character of God that James repeats throughout the book. God by his nature gives. See Luther’s commentary in the Small Catechism on the 1<sup>st</sup> Article and the 4<sup>th</sup> Petition. We might be ashamed and prideful to come to God empty handed, thinking that by his nature God would despise us for our lack. But God by nature gives. Those who confess their need to God will not receive derision from him.

## 1:6

*But let him ask in faith...* Having focused on God and his character, James turns to the recipient of God’s gift. God is single minded in giving, which gives us the basis of trust. James will comment on this further in chapter 4. When not asked in faith, prayers to God become about self serving. Faith means we are new

creatures of God. We cannot be so base as to pray: God, I want to win the lottery. This makes prayer a mockery of God and what God would promise to give us. To complete the thought so far in James, a person needs suffering to be made complete, but this does not seem right in our eyes. We then need to ask God to grant us wisdom to endure and see God at work in our suffering. To ask God then is trusting that in suffering, God is at work in us, not out to get us.

*With no doubting*, God is described in verse 4 as one who is set on giving with no second thoughts. James wants us to receive what God is set on giving without having second thoughts. What God ordains is always good. The word doubt here, (diakrino) comes from the word “judge, make a distinction.” James will use this same word in 2:4 to describe how the Christians he is writing to are making a distinction between the rich and the poor. To not trust God to give us what we need is to judge that God is unfaithful.

*For the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the winds.* This can bring to us many images from the Bible. The disciples uncertain that a sleeping Jesus cares about them in Mark 4 while the waves turn the boat. It can remind us of the prophet Jonah in the storm. Paul in Ephesians desires that the Christians there mature so that they are not tossed by every word of teaching that is foreign to the Scriptures. The prophets will use storm driven seas as a call back to the world before creation. The implication here being that someone who doubts has not been recreated by the Word of God which is implanted in us (1:18)

**1:7** *That person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; For the one who judges that God may or may not grant what is needed to make a person complete in Christ, James will fault the one who prays. It is like if someone handed off an expensive glass dish, but as they passed it off, the person receiving it was careless or too quick to steady it and dropped it and it shattered. It was not the fault of the giver, but of the one who dropped it. A person who doubts, will miss what God gives and fail to see God at work.*

Here a person is hedging their bets. They are anticipating that God will give but they allow the opposite to also be possible. It could be that God won't give. Such a double nature will appear throughout the book. In chapter 3, James will note

that a person cannot speak both blessing and cursing from the same tongue. Human double nature is something that needs to be resolved.

James in this verse is also echoing our Lord's teaching on prayer. See Matthew 7:8. If a person doubts, he judges that Jesus cannot be trusted when he tells us to "ask and receive." When James refers to "the Lord" he is thinking of Jesus in whose name we pray. Luther picks up this thought in the Conclusion to the Lord's Prayer when he says, "we should be certain that these petitions are pleasing to our Father in Heaven and are heard by him. For he has commanded us to pray in this way (faith!) and has promised to hear us. Amen. Amen. Means, yes, yes it shall be so."

**1:8** *He is a double-minded man*, Double minded, or someone who flip flops as we might say today. This word appears for the first time in Greek in the book of James. Christian authors will later use this word in their own writings. This person has not been created a new by God and refusing God's Word that is implanted in us through the preaching of God's Word and how that forms us in life with suffering.

James could be alluded to the Apocryphal book Sirach 1:28-29, "Do not disobey the fear of the Lord, do not approach him with a divided heart. Be not a hypocrite in the sight of people and pay attention in your speech." Words are indeed powerful and as those whom God has planted his Word which creates what it says, our prayer that is formed by God's Word is effective. Jesus would put it, "You cannot serve two masters." Matthew 6:24.

*Unstable in all his ways*. If a doubting person is like the waves of the sea, then being unstable brings the picture of a man on a boat who can't walk straight. In James 3, the word unstable will be used of the tongue that is set on fire by hell. James notes that the words we use to pray to God will also be how we use to talk to others. Prayer will inform common speech. The law of prayer is the law of belief. Being unstable leads to envy and selfish ambition in chapter 3. What begins with prayer infects every area of a Christian's life in the end. See later that by breaking one law (here prayer) it leads to the breaking of it all. Understand law as how things are made by God.

## 1:9

*Now the lowly brother:* The word “Brother” here refers to members of the faith. Why brother? Paul in Galatians 3:26-27 reminds us, “for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God by faith. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Only Christ exists within the bodies of believers, making us all truly “brother.”

When saying the “lowly” brother, James is most likely referring primarily to social and economic standings. A reminder that in the church, those often discarded by society or thought little of, were considered highly within the Church. This is not the only way to see, “lowly.” It also extends to those who have been “brought low.” Sufferings and trials in this age make us “lowly” or “humble.”

*Is to boast in his exalted status:* The lowly brother is to boast in this exalted status. Though odd, it continues James’ thought so far in the letter. If sufferings and trials in this age complete us, then we are to boast that God is at work in us through sufferings and trials. See Phillipians 3:1-21 where Paul gives extended thought on this same thing. Here the suffering from God is a gift. Poor and lowly people have the advantage that nothing in this world has them tethered to trap them. They possess a certain humility and recognize that they need to receive.

James is also pointing ahead to the Final Day, which he anticipates the turning of the tables. Read Matthew 5, where Jesus blesses the “Lowly.” Also note when Jesus says, “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Luke 14.

## 1:10

*And the rich in his humiliation.* Continuing the logic, the rich person is to boast that God humiliates and takes away. “The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord.” We can think of Scrooge laughing as he gives away his riches and is joyful as he provides for the needy after coming into contact with his mortality. Knowing our end, shapes how we live now.

*Because like a flower of the grass he will pass away.* This is a reference to Isaiah 40:1-11 which also is pointing ahead to the last day. It allows us to see that riches are not something inherent or deserved but given. The word, “pass away” can be seen in 2 Peter 3:10 and Mark 13:28-30. Pass away happens in the fall of this creation. James is noting what poor and rich alike will do on the last day. Note here that punishment is not necessarily in view. Something that passes away here means “not eternal.” Both our sufferings and our riches will not last. What Jesus is bringing will be eternal. This causes us to be faithful with our sufferings and faithful with our riches. See Galatians 6:14-16.

And so, the poor rejoice that God has done this to them. Their poverty is a gift. And the rich rejoice that God will take away their riches or that what Christ has given to them far exceeds any of their riches now. This brings us back to “rejoicing in our trials.” For both rich and poor, God will do what he does to complete us and give us something eternal.

Note how this works with Jesus in 2 Corinthians 8:9-15. Notice how Paul uses the Gospel of what Jesus did which motivates us to similar action with our riches.

Also note the Gospel in Philippians 2:5-11. Jesus was humbled and exalted by God his Father.

## **1:11**

*For the sun rises with its burning heat and withers the grass, and its flower falls off, and its beautiful appearance perishes:* Verse 11 is explaining verse 10 more. Matthew 20:12 and Luke 12:55 are the only times in the NT that “burning heat” is used along with here. Luke 12 Jesus uses burning heat to depict the ability to interpret the time. Matthew 20 uses it to denote the work that the workers did in the burning heat leading up to the end of the day.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:10-15. The last day that exposes our work is a day of “fire,” with this context, we can see that our riches are something that will not survive the final day and we should not put our hope or boast in them now, but use them wisely ahead of the last day.

The idea of the flower falling off means something that falls from its place (star in heaven which is fixed like in Revelation 12 or Isaiah 14:12. Read 1 Peter 1:22-25. Flower falls is that which stands and looks good now but doesn't last. Don't be swayed by appearances is another way to think here.

Its "beautiful appearance" is literally "the beauty of its face." God in the Bible is said to not be one who regards "a person's face" to show favoritism. Here, we should not be swayed by looks or impressions. Our Lord in Isaiah 53 is said to be one "from whom men hide their faces."

*In this way also, the rich man will dissipate/fade:* Likewise, we should not adore the rich for the same reason that on the surface we are taken in by riches or influential people. But none of that stands forever. Only, "The Word of the Lord stands forever." "Heaven and earth may pass away, but my Word will never pass away."

To dissipate refers to the idea of withering in plants that seems to happen suddenly. But when applied to people, dissipate gives a more textured thought. Riches are like a mirage that vanishes as you get near it, or like a fog that disappears with the sun.

*in the midst of his pursuits:* "Midst" can mean. "Journey." The concrete thought is that as the rich man goes about his way, his business transactions or even "how he does business." Will prove the ethics of being rich. Read Matthew 19. Jesus wants the rich young man to be a "cheerful giver." To let his riches fade and to receive Jesus. The rich man, however, cannot let them go.

In this light, Jesus wants us to be able to let go of our riches in service to following Christ. The rich man boasts that his money and riches are to be used in this life to serve Christ and not himself or his pleasures.

## **1:12**

### *Blessed is the man...*

Blessed brings to mind major key ideas in the Bible. Genesis 1-2 begins with God's blessing of his creation. That blessing is lost in the fall into sin. God promises to restore that blessing as you move through the book and OT, see Genesis 12:1-3 for example. James is bearing all this to mind by bringing that word in.

This is a direct allusion to Psalm 1 which begins the exact same way. Read Psalm 1 to see what makes a man blessed. (Also note that Psalm 1 is not an "everyman" but has one particular man in mind, the Messiah. Note also, also the structure of the Psalms.) In Psalm 1, the blessing is upon God's Word, the Word which James says is implanted in us.

Blessing is used 50 times in the NT. The theme of blessing is restored by the Blessed Man himself, Jesus Christ, who extends the blessing to us. This is why Jesus' opening sermon in his ministry in Matthew's Gospel is the Sermon on the Mount which begins with "Blessed are the poor..." James is bringing us back to the Sermon on the Mount which he will quote and allude to in just about every section of the book.

Finally, Revelation will speak 7 blessings throughout the book as well. (1:3, 14:13, 16:15, 19:9, 20:6, 22:7, 22:14.)

### *Who perseveres (under) trial...*

The word perseveres has the idea of "what is left over" or "what remains" In us, God is purging away what is detestable in us. What is left is pure and holy. The word trial brings us back to 1:2-4. The trials are meant to change us into worthy candidates for God's new creation.

The word "trial" will be used by James as opposed to "temptation." As we will see going forward. God brings trial and tribulation.

The man is blessed who lasts under the trial. This calls for endurance and to see that suffering and trials answer to Christ.

### *Because after being tested...*

In this, we can see that life on this earth is a test. A test to note whether we are worthy to attain to that age which Christ is bringing. Will we receive God's blessing by faith, or will sin cause us to mistreat God's blessings and be disqualified from the greater blessing that awaits at the end of all things? Will we prove responsible or will this age make us blind? It comes down to how faith see God's Word. See Matthew 25:14-30.

The word "tested" also means "approved." Or even "genuine."

*He will receive the crown of life...*

The word crown is where we get the name Stephen. Stephen in Acts 7 boldly proclaimed and lived the Word of God and was killed for it, making him the first martyr of the Church. Before his death, he saw Jesus sitting at the right hand of God in all his glory. In this way, Stephen was also, well, stephened. Crowns also denote high status. Our Lord's crown of thorns reminds us how he is bearing the curse of Genesis 3.

The idea, Crown of Life, is connected with the eschatological blessing of the New Heavens and the New Earth. See 2 Tim. 4:8, 1 Peter 5:4, Rev. 2:4.

The phrase crown of life could also be translated to read, "he will receive the crown, that is, life." The idea here is that Jesus will crown us with eternal life. Also to receive carries the idea of "gift." This is not earned, it is rewarded from the Giver of every good and perfect (complete) gift.

*Which he promised to those who love him.*

How do we love Jesus? Read John 14:15-24. Note what Jesus means when he says that loving him means "keeping" his commandments. Keeping means to treasure and store. Keeping means storing the words of Jesus and treasuring them and living them. This also ties us back to the "Blessed is the Man" of Psalm 1. In that psalm, it is the Word of God that held dearly. Here it is the same implanted Word that recreates us as well. God's Word is memorized because the desire is to keep it. You memorize, store, do, honor, etc. the things that you love in life.

Here, clinging to the fact that Christ loves us, especially in trials, allows us to persevere. See Hebrews 12:3-17 to also complete this thought. Trials end on the last day.

**Summary:** 1:12, brings together and alludes to every section thus far in the book (2-4, 5-8, 9-11). It uses key words such as trial (vs.2), testing (vs.3) perseverance (1:3-4 where it is translated steadfastness). The completion of this, leads to life. It also looks ahead to the rest of chapter 1, especially 16-18.

Luther has some great quotes on James 1:12:

“Trials keep a man alert, perfect him in humility and patience, and make him acceptable to God as his dearest child.” *Lord’s prayer for simple laymen*

“Thus it is good for us always to be oppressed with some trouble, lest in our weakness we succumb to the offenses of the world and fall into sin.” *Fourteen Consolations*

“This is the continuous teaching of the entire Holy Scripture and also God’s will, namely, that we are mortified according to the flesh and made alive according to the spirit.” *Luther’s commentary on Genesis 37:15-17*

“Therefore let us conclude for certain that disasters, sobs, sighs, and our death are nothing else than a most pleasant and beautiful game of God’s goodness.” *Luther’s commentary on Genesis 42:7*

Finally, our own Book of Concord puts it beautifully in this way to wrap up these first verses from James:

“Before the Word began God ordained in his counsel through which specific cross and affliction he would conform each of his elect to the image of his Son, and that in each case the afflictions should and must work together for good since they are called according to his purpose.” *Formula of Concord Solid Declaration Article XI, paragraph 49.*

## 1:13

*Let no one while being tested say, "I am being tempted by God."*

This brings us back to the trials that are supposed to bring us joy. We could wrongly assume that God is the one tempting us away from him. God is not doing the testing to our detriment and wanting harm on us.

Think of the Tree of Good and Evil in the Garden. It was not God tempting like a cookie jar. It is no different than telling my boys I don't want them to touch the light socket when they were babies. It was not a trap, it was said out of concern.

James uses the same word that is translated as "test" and "tempted." The word is translated differently to help make the distinction that James is setting up in the verse. This leads back into doubting God that he will give. The doubt leads to saying that God is tempting us to fail. This is not how faith responds to God. James would forbid us from going that route.

*For God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one.* James gives two reasons for why God is not tempted by evil. The first is that God's character is that he has no evil in himself. He is beyond evil. Much like Tom Bombadil is with the ring in Lord of the Rings. God is not enticed by sin or evil. It has no lure for him. So as James sees it, God would not use it on us. That is the second reason. God is beyond evil and therefore does not use it on us to entrap or catch us. God is not using a sting operation against us. And God is not betting on us failing. Luther uses this argument when we say, "lead us not into temptation."

Bonehoeffer has a deep thought that temptation is the result of God's absence. Read 2 Chronicles 32:31. God withdraws from Hezekiah to allow him to be tempted. Or how the Holy Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness and leaves him alone to be tempted by the devil. God is seemingly absent when Eve and Adam with her are tempted. This is why many psalms pray for God's presence when evil abounds. This is why we pray that God would not lead us into temptation but instead be with us to deliver us from evil.

God's testing then, is different. When he tests Abraham, or Issac, or David, or Job. This is to strengthen them in the faith by giving them opportunities to trust the

word of promise. Note the promise to Abraham to have a child, David a kingdom and son, etc.

### **1:14**

*But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.*

Evil does not originate in God. Evil originates as we confess in the Augsburg Confession: From the Devil, the world, and ourselves. Now that we fell into sin, we author evil. Evil is the corruption away from good and a corruption of good. We are responsible when tempted and when we fall into sin. The blame is on us. We see that in Genesis 3 as well. Adam is at total fault for the fall.

Lured has the sense of “being dragged away” and entice has the feeling of “falling into a trap.” Hunter and fisherman language. Our desire is at fault for this, we are baited. The word for desire is “passion.” James here shows us what we call original sin. A bentness away from God. Instead of acting by sanctified reason, we are lured out of base instinct. The church should be careful to respond by knee jerk reactions. By later saying we are implanted with the Word of God, James notes how we are both sinner and saint. Simul Justus et Peccator.

Desire is something that is used here like a wild animal. Sin in Genesis 4 is described as an animal waiting to pounce.

### **1:15**

*Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it has fully grown brings forth death.*

James gives us a rather frightening picture. Desire acts as a mother that conceives sinful actions. Almost like we are infected and evil replicates inside us. Think of David in 2 Samuel 11. His desire led to action. Sinful acts are the result of sinful hearts. We sin because we are sinners. (Do I sin when I sleep? Example) Bad trees give bad fruit.

Sin when it fully grows, gives the fruit of death. This is horrifying when placed with the image of giving birth. Giving birth leads to life and joy. This on the other hand leads to death. That is the reward for sin. Someone who allows sin to take

root and achieve its ends, dies. “In the day you eat of it, in dying you will die.” As opposed to the implanted Word in us that breathes out life. Proverbs here has many things to say about this as well.

This gives some thought to what God said to the devil about “your seed” and “her seed.” This could be that the work of the devil is at odds with God’s work and people.

James here is keen to place the blame for sin right into our laps. There is no, “God made me do it.” Or “the devil made me do it.” It is our fault and ours alone. God is the one who rescues us. God comes to bless and restore.

Read note from Sirach 15:11-20 on page 131 of Blue Commentary.

As we will see soon. God is the giver of every good and perfect gift.

## **1:16**

*Do not be deceived.*

This is connected with verses 13-15. It is not starting its own new thought. It is the conclusion to what came before. Deceive has the idea of “wandering away.” See 5:19-20 where he uses that word again. The word deception is always strongly warned throughout the New Testament. See 2 Peter 2:18, 3:17, 1 John 4:6, Jude 11. The path of truth can be lost by someone who wanders from the truth.

James does not want Christians to think God is tempting them down a different path or a “spiritual” path that rejects the law that God has built into creation. James calls that thought out as a deception by the deceiver. No one should say that God leads them astray or to bait them into sin. It is our own sinful flesh that does that. We are the source of evil.

Note example of marriage: God wants me to pursue something that is spiritual so this means that I should leave my spouse.

James will then lead into his idea of what God does give. His gifts are opposite of sin which gives a “telos” of death. God gives complete gifts that lead to life. (Take a note from the Heidelberg Disputation where God’s works on the surface appear to be base and bitter.)

The temptation will be to use God’s gifts (faith, the tongue, etc.) and abuse them.

Verses 13-15 gives us this pattern: human desire entices us which leads to sin, and sin results in death. This is the status of humanity.

Verses 16-18 give us this pattern: God desires lead to his giving, and his giving results in new life.

*My beloved brothers.*

By calling them beloved brothers, James is noted the birth that they share from God, the gift that they have in each other, and the use that they have in life together that keeps them on the path and not wandering. God uses his church to keep fellow believers from being deceived.

## **1:17**

*Every good gift and every perfect gift...*

The word gift here in the Bible always is connected with God's gifts. What is this gift? The only other time that this word is used is in Romans 5:15-16. There it relates to the gift of salvation and new life.

Read Matthew 7:7-11 and Luke 11:9-13 for the idea of "good gifts." There Jesus connects the thought that though human fathers are evil, yet they know how to give good gifts to their children.

Perfect gift is what we have seen before already several times in these first 17 verses. The perfect gift is the telos. The gifts that "complete" us.

*Comes down from above....*

James notes the source of the good and perfect gifts. God is. He is the source. To capture the idea "from above" we can see this in creation. Light is above us. Rain comes from above us. Jesus came "down" from heaven. This brings us outside of ourselves. "Our Help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth." We look to God and not here on earth or within ourselves.

With noting the direction here, James emphasizes again the gift: Life. That is the good and perfect gift. The gift of our creation is not out of view here, but the goal of the "complete" gift is the resurrection and new life that comes down from Jesus.

Read John 6:32-33 to see the gift of life that the Father gives. There all the words in James 1:17 are present in Jesus' words.

*From the Father of lights...*

This idea brings us back to Genesis. God one day one made light and then on day four organized light. The lights in the sky serve as a reminder of God's creative power and care. It also reminds us that the heavens above are Fathered by God. A reminder as well that the heavens and the cosmos are alive with God's activity. The stars above are made of gas but that is not what the stars are. (C.S. Lewis, the Dawn Treader).

We also remember that Jesus is the “light of the world.” The source of light is Jesus himself. It is interesting that it is translated as “Father of lights” but the Greek is singular, “light.” The idea here could very well also mean: that the Father of light is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. See John 1.

*With whom there is no variation or shadow due to change...*

These words are unique in that this is the only time they are used in the New Testament. Outside the New Testament they refer to astrological processes. The literal translation here would be: “a shadow cast by variation.” Or as is take elsewhere: “

The idea that James puts forward here is that the heavens above react in a predictable manner. We can time exactly when the sun rises and sets. We know when there will be solstices. Everything in the heavens acts exactly on time and is well ordered.

And yet at the same time, while they are predictable they change. Day turns to night, Spring turns to summer, and so on. The seasons come and go. Things change. God does not change the way our seasons do or how the day comes and goes.

This is how we get the idea of the immutability of God. “I the LORD do not change... Malachi 3:6. Since God does not change, we can expect and be comforted by the fact that he always will graciously give.

## **1:18**

*Of his own will he brought us forth...*

Read John 1 again. God is the source of our new life. It was not our choice that gave birth to us into God's family. It was God's choice. God alone has free will. To be brought forth is literally "birthed." God birthed us from his own will through faith in Christ. God excluded us from his decision, just like how humans have no say in their birth.

The word "will" could also mean "desire." This verse will be important when we keep what else James has to say, especially about faith and works in chapter 2. James will not mean that our works save us. But new humans, operating by faith, will live new lives.

With this thought, we can see two views that are contrary in James. Humans conceive sin which gives birth to death. God conceives by his own will and it gives life.

*By the word of truth...*

The agent of our birth is the Word of truth. Read Ephesians 1:13, Colossians 1:5, 2 Corinthians 6:7, or 2 Timothy 2:15.

Faith comes from hearing and hearing from the Word of Christ. Christ who is the way and the truth and the life. People must hear the Lord Jesus Christ. Where does this happen? Through the preaching of the Church. "The one who hears you hears me." Christ says to his apostles. Read 1 Peter 1:3.

This also connects with Baptism which is the new birth through water and the Spirit. Baptism being the physical Word of God applied to sinners to cover them and give them new birth. See John 3 and the discussion between Jesus and Nicodemus who has a bad habit in that chapter of hearing wrongly.

*That we should be a kind of first fruits as his creatures.*

By this new birth, Christians are a new humanity a new creature. "If anyone is in Christ the old has gone and the new has come." 2 Corinthians 5. The idea that James connects this with is the firstfruits. In the OT, the firstfruits was the first

year that fruit grew on a tree that finally has matured to grow fruit. When that happened, the fruit was considered holy and therefore not fit for human consumption. The first fruit was offered to God. This anticipated a greater harvest to follow. James sees the first generation of Christians as a type of all Christians that have come and all Christians on the last day.

Paul also uses this idea in 1 Corinthians to describe the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

No doubt James is playing off of that as he looks to the last day. Christians are a greater showing of what is to come. Note here the 3<sup>rd</sup> article of the Creed and the idea of the Church as the start of the New Creation. The resurrection of Jesus Christ has started a new humanity. Jesus as the new Adam and those who are given new birth in him join in this new humanity. James wants Christians to continue to show forth this new humanity.

Read Romans 8:21-23 to see how Paul uses this idea as well. Jesus was born so we might receive a new birth. And what do living people do? They live.

## 1:19

*Know this my beloved brothers....*

The word “know” carries dual meaning and could be translated in two ways. It could mean, “you know this already” or it could be translated as a command. “You must know this.” Because it can be translated either, James could certainly have left it so it could be taken one way or the other.

Again, as we heard in 1:2 and 1:18, James calls them beloved brothers. He is not talking down to them as ignorant; he is speaking to them out of concern in their walk together.

Hearing this and comparing to 1:18, it is good to note that James holds to a “now and not yet.” We are God’s new creatures now, but it has not yet appeared in its fullness.

James, noting that the Gospel has saved and made us new does a third use of the law here that guides our life of faith. Speaking to them as brothers indicates that they are fellow Christians. James is not speaking of how they are saved, that happened when God implanted his word in them, James is talking about how they live this new life not how to earn favor with God.

*Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger...*

This translation is rather weak compared to the force of the grammar James employs. “Let every person be...” is more permissive and suggestive. The force of James is better said as “Every person must be...” This is not a suggestion, James sees this as divine law. Most translations smooth it over and leave out a Greek word when translating. The NASB translation is an exception.

“person” is the word “Anthropos” and is the word meaning “man” or “mankind.”

James here emphasizes what to move quickly in and what to move fast in. The old adage of “you have two ears and one mouth.” Shows the priority to what we must do more often.

Listening is an important virtue found in wisdom literature in the Bible. “My son, listen to your father’s teaching.” Faith comes by hearing. God’s frequent

complaint in the Old Testament is that his people do not hear. Jesus will also frequently say, “The one who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

Being slow to speak is also something needful in the Christian community. The Psalms will at times beg God to put a guard on one’s lips. Proverbs 29:20 says, “Have you seen a man who is hasty with his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.” Jesus notes that our words will be judged on the last day.

To be slow is to delay implies long suffering. Here the need to speak and be angry should always be delayed. James will warn in chapter 3 that the tongue is set on fire by hell. It is in God’s wisdom to put off speech. In a world where social media allows endless discussion, this would be good to hear. As we will note later, God made humans to speak in order to praise God and bless our neighbor. Any other speech need not occur.

When James notes that we should be slow to anger/wrath, he is alluding to the famous declaration of God in the Old Testament that we see in Exodus 34. “Slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” It is in God’s character to be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger. As people made and remade in God’s image and a first fruit of his creatures, it is good and right to be like him.

Anger in the Bible often comes from man when we feel wronged. James in 3:13-4:12 will flesh out anger more. Anger leads to overreactions that make things worse.

## **1:20**

*For the anger of man...*

In Ephesians 4:31 and Colossians 3:8, anger is listed as a human vice. It can also be translated as “wrath.” Yet for many, acting out in anger is perceived as righteous or vindication. Along with those two occurrences of the word “anger” this is the only other time that anger is listed with humans. God’s anger is always just because it is a result of his long suffering being denied and acting for the good of his creation. Man, confused by evil, will find our anger a quick tool of the devil.

The word for “man” here is also a different word than above. “Andros”, more often refers to men than women. The picture here is violence since men are stronger physically than women.

*Does not produce the righteousness of God.*

This gives us the reason why James is giving commentary on anger. Human wrath denies God’s order and will in the world and causes us to take matters into our own hands. It also has the nasty habit of denying trust in God and God’s justice.

There is a similar sound between “wrath” (orge) and “produce/work” (erge). Wrath does not work might be a fun way to phrase it. Even God’s wrath does not fix problems, it only removes them from the equation.

The law of course does not make righteous, though it points us to it. The law only reveals wrath. (See Romans 3 and Romans 4:15, “The law brings wrath.”)

Righteousness has a very broad use in the Bible. It can even mean different ideas (justification and sanctification for example come from this word.) Look at Matthew 5:1 and Matthew 6:1 to see how even Jesus uses it in two different ways. So, what does James mean here exactly?

Some take righteousness to mean fulfilling the law that we must carry out. Anger in this way means that we will fail God’s law. (murder, for example).

But since the law works wrath, our attempts to be perfect will lead to pride and anger at our failure, which leads us to blame God and blame others.

The other sense of righteousness is most likely meant by James here. This is the righteousness that is imputed by God. God declares us righteous in Jesus Christ. This causes new life. Anger, coming from our sinful flesh tries to block out God’s righteousness from being manifest in our life.

This works even better if we understand “produce” as “works.” The anger of man does not work with God’s righteousness. Our works and boasts are excluded.

## 1:21

*Therefore, put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness...*

James reaches a conclusion with his “therefore.” Here is the consequence that we are to take away from this.

James would have us “put away” but the idea here is connected to clothing. “Take off” is the sense here. We need new clothing. It is no mistake that the NT will often talk of “Putting on” the Lord Jesus Christ and baptism being discussed as “Putting on Christ.” James is telling them in this way: “live as you are baptized.”

Filthiness then is like when your clothing gets soiled. Take off is then repentance. Put on is faith. Filth is “Moral filth” and rampant wickedness is how evil tends to stack up and build. The same word is used in Ephesians 4:31, Colossians 3:8, Titus 3:3 and 1 Peter 2:1. It is usually connected to our speech and also sexual sins and depravity.

*And receive with meekness the implanted word...*

Note here that we receive with meekness. Putting away is putting to death our human sinful flesh. It is to die. God then is the actor in giving the implanted word that we receive.

And we receive it with “meekness.” This is the word for humility as well. Jesus in Matthew 5 has words for those who are meek. The word meek means powerless. Those who are powerless and cannot even do anything for themselves are the recipients of God’s Word. This shows us how we can receive God’s Word. It must be planted in us, which is not something we can do, but only something God can do once he destroys what is in his way to do that.

This also notes that the implanted Word is already in them. James is cultivating its use.

*Which is able to save your souls.* James’ goal is their salvation. James wants this cultivated in us because it leads to our salvation. James is thinking of the last day here.

The word that we translate as “soul” means “life.” This means body and soul.

## 1:22

*But be doers of the word...*

The implanted word brings about fruit. Note Jeremiah 1 where God plants his word in Jeremiah, or Jeremiah 31:31-34 or Ezekiel 11:19-20. Just like a seed brings forth a plant, so does the Word of God, planted in our hearts, shine new light from us. Because God, by grace, has caused us to be a first fruit of his new creatures, this saving action will bring about a new humanity.

James is wishing to correct a disconnect in those who believe that the Gospel does not change hearts or is just information only. James desires to drive apathy from them. The force of the word “be” here carries the implication that the hearers have been doing this but they may be weathered down or beaten down. James is encouraging them to keep going.

It is of interesting note that the word “doer” is the same word as “maker/creator/poet.” Be poets of the word. This drives us back into creation. God said and it happened. Christians, who have the same creative word, will now “do” as well. Anything less is evil and unbelief.

Another way to understand this verse also needs to look back at the verse previous. God’s implanted word which saves our souls then is how we receive the gift of salvation. We assume that doers of the word implies doing God’s law. But it is just as much in force here that a doer is someone who believes God’s word.

In this case, here is an example of someone who is a doer of the implanted word: “Your sins are forgiven by the blood of Jesus.” A doer of the word believes that word. A hearer only sees it as information that means nothing to them.

John 6:40. What is the work of God? To believe the one whom the Father has sent. In short, to do the word is to believe the word which saves us. The Word of God asks for faith and works faith in us. Since faith is a gift of God, it fits with the idea that God is the giver of all good and ‘perfect’ gifts. (note with the ‘Perfect’ law of liberty.)

*And not hearers only, deceiving yourselves...*

James wants us to see the ridiculousness of hearing God's word only but not doing what his word says. It would be like light not coming into being when God spoke it. Here the nature and danger of unbelief is on display. Not because unbelief rivals God's creative word, but because it refuses and rebels against it. Such is the nature of evil that eludes our understanding.

The word for deceive is fun to note as well. The root comes from the word "to say." Someone who deceives themselves is someone who plants a false word in themselves. We might say today that it is someone who believes their own lie and lives accordingly. We all live out what we believe.

This shows us a repeated problem in humans, it is not that we don't know how to do, it is that we fail how to see.

### **1:23**

*For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer. He is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.*

James here gives an illustration of someone who is a hearer only and not a doer. He compares it to someone who, literally, "contemplates the face of his birth in a mirror." A lot has been done on how to take this. It is often translated "natural face" but could be taken "original face, living face, fleeting existence, or even 'state of being, life, human experience.'" The only other time this is used is also in James 3:6 where it is there translated "course of life."

Perhaps the best way to connect it is with the idea of birth in 1:15, 18.

Mirror here is not the mirror we think of today made from glass and metal coating. A mirror in James' mind is highly polished metal such as silver that was used for grooming.

Putting this together, we would say that James is getting at this: a person knows what they look like, even without a mirror. To stare at a mirror intently gives the idea that the person does not know what he is looking at, though it is his own face.

## **1:24**

*For he looks at himself and goes away, and at once forgets what he was like.*

The idea is ridiculous that James describes, which is the point. Without a mirror, a person knows what they look like. So someone, who has intently studied the mirror, and walks away and forgets what they look like, is absurd.

That is the point for James. It is absurd that someone who is implanted with new life in Jesus will not respond and be a doer. A person who is not a doer of God's Word is someone who forgets what they look like even though they just got done staring at themselves in the mirror. It is comedic and tragic.

The Concordia Commentary on James says it this way: "James depicts a totally unnatural occurrence. The man's major failure is forgetting what should have left a deep, lasting impression, something so integral to his very identity." Page. 179.

Compare this with Jesus' teaching in the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:4 and 19.

God's word and teaching leaves a lasting and permanent change in us. A professor of mine in college put it this way about the Bible. "This is not a book of information but transformation." This leaps out in the Bible on page one. "let there be...and there was..." Or John 9, "are you the same man or someone else?" And the man goes: "yes."

This hits home with the word "forget" as well. Just like how remember is not a mental idea but a physical one. Forget is not just a slip in memory. It is a loss of identity. Read Deuteronomy 6:12 and 8:11. Note the danger of forgetting even if you "know" factually.

What could make us forget God? Peer pressure, persecution, desires of the world that call us to live a different identity than the Word planted in us.

Here is a fun quote from Luther on this subject: “Therefore anyone who is so cold that he thinks he knows enough and gradually begins to loathe the Word has lost Christ and the Gospel. What he thinks he knows, he reaches only by speculation; and as St. James says, ‘he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, and goes away and at once forgets what he was like’ This is what is finally happening to the frivolous fanatics. Therefore, let every faithful person work and strive with all his might to learn this doctrine and keep it, and for this purpose let him employ humble prayer to God with continual study and mediation on the Word.”

In short: Never forget our God given identity given to us by the grace of Jesus Christ. Forgetting that leads to all our problems.

## **1:25**

*But the one who looks in the perfect law...*

Here is that word perfect again. What is meant by the perfect law and the law of liberty? See 1 Corinthians 9:21 and Galatians 6:2. Are we thinking of the law is the list of commandments, or just how something is, like the “law of gravity.”

Understanding this, the perfect law is the gift of God. This is faith, grace, freedom, forgiveness. This is God at work in us to transform us into new people. New people have a certain way of life to them. This is not us working to become new people. This is us being made new people by God’s grace and cooperating with that. It is knowing what we look like in the mirror and being that way.

The word “looks in” is used only four other times in the NT and they all pertain to the resurrection accounts. Luke 24:12, John 20:5, John 20:11 and 1 Peter 1:12 to angels who look in on the matters about our salvation.

*The law of liberty and perseveres...*

Here, liberty exclaims what kind of law is happening here. This is not the law of works which only enslave us and condemn. This is the law that has set us free. Read John 8:31-33. To persevere is the call for endurance or as Jesus puts it: to abide. It is to stay put and keep at it, no matter the peer pressure otherwise.

The law of liberty also reminds us how the Gospel frees us from the curse of the law.

*Being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, He will be blessed in his doing.*

Here the Gospel changes our lives. Faith then holds on to this. The doer who acts we could say is the one who believes will act in response to it. This is not just the law as we narrow it down to the 10 commandments. This is all of God's Word.

The word "blessed" comes back here as well. Note the sermon on the mount. God blesses those who believe. He acts on our lowly estate.

Hearers and doers then are about three things: what we look at, how we look at things and the action that follows. If we look to Jesus, and trust in him, that results in fruit.

It is impossible to separate faith and works as impossible as it is to separate heat and light in fire. They go together.

## 1:26

*If anyone thinks he is religious...*

Here James moves into the life of someone who has been made new by God by giving us an example of what this is not like.

The person in James' example thinks he is religious. This person is convinced that they are religious. Already the force makes us realize that he is not religious but thinks he is. A realization that we can be deceived by what devotion to God looks like. The person is the same person in the example of someone who looked into the mirror and forgot what they looked like.

The word for religious comes from the idea of sacrifice, or a life that is devoted to God. It even carries the context for the word "rite." A person's life takes on a certain liturgy as we would put it today, a living sacrifice. In outside literature outside the, the word religious also means, "the things that befit devotion to God."

Read Romans 12 for more thoughts on this. Today, the idea of religious no longer carries the same force as it does here. We might substitute religious for spiritual. If anyone thinks he is spiritual... Would apply here too.

*And does not bridle is tongue...*

The word bridle is a rare word in the New Testament. It only occurs here and in 3:2 which tells us that we should connect the two spots as we read. The word bridle is actually two words joined together: "bridle" and "guide."

The tongue is pictured as something wild and in need of taming. Almost like it is outside our control. Either God owns the tongue or hell does, see chapter 3.

So someone who thinks he is religious but does not talk like he is religious will be

*But deceives his heart...*

The words and stories we tell ourselves can lead us to actually believe they are true even when they are lies. Read Luke 8:16-18.

We have already met someone who is deceived in chapter 1 where the word “doubt” was from the word “deceived.”

James will connect the tongue and religion throughout his letter to prayer. Paul does as well in Ephesians 5.

*...this person's religion is worthless.*

Here James employs the “then” to the “if” at the beginning of the verse. If someone thinks he is religious and following God, but yet is deceived by his own words that are not bridled and controlled, then he is not spiritual. He makes a show of himself. See Matthew 6 when our Lord speaks about prayer.

Our words reveal an extension of our heart. “Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.” Luke 6:45

James is reflecting the thought that we can discern a person's heart by what the words they say. Read Ephesians 5:1-21 and note how often the mouth is brought up.

If someone who thinks he is religious and faithful to God and yet does not practice this with prayer will find his religion to be worthless. The word worthless means literally “idle.” It is a car that is in park but is running and not going anywhere. Engine is roaring but the car is not moving. This is used with idolatry in Acts 14:15. We might imagine then a person who is a big talker who knows the right words but doesn't mean anything by them.

### **1:27**

*Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father is this...*

James now moves into true religion and true spirituality. He characterizes right devotion to God the Father as pure and undefiled. These words, along with untainted heavily lean into the sacrifices in Leviticus. The theme of Leviticus echoes here in this verse. “Be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.” Read Leviticus 19:2 and 20:26. Especially take a glance at the context before and after those verses.

To be pure is the word for “clean” and it is to be fit to be in God’s presence. Such as the clean animals for Noah as right for sacrifice or the clean foods people could eat. People themselves by their actions could be either clean or unclean. Having improper religion then is like being a leper before God.

Elsewhere in the Bible, people are made clean by faith see Acts 15:9 or Ephesians 5:26. See also 1 John 1:7. Also read Matthew 15:10-29 breaking first at verse 20.

The Word undefiled usually refers to the marriage bed. See Hebrews 13:4 And also to the Christian hope in Christ 1 Peter 1:4. It reminds us that the sexual union between husband and wife is a ritual union before the eyes of God. Something that joins them together and joins them to the story of God. (Ephesians 5).

*To visit orphans and widows in their affliction...*

Visit certainly means going to see these people. In the Bible, the word visit usually carries the meaning of God bringing about judgment for evil and rescue for the powerless. The visitation (where we get the word episcopal/bishop) means that Christians caring for these people are acting in God’s stead.

The affliction is the loss these people have experienced: loss of parents for widows and husbands for widows. In the ancient world, losing these people was a death sentence. Affliction is the word for tribulation/crisis.

Read the quote from the James commentary on page 195-196. Note these core thoughts about orphans and widows:

In the Bible, God has a special attachment to these groups of people. He especially wants them cared for.

Visiting these people is a sacrifice as Christ did for us. We walk with them in their loss. It is also connected to the death of Christ. “You visited me... As you did it for one of the least of these, you did it to me.”

Visiting these people anticipates the last day. A new creation. Christians are acting like provisional family members (Son, behold your mother...) We act as first fruits of the resurrection. We maintain the gift of life for those at most risk of

losing it. We “demonstrate the trajectory that Christ has established toward the fulfillment of the new creation.” James commentary 196.

*And to keep oneself unstained/untainted from the world.*

The word “unstained” or “untainted” as it could be also said is only ever used elsewhere for the blood of Christ. See 1 Peter 1:19 and Ephesians 5:27.

The world and its corrupting influences are to be avoided. And so we go out into the world but to be free from it. We are not to be seduced by hopes of power or strength or even self-survival. This is how we become sacrifices. It reminds us that the correct path in life is “down.” (Note that this is the direction of the Son of God.)

See the temptations of Christ in Matthew 4 to get an idea of the warnings that James is alluding to.

Putting all of this together: A right religion keeps in mind life on the last day being lived right now today. We are last day people. In us, Christ is shining to point us to the hope of the Last Day when all affliction is overturned.

## 2:1

*My brothers, show no partiality...*

James most likely responds to something that is too easy to do: be taken in by our eyes. The word partiality literally means, “taken in by/lift up someone’s face.” It is the classic idiom, “don’t judge a book by its cover.”

This word is also used in three other places: Romans 2:11, Ephesians 6:9, and Colossians 3:25. All are used by Paul with God to state that God shows no regard to someone’s face.

This means that we show favoritism by how someone looks rather than by how they act, especially at the expense of another.

*As you hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.*

Faith here is the *fides qua creditor* (the faith that believes) versus what we see in 2:14 with *fides quae creditor* (the faith that is believed, the content).

To hold this faith suggest a living faith that continues to act and operate. This is the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. Which is an interesting thought and a lot of ink has been spilled over this thought. Is it the faith of Jesus Christ that is given to us that we hold onto? Or is this our faith in Jesus? An argument can be made for both.

Glory reminds us in this context that Jesus was not much to look at. Note how Pilate and Herod do not think much of Jesus when they finally see him in person. Much like how the Christians James is writing to are doing the same. The cross, being the center of our faith in Jesus, shows us not to take things by how we see them.

The word glory is also oddly placed. Here it is translated attributively, but we could also say, “As you hold the faith of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.”

## **2:2**

*For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly...*

The word “assembly” is literally synagogue. This probably suggests that James’ community is predominantly Jewish.

The word “a man wearing a gold ring” is actually one word in Greek, and is probably invented by James here. It is a “gold-ringed man.”

The word “fine clothing” is often used of the angels when they appear in the Gospels. See Acts 10:30 or Revelation 19:8. The word can often mean, glisten or radiant.

The rich man literally looks like an angel. That is the description given. He looks nice.

*And a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in,*

The word poor in Greek can’t be said without almost spitting. “ptokos.” His clothing is also described as not just shabby, but filthy. For us people in Wisconsin, this guy just got in from the barn and smells like it.

## **2:3**

*And you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, ‘You sit here in a good place.’*

When something glitters, it draws our attention. We like good looking people too.

The word pay attention is often used for slaves. The guy coming in looking good is pampered and treated well. To favor him is to become his slave. This was the idea of justice in the ancient world. Justice is giving to people what their social class deserved. People in high rank deserved to be treated right. Those in lower class were expected to be treated with disdain. That was the idea of justice that even Plato teaches.

The good place is the place of honor is to please the rich man. The word “good place” literally means, “a pleasing spot.”

*While you say to the poor man, 'You stand over here.' Or 'sit down at my feet.'*

To stand means to stand afar and away. The nosebleed seats as it were. To “sit down at my feet” literally means “to sit under my footstool.” It treats the poor person as the servant. He is the footrest. Footstool is often used elsewhere to denote images of defeat and humiliation of one’s enemies. To put the poor man here is to treat him as a hostile.

For example, Death is put under Christ’s footstool. Read Psalm 110. It might not be too far to imagine that the poor person is the footstool for the rich one.

## **2:4**

*Have you not then made distinctions among yourselves...*

Distinctions means literally “judgments.” By making judgments they have made themselves the judges of what is good and what is evil by using their eyes only.

They are continuing the class distinctions that society around them continues to make and use that as standards in the church.

*and become judges with evil thoughts?*

The evil thoughts show that this is not the work of the world to come. The glory of Jesus was hidden in his suffering. The cross is glorious not because crosses are glorious but who it was that was crucified. When the Lord of glory was crucified, it was done with not recognizing who he truly is. That here is the evil thoughts.

Evil thoughts also can think utilitarian. The rich guy can give kick backs, the poor man has nothing to pay you with. They are treated for their usefulness. Tempting to work that way in the church, give treatment to the useful members.

## **2:5**

*Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world...*

James really wants to get their attention with the imperative “listen.” He doesn’t want them to miss this. And he calls them beloved brothers again.

He reminds them who God so often calls to faith: the poor. God “chooses.” Literally “elects.” The poor in the world reminds us of Matthew 5. Those who are poor in the eyes of the world are often neglected.

Note 1 Corinthians where Paul notes the same. Read the account of St. Lawrence of Rome in 258 AD.

*To be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom...*

Those who are not much in this world, are great in the kingdom of God. But here rich and heirs are parallels. We are rich in the world that is to come. Our eyes are fixed on the last day. If we take our eyes off the last day, we make the wrong judgments here.

*Which he has promised to those who love him?*

Those who love God see Jesus Christ for who he is and believe in him. They will see in the poor of this world and remember the blessings Jesus spoke upon them. They will see in the poor, the Lord Jesus himself. See 2 Corinthians 8:9.

Those who love God will receive what God promises.

## **2:6**

*But you have dishonored the poor man.*

James wakes them up to see what truly happens. When we show favoritism, especially to what our eyes like, we end up dishonoring what God wishes to honor. Honor is a big deal in the ancient world. Here it is the faith of the man that we are to honor. The treasure in the clay jar.

*Are not the rich the ones who oppress you...*

The word oppress can mean, “exploit, dominate.” The only other time it is used in the New Testament is in Acts 10:38. There it is the devil who oppresses the human race with disease and suffering.

*And the ones who drag you into court?*

Ironic that they are judging the rich and the poor when they gather when it is the rich in this context who judge them in court. The word drag is used in the Septuagint for when the Israelites were oppressed as slaves in Egypt.

**2:7**

*Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?*

To blaspheme is to speak evil about God. To revile or slander God. James notes that it is often these people who laugh at the faith given to us. We should be careful that we honor them when they dishonor God and lack faith. To blaspheme is to dishonor as compared to the honorable name by which we were called. The word honorable here is actually the word “beautiful, good.” To blaspheme is to rub mud on something that is clean and good. Here it is the name by which we are called by. This could be mocking God, mocking our faith in God, etc.

## **2:8**

*If you really fulfill the royal law according to Scripture...*

The word fulfill is our familiar word in James, "Complete." James is laying out for us the true meaning of God's law. The "spirit" of the law as you will. The spirit of the law is much deeper than what it appears on the surface.

"Royal" is a rare word in the Bible and only here is it placed with "law". It occurs only in John 4:46,49, and Acts 12:20-21. It reminds us that the law is not something decided by consensus but by the ruler of the Universe.

*You shall love your neighbor as yourself...*

This is the summary of the entire law of course. This is God's decree, desire and also built into the creation. Here James is quoting Leviticus 19:18. The force of "shall" is simply "will" As in "You will do this."

*You are doing well.*

In the "if-then" clause, this is the "then." The word "well" has the freight of "beautiful, good." It echoes creation. "God saw that it was good."

## **2:9**

*But if you show partiality...*

Partiality is the sin of judging the book by its cover, or by the outward appearance. It is to take things at by the look of one's face.

To show partiality is to make a judgment call that is often only by externals. It also brings us back to Genesis 3. Eve "saw that the fruit was pleasing to the eye and desirable for making one wise."

*You are committing sin...*

James tells us point blank that such observation is inexcusable. It is sin at its heart. Taking things at the face of things often denies justice and gives way to oppression of those who need it. The rich look good on the surface and can pay you back for your kindness. But the poor don't look good and are denied since they can't scratch your back in return.

*And are convicted by the law as transgressors...*

The word transgressor implies betrayal. To deny what is right and to make judgments based on the surface leads to rejecting the love of your neighbor. This also signals a betrayal of God who gave the Law.

**2:10**

*For whoever keeps the whole law...*

The law is one because the one who gave the law is One. Since all the laws come from God, a breaking of one is a rejection of all the one who gave all the law.

*But fails in one point has become accountable for all of it...*

So when you break one law, you will suffer the consequences from the true judge of the law, the one who made the law. This is also why Luther will note that all commandments are an expression of the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment.

**2:11**

*For he who said, 'Do not commit adultery.' Also said, 'Do not murder.'*

Here, James is probably referring to what Jesus said in the sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 since those are the two commandments that Jesus also brings up.

*If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the Law...*

Breaking one commandment breaks the whole law. Breaking one commandment doesn't make you any less of a rebel than breaking a different one. Here James is probably refuting a thought some might have had that treats one sin as better than another. Or the fact that by showing partiality, they are making themselves the judge of the intent of the law and therefore subverting the place of God.

## **2:12**

*So speak and so act as those who are judged under the law of liberty.*

Partiality denies the Gospel that has come to all. Verses 12-13 are the culmination of the section so far.

Here James wants the Christians he is writing to, to act and anticipate the last day. On the last day, God will judge us by the freedom that Jesus Christ has won for his people. This is the Gospel that James is laying out. Since we have been forgiven and set free, we should act that way now as we will be on the last day.

The last day is the day when what we see now will fail. If partiality prefers what the eyes see then we are setting ourselves up for failure. The law of freedom anticipates God's action to save those in bondage.

This will cause us to show mercy to those who are at wits end. Such as widows and orphans. The law of freedom will see these people as ones to show care and mercy toward.

## **2:13**

*For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy.*

What we put out in the world will find its way back to us. The idea here is that judgment without mercy will happen to the one who has shown no mercy in life.

We pray this in the Lord's prayer, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

*Mercy triumphs over judgment.*

The word triumph is the word for "boasts." Mercy boasts over judgment. Here James gives us a picture of the end for those redeemed in Christ. Mercy will stand above the final judgment. Christians now have a chance to show the final judgment shining forth. The overturning of doom in the lives of others resonates with the resurrection over death and the grave in the final judgment.

Acts of mercy then is how the world ends, though it bends toward judgment.

## 2:14

*What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?*

Here we need to apply a good rule of thumb when we read the Bible. From Genesis to Revelation, the Scriptures (inspired by the Holy Spirit) are not to be pitted against each other.

Here we need to read this section in James, especially 2:21 coming up, and to hold it together with Romans 4 and Galatians 2-3. We read James in light of those passages.

We first can note how James is using faith as it can be misused. So far in the letter, James has referenced faith several times. See 1:3 and 1:6, and 2:5 for example.

Here James notes that there cannot be a disconnect between faith and works. Faith will lead to works. It is like how a living person therefore breathes. James is replying to a situation where someone has heard faith as a call to inaction, something that doesn't make sense. Like looking in a mirror and not recognizing who is looking back at you.

*Can that faith save him?*

By saying "that faith" James underscores already that this is not faith at all. This is a different person and situation that James is rebutting than what Paul is addressing. Paul is addressing someone who fears they are not good with God and feels the need to get good with God by their works, something that is a dead end and lacks assurance before God.

James is addressing someone who has decided that since works cannot save that he can just do whatever he wants and still claim faith. See Paul in Romans 3 where he agrees.

James notes that because we are last day people, our faith will be lived out now. Life can't continue as it was before we had faith.

A faith that does not exhibit a new life and the fruits of that work in Jesus is not a faith at all. James rightly notes that such a faith cannot save a person.

## **2:15**

*If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food...*

James lists an example. Here he calls attention to a brother or sister. This is referring to a fellow Christian, not a generic “fellow human.” James is referring to someone talking to another brother or sister in Christ. Note how James has referred to those in the letter as “my brothers/my beloved brothers.”

So imagine that someone at Christ Lutheran Church came in and lacked clothes on their back and daily bread. What is our reaction? The answer is easy of course. That person needs to be cared for. We don’t need to do it to get good with God, we are doing it because our neighbor needs it done. It is an act of mercy. Faith will respond like how God has responded to us.

## **2:16**

*And one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled...”*

James gives us a weird hypothetical response by someone in the congregation. While this is hypothetical that someone there has said this, James shows a concern that it is possible someone might.

It is of note that James has made use of words that Jesus frequently says, “Go in peace, your faith has saved you.” Here James shows that someone might say those words but they could be empty of meaning! “Go in peace” is often said in a liturgical setting, like worship. The person who says this here is using it to hide inaction. “It is a religious cover for the failure to act.”

It is like he says, “imagine someone here looking at a naked and hungry brother and by the act of saying go in peace, be clothed and fed” that saying that is enough. It doesn’t even address the need. That is like acting like we are God himself, that by speaking it, it is done. This is a disconnect.

Such is faith without the response. Faith alone saves, but faith is never alone as Luther would note. Faith that knows the answers, and knows what is good, but

does not do what is good is a faith that is not the faith that all of Scripture points out as faith.

This faith is a deception, which James referred to in 1:6 and 1:16. We should not believe those who claim to have faith but do not respond as one with faith would act. If someone believes murder is wrong, but murders or approves those who murder, they don't believe that murder is wrong. Note the "I would not do that but if others want to do it they can." Attitude. There is a disconnect.

*Without giving them the things needed for the body...*

James continues the awkward moment. Someone in great need is told to be clothed and fed while still being naked and hungry. But to the person who told them that, it is good enough. He has not fulfilled the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment. Note how Luther discusses that in the Small Catechism.

*What good is that?*

That is good for nothing is what that is. In fact, if someone claimed that was what faith really is, we would conclude that faith is merciless and self-centered. That is the nature of sin to fail to note the brother in need. Paul himself will never suggest that faith is inward focus. Faith, rather, frees us to look beyond ourselves to those around us.

As we say in the prayers after communion. Faith in you and love for one another. Faith restores that awareness and need for compassion.

## **2:17**

*So also faith by itself...*

James brings the consequence of the example to bear on the discussion of faith. Faith by itself is a dead faith. Saying someone is alive when they are not breathing and heart is not beating is a lie.

Faith that is severed from daily life and looking to the last day cannot continue believing what is reality.

*If it does not have works, is dead.*

The works are what the law tells us and what James illustrated “love your neighbor as yourself.”

Here, James is comparing a living faith from a dead faith. This is ironic and shocking, especially since James at 1:12 noted that faith under trial inherits life!

We might suggest at this point that a faith without works is a faith that has not been tested or stressed. God even tested Abraham’s faith and he came out with the work that is born from faith.

## **2:18**

*But someone will say...*

James expects a rebuttal, which may suggest that this is more than a hypothetical conversation.

*You have faith and I have works...*

This flips the point James has made. We expect the quote to read, “I have faith and you have works.” But James flips the script to show that the point could be abused the other way as well. The hypothetical person notes that he doesn’t need faith since he has works to back him up! And he also suggests that one person can be saved by faith and another person (himself) can be saved by his works.

The person might also suggest that a person has a gift of faith while he has the gift of works. Regardless of who has what, James sets this false idea of viable expressions of Christianity in order to knock it down with what he says next.

*Show me your faith apart from your works...*

It cannot be one or the other. They fit hand in glove. The faith leads to works. They cannot be divorced. What we believe will always manifest itself in response and in works.

*And I will show you my faith by my works.*

James tells us as much. The faith we have will show up in how we live. If we believe that God forgives us all our sins, we will forgive the sins of others. James is

also referring to the fact that we are the first fruits of God's new creatures of the new heavens and earth. Since we are born from the Word, we will live as children of the Word.

## **2:19**

*You believe that God is one, you do well.*

James is referring to the Confession of faith from the Old Testament. The Schema. Deuteronomy 6:4. This verse was said several times a day by Jews. James picks up their common confession of faith. We still echo this when we confess: "I believe in one God..." He notes that someone who believes this is doing well. This is true and good and right. But then he mentions this:

*Even the demons believe—and shudder!*

Here, even the demons know and ascent to this truth. They also know that God is one, but this knowledge does not save them. They recoil at the thought and it terrifies them.

So while the demons know this, they do not trust God. We on the other hand are not called to have this kind of "faith" if you can call it that. A generic faith for faith's sake is not the same as a faith that trust in God for the forgiveness of sins that cleanses us and makes us new.

Faith includes knowledge, but it must have trust to truly be faith. It is not a historical belief, but faith is something done to me and for me.

A good quote from Luther: "There is no other mediator than the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God. Therefore the faith of the Jews and the Turks is false. They say, "I believe that God created the Heavens and the Earth." The devil believes the same thing (James 2:19) but it does not help him. For the Jews and the Turks have the audacity to come before God without Christ as Mediator." (Luther's Works, Volume 30. Again: "I am rather pleased that you speak so discriminatingly about faith as to say it is one thing to believe about God, another to believe God, and still another to believe in God. Thus, the demons also believe about God...but to believe in God is to follow God with love and good works, and so forth."

## 2:20

*Do you want to be shown, you foolish person...*

Read Galatians 2:15-3:14. Note how Paul talks about being justified before God. Note how James describes being justified in this section. As Paul and James go at it, they are talking to different attitudes and applying Law/Gospel. James is using this as law to attack unbelief manifesting as inaction. Paul is using this as Gospel to calm troubled consciences.

In the Bible, justification is the work of God. He makes us righteous. We in turn from this work will show forth that we are righteous. Faith, which makes one righteous by trusting in the work of Jesus, then live as Jesus. "Christ lives in me." But when it fails to happen, the burden for its failure is on man. So we can say at once that faith alone justifies without human works. But if humans do not exhibit works then their faith is false.

Glory belongs to God for our righteousness, but the burden remains on us to get it done. The logic for us doesn't add up, but Paul works this way as well when he says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you." Philippians 2:12-13. You need to get it done, but when it gets done, it was solely God.

The word "foolish" means "empty headed" such is faith without works, hollow.

*That faith apart from works is useless.*

James is not trying to pull apart works from faith as if the two are competing against each other. Someone also cannot claim to be saved if they have works but no faith in Christ. Someone who does what looks like good works is lost outside of being born from the Word of God.

James is attacking the opposite error that faith means inactivity and passivity. Paul wants us to see how we are made righteous before God. James wants us to see how we are shown to be righteous before the eyes of the world. Paul discusses how salvation came to us. James talks about how salvation is then lived out by active trust in God. Works don't bring faith; they follow faith. This is why faith cannot be divorced from faith or mingled with faith.

“Justification in the Pauline texts above pertains solely to one’s status in Christ before God.” In contrast, James speaks from an eschatological perspective regarding the type of faith that, by grace, will stand at the final judgment.” (p. 245 of James Concordia Commentary)

Paul and James are usually complementary arguments. They are not opposed. We might say that Paul demonstrates how we are made righteous—by faith. James demonstrates how we show that we are righteous—by faith active in response.

## **2:21**

*Was not Abraham our father justified by works...*

Abraham is brought up as the first illustration from the Old Testament that James will use.

Here, the word “justified” comes to its often tangled mess of translation. In the Bible the word for justified is the same term used for sanctified. Perhaps where the confusion also comes in. Justified is how we talk about how one is made just with God. Sanctified is how we are made holy. There is strong overlap but also separate uses for the same word.

*When he offered up his son Isaac on the altar.*

Here, James uses a different point in time than Paul does. When Paul talks about Abraham being justified he brings up Genesis 15:6. Abraham believed when God told him that he would send him a son. Abraham did not work to get this. God promised.

Here, James reaches ahead to Genesis 22 after Abraham already has his son Isaac. James is not using this justified to indicate how Abraham got in good with God, but how his faith, being tested, was God proven. In this, our faith, when tested, will be proven to be from God himself and a living faith. Not a dead faith. After all, suffering completes our faith, as James will argue in just a moment.

## **2:22**

*You see that his faith was active along with his works...*

Abraham's faith in God resulted in living a certain way. Even when tested to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham's faith that believes God proved true through his work to go ahead to kill his son. A faith at work that God rewarded.

*And his faith was completed by his works;*

Here we see our favorite word "complete" that James has used several times so far. We could translate this: "faith was brought to its intended goal." Works complete faith just as suffering completes faith! (Chapter 1) In this discussion about works, we might want to ask, "what is the work?" In the context of James' letter, there is no greater work in our faith than suffering.

Abraham suffered the entire time he went to offer his son as a sacrifice. That was the work. His faith worked out to the end. That trust in God that God counted as righteous in his sight (Genesis 15:6) reached the finish line in Genesis 22.

Go read, Acts 14:19-23. There we read, "through many sufferings we will enter the kingdom of God. So instead of asking, "why, God?" when we suffer, we need to hear this as a work that proves our faith.

We might say than that the work God has for our faith is to suffer in the present time. Faith which beholds that which we do not see, must put up with what appears to be the opposite of what we believe to be true. This is why James continues to say often, "you see..." James wants our works to match what faith already sees.

## **2:23**

*And the Scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness'...*

James reaches back from Genesis 22 to Genesis 15. This is key. The faith that justified Abraham back in Genesis 15 is put on display when he offered up Isaac. That is the point for James. Abraham's faith is true. And it is a faith that is an example for us.

*And he was called a friend of God.*

The word friend here is the word “philos” or love. This is the filial love, or the Philadelphia kind of love. Here it is translated as “friend.” This is a gift from God and initiated by him. A faith that is proven is a faith that makes God call someone his friend. We can see this in Luke 12:4, John 11:11, and 15:13-15, and 3 John 15. James will describe the opposite of this in 4:4. Love with the world makes you an enemy of God.

## **2:24**

*You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.*

Here, James switches from his argument with the imagery opponent to the readers and hearers.

This is usually the greatest point of contention that is drawn today between Paul and James.

Romans 3:28, “For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

To quote our confessions: “When James says we are justified by faith and works, he certainly does not mean that we are regenerated by works. Nor does he say that our propitiation is due in part to Christ and in part to our works. Nor does he describe the manner of justification, but only the nature of the just who have already been justified and reborn.”

Only someone justified by faith is eligible for good works. Only from faith alone can good deeds spring that actually please God.

## **2:25**

*And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received messengers and sent them out by another way?*

Having used a father figure in the faith, James now turns to a mother figure in the faith.

What is interesting about Rahab is the manner of her life. She is called a prostitute, certainly not a good work to emulate. But her recognition that the arrival of the Israelites meant the destruction of Jericho, she didn't resist them but welcomed them, lied to the king that they were there, snuck them out, and sent them safely away. She trusted that she could be saved, and to secure that salvation, welcomed the stranger (a stranger who was coming to destroy her city and claim the land for themselves at that!) So even lying to her own people (the world) she became a friend of God.

The faith at work here is not her deeds in life but responding favorably to what God was going to do through his people. We can read about Rahab also worshipping the true God in Joshua 2:10-14. We can say that faith is taking advantage of the situation despite how we have lived.

## **2:26**

*For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.*

James arrives at his conclusion for this section. Just as he began saying so he ends by saying as well.

Here faith and works are connected like body and spirit. If the spirit is gone, the body is dead. So faith that doesn't have works functions in the same way. Here spirit functions like the breath that God gave to Adam.

“The absence of spirit or life breath means that a body is a dead corpse. If one cannot find breath when looking for an obvious indicator of respiration, like movement of the chest, one concludes there is no life in the body. Similarly, the absence of deeds to substantiate faith signals a dead faith. If a person alleges to have faith but there is an absence of deeds to manifest that faith, one must conclude that that faith is dead. Indeed there is nothing living at all.” Pg. 271 of James Concordia Commentary.

### **3:1**

*Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers...*

Here the word that James uses for teachers is used often in the Bible to refer to the spiritual office. This is not referring to someone who teaches a subject like we think of today. James assumes the pastoral office. Jesus is called the Teacher in the Gospels.

But if you look at Acts 13:1, 1 Corinthians 12:28-29, Ephesians 4:11, 2 Timothy 1:11, the same term here is being applied to the pastoral ministry.

The teachers that James is referring to are what we today call pastors. James here is warning of someone who wants to eagerly get into these positions. Teachers are in a precarious position because they form people. People believe and are shaped by the teachers who shape them.

*For you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness...*

James gives us the warning for being a teacher. It comes with receiving a harsher judgment from God. Read Luke 12:42-48 to see how Jesus describes it. Hopefully with James saying this, it will cause those with less pure motives from seeking the pastoral office.

Hebrews 13:17 “as those who will have to give an account.”

### **3:2**

*For we all stumble in many ways.*

As James presses on, he uses a word that Jesus uses for those who do not believe in him, Jesus notes that he is the stumbling block. Stumbling happens due to false belief. Noting this for teachers/pastors, stumbling as a teacher causes students to also fumble and trip in the faith as well. This issue can compound itself as time goes on. What might be a little fumble in a teacher, can cause later generations of students to be completely off.

This causes us to confess to God, correct our ways, and ask God for wisdom as we press on.

*And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man...*

So if a teacher does not stumble, what he passes on is good. Speaking is hard, teaching is even harder. Failure causes great harm.

James notes our favorite word in his letter when he writes, “perfect” This is the telos, the finish line, it is the accomplished word. We might say someone who preaches and teaches well is the complete package. Not saying “morally perfect” for we all sin, but to correctly teach the faith is what plants the word in people as James noted.

James returns to this topic of the mouth that we have heard several times already in his letter. Notably in 1:19 “slow to speak...” and 1:26, “bridle his tongue.”

*Able also to bridle his whole body.*

Notably, if you can control your mouth, you are able to control your whole body. We all know that what we say can get us into hot water. Words have consequences. They are not just sounds that echo in the air, but they carry meaning and power. Our words set us on a path. A path that leads to a conclusion or a telos.

### **3:3**

*If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us...*

James makes his first example from creation. Putting a bit into a horse's mouth allows someone to control where they go.

*We guide their whole bodies as well.*

James makes the point clear. Someone who controls the mouth controls the body. To act rightly (works!) one must speak and talk rightly.

Read Psalm 51:15 or Psalm 141:1-4. The control of the mouth to praise God is what then allows us to live rightly. A right praise of God leads to right living. Faith that expresses itself in works begins with the praise of God.

### 3:4

*Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds...*

We can picture this for ourselves as well. Ships can be these massive things and the forces of wind and sea that drive them are powerful as well.

*They are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs.*

And yet a simple little device in the water allows a person to steer a massive ship and guide the masts.

Despite being small, they decide the course of sailing.

### 3:5

*So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.*

James now moves to his point of the images. The tongue on a human is a small instrument. And yet it is used by the heart to speak great things. The “great” could be positive or negative. Praising God is something great that the tongue can do and was created to do. But the great things can also be negative.

The word “great things” is only used here in the NT. It is used often in outside literature to the negative side, often in political propaganda. The “great” things are the boasts that we make about how great and awesome “I am.” What we can do and accomplish. And yet never realize how frail and flighty we are.

James could mean both. The rest of verse 5 might suggest he first has a negative view.

*How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire.*

Just like how a ship is massive and controlled by a small rudder, so the tongue which is small can light up a whole forest. Note the impact of social media. Something that happens or is said is quickly spread throughout the internet. We can imagine the fire here in Marshfield that started off small by the tracks and ended up burning the whole town down.

Words are powerful, this means to tread lightly and use them well. Think of 2<sup>nd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> commandments. Two commandments are dedicated to the tongue.

### **3:6**

*And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness.*

All it takes is for one sentence to set off anger. Family, friends, and relationships have all come crashing down due to something so small as words.

*The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body,*

Here the tongue is personified, it has a life of its own. How often do we say words that we wish could be recalled. Our words can make our whole body feel dirty. Hence the idea of “stain.” Note back in 1:27 that James urges us to “be unstained from the world.” Read Ephesians 5:1-21

Sirach 28:8-12 puts it this way: “A hasty quarrel kindles fire, and hasty strife sheds blood. If you blow on a spark, it will glow; if you spit on it, it will be put out; and both come out of your mouth.”

*Setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.*

When the mouth gets us into trouble, it causes our lives to be set on fire as well. Angry words said between two friends cause them to go their separate ways.

This is what it means to be set on fire by hell. Hell causes strife and division. The use of someone’s tongue causes their works to be enflamed as well. We need a new Word from God to be planted in us. (1:21)

### **3:7**

*For every kind of beast and bird, or reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind...*

James lists all the major groups of where we find animals. This is the classic distinction of animals in the Bible. The land animals that walk and creep (reptiles), and the sea creatures and the air creatures. See also Genesis 9:2 “all the beasts of the field, and over all the birds of the sky and over all that creeps on the ground, and over all the fish of the sea...”

This also brings to mind the created order that we see in Genesis 1-2 and which James employs here. When these animals are organized, it reminds us of man’s

dominion to keep them ordered! Taxonomy comes from the Greek word, “to order.” This is why the charge from God to mankind is to steward them the animals.

And that is where James goes: the animals can be tamed. This is what God wants mankind to do. We can note C.S. Lewis’ thought that the animals that mankind tames have a place in the new creation. The association with mankind results in them sharing in new life with us.

### **3:8**

*But no human being can tame the tongue.*

Amazing that we can tame anything in creation, but something that stands in our own body has been tamed by hell instead! James wants to inspire repentance.

This is then why James in 3:2 notes that someone who has tamed the tongue has reached completion!

*It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.*

Here the connection to hell is fully made. We are infused with the serpent’s own poison. We see this on display in Genesis 3 after the fall into sin. Adam and Eve, full of shame use their words to blame God and each other. Their split is made complete.

Poison of course kills others. Our words can inflict a lot of carnage.

### **3:9**

*With it we bless our Lord and Father...*

James now drags out the thought expressed earlier with “great things” yet here we discuss blessing God on the tail end of being set on fire by hell, so we approach this with a bit of sadness in realization.

This is why forgiveness is the words of the Holy Spirit when we speak in confession. Repentance and forgiveness is the tongue doused by the Holy Spirit.

*And with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.*

The image of worshipping and praising God and yet cursing people brings an inconsistency. How can someone bless and love God and yet hate others whom God has made? 1 John has a lot to say about that. That is the oddity.

The image also reminds us of Luke 18:9-14 of the Pharisee and Tax Collector who go to the temple to pray.

### **3:10**

*From the same mouth come blessing and cursing.*

The image here is sobering. It is easy to think of ourselves as James wishes to paint it. Worshipping and praying to God and then going out with anger and vitriol on our mouths. Or, it is the going to church and then out to a restaurant to complain to the waitress staff. I heard this a lot when Christian movies came or did not come to theaters.

*My brothers, these things ought not to be so.*

Like a loving father, James chastises these thoughts that he has pushed into our minds from our lives. It is easy to stumble indeed. Lord have mercy.

### **3:11**

*Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water?*

It does not of course. It would all be salt. Same with blessing and curses, it all comes out as curse. A praise of God by a tongue set on fire by hell is damning praise.

Also stark is that the creation around us runs in a logical manner, but mankind is acting against design when he blesses God and curses others.

### **3:12**

*Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs?*

Jesus also brings out this imagery in Matthew 7:16-18, 12:33-35 and Luke 6:43-45. We all know how the created world operates.

*Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.*

Here James has an agricultural image in mind. While a spring brings up refreshment and disappointment (and therefore hope in words being disappointed with rude tongues) so here salt water has no use for farming. Fresh water is needed for plants and farms, salt water is good for nothing.

So the tongue if set on fire by hell is good for nothing for life. In our quests for faith being alive by good works, we cannot miss where we first need to begin: our tongue and our words.

### 3:13

*Who is wise and understanding among you?*

Coming off the previous verses, this is talking first and foremost about the mouth. Someone who is wise and understanding will manifest it through his mouth. A mouth that speaks God's Word faithfully and truthfully and then follows through it. Because our mouth can only give out salt or fresh water as it were, someone who is wise and understanding has a tamed tongue that God has renewed.

We have seen the word "wise" already in James. 1:5, "if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God." Back in chapter 1, James noted that a man who lacks wisdom is double minded. Like someone who pours out both salt and fresh water, or someone who grows both figs and olives. Or someone who is tossed about by the sea. It just can't be. Wisdom and Understanding don't flip flop.

James' words here could be a question as it is translated in the ESV. Or it could be a conditional statement because verse 14 has the same construction. So it could also be translated this way, "If someone is wise and understanding then by his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom."

*By his good conduct...*

The word "good" falls flat here. The word implies 'beauty' or 'noble.' This is what is behind the word in creation when God saw that what he had made was good.

Quote on beauty from the book Day 7: "What is beautiful is what manifests and expresses God's glory; it points to him and his reality. Beauty is certainly not in the eye of the beholder. Beauty is not a matter of taste or culture. Beauty is not what creates certain feelings or responses in us. Beauty is what honors God and furthers his purpose for the world. It is beautiful when the physical world is operating as God intended." Pg.228

This reminds us that anything that is against God's order is not beautiful.

God's word, which is beautiful, is teaching the truth. The first place we see a person's conduct is in their speech. The tongue is a rudder that guides the rest of the body. This is how we become "doers" of the word.

*Let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.*

As we will see soon, wisdom comes down from above. Every good gift comes down from above. Meekness reminds us of Jesus when he says that he is “gentle and lowly and you will find rest for your souls” And “my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Jesus also gives a blessing about being “meek” in the Beatitudes.

Meek means to be powerless. It means to let God do his thing at his time. Our Lord was meek upon the cross. The wisdom of the cross is the power of God. The cross of Jesus Christ is then beautiful. It is the good conduct. Again, James is aiming on the life of a Christian being shaped by the cross of Jesus, the suffering we face, completes and makes us perfect and wise.

### **3:14**

*But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts...*

James here sets up this part as a rhetorical truth. If someone has these qualities stored up in their hearts, then out of their mouth will not be wisdom but boasting. Someone who is wise will not tell you that you are wise. They will just show it and demonstrate it naturally.

Jealousy and selfish ambition show up a few times in the NT. Galatians 5:20, Philippians 1:17, 2:3, Romans 13:13, 2 Corinthians 12:20. These qualities divide and destroy the unity of the people of God. These often characterize life in this world.

*Do not boast and be false to the truth.*

Remember how James described boasting in 1:9. We are to boast in our “meekness” and being brought low. When we boast with selfish ambition, we put ourselves on a pedestal. But God will bring down the mighty and raise up the lowly.

Usually the word “boast” would take a subject. Here it is thought to be implied that the subject is “wisdom.” So James is talking about “boasting that you are wise.”

But it could also be that the subject of boast is “truth.” The NASB translation takes this route and translates this as “do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.” Meaning that someone who thinks he is wise is lying to himself. Self-deceived.

### **3:15**

*This is not the wisdom that comes down from above...*

By saying that wisdom comes down from above, James reminds us that Wisdom is something that God gives. Wisdom is not something that experiences or age give, it is something that God gives and to those who ask him.

Read Proverbs 2 and note the similarities between James and Proverbs. James is sometimes called the Proverbs of the NT.

Wisdom never show boats. Wisdom does not call attention to itself.

*But is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.*

The demonic reminds us that boasting is our tongue set on fire by hell. We see this language demonstrated in God’s rebuke of the King of Babylon in Isaiah 14.

The ordering of earthly, unspiritual, and demonic reminds us of 1:13-15 and the pattern laid out there of desire, sin, and death.

### **3:16**

*For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice...*

Boasting creates division between people. A person who boasts causes others to get upset. It breaks down unity and God’s good creation. Disorder is the opposite of creation. God’s word put creation into order. “It was good.” God’s word that made all things was not a boast then, it was a word that “came down from above.”

The incarnation of our Lord Jesus is once again God’s Word that came down from above. Boasting in anything but our meekness or in the Lord is wrongly ordered speech. God did not create us to talk that way.

The word “vile” is where we get the word, “foul.” The word “practice” in the Greek is where we get the word “pragmatic.”

### **3:17**

*But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable...*

These words, which describe our Lord to a “t” describe also those who are now born from above. See John 3:1-21 for that thought.

The following list is James’ version of the fruits of the Spirit from Galatians 5.

The word “pure” is related to the word “holy.” “Be holy for I the Lord your God am holy.”

Peaceable has a holistic idea behind it. It is not just lack of war. It is everything running smoothly. “peace be with you.”

*gentle, open to reason, full of mercy, and good fruits impartial and sincere.*

The word gentle here is not the “meek” word that is often translated as gentle. The idea is courteous.

Open to reason literally means, “persuaded by good.” Thinking back to the good conduct in verse 13.

The word “full” is attributive. It describes both the mercy and the good fruits. Fullness in the Bible describes abundance and God’s provision. “My cup runs over” the people in the eating of the 5000 ate to their full.

Mercy is changing someone’s circumstances. “Have mercy on me!”

“good fruits” here the word “good” is a different good than beautiful. It denotes health. Think of fruit on a tree that is rotten. Healthy fruit is useful and good for eating.

Impartial brings to mind the opening words of James 2. The sin of partiality. Both impartial and sincere rhyme and come from the word “judge.”

### **3:18**

*And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

James reminds us of those who are blessed because they are peacemakers. The good fruit produces a harvest and those who work this will harvest it.

## 4:1

*What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?*

Peace had been the last word said in 3:18. Here, the first word in 4:1 is the opposite of peace: quarrel.

James' words that he uses for quarrels and fights is literally the word translated elsewhere as "wars" and "battles." The word "war" in Greek is where we get the word "polemics." James notes that the Christian congregation he is writing to is at risk into turning into a battlefield. James will now ask: "what is the trigger that sets the war off?"

*Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?*

Passions here is where we get the word "hedonism." Passions here has the idea of "pleasures."

Read 2 Peter 2. Note how the word "passions" is used throughout the chapter there. James has the same thoughts running through his writing here.

Someone who is controlled by their pleasures will only seek what feels good. The next hit, at the cost of everything. They are controlled by what we would say are instincts. They are no different than a dog who can't control his desire for food.

This causes the sin of partiality. Someone/something looks good and can cause us to believe it is good. The heart, now corrupted by sin, can't recognize good from evil because it believes we choose what is good and evil.

Passions then cause us to seek only after our good and not our neighbor's good. This leads to infighting and war.

Curiously, the word used here for "war" is where we get the word, "strategy." We would say that our passions "wage war."

The word "within you" is literally, "in your members." It carries with it the idea of the body. Our passions then, are like a cancer that eats and devours our body.

## 4:2

*You desire and do not have, so you murder.*

We can remember Genesis 3, where Eve saw that the fruit was to be “desired to make one wise.” Later on in Genesis 4, Cain does not have God’s blessing and so murders his brother Abel.

When our cravings go unfulfilled, we get cranky and irritable. This leads to anger and eventually murder. This all happens in the heart before any action is taken.

Read 1 John 3:15-19 for how John tackles this idea.

There is a question of how to exactly translate this verse due to the order of the verbs. They happen in rapid succession, but the English needs to smooth that over. James phrases this in a rather Hebrew way of writing. Here is another way to translate this: “You desire and do not have, so you murder and are envious but are not able to obtain. You fight and wage war.” The KJV follows this pattern. In the text, the order of the words is agitated and fragmented like someone would be who wants and cannot have. Even when they do fight, they don’t get what they want.

The ESV has it translated as you see here into a two part thought that flows better but might miss the nuance of being agitated.

*You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.*

Covet is when we want what others have, or when we get angry that someone has something that we want. It can be that we think they shouldn’t have it and we should instead. Envy and Jealousy fit with this word. Coveting happens in the heart/will of man and it leads to other sins. Sins inwardly manifest eventually outwardly.

*You do not have, because you do not ask.*

Our coveting comes because we do not have. Why do we not have? James tells us because we do not ask. He is reminding us of prayer. God is more ready to give than we are wanting to ask. “Take it to the Lord in prayer” as the hymn goes.

### **4:3**

*You ask and you do not receive, because you ask wrongly,*

This steps up the game. What if you have asked and prayed? James notes that prayer can come from a wrong desire. God will not give what we desire, but what God desires. Our desires then need to be synced with God's will.

The word "wrongly" comes from the Greek word kakos. This word means "ugly." This contrasts with 3:13 with "good/beautiful."

*To spend it on your passions.*

Someone who wants a million dollars wants it to pursue their dream life on earth. They want to be rich because they want the means to pursue passions/hedonism.

The word "spend" has in mind, "spend freely" or "wastefully." We can think of the prodigal son who "wasted" his father's possessions.

### **4:4**

*You adulterous people!*

The word here is much more sharp. James literally says, "whores!" It is a shocking charge that reminds us that the Christians there are using God to get what they really want. This is the worst kind of idolatry because it uses the one true God as a mask. This is also used in Ezekiel 23:20-21 and Hosea 3:1.

The use of the feminine form for this word reminds us that the Church is the bride of Christ.

It also is the same word that Jesus uses in Matthew 12:39 and 16:4 and Mark 8:38, "an evil and adulterous generation"

*Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?*

Jesus calls his disciples friends because they know and desire God's will. Here James notes that friendship with the world means we follow the world's desires.

But this puts us at odds with God. Note Jesus, "Whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

Friendship is also the word for "love." Whoever loves the world hates God. World here is not the good world that God created, but the world as it stands in rebellion against God. It is to side with the serpent.

Friendship implies loyalty and fidelity to that friend. True friends in the ancient world are often depicted as "one soul." Euripedes and Aristotle note this in their discussion of friendship.

Read 1 John 2:15-17. Note how the love of the world is played out. Note that the idea of antichrist plays into this as well.

*Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*

We see here that the abuse of the will and seeking after sinful desires finally lands one as an enemy of God.

At first this appears to be a repeat of what James already said. But he uses the word, "therefore" to make a concluding point.

The point that James now makes is this: a person's will is a deliberate act of friendship or rebellion. It is a difference between the demonic or heavenly wisdom laid out in 3:13-18.

## 4:5

*Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us?"*

This verse has a ton of controversy. The grammar is tough and the topics stem in different directions.

First, what is James quoting? Or is he quoting? There is no verse in the OT that says this. He says, "Scripture" which in Greek is the usual "The Writings." So we expect something from the OT, and James' use of the OT is extensive for such a small book. The construction in the grammar implies that James is speaking a quote, but this is not anywhere in the OT. This has led to strange thoughts (missing books, etc. though this lacks any evidence). But it could lend toward a summary of biblical teaching. See Exodus 20:5, 34:14, 2 Kings 19:31, Isaiah 9:6, Isaiah 26:11, Zechariah 1:14, 8:2. James is pulling the idea from Scripture and summarizing them with a quote, though no single exact verse is quoted. This is how most take it.

The word, "no purpose" means "vain or empty"

Second, the grammar in this verse is tough to discern. It literally reads, "Toward envy yearns the s/Spirit has which he has caused to dwell in us." The referent is not clear. It could either be taken as God as the subject or man. Here are some options in the verse:

1. "Toward envy," how should this be understood? If this means God, which this is how the translators take it, then it is a virtuous understanding "I the Lord your God am a Jealous God." This is the usual meaning it is taken. If man, then it follows the pattern of sinful desire that fits the context too.
2. "Yearning" this can imply a longing that God has for us or if it refers to man can mean improper sexual desire.
3. "Caused to dwell. It can come from two different meanings. It could mean, "he dwelt" or it could mean how it is usually taken, "caused to dwell." The textual evidence for "caused to dwell" is more likely and the earliest quotes of James 4:5 from the writing "Shepherd of Hermas" use this as well.

4. Who is the referent of “He” Is “He” God the Father, or the Spirit, or the spirit of man?

This gives us 6 different ways of taking this verse:

1. “The Spirit that God has caused to dwell in us yearns jealously.” (God does not tolerate his people trying to be friends with the world.) \*This is the usual taken meaning throughout church history.
2. “God yearns jealously regarding the (Holy) Spirit that he has caused to dwell in us.” (The threat of withdrawing the Holy Spirit hangs over those who want to become friends with the world) The NASB takes this route.
3. “God yearns jealously regarding the breath of life that he has put within us” (God desires faithfulness from his human creatures generically) The NRSV and ESV take it this way.
4. “When the human spirit that God has caused to dwell in us yearns (for the pleasures of the world), envy (and thus fighting) is the result.”
5. The human spirit that God has caused to dwell in us yearns for the world enviously.
6. “Does Scripture mean nothing? Is this (according to scripture) the way the human’s spirit’s longing is directed, by envy?”

The last three take shortcuts in answering some grammar takes and are less likely, but still possible. Either way you take it, all options have a witness backing them in Scripture. This is a reminder that translators have are making interpretations for us when they translate. This is good and necessary, but good to remember that the English texts we have are interpretations of the Scripture. They are faithful though.

## 4:6

*But he gives more grace.*

James ends the thoughts of 4:4-6 with this idea. Funny thought is that the Greek understands this to be tied to verse 5. But almost all translations and commentaries take this as a new thought.

Here we can remember from chapter 1 that God is the giver of every perfect gift, which comes down from above. Grace is a gift of God, not something achieved by man. James frontloads verse 6 ahead of the verses 7-10 to show what God's goal is and how he goes about achieving giving grace. Proud hearts cannot receive grace. Hence:

*Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.*

This is a quote from Proverbs 3:34 which in the Hebrew reads, "Toward the scorners he is scornful, but to the humble he gives grace." James is quoting from the LXX (the Septuagint) the Greek Translation of the OT that the NT mostly quotes the OT from.

Proud people do not believe that they need grace. Selfish ambition and worldly friendship create proud people who end up opposing God. God must first break this down. He does this by humbling us.

The Venerable Bede (672-735 AD) said this, "God punishes robbers, perjurers, gluttons and other sinners because they are in contempt of his commandments, but it is said that God resists the proud in a special way. This is because those who trust in their own strength, who neglect to submit themselves to God's power, who really think that they can almost save themselves and therefore have no time to seek help from above—these are all deserving of greater punishment."

Read Philippians 2:5-11 to see how our Lord was humbled and how God exalted him.

## 4:7

*Submit yourselves therefore to God.*

Verses 7-10 begin a series of 10 imperatives which are in the Greek tense “aorist” which imply a sense of urgency. “Submit, Resist, Draw near, Cleanse, Purify, Be wretched, mourn, weep, be turned, Humble”

Here submit, fits into the idea of “repent.” Stop being friends with the world and start being friends with God.

Submission in the Bible means, “to be in the proper placement.” Or to be ordered rightly. It literally means to “be ordered under”

*Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*

To resist the devil is to have the Word implanted in our hearts. To have God’s grace as a gift causes the devil to flee because the Word sown in our hearts has happened when God makes aware our sin that causes us to depend on him to make us right. The devil would have us remain proud that defies God’s help. Remember in Genesis 3 who the devil convinced our first parents to leave their proper place under God and to “be like god.”

The word “resist” is where we get the word “antithesis.” To be the antithesis of the devil is to order ourselves rightly. The devil left his order to seize something greater (at least in his mind).

The devil cannot endure someone who desires to be humbled and made into nothing! The devil flees because he cannot stand to be mocked and belittled and shamed! He desires to remain strong and defiant.

This is why Jesus describes his cross as the exorcism of the devil. By God humbling himself upon the earth in such a shameful way on the cross, the devil high tails it out. God’s shameful death causes the devil to flee his dominion.

Seizing power and prestige in this age then, is a trap.

## 4:8

*Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.*

To become close to God then is to be humbled! This is the opposite of where we think we should go. We think getting closer to God is to go up. But to be exalted by God and to draw near to him, is to be made nothing first. This is why love calls for us to descend into the tragedy of others. Love humbles, pride defies.

The parable of the prodigal son bears a striking illustration to this. See Luke 15:11-32.

In a topsy turvy way that defies man's logic. Being close to God is not about a matter of self-improvement or independence, but being further drawn into dependence on God and in need of mercy. Becoming perfect is a matter of recognizing our own sinfulness and allowing ourselves to be emptied of our pride and ego. "to be made nothing...being obedient (read submissive) until death, even death on a cross."

The path of the cross is the path to God. The path of glory is the path to hell.

*Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double minded.*

"O you sinners, cleanse your hands." This implies actions. But to have clean hands, hearts must be purified. And to have a purified mind means to have a single focus in heart and mind toward God. We can't have our cake and eat it too. "Can't I want to be both rich and a friend of God?"

We can note that a purified heart comes from the implanted Word.

Read Psalm 24, especially verses 3-4 where the words cleanse and purify are used. There the idea of using one's tongue, (James 3!) comes back into mind. In verse 5, God promises grace! Psalm 24 has often been used in the context of Confession and Absolution in the Church. In the Old Testament, this psalm was used in context of the Ark being brought into the sanctuary and the people gathering for worship and sacrifice. Hence the liturgical terms, "cleanse" and "purify" that are used routinely in Leviticus.

## 4:9

*Be wretched and mourn and weep.*

“Be wretched” means “to endure sorrow, be in distress, be miserable.” This is the only time it is used in the NT, in the OT, this word is tied to thoughts to trauma of God’s impending judgment. Jeremiah 4:13 “Woe to us, because we are distressed!”

To mourn is used in the OT to describe acts of mourning in the face of punishment for rebellion. See Revelation 1:4-8 where the word there is used “wail”.

Weep is the response once judgment comes. This word occurs in Lamentation in response to the destruction that God brought on the People of God. 1:2.

*Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.*

James here is quoting Jesus from the sermon on the plain in Luke 6:21. “Blessed are those who weep now, because you shall laugh.” And then again in 6:25. “Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.”

Joy, merriment and the comforts of this world cause us to long after it and to become an enemy of God’s work in a new creation. Our longing is true, but we dare not find satisfaction for it in the here and now. Now it is proper to weep and mourn. On the last day it will be proper to be joyful and laugh.

Here, James is employing this idea, “God will flip the script one day.” So it is better to mourn here so we can laugh then. It is a risk to laugh now for we shall mourn then. It is better to be miserable in this life than to be miserable for all eternity.

Polycarp, a disciple of John, said this when threatened with death by fire at his trial and martyrdom. “You threaten with a fire that burns for a little while. God has a fire that never dies out!”

James is threatening the church’s agitators’ delight in their duplicity, their wrongful zeal, and sinful desires.

See Luke 13:22-30.

## **4:10**

*Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.*

We wait for God to put us in our right place, we should not seize it for ourselves. Read Luke 14:7-11. Also see Luke 18:9-14.

Humbling ourselves means debasing ourselves of what the world would hold out for us to take.

Humbling ourselves is also not something that a person can do to themselves but can only be done to them. One way to translate it is this, "If you allow yourselves to be humbled...he will exalt you." This is a reminder that God must use his law to convict us of our need.

Luther writes this way in the Smalcald Articles about John the Baptist, "John was to accuse them all and convince them that they were sinners in order that they might know how they stood before God and recognize themselves as lost men. In this way they were to be prepared to receive grace from the Lord and to expect and accept from him the forgiveness of sins."

To conclude what began in 4:6 through the work of the Holy Spirit, the Law is used to convict the world of sin which produces humble people. To such a person who is humbled and emptied of their self-worth, God gives grace.

Verse 10 is a summary statement of everything 7-9 has tried to say.

## 4:11

*Do not speak evil against one another, brothers.*

The word “speak evil” literally means to “talk down.” It is used three times in these two verses. Unbelievers do it to believers in 1 Peter 2:12, “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.” Jesus notes that this is the behavior of those who stand outside salvation! See Matthew 5:11 as well.

In the LXX, this word is used of actions that are taken against people secretly. This is 8<sup>th</sup> commandment things of attacking a person’s reputation. A Christian calling another Christian evil, or the devil, or gossiping about them behind their back fits with this. In the context of James 3, it is a reminder of pastors serving their flocks to care for them, not belittle them. Vice versa, it is a reminder for members of the flock to not judge their spiritual leaders, especially when they do not understand.

Since it is the behavior of unbelievers elsewhere, it has no place among the brothers. To speak evil is to be a friend of the world. Talking down carries with it the idea of slander or belittling a brother. It is to consider a brother, (as James rightly and continuously calls Christians to one another) to be less than me. It literally goes against what has just been said about the use of our tongue in chapter three.

It also goes against the idea that James just got down saying about being humble. To belittle someone to enhance our own standing and position. This is what the devil does. But we are called to flee from him. We flee by becoming humble. Jesus is the pattern and shows us the pattern.

Read John 13.

This happens when we consider ourselves to be the least. We see how Jesus lowers himself and trust in our master. It is custom to never place yourself higher than your master. When Jesus lowers himself, it causes us, who call him Lord, to not place ourselves higher than our Lord.

Luther's quote in the freedom of a Christian: "The Christian is the free lord of all subject none. And the Christian is the dutiful slave of all, subject to all." We are free in Christ to be slaves of righteousness as Paul puts it in Romans 7. When we consider ourselves to be least, we will not speak down to anyone, rather we will always speak up since we will consider others to be greater.

*The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law.*

Dietrich Bonehoffer once noted that self-justification and judging our neighbor go hand in hand. In order to improve my standing in my own eyes before God, I have to put down my neighbor. I treat my neighbor as less.

Interesting enough, to speak against a brother is to accuse them, which is what the name "Satan" means.

By speaking down/evil to our neighbor, what we are doing is placing a judgment on them. We end up using the law to serve ourselves instead of placing ourselves under the law to do it ourselves.

This is where talking down/speaking evil turns evil. We place ourselves in a spot that unbelievers do when they speak against Christians. "You are backwards." "Your beliefs are old fashioned." "Get with the times." "People know better now a days." Christians sadly do this to other Christians, but their talking down and belittling is behavior that nonbelievers do!

This is what makes them a judge of the law. When Christians throw away God's estate of marriage, or cast shade on those who gather for worship, or pray in public, or preach on the street corners. The sin of partiality plays into this as well from 2:1. A poor brother in Christ is put down while someone who looks good is elevated.

In the end, putting ourselves in the judge seat means that we also think we can judge the law. Only Jesus can do this, see Matthew 5-7.

*But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.*

Finally, speaking evil, which is judging the law of God places oneself in the seat of God himself. To speak down is improper for those who are not God. Only God can do this, as we shall soon see.

Back in 1:22-25, James had noted that someone who does not do the law is like someone who forgets what he looks like. Here that image is brought back into focus.

Someone who puts himself forward as a judge of the law to belittle another brother has forgotten that he too is lowly and in the same position before God. In fact, they are acting like they are God and forgetting that they are but fellow creatures. This is where humility comes in. To this we see Jesus washing feet and dying on a cross. Keeping that image in mind keeps us from speaking down to a brother, but lowering ourselves down as well and not presuming to be God.

To try to rival God also prevents us from drawing near to him. Since our attempts to go up pass by God who comes down.

#### **4:12**

*There is only one lawgiver and judge,*

“God is one.” James punches this hit hard to remind us that there is only One who sits on the throne and is capable of judging. In the Greek this is even more pointed as it is said literally, “One is the lawgiver and judge...” James fronts the One to emphasis who belongs the authority and power to judge.

Later on in James 5, James will note that Jesus is the judge. Here, James is thinking of Jesus Christ who is in the position that only God can be in. By referencing the Sermon on the Mount throughout his letter, James is noting that Jesus is the Lawgiver that he has in mind.

For Jesus to say that he has a new command in John 13 could also easily be on James’ mind.

*He who is able to save and to destroy.*

This reminds us of Jesus in Matthew 10:28, “Do not fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul. Rather, fear the one who is able to destroy both body and soul in Gehenna.”

A good reminder again, that to be in the position to judge is to also to be able to save someone.

*But who are you to judge your neighbor?*

The thoughts combined so far in these two verses, along with the appearance of the word “neighbor” probably means that James has Leviticus 19:18 in mind. This is also referenced by Jesus in Matthew 22:39 and Mark 12:31. This is probably what James means also earlier by saying the “royal law” in 2:8.

By judging our neighbor we are trying to relieve ourselves of the burden to love them, since loving them would mean for us to be humbled.

With these words, James puts Christians back in their proper places. Those who presume that they would “do this or that” compared to what other Christians are putting themselves forward as the judge. St. Paul warns the Corinthians against doing this against their pastors in 1 Corinthians 4. Paul tells them not to judge Apollos or Peter or himself by how they have to carry themselves as spiritual caregivers. The Corinthians were picking favorites or saying, “Peter would do so and so” or “Paul would say this.” This is speaking down/evil and judging a brother.

With these words we must also realize that James is not saying we cannot confront wrong doing. If so, then James is guilty of judging people throughout this entire letter.

James will even give a blessing to those who bring a brother back from his error in 5:19-20.

The difference in calling a brother back from wandering and covering his sin is different then tearing their name and reputation down, which is inherent in speaking down and happens as a result of selfish gain.

#### **4:13**

*Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit."*

"Come now" here in 4:13 and in 5:1, James James hits here on human arrogance. It is not so much the idea of planning and being prepared. Read Jesus in Luke 14 for example. But forgetting the situation at hand.

It is dangerous to place ourselves in God's spot thinking we know how the future is going to go is putting ourselves at risk of missing the last day. Jesus also makes that note in

Read Luke 12:13-21 to see an example of the attitude that James has in mind. Also consider Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 7.

Already, James notes the comical nature of knowing the future when the hypothetical person says, "today or tomorrow." They are not sure of something that is near to happen. How can they know they will spend a year there? How do they know they will make a profit? They don't and we would be fools to assume we know how life will go down.

Notice how this plugs into James' thoughts so far in his epistle with the desire of people to want to gain more material wealth. The desire for the here and now puts us at risk for losing out on the then and later.

#### **4:14**

*Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring.*

A reminder for us who like the calendars and the schedules. All it takes is a sudden emergency or wrench in the machine and all the plans we make go up in smoke. This means that we are to be humble, which is just another example of drawing near to God. We let him shape our days and guide our path. Take an example of George Bailey from the movie "It's a Wonderful Life."

Read Proverbs 27:1, this is probably one of the sources behind James' thought.

*What is your life?*

Literally in the Greek it says, “what the life of you?”

The idea is that we are made for more than just making money and making a mark here.

Read Jesus in Matthew 6:25-34. What is our life for?

Augustine once said, “The heart is restless until it rests in you.”

*For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.*

James here is playing on the coming thought: here today and gone tomorrow. Or the “now you see it and now you don’t.” The word “appears” and “vanish” come from the same word in the Greek.

Read Isaiah 40:6-8 to get this idea elsewhere. Or even Psalm 39:5-7 or Psalm 90. It is a thought of wisdom to know that our time is short. It is the thought of a fool to not consider their time here and to waste it however they want. This demands a contemplative sort of approach to life. Intentionality and to stand in dependence of God to send wisdom to us so that we can act with integrity and truthfulness.

The idea of being a mist is like fog in the morning. We wake up and it is here but the moment we look away and do something, we can come back and see that the fog is vaporized.

Or even how a morning mist of rain can easily and quickly be dried up by the sun.

#### **4:15**

*Instead, you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”*

We live by God’s grace and timing. God’s plans succeed not if I want them to succeed or fail.

We can learn to say, with Jesus, “If the Lord wills.” When it comes to our plans, this is the hardest thing to say. We cannot see all ends and wisdom places its trust in the one who made all things.

#### **4:16**

*As it is, you boast in your arrogance.*

The word “arrogance” is idea of pretensions. To have a pretension is to assert a claim based on your own authority.

James’ idea is that when we say what we will do and expect it will happen just as we imagine it will happen, we are claiming to tell God what we expect him to do.

In ancient writing, this was thought to be one of the more negative, even violent emotions to have. In 1 John 2, this word is used with the desires of the flesh.

In 4 Maccabees 2:15 it is labeled as the “arrogance that threatens to destroy us.” It is a vision that does not see the path and wanders into oblivion.

We often demand that our plans be met at the expense of everyone around us. When our plans fail, we blame our brothers and God for why our vision was not met. Bonhoeffer in Life Together says this perfectly on page 26-27.

*All such boasting is evil.*

In the church demanding God fulfill our vision takes away from the vision that God has for his people or can even replace it. The Church is taken away from her bridegroom and given to a different husband!

A person who does not submit to God’s rule becomes a rebel fighting against God, even while use pure motives! Evil is good corrupted.

#### **4:17**

*So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.*

James here is pointing out that this sin is being done willfully and not in ignorance.

The Word “right” is the word for “good” the beautiful word. Someone who knows what is in line with God’s will and fails to do that is guilty of the sin of omission.

This is a grievous type of sin. To see how you can do something good but choose not to do it causes more pain.

## 5:1

*Come now, you rich, weep and howl...*

Like one of the ghosts in Dickens' Christmas Carol, James points to the future of those who abuse their riches. He shows them that what awaits is weeping and howling.

The word "weep" and "howl" could be taken as "weep with howls of mourning." The sorrow is not quiet, it is loud and visible. This type of imagery is commonly found among places describing the last day and the final judgment. See Isaiah 15:1-2

Weeping happens as a result of God's judgment (being found guilty) while wailing is a result of destruction (punishment for being guilty).

We had last heard of the rich in chapter 2, there James depicted that they often take advantage of their riches to get what they want at threat of litigation.

There is debate whether James is talking to Christians, or that he is speaking prophetically to an audience that cannot hear him, much like the prophets do.

The thought backing why James is addressing an audience that is not the reader of the letter is that he gives no way out and no hope of redemption. Elsewhere in the letter, James will affectionately call the readers of the letter, "my brothers" even when he is going about correction, but here there is not that, only destruction. This might indicate that James is letting Christians hear the judgment against those who have persecuted and harmed them.

Since James had brought up a rhetorical person in the merchants in 4:13-17, it is possible that he is keeping up that image and attacking it as a type of what will happen to any who choose this path.

It could be that James here is giving a prophetic warning for anyone who does read the letter who has engaged in taking advantage of anyone under their care. Rich with the poor, masters with servants, pastors with the sheep, etc.

*For the miseries that are coming upon you.*

Here is where we discover why they are weeping and wailing. The miseries are about distress. Something has occurred that they cannot get themselves out of.

This language reminds us of the Minor Prophets and the language they employed for those who used their riches to take advantage of another.

This invites repentance for those who find themselves in these stations. Being rich is not the problem, as we will see, it is how they used their riches.

## **5:2**

*Your riches have rotted...*

“rotted” the word in Greek is where we get the word “sepsis.” When the body gets sepsis it is the result of an infection that has spread. Here, the riches are described as almost melting away and are useless. Perhaps because the riches were used in such a way that caused others to rot in life. Their “ill gotten” gains are the source of their illness now.

*And your garments are moth eaten.*

Clothes were hard and expensive to make prior to mass production. Most people did not have more than a couple outfits to wear.

Here the nice clothing is subject to being eaten by moths.

There is only one other place where “rot” and “moth eaten” are used together and that is Matthew 6:19-20. James is most likely referencing the Sermon on the Mount, as he has done several other times throughout the letter.

## **5:3**

*Your gold and silver have corroded...*

A good reminder that riches cannot save a person for the simple fact that all things on this earth fall apart or become tarnished.

It is interesting to note that what James has described so far in 5:1-3 is the use of a proleptic. The riches, clothing, gold, and silver are being described as destroyed

now because it will happen on the last day. James is dragging the future to the present. And since it is guaranteed to happen on the last day, it is a done deal now.

*And their corrosion will be evidence against you...*

Corrosion is also translated elsewhere as “venom, poison.” The image of a serpent’s bite is fitting here as well. Due to the destruction of these things that have been saved up, they are the evidence of putting our trust in the wrong thing.

The word evidence is where we get the word “witness” or a “Martyr.”

Here the rotting riches are a witness against the person. A very haunting and chilling image. Imagine the riches pointing a rotting finger at you in accusation.

*And will eat your flesh like fire.*

The original hope of gathering riches was to make life better, but now the ending of those who trusted in them is death. These rotting goods end up devouring the person. It is like the riches turned on them.

“The very thing they focused on, riches like clothing and gold and silver, will turn against the rich in a final act of cosmic betrayal.” Commentary pg. 398

*You have laid up treasure in the last days.*

This is bad timing. The amassing of riches was done at a bad time. They treasured up their wealth thinking it would save. Not they have treasured up God’s wrath for themselves. This brings to mind once again the parable of Jesus in Luke 12 of the rich fool who was not rich toward God with his gifts but saved up for himself.

## 5:4

*Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields...*

Here we get why the riches accuse them. The riches didn't belong to them. The riches they had belonged to the laborers who were working for them but did so without pay.

*Which you kept back by fraud...*

There could be excuses for why they didn't pay the laborers, "this was not done well enough" or "I will pay you later." Or whatever excuse was done falsely to not repay what was owed.

Leviticus 19:13 and Deuteronomy 24:14-15 speak against this type of theft.

Malachi 3:5 warns of God's judgment on this particular sin. Withholding what is owed to another and lying about it is among the chief offenses in God's sight. Especially when it was needed.

*Are crying out against you...*

Here the wages are personified. They are the voices accusing the theft of withholding them from the worker. The wages are a witness of sorts. This happens often in the Bible that the material world around us acts as a witness for or against the actions of humans.

*And the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.*

The rest of this verse echoes the thoughts of Exodus 2 when the Israelites in bondage to Egypt cry out. We are not even told that they cry out to God, but God does hear their cries and it is what moves him to act.

The term "Lord of hosts" is used. In the Greek it is left transliterated from the Hebrew, which tells us that James has the OT use of that term in mind. God and his armies will act to make the wrong right.

## 5:5

*You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence.*

Literally: “You self-indulged upon the earth and in luxury.” The image is almost piggish of a person just going from one form of craving to another. The life lived for luxury had an effect on a person of dulling their hearts to any other concern that might have been more important. Someone who lives only for their gut is someone who never sees the needs of others.

It also has the idea of living beyond your means, which is why they stole from their laborers so they could keep living as they wanted.

*You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.*

The last day here is depicted as a slaughter house. The wicked then are the pigs and the cows who have been fattened up. Here we see the tragic misuse of their riches in this life. It is the fat who get butchered. This is why practices of fasting, prayer, and repentance have been seen as good tools to fight our stomach and piggish cravings.

The Greek makes this more apparent by front loading the “day of slaughter.” It literally reads, “It was on the day of slaughter that you fattened your hearts.”

## 5:6

*You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.*

The identity of the “righteous person” is debated. It could be the rich unbelievers in this age who disparaged the ones made righteous in Jesus.

It could also remind us how the Pharisees “who ate widow’s houses” then condemned and murdered Jesus, the righteous one. And Jesus was silent against his accusers and did not resist them. Read Acts 7:52 for example. Most Church Fathers see this as the “righteous one” of James 5:6.

“He does not resist you” could be taken as a statement, or a question. “Does he not resist you?”

## 5:7

*Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord.*

The tone change is obvious here. Verses 1-6 were clearly aimed at nonbelievers while here James turns his attention back to his audience.

Given that wicked people will commit and do evil things, the question is: what will the righteous do? Here James uses the example of the “righteous one”, namely Jesus, to characterize the ones that Jesus has made righteous.

The word “patient” here is a combo word of macro- great and thumos- passion/longing. The patience being described here is an intense longing as we wait for Jesus. We could also say that James is saying that we should have “A great longing for the return of Jesus.”

“Have a great desire, therefore brothers, for the appearing of the Lord.”

The need to be patient is the key to putting up with the injustice of those who are evil. This is not a permissive attitude toward evil. This is waiting for the Lord to take action rather than to deliver the blow of judgment ourselves.

James assumes again that the return of Jesus will set everything right. This is a humbling thought, human action that involves swift judgment against perceived evil will have unintended evil consequences as well. The trap of evil is not something that anyone can escape from, not even the righteous.

The word for “coming” is the word Parousia, which means the “appearing.” The arrival of Jesus, coming on the clouds will be a sudden event. Coming gives the impression that we will see him coming a long way off. “Appearing” captures the true meaning. One day, Jesus will take our blinders off to see how things are really going down.

*See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it...*

James turns to another agrarian example that hits home for many people, especially farmers and gardeners. The image of farmers and harvests is a common way to describe the harvest at the end of the age.

The “precious” is the word for “honor.” It can denote something that is high in value and in price. The image of Jesus purchasing us and our Lord seeing us in such a high value creates another image to this word. We can image that the dead in the earth is the precious fruit that the Lord is waiting to harvest when the time is right on the last day.

Here the same word is used as earlier in the verse, “patient.” The image is not of a farmer twiddling his thumbs as he waits bored. The image is an eager, constant checking of the ground to make sure all is well and the plants are growing.

*Until it receives the early and the late rains.*

This might be a play on the words of Deuteronomy 11:14 where God promises to give the land the “early and the late rains.”

This could also be a reference to Hosea 6:3 in the Greek that reads, “Like the sure to come dawn we will find him, and he will come to us like the early and late rain comes to the earth.

Joel 2:23 also says, “And you, O children of Zion, rejoice, and delight in the Lord, your God, for he gave you the foods for righteousness, and he will drench you with early and late rain just as before.”

Curious enough for Joel, this is describing God pouring out his blessings so that the people can renew the sacramental system in the temple. The image for James could also be sacramental. God is waiting to give the gifts of his salvation to the first and the last so that all are ready to receive him. The patience is the eagerness of a child waiting for Christmas morning.

## 5:8

*You also, be patient.*

For the third, time James uses this same “great eagerness” to reinforce how we should also be in our time here. Life is a gift, for sure, but Christians want the full blessing that God has already planted in our hearts.

*Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.*

To “establish” means to shore up, stand something back up after falling down. Read Psalm 57, especially looking at verse 7. Mel Gibson has Jesus allude to this verse before he is beaten.

Also see how this word is used in Luke 22:32, Romans 1:11, 16:25, 1 Thessalonians 3:2, 2 Thessalonians 2:17, 3:3, 1 Peter 5:10, 2 Peter 1:12, Revelation 3:2.

“is at hand” James wants to encourage us to not give up when we are so close. The phrase, “is at hand” can also be translated “has arrived.” James is playing with the now/not yet paradigm of the Lord’s coming. The firstfruits have arrived, or the early rain, but the later rain has yet to come. But the early rain is the guarantee that the later rain will arrive.

Again, the coming of the Lord is our great hope and longing. It is the backbone of James’ letter and the source of all Christian living in this age.

## 5:9

*Do not grumble against one another, brothers...*

The word “grumble” reminds us of how the people of Israel grumbled in the wilderness. They were not trusting that God would act or have their best interests in mind. Instead they jumped the gun against God.

This suggests that James does not want Christians to lash out against each other. In the Bible, grumbling is a mark of unbelief and the opposite of great eagerness/patience.

Grumbling also seems to have this effect: “Why is so and so the way they are?”

*So that you may not be judged;*

Grumbling is what puts us in a vantage point of thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to do.

This then puts us into the position of being judged by God for our unbelief. This implies that suffering must be done among the whole body. When one member suffers, our job is to not bemoan the fact that he is suffering, but to cry out together with them.

This suggests that our patience is lived out together as believers in Christ. It is not to grumble at the chance to visit orphans and widows, but to relieve them as a sign of the last day.

*Behold, the Judge is standing at the door.*

This reminds us of the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:1-2. With our Lord's words and James tied together. We can see that judging someone is more so about their station and standing in life.

For example, if something bad happens to someone, we are tempted to say, "couldn't have happened to a better person." This is grumbling and casting judgment. This is then the judgment we can expect to receive from our Lord.

Judging then is not so much about calling out sin, but hoping they get what they deserve for their actions. To judge would be to leave someone in their sin.

## **5:10**

*As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.*

James uses the Old Testament to show how the people of God were always received. We could hear Jesus here talk about how the prophets are blessed for being treated badly.

Think through how Moses and Isaiah and Amos and Jeremiah were treated for example. See how they endured. They didn't take up arms against their accusers, but rather turned to God in prayer and waited for his action.

## 5:11

*Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast.*

This literally reads, “We bless those who remain.” This calls us back to 1:12, “blessed is a man who remains steadfast until trial, because after being tested, he will receive the crown of life...”

To be “steadfast” carries with it the idea of “remaining.” A blessing of the faith is to outlast the trials. It is what is left over after the dross is purged away.

This is again an allusion to the words of Jesus on the sermon of the mount. Matthew 5:11-12 or even Matthew 10:22.

*You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord...*

We all know the story of Job, how the Lord afflicted him and he stayed faithful. Job in the book also shows times of lament and anguish, he even complains about his perdictament to God.

But James’ orientation is never against God, but rather wanting vindication from him.

It is interesting that the word “Purpose” is the word that we have heard so many times from James in the letter. It is the word, “complete.” James is noting the outcome that God gave to Job at the end and how he was rewarded by God. The final state of Job is what the Lord was aiming for the whole time.

*How the Lord is compassionate and merciful.*

Here we see that the Lord’s testing is his “alien” work. His “proper” work is to bless and give mercy.

The word compassion is the word in the ancient world that refers to the guts. In Hebrew, it is the word for the “womb.” The word here is a compound word meaning “many guts.” It is also translated “abundantly compassionate.”

Mercy is when we concern ourselves with another person’s state of affairs and make their problems our own to help bring them to resolution.

## 5:12

*But above all, my brothers, do not swear...*

James leaves this conclusion for last. The word, “but above all” literally means, “taking precedence.” James wants this to be their first concerns when it comes to their lips.

The thought here by James seems to point to prayer, which will be where he goes at the end. Do not let your prayers be oaths that you promise to do for God that you call heaven and earth to be your witness should you fail.

We should note that in the Bible, oaths are binding to a person’s eternal wellbeing. They should never be undertaken in a light manner and best to avoid them. It is better to be trustworthy to never have to take an oath to begin with.

This reminds us of the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:33-37 and also in Matthew 23:16-22. This comes from Leviticus 19.

*Either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath...*

Calling heaven and earth was the legal way of saying that God will count your oath against you should you fail. It is asking for God’s curse, and in a fallen world, it is never good to make promises to alleviate temporary trouble at the risk of eternal well being.

*But let your “yes” be yes and your “no” be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.*

The comparison with Matthew’s Gospel on the topic of oaths suggests that James knew Matthew’s Gospel well or was present when Jesus gave it!

If we take an oath we are inviting God’s final verdict upon it and God will bring greater judgment upon it for that reason. We should tread carefully when making promises.

## 5:13

*Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.*

Over these next two verses James covers both ends of the spectrum that all result in prayer. Sorrow and Joy. Weal or Woe.

Here in verse 13, the word for suffering here is a different word than usually is used. It is literally, “ugly passion.” The idea is misfortune or hardship. Different than the word for suffering used at the beginning of the narrative though not completely disconnected. The only other use of this word is in 2 Timothy 2:9 and 4:5. There Paul talks about his suffering prison and calling upon Timothy to endure the suffering with respect to his calling as a pastor.

Both times it is the suffering that comes from the world on those who follow Christ. Which might be the idea here. Outside the Bible, this word suffering is used of war and marital distress.

The only way to make it through suffering and to endure it is to heed James’ advice. “Let him pray.” Often this prayer is connected to asking God for mercy, See Mark 10 with the blind man praying to Jesus. Through the prayer, the suffering is connected to God and to the suffering of Jesus. Through suffering then, we shall be glorified.

*Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.*

The Word cheerful is also a rare word used in the Bible for words that deal with joy. The only other usage is in Acts 27:22, 25, where Paul tells those on the soon to be shipwrecked ship to rejoice. It seems to be a word used for those joyful despite their present circumstances only because of what is coming.

The word for praise is the word we get for Psalm. The Word Psalm means “Praises.” Curious enough, praises in the Psalms include both joyful words and sorrows. The immediate context here though implies the joyful words. Other times that this word is used is in Communal worship settings, see Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:18-19. It could well be that James has the Psalms in mind. The individual joy leaks out into the corporate life of the church. “come rejoice with me, for I have found my lost coin!”

## 5:14

*Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him...*

James turns to members who fall ill in the church. He expects them to call their pastor. The word elder is used other places for “pastor.” See Acts 20 or 1 and 2 Timothy.

The word “let him call” seems more permissive. It is much more forceful. The idea is this: “Is anyone among you sick? He must call for the elders of the Church...” Same goes the “let them” for the elders. It is “The elders must...” This is not optional, this is expected behavior.

The word “church” is where we get the word “ecclesiastical.” The ekklesia of God literally means “those who are called out.” It is the main word that the NT uses of the word in the Psalms for the “Great Congregation” or “the Great Assembly.” The idea is the Church in her wholeness without remainder.

Elders/pastors are servants of the Church. When members of the church are sick, elders are called to go out and pray for those who cannot pray for themselves.

*Anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.*

To be anointed with oil is the prayer in visible and olfactory form. Oil and perfume was used on Jesus to indicate his burial. Oil was also used to bind up the wounds of the man beaten by robbers in the Good Samaritan. It could be that the oil has a refreshment of the body. In the ancient world, oil was used to give relief.

It could also have a sacramental understanding to it. The disciples were told to go and anoint the sick with oil by Jesus in Mark 6:13, which might describe a healing attribute given to the oil by Jesus.

Luther took this to refer to the sick being a reminder to the sick person of the prayers of the Church that stick and still leave their smell long after.

Psalm 23 reminds us that “God anoints my head with oil, my cup overflows.”

Pastors still today, myself included, have oil with them to place upon the head of

the those sick as they await God's action. Oil is often applied after the confession of sins toward those on the death bed.

The word for "anointing" is used in the LXX for the consecration of priests for their duties as well.

To do this in the name of the Lord reminds us that the oil serves the purposes of communicating the promise of Jesus to that person.

### **5:15**

*And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick...*

The idea of where this happens is at the deathbed. The prayers uttered by those and the pastor uttered around the death bed will move God to save the person who is beyond speech and human help.

There are many ways to take "prayer of faith." Is this the person's own faith who is praying? Is it a vicarious prayer of Jesus through the person prayer, "The Spirit intercedes for us."

It could also be the "prayer of the faith" meaning the doctrine and beliefs of the Church. This was used back in 2:1. "As you keep the faith of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ."

The result though is clear. This will prayer will "save." God answers the prayer by saving the one who is sick. What does this look like? It could be healing and recovery. It could also mention eternal salvation as the sick person dies.

*And the Lord will raise him up.*

Here the consequence is listed as a result of this prayer. The Lord will save and the Lord will raise up. The word raised is often used in the resurrection accounts of the miracles of Jesus and of Jesus himself. This could be that the sick person gets up again, fully healed. But it could also refer to the resurrection on the last day.

*And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.*

This could refer to the visit of the elders to the sick. If the person is concerned about their eternal wellbeing, they can confess to the one who has visited them what sins they have done and forgiveness for that sins will be given. The guarantee is on the mercy of God to forgive sins.

Another way to take this is that the sins forgiven now are a guarantee that the person who dies is saved and will rise.

## **5:16**

*Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another,*

James then moves to a connected issue. Confessing sins should not be limited to death bed or sick days. It should be practiced on good days and bad days.

The word “confess” is the word for “say the same thing.” The idea is to say together but to also say what God has said. I am a sinner, God’s word says that. God’s word also forgives sins, and we should say that too.

While the elders and the pastors execute this on behalf of the Church and in the Church’s stead professionally and publicly. Individual Christians are also to practice this daily and what we would mean rightly by “privately.”

*that you may be healed.*

The word healing here is more often than not used in demonic cases. It reminds us of Jesus when he told the disciples that this particular demon “can only be cast out by prayer.” Acts 10:38, “Jesus went about healing all who were oppressed by the devil.”

*The prayer of a righteous person has great power while it is working.*

Prayer itself is not the cause of the healing, but God, who hears prayer, cares about the needs of his children. This will set up the following example with Elijah.

What makes a person righteous? One who has received the grace of God and has been made righteous and therefore lives righteous. Who has heard the word and is a doer of the word.

This encourages us to continue in prayer, for God will not delay long over us.

## **5:17**

*Elijah was a man with a nature like ours...*

James brings up the example of Elijah in 1 Kings 17-18. Elijah is the most prominent prophet in the Old Testament. Yet he is also just a man made righteous by God. James sees him as a good example to give us hope for our prayers.

*And he prayed fervently that it might not rain...*

Here, we are reminded of what Elijah prayed for, that it would not rain on the earth. God had commanded Elijah to pray for this to punish the wickedness of King Ahab for his murder and coveting.

*And for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth.*

This is the period of judgment. This number is often used in Apocalyptic literature to indicate God's time to bring us to repentance and faith. The "time, times, and half a time." Or 3.5 years. This is the number used in Revelation.

## **5:18**

*Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain and the earth bore its fruit.*

Again, prayer is behind God's actions. Elijah has prayed and God has granted Elijah's prayer. Read Luke 18:1-8 to get another story of faithful praying.

The word "bore its fruit" is a rare word but is used predominately in Genesis 1:11 to indicate God bringing forth his creation through his Word. It is thought that James might be echoing the thought of a new creation born in us by the implanted Word of God. Prayer is how the word grows in us when under pressure from suffering. Suffering expedites our growth because it pushes us to prayer.

## 5:19

*My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth...*

For the last time, James addresses them as brothers. He gives a hypothetical scenario of a brother who wanders and what to do with them. It is reminiscent of a later work called the Didache about the way of life and the way of death.

This is connected to the Northern Kingdom of Israel who went astray and eventually were lost.

The word “wanders” is the word for “deceived.” The word implies leaving the straight path. The image is to be deceived about the truth and lead to apostasy. Often this word is dire and have forfeited faith in Christ. The lie multiplies to lead people from it. Those on the path have a duty to bring them back. It is not good to let them go.

\*story of St. John as an old man bringing back someone who wandered from the faith. Eusebius pg. 97.

For someone who is leaving the faith or wandering from the truth, their fate is sealed unless...

*and someone brings him back*

We are our brother’s keeper. We must care about the spiritual condition of those outside of Christ but especially of those who have abandoned the faith.

## 5:20

*Let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death*

The last day is the final image given here. A Christian brought back to the faith and to the fellowship of believers will be saved from hell. See Ezekiel 3.

*And will cover a multitude of sins.*

James has now covered those who are lost, sick, and dying and how to care for them. As he concludes his letter, he does so with the goal of Christian faith, to cover sins and to show the love of God to others as Christ showed to us.