PREACHING FAITH SEEN THROUGH WORKS TO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AT FAITH BIBLE CHURCH IN EDMOND, OKLAHOMA

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Doctor of Ministry

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by

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APPROVAL SHEET

PREACHING FAITH SEEN THROUGH WORKS TO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AT FAITH BIBLE CHURCH IN EDMOND, OKLAHOMA

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This project is dedicated to my loving wife, Rachel, who models the characteristics of biblical womanhood and is a constant source of encouragement and support

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AYBC	Anchor Yale Bible Commentary
BDAG	Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
LXX	Septuagint
NICNT	New International Commentary of the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
PTW	Preaching the Word
SBJT	*Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

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PREFACE

From my first exposure in an introductory Greek class, the book of James has always captivated me. James's clear reliance on the wisdom literature, along with his integration of Jesus's teaching into short applicable words of truth, have challenged me as I have continued to pursue the Lord. In this book James is not afraid to tell it like it is. He lays out the truth plain and simple, exhorting every believer to live out their faith in their daily lives. It is for these reasons that James's letter has been the center of this project.

I am deeply indebted to many people who have led me to where I am today. My parents, Kermit and Virginia Kinsley, have faithfully modeled a life lived for the Lord Jesus. The foundation they laid in my life is one I hope to impart to my own children as they grow. My wife Rachel has always been supportive of the Lord's leading in our lives. She has encouraged, challenged, and lifted me up throughout our marriage and for that I am deeply appreciative.

Throughout the writing of this project, I have been helped greatly by Dr. Brian J. Vickers. His guidance has helped me become a better writer, pastor, and student of God's Word. I am also thankful for the staff and elders at Faith Bible Church who have given me the financial support and encouragement I needed to complete this project. To be a part of a church that values the gospel and proclamation of God's Word has been one of the supreme blessings of my life.

Justin Kinsley

Edmond, Oklahoma

May 2021

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Every so often, culture is confronted by a giant craze stirred up by a new series of books that continues to impact every part of society from social media to magazines, movies, and more. Not long ago, the *Harry Potter* series by J. K. Rowling created just such a cultural phenomenon. Lines wrapped around bookstores, movie tickets sold out in a matter of minutes, and eventually Harry Potter had become an integral piece in the kaleidoscope of popular culture. But what made these books so enthralling? It was not just the relatable characters or Rowling's descriptive writing that made these books so popular; ultimately, it was the interwoven plot structure that continually built upon itself book by book until the climax is reached in the final saga. This was the glue that bound readers closely to the pages of this series of novels. After reading the seventh and final book of this collection, connections and similarities from previous novels in the series soon begin to emerge. In retrospect, the books now have taken on more meaning and have more connections.

The Bible is no different. Once an overall unified perspective is gained by the reader, connections begin to appear from the beginning of Scripture to end of Scripture, even though the books were written by human authors centuries apart.[1] Themes begin emerging that otherwise seemed elusive, and the shadows of various types begin to appear with more regularity; however, a proper view of the Bible can only be assessed

[1] John Goldingay sees the usefulness of biblical theology in a similar way as he suggests that after reading the entire biblical narrative, often readers will begin to see connections that they missed in their first reading of the text. John Goldingay, *Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2016), 17.

once the reader acknowledges that God is the ultimate author of all sixty-six books of the Christian canon. Traditionally, evangelical Christians have acknowledged the inerrancy and divine inspiration of Scripture, apart from which, biblical theology would be nothing more than a fruitless academic expedition. For those Christians who acknowledge that God divinely inspired all Scripture for His intended purposes, it should not be a big leap to acknowledge that similar themes, symbols, and types will be used throughout the entire biblical canon, since there is one divine author behind each historical author writing each book.[2]

It is also important to note that biblical theology is not simply for the academic or preacher. As James Hamilton suggests, "If you believe 'all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness' (2 Tim 3:16), you need biblical theology."[3] Biblical theology in this understanding is a necessary pursuit for any student of God's Word.

Working toward a Definition

With this in mind, a working definition of biblical theology can now begin to be fleshed out. One good starting point can be stated as such: Biblical theology is the art of tracing how particular authors of Scripture pick up and progress various theological

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[2] In speaking about a presupposition of interpretation for biblical theology, G. K. Beale states, "One such presupposition, for example, is that the Protestant canon of the OT and the NT composes the divinely inspired, authoritative material for doing biblical theology." G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 2.

[3] James Hamilton lays out the importance of Biblical Theology for the preacher in this chapter, but here suggests that this pursuit is profitable for any believer. M. Hamilton Jr., "Biblical Theology and Preaching," in *Text Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Mathews (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 194.

themes, images and types throughout their individual letters or narratives.[4] Simplified, biblical theology seeks to explore the Scriptural framework of the Bible. It is from this starting point that we will begin to work out the many nuances and pieces to the process of biblical theology.

In the preface of his book, while introducing the general topic of biblical theology, Geerhardus Vos mentions that often the question is raised, that all theology should be "biblical" theology, and to that extent, the term biblical theology can often be misleading. Understanding this confusion, Vos provides a better phrase for the pursuit of biblical theology, calling it the "History of Special Revelation."[5] What Vos is trying to describe with this phrase is the fact that biblical theology constitutes the task of the exegete to set oneself within the history of revelation and seek to understand how the biblical authors understood God's Word and its impact on their own writing. Such is the task of the biblical theologian, to set oneself in the immediate context of the biblical author and subsequently attempt to look through the whole counsel of God to "seek to analyze and synthesize the Bible's teaching about God and His relations to the world on its own terms, maintaining sight of the Bible's overarching narrative and Christocentric

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[4] In Wayne Grudem's massive volume on systematic theology, as a means of distinguishing systematic theology from biblical theology, he defines biblical theology as paying "attention to the teachings of individual authors and sections of Scripture, and to the place of each teaching in the historical development of Scripture." While he does see some overlap between the process of biblical theology and systematic theology, biblical theology is differentiated by the task of the theologian to understand how biblical themes were understood by one author in light of all of Scripture that came before his writing. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 22-23.

[5] Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (East Peoria, IL: Versa Press, 1948), v.

focus."[6] What Vos rightly points out is that the focus of biblical theology is the immediate text's influence and progression of God's divine Word to mankind.

In their massive work undertaking the task of biblical theology with an eye to how the covenants act as the "backbone" for the biblical narrative, Gentry and Wellum begin with a brief description of biblical theology. In their assumption, rightly so, biblical theology is a hermeneutic that seeks to understand individual scriptures in light of their own context and then in light of the story of the entire Bible.[7] Done correctly, the biblical theologian will seek to understand how the individual parts of the Bible relate to the whole. In more poignant words, doing biblical theology "will not permit a retreat to the study of texts as if they were naked art forms and nothing else."[8] Instead biblical theology should view various scriptures as continuing the tapestry of God's Word where the parts relate and contribute to the whole of the scripture's overall message.

With the understanding of biblical theology above, two *a priori* questions often, though not necessarily, emerge that will undoubtedly flow from the reader of God's Word as he or she seeks to interpret its message: Is there an overarching storyline of Scripture? What is the core message of God's Word? The answers to these two questions will inform how the reader understands each individual Scripture in light of the local and historical contexts of a particular text.

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[6] Brian S. Rosner, "Biblical Theology" in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity & Diversity of Scripture*, ed. B. S. Rosner, T. D. Alexander, Graeme Goldsworthy, and D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 10.

[7] Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 34.

[8] D. A. Carson, "New Testament Theology," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & It's Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 808.

Is There an Overarching Storyline?

As was stated earlier, understanding the biblical canon as one story instead of a conglomeration of individual stories, will change the way one conceives of its message. A temptation for the student of God's Word would be to treat each biblical book as if it were one unique and separate story that needs to be examined without the help of other biblical texts outside its immediate context. However, to take the path of biblical theology means to view the entire Bible as the unified and inerrant story of God for mankind, where each biblical book adds and develops a piece of the overall narrative structure.

One basic structure of a story involves a single plot line that moves in a very predictable pattern. It begins with favorable circumstances, but inevitably a crisis is presented in the story that begins the driving force that leads to the climax and resolution of the story. Viewed through the lens of biblical theology the story of Scripture can be lined out in a similar pattern. The biblical narrative begins with a situation that is described as "good" by God, but soon sin and death are introduced as the result of Adam's disobedience to the direct command of God. From this point in Genesis 3 on, the storyline shifts to finding a resolution for mankind's sin problem. Throughout the continuing narrative, readers begin to see glimpses of God's rescue plan through events like the Exodus and through foreshadowing figures like King David. These occurrences reassure God's people that He had not forgotten about them and would soon bring the redemption He promised (Gen 3:15). As the plot progresses, eventually readers are introduced to God's chosen Redeemer. God's very own Son, Jesus of Nazareth, son of David, who became incarnate in the first century A. D. and declared himself the long-awaited Messiah would eventually redeem mankind from the ever-present plague of sin and death. The tension and climax peak when the Messiah dies at the hands of the very people He came to save. The solution to sin seems to fail, when suddenly Christ is said to have been physically raised from the dead. From this point on, those who trust in Him

live out their days as they await His second return when the world would be renewed to its past glory.

A simplified way of boiling down the narrative storyline can be condensed to the following: the Garden, the Fall, the Redeemer, and the Renewal.[9] When reading a particular Scripture, the first duty of the reader is to place the immediate verse before them in the overarching narrative of God's Word; it is from this place in the storyline that the contemporary reader is able to understand the flow of Scripture as a whole and properly place themselves within the redemptive history of God's Word.[10]

What's the Core Message?

After mapping out the overarching storyline of the Bible in such a way as described above, the reader can not only locate each individual text's place within redemptive history but gives way to seeking out a potential "central core" that holds the entire narrative together. It is important to note at this point that extracting a core message or theme from the text is not mandatory but can help inform the reader how God is working in a unified manner throughout history. Some biblical theologians argue for one definitive central theme on which the entire Bible hangs, of which there are many different opinions on what such a potential core could be. For example, James Hamilton argues that the core of biblical theology can be viewed as "the glory of God manifested in

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[9] G. K. Beale uses a similar plot structure as the basis of the story line of the Bible: "creation, fall, redemption, and consummation." In particular, Beale's use of this same storyline undergirds his entire New Testament theology, which tells us that Beale is attempting to look at the New Testament in light of the Old Testament and its continuing storyline. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology,* 5.

[10] I fully acknowledge that there are some portions of Scripture, especially in the wisdom literature, that do not neatly fit with the proposed narrative structure listed above. This however does not mean that such Scripture has a place in biblical theology. Scripture in these categories often find ties throughout the rest of the canon through similar themes presented and types given.

salvation through judgment,"[11] while Thomas Schreiner suggests that the kingdom of God "fits well" as the center of biblical theology.[12] Such a practice of identifying the core theme on which the rest of the biblical narrative hangs is not a means to impose modern themes onto God's Word, but it is an attempt to look at what the Bible says about itself and summarize the overall motif which God seeks to present to readers throughout the centuries.

Definition of Biblical Theology

To begin, biblical theology is rightly biblical when the interpreter first seeks to look at what the Bible says about itself before coming to the text with modern notions and categories in an attempt to systematize what the Bible has to say.[13] It is through studying the ways by which the original authors read Scripture that contemporary readers will arrive at better conclusions as to what the author's writing originally meant to portray. Wellum puts it well when he says that biblical theology is a hermeneutic discipline that "attempts to exegete texts in their own context and then, in light of the

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[11] James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 53.

[12] Although adamant about not proposing one center for biblical theology, Schreiner proposes that the most ideal center would be the theme of the kingdom of God. With this in mind, what Schreiner does well in this section is differentiating the difference between the center of the Bible's theology and the reason for the Bible's theology, which he believes is the glory of God. Thomas Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), xii-xiii.

[13] Schreiner has a great discussion on how biblical theology and systematic theology interact with each other and draws the conclusion through his vast research that biblical theology is an attempt to allow the text of Scripture to do the talking before systemizing its theology. Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 882-88.

entire canon, to examine the unfolding nature of God's plan and carefully think through the relationship between *before* and *after* in that plan which culminates in Christ."[14]

One way that the Bible continues and progresses its message throughout the entire canon is through the use of various symbols, types, and themes.[15] These literary devices are strategically used by the authors as a means of taking the reader of his text back to previous Scriptures so that through his use of the symbol/type/theme God might build upon and progress its past usage. For example, in Genesis the Bible presents the historical figure Adam as the first man created by God. In other places throughout the New Testament, Adam is no longer referenced as simply a historical figure; rather, he is seen as a type, symbolizing all of mankind (1 Cor 15:22, 45). Paul makes use of this literary feature in Romans 5:12-21, when he links Adam with the death brought by his sin and then compares Jesus as the new Adam who has come to bring life to mankind. In this way, Adam serves as a type which is ultimately fulfilled through the atoning work of Christ.

With the above discussion in mind, the rest of this project will assume the following definition of biblical theology: the process by the contemporary reader to view individual scriptures (which also include repeated images/types/themes) within the scope of the entire canon and storyline of God's redemption of mankind.

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[14] Stephen J. Wellum, "Editorial: Reflections on the Significance of Biblical Theology," *SBJT* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 7.

[15] A symbol can be defined as a material that "represents or stands for something else." A theme can be defined as a unifying and "recurring or pervading idea." A type can be defined as a "person exemplifying the defining characteristics of something" else which is further built upon and progressed. Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, eds., *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), s. v. "symbol," s. v. "theme," s. v. "type."

Biblical Theology and Preaching

As was noted earlier, Scripture is the divinely inspired and inerrant words of God written by the hands of particular men under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to inform mankind about God and His relationship to humanity. It ultimately transforms mankind through a knowledge about His Son Jesus and the salvation provided through His death and resurrection. This Scripture is formed by two testaments but is unified through a continuing story line that weaves itself through the entire narrative of the canon. Understanding Scripture in this light could leave the modern preacher feeling the extreme weight and burden to exegete Scripture properly. Knowing this, the following questions arise: How does one begin to exegete Scripture in line with the Bible's intended purposes? How does one express the present veracity of Scripture to a church full of attentive ears? This is where biblical theology shines, whereas a simple applicational approach to preaching can seem subjective and fluctuating with the needs and events of the present times. Preaching with a mind toward biblical theology means allowing the text to come on its own terms instead of imparting man's own understanding upon its revelatory words.[16]

As was stated above, biblical theology is an approach to Scripture that views its contents through the literary themes, symbols, and types used by the original authors; it seeks to interpret the contemporary meaning of the text through an understanding of the scripture's place within the grand narrative of the Bible as a whole. Hagner discusses this objective of the Christian preacher in an essay describing the role of biblical theology and preaching. He writes, "On the one hand, it is necessary for the preacher to be true to the past—to what the text meant. On the other hand, however, it is equally important for the preacher to express what the text means in such a way as to shed light on its

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[16] Hamilton rightly asks the question, "Is the Bible shaping the way we read the world, or has the world shaped the way we read the Bible?" Hamilton, "Biblical Theology and Preaching," 200.

contemporary relevance."[17] In other words, what Hagner is trying to describe is the tension for the preacher to be true to Scripture's historical accuracy while at the same time staying true to the Scripture's present-day application. To be true to biblical theology means allowing the text to interpret itself and not allowing modern assertions to dominate one's understanding of the text and its application

The Either/or Paradigm

It can be easy for any preacher to fall into the trap of an either/or scenario: Either the preacher teaches a strictly historical view of Scripture and fails to properly apply it to his modern context, or the preacher looks only to the "now" and fails to pay homage to the text's original meaning. Such an understanding fails to properly acknowledge the place of Scripture in history and its timelessness for every generation.

To escape from the temptation of "either/or" preaching, one may rely on the hermeneutical arch that seeks to unite the exegetical, theological, and homiletical meanings of the text together in order to properly understand the truthfulness of Scripture for today's audience. Such an approach to preaching is one way to stay true to the historical accuracy of the text while at the same time maintaining a relevance for the modern hearer. While this method may be helpful, it is my firm belief that by pressing hard into biblical theology, as defined above, one is able to stay true to the original meaning of the text, its original place within the whole of the canon, and its current relevance in today's world.

By only focusing on the historical context of a text, preachers stop short of fully pressing into biblical theology. Biblical theology comes into play by asking the following critical question: "How does this text fit within the rest of the revealed canon

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[17] D. A. Hagner, "Biblical Theology and Preaching," *Expository Times* 96, no. 5 (February 1985): 138.

of Scripture?"[18] Others simply jump straight from the historical contextual meaning of the text to the systematic meaning of the text without ever contemplating its relevance to the overall storyline of the Bible. This is where biblical theology plays an important part in the preaching of God's Word—it is the bridge between the historical, systematic, and applicational worlds of the Bible. It's the tie that seeks to bind the uniqueness of each written book in their own individual contexts with the systematic themes presented throughout their writings. Looking through a lens such as this allows one to escape the either/or paradox where either a sermon has to be highly historical or highly applicational and lets God's Word flow from one story straight into the hearts and lives of their congregants.

Readjusting Our Sights

In looking at the primary aim of Christian homiletics, preaching the Scriptures faithfully entails allowing God's Word to speak for itself instead of coming to the Scriptures with a predisposed set of ideas to lay on top of the text.[19] If such an understanding is true, then P. J. H. Adam is correct when he says, "Biblical theology and preaching have the same aim,"[20] namely to allow the text to interpret itself in light of its

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[18] P. J. H. Adam suggests that most preachers have yet to be trained in using biblical theology to understand the text of Scripture. "Most preachers have been trained to read a text in its literary context, a verse in the context of a paragraph, a paragraph in the context of a chapter, a chapter in the context of a book, a book in the context of the thought of the author. However not every preacher has been trained to read a text in the context of theology, much less biblical theology." P. J. H. Adam, "Preaching and Biblical Theology" in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity & Diversity of Scripture*, ed. B. S. Rosner, T. D. Alexander, Graeme Goldsworthy, and D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 108.

[19] David L. Allen. "Introduction," in *Text Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Mathews (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 1-8.

[20] Adam writes a lengthy disposition on the interrelationship between preaching and biblical theology in the *New Dictionary for Biblical Theology*. His work

local context and the context within the entire narrative. With this in mind, it can be clearly seen that preaching and biblical theology go hand in hand in an effort to make the scriptures both informative and revelatory for a modern audience by looking at the collective local, canonical, and theological contexts of God's reveal and inspired Word.

When using biblical theology while preaching, the underlying truthfulness that the entire biblical canon is one coherent story told through sixty-six different books is of particular importance.[21] After the Enlightenment and the rise of critical scholarship, studies began to focus their attention away from the unity of the Bible and instead began to focus on how each text could be differentiated from one another. Such an endeavor has led to a hesitancy to view Scripture as one book telling a singular story, and in turn has undermined the integrity and inspiration of God's Word as a whole.[22] Following this way of the Enlightenment, when the modern preacher chooses to teach his congregation as if the books they are reading should be viewed as separate entities bound together in one volume instead of one book made up of 66 different sections telling the same story, the congregation is sure to assume that God's Word is varied and incoherent.

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does a great job at summarizing the various complexities and avenues of preaching while remaining true to biblical theology. Adam, "Preaching and Biblical Theology," 104-112.

[21] Adam suggests that using biblical theology presents congregations with a coherent view of God's Word and allows them to move away from the "postmodern question 'What does this text mean to me?' to the more fruitful question 'What does this text mean?'" Adam, "Preaching and Biblical Theology," 110.

[22] Looking through this work, Wellum ("Significance of Biblical Theology," 6) does well when he shows how the discipline of biblical theology broke out of the Enlightenment into two strands. On the one side were theologians who did not look at Scripture as a unified whole divinely inspired by a single author but instead as separate books meant to be isolated and evaluated using modern methods of text criticism. However, another strand of biblical theology broke off which gave rise to a discipline that became to look at individual texts as a part of a greater whole its an overarching Christological emphasis. Stephen J. Wellum. "Editorial: Reflections on the Significance of Biblical Theology" SBJT 20, nu. 1, (Spring 2016): 6.

Gentry and Wellum note the effect of the Enlightenment on biblical theology, when they assert that the critical approach promoted to reading the Bible during this time undermined the Bible's divine authorship and resulted in readers coming to the Bible like any other piece of literature. "This meant that the Bible was not approached on its own terms as 'God-breathed.'"[23] Pushing back on this methodology from the Enlightenment, biblical theology asserts the truth that God's Word is not changing over time but has remained consistent as He seeks to reveal to mankind His singular storyline that displays His glory through salvation.[24]

Described as such, biblical theology is an integral piece of the life of the preacher as he seeks to distill God's Word through the literary and canonical contexts of the Scripture, so that his current audience might be able to hear and apply the timeless truths to their own lives. Properly done, biblical theology seeks to allow the congregation to approach the text on Scripture's terms, instead of approaching the text with a predisposed set of ideas meant to be laid over the text. When we approach the text with an eye toward biblical theology, "God speaks a transcendent message to people in every age, and shapes their minds, hearts and lives so that they can know and serve Him and speak His truth to others."[25]

Local Congregational Context

Currently I serve as the Student Minister to the sixth through twelfth grade students at Faith Bible Church (FBC) in Edmond, Oklahoma. The majority of FBC's

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[23] Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 28.

[24] James Hamilton (in *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*) argues that God's glory in salvation through judgment is the central theme by which the Bible should be read. I tend to agree with him on this point but give way to other "centers" that could be possible.

[25] Adam, "Preaching and Biblical Theology," 111.

students have been raised in a church from the time they were infants and have grown up in a "Christian community" where a purely intellectual faith is the norm. Edmond is an affluent suburb situated on the north side of Oklahoma City. Edmond is home to many wealthy individuals seeking to "get away" from the city and live in a smaller community of like-minded families. From its conception, Edmond has been known as a Christian community; in fact, for many years a cross was placed on the lower left side of the city's official seal as a sign of the city's commitment to traditional Christian values. Even though the cross was forced to be removed from the city's official seal in 1993, the vast population of Edmond would still affirm some sort of belief in the gospel. Christ's atoning work on the cross often becomes simply an intellectual statement to affirm instead of a living faith that works itself out through everyday actions.

While often a very positive atmosphere, it can be easy for the students at Faith Bible Church to assume the gospel's presence in their lives because it is the normative experience of the community around them. More than simply hearing the gospel at a local place of worship and assuming its presence in the surrounding culture, the students of Faith Bible Church are often placed in schooling systems that place a high priority on Christian education such as homeschooling and Christian private schools. What this indicates is an overwhelming amount of Christian influence in the life of FBC's students.

Regarding homeschooling, while each particular setting is different, the vast majority of students receiving their education at home through either a Christian based curriculum or through a faith-based co-op. In terms of private school students, there are two prominent Christian private schools in the area where the vast majority of FBC students attend. Both of these schools adhere to an evangelical statement of faith. These two schools mandate daily Bible classes, prayer before each class, and hold mandatory weekly chapel services. Only a small portion of students receive their education from a secular point of view in one of the many public middle schools and high schools.

With the vast majority of FBC's students receiving daily Bible training and Christian based teaching in their individual school settings, the majority of students who attend FBC have been saturated with the Bible for their entire lives. Add this to the fact that these students are living within the Bible Belt of America, where a church sits on every street corner and Christian values are often assumed as the norm, and one can see how easy it would be to believe that a Christian is someone who simply adheres to an intellectual statement instead of allowing Christ to circumcise their heart. The normative place of the Christian faith in Edmond, and especially within the students at FBC, can often lead students to passivity in working out their faith in their daily lives.

Even though the majority of the students at Faith Bible Church are totally immersed in a gospel centered community and are placed within a Christian education system, all too often it can be easy for students to assume that because they live under the umbrella of a gospel centered culture that Christ is automatically present within their own lives as well. However, where the gospel is assumed, ultimately the gospel is forgotten. With this being said, the message of James proves to be extremely beneficial now more than ever for the students of Faith Bible Church.

The Christian faith was never meant to be a purely intellectual or cultural assent; instead, it was meant to transform the way individuals live in the world. Therefore, faith has a direct connection to works. Genuine faith shows itself to be genuine not from a simple verbal proclamation alone but from a life that evidences the qualities and virtues of Christ. By listening to the words of James, it is my hope that FBC's students would be able to make this connection in their minds, and their faith would move away from being something simply tacked onto their life, to something that informs the way that they live their life.

The book of James is extremely practical and easy enough for students to comprehend, as James uses parables and images to engrain certain Christian themes into the minds of his readers. His message is timeless in the sense that the issues he seeks to

overcome are the same issues present within the lives of the students at Faith Bible Church: perseverance, wealth, taming the tongue, and much more. The students at Faith Bible often encounter a surrounding culture that proclaims one thing but lives in a manner that defies their own personal claims. For James this cannot happen for a true believer. Genuine faith must always produce genuine works; if not, such faith should be pronounced dead.

Often the book of James is further misunderstood as James's use of the word justification can be placed in direct contradiction with Paul's use of the same term. Upon further reflection, this project aims to show that Paul and James are using the term justification in the same manner. These two biblical authors are not challenging or modifying a previous definition of the word but are expounding upon its vast depth of meaning in the life of a believer. Through this project the students of Faith Bible Church should be encouraged to view the book of James as a unique piece of the literary canon of the New Testament, ultimately broadening their understanding of what it means to live as a child of God. It is for this reason that the book of James will be an invaluable tool in showing the connection between faith and works in the life of a believer for my present ministerial context.

Preaching through James is extremely necessary for the context in which I minister, as often confessional theology is the norm, while practical theology is far from the minds of some. Faith is assumed to be the starting and ending point of God's work in the life of the individual, when in fact James tells us otherwise. The Christian faith was meant to lead to godly living in the world and without those noticeable works in the world, James says such faith is dead. In conclusion, this project seeks to inspire my congregation to allow their confessional faith in Christ to lead to practical works in the world around them.

James in Context

As with any other part of Scripture, understanding James's context is a necessary task to understanding his intended purpose for this epistle. Therefore, before looking at each individual text that this paper seeks to explore, one must first understand the framework of James's context by looking at the historical and biblical theological context of this letter. The first step in this process is to look at the historical context of the epistle and assess when, why, and to whom James was writing. After one has a proper historical understanding of James's authorial context, the next step to understanding his message is to question how he is using previous scripture to inform his own writing and determine what biblical symbols, types, or themes appear in the text. Through the process of exegeting the historical and biblical theological context, the reader of James will be able to better understand his original intention; however, before we look at the historical and biblical theological context, we will first briefly examine the canonicity of James.

Canonicity

The first clear reference to the epistle of James appears in the third century writings of Origen where he identifies James by name and cites his work as a part of the Christian Scriptures. While this may be the first direct reference to James, both Moo and Kistemaker see indirect references to James in various early Christian literature.[26] The Christian historian Eusebius indicated that within the early church James was among the disputed books of the Christian canon.[27] However, the hesitancy to attribute the epistle of

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[26] Moo and Kistemaker suggest not only that Origen was the first to reference James by name but also that early direct references to James are scant. Both agree, however, that there are many allusions to James's epistle in the works of the early church fathers. Douglas J. Moo, *James: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 27-28; Simon J. Kistetmaker, *James*, in *New Testament Commentary*, vol. 11, *James, Epistles of John, Peter, and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 20.

[27] The famous early church historian Eusebius, in his work *Ecclesiastical History,* says, "Of the disputed books which are nevertheless known to most are the

James as Scripture in the early church may be due to the fact that it was not written by an apostle, questions regarding the identity of its author, and its general address to a Jewish audience.[28] Nonetheless, James became officially recognized as part of the biblical canon in A.D. 397 at the Council of Carthage.

The question of the canonicity of James arose again during the Reformation most notably with Martin Luther. While Luther did not include this epistle among the "chief books," he still regarded it as a necessary part of the canon, and even cited many of James's verses in his own writings.[29] While the path to canonicity for James has been a rocky road at times, this epistle has proved itself to be an essential part of the Christian canon for every generation.

Textual Context

The Epistle of James is part of a group of epistles called the general epistles or catholic epistles, which also includes the books: Hebrews, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, and Jude. A common feature in these epistles is their pastoral emphasis, of which James is no exception. Conservative evangelical scholars generally date the writing of this epistle to the middle of A. D. 40 by the half-brother of Jesus, James the Just. Such a placement

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Epistle called James, that of Jude, the second Epistle of Peter, and the so-called second and third Epistles of John which may be the work of the evangelist of some other with the same name." Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History: English Translation*, edited by T. E. Page, E. Capps, W. H. D. Rouse, L. A. Post, and E. H. Warmington, translated by Kirsopp Lake and J. E. L. Oulton, The Loeb Classical Library, vol. 1, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926-1932), 257.

[28] Donald W. Burdick, *James*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, *Hebrews, James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude, Revelation*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 163.

[29] Moo has a short discussion on the view Martin Luther held on the book of James in his commentary on James. Moo, James, 30-31.

would make James's letter one of the earliest written documents in the Christian Scriptures.

With James's continued use of illustrations and images throughout his entire epistle, it is easy to see the words of Jesus being explained and elaborated by James. According to Alexander Ross, "This Epistle contains more verbal reminiscences of the teaching of Jesus than all the other apostolic writings taken together."[30] Furthermore, the teaching of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount serves as foundational piece for much of this epistle. While James did not know his half-brother Jesus as the Savior of the world for much of his life, after his conversion it would make sense that he remembered much of what Jesus said and did while He walked this earth.[31] From the start, James assumes that his readers already know Christ as the resurrected Messiah of the world, through whom all can receive eternal life. James does not exhort these individuals to faith or even speak on the salvific work of Christ, but immediately jumps into an exhortation on faithful living amidst various circumstances in life. Such an assumption is shown in how James focuses primarily on the practical outworking of faith instead of trying to convince these readers of the person and work of Jesus as Paul's letters tend to do. While faith is not the main theme of this epistle, it does serve as its backbone, since James continually reminds his audience that genuine faith in Christ should lead to genuine good works.

The controversy regarding the inclusion of James in the biblical canon for many Christians throughout the centuries is based on the question of how this particular epistle fits within the Christian doctrine of justification by faith, which is so often highlighted in Paul's many letters to the first century church. From a casual reading

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[30] Alexander Ross, *The Epistles of James and John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 16.

[31] Jesus states in John's Gospel, "For not even his brothers were believing in Him" (John 7:5). Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are taken from the English Standard Version.

James can seem to be supporting justification by works. The two often cited concerns for readers when exploring this writing are James's focus on practical works and James 2:17 which states, "So also faith by itself, if it does not have works is dead." Upon first glance, this verse may seem to contradict Ephesians 2:8-9 where Paul writes, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." This seeming contradiction, however, can be quickly overcome when the reader properly understands the audience and terms being used by these two biblical authors. Often Paul is exhorting unbelievers to faith in Christ, while James is speaking to individuals who have already placed their faith in Christ. Paul then is more often using works in relation to the legalistic nature of the Mosaic law as produced by the Pharisees of the time, while James uses works in an effort to steer believers away from a stagnant faith. For Paul, he is expressing man's inability to achieve salvation by works, while James stresses the need for faith to be lived out through the works of man in the world. While this may be a quick glance at the controversy as a whole, it helps to show the authenticity of James's as a divinely inspired Scripture useful for teaching and reproof in the life of Christians today.

Biblical Theology Context

Often biblical theology can be seen clearly in the narrative based portions of Scripture; however, when the book deals primarily with pastoral concerns, biblical theology will often require a little more work on the part of the reader. Needless to say, James is reliant upon much of previous scripture for his own writing. Therefore, the goal of the biblical theologian when reading James is to learn how he is interpreting previous scripture and using it to inform his own writing.[32]

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[32] James Hamilton suggests that all biblical authors used biblical theology in some way to understand the Scriptures available to them at the time. Knowing this, to understand James means to understand how he used biblical theology to write his own

Within the larger framework of Scripture, James was written for an audience that has come to see Christ as their Redeemer and is in current need of some encouragement to faithfully live according to God's principles instead of the standards of the world. Therefore, within the larger plot line of God's Word, this epistle, according to Hamilton, would relate to the restoration of God's people.[33] At this point in the overall plot line of Scripture, Christ has already come to redeem God's creation from the results of their sin, and now those who have turned to Him are being transformed into the image of God through the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit within their lives. Salvation has been accomplished, and now the people of God are being encouraged to live for Him as they await the coming of the Lord and the commencement of their eternal reward.

In his understanding that the central theme of the Bible's message is God's glory in salvation through judgment, Hamilton argues that in James "the burden of the epistle is to condemn worldliness and a worldly approach to the faith. Through that condemnation James seeks to bring the audience of his letter safely to salvation for God's glory."[34] The propositions and values presented in the letter of James are never meant to be seen as a guide to good living, but as a necessary result for those who have been redeemed through the blood of Christ. Putting this within the broader theme of biblical theology, whereas Christ has paid the price of sin and has been judged in man's place, man now is able to pursue salvation and godly living which ultimately results in God receiving the glory.

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epistle. "The biblical authors used biblical theology to interpret the Scriptures available to them and the events they experienced. For the believing community, the goal of biblical theology is simply to learn this practice of interpretation from the biblical authors." Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 42.

[33] James M. Hamilton Jr., *What Is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible's Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 31.

[34] Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 519.

The propositions stated throughout the book of James are not new but are themes we continually see repeated time and time again in Scripture. For example, the Bible has a lot to say regarding warning against the love of money. Proverbs is full of pithy sayings that declare the ultimate uselessness of the treasures of this world, which then is taken up again by Jesus in His confrontation with the rich young ruler, elaborated on by Paul in his epistles, and then again used by James. The common thread in all of these scriptures is that man has been called to focus on God instead of the things of this world, because ultimately the treasures of God are eternal, and the treasures of the world are temporal. This is just one example that shows how James takes previous Scripture and elaborates on it for his current context, thusly providing a wider understanding of God's commands to His children.

While James may look like an epistle in isolation, upon further consideration James is a small piece of the puzzle that further elaborates and colors the message of Scripture. Thusly, knowing where and how James fits into the overall scheme of the Bible becomes a vital task in understanding its message for one's current congregations.

Proposed Sermon Series

In response to the localized need presented above and the intense regard for a faith that works itself out in James's epistle, I propose to set out seven sermons that will look at the message of James from a canonical point of view to discover the imperative for the students at Faith Bible Church to work out their faith in the culture and world that they presently live. The purpose of this sermon series will not be to simply describe virtues for which Christians should strive, but in the end just as James was informed by the ministry of his brother, we too will be taking the truths presented in the Epistle of James and connecting them with the life of Jesus and the entire biblical canon as a means of truly living out one's salvation in Christ. As such the sermons will be presented per the order listed in table 1 below.

Table 1. Sermon series in James

Sermon #	Sermon Title	Passage
1	Meet Trials with Joy	1:2-4
2	Be a “Doer” Not Simply a “Hearer”	1:19-25
3	Spoiling the Chili	2:8-13
4	Dead upon Arrival	2:14-26
5	A Small Spark	3:1-12
6	To Be a Friend of God	4:1-10
7	Don’t Abandon Ship	5:7-11

James 1:2-4

James spends little time with his salutation as he delves quickly into his discourse concerning the upcoming trials of life that his audience will undoubtedly experience. Opposed to the common thought of the day, James exhorts his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ to consider the trials of life as a source of joy while they wait the coming of their Lord Jesus Christ (Jas 1:2).[35] Such a radical view of trials would surely have left most audiences in a state of wonder, contemplating how Christians are supposed to find joy in the midst of adversity. This type of command, however, was a common feature of the Jewish faith. The Jewish people often believed that adversity and trials were brought by God in an effort to strengthen and support the individual. Such responses can be seen in the Old Testament (Ps 126:5), Second Temple Jewish writings

[35] Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 53.

(Wis 3:4-6),[36] and the New Testament (Matt 5:10-12; Rom 5:3-5; 1 Pet 1:7).[37] Through these three verses, James begins with a common notion held by his audience and brings such an understanding into a Christian perspective.

Through James's use of "link words," the trials that will undoubtedly arise in the life of a believer are described as the means by which faith increases and is strengthened; whereas, compared to the world around them, the sufferings of the world would only serve as a barrier to achieving personal pleasure, in James's estimation the Christian is called to view such times in life through a different lens.[38] Instead of running from hardship or cowering in fear, James instructs his audience to face these trials of life with confidence knowing that through them God will strengthen and perfect their faith. Trials should thusly be viewed as a source of joy, since in the long run they serve to bring the individual closer to God.

James 1:19-25

After comparing the doubting man to a wave of the ocean (Jas 1:6-8), James begins to verbally make the distinction between a professing Christian who acts upon their profession with a professing Christian who fails to act according to their profession. James describes only two roads by which a person can travel, one either becomes simply

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[36] Second Temple writings often focused on blessings that arrive through adversity. "Though they be punished in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality. And having been a little chastised, they shall be greatly rewarded: for God proved them, and found them worthy for himself. As gold in the furnace hath he tried them, and received them as a burnt offering." *The Apocrypha: King James Version* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1995).

[37] For Second Temple passages, see Sir 14:20-15:10; 4 Macc 7:22. For New Testament passages, see 2 Cor 8:21; 1 Pet 4:12-13.

[38] Dan McCartney sees James using very specific language that intends to show a progression of faith that begins with trials, leads to steadfastness, and is followed by perfection. (Dan G. McCartney, *James*, ECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 83.)

a "hearer" of the Word of God or one becomes a "doer" of the Word of God. For James, there is no middle ground.

One who lives according to the Word of God can be seen living out the characteristics that James describes in verses 19-21—quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, righteous, and meek.[39] These characteristics grow not out of religious virtues that are sought out by the individual; rather, verses 19-25 flows out of verse 18 that tells the reader that out of the Word come these "first fruits."[40] Acknowledging that God has spoken and that His words are authoritative for mankind is the first step to one becoming a "doer" of the Word of God. These words echo the sentiment of the psalmist David in the very first verses of Psalm 1.[41] Upon looking at God through the Scriptures, a "doer" of the law will be compelled to conform themselves to the standards set forth by God Himself, while the "hearer" of God's Word will walk away unchanged.

James 2:8-13

With the command to be a "doer" of the law fresh on the minds of his readers, James undertakes the need to knock down the sin of partiality growing in the midst of his audience. To do this, James questions the notion of whether or not his audience has been living in accordance with the law—but not just the Mosaic law. James here describes this law as the "royal law" (Jas 2:8) and the "law of liberty" (Jas 2:12). This law that James

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[39] Davids sees more allusions to Old Testament and Second Temple Jewish writings: Prov 13:3; 15:1; 29:20, Eccl 7:9; Sir 1:22; 4:49; 5:11; 6:35. Davids, *The Epistle of James*, 92.

[40] McCartney suggests that a proper reading of vv. 19-25 flows from a proper perspective of v. 18. McCartney, *James*, 114.

[41] The psalmist contends that walking according to the ways of God is the means by which man is able to enjoy the blessings of God. "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked nor stand in the way of sinners, no sits in the seat of scoffers; but His delight in in the law of the Lord and His law he meditates day and night" (Ps 1:1-2).

has in mind is referencing back to the ministry of Jesus, during one moment in His life when He was approached by a group of Pharisees and was asked to select the greatest command within the Mosaic law. Jesus's response to this question is what James defines as the royal law, namely, love the Lord God and love your neighbor as yourself.[42] If the people had truly been adhering to the law, then favoritism would not have been an issue; rather, the love of Christ would be offered and extended to all people regardless of societal status.

As Moo points out, because believers know that one day soon Christ is coming to bring both judgment and salvation to the world, verse 12 and 13 begin to stress importance of doing such works according to the royal law.[43] Therefore the one who does not love his neighbor and shows no mercy to him, in opposition to the command of Christ, will be judged without mercy at the Second Coming of the Son. Those who give no mercy while on earth will receive no mercy from God, but those who extend mercy to those around them will be judged according to the mercy of the Lord Jesus.[44]

James 2:14-26

James begins this section of Scripture with a question that for many Protestant post-Reformation readers may cause hesitancy and confusion (Jas 2:14). James's

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[42] For examples, see Matt 22:37-40; Mark 12:30-31; Luke 10:27. In these responses, Jesus is referencing back to Lev 19:15, 18; Deut 6:5.

[43] Douglas Moo rightly points out here that James moves beyond the present moment and looks to the future judgment. "A new twist is added here. For the first time, James warns about eschatological judgment and suggests that conformity to the demands of the law will be the criterion on that judgment." Moo, *The Letter of James*, 116.

[44] Davids (*The Epistle of James*, 119) suggests, rightfully so, that the connection made between the mercy given on earth and the mercy received from God is not new to James but is a restatement of Jesus's statements at the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:7) and could be harken back to Second Temple statements as well (e.g., Sir 28:1-7; Tob 4:9-11).

question asks the readers to evaluate the interrelation of faith and works. For James, faith and works are not mutually exclusive as some may say, but are, in fact, two sides of the same coin. As his exposition continues, James delves into these deep waters of the role of faith and works, using Abraham's act of offering up Isaac as a sacrifice (Jas 2:21-23) and Rahab's act of hiding away the Israelite spies (Jas 2:25) as proof that true faith is seen in the genuine works of a believer. Upon surfacing at the end of chapter, the reader is fully attuned to the fact that living faith must be accompanied by works (Jas 2:17-18, 26).

The biggest issue that will need to be resolved in this passage is the correlation of James's use of the word δικαιοω (*dikaioō*) with Paul's use of the same word throughout his epistles (Rom 3:24, 28; 4:2; 5:1; Gal 2:16; 3:8, 11, 24). It will be helpful to understand James's use of this word compared to Paul's use before harmonizing the two together to glean a proper biblical understanding of the theology of justification.[45] Upon further reflection, we will see that James is not using a definition different from that of his counterpart Paul, but these two biblical authors are painting a bigger picture of "justification" than can be seen at first glance. Living faith can be seen through a life that displays works of faith—without such works, a faith can rightly be declared dead.[46]

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[45] Luke Timothy Johnson makes the point that to properly understand what James means when he uses the word δικαιοω (*dikaioō*), we must not impart any Pauline usage of this word onto James's text. While I tend to agree with this methodology, I believe that to properly understand the theology of justification, after looking at each use in their own context, the biblical reader must necessarily look to see how these terms are used to promote a single understand of how a Christian is justified before God. Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 246.

[46] Highlighting the importance of a living faith, McCartney states, "James's principle point is not in doubt, in any case that which distinguishes living faith from dead faith is works of faith. By no means does any of this suggest that one could create genuine faith by works, any more than an effort at mouth-to-mouth resuscitation could revitalize a corpse." McCartney, *James*, 172.

James 3:1-12

James's immense use of imagery is utilized throughout chapter 3 in an attempt to focus on one practical aspect of a believer's life: controlling one's tongue.[47] To showcase the power of the tongue, James uses the illustration of a bridle (Jas 3:3), a rudder (Jas 3:4), and a spark (Jas 3:5-6). While relatively small, these objects are able to direct and steer large objects. In the same way, the tongue has the power to do great good in the name of Christ or to do great harm in the world. Therefore, since James's audience was just instructed to live out their faith through works, it becomes imperative that these individuals consciously control their tongues as they live out their faith.

Such an insistence on controlling one's speech can be seen scattered throughout the wisdom literature of the Old Testament (Pss 10:7; 19:14; 36:3; 37:30; 50:19; 59:7; Eccl 10:12; Lam 3:18), especially in the book of Proverbs (Prov 10:11, 21; 11:9; 12:18; 13:3; 16:27; 18:7, 21) where the author laments on the power of the tongue to spit out evil. At the end of verse 12 the reader comes away from James's discussion not only with a warning to watch one's tongue, but the reader also sees how double-minded the tongue can actually be (Jas 3:9-12).[48] At one point the tongue will be praising the Lord and at the other spewing curses (Jas 3:9). The believers then are encouraged to bring life with their tongue as is seen in the life-giving power of the Word of God.

James 4:1-10

Beginning in chapter 4, James looks to the conflicts and quarrels that had been raging in the midst of these immediate believers. Apparently, there had been quarreling and coveting among these believers for quite some time (Jas 4:2-3). Instead of looking

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[47] Moo (*The Letter of James*, 147) suggests that moving from "work" in chapter 2 to "words" in chapter 3 is very intentional and natural in the flow of James's argument.

[48] Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 264.

toward God to fulfill their needs, they had been looking to wrongly gain from their Christian brothers and sisters.[49] For James, the answer is quite simple: Their passions are not set on the things of the Lord but instead are focused on the things of this world (Jas 4:1). Instead of seeking what the world can provide, these believers should be coming to the Lord with sincerity asking Him to provide for their daily needs. To reconcile within the body of believers, these individuals are to focus their attention away from themselves and onto the Lord. Man does not provide for himself, for it is God who is the ultimate provider for mankind.

Seeing a need to distinguish one's priorities away from the world, James sets up a dichotomy in the latter half of this section in James (Jas 4:4-10).[50] If one is to be a member of God's Kingdom, he must necessarily renounce his citizenship with the world, for the world desires that which is opposed to the rule of God (Jas 4:4). Man cannot serve the prince of this world (John 14:30; 2 Cor 4:4) while also paying homage to the Lord of the universe at the same time. Just as one can either be a "hearer" or "doer" of God's Word, one must either submit to the Lordship of Christ or to the false reign of Satan (v. 7). For those who submit to the Lordship of God, they are commanded to resist the Devil and submit themselves humbly before God (v. 7). By humbling oneself before the Lord in this current world, believers will ultimately be exalted with Christ in the end (v. 10).[51]

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[49] Moo (*The Letter of James*, 182) suggests that the envy within this congregation spurs from a yearning to have what their neighbors do but what they cannot personally achieve. Ultimately, envy will lead to "hostile acts" as described by James as quarrels, murders, and wars.

[50] McCartney (*James*, 209) describes the "world" as the "ethos of life in opposition to, or disregard of, God and His kingdom."

[51] Lev 23:29; Job 22:29; Ps 37:11, Prov 11:2; 29:23; Eccl 10:6; Matt 18:4; 23:12; Luke 1:52; 14:11; 18:14; Jas 1:9; 1 Pet 5:6.

James 5:7-11

This passage begins with the command to be patient until the coming of the Lord as James draws near to the close of his epistle.[52] Knowing that the Lord is coming back to redeem His people serves as the backbone for James entire plea to the people in his audience.[53] Since Jesus is coming soon, these believers have a hope to endure through the trials of this life and an impetus to live faithfully to the Word of God in their own lives. McCartney summarizes this theme well when he says, "When one has confidence of vindication and a beneficial outcome, one can more readily endure."[54]

Using his audience's knowledge of the Old Testament, James refers his readers back to the time of the prophets and their remarkable ability to endure through the trials brought upon them (Jas 5:10). Just as these Jewish believers acknowledge the faithfulness of the former prophets as they awaited the first coming of the Messiah, these readers also have been called to faithfulness through trials as they await the Second Coming of the Lord (v. 11). In this way, the prophets and Job serve as a type that these believers are to model their own lives after, as they patiently wait for the parousia, when Christ will come to exalt the humble in spirit who entrusted themselves to Him.[55]

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[52] Johnson (*The Letter of James*, 312) suggests that James's use of the Greek word μακροθυμεω (*makrothymeō*) emphasizes the need for the believer to wait patiently for the coming of the Lord. He proves this by looking at the use of μακροθυμεω (*makrothymeō*) in the LXX and showing that the majority of the time when this word is used, it is used in the expectation of the coming Messiah.

[53] See also 1 Thess 3:13.

[54] McCartney, *James*, 240.

[55] Regarding the life of a believer in trials, McCartney states, "His concern is with the pattern of faith in the face of adversity and pressures toward unbelief, a pattern of faith set by those whom we now consider blessed." McCartney, *James*, 242-43.

CHAPTER 2

MEET TRIAL WITH JOY: JAMES 1:2-4

Every year on December 24th, the Turner Broadcasting Station repeats a single movie for twenty-four hours. A Christmas classic like no other, the film is replete with mystery, humor, and a lot of wholesome family values. This timeless gem is, of course, "A Christmas Story." The story revolves around the Parker family, with particular attention focusing on Ralphie, the young protagonist who desperately wants a Red Ryder BB Gun for Christmas. In one scene, Ralphie and his friends are headed off to school on a cold and snowy winter morning. As always, Ralphie's little brother Randy has to join along; however, before Mrs. Parker lets him out the door, the baby of the family has to be dressed appropriately for the cold conditions outside. The scene continues with Randy wearing several layers of warm sweaters when his mom begins to squeeze him into a tight red snow suit. By the time the snow suit is zipped up, Randy can hardly move his arms and legs to get out of the door.

In life, we often treat ourselves and our loved ones like little Randy, putting layer after layer of protection around ourselves so that the harsh cold world outside might not hurt us so badly. Nevertheless, no matter how many layers we surround ourselves with, we all inevitably face the same eventual fate of little Randy Parker—flat on our back in the middle of the snow. Trials are a fact of life, whether we want to think so or not; there are no perfect lives. We all will face trials and tribulations many times throughout our lives on this earth. While many seek to shelter themselves in a bubble of safe keeping, no amount of planning or effort can shield you from all the trials of life.

Bleak as this may sound, James presents us with a proposition. Instead of insulating ourselves from the inevitable trials of life, James tells us that we are to

perceive our trials as an opportunity to help us grow in our faith. In fact, James goes even further. The brother of Christ tells us that we are to look at those times in life through a different lens—a lens of joy.

Expecting the coming trials of life, especially with regard to their faith, James calls his readers to take on a different approach when it comes to encountering these tests. Instead of regretting or dreading the trials of life, James calls his readers to consider them all joy. The trials of life give rise to an opportunity for believers to further refine their faith.

Exegesis

Verse 1 sets up James's context for his upcoming letter as he identifies himself as the author of this letter, but more importantly He submits himself under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ as a servant to His will. By identifying himself with Christ as His servant, the readers of this epistle are encouraged to take heed to his message. The letter was originally written to the Jews who had been living away from the Promised Land since the Exile. Scattered across the Roman Empire, James calls the newly converted Messianic Jewish people to harken to his message.

The Environment (1:2)

Wasting no time at all, James begins his exhortation with a command for the readers of his letter to consider the trials of life as a joyous occasion to grow and mature further in their faith. His plea is directed to "my brothers". While James uses the plural masculine word ἀδελφοί (*adelphoi*) to address his readers, the Greek term is in no way limiting his audience to only male believers. James's use of this word includes the

possibility of female readers as well. One may even translate this phrase as "my brothers and sisters" to indicate the inclusive nature of James's letter.[1]

Often biblical authors use familial language to address their readers as a means of pointing out their connectedness and relationship to those in the same faith family. Moses often refers to the Jewish people as "sons of Israel" (Lev 25:46; Deut 15:3), Luke uses the term "brethren" to specify the body of believers;[2] and Paul several times calls believers "sons of God" (2 Cor 6:18; Gal 3:26; 4:5, 7; Eph 1:5; 1 Thess 5:5; Heb 2:10). Such use of familial language throughout the entire canon, and here in James's address as well, was one way to display the unity of the people of God under one father, the Lord God of heaven. Therefore, when James addresses his readers as "my brothers" his voice stretches further then just his immediate context but continues to resonate with believers united under the same Father today. [3] We are the family of God. We are sons and daughters of the Almighty, and through James his word speaks to us today.

As the family of the one true God, James gives us all a command to consider every trial in life as a source of joy. When James gives his command, he uses the word "consider" which is a term that originally denotes a judgment of value.[4] Therefore, what

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[1] Recognizing the inclusivity of this phrase Dan McCartney suggests that "The church [is] the people of God, who call upon God as Father, and who thereby are His children and hence are siblings." Dan G. McCartney, *James*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 85.

[2] Interestingly enough, Luke does not use the term "brethren" in his Gospel account, but the term shows up immediately after the Lord's death Luke's second work: Acts 1:15; 11:1; 13:38; 15:36; 16:40; 28:14.

[3] David's rightly recognizes the fact that the writing of James is meant to be heard and read by the universal church, not the world at large. "In a Christian context the term means that he addresses those within the church: this is not an epistle addressed to the world at large." Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 67.

[4] By using the word "consider" James suggests that believers must be active in their recognition that trials should be a source of joy. Johnson points this out in his

the author is telling us is that whenever trials draw near, the believer should receive them with joy. The English Standard translation of this phrase reads, "consider it all joy," but a better English translation probably reads more like that of the New International Version that translates this phrase, "consider it pure joy," as James is seems to be stressing the quality of the joy rather than its exclusivity[5].

The joy mentioned by James is more than a simple emotion, but it is a state of mind that the believer is meant to live out.[6] In fact, the choice to rejoice during trials was a common theme found in the teaching of Jesus. During His famed "Sermon on the Mount," Jesus communicates the same theme to His listeners. In Matthew 5:12, He says, "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven; for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." For the follower of Christ, joy often accompanies persecution and trials, for it is through such times that the believer is able to see the ever-steady hand of God at work. Scot McKnight describes this type of joy well in his commentary on the letter of James. He writes, "This joy . . . transcends any optimism or 'positive thinking.' What James has in mind is an inner confidence that permits fidelity to follow Jesus because of one's confidence in the goodness of God, in God's sovereign

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commentary when he says, "As used in the NT, the verb always denotes some sort of mental judgment such as 'regarding'; 'considering'; and 'calculating' or 'reckoning.'" Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYBC (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 176.

[5] Douglas J. Moo, *James: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 80.

[6] Remarking on the uniqueness of joy, Blomberg and Kamell state that "Joy, in turn, speaks of a state of being rather than an emotion. Joy proves quite different from happiness . . . . Joy may be defined as a settled contentment in every situation or 'an unnatural reactions of deep, steady and unadulterated thankful trust in God.'" Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, *James*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2008), 48.

control of history and eternity, and in one's inner transformation."[7] The joy experienced by the Christian is something much greater than the fleeting joy found in this world; rather, it is a joy that stems from trusting the supreme sovereignty of God over all matters. This joy is not dependent upon the ever-changing circumstances around us, but it is found in the unchanging almighty God.

While the rest of the world loathes trials, James tells his readers that trials are a natural part of life and should be seen as a necessary part of everyone's spiritual maturity. Notice how James chooses to use the word "whenever" instead of the word "if." By using the word "whenever," James subtly communicates the fact that trials are customary in every person's life. The Christian walk does not protect the believer from ever experiencing any trial. Such experiences like these are necessary and are a crucial part of anyone's life. The famed fourth century "golden mouthed preacher" John Chrysostom once said, "For in the world there is no one who wins a trophy without suffering, who has not strengthened himself with labors and dieting and exercise and vigils and many other things like that. How much more is that true in this battle!"[8] Life is full of trials and hardships, but in each of these God has called the believer to approach them with joy, knowing that He is the true and faithful one that will bring us through to the end.

Instead of dreading or fleeing from the trials of life, James encourages us to encounter them with joy, knowing that the God who created the universe stands sovereignly over our lives. The absence of any trial or tribulation is not the goal of the Christian faith, for through these times God often performs some of His greatest works.

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[7] Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 72.

[8] Gerald Bray and Thomas C. Oden ed., *James* in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament,* vol 11, *James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude,* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 5.

Therefore, if He works through trials for our good, the proper response to the environment of a trial is one of joy.

The Encouragement (1:3)

While we all know that trials are not a natural setting for joy, James encourages us to think of them in this way, ultimately because trials are used for our benefit. Through them we have the chance to be strengthened in our endurance.

What's unique here in verse 3 is that James has deliberately chosen to use a different word to refer to the testing of one's faith. In verse 2, James uses the Greek word πειρασμός (*peirasmos*) to refer to "trials," while in verse 3 James switches things up and inserts the term δοκίμιον (*dokimion*). The difference between these words encourages the reader to properly understand the purpose of trials. There are a couple of places in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Ps 12:6; Prov 27:21) where this word is used and will help shed some light on James's use here in his epistle.

Proverbs 27:21 states, "The crucible is for silver and the furnace for gold, and each is *tested* by the praise accorded him." In Proverbs, as well as in Psalm ,[9] the Greek word δοκίμιον (*dokimion*) is used to refer to the process of removing unwanted elements from precious metals through extreme heat. In a similar fashion, the trials of life provide the extreme heat that is needed to refine the unwanted impurities in our faith. Often, Christians today look at the great models of faith with whimsical wishes that they too could model such faith and endurance in their own lives. The truth is that the great men and women of the faith did not arrive at such enduring strength overnight or without their own trials. Each Christian will face their own trials in life, and through each trial man has

[9] Referencing the refining power of fire, the psalmist proudly proclaims that "The words of the Lord are pure words; like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times" (Ps 12:6).

the opportunity to refine his faith and produce the precious stone that is an enduring faith in Christ Jesus.

In the New Testament, Paul (Rom 5:3-4) and Peter take up this same word in their own epistles describing the necessity of δοκίμιον (*dokimion*) in the life of every believer to produce one whose faith can be defined as genuine. Peter's usage closely mirrors that of James in that Peter sees the trials of life leading to a genuine or tested faith. Peter even echoes the use of a crucible for the heating process found in the Old Testament texts. 1 Peter 1:6-7 says, "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have bene distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." This citation, along with those in the Old Testament and in Romans, helps the reader see that the testing that comes into the life of every believer is allowed with the intended purpose of refining the faith of an individual; thus, once the testing is complete, their faith, as Peter puts it, would be "more precious than gold."

Whether you are working to construct a house or whether you are studying for a test, hard work is meant to produce an intended outcome. At the end of verse 3, James lists the intended outworking of trials as endurance. The word "endurance" can mean a lot of things to a lot of different people, but the Greek word ὑπομονήν (*hypomonēn*) details a specific manner of endurance that should be noted before we go any further.

The word "endurance" is often linked with a similar word "patience," but the two diverge at some critical junctions. Patience is the act of passively waiting for someone or something to happen, but ὑπομονήν is not passive whatsoever. ὑπομονήν holds an element of active hope.[10] As Ralph D. Martin says, "the word has more to its meaning

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[10] The LXX transposes the Greek word ὑπομονήν for the Hebrew word מִקְוֶה, which can be translated as hope (see Jer 14:8; 17:13; 1 Chr 29:15).

than a quietistic acceptance and wistful longing for better things."[11] Endurance is an act of steadfastness, where the believers are actively yielding themselves over to God as their Savior and allowing Him to work through their lives. Douglas Moo, echoing this same point in his commentary on James states, "ὑπομονήν is not a meek, passive submission to circumstances, but a strong, active, challenging response in which the satisfying realities of Christianity are proven in practice."[12]

Growing up in Texas on the coast, while each year others around the country experienced four seasons (spring, summer, fall and winter), we experienced three: summer, football season, and hurricane season. During hurricane season each year we would watch the news with fingers crossed, praying that another hurricane would not run its way through our town. Whenever a hurricane would make landfall, we'd be glued to the television set, watching and listening with attentive ears. The weathermen would be standing in the middle of a raging storm, fighting deliberately to keep their footing. All the muscles of their bodies seemed to be enacted to help them stay put and report the weather. This is the type of endurance that James is speaking of here in verse 3. The type of endurance that actively seeks to remain secure in the foundation of Christ even against insurmountable odds. It is an endurance that takes everything you have just to hold on. When believers go through trials and hold on desperately, our endurance strengthens and takes shape.

Ultimately the best example of endurance comes from the example set by Jesus as He endured the pangs of death on behalf of all mankind. The prophet Isaiah, long before his arrival, prophesied about the manner by which Christ would die. In Isaiah 53:3-9, we see the perfect picture of a faith that leads to endurance. Isaiah, in prophesying

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[11] Ralph P. Martin, *James*, WBC, vol. 48 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 16.

[12] Moo, *James*, 81.

about the passion narrative, describes what Jesus endured using words like: despised, forsaken, sorrow, grief, smitten, afflicted, crushed, and oppressed. Yet still Christ took His place on the cross enduring it all for His chosen people. Isaiah tells us, "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth" (Isa 53:7). Trials in the Christian life are not brought about without purpose, but they are given so that we might have a chance to grow in our endurance, becoming ever faithful to the one who was fully faithful on our behalf.

The End Result (1:4)

Even though endurance is a direct result of walking through various trials, endurance is not the end result for which a believer should solely strive. Verse 4 lays out the result of the sanctifying power of the Spirit in the life of the believer by saying, "And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." The goal, as stated by James, is that through trials believers may grow in their endurance, and through their endurance they are continually shaped into the image of God.

James tells his readers that the direct result of trials and endurance is the perfection of the believer. "Perfection" is a word that many believers today struggle with, and rightly so; because of man's total depravity perfection in this life is never fully attainable. Bible translations like the NIV have translated the Greek word τέλειος (*teleios*) as "mature." While this meaning is plausible and within the semantic realm of this word, ultimately, in my opinion, it fails to grasp the call given to mankind from Christ himself. Throughout the biblical narrative the believer is commanded to strive toward perfection.

Jesus in his famous Sermon on the Mount, gives us the clearest command of perfection. Matthew 5:48 tells us, "Therefore you are to be perfect as you heavenly Father is perfect." Douglas Moo agrees with the understanding that τέλειος (*teleios*)

should be translated as "perfection" instead of "maturity" when he states, "The ultimate goal of trials that believers meet with fortitude and confidence in the Lord is not simply maturity but perfection."[13]

This idea of perfection carries with it a sense of moral purity, especially when seen in light of Jesus's command in Matthew 5:48 where Jesus gave a whole host of moral commands to the people in Galilee.[14] We can tell that James uses "perfection" in a moral sense of the word as we continue to read the rest of his epistle, which deals primarily with the conduct of one's life. Even more clearly seen is this fact in light of the subsequent verses of James 1:5-8 which talks about an "unstable man" who lacks wisdom and acts in ways contrary to God. However, such moral purity must be set within the proper eschatological context, namely there will be a day when total perfection is imputed upon the now glorified believer.

The fact remains, until Christ comes again, or we pass away, man still lives in sinful flesh amidst a sinful world. Can moral perfection even be obtained in this life? Well . . . no. Moral perfection cannot be gained in this life, but its work has begun now where believers are seeing its results and one day believers will see its completion at their eternal glorification. As Craig Blomberg and Mariam Kamell say, "As believers, we must constantly strive for perfection, even while knowing that we will never fully reach it until our resurrection and glorification."[15] Even though sin has distorted what it looks like to live as a human in God's world, through Christ's work in a believer we are being made complete and whole in Him.

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[13] Moo, *James*, 83.

[14] McKnight (*The Letter of James*, 81) rightly points out that "perfection" for James is not simply an "eschatological or an inner orientation toward God" but deals primarily with the moral purity of the individual.

[15] Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 50.

However, perfection, rightly understood, is not simply a state of moral perfection; it is a work of Christ done in the life of a believer that brings him or her back into a unified relationship with the Creator. The Christian life is not simply about having the right moral character, it's about finding our true identity and purpose in our relationship with God. In Christ we find out what it means to be human, namely, living a life that serves to glorify God. We were created by and for God, and anything that veers from that purpose is nothing short of imperfection. For those who recognize their sinfulness and need of God, Christ has provided a path of forgiveness that brings mankind back into communion with God. Therefore, James suggests that it is the trials experienced in this life that serve to bring mankind to a place of recognition that we are all dependent on the grace of God, and it is through His Son that mankind is able to experience the all-encompassing perfection that only He can provide.

Conclusion

In his introductory remarks James presents us with a quandary: As a follower of Christ how are we to approach the trials and difficult situations of life? The world's response is simple—insulate your life and flee from any challenging situation. After all, trials and challenges are meant to be difficult and are often emotionally taxing.

James states something completely contrary to the world's solution. When a trial comes your way, the proper Christian response is joy—joy knowing that through the various trials of life God is at work transforming you into the person whom you were originally created to be. Sin marred our life, and through the sanctifying work of the Spirit we are being made into the children of the living God. The joy we are to have during trials is not a fleeting emotion that comes and goes at will, but it is a firm confidence that the Lord is sovereign in every situation of life.

As we encounter trials, our faith is strengthened in endurance and our endurance in faith leads us ever closer to the perfection we have been called to live out.

As you go about your life, instead of padding yourself with insulation, perceive your trials as joy, knowing that in them God is working on your behalf.

CHAPTER 3

BE A "DOER" NOT SIMPLY A "HEARER"

In the 2001 film *Left Behind*, actor Clarence Gilyard Jr. plays a well-known local pastor named Bruce Barnes. We are first introduced to his character when he is addressed as "reverend" after dropping off his son at a parishioner's house for a birthday party. This is the last we see of Bruce for quite some time, that is until the rapture occurs. Half-way through the movie, the camera pans onto a pulpit with Bruce sitting inside. He is obviously in disarray as he is heard calling out to the Lord in anguish. Alone, Bruce prays to God saying, "What a fraud I am, and everybody bought it . . . except you. I knew your message. I knew your word. I stood right here. I preached it. And I was good. But knowing and believing are two different things. I'm living a lie."[1] As a pastor, Bruce was the last person you would expect to be left behind in the tribulation. However, by failing to allow the words that he preached each week to connect to his heart, in the end Bruce's "faith" proved itself to be faulty. His words did not match up with the life he was living.

In James 1:19-25, the brother of Jesus gives us a command not only to be someone who hears the amazing truth found in the Good News, but also to allow that Good News to transform the way we live our lives today. The Christian life is about more than simply hearing from the Word but allowing the Word to take root in our lives and change the way we act, speak, and think. The faithful Christian life is one who allows their faith in Christ to impact not just what they think, but how they interact in the world.

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[1] *Left Behind*, directed by Victor Sarin (Louisville, KY: Namesake Entertainment, 2001).

James calls his readers to look upon the Word of Life and see their desperate need for Him. In response to their reflection on Christ, his readers are urged not simply to hear the Good News but to allow it to inform the way they live their lives in the world. The Word of God is more than an ideology to which we should adhere, but it is the law of liberty through which to live out.

Exegesis

The Expectation (1:19-20)

Often, when James wants to signal a transition in his discourse his change is preceded by a familial address.[2] In verse 19 James calls his readers "my brethren" which indicates to his readers that James is switching gears in his discussion, and what follows in his epistle will be a new line of thought. After signaling his change in thought, James sets out a three-part exhortation for his readers, namely that they should be: quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.

James begins his expectation with a Greek imperative.[3] The imperative verb is used by James in order to stress that his readers should understand and implement the threefold qualities found in verse 19, since, as verse 18 states, these believers have been brought into new life through the Word. As a new creation, formed through one's identification with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, one's life should be lived in a manner that distinguishes themself from the world, especially when it comes to controlling one's speech.

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[2] See Jas 1:2, 16; 2:1, 14; 3:1; 4:11; 5:7, 12, 19.

[3] The NASB translates Ἴστε as an indicative verb ("This you know . . ."). While grammatically this is a legitimate option, the imperative use should be preferred. As Douglas Moo points out, "The imperative is more likely here since this is the kind of verb that James usually pairs with his address." Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 82.

A focus on controlling one's speech is not uncommon in the Jewish world, having a prominent place in both Old Testament and Second Temple literature. In the Old Testament, speech is a prominent theme, particularly in the Proverbs. Proverbs 13:3 is a great example of the Old Testament's emphasis on controlling one's speech as a virtuous pursuit. "Whoever guards his mouth preserves life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin." Here, James is not providing a new command to his Jewish readers in verse 19; instead, he is reinterpreting Jewish wisdom literature in light of the Messiah who has come on their behalf. As we will see in later verses, being characterized by the Messiah means not allowing one's tongue or anger to be the driving force in the life of the believer.[4]

In a society oversaturated by social media, words regularly flow freely with little to no restraint by the communicator. Words on Facebook or on Twitter seem to flow with little forethought to their effect on others. As Craig Blomberg and Mariam Kamell point out, "Credible Christian relationships require careful attention to others."[5] The tongue can be divisive, breaking even some of the strongest relationships. However, if believers are to make up the body of Christ in the world, our ears must be continually open and our tongues must be slow to act. "This is the reason why we have two ears and only one mouth, that we may hear more and speak less. The ears are always open, ever ready to receive instruction; but the tongue is surrounded with a double row of teeth to hedge it in and keep it within proper bounds."[6]

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[4] Sophie Laws supports this statement when she says, "The behaviour of the truly religious man is outlined in terms of control of speech and performance of specific actions." Sophie Laws, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1980), 79.

[5] Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, *James*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2008), 85.

[6] John Blanchard, *Truth for Life* (West Sussex, UK: H. E. Walter, 1982), 73.

Pursuing discernment in speech is a virtuous task. A quick look at Isaiah shows us the importance of holding one's tongue. The prophet predicts the passion of the Messiah when he says, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth" (Isa 53:7). The Gospels come alongside of the Old Testament and picture Christ as quiet and consciously perceiving the most opportune time to use His speech, especially when it came to His trial during the Passover. As Jesus underwent the trials and torture of the passion night, His words were chosen with precision, selecting the most beneficial words to proclaim His divinity and His sonship (Matt 26:62-65; Mark 14:60-62; Luke 23:9; John 19:9-11). While His words were few, they were powerfully and intentionally placed to inform his hearers of the identity of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

In a similar vein, James calls his readers to use their words carefully and intentionally, not out of anger or malice towards one another, but out of love and concern for others.[7] James reiterates this fact by telling us in verse 20 that the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. There is considerable debate on what the righteousness of God is referring to in this passage,[8] but likely James is referring to the

[7] In Matt 5:21-22, Jesus strictly denies the use of this type of anger in the life of a follower of God, going so far as to liken the evil produced by anger with that of murder: "You have heard it said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgement."

[8] Dan McCartney best describes the three possible positions as follows: "(1) as a genitive of source (the righteousness that God gives), (2) as an objective genitive (the righteousness that God requires), (3) as a descriptive (or subjective) genitive (the righteousness that God does)." Dan G. McCartney, *James*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 115.

righteous justice that God brings upon all mankind.[9] Often when a believer fails to listen and is instead quick to speak, anger flows freely. Using speech out of anger cannot produce the righteous will of God in the world. Homer Kent sums it up well when he says, "Defenders of God's truth do not further His cause by resorting to wrath, for man's wrath is usually mixed with other motives—ambition, revenge, jealousy, egotism, to name a few."[10] Believers can often be tempted to replace the justice of God with our own anger and malice, and it is for this reason that man should be eager to listen and carefully discern the proper speech necessary to encourage and uplift other believers and non-believers alike.

The Two-Part Command (1:21-22)

After outlining the expectation regarding their speech, James provides his readers with a two-part command so that they might be able to live out the righteousness of God in the world: receive the Word and do the Word.

James begins by telling his readers to shake off all their filthy and wicked behavior in life, and instead clothe themselves with the Word of God. The ESV masks the intensity of this command by translating the aorist form of the Greek word ἀποτίθημι (*apotithēmi*) as "put away," but that translation does not capture James's intent. The NIV translates this phrase best when it says, "get rid of all moral filth." The implication of this translation is that James is not simply asking his readers to put their wickedness aside for a short time; rather, James implores them to get rid of it entirely from their lives, so that

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[9] Agreeing with this conclusion are Dan McCartney (Dan G. McCartney, *James*, 115) and Scott McKnight (Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 139). Sophie Laws holds a different opinion, believing that the righteousness of God refers to the standard God has set for mankind (Laws, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, 81).

[10] Homer A. Kent Jr., *Faith That Works: Studies in the Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 63-64.

there will never be a time in the future where they reach to clothe themselves with it again.[11] The root of the term "filthiness" (ῥυπαρία), as Luke Timothy Johnson points out, means physical dirt, but in this particular passage James uses this term figuratively to liken dirty garments with a life that is filled with moral filth.[12] James is intentionally graphic so that his readers may understand "just how offensive and detestable sin really is."[13]

Sin has left its mark leaving man dressed in moral filth, and to be honest most of the time these clothes feel much better than what man has been called to put on. Sin is often comfortable, but sin defiles. Therefore, James's call to his readers is to recognize the filthy garments that we all wear and constantly be shedding those clothes in the effort to put on the righteous clothes of God.[14] In Paul's epistles, this same imagery is used with regard to the old self and the new self. Colossians 3:9-10 states, "you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator." The similarity between these two passages goes to show

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[11] Luke Timothy Johnson suggests that the language used by James is remarkably similar to that of Zech 3:3-4, where Joshua was standing before the angel of the Lord and instructed to remove the filthy garments on his back. This instruction links the holiness of God to the moral conduct He requires of His people. If Johnson's conclusion is correct, then God's instruction that Moses remove his sandals in the presence of God provides a similar commentary on the responsibility of the believer in their life. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYBC (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 201.

[12] Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 201.

[13] Moo, *The Letter of James*, 86.

[14] Recognizing James's view on the moral filth produced by sin in the life of every man, Ralph Martin states that "'Every trace of evil' may be rendered 'the abundance/excess of wickedness,' and is a tautologous expression to sum up the complete moral renovation James is calling for." Ralph P. Martin, *James*, WBC, vol. 48 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 48.

the reader the immense need of the believer to discard the old filthy clothes of our former self and instead be identified with the life of Christ.

James instructs his readers, as we see at the end of verse 21, to receive with meekness the implanted Word of God. The term for meekness (πραΰτητι) brings us back to the words of our Lord on the side of the Sea of Galilee in Matthew 5:5: "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." In one of Jesus's most quoted sermons, the meek, not the proud, are said to inherit the earth. Similarly, James sees meekness as a primary condition to receiving the Word of the Lord, which, as he states, is able to save our souls.

The Word, to which James is referring, is not simply the revealed canon of Scripture; more importantly, it is Jesus Christ Himself. Accepting this good news is the basis by which salvation is graciously gifted. So great a salvation is gifted to the meek, who come to the Lord of heaven understanding that salvation is not of their own doing but is a free gift graciously given by Christ. Therefore, James calls his readers to shed their sinful patterns of life, and humbly come before the Lord and receive the free gift of salvation.

Verse 22 is arguably a summary of the entire epistle of James. It encompasses all that James yearns for his readers to comprehend, namely that hearing the Word of God must lead to doing the Word of God.[15] As we will see later in chapter 2, James is not promoting a salvation by works; rather, he is advocating the necessary response to one's acceptance of the Gospel, particularly that it should change the way that one lives in the world.

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[15] Douglas Moo rightly points out that here in verse 22 "[James] takes us right to the heart of his pastoral concern. However important may me mental assent to the word, it has not been truly received until it is put into practice." Douglas J. Moo, *James: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 112.

James's command in verse 22, as Craig Blomberg and Mariam Kamell put it, is a "command . . . that was assumed but not always realized."[16] In the Christian church today there is no shortage of people who understand that the Bible lays out a set of moral commands; however, many have failed to connect those moral commands to their everyday lives. James tells us today to stop being simply hearers of the Word of God, but instead to be doers of that Word. Notice, though, the way James states this command. He does not simply command his readers to "do the Word" but instead says "be doers of the Word." Homer Kent tells us that this subtle difference is James's way of stressing what "kind of person the Christian is to be, not just some act he is to perform."[17] This theme is not new with James; this theme began with the Old Testament writers (Deut 28:58; 29:29; 30:8; Prov 6:3; Ezek 33:31-32), was further clarified by Jesus (Matt 7:24-27; 25:31-46; Luke 6:46-49; 11:28; John 13:17), and continued by Paul after James (Rom 2:13; Col 2:4). The Word must be heard first and subsequently practiced to be truly implanted in the life of an individual.

Those who only hear the Word of God, opposed to living it out, are deceiving themselves. In the ministry of Jesus, He verbalized this truth through the word "hypocrisy."[18] Those who falsely believe that because they have simply heard the Word of God but have yet to apply it to their lives are on "dangerous ground."[19] The Word of God is never meant to lie dormant in our lives; He is meant to be a flame burning within

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[16] Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 89.

[17] R. Kent Hughes, *James: Faith That Works*, PTW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 65.

[18] Hughes (*James*, 66) says, "A hearer who is not also a doer has usually deceived only himself. If his conduct does not match his Christian profession, his hypocrisy rarely fools his friends and neighbors, and it never deceives God.

[19] Moo, *The Letter of James*, 89.

the life of the believer urging them to live in light of the holiness and righteousness of Christ. Be a doer, not simply a hearer.

The Reasoning (1:23-25)

With James's expectation and two-part command in place, verse 23-25 stands as a simile to illuminate the meaning behind the text. James, like his brother, finds the use of similes instrumental in his teaching in order to better convey his message. In this passage, James compares a man looking at himself in a mirror who immediately forgets what he looks like with a man who hears the Word of God but fails to implement it through acting out the Word in his life. The implication, as James states, is that "[the man] will be blessed in his doing."

In order to understand the narrowed focus of this simile, there are a couple of questions we must answer. First, we need to identify the meaning of the Greek word κατανοέω (*katanoeō*) in verses 23 and 24. Second, we must understand what James is referring to when he uses the phrase "law of liberty." Tackling the first question, James describes a man who looks at himself in a mirror and then forgets his appearance. Bible scholars Luke Timothy Johnson[20] and Scot McKnight[21] understand this word to refer to the man in this simile taking a quick look at his appearance and then hastily leaving the scene. Others, however, interpret κατανοέω (*katanoeō*) as referring to this man making a

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[20] Describing the quick state upon which the man looks upon himself in the mirror, Johns suggests that "Everything in the description stresses haste and casualness." Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 208.

[21] Scot McKnight suggests that the Greek verbiage used by James intends to show the carelessness of the man who looks upon himself in the mirror and then quickly forgets what he just looked at. "The perfect tense, as the 'imperfective aspect,' indicates the characteristic of the person and is used to create a more vivid, ongoing scene: this person observes and moves on. The point is not how long or when but the kind of action the author chooses to depict: it is depicted as uncompleted or 'imperfective.' The looking is depicted as uncompleted." McKnight, *The Letter of James*, 150.

careful examination of his appearance in the mirror[22] before leaving.[23] Since similes are used as an illustrative comparison between two objects, the second option seems to best fit James's intention. The point being made is that the man is looking intently at his appearance, noticing himself as he truly is, flaws and all. Therefore, after such careful study, to think that such a man would immediately forget what he saw in that mirror seems implausible.

The second question we must answer is to what the "law of liberty" refers in verse 25. The law of liberty, the implanted Word of God, is directly connected with verse 21 which we previously discussed was the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the grace that He brings to the sinner.

In modern evangelical thought, often the grace of the Gospel stands in direct opposition to "law." However, James breaks down these notions by likening the gospel as a law of liberty. While some may see a contradiction between James and Paul at this point, if we look closer at Paul's writing, he often uses the term "law" to refer to more than simply the Mosaic law and the demands it places on an individual. While this law does not save, it is a necessary part of any Christian life, as we will soon see in chapter 2. Law, then, is the code by which a person lives, and in this instance, the code of a Christian is the grace and freedom found in Christ.

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[22] Blomberg and Kamell (*James*, 90) make the point that the type of mirror James would have been accustomed to would necessitate a careful look as opposed to a quick glimpse: "Mirrors in the ancient world were very different from our modern crystalline inventions. Generally made of polished bronze or copper, they produced dim and warped reflections. While one could gain a good impression of oneself, one could not simply glance at such a mirror and learn much."

[23] See Douglas Moo in TNTC (Moo, *James: An Introduction and Commentary,* 113) and Martin Dibelius (Martin Dibelius, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James,* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1975), 115). The ESV also takes this view by translating κατανοέω (*katanoeō*) in v. 23 as "who looks intently."

By answering these two questions, we can now better understand the purpose of the simile James is using in chapter 1. In coordination with verses 19-22, James uses this simile to liken the uselessness of encountering the gospel and failing to allow it to transform your life. The one who hears the Word of God and allows it to remodel their life, as James says, will be blessed.

Generally, mirrors are used to look at our appearance, and when a flaw is found in our hair or our skin, we try to remedy the issue; we correct that stray hair or cover up that blemish on our skin.[24] The same should be true when individuals look at the Gospel of Christ. When we look at the gospel, we should see our depravity. To look at the gospel, see our need, and then fail to turn to Christ would be just as foolish and unthinkable as forgetting your likeness after looking in a mirror.

Conclusion

Living in the middle of the Bible Belt can often lead to a false notion that faith is nothing more than an intellectual assent. At times it can seem like almost everyone you encounter confesses to know Christ, yet many still live lives that seem to contradict their confession. James 1:19-25 submits to its readers that faith, if properly received, is more than simply knowledge but it involves a transformation of the entire person.

Looking at the Word exposes our sinful state, yet at the same time it illuminates the Redeemer who took it upon himself to reconcile us toward God. Jesus is the mirror that came to be with us. When you look upon Christ, who do you see? Do you see a simple first century carpenter who lived an honorable life, or do you see the Son of God who came to reconcile us to God by removing the stain of our sin and imputing to us

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[24] Ralph Martin correctly notes the purpose of a man when looking mirror by saying that "What is seen in a mirror is meant to lead to action, usually regarded as remedial. The face is seen to be dirty or blemished and needing attention." Martin, *James*, 50.

His righteousness? Look to Him in faith and allow Him to transform your life. Allow the Word of God to implant Himself in your life, so that you may be a doer of God's Word and not simply a hearer.

CHAPTER 4

SPOILING THE CHILI: JAMES 2:8-13

It was the first year of our marriage. Rachel and I were living in our first home. Though it was just a small apartment building, it was still home to us. The first year of marriage is a time to learn what it is like to live with someone of the opposite sex. I quickly began to realize that I needed to pick up the clothes that I used to lay on the floor, help cook, and clean the dishes every night. Being the first-year husband that I was, one night I decided to make dinner. It was a cold day, so chili seemed like a good choice. On my way home from work I picked up all the necessary ingredients and headed home to make my first big pot of chili.

I found a recipe online—that was my first mistake. The cooking part went well enough and soon there was a simmering pot of chili ready to be eaten. Rachel and I sat down at our dining room table and began to dig in. Simultaneously we looked up at each other in disgust. Something went wrong. The first bite was the last. Thinking back to what might have gone wrong, I discovered that I had mistaken the abbreviation symbolizing teaspoon for tablespoon. There was no going back, the pot of chili had been ruined. This one mistake in my chili meant that the rest of the pot was now condemned to go right into the trash bin. Similarly, James suggests in 2:8-13 that if someone commits even one sin he or she has become a transgressor of the whole law. In other words, the entire pot of chili has been spoiled.

Chapter 2 began by focusing on the church's response toward those of lower status and the favoritism James's audience had shown to those of higher status. While seemingly pious in their own eyes, James points out that their sin of partiality toward others has condemned them as transgressors against the law. In other words, the guilt

incurred by one sin condemns the whole person as a transgressor against God (Jas 2:10). In response, James calls these believers to reorient themselves to a new law. A law initiated by Christ and His teaching. This new law shows mercy and love but displays no partiality towards others. It's a law that lives in the freedom purchased by Christ.

Believers have been released from the standard set by the Mosaic law and have been set under the law of liberty which expresses itself most fully through the characteristics of love and mercy.

Exegesis

The Standard (2:8)

Comprehending the argument in this passage starts with understanding the issue James addresses at the beginning of chapter 2. In the communities to which James writes, a serious issue has arisen, namely partiality among the body. With different socio-economic standings present within these communities, certain people were given preferential treatment while others were simply forgotten or disregarded as not important. Such partiality within the body of Christ is unacceptable for James. He, therefore, shows them why partiality must be eliminated within the community of Christ. James begins his argument with an allusion to Leviticus 19:18, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Jas 2:8).[1]

The question that we must first answer before we go any further in this study is just what does "royal law" refer to? Often when approaching the term "law," immediate connections to the Mosaic law are made; however, as Ralph Martin points out, by

[1] Johnson points out that James will show himself dependent on Lev 19 later on in his epistle where he alludes to or quotes from this book continually. See Jas 2:9; 4:11; 5:4, 9, 12, 20. The argument will be made later that while James is dependent on Lev 19 for his argument in 2:8-13, his most relied upon source is that of his brother Jesus's teaching from the Sermon on the Mount. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYBC (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 231.

qualifying the term "law" with the modifier "royal" James is purposefully diverting his readers attention away from the Mosaic law onto something totally new.[2] This new law is not like the previous law which defined the nation of Israel, in that it is royal and, as verse 12 states, provides liberty. The term "royal" (βασιλικός) is derived from the Greek noun for "kingdom" (βασιλεία), from which Blomberg and Kamell conclude that "this is kingdom law, in which Jesus's kingdom teaching must play a central part."[3]

Jesus's ministry is replete with teachings concerning this newly established kingdom. Mark begins his narrative by recording the words of Jesus: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). As Mark records, the coming of Jesus initiated a new kingdom. It was a kingdom unlike any other kingdom there had ever been before. This kingdom was not based on the old Mosaic law, since, as Matthew builds upon, this law was fulfilled through Jesus.[4] This new law can be described as royal in that it "describes the whole body of commandments and exhortations that govern the people who belong to God's kingdom."[5] Jesus comments on this new law while answering the Pharisees in Matthew 22:26-40. He states "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and

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[2] Recognizing the characteristic of the modifier "royal" Martin suggests that "The term 'supreme law' is not restricted to the OT law. When James wishes to speak of the OT law (or one of its commandments) he simply uses νόμος. However, when he is referring to the Christian understanding of 'law' he qualifies νόμος." Ralph P. Martin, *James*, WBC, vol. 48 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 67.

[3] Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, *James*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2008), 116.

[4] Having come to fulfill the law of Moses, Jesus states in Matthew's Gospel "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished" (Matt 5:17-18).

[5] Douglas J. Moo, *James: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 126-27.

with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself." Believers have been set under a new law. This law is preeminent against all others and it calls believers to love.

Believers have been called to live out a love for God that reveals itself through a love for others. This standard is nothing new to the Old Testament. In fact, this love was meant to be a normative part of the Israelite's commitment to God, but instead had been replaced by a ridged works-based religion. Knowing this, James quotes Leviticus 19:18 to show that loving others is not simply a New Testament command but has been the standard since Moses. Fulfilling the royal law, then, means loving the Lord and equally loving our neighbor.

Jesus has a lot to say about who our neighbor is, and His most illuminating teaching on this subject comes from the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). In this story, a Jewish man lies dying on the side of the road. Two men, a priest and a Levite, walked past him, unwilling to acknowledge this man's medical needs if it meant that they would be unclean according to their religious tradition. Afterward, a Samaritan man, despised in many ways, walked down this same path, stooped down, cared for the man, and gave him the help he needed to survive.

Jesus uses this story as an example of who believers consider to be their neighbor. While mankind often imposes labels and distinctions upon each other, in the kingdom of God every man is a neighbor. If a believer's neighbor is all mankind, a believer's love should not be retained by distinctions or labels either. If a believer's neighbor is all mankind, a believer's love should be as far reaching as Jesus's was for His beloved creation. The standard for Christians is just that—to love their neighbor just as Christ loved mankind. As shown in the next verse, this kind of love should not show partiality.

The Transgression (2:9)

After setting up the standard of love as seen through the words of Jesus and the Torah, James addresses the central issue within this community. James sets his readers up for a new revelation that will serve to convict and rebuke them. While claiming to love well, they are in fact transgressors against God's call to love without partiality.

To illustrate his point, James uses a very peculiar verb in the Greek text: προσωπολημπτέω (*prosōpolēmpteō*). In the Greek literature known to us, this word is only used within Christian writings, and in the New Testament it only appears here in James.[6] Generally referring to the idea of one physically turning his face away from someone, one may read verse 19 like this: "But if you turn your face from others." The point at hand is that these believers who, in their opinion, had been abiding by the royal law to love others, had in actuality been turning their eyes in partiality away from those who did not fit their standards. Such actions, according to James, invalidated their claim to truly live as those abiding by the royal law; instead they should be labeled as transgressors of the law. The same law they believe to be adhering to was now the law that was condemning them.

This practice is quite easily seen in our world today. Whether you work in the business world, public sphere, or even in a church setting, often individuals practice partiality as they classify some as more favorable than others. Partiality often happens today when man attempts to tag others with various labels. One example is the value assigned to various political affiliations. For many in the South, if someone is labeled a Democrat, certain social barriers will arise; conversely, the label Republican will often put minds at ease. In other cases, our ethnicity becomes a label by which we show partiality to some and not others. However, abiding by the royal law of love means that

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[6] William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. "προσωπολημπτέω."

the individual will flee from the labels and titles of partiality, and instead show love to one's neighbor. Paul sums this up perfectly in Galatians 3:27-28: "For as many of you were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

The problem with partiality is that it patently rejects the command of God to love our neighbors. The parable of the Good Samaritan is again instructive. Neighbors cannot be chosen. Our neighbors constitute all those around us from all backgrounds, ethnicities, and socio-economic levels. Therefore, if man does not show love to those who have been placed around them, they are committing sin. James shows that this sin is not a one-time occurrence but has been a normative part in the life of this community. As Scot McKnight says, "The actions are depicted as incomplete and depicted as going on before our eyes."[7] While claiming to live for Christ, these individuals are actively denying the love of Christ to those who do not meet their standard of acceptance. These believers are actively living in sin, a personal decision to deny the moral commands of Christ. "To play favorites is to commit sin."[8] Instead of being labeled as a faithful follower of the royal law, James suggests they should actually be labeled as a transgressor.

The Guilt (2:10-11)

In verses 10-11, James sets out to show why he labels them as transgressors of the law. To do this, he relies on the Old Testament Decalogue and the teaching of Jesus from His Sermon on the Mount.

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[7] Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 209.

[8] Kurt A. Richardson, *James*, New American Commentary, vol. 36 (Nashville: B&H, 1997), 120, Logos Bible Software.

Verse 10 begins with a general statement as to why these readers can be labeled as transgressors of the law for their acceptance of partiality within their midst. James points out that whoever seeks to live by keeping the law must keep the whole law. Whoever fails to keep the law at one point is guilty of breaking the law in its entirety. Martin Dibelius observes that the act of weighing the importance of different commands in the law was a common Jewish practice among scholars and priests. In James's day there was also a common practice of examining the gravity of various Jewish laws against one another.[9] This temptation is especially true for many Christians today. When it comes to examining their own lives underneath the microscope of the Bible and God's will for their lives, often believers have an easier time letting some sins slide between the cracks while whole heartedly objecting to others. Craig Blomberg and Mariam Kamell assert, "All sins may separate us from God, but we would still far prefer someone else to tell a 'white lie' than to initiate a nuclear holocaust!"[10] While this example might seem extreme, it serves their point well. Often, we treat God's will for our lives as a set of weighted rules, where some bear more penalty than others. According to James, this is patently wrong. The royal law of God must be treated as an indivisible whole, and not separated into various parts.[11] One must love their neighbor if they claim to truly love God.

After providing the general example of why James's readers should be classified as transgressors of the law, in verse 11 James uses two commands from the

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[9] Martin Dibelius suggests that "The concept which it contains seems to have been applied especially in the common Jewish distinction between lesser and greater commandments." Martin Dibelius, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 144-45.

[10] Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 119.

[11] Moo summarizes this point well: "But, James answers, the law, the will of God for his people, is an indivisible whole, and to violate one part of it is to be at odds with all of it." Moo, *James*, 127.

Decalogue to further prove his rationale. However, before he states the actual command, it is important to note the one who is attributed to speaking these commands into existence, namely Yahweh. By ascribing these commands to the God of Israel, James helps his readers come to the conclusion that disobedience in these commands is not simply transgressing the law as an entity in itself; rather, it is a transgression against the one who commanded these laws in the first place.[12] In other words, these believers' guilt goes further than the law itself. They have in fact become guilty before the lawgiver Himself.

In verse 11 James's chosen commands come from Exodus 20:13-14 and Deuteronomy 5:17-18, which is commonly known as the Ten Commandments. Knowing the prominence of these commands, the question must be asked: Why did James choose these two particular commands? To answer this question, we must travel back to the words of Jesus in Matthew and His answer to what was the greatest commandment in all of the Jewish Law.

Matthew 5 begins the most well-known sermon in all of history, commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount. Within His teaching, Jesus cites the same two commands listed as James. However, Jesus brings them to their desired fulfillment by saying, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment" (Matt 5:21-22). In this passage, Jesus begins readdressing what the law of Moses truly means for believers, where he begins with murder and then moves on to lust in verse 27. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with

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[12] Moo summarizes James's point well by saying, "To violate a commandment is to disobey God himself and render a person guilty before Him." Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 115.

lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matt 5:27-28). Commenting on these two scriptures, Robert Wall summarizes a portion of Jesus's intent by saying, "Jesus's interpretation extends the range of God's law to include the thoughts and intentions at the very heart of the matter."[13]

Therefore, we might conclude that because of James's understanding of the Law of God as being spoken from the mouth of God and Jesus reinterpretation of it for the life of the believer, those who show partiality—or any other particular sin—are guilty of trespassing against the will of the one true God. They have become violators against the Lord Almighty.

The Call for Mercy (2:12-13)

Thus far in this section of James's epistle, the standard and transgression of this congregation's partiality have been brought into the daylight, followed directly with the proof of their guilt found in the previous two scriptures. With his argument in hand, James turns in the last two scriptures of this section to place a call upon the lives of his readers. Throughout this epistle, ethical arguments are never far from an ethical command. James's call is quite clear in response to his evidence against the partiality he finds within the body of Christ; he begins with two imperative verbs that mandate every believer to "speak" and "act" according to the law of liberty.

The law of liberty is not a new law James is bringing forth but instead is another way of referring to the "royal law" found in verse 8. As previously concluded, the royal law refers to the command residing over all believers that to love God means to love their neighbor. Since Christ has set believers free from the obligation to fulfill the entirety of the Mosaic law, man has been set free from its burden and made alive to a new

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[13] Robert W. Wall, *Community of the Wise: The Letter of James* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 127.

law that brings with it ultimate freedom—namely the freedom to love.[14] As those who have been set free, James implores his readers to live according to this new law and not go back to the Mosaic law.[15]

Verse 13 ends this section with a classic example of James's style of writing when he employs a pithy ethical statement. This statement from James seems as if it could have been taken straight out of the book of Proverbs. It begins by setting up two alternatives in which the first describes the one who shows no mercy on earth and the second describes the individual who provides mercy to others. For the first, one will not receive mercy because that individual did not show mercy. In contrast, the one who displays mercy will be shown great mercy because of his love for others. The question must be asked: How are mercy and love interrelated in this passage? James seemingly moves from a command to love in verses 8-12 to a command to show mercy in verse 13 with little forethought to his difference in verbiage. To understand how James is thinking we must look back at the Old Testament's use of the Hebrew word חֶסֶד (*hesed*). This verb, often likened to mercy in the LXX's translation of the psalmist,[16] is used to refer to "the expression of God's loving kindness towards humans."[17] If mercy were to carry a similar idea as seen in this Hebrew word, mercy than would take on the idea of providing love towards those who may not be deserving. Ultimately mercy is what man has seen

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[14] According to Martin (*James*, 7), "To love one's neighbor is the highest form of freedom exercised and ends in fulfillment of the law. What James is telling his readers is that the Jewish law per se is not the seat of authority but rather it is the law, as understood and interpreted in the Christian sense, which is the norm that guides the life of the follower of Jesus the Christ." Martin cites Jesus's own statements in the following verses to prove this point: Matt 7:12, 21, 24-29; 19:17-21; 22:36-40; 28:20.

[15] Paul makes a similar point in Gal 3:19-29, where he suggests that Jesus came to fulfill the law, and now those who have faith in Him are clothed in the righteousness that He gives as opposed to that of the law.

[16] See Pss 5:7; 6:4; 25:7; 32:10; 40:11; 51:1; 141:5.

[17] Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 234.

from God in His interactions with us. His love shows itself through mercy. While man was totally undeserving of God, He made Himself available to us by sending His Son to live on earth with us. Mercy then is the direct outreach of a heart of love. Douglas Moo echoes this in his commentary on this verse, "Showing mercy is, in fact, just what the love command requires and what James's readers are failing to do when they dishonour the poor."[18]

For the one who does not show mercy through love, no mercy will be returned to him in the final judgment, while the one who shows mercy will be given mercy in return. Jesus makes a similar statement in Matthew 5:7 when He says, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."[19] Ralph Martin suggests, "Those who fail to demonstrate a living and consistent faith are in danger of facing harsh judgment at the end, for they live as though ethical issues were of no consequence. Failure to show mercy to others cuts a person off from a true appreciation of the divine compassion."[20] The severity of one's judgment is dependent upon the reception of the divine mercy and the continuation of personal mercy. If no mercy is given, it is a sign that they have yet to accept the mercy of Christ in their own lives, but if mercy is given it is a testament to the mercy they have received through Christ. Believers should show mercy and love because they have been shown mercy and love.[21]

The Greek word κατακαυχάομαι (katakauchaomai) provides us with a perfect picture of the priority of mercy. McKnight states, "This word describes the posture of the

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[18] Moo, *James*, 131.

[19] See also Jesus's statements in Matt 18:23-30.

[20] Martin, *James*, 72.

[21] In his first epistle, the apostle John states that "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

victor, even the gladiator, as he or she stands over the defeated on the battlefield. Paradoxically, it is mercy that stands as the conquering victor in this building."[22] This imagery depicts mercy standing victoriously over a defeated judgment. Where once believers lived in complete judgment due to the weight of their sin, they now stand victorious over death because they met mercy in Christ. This is the wonderful truth of the gospel: Mercy triumphs over death! In response, God's people should be known by that same mercy and love being played out in their own lives.

Conclusion

For this community, James points out one specific ingredient that has spoiled their witness. Their unwillingness to fulfill the royal law by loving God and, in response, loving their neighbor has made them guilty before the lawgiver. However, the partiality that had infiltrated the congregation to which James was writing is not exclusive to them but often finds its way into churches today. Churches value the big giver. Churches value the well-educated. Churches value the two-parent household. Whether explicitly or not, partiality is a temptation of any congregation. This is why James's warning is of extreme value.

As those who have made a choice to live under the banner of Christ, believers must be known by their love—love for God and love for all our neighbors. Those who exclude and show partiality do a great disservice to the influence of Christ around the world, for they often speak of receiving Christ's love but fail to extend that same love to others. The love of a member of Christ's body must be the love of Christ himself. His love is seen in that He came to die for individuals who did not live up to the standard of God; nevertheless, Christ came to redeem us from sin. His love extended far past the differences that stood in between us and Him.

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[22] McKnight, *The Letter of James*, 221.

Those who have received Christ's love need to be willing to extend that same love to others, for in doing this we abide by the royal law, the law of love that brings true freedom. For to love God is to love others, thusly abiding by the Royal Law. Do not allow the transgression of partiality to spoil your witness; instead, choose to love without reservation.

CHAPTER 5

DEAD UPON ARRIVAL: JAMES 2:14-26

In 2002 American Idol hit the airwaves of American television. For many families, this singing competition was something that they just could not miss. One of the best aspects of this show was that all of their open auditions were filmed. The auditions generally looked the same. The contestant would enter into the room, walk in front of a table where three very famous music industry professionals were sitting, and then begin their audition. In the contestant's preliminary introductions, the audience usually heard the contestant's boastful words about their great talent and their yearning to be the next great musical artist. At this point in the audition the rubber must meet the road—the contestant's boastful words must produce a vocal performance that leaves the judges in awe or else they will be sent home packing. While many were actually good singers, there were a handful who were truly terrible. Their boastful words did not match their screeching vocal cords. Their claim of great talent showed itself to be lifeless. Without the talent to back it up, these contestants proved their words to be empty and void.

Similarly, in the protestant Christian tradition, it can be easy to substitute the right words for the right life. For many it can become more important to profess the right doctrines rather than allowing those doctrines to inform the way one lives their life. Their boastful words about their faith are disconnected from their everyday lives. For James, works and faith are not two separate ideals, but they are two important pieces of the true faithful life. One without the other is simply void and useless. So, while proclaiming the right words is important, allowing those words to root down into your everyday life is of greater value. Just like the contestant on American Idol, at some point in the life of a Christian the rubber must meet the road.

Faith, properly understood, does not simply reside in an intellectual assent toward certain ideas, but according to James, true faith is followed by genuine works. A faith without works is a faith without a pulse. Therefore, believers are exhorted to allow their faith to lead them towards works that glorify God.

Exegesis

Faith without Works Is Dead (2:14-17)

In the entire book of James, nothing receives more attention than 2:14-26. For centuries, debates have raged on James's precise meaning in this Scripture and its purpose within the scope of the rest of the canon of Scripture. From a casual reading the Apostle Paul seems to contradict James, but the good news is that the supposed problem that many people might think James presents in this passage actually meshes well with the message of Paul. In fact, James's passage provides a much-needed word that can often be left unsaid from our twenty-first century pulpits.

The contents of this passage serve as the backbone for all who have come before and all who will follow in his address to his Jewish audience. Therefore, if we are to properly understand the message of James as a whole, we must correctly understand these verses.

Verse 14 immediately follows James's call to shed any form of partiality within the life of a believer and after his foreshadowing statement in 1:25 in which he writes, "But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed." Verse 14 begins with a probing question meant to leave readers asking what a genuine faith looks like. Is faith only an intellectual assent to certain doctrines or does true faith bring alongside it works of righteousness? James answers this question four different times in these few verses with a resounding claim that faith without works is dead (Jas 2:17, 18, 20, 26).

When answering the question posed by James, we must first begin the process of defining our terminology. Without doing such, we may become guilty of bringing wrong assumptions to the table of interpretation. Of particular interest for this study is the term ἔργον (works). For James, "works" are classified as a life lived out of love for God and for others. As we explored in our previous lesson, James's emphasis on the "law of liberty" is a focus on the greatest commandment given by Jesus in Matthew 22:36-40. In like manner, works of righteousness should flow from one who is in a proper loving relationship with God.[1] To read another definition of "works" into James's account does a severe disservice to James and his message. Using this definition makes all the difference in the world to understanding James's message in 2:14-26.

When James questions if a faith that does not reflect a loving relationship with God can save such an individual, the obvious answer to this question is no.[2] As with the greatest commandment, loving God necessarily means that one should love others in the same way that God shows love for others. If such love and works towards others are absent, the individual's faith should be called into question as genuine faith leads to genuine works of righteousness.

To illustrate his point, James uses the example of a believer who comes to another supposed believer while he is in dire need for daily essentials like food and clothing. Instead of meeting the physical needs of these believers, the one who has much

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[1] Trying to avoid this confusion, Craig Blomberg and Mariam Kamell suggest the following: "Perhaps 'works' might be better translated as 'action' in this context" so as to avoid any terminology confusions between Paul and James. Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, *James*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2008), 129.

[2] Commentators like Douglas Moo suggest that the Greek word σῴζω ("save") "denotes the final deliverance from sin, death and judgement in the last day." Therefore, when James uses "save" in this passage, he is referring to eschatological judgment rather than the declaration of righteousness given to the believer at the point of their conversion. Douglas J. Moo, *James: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 135.

leaves the needy with a simple blessing of good tidings. “Go in peace” is a common greeting used throughout the Bible, but in this context it is used as a way of dismissing the needy altogether.[3] However, James’s point is not to critique the words used but to critique the inaction that follows such a statement. Christopher Morgan comments on this by stating, “Today it would be like saying ‘good-bye and God bless you.’ Instead of the poor receiving warm clothes and satisfying food, all they get is religious triteness. Their words speak of grace, but they fail to minister grace.”[4] James’s point is simple— faith without works is just as useless as a word of blessing is to a person who is hungry or cold.[5] Similarly, in his first epistle John states, “But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:17-18).

James sums up his point in verse 17 with a poignant and heart sinking statement: “So also faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (Jas 2:17). The relationship is clear at this point—faith must have works to be considered a living faith. Without works faith is stagnant and lifeless. The New Testament scholar Douglas Moo sums James’s point clearly by stating, “James is not really contrasting faith and works, as if these were two alternative options in one’s approach to God.”[6] Instead James is suggesting that there is only one type of faith—a faith that lives out in the works of an

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[3] Judg 6:23; 2 Sam 15:27; 2 Kgs 5:19; Mark 5:34; Luke 7:50; 8:48; Acts 16:36; Rom 1:7; Eph 6:23; Phil 4:9.

[4] Christopher W. Morgan, *A Theology of James: Wisdom for God’s People*, Explorations in Biblical Theology (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 89.

[5] Martin Dibelius, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 152.

[6] Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 126.

individual. True faith is evidenced by a life filled with works of righteousness. In simpler terms, true faith can be seen through the effect it has on the everyday lives of believers.

Evidence from Orthodoxy (2:18-20)

With argument in hand, James wastes no time in seeking to prove to his readers that faith without works is dead by highlighting the first of two pieces of evidence. James's first piece of evidence relies on the testimony of a group of unrighteous figures who actively rebel against the divine will of God, namely the demons.

Verse 19 begins with a statement with which every Jewish reader would have been extremely familiar: "You believe that God is one." This statement refers back to the Great Shema found in Deuteronomy 6:4. Of the many different religious beliefs that surrounded the contexts of the Old and New Testament authors, what made Judaism far different was its belief in one god. Adhering to this doctrine was imperative for one to remain within the orthodox teaching of Judaism, "but James insists that correct doctrine by itself is insufficient."[7] For James, knowing theological concepts and statements of orthodoxy is not a means in and of itself to exemplify true faith. Luke Timothy Johnson suggests that such "faith" is only a "simple assent, which is not the fullness of faith as response to God in action."[8] In comparison, true faith fills itself with the works of righteousness, not simply words of orthodoxy.

In reality, as James suggests, even the demons believe that God is one, yet they remain in constant rebellion against Him. Therefore, if demons believe the orthodox statements about God, what good is a "faith" that simply believes these facts yet fails to

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[7] Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 135.

[8] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYBC (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 241.

submit to the One whom those statements of orthodoxy refer? The answer to this question is obvious—such a faith does no good for the individual. To add emphasis, James insists that at least the demons shudder at their understanding of God, yet seemingly the individual who does not allow their faith to be filled with works remains unmoved.[9]

It can often be tempting in churches today to replace correct doctrine for true faith. While a true orthodox understanding of God is necessary, it is not the basis for salvation. As Paul says, "For by grace you have been save through faith" (Eph 2:8). Faith is what saves, not merely an intellectual assent to an agreed upon set of conclusions. While understanding theology is a good pursuit, theology for theology's sake is useless if it is unaccompanied by faith. If the true understanding of God fails to change the heart of the individual, theology remains a useless tool. Dr. Roy Aldrich puts it another way,

> It is evident that there is faith and FAITH. There is nominal faith and real faith. There is intellectual faith and heart faith. There is sensual faith and there is spiritual faith. There is dead faith and there is vital faith. There is traditional faith which may fall short of transforming personal faith. There is a faith that may be commended as orthodox and yet have no more saving value than the faith of demons.[10]

The faith that James espouses is one that takes hold of the very heart, mind, and soul of an individual and transforms their lives to live according to the law of liberty.[11] Faith is not simply an intellectual assent, but is a surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ, knowing full well that He has paid the price for salvation by His death on the cross.

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[9] In talking about the response of the demons, Moo (*James*, 139) says, "At least it is a response—which is more apparently, than can be said of some professing Christians who make the same confession."

[10] Roy L. Aldrich, "Some Difficulties of Salvation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 111, no. 442 (1954): 167.

[11] As was stated in the previous chapter, when James uses the phrase "Law of Liberty" or "Law of Freedom," he is referring to the greatest command to love God and to love others given by Jesus in Matt 22:36-40. True faith, then, is seen in love for God and love for mankind.

Evidence from Two Israelites (2:21-26)

James's second piece of evidence comes from the living witness of two Old Testament Israelites. Whereas from the outset these two figures seem irreconcilably different, especially for James's original Israelite audience, upon a closer look, James's use of these two individuals serves as opposite bookends to his proposed thesis. Abraham the patriarch, along with Rahab the prostitute, act as the second piece of evidence for James's thesis that true faith is seen through one's good works. Without works of righteousness, their faith is declared dead. In other words, even though these two witnesses are different in many respects, their testimony remains consistent, namely that faith finds its fullest and truest expression through their works.

Abraham's influence over Judaism is unmistakable and unavoidable. James, the proper Jewish man he is, does not simply classify Abraham as the patriarch[12] over Israel; rather, he shows Abraham's intimacy with every Israelite by labeling him as "our father."[13] As the exemplar par excellence for true faith in God, Abraham provides the weight needed to secure James's point concerning the role of faith and works. James uses God's declaration of Abraham's righteous standing in Genesis 15:6 and the offering of Isaac in Genesis 22:1-18 to drive home this point.

What is particularly interesting is the timing of these events in the Genesis narrative. In chapter 15, God declares Abraham to be righteous and then seven chapters later we encounter the story where Abraham attempts to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. James, however, seems to suggest in verse 21 that Abraham was justified in chapter 22, not in

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[12] Commenting on the NRSV's translation of Jas 2:21, Scot McKnight says, "The NRSV's 'ancestor' is not enough, Abraham is more than an 'ancestor.' He is *the* ancestor." Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 245 (emphasis original).

[13] Paul extends the role of Abraham as the father of faith to the proselyte Christian community in Rom 4:10-11 and, most obviously, in Gal 3:7. This pattern extends into the post-apostolic writings of the early church (see 1 Clem 10).

chapter 15 as is it stated in the Genesis narrative. To understand James's point, we must first take some time to reflect on the semantic range of the Greek word δικαιόω (*dikaioō*) in James and the later author Paul.

With particular words, especially theological terms, readers often come to the table with pre-conceived notions as to what such words should mean, and the word δικαιόω (*dikaioō*) is no different. What we must do at this point is clarify how Paul uses this word when referring to Abraham as opposed to how James uses this same term in reference to the same patriarch.

When Paul uses the word δικαιόω (*dikaioō*) in Romans 4 in reference to the accreditation of righteousness to Abraham, he is rightly using the word to emphasize the fact that man is only justified by faith. In this sense, Paul is rightly using the word δικαιόω (*dikaioō*) to refer to one's initial relational reconciliation with God.[14] James however, in reference to Abraham in 2:22, uses the word δικαιόω (*dikaioō*) to refer to the act of vindication, or proving something to be valid or true.[15] In other words, Abraham was shown to be justified through his works. Therefore, Paul uses δικαιόω (*dikaioō*) as a declaration of one's imputed righteousness, while James uses δικαιόω (*dikaioō*) as a demonstration of one's imputed righteousness seen through their earthly works.[16]

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[14] Moo puts it this way: "Paul uses 'justify' to denote God's initial judicial verdict of 'innocence' pronounced over the sinner who trusts Jesus Christ in faith." Moo, *The Letter of James*, 133-34.

[15] BDAG lists James's use of δικαιόω (*dikaioō*) in the second category meaning to vindicate. William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. "δικαιόω."

[16] In differentiating James and Paul's usage of δικαιόω (*dikaioō*), C. Ryan Jenkins says, "Paul was writing of a forensic declaration of righteousness that a sinner achieves only through faith, and James was writing of a universal demonstration of righteousness that is accomplished by works." C. Ryan Jenkins, "Faith and Works in Paul and James," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159, no. 636 (January-March 2002): 64.

James is not suggesting in verse 21 that Abraham's works gave way to his justification; rather, James suggests that Abraham's faith in Genesis 15:6 showed itself to be true through the works he performed in Genesis 22:1-18. By trusting God through his willingness to sacrifice his only son Isaac, Abraham showed himself to be justified. Robert Stein furthers this point by suggesting that "justification [for James] should be interpreted as demonstrative in nature, i.e., Abraham's justification was demonstrated or shown by his visible works."[17] James is primarily concerned with the demonstration of true faith through works. In verse 22, James states, "You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works" (Jas 2:22). His conclusion is not that Abraham's works serve as the means of attaining his right standing before the Lord, but that the works of Abraham served to guide his faith to its desired goal, namely a mature faith in God.

Similarly, in verse 25 James brings up the Gentile prostitute Rahab as an example of how true faith is seen through the works it produces in the life of the faithful follower of God. While seemingly different in all respects from the great Israelite patriarch Abraham, James suggests that Rahab and Abraham had a lot more in common than might first catch the eye.[18]

Joshua chapter 4 introduces the reader is introduced to a Gentile woman previously living in a life of sin, who displays her faith in the God of Israel by risking her life to hide the Israelite spies as they scouted out the people of Jericho. Through this good work, Rahab showed her trust and faith in the providence of God, so much so that she

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[17] Robert Stein, "'Saved by Faith [Alone]' in Paul versus 'Saved by Faith Alone' in James," *SBJT* 4, no. 3 (2000): 13.

[18] Blomberg and Kamell (*James*, 140) suggest that by using the example of Abraham and Rahab, James is creating a merismus "so that everyone in between them is included as needing to exhibit transformed living in order to demonstrate the genuineness of faith."

became an example of how one's faith and works are inseparable (Josh 2:1-21; Matt 1:5; Heb 11:31). Rahab's faith is seen, not by her verbal adherence to orthodoxy, but through her works that bear witness to the testimony in her heart. Rahab's faith was proved to be a living faith, not because she could spout various theological truths, but because her faith flowed into works of righteousness for the glory of God. So, while Abraham and Rahab may seem vastly different to the naked eye, one a patriarch and one a prostitute, their lives were to be commended for the fact that their faith was shown to be living through their works of righteousness.

Conclusion

Living in the Bible Belt, it can be easy for some to assume the title "Christian" as one of many other titles in their life. However, what we see through the exposition of James 2:14-26 is that faith is more than a simple intellectual agreement or doctrinal assumption; it is a faith in God that necessarily leads one to works of righteousness. The faith that James describes as a true and authentic faith is a faith that works. It is a faith that displays itself in the moments of everyday life. It is a faith that informs how we think, speak and act. Faith in God is all-consuming. It transforms every aspect of our lives.[19]

James's final illustration in verse 26 drives home his point one last time. Just as our physical body is dead without a spirit, so too our faith is dead without good works. In the end, James is not simply imploring us to do more good things in the world around us. What James is calling his readers to look at is their faith. Is their faith a living faith that evidences itself in the works of their lives or is their faith stagnant and lifeless? True

[19] The Great Shema in Deut 6:4-9 suggests a similar theme. Moses's command to the Israelite community was to build their entire life off of their faith in God. So, whether they were in their house or outside, the priority of a faithful Israelite was to live in light of the one true God. Faith leads to action.

faith in Christ does not simply reside in our intellect, but it transforms every aspect of who we are. The rubber must meet the road. So, the question we must ask ourselves is this: What kind of faith do I have? Is it one stemming with righteousness and godliness, or is it dead upon arrival?

CHAPTER 6

A SMALL SPARK: JAMES 3:1-12

Growing up, camping was a normal pastime for my family. Every year we would pack up our gear and head off into the woods. During those camping trips, I remember seeing signs posted near the entrances to the campgrounds depicting a large brown bear named Smokey who always said the same thing: "Only *you* can prevent forest fires." Smokey served as the park rangers' way of making sure that every camper properly put out their campfires each night so that forest fires could be avoided altogether.

Forest fires can be extremely dangerous and destructive, and often they can come from the smallest and the most unimaginable sources. In 2018, California experienced one of their largest ever recorded wildfire that burned over 400,000 acres of land, killing one fire fighter, injuring more, and destroying many structures. The end result of this fire was devastating for those living in the surrounding areas, leaving many homeless.

After the fire was contained in September, the local authorities began their investigation into the fire's origin. Peculiarly enough, the fire was not started by a campfire or some reckless individual looking to cause some mayhem, but instead the fire was caused by a tiny spark from an unlikely source. In July, a local man was looking to plug up an underground hornets' nest with a metal stake. While driving the stake into the ground, one tiny, seemingly insignificant spark flew outward after his hammer collided with the metal stake. That tiny spark was thought to be the initial cause of what is now known as the Ranch Fire.

In the first twelve verses of chapter 3 James discusses the nature and power of speech. While specifically looking to those who yearn to be teachers in the Christian community, this section of James holds important implications for every believer. To describe the guiding power of our speech, James will use two illustrations: a bit in the mouth of a horse and the rudder of a large ship. After describing the guiding power of man's tongue, James will then go on to describe the destructive nature of a tongue that goes unchecked by likening it to a fire.

What James seeks to highlight in this passage is the immense power of man's speech. The tongue has the power to build up, yet if left uncontrolled, man's speech also has the power to destroy. Therefore, it is imperative that all believers learn to control their tongue.

Exegesis

The Tongue Guides (3:1-5a)

As an elementary school teacher, one of my wife's least favorite phrases she hears from time to time goes something like this: "Those who can't do, teach." If you want to see a normally composed woman boil over, this phrase will do it. What my wife knows, as well as many other teachers out there, is that teaching can have a profound impact on students. With their words, teachers guide, instruct, and build up their students. In a similar way, James understands that there are some religious teachers who use their tongues to positively impact their students and others who abuse their students with their words. Our tongues can have an immense influence, and noting this, James begins his third chapter by commenting on the powerful nature of man's tongue. Before we go too far, it is important to note that while James is specifically addressing teachers in this Scripture, his words of caution ring true in the life of any individual.

Having both authority and a platform, teachers often have the most to say. Their job consists of crafting a series of phrases and arguments to lead their hearers in a

particular direction of learning. Scot McKnight makes a compelling point as to why teachers in James's era needed to use their words with caution. He states that "teaching has always been necessary and, to one degree or another, prestigious because knowledge and power go hand in hand, especially in that world, where only about 10% could read."[1] With this platform and authority, James warns from many becoming teachers of God's Word, since they will be judged according to the manner by which they lead others. As such, teachers will be judged with a greater strictness.[2] This makes sense after realizing that religious teachers are in charge of the spiritual health of those who sit under their tutelage.[3]

Knowing that our speech carries immense power, a word of warning concerning our speech should resonate with every believer. The stress placed on our words is not new to James, but closely resembles a warning given by Jesus. In Matthew 12:36-37 He says, "I tell you, on the day of judgement people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." If our words will be judged, we therefore must take care to think before we speak. The psalmist shows what should be the heart of believers when using their tongues: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord my rock and my redeemer" (Ps 19:14).

In verse 2, James further explains his previous statement by suggesting that mankind in general suffers from a plurality of sins. Often these sins are directed and

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[1] Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 269.

[2] Douglas Moo summarizes this point well: "The importance of the teaching ministry renders it liable to a closer scrutiny and that failure to discharge the ministry faithfully will bring a correspondingly more severe penalty." Douglas J. Moo, *James: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 154.

[3] Robert W. Wall, *Community of the Wise: The Letter of James* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 162.

guided by one's speech. James uses this verse to begin a transition from a specific focus on teachers to a more general warning for his broader audience.[4]

One must ask the question, why does the mouth often become a vehicle for sin? To answer this question, as is often the case, James uses both his understanding of the Jewish wisdom literature and the words of his brother Jesus to inform his own argument. Traditionally written by King David, Psalm 52:2-4 says, "Your tongue plots destruction, like a sharp razor, you worker of deceit. You love evil more than good and lying more than speaking what is right. You love all words that devour, O deceitful tongue." Here David describes the tongue as evil, plotting destruction, sharp as a razor, deceitful, lying and devouring. The mouth of mankind is able to produce all kind of atrocities that cut deep into a person. As much as we'd like to think "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me," realistically we know that words can cause a tremendous amount of pain.

Jesus takes the sin produced by the tongue a step further and uses it to diagnose the evil festering in our hearts. "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man come evil thoughts . . . deceit . . . slander . . . All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person" (Mark 7:20-23). What Jesus seeks to point out is that whatever is found in the heart of an individual will come out in their speech, thoughts, and actions. Therefore, since all mankind has been plagued with sin, it is no wonder that every man struggles holding their tongue.

Knowing this, in the second half of this Scripture James sets up an impossible scenario which obviously no man can live up to. He suggests that if a man never stumbles with his words, he is a "perfect" man. The word James uses here is the Greek word, τέλειος (*telios*). Chris Vlachos suggests that any time James uses this word, he is referring

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[4] Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, *James*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2008), 152.

to "completeness" or "perfection."[5] Adding to this understanding, the Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament suggests that James uses τέλειος (*telios*) to refer to someone who is flawless morally.[6] Therefore, if the Bible's stance that we all stumble is true, then no man can ever achieve moral perfection apart from the work of Christ in their life.[7] However, while perfection is unattainable by human self-will, man is called to strive toward perfection with the help of Christ, knowing that one day man will be renewed in that perfection at the eschaton.

Before focusing on the adverse effects of one's tongue, James takes time to use two illustrations to show the positive guiding power of one's tongue. The two images James chooses to focus on are the bit in a horse's mouth and the rudder of the ship. These two illustrations would have been abundantly clear within the minds of his audience, as horses and ships were a common feature of antiquity.[8]

The bit, weighing only about two pounds, pales in comparison with the muscle-bound horses that hold these bits in their mouths, yet the rider is able to control the horse's movements with just a small piece of metal. Likewise, the captain is able to steer a mighty ship with the help of the small rudder. While the winds may pound against the ship in a great effort to push it off course, "the pilot [can] control the impact of the

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[5] Chris A. Vlachos, *James: Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013), 20.

[6] William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. "τέλειος."

[7] In his epistle to the Romans, Paul lays out the biblical warrant for the depravity of all mankind by saying, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23).

[8] Christopher Morgan suggests that these two illustrations were "curiously well-known in antiquity." Christopher W. Morgan, *A Theology of James: Wisdom for God's People*, Explorations in Biblical Theology (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 118.

winds on the sails by operating the rudder with expertise."[9] Seemingly small, these two instruments have great control over that to which they are attached. Both of these illustrations point out a central feature—large vessels are able to be controlled by something comparatively smaller. In the same way, man's tongue, while being small in nature, is able to control and guide the actions of mankind.

From these two illustrations James implicitly points out something quite striking: bits and rudders are only instruments for steering, but it is the will and direction of the rider of the horse and the captain of the ship that determines the direction. In a similar idea, it is the heart of mankind that directs the tongue to act. Jesus suggests this when He speaks to the Pharisees: "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil" (Matt 12:34-35). James understands that it is man's heart that guides and leads him in particular directions. Therefore, those who dwell in the darkness will produce darkness with their speech, but those who dwell in the light will speak truth and love to those with whom they associate.

The tongue, while small, directs the lives of men. Daniel Doriani writes, "What we do follows what we say. Both our internal speech (our thoughts) and our spoken words direct our actions."[10] What our words say we follow. To control our speech is to control our entire body. Luckily, man does not have to accomplish this task alone—through the help of the Holy Spirit living within those who believe in the saving work of Christ, believers are strengthened and encouraged to speak the words of Christ in their own lives.

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[9] McKnight, *The Letter of James*, 278-79.

[10] Daniel M. Doriani, *James*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 108.

Verse 5 concludes James's first two illustrations by emphasizing the small size yet boastful arrogance of our tongue. When compared to the rest of our body, the tongue is small, but it has immense control over our lives. This control can either be used to build up and edify others for the kingdom of God, or it can be used in dangerous ways. This leads James to his third illustration concerning the power of the tongue, but this time the focus is not simply on its power to guide, but its power to destroy.

The Tongue Destroys (3:5b-12)

Despite its power to bring warmth and light, a fire that is not contained can cause immeasurable damage to property and even take a life. Likewise, when James compares the tongue's potential as a small spark setting ablaze an entire forest, he has moved from focusing on the guiding power of the tongue to its potentially destructive force.

The tongue is often compared to a disastrous fire in the writings of the wisdom literature. The Psalmist writes, "Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from him" (Ps 18:8). Job similarly states, "Out of his mouth go flaming torches; sparks of fire leap forth" (Job 41:19). We find this pattern of thought expressed bluntly in Proverbs: "A worthless man plots evil, and his speech is like a scorching fire" (Prov 16:27). All this leads us to one conclusion—man's speech can be detrimental if not checked properly.[11]

James further comments on this destructive force in verse 6 where he suggests that the tongue is a "world of unrighteousness" and "set on fire by Hell." His use of these phrases is extraordinary. When he proposes that the tongue is a world of unrighteousness,

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[11] Commenting on the destructive potential of our speech, H. A. Ironside writes, "An unwise or unkind word may be the beginning of trouble which will go on for years and be the means of unceasing strive and division." H. A. Ironside, *Hebrews, James, Peter* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1947), 35.

what he suggests is that many of the sins of mankind stem from this tiny bodily member. As speech is our primary way of communicating and interacting with others, it makes sense that our tongues have become the most abused part of our body. With our words we lie, we hurt, we covet, and we curse. From this small bodily component comes a world of sin and destruction.

Such sins not only affect the hearer, but as James suggests, they also hurt the individual who uses such words. Douglas Moo summarizes this point by writing, "The sins committed with the tongue spread spiritual pollution to the whole person."[12] The words of an individual not only damage others, but in the end words can be a detrimental power in one's own life. The fire set by one's tongue eventually comes back to consume us. Jesus, in Matthew 15:11, reminds us that "it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person." The fire that comes through the tongue of an individual burns those around us and ultimately comes back to inflame the speaker as well.

James moves on to suggest that the tongue's deadly power finds its source in hell. In the first century on the south side of the Jerusalem, the inhabitants of the city would throw their debris and trash into a valley named Hinnom. This valley was constantly on fire, as people would burn their trash day and night. One can only imagine the smells and sights of a trash heap constantly on fire, which makes it all the more compelling that Jesus[13] uses this valley as an image of the final place of judgment for the

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[12] Moo, *James*, 160.

[13] It is interesting to note that Matthew uses the Greek term γεέννης seven out of the twelve times it is found in the New Testament (see Matt 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33). Writing to a Jewish audience, one would expect that the evil reputation of γεέννης in the Old Testament would carry over to the New Testament.

wicked.[14] This perpetual burning trash heap thought to signify the final judgment of man is the source for the evil that spews forth from man's lips.

The unique piece of this equation is the fact that man has been given extraordinary power in this world. James lists the beasts, birds, reptiles and sea creatures in such a way that one is taken back to the very beginning, where man and God lived in harmony. In the garden of Eden, man was given the task of filling the globe with fellow worshipers of God and having dominion every beast of the earth. Even with this great power in hand, because of sin, man can no longer tame his own tongue. Seemingly locked in a cage of teeth and lips, sin causes the tongue to continually break free and wreak havoc in the life of man. Whether it is an unkind word to a co-worker, gossiping about a fellow church member, or even a curse against you neighbor, no man is able to tame his tongue. It is an unruly beast with an immense power to destroy. Just as the words of the serpent produce death in the Garden, so, too, do our words bring death when we fail to control our tongue.[15] The psalmist rightfully points out, "they make their tongue sharp as a serpent's, and under their lips is the venom of asps" (Ps 140:3). The tongue is deadly; therefore, with the help of the Spirit dwelling within us, we should seek to tame our tongue, producing life instead of death.

With all that James has written regarding the tongue so far, it can be easy to lose and forget the overall picture he illustrates for these scattered Jewish believers. As he expressed in chapter 2, James's concern is that those who read this will live lives of

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[14] In referring to James's use of the Greek word γεέννης, Moo suggests that "The word is a transliteration of the Hebrew 'Valley of Hinnom', which had an evil reputation in the Old Testament, and in the intertestamental period came to be used of the place of final judgment." Moo, *James*, 161.

[15] Wall's makes the connection clear by suggesting that "It therefore seems apropos that James would include an image that echoes the great 'reptile' of Eden's domain: the Serpent was a teacher also, whose deceiving word to Eve about God let to creation's chaos and humanity's death." Wall, *Community of the Wise*, 173.

consistency[16] and wholeness.[17] Just as true faith will manifest itself in good works, so too will true faith manifest itself in an edifying use of the tongue. Summarizing this well, Christopher Morgan states, "Sinful words come from sinful hearts, and people who genuinely love God display their basic consistency in following God, even in the difficult area of speech."[18] This makes it incomprehensible when James hears people using their tongue for the worship of God at one moment and then cursing humanity, God's crowning creation, in the next.[19] Faith not only shows itself in our works but also in our words.

To make this abundantly clear, James focuses his readers attention on a string of four analogies meant to drive home his point. First, James suggests that a spring cannot bring forth fresh and saltwater. The spring must produce one or the other, for when there is any salt in the spring it immediately has become saltwater—it is no longer fresh. Therefore, if one claims to be of the Christian faith, redeemed by the blood of the lamb, their mouths should produce good words, not evil.

In his second and third analogies, James writes that a fig tree cannot produce olives and a grapevine cannot produce figs. "James's point is that no plant can produce the fruit that belongs to a different plant . . . ; in the same way, our tongues, which have

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[16] Morgan develops this theme in *A Theology of James*, chap. 5 (pp. 55-63).

[17] Along these lines, Douglas Moo states, "Basic to all that James says in his letter is his concern that his readers stop compromising with worldly values and behavior and give themselves wholly to the Lord. Spiritual 'wholeness,' then, we suggest, is the central concern of the letter." Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 46.

[18] Morgan, *A Theology of James*, 63.

[19] Motyer highlights the issue well by saying "Our inconsistency is further compounded by the fact that we bless and curse the same thing, the image of God." J. A. Motyer, *The Message of James*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1985), 125.

been natural conduits of evil ever since the Fall, cannot produce good on their own."[20] The method of changing our speech is not to try harder or set up a swear jar, but ultimately to change one's tongue, man has to be changed by the saving grace of Christ. It is only in Him that our speech can ever produce life instead of death.

Lastly, James tells his readers that a salt pond can never produce fresh water. While at first this last analogy seems almost identical to his analogy of the springs in verse 11, we must reject the idea that James is simply repeating his previous illustration. As Scot McKnight points out, the analogy in verse 11 focuses primarily on the source of the water, namely the spring, while in the second half of verse 12 James is focusing on the consistency of the product given by the source.[21] This leads us back again to the words of Jesus in Matthew 12:34 which says, "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." In the same way, we cannot assume a heart full of sin can produce anything less than evil and death. For those who have been redeemed, our mouths must then speak goodness and life into the world.

Conclusion

As James suggests in this passage, the tongue wields immense power. Our words have the power to encourage the downtrodden, strengthen the faltering, and heal the wounds of others. Yet at the same time our words condemn, judge, curse, and gossip. While originally a warning to teachers that their speech is a guiding force that can lead to destruction if not properly kept in check, the same truth boils over to believers today. For those who claim to have faith, our words must reflect the faith we find in our hearts and the goodness we see in our Savior. While sticks and stones may break our bones, "[It is]

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[20] Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 162.

[21] The final analogy presented by James concerns "the rightful congruity of source and produce." McKnight, *The Letter of James*, 296.

far easier to heal the wounds caused by sticks and stones than the damage caused by words."[22] Our words carry the power to guide in directions that are fruitful to the Kingdom of God, yet also they have the power to destroy. Therefore, believers must use their words carefully, for on one hand our words have the power to build up but on the other hand they can also destroy.

[22] Moo, *The Letter of James*, 160.

CHAPTER 7

TO BE A FRIEND OF GOD: JAMES 4:1-10

On September 16, 2017 Nabeel Qureshi passed away after a long battle with stomach cancer. Even though Nabeel succumbed to physical death, he is now certainly experiencing the greatest joy imaginable. Before Nabeel passed away, he was quickly becoming quite well known for his wit in Christian apologetics. Trained by Ravi Zacharias, Nabeel learned the ropes and began traveling all around the world teaching about the reliability and truthfulness of the Bible; however, Nabeel's journey to this point was not one without its own hurdles.

Growing up as a Pakistani Muslim, Nabeel knew the Qur'an well. His parents were devout Muslims who wanted to instill their faith in Allah to their son. They taught him Arabic, the Qur'an, and how to defend his faith in the world. From the outside looking in, Nabeel was set to be a devout Muslim for his entire life. It was not until Jesus reached Nabeel through a series of events in his life that led him to make a decision to follow Christ. This decision was not one without its own consequences. You see, for Nabeel to reject his Muslim upbringing to follow after Christ would certainly mean a lot of heartbreak and sorrow for his still Muslim parents. Nabeel notes this in a *Christianity Today* article where he writes, "To this day my family is broken by the decision I made, and it is excruciating every time I see the cost I had to pay."[1] To be found righteous before God, Nabeel had to reject the world he knew best, trading it in for the truthfulness

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[1] Nabeel Qureshi, "Christ Called Me off the Minaret," *Christianity Today*, last modified January 8, 2014, https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/january-february/christ-called-me-off-minaret.html.

found in Scripture. In the end, his friendship with God that was more important than any other relationship that the world could provide.

Context

Immediately prior to our passage, James compares the qualities of wisdom that come from above to the qualities of earthly wisdom. Wisdom from God, which is given to those who ask, displays itself through purity, peace, gentleness, reason, mercy, good fruits, impartiality, and sincerity (Jas 1:5). In comparison, earthly wisdom is demonstrated through jealousy, selfish ambition, and boastfulness. Ultimately, James characterizes earthly wisdom as demonic.[2] After describing these two types of wisdom, James takes the first ten verses of chapter 4 to look at the effects of living out a friendship with the world (vv. 1-6) and then describes how believers are to pursue a friendship with God (vv.7-10). Friendship with the world leads to strife with man and animosity toward God, while friendship with God is displayed through submission and humility.

Exegesis

Friendship with the World (4:1-6)

James begins his discussion on the effects of a relationship with the world by asking a series of two pointed questions: "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you" (Jas 4:1)? Recognizing the strife found in the life of a double-minded man, James correctly points out that friendship with the world produces quarrels within oneself and in one's relationships. Ultimately, the reason why these quarrels exist is because a friend of the world has his or her eyes on themselves instead of on God. James points this out by suggesting that this man's passions are at war within him. The Greek word for "passion"

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[2] Just as the untamed tongue is set on fire by the fires of hell (v. 6), James mentions the source of earthly wisdom as being from the demons.

is the "source of the English word 'hedonism,'"[3] which tells us that James is describing one who has an eye out for their own sinful self-indulgent gratification. The apostle Peter elaborates on this same theme in his first epistle, "Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul" (1 Pet 2:11). A friend of the world is first and foremost a friend of the self.

Verse 2 begins a series of two brushstrokes that James uses to paint an even further detailed pictured of a friend of the world.[4] First, he states that when the friend of the world desires something and is unable to obtain it, he is willing to commit murder to receive his desire. While hyperbolic in nature, what James seeks to do by suggesting that his reader's desires can lead to murder, is state exaggeratedly that man's unmet selfish desires can lead to disastrous results. Robert Wall suggests that there is a strong connection being played out here by James with the story of Cain and Abel.[5] The jealousy that Cain experienced over Abel burned so passionately within him, that the end result was a bloody rock in his hand and his deceased brother lying on the ground beneath him. A better connection to make, however, is with the teaching of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount where He declares, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment" (Matt. 5:21-

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[3] Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, *James*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2008), 187.

[4] It is important to note that there is a translation issue regarding punctuation happening in this verse. In my opinion, it is better to translate this verse as is presented in the ESV. Others, like the KJV and NIV, use a three-clause structure, while a more appropriate structure should use two clauses. For more information, see Douglas J. Moo. *The Letter of James*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 181-82.

[5] Robert W. Wall, *Community of the Wise: The Letter of James* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 196-97.

22a). It is clear with this connection that James's goal is to get his audience to understand that the internal turmoil within themselves will ultimately boil over into external turmoil.[6]

While the first clause of verse 2 deals primarily with the misplaced desires of physical items in this world, James moves to focus on the envy a friend of the world fosters over the achievements of other people.[7] We often yearn for the lives we see others living around us, and in doing so we fight and quarrel with one another.[8] We sacrifice our relationships for something we believe will bring us closer to feeling better about our own lives. The inner heart of man longs for something to fill its deepest desires, and too often man strives to fill those desires with something that this world tries to offer. We see others and think to ourselves, "If only I had that in my life, then I would be happy." Our desires brew and rage within us until we are ready to do whatever it takes to obtain it. To condense this further, a friend of the world is also one who tries to find fulfillment in the things of this earth.

The last statement of verse 2, combined with verse 3, quickly moves from focusing on the anger birthed out of jealousy and envy to an explanation as to why these individuals do not have what they believe would fulfill them. James correctly points out to his audience that their desires have not been met because their desires are misplaced. Instead of yearning to know God more, these people are yearning to indulge themselves; therefore, the people do not have what fulfills them because they are not asking for what

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[6] Daniel M. Doriani, *James*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 131.

[7] BDAG seems to make this distinction with the Greek word ζηλόω, which James uses in the second clause, as opposed to his prior use of ἐπιθυμία. The definition of ζηλόω is "to have intense negative feelings over another's achievements or success." Arndt, Danker, and Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, "ζηλόω."

[8] Looking at the semantic range of the Greeks word μάχη, Doriani says that "The word 'fights' can refer to physical violence, but in the New Testament it usually refers to verbal conflicts or internal struggles." Doriani, *James*, 131.

would truly fill their spirits. When they do ask God for something, their request is made at the behest of their own sinful desires as a means to gratify their own lusts for this life, instead of asking as a means of glorifying their creator.

James's discussion on this subject is not new to him. "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened" (Matt. 7:7-8). In this Scripture, Jesus makes the same point as James—that prayer is effective when the one praying is petitioning the Lord for His Wisdom and His will, not one's own selfish yearnings. H.A. Ironside describes well what a faithful petition to the Lord looks like, "True prayer is not asking God to do what we want, but first of all it is asking Him to enable us to do that which He would have us do."[9] Too often the prayers of believers revolve around their perceived needs, whereas true prayer revolves around petitioning the Lord for His will and wisdom to be displayed in their lives.[10] Our Lord shows us this when teaching the disciples how to pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done" (Matt. 6:9b-10). It is the wisdom and will of God that should be the motivating factor in prayer, not one's selfishness.

This leads James to his direct condemnation of the double-minded friend of the world. Intending to catch his readers attention, James emphatically calls his readers adulterers. Calling the people of God "adulterers" is not uncommon in the Biblical text and often can be found in the message of the major and minor prophets. As the people of Israel turned away from Yahweh and pointed their affections toward the lifeless gods of

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[9] H. A. Ironside, *Hebrews, James, Peter* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1947), 43.

[10] Scot McKnight rightly points out that "Wise church leaders know the fine line between wanting what God wants and wanting what they want; the teachers in James's community had erased that line and were now well beyond it." Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 331.

the world, the prophets appropriately likened their actions to adultery. In the writings of the prophet of Jeremiah, the Lord lamented over the waywardness of His people, "Oh that I had in the desert a traveler's lodging place, that I might leave my people and go away from them! For they are all adulterers, a company of treacherous men" (Jer 9:2). Furthermore, the book of Hosea pictures the nation of Israel as a woman of whoredom, who continually seeks the comfort of other men. In the Old Testament, Israel had become an adulterer who sought meaning and belonging in the arms of inanimate objects. This idea broadens in the New Testament with the imagery of the church becoming the bride of Christ (2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:22-33; Rev 21). The marriage of the church to her groom, Christ, finds its climax in Revelation 19 when the angels of God exclaim proudly, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give Him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His Bride has made herself ready" (Rev 19:6b-7). Therefore, with the church as the bride of Christ, any subsequent submission outside of Him should be likened to adultery, which is exactly what James seeks to point out.

James follows this by equating friendship with the world to animosity toward the Lord. Not only are these people defiling the marriage relationship between Christ and His people, now they are referred to as direct enemies of God. Friendship, in James's view, "is much more than casual acquaintance in that genuine friends are both sought after and restricted in number. Friendship involves commitment to one another, fidelity, and the expectation of mutual instruction for mutual moral development."[11] Friendship, in this sense of the word, implies more than a simple acquaintance or label on social media but implies personal loyalty and devotion. Therefore, to claim friendship with the world, means pledging loyalty to the world and its values. As Jesus says in Matthew 6:24, "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he

[11] McKnight, *The Letter of James*, 333.

will be devoted to the one and despise the other." Individuals must choose friendship with the world or friendship with God—man cannot have it both ways. For as James says, "Friendship with the world is enmity with God" (Jas 4:4), which also reinforces the idea that friendship with God is enmity with the world.[12]

With the decision of where one's friendship lies lingering in the minds of his readers, James concludes his section on friendship with the world on a hopeful note. Notoriously difficult to interpret, verses 5 and 6 suggests that in the life of a believer God provides enough grace to oppose friendship with the world and grace enough to lean heavily on the love and mercy of God. While we cannot be certain of our interpretations concerning these scriptures, it makes sense to follow the NET's translation of 5b that states "the spirit that God caused to live within us has an envious yearning" (Jas 4:5b).[13] This makes sense because James will go on to speak about the grace given to the humble to overcome such envy from the world.

In verse 5 James speaks of mankind as having an envious spirit that yearns for the things of this world.[14] Truer words have never been spoken. The world is an

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[12] Previously, James referred to Abraham as a "friend of God" (2:23), noting that his faith and works aligned with the will of God in his own life. A friend, then, is one who not only believes the right things but allows his or her faith to impact the way he or she lives in the world. One who is friends with God will models works that glorify God, while the one who is friends with the world will model works for the world.

[13] There is no major agreement on the subject of these verses, which has led to several different options being presented: God's jealousy for the spirit of His people, the Holy Spirit yearns jealously, and the spirit of mankind leaning toward jealousy. With this being said, I will assume that the subject of these verses is the human spirit which is naturally envious.

[14] No direct Bible passage can be found for the quote that James provides in the latter half of verse 5. One solution to this problem would be to suggest that James is referring to a piece of Scripture that is now lost, another would be to suggest that James is simply editorializing some other piece of Scripture. The best view, according to Christopher W. Morgan and Dale B. Ellenburg, is to "understand James to be using his own paraphrased form on an Old Testament reference." Christopher W. Morgan and B.

extremely effective temptress, luring mankind with her siren song. Man's common temptation suggests, if only man submits to the world, it will provide all that is needed for his satisfaction. Yet those longings can never be filled by the world, since man was created to glorify the Creator in all aspects of life. The spirit within man was created not to envy the world or its friendship; rather, mankind was intended to delight in the glory of God. Luckily, verse 6 tells mankind that God is loving enough to provide man with grace enough to look past what the world offers and instead look towards what God gives.[15]

Grace is given to those who, instead of befriending the world, turn in subjection to the Lord. While an envious spirit is still present within all of mankind, to those who turn to God, He bestows grace to turn man's spirit toward Him. Sophie Laws eloquently states that "the spirit should naturally turn its desire to God, and God's response to it is one of expansive graciousness or benevolence."[16] For those who befriend the world pride becomes a mainstay; however, the humble look beyond themselves onto the glorious grace that is given to any who call upon the Lord in faith. To highlight his point, James quotes the Septuagint's translation of Proverbs 3:34, in which God opposes the prideful and shows grace to the humble. The apostle John writes similarly, "For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world" (1 John 2:16).

Through verses 1-6, James's point has been clear: a friend of the world is marked by quarrels, fights, sinful passions, covetousness, envy, and pride. Further, the

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Dale Ellenburg, *James: Wisdom for the Community* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2008), 147.

[15] According to McKnight (*The Letter of James*, 340), mankind has "within them a divinely-planted spirit that (un)naturally craves for envy and the goodness is that God is there to supplant those cravings with His grace."

[16] Sophie Laws, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1980), 180.

friend of the world is not simply apathetic towards God, but James suggests that befriending the world is an act of animosity toward God. Mankind cannot have it both ways—they must choose either to align themselves with God or with the world.

Friendship with God (4:7-10)

In this next passage James infers the question lingering on the minds of his readers: "How then can I forego my friendship with the world and instead become a friend to God?"[17] To describe what a friendship with the world looks like, James lists off a series of commands for those who yearn to be called a friend of God. Craig Blomberg and Mariam Kamell suggest that these few verses are James's remedy for friendship with the world.[18] These commentators go on to propose that there are "no less than ten commands to obey" here in verse 7 through 10.[19] While entire sermons can be written on each of these commands, it will do us well in this setting to quickly summarize each point being made by James.[20] Finally, in verse 10 we will look at the means by which a believer can move forward in this relationship.

Verse 7 begins with a two-fold command to submit to God and resist the Devil. Submitting to God is not only the beginning of wisdom, but it is the means by which mankind can find solidarity with God.[21] The commentator Ralph Martin suggests

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[17] Referencing one's friendship with God, Motyer says "The Bible, as so often, not only tells us what is true but also how to respond to what is true." J. A. Motyer, *The Message of James*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1985), 151.

[18] Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 193.

[19] Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 150.

[20] McKnight presents a very compelling structure to James's discussion. He presents v. 7a as the main subject, followed by three pairs of commands (7b and 8a, 8b and 8c, 9a and 9b), with v. 10 being the conclusion. McKnight, *The Letter of James*, 345.

[21] The author of Proverbs points out that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov 9:10).

that submission implies humility, which would mean that verses 7 and 10 serve as bookends and the main theme of this section of Scripture.[22] Therefore, the means by which a believer leaves a friendship with the world and finds themselves near God is through the process of humbling oneself before God

Submission to an outside authority requires that man understands who ultimately stands above him. When believers submit to God, they take the authority out of their own hands, away from the Devil, and place it in the hands of God. Paul furthers this idea of submission in the book of Romans where he likens believers to slaves, who must either submit their members to sinfulness (i.e. the Devil) or to righteousness (i.e. God).[23] When one runs toward God in humble submission, James assures his readers that in turn the Devil will flee from them. Friendship with God, therefore, begins with humbling oneself to God and submitting oneself to the will and power of God.

Verse 8 gives the readers three commands, one of which calls the reader to a closer walk with the Lord and two of which call the reader to a life of purity. Drawing near to God is an act done by a believer in which they recognize their utter need for God. It is the decision by the individual to look to God for His will above their own. It is the choice that a believer makes to put God first and submit all other things to Him.[24] When the believer does this, he is assured that God will draw near to him. A growing relationship is mutual; believers must pursue God while He pursues them.

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[22] Ralph P. Martin, *James*, WBC, vol. 48 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 152.

[23] See Paul's discussion in chapter 6 concerning the Greek term δοῦλος. Of particular interest is v. 19: "For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification."

[24] In writing concerning a believer's faithful submission to the Lord, Scot McKnight writes "Drawing near to God, then, is about a person's inner repentant disposition of vulnerability to God's will." McKnight, *The Letter of James*, 350.

The second set of imperatives call for purity of the hands and hearts of believers. Douglas Moo suggests that the commands to "wash your hands" and "purify your hearts" is a further unpacking of James's command to draw near to God. "Together, they call for a radical repentance that embraces the total person."[25] Drawing near to God also implies that one is shedding the sin that has covered him for so long. While we know that Christ has already paid the price for our justification, until we see God, we will be in a state that is still filled with sin. James's dynamic call to the sinner[26] and double minded,[27] is to rid themselves of the sins by which they so often continue to clothe themselves. A friend of God sees sin for what it is—an act of rebellion toward God. Therefore, to draw near to God is to throw away the means by which man rebels against God and instead submits in humility to the Lord of the universe.

Verse 9 moves the letter forward by giving the command to be "wretched" and "mourn." These two terms are often absent from the vocabulary of many evangelicals today, as mourning is often perceived as a negative attribute. However, James is not alone in lifting up the position of the one who mourns. Jesus says in Matthew 5:4, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." To be mournful, in James's perspective, is not some sort of colorless outlook on life; rather, the Christian is to mourn their sinful state[28] relying continually on the strength of God to sustain them. In Psalm

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[25] Moo, *The Letter of James*, 194.

[26] This is the first of two times that James will use the label "sinners." Here, a sinner is likened to one who is a friend of the world.

[27] James previously used this term in 1:8 in reference to the double-minded man who displays instability by doubting God. Here, James refines this term to refer to the man who wants to be a friend of God while at the same time keeping his allegiances to the world. Ralph P. Martin, *James*, WBC, vol. 48 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 154.

[28] D. A. Carson suggests, "Weeping for sins can be deeply poignant and cover a global as well as personal view of sin and our participation in it." D. A. Carson,

119:134-136, the psalmist exclaims, “Redeem me from man’s oppression, that I may keep your precepts. Make your face shine upon your servant, and teach me your statues. My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law.” Mourning, in James’s estimation, refers to the utter dependence man has on God to not only forgive sins but to survive the temptation to sin in the first place. Believers are called to mourn their utter sinfulness in light of a righteous and holy God.

In a similar thought, James extols his readers to turn their laughter and joy into mourning and gloom. In the Old Testament, laughter is often pictured as coming from the unwise man who lives his life apart from God’s wisdom. “So is the laughter of the fools; this also is vanity” (Eccl 7:6). Laughter is not pictured here in Ecclesiastes and in James as a glee filled experience, but one of haughty pride over and against the wisdom and omnipotence of the Lord. The psalmist picks up this picture of the laughing fool in Psalm 14:1: “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good.” The friend of God is no fool, for he knows where true wisdom and life lay, within the gracious arms of God. Paul lays out an example of this type of mourning for our sinfulness in 1 Timothy 1:15 where he asserts, “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.” Believers, therefore, are called to mourn their sinful state before God.

The final bookend of James’s series of commands ends in a very similar way to which it began—a call toward humility. To be a friend of God, one must humble himself before the Lord. To humble oneself means to assign yourself lower importance than others. Therefore, humility before God is a recognition that God is god and man is not.

Matthew, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, *Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 133.

James's call for individual humility resulting in exaltation by God is not new to the Christian understanding; Jesus's teaching once again, serves as the basis for a large portion of James's speaking (Matt 18:4; Luke 18:14). In Matthew 23:12, Jesus similarly says, "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." If one takes a canonical look at this issue, it will become quite apparent that the exaltation of the lowly is a vast concept within the pages of Scripture. Whether it is the lowly shepherd boy David who is given the keys to the Kingdom of Israel or the lowly shepherd boy on the Judean hillside who is gifted with the pronouncement that the Messiah has been born in Bethlehem, often God exalts the lowly for His own glory (Deut 7:6-8; Job 5:11; Ezek 17:24). In a similar way, the one who approaches the throne of grace with humility will be exalted. A true friend of God recognizes his place before God and the grace that has been given reconciling him to God.

Conclusion

A choice must be made by all mankind. Who are you going to associate with? Are you going to be known by your kinship with the world, or will the world look at you as a friend of God? There is no middle ground here, and there is no third option. Believers have been called to leave their friendship with the world behind, and instead be known by their close ties with the Lord. They have been called to submit themselves under the authority and will of God by walking humbly with Him.

For those who cling to what the world can offer, James promises nothing but strife and quarrels. To claim friendship with God yet at the same time flocking back to the world is nothing short of adultery. As the Bride of Christ, the church has been called to be faithful to its first love. It is the love of Christ that binds the church together and brings mankind to the satisfaction and peace that it desires. Therefore, the call of the believer is to draw near in humble submission to the one who is worthy of our friendship.

CHAPTER 8

DON'T ABANDON SHIP: JAMES 5:7-10

The movie *Just Mercy*, based on the book with the same name, is a film full of many great themes to explore including patience during rising oppression and strife. In this true story, Bryan Stevenson is a fresh young African American attorney from Delaware who moves to the South, an area still trying to progress past the Jim Crow era. After meeting and agreeing to represent Walter McMillian, an African American man falsely accused of murder, Bryan finds himself facing a new host of challenges he had never seen before. His access to records and testimonies were denied simply on the basis of the color of his skin. His safety in his home was compromised repeatedly by individuals who saw him as a nuisance to their community. Yet still, even with all the obstacles mounting in front of him, Bryan Stevenson remained patient. Given every opportunity to quit and jump ship, Bryan remained faithful to his commitment to see a falsely accused man released back to his family. Eventually Bryan's patience and persistence paid off as the justice system finally progressed past their previous biases and declared the innocence of a wrongly convicted man.

With mounting oppression facing this new Christian community, many in James's audience no doubt felt the temptation to take matters into their own hands or maybe even to just jump ship altogether. It is for this reason, nearing the conclusion of his epistle, James directs his readers to look at their trials once again, this time pleading for them to exhibit patience in waiting for the Lord to bring judgment upon their oppressors.

Instead of focusing on their suffering, James calls his readers to look upon the Lord and eagerly anticipate the day when He will come again as both judge and jury to

exact true justice here on earth. Until that day comes, believers can find solace in knowing that not only will God bring judgment upon their wicked oppressors, but He will also display mercy and compassion toward those who humble themselves before Him. In the midst of injustice and strife, believers are to patient for the Lord's coming. When the Judge appears, He will bring true justice for His people. In the meantime, believers should wait patiently for the compassion and mercy of the Lord.

Exegesis

Patient for Justice (5:7-8)

Cries for justice can be heard all around us. Whether it be a family experiencing the loss of a child in a car accident with a drunk driver or the impoverished living in North Korea who have yet to know a government for the people. Mankind longs for justice. We see the many wrongs in our world, so we yearn for a day when the wrongs will be made right and justice will prevail over the earth. This raises the question: What does justice look like? Is true justice taking matters into your own hands, acting as a modern-day Robin Hood? Or is justice some form of government that defines and punishes any type of wrongdoing? Approaching the end of his letter, James addresses the rising calls for justice in his world with yet another tough pill to swallow—be patient.

Immediately preceding these verses, James has just castigated the rich for their selfish nature in regard to the way in which they use their wealth. Verse 5 summarizes these wealthy individuals quite poignantly: "You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter" (Jas 5:5). The rich have been a prime subject of James's words of condemnation throughout his epistle so far, where 5:1-6 serves as his capstone.[1] The riches of the wealthy have not only caused

[1] Douglas Moo points out five areas in James where the rich are pointed out for their wrongdoing: 1:9-11, 27; 2:5-7, 15-16; 4:13-17. Douglas J. Moo, *James: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 210.

self-harm, but, according to James, they have inflicted injustice against the poor and needy. With this injustice in mind, James begins verse 7 with an imperative as he implores his readers to "be patient."

Empathizing with the oppressed Christian believers, James once again calls his readers "brethren."[2] By doing this, James aligns himself with their cause, empathizing with their pain. Hearing the calls for justice against their rich oppressors and in light of the second coming of Christ, James begins his dialogue with a call for patience.

James, along with the other New Testament writers, use the Greek word παρουσία (parousia) to identify the second coming of the Lord. According to Dan McCartney, the term is generally used in the Greek language outside of the Bible to refer "to the presence or arrival of a royal or official personage, such as a king."[3] It makes sense then that the New Testament writers would use this type of vocabulary to refer to the second coming of Jesus, their own king, who promised to come again to enact judgement and justice upon the world.[4] The call pressed upon the hearts of these believers by James is to wait patiently for the coming of their King who will judge their oppressors.

It may seem tempting for the oppressed, who often feel the need to take justice into their own hands, to rise up against their oppressor. However, James suggests that an even better justice is on its way through the second coming of Jesus Christ. Craig

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[2] James addresses his readers as brethren fourteen different times in his epistles, three of which can be found in 5:7-10; see 1:2, 16, 19; 2:1, 14; 3:1, 10, 12; 4:11; 5:7, 9, 10, 12, 19.

[3] Dan G. McCartney, *James*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 240-41.

[4] Scot McKnight suggests that "the *parousia* is the act of God on earth in judgment against the disobedient (oppressors) that entails, probably, vindication for the righteous, poor, and obedient." Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 407.

Blomberg and Mariam Kamell summarize this well when they write, “The only perfect comfort that people can find in the midst of injustice is the realization that God will bring complete justice in his own time.”[5]

The Old Testament serves as further proof for James that judgement is the Lord’s and that there will be a day when perfect justice will be served. Moses writes accordingly of the Lord: “Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and their doom comes swiftly” (Deut 32:35). The psalmist also brings this point into view: “Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil. For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land. In just a little while, the wicked will be no more” Pss (37:9-10a). When Jesus comes on the scene, He proclaims that He is the one who will bring that ultimate judgment and vengeance against the evil ones. In fact, in the Olivet Discourse recorded by the disciple Matthew, Jesus tells His followers that the Son of Man will once again come in glory to sit on the throne of God in judgment (Matt 25:31-46). His second coming is not one of diplomacy or democracy; rather, His *parousia* will be marked by justice against the wicked. Therefore, James insists that his readers not take matters into their own hands, but that they wait patiently for the Lord’s coming.[6]

To illustrate the need to be patient for the Lord’s second coming, James looks to the field of agriculture. Living in an agrarian setting, James’s readers would have understood his illustration of the patient farmer well. In this illustration, James highlights the patience of the farmer who must wait for the earth to yield fruit in it’s own time (Jas

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[5] Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, *James*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2008), 226.

[6] It is important to note that the New Testament authors spoke about expectant waiting. The Lord’s second coming is immediate.

5:7). After the seed is planted, the farmer is wholly dependent on the Lord to produce a fruitful yield. Farmers in James's day had no access to modern-day fertilizers or insect repellents but were dependent upon the Lord to bring about a bountiful harvest. The farmer was also dependent upon the Lord to bring the proper rains needed to cultivate a good crop.

Commenting on the farmer's diligence in waiting, James uses the phrase "being patient about it, until it receives early and late rains" (Jas 5:7). Reference to the early and late rains was a common method used in the Old Testament to highlight God's provision for Israel. The prophet Joel gives a great example of this feature when he writes, "Be glad, O children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God for he has given the early rain for your vindication; he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the latter rain, as before. The threshing floors shall be full of grain; the vats shall overflow with wine and oil" (Joel 2:23-24).

What the biblical authors, like Joel, seek to show by using this phrase is that all life is sustained by the loving provision of God.[7] Translating this imagery into James's illustration, we come to see that just like any farmer must wait for the germination and flowering of their crop, so too must the oppressed believers wait upon the true justice of the Lord at His second coming. In the meantime, believers are urged to "wait well,"[8] knowing that the harvest will arrive soon and judgment will be passed down onto the wicked.

James wraps up his first point by calling his readers to "establish your heart." The Greek term used is the word στηρίζω (*sterizo*), which carries the idea of firmly

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[7] See also Deut 11:14; Jer 5:24; Hos 6:3.

[8] Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 227.

establishing something.[9] This is the same word used by Luke when he describes Jesus "setting His face toward Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51), which illustrates His firm commitment to travel to Jerusalem for His final time. James's call for the believers in his community is to set their hearts upon the second coming of the Lord, knowing that when He comes again, Christ will bring true justice to the oppressed.

Patient for the Waiting Judge (5:9)

What would the television show Judge Judy be without Judge Judy? What is justice without a judge to administer it? As the day approaches where Jesus will come in the *parousia* as the Judge, James continues his writing on godly patience by imploring his readers not to grumble against one another. Jim Samra notes, "One of the greatest temptations during times of trial and suffering is to grumble and complain against others . . . instead of waiting for the Lord to bring help, it is easier to look around for others to blame."[10] People have a unique ability to turn on one another when patience wears thin. James implores his readers to act in patient love toward one another seeing that soon Jesus will arrive as Judge over all mankind (Rom 2:16; 2 Cor 5:10; 2 Tim 4:1; Jas 5:9).

James's words of wisdom toward this community of believers comes at a time when they are feeling the heat of oppression. For many in James's audience their circumstances were tough. It could have been easy to become impatient with the Lord's coming and begin groaning against their neighbor. Scot McKnight summarizes this temptation by saying,

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[9] BDAG suggests two main definitions: to fix firmly in a place or to cause to be inwardly firm/committed. William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. "στηρίζω."

[10] Jim Samra, *James, 1 & 2 Peter, and Jude*, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016), 78.

> One must imagine that the oppressive conditions led to the temptation not only to violence but also to turning against others (and God). Oppression leads to consternation and the yearning desire to find a way out. James knows this so he counsels the messianic community not to let their anger turn to grumbling, wrathful violence, yearning to climb over one another.[11]

When life seems hopeless and difficulties continue to mount, often anger and criticism begin to show their ugly heads. James calls his readers to deny that temptation to grumble against one another.

Grumbling often serves as a sign of discontent. This can be seen clearly in the wilderness journey of the Israelites after they fled Egypt.[12] As the people of God progressed further from the Exodus event, their patience began to turn into impatience, which led to grumbling against God and His anointed ones.[13] Their hope of the future Promised Land seemed to vanish behind the curtain of their discontent for the present circumstances. Similarly, James seeks to caution his readers against using their discontent for the present circumstances as validation for their griping attitudes directed towards their neighbor.

The fundamental problem James has with grumbling against one's neighbor is twofold. First, grumbling against one's neighbor violates the "law of liberty." Previously in 2:8 James commended those who fulfilled the command to love one another given in Leviticus 19:18 and in Matthew 22:39. It is this law, termed by James as the "law of liberty" or "royal law," that calls believers to live out their love for God through love for

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[11] McKnight, *The Letter of James*, 414.

[12] In reference to Israel's wandering, the ESV translates the Hebrew word לון as "grumble" in the following passages: Exod 15:24; 16:2, 7, 8, 9, 12; 17:3; Num 14:2, 27, 29, 36; 16:11, 41; 17:5, 10.

[13] Seeing the connection to Israel, Wall states that "In the wilderness tradition, the people's complaint signifies the rejection of God's promise of land and a desire to retreat back into the creature comforts and material securities of Egypt." Robert W. Wall, *Community of the Wise: The Letter of James* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 257.

their neighbor. This necessarily means that grumbling against one's neighbor is a violation against this law, since grumbling against one's neighbor is a form of passing judgment (Jas 4:11-12).

Second, by grumbling against one's neighbor, individuals put themselves in the place of Christ as judge over mankind. Previously, in 4:11-12, James has illustrated the severity of speaking ill of another brother by suggesting that when Christians judge other believers, not only are they casting judgment on the individual, but they are also lifting themselves up as the lawgiver and the judge, a place reserved only for God.

> Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor? (Jas 4:11-12).

This act of judgement is reserved for Christ.[14] When believers gripe and complain against their fellow believers, they are attempting to take his judgment into their own hands.[15]

The judge is at the door, so instead of assuming the role of God, believers are encouraged to wait eagerly for the coming day when final judgment will be handed down by the one true judge.[16] Readers of this epistle must wait patiently for the coming of the Lord and not allow their present circumstances to lure them into breaking the "law of

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[14] Jesus condemned judging one another during his ministry (see Matt 7:1-2; Luke 6:37) and urged his hearers to allow Him, as the true judge (John 5:22, 27, 30; 8:16, 26; Acts 10:42), to hand down true justice to mankind.

[15] In this passage, believers are warned that by violating the "royal law" and usurping the role of Christ as judge, along with sinners, they too will be judged according to the life they lived on earth.

[16] Moo (*The Letter of James*, 225) suggests that James may be playing off of Jesus's words to the disciples in Matthew 22:33. In this passage, Jesus emphasizes the nearness of the Son of Man by suggesting that he is at the gates about to enter into the world. The imminence and proximity of His arrival should spur believers to hold off on passing judgment until the one true judge comes.

liberty," thusly usurping Christ's role as judge. For it is only at the *parousia* when court will be in session and the judge will hand out justice to all mankind.

Patient like the Prophets (5:10-11)

James begins his last push for patience amidst suffering in verse 10, by urging his readers to remember the work of the prophets of the Old Testament. With great respect for the authority and message of the prophets, James's Jewish audience would have been encouraged by their association with these men of old in their effort to press on in faithful patience. Luke Timothy Johnson makes this point in his commentary saying, "The very experience of such persecution helps solidify the community's sense of being in the line of the true prophets who also suffered."[17]

Using the prophets as an example of endurance in suffering, James points to these great men who stood firm in their faith, waiting patiently for the Lord, even while at times it seemed like the whole world wanted to erase them. Readers are then encouraged to remember the faithfulness of men like Elijah and Daniel. If Elijah stood firm even after running for his life from Jezebel, so too can these believers patiently endure their own oppression. If Daniel was able to wait patiently for his salvation in the lion's den, so too can these believers endure the darkness of their own persecution. The prophets serve as an example of suffering and patience.They trusted in God, His timing, and His plan, rather than hoping for earthly justice.

Serving God does not secure one a life of freedom from suffering, as is evident in the life of the prophets—in fact, it often means that more suffering will follow. In light of this reality, James seeks to "underscore the worthiness of patience and to strengthen his community by showing it that indeed patience is a characteristic common to all those

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[17] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYBC (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 319.

who have walked on this earth and served God."[18] Shared suffering stimulates faithful service. The audience of this epistle can look to these men of old who likewise walked the path of adversity, yet through the grace of God they were strengthened to endure until the end. If they could withstand such persecution, so too can the oppressed of James's day.[19]

Patience in suffering is not easy, but James wants to encourage his readers to remain long-suffering as they walk the road of the Christian life. Referring again to the Sermon on the Mount, James picks up on the language of blessedness from Jesus as he reminds his readers of the position of blessedness reserved for those who remain steadfast in their faith. In Matthew 5:11-12 Jesus teaches the crowd, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Blessedness for James,[20] like Jesus in the previous passage, is not a state of happiness, but refers primarily to the relationship a believer is able to enjoy with the Savior. When believers clinging tightly to faith, even when trials seek to knock them away from that relationship with God, blessed is the one who stays true to the foundation of his faith.

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[18] Ralph P. Martin, *James*, WBC, vol. 48 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 193.

[19] Likening believers today with the prophets of old, Scot McKnight says, "Their message [the prophets] brought them suffering, and in that suffering they patiently awaited God's vindication. Hence prophets, who are everywhere esteemed and held out as God's special instruments are examples for the oppressed poor of the messianic community because, though much esteemed, they, too, suffered." McKnight, *The Letter of James*, 417-18.

[20] James previously elaborated on the state of blessedness of the one who remains steadfast in 1:12. This, along with other connections to patience during trials, is one reason why it seems possible that the theme of patience serves as two bookends for James's entire epistle.

In verse 11, James switches his focus from "patience" (μακρόθυμος) to "steadfastness" (ὑπομονή). While the words are very similar, some scholars, like Luke Timothy Johnson, see a subtle difference between them. For Johnson, μακρόθυμος (*makrothumos*) refers generally to "the active adoption of an attitude of 'forbearance' and 'putting up with' another."[21] In other words, this is a patience that generally deals with other people. On the other hand, ὑπομονή (*hypomone*), according to Johnson, refers to the patience needed for trudging through the difficult events of life. In other words, this is a patience that deals with external trials. While these differences might seem minimal and do not convey an entirely different message, using these two terms helps transition believers to look at the proper measure of patience they must acquire when life throws them a wrench.

With this subtle transition of words in place, James moves to his last example of patience by focusing his attention on Job. In the book bearing his name, Job experiences a whole host of external trials. From skin lesions, to financial ruin, and even his entire family passing away, Job has always been seen as a man of great suffering, but was he actually patient during his suffering? Ralph Martin notes that, "on the surface, it is not clear why Job is chosen to exemplify patience in suffering. He was anything but an example of a godly person who was patient in the midst of suffering . . . ; rather he was one who complained bitterly to God."[22] However, what James seeks to show through the example of Job is not that he never complained or questioned the plan of God, but that even through all of his suffering, Job endured in his faith.[23] This is where James's

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[21] Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 313.

[22] Martin (*James*, 194) notes the seeming contradiction in calling James patient but finally concludes that James uses Job as an example of someone who endured in faith until the end.

[23] The extrabiblical work *The Testament of Job* recounts the life of Job and in doing so often comments on the patience of Job. For this reason, there are some who

transition to the Greek word ὑπομονή (*hypomone*) comes into play. Job is a stellar example of a man who, even though the world came crashing down around him, remained steadfast in his commitment to the Lord.[24] He did not allow his suffering to destroy his faith in the Lord. At the end of his trials, Job repented, and the Lord blessed Job by returning all of his fortune and giving him a new family to enjoy. Blessedness, then, is reserved for those who patiently endure in the name of the Lord who is compassionate and merciful towards his faithful followers.

Conclusion

When James began this epistle in 1:2, he told his audience to "count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds" (Jas 1:2). In this statement, James comes just short of promising that trials will come to anyone who follows after Christ. This assurance of trials is further refined and elaborated upon here in 5:7-11, where James pleads that his readers refrain from taking justice into their own hands; instead, they should wait patiently for the Lord who brings justice to the wicked and compassion to the humble of heart.

Christ as judge stands at the door, ready to enter at any moment. As Jesus stated himself, "You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."[25] Believers are encouraged to remain patiently faithful during suffering and affliction, knowing that one day soon Christ will come and set things right. He is faithful to His Word, so set your face upon the Lord and wait patiently for His glory to be

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believe that *The Testament of Job* could have been in the background of James's mind when using Job as an example of patience. However, as noted above, James seems to be using Job as an example of one enduring in faith rather than a one who simply maintains a patient attitude.

[24] See Job 42:1-6.

[25] Matt 24:44.

revealed. For on that day, believers will be vindicated and Christ will be lifted up in eternity.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

Preaching the Word faithfully means allowing Scripture to interpret itself. The pursuit of biblical theology seeks to do just that. In biblical theology the faithful student of God's Word seeks to view Scripture within the scope of the entire canon and storyline of God's redemption of mankind. When a preacher or student of the Bible comes to the text with a contemporary lens before regarding its historical and biblical theological context, the reader is in a dangerous position to make wrong assumptions of the text and fails to allow God's Word to portray itself as it was intended. Biblical theology, therefore, is the means by which readers stay true to the inspired story of God's relationship to mankind.

For the students of Faith Bible Church, the book of James serves as an important reminder that faith without works is dead (Jas 2:26). While Edmond's culture often assumes Christian faith as a cultural norm, students should see in James's epistle that a living faith should cause one to live differently in the world. Through his repetitive use of illustrations and terse statements, students are encouraged to allow their faith to continually produce in them a life that glorifies God.

James, in the writing of his epistle, was dependent upon much of the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament for his writing. The books of Psalms and Proverbs play an important role in understanding the aim and features of James's epistle. The short, poetic discourse of James mimics the same flow and train of thought found throughout Psalms and Proverbs. James's teaching on godly living also correlates to the same teaching found in these two Old Testament books.

While James was the first epistle of the New Testament to be written, this does not mean that he is without influence from other New Testament sources. In fact, James is influenced greatly by his brother's Sermon on the Mount. Being a discourse on Kingdom living, Jesus's sermon laid the groundwork for James's further elaboration on what it looks like for a believer to allow their faith to impact the way they live in the world around them.

As James indicates, faith in Christ is meant to change the whole person. From the way one speaks to the way one acts, Christ has called believers to a new life of Kingdom living for the glory of God. While it can be easy for a believer to assume their faith, ultimately a faith that is assumed and not lived out is a faith that has been forgotten. In the end, James serves the reader of God's Word well, as believers are called to "be doers of the Word, and not hearers only" (Jas 1:22).

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ABSTRACT

PREACHING FAITH SEEN THROUGH WORKS TO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AT FAITH BIBLE CHURCH IN EDMOND, OKLAHOMA

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Brian J. Vickers

This project is series of seven sermons in the book of James which seeks to exposit selected Scriptures in light of biblical theology. James was an extremely effective communicator, who used vivid illustrations to drive home his point that the Christian faith is a working faith. While salvation for James was dependent on faith, true saving faith is evidenced through the fruits of a believer's life.

Through continual use of the wisdom literature and the teachings of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount, James shows the reader of this epistle that faith was never meant to be an isolated ideology in the life of a believer. Instead, faith serves as the catalyst for living a life in honor of the Lord. Therefore, the believer's call is to hear the Word of God and live out their life in submission to Him, for without works, faith is void of all life.

VITA

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