

James 25-08-17a2

Sunday morning greetings. This is the 17th of August, 2025. We're at Grace and Truth Bible Church.

We're studying the letter of Jacob, popularly known as the Epistle of James. We're in chapter one, and we are coming to perhaps the most well-known section of this book, much discussed, great oceans of ink spilled, many gigabytes of storage of analysis, interpretation, argumentation about the meaning of this section. And this is the section in verse 22 that says, be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

Goes on to describe the symptoms of being a hearer without being a doer. And standing alone, this seems pretty straightforward, and I think it's going to be straightforward for us. But those who see a different emphasis and a different set of doctrinal applications, looking at the letters of Paul, this causes great difficulty.

Faith versus works, it caused trouble for Martin Luther and many others up and down through the centuries. We will be able to make pretty short work of this. I love the hermeneutical principle, when the plain sense makes common sense, seek no other sense.

Many times our spiritual common sense, the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit helps us understand things in a way that is meaningful and practical for us. We're not having to write theological journal articles on this. So we'll take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and study, and we'll resume our study of this incredibly meaningful and helpful passage.

Father, we are so grateful that we have the gift of your Spirit to lead us and to guide us, to speak the things of the Lord Jesus to our hearts, to enable us to live a supernatural life, a life that takes each moment, each activity, each thought captive for Christ, investing it in the eternal future, our lives transcending the mundane, the short-term, the ephemeral, the immediate, and counting on eternity, making a difference in the ages to come. It is one of those tremendous good givings and perfect gifts that you have bestowed on us in the Lord Jesus. We thank you for Him, for His wonderfully great work on our behalf, expressing your love, embodying your truth, and delivering us from this present evil age, the penalty for our sin, the enslavement and bondage to our fallen nature, and to make us complete in Him.

We pray that as we look at this passage and its parallels in your Word together, that the Holy Spirit will find us readily impressionable, teachable, able to remember and put into practice these important truths so that we can truly be doers of your Word and not just hearers. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

It's always helpful to look at our passage in its context. The review that we do in looking back at the earlier portions of this is essential. I would encourage you anytime you have a thought about a scripture, a memory verse comes to mind that seems pertinent in the immediate

circumstance.

And we say, well, should I bear one another's burdens? Should I endeavor to maintain fellowship? Or should I touch not the unclean thing, come out from among them and be separate? As one example, you can come up with a memory verse that would justify, well, I will continue to try to work with this person who is pursuing sin and evil in their life, or I'm going to separate and what is the nature of that separation? You can think of a verse for each one. So as we travel through life and as we try to live each day in a way that is pleasing in God's sight, as we approach each circumstance or situation or relationship or conversation, and the Holy Spirit brings a passage to our mind, to the extent that it is possible, if we can review the context, that may sound pertinent when you quote the verse. But what is the meaning as it is embedded in the the fabric of the book or passage in which it is found? So important.

One of the pieces of context we have here for this letter from Yakov, or Yakovu, if you look at it in Greek, James, as they have modified it into English, is in verse one. The first thing we remember is this letter is early and it is directed at the first generation of believers. So the 12 tribes scattered abroad.

This tells us that the author evidently is still located in Israel and is endeavoring to fulfill the Lord's exhortation and imperative to his original apostles to teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you to teach them. So that's what this letter does. That's why I think it originates with one of the original apostles.

You shall be witnesses unto me. Where did Jews live? Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria until the end of the age. There will be another apostle who is going to be the primary messenger to the Gentiles.

The Gentiles are not in view here. Dealings with Gentiles are never mentioned. Something that is even more astonishing is the Holy Spirit is never mentioned in this letter.

Quite extraordinary. I did a little digging here and in the letters of John and Peter, also original apostles, written much later, if my hunch is correct, and this is John's brother James who is writing, it's early because he is the first to be slain, to be martyred. The letters of Peter and the epistles of John are much later.

And if you look at 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John, all three of those letters, the Holy Spirit is mentioned four times. Four times in 1st John. Not mentioned at all in 2nd John or 3rd John.

But in that wonderful 1st John talking about confession of sin, walking in the light, fellowship, love, deceiving ourselves. Only four times. If you look at the letters of Peter, you find in 1st Peter, the Holy Spirit is mentioned four times.

Only four times. In 2nd Peter, mentioned once. And you remember it's early on when he's talking about the inspiration of Scripture.

And no Scripture is of any private interpretation, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. It's the only reference to the Spirit in 2nd Peter. So if you add up 1st John and 1st and 2nd Peter, you have eight explicit references to the Holy Spirit.

In the letters of Paul, you have across Romans and the other epistles, a total of 86 explicit references to the Holy Spirit. 86. Granted, we have a lot more material from Paul, but still the density of those references, the Holy Spirit really comes to the fore and is appreciated.

And the teaching about him is so much more explicit in Paul. And Paul is writing to the Gentiles. Now I've not included Hebrews in that, although in my count, I would.

So here's the point. This letter is practical application of the Word of God. And you could almost include this in the Old Testament in terms of its recipients, in its focus on hearing the Word and being obedient, being faithful, being motivated by hope, by the promises that God makes.

This is largely Old Testament thinking. And one of the signs that this is perhaps the earliest of the New Testament letters is that it is far more of an Old Testament cast in its audience, in its approach, and its realization that there is new revelation from God. This is why we saw in chapter one, that verse 18, every good giving is more literal translation, every good giving and every perfect gift, every complete mature gift, every good giving, every perfect gift is from above.

It comes down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. The Father of lights immediately makes you look up to the sky. You think about the phases of the moon.

You think about the circular rotation in the sky that was visible very much more to people in the ancient world because you didn't have the city lights glowing and obscuring the stars, the planets, but they knew that there were wandering stars. That's what the word planet is derived from, is wanderer, the phases of the moon, and realizing that there is a change. There's variation in these circular motions and in the lights, but God the Father authored those.

He is the Father of lights. There is no variation with him. This helps us understand in the same way that we study Old Testament books, this letter of James, absent any explicit reference to the Holy Spirit, with only two mentions of the Lord Jesus explicitly, is nevertheless extremely pertinent and practical for us.

And in the next verse, verse 18 of chapter 1, of his own will, he brought us forth. We've seen that this birth imagery recurs. Lust conceives, brings forth sin, births sin, but God, for his own purposes, for his own glory, to reveal his own character to humanity and to the angels, of his own will, of his own volition, he brought us forth by the word of truth, by the word of truth.

And in context, this is not the Old Testament law. The Old Testament law did not give birth to New Testament believers. What is this word of truth? Keep your place here in James and turn back to Ephesians chapter 1, one of my favorite New Testament chapters.

I've mentioned in the past that I did both my short and my long exegetical study at Dallas Seminary on this chapter. It is so rich. It is so much a chunk you can chew on and gain benefit from.

But you remember the in hymns and the wonderful blessings we have in Christ. We are chosen in him. Verse 13, in him, after you heard the word of truth, you heard the word of truth.

That's what James mentions. God birthed us by the word of truth. Paul understands this identical truth.

There is no variation with God. If he's speaking to the apostle Paul, or he's speaking to the apostle James or to John, the word, the truth is consistent. In him, you see, you also trusted.

You can just scratch out trusted. Trusted is further down in the context. In him, you also, you also, Paul throughout this letter is recognizing that the Jews were first.

The 12 tribes were the first to hope in Christ. In him, you also, you Gentiles, you recipients of this circular letter. I think this was originally addressed to the Laodiceans, as you know.

And they were told to exchange it with the folks in Colossae, send this letter to Colossae, get the letter I sent to Colossae and bring it here and read it. They are very similar. They share concepts and teachings and were carried by the same individual to each church.

But it was designed to be passed around in Asia, in the area that Laodicea and other parts of what are now Turkey were found. In him, you also, you Gentiles also, after you heard the word of truth, the good news of your salvation, your new birth, having believed you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, having believed the Holy Spirit didn't effectually move you to faith, you believed, this is, remember the action of the aorist participle precedes the action of the main verb, one of the first principles of Greek I ever learned from my old pastor. He wasn't old at the time.

But having believed the Holy Spirit sealed you into the Christ, having believed the word of truth, birthed you, wonderful truth. And as I said, these truths are parallel in Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, flip over a few pages to Colossians chapter one, verse three, we give thanks to the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you. Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints, because of the hope, our triad of Christian virtues right here in verses four and five and verse five is the one you want to write down for our point.

We heard of your faith, your belief in Christ Jesus, your love for the saints because of the hope, which is laid up for you in heaven of which you heard before. How in the word of truth, the identical phrase we have. This is what gave us birth.

This is what makes us new, gives us eternal life. The hope laid up for you in heaven of which you heard before in the word of truth of the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ that he

mentioned in Ephesians one 13, here in Colossians one five. We saw this not long ago in second Timothy two 15.

Paul says in another place, as you received Christ, so walk. The mechanism that births us and enters us into Christ, all of the in hymns of Ephesians chapter one, we continue in that same way. And so you find in second Timothy two 15, be diligent.

Now, this is you and me. This is right now. This is what we need to do this afternoon.

Whatever circumstances, situations we encounter, whoever we talk to, whatever we undertake, even if it is to rest and try to charge our batteries up for the coming week, whether it be work or other challenges, what are we supposed to do? Every minute where we are conscious enough to make decisions, to explore options, make our choices, be diligent to present ourselves approved to God, the father of lights from whom comes every good giving and every perfect gift. I want to be approved. I want to be qualified to receive those gifts and continue to receive them, receive the gift of salvation.

I want to receive his wisdom. I want to receive his grace, his provision. This is what separates us from the world.

We are unique. We are different. We are exceptional.

We are related to God uniquely through Christ. And we are not our own. We have been bought with a precious price, the blood of Christ and our mission.

The only thing that makes a day worthwhile is if we glorify God in our body. If, as Paul says in Romans 12, one and two, we present ourselves living sacrifices, holy and acceptable, it's a reasonable service. What more can we do? We can't earn or deserve God's grace, but we can exploit it.

We can endeavor to reflect his glory and to fulfill the purpose for which he saved us. It's our reasonable service to not be conformed to the world. We shouldn't look like unbelievers.

We shouldn't think like them. We shouldn't be motivated like them. We shouldn't operate like they do.

We don't pursue what they pursue. We are separate. We are sanctified.

That's why Paul says at the beginning of his letter to the saints, here in Colossians 1-2, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ. Saint means sanctified ones. Sanctified means cleansed and set apart.

You got a whole sink full of dirty dishes. Don't have time to do the whole thing, but you need a plate. What do you do? You grab a plate.

You grab some flatware and you wash it so that you can use it. We cleanse it. We bring it out

from the dirty stuff and that's what meets our purpose.

That is what fulfills our need. So we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, your love for all the saints because of the hope which is laid up for you. We saw that in Colossians.

You go to 2 Timothy 2.15, be diligent to present yourself approved. Exploit the opportunity to be cleansed that John talks about in 1 John 1.7 and in 1 John 1.9. Walk in the light. Confess our sins to be cleansed of all unrighteousness.

Sanctified, set apart, be diligent to present yourself approved unto God. A workman, someone who gets stuff done. Many times when you think about 2.15, we jump to the rightly dividing the word of truth.

We need a good church. We need an educated pastor who can delve into the languages and help us understand things correctly. I would focus on and circle and underline the word workman.

This is James helpful emphasis for us. We need to rightly divide the word of truth. We need to understand it.

We need to be diligent to be approved to God in our work, in what we do, what we accomplish in a day. We have been given a stewardship of time and opportunity. We can speak.

We can think. We can do. We can watch out for widows and orphans in their times of trouble.

And by extension, anyone in our periphery as salt and light that we touch, we have the opportunity. We parse the situation. Is this a place where God has put me so that I can be a blessing so that I can express true and undefiled religion? That's my opportunity.

A workman who does not need to be ashamed. Notice he doesn't say be diligent to rightly divide the word of truth so that you can be approved. It isn't our doctrinal understanding that will be evaluated at the judgment, except as it is reflected in what we do.

We will be judged according to our works at the end of our life, just like everyone else, including unbelievers. Great white throne judgment is a judgment of works. We see that not only in Revelation chapter 20, we also see it in Jesus' parable of the sheep and goats.

What did you do? And this is what James is going to explore in our passage, verse 22 of chapter 1, being a doer of the word and not just a hearer. So important. Rightly dividing the word of truth should make us workmen who do not need to be ashamed.

All sorts of apprenticeships, all kinds of training. You are given materials. When I took instructional systems development, we learned to craft learning objectives.

The student, given the following materials, will perform this task to this standard. So you go to shop class, you're given wood and access to tools. You will construct a shoe box that will open

and close, that will be smooth enough that when you put the finish on, it has a reflection.

It doesn't come apart when somebody sticks their boot on it to do a shoe shine. It will have enough room inside to hold the shoe polish and the other accouterments. There are requirements for the work.

There are materials that are provided and there is a standard that has to be met. And that is biblical. By the grace of God, we have been positioned and given the ability through the spirit and the word.

We have been given the instruction to fulfill this task and it will be evaluated at the judgment. Do we meet the standard or not? So be diligent to be approved now and at that judgment. Workmen who do not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

The word of truth. Same phrase we have in James. He gave birth to us by the word of truth.

And as we explore that of truth, whether it is Ephesians 1.13, Colossians 1.5 or 2 Timothy 2.15, this is what defines us. This is what sets us apart and makes us unique and capable of investing in eternity, laying up treasure in heaven. Because we believe, having believed, we apply.

So important. That is our context in James. And he goes on to say, he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits.

This again, because God is the author of this truth and he has expressed it to multiple apostles. You remember in John chapter 1, all you have to do is refer to the name of our church. This word of truth is embodied in the Lord Jesus Christ.

John chapter 1, John chapter 14, Jesus says in verse 6, I am the truth. John chapter 1 says he is the word. The word became flesh and dwelt among us.

We beheld his glory, full of grace and truth, full of grace and truth. The word became flesh. We beheld his glory, which is the fulsome expression of God's grace and God's truth.

The Lord Jesus is the word of truth. And when you think about James chapter 1, giving us birth, this is the new birth. This is church age birth.

This is us. The word of truth there, they talk about there's only two explicit references to Jesus in James. But if you understand what James is saying, that verse is a reference to the Lord Jesus.

God the father gave birth to us by the word of truth, by the Lord Jesus Christ. Right? There is no new birth apart from Jesus. In him was life, and that life is the light of men.

Again, going back to John chapter 1, of his own will, he brought us forth by, I would put capital W on that, the word of truth, the Lord Jesus. So that we might be a kind of first fruits. You go back to our passage in Ephesians chapter 1, verse 13.

I'm having you riffle your Bible pages a little bit. But if you continue there in Ephesians 1, if you look at verse 11, in him, we have obtained an inheritance being predestined according to the purpose. This is what James talks about.

According to his purpose, he gave birth to us. Paul says in him, we've obtained inheritance being predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will. Identical truth being talked about here.

Now look at the next verse, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of his glory. Who's Paul talking about there? The 12 tribes, Israel, the first generation Jewish church, Messianic Jews, if you will, who recognize the Lord Jesus as God's word of truth and are the first, not just to believe in him, but to hope in him. We first trusted in Christ to the praise of his glory.

In him, you Gentiles also trusted. But who's James writing to? That initial generation. This is why I believe this is a really early letter.

The Gentiles are really not even alluded to in terms of being fellow hopers and trusters in Christ. We who were the first to trust. So back to James chapter one.

So then we 12 tribes, we Jewish believers are a kind of first fruits of his creation. But implied in this, if the Jews are the first fruits, there will be a larger harvest to come. The first fruits is just the earliest to ripen and to be ready for harvest.

There's more coming. And you come to realize that James, as with the other apostles, understands that the promise to Abraham, that he will be a blessing to all nations. And that in the Lord Jesus, all who place their faith in him, they had adumbrations of this with the Syrophoenician woman and with the Roman centurion and with others who were Gentiles and were blessed in and during the lifetime of the Lord Jesus.

And that this gospel is going to widen. The Jews are the first fruits. So then, my beloved brethren, and this is a double entendre because they are brethren in the being fellow Israelites, fellow members of the 12 tribes, but they are fresh and new brethren in the sense of Christ, hope in Christ, faith in Christ, love in Christ.

And because of this, because God has a purpose in birthing anew a people, let everyone be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. There is no more practical and convicting exhortation and command than this. Let everyone be quick to hear, listen, but bridle the tongue.

And I think many of us struggle with this. We just speak before we think. We hurt because we did not take time to be spiritual, be the people that God calls us to be.

Our nature slips out from under the foot that ought to be on its neck and we sin against one another. And it is so often in what we say and how we say it. And that is the fruit of the heart.

And rather than saying, I've just got to bite my lip. No, I need to go examine my heart. Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean.

Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. Search me, oh God, and know my heart. Test me and find whatever wicked ways are in me.

I want to walk the path of eternal life. Psalm 51, 1 John 1. All of us need it. Doesn't matter how long we've been saved, how much we know about the word of God, our sinful nature is just waiting for an opportunity.

It's as bad as Satan looking for an avenue to leak out and express itself. It's like the air in your tires. Any kind of small, you run over a nail, that air is going to try to escape and it's got to be contained.

So then, my beloved brethren, let everyone be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. The wrath of man, impatience, being unhappy with something and letting anger express itself. The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

What does produce the righteousness of God? The word of truth. The same thing that births us, we turn to the word in the power of the spirit to dominate, overcome, subjugate, and put a bridle on our nature, which expresses itself in our tongue. And this is the key, and he's going to continue in verse 21.

That's why we have to have laid aside, having laid aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, receive with humility the implanted word, the same word of truth. Receive the things of the Lord Jesus. I'm leaving, he told his disciples in the upper room, I will send another comforter.

He will lead you into what? All truth. The word of truth. Receive with meekness, with humility, the implanted word.

This is the way we are delivered. It is able to deliver your soul. Deliver it from what? This isn't deliverance from the lake of fire.

This is deliverance from our nature, from those evils that draw us. And instead of being met with faith, these influences from the outside, these opportunities that we saw earlier in the chapter, let no one say when he's tempted, this is God's doing. No, we are enticed and drawn away by our selfish fallen nature.

That thing has got to be kept under control and only God's power can do it. No amount of promising myself or making a commitment or trying to get accountability with some other human being. I'll do some sort of external, I'll put duct tape over my mouth, and then I won't say bad things.

If it takes place in the heart, you're already defeated. This is able to deliver our souls, the

implanted word of truth. But implanted means more than hearing it.

And that's where we're going this morning. Let's pause here and take our break. This is plenty to chew on and so practical.

Such a great perspective and a reminder of who we are, why we're here, and how it is we can live a life that makes us approved to God as workmen. Work is where we're headed here when we come back from the break.