

James 25-08-10a

Greetings. Welcome to the Sunday morning services here at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 10th of August, 2025.

We're in the book of James chapter one and have come to this section that is perhaps the most quoted, the most famous, the most thematic in terms of what people think of when they think of this book. And that is be doers of the word and not hearers only. What is the means by which we can fulfill this command and in so doing fulfill the royal law? Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and study and we'll begin.

Father, what a privilege it is to spend this time together in sharing our enthusiasm for the truth that we find in your word, the example of the Lord Jesus, his teaching, his embodiment of that word of truth, and the opportunity we have to represent him to enter into that same level of integration with your plans and purposes to be a part of your ongoing work of salvation and deliverance and renewal, both individually and collectively. We pray that as we look at this portion of your word together, that your Holy Spirit will help us to understand it and to remember it at the point of application so that we can truly fulfill this wonderful exhortation to make application of what we learn from you. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. This section of the New Testament, this book of Jacob or James, is so compact that to look at any one portion, we have to constantly step back a bit and look at the context. It is similar, and he's going to use the example of looking into the mirror to see what you look like.

We seldom get the mirror up so close that we only see one little part of our face. You can do this if you're trying to find a splinter or get something out of your eye, but normally we're looking at the whole picture. We want to see, does our outfit match? Did the makeup get applied evenly? Did we miss a spot when we shaved? Whatever it might be, every different part, every component is looked at in relation to the rest.

We have been doing this as we go through this first chapter of James, and it is so important to do so, especially as it relates to the roots of this teaching, the emphasis that God places on it. It is found a lot more than just here. So in looking at it, you can remember all the way back to verse two, the trials, the tribulations that we face, and to consider it all joy.

We saw that reiterated in verse 12, blessed is the man who endures under testing, under temptation. Don't get distracted. Don't start thinking that God is persecuting us or putting us to the test and tempting us to evil.

Uh, the problem is our own desires. And this is a key. When you see in verse 14, each one is tempted when he's drawn away by his own desires.

This is what gets us, right? We just want what we want. We want it when we want it. We want it how we want it.

And we will find ways to rationalize it, justify it, obtain it. Um, if it's illegitimate, we will try to legitimize it. We will excuse it.

We'll justify it. We'll hide it. Uh, there's all kinds of ways that we fall into trial.

And our desire is at work. We saw last time that when these external opportunities arise, there is a temptation. Satan is roaming the earth, seeking whom he may devour.

He can't devour everybody. Who can he devour? Somebody who is too lazy to pick up the breastplate of righteousness and the shield of faith to quench his fiery darts. Someone who is too lazy to flee youthful lusts, youthful desires.

We're not invested enough in who we are in Christ, what is happening now, and what is going to happen in the future, both in terms of judgment and opportunities in the kingdoms which are to come. So here comes an opportunity. Somebody is talking and my blood is starting to raise temperature.

I'm reaching the boiling point. I'm getting angry. I'm getting frustrated.

I disagree so strongly that I'm starting to have sins in my thinking, my mental attitude. My abbreviation in my notes used to be MAS, mental attitude sins. SOT, sins of the tongue.

Those arise out of the mental attitude. What comes out of our mouth is sourced in our heart. So to nip this in the bud, what do we need to do? When the opportunity arises, instead of becoming partners and co-sponsor of sin, because we've got a desire and here's an opportunity to express that desire.

Nobody's looking or I want what I want and this is going to really be great. I will be wonderfully gratified if I exploit this particular circumstance. Instead of that opportunity meeting our selfish desire, we want it to meet faith.

Faith. Testing of your faith produces patience, but if testing finds my sinful desires, my selfish desires, it's going to bring forth sin. That's the big contrast here that we've seen in this chapter is you're going to fall into various trials.

It is going to happen. People are going to talk. People are going to act.

Situations are going to arise and it is going to reveal what kind of person we are. Interestingly, so often in traditional interpretation circles, Paul and James are said to be at odds, thought to be at odds. Martin Luther was so impressed as a Catholic priest when he started reading Paul and found out about grace.

You are saved by grace through faith. By the works of the law, no flesh will be justified. And to not have to do in order to be accepted, it is a matter of faith.

Well, here comes James and in our passage this morning, he says, you've got to be a doer and

not just a hearer. And they say, well, wait a minute. I've just been liberated from all of that doing.

And of course, you think about Luther's background in the Catholic church with indulgences and lighting this and counting that and, you know, the constant groveling and climbing the Scala Sancta and the rest of it, you know, knees on a hundred and some odd steps climbing. And to be blessed with the understanding of God's grace, I don't have to do these things that I'm disagreeing with in my heart, but everybody says I've got to do them. You've got to show up.

You have to do these good works and by the works of the law. So this is what we're getting into now, because stop and think about it. Paul says by the works of the law, what is the law? What's another word for that? It's the word of God.

The law was given to Moses by God. The law came by Moses. Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

John tells us that in chapter one of his gospel. So which is it? It's faith and not works. And that James says, if you've got faith in no works, your faith is dead.

Well, then am I back to, I read the law, the law says do this. I've got to do these things. Here's what gets missed.

In order for faith to be shown by works, which is James's theme, they have to be sourced in a transformed heart. An untransformed heart can do all of the works in the world. Lord, Lord, in your name, have we not done these wonderful works? We've cast out demons.

We've done all of these things in your name. They are not transformed people. They haven't been renewed in their mind.

Transformed by the renewing of your mind. You remember Romans 12, one and two, don't be conformed to the world. The world says, if you do good things, you're a good person.

Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. This is what we're going to see in our parallel passage this morning. And I'm kind of setting this up in advance because this entire chapter and on into chapter two, you remember when James wrote this and for hundreds of years, there were no chapter and verse divisions.

It's just a letter and it flows, but it has an internal structure and it has emphasis by repetition. And we've seen that already in this looking at testing, but we get tested every day. You might be getting tested right now, just listening to class.

We'll be tested later on today. There are going to be opportunities for something to poke around and find a crack, a chink, someplace where we haven't got the full armor of God strapped on properly, find a weakness, dig around in there and find a selfish desire and hook it,

hook up with it, conceive with it and bring forth sin. If we've got all of our armor on because we are people of faith, if we remember who we are and why we're here, we are different people.

Two people can do the very same thing. In a traditional church, the easy illustration is in a lot of churches, probably most churches, they pass the plate. Here comes the offering plate.

There's an usher at each end of the pew. And sometimes they have, have you seen some churches have a little bag and it's got a handle on it. And so you can, you have your offering in your hand and you stick it down in the bag and release it.

So it could be anything from a \$50 bill to a nickel and the bag hides it. Others, every Baptist church I've ever been in, it's a plate. And you know, if you only put in a dollar, the next person down the thing or somebody sitting next to you is going to see what you put in.

And I think they do that on purpose. They like the flat plate because they want the peer pressure to up the ante, you know, as it goes by. And there, it's a wonderful thing to contribute from the heart to any form of Christian ministry, whether it is church or missions or evangelism, local, international.

If, if we are aware that there is something happening that is blessed by God, reflects the Lord Jesus Christ, et cetera, we have decided this is something I have the means, the motive, and the opportunity to support it. And I'm going to. That comes from the heart.

So I make a contribution. I contribute \$20. In the pew, back to my superficial analogy of a brick and mortar church and the plate comes by, another person sitting right next to the first guy that put in \$20 because he is blessed and he sees others being blessed by what is going on in that church.

And the Lord has laid it on his heart. He is a cheerful giver. It's not grudging.

It's not out of necessity. He just thinks what a wonderful opportunity for stewardship, for support, for cooperation, being a part of this work by supporting it financially and so on. The next guy saw the first guy put in a \$20 and so not to be outdone, well, I'll put in a \$20 or I'll put in \$25 or whatever.

The very same action from two different motivations. We understand this. This is not really a deep complex topic, but it is deep and complex when it comes to eradicating it out of our own thinking to do what we do because we are transformed people, because we have the implanted word which delivers our souls from selfishness, from the desire to be well thought of by people.

This well thought of by people thing is coming up. It's a big deal in the next section of James, but it is anticipated here and set up. It's a test.

We think hardship, physical suffering, financial setback, circumstances, relationships, whatever it might be, have gone awry and I'm worried, I'm upset, I'm angry, I'm lashing out, I'm

defensive, I'm committing all of these sins. Sure, those are legitimate trials, but James is about to address a kind of trial that his audience probably doesn't see coming. Oftentimes, we don't see it coming.

We can excuse ourselves. When we were doing the pastoral epistles, remember when Paul is talking to Timothy and he's talking to Titus and he says, these are things that you should be and you should do as a pastor. And many listeners could say, oh, sure, glad I'm not a pastor.

You know, those guys have got a high bar to meet. And we saw that these are emblematic. They are examples.

That's a particular spiritual gift. The principles and the exhortations and the imperatives related to the pastoring spiritual gift are the same principles and imperatives and requirements that apply to your spiritual gift. So we look at the pastorals and we think not only are these truths the same when applied to other gifts, but also this is what the Holy Spirit has laid on the heart of the Apostle Paul to tell pastors to teach everyone in the congregation, preach the word, be ready in season, out of season.

We, as recipients of the word, if it's going to be preached in season and out of season, if it's going to rebuke and correct and exhort and instruct, that ought to be happening. It's not enough for the preacher to send it. The pitcher is going to throw the baseball.

It needs to be either caught or hit or the game gets real boring. We're looking at examples that are given here in James and we say pure and undefiled religion to look out for widows and orphans and keep oneself unspotted from the world. That's down in verse 27.

We looked ahead to that. That is not the sum total of religion, of godliness, of Christian practice. Those two things are shorthand.

They are emblematic. Think about our previous examples, previous studies we've done where there is an example given, but it has wide application. So you think about that verse 27, pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this, to visit orphans and widows.

So can any old body find a couple of widows and a couple of orphans and go see them, take them a box of food? Have you seen there is a ministry that's Christians and Jews and there's these little old ladies that are Holocaust survivors somewhere in Europe and they're all in their 80s and 90s and they're just pathetic. They live in hovels and they've got a pot of gruel and that's all they've had to eat. It's tragic that there are people in those circumstances and so they say, contribute to this ministry, we'll give them a box of food.

So is anybody that sends money to that organization or works for that organization and delivers those boxes of food to these poor little old ladies, are they practicing pure and undefiled religion? I don't know. Maybe, maybe not. What determines whether good works are good in God's sight, are pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father? Why does James include that in verse 27? What is God and our Father looking at when we perform

actions? Man looks on the outward appearance, the Lord looks on the heart.

The Word of God slices into the very core of our being, soul and the spirit, joints and the marrow, judges the thoughts and intents of the heart. There is absolutely no distance, there is no daylight between Paul and James when it comes to faith and works. Whatever is not of faith, Paul says, is sin.

Even a good work. If you go, as a Pharisee, Jesus said, and drop a big bag of money into the temple coffers and you sort of wave it around and make sure everybody sees it before you drop it in, Jesus said they had their reward. That's not righteousness in God's sight.

Whatever momentary admiration or discernment of hypocrisy that the crowd has when they see somebody do that, that's their reward. There is no reward in God's eyes and it's a huge gift. The widow comes and drops her last two pennies into that same coffer and Jesus says, she gave more than the first guy.

And that is pure religion because she is giving from the heart. We understand this. Here's the difficulty.

Hearing it is one thing. Agreeing with it, assenting to it, believing that it is true is good, but it doesn't get it done. Think about this.

I've been trying to learn some new songs on the piano. You can go on YouTube and watch people play these arrangements beautifully, perfectly. You can click the link and get the sheet music and download it and print it and put it on the music rack of your piano and you can look at it and there it is.

All the notes that you have seen played perfectly. You can hear audio recordings. So beautiful.

But knowing the piece, knowing how it should sound, seeing how it should be played and believing, yep, this is the arrangement I want. It's got just the right melody and harmony and tempo and the beauty. It's a wonderful arrangement.

I appreciate it. This is the one of all of the arrangements of this song. This is the one.

And I sit there at the bench and I look at the sheet music and there's nobody that's more in favor of that particular song and that particular arrangement than me. But if I do not learn to play it, it's pretty much all a waste. I can enjoy someone else playing it, but I can't perform it.

I can't do it. I can't make it happen. I can't bless someone else with a wonderful hymn arrangement after I tune their piano if I never learned it or if I try to play it and I make a bunch of mistakes and just slaughter the thing.

You see my point and it's James's point. It isn't enough to hear, to understand, to agree, to affirm, to believe it, say absolutely. These kinds of things have to come from the heart.

They can't be superficial. They can't be wrongly motivated. We all believe that.

We get it. It's not a difficult truth. What is difficult is getting it done this afternoon, tomorrow morning, tomorrow midday, tomorrow afternoon, tomorrow evening, interacting with people, confronting challenges, negotiating circumstances for this to happen, to play the piece, to perform the music and make it happen.

That's what's difficult. So where do we go for that ability? It obviously, just like performing on an instrument, it takes practice. What makes practice happen? I am all in favor of practice, but is it a high enough priority that I say I am going to dedicate 30 minutes a day, 45 minutes a day.

I am not going to go to bed until I sit down and I practice. I'm not going to wishfully think about practice. I'm not going to say rah, rah, hooray for practice.

I have got to practice. Well, this is where the transformed and renewed soul that we are supposed to have from Romans 12, 2, because we have presented ourselves a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, confessed our sins, listened to the word of God, got it in our soul. We understand the filling and the absolutely essential role of the Holy Spirit.

It's the spirit and the word that bring the power of God into our lives. I've got to choose to implement that power. This is why there is a judgment at the end of this life.

What did you choose? Not what did you agree to? What did you assent to? What did you learn? I've said this many times. The judgment seat of Christ is not a theology test. You're not going to get a hundred question stack of papers with multiple choice.

What are the five salvation ministries of the Holy Spirit? What are the three kinds of death? What are the fruits of the spirit? Did you memorize Galatians 6, 7, and 8? Did you memorize anything? Can you quote Psalm 1? None of that is going to be there. What will the judgment be? And we're coming up on this. Take a look at verse 13 of chapter 2. Look at James chapter 2 verse 13.

Judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Judgment and mercy. Are we going to be shown mercy or are we going to be judged? Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Mercy begins in a reconditioned soul, a transformed heart, a renewed mind, and then is applied at the point that mercy can be expressed. To be merciful. This is where this passage is going.

It's why it talks about being a doer of the word, but doing it from a heart that is characterized by concern for those who genuinely need help. The placeholder for that is widows and orphans. The widows and orphans are the example.

They're the convenient symbol for anyone in our periphery who has a need, and we have the opportunity to put a shoulder under that load, to bear one another's burdens. Notice that's a one another. As I have said many times, we are commanded to be salt and light in this world.

And what do you know about salt and light? They do what they do by contact. Light is traveling through the room and you can't see it until it hits something and is reflected or refracted or absorbed. But light works by contact.

If the light doesn't contact anything, look at all the starlight that's traveling through space, and yet space is black as sin because the light, all of those photons, are not encountering anything. The light is there, but if it doesn't touch something, it doesn't do its job. Salt is the same way.

Salt in a block, salt in the shaker, isn't doing anything. It's when it is applied to the food or applied to a wound or gargled or whatever it is you're going to do with it. By contact, salt expresses its salt character and has its salt effect.

This is why when it says pure religion and undefiled in verse 27 of chapter 1 is to visit, to contact, to be present with widows and orphans in their trouble. He's already talked earlier in the chapter about when you're in trouble, you've got to have an attitude of hope. Count it all joy because there will be joy in the future when I meet this challenge with faith and not with a selfish desire.

And then down in verse 12, you're blessed when you endure trouble because when you're approved, be diligent to show yourself approved unto God, not ashamed, receive the crown of life. Now, having learned that myself, I can turn my attention outward. Notice, myself first, then I can visit others who have a need.

Turn with me back to Luke chapter 6. You know, my personal persuasion, I don't argue with those who believe that the letter we are studying was written by James, the Lord's brother, but it is so rooted in the teaching of the Lord Jesus that I have to believe that the Jacob who wrote this letter is the brother of John and heard the teaching of the Lord Jesus. We saw the Sermon on the Mount and how many similarities there are to what is in James and what is in the Sermon on the Mount. This is the Sermon on the Plain.

So if you go to Luke chapter 6, verse 12, came to pass in those days, he went out to the mountain to pray, continued all night in prayer to God. When it was day, he called his disciples to himself and from them. This tells you that there was a large group of disciples.

This was several dozen, if not a few hundred, disciples. He called the whole group of disciples and from them he chose 12 to be apostles. He was in the mountain, prayed all night.

What do you suppose he was praying about? Ask God for wisdom, for discernment, for discretion, for leading and guiding, for a Holy Spirit-infused set of choices. So as Jesus comes down, having consulted with the Father all night long, filled with the Holy Spirit, he comes down. He looks at the assembled sea of faces of his disciples, these who are with him and listening to him and learning from him, and he chooses 12.

And we've noted this before, half the disciples have the same name as other disciples. So there's two Shimon's, there are two Jacob's, and there are two Judas's. And so here you have

Simon, whom he also named Peter, Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew.

Notice how Luke groups these in twos. I think when they sent them out two by two, these were the teams. So the first two sets are brothers, Simon and Andrew, Peter and Andrew, James and John, brothers.

Then you have Philip and Bartholomew. Bartholomew, of course, that's son of Ptolemaios, but it's also Nathaniel. Matthew, also known as Levi, and Thomas, James, the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, that's your second Shimon there, Judas, the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who also became a traitor.

Now, he came down with them and stood on a level place with a crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem, from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear him and be healed of their diseases. Notice, these people have traveled a distance to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only.

As well as those who were tormented with unclean spirits, and they were healed, and the whole multitude sought to touch him, for power went out from him and healed all. Then he lifted up his eyes toward his disciples. Notice, both Matthew in the Sermon on the Mount, the teaching on the hill, and Luke with the Sermon on the Plain, note specifically that this teaching is addressed to the disciples.

He is not teaching the masses from Tyre and Sidon, and Jerusalem and Judea, who have come to hear him and to be healed, but he looks at his disciples. It is the twelve and those who are also in the disciple crowd, but are not apostles. He lifted up his eyes toward his disciples and said, Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake.

Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy. 1st chapter of James, count it all joy when you are poor, hungry, sad, hated, abused, reviled. Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for indeed, your reward is great in heaven.

Yours is the kingdom, it is a future rectification, it is a future justification, it is a future reward, a future hope. Your faith makes that which is not seen substantial, right? Substance of things hoped for, evidence of things not seen. Faith brings that future reward into the present, makes it real, makes it a motivation, so motivating that you have joy.

Satisfaction, there's a happiness spectrum, you may just be content, or you may be ecstatic, but you're somewhere on the joy spectrum, the happiness spectrum. Your reward is great in heaven, for in like manner their fathers did to the prophets. People that hate you in God's name

are the same ones, same type of people who hated on God's messengers.

These were men delivering the Word of God, doing a wonderful service. People didn't have Bibles. If you didn't have a prophet forth telling the Word of God, you wouldn't know it.

And instead of listening to it and appreciating the fact that God sent His Word through these individuals, they would abuse, they literally shoot the messenger in the sense of hating and reviling and casting out their name as evil and arguing and contending and rejecting. Rejecting the message, rejecting the messenger. When we live by faith, when we reflect the light of God, those who love darkness rather than light are going to hate us, whether it's in society, whether it's politically, or whether it is in our personal periphery.

Now, look at the parallel, starting in verse 24. Woe to you who are rich. What did we see in James chapter 1? Let the poor man boast in his exaltation, and let the rich man boast in his denigration, in his being taken down.

Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Whatever momentary happiness you get from acquiring and buying and beating the other guy and getting the best end of a deal, that's all you get. Enjoy it while it lasts.

Woe to you who are full, for you shall hunger. Just the opposite of those who hunger now, for you shall be in the future filled. But those of you who are filled now are going to be hungry in the future.

Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets. This idea of reversal.

And remember, this is not always actual circumstantial poverty or actual material wealth. This is how do you view yourself. You can have all kinds of money and nobody would know it.

I've had the privilege of knowing more than one person who was extremely well off, but you wouldn't know it to talk to them. You wouldn't know it to look at their car. You wouldn't know it in their priorities or the way they act.

They were not rich in the obvious sense. I've known people that were extremely limited in their finances and their material circumstances that were bountiful, fruit-laden trees in terms of spiritual production and the effect they had on fellow believers and on others in their periphery. And it had nothing to do with their financial status.

It had everything to do with being rich toward God. And that's what's in view here. These things are put for wider truths.

And it isn't just, well, if I don't have any money in the bank, I'm going to be blessed. How do I approach life? How do I think of myself? This is Jesus talking to the Pharisees in John chapter nine at the end of the chapter after healing the blind man. And Jesus talks about spiritual

blindness.

And so the Pharisees come up and say, are we blind also? And Jesus said, if you were blind, you would have no sin. But because you say we see, your sin remains. This is the idea.

What is your attitude? If you are full in yourself, if you are satisfied that everything is fine, I am not needy, I'm rich. If I recognize that I am needy, it doesn't matter what kind of stuff I've got. I am poor and miserable and blind and naked, as Jesus says over in Revelation.

That is the difference between riches and poverty. That's what we have over in James chapter one. There are so many parallels here in Luke chapter six to our passage.

And they give us stereoscopic vision. They bring a three-dimensional understanding of these truths that is really memorable and really helpful for us to be doers of the word and not just hearers. So we'll continue looking at this comparison when we come back from the break.