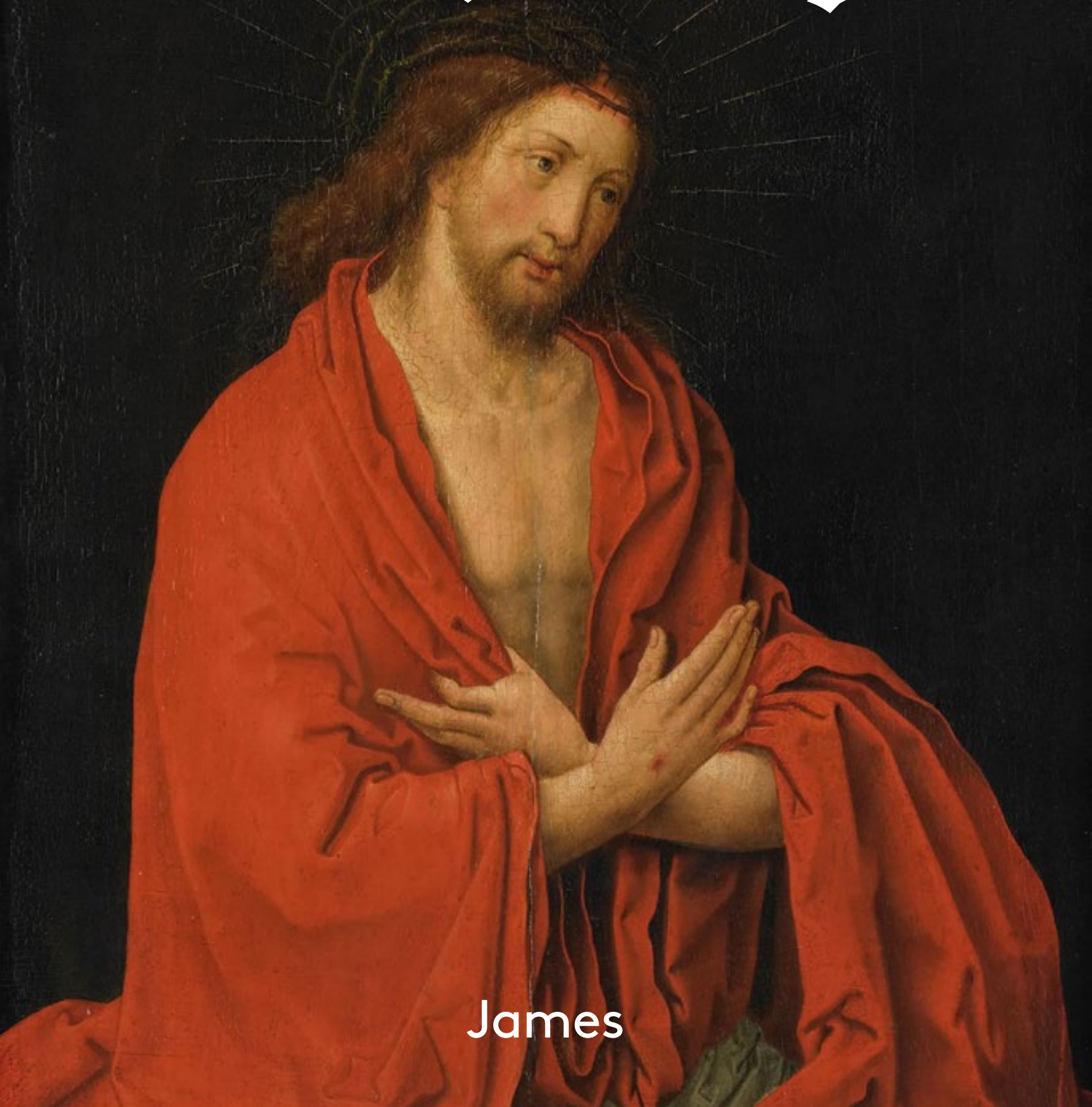


The Quarterly



James



Cities Church

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The Quarterly is a publication of Cities Church that complements our current sermon series. It includes Bible study resources and articles from our congregation.

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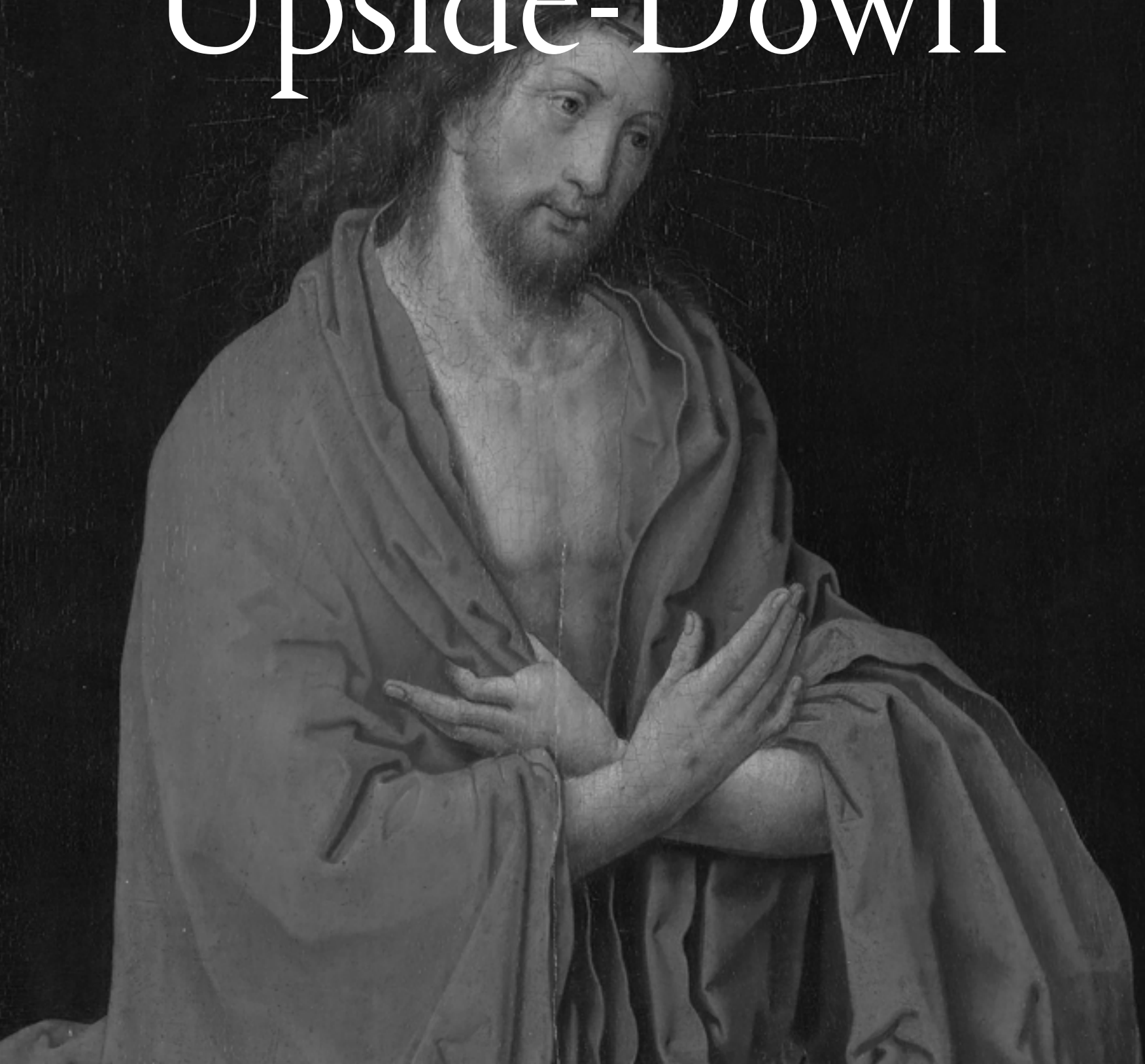
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Living in the Upside-Down



Jonathan Parnell

We all live in the upside-down.

That's pretty much what this world *is* compared to the way it should be. The whole way of thinking, the way of seeing things, has capsized and drifted far from the shores of righteousness and peace. And we've drifted with it, buying into the brokenness, breathing in the smog that surrounds us. Which is why James comes and tells us to snap out of it.

That's mostly what this letter is about.

James has written to exhort us, to challenge the perspective we've borrowed in this upside-down. He doesn't give us the rich explanations of the gospel like we find elsewhere in the New Testament, but he does expect us to live in its light. He tells us things that only make sense because of the gospel, and he does it right from the start.

“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds...” (James 1:2)

Trials and joy don't mix, not in the upside-down — not unless you believe in a sovereign God who works all things together for good for those who love him (Romans 8:28), a God who has secured for us a destiny incomparable to the slight momentary affliction of today (2 Corinthians 4:17), a God who promises us that no matter what, he will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

Trials then, trials of various kinds, trials of every shape and size, trials become a means for joy. Because, see, in God's world trials refine our faith. Trials get

turned into a crucible that produces steadfastness in our souls, and steadfastness, by the time we're done here, has transformed us to be more like Jesus. And the more like Jesus we are, the happier we will be.

So, James says, when trials come, don't gripe like they do in the upside-down. We shouldn't grieve *or complain* as those who have no hope.

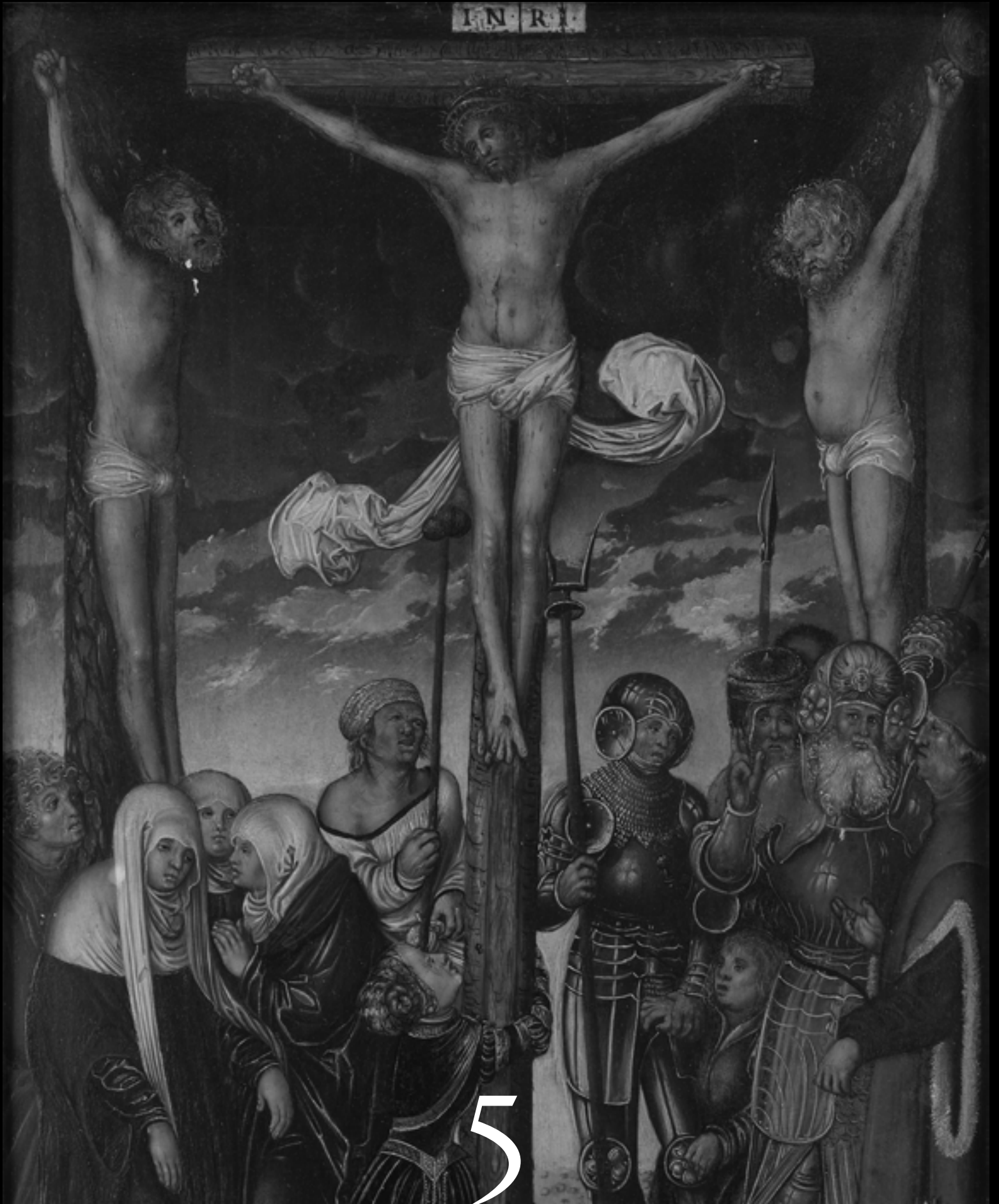
(Now to be sure, a trial is never less than a trial. *Don't pretend it's not what it is.* It's because of what it is that makes it any good for us.)

And because it is a trial, we are called to look outside ourselves. We are pressed to rely on God. We are required to trust that he is who he says he is, and that he will be enough. That's what trials are about. That's what they are meant to do. They call for our faith, and it starts with how we see them.

Count them all joy, James tells us — and his letter is loaded with of a lot more where that comes from. Our plan, if the Lord wills, by his Spirit's help, is to learn from him this Spring.

Four Prayers for Bible Study

David Mathis



5

When we open our Bibles to read, we're never alone. The Holy Spirit hovers over and in the words of God, ready to stir our hearts, illumine our minds, and redirect our lives, all for the glory of Christ (John 16:14). The Spirit is the X factor in Bible reading, making an otherwise ordinary routine supernatural — and making it utterly foolish to read and study without praying for our eyes, minds, and hearts.

Prayer is a conversation, but not one we start. God speaks first. His voice sounds in the Scriptures and climactically in the person and work of his Son. Then, wonder of all wonders, he stops, he stoops, he bends his ear to listen to us. Prayer is almost too good to be true. With our eyes on God's words, he gives us his ear too.

How then should we pray over our Bibles? Here are four verses you might pray as you open God's word.

1. PSALM 119:18: OPEN MY EYES TO WONDER

"Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law" (Psalm 119:18). We ask God to open our spiritual eyes to show us the glimpses of glory we cannot see by ourselves. Without his help, we are simply "natural" persons with natural eyes. "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand [see] them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

"Seeing they do not" was Jesus's phrase for those who saw him and his teaching only with natural eyes, without the illumining work of the Spirit (Matthew 13:13). This is why Paul prays

for Christians, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, *having the eyes of your hearts enlightened*" (Ephesians 1:17–18).

Join the psalmist in praying not just for the gift of spiritual sight, but for the gift of seeing *wondrous things* in God's word. Wonder is a great antidote for wandering. Those who cultivate awe keep their hearts warm and soft, and resist the temptations to grow cold and fall away.

2. LUKE 18:38: HAVE MERCY ON ME

Pray, like the blind man begging roadside, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Luke 18:38). For as long as we are in this life, sin encumbers every encounter with God in his word. We fail friends and family daily — and even more, we fail God. So it is fitting to accompany our opening of God's word with the humble, broken, poor plea of the redeemed: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" (Luke 18:13).

Bible reading is a daily prompt to own our failures, newly repent, and freshly cast ourselves on his grace all over again. Prayer is the path to staying fascinated with his grace and cultivating a spirit of true humility.

3. JAMES 1:22: MAKE ME A DOER OF YOUR WORD

Pray that God, having opened your eyes to wonder and reminded you of the sufficiency of his grace, would produce genuine change in your life. Ask him to allow the seeds from Scripture to bear real, noticeable fruit in tangible acts of sacrificial love for others. "Be doers of the word, and not

hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22). You need not artificially capture one, specific point of application from every passage, but pray that his word would shape and inform and direct your practical living.

Ask that he would make you more manifestly loving, not less, because of the time invested alone in reading and studying his word.

4. LUKE 24:45: OPEN MY EYES TO JESUS

This is another way of praying that God would open our eyes to wonder, just with more specificity. The works of God stand as marvelous mountain ranges in the Bible, but the highest peak, and the most majestic vista, is the person and work of his Son.

As Jesus himself taught after his resurrection, he is the Bible's closest thing to a skeleton key for unlocking the meaning of every text — every book, every plot twist, the whole story. First, "he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27), then he taught his disciples that "everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44). And in doing so, "he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45).

The great goal of Bible reading and study is this: *knowing and enjoying Jesus*. This is a taste now of heaven's coming delights. "This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3). This gives direction, focus, and purpose to our study. "Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD" (Hosea 6:3). This forms great yearning and passion

in our souls: “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Philippians 3:8).

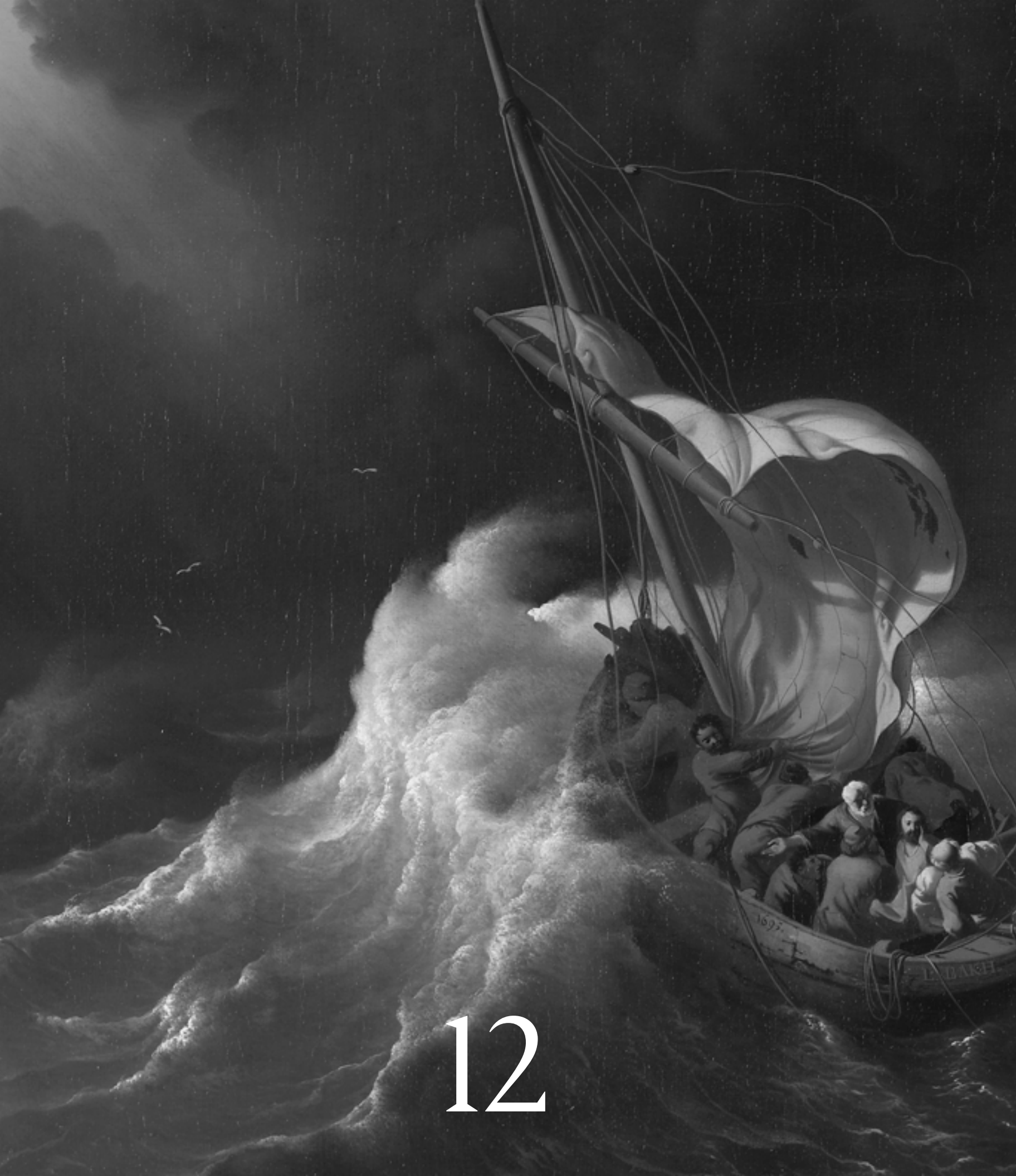
Keep both eyes peeled for Jesus. Until we see how the passage at hand relates to Jesus’s person and work, we haven’t yet finished the single most important aspect of our reading.

We are desperate for God’s ongoing help to see, and so we pray.

Week 1

COUNT IT ALL JOY, MY BROTHERS,

WHEN YOU
MEET TRIALS OF
VARIOUS KINDS.



12

Why Trials?

Michael Thiel

WHY DOES JAMES START HIS LETTER WITH TRIALS?

Troubles are inevitable. They are. Trials will come. It doesn't matter who you are, life is difficult and tough times will find you. The variance of trials is as big as the ocean. Trials come in different shapes and sizes and impact people differently, which is why James wants to talk with us about them. Anything that can happen to a person can happen to a Christian. If we think we are above trials and they won't happen to us, chances are they already have and you are in denial. It's best at this point that you acknowledge that some area of your life is tough and then sit before James and listen to him.

See, our culture is a cry-baby culture when it comes to suffering. Most other cultures knew life would be hard. We are a secular society, which means everything is about the now. Our culture says get your happiness now. We need it now. Other cultures of generations past took a long view of life, meaning they did believe in life beyond death and they had a category that the present world had suffering but one day it'd be over. They knew that it was not a matter of if they would suffer, but when. We would do well to not be caught off guard that suffering and trials will come.

IF TRIALS ARE COMING HOW SHOULD WE HANDLE THEM?

James tells us to count trials with joy. "Count" is an imperative so in effect it is a command. James is saying that we need to take action on how to approach our trials. Work your trial. James does not say "enjoy your trial." To count it all joy in your trial is to

work deep at the heart level to develop perspective and attitude about God and your suffering such that there would be a good level of understanding that God is in control and you can trust him, even if it feels like life is out of control.

One way to think about trials and to consider them joy is to remember that there are purposes associated with them. Trials produce in us steadfastness, which is stability and steadiness, or constancy. Before we go through the trial, we are somewhat inexperienced. But after going through the trial, and experiencing the pain and the suffering, we learn and grow. The trial produces in us character.

This steadfastness is a big deal to God. It must be important to God if he is willing to subject his children to massive trials. *Why?* There is a "full effect" that He is after. *What's that?* It's our faith. It's our perseverance. It's our sanctification. God wants our faith to be more perfect. Complete. Refined. *Why?* Because faith makes Jesus the object of our faith. And that brings glory to God and joy to us. Think about it: the thing we need most in this world is Jesus. And when we get more of Jesus, all is good. So, trials help us leave idols. Trials break idols. Trials make us more dependent on God.

HOW DO YOU INTERACT WITH A PERSON WHO IS SUFFERING?

What James is saying is true. It is. But that doesn't mean it is easy. And relationally, interacting with someone who is suffering is a delicate matter because trials are complex. By faith, we see purposes in the trials, yet this biblical point cannot be used dogmat-

ically as if we should carelessly say to someone suffering "there are purposes in this." Yes that is true, but trials can be very painful and there is a time and place to think, pray, meditate, and talk about those purposes. It can be very hurtful to jump to "purposes" when a person is in the trial. The text does not say "make sure you tell the person who is in pain in the trial that the purpose of this trial is steadfastness." No, James is not saying that to anyone directly. It's not as if he sitting in front of a man or woman with their eyes red from weeping. James is offering to us massive truth that will take time, maybe years, to sink in. It is a category to establish and remember. So, the truth is, testing of our faith does produce steadfastness, yet give this truth time to sink in. After all, that is part of the process. You don't need to rush the process. Rather sit and weep with those who weep.

WHAT IS THE BOTTOM LINE

In this life we will face trials and they are used to mature us. This may take years, and in the moment we most likely won't understand what is happening. John Piper once said, "God is always doing 10,000 things in your life, and you may be aware of three of them."

Day 1

- ① Read James 1:1. How familiar are you with the book of James? What passages, themes, or impressions come into your mind when you think about this letter?

- ② The author is known as “James the Just.” This is not the James who was the brother of John and was one of the original. Study Acts 12:17, 15:13, 21:18, 1 Corinthians 15:7, Galatians 1:18–19; 2:9.

- ③ Read James 1:5–6 and 3:13–18 and write a short prayer below asking God for his help in adjusting to James’s format and that his Spirit would help you to “get wisdom” in this study.

- ④ At least three key instances in the letter relate to rich and poor, factions in the church. Read the following two passages related to rich and poor summarize how James wants his readers to “live out the gospel” in each instance: James 2:1–7 and James 5:1–6

- ⑤ What do you hope God will do in and through you during this study of James? (For additional background for our study, watch this 8-minute video: <http://cit.ms/2IA6bKn>.)

Day 2

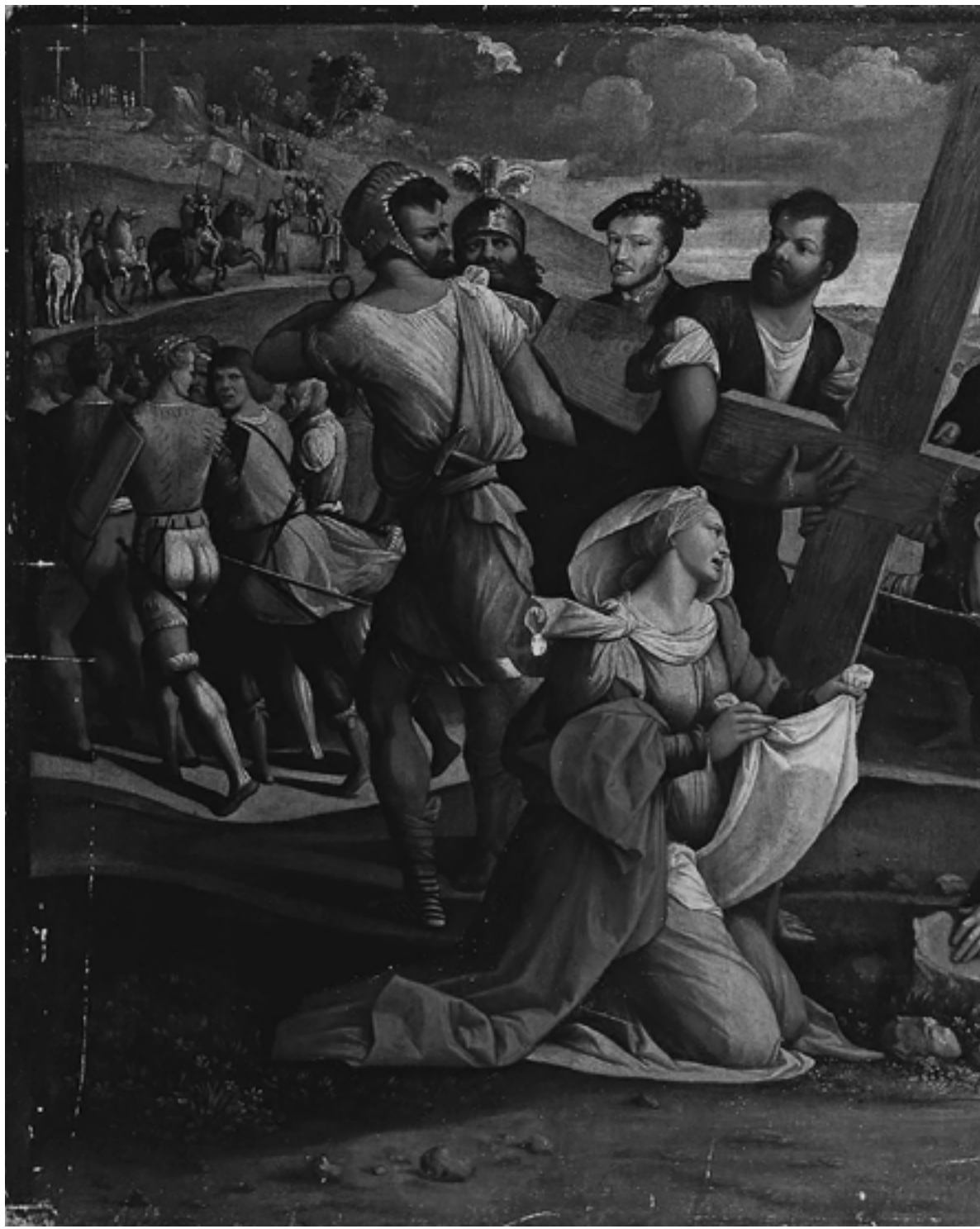
- ① Read James 1:2–4. Consider the verb “count” in verse 2. What difference does it make to hear the charge not simply as “enjoy your trials,” but to “count it all joy” when you encounter trials?

- ② Ponder joy in the context of trials. What does joy, as fruit of the Holy Spirit, look like in the life of a Christian in painful and difficult circumstances, and what steps can we take in trials to pursue it?

- ③ What about the “all”? What does James not mean in saying we count it all joy? What then does he mean? (For the Christian, are there any circumstances in life, any details however painful, that God cannot capture and somehow turn them to serve our everlasting joy?)

- ④ Describe what it means to be “steadfast” in the midst of trial. How does joy in the soul relate to being steadfast in life in the worst of situations?

- ⑤ Various trials—the smallest and the biggest and most tragic as well. Recall a time when you went through suffering, however big or small. Describe that suffering, its pains and the hope that faith provides, through the lens of 1:2–4.





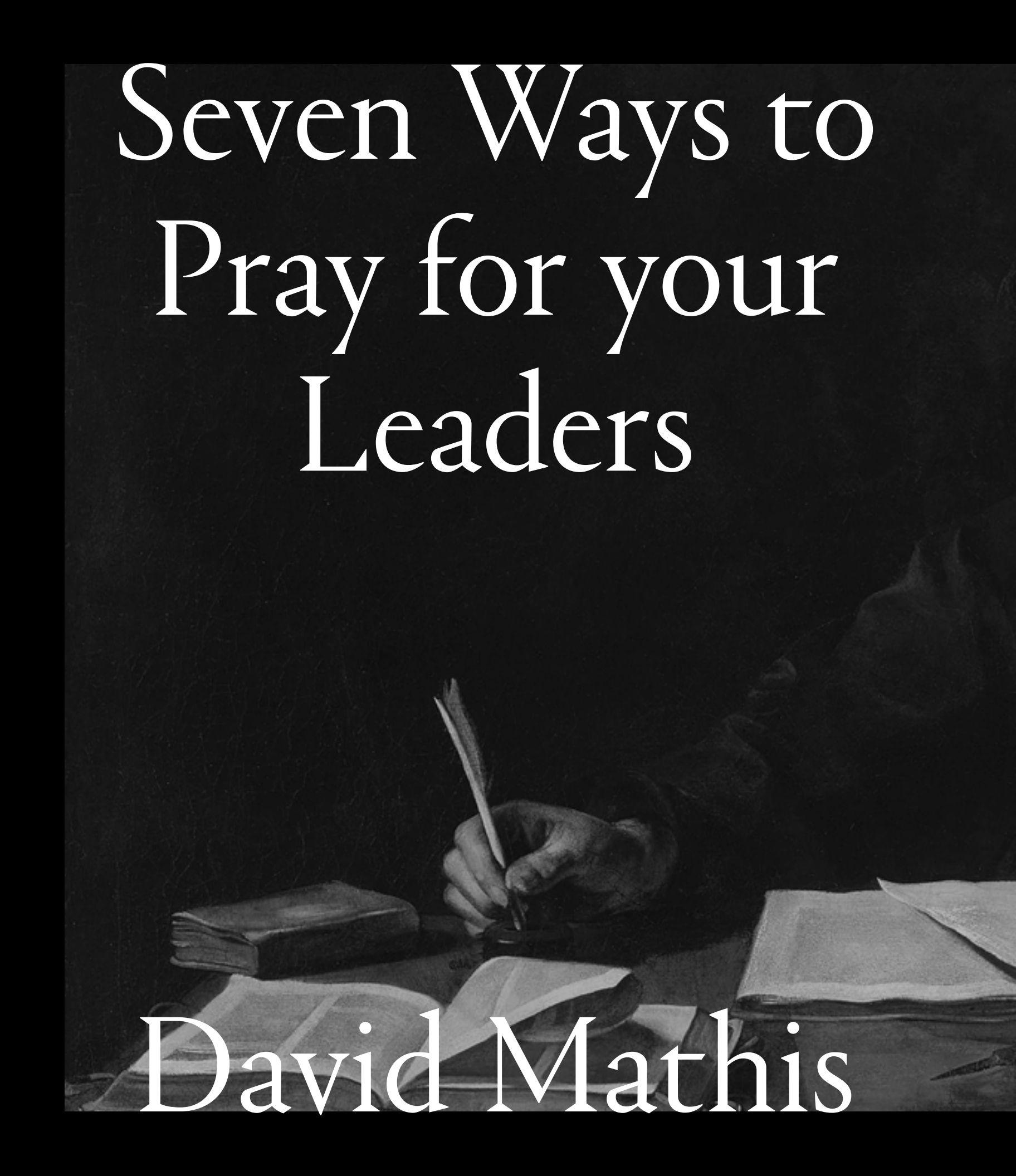
Day 3

- ① Study 1 Peter 1:6–7.

Sermon Notes

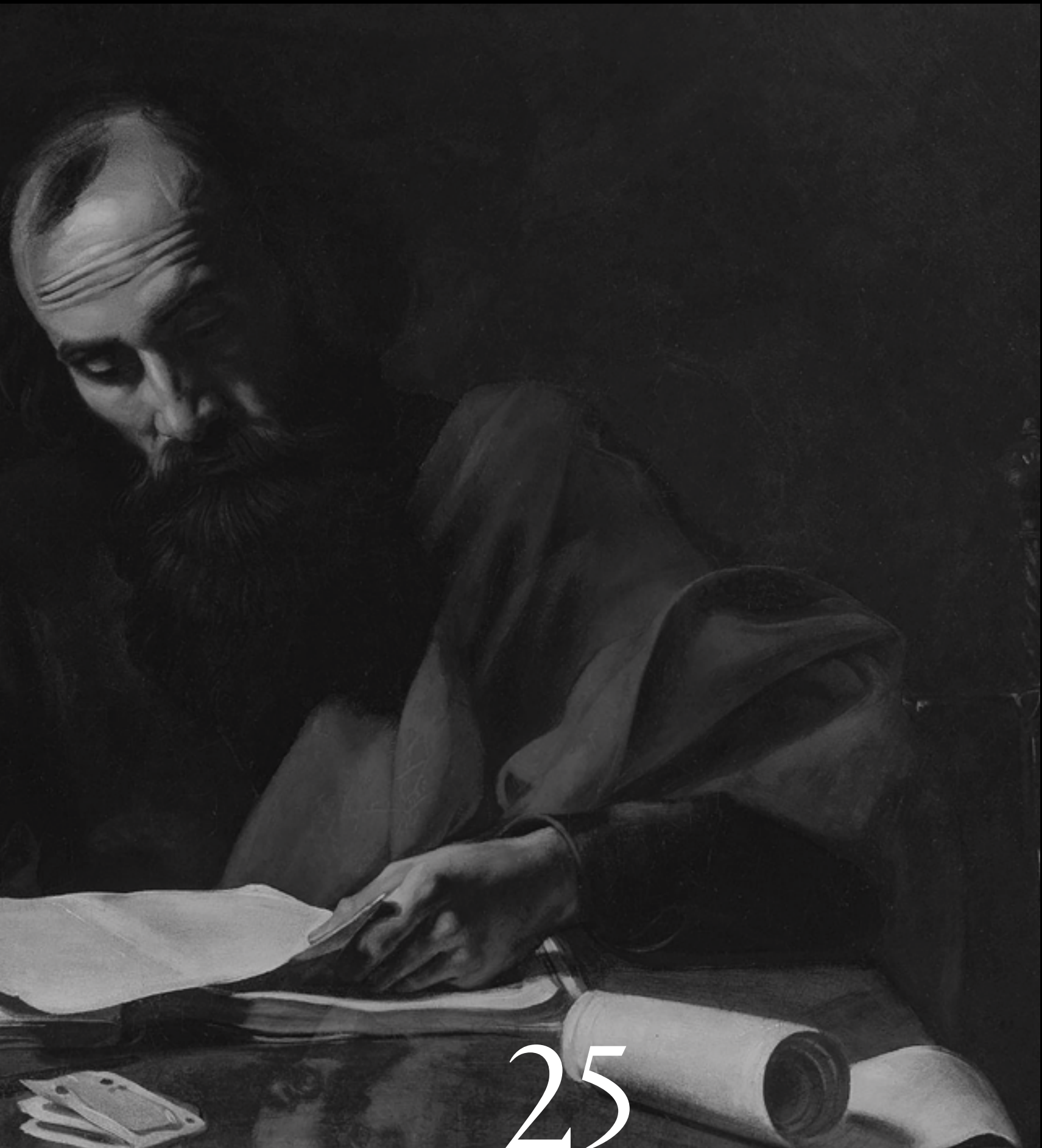
March 5, 2017

Week 1



Seven Ways to Pray for your Leaders

David Mathis



25

Wisdom is one of our greatest needs. As finite, fallen creatures, navigating the twists and turns of a complex, chaotic world, we often find ourselves at a loss for what to do next. And that's only when we stop to consider the tough decisions.

Perhaps even more significant is the wisdom we exercise intuitively in all the little decisions in life we don't pause to ponder. The overwhelming majority of our actions are not premeditated, but decided instinctively, without reflection. What comes out in these moments is either a trajectory of life with self at the center, or walking in various measures in step with the Spirit.

And the stakes are even higher for leaders, who are making decisions for others.

TALE OF TWO WISDOMS

James 3:13–18 draws a clear contrast between two kinds of wisdom: earthly wisdom and “the wisdom that comes down from above” (James 3:15). There is a kind of wisdom, exercised by humans, of human origin, and there is another kind — the true wisdom, exercised by humans, but of divine origin. One is heavenly, spiritual, and godly. The other, “earthly, unspiritual, demonic” (James 3:15).

Fortunately, our Father is an exceedingly generous giver, and he loves to respond with favor when we humbly petition him for wisdom (James 1:5). It is good to pray often for wisdom for yourself — and it is one of the most important things you can pray for your leaders.

Consider James 3:17 as a guide for praying for what our leaders would be.

The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.

1. PURE

First, pray for your leaders' purity. Sexual purity, yes, especially in our highly sexualized society, but “pure” here is so much more than simply that.

Pray that they would be pure in their conduct, *blameless*, meaning “above reproach” (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6–7). Pray that their motives would be pure, not mixed (2 Corinthians 7:11). Pray that their minds would be pure, not distracted (Philippians 4:8). Pray that the words of their teaching would be pure, not deceptive (2 Corinthians 2:17). “We who teach will be judged with greater strictness” (James 3:1).

Pray that their counsel would be pure and not lead others into sin, and that they would be wise in deciding whom to empower to represent the church as fellow leaders (1 Timothy 5:22). Pray that they would lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and be free to run with endurance the race that is set before them (Hebrews 12:1).

2. PEACE-LOVING

Pray that your leaders would love peace. Leaders in the church should not be quarrelsome (1 Timothy 3:3), and they should not be indifferent to peace (peace-neutral), but rather peacemakers (literally, “peace-loving”).

Pastors should not be “pugnacious” (the old language for it), quick to argue and pick a fight. Rather,

they should be the kind of men who “have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels” (2 Timothy 2:23; see also 1 Timothy 4:7), and who are willing to go the extra mile to keep others from getting swamped in silly arguments.

This means that it is essential for church leaders to correct others. Being genuinely peace-loving means loving peace enough to move toward conflict and controversy for the sake of seeing peace come from it. Pastors who are truly peace-loving don't avoid conflict, and don't enjoy picking a fight, but are eager to engage with disagreement for the sake of bringing about the peace of agreement in the truth.

Pray that your pastors would “hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to *rebuke those who contradict it*” (Titus 1:9). And such rebuke is not fight-picking, but peace-making, purging the church from gospel distortions, and ushering in the peace that we enjoy when we share in the truth. “A harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (James 3:18).

3. GENTLE

Wisdom from above is gentle. In a world that says you must assert yourself and grab the bull by the horns to make a difference, divine wisdom runs in a different direction. Knowing that our Lord is sovereign and engaged, and building his church, enables the Lord's servant to “not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,

correcting his opponents with gentleness” (2 Timothy 2:24–25).

Pray that your leaders would have enough confidence in God to trust his will and ways, and play their part in his plan with patience and gentleness.

4. OPEN TO REASON

Good leaders are good listeners. Wisdom from above teaches a leader that he emphatically does not know it all, and desperately needs the help and insight of colleagues and congregants, and even his critics, to gain fresh perspective and continue to learn as he’s leading.

Leaders in the church are teachers (Hebrews 13:7; 1 Timothy 3:2; 2 Timothy 2:24; Titus 1:9); they must do more than listen. They must speak. But it is essential that they be nothing less than good listeners. As James 1:19 says, “Let *every person* be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.” Yes, “every person” — and every leader all the more.

Pray that your leaders would be quick to hear, open to reason, and easily persuaded by good sense, argument, and rationale.

5. FULL OF MERCY AND GOOD FRUIT

True wisdom is inevitably practical. It comes out in action. “By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom” (James 3:13). And in the church in particular, such good fruit includes mercy.

Leaders who are simply just, and not merciful, have no place in the church. The church is the most mercied collective on the planet. Her leaders must know God’s mercy for them, and show God’s mercy to

others. It’s true for every Christian, and all the most important for leaders: “Judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13).

6. IMPARTIAL

Impartiality is an especially important virtue for leaders. It’s bad enough when anyone plays favorites and treats others unfairly, but when it takes root among the leadership, the effects multiply. The whole church soon suffers.

The impartiality of God is a clear, and often overlooked, theme in the New Testament (1 Peter 1:17; Galatians 2:6; Romans 2:11; Acts 10:34; Luke 20:21; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25). Pray that the wisdom that comes from Christ would make his under-shepherds increasingly fair and impartial (James 2:1, 9; 1 Timothy 5:21).

7. SINCERE

Sincerity now brings us full circle to purity at the beginning of the list. The term literally means “without hypocrisy.” Pray that your leaders would practice what they preach, that they would be doers of God’s word and not teachers only.

Pray that they would have the spirit of the apostles: “We are not, like so many, peddlers of God’s word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:17). Pray that they would be free from people-pleasing and too much concern with public relations.

Pray that the leaders of Christ’s church would renounce “disgraceful, underhanded ways” and “refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with

God’s word,” but that in a world of spin, posturing, and deception, they would lead “by the open statement of the truth” (2 Corinthians 4:2).

Day 1

- ① Read James 1:5–8. James sets the context of suffering in 1:2–4. Then he abruptly implies that many lack wisdom. Why do you think wisdom is important in suffering?

- ② First, we need to acknowledge that we lack wisdom. Then we need to get wisdom, if we want it. Lay out how you typically go about getting wisdom. Contrast that with what James tells us in how to go after wisdom.

- ③ What does it mean to doubt? How does doubting impact wisdom?

- ④ Matthew 7:7–11. How does this passage align with the reality that God gives generously to those who ask?

- ⑤ Obtaining wisdom may be one way in which 1:4 is fulfilled in your suffering. Give an example where you gained wisdom through a trial.

Day 2

- ① Read James 1:9–11. James 1:12 bookends our section on trials, which started in 1:2, so 1:9–11 most likely also pertains to trials. What types of trials does poverty bring?

- ② What is this exaltation that James speaks of in 1:9? How can a person in poverty boast in their exaltation? See Philippians 3:20.

- ③ How can being “rich” be a trial?

- ④ What should a person with resources boast in? Why?

- ⑤ Compare James 1:11 with Matthew 13:22. What do you learn about riches?





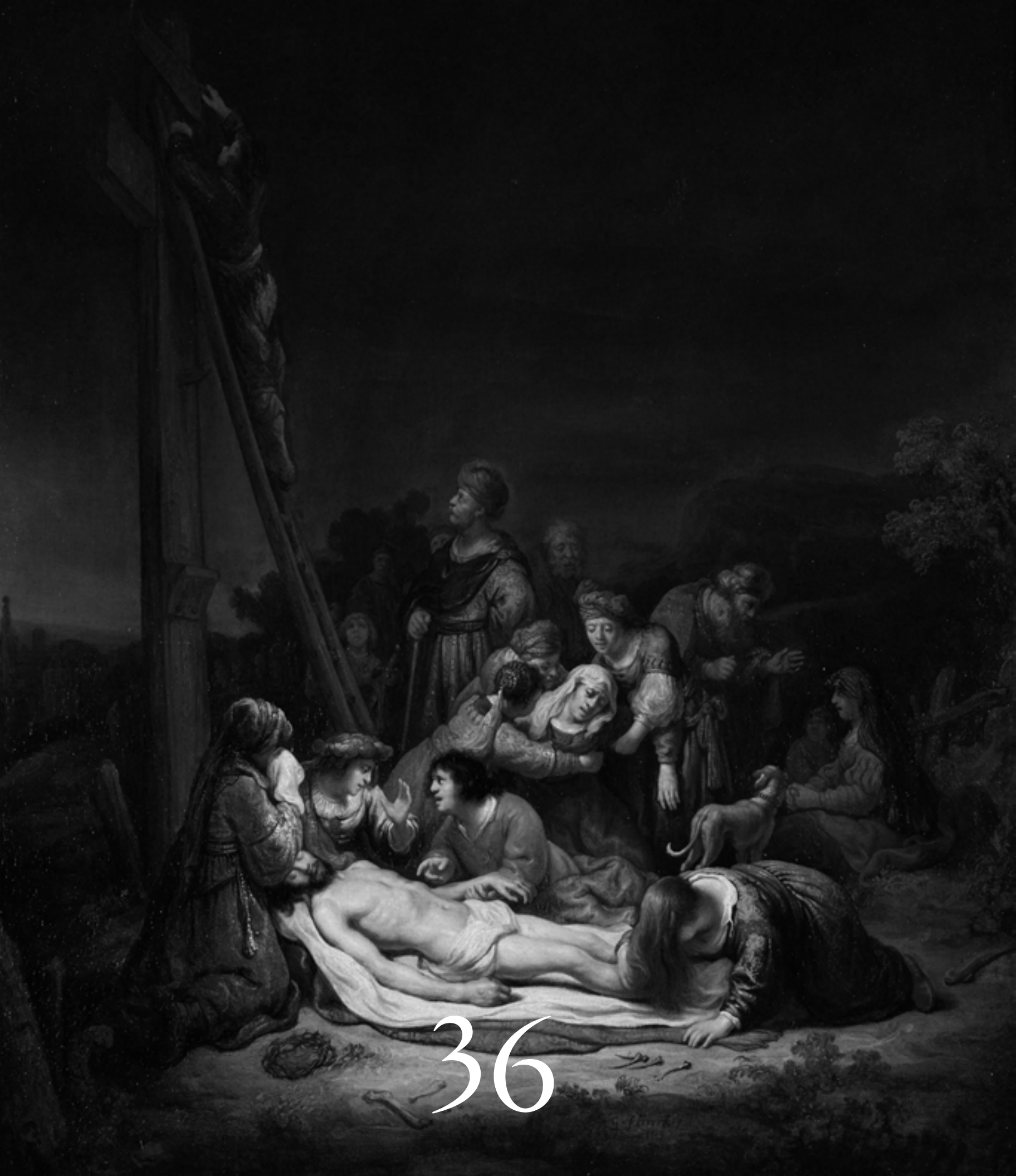
Day 3

- ① Study Matthew 16:26.

Sermon Notes

March 12, 2017

Week
3



36

Screwtape
Letter: Blaming
God

Joe Rigney

My dear Wormwood,

I'm encouraged to read in your last report that your patient has gotten in the habit of blaming others for his own vices. The way that he lost his temper and then had the audacity to blame his wife for it warmed this old devil's heart. Perhaps something of me is finally penetrating that thick skull of yours. Continue to work on that wound in their relationship. Whenever he thinks back to those quarrels, keep his attention on what *she* did to provoke him and not on his own impatience and anger. With any luck, you'll prevent him from ever engaging in the kind of sincere repentance reflected in those awful words, "Change me first." I just cringe to think of them.

The question now is what to do should he begin to soften toward his wife; his natural affection and attraction for her could enable this at any time. I see two options. Your man is one of those evangelicals who really believes in the invisible world, including spirits like us. Thus, if you find that his attention moves from his wife as the cause of his outbursts and begins to settle on his own selfishness, you may call to mind his belief in "principalities and powers." Keep that belief vague. Never let him think that you are in the room suggesting it. More of a general sentiment of "The devil made me do it." We've been running that play on humans ever since their first mother blamed our Father Below for the glorious incident with the fruit. You might even inflame his curiosity about devils and angels and spiritual warfare and all that, anything to keep him from

truly owning his culpability in the quarrel. Of course, in such matters, there is always the risk of awakening him to the thought that he is not, as he perceives, considering a distant battle as some old historian might do in a dusty library somewhere. Rather, he is in the thick of the conflict right then, bombs bursting in air all round him, our schemes and plots hatching and entwining him as he sits musing like the silly fool that he is. Should he come to an awareness of this fact, it might awaken some latent courage and nobility in him; he might sit up straight and resolve to "fight the dragon in his own heart" or "take the log out of his own eye." Worse, he might run to the Enemy for help. Thankfully, there is another way.

As delightful as Eve's "the devil made me do it" is, Adam's "the woman you gave me" is even better. Ah, how the phrase rolls off the lips. Note the subtlety: "The woman *you* gave me." Yes, you've gotten your man to blame the woman. But can you implicate the Enemy as well? You must be careful. The humans are stupid, but even they recoil from directly blaming Heaven for their transgressions. Instead funnel their blame of God through the things that he's given them. Let them say, "I was just born this way" or "That's the way I was raised" or "That's just my personality."

All of these, of course, are from him. "Good and perfect gifts" he despicably calls them. Their design, like everything in this cursed world, is to testify to him and lead them back to him and be the pathways for adoring him (one shudders to imagine it). We must take them on a detour. Unfortunately, we must always start with

something true, some real feature of the world. Let it be their genes, their physical makeup, their emotional constitution, the circumstances of their lives—anything that is a real influence on them. And then, subtly, imperceptibly let them ascribe more significance to these things than to their own choices. The trick is to get them to turn explanations, even true explanations, into excuses. Thus, "If I hadn't had such a hard day, I wouldn't have lost my temper" subconsciously comes to mean "I am being tempted by God." "I've got a lot on my plate right now" turns into "My anxiety is justified. If God wouldn't overburden me, I wouldn't be so worried about money." Let the Enemy's wretched truth—"God ordains trials for the testing of my faith" serve your lie—"Therefore, he is to blame if I fail." Above all, never, never, never let them forthrightly take responsibility for what they've done.

While we're on the subject, let me remind you of one of old Slubgob's lessons from the Tempter's College. You must always obscure the distinctions between desire, temptation, little sins, and big sins. To do this, we must squarely face the "truth" of the matter. Bringing a human from a state of obedience to a state of death is a process. The Enemy himself describes it like a pregnancy. A man's own desires entice and lure him (with our aid, of course). These desires conceive and eventually bring forth sin—real, delicious, deliberate sin. And then sin, as it grows and flourishes under our infernal care, eventually brings forth that bitter yet tasty fruit of death. You must flatten out these distinctions. Press them down, compel them

to meld together, make them all the same in the patient's mind—and then watch the vermin squirm no matter which way he goes. One man will develop a hyper-sensitive and false conscience. He will experience each temptation as though death was already born in his soul, and he will despair. The slightest hint of a temptation in his heart will kill all joy, all comfort, all security in the Enemy's vicious promises. Nevermind that the Tyrant himself, when he was on earth, was tempted, yet without sin. As our Father Below tells it, the Tyrant, in his ridiculous man suit, was this close to kneeling, to prostrating himself at Hell's feet, when some chance remembrance of a line from that vile Book interrupted the trance that our Prince was so expertly placing him under. Thankfully, the humans are more forgetful than *He* was.

On the other hand, flattening the distinctions serves in another way. I knew a woman once who would be practically glorying in self-pity and bitterness and rage at God and her husband and the world, yet all the time was convinced that she was resisting temptation like a hermetic monk. To her, the sin, if it even was there, was so small that it was hardly worth the name. In reality, she was thirty-nine weeks pregnant and baby Death was due any day. She is now safely in our Father's house.

Of course the best of all is to convince your man that it is possible to be a little bit pregnant. Like the silly fish that he is, let him think that he can play with the lures, fondling lustful fantasies or envious impulses or bitter thoughts, without ever being caught. Let him try to be two months

with child and stay there. What he doesn't know is that giving in a little makes it harder to resist the next time. Each small choice in our favor curves his soul further inward. Gradually the pressure builds and builds until finally the great Sin, the glorious Calamity breaks forth, much to the surprise of the patient himself. Those who fall into great sin rarely fall far.

These kinds of situations are precisely the best ones for fostering in your patient a deliberate accusation against God for his own sin. In fact, Paul, that cursed apostle, can actually be twisted to our use. His words about no man being tempted beyond his ability and God always providing a way of escape can be very useful to our plots. One of my own patients, whose soul is now swirling in agony in a bottle on my shelf, used to indulge lustful fantasies in his mind day after day. After a few minutes of drinking from my draught, he would catch himself and resolve to do better next time. He might even pat himself on the back for his "noble resistance." But he'd never repent of the little sin. Day after day, I would work on him, each time letting his mind swim in vileness a little longer. Finally, I would spring my trap and the man would fall headlong into debauchery. But the most delicious moment was always afterward when he would be groveling in self-loathing and shame, and then, in a moment of righteous indignation, accuse the Enemy of failing to provide "the way of escape." Little did he realize that the way of escape was three days earlier when he was busy caressing those fantasies as he drove down the road. He blew right past the exit and then had the gall to blame

the Almighty for his crash. When he eventually left his wife and family and the faith, I received our institution's highest honor, the Diabolical Medal of Slavery. Ah, I think I need a drink.

Your affectionate uncle,
Screwtape

Day 1

- ① Read James 1:12–15. What have you learned about steadfastness so far in James in 1:1–11?

- ② Define “blessed”. Describe how one is blessed in 1:12.

- ③ Define temptation. Is God involved in your temptations? How so or why not?

- ④ In 1:14 we have a contrast word “but”. Lay out the contrast between v.13 and v.14. What do you learn about temptations?

- ⑤ In 1:13–15 we see a progression of events. Lay out and describe the progression of events. In what ways do “small” temptations lead to “death”? Have you seen this in your life?

Day 2

- ① Read James 1:16–18. James begins this section by saying, “Do not be deceived.” What deception do you think he has in mind?

- ② What do you consider good gifts in your life right now? Do you enjoy them? How so?

- ③ What do good gifts point to? How does this reality help us to enjoy the good gifts properly? Do good gifts satisfy us ultimately? Explain.

- ④ The previous passage uses the metaphor of pregnancy and childbirth to talk about temptation, desire, sin, and death. Verse 18 uses some similar language and imagery. Note similarities between the two passages and then speculate on the significance of this comparison

- ⑤ You are born again through the word of truth. It means to be a Christian you go by the truth. This is where you get the power. This truth comes alive in you. Compare James 1:18 with 1 Peter 1:22–25.





Day 3

- ① Study Hebrews 3:12–15.

Sermon Notes

March 19, 2017

Week 4

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In the book of Jeremiah the Lord declares that the Jews had forsaken Him, the fountain of living water, and instead dug empty cisterns incapable of holding water. As a teenager I was deeply thirsting for something that would satisfy and bring meaning to my life. I had grown up in the church and acknowledged the existence of God, yet never experienced any sort of relationship with the living God. He felt distant and unable to practically meet my needs so I found no reason to trust in Him. The Christian faith seemed like a set of rules that would only restrict the way I wanted to live.

My parents held high standards for me and I was often disciplined by them due to my unruly behavior and rebellious attitude. Sometimes I felt that my parents were overly concerned about me becoming the ideal, well-behaved, and academically successful son that I questioned their love towards me in my current sin and struggles. I kept falling short of their standards so when high school came around I had stopped trying to please my parents and instead strongly rebelled against them behind their back. I dug more and more "cisterns" hoping to satisfy the deep thirst that I had. I pursued happiness in

acceptance from my peers, alcohol, marijuana, and occasional “hook ups” with women.

When I was 18, I entered into my first serious relationship. I poured all my effort, energy, and hope into this dating relationship after I had begun to experience deep feelings of infatuation. Things moved quickly emotionally and physically and it wasn't long till we were sleeping with one another. My identity was found completely in the relationship. I thought that this woman I was dating would finally satisfy the deep longings of my heart. I thought I had found the forever-quench-

ing drink. My girlfriend and my sexuality became the gods I worshiped. These Idols had kept me satisfied for a time, but the summer before my sophomore year of college I began to lose those strong, infatuated feelings I had for my girlfriend. I no longer found deep fulfillment in the relationship. I was hit with the sobering reality that another person could never satisfy the deepest longings of my heart.

It was at this time that I began to ask the question "Is God the only one who can bring lasting fulfillment and joy?" I began to further pursue knowledge of Je-

sus through reading the scriptures and attending a Bible study.

Additionally, I began to feel a subtle conviction of my sin that would slowly grow over time. As my convictions grew I began to think about one day surrendering all of my life to Jesus. That being said, I still felt like a slave to my sin and I wasn't sure that I could trust God or experience a relationship with Him in a tangible way. I would take steps towards God but then fall back into my sin. I experienced a lot of frustration and guilt as I continued to fail in the progress I was making in my faith. This restless back-

and-forth lifestyle changed when I attended a fall retreat through Cru (Campus Crusade for Christ). I remember Dusty Hoffman, the speaker, talk about the Gospel and the amazing grace and love of God.

I took a long and hard look at the lifestyle I was living.

Nothing in this world had satisfied and I felt the full weight of my sin. I took a step of faith. I confessed before God that I was a sinner in need of his grace, powerless to change without his divine power. I remember praying: "God, I'm scared, I have no idea what it means to

live for you, but I surrender. I'm done living for myself." It was then that I first came to experience the peace and joy that only the Holy Spirit brings. My identity slowly became more and more established in Christ, not in a woman or in the fleeting pleasures of this world. I surrounded myself with a supportive and loving Christian community and I saw victory over sexual temptation. Healing from the neurological bond of my past relationship has been the hardest thing that I've had to go through, but by God's grace in my life, he has used my story and circumstances to speak hope into the lives of young men strug-

gling with sexual sin. I am not defined by the sins of my past, present, or future. I'm still far from perfect, but I am a new creation in Christ who is slowly being transformed more and more into his likeness. What he began in me, he is faithful to bring to completion.

“But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14).

Day 1

- ① Read James 1:19–25. Explain what our new humanity should look like in Christ compared to our old selves prior to salvation? See Ephesians 4:22–24.

- ② What does James want us to do in v.19 and v.21? Why? See v.20.

- ③ 1:21–23. Note each use of “word”. Follow James’s progression of thinking as he thinks about the “implanted word”. What is the “word” and why is it so important?

- ④ 1:23–25. What metaphor does James use in these verses and what does it mean? Notice the emphasis on the contrast of “forget” in v.24 and “persevere” (or remain) in v.25.

- ⑤ The perfect law of v.25 is the same as the word in v.22. The perfect law of liberty is closely associated with the gospel. In v.25 notice the contrast between the “hearer who forgets” and the “doer who acts”. Who is blessed? If God cares most about our hearts, why do you think God blesses that person? How does the gospel help us be doers who act?

Day 2

- ① Read James 1:26–27. Define religion—what is it? What type of religion is James looking for?

- ② Define bridle. What does it mean to bridle your tongue and why does James think this is important? Why is it difficult to bridle your tongue?

- ③ Where do our words come from? See Matthew 15:17–20.

- ④ James is looking for service in your religion. How is serving the lowly or helpless a picture of the gospel? Why is a changed heart needed in order to do this?

- ⑤ What does worldliness look like in America? How does this show up in your life? How does the gospel give the power to keep yourself unstained from the world?





Day 3

- ① Study Colossians 3:1–5.

Sermon Notes

March 26, 2017

Week 5

AS THE BODY
APART FROM THE
SPIRIT IS DEAD

SO ALSO FAITH
APART FROM
WORKS IS DEAD.

Show No Partiality





In one light, partiality is simply showing fondness for one thing over another. When it comes to people, we tend to show partiality towards those in whom we see ourselves reflected or defined. In a herd of crazed football fans (especially in Minnesota), I show partiality towards those wearing Green and Gold, because I am a Packer fan and know that I must stay tight with my Wisconsin brethren. In a group of professionals looking to network, I show partiality towards people who have been laid off, because I was laid off and I know how much I appreciated those who went out of their way to help me get connected. In the work place, when I find out a co-worker is a Christian, I tend to reach out to them for help more than others, because I know they will be looking at things through a different lens, similar to me.

I would say there is nothing morally wrong with showing partiality in the ways I did above. I am seeking out an invisible fraternity that exists in each scenario. I am naturally going to gravitate towards those who are similar to me. Nevertheless, *partiality* is also known to bare its ugly teeth from time to time, when we show preference towards one person at the expense of another. This can be much harder to identify when you are the guilty party.

James 2 provides an example of this, with two men coming to our door: a rich man who appears to be of great importance and a poor man, wearing shabby clothing. We often show favor towards the rich man, placing him on a pedestal, while we give the poor man our sloppy seconds.

At the root of this evil is not simply our fondness of wealth over poverty. We see ourselves in the rich man, or at least we see our perception of ourselves. We are guilty of thinking that the rich man is the one whom we have the most in common with. To take it even further, because we don't see anything in common with the poor man, we decide to discount him entirely. The rich man gets our best service, because we would only give ourselves the best, and the poor man gets next to nothing.

This is an underlying point I think James intends to make, to show his brothers how much of a rags to riches story they all carry. He never blatantly tells them that they are the poor man, but instead asks the question "has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?"

James catches us all in a classic "if-then" statement with this question. If I am chosen by God to be rich in faith and an heir of his kingdom, then I am poor in the world. *You got me James. You got me good.*

But we can't stop there. By definition, I would not consider myself to be poor like the man with shabby clothing. Does this mean that God has not chosen me to be rich in faith and an heir to his kingdom? No, but it forces me to reexamine what else James could be communicating by using the word *poor*. Am I a poor loser? Sometimes. Am I of poor health? I stay healthy for the most part. Am I a poor and needy sinner? Only on days that end with the letter "y." This is starting to make more sense.

The only way we can truly be saved is if we see our absolute need for a savior. To see our need for a savior, we must first see how broken and sinful we are. And if we truly see how broken and sinful we are, then there is no way we can find ourselves having more in common with the rich man. The rich man has fine clothing, a gold ring and status. He would be insulted if you identified him as a sinner. Furthermore, telling him that he could inherit the kingdom of God would have no appeal, as his wealth outshines any intangible promise that God could offer. The poor man has nothing but shabby clothing. Telling this man that he is poor and needy is nothing he hasn't heard. But telling him that he can inherit the kingdom of God by having faith in Jesus, is a gift that he could never have imagined being worthy of.

With this in mind, my charge to you is to think about those whom you show partiality towards. Are you showing favor towards someone at the expense of another? And when you take a step back, with whom do you really have more in common? Who would be more grateful for your friendship? Who would be more grateful for the favor you are willing to show? Could this same person be any more eager to hear the good news of Salvation? How many more outlets does this new mindset give you to share the gospel?

Day 1

- ① Read James 2:1–7. What does it mean to “show partiality”? From 2:1–4 to explain what partiality means.

- ② What is “holding the faith” and why is it important as you aim to show no partiality? Why can showing partiality be tempting? See Paul’s example in Galatians 2:6.

- ③ James gives a concrete illustration of what “showing partiality and favoritism” looked like in his day. Write down what “showing partiality” might look like in the present day.

- ④ Why do you think God is opposed to partiality? See Deuteronomy 16:18–20, Proverbs 24:23, and 2 Chronicles 19:7.

- ⑤ How did Jesus live and show us how to live in regards to partiality? How does the gospel free us from the temptation to show partiality? See Luke 20:21, Acts 10:34–38, and Romans 2:6–11.

Day 2

- ① James 2:8–13. What is the royal law? What does it look like to love your neighbor in your neighborhood? See Leviticus 19:18 and Matthew 5:43–44.

- ② 2:8–9 are contrasted with the use of “but”. Lay out that contrast to learn more about loving your neighbor. How does showing partiality impact your relationship with your neighbor?

- ③ There is a very important logical connection between 2:10 and 2:11. Explain James’s reasoning in these two verses. Why are we guilty of the whole law if we stumble at only one point?

- ④ Review James 1:25. The “law of liberty” is true freedom, which is freedom to obey God and do what pleases him. Why is this freedom important when you speak and act? How does this freedom help you not show partiality?

- ⑤ What does James mean by “Mercy triumphs over judgment”? In what ways does this encourage you as you follow Jesus?





Day 3

- ① Study Romans 13:9–10.

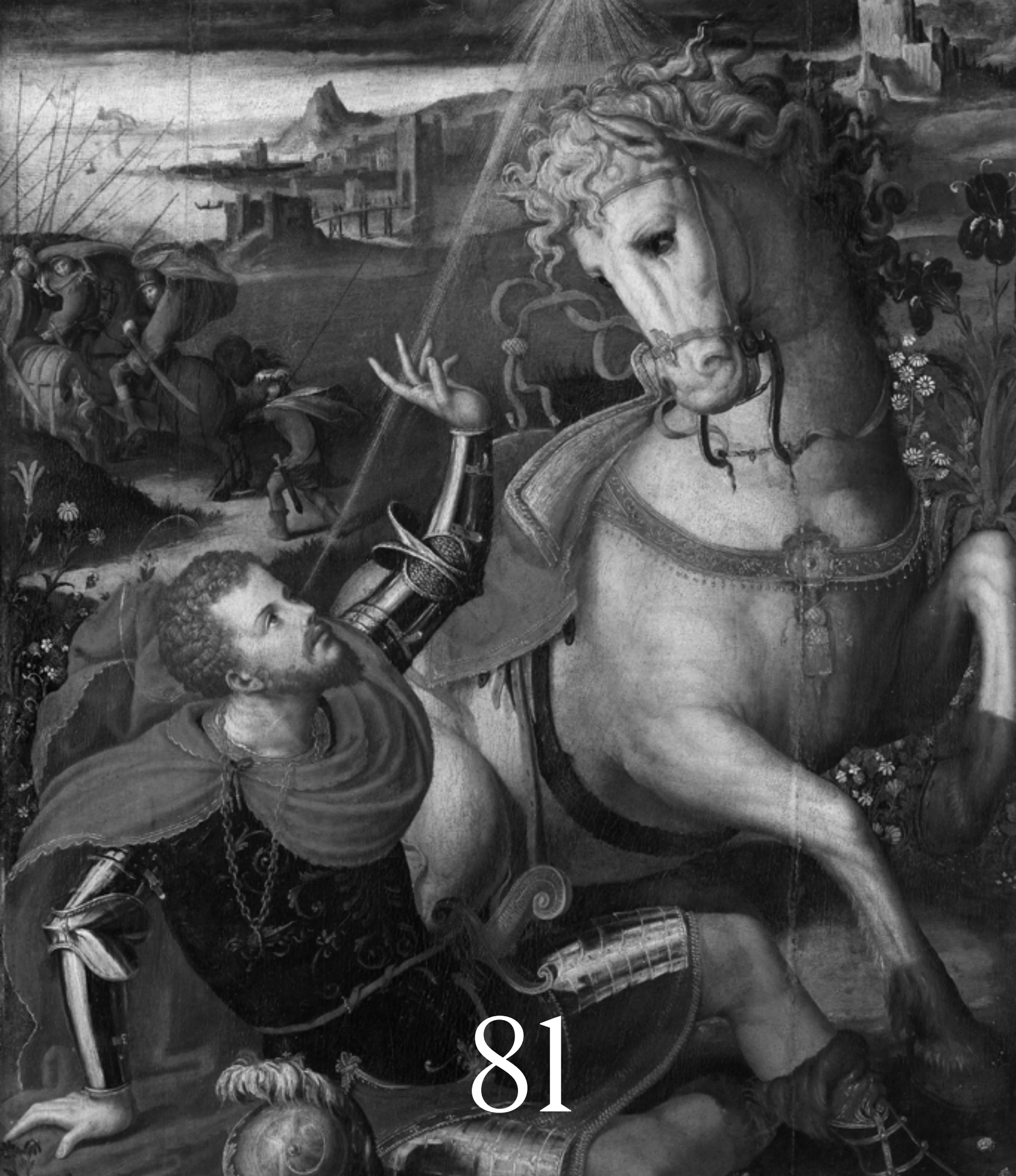
Sermon Notes

April 2, 2017

Week 6

Does James Contradict Paul

John Piper



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Romans 3:27-4:5,

Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in[a] him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness. . . .

GOD’S WORD DOES NOT CONTRADICT ITSELF

We believe that the Bible is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16). It is the very word of God, written. Therefore, we believe that the Bible is true and coherent. It does not teach us things that are false. It does not contradict itself. We believe this because Jesus Christ has made himself real to us and has shown himself to be the trustworthy Son of God. He has taught us that the Scriptures cannot be broken (John 10:35). He commissioned apostles to teach the church and promised to lead them into all truth (John 16:13). And he has given us his Spirit to open our eyes to see reality for what it is

(1 Corinthians 2:14-15). So we have come to receive his Word as the very Word of God (1 Thessalonians 2:13), free from error and contradiction, because God is true and not a God of confusion.

THE AMBIGUITY OF WORDS

But this does not mean that there are no problems for us in the Bible. We are finite. We are sinful. We are culturally biased. And language itself can confuse us when different words carry the same meaning, and when the same words carry different meanings. Take the simple English word “rock.” It might mean a stone, or a kind of music, or something you do in a rocking chair, or a man’s name. Or take the Greek word *zelos* which can be “jealousy” in a bad sense or “zeal” in a good sense. So if someone says to you, “I think we should strive to overcome all *zelos* in our lives,” before you agree or disagree what should you ask him? You should ask him to define the term *zelos*. Or consider an Englishman saying, “Let’s play football this afternoon,” to which you respond, “No, I’d like to play soccer.” What a waste if you spent the afternoon arguing about which you should play, when the word “football” to an Englishman, and the word “soccer” to an American mean the same thing.

So the same words can have different meanings. And different words can have the same meanings. This is true in the Bible as well as in all other books and conversations. Jonathan Edwards came to the end of one of his journal entries after arguing that the phrase “moral duty” was a redundancy, since “every duty whatsoever is a moral duty.” And the last sentence is

a sigh of resignation to the world of words: “O, how is the world darkened, clouded, distracted, and torn to pieces by those dreadful enemies of mankind called words!” (Miscellany #4). Of course, that’s an overstatement, and while words are at times maddening, they are also a precious means of communicating.

But we do feel like Edwards sometimes when trying to solve problems in the Bible. The inspiration of the Word of God is like the incarnation of the Son of God. When the Son of God became a human being he became vulnerable to abuse and death. When the Word of God became human language, it became vulnerable to ambiguity and misunderstanding.

APPARENT CONTRADICTION BETWEEN PAUL AND JAMES

All of that introduction is simply to set the stage for the apparent contradiction between Paul and James on the doctrine of justification by faith.

Last week I made a case from Romans 4:1-5 for the truth that we are justified by faith alone, not by works. You can already see it, for example, in Romans 3:28, “We maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law;” and especially in Romans 5:5, “To the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.” So God’s verdict of not guilty and his imputing his own righteousness to us in Christ at the beginning of the Christian life is by faith alone, with nothing else commending us to God. We trust his free grace to forgive us and acquit us and count us as righteous because of the work of Christ. That’s how we get

started in the Christian life — justified by faith alone.

Now you have just heard the verses in James that seem to contradict that. Let's note them again. James 2:21, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?" And James 2:24, "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone." So you see that James not only says that a person is justified by works, but he also denies that justification is by faith alone. At least he uses words that, on the face of it, in isolation, seem to mean something very different from Paul.

DOES JAMES REFUTE PAUL OR AN ABUSE OF PAUL'S TEACHING?

So the key question here is: Does James aim to refute the doctrine of Paul that justification is by faith alone, which would mean there is a massive contradiction in the Bible? Or does James aim to refute an abuse of Paul's teaching and bring a corrective for the churches he was writing to? I want to try to show you that James is not contradicting Paul here but teaching something compatible with Paul's teaching and correcting a misuse of Paul's teaching.

Paul was very aware that his teaching of justification by faith alone was being distorted and misused by those who said, "Well, if we are justified while we are ungodly by faith alone, and this magnifies the grace of God, then let's just keep sinning, because we are secure anyway and God's grace will get more glory." You can see this, for example, in Romans 3:8, "And why not say (as we are slanderously

reported and as some claim that we say), 'Let us do evil that good may come'? Their condemnation is just." So he knows he is being slandered: "Paul teaches that the more evil you do the more good comes of it, because God's grace is glorified in justifying the ungodly."

Or consider Romans 5:20. Paul says, "The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." Paul knows what some are saying, "Well, if grace abounds where sin increases what shall we say?" Romans 6:1, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?" That's what they were saying, "Let's continue in sin that grace may increase."

Now Paul has answers to this kind of superficial distortion and abuse of his teaching. He has answers in virtually all his letters to show how good works and love necessarily flow from real justifying faith. For example, in Galatians 5:13 Paul says, "You were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." So we have a wonderful freedom from the commandments of God as a means of justification. But does Paul then just lay the works of love on top of that freedom as a layer of legal duty? You got a good start through justification by faith alone, but now there is another way, besides faith, to do what you ought to do and become a loving person?

FAITH WORKS THROUGH LOVE
No. Look at Galatians 5:6, a crucial text in seeing Paul and James in harmony with each other. "For in Christ

Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love." So when Paul dealt with the abuse of his doctrine of justification by faith alone, he said: It's not added works like circumcision that will win God's favor. What then? It is "faith working through love." Notice very carefully what he says. What counts with God? "Faith." But what kind of faith? Faith that "works through love." He does not say that what counts with God is "faith" plus a layer of loving works added to faith. He says that what counts with God is the kind of faith that by its nature produces love. But it is faith that gives us our right standing with God. The love that comes from it only shows that it is, in fact, real living, justifying faith.

Now that, I think, is what James was trying to get across to his churches. Loveless faith is absolutely useless; and anybody that comes along and says "We are justified by faith alone, and so you don't have to be a loving person to go to heaven" is not telling the truth.

Let's see how James corrects this distortion of Paul's teaching. Here's where you have to watch out for words — what does James mean by the words he uses? Even when his words may seem to be in conflict with Paul, is the meaning in conflict?

James' concern is with a kind of counterfeit faith that does not produce love. This faith cannot justify anybody. Verse 14: "What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?" You see his concern. "Can that faith save him?" Such faith is not going to save. What

kind of works is James interested in? The same kind Paul is — the works of love. Verses 15-16: “If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?” So James’ concern is that people have real saving faith, not counterfeit faith. And the difference is that the real faith produces loving behavior.

He has three ways of describing this counterfeit faith. First in verse 17, he says it is dead: “Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.” It is dead faith. If faith does not “work through love” as Paul said, it is dead. Second, in verse 19 he says, “You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.” There is a faith that even devils have, namely, belief in right doctrine. The faith that justifies and works through love is not simply belief in right doctrines like, “God is one.” Devils can be orthodox at the intellectual level. They believe. But it doesn’t save them. So there is dead faith and devil faith. Third, he says in verse 20, “But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?” So there is useless, idle, ineffective, vain, empty faith.

So there are three ways in this passage that James talks about faith to show that the faith he says cannot justify is a faith that Paul would totally agree cannot justify — dead faith, devil faith, and useless faith — faith that has no vital life that works through love.

ABRAHAM AS AN EXAMPLE FOR BOTH PAUL AND JAMES

Now how does James make his case from the life of Abraham — which was what we saw Paul doing in Romans 4? Well, he does it like this. He takes two events in the life of Abraham. The first (in James 2:22) is from Genesis 15:6. God promises Abraham a great host of descendants though his wife is barren. Verse 23 cites Abraham’s faith from Genesis 15:6: “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” That is exactly what Paul does with that event and that verse (Romans 4:3). One thing is reckoned as righteousness: faith. Abraham believed God and it was reckoned as righteousness. Faith, not works, was reckoned as righteousness.

But then James notices that in Genesis 22:1 “God tested Abraham” by commanding him to offer up his son Isaac. What was God testing? He was testing his faith. What was he looking for? He was looking for the kind of obedience or works that shows Abraham’s faith was not dead faith or devil faith or useless faith. So the issue in James 2:21 (where Abraham offers Isaac) is not the first act of justification that put Abraham in a right standing with God. The issue is the test: was Abraham’s faith the living kind of faith that produces the “obedience of faith” or the dead kind that has no effect on life?

“JUSTIFICATION BY WORKS” DEFINED BY PAUL AND BY JAMES

So when James says in verse 21 that Abraham was “justified by works” he has a meaning in mind different from Paul’s when Paul denies that a man is

justified by works (Romans 3:28; 4:2; 4:5). James is answering the question: Does the ongoing and final reckoning of Abraham’s righteousness depend on works as the necessary evidence of true and living faith? James’ answer to that question is Yes. And Paul’s answer is also Yes, in Galatians 5:6 (the only thing that counts is “faith working through love”). If you ask James and Paul, “How does an ungodly person get right with God and receive the righteousness of God in Christ as a gift?” both James and Paul would answer with the words of James 2:23: “Trust God (trust Christ) and that faith alone will be reckoned as righteousness.”

But if you ask them, “Does justification as an ongoing and final right standing with God depend on the works of love?” Paul is going to say, “No, if by works you mean deeds done to show that you deserve God’s ongoing blessing (the point of Romans 4:4).” And James is going to say, “Yes, if by works you mean the fruit and evidence of faith like Abraham’s obedience on Mount Moriah.” And Paul is going to say, “I agree with James, based on his definitions.” And James is going to say, “I agree with Paul, based on his definitions.”

So when Paul renounces “justification by works” he renounces the view that anything we do along with faith is credited to us as righteousness. Only faith obtains the verdict, not guilty, when we become Christians. Works of any kind are not acceptable in the moment of initial justification. But when James affirms “justification by works” he means that works are absolutely necessary in the ongoing life

of a Christian to confirm and prove the reality of the faith which justifies.

For Paul, “justification by works” (which he rejects) means “gaining right standing with God by the merit of works.” For James, “justification by works” (which he accepts) means “maintaining a right standing with God by faith along with the necessary evidence of faith, namely, the works of love.”

To put it yet another way: When Paul teaches in Romans 4:5 that we are justified by faith alone, he means that the only thing that unites us to Christ for righteousness is dependence on Christ. When James says in James 2:24 that we are not justified by faith alone he means that the faith which justifies does not remain alone. These two positions are not contradictory. Faith alone unites us to Christ for righteousness, and the faith that unites us to Christ for righteousness does not remain alone. It bears the fruit of love. It must do so or it is dead, demon, useless faith and does not justify.

The glory of Christ in the gospel is not merely that we are justified when we depend entirely on Christ, but also that depending entirely on Christ is the power that makes us new, loving people. Depending entirely on Christ is how we are justified and how we are sanctified. Paul struck the one note. James struck the other. Both are true and together they bring Christ the glory due his name.

Day 1

- ① Coming into the study today, what's your understanding of James's statement, "Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead"?

- ② Read Romans 3:21–31, and explain what you think Paul means by verse 28.

- ③ If Paul and James both mean the same thing by "justification" (as well as by "faith"), then we do have a problem. Look at James 2:24 side by side with Romans 3:28. How can both be true? An essential difference to observe is the element of time. When does Paul have in mind, and when is James referring to?

- ④ Look at James' use of "faith" in the passage (especially in verse 14) and explain how he is using the word slightly differently here from true, saving faith, as Paul does.

- ⑤ Saving faith is a living faith that will not stay private and hidden but "show" itself through good works. Such "showing," then, is not unimportant, but an essential evidence to the world that God has changed us inside. Consider your life and schedule today. How might you show family, friends, coworkers, and anyone else who notices your outer life that God has changed you inside?

Day 2

- ① James uses the stories of Abraham and Rahab to show the importance of faith being lived out in good works. Read the story of Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3; 15:1–6; and 22:1–14. How did Abraham’s external act of faith in Genesis 22 show the inner work of faith God did in him in chapters 12 and 15?

- ② James says about Abraham in verse 22, “Faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works.” How was Abraham’s obedience to God not a superfluous external act, but an essential “completion” of Abraham’s internal faith?

- ③ Read the story of Rahab in Joshua 2:1–22 and Joshua 6:23. How was her obedience, her “works,” not meaningless but an essential expression and extension of her faith in the true God?

- ④ Consider your life. How might God be calling you to trust him in a fresh way for some pattern of sin or disobedience that is inconsistent with the faith you profess? Perhaps think of two or three ways, not simply the first one that springs to mind.

- ⑤ Write a brief prayer below asking for God’s help in making your life to better show through your actions what faith he has given you inside. Be specific, and share your thoughts with a friend or family member in the faith.





Day 3

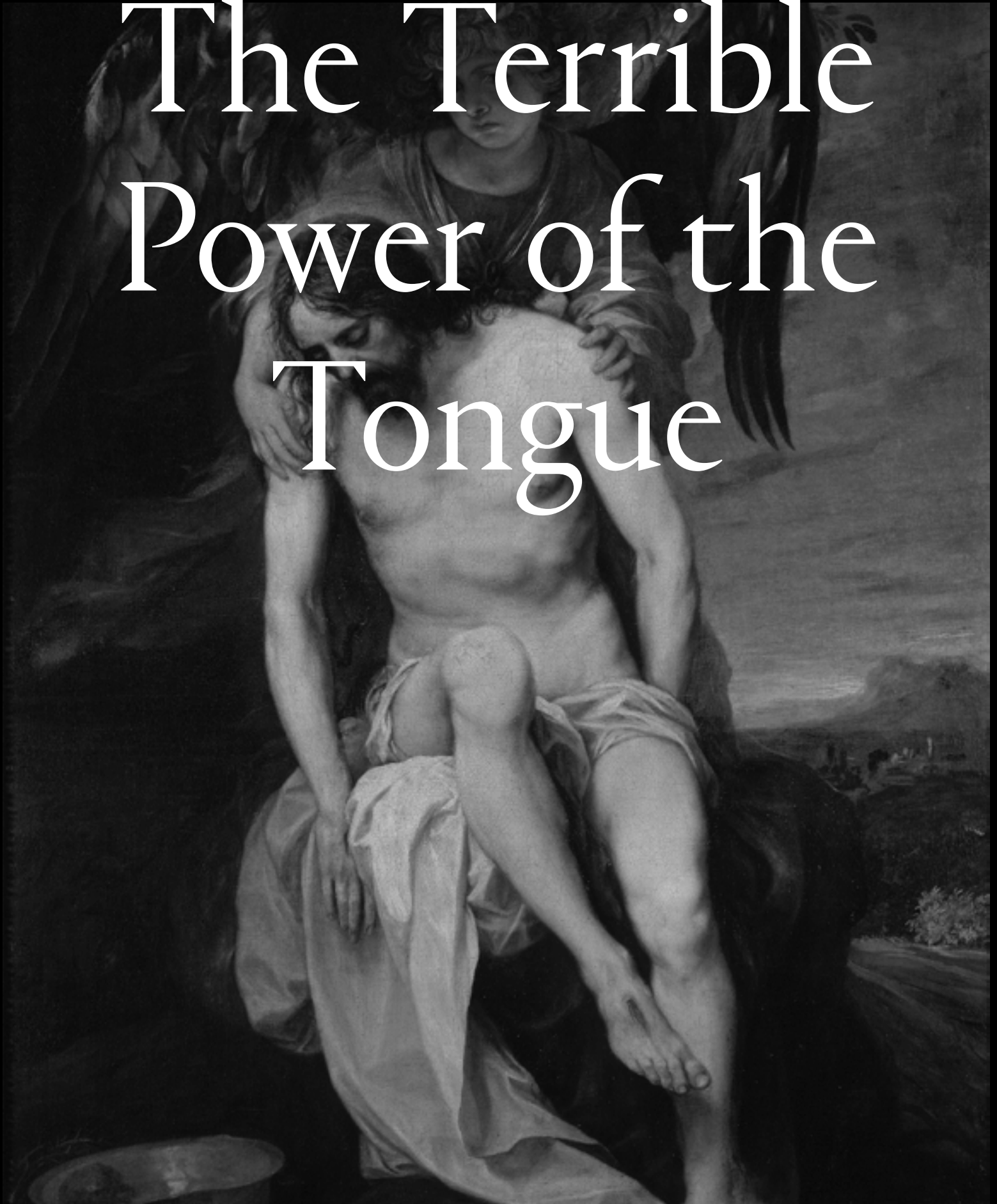
- ① Study Matthew 7:24–27.

Sermon Notes

April 9, 2017

Week 7

The Terrible Power of the Tongue



Sam Choi

95

How bad is gossiping or slander? Or a harmless mock of someone online? Or what about saying some harsh words in the heat of anger?

We have all used words in negative ways. However, the letter of James would not downplay these sins as merely mistakes or “fun and games.”

How we speak is a very big deal in James. Your speech is a great barometer of your faith. If you want to know where your heart is, look at your speech (Matt 15:18). In fact, James 1:26 teaches that a person’s religion is worthless if they cannot control their tongue.

James 3 continues this theme and further unpacks it.

MAIN IDEA

Christians must control their speech, for it is a life and death matter. However, no man is able to tame the tongue, but God can.

WARNING TO WOULD-BE TEACHERS

James introduces this section with a warning to any who would desire to be teachers. He warns them that as teachers, they will be judged more strictly.¹ For, “We all stumble in many ways.” Lest anyone believes James teaches that all Christians will be perfect, he makes clear that all Christians, struggle and stumble in many ways, including himself. In the next section, James expands on the dangerous nature of the tongue. Teachers, of course, speak more than everyone else, thus, putting themselves in greater danger to stumble (Proverbs 10:19).

THE TERRIBLE POWER OF THE TONGUE

Building off of his warning to anyone who would want to teach, James compounds more reasons why the tongue is so dangerous.

James uses three analogies and every one of them points out the power of something that seems small and weak (bit, rudder, a small fire), but has great power.

Likewise, the tongue, although small, has the power to bring life or death.

THE UNTAMABLE TONGUE

James then makes a list of different kinds of creatures that have been tamed. Mankind has been able to tame every kind of beast. However, there is one creature that hasn’t been tamed: the tongue (v. 8). Note the wording, “no *human being* can tame the tongue.” There is a glorious hint that where man has failed, God can succeed. We need God to tame the untamable.

THE ABSURDITY OF HAVING DOUBLE-SPEECH

In this section, James lists two absurd examples. How can man praise God and then curse² his neighbor? That’s like my son telling me how much he loves me, only for him turn to his sister and make fun of her.

James continues with two more examples. Both are impossible scenes. What’s the point? James is destroying any category we may have that would believe a Christian can have fowl speech towards others. “That just doesn’t happen,” James would say. That’s like a lake in Minnesota being salty. Christians have been forgiven

of unthinkable sins and also have the Spirit. Does it make sense for them to habitually³ speak ill of others?

BRINGING IT HOME

How careful are we with our words on social media? Or with our spouse when no one is watching? When are kids have gotten on our last nerve, do we lash out at them? How do we speak about our new president? Regardless of our personal feelings of him, do we honor him with our words (1 Peter 2:17)?

I know I’m guiltier than all. I often speak out in anger on the basketball court when someone blows a play. I have been snarky to someone I find annoying on Facebook. Sometimes I make cutting jokes about others because it can garner some laughs. How many times have I gossiped about someone under the guise of a “prayer request?”

James is not subtle in this section. He has words for me. He has words for you. He has words for our community. It is not okay to be careless with your words. It is not okay to gossip, grumble, cuss, mock, etc. Christians must control their tongues. It’s a command. And if you don’t, then James would say that your Christianity is a fraud and is worthless (James 1:26).

But we can’t control our tongues on our own, so we need God to do what no man can do. Jesus is the ultimate example. If anyone had the right to use his tongue for great harm, it would be him. Jesus could destroy all of us with the word of his mouth for our rebellion and indifference. But instead, Jesus brings life with his words. May we go do likewise. May we be quick to listen, slow to speak, and

slow to get angry (1:29). God tame our tongues for our good and your glory!
Amen!

- 1 James isn't clear what this means. Three common interpretations are: (1) Teachers will have a higher criterion of judgment when it comes to gifts in heaven. (2) Teachers will have a higher standard and criticism from the community. (3) God will hold teachers more accountable in their salvation since they are given more and thus, more is required. In addition, they speak a lot and have more chances to sin (cf. v.2 and Mark 12:40; Luke 12:48). This author leans towards option two and three.
- 2 Curse is a heavy term. It is not merely saying something mean but wanting evil for someone. The person is literally playing God, for he is the only true one who should bless and curse (see Deuteronomy 28).
- 3 It is important to note that James is not likely speaking about a one time occurrence, but a pattern of the heart that has manifested itself repeatedly with words.

Day 1

- ① Read James 3:1–5. Which verse stuck out to you the most and why?

- ② Describe the importance of teachers. See 2 Timothy 2:2. Why is James cautioning people who become teachers? See also Luke 12:48.

- ③ Our words are often tough to control. James says “we all stumble in many ways”, that is, a variety of ways. And James is implying here that we most definitely will sin with our words. What does Proverbs teach us about words: Proverbs 10:8; 10:11; 16:27–28; 18:7–8. See also Romans 3:13.

- ④ 3:3–4. Describe the two metaphors that James uses. What point is he trying to make?

- ⑤ 3:5. Even though the tongue is small, what can it do in large measure? How can this be? How does the gospel impact our words?

Day 2

- ① Read James 3:6–12. With the same mouth we can both bless God and curse people. This is so messed up. Study Luke 6:43–45 to learn more about where our evil speech comes from.

- ② In what ways can the tongue be a world of unrighteousness?

- ③ Define “tame”. Describe the significance that no one can tame their tongue? What first steps can you take to try and make improvements in your speech?

- ④ 3:10–12. What two things is James saying cannot go together—“these things ought not be so”? Yet we all stumble in these ways. In what ways do you mess up with your words? What do you think you should do about it?

- ⑤ Read Matthew 7:15–20. Take inventory of the words that you used today. What do your words suggest is going on in your heart?





Day 3

- ① Study Ephesians 4:29.

Sermon Notes

April 16, 2017

Week 8

Who Is Wise and Understanding?

106





Linda Linder

Who is wise and understanding among you? Good question! And when my Lord's brother asks this question, it gets my attention. Who is wise and understanding among us?

In his letter to the troubled and tested believers of the first century, James addresses the very practical and difficult issues these Christians faced. In chapter 3 of his letter he tackles the distressing problem of the tongue and how very tough it is to tame the tongue (control what we say). And then before he begins to take on the reasons behind fights and quarrels among believers, it's as if he steps back, takes a deep breath and sighs, "Oh, is there anyone around here who is wise and understanding?"

It's significant to note that in James 3:13-18 the question is not the *what* question, but the *who* question. The focus is not: What is wisdom? It is: *Who is wise?*

Because James brought up the topic of wisdom in chapter 1, verses 5-8, we have some clues to the basic assumptions he makes regarding wisdom. James writes, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God..." Wisdom comes from God and we can ask for it. James goes on to say that when we ask God for wisdom, we must ask in faith. In other words, when we ask God for wisdom we must believe in and fear God. It seems that James roots his thinking on wisdom in the whole of the Old Testament, particularly the wisdom literature of Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. These writings consistently confirm that God is the source of all true wisdom and the fear of God is the starting point of all true wisdom.

It also seems clear that James bases his thinking about wisdom on the teachings of Jesus, in particular what we call the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). For example, Jesus tells the familiar parable of the wise and foolish man and says, "Everyone... who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock." In contrast to the wise man, Jesus continues, "...everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand." (Matthew 7:24-27) Based on this parable, who is the wise man? The one who hears the Word of God and puts it into action (does it).

So, following James's example let's make these assumptions: The beginning of true wisdom is the fear of God. Wisdom comes from the intake of God's word. We can ask God for wisdom. Wisdom is putting God's word into action.

Now, back to the question at hand: Who, then, is wise? As I considered this question, I found myself asking these questions: Am I wise? Are you wise? Is there any way to tell if a person is truly wise or not? Is there something that looks like wisdom, but really isn't? If so, is it possible to tell the difference? So what?

James answers these questions for us. Again, his reasoning closely follows Jesus' teaching in Matthew chapter 7. Jesus warns, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves." In other words, there are those who outwardly look like believers, they may seem wise, but in actuality they are not believers and they are not truly wise. They are

not as they appear to be. Jesus goes on to say, "You will recognize them by their fruits." What a comfort to know we don't need to be afraid of such people. We are not helpless victims of deception and lies. There are outward manifestations (fruits) in these false prophets' lives that will identify them as frauds.

In essence, this is what James is saying. Do you want to know who is wise and understanding among you? Well, take a look. Do you see someone whose life demonstrates good, godly, conduct in a meek and gentle manner? That person is wise and understanding. Do you see someone, who could be named "mayhem," whose life is a perpetual state of rowdy disorder or chaotic frenzy? That person is not wise. Do you see a life that exhibits the godly fruits of peace, gentleness, reason and mercy? That person is wise. Do you see someone whose life is vile—offensive, morally debased, foul? That person is not wise.

That's not so hard, is it? There are outward behavioral signs that reveal whether a person is truly wise or not.

But James doesn't stop there. Remember, this is the man who said if we lack wisdom we should ask God. And God is the one who said, "I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds" (Jeremiah 17:10). God doesn't just look at the outward things, but He sees the heart. And, furthermore, Jesus is the one who raised the bar from outward actions like murder and adultery to the inward attitudes of the heart like hatred and lust. So once again James builds on the teachings of the Old Testament and of Jesus.

Yes, there are behavioral tests that reveal whether one is truly wise or not. But there are also heart tests. When one's heart is filled with bitter jealousy and selfish ambition, out of that heart cannot flow wise and understanding thoughts, words or deeds. But streaming out of the heart that is pure, God-centered, merciful, and sincere are the wise and understanding fruits of righteousness.

Here's why the study of James 3:13-18 is so important for us today. There are two kinds of wisdom: true wisdom and false wisdom. False wisdom stems from a bitter, me-centered heart and is disconnected from the truth of God and his word. Unfortunately, today many boast in this kind of wisdom, confident that they know best about just about everything. These purveyors of false wisdom often appear wise and may, in fact, be knowledgeable about any number of subjects. But God's word tells us plainly that this kind of godless wisdom is the false wisdom of the world, the flesh and the devil. Yes, quite literally. James says this self-centered, bitter, me-wisdom is "earthly unspiritual, demonic." Now those are strong words. But keep in mind that Jesus told the false prophets of his day that they were of their father the devil (John 8:39-47). This is serious business. There is a wisdom that people brag about which may at first glance look like real wisdom; but the truth is, if the heart is not connected to God and his Word, what we have is false wisdom masquerading as true wisdom and the rotten fruits of disarray will eventually expose this.

Fortunately, there is also true wisdom. True wisdom is from above

and comes from our Father, God. This wisdom begins with God and it is acquired by knowing him better and better through his Word and his presence in our lives. This true wisdom flows from a heart that has been purified by the blood of Christ and the Word of God. True wisdom is revealed through the good conduct of a godly life and the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

Who is wise and understanding among us? Outward behavior and inner heart attitudes reveal the answer to that question. With the help of God we can recognize the false wisdom of the world and the devil and we will not be deceived. And with the grace of God we will recognize true wisdom when we see it in others and acquire it ourselves.

Day 1

- ① Define “wisdom”. Define “knowledge”. Define “understanding”. How are these three different?

- ② Based on this passage, how would James define a *wise and understanding* person?

- ③ How are earthly wisdom and heavenly wisdom contrasted?

- ④ Read Matthew 5:1–12. Contrast true vs false wisdom.

- ⑤ How does jealousy and selfish ambition mess up wisdom?

Day 2

- ① How does Jesus epitomize or exemplify what James describes as “wisdom from above”?

- ② How does Jesus epitomize or exemplify what James describes as “wisdom from above”?

- ③ The ESV Study Bible calls 3:13–18 the tale of two cities—why do you think that is?

- ④ Compare Hebrews 12:11 with James 4:18 to learn more about getting this peace.

- ⑤ How is the gospel the foundational element needed to obtain peace in your soul?





Day 3

- ① Study Matthew 5:9.

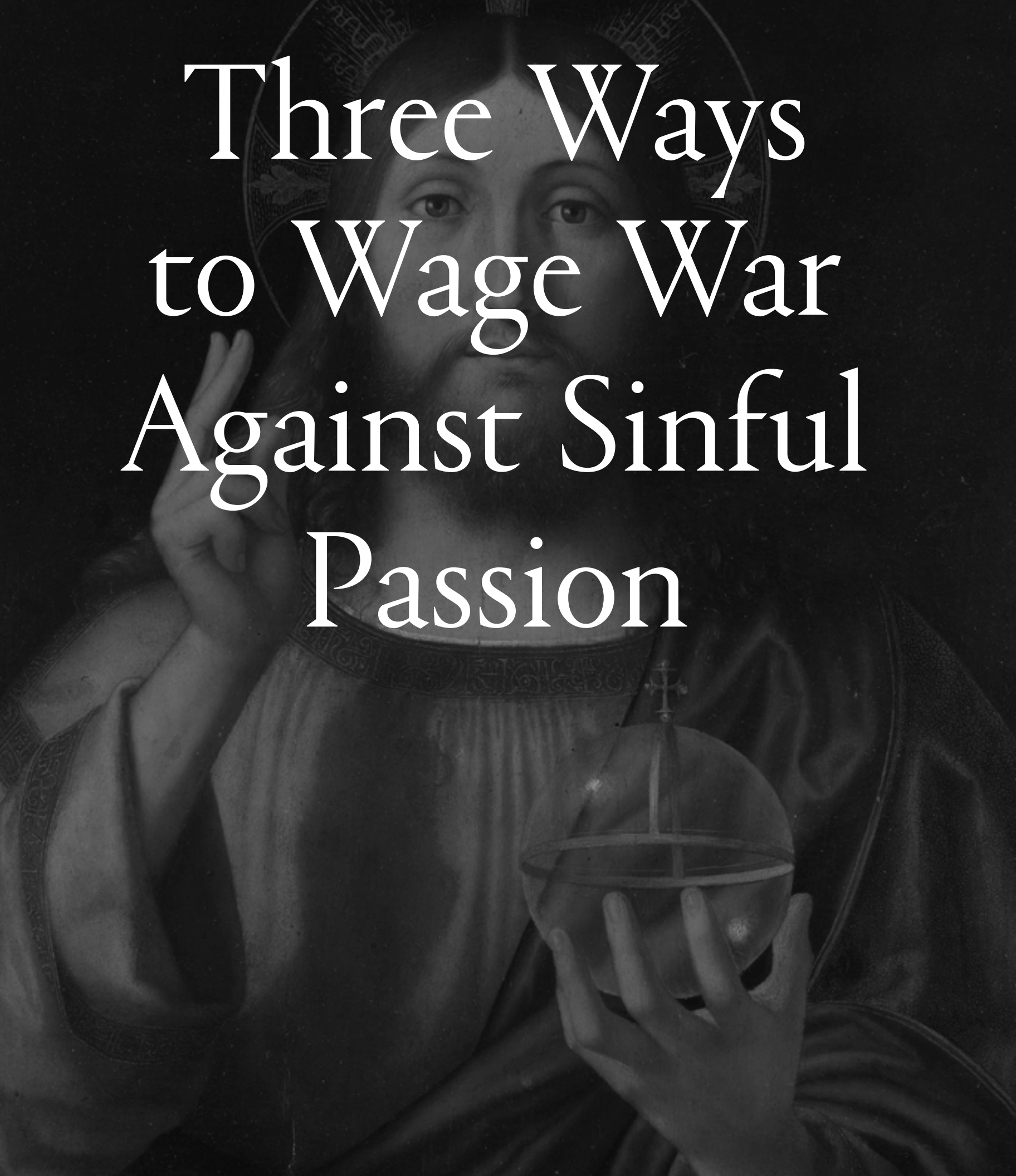
Sermon Notes

April 23, 2017

Week 9

GOD OPPOSES THE PROUD

BUT GIVES
GRACE TO THE
HUMBLE.



Three Ways
to Wage War
Against Sinful
Passion

Michelle Griep

121

Passion is a strong word for a Minnesotan. We're nice. Easygoing. Shoot, we hardly ever lay on the horn even when the driver in front of us is too busy texting to move on a green light. We simply don't get amped up like those hotheads in New York or L.A.

Or do we?

What about when the Vikings lose and a Packer fan starts bragging? Or have you ever gotten sucked into the perennial debate over *Duck Duck Gray Duck* vs *Duck Duck Goose*? Large or small, we all have passions raging inside us, whether we admit it or not.

Take a moment and catalog those strong feelings. Those urges and desires. Yeah, this might be uncomfortable for a buttoned-up Midwesterner, but it's a healthy thing to peel back the layers of your "Minnesota nice" and see what might be festering beneath.

I came across a list (*taken from Evagrius Ponticus in the Fourth century*) that's a handy guide for self-introspection on what passions you might be harboring...

Gluttony—overeating; eating in secret; eating portions that are too great; desire for delicacies/fancy foods

Unchastity—sexual activity outside marriage between man and woman; voyeurism, looking at someone with sexual desire; homosexuality; sexual innuendo; playfulness; flirtation

Avarice—love of money; desire for wealth; idolatry; covetousness; stealing; desire for security or status through possessions

Discontent—sadness; self-pity; fretfulness; exasperation; restlessness

Anger—outbursts; hostility; outrage; resentment; hatred; violence; slow burn; disgruntledness; meanness; bitterness

Despondency—anxiety; listlessness; persistent grief

Vainglory—boastfulness; vanity; smugness; overconfidence; pretention; bragging; conceit

Pride—self-absorption; arrogance; disdain; egotism; self-importance; contemptuousness

Are any of those passions lurking inside you? I sure stand guilty—of several. James 4:1 tells us that it's these very passions that cause quarrels and fights amongst us. The nature of passion is that it's a barely controllable emotion. So how do you tame such a beast? How in the world are we to find peace and live in harmony with one another? Thankfully, God provides the answers in the rest of this passage in James.

Here are three ways to wage war:

1. ADMIT

Newsflash: you are not a super Christian. Everyone has passion demons to wrestle with, and if you don't think you have any, then re-read that list of eight. The first step in waging war against passion is to acknowledge you have a battle on your hands. It's a humbling thing to realize you harbor urges that you'd secretly like to keep—and that's exactly when and where God will step in to help you.

"But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'"

Bringing your most sinful passions to God in prayer is the beginning of the end in slaying those deadly desires. If you humble yourself before the cross, you will receive grace.

2. ASK

If you have a problem overeating, then it's a bad idea to have junk food galore in your cupboards. Pornography an enticement? Then get yourself an accountability partner and never, ever be online in a room by yourself. Asking God to reveal tangible ways for you to wage war against your passions is a battle plan for resisting temptations the devil will throw at you.

"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

Once you've identified a way—or ways—to fight against temptation, then it's time to drop back to your knees and ask God to help you put those ways into action. You cannot do this on your own. Resisting the devil isn't easy, but scripture does say that if you do, he will flee from you.

3. ACT

Spend time in the Bible. Listen to it on audiobook as you go about your day. Slap up sticky notes around the house with verses. Text meaningful passages to your friends. Any way you can fit more of God's word into your day is one way to draw nearer to Him.

"Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded."

There's a definite cause and effect going on in this verse. You do all you can to know more of God, and He will make ways for you to know Him better. It might not be a lightning bolt

with a love note skewered on the end,
but He will make Himself known in
His time.

Bad news: There is a passion war
going on in each of us.

Good news: Jesus experienced the
same thing—and came out the victor.

It's nothing new to be in a war
with what you know you ought to
do versus what you want to do. Jesus
sweated blood in the garden over this
same issue. He knows the struggle
you're going through.

And it's comforting to know He
loves you anyway.

Day 1

- ① Read James 4:1–6. What people and stories come to mind when you think of people who have warring passions within them (v.1)?

- ② What OT stories and people come to mind as you read James 4:2–3?

- ③ James is not accusing his audience of literally being adulterous. Why do you think he chooses the imagery of adultery to rebuke his audience? In what way does he think his audience is being adulterous?

- ④ Compare James 4:4 with Matthew 6:24. What does it mean to be a friend of the world? In this context why is being a friend with the world a bad thing?

- ⑤ Compare Proverbs 3:34 with James 4:5–6. See also James 4:10. Why is humility so important? What did humility look like for you this past week? In what ways would you like to change to take steps to more humility? How will you get there?

Day 2

- ① Read James 4:7–12. What are the commands/exhortations that James gives in 4:6–12? What are the promises that accompany each commands?

- ② Which of James’s commands and promises do you struggle most to obey or believe? If you firmly and consistently believed those promises, what specific ways do you think the past 24 hours may have looked differently?

- ③ Read James 4:7–8. Why is it important to not only resist the devil but also draw near to God? What does drawing near to God look like in your life? In what ways do you think it should change?

- ④ Read James 4:11–12. In what ways can a person speak evil against another person? What light does James shed on this situation? See also Romans 1:29–32 and 2 Corinthians 12:20–21.

- ⑤ Why does James tell us to not judge our neighbor? Why is judging a neighbor bad? See Matthew 22:34–40, John 13:34–35, and Romans 2:1.





Day 3

- ① Study 1 Peter 2:1-3.

Sermon Notes

April 30, 2017

Week 10

Tomorrow





A friend of mine tells a story about hunting—he (11 years old at the time) and his father wake around 3:30 am and drive 45 minutes to public hunting grounds. They huddle under a heat blanket until 5. And from 5am to 4pm his dad strides quick through the sage, up and down terrain, searching for a deer. His son tries to keep up. He's shot a gun only a few times before, he's nervous. They see a stag move quickly through heavy brush and it disappears. His father mutters frustratedly, the boy is anxious and annoyed for rushing all day. Neither one fires a shot during the whole hunt. On the drive home, my friend says his father shakes his head, agitated, apologizing for not finding a deer for them, the boy nods and says its ok, looking out the car window—this is the most meaningful conversation they have all day.

The God who makes the sun stand still—is it difficult for him to provide a successful hunt? To place a buck between a kid's shaky crosshairs? That day, the father taught his son this: getting the deer is the important thing. *Accomplishment of the goal is the important thing.* He said to his son, “tomorrow we will go hunting and we will get a deer. We must get a deer.” Yet the father did not know what that day would bring; providence denies them a deer, and the father furrows his brow at what God gave that day.

It sounds like James in 4:13 is addressing business men or merchants who plan on increasing profits. But the principle of the passage extends beyond merchants to people like the father in our story; it extends to anyone who plans with a kind of certainty and determination that

ignores the providence of God, which often confounds our expectations remodeling our constructed future. We should have “but if God...” built into any plans we make. But often we arrogantly plan without considering God's hidden designs, and because we are arrogant his designs bug us. When we chafe at providence, we despise the plan of God saying in our hearts, “what a stupid design, I could do better.” That is what the father taught his son. This offends the perfect wisdom of God. That's why James calls it “*evil boasting.*”

Not only does it insult God, but it schisms relationships. My friend never had a good relationship with his dad. The hunting trip was the usual: the father is distracted, busy, and frustrated. It might be that this man lived his whole life like he did during their hunt—he plans the future, providence disrupts his plans, and the man grumbles. Grumble grumble grumble all your life and though you be in paradise you will carry a wilderness inside you. And the wilderness spreads to those close to you; like a drought it exhausts your loved ones. God provided the father 13 hours man-time with his boy—he might have brought the boy alongside and talked to him of God's world, told him how to be holy, how to grill a steak, how treat women. He might simply have smiled for the beautiful landscape. Instead he furrows his brow and mutters, hurrying his pace. My friend says he assumed guilt for his father's chronic frustration, assuming he was part of the cause. It takes a lot to grow out of something like that.

This is the root issue: we forget we are vapor and God is God.

We are grass, a candle flame. A stiff breeze can do us in. Somehow we get to thinking we're cosmic potters, molding the shape of our lives and hardening them in the kiln, and with self-satisfaction saying, “Thus!” Some people can literally be killed by eating a peanut. Once, a chicken marsala nearly suffocated me in the back of an *Old Spaghetti Factory*—I didn't chew enough. Though so fragile (often silly too—ever spent a morning looking for “that thing” that is actually in your pocket?), we still pretend to author our days.

It's not that we shouldn't make goals and plans; rather, it's that we should joyfully receive what God chooses to do with them. Part of the problem is that we convince ourselves that if only God would stop messing us up, we could really do his kingdom some good. Devise godly projects, but know God doesn't need them. The word of his design never returns void. He needs nothing but asks us to be obedient (see Ecclesiastes). *It is never about the product but always about the process;* or, to put it another way, *God is concerned with the heart.* Apostle Paul's plans are constantly disrupted—he didn't write in his missionary travel-planner, “8:00 am: On the way to Rome, have sail boat smash into a reef. 8:20 am: Brief morning swim to island Malta. 8:55 am: Fasten two poisonous viper fangs onto left hand.” Yet he writes, “I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content.” Paul receives providence, which often shatters his own plans.

People with epilepsy sometimes have service dogs that can sense an oncoming seizure—they bark and prance to warn their patient. Like those service dogs, *frustration and*

restlessness are alarms, signaling something unseen under the surface is wrong. We are not receiving, contentedly, the day God is giving us. I make it habit that when I feel low-growling, grumbling discontent, I close my eyes and seek out the source of my displeasure. Whether I find it or not, I try to give thanks in that moment for all things past, present, and future.

Because all things are gift. The Father of Lights does not change toward his children; ever his hand comes to us bearing some new love. Even those black, desperate nights are from the God of light. Somehow, those dark times will gleam in our memory with a strange beauty, like amethyst or onyx stone, when we pass into the coming life. At our center, we must rejoice at the design of God—it's either that or pretending you're in control and then fussing at your lack of control. Rejoice in the deer-less hunt; teach those around you gratitude. Eventually, we will worship History as God's masterful art. Might as well start now.

Day 1

- ① Read James 4:13–14. In this short letter, James writes quite a bit about wealth. If wealth and resources are morally neutral, why devote so much attention to the subject? See James 1:9–11, 1:16–18, 2:1–7, 2:15, 4:13–5:6.

- ② How can areas of sin in our hearts be exacerbated by wealth?

- ③ It is understandable that someone might read James 4:13–14 and come away with the impression that we should not plan for the future, for we do not know what tomorrow will bring. Read Proverbs 16. How do these proverbs inform our understanding of vv. 13–14?

- ④ Are there other passages in the Bible that might influence how we should view planning?

- ⑤ James says that you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Death is part of the judgement of Genesis 3 and as wickedness increases, we see God shorten man's life in Genesis 6:3. Is there any way that the shortening of man's life might be considered a grace from God? What would be the argument for such a thing being considered grace?

Day 2

- ① Read James 4:15-17. Circumstance, wisdom, action, and the sovereignty of God are all themes in James' letter. How do these four themes fit together in 4:13-17?

- ② Read 4:13-17 and write out what God would say to you in how you handled this week at work in light of this passage.

- ③ Define "boast". What type of boasting is ok and what type of boasting is not ok?

- ④ Wealth can create arrogance in people. People are deceived to think that wealth will be around forever. See Matthew 6:28-34. Think about a time that you have had an arrogant heart this week. What triggered it and why? How can you apply the gospel to address this?

- ⑤ What do we learn about boasting in 1 Corinthians 5:6?





Day 3

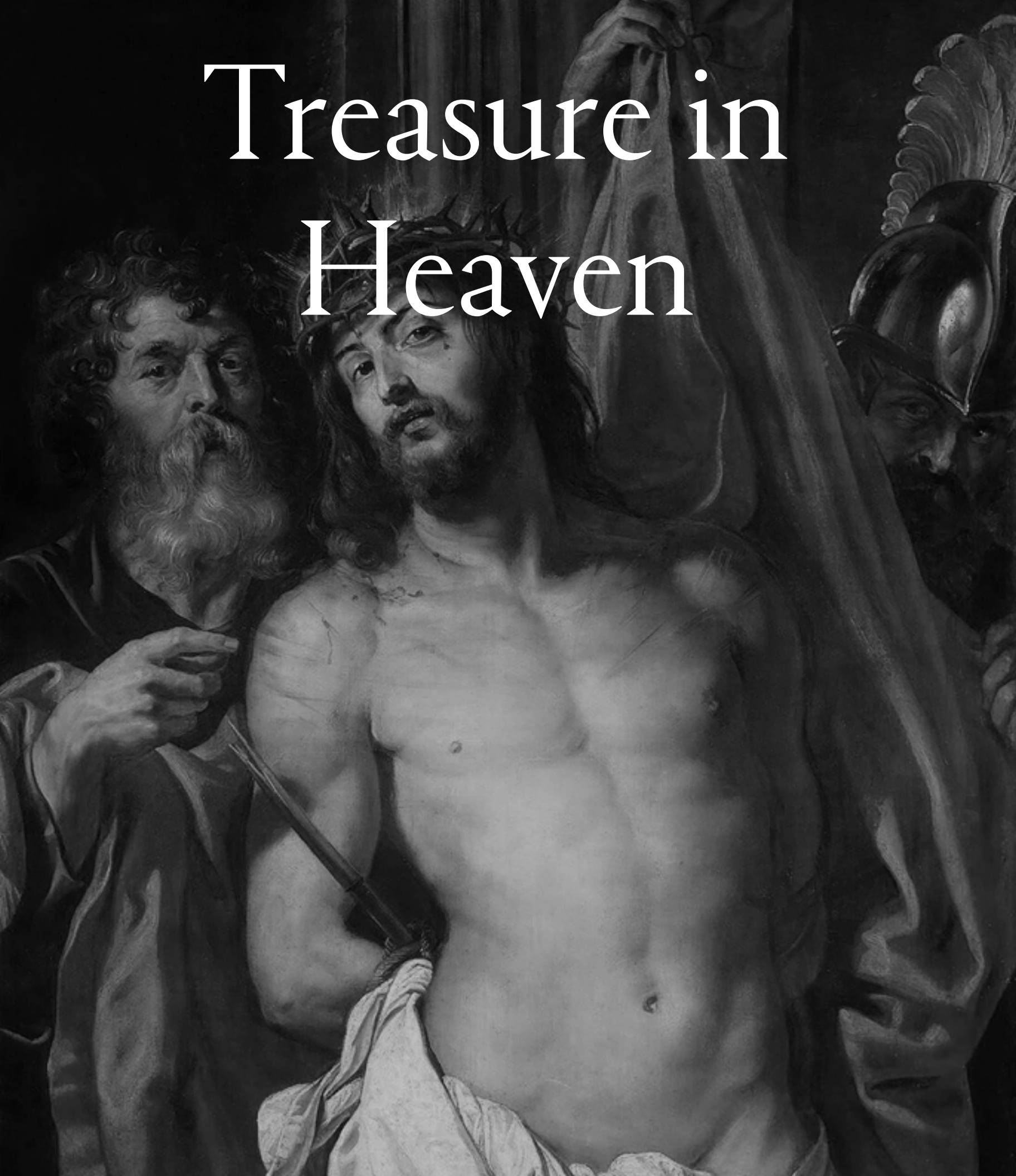
- ① Study Matthew 6:34.

Sermon Notes

May 7, 2017

Week II

Treasure in Heaven



Tom Keefe

145

My wife Jessica and I enjoy watching the TV show, *Shark Tank*. In the show (if you've never watched), hopeful entrepreneurs come into the "tank" with ideas, inventions, or business proposals, attempting to secure investments from one of five "sharks." These "sharks" are successful, wealthy businessmen or women who attempt to increase their personal wealth by investing equity into what or whom they discern will be the most successful products or people. Primarily, we enjoy the show because God's creativity is expressed through highly talented, indefatigable people who come up with incredible ideas that leave us saying things like, "I want that!" or more frequently, "Why didn't we think of that?"

Occasionally, though, what is most striking is the greed of the aforementioned "sharks." These people are extraordinarily, mind-numbingly wealthy, yet, through their conduct it is clear that their current wealth is insufficient for their liking, sometimes arguing and competing over a relatively small sum of money. There is a poorly hidden desperation in them, expressed in their desire to make more earthly investments, in order to increase profits, ultimately attempting to accrue further wealth. During these parts of the show, it is very easy for me to scoff at their insatiable hunger for money, and thank God that I do not have that "problem."

Upon reflection, though I am more similar to the sharks than I'd like to admit, and I would guess most of us fall into the same category.

We worry about money.

We're anxious about providing for our families. At times, we desire more

wealth. In reality, our hearts are not much different from the those who grossly and outwardly seek excessive amounts of money, and in that conviction it is clear that we need to be responsive to how God speaks about earthly feelings, expectations, and desires for wealth. The Bible is not secretive about how Christians ought to deal with wealth, as many passages and teachings explicitly relate to faith and money. In fact, many of us could probably articulate the most famous faith fragments describing the relationship. The teachings of Jesus resonate in expressions like, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:36); "No servant can serve two masters..." (Luke 16:13); and "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a person to enter the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:25).

Along with these more "notable" texts, Scripture also contains many passages like James 5:1-6, with more implicit conclusions for followers of Christ. In times where we may struggle with the unrighteous pursuit of wealth, understandings related to the eternal worthlessness, and the eternal danger of wealth, can help to affirm our convictions.

If we understand our lives to be eternal (which as believers, I hope we do), the idea of pursuing wealth for personal, earthly gain is absolutely illogical. Although this is a strange concept to consider in a consumer society where wealth is celebrated in a highly saturated fashion, we have to recognize that our existence is not tied to our current context. The reason that we can be certain that the grandeur of wealth is folly is through

arguments similar to ones proposed by James, who makes it abundantly clear that earthly wealth is fleeting in nature. These riches, earthly riches which presently provide comfort and prosperity in our earthly life, will one day be "rotted," and "corroded" and cease to be, losing any semblance of significance (James 5:2-3). The currency, or credit cards, or checks that carry so much weight in our present reality, will lose all utility and form after we die. It is not coming with us! (1 Timothy 6:7). Therefore, it should not have a strong hold on us, and should not define our earthly lives.

Not only will wealth lose its luster immediately upon our passing, but also on a more sobering level, an unchecked pursuit of riches is eternally dangerous. James speaks that those who pursue the wealth in a gluttonous fashion ought to "weep and howl" for their impending judgment (James 5:1). He also states to the wealthy of the Roman Empire, that the corrosion of gold and silver "will be evidence against you and eat your flesh like fire" (James 5:3). These verses are expressively indicating that judgment is coming for the greedy, and the misuse of wealth is evidence that has the power to condemn their souls eternally. Paul built on this idea in his letter to Timothy, saying that the pursuit of wealth can, "plunge people into ruin and destruction" (1 Timothy 6:9). While the described ruin and destruction can pertain to life here, it more accurately refers to the destiny awaiting those captured by the grip of the love of money.

Just like the "sharks" in the popular TV show, we too have a choice to make in the types of investments

and ventures we will pursue in life. As followers of Jesus Christ, we need to pray and seek God's will regarding our own pursuit and use of His resources. Unlike the "sharks" of the world, we know that mindlessly seeking personal gain, as a means of gratifying ourselves, is an utterly useless proposition, and can lead to eternal destruction. We absolutely have a different call for our investment. We have an inheritance, which far surpasses any earthly end or goal (Ephesians 1:11). We have a Treasure that is far more valuable than any amount of silver or gold (Psalm 19:10). And ultimately, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have been made co-heirs with Him, and long for the day in which our inheritance will be realized and we will meet our Treasure face to face (Romans 8:17).

Until then, while at times the allure of investing in earthly wealth will be tempting or even overwhelming, we must strive to take different action and allow God to differentiate us from the world regarding our attitude about wealth. We must invest in our heavenly treasure, the investment that will yield an eternally glorious profit.

Day 1

- ① Read James 5:1–3 out loud. What is your initial reaction?

- ② Does the Bible condemn money and riches? Why or why not?

- ③ Where else in the Bible are riches mentioned and what does it say about it?

- ④ Write out your prayer for how you would like to handle and use money.

- ⑤ Remember that money is temporary and is not a treasure that lasts. It must not be our security. In what ways could you apply that this week?

Day 2

- ① Read James 5:4–6. How do you think God feels about corrupt leaders?

- ② How is the gospel a reversal of the natural order of powers and oppression commonly seen in the world?

- ③ Write out a prayer for you to see how Jesus endured corruption on your behalf so that you could be freed from the natural human power cycle and how you'd like to see this impact your life this week.

- ④ What is the heart issue in 5:4–6? What can money do to a person?

- ⑤ What does Matthew 5:38–42 teach us about retaliation? How can you apply this truth in your life this week?





Day 3

- ① Study Matthew 6:19–21.

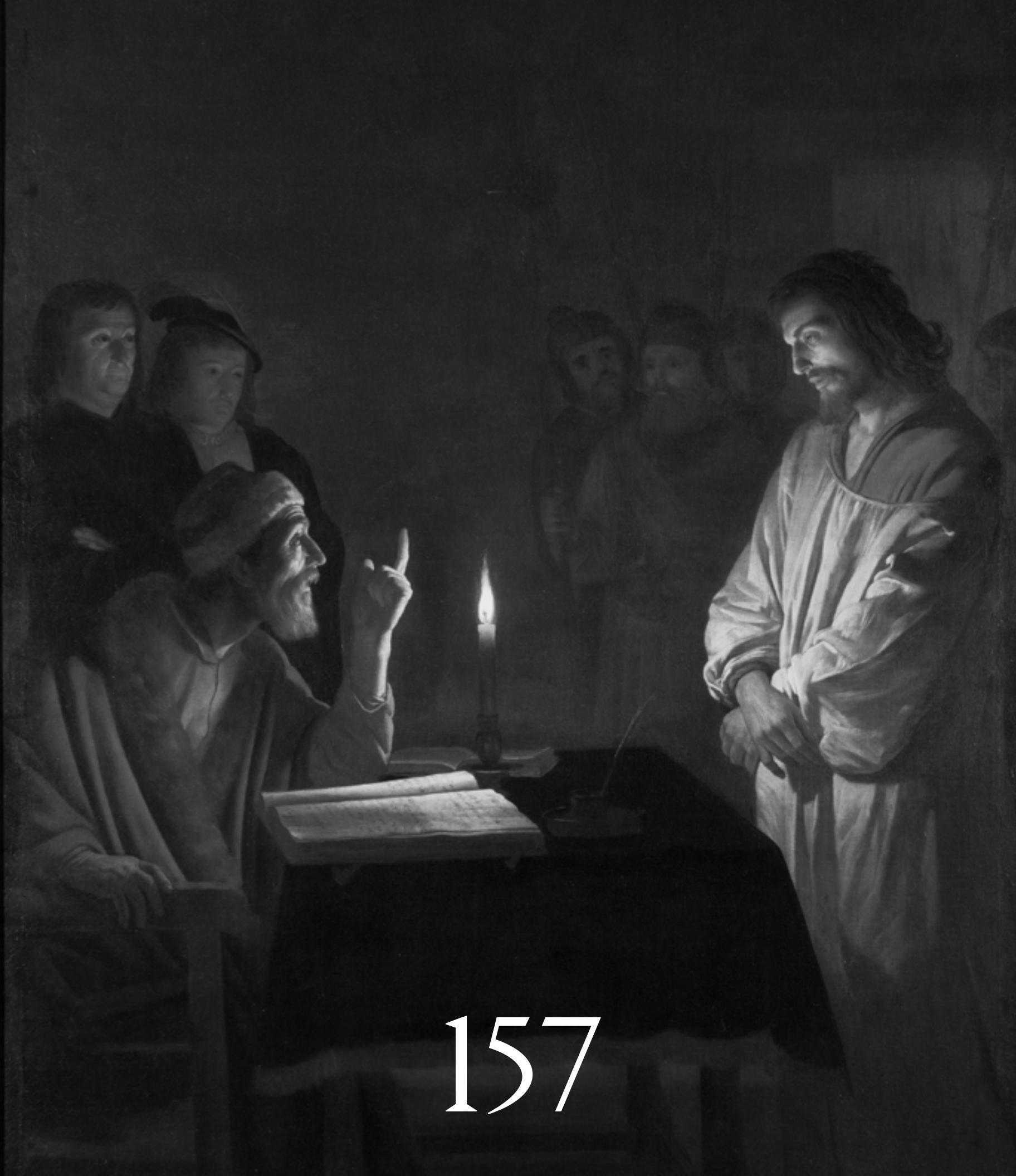
Sermon Notes

May 14, 2017

Week 12

Being Patient

Zach Krych



157

Patience... one of the fruits of the Spirit. Patience... a virtue that is always right to practice. Patience... something everyone wants to have but nobody wants to use. Like a muscle, if you don't exercise your patience it will be tiny and of little strength. If you don't continue to use it, you will lose it.

Since James has commanded us to "*Be patient... be patient,*" we can know that the opportunity to exercise our patience will come to us all. And the kind of patience we need is beyond the simple expectance of something good. It's much deeper than kindly waiting for your piece of the birthday cake at your friend's birthday party. That's beginner's patience, which is pretty wimpy. James is calling us to something better as he transitions seamlessly from general patience, "being expectant," to steadfastness: "being expectant while enduring suffering," patience throughout the sunrise, midday, and sunset of our suffering. Endurance. This level of patience is what James is commanding and what every Christian should seek.

In verses 7-11 James gives us two reasons why we are to be patient while suffering and one way how. First, he reminds us why we are to be patient by reminding us what we are waiting for, namely, the glorious return of our Lord Jesus in power, the righting of every wrong, the wiping of every tear, the judgment of all evil: *The coming of the Lord*. We are to be patient because this is actually going to happen and it's going to happen soon. "*The coming of the Lord is at hand,*" says James. Jesus is as near as your right hand, as near as this paper between your fingers. The cake is being passed around and

it's almost to you. Very soon Jesus will have returned, our waiting will be in the past, and like a farmer eating his delicious fruit we will realize the waiting was worth it.

The second reason why we are to be patient is revealed in verse 11 with the single word *Behold*. This is a word that should grab your attention. Look at this! Pay attention! *Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast*. You want to be blessed by God, don't you? Well, the prophets were blessed precisely because they were steadfast; they waited patiently for the Lord while enduring great suffering. Behold, blessing can come through suffering because suffering gives you the opportunity to learn steadfastness, and being steadfast produces all kinds of fruit (character and hope, Romans 5:3), making you more like Christ. This way of thinking about suffering should remind you of how James started his letter: *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness* (James 1:2-3). Behold, here is a path to blessing: patient endurance though suffering.

If this view of patience while suffering feels a little naive or simplistic to you, you are not alone. In the midst of pain it often feels that way to me as well. Yes, He is coming soon, and yes, I'm sure this is an opportunity for me to become more like Christ... but it still hurts and I don't want to have to endure this any longer. I want to have patience; I just don't want to use it. James knows it's going to be hard, which is why he also tells us how to have manifest patience. "*Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand*". This is how the prophets, who

suffered much more than we likely ever will, became steadfast. They daily established their hearts on the Lord, and they daily *entrust(ed) their souls to a faithful Creator* (1 Peter 4:19). Simply put they had faith in God. They had faith that *the Lord is compassionate and merciful* even while they were hurting. *You have heard of the steadfastness of Job*, says James; he didn't know any of the reasons why he suffered yet he trusted God. While he was lonely in the ash heap scraping broken sores off of himself he kept his heart established on God's compassion and mercy God and could say "*I know that my redeemer lives...*" (Job 19:25).

Why focus on God's compassion and mercy? Because when suffering comes we are tempted to believe the very opposite, that God is not truly compassionate and merciful. This is why all suffering is an opportunity to grow, because all suffering can tempt us to doubt God or trust Him more. Job didn't want to have to practice steadfastness, but when the opportunity came he trusted that "*even though he slay me, yet I will praise him*" (Job 13:15). His muscle of patience grew, and he was blessed because of it.

It is helpful for me to remember that nowhere does God say this is easy. The fight for faith is truly a fight, and it's not a one punch and done fight. It's our whole life. I want to learn patience quickly, one punch. I want to learn steadfastness easily, a simple jab. But quick patience and easy steadfastness are oxymorons. God didn't set up the world that way. It takes fear to learn courage, danger to learn bravery, uncertainty to learn trust, time to learn patience and suffering to learn steadfastness.

So, don't expect the virtue of patience will just happen to fall on you one day without your effort. We must work to establish our hearts on the foundation that Christ the Lord will soon return with compassion and mercy for those who are patiently waiting for him. We must dig deep and plant our wandering hearts in the soil of God's faithfulness, and then like the farmer, wait for the rain from God and the precious fruit that grows from it, which will be worth it.

Day 1

- ① Read James 5:7–9. Define “patience”. What does James teach us about patience in James 5:7–8? To some degree everyone is impatient. Describe a time you were impatient this week. What was the root of your impatience?

- ② In v.7, James transitions from addressing rich, unrighteous oppressors (5:1–6), to addressing righteous people who are oppressed (5:7–12). How does James comfort and encourage the righteous who have been oppressed?

- ③ Often, it is in our suffering or conflict that we feel most justified in our grumbling or complaining towards or about others. Why do you think James addresses this as a major concern?

- ④ Read James 5:7–12. How does this passage echo or elaborate on James 1:2–4 and 1:12?

- ⑤ How do patience and endurance fit together when thinking about persevering in faith till the end? Why is steadfastness so important, and from James 1:2–4, how do you get it? See Matthew 24:13. How is the return of Jesus a comfort and a motivation for steadfastness under trials and sufferings?

Day 2

- ① Read James 5:10–11. What point is James making, and why are the prophets an example?

- ② Why is it so difficult for us to be patient while going through a trial?

- ③ James 5:12 is a strong exhortation: “But above all, my brothers, do not swear either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your ‘yes’ be yes and your ‘no’ be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.” Why do you think James concludes the section with this exhortation?

- ④ Review and list all the places in James where he addresses “the tongue” or words we say and what you glean from these verses: James 3:1–12; 4:11–12; and 5:12.

- ⑤ Compare James 5:12 with Matthew 5:37. What does Jesus have to say about our words?





Day 3

- ① Study Philippians 2:14–16.

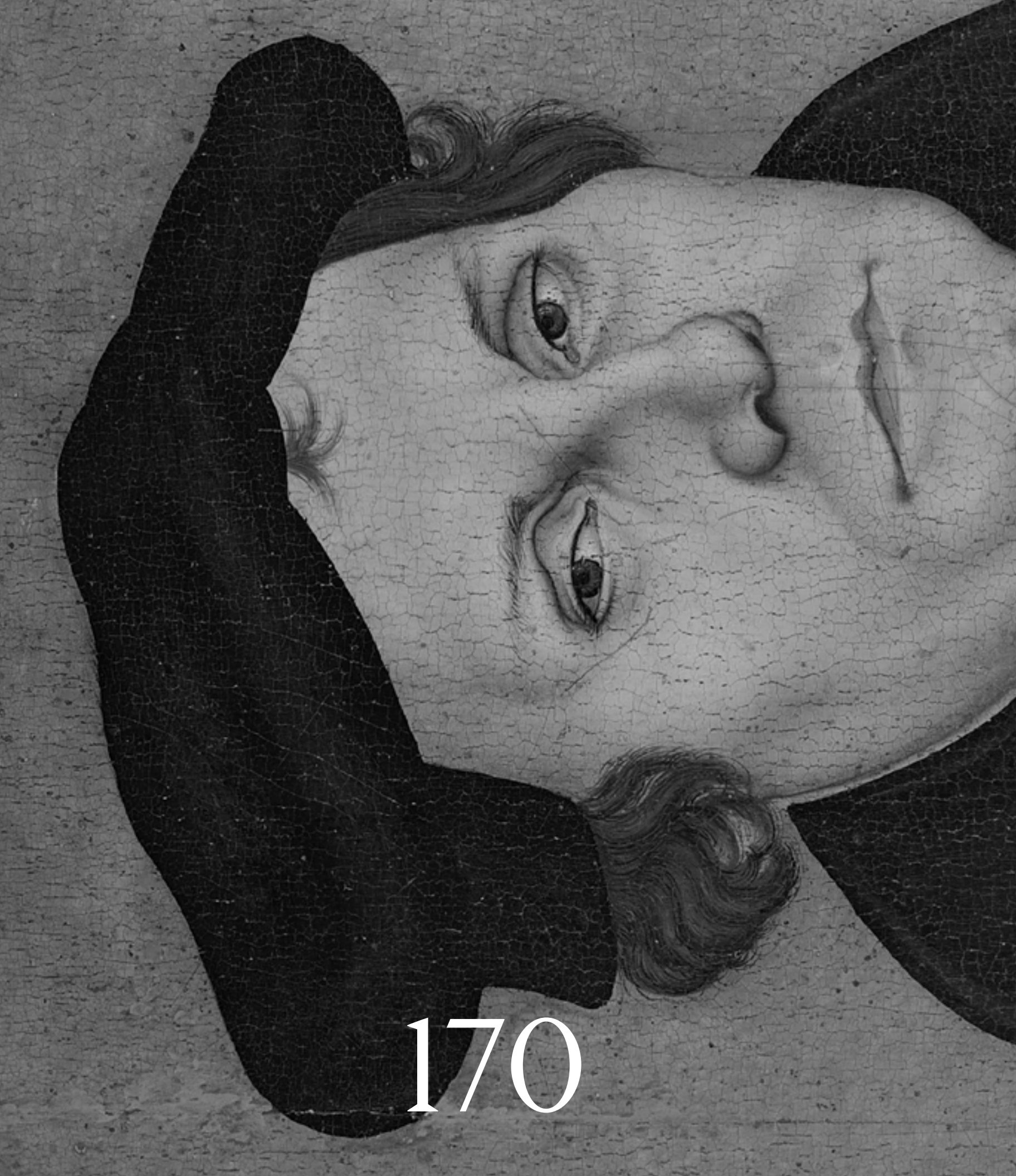
Sermon Notes

May 21, 2017

Week 13

IF THE LORD WILLS,

WE WILL
LIVE AND DO
THIS OR THAT.



170



Learning to Pray with Luther

Nick
Aufenkamp

Of all the things the mighty reformer, Martin Luther, is known for, one of the foremost was his dedication to prayer. Often, he is quoted having said, “I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer.” He wasn’t exaggerating either. Many his friends and students are on record attesting that he would spend several hours daily – often at seemingly inopportune times in the middle of the day—on his knees in fervent prayer.

In 1535, Luther’s barber and long-time friend, Peter Beskendorf, asked if he would teach him how to pray. Luther responded by writing Beskendorf a more than 7,000 word letter entitled *A Simple Way to Pray*. Luther’s letter is a gourmet buffet for all Christians who hunger for more rich and satisfying prayerfulness. My hope is that this post will be an appetizer as I summarize and commend just one of Luther’s recommendations on how to pray using the Lord’s Prayer.

THE AGE-OLD PROBLEM

Before going there, one small tangent. Throughout his letter, Luther addresses the common temptations that would keep Christians from prayer. Hear how his words resonate with your own experience regarding the discipline of prayer:

Guard yourself carefully against those false, deluding ideas which tell you, “Wait a little while. I will pray in an hour; first I must attend to this or that.” Such thoughts get you away from prayer into other affairs which so hold your attention and involve you that nothing comes of prayer for that day ... we must be careful not to break the

habit of true prayer and imagine other works to be necessary which, after all, are nothing of the kind. Thus at the end we become lax and lazy, cool and listless toward prayer. The devil who besets us is not lazy or careless, and our flesh is too ready and eager to sin and is disinclined to the spirit of prayer.

It is strangely encouraging to be reminded that our propensities towards distraction and to skip over regular times of prayer in favor of seemingly more “productive” tasks are not unique to the 21st century but have been common to Christians for at least the past 500 years. This realization also helps us see that our lack of prayerfulness is not simply to be blamed on our smartphones or our busy schedules, rather the problem is with our hearts. Thus, while certain strategies like putting the phone in a different room or finding that proverbial isolated space to pray are helpful, there are no quick fixes to more meaningful times of prayer. If we really want to grow in our prayer life we must take aim at something much deeper – our most inward affections and desires.

PRAYING THE LORD’S PRAYER

The first tool Luther offers Beskendorf is to begin by praying the Lord’s Prayer. Luther recommends praying through the prayer once, as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 6:9-13). He then says to go back through the prayer and pray each petition individually, which is broken up something like this:

- Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
- Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
- Give us this day our daily bread,
- And forgive us our debts,
- As we also have forgiven our debtors.
- And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
- For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.
- Amen.

Luther exhorts us to let each petition guide our prayer. So, after praying, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,” we may continue to pray, “Yes, Father, it is our great desire that your name would be feared and revered for who you are: our God; our Creator; the “Holy, Holy, Holy” One who cannot tolerate sin but utterly consumes all impurity; and as the One who, in unthinkable mercy, gave your only begotten Son to save us from your wrath upon our sin.” We can then move to the next petition, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,” and pray, “We know that Jesus is ruling and reigning right now with authority over all things, and yet we still experience much brokenness and hurt here on earth. Father, would you realize your kingdom in greater measure today beginning in our own hearts and homes; then use us to do your will as the hands and feet of Jesus to bring gospel witness and restoration to our communities, cities, nation, all the way to the ends of the earth.”

Continue to move just like so through each petition until you’ve reached the “Amen.” On this point,

in classic Luther fashion, Luther exhorts us make a bold, powerful, and confident “Amen.” His words are too good on this point to be adequately summarized:

Finally, mark this, that you must always speak the Amen firmly. Never doubt that God in his mercy will surely hear you and say “yes” to your prayers. Never think that you are kneeling or standing alone, rather think that the whole of Christendom, all devout Christians, are standing there beside you and you are standing among them in a common, united petition which God cannot disdain. Do not leave your prayer without having said or thought, “Very well, God has heard my prayer; this I know as a certainty and a truth.” That is what Amen means

THE BENEFITS

I have found great benefit in regularly praying through the entire Lord’s Prayer in this fashion.

One, I personally tend towards praying predominately inward prayers that center on my confession, my problems, and my requests. Praying through the Lord’s Prayer as Luther recommends has helped me to pray more broadly and to have a greater awareness of God, other people, and God’s mission in my prayers.

Secondly, my mind is ever so prone to wander during times of prayer. One moment I’m praying, the next I’m thinking about that email I need to reply to. Utilizing the structure of the Lord’s Prayer helps me recognize when my mind has wan-

dered and helps me remember where to pick-up at.

Lastly, I mentioned earlier that our lack of prayerfulness is chiefly a heart issue. While some people may push-back on this method of prayer, protesting that it is too structured and therefore restrains the Spirit’s spontaneous leading, I have found the opposite to be true. As one who has always favored extemporaneous prayers that express heartfelt longings and desires, I have not found structure and spontaneity to be at odds with one another. I am amazed to find that every time I pray through the Lord’s Prayer as Luther has commended, my prayers have been richer, deeper, and have exposed and unlocked some of my otherwise seldom seen affections. Moreover, I’m routinely praying through the words that Jesus has taught us to pray! This routine or habit has had a shaping effect on my heart as it’s helping me see and yearn for the very things that God himself desires. As a result, I’ve had a renewed sense of expectancy in prayer, more excitement and intentionality in praying, and a deeper love Jesus and appreciation for the gift of prayer that he secured through his death and resurrection.

Obviously, there is no silver-bullet for achieving the perfect prayer life. On this side of glory as we pray we will always experience the war between the Spirit and the distractions and weaknesses of our flesh. I have found Luther’s method of praying through the Lord’s Prayer to be an effective weapon in fighting for a richer life of prayer, and inasmuch as it has benefitted me I commend it to you. With that, I conclude with Lu-

ther’s opening line, “I will tell you as best I can what I do personally when I pray. May our dear Lord grant to you and to everybody to do it better than I! Amen.”

Day 1

- ① Read James 5:13–15. Read through the passage and try to summarize what James is saying. How does what James says here connect with the themes you've seen so far in his book?

- ② What effects does James clearly state corporate prayer has?

- ③ What do you find to be most challenging about this passage? What questions do you have? What resources or people can you utilize to try and find answers to these questions?

- ④ What do you find most encouraging in this passage?

- ⑤ Read Matthew 21:18–22. Describe what you learn about prayer from Jesus. See also Matthew 6:9–13. What is happening if you think you didn't receive exactly what you asked for in prayer?

Day 2

- ① Read James 5:16–20. In what ways are you doing the “one another” commands in your life?

- ② Study 2 Corinthians 13:11. What does it say about “one another”? When coming together you can either lead with the “comfort of the gospel” or with the “conviction of the gospel”. In what ways do you think it is important to lead your interactions with the comfort of the gospel?

- ③ What does 1 John 1:9 teach us about confessing our sins?

- ④ What is James’ point with the example of Elijah? Who is Elijah and what do we need to know about him?

- ⑤ What is James’ charge in his closing comments and why do you think he ends his letter this way? See Matthew 18:15.





Day 3

- ① Study Hebrews 10:24–25.

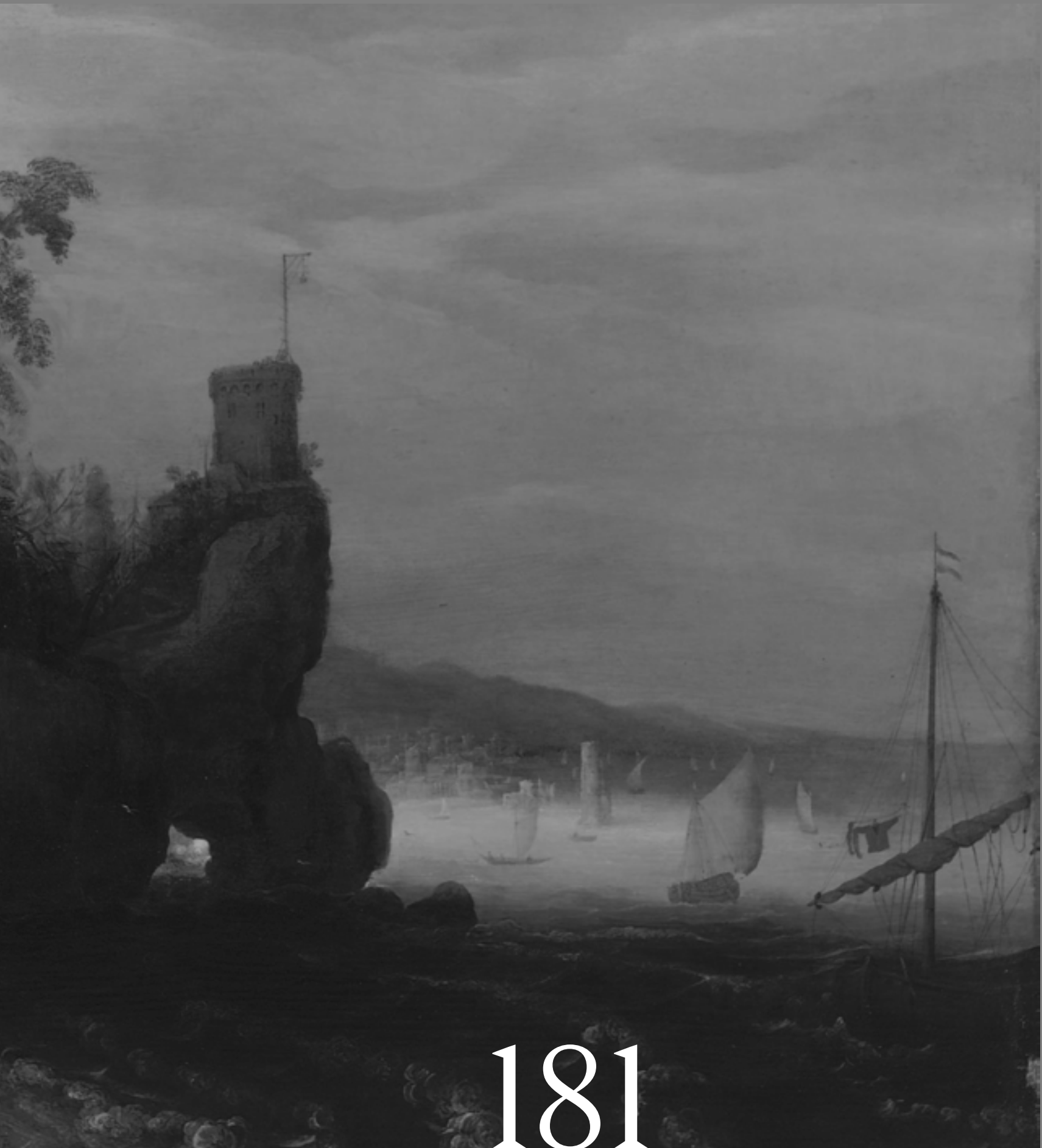
Sermon Notes

May 28, 2017

A dark, atmospheric painting of a forest scene. The foreground shows a group of figures in period clothing, some sitting and some standing, in a clearing. The background is filled with dense, dark trees, with light filtering through the canopy in several places, creating a sense of depth and mystery. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

To the Friend of the Wanderer

David
Easterwood



181

Watching someone you love wander from the truth hurts. It hurts in a way that makes you sad. It hurts in a way that frustrates you to the point of anger. It hurts in a way that makes you question the truth yourself, or at least the power of the truth. It hurts in a way that seems to become numb after a time, as if the nerves have been frayed for so long that the sense of feeling leaves altogether.

It's hard when you have stood shoulder to shoulder with someone singing praises to God, and now they don't want to sing anymore. It's hard when you have spent hours under a starry sky with someone, watching the constellations slide from one horizon to the other while you talked about the glories of God, but now they don't want to talk anymore.

This article is not a fix-it. The title is not "Five Ways to Win the Wanderer." The alliteration would have been great, but if you've ever been close to the wanderer, you know it's not that easy. The aim of this article is to encourage you in pursuing the wanderer. The catalyst for this article is the very end of the book of James.

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

I believe that James means these verses to be an encouragement to those who engage and pursue the wanderer. The phrasing, however, probably requires a little effort on our part to see its meaning.

I think that the truth James is talking about could be pretty closely equated to the gospel, or the good news that we can be reconciled to God by trusting in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. James uses this same word, truth, earlier in his letter when he says in James 1:18, "Of his own will he brought us forth by the *word of truth*, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." Paul uses "word of truth" in Ephesians 1:13 when he says, "In him you also, when you heard the *word of truth*, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit..." So, we can see the one who wanders from the truth as being the one who wanders from the gospel.

Too often we talk as if believing the gospel is a one-time event that occurs at the beginning of our life as a Christian. After that, we try our best to "share the gospel" with those who are not Christians so that they might experience their own one-time belief event and become Christians, too. Believing the gospel, however, is not a one-time event in the Christian life.

Believing the gospel is like breathing for a Christian. It is meant to be perpetual. It enables us to live a God-ward life. Believing the gospel even has a respiratory feel to it. As a pastor once pointed out to me, life as a Christian requires a breathing-in of the gospel and a breathing-out of gospel-centered ministry. We mature into doing it without much conscious effort. When this gospel believing becomes difficult, however, spiritual distress can be fast upon us. The one who wanders from the truth is in spiritual distress. He or she is having trouble breathing. The encourage-

ment from James is that we can help our brother or sister breathe again. Indeed, when we bring him or her back to the truth, or back to the gospel, James says that we save our brother or sister's soul from death! That is an incredible statement and I want to make sure we hear it clearly.

James would wholly agree with the psalmist in saying, "Salvation belongs to the Lord," (Psalm 3:8) or with the prophet who declares, "I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior" (Isaiah 43:11). He says as much in chapter 4, "There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and destroy." God alone saves ultimately. He alone is sovereign over our belief in the gospel, just as he is sovereign over the very breath that fills our lungs. The recurring tension in the book of James is that though God is sovereign and the ultimate authority over all things, he has not designed us to be robots moving about according to our programmed code, unconscious. No, we can breathe. We can wander. We can be brought back and we can be the one who brings back! In God's design, we can be an active, even integral part, of His saving work in others. The breath of life is God's, yet he allows the lifeguard on the beach to administer it to the near-drowned boy.

The encouragement that James offers is that in God's design we are not constrained to watch our loved one wander from the truth, as if stuck in the stands of a track meet. God allows us, if not invites us, to leave the stands and run! We run alongside our brothers and sisters. We grab hold of their hands and pull. We lovingly push. We show them the course when

their vision is failing. We pick them up when they trip. Sometimes we sit on the ground with them when they have given up and we plead. We plead through so many tears. "We are in a race, friend. Please run with me. Please don't stop." And when our friend stands and begins to run again, the glory is God's. He is the strength; he makes our friend's feet like deer's (Habakkuk 3:19). We wouldn't want it any other way. But what joy is ours!

It hurts to watch a loved one wander from the truth, but God's mercies are new this morning and perhaps today is the day you bring him or her back.