

James' Letter

12: Men Like Jesus

We now move into the conclusion of James' letter which contains three final teachings addressing the integrity of our words, the power of prayer and the summary statement of why James wrote this letter in the first place.

As we have seen throughout this letter, James doesn't waste any words and here in this final section, he abruptly concludes his letter with three principles that ought to define every follower of Jesus.

As we mentioned in the first study, the goal of this letter was to instruct all followers of Jesus on how to practically live out their faith in Jesus as Lord, and now he concludes with these three principles that provide a good summary of how to do just that.

These three principles and the main point of James' letter can be summed up in this way:

As followers of Jesus, we ought to be men of our word, men of prayer and men on a mission.

Men of Our Word

James begins his conclusion by addressing the integrity of our word. We are all tempted to distort the truth to our own advantage and to use extra words or phrases to try and convince others to believe us. James tells us to speak with such integrity that no swearing or oaths are ever needed for people to believe what we say.

He writes:

“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.” (5:12)

James is telling us that we ought to commit ourselves to speaking with a raw honesty and a simple truthfulness that doesn't need to elaborate or use extra phrases for people to believe what we say.

Do you ever find yourself using extra words in an effort to convince people that you mean what you say?

Do you ever feel the need to say something like, “I swear to God I'm telling the truth” or “I promise I'll do this and if I don't you can do whatever to me in return”?

Many of us fall into a habit of using these kinds of extra phrases to try and convince people that we are telling the truth. However, this gives off an impression that we can only be trusted when we swear or make dramatic overstatements. Our simple word is simply not good enough anymore, and that's the issue James (and Jesus) have with swearing.

Jesus wants the word of his followers to be enough without extra phrases.

James says, "Let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation."

Jesus said, "Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil."¹

Deceitful and dishonest people always have to use extra phrases and have to negotiate little deals with people in order to get people to trust them and believe them. Jesus says, "Don't put yourself in that category."

Jesus and James want all of us as followers of Jesus to be such a man of our word that our 'Yes' is understood as yes, and our 'No' is understood as no, and no extra explanation of what we mean is ever needed for others to believe us. A follower of Jesus should be able to eliminate phrases like "I promise I'll do this" or "I swear I'll do that."

We ought to have such an outstanding track record of speaking the truth and keeping our word that people have full confidence in everything that we say.

And we must always remember that everything we say and do in this life is done in plain sight in the presence of God. And everything that we say and do in this life is done on his behalf as his representatives. And so, as those who are being held accountable by God and who live in this world as representatives of God, we of all people must be men of our word.

¹ Matthew 5:37

Men of Prayer

Next, James moves into a passage about prayer where he basically declares that prayer possesses supernatural power to heal people and to help keep us healthy — physically and spiritually. And so, James is pointing out that followers of Jesus ought to be constantly praying for one another and with one another.

If someone is sick or struggling, we ought to pray with them. If things are going well and life is good, then we ought to show gratitude by praying and praising God for these good things in our life. If someone is struggling with an area of sin in their life then we ought to be confessing these things to one another and then praying with one another in hope and with confidence that God can take care of it.

James declares that, “The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” (5:16)

Elsewhere in Scripture, John writes:

“And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.”² (1 John 5:14-15)

² 1 John 5:15-15

If we are asking for things according to what the bible teaches about God's will for his people then we can have confidence that our prayers possess great power and will be effective.

Prayer doesn't make God do anything, but there are things God won't do unless we pray.

And it should not go without saying that prayer is not a magic formula, and God is not a genie in a bottle. Praying according to what God desires includes the need to pray in faith, with patience, in obedience, and in submission to God's greater wisdom and judgement. As the special people of a God who promises that he hears us, prayer ought to become our reflex reaction to all circumstances.

Jesus was a man of constant prayer, and so we as followers of Jesus are to be men of prayer as well.

Men on a Mission

And lastly, to conclude his letter, James encourages followers of Jesus to pursue the joy of leading others toward a proper relationship with their Lord. This is the summary statement of why James wrote this letter. He writes:

“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.” (5:19-20)

James has been providing straightforward instruction throughout his letter on how to walk in obedience and live out the truth of Jesus' teaching, and so now he points out that we ought to be actively looking for opportunities to restore anyone who might have wandered away from truly following Jesus.

Many people make a decision to follow Jesus but then the cares of the world, the fascination with wealth and the desire for other things in life lead these people to wander away from a life devoted to Jesus. These people still identify themselves as followers of Jesus, but the way that they live their life looks nothing like the way Jesus lived his. James says the souls of these people are still at stake, and they don't even realize it.

He has written this letter hoping to bring people back to true faith in Jesus, and now he wants every other true follower of Jesus to be on the lookout to bring people back to true faith as well.

Jesus said his mission on earth was to seek and save the lost.³

There is nothing greater that we can accomplish here on earth than to take part in the rescue and restoration of a person's soul from eternal death. This was the mission of Jesus, and now it is our mission as well.

Giving food to the poor, shelter to the homeless and clean water to the thirsty are extremely valuable acts in the sight of God, but the salvation of a soul that doesn't even realize it's lost is the ultimate treasure that we ought to be pursuing. And so, as followers of Jesus, we are to be men on a mission.

³ Luke 19:10

Scripture declares that it is impossible to be a disciple or a follower of someone and to not end up living like that person lived and taught.

As followers of Jesus, his characteristics ought to define who we are and what we are all about. We ought to be men whose word is trusted, men with an instinct to pray in all circumstances, and men who live life on a constant mission that our Lord himself started and entrusted to us.

And so, to sum it all up, James has written a letter to teach us in a very straightforward way that we must walk the talk and be men like Jesus.