Legacy Church

James

Truth That Hurts

Study Companion

The follow-along from every sermon in the series, collected in order.

Casey Ryon

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James: Truth That Hurts

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Soli Deo Gloria

James: Truth that Hurts · Sermon One

The Man, the Audience, and the Problem

Humility, Hardship, and Wholeness

James 1:1–4

James writes to fractured people, and his first word about their suffering is that God is using it to make them whole.

i. The Man

v. 1a

> James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
>
> James 1:1a, ESV

Not one of the Twelve. Not in the garden, not on the mountain. During the years of Jesus's ministry, James was a skeptic, and Jesus was his older brother.

The resurrection confronted every entrenched position he held. He went on to lead the church in Jerusalem and died a martyr, thrown from the temple and stoned, praying for his attackers as he lay injured.

And he introduces himself as a servant. Not the brother of Jesus. Not the most prominent leader in Jerusalem.

> *You are not hearing hard truths from a hard heart.*

ii. The Audience

v. 1b

> To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion:
>
> James 1:1b, ESV

Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome. Centuries of conquest had left the Jewish people scattered, displaced, and living as strangers.

James writes to the believers among them, hunted by Jews and Romans alike, hiding wherever they could. So why is his letter corrective rather than comforting? Because trial is where we find out what we are really made of.

> *Your faith is merely theory until it is tested.*

Before We Begin

Roughly fifty commands in one hundred eight verses. James tells us what to do more than what to think, and he assumes we already know what to think.

He draws heavily on the Sermon on the Mount and on Proverbs 1–9, which is why this letter is often called the Proverbs of the New Testament.

Words to Know

servant
δοῦλος · *doulos*
A bondservant: one who belongs to a master, whose allegiance, life, and identity are not his own. Not one who knows Him. Not one who works for Him.

count
ἡγέομαι · *hēgeomai*
To evaluate, to reckon, to consider. A perspective, not a feeling.

perfect
τέλειος · *teleios*
Whole. Complete. Undivided.

iii. The Problem

vv. 2–4

> Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.
>
> James 1:2–4, ESV

Count it all joy does not mean trials should make you happy. By definition, if you are happy with it, it is not a trial. To count something is to evaluate it, to reckon it, to think about it a certain way. It is the call to think before we feel.

And the conclusion we are to reach is joy, because God will redeem this and produce something from it down the line.

Then comes the word that exposes the problem: *perfect*, meaning whole. If we must be made whole, we are not whole. We are fragmented, frail, carnal, inconsistent, believing one way and living another. That gap is what the rest of the letter exists to close.

> *The gap between what we believe and how we live should get smaller every day.*

The Progression

- Trial
- Testing of faith
- Steadfastness
- Maturity
- Completeness
- *Lacking nothing*

Take It Further

1. Do you belong to Jesus, or do you only know Him? Are you a bondservant, or an employee?
2. If you had the pedigree of James, how would you have introduced yourself?
3. Name a trial God has already used to make you more like Christ. What did it cost, and what did it produce?
4. Where is the widest gap right now between what you believe and how you live?

Notes

James: Truth that Hurts · Sermon Two

Strength, Wisdom, and the Problem of Doubt

What to Ask For, and How to Ask

James 1:5–8

A trial takes more than endurance. It takes wisdom, and God has promised that wisdom to anyone who will ask Him for it without wavering.

i. Seeking Wisdom

v. 5

> If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.
>
> James 1:5, ESV

Getting through a trial takes grit. You have to learn how to take a punch, because life hits hard. But strength alone will not carry you, and neither will knowledge. Knowledge is information; wisdom shows you what to do with it.

And wisdom does not begin with insight. It begins with the fear of the Lord. Not fear that God hates you, but the sober awareness that you will give an account.

> *Eve got in trouble not because she wanted to be wise, but because she sought wisdom while forsaking the fear of the Lord.*

ii. Identifying Doubt

v. 6

> But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.
>
> James 1:6, ESV

We often pray with doubt, which is an oxymoron. Why pray if you doubt? That is the gap showing. Doubt is the root of your fear, your anxiety, your control issues, your greed. It is what makes a man double-minded, or as one commentator put it, two-souled.

> *You think you have a lust problem. You think you have a pride problem. You don't. You have a doubt problem.*

Before We Begin

Written by the brother of Jesus, who did not believe until after the resurrection, around AD 45. Paul later called him a pillar of the church.

His readers had fled Jerusalem and were living as hunted strangers. Rather than comfort them, James confronts them.

The only thing it cannot be is moderately important.

C. S. Lewis, on Christianity

Words to Know

wisdom
σοφία · *sophia*
Not information, but the skill of applying it rightly. Spoken of more than two hundred times in Scripture.

doubt
διακρίνω · *diakrinō*
To be divided against yourself, to waver between two judgments.

double-minded
δίψυχος · *dipsychos*
Literally two-souled. One soul in heaven and one on earth.

iii. A Warning on Application

vv. 6–8

> But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.
>
> James 1:6–8, ESV

What we often do with this passage is take a specific instruction, tied to a specific prayer, and turn it into a broad principle covering all prayer. If I want something badly enough, and I have enough faith for it, I will receive it.

We cannot do that. The promise here is tied to wisdom. James does not say that if you pray for the promotion you will get it, or that if you pray without doubting the house is yours, or that the trial will disappear.

Think of it as a parent. If your child came to you sincerely asking for your wisdom about a hard situation, would you turn them away? Not one of you. And if that same child asked for a million dollars and an easier life, would you grant it? Probably not, and not only because you may not have it. Because it would not be good for them.

> *Wisdom is always good for us, so it is always answered.*

Where Wisdom Comes From

- The fear of the Lord
- Ask God in prayer
- Stop talking and listen
- The whole of Scripture
- *Then outside counsel*

Where Doubt Shows Up

- Restless and unsettled
- High highs, low lows
- Peace, then fear
- Hope, then despair

Hebrews would name the same thing unbelief.

Take It Further

1. Is God real and the Bible true? If your answer is yes, name one area of your life that answer has not touched yet.
2. Are you praying for deliverance from your trial when you should be praying for wisdom inside it?
3. What have you been calling a lust problem, a pride problem, or an anxiety problem that may actually be a doubt problem?
4. When did you last sit somewhere quiet, lay the whole situation before God, and then stop talking long enough to listen?

Notes

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Soli Deo Gloria

Legacy Church · Sermon Notes

James: Truth that Hurts · Sermon Three

Trials, Temptation, and the Goodness of God

What the fire reveals, and who God is while it burns

James 1:9–18

Pressure tempts us to blame God for the desires that live inside us, but the Father of lights does not change and does not waste our faithfulness.

i. The Rich and the Poor

James 1:9–11

> Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.
>
> James 1:9–11, ESV

Back home, before their faith cost them anything, some were rich and some were poor. Now, in the middle of persecution, many who were once rich are rich no longer. To both James says the same thing: boast. The poor in their exaltation, the rich in their humiliation.

That only makes sense if we do not live for this age but the next. There is also a warning in the image. The rich man fades in the midst of his pursuits. He does not vanish, he fades, which means you can lose yourself before you notice you are gone. Wealth is not sin, but handle it with wisdom, discernment and sobriety, and do not let it own you.

> *They can rejoice because what appears to be a curse is actually a blessing.*

ii. Rewards

James 1:12

> Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.
>
> James 1:12, ESV

Steadfastness under trial has a promise attached to it. What exactly the crown of life is remains a rabbit hole of theory, worth researching but not worth forcing into the text. What James says plainly is that one day you will be rewarded.

Salvation is not that reward. It is a free gift, never earned and never deserved. But Scripture is clear that we are rewarded in the next age for how we steward this one. Salvation gave you a hundred on the test; now we are working for extra credit.

So when you serve your wife, when you encourage your husband, when you lose money and keep your faith, when you lose the job and refuse to get bitter, none of it goes unnoticed.

> *There are rewards for all of it. It's just not in this life.*

Before We Begin

James, the brother of Jesus, did not believe He was God until he saw Him raised from the dead. A decade later he was helping lead the early church, writing to believers who had fled homes, families, and loved ones for fear of being killed for their faith.

Pressure makes us question God, doubt God, and blame God. James calls the result double-mindedness: believing one thing and living another. The letter reads like a proverb, drawing on Proverbs 1–9 and the Sermon on the Mount.

Words to Know

Crown
στέφανος *stephanos*
Not a royal diadem but the victor's wreath, given after the contest is finished.

Enticed
δελεάζω *deleazō*
To bait a hook or a trap. The bait is always something you already want.

Conceived
συλλαμβάνω *syllambanō*
To seize or take hold of. Desire does not just start life, it takes you captive.

Variation
παραλλαγή *parallagē*
Shifting or change, like a moving shadow. James says God has none of it.

iii. Temptation

JAMES 1:13–15

> Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.
>
> JAMES 1:13–15, ESV

The natural tendency of a double-minded believer, when the trial sucks the life out of you and the temptation starts to hit, is to blame God: if You had not put me here, I would not be tempted to do this.

James corrects it flatly. God does not tempt anyone with evil. He is for you, not against you. We typically blame the devil, the other person, or God, but the temptation comes from you. You are your own worst enemy, and the devil's best strategy is often to leave you alone and let you be your own undoing.

So our sin, left unchecked, matures into death. Not only death in you, but death produced in the people around you.

> *Master your desires.*

iv. God is Immutably Good

JAMES 1:16–18

> Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.
>
> JAMES 1:16–18, ESV

Having said what God is not, James says what God is. He is good, the only One good, the author of all that is good, and He is not the author of sin, not the author of temptation, and not the father of lies.

He is also demonstrably good. Every good thing you have, whether you worked hard for it or not, came down from Him. And He is immutable: no variance, no inconsistency, no change. God is not double-minded like us, and He does not change even when we do.

Two births run through this text: desire giving birth to sin, which produces death, and the Father of lights giving new birth, which produces life.

> *He is stable, steady and steadfast, able to be relied upon.*

The Progression

- Your own desire
- Lured and baited
- Desire conceives and seizes
- Sin is born
- Sin matures
- Death, in you and around you

The second birth runs the other direction: the Father of lights, the word of truth, and life.

Take It Further

1. What has God taken from you that may have kept you from losing yourself?
2. Where is something good in your life quietly beginning to own you?
3. What faithfulness are you tempted to quit because no one has noticed it yet?
4. Name the desire most likely to bait you this week. What does mastering it look like?
5. How has God demonstrated His goodness to you? Be specific.

Notes

James 1:9–18 · Trials, Temptation, and the Goodness of God

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Soli Deo Gloria

James: Truth that Hurts · Sermon Four

The Test of True Religion

What your tongue, your ears, and your hands reveal

James 1:19–27

You can be biblically literate and theologically sound and still fail the test, because James measures faith by the distance between what we know and how we live.

i. Quick, Slow, and Slow

James 1:19–21

> Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.
>
> James 1:19–21, ESV

When things get hard, none of us is ever tempted to shut up, calm down, and listen. The temptation is to tell the world, get frantic, and get angry. The response of the godly runs the other way, and it applies to every hat you wear: husbands and wives, parents and children, employees and employers, friends, pastors and leaders. It does not matter what role you play, this is how you are to be governed.

Quick to hear does not mean quiet. It means that when you do not understand something, you ask questions before rendering judgment, and you hear both sides before you decide. Your inclination is to lock in and hear first.

Slow to speak does not mean do not speak. It means weighing your words and letting them be informed by the hearing. There is a time to render verdict, judgment, opinion and conviction. The verse does not forbid speech, it demands that we slow down before we use it. And if you are the quiet one, you are still required to speak.

Slow to anger does not mean do not be angry. It means making sure that what angers you is worth being angry about. So ask the honest question: how much of what you get angry about do you think the Lord is angry about? Does it anger Him when a pastor takes advantage of the flock, or a husband dishonors his wife? Yes. We should get angry, but about the right things.

> *Your personality, wiring or temperament don't override God's command to be slow to speak.*

Before We Begin

Today finishes chapter one, the groundwork for the rest of the letter. Nearly every topic here reopens at a deeper level in chapters two through five.

James is writing to Christians who fled for their lives, and in that hour he confronts them rather than comforts them. Some of us have an aversion to confrontation and a proclivity to comfort. There is a time for both, and we should be Spirit-led about which the moment requires.

So far: the trial will produce fruit, they need wisdom and not only strength, they must stop being double-minded, the humbled will be exalted, endurance is rewarded, temptation is not God's doing, and God is both demonstrably and immutably good. The hard truth continues here.

Words to Know

Slow

βραδύς *bradys*

Unhurried, deliberate. Restraint, not silence.

Hearer

ἀκροατής *akroatēs*

One who attends a lecture. An audience member, not a participant.

Bridle

χαλιναγωγέω *chalinagōgeō*

To lead by bit and bridle. Not to silence the horse but to steer it.

Religion

θρησκεία *thrēskeia*

Devotion visible from the outside. The practice, not the profession.

ii. Hearers and Doers

JAMES 1:22–25

> But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 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. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.
>
> JAMES 1:22–25, ESV

There are believers who think they are Christians but are merely philosophers. Those who hear the word and never do it are philosophers of Christ, not followers of Christ. The pull is to choose between the philosopher, who hears without doing, and the pharisee, who does more than he hears. We must do neither.

Let us get Legacy specific. Because we are committed to producing Christians who are biblically literate and theologically sound, we may drift into being excellent hearers who never make the transition to doing.

The self-deception is that we judge our maturity by what we know rather than by how well we respond to it. The mirror analogy is waking up, seeing the hair jacked up and the crust in the eyes, and walking out the door anyway. The problem is not that you did not see clearly. It is that you did not respond to what you saw.

> *Maturity is measured by how small the gap is between what we know and how we live.*

iii. The Test of True Religion

JAMES 1:26–27

> If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.
>
> JAMES 1:26–27, ESV

Some of us want a litmus test for how we are doing with the Lord. This is it. You can fast, pray, read your Bible, go to church and avoid the obvious pitfalls of wealth and sex, but if you do not bridle your tongue, you have deceived yourself. The image is a bit in a horse's mouth, and James returns to it later in the letter.

To bridle the tongue is to control it, so that what we say is right, with the right heart, at the right time, in the right way. That is not a technique. It requires real-time conversation with the Holy Spirit, and pure religion adds two more marks to it: care for those in affliction, and a life kept unstained by the world.

> *Bridle my tongue. Take care of people. Stay unstained.*

Ways the Tongue Runs Loose

- Complaining *Phil. 2:14*
- Slandering *Eph. 4:31*
- Gossiping *Prov. 16:28*
- Speaking harshly *Prov. 15:1*
- Lying *Eph. 4:25*
- Speaking carelessly *Prov. 10:19*
- Flattery *Prov. 29:5*
- Boasting *James 3:5*

Every one of them is named in Scripture, and every one of them deceives the heart that excuses it.

Take It Further

1. How much of what you get angry about is the Lord angry about?
2. Which is your failure: speaking too fast, or staying silent when you should speak?
3. Where is the gap widest between what you know and how you live?
4. Which item on the tongue list would those closest to you say is yours?
5. Who are the orphans and widows within your reach?

Notes

James 1:19–27 · The Test of True Religion

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Soli Deo Gloria

James: Truth that Hurts · Sermon Five

The Good Seat

Partiality, Honor, and the Question Underneath

James 2:1–17

The Fall distorted the way we hand out honor, and James names one particular version of it, so read this chapter asking the same question all the way through: Lord, where is this in me?

i. Let It Confront You

James 2:1–4

> My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory … if you say to the one in fine clothing, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there" … have you not then become judges with evil thoughts?
>
> James 2:1–4, ESV

James is tender with these people. He calls them beloved brothers. And then he says something direct enough that the tenderness is the only reason it lands instead of wounding.

So here is how to read it. The instinct when a passage like this starts is to think of someone else. Another person, another church, another political group, another generation. Resist that for the length of this chapter and ask one question instead. Lord, where is this in me? Let the Word confront you, because that is how God conforms anyone to Christ.

Partiality is an unfair bias or preference toward one person, group, or side over another. James picks rich and poor as his example, but the example is not the principle. The rich man gets the good seat because of his money, his appearance, his influence. The poor man is told to stand at the back or sit on the floor.

Like Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, James goes past the behavior and after the heart. The question is whom your heart honors before anyone speaks.

> *Lord, where is this in me?*

ii. The Dividing Wall

James 2:5–9

> If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.
>
> James 2:8–9, ESV

James says plainly that they have dishonored the poor man, while God has honored that same believer as rich in faith and an heir of the kingdom. At the same time he confronts the honor handed to the rich, whose character does not warrant it. Scripture does tell us to give honor where it is due, and James is not claiming everyone deserves identical trust or access. The problem is a heart assigning honor by a value system that is not God's.

Before We Begin

James closed the last chapter by defining the religion God accepts: caring for orphans and widows in their affliction, and keeping oneself unstained by the world.

Chapter 2 opens by naming something that makes that impossible. To see why it matters, hold the whole story in view. Creation gave every human being dignity and honor as an image-bearer, crowned with glory and honor. The Fall fractured connection with God and with each other, and it surfaced immediately, in Cain and Abel.

Redemption is God moving toward exactly what the Fall broke. Restoration is His promise that division and hostility do not get the last word. James now zooms in on one particular effect of the Fall.

Words to Know

Partiality

προσωπολημψία · prosōpolēmpsia

Literally face-receiving. Judging by the surface and deciding from it.

Honor

τιμή · timē

Weight or worth. To honor is to assign value, not to flatter.

Royal

βασιλικός · basilikos

Kingly. The law the King Himself keeps and gives His people.

Mercy

ἔλεος · eleos

Compassion toward someone in need, acted on rather than felt.

And this runs far wider than money. The same reflex attaches to education, intelligence, appearance, athletic ability, success, power, race, culture, nationality, whether someone is male or female, political identity, and what kind of church they came from.

Paul wrote to people split by the deepest ethnic and religious divide of their world and said Christ has made both groups one and torn down the dividing wall of hostility, reconciling them to God in one body through the cross. The gospel does not only reconcile you upward to God. It starts reconciling you sideways to each other. Which means partiality is not a small social failure. It is rebuilding something He died to demolish.

> *Partiality rebuilds dividing walls that Jesus died to tear down.*

iii. Mercy Triumphs

James 2:13–17

> For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.
> James 2:13, ESV

Mine ran backwards, and it took me a long time to see it. Growing up with chronic illness, visible symptoms, real physical limits, and the teasing that came with all of it produced genuine rejection. Some of that was the Fall happening to me. But the Fall also shaped how I answered it. I identified with the overlooked, and I built a quiet bias against people who were successful, athletic, wealthy, academic, or simply put together. I could also excuse destructive behavior in people I felt safe with. My pain explained where the partiality came from. It did not make it righteous.

So ask what sits underneath yours. Favoritism grows out of pride, insecurity, fear, pain, rejection, envy, bitterness, offense, or plain hunger for approval. James confronts the outward thing and exposes the inward one at the same time.

Then he asks what good it is to claim faith with nothing to show for it. He has not changed subjects. He opened this chapter talking about people who hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, and now he shows what that faith looks like in how they treat the person in front of them. A healthy tree bears fruit eventually. If God has exposed something here, the response is not shame but humility, surrender, and repentance.

> *My pain explained my partiality. It did not make it righteous.*

Where Partiality Hides

- Wealth and poverty *James' own example*
- Education and intelligence *who sounds credible*
- Appearance *who looks the part*
- Success and power *who can do something for you*
- Race and culture *who feels familiar*
- Nationality *who belongs here*
- Political identity *who votes as you do*
- Church background *who was raised right*

Across history, groups have honored their own and dishonored everyone else. Galatians names Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, and says none of it decides worth, access, or family.

Take It Further

1. Who do you instinctively honor? Who gets the good seat in your heart?
2. Who do you dismiss before they have spoken?
3. What pain, fear, pride, or bitterness might sit underneath that?
4. Where is Jesus asking you to repent rather than explain?
5. Name one person this week to whom you can extend the mercy you were given.

Notes

James 2:1–17 · The Good Seat

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Soli Deo Gloria

James: Truth that Hurts · Sermon Six

Faith that Works

Saving faith is living faith

James 2:14–26

Salvation is a gift you could never earn — and the faith that receives it is never the kind of faith that sits still.

i. A Faith That Only Talks

James 2:14–17

> What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.
>
> James 2:14–17, ESV

There are two temptations we will have when reading this text, and I want to state them plainly and ask you not to hold either one. The first is to take James to mean that good works, added to your faith, are what save you. The second is to reduce good works to nothing more than external evidence that saving faith once occurred. That doesn't seem to be what he is saying either — works appear to be more than the outward proof of an inward reality. We are going to have to be comfortable living in some tension.

Now focus on one word in verse 14: someone says. James is dealing with a claim to faith that has no works backing it up, and he asks whether that kind of faith can save. The implied answer is no. It cannot.

Then he hands us an analogy. A brother or sister is poorly clothed and hungry, and you tell them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," and then you do nothing about it. We would condemn that person instantly. We would tell them they are fooling themselves and that their words have no substance. That is exactly the person who says they have faith and has nothing to show for it.

This analogy hits so hard because it feels scandalous. It is scandalous. We should read it and think, that person is awful. Listen — as Christians we are called to be a light to the world, which means we meet needs and make a difference in our domain. Wherever we go, collectively or individually, ought to be better because we were there. We cannot be the kind of people who claim faith and use wonderful spiritual language but never lift a finger to help anyone in need.

> *A claim with nothing behind it is not faith. It is vocabulary.*

Before We Begin

James writes to Jewish Christians persecuted badly enough that they fled their homes, families, and community to keep their lives. In that hard season, when following Jesus has cost them everything, he confronts them rather than comforts them. He knows it is in trial that our walk is most likely to falter.

The theme runs the length of the book: half-hearted devotion and double-mindedness. All of us have areas where we believe one thing and live another. That is the gap James is after, and he means to eliminate it.

But first, the gospel. We were by nature children of wrath, condemned not because Adam sinned but because we sin, and the debt was too high to ever escape. Then God dies for his enemies. It is a gift, not a reward — and the moment you try to earn it, you invalidate it.

Words to Know

faith

pistis · πίστις

A conviction that something is true, and trust in what it implies.

works

erga · ἔργα

Deeds, doings. The visible activity that a living faith produces.

dead

nekra · νεκρά

A corpse. Not weak or immature — without life in it at all.

justified

dikaioō · δικαιόω

Declared righteous. Paul uses it of how we are saved; James of how it is shown.

ii. Even the Demons Believe

JAMES 2:18–20

> But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?
>
> JAMES 2:18–20, ESV

This answers the person who says, well, I'm a faith kind of guy — or the modern version, my part in the body is to have faith and your part is to work. James's reply: show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You cannot show me anything.

Then he turns up the heat. You believe that God is one — you do well. Even the demons believe, and shudder. You can believe all the right things, but if you never live them out, you resemble demons. They hold right beliefs about God. Their works simply never align with them.

There are two kinds of "Christian" we must never become: the one who checks every doctrinal box and lives contrary to it, and the one with good works and bad doctrine. We are after a third — right beliefs, right walk, right heart. Faith without works isn't merely dead. It isn't faith. It's belief, and belief saves no one.

> *Conviction that changes nothing is only an opinion.*

iii. Completed by Works

JAMES 2:21–26

> Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works ... For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.
>
> JAMES 2:21–26, ESV

Here is where we pause and ask, wait — what about everything Paul just said? Hebrews helps us. By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called out. By faith he lived in the land of promise. By faith, when he was tested, he offered up Isaac. Notice the pattern: by faith Abraham did something. His faith compelled the action, and the action found its home back in his faith.

Then one more analogy. You can have a body, but without the spirit there is no life in it. Faith that never moves, never obeys, never produces anything is dead. Paul says the same thing — read the verse right after Ephesians 2:9. We are his workmanship, created for good works, which God prepared beforehand.

> *You prayed the prayer. James asks what happened next.*

Grace, Faith, and Works

- Justified by grace as a gift *Rom. 3:23–24*
- Justified apart from works *Rom. 3:28*
- God died for his enemies *Rom. 5:8*
- By nature children of wrath *Eph. 2:3*
- Saved by grace, not works *Eph. 2:8–9*
- Created for good works *Eph. 2:10*
- Not by works of the law *Gal. 2:16*
- By faith Abraham obeyed *Heb. 11:8, 17*

Paul and James are not arguing with each other. Paul is telling you how a sinner is declared righteous before God. James is telling you how you would ever know it happened.

Take It Further

1. Where do you believe one thing and live another?
2. Whose real need have you talked about but never met?
3. What faith would this week's works prove you had?
4. Which of your convictions is actually just an opinion?
5. Name one work your faith owes. Do it this week.

Notes

James 2:14–26 · Faith that Works

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Soli Deo Gloria

James: Truth that Hurts · Sermon Seven · Casey Ryon

The Untamable Tongue

What Your Mouth Reveals About Your Heart

James 3:1–12

Your words don't create the condition of your heart. They reveal it.

i. The Weight of Words

James 3:1–5

> Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body.
>
> James 3:1–2, ESV

James starts with teachers because their ministry is words, and their words can shape an entire group of people. Increased influence brings increased accountability. As someone who teaches Scripture, this verse should scare me a little. There is a massive difference between "here is my opinion" and "thus says the Lord." There is a huge weight that comes with teaching the Word, and it's not merely the weight of having right character. It's the weight of accurately teaching the Word, because teachers don't simply answer to the people listening. They answer to the God they are speaking for. And this isn't only for Bible teachers. If you teach on social media, in small group, or to friends and coworkers who will listen, this counts.

Notice James' humility: we all stumble. Nobody gets out of this sermon. Not me, not you, and not the person you're thinking really needs to hear this. Then James makes speech the measure of maturity. The "perfect" man isn't sinless. He is mature, complete, whole.

If you want to know how mature someone is, listen to them talk. Not when they're praying or leading Bible study. Listen when they're angry, when they're frustrated, when somebody disagrees with them, or when a name they don't like comes up. Pressure has a way of revealing what's actually inside us.

A small bit steers a powerful horse. A small rudder steers a massive ship. Your tongue is tiny, but it can steer your entire life. One sentence can change a marriage, destroy a friendship, or fracture a church. One sentence spoken to a child can stay with them for decades. But the opposite is also true: "I forgive you." "Please forgive me." "I was wrong." "I love you." Words are small, but words steer our lives.

> *Your mouth will tell on you.*

Before We Begin

James writes to Jewish Christians scattered by persecution. Instead of simply comforting them, he confronts them, because hardship has a way of exposing what's really inside us.

His theme runs the length of the book: the gap between what we say we believe and how we actually live. He is calling us out of double-mindedness into maturity and wholeness.

Last week: saving faith is living faith. Tonight James shows one of the clearest places our faith, maturity, and heart become visible: our mouth.

Words to Know

Perfect

τέλειος · teleios

Mature, complete, whole. Not sinless (3:2).

Hell

γέεννα · geenna

Gehenna, the place of judgment (3:6).

Restless

ἀκατάστατος · akatastatos

Unstable; the same word as the double-minded man in 1:8 (3:8).

Likeness

ὁμοίωσις · homoiōsis

Resemblance; the image-bearer of Genesis 1:26 (3:9).

ii. A Fire Set by Hell

JAMES 3:5–8

> And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.
> JAMES 3:6, ESV

Nobody has to torch the whole forest. All you need is a spark: gossip, slander, repeating what you don't know is true, sharing what wasn't yours to share, exaggerating a story because it makes someone look worse. Once the fire starts, you don't control where it goes. You can apologize and repent, but you cannot unsay what you said.

Heavenly speech isn't always positive, and demonic speech isn't always negative. You can destroy someone with a smile. So the test isn't "Was it nice?" It's "What does it produce?" Heavenly speech produces life and points to righteousness. Demonic speech produces death and enables wickedness.

And no human being can tame the tongue. This isn't ultimately a self-discipline problem, because the tongue isn't the source. The heart is.

> *Heavenly speech isn't defined by how it sounds. It's defined by what it produces.*

iii. The Spring and the Stream

JAMES 3:9–12

> Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.
> JAMES 3:11–12, ESV

We bless God with our mouths, then gossip about and slander His bride on the way home. James says these things ought not to be so. No caveat. Not "I was just venting." Not "I was only asking for prayer." Putting "pray for them" at the end of gossip doesn't make it prayer.

Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Matthew 12:34). Anger didn't create it; anger revealed it. Exhaustion didn't put it there; exhaustion exposed it. So don't only ask, "Why did I say that?" Ask, "Why was that in me?" Then speak truthfully, speak to build, speak with grace, be slow to speak, and refuse gossip and slander.

> *If He transforms the spring, the stream will follow.*

Ways the Tongue Runs Loose

- Gossip *Prov 16:28*
- Slander *Eph 4:31*
- Lying *Eph 4:25*
- Flattery *Prov 26:28*
- Boasting *Jas 3:5*
- Corrupting talk *Eph 4:29*
- Cursing others *Jas 3:9*
- Hasty words *Jas 1:19*

If they aren't affected by the problem, part of the problem, or part of the solution, why are you telling them?

Take It Further

1. What does your speech reveal when you're angry or tired?
2. Where were you right on the issue but sinful in how you said it?
3. Have you said things about someone you wouldn't say to them?
4. Who do you need to ask forgiveness from this week?
5. What sits at the source: jealousy, pride, bitterness, or insecurity?

Notes

James 3:1–12 · The Untamable Tongue

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Soli Deo Gloria

James: Truth that Hurts · Sermon Eight

Show Me Your Wisdom

Where Wisdom Comes From and What It Grows

James 3:13–18

You can tell where wisdom came from by what grows wherever it goes.

i. Real Wisdom Shows Up

vv. 13–14

> Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth.
>
> James 3:13–14, ESV

Remember how this chapter started: "Not many of you should become teachers." Now James comes back around. You think you're wise? Okay. Let's see it. And notice what his test is not. It's not how much theology you know, how persuasive you are, or how well you can argue. It's, "By his good conduct let him show his works."

That's James all over. Faith shows itself through works. The heart shows itself through the tongue. And wisdom shows itself through conduct. In the Bible, wisdom isn't mainly an IQ thing. It's a life thing. If you want to know whether someone is wise, don't just listen to their answers. Watch their life.

Meekness doesn't mean weakness. The word was used for a strong horse trained to respond to the reins. All that power is still there. It's just under control. If you're actually wise, you won't have to convince everybody how wise you are. Your life will do the talking.

Then James names two roots. Bitter jealousy is zeal gone sour, a passion that says, if you're winning, I'm losing. Selfish ambition is a word once used for campaigning for office: working the room, building a coalition, positioning yourself at someone else's expense.

Here's what makes selfish ambition so dangerous: it works. Because it gets results, we call it drive, leadership, vision. But a church can grow big on selfish ambition. It just can't grow healthy on it. Don't be impressed by someone's influence until you've looked at their fruit, and that includes the guy standing up here. You can be right and still not be wise.

> *Wisdom from God doesn't strut. It serves.*

Before We Begin

Last week James taught us that our mouths reveal our hearts. Our words don't create the condition of the heart. They expose what was already there.

We ended with a question: what's happening at the source? Don't just ask Jesus to change what comes out. Ask Him to show you where it's coming from.

James isn't done with the source. He's just widened the lens. Verses 1–12 said, listen to what comes out of your mouth. Verses 13–18 say, now look at what comes out of your life.

Words to Know

meekness
πραΰτης · prautēs
Strength under control; power that doesn't need to dominate.

selfish ambition
ἐριθεία · eritheia
Self-seeking rivalry; once used of campaigning for office.

disorder
ἀκαταστασία · akatastasia
Instability, unrest; kin to "unstable" (1:8) and "restless" (3:8).

open to reason
εὐπειθής · eupeithēs
Teachable; easily persuaded by what is good and true.

ii. Where False Wisdom Comes From

VV. 15–16

> This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.
> JAMES 3:15–16, ESV

James takes us down a staircase. Earthly: it never looks up. Unspiritual: it's what fallen human nature produces without the Spirit. Demonic: it mirrors the logic of hell, with its self-exaltation, accusation, rivalry, and division.

James already told us the demons have pretty good theology (James 2:19). Their problem isn't what they know. It's what they are. That's what makes this passage so dangerous for religious people.

So look downstream. Jealousy leads to competition, competition to division, division to disorder. When you walk into a room, what grows? If everywhere you go there's tension, sides, and drama, and everybody else is always the problem, it might be time to look at the source. Chaos isn't random. Chaos has a root.

> *You can have accurate doctrine and a demonic spirit at the same time.*

iii. What Heavenly Wisdom Grows

VV. 17–18

> But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.
> JAMES 3:17–18, ESV

James doesn't define wisdom. He paints a portrait, and it looks a lot like Jesus. First pure, then peaceable: truth isn't sacrificed for unity. And open to reason: you can still be convinced that you're wrong. Watch how a leader responds when they're challenged.

Righteousness doesn't grow in angry soil. You cannot bully people into it or win enough arguments to produce it. It grows slowly, sown in peace. Peacemakers aren't peacekeepers. They walk into conflict carrying truth and grace. Keep sowing. The harvest is coming.

> *A leader who is never wrong isn't a leader who is always right. It's a leader who has stopped listening.*

Wisdom From Above

- Pure *hagnē*
- Peaceable *Matt. 5:9*
- Gentle *epieikēs*
- Open to reason *eupeithēs*
- Full of mercy *2:13*
- Good fruits *2:17*
- Impartial *adiakritos*
- Sincere *anypokritos*

James doesn't mainly separate the two kinds of wisdom by what they know. He separates them by what they produce.

Take It Further

1. Why do we mistake selfish ambition for vision?
2. Where are you right but not wise?
3. When you walk into a room, what grows?
4. When did someone last change your mind?
5. Where do you need to keep sowing peace?

Notes

James 3:13–18 · Show Me Your Wisdom

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Soli Deo Gloria

James: Truth that Hurts · Sermon Nine

He Gives More Grace

Quarrels, Pride, and the Only People God Opposes

James 4:1–6

James has spent four chapters stripping away our ability to pretend the problem is somewhere outside of us, and here he finally names where it actually lives.

i. The War Within

James 4:1–3

> What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.
> James 4:1–2, ESV

James has just said that false wisdom leads to disorder and every vile practice. Now he shows us what that disorder actually looks like, and in his language it looks like fighting, murdering, quarreling, and coveting. The murder is the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus says hating your brother is murdering him in your heart. They were not killing each other. They were hating each other.

And what is driving all of it? Not primarily the people around you. Here is the question James would ask. If you are constantly fighting and bickering with people in the body of Christ, what does that reveal about what is happening inside you? Is the dislike rooted in jealousy? Pride? Coveting?

Then he drops a line that should stop us. You do not have because you do not ask. You are discontent because you do not have what you want, and it has not even occurred to you to go ask the Lord for it. Your first instinct was to fight, quarrel, and take. And you are a believer, which is exactly the double-mindedness he has been tracking all along.

The second half is just as sharp. When you do ask, you ask for selfish gain. You want more because you want your will done rather than His. You are in this for yourself.

> *It isn't primarily the people around you. It's the war within you.*

ii. Bitter Jealousy, Selfish Ambition

James 3:14–16

> But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts … this is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.
> James 3:14–16, ESV

Zelos on its own is not negative. It means zeal or intense desire, and you can have a good zeal for something. James modifies it with pikros, meaning bitter, harsh, or poisonous, the same root behind his picture of a spring producing bitter water. So bitter jealousy is more than wishing you had what someone else has. It is a resentful desire that starts treating another person's good as a threat to your own.

Before We Begin

James wrote to believers who had lost nearly everything in order to keep worshiping Jesus. Homes, friends, family. They are under real pressure, and it is in the trial that their double-mindedness starts to show, the gap between what they believe and how they actually live. So he writes not to comfort them but to confront them, not to coddle them but to call them higher.

One tool before we read. Subheadings and chapter breaks were not in the original manuscripts and are not inspired. They were added later to help us navigate, and they can mislead us into thinking a thought has ended when it has not.

That matters here, because the chapter 4 break falls in the middle of a thought rather than at the end of one. So we start a few verses earlier, in chapter 3.

Words to Know

Bitter Jealousy

ζῆλος πικρός · zēlos pikros

Zeal turned poisonous. Pikros is the bitter water of James 3:11.

Selfish Ambition

ἐριθεία · eritheia

Rivalry and self-advancement. Used of campaigning for public office.

Passions

ἡδονή · hēdonē

Cravings for pleasure. The word behind hedonism, here at war inside you.

Disorder

ἀκαταστασία · akatastasia

Instability, unrest. What false wisdom reliably produces.

Here is the most useful way to test for it. Bitter jealousy is when someone else's blessing starts feeling like your loss. Someone gets recognized and you think, why was I not recognized. Someone else's opinion carries the room and you think, why did they not listen to me. Someone receives attention and you think, why are they not noticing me.

Selfish ambition sits right beside it and is not the same thing. It is self-seeking and rivalry, advancing yourself at other people's expense. It was a word used for campaigning for office, working to win people to your side. So if bitter jealousy looks at someone and says I resent what you have, selfish ambition says I want to be the one who has it. One is concerned with what you have. The other is concerned with what I want.

> *Bitter jealousy is when someone else's blessing starts feeling like your loss.*

iii. Grace to the Humble

JAMES 4:4–6

> But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."
>
> JAMES 4:6, ESV

Then comes the blow he has been building toward for four chapters. You are adulterous, unfaithful to the One who has been faithful to you, breaking covenant, belonging to Him and continually giving yourself away. You have become a friend of the world and therefore an enemy of God. You thought you were His friend this whole time. He yearns jealously over the Spirit He made to dwell in you, the way you would want your spouse jealous for your faithfulness.

Now imagine you are born again and hearing that. You love God but you have gotten lax, complacent, compromised, and these words land in your soul as remorse and conviction and regret. If you really belong to Jesus, being exposed like that should produce brokenness. And look at the very next words after the crescendo. He gives more grace.

But there is a qualifier, and it is the key to the whole letter. Grace comes to the humble. When you are confronted over your own sin there are only two available responses. Pride minimizes it, ignores it, defends it, covers it. Humility owns it: Lord, You are right, I have done these things, I have been unfaithful while You were faithful, I am sorry. You can come back to the cross even from deep compromise. No one is too far gone.

> *He opposes the proud. Not the lost, not the wicked. The proud.*

Four Chapters of Rebuke

- Doubting God *1:6*
- Blaming God for temptation *1:13*
- Hearing without doing *1:22*
- Not bridling the tongue *1:26*
- Favoritism to the rich *2:1*
- Withholding mercy *2:13*
- Faith with no works *2:14*
- Neglecting the poor *2:15*
- Teaching carelessly *3:1*
- Blessing and cursing *3:10*
- Bitter jealousy *3:14*
- Selfish ambition *3:14*
- Demonic wisdom *3:15*
- Quarreling and fighting *4:1*
- Coveting *4:2*
- Hatred as murder *4:2*
- Praying selfishly *4:3*
- Pride *4:6*

Eighteen in four chapters. James has systematically stripped away our ability to pretend that our biggest problem is somewhere outside of us.

Take It Further

1. Where are you in conflict, and what might it reveal about you?
2. Whose blessing has started to feel like your loss?
3. Is it I resent what you have, or I want to be the one who has it?
4. What do you want badly that you have never actually asked God for?
5. When God confronts you, is your reflex to defend or to say Lord, You are right?

Notes

James 4:1–6 · He Gives More Grace

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Soli Deo Gloria

James: Truth that Hurts · Sermon Ten

The Path of Repentance

What to Do When the Truth Lands

James 4:7–11

Having told them their condition is far worse than they thought, James does not leave them there. He gives them nine things to do about it.

i. Submit and Resist

James 4:7

> Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.
> James 4:7, ESV

Submit means giving up lordship. These people got where they are because lordship had quietly moved somewhere else, to themselves, their desires, their dreams, their preferences. And that transfer is subtle. It almost never announces itself. Nobody consciously decides that they will take the reins for a while. It starts by confusing your desires with His, assuming He wants what you want. They are in the mess they are in because Jesus had not been getting the final word, so the answer is that He gets the final word.

Submitting to God will require you to resist the devil, and those two commands sit together for a reason. The Greek for resist is stronger than the English. Our word sounds defensive, like bracing for impact. This one is offensive. It means to take a stand against, to oppose. It is a command rather than a principle.

So it is not only gritting your teeth in a moment of temptation, though that counts. It is returning to the settled conviction that you will stand in opposition to the devil. And notice it comes with a promise attached. You draw the line, and he flees. Nobody talks about that in conversations about spiritual warfare. It is always fast, pray, give, and worship. Nobody is preaching that you want breakthrough, so draw a line in the sand and refuse to do things the devil's way.

> *You've been resisting the wrong person.*

ii. Draw Near, Cleanse, Purify

James 4:8

> Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.
> James 4:8, ESV

This is all priestly language, and it is deliberate. Drawing near is how the Old Testament talks about approaching the presence of God. Which tells you something. In the middle of their shame, having just been told they failed miserably, James still wants them to approach. He does not want them pulling an Adam and hiding in the trees. It is the same language Hebrews uses about drawing near to the throne of grace to receive mercy in time of need. You may feel too dirty, too guilty, too far gone. He gives more grace.

Before We Begin

James is writing to Christians who refused to recant and lost everything for it. They fled their homes, their livelihoods, their families. These are not nominal or lukewarm believers.

And yet they had lost so much ground inwardly that it took an intervention from the brother of Jesus. Chapter 4 opened by telling them they had become friends of the world and therefore enemies of God.

Note what James is doing. He is not a prophet thundering from heaven. He is a pastor contending for the souls of his people. He has told them their condition is worse than they thought. Now he tells them what to do about it.

Words to Know

Submit
ὑποτάσσω · hypotassō
A military word. To arrange yourself under someone else's command.

Resist
ἀνθίστημι · anthistēmi
To take a stand against. Offensive, not defensive.

Draw Near
ἐγγίζω · engizō
To come close. Temple language for approaching God's presence.

Double-Minded
δίψυχος · dipsychos
Two-souled. A word James appears to have coined himself.

The next two commands seem to be pulling from Psalm 24. Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? He who has clean hands and a pure heart. Cleansing your hands means stop sinning, stop actually doing the thing. But it is more than stopping. It is restitution. You cannot simply repent before the Lord, feel bad, and move on. If you stole, it is not enough to feel sorry and ask forgiveness. You return what you took.

This is where we are most likely to go wrong. Biblical repentance brings together confession, restitution, and reorientation. I own what I did, I make right what I can, and I turn from the heart that produced it. Cleansing your hands deals with the fruit of your sin. Purifying your heart deals with the root, the motives and desires underneath it.

> *A lot of Christians think they have repented when they have merely confessed.*

iii. Mourn and Humble Yourself

JAMES 4:9–11

> Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.
> JAMES 4:9–10, ESV

Having told us how to respond, James now tells us what it should look like. This is the right emotional response when a believer is confronted with the fact that they have been living in delusion. It means to feel your own wretchedness, to grieve, to cry. You have spent a long time laughing and rejoicing in your compromise. It is time to stop and feel the weight of it. Look at the fruit of your sin in its ugly fullness and do not minimize it. Do not justify it, soften it, or give yourself the benefit of the doubt. Sit in it for a moment. You cannot stay there forever, but you should stay a while.

Then comes the promise. Humble yourself now, and trust that God will exalt you later. There is coming a day when He will look you in the eye and exalt you in front of many people, and that day is worth the pain of this one.

And he closes with a line he has used before, which means the repetition is doing something. In this moment of mourning and drawing near and cleansing, do not speak evil against one another. Do not blame anybody else for what you did.

> *Your sin is yours alone. Your sin is your fault.*

Nine Commands

- Submit to God *4:7*
- Resist the devil *4:7*
- Draw near to God *4:8*
- Cleanse your hands *4:8*
- Purify your hearts *4:8*
- Be wretched *4:9*
- Mourn and weep *4:9*
- Humble yourselves *4:10*
- Do not speak evil *4:11*

Nine imperatives in five verses. James has stopped diagnosing and started prescribing, and three of them carry a promise: he will flee, he will draw near, he will exalt you.

Take It Further

1. Who have you actually been submitting to?
2. Have you drawn a line in the sand, or only resisted in the moment?
3. Name something you have confessed but never made right.
4. What is the root under the sin you keep treating at the fruit level?
5. When your sin gets named, whose name do you reach for?

Notes

James 4:7–11 · The Path of Repentance

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Soli Deo Gloria

James: Truth that Hurts · Sermon Eleven

If the Lord Wills

Plans, Providence, and a Rebuke Not Aimed at You

James 4:13–5:7

James has called out the sin, called for repentance, and explained what repentance involves. Now he shows what a life lived in humility before God actually looks like, starting with how you talk about tomorrow.

i. The Problem With the Plan

James 4:13–16

> 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."
> James 4:13, ESV

Start with what James is not saying. He is not saying it is wrong to make plans. He is not saying it is wrong to travel. He is not saying it is wrong to make a profit. The problem here is twofold, and both halves come down to who is holding the pen.

They are in charge. They decide the when, the where, the what, the how long, and the why. God is nowhere to be found in the scenario.

They spoke with confidence. This is what we are going to do. James answers that you do not know what tomorrow brings. You are not the Lord.

Make the plan anyway. The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps. Make it, and hold it loosely enough to pivot when He redirects.

> *Pride isn't just thinking you're better than someone. It's building a life on your own will, void of God's.*

ii. You Are a Mist

James 4:14–17

> ... yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."
> James 4:14–15, ESV

Think of your breath on a cold morning. You can see it, but only for a moment, and then it is gone. We know life is short. Every so often we need to stop and sit in what that actually means.

Live for the next one. This life is too brief to spend on its own pleasures and comforts. We live for the eternity that comes after it.

Two years. If you knew that was all you had left, how would you spend it? That is close to the bullseye for how to spend it now.

Everything is temporary. The best seasons and the worst ones alike. So cherish the good, and do not let the bad ruin you.

Before We Begin

James has spent this letter exposing double-mindedness. His readers are lukewarm and compromised, and have drifted from friends of God to enemies of God.

So he does what a good pastor does. He confronts them, calls them to repent, and explains what repentance involves. Now comes the last step, which is what a life lived in humility actually looks like.

File that pattern away. When you have to confront a brother, do not stop at naming the sin. Call it out, call them to repent, explain what repentance involves, and explain how life should look different going forward.

Words to Know

Come Now

ἄγε νῦν · age nyn

An interjection. Look here. It opens both 4:13 and 5:1.

Mist

ἀτμίς · atmis

Vapor or steam. Breath on a cold morning, visible for a moment.

Arrogance

ἀλαζονεία · alazoneia

Pretension. Claiming more than you can actually deliver.

Be Patient

μακροθυμέω · makrothymeō

Long-tempered. To wait a long while without giving way.

The right thing. Knowing it and failing to do it is sin. Here it means acknowledging your dependence on God and submitting your plans to His will.

> *Life is short. Everything is temporary.*

iii. A Rebuke Not Aimed at You

JAMES 5:1–7

> Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you ... Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire.
>
> JAMES 5:1–3, ESV

At first glance this is the harshest thing in the letter, intense enough to make the earlier rebukes look like child's play. But most Protestant scholars hold what is called the outsider view, that James is not addressing his readers here at all. Calvin, Matthew Henry, and Douglas Moo all land there, and so do I.

The markers are different. Every other rebuke is addressed to his brothers. This one is not. Every other one is followed by a call to repent. This one is not.

Then therefore. Verse 7 says therefore be patient, which makes everything before it the world believers are living in rather than the charge against them.

So who is he addressing? The unbelieving world around them. And he is not only rebuking it, he is pronouncing judgment on it, and letting the people of God watch him do it. He does that to comfort them. He promises judgment on the very people afflicting them. He validates that the trial is real, refusing to tell them it is not that bad. And he draws a line, so they can see they do not fall into the same category as the world around them.

> *A Christian who has lost ground in their own soul is not the same as a wicked, godless pagan.*

The World's Indictment

- Hoarding wealth *5:2*
- Storing up treasure *5:3*
- Withholding wages *5:4*
- Defrauding workers *5:4*
- Living in luxury *5:5*
- Self-indulgence *5:5*
- Fattened for slaughter *5:5*
- Condemning the righteous *5:6*
- Murdering the righteous *5:6*
- Oppressing the defenseless *5:6*

Ten charges, and not one of them is followed by a call to repent. That omission is part of why most hold this paragraph is aimed past the church, at the world outside it.

Take It Further

1. Where have you built a plan without asking the Lord what He wants?
2. What are you holding so tightly you could not pivot if He redirected?
3. If you had two years left, what would change this week?
4. Name a good season you are failing to cherish.
5. Where have you confused losing ground with being lost?

Notes

James 4:13–5:7 · If the Lord Wills

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Soli Deo Gloria

James: Truth that Hurts · Sermon Twelve

Until the Coming of the Lord

Patience, False Promises, and Where Our Hope Actually Is

James 5:7–11

James does not promise his suffering readers that things are about to improve. He promises something better and further off, and then tells them how to live until it arrives.

i. Be Patient

James 5:7

> Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains.
> James 5:7, ESV

In light of the moment they are in, suffering and persecution and oppression, the answer is patience. That is worth sitting with, because it points at a theme that runs through the whole New Testament. In the middle of oppression, James does not say fight fire with fire. Not overthrow your oppressors. Not rebellion, not revolution. Patience. That can be a hard pill to swallow.

We may dissent. John MacArthur frames it this way: we have no license as Christians to take up arms and overthrow our oppressors. We can dissent, but we cannot rebel.

Which means what? We can hide, we can run, we can refuse to comply. We take the consequences that come with it.

The answer never changes. Wherever the New Testament addresses a suffering believer, it says the same thing every time.

> *Be patient, endure, don't give up on Jesus, and don't repay evil for evil.*

ii. What He Actually Promised

James 5:8

> You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.
> James 5:8, ESV

We want James to say that breakthrough is coming, deliverance is coming, change is coming, that if you keep doing what is right your life will turn around. He does not say it, and he does not promise it, because he is being honest with them. It might happen. It might just as easily not.

The paradigm. There is an idea in the western church that good things happen to the faithful. Sometimes they do. They are not guaranteed. Faithfulness does not reliably produce the house, the job, the promotion, or the breakthrough.

What Scripture does promise. Trial, tribulation, suffering, joy in the middle of it, peace, grace, the salvation of our souls, an advocate, a friend who sticks closer than a brother, and eternal reward for the faithful.

Before We Begin

James has just turned to the world outside the church and pronounced judgment on it. Most Protestant scholars hold the outsider view of that paragraph, that it is not addressed to his readers at all.

He lets the people of God watch him do it, and he does it to comfort them. He promises judgment on the people afflicting them, he validates that the trial is real, and he draws a line between a believer who has lost ground and a godless world.

Now he tells them what to do while they wait. Pay close attention to what he does not say.

Words to Know

Be Patient

μακροθυμέω · makrothymeō

Long-tempered. To hold out a long while without giving way.

Steadfastness

ὑπομονή · hypomonē

Remaining under. Bearing up rather than escaping.

Coming

παρουσία · parousia

Arrival. The word used for a king's royal visit.

Establish

στηρίζω · stērizō

To set firmly. To prop a thing in place so it holds.

Not until. Not until revival sweeps the land. Not until you see breakthrough. Not until the Lord removes the oppressor. Be patient until the coming of the Lord.

Which implies something. The suffering may not lift before that day. There will be seasons of calm. That is not the same as it being over.

> *Our hope isn't that things get better or easier. Our hope is the coming of the Lord.*

iii. Take the Prophets

JAMES 5:9–11

> As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.
>
> JAMES 5:10–11, ESV

First one more word about how we treat each other under pressure, and he ties it to the same event he has been pointing at all along. Do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged, because the Judge is standing at the door. Then he turns to Scripture for comfort and hands them the prophets and Job.

Why these names? Because every one of them was faithful and suffered for it. Not one is an example of faithfulness producing an easier life.

They kept going. They did not lose faith and they did not lose heart. That is what James means by steadfastness.

The purpose of the Lord. You have seen it, he says. The Lord is compassionate and merciful. That is where the story ends, not where it sits right now.

> *They were faithful, and bad things happened to them anyway.*

Suffering and Patience

- Isaiah *martyred, by tradition*
- Jeremiah *beaten and imprisoned*
- Ezekiel *exile, then his wife*
- Daniel *the lions' den*
- Hosea *an unfaithful wife*
- Amos *told to stop preaching*
- Job *everything but his life*

Seven names, and not one of them is an example of faithfulness producing an easier life. James offers them as comfort anyway.

Take It Further

1. Where are you waiting on a breakthrough God never promised?
2. What changes if your hope is His coming rather than your circumstances?
3. Who are you grumbling against while you wait?
4. Which of these seven stories is closest to yours right now?
5. Name something you are enduring that you keep expecting to end.

Notes

James 5:7–11 · Until the Coming of the Lord

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Soli Deo Gloria

James: Truth that Hurts · Sermon Thirteen

Bring Them Back

Integrity, Prayer, and the Last Word of the Letter

James 5:12–20

James ends without a goodbye. He ends with a warning about wandering and the job of going after each other, because that is what the whole letter has been doing.

i. Let Your Yes Be Yes

James 5:12

> But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.
>
> James 5:12, ESV

The ancient world had binding oaths and non-binding ones. A binding oath invoked God. A non-binding oath invoked anything else, the earth, the heavens, or in our version of it, my mother's grave. It was a way to promise something while keeping a door open to get out of it later. Empty rhetoric with no bearing on how sure the promise actually was. James strips all of it away.

No second guessing. If a Christian says yes, you should be able to trust them. If you say yes, it is binding. When you say no, mean it.

Which requires something. Be slow to give either one. If you want your yes to be more potent and more reliable, say yes less and no more. Count the cost before you commit.

Be honest with yourself. Is this something you can do, want to do, must do, or will do? What usually happens is we cave to perceived social pressure and say yes to things we would not otherwise.

It is fine to hear no. The verse tells us it is fine to say no, which by default means it is fine to hear one. Do not feel bad saying it, and do not think someone rude for saying it.

> *If you are unsure about your yes, your answer should be no.*

ii. Pray in Every Season

James 5:13–16

> Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.
>
> James 5:13–14, ESV

Start from the top. Are you suffering? Pray. Hardship should drive you toward God, though the honest tendency is to complain, to process and dwell on the hard. Are you cheerful, are things going well? Sing praise, and rejoice to Him. Whatever season you are in, the response is the same. Draw near.

Before We Begin

Four chapters of plain speech about double-mindedness, believing one thing and living another. Their faith had been tested by the fire of trial and found impure, and the compromise had made them friends of the world and therefore enemies of God.

There was still time to repent, and James told them what that looks like. Draw near, resist the devil, clean your hands, purify your hearts, grieve over sin, and stop speaking evil of each other.

Then he turned to the world oppressing them and promised judgment. Be patient until the coming of the Lord. We are pilgrims here. Our home and our reward belong to the next age, not this one.

Words to Know

Oath

ὅρκος · horkos

A sworn promise. The ancient world had binding and non-binding kinds.

Sick · v14

ἀσθενέω · astheneō

Sick, or weak and without strength. Rendered weak in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8.

Sick · v15

κάμνω · kamnō

A different word. To grow weary or become exhausted, as in Hebrews 12:3.

Save

σῴζω · sōzō

To save or heal. Every other time James uses it, it means salvation.

Then it gets challenging. There are two ways to read what follows, and both have real merit. I lean one way, and the other is compelling enough that I cannot preach mine alone with a good conscience.

The familiar reading. Physical healing. Call the elders, they anoint and pray, the prayer of faith brings healing, sins get confessed along the way. It fits the immediate context, and most of us grew up practicing it, minus the confession part.

What it leaves open. Does unconfessed sin block healing? Does an unhealed person lack faith? Paul left Trophimus sick, told Timothy to take wine for his stomach, and prayed three times about his own thorn without relief.

The other reading. The restoration of a wandering Christian. The word for sick can mean weak. The word in verse 15 can mean weary. And save is the word James uses for salvation everywhere else, including five verses later.

> *It reads very clear in English. To a first-century Christian reading Greek, it would not have been as clear.*

iii. No Formal Goodbye

JAMES 5:19–20

> My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.
> JAMES 5:19–20, ESV

And with that line, the letter ends. No formal goodbye. No closing pleasantries. Just a warning about wandering from the truth and the responsibility we have to bring one another back. He closes there for a specific reason. This verse is the whole purpose of the letter.

He has been doing it all along. Calling them back from their wandering. Now he hands them the work and tells them to do it for each other, so that a soul would be saved from death.

Five chapters, one theme. Double-mindedness. Believing in God while living as if you do not. To live in double-mindedness is to wander from God.

Remember the mirror. Chapter 1 warned us not to look into the Word, see what is true, and then go on with life without doing anything about it.

> *Don't feel the conviction of the last thirteen weeks and then do nothing about it.*

True Either Way

- Elders are plural *5:14*
- The sick one calls *5:14*
- Elders carry the flock *5:14*
- God meets the person *5:15*
- The individual prays *5:13*
- The elders pray *5:14*
- The congregation prays *5:16*

The reading is debated. The practice is not. Make your need known, call for help, pray on every front, confess, and trust God to meet you. James moves from personal prayer to pastoral prayer to mutual prayer.

Take It Further

1. Where has your yes stopped being reliable?
2. What are you about to say yes to that should be a no?
3. In the season you are in, are you praying or complaining?
4. Who have you not told that you need help?
5. Who has wandered, and will you go after them?

Notes

James 5:12–20 · Bring Them Back

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